

1 June 2022

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Latrobe City Council
PO Box 264
MORWELL VIC 3840

Dear [REDACTED]

Heritage Assessment – Former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel (Methodist Church)

The attached report provides an assessment of the heritage significance of the former Wesleyan Chapel (also known as the Traralgon Methodist Church).

Section 8 provides the findings arising from this assessment. In summary:

- The former Wesleyan Chapel is of local historic and representative significance to Latrobe City. Attachment 1 provides the statement of significance for this place.
- As a building of local significance conservation – that is retention, repair, and maintenance – of the former Wesleyan Chapel is the preferred option and if the building cannot remain on its current site, then it must be relocated.
- For relocation to occur a suitable site must be found, as well as a new use. In deciding this, the question of future ownership must also be determined. To assist with this process, interim management guidelines have been prepared in relation to potential location, use and ownership (see section 8.3).
- That said, the 2021 condition assessment has identified significant works necessary to make the building safe and to prevent further deterioration of the structure and while it does conclude that relocation of the building is possible, it will require repairs and bracing works to be carried out prior to relocation. The site also has restrictive access constraints, which would add costs to the project.

On this basis, the following recommendations are made:

- That Latrobe City:
 - Commissions a peer review of the 2021 building condition assessment by a consultant with experience in the maintenance and repair of heritage buildings to ensure the approach and recommendations are consistent with the Burra Charter and to gain a better understanding of the costs and issues.
 - Following completion of the peer review, Council in consultation with the local community further explores the feasibility of relocating the former Wesleyan Chapel, having regard to the interim management guidelines set out in this report (see section 8.3 for further details).
- Depending on the outcome of the above investigations there are two options:
 - If the option of relocation is feasible, then Latrobe City should commission a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) to identify the most appropriate way of caring for the heritage fabric of the former Wesleyan Chapel having regard to heritage significance. In doing so, it

will build upon the assessment and preliminary guidelines in this report and will address the most appropriate manner to respond to the building condition issues and need for relocation. It would also explore potential social values. The CMP should be prepared prior to any action associated with the relocation such as site acquisition, or sale of lease of the building (see section 8.3).

- If the option of relocation is not feasible, then Latrobe City should commission a heritage impact assessment by a suitably qualified consultant to identify strategies and actions to minimise the impacts of the demolition – for example, by potentially retaining some original features, which could become part of the TDHS collection, undertaking a photographic survey, or interpreting its history through various means such as on-site signage at the original site or a website page or similar.
- A further recommendation is for Latrobe City to find a suitable location for the ‘Diorama’ currently stored at the former Wesleyan Chapel. One option is for it to be donated to the Powerworks Visitor Centre at Morwell. It is understood the Traralgon & District Historical Society holds original copies of the historic photos in the foyer. Nonetheless, they should be offered to the Society or kept by Latrobe City Council.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Kind regards



David Helms

Heritage assessment – Former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel

1. PURPOSE

This report has been prepared for Latrobe City. The purpose is to:

Conduct a site-specific heritage assessment of the former Traralgon Methodist Church building located at 41 Princes Street Traralgon (within the Traralgon Railway Station precinct) to determine whether the building is of heritage significance.

This report is required as a redevelopment of the subject land is proposed and this will require the relocation or demolition of the building.

According to historic sources this building was originally known as the Wesleyan Chapel, as it was constructed for the Wesleyan Methodist Church, which is now part of the Uniting Church of Australia. Because of this, the building is referred to throughout this report as the former Wesleyan Chapel.

2. METHODOLOGY

This heritage assessment has been prepared in accordance with the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*, 2013 (the *Burra Charter*) and its guidelines, and in accordance with relevant guidelines including Planning Practice Note 1: *Applying the heritage overlay* (PPN1). All terminology is consistent with the *Burra Charter*.

The key tasks have included:

- Historic research using selected primary (Public Records Office of Victoria public building file, newspaper articles available on-line via the Trove website, and building files, plans and reports and historic images held by Latrobe City) and secondary (local histories) sources.
- An inspection of the former Wesleyan Chapel, including the interior.
- Review of 'Structural inspection and assessment of existing building Traralgon Visitor Information Centre' (that is, the former Wesleyan Chapel) prepared 31 March 2021 by Hade Consulting for Latrobe City.
- A 'desktop' comparative analysis– this means the analysis has relied on information about the comparative heritage places in Latrobe City.
- Analysis against the Hercon criteria, and preparation of a statement of significance in the PPN1 format.
- Preparation of preliminary management guidelines to guide further investigation of future development options.

The kind assistance of Barbara Johnson, President of the Traralgon & District Historical Society (TDHS) and Linda Barraclough who provided information about the history of the former Wesleyan Chapel is gratefully acknowledged.

3. EXISTING HERITAGE LISTINGS AND ASSESSMENTS

The former Wesleyan Chapel is not currently included in the heritage overlay or any other statutory heritage register.

The former Wesleyan Chapel was assessed to be of local heritage significance by the *Traralgon Heritage Study*, prepared by Context in 1992. At that time, the building was on its original site, which is the property now known as 57 Post Office Place, Traralgon. The 1992 study included the following:

The first Methodist Minister was appointed to Traralgon in 1877 and two years later the first church, a wooden building, was erected on the site of the Windsor's home at the corner of Argyle and Mills Streets. This building remains on the site and is one of the oldest buildings in Traralgon (the Star Hotel, 'Brooklea' and the 1855 part of Traralgon Park homestead may be the only older buildings). The simple Gothic building reflects early methods of construction and compares to churches in Moe and the old Narracan township.

In 1939, the red brick church which also exists on the site, was built next door. Later the wooden church was moved to the rear of the site. This church, unlike the other denominations, remained on the same site, which is not in the vicinity of Church Street.

An interim heritage control was applied to the former Wesleyan Chapel on its original site. However, it expired and was not re-applied when the building was relocated to the present site c.1993.

The former Wesleyan Chapel was not assessed by the *Latrobe City Heritage Study* 2008 (updated 2010). The 1939 Church (since demolished) was assessed and found not to satisfy the threshold of local significance.

4. HISTORY

4.1. Contextual history

Traralgon is situated on the traditional lands of the Gunai Kurnai people. The Brataualung, a clan of the Gunai Kurnai, claimed the land south of the Latrobe River, while the Briakalong occupied land to the north (Context 2005:1).

Traralgon's origins date from the early pastoral period. Edward Hobson occupied the Traralgon run in 1844 and an accommodation house near Traralgon Creek provided shelter for travellers on the route between Melbourne and Sale. The town was surveyed in 1858, the first sale of township sites was conducted in 1859 and a census in 1861 revealed there were 36 residents.

The opening up of the land for selection around Traralgon contributed to the development of the town in the 1870s and the population grew steadily from 111 in 1871 to over 300 ten years later. Construction of the railway line between Sale and Melbourne, which was completed in stages from 1877 to 1879, was a major impetus to the town's growth and most development took place on the western side of the creek centred around Franklin Street, which led to the station. It was during this decade that the first community facilities were established beginning with the first school, which opened in May 1870, moved to a new building in 1872, which was replaced by another by the end of the decade as enrolments grew. The school was also used for church services until 1878 when the Presbyterian congregation constructed the first church in Traralgon, which was then used on alternate Sundays by the Methodist and Anglican congregations. This was soon followed by the Wesleyan (Methodist) Chapel, opened at the end of 1879, and the Anglican Church, built in 1880. The first Mechanics' Institute was established in 1876.

The growing importance of the town was recognised in 1879 when it became the centre of the Shire of Traralgon, which was separated from the Shire of Rosedale. Traralgon became the legal, administrative, and educational centre for its hinterland where dairying and saw milling were developing as major industries. In the 1880s four brickyards were operating, substantial public buildings including the first Shire Hall (1881), the imposing Post Office and Court House (1886) and the new Mechanics' Institute (1887) were constructed in the town and new subdivisions provided land for housing (Context 2005:1). By 1896 the population had grown to over 1,000.

The establishment of railway workshops in 1903 led to further growth and between 1901 and 1910 the population almost doubled to reach over 2,000 people.



Franklin Street looking south, c.1910 (State Library of Victoria)

The next major period of growth began in the late 1930s when Australian Paper Manufacturers (APM) established a paper pulp mill at Maryvale, north-west of Traralgon. The pilot mill opened in 1936 and by 1939 the main mill was in operation. New homes to house the large labour force were constructed in Traralgon and between 1933 and 1954 the population more than trebled to almost 9,000. The establishment of other industries and the opening in 1956 of the Central Gippsland Hospital in Traralgon resulted in a further 4,000 residents by the early 1960s.

4.2. Place history

While the first church services were held in people's homes or farm buildings – travelling Anglican minister, Francis Hales, held a service at the Hazelwood station in 1848 as he moved around Gippsland – once communities became established a church was often one of the first buildings they constructed. Here, people have performed some of their most important ceremonies and rituals (Context 2005:38).

The churches and their associated buildings, such as halls, residences, and schools, have made distinctive contributions to town streetscapes and rural districts throughout the region. Communities have had close affiliations with their churches, especially during times of sectarian rivalry when people's denominations greatly influenced their identity, work, and social contacts. Churches also contain community memorials to local people through stained glass windows, monuments, and plaques (Context 2005:38)

In 1875 the Wesleyan Conference instructed the Rev. William Williams, then stationed at Sale to make a 'thorough inspection' of the Traralgon district and report the result to the ensuing conference. After an excursion lasting three days Rev. Williams returned home 'well satisfied with the prospects for Methodism' in the districts he had visited. However, it was not until 1878 that the results were fully reported to the conference, which quickly appointed the Rev. William Batten to reside at Traralgon. Following his death in February 1879 he was replaced by the Rev. D.J. Flockart (*Gippsland Farmers' Journal and Traralgon, Heyfield & Rosedale News*, 26 July 1888).

The first services, with an average attendance of 25, were initially held once a fortnight in the common school, and then moved to the Presbyterian Church when it opened in 1878. The arrival of several Methodist families boosted the average congregation to about 50 and so in 1879 the Rev. Flockart prepared plans for a wooden building 20 feet by 32 feet, which was constructed by Messrs. Horne & Matthew who submitted the lowest tender of £200. It was described as a 'neat and compact little structure, and well fitted up inside' (*Gippsland Farmers' Journal and Traralgon, Heyfield & Rosedale News*, 26 July 1888; *Gippsland Times*, 7 November 1879, p.3).

The Wesleyan Chapel was completed and opened on Sunday, 5 November 1879. The opening was celebrated by a tea and public meeting held on the following Monday in the Traralgon Mechanics' Institute. Addresses were delivered by the Revs. Messrs. Adams, D.J. Flockart, R.C. Flockart, Hutchison, Moorhouse and Wilson and the united choir of the Wesleyan, Presbyterian, and Church of England 'rendered several pieces in great style' accompanied by Miss Kate Campbell at the organ (*Gippsland Times*, 7 November 1879, p.3).

Continuing growth in the town and the congregation resulted in the need for a larger building to provide accommodation for '120 persons more than formerly'. Designed by Mr. J. Kinder of Morwell, who acted as architect and clerk of works free of charge, the extended building was formally re-opened on Sunday 19 February 1888, under the presidency of Rev. F.G. Watsford. Addresses were given by the Revs. J. McBride, Watsford, and Whitechurch and several anthems were rendered by the choir. The cost of the additions was partly funded by a bazaar organised by the women in the congregation and money raised during opening services, but a considerable debt remained on the building (*Traralgon Record*, 24 February 1888, p.2).

In 1911 further additions were made at the rear of the Wesleyan Chapel at a cost of £45, for use as a kindergarten, Sunday School, and meeting room (see Figures 1 & 2).



Figure 1: At left, undated early (c.1900s) image of the Wesleyan Chapel; At right, 1911 working bee to build the kindergarten room additions – Rev. Jas. Wilson pictured second from left (standing) (Source: TDHS).

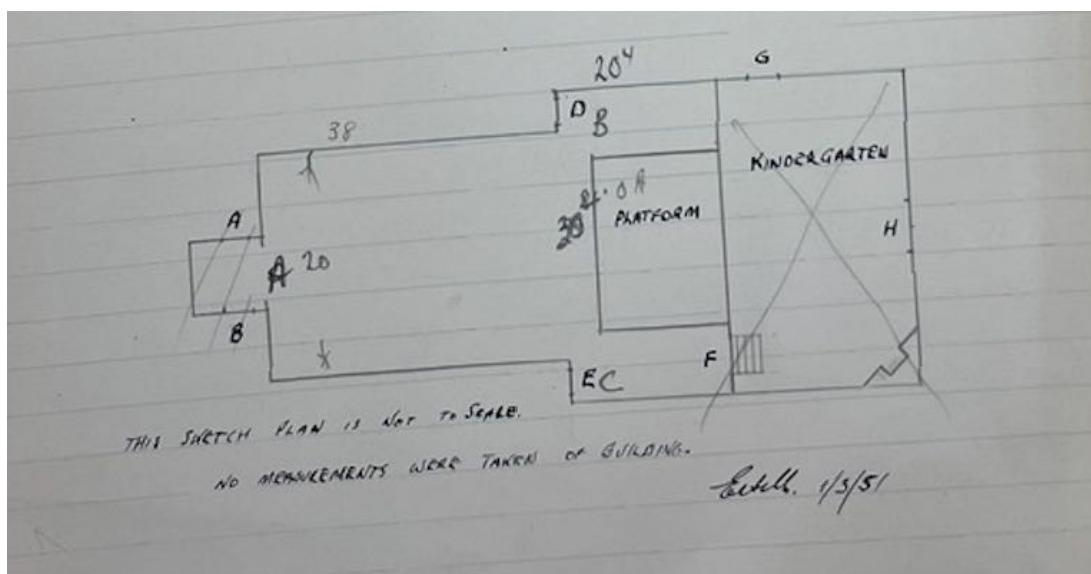


Figure 2: Plan dated 1951 showing the original layout of the former Wesleyan Chapel including the kindergarten room extension of 1911 at the rear (Source: PROV)

In 1937 the Rev. J.J. Webb initiated a fund for a new brick church. Designed by architect F.C. Armstrong of Melbourne, the foundation stone of the new church was laid on 12 August 1939 by Rev. D.J. Flockart and the official opening took place on 22 November 1939. Rev. E.B. Bond of Sale, Chairman of the District, performed the opening ceremony.

The new brick church was situated to the east of the old Wesleyan Chapel (see Figure 3), which was then used exclusively as the Sunday School Hall and kindergarten. It performed this role until 1955 when it was relocated to the rear of the site to make way for major additions to the church, which comprised a new Sunday School Hall with stage, kindergarten room, a fellowship room, kitchen, and office for the secretary. It appears that the porch and kindergarten extension to the Wesleyan Chapel were removed when it was relocated (see Figure 4).



Figure 3: New brick church beside the former Wesleyan Chapel, c. 1939 (Source: TDHS)

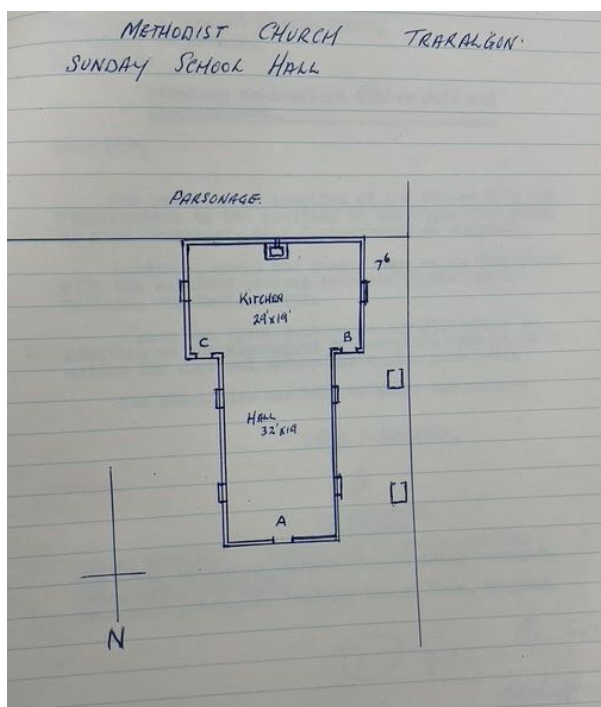


Figure 4: At left, extract of c. 1956 plan showing the relocated building adjacent to the south boundary. Note the porch and kindergarten room shown in the 1951 plan in Figure 2 have been removed (Source: PROV); At right, undated image of the relocated church/hall (Source: TDHS)

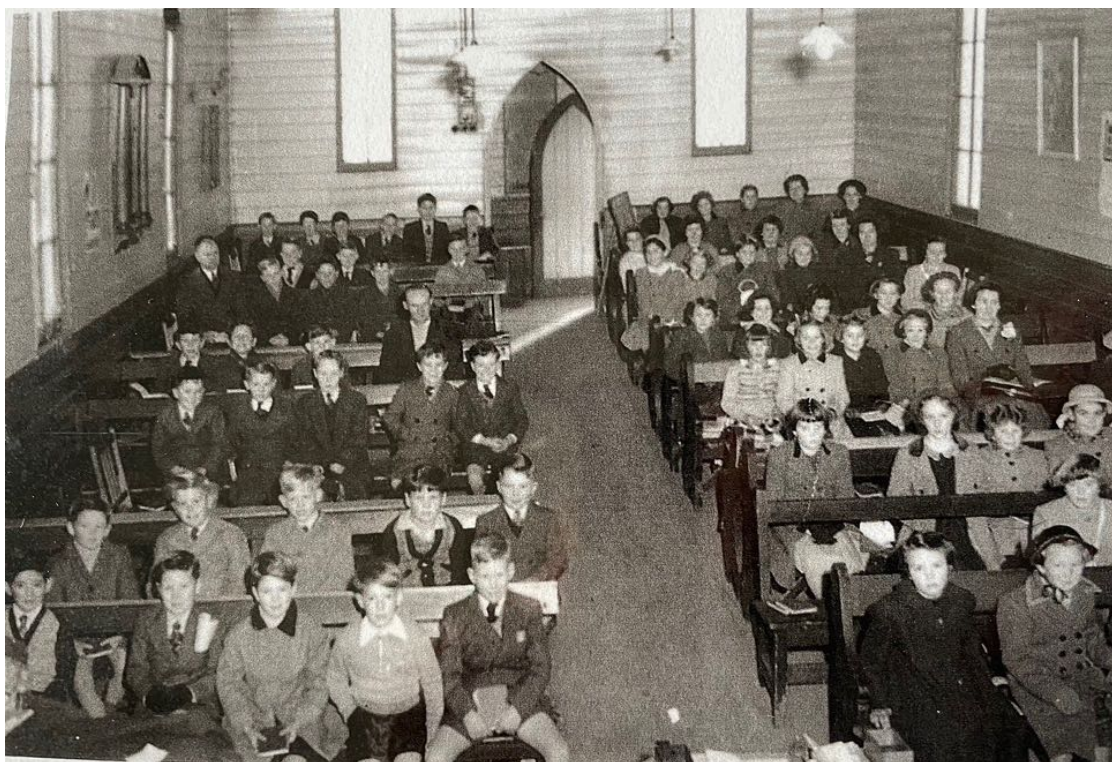


Figure 5: Sunday School children c.1950 in the former Wesleyan Chapel (n.d., but as the porch is visible this is prior to the relocation of the building in 1955) (Source: copy of an original photo donated by Lorraine Piechota to Latrobe City – Lorraine is one of the children in the photo).

In 1977 the Methodist and St Andrew's Presbyterian churches in Traralgon, and the rural congregations of Tyers, Glengarry and Toongabbie merged to form the Traralgon Parish and became part of the Uniting Church in Australia. Services were held jointly in both churches until 1992 when a new church was built in Park Lane. The original St Andrew's church was sold, and the 1939 Methodist Church was then used by the Salvation Army as their meeting place.

In recognition of its history, the Uniting Church offered the former Wesleyan Chapel free of charge to the Traralgon & District Historical Society (TDHS) provided it was relocated from the site. However, the Society did not have the resources to relocate the building and so it sought help from the City of Traralgon (Council Report, 1992:29).

At around the same time, the historic significance of the former Wesleyan Chapel had been formally recognized by its inclusion within the *Traralgon Heritage Study*. It was assessed to be of local heritage significance and an interim Historic Building Overlay control was applied to the site until November 1992, which was the date the *Traralgon Heritage Study* was due to be completed. The interim control meant that any demolition or removal of the building required a planning permit, and the views of the TDHS had to be considered (Council Report, 1992:29).

Because of this, the City of Traralgon established a taskforce to investigate the feasibility of relocating the Wesleyan Chapel. The taskforce considered requiring the Uniting Church to retain the building in its original location but decided this was not feasible as it would impact upon the future development of the site, which was within land then identified by Council as a future car park. The option of demolishing the building was also considered but was rejected as this would have resulted in Traralgon losing its oldest church, and Council would also lose the opportunity of acquiring a 95 sq m building at a relatively modest cost (\$33,000 compared with \$50,000 for a new building of this size) (Council Report, 1992:31).

The taskforce decided to relocate the Wesleyan Chapel to the present site in Princes Street adjacent to the railway. At the time, the site was in the process of being declared surplus to V-Line

requirements and was to be offered to Council at Valuer-General's valuation prior to sale.¹ In making this decision the Council identified the need to relocate the old church 'in a manner sympathetic to its original location', noting that it originally fronted onto Argyle Street, which historically was the early main street in Traralgon (ibid).

In consultation with TDHS the taskforce also recommended the Wesleyan Chapel upon relocation should be used as a tourist information centre and could also contain historic displays of materials held by the TDHS, as well as a sales area for local artwork (Council Report, 1992:31-32).

The building was relocated in accordance with the recommendations of the taskforce and was used as a visitor information centre for over 20 years. Upon relocation to the site, the porch was reconstructed, and a small gabled addition was made at the rear. Ramps were constructed leading to the side doors and internal partitions and toilets were installed.

In 1994 ownership and management of the former Wesleyan Chapel building transferred from the City of Traralgon to the newly constituted Latrobe City Council.

The use of the building ceased in early 2022 following the relocation of the visitor centre to new premises at the Gippsland Performing Arts Centre in Kay Street, Traralgon.

4.3. Sources

Context, *Traralgon Heritage Study*, 1992

Context, *Latrobe City Heritage Study Volume 1: Thematic environmental history*, 2008

Cuthill, William J., *The River of Little Fish*, 1970 online edition viewed at <https://www.traralgonhistory.asn.au/rolf.htm> on 11 March 2022.

'Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council of the City of Traralgon, 29 September 1992', Section 7, Report by Manager – Economic Development & Planning, Item 1: Wesleyan Church Taskforce (Council Report, 1992)

Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV)

State Library of Victoria (SLV) pictorial collection

Traralgon Centenary Committee, 'Traralgon Centenary 1846 1946' (State Library of Victoria collection)

Victorian Places website, viewed at https://www.victorianplaces.com.au/rainbow_on_20_March_2022

Wilson, Rita (ed.), *From age to age. 100 years of Methodism in Traralgon June 1877-1977*, 1977

Information provided by Barbara Johnson, President TDHS, and Linda Barraclough.

¹ Sale of the land to the City of Traralgon did not proceed. Council retained ownership of the building, but VicTrack is the owner of the land on which it stands.

5. DESCRIPTION

The former Wesleyan Chapel is a Victorian Carpenter Gothic church (see Figure 6). ‘T’ shape in plan, it was built in three stages, two of which survive today:

- The 1879 building comprises the nave (which has dimensions of 32 feet x 20 feet, consistent with historic descriptions in newspapers and the PROV file).
- The 1888 addition comprises the rear section.



Figure 6: Former Wesleyan Chapel, 2022 (Source: David Helms)

Typical of the style, the building has weatherboard walls and lancet (pointed arch) timber doors and multi-pane windows (which incorporate ‘hoppers’ – inward opening sections – at the top). The exceptions are the two square head windows in the rear wall, which possibly date from the 1950s when the building was relocated, and the 1911 addition was removed. Other original details include the circular louvred vents in each gable end (the vent to the front gable is presently covered by a signboard). Internally, there are original beaded lining boards with a dado rail, and a coved ceiling of stained pine, which has circular patterned metal ventilation grills. The roof and walls are braced by steel rod collar ties. Please refer to Attachment 2, which contains additional images.

There are no objects or furniture associated with its former use as a church. There is, however, a diorama of the Latrobe Valley landscape and key features (towns, power stations, tourist attractions), which was reputedly created by the former State Electricity Commission of Victoria. While not associated with the historic use as a church, this is nonetheless of some historic interest as a distinctive object associated with the development of electricity supply, which is an important historic theme in Latrobe City.

Within the porch are several framed historic photos of the building – these are copies of originals held by the TDHS (some of which are used in this report) and are not, in themselves, important.

5.1. Integrity and intactness

Overall, the former Wesleyan Chapel has relatively good integrity, despite being moved twice in its history. Key features including the windows and doors appear to be original or early, as does the internal cladding materials to the walls and ceiling. Where materials or details have been replaced

this has generally been done ‘like for like’ using similar materials based on historic evidence. The following alterations and additions were made following its relocation to the present site:

- The porch was reconstructed close to the appearance shown in early photos.
- Finials of similar but not identical design to the originals shown in early photos were reinstated to the gable ends.
- A small gabled addition was made at the rear.
- Internally, partition walls have been inserted to create a toilet and office spaces at the south end.
- A signboard was attached to the front wall, partially covering one of the original vents.
- Installation of two square head timber multi-pane windows in the rear wall.

5.2. Condition

Assessment of the condition of this building was outside the scope of this study. However, Latrobe City commissioned Hade Consulting structural engineers to prepare a detailed building condition report. This was completed in March 2021.

In summary, the condition assessment identifies an extensive list of defects, many of which are rated ‘severe’ and require ‘extensive and urgent repairs or replacement ... to make the building safe and to prevent further deterioration of the structure’ (Hade Consulting, 2021:12).

Nonetheless, the report does conclude that relocation of the building is possible; however, it will require repairs and bracing works to be carried out prior to relocation. The site also has restrictive access constraints, which would add cost to the project (Hade Consulting, 2021:12).

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

6.1. Carpenter Gothic churches in Latrobe City

According to Lewis (1991:34-5) by the end of the nineteenth century the Gothic style had been adopted by most of the Protestant churches in Australia and early churches were typically simple Carpenter Gothic buildings, often built by the congregations. Many initially comprised only a nave, with anterooms containing the vestry, chancel or choir added later as the resources of the congregation allowed. In larger towns, these early churches were sometimes replaced by more substantial buildings and became the church hall. Like schools and halls, churches were often moved according to need as areas declined or flourished.

Carpenter (or Carpenter's) Gothic style emerged in North America during the nineteenth century and later transferred to Australia where it was used in church design mostly from the 1870s to World War I, with some late examples (particularly in rural areas) dating from the interwar period. As explained by Apperly et al (1994:94) Carpenter Gothic was:

... a style used for churches of modest size when economy of expenditure and simplicity of construction were important. It is, as the name suggests, an idiom, which made great use of timber, demonstrating how the tradesman, used, connected, expressed, and embellished the various timber components of the building.

Carpenter Gothic buildings are relatively unadorned, and architectural or decorative elements drew upon the basic elements of the Academic Gothic or Free Gothic styles such as pointed arches, medium to steep gables, and buttresses. Models for at least some Victorian Carpenter Gothic designs were provided by the Ecclesiological Society in England, which encouraged the development of timber church architecture in the South Pacific region (Apperly et al, 1994:94).

Although originally a derogatory term implying 'academically uniformed Gothic Revival work produced by provincial tradesmen' (Lewis, 1991:158) it is now recognized that Carpenter Gothic buildings have quite often 'effortlessly achieved a genuine architectural quality not always attained by more pretentious structures' (Apperly et al, 1994:94).

Carpenter Gothic style churches were constructed in Latrobe City from the 1870s to as late as the 1930s when St Brigid's Catholic Church (1933-36) was built in Yallourn North. Most of the examples are simple and basic examples of the style.

Perhaps the finest Carpenter Gothic Church in Latrobe City is St David's Church of England at Toongabbie. Constructed by local builder Henry Bosustow in 1884, St David's is distinguished by the bell tower located at the front of the ridge line to the main roof, the stepped timber buttresses, and the elaborate decorative carved bargeboards. The interior is relatively intact and includes some early church furnishings.

The former Wesleyan Chapel is typical of the Carpenter Gothic churches constructed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has features that are typical of the Carpenter Gothic style including medium to steep roof gables and pointed arches to windows and doors and, despite being relocated on two occasions, it has relatively good integrity, which includes original internal finishes.

As a representative example it is notable for its early construction date – it is among seven nineteenth century churches in Latrobe City, but one of only two that date in part from the 1870s. The other example is St John's Church of England, Glengarry which comprises what is thought to be the 1879 church (now the chancel and vestry) with c.1900 additions. Of the others:

- Two churches date from the 1880s – St David’s, Toongabbie (1884) and Moe Uniting (former Wesleyan Methodist) Church (1887). The latter was altered when moved to its present site in 1951.
- Three churches date from the 1890s: Glengarry Uniting (former Wesleyan) Church (1891), St Columbkille’s Catholic Church, Glengarry (1893) and Holy Innocents’ Church of England, Middle Creek (1895).

The other nineteenth century church in Latrobe City is the former St Mary’s Church of England, Morwell. Constructed in 1886, this is a Gothic style church unusually constructed of brick with a timber front.

6.2. Early buildings in Traralgon

The former Wesleyan Chapel is the oldest church and one of the oldest buildings of any type in Traralgon. It is one of only three to date from the 1870s. The others are:

- The original section of the former Star Hotel in Peterkin Street, which is believed to date from c.1875.
- The timber cottage at 134 Dunbar Road, which reputedly dates from c.1878 or earlier. This much altered building is in poor condition.

Other surviving nineteenth century buildings in Traralgon include:

- The Railway Station, built in 1881 and extended in 1901.
- The former Court House and Post Office, 1886.
- Former Ostler’s House at Traralgon Hotel, c.1890.
- Traralgon Park Homestead, c.1895 (The original c.1855 section has been demolished).

There are also several houses, possibly constructed in the mid to late 1890s or early 1900s. Examples include the cottages at 10 and 11-13 Janette Street and 14 Roseneath Street, and the houses at 8-14 Henry Street.

All the other nineteenth century churches in Traralgon were demolished and replaced in the twentieth century, as were the other nineteenth century hotels.

6.3. Sources

Apperly, Richard, Irving, Robert & Reynolds, Peter, 1994, *A pictorial guide to identifying Australian architecture. Styles and terms from 1788 to the present*, Second edition, Harper Collins, Hong Kong

Lewis, Miles, 1981, *Victorian churches. Their origins, their story & their architecture*, National Trust of Australia, Melbourne

7. ANALYSIS AGAINST HERCON CRITERIA

This section provides an assessment of the former Wesleyan Chapel against the Hercon criteria. It is considered to satisfy Hercon criteria A, B & D at the local level for the reasons set out below.

Criterion A

Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).

The former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel was the second church built in Traralgon and is now the oldest surviving church in Latrobe City. Dating from 1879 it is associated with the establishment and early development of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Gippsland region. It is also one of the oldest surviving buildings in Traralgon and provides evidence of the development that occurred at the time the railway line was opened when Traralgon grew to become one of the most important towns in the region.

Criterion B:

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).

The former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel is one of only three known surviving 1870s buildings in Traralgon, and one of only two 1870s churches in Latrobe City.

Criterion C:

Potential to yield information that will contribute to understanding our cultural or natural history (research potential).

Not applicable.

Criterion D:

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

The former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel is an early example of a Carpenter Gothic Church with typical form and detailing including the steeply pitched gable roof, and lancet (pointed arch) multi-pane windows and doors and circular louvred vents in each gable end and original internal finishes including beaded lining boards with a dado rail, a coved ceiling of stained pine, which has circular patterned metal ventilation grills, and steel rod collar ties.

Criterion E:

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

Not applicable.

Criterion F:

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).

Not applicable.

Criterion G:

Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

Full assessment of social significance was outside the scope of this study. As the use as a church building ceased more than three decades ago any social values associated with that use have become historic values (Criterion A).

The reaction to the proposal to demolish the building suggests there *may* still be strong community associations with the building simply because of it being known as one of the oldest buildings in Traralgon and this aspect of significance could be explored as part of future work (see Section 7).

Criterion H:

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

Not applicable.

8. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The former Wesleyan Chapel is of local historic and representative significance to Latrobe City.

Attachment 1 provides the statement of significance for this place.

Despite its age, the former Wesleyan Chapel is unlikely to be of State heritage significance as there is nothing about the building or its history that is important at a State level and a nomination to the Victorian Heritage Register is not recommended.

8.1. Discussion

As a building of local significance conservation – that is retention, repair, and maintenance – of the former Wesleyan Chapel is the preferred option and if the building cannot remain on its current site then it must be relocated. Relocation is acceptable, as the building has already been moved and is no longer on its original site.

For relocation to occur a suitable site must be found, as well as a new use. In deciding this, the question of future ownership must also be determined. To assist with this process, interim management guidelines have been prepared in relation to potential location, use and ownership (see section 8.3).

The option of relocating the building is strongly preferred to demolishing the building. The significance of the former Wesleyan Chapel rests upon its construction date – it is an early building both in the context of Traralgon and the Latrobe Valley (and Gippsland) region. The importance of the former Wesleyan Chapel as an historic relic of early Traralgon was first recognised in 1992 by the then Traralgon City Council when it made the decision to save the building and relocate it to the present site. Since then, at least two other early (pre-1880) buildings in Traralgon have been lost. Consequently, very few buildings survive to illustrate this important period of post-contact history and if the former Wesleyan Chapel was to be demolished the ability to understand the early history of Traralgon would be further diminished.

That said, the 2021 condition assessment has identified significant works necessary to make the building safe and to prevent further deterioration of the structure and while it does conclude that relocation of the building is possible, it will require repairs and bracing works to be carried out prior to relocation. The site also has restrictive access constraints, which would add costs to the project.

8.2. Recommendations

On this basis, the following recommendations are made:

- As a first step, the 2021 condition assessment should be peer reviewed by a consultant with experience in the maintenance and repair of heritage buildings to ensure the approach and recommendations are consistent with the Burra Charter and to gain a better understanding of the costs and issues.
- Following the above, Council in consultation with the local community further explores the feasibility of relocating the former Wesleyan Chapel, having regard to the interim management guidelines set out in this report (see section 8.3). This should include consideration of potential external funding opportunities or partnerships with organisations such as Working Heritage, which has recently relocated a similar weatherboard church in Wollert that was threatened by a road upgrade (see www.workingheritage.com.au).
- Depending on the outcome of the above investigations there are two options:
 - If the option of relocation is feasible, then Latrobe City should commission a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) to identify the most appropriate way of caring for the heritage

fabric of the former Wesleyan Chapel having regard to heritage significance. In doing so, it will build upon the assessment and preliminary guidelines in this report and will address the most appropriate manner to respond to the building condition issues and need for relocation. It would also explore potential social values. The CMP should be prepared prior to any action associated with the relocation such as site acquisition, or sale of lease of the building (see section 8.3).

- If the option of relocation is not feasible, then Latrobe City should commission a heritage impact assessment by a suitably qualified consultant to identify strategies and actions to minimise the impacts of the demolition – for example, by potentially retaining some original features, which could become part of the TDHS collection, undertaking a photographic survey, or interpreting its history through various means such as on-site signage at the original site or a website page or similar.
- A further recommendation is for Latrobe City to find a suitable location for the ‘Diorama’ currently stored at the former Wesleyan Chapel. One option is for it to be donated to the Powerworks Visitor Centre at Morwell.
- It is understood the TDHS holds original copies of the historic photos in the foyer. Nonetheless, they should be offered to the TDHS or kept by Latrobe City Council.

8.3. Interim management guidelines

The following interim management guidelines are recommended to assist with the further exploration of the potential relocation of the former Wesleyan Chapel:

Location

The new location should have the same or similar attributes to the present location:

- It should be physically within Traralgon and ideally close to the historic town centre.
- It should enable the building to be visible from the public realm.
- It should enable the building should be sited correctly – that is, with the front facing to and perpendicular to the frontage.

Use

The use of the former Wesleyan Chapel as a Visitor Information Centre is a good example of adaptive re-use. It enabled the building to continue to be used and accessed by the public and was in a location that is readily accessible. Minimal changes were required to the original building.

In considering adaptive re-use options, preference should similarly be given to uses that:

- Enable the conservation of culturally significant fabric and causes the minimum degree of change to it.
- Will require the minimum amount of change to the significant fabric.
- Ensure that the building is continually occupied or has a continuity of occupation that will ensure its security and maintenance.
- If ownership is retained by Latrobe City, provides an economic return that will subsidise the ongoing maintenance of the building.
- Provides an opportunity for interpretation.

When determining a new use Latrobe City may also consider:

- The interest of the community in the asset.
- Means for harnessing community interest, and

- Potential community opposition likely to be created by a use that would impact upon the significance of the building.


Ownership

The issue of ownership will likely be determined following or in association with finding a suitable new location or appropriate new use. As a building that was originally privately owned, retaining public ownership is not essential to maintaining the significance of the building and it may be that selling the building is the best option for ensuring it can be relocated, and to enable an adaptive re-use (for example, residential conversion). Another option is a long-term lease.

Ideally, as discussed in section 8.2 a CMP should be prepared prior to the sale or lease of the building, so the future management and development options are clearly understood by both Council and the new owner/lessee, and Council may put in place appropriate controls or agreements to ensure the former Wesleyan Chapel is retained and conserved. For example, this could include:

- Applying a heritage control over the property in the new location.
- An agreed schedule of conservation or on-going maintenance works that must be carried out by the new owner/lessee.

Attachment 1 – Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel (former) Statement of Significance

Heritage Place: Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel (former)	PS ref no: HOXX
	Insert location plan

What is significant?

The former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel constructed in 1879 and the 1888 additions is significant. The original finishes to the interior including the wall and ceiling cladding and details also contribute to the significance of the place

Alterations and additions made following the relocation of the church in 1992 including the porch, the access ramps, the gabled section to the rear and the two windows in the rear wall, and internal partition walls, fixtures and counters are not significant.

How is it significant?

The former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel is of local historic and representative significance to Latrobe City.

Why is it significant?

Historically, the former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel was the second church built in Traralgon and is now the oldest surviving church in Latrobe City. Dating from 1879 it is associated with the establishment and early development of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Gippsland region. It is also one of the oldest surviving buildings in Traralgon and provides evidence of the development that occurred at the time the railway line was opened when Traralgon grew to become one of the most important towns in the region. (Criterion A)

The former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel has rarity value as one of only three known surviving 1870s buildings in Traralgon, and one of only two 1870s churches in Latrobe City. (Criterion B)

The former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel has representative significance as an early example of a Carpenter Gothic Church with typical form and detailing including the steeply pitched gable roof, and lancet (pointed arch) multi-pane windows and doors, circular louvred vents in each gable end and original internal finishes including beaded lining boards with a dado rail, a coved ceiling of stained pine, which has circular patterned metal ventilation grills, and steel rod collar ties. (Criterion D)

Primary source

Heritage Assessment – Former Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel, 2022

This document is an incorporated document in the Latrobe Planning Scheme pursuant to section 6(2)(j) of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*

Attachment 2 – Traralgon Wesleyan Chapel (former) images



Views of the front elevation showing the reconstructed porch and finials, as well as the signboard covering one of the circular gable vents



Views of the west side, note typical circular louvred vent in gable end (note visible deterioration to weatherboards at wall corners in the image at right).



At left, typical window in the 1879 section of the building. At right, one of two doors in the 1888 addition.



View of the interior looking toward the porch showing covered ceiling and steel rod collar tiles and non-original lights and fans. Note 'Diorama' in corner at right of left image, and bottom left



At left, view looking toward the rear showing the non-original counter and partitions installed for the Visitor Centre use. At right, toilet addition.



At left, internal view of side door. At right, internal view of nave window



At left, view from pedestrian bridge showing substation at the rear. At right, non-original section added to the building upon relocation with non-original window at right.