

Heritage Citation



Valley Presbyterian Church & School (former)

Key details

Addresses	At 25 Warner Street, Fortitude Valley, Queensland 4006
Type of place	Church, School
Period	Victorian 1860-1890, Federation 1890-1914
Style	Romanesque
Lot plan	L8_RP806838; L9_RP806838
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — September 2010

Construction	Roof: Corrugated iron; Walls: Masonry - Render
People/associations	Alexander Brown Wilson and Ronald Martin Wilson - the Sunday School building (Architect); Richard Gailey - Presbyterian Church (Architect)
Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (B) Rarity; (D) Representative; (E) Aesthetic; (G) Social; (H) Historical association

This Presbyterian Church was constructed in 1885 to a design by influential architect Richard Gailey, while the Sunday School building was designed by honorary Presbyterian architect Alexander Brown Wilson and built in 1906. The church was built at the height of the Valley's residential boom to accommodate the expanding numbers of Presbyterians in the area. The Sabbath school originally operated from the church building but its popularity encouraged the 1906 construction of the Sabbath school building. The school was extended in 1925 and both the church and school were refurbished in 1935. The church continued to serve the spiritual needs of the local parish through the mid-twentieth century until numbers dwindled. Following the amalgamation of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches in 1977, ownership of the building was transferred to the Uniting Church in 1980. In 1989 the building was privately sold and is no longer in use as a church.

History

The Presbyterian Church had been a force in Brisbane from the early 1850s, and was instrumental in the development of Fortitude Valley. The Presbyterian Reverend John Dunmore Lang chartered vessels in the late 1840s under an immigration scheme, bringing Presbyterian migrants to Moreton Bay. The first vessel, the Fortitude, landed in 1849. Despite a dispute with the government over land grants in the area, many of the Fortitude's passengers went on to establish a thriving village in what came to be known as Fortitude Valley.

The Presbyterian ministry was first conducted from a house in Kangaroo Point, until 1851, when a small timber church opened in South Brisbane. The first Ann Street Presbyterian church in the city was built seven years later. Oddly, given the religious convictions of the Fortitude immigrants, the Presbyterian Church was comparatively late in its establishment in the Valley. By the time a congregation began to meet in a small cottage in Ann Street in 1866, most of the other Christian denominations had already established churches in the Valley. The first Methodist church was built on Ann Street in 1856, followed by the original Anglican Church in 1857. In 1862 the Jireh Baptist Church – the second Baptist Church in Brisbane – was completed, and Bishop Quinn opened a Catholic Nunnery and girls' school on Ann Street in 1863.

The Fortitude Valley's first Presbyterian parish was small, sharing a minister with the Oxley and Bald Hills congregations. With the loss of the Reverend Alexander Caldwell to the Gympie parish, the church gradually dwindled away in the early 1870s, with only the Sabbath school continued in union with nearby Presbyterian parishes. The Valley Presbyterian was re-commenced in September 1876, and in 1877 the Valley became an independent congregation. The church, composed of 38 worshippers, purchased the recently constructed Primitive Methodist Church building in what was then Windmill Street.

The 1880s was a decade of expansion and consolidation in the Valley, as it experienced an unprecedented population boom. Between 1881 and 1891, Brisbane's population almost trebled. More than half the increase in the city's population during the first half of the decade was concentrated in Spring Hill, Fortitude Valley,

Newstead and South Brisbane. The population of the Valley leapt from 5,148 in 1881 to 7,485 in 1886. To cater for the influx of families, new housing, shops and community facilities were needed. Between 1876 and 1888 five substantial new churches were built in the Valley. Some replaced earlier churches that had become too small for the growing congregations; others established themselves in the Valley for the first time. The wave of new development started with the Primitive Methodist Church in Brunswick Street (1876), followed by the Anglican Holy Trinity (1877), St Patrick's Catholic Church (1880-82), this church in 1885 and the Brookes Street Methodist Church in 1888.

In line with this trend, the second attempt at a Valley Presbyterian church was a greater success. By 1884 the Valley Presbyterian had 138 members, and the congregation was forced to meet in the Valley Hall as it outgrew the church building. Reverend W. Anson Smith agitated for the construction of a church on land in Warner Street, between Ann and Wickham Streets, which had been purchased for £500 in 1881. Warner Street was then a sparsely populated residential street, despite its proximity to the commercial Ann Street. It was an ideal location for the church, easily accessible to the Valley residents for Sunday services and weekly meetings but away from the noise of the busy business area and the corrupting influence of the hotels. Accordingly, the foundation stone of the Valley Presbyterian was laid in August 1884, and the church was officially opened in May 1885 by the Reverend J.M. Ross, General Agent of the New South Wales Presbyterian Church. Richard Gailey was commissioned to design the building. Contractor William Ferguson, who also constructed the Prince Consort Hotel, supervised the construction of this building.

At the time Richard Gailey was among the most prominent of Brisbane's architects. In the ensuing decades of his 60-year career, he would become one of the most prolific and renowned architects of Brisbane's history. Many of the buildings he designed are now among Brisbane's most well-known landmarks. These include the Empire Hotel (1888), the Prince Consort Hotel (1887-88), and the Wickham Hotel (1885), all in Fortitude Valley, the Orient Hotel in Ann Street (1874-75), the Regatta Hotel, Toowong (1886) and Brisbane Girls Grammar (1882-83). Among the ecclesiastical buildings he designed were the Primitive Methodist Church (later Potters' Gallery) in Fortitude Valley (1876), Sandgate Baptist Church (1887) and the Baptist City Tabernacle, Wickham Terrace (1889-90). Gailey was himself a Baptist, who in later life was particularly devoted to the cause of the church.

The design of the new Presbyterian Church was slightly unusual for the time. Victorian-era churches in the British Empire were designed in accordance with the revival of the Gothic movement. The thirteenth and fourteenth century Gothic church came to represent the power and glory of the church, in a time when those characteristics were threatened. The movement began to pass towards the end of the nineteenth century, with earlier Christian ecclesiastical architecture preferred, particularly Byzantine and Romanesque. Gailey's design for the Valley Presbyterian was a combination of the movements, described as fifteenth century Romanesque.

The building constructed in 1884 was only part of Gailey's design: the cruciform plan included a porch, vestibule, nave, transepts and choir, and the entire design would have cost £6000. The church, which opened in

May 1885, comprised about half of the plan, with the intention to complete the transepts and choir stalls at a later date. The building had a 130 foot frontage by a depth of 140 foot, with space towards

Wickham street for the Sunday School. It was substantially built of cemented, moulded and coloured bricks, with stone and concrete foundations and a slate roof with a belfry.

The population boom continued to enhance attendance numbers at the Valley Presbyterian in the late 1880s, with the parish nearly doubling from 1887 to 1888. 99 new names had been entered onto the membership roll in ten months, in addition to the 372 people in the temperance 'Band of Courage' group, and 41 young men in a morning fellowship meeting. From 138 congregation members in 1884, 347 members were listed in 1890 and 380 in 1891. In addition to religious services, the church provided numerous activities and social services for its congregation, including sporting competitions, welfare assistance, bazaars and fetes, and hosted various associations such as the Valley Religious and Literary Association.

The Presbyterian Church also placed great value on religious education, and Sabbath or Sunday Schools were very well attended. The Fortitude Valley congregation had established a Sabbath School early in its formation, and it was the only branch to continue after the demise of the church in the mid-1870s. By 1888 nearly 250 students were enrolled in the Sunday School. In the late 1890s, the number of students had risen to 300, and the Valley Presbyterian Sunday School opened a branch in the Newstead Hall in 1894 to 'missionise' the surrounding district.

The jubilee of the Presbyterian Church in Queensland occurred in 1900, and the Valley Presbyterian marked the occasion by branching out into evangelical and revival services and supporting missions. By this time, churches of every kind were numerous in the Valley, of different sizes and architectural merit, reflecting both the continued importance of the church in early twentieth century society and the residential nature of the Valley.

Although the Valley Presbyterian could boast a strong and loyal congregation, there had been insufficient funds to finance the construction of both a church and a Sabbath School at the same time. While the original plan for the new church had not been completed, the overcrowding of the Sunday School was a more pressing issue, and an enthusiastic fund-raising campaign to build a school hall was commenced. The campaign survived opposition from within the church from members who believed the church was already in too much debt. In 1905, honorary architect to the Presbyterian Church Alexander Brown Wilson called for tenders for the erection of the brick Sunday School building, accepting the offer of Alexander Davidson. The first section of the Sabbath School adjacent to the church was opened in April 1906 by the Mayor, John Crase. The Sunday School hall had been designed in harmony with the 'plain substantial appearance' of the church. The brick and cement building, with iron roof, had cost the church £400 and could hold 150 pupils, with room for later extensions.

Alexander Brown Wilson, the designer of the Sunday School, was a Scottish-born emigrant who had worked for the Department of Public Works from 1875. Wilson established an independent practice in 1884 and was one of the founding fellows of the Queensland Institute of Architects in 1888, holding the president's role four times. His son Ronald Martin joined the partnership in 1920, taking over when Alexander retired in 1928. Father and son were both members of the Presbyterian Church, and

held the role of honorary Presbyterian architect consecutively. Alexander Wilson had designed his parish church, the Mowbraytown Presbyterian church, in 1885 [601219] as well as major alterations to the Ann Street Presbyterian Church in 1897 [600071].

The Sunday School hall proved its usefulness as a meeting place and concert hall for the church and other groups, and from 1910 was a crèche for some of the evicted Brisbane Creche and Kindergarten class. The second section of the Sunday School, which opened in August 1925, was also designed by Alexander and

Ronald Wilson. Renovations to the church and school were carried out in 1935 and it was in this year that the brick fence was erected in front of the church.

The importance of the church in the lives of members of the congregation is reflected in some of the generous bequests that were made to the church over the years. In 1946 Mr Robert Hastie bequeathed the church £10,000, allowing for several improvements, including alterations to the hall and enclosing the verandah to serve as a kitchen. In 1959, the bequest of £751 from Mr Donald Howe funded the installation of new leadlight windows, including the Women's Guild Memorial rose window.

Despite the dedication of members, speakers at the jubilee services held for the Valley Presbyterian in 1927 foreshadowed the future of the church. Moderator Rev. W.C. Radcliffe noted that, with the expansion of industry into the Valley, the locality of the church was no longer conducive to large attendances. McWhirter's massive bulk store, which had been constructed on land adjacent to the church in 1919 epitomised the spread of commercial and industrial land, dwarfing the Presbyterian Church. The spread of suburbanization in the second half of the twentieth century continued the decline of the Valley's residential population, and the congregation of this inner city church declined with it. However, the church continued to hold services until the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in Australia were amalgamated in 1977, and the property was transferred to the Uniting Church in 1980. In 1989 the Valley Presbyterian was sold to a private company and was converted to a Greek Restaurant. The restaurant ceased to operate in the mid 1990s. At present, the church and Sunday School are owned by the Warner Street Unit Trust, and both are used as nightclubs.

Description

The rendered masonry church and school are built in complementary Romanesque or Renaissance style displaying symmetrical facades, simple low pitched gable roofs of corrugated metal sheeting, rose windows, projecting string courses and semi-circular arches and fanlights. The church has an imposing presence in the street, somewhat dwarfing the school, but the two buildings together creating a fine piece of late nineteenth century urban design. It is possible to assess that the well considered but plain and robust architectural expression of these buildings display attributes highly valued by the Presbyterian Church of that time.

The church has an entry porch with arched openings, centred on a recessed arched panel bounded by pilasters, and containing a rose window surmounted by a triple arched louvre vent. The flanking walls contain a group of three arched windows to the upper level, over a projecting string course and three arched windows to the lower level. The side walls are divided by pilasters into five bays each containing two levels of arched windows all on a porphyry stone base.

The gable roof has bracketed eaves, and is surmounted by two ridge ventilators and a triangular pedimented bell tower with an arched opening capping the street elevation.

The school has double entrance doors surmounted by a semi-circular fanlight, string course and rose window between pilasters. This central panel is flanked by pairs of arched windows. The roof is constructed with a rolled ridge ventilator.

The buildings are set back 3-4m from the front alignment behind a low brick fence with taller piers and a pipe handrail. Their exteriors appear to be largely intact. The interiors were not inspected.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as it reflects the residential growth of Fortitude Valley in the 1880s and the strong presence of the Presbyterian community.

Rarity

CRITERION B

The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage

as a fine example of a relatively rare Victorian Romanesque style of church architecture.

Representative

CRITERION D

The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places

as an 1880s Presbyterian Church and Sabbath school.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a fine example of a relatively rare Victorian Romanesque style of church architecture.

Social

CRITERION G

The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons

as a church and Sabbath School that played an important part in the lives of successive generations who worshipped there.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

the church, as an example of the ecclesiastical designs of influential architect Richard Gailey, who designed some of Brisbane's most well-known buildings; and the Sunday School, as an example of the designs of prominent architect Alexander Wilson and son Ronald Martin Wilson, consecutively honorary architects for the Presbyterian church.

References

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4. *The Brisbane Courier* 18 Jan 1888 p6
5. *The Brisbane Courier* 24 March 1890 p6
6. *The Brisbane Courier* 23 July 1891 p6
7. *The Brisbane Courier* 18 April 1895 p3
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10. *The Brisbane Courier* 11 May 1885 p5
11. *The Brisbane Courier* 19 Oct 1897 p6
12. *The Brisbane Courier* 30 April 1906 p3
13. *The Brisbane Courier* 26 April 1910 p7
14. *The Brisbane Courier* 7 April 1925 p9
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16. *1849-1949*, W.R. Smith and Paterson, Brisbane
17. *Fortitude Valley Presbyterian Church, Brisbane: Jubilee Memoir, 1877-1927, 1927*, W.R. Smith and Patterson, Brisbane
18. *Fortitude Valley Presbyterian Church Centenary 1866-1966*, 1966
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Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

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