



PARISH HISTORY

A HISTORY OF ST MARY'S

In 1860 Bishop Matthew Hale bought land for the Diocese of Perth on the eastern side of South Perth. The block, said to possess the best view in the district, was sold in 1885 when the Anglican Church was granted a 6 acre (2.4 hectare) block of land at Lot 122 Suburban Road, now known as Mill Point Road. However, until 1895, the local Anglicans wishing to attend services had to make their way across the river by boat or ferry to attend either St George's Cathedral or St John the Baptist Church in the city. In that year, a weatherboard building, which would become the first Anglican Church to be established south of Perth Water, was constructed on a block of land in South Perth that had been donated by politician and newspaper owner, John Winthrop Hackett, for that purpose.

In 1898 the Lot 122 block of land was resumed by the government in order to establish the Zoological Gardens but in return the church was offered a triangular block bounded by Angelo Street, Labouchere Road and Onslow Street as glebe land and also Lot 427 situated at the top of Zoo Hill on the corner of Suburban Road and Onslow Street. On 5 February 1899 Bishop Charles

Riley consecrated the wooden building that had subsequently been constructed on Lot 427 and this became the original St Mary's Church in South Perth.

The local congregation soon became disenchanted with having to climb up Zoo Hill to attend services and this resulted in the church being moved to a new site in Labouchere Road and rededicated by Bishop Riley in December 1901. After the move a new sanctuary was added to the original structure.

The current building

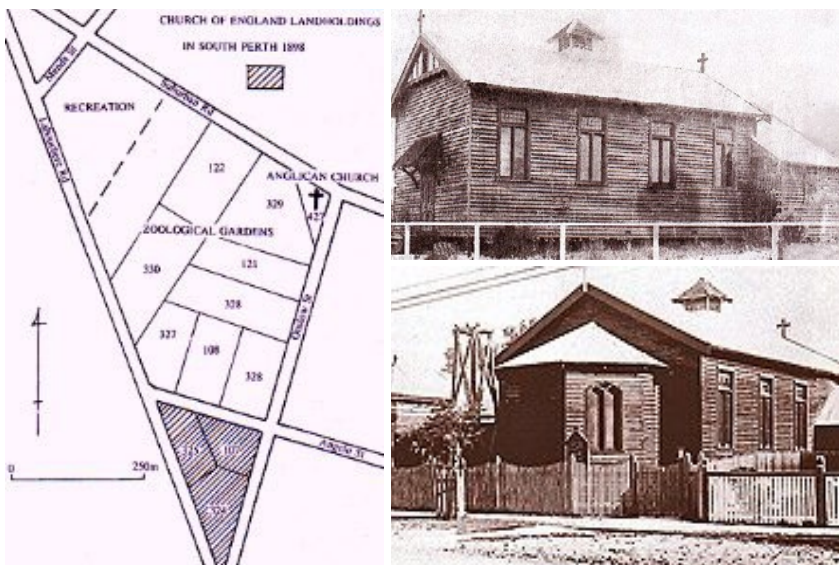
With the extension of the tram service in the 1920s into South Perth, the population expanded markedly. At a stormy meeting of the parishioners on 25 April 1929 the possibility of building a church 'more worthy' for the worship God was discussed. The then Rector had become keen on purchasing an acre of land at the corner of Ridge and Karoo Streets upon which a new church would be erected. Like the first St Mary's Church it would be sited at the top of a hill, much to the dismay of some of the parishioners! But the Rector, The Reverend John Bell, received

much support for the project from the Archbishop of Perth, Henry Le Fanu.

The Reverend Bell acquired the acre site on the corner of Karoo and Ridge Streets in 1929 for the sum of approximately £1,300. With no record of any loan to the parish and despite difficult financial times it is thought the parishioners paid for the plot of land for the future church through intensive fundraising schemes. In December 1930 it was revealed that architect Herbert Parry had been instructed to draw up plans for a new church to be constructed of reinforced concrete. Only one section of the plan was adopted immediately because of the costs involved. This comprised the nave (about 19 meters long), temporary sanctuary, two vestries, west end and porch. The foundation stone was laid on 3 May 1931 by the Governor, Sir William Campion.

The church was built almost entirely of local materials. The approximate quantities of the materials used were as follows: 250 tons of quartzite, 50 tons of cement, 12 tons of reinforcing steel, 150 tons of sand, 300 square yards of Ajax gypsum sheets, 2 tons of roofing iron. As well as raising funds for the purchase of the church site the South Perth community also donated the stained glass windows and the church furniture, purchased from Hearn Bros and Stead in Victoria Park.

According to the West Australian on 27 October 1931 the church was 'of lofty proportion with an imposing entrance and pointed arches over windows and doors with conventional Gothic treatment.' In addition, the article stated the church was 'the first of its kind in the State' and 'constructed of reinforced concrete with the exception of the roof covering.' The partly built church was dedicated on 7 November. The consecration service, held on the following day, was attended by seven hundred people of whom only four hundred were able to be



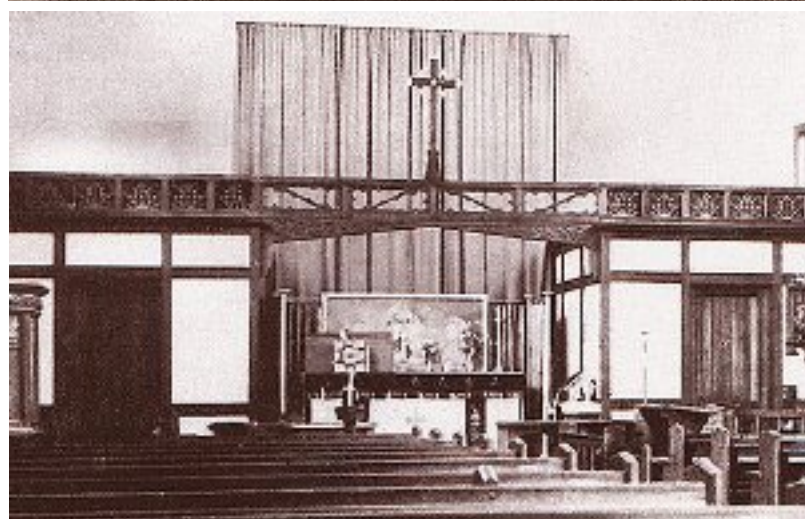
Above, clockwise from left Church of England Landholdings in South Perth in 1898, and the original St Mary's Church at the corner of Onslow Street and Suburban Road in 1899.

accommodated in the building: the remainder followed the service by means of loudspeakers situated outside.

On 20 September 1936 the foundation stone of a new parish hall was laid. The history of the hall shows that it was designed by architect William G. Bennett of Eales, Cohen and Bennett. The Moderne style of the Hall did not give the appearance of a public hall. It blended comfortably with the surrounding predominantly residential tone of the neighbourhood. On 5 November the hall and a new rectory were dedicated. An addition to the hall was built in 1956.

The first stained glass window was installed in the church on 29 July 1937. The window, presented to the church by relatives of parishioner, Muriel Simpson, depicts St Cecilia, Patron Saint of music.

Although a new porch was added to the church in 1950, in 1951 (and again in 1971) it became clear that the exterior of the church had deteriorated to such a degree that restoration work was urgently required. This produced a major drain on the parish financial resource. In the Jubilee Year of 1956 and in response to yet another appeal the Church of St Mary the Virgin was finally completed with a new east end to the nave. The architect for the second stage was the firm Hobbs, Winning and Leighton who designed a transept containing a War Memorial Chapel with a choir loft above the northern wing. The southern wing consisted of vestries for the Priest, warden, and an organ loft. On 3 November 1957 the Governor Sir Charles Gairdner laid the foundation stone for the new east end. By 1958 the extensions had been completed and were consecrated by Bishop Robert Freeth on 13 July. In the following November the War Memorial Chapel in the north transept was dedicated by Archbishop Robert Moline. According to a 1991 National Trust Assessment the porch was built of second hand materials by voluntary labour, including



Above The parish hall (top) and the Sanctuary at St Mary's in the early 1940s (bottom).

the architect (who resided nearby in Ridge Street), the Rector and a bank clerk, accountant and finance officer.

In May 1968 it was announced that local retired farmer Stanley Lovelock intended to give \$20,000 to the church for the purpose of building a structure in the grounds to support a statue representing Christ that would be visible from afar off. Although the original plan was to place the statue three hundred feet above the ground (nearly one hundred metres), eventually a three metre representation of Christ was placed on a narrow tripod of reinforced concrete just one hundred and seven feet (about thirty five metres) high. It was designed by Bruce Tomlinson to be reminiscent of the illuminated cross on the mountains above the harbour of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The resulting edifice was blessed by Archbishop

Geoffrey Sambell on 8 March 1970.

During the 1970s more stained glass windows were installed. But the fabric of the church had continued to deteriorate in spite of restoration work carried out in 1951 and 1971. It was then suggested that the church be demolished and a new one built (this suggestion was also made in the mid 1980s when parishioners expressed great concern about the amount of money being spent on maintenance and restoration). However, sufficient funding was obtained and a new ceiling was put in place in 1974. In 1979 a Garden of Remembrance, funded from a bequest, was created on the south side of the church. But also in that year the choral tradition that had been built up over many years came to an end with the disbanding of the choir.

The Reverend John Wardman began



Above, left The erection of the monument.

Above, right The Reverend John Wardman presides at a Eucharist service in 1974.

getting rid of the sanctuary clutter in the 1970s and Reverend David Murray, who arrived in 1983, revolutionised the whole concept. A number of alterations were made to the interior of the church including the removing of canopies above the pulpit and lectern, and wrought iron work near the chancel steps and around the baptistry. The Reverend Ron Dowling was installed as Rector in 1989 and during his incumbency a number of changes were made both in the worship liturgy and in the physical appearance of the church. The communion rails were removed and the altar brought forward to the centre of the sanctuary. In 1997 the entire church was re-wired and later re-painted when designer Ron Facius devised a new interior colour scheme in varying shades of green to enhance

the colourful stained glass windows of the church. Also, during Ron Dowling's 'reign' a suggestion was put forward in 1991 that part of the church site be set aside for a retirement village which would be built under the auspices of Anglican Homes. Although the original plan was to demolish all the buildings on the site except the church it was later modified so that the hall was included in the development and the original art deco style retained. This viable alternative to demolition was encouraged by the Art Deco Society of WA with the help of former Chairman of the Heritage Council of Western Australia, Ian Molyneux. In return the church would obtain a new linked hall and office building, designed by the architectural firm Architekton, as well as two clergy houses. The new

plans for a village comprising thirteen retirement dwellings plus two clergy houses were accepted and the complex named 'St Mary's Close.' Together with new church developments the buildings were completed and later blessed by Archbishop Peter Carnley on 28 November 1993. In 2007 the St Mary's Parish Council funded a structural engineers report. The engineer's survey of the church building revealed significant deterioration in the structural fabric of the Church building (better known as 'concrete cancer'). In 2010, thanks to significant donations from the parish, several government grants and the use of the financial reserves, a substantial renovation was undertaken (to the sum of over \$1.25 million) to preserve the church building.

HERITAGE LISTING

The Church of St Mary the Virgin, South Perth has been classified by the National Trust (WA) since 1998. It was entered in the Register of Heritage Places on a permanent basis on 31 July 2007. The church is also listed on the South Perth (Central) Municipal Heritage Inventory.

It states: 'The Church of St Mary the Virgin has aesthetic, historic, social, representative and rarity cultural heritage

significance. The Church is an excellent example of Inter-War Skyscraper Gothic in the Art Deco idiom. Buildings designed in the Inter-War Skyscraper Gothic style are uncommon throughout Australia.

'St Mary's is a fine and rare representative of buildings appropriately adapted and extended for modern usage while retaining the ambience and unity with the dominant characteristics

of the inchoate structures. The building contributes high streetscape values to its elevated corner site in its essentially residential location.'

Historically the parish has been an important part of the South Perth community since 1898 and celebrated its centennial.