Tasmanian Heritage Register Datasheet

Tasmanian Heritage Council

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Hobart Tasmania 7001
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Name: **Wesley Methodist Church & Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute)**

THR ID Number: **12150**

Status: Permanently Registered

Tier: State

Municipality: Hobart City Council

Boundary: CPR11669

Location Addresses
56-58 MELVILLE ST, HOBART 7000 TAS

Title References
38154/4

Property Id
5669184

Wesley Methodist Church – forecourt
NRE 2025

Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute)
NRE 2025

Church – interior from back
NRE 2025

Church – curved altar, rail and murals
NRE 2025

Church – pulpit and choir gallery
NRE 2025

Church – southern and eastern elevations
NRE 2025

Wesley Methodist Church interior c.1900 – prior to 1911 alterations
State Library & Archives of Tasmania PH30/1/2982

Wesley Methodist Church and forecourt c.1911
State Library & Archives of Tasmania NS392-1-749

Wesley Hall/Mechanics' Institute. Photograph by Architect, Frank Heyward (1920–1940)
State Library & Archives of Tasmania

Statement of Significance: (non-statutory summary)

The Wesley Methodist Church and Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) demonstrates the establishment of nonconformist

congregations in Van Diemen's Land and the integral role that the church played in social welfare and outreach programs in Tasmania from the early 19th century through to the 21st century. The Wesley Hall and subsequent additions demonstrate the evolution and importance of education in Tasmania, through the establishment of a Sunday School by the Methodists, and the provision and dissemination of knowledge by the Mechanics' Institute. The Wesley Methodist Church contains c.1837 timber box pews, many of which across Tasmania were replaced from the mid-19th century and therefore makes this an uncommon example, in particular the scale and intactness. The Wesley Methodist Church and Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) have high archaeological potential. The buildings and exterior spaces may contain subsurface archaeological features and deposits that provide evidence of past religious, community and educational uses of the site. The Wesley Methodist Church and Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) demonstrate a pair of buildings established in the early 19th century, that have evolved and developed according to the Methodist (and Uniting) mission, and the requirements of the congregation over 200 years. The Wesley Church and Wesley Hall is associated with organisations that have played a significant role in Tasmania's history, including the Methodist Church and the Mechanics' Institute. The site is also associated with notable Tasmanian architects, Henry Chapman and Frank Heyward.

Why is it significant?:

The Heritage Council may enter a place in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of the following criteria from the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995:

a) The place is important to the course or pattern of Tasmania's history.

The Wesley Methodist Church and Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) demonstrates the establishment of nonconformist congregations in Van Diemen's Land and the integral role that the church played in social welfare and outreach programs in Tasmania from the early 19th century through to the 21st century. The Wesley Museum demonstrates an awareness of the importance of the Methodist mission in Tasmania; established in 1927 it is the first purpose-built community museum in Tasmania. The Wesley Hall and subsequent additions demonstrate the evolution and importance of education in Tasmania, through the establishment of a Sunday School by the Methodists, and the provision and dissemination of knowledge by the Mechanics' Institute.

b) The place possesses uncommon or rare aspects of Tasmania's history.

The Wesley Methodist Church contains c.1837 timber box pews, many of which across Tasmania were replaced from the mid-19th century and therefore makes this an uncommon example, in particular the scale and intactness.

c) The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history.

The Wesley Methodist Church and Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) have the potential to yield information that will contribute to a greater understanding of the pattern of development of early Hobart Town during the early 19th century. The Wesley Methodist Church and Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) have high archaeological potential, and the buildings may contain underfloor artefact deposits, and exterior spaces may contain subsurface archaeological features and deposits providing evidence of past religious, community and educational uses of the site.

d) The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place in Tasmania's history.

The Wesley Methodist Church and Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) demonstrate a pair of buildings established in the early 19th century, that have evolved and developed according to the Methodist (and Uniting) mission, and the requirements of the congregation over 200 years. The external form of the Methodist Wesley Church is largely intact. Internally the Wesley Church retains c.1837 features such as the fixed boxed pews, balcony, altar murals and Ionic columns. There are several elements of the c.1837 interior that were reconfigured and/or recycled in 1911, such as the balcony balustrade, pulpit and choir gallery with spiral staircase, and fenestration to incorporate aedicule detail with stained glazing; the Church remains an open space designed for congregation and gathering. The interior of the Wesley Hall has been altered over 200 years, however, the space remains an open hall, as originally constructed.

e) The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.

No Data Recorded

f) The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social or spiritual reasons.

No Data Recorded

g) The place has a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's history.

The Wesley Church and Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) has a special association with the Methodist (later Uniting) Church in Tasmania, and the integral role that the church has played in the Methodist mission of social welfare and outreach in Tasmania for over 200 years. The Wesley Church has a strong association with architect and Methodist, Henry Chapman. Chapman designed several notable buildings in Hobart Town, including nearby Westella (THR#109) for Henry Hopkins in 1835. The Church also has a special association with architect Frank Heyward, who is responsible for the 1911 'Edwardian Baroque' interior alterations; he later expressed regret for the modifications. The Wesley Hall has a strong association with the Van Diemen's Land Mechanics' Institute / Hobart Town Mechanics' Institute, who occupied the building for over 30 years and constructed the façade addition in 1847.

h) The place is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

No Data Recorded

Heritage approval is required for work that will result in changes to the nature or appearance of the fabric of a Heritage place, both internal and external.
Please refer to the Heritage Council's Works Guidelines (www.heritage.tas.gov.au) for information about the level of approval required and appropriate outcomes.
Heritage Advisors are also available to answer questions and provide guidance on enquiries@heritage.tas.gov.au or Tel 1300850332

This data sheet is intended to provide sufficient information and justification for listing the place on the Heritage Register. Under the legislation, only one of the criteria needs to be met. The data sheet is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the heritage values of the place, there may be other heritage values of interest to the Heritage Council not currently acknowledged.

Setting:

The Wesley Methodist Church & Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) are located to the north of the central business district of Hobart, where the city changes to a mix of 1-2 storey commercial and light industrial buildings. The surrounding area comprises several historic buildings, including the Avalon Theatre and Temperance Hall (former) (THR #11054) directly adjacent, and opposite is the Crisp & Gunn offices and workshop, and Forestry Tasmania dome (THR #12028).

Description:

The Wesley Methodist Church & Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) and several other associated features form this registration. The buildings sit side by side on a large rectangular parcel of land; the church is set back from the street, whereas the chapel/hall fronts directly onto it. There is a narrow laneway between the buildings.

Chapel/Hall (1825), Sunday School (1833) and Mechanic's Institute (1847)
The Wesley Hall sits directly on the boundary with Melville Street. It has a rectangular footprint, formed by three conjoined masonry structures that are rendered and painted. There is a series of hipped roofs clad in corrugated iron, with one simple chimney to the front section and two on the back section.

A two-storey 1847 sandstone addition is the principal elevation. This symmetrical façade, central recessed doorway, with two steps and corbelled overhang is flanked by sash windows and three evenly spaced sash windows to the upper level. Each window has a masonry sill and the central window has a corbelled detail above. This section of the building has quoins and a low parapet to the roofline with the text: 'WESLEY HALL' within. Internally the c.1847 addition retains its 19th century layout, fireplaces and mantles, and elements of timber joinery, including skirtings, architraves, floors and doors.

The 1825 hall sits behind the 1847 addition. The single storey section of the building was constructed as an open hall. The hall has evenly spaced, multi-paned sash windows with curved lintels. Alterations to the eastern doorway created an accessible entry. Internally the space retains many historic features, including evenly spaced engaged columns that extend part way up the walls, timber dado panelling, and a 20th century panelled wall with crucifix. Internal works to the building in 2019 converted the ground floor hall into office space with removable partitioning.

The two-storey 1833 Sunday school behind has a double hipped roof. On the western elevation, the lower level has various sized windows and configurations, the lower level on the eastern side and upper levels on both sides have evenly spaced multi-paned sash windows; all windows have stone sills. The back of the building has an arrangement of various window and door openings. Internally the 1833 Sunday school retains the 19th century layout, fireplaces and mantles, and elements of timber joinery, skirtings, architraves, floors and doors – including a double doorway with arched head and leadlight glazing.

A bitumen car park is located behind the hall, accessed via a laneway on the western side of the Wesley Hall.

Church (1837)
The Wesley Methodist Church is two-storey building set on sandstone foundations, displaying both Regency and

Classical style detail. The church exterior is highly intact. The hipped roof is clad in corrugated iron with ventilators/Tobin tubes. The principal elevation has three bays of stuccoed panels divided by simple sandstone pilasters. The foundation and memorial plaques are incorporated into the pilasters; the foundation stone laid by Sir John Franklin (1837), centenary stone laid by Sir Ernest Clark (1937), and sesquicentenary stone laid by Sir Philip Bennett (1990). A plain entablature sits atop the pilasters, forming a low pediment that conceals the roof form. A centrally placed doorway with solid double doors has a simple sandstone portico with Ionic order columns and entablature. Stained glass windows on the principal elevation have sandstone surrounds with timber aedicule detail. The upper windows are slightly smaller than the ground level windows. The side elevations are rendered and painted with evenly spaced openings with stone sills, timber aedicule detail with stained glazing. The southern end of the building has a blank wall with gable flanked by curved walls. The red brick museum addition (1927) sits on the south-western corner, abutting the curved wall.

Internally the building retains many c.1837 features, and several 1911 alterations. The entrance has a timber panelled vestibule with doorways each side to the ground floor and stairs to the balconies above. Within the church there are three bays of fixed c.1837 Australian red cedar boxed pews and some freestanding pews on the ground floor. There are fixed Australian red cedar pews at the front of the church in various configurations. The window sills on the ground floor have decorative candlestick-like features on each side, with gold acanthus leaf detail atop and holes behind that function as natural ventilation. Most of the stained glass has a cross pattern with sunburst detail above within a timber aedicule, and a border of alternating blocks of coloured glass and a repeated floral motif. There are also several memorial windows depicting religious scenes.

The gallery above is supported by Ionic columns. Like the ground floor, the stepped gallery has rows of c.1837 Australian red cedar boxed pews that curve around the gallery. There is a stepped section at the back, with timber floorboards of various thicknesses and several free-standing pews that are thought to be the 1825 seating from the chapel. The 1911 alterations to the interior include the pulpit and choir gallery at the front of the church; the later balustrade extends around the gallery, extending to the pulpit and choir gallery. These alterations also include the ornate plasterwork ceiling with its rosettes and lines of decorative detail across the length and width of the space terminating in scrolled corbels.

Spiral staircases on each side provide access to the pulpit and choir gallery; one of the staircases dates from the construction of the church and was repurposed following the 1911 alterations. The wide stepped pulpit was enlarged to accommodate the organ and pipes built by George Fincham in Melbourne and installed in 1878. The original case of the organ was described as ‘Gothic style’, however both the scale and appearance of the instrument have been modified over time. Built from pine, it was to be ‘grained, and varnished ‘oak’’ (*Mercury* 22 June 1878, p.2); the timber is now painted white. The number of pipes has been increased over two stages of expansion. The draw knobs were of ivory ‘turned at Alcock's factory and engraved at Roezlier's Melbourne' (p.2).

Beneath the pulpit is a curved altar area with large painted borders and murals, a central image of an open bible with a crucifix and dove, flanked by text of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer and engaged columns. An Australian red cedar communion/altar rail partitions the semi-circular area.

Museum (1927)
The museum addition sits at the back of the Wesley Methodist Church, on the south-western corner. Constructed from red brick, it is a small two-storey structure that sits politely behind the 1840 church. There is a sandstone foundation stone on the western side acknowledging the contribution of L.M. (Louis Manton) Shoobridge, dated September 1927. The building has a hipped roof clad with corrugated iron. The western elevation has a doorway with fanlight above, and timber framed windows grouped in threes, double timber framed windows on the eastern elevation and a blank southern wall. The windows on the lower level of the museum are leadlight with textured glass.

Internally, there is a small entrance hall from the western side; within that space remains brass and marble memorial plaques fixed to the wall. There is a museum room on the ground floor with a built-in Tasmanian Oak timber display cabinet. A sweeping staircase accesses a room upstairs, the same size as below, with a built-in Tasmanian Oak timber cupboard for hymn books and a strong room with reinforced door, timber shelving and safe within. The Museum retains original joinery, including skirtings, architraves, doors, floors and stairs.

The Wesley Museum was closed c.2021, and the collection was transferred to other Tasmanian museums and cultural institutions, including the Maritime Museum Tasmania, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and the Tasmanian Archives (Tassell).

Forecourt
Accessed from Melville Street, there is a large, paved forecourt in front of the Wesley Church, used as a car park at the time of writing. The forecourt is flanked by deciduous trees and low shrubbery. The only remnants of the c.1840 sandstone boundary wall and corner stones sit on each side of the forecourt. A later low masonry wall marks the

boundary with the footpath.

Memorial to Rev John Waterhouse
On the eastern side of the forecourt is a granite obelisk memorial to the Rev John Waterhouse (1789–1842), who served as Superintendent of Wesleyan Missions to Australasia and Polynesia from 1839 to his death in 1842. Waterhouse conducted the first service in the church in 1840.

Archaeological potential
Wesley Methodist Church & Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) has high archaeological potential. There is potential for subsurface archaeological features and deposits relating to the past religious, community and educational uses of the site.

History:

The Wesley Methodist Church and Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute) sit within the country of the Muwinina people.

Early Hobart Town and religion
Hobart Town was established by British colonisers in February 1804. The small settlement centred around Sullivan's Cove, developing as the capital and the administrative centre of Van Diemen's Land during the early 19th century. Religion in early Hobart Town was dominated by the Anglican Church, considered the official religion, under Reverend Robert Knopwood. Other denominations that emerged in Van Diemen's Land during the early 19th century include Catholic and Presbyterian churches, and non-conformist movements like the Society of Friends (Quakers), and the Congregational, Methodist and Baptist churches. Many of these religious groups engaged in important social and welfare work, including the temperance movement (Ely 2015, p.472–77).

Methodist Movement and Van Diemen's Land
The Methodist movement originated with John Wesley in England during the mid-18th century, originating as a revival movement within Anglicanism, becoming a separate denomination after his death in 1791. It was characterised by the simple and accessible way their message was preached, evangelism and the methodical pursuit of holiness. Their teachings were also accompanied by practical actions of assisting with healthcare, finance and literacy, establishing ragged schools, and conducting prison visits. Methodism was a popular alternative to established religion and spread throughout the United Kingdom and its colonies in the 18th and 19th centuries because of enthusiastic missionary work (Wesley Chapel and Leysian Mission; Wilson 2005, p.234).

As a result of representations made to the Methodist Church in England, the Rev. Samuel Leigh of New South Wales and the Rev. Benjamin Carvosso on instruction from the Mission Board, called at Hobart Town on their way to Sydney. The first Methodist sermon in Tasmania was preached in Hobart in April 1820 by Carvosso on the steps of the Hobart Town Court House. He also preached at the prison, held two more meetings at the courthouse and visited several Wesleyan families, who formed a Methodist Society three months later. The first Methodist meeting was held in a Collins Street house owned by Mr Benjamin Nokes and was attended by eight people. The group set out regulations for meetings and established a Sunday School. Increased membership resulted in relocation to a room in Charles Donn's carpentry shop, known as the Argyle Street chapel (current site of Hobart City Council car park) (*Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser* 29 June 1822, p.1). Following Carvosso's departure from Hobart he wrote to the British committee describing the need for a resident minister in the colony. His letters emphasised the need for Christian influence and were partly responsible for the emigration to Hobart of several Methodist tradesmen, amongst them, Robert Mather, Henry Hopkins and John Dunn (Colgrave).

Wesley Chapel in Melville Street
The congregation outgrew the Argyle Street chapel and in 1822 the foundation stone for a new chapel was laid in Melville Street, on land gifted to the church by wealthy landowner, David Lord (Allen ADB). A chapel committee was formed that included prominent community figures such as William Shoobridge, Robert Mather and David Lord. In November 1823 a public meeting was held at the Argyle Street chapel for the purpose of founding a branch of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Lack of funds slowed construction of the chapel, which officially opened in 1826 (Ratcliffe 2015, p.2273-4). However, reports in the *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser* from November 1825 record that services and meetings were being held in the new building (25 Nov 1825, p.3). In February 1826 it was reported:

the Melville-street Chapel, now being completed, Public Worship will henceforth be performed in it on Sabbath-Days, at Eleven o'clock, in the morning, and Six in the evening…On the occasion of its completion, two sermons will be preached next Sunday, at the usual Hours of Worship, by the Rev. B. Carvosso, then Collections will be made to assist in defraying the heavy Expenses incurred in the Erection of this Public Building…A large Portion of the Chapel is occupied by Free Sittings for the Poor; and the Trustees avail themselves of this Opportunity of earnestly and affectionately inviting them to attend the House of God, and hear "the things that belong to their peace" (*Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser* 10 Feb 1826, p.1).

A modification of the original design was the inclusion of removable internal partitions to create two school rooms. However, within a few years demand for space prompted the construction of a two-storey classroom extension behind the chapel in 1833. The Wesley Chapel/Wesley Hall is the oldest extant Methodist building in Australia (Ratcliffe 2015, p.2274).

Carvosso became the first minister of the Wesley Church in Hobart from 1825 and 1830. A society was formed in Launceston in 1826 and by 1840 there were 14 chapels around the two major settlements and in the Midlands, later spreading to the north-west in the 1850s, the north-east in the 1870s and the mining towns of the west coast in the 1880s. Methodists were prominent in the temperance movement (see THR #11054 Avalon Theatre and Temperance Hall (former); Wilson 2005, p.234).

Missionary work and pastoral care

By 1824 the 'Hobart Town Circuit' was conducting services at Hobart, Glenorchy, New Town and four other locations (*Mercury* 20 Dec 1937, p.3; Dugan 1920, pp.10–18, 24; Allen). By 1850 there were 23 Methodist Chapels in Van Diemen's Land, regular services were maintained in 20 other places, there were 4950 attendants to Methodist services, 1276 scholars and 147 teachers enrolled in the Sunday Schools. There were six ministers, regarded as missionaries, appointed by the London Committee and 27 local preachers. In the same year the Church resolved to launch an ambitious education scheme, commencing with the establishment of Horton College, near Ross (Dugan 1920, pp.50-51).

The Methodist Church has played an important role in supporting the spiritual and social well-being of the Tasmanian community. Its early support for convicts and the socially disadvantaged was unmatched and marked by a series of significant initiatives. These included beginning the first Sunday Schools in the colony in 1821, and providing sustained pastoral support for the colony's convicts, most particularly the secondary prisons at Macquarie Harbour and Port Arthur (Dugan 1920, pp.20–23). In 1823, when the church was in Argyle Street, it also established Australia's first public lending library (ADFAS in the Community Feb 2016, p.5). The church has continued to provide social services for those in need into the 21st century, through the provision of basic amenities, food, clothing and support. Lifeline, a national 24-hour crisis service, was established in 1963 by Rev Sir Alan Walker, a former Superintendent of Wesley Mission in New South Wales.

Sunday Schools were an integral part of Methodist Churches and were established with each church built; they were often used as day schools. It was noted in 1822 that:

this Charity, like every other Wesleyan Methodist Sunday School throughout the World, is not confined to any particular Party, but is Open for the gratuitous Instruction, in Reading and Writing, of Persons of every Age and every religious Denomination' (*Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser* 22 June 1822, p.1).

In 1824 a Methodist Sunday School Union was formed, and schools were established at Liverpool Street, Sandy Bay, Kangaroo Point, O'Brien's Bridge and the Penitentiary (Grant 'No.1022'). Sunday Schools were also established in Hobart when Methodist churches/chapels were constructed on Davey (THR #2279 – 1834, 1870), High/Tasma (demolished, 1839), and Swan Streets (THR #2885, 1905).

A new church (1837)

By 1836 the Hobart Town congregation and Sunday School had outgrown the chapel, and the decision was made to build a new church, adjacent to the chapel. The new church was designed by prominent Hobart architect and member of the congregation, Henry Chapman; a semi-circular sanctuary and organ were added to the design by the church trustees ('Sesquicentenary Wesley Church', p.2). The foundation stone was unveiled by newly arrived Governor, Sir John Franklin in December 1837. A spacious courtyard sits in front of the new church, a place for congregation and the Wesleyan tradition of open-air sermons (Ratcliffe 2015, p.2277).

Henry Richard Chapman, architect (1794–1855)

Chapman designed several notable buildings in Hobart Town, including nearby Westella (THR #109) for Henry Hopkins in 1835; Chapman's father Isaac Chapman was a builder who had come to Van Diemen's Land with the Hopkins family aboard the *Heroine* in 1822. Hopkins was influential in the early history of Tasmania and was involved in the founding of Congregationalism in Hobart Town, and contributed generously to other non-conformist churches, including Presbyterian and Wesleyan (Tassell).

By 1840 the Methodists owned a large parcel of land measuring one acre, one rood and 32 perches on Melville Street, extending along Melville Street to the intersection with Murray Street (LTO Con 2/3695). The land was purchased with funds from the sale of an earlier land grant from Governor Arthur, who was impressed with the work being done by the Wesleyans among the convicts (Everist, p.30). Sprent's map (c.1840) shows that there was a Manse located on the western side of the Chapel (1826). The land was sold to Hobart City Council in the 20th century, and a multi-level carpark was constructed on the site.

Opening services were held on 18 October 1840, the Rev Mr Waterhouse preached in the morning, Rev Mr Hurst in the afternoon and Rev Mr Cargill in the evening (Taylor). The media of the day reported that the new church was:

rather out of the ordinary style of architecture and magnitude… This chapel presents an attraction quite English in its appearance. Usefulness, and not ostentation, being the order of the day with the Wesleyans, their places of worship seldom exhibit anything but what is exceedingly plain; but as regards the new edifice in Melville-street, the interior portion of it is fitted up with a degree of elegance and beauty that is seldom surpassed. There is a spacious gallery, one portion of which is occupied by the singers; all round the interior this is supported by Ionic columns…The pews are large and appropriately finished; neither do they present that awkwardness exhibited in the old chapel…The aisles also present an improvement…The chapel is well supplied with windows, so that during the winter solstice an abundance of light will be admitted… (*Courier* 27 Nov 1840, p.3).

Comparisons have been drawn to Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London, designed by George Dance the Younger and built in 1778 by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism (Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission; Powell 1990, p.2).

Following the completion of the new church, in 1841 the chapel became the home of the Van Diemen's Land Mechanics' Institute (ADFAS in the Community Feb 2016, p.16). The Mechanics' Institute had previously used the Chapel as a venue for lectures.

Van Diemen's Land Mechanics' Institute/Hobart Town Mechanics' Institute
Mechanics' Institutes originated in Britain with the establishment of the Edinburgh School of Arts in 1821 and the London Mechanics' Institution in 1823, soon spreading throughout many cities and towns, and the colonies. The Institute sought to give skilled workers technical and adult education, providing lectures, classes, and access to libraries and museums, at the cost of a small subscription fee. Australia's first mechanics' institute was established in Hobart Town between 1826 and 1827. Dr James Ross, teacher and editor, chaired the meeting and George Augustus Robinson, builder and self-trained preacher, was described as the founder of the Institute (Petrow 1993, p.8; ADB).

After years of temporary accommodation for its activities the Institute secured the Wesley Chapel for 50 pounds a year. Acknowledging that raising funds for the construction of their own building, the Institute committed to a 21-year lease of the Chapel and to spend 500 pounds on alterations. The chapel and two-storey addition to the front of the building provided members with 'a commodious and well-adapted Hall' for lecturing and for housing the scientific apparatus, the museum collection and the Library. A reading room was also established. The addition was originally smooth-tooled sandstone ashlar with lighter sandstone quoins that has since been rendered and painted. A low parapet carried the name of the organisation, 'Mechanics' Institute', later replaced with 'Wesley Hall'. The organisation was renamed the Hobart Town Mechanics' Institute in 1857 following the cessation of convict transportation and renaming of Van Diemen's Land to Tasmania (Petrow 1993, p.7, 10).

Membership of the Society waned, unable to pay its debts and loss of government funding, the organisation folded in 1871 (Petrow; *Mercury* 23 Dec 1871, p.3). Following the dissolution of the Mechanics' Institute, the Church resumed use of the building; the building accommodated various organisations, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In the 20th century the hall was used as a public meeting place, and was used by secular groups, including the Hobart Poultry Club and the Caged Bird Society (pers comm. D Grant Jan 2026).

Alterations, additions and a museum (1911 and 1927)
In 1878 a large pipe organ was installed in the Wesley Church, requiring the apse to be enlarged. The organ was built in Victoria by George Fincham founder of Australia's largest organ building enterprise, prospering and surviving for 130 years through four succeeding generations of his family; their work also extended to New Zealand (Hargraves). The instrument was enlarged by George's son in 1927, and in 1969 it was completely remodelled and enlarged by his grandson. (Stansall 1975, p.20; *Mercury* 27 June 1878, p.2, 11 August 1927, p.5; Henwood).

In 1902 the various sections of the Methodist Church throughout the Commonwealth of Australia, (the Wesleyan Methodist Church, Primitive Methodists and United Free Methodists) were combined to form the Methodist Union (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1 Jan 1902 p.2).

In 1911 the interior of the Church was remodelled 'in a style approaching Edwardian Baroque', designed by architect, Frank Heyward. Best known for houses in the Arts and Crafts style and early Modernist Interwar industrial complexes, Heyward later expressed regret for the alterations (Tasmanian Archives, 'Early Tasmanian architecture [album 2] Frank Heyward'). As part of this redevelopment the pulpit and the choir gallery were reconfigured to the current structure, and the windows were altered to include timber aedicule detail and stained glazing (Ratcliffe 2015, pp.2276–77).

Frank Heyward, architect (1876–1942)
Heyward was born in Hobart and studied and worked there with Norris and Sharland; George Fagg; and the Department of Lands and Works, and finally Robert Flack Ricards. They formed a successful partnership, and were later joined by Alexander North, who Heyward would join in their Launceston office in 1920, before going out on his own. Heyward is known for the Arts and Crafts style houses of his early career, and for delving into Modernism with a number of stripped classical and simple art deco commercial and industrial buildings in Launceston in the 1920s and 30s(Neale 2012, p.330). These include the Patons & Baldwins plant (THR #11824), Alexander Patent Racket Factory (THR #11039); CH Smith Woolstore (THR #10568), and Rapson Tyre and Rubber Factory (THR #12073) (*The Mercury* 2 July 1942, p.6). Heyward was prominent in the architecture profession and arts community, serving as president of a number of state and local organisations. He also had active interests in archaeology, history, and nature and served on the Launceston City Council (Neale 2012, p.331).

In 1927 a new choir vestry was added to the Church, and in the same year the Hobart Wesley Museum was established, following a bequest that provided for the construction of an extension to the Church building to house the Church's historical collections (Stansall 1976, p.20; Tassell; *Mercury* 16 November 1927, p.8). The museum held letters, pictures, photographs concerning the life of John Wesley, and objects associated with the church, including the silver trowel Sir John Franklin used to lay the foundation stone, the old silver communion cup and candle snuffers (*Mercury* 18 January 1937, p.3). It is thought that the Wesley Museum is the first specifically built community/church museum in Tasmania (Tassell 2025).

In 1937 a centenary memorial stone was placed above Franklin's foundation stone by then Governor of Tasmania, Sir Ernest Clark (*Mercury* 6 December 1937, p.3).

Uniting Church in the 21st century
In 1977 three Australian Christian denominations joined to form the Uniting Church in Australia, these included the Congregational Union in Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia (Uniting Church). The Uniting Church continued to conduct services in the 1840 church building and the Wesley Hall was used for community events and outreach programs, including the Nobucks kitchen, a community meal service (Porter). In 2019 internal works to the Wesley Hall were made to improve the outreach services for the organisation, including the conversion of the main hall space with partitioning for offices, upgraded kitchen facilities for the Nobucks kitchen, and equal access to the building via the eastern door.

The Uniting Church stopped using the Melville Street Church for services in 2021. The Wesley Museum was closed shortly after, and the collection was transferred to other Tasmanian museums and cultural institutions, including the Maritime Museum Tasmania and the Tasmanian Archives (Tassell). In 2025 the Faith Methodist Church occupies the church, a congregation of the Chinese Methodist Church in Australia (Grant). The church and hall were sold in late 2025.

Comparative Analysis:

Methodist Chapels and Churches
By the mid-19th century there were 23 Methodist Chapels in Van Diemen's Land, regular services were maintained in 20 other places, there were 4950 attendants to Methodist services, 1276 scholars and 147 teachers enrolled in the Sunday Schools. (Dugan 1920, pp.50–51).

Ratcliffe noted in 2015 that the Methodist chapel in New Norfolk (THR #1222) was the oldest Methodist church still in use as a place of worship in Tasmania – it closed in 2020. The chapel opened in 1837, a 'Regency hybrid' with Gothic style fenestration and later porch, on a more modest scale than the Melville Street church. Many pioneers of the Derwent Valley were Methodists, including the hop-growing Shoobridge family of Bushy Park, who were also associated with the Melville Street church and museum.

Several other Methodist Chapels and Sunday Schools were constructed in Hobart during the 1830s, however, these structures were replaced in the late 19th century with larger Gothic style buildings – these included the Davey Street Methodist Church (THR #2279, 1870), which replaced a schoolroom and 1838 chapel, and the Swan Street Methodist Church (THR #2885, 1905), which replaced a c.1838 chapel and schoolroom on High Street (now Tasma Street), since demolished. A substantial Sunday School building was constructed behind the Swan Street church in 1913, with a second storey added in 1922. There are however, several chapels remaining in rural areas including; Lawitta (THR1205), Campbell Town (THR#4967), and St Leonard's (THR#4622).

The Methodists in Launceston were granted an acre of land in Paterson Street, the site of the former Government pound. A chapel, designed by Samuel Jackson, opened in late 1835, 'described as a basic brick non-conformist chapel of the larger size with a stuccoed street-front'. Ratcliffe describes the former chapel, now Pilgrim Hall, as a product of 'Regency eclecticism…a building with Gothic decoration, not a Gothic building…although it was one of the

earliest harbingers of the forthcoming style in the Australian Colonies' (Ratcliffe 2015, pp.2278–79). In 1839 a Methodist parsonage was constructed on the eastern side of the chapel. In 1910 the residence was redeveloped by the Methodist Church Trust and a new façade added and the interior converted to offices ; the building was renamed Wesley Chambers (Grant, No.1411). The congregation outgrew the chapel and a larger Gothic church was constructed alongside in 1866 (Grant, No.43). The buildings were sold by the Uniting Church in late 2025. Similar to the Melville Street Methodist buildings, the Paterson Street buildings demonstrate the evolution and development of Methodism and the Uniting Church in the state, and the integral role that the church played in social welfare in the larger population centres of Tasmania.

There are a handful of other c.1830 non-conformist churches and halls in Hobart, including the Independent Chapel (1831, demolished and replaced with c.1868-1872 Memorial Church) and Hopkins Hall (1835, THR# 11970), Scots Church and Hall (1834-36, 1824, THR#6638),

St John's Presbyterian Church (1841, THR#79), Macquarie Street was designed to replicate a Greek temple; similar to the Wesley Methodist Church it has Classical style façade with columns, pediment and aedicules. Although on a more modest scale, the interior also features fixed box pews and a gallery at the back.

Boxed pews
Fixed box pews are uncommon in a Tasmanian context and likely at a national level. Box pews were designed to create an enclosed draught-free family space. They were often arranged in blocks accessed by two aisles rather than one central aisle and were a common feature of Georgian church interior design, including in the Australian colonies up to the mid-19th century. From the 1850s, box pews became less common in new church designs, and existing examples were often replaced with bench pew seating. In Tasmania, few examples of box pew seating remain. Surviving examples include St Thomas' Avoca (1842, THR#12016), Scots Church, Hobart (1835; THR#6638), St Andrew's Presbyterian, Evandale (1840; THR#5019); Campbell Memorial Church, Oatlands (1856; THR#5519); St George's, Battery Point (1838; THR#1688); St John's Presbyterian, Macquarie St (1843; THR#79), and the Wesleyan Uniting Church, Melville St (1837; THR#2504). In other early Tasmanian churches such as c.1825 St John's Church, Launceston (THR#4612), c.1836 St Luke's Richmond (THR #1135) and c.1841 St Joseph's Church, Hobart (THR#107), the box pews were removed in the 19th century (Examiner, 4 February 1902 p.7, Mercury, 13 October 1909 p.2 and Tasmanian News, 24 December 1891 p.2). Those in Chalmers Launceston (THR#4619) were removed in 1981 while those in St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Campbell Town (THR#4964) have been disassembled and only partly retained. Of the Tasmanian examples identified above most of their configurations feature blocks of pews accessed by two aisles.

Mechanics' Institutes
The most successful mechanics' institute was established in Launceston in 1842 with the support of Congregational minister, journalist and historian John West. They built a dedicated building between 1857 and 1860 designed by William Henry Clayton. The Italianate edifice remained the centre of culture and an ornament to the town until demolished in 1971. Less impressive but still noteworthy were the Franklin, Huon, Don, Port Esperance, Ellesmere (later Scottsdale), Emu Bay, Ringarooma and Queenstown Mechanics' Institutes (Petrow). The Atheneum Hall at Waratah (THR #7408) was designed by Leslie Corrie of Launceston in 1886 to accommodate the growing Mount Bischoff Mechanics' Institute, established in 1877 in a neighbouring building that burnt down shortly after the new building was completed. It is a large Victorian era timber hall that has served as a community centre following the closure of the mine in 1947. The word 'mechanics' did not form part of the name of the Bellerive (THR #989), Campbell Town (THR #12041), Devon, Glenora, Green Ponds, Hamilton-on-Forth, Lefroy, Oatlands, Sorell, Stanley and Wynyard institutes, but they had similar aims to mechanics' institutes.

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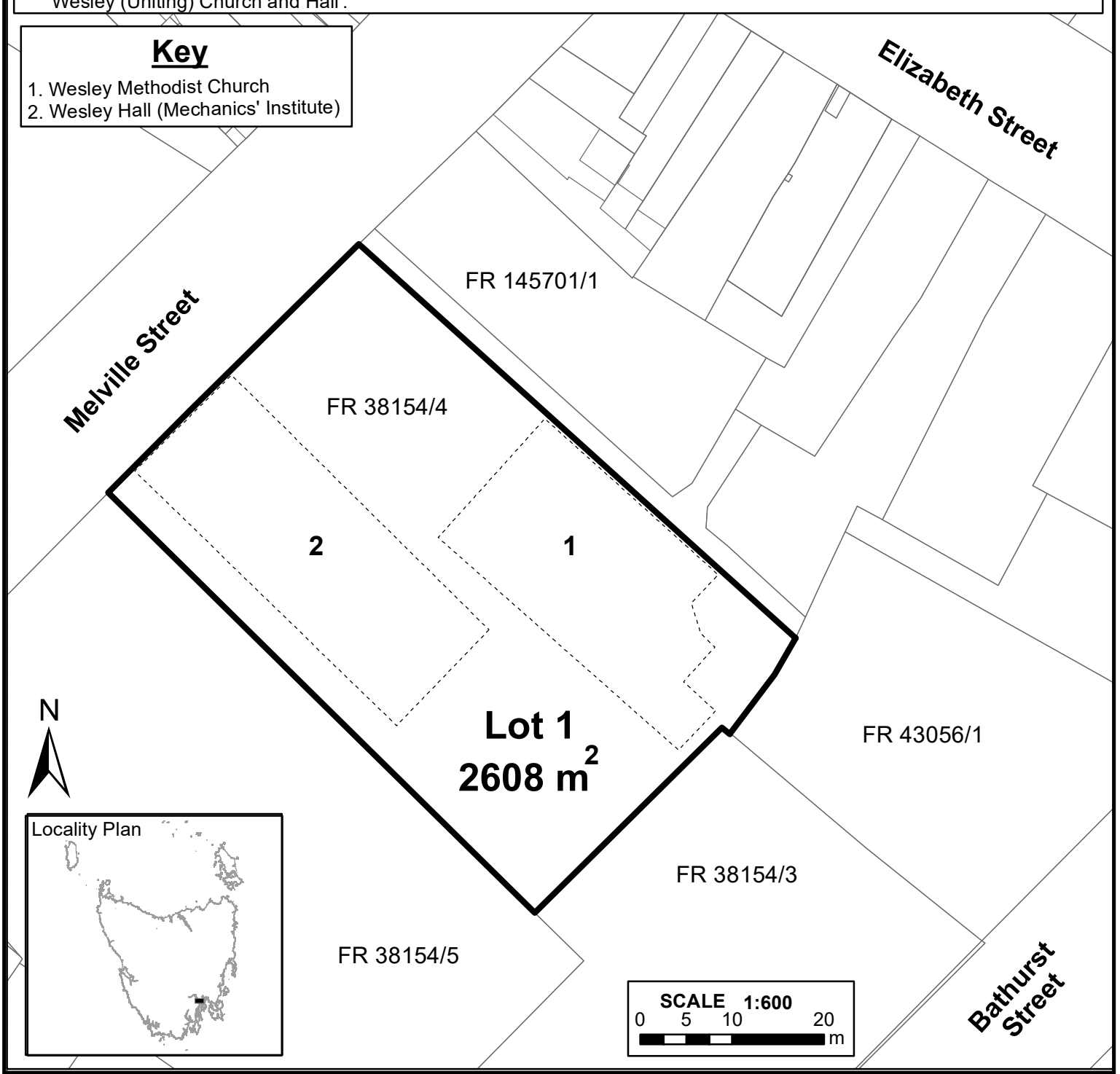
Note

1. Lot 1 represents the registered boundary for "Wesley Methodist Church & Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute)", #12150 on the Tasmanian Heritage Register.
2. Lot 1 is the whole of parcel FR 38154/4, the boundary of which is marked by a heavy black line, and described below.
3. All boundaries are parcel boundaries unless otherwise stated, details of individual land parcel boundaries may be accessed through the Land Information System Tasmania (LIST).
4. For the purpose of S15(4)(b) of the Historic Cultural Act 1995, this plan replaces the previous registration THR 2504 'Wesley (Uniting) Church and Hall'.

Key

1. Wesley Methodist Church
2. Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute)



TASMAP:	HOBART - 5225	GRID:	MGA94 / ZONE 55	DATUM:	AHD	CONTOUR INTERVAL:	N/A

No.	PRODUCTION / AMENDMENT	AUTHORITY	REFERENCE	DRAWN	APPROVED	DATE
1	Production	THC	12150	AW	S. PARRY	15 APR26

Tasmania

Wesley Methodist Church & Wesley Hall (Mechanics' Institute)
56-58 Melville St, Hobart

PREPARED BY HERITAGE TASMANIA

Tasmanian Heritage Council

GDA

CENTRAL PLAN REGISTER

p.p. Surveyor General: _____

Date Registered: 21 APR 2026

CPR 11669