



CANBERRA AND REGION HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Reid Uniting Church- A brief History

The South Ainslie Methodist Church, as it was initially known, was the first church to be completed in the Federal Capital Territory, opening for worship on 8th October 1927. The history of Canberra's first urban church can be traced back beyond 1927 to the early years after Federation and the building of the national capital. Between the years 1911-27 there were many arrivals in Canberra to plan and build the city. Methodists in the construction camps were ministered by the Rev R J F Boyer, Canberra's first Methodist minister who arrived in 1914.

In 1926 the Methodist General Conference was concerned that a church be built in Canberra as a matter of priority and a site was made available by the Federal Capital Commission (FCC) in Reid (known as South Ainslie until 1929). The foundation stone of the church was laid on 9 February 1927. The first minister was Rev E L Vercoe who was appointed by General Conference early in 1926. He was closely involved in the planning and construction of the church.

The architect of the church was Mr J C R Mills of Concord, NSW, and the builder was Mr R E Midson of Epping, NSW – both of whom were Methodists. The cost of construction was £5,150. Contributions were obtained from Methodists across Australia to build the church. One of the churches trustees was Harold White (later Sir Harold White, the National Librarian). The church design was described in 1927 as 'of the Gothic decorative period and [with its square Norman tower] resembles a type frequently seen in English villages'. Surmounting the tower was a removable cap, to be removed when funds and opportunity permitted the construction of a steeple.

As Canberra began to grow in those early years the South Ainslie Methodist Church attracted and ministered to an increasing number of people. A Sunday School commenced on 16 October 1927. There were 54 pupils enrolled in December and this number had more than doubled within the next six months. The need for a Sunday School hall was recognised and on 17 March 1929 the Foundation Stone was laid. The building was opened on 24 July 1929. In 1957 further extensions to the hall were completed and named Reid Methodist War Memorial Youth Centre. Two other major property expenses followed. The pipe organ was built and installed by United Kingdom manufacturer J W Walker & Sons Ltd in April 1963 at a cost of £4,500. Then, in 1967 plans were drawn up to extend the rear of the church to include a choir vestry and Minister's study. The Reid Church Tennis Club was formed in 1936 and the present tennis courts were built in 1959 on land made available by the surrounding three neighbours.

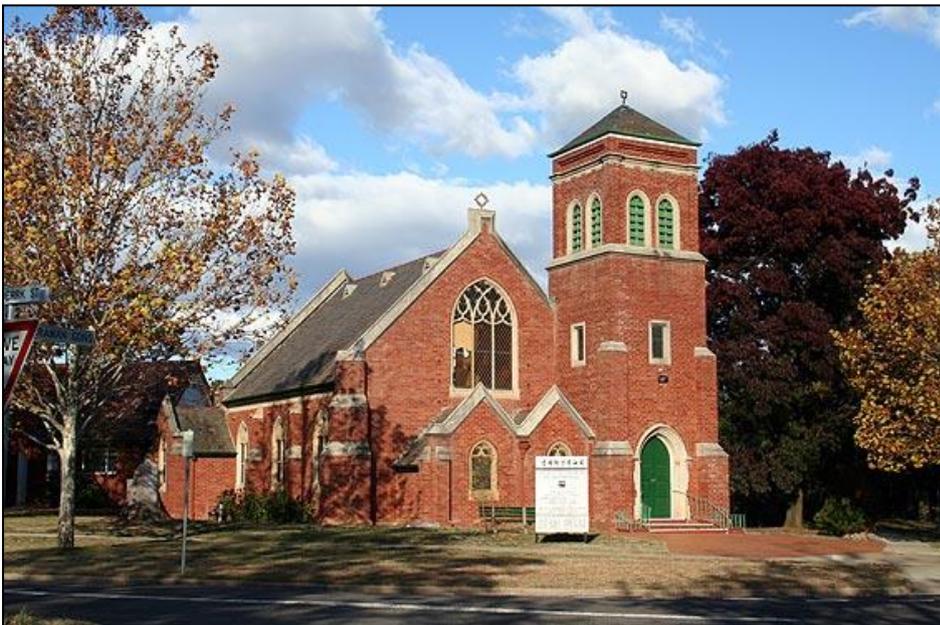
In June 1977 the Methodist Church in Australia joined with Presbyterians and Congregationalists to form the Uniting Church in Australia and the Reid Methodist church became the Reid Uniting Church. Since 1984, when it was established with encouragement from the Rev Ian Pearson, the Korean Methodist (now Uniting) congregation has met each Sunday afternoon at Reid. More recently, the Korean Uniting congregation has taken full occupation of Church with the departure of the original congregation, now very elderly, to Yarralumla and other Uniting Church congregations. In addition to the Korean congregation, a Fijian congregation also worships at the church.

The church's heritage significance has long been recognised. The Reid Urban Conservation Area was classified by the National Trust (ACT) on 14 July 1980 and accepted for listing on to the National Estate on 21 October 1981. The Reid Uniting Church falls with that area. Following submissions, the National Trust (ACT) separately classified the church on 11 May 1981. The church, its associated buildings and identified trees were subsequently entered in to the ACT Heritage Register under the ACT Heritage Act 2004.

Several grant applications have been made successfully by the Uniting Church of Australia (ACT)'s *Restoration Works Committee* to ACT Heritage for conservation works at the Church. These include: 2009-10: Restoration of the Stained Glass Window & Conservation Management Plan; 2010-11: Restoration Works as identified in the Conservation Management Plan; and 2016-17 & 2017-18: Roof Restoration Works. Donations (tax deductible) are always most welcome to support conservation work at the Church.



Opening of the Reid (then South Ainslie) Methodist Church on 8th October 1927



Reid United Church (circa 2010), showing the large leadlight window in a damaged condition, since fully restored.



Interior of Reid United Church showing organ (removed circa 2016) to permit repair of large leadlight window behind.



Interior of Reid United Church (circa 2016)