
FORMER WESLEYAN CHURCH AND SCHOOL, MORDIALLOC

Location

1 MCDONALD STREET, MORDIALLOC, VIC 3195

Municipality

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7921-0134

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 22, 2024

What is significant?

The Wesleyan Church and School site is historically and archaeologically significant to the state of Victoria. The original features of the Wesleyan Church and Sunday School were constructed c.1881- 1882 and replaced in 1913 with newer buildings.

While the church and school buildings have been demolished, subsurface archaeological components exceeding 75 years old are potentially present below the ground surface. The types of features to be expected include building footings, post holes, cess pits associated with the two building phases of the Wesleyan Church occupation.

How is it significant?

The Wesleyan Church and School site is historically and archaeologically significant to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Wesleyan Church and School is associated with the development community in the Mordialloc area. The site's significance is relevant to the theme of 'Building community life' (8.0), as set out in Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes, specifically, 'Maintaining spiritual life' (8.1), 'Educating people' (8.2), 'Forming community organisations' (8.4) and 'Marking the phases of life' (8.6). Features present within the Wesleyan Church and School have the potential to inform about the development of early church and community organisations from the 1880s in Mordialloc, which was a significant early township in Victoria.

Interpretation
of Site

The former Wesleyan Church and School at Mordialloc had several building phases: the first was the construction of the church building c.1881-1882 and the laying of the foundation stone in November 1882. The Sunday School Hall must have been constructed soon afterwards at the rear of the church in the 1880s, because it is shown on the Victorian Railways Drainage plan of the Mordialloc Railway Station dated 1885 (Figure 6; VR 1885). A later plan of Mordialloc Station also shows the Wesleyan Church and School buildings in the same locations (Figure 7; VR 1890); however, the plan is dated to 1930, but the buildings had been removed by 1913 and the church rebuilt, so possibly the 1930 VR plan was drawn from an earlier base plan of the station area and not updated. The description of the original church provided in the newspapers does not state what the church was constructed of, only that a foundation stone was laid (The Argus, 1882). The re-building of the church in 1913 with a 'fine brick building' suggests that the original 1882 church building was probably built of timber. The second building phase in 1913 saw the demolition of the original church and school hall and the construction of a second, brick church building (see Place History and Figure 15 and Figure 16). The 1930 Victorian Railway plan shows this building to have had buttresses along the sides (Figure 8). An aerial photograph of Mordialloc Station and McDonald Street taken c. 1925-1930 shows the brick church building had a single gabled roof and the buttresses can be seen along the south-western side of the building (Figure 13, Figure 14). This photograph also shows that the northern part of the building was constructed of light-weight materials, possibly timber or corrugated steel sheet, with a lower, skillion roof, and appears to have been attached to the northern wall of the brick church. Two small outbuildings can also be seen in the photograph at the north-western corner of the site (Figure 14) – these appear to have been bathroom facilities. The 1940 MMBW plan of the site shows these outbuildings (Figure 9, Figure 11, Figure 12). Whilst the impact to the standing buildings of the Wesleyan Church and School Room has been high, the potential ground disturbance to the site may have been only low - moderate. The 1913 Church and School Room were demolished and removed in the 1960s (see aerial photo from 1963, Figure 18) but the area of the original 1882 church and the later 1913 church is now a paved car park, while a new building for the Mordialloc Men's Club has been constructed on the northern half of the lot, where the School Room once sat (Figure 2). If not impacted by the demolition process, construction of the car park and Men's Club, deep structural features, including building footings, post holes, cess pits and refuse pits could potentially remain unaffected. The area now presently covered by car park has potentially had the lowest level of impact and it is well-known that carparks can preserve remains from historical archaeological sites. Examples are: the remains of an entire row of terraced housing and factory remains at the Cato Street Car Park, Prahran, Victoria (H7822-2343); and the remains of more than 8 houses dating from the middle and then late 19th century below a surface car park at Wesley Place (Jones Lane) in Melbourne's CBD (H7822-2349); intact structural remains of a house and numerous artefact-bearing refuse pits under asphalted car park in H7922-0528 Former Croydon Station Master's Residence; structural remains of former station master's residence below the car park surface at H7922-0504 Mooroolbark Railway Station Archaeological Precinct; and well preserved archaeological remains of interlocking gate footings and numerous brick drainage features under asphalted surfaces in H7922-0511 Surrey Hills and Mont Albert Railway Stations Archaeological Precinct. The documentary evidence and the ground disturbance assessment indicate that there is archaeological potential for the remains of the early Wesleyan Church and School to be present. As the place also meets the definition of an archaeological site under the Heritage Act 2017 being over 75 years of age, the site meets Threshold A of Heritage Victoria's (HV's) policy for determining archaeological value. The site is also likely to evidence an association with a historical event, phase, period, process, function, tradition, movement, custom or way of life, being associated with both the development of the Mordialloc area, 'the boom years' of the Victorian Railways, and the evolution of Victorian Railway technology. The significance of Wesley School and Church at Mordialloc contributes to the theme of 'Building community life' (8.0), as set out in Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes. Features present within the Wesley Church and School site have the potential to inform on the development of early settlement and community in Mordialloc, as an important outer suburban area of Melbourne. Therefore, the site meets both Thresholds A and B of HV's policy and has archaeological value.

Hermes
Number 212191

Property
Number

History

The Wesleyan Church and School Room was established in 1881-1882 adjacent to the Mordialloc rail line and north of McDonald Street. As early as 1857 there was ground set aside for the establishment of a Wesleyan Church in Mordialloc by the trustees George Laver, Josiah Preston, David Cameron, William Keys and William Sykes (The Age, 23 May 1857, p. 5). The foundation stone for the church was laid on 23 November 1882 by "Mrs. G.W. Taylor", a local resident and the wife of businessman and landowner G.W. Taylor (The Argus, 23 November 1882, p. 1). G.W. Taylor was a well-known figure in Mordialloc and the adjacent towns of Cheltenham and Brighton; he was active in local council meetings and a "leading light" in the promotion of land syndication in Victoria (Geelong Advertiser, 6 January 1888, p. 3). At the laying of the foundation stone, addresses were given by ministers and laymen, and tea was taken in a large tent on the church grounds (The Argus 1882).

The Church building appears to have accommodated multiple faiths to serve the diverse religions of the local population (Kingston Local History 2018; Living Histories 2000). Reverend Robert Rigg, a prominent local figure, played a pivotal role in establishing the Wesleyan Church in Mordialloc, earning recognition as one of its pioneers (Figure 4; Whitehead 2018). Rigg's commitment to the church extended beyond its establishment; he authored a comprehensive local history of the Moorabbin Methodist Church circuit, which encompassed Mordialloc (Whitehead 2018). Rigg also served as the headmaster of Mordialloc State School from 1877 to 1905 (Whitehead 2018).

The integration of Wesleyan Sunday School services into the adjacent School Room marked a significant development in 1890. The Mornington Standard reported on this occasion, describing the newly erected school room as "a spacious building 40 x 25 ft built by Mr. Kretchmar" (Mornington Standard, 15 February 1890, p.3). William Herman Kretchner was a prominent Mordialloc resident during the 1890s, serving the community as an "furnishing undertaker" with a business on Main Street; he also worked as a contractor and a boat builder (Figure 5; Mornington Standard, 11 October 1890, p.2; The Age, 27 May 1891, p. 8; The Age, 3 April 1890, p. 8; Mornington Standard, 30 June 1892, p.4; Mornington Standard, 3 March 1892, p.1).

In February 1914, the Mordialloc Wesleyan Church celebrated the congregation's 33rd Anniversary, and the opening of a new Church building on McDonald Street (Moorabbin News, 14 February 1914, p. 1). The Moorabbin News reported that "the new church is a very fine brick structure, built at the cost of £1000. It is well-lighted and ventilated, capable of seating 250 people" (Moorabbin News 1914). The "Sunday school hall" adjacent to the Church was not rebuilt, although it was noted that the school room had recently started holding kindergarten class (Moorabbin News 1914). Amongst the various celebrations for the Church's anniversary and new building was a "tea and public meeting" held at the school hall. During the occasion, "an army of methodist ministers" spoke to the congregation, including Reverend T.B. Reid (Moorabbin News 1914). Reid was associated with the Church for over twenty years: in 1890, the Mordialloc Wesleyan Church on McDonald Street was listed in the Sands & McDougall directory under Reid's name (Sands & McDougall, 1890, State Library of Victoria).

Archival aerial photographs of the area show the buildings on the site from the 1920s to 1957 (Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 16, Figure 17). By 1963, there are no buildings present on the site (Figure 18), so the church and outbuildings appear to have been demolished between 1957 and 1963.

Throughout its operational years spanning from approximately 1881-1882 to around 1963, the Wesleyan Church catered to the religious and social needs of numerous members within the Mordialloc community. The Church provided a meeting place for Christian societies, held numerous weddings, church socials and public meetings (Caulfield and Elsternwick Leader, 27 August 1898, p. 2; Mornington Standard, 30 July 1891, p. 2; Mornington Standard, 29 June 1893, p. 4).

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>