

Wesley Methodist Church and Hall

75 Taranaki Street



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The Wesley Methodist Church is one of the finest 19th century timber churches in Wellington. It has high aesthetic value for the rich and interesting composition in timber of the front façade to Taranaki Street and for the quality of the main interior space.
- The building continues to have spiritual significance to the religious community that, for over 130 years had used the Church. Public access to religious and secular events at the Church is supported and it remains popular. It holds particular importance for the Pacific Island community in Wellington who, in the last several decades, have made this their spiritual home.
- The Wesley Church has stood as the symbol of Methodism in Wellington for over 130 years, and has historic value for its association with the Methodist religion in Wellington and the development of the city. It is also associated with prominent Wellington architect Thomas Turnbull.

District Plan:	Map 16, reference 283
Legal Description:	Lots 1 & 2 DP 10033
Heritage Area:	
HPT Listed:	Category I, reference 4422
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270, Pre 1900 building
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	Built: 1879-80
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Thomas Turnbull
Former uses:	Religious – Church
Current uses:	Religious – Church
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone/ Outside Earthquake Prone Policy – Several SR attached

Extent: Cityview GIS



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

The Methodist Church began early in Wellington. Two Wesleyan missionaries J.H. Bumby and John Hobbs conducted the first Christian service at Te Aro Pa in 1839 before the immigrant settlement of Wellington had been truly established. A simple church was established later that year; it was later replaced by two more permanent structures on the corner of Manners and Cuba Streets. One of these was destroyed by the earthquake of 1848 and the other in the earthquake of 1855. The final attempt at constructing a church on this site, a large timber building which was periodically extended as the congregation grew, was destroyed in the Te Aro fire in 1879.

Prior to the 1879 Te Aro fire, in response to the dangers that fire posed to the predominantly timber-built town, the Wellington City Council had introduced new regulations that stated that stone, brick, or concrete boundary walls had to be used if rebuilding in the central city. The church decided at this time to move to a new site in Taranaki Street where a whole town acre could be acquired and they would be able to construct a building in timber, which would be much more economical. The church purchased the property from J. Johnstone for £4, 160. Over the years most of the property was sold, but the church retained some property there.

The Manners Street property was sold, but there was still some misgivings about the financial burden that the church was taking on. Nevertheless, plans that had been drawn up by Thomas Turnbull were accepted and the work proceeded. The successful contractor was James Wilson, and the foundation stone was laid on the 19th November 1879 and the building opened on the 14th March 1880. Shortly before the church opened, the land and building were valued at £10, 060.

At the time of construction, the church building was the only structure on the site, so the associated lands presented the opportunity to build other church buildings and facilities, and to gain income from renting part of the property. Within two years the church had enough money to commission more plans from Thomas Turnbull, this time for a Sunday School. The building cost £1,280 and opened on the 30th April 1882.

In the period since its completion the church has undergone three major physical changes. The interior of the church was renovated in 1930. Although no permit record can be found, the architect William Fielding is known to have placed a tender notice for the works in a local newspaper in 1929. In 1962 prominent Austrian architect Ernst Plischke was engaged to make major changes including the removal of one set of stairs to the gallery, moving the pipe organ, changes to the chancel, and squaring off the back of the church, which created more room but removed part of Turnbull's elegant design. The works cost £12, 857 and were undertaken the following year. In 1982 an arson attack badly damaged the building and substantial restoration was required. This work was designed by Gordon Moller.

In the first decades the church's congregation were large, but as people moved to the suburbs in the early 20th century attendance dropped. This process was accelerated later in the century and in 1949 the church was turned into an inner city mission. It was formally given this title in 1969.

¹ History adapted from Wellington City Council, 'Wesley Methodist Church', *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory: Non Residential Buildings*, (Wellington City Council, 2001), TARA2

With this change in emphasis and the growth of the Samoan community in Wellington, the church has remained at the centre of an active Methodist congregation. The church, now 130 years old stands as the symbol of Methodism in Wellington, a tradition which goes back through five church buildings to 1839 and the development of the city. In 1995 land was purchased alongside York Street to augment the existing town acre, a new building was constructed to meet the church's changing needs. This building now houses the parish office, the ministers' offices, counselling rooms, a second hall, and a kitchen. To take advantage of the long Taranaki Street frontage of the property, space was let to a bookshop, café, and a real estate agency on the street edge.

Today the Wesley complex is also home to the Methodist Youth Empowerment Board, Christian World Service, Churches Education Commission Forum of Co-operating Ventures, Downtown Community Ministry, Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand, and Epworth bookshop.

1.2 Timeline of modifications (include original plans)

1879-1880	Original Construction
1896	65-75 Taranaki Street, schoolroom (00053:30:1813)
1959	69/75 Taranaki Street, Church hall alterations (00058:107:C5187)
1962	69-75 Taranaki Street, church alterations (00058:265:C11771)
1963	Modifications
1966	69/75 Taranaki Street, carparking area (00058:449:C19276)
1968	69-75 Taranaki Street, education building (00058:563:C26809)
1971	69/75 Taranaki Street, new porch to lounge building (00058:727:C32973)
1972	69/75 Taranaki Street, alterations to offices in hall building (00058:806:C36163)
1979	69/75 Taranaki Street, alterations to mezzanine floor and stairs, hall building (00058:1209:C51798)
1982	Modifications
1989	69-75 Taranaki Street [79 Taranaki Street], office fitout (00059:239:D10956)
1992	75 Taranaki Street, demolition of custodian house at rear of church site (00059:516:E24335)
1997	75 Taranaki Street, play area/umu (00078:111:34995)
1997	75 Taranaki Street, demolition (00078:54:27139)
2002	75 Taranaki Street, partial repile of drama studio (00078:942:95578)
2003	75 Taranaki Street, repile of church (00078:1236:106584)
2007	75 Taranaki Street, exemption - commercial - drama christie studio - remove double doors to front entrance - increase foyer size and install one large single door, opening outwards (00078:1996:166148)

1.3 Occupation history

Methodist Church of New Zealand

1.4 Architect

Turnbull, Thomas – Architect²

Thomas Turnbull (1824-1907) was born and educated in Scotland and trained under David Bryce, Her Majesty's Architect. He travelled to Melbourne in 1851 and after nine years there moved to San Francisco. He arrived in New Zealand in 1871 and soon established a thriving business. His son William, a distinguished architect in his own right, became a partner in the firm in 1891. Turnbull was a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He was a pioneer in the design of buildings to withstand earthquakes and he was responsible for breaking down prejudice against the use of permanent materials for building construction. He specialised in masonry construction for commercial purposes but was also responsible for some fine houses. Among his most important buildings were the Willis Street churches of St Peter (1879) and St John (1885), the former National Mutual Building (1883-84), the General Assembly Library (1899) and the former Bank of New Zealand Head Office (1901), all in Wellington.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture³

The main glory of the Wesley Methodist Church is the Taranaki Street façade – a skilful blend of mainly Gothic and Classical elements, well modified by the choice of timber as the main building material. The façade has three main components: a central gabled portion flanked by two towers which project slightly. The main church hall is essentially a simple gabled rectangle.

The architect, Thomas Turnbull, has designed a building in which no one style predominates, and the result is more Italianate than anything else. The central gable for example, has a shallow pitch, repeated in the smaller gable over the main doors. The two towers each have small projecting gables capped by finials, but are rather neutral in regard to any vertical emphasis. The steeple roofs of both towers are comparatively short, too, so that the eye is drawn more to the simple dignity of good proportions and the pleasant regularity that characterises the façade as a whole. The centrepiece is the big windows over the main entry, with circular tracery in wood, capped by a semicircular label mould which links it to two flanking round arched windows. All the arches of the windows and doors are round, which, again, neutralises the Gothic influences of the building – the timber buttresses on each side for example, and the pinnacles at either end of the main entrance. The side windows of the building, and the upper tower windows, are modified lancets, each set into a round arch with a label mould.

The church is sheathed in rusticated weatherboards of kauri, with boxed corners, plain cornices, and bands of timber moulding under the main gable and above the windows of the towers. The interior has been extensively modified over the years, although the main space of the nave (there are no transepts) retains its original form and in particular the elliptical ceiling spanned by kauri ribs.

² Historic Places Trust, 'Thomas Turnbull', *Professional Biographies*, accessed 31 July 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Turnbull,+Thomas>

³ Adapted from Wellington City Council, 'Wesley Methodist Church'.

2.2 Materials

- Timber framing
- Rusticated weatherboards – kauri
- Steel roofing

2.3 Setting

The Wesley Methodist Church is set with its main façade onto Taranaki Street and is the most important remaining 19th century building on this busy thoroughfare. Its immediate setting includes an open area that affords views of the Sunday School, and the Drama Christi Studio, two buildings with which it has a high group value. It is important in the streetscape in an area of otherwise undistinguished buildings and with two mature pohutukawa trees and a forecourt, it makes a significant contribution to the townscape.

The wider setting is Te Aro, a residential neighbourhood growing from what was for the greater part of the 20th century a commercial and industrial area.

3.0 Sources

Historic Places Trust. 'Thomas Turnbull'. Professional Biographies. Accessed 31 July 2013,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Turnbull,+Thomas>

Wellington City Council. *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001.

Wellington City Archive

00053:30:1813; 65-75 Taranaki Street, schoolroom 09 Sep 1896
00058:107:C5187; 69/75 Taranaki Street, Church hall alterations 04 Aug 1959
00058:265:C11771; 69-75 Taranaki Street, church alterations 13 Dec 1962
00058:449:C19276; 69/75 Taranaki Street, carparking area 15 Apr 1966
00058:563:C26809; 69-75 Taranaki Street, education building 20 May 1968
00058:727:C32973; 69/75 Taranaki Street, new porch to lounge building 21 Apr 1971
00058:806:C36163; 69/75 Taranaki Street, alterations to offices in hall building 04 Sep 1972
00058:1209:C51798; 69/75 Taranaki Street, alterations to mezzanine floor and stairs, hall building 31 May 1979
00059:239:D10956; 69-75 Taranaki Street [79 Taranaki Street], office fitout 1989
00059:516:E24335; 75 Taranaki Street, demolition of custodian house at rear of church site 1992
00078:111:34995; 75 Taranaki Street, play area/umu 1997
00078:54:27139; 75 Taranaki Street, demolition 1997
00078:942:95578; 75 Taranaki Street, partial repile of drama studio 2002
00078:1236:106584; 75 Taranaki Street, repile of church 2003
00078:1996:166148; 75 Taranaki Street, exemption - commercial - drama christie studio - remove double doors to front entrance - increase foyer size and install one large single door, opening outwards. 2007

Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?

The Wesley Methodist Church is one of the finest 19th century timber churches in Wellington. It has high aesthetic value for the rich and interesting composition in timber of the front façade to Taranaki Street and for the quality of the main interior space.

Townscape: Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?

The Wesley Methodist Church, along with its ancillary buildings, its forecourt, and its pair of fine mature pohutukawa trees are a local landmark. These elements have high townscape value, and contribute to the character and sense of place of Taranaki Street – a key transport corridor through the city.

Group: Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?

With the Sunday school, and the Drama Christi Studio, the Wesley church has a high group value.

St Peter's has group value as one of three great timber Gothic churches designed in the same style by the same architect, in the same time period and set within Wellington's CBD. These buildings include St John's Willis Street, St Peter's Willis Street, and The Wesley Methodist Church on Taranaki Street, and although each building has great aesthetic, historic and social value, when seen as a group they attain national significance.

Historic Value:

Association: Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?

The Wesley Church has stood as the symbol of Methodism in Wellington for over 130 years, and has historic value for its association with the Methodist religion in Wellington and the development of the city. It is also associated with prominent Wellington architect Thomas Turnbull.

Association: Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?

NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270, Pre 1900 building

Educational: Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate

about aspects of the past?

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

There is technical value in the construction of this building in timber and as a representative of building techniques in the later part of the 19th century.

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

The building is a particularly fine Gothic timber church and is likely to be held in very high public esteem –for its architectural, aesthetic, historic, and social values.

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

The building continues to have spiritual significance to the religious community that, for over 130 years had used the Church. Public access to religious and secular events at the Church is supported and it remains popular. It holds particular importance for the Pacific Island community in Wellington who, in the last several decades, have made this their spiritual home.

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

*Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?
Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?*

The building has had few intrusive modern alterations and additions in the past 130 years and contributes to the sense of place and continuity in Taranaki Street and Te Aro, an area that has rapidly changed.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

The church has been the site of traditional social ceremonies associated with the key events in the lives of its congregation. It will therefore form the focus of community sentiment and connection for many of its parishioners, and their friends and family.

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

This building is a good representative of Thomas Turnbull's designs and is a significant example of a church constructed in timber form the later part of the 19th century.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The building has retained a significant amount of original fabric therefore it has authenticity.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

This building is locally and nationally significant. Historically, this building is the home of one of the largest Christian denominations active in Wellington, and has been a prominent feature of the cityscape for over 130 years. It is the only 19th century building in the immediate neighbourhood and contributes significantly to the streetscape. It has had few major alterations to the exterior and the main chapel space is still in reasonably authentic condition. It is also an important work of prominent New Zealand architect Thomas Turnbull and, with his two other inner city churches – St Peters and St Johns – it forms a valuable legacy of timber design and construction.

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website		
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

Background research

Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*