

Wesley Church, Petone

70th Jubilee Celebrations
September 12th to 20th, 1953



— 1953 —

Methodism in Petone

EARLY DAYS

The following article has been written by request by Mr. C. J. Freeman after considerable original research:—

The story of Methodism in Petone goes back to pre-pakeha days, when on Thursday, 13th June, 1839, in the course of a visit to Port Nicholson, the Revs. John Hewgill Bumby and John Hobbs, Wesleyan Missionaries, came to Petone. They were the first Missionaries to visit Port Nicholson and had come from Mangungu in the north in order to select the most suitable locality for a new station. The entry in the unpublished Journal of the Rev. John Hobbs is as follows:

"Went to the Pa called Pitoni, the residence of Raua-ki-tua, the father of Te Ware-Pouri. Spoke to the natives there and Te Ware-Pouri said "Worship! Worship! Worship!" upon which we sung and prayed, and took our leave." Pitoni is the best Pa we have seen in Port Nicholson. We think there is of men, women and children about 400."

Shortly after the return of the Missionaries, in order to start the proposed new mission, the Rev. James Buller set out on foot from Kaipara and on January 19th, 1840, accompanied by several natives, he at last reached Porirua.

"We had," he wrote, "five hours' walk through thick woods to Port Nicholson. When the land-locked harbour broke upon us, it seemed—a lake. We descended the hill to Petone, where I met with Wharepouri and others."

On January 22nd, 1840, the "Aurora," the first of the New Zealand Company's emigrant ships to arrive, dropped anchor between Somes Island and Petone Beach. On Sunday, January 26th, the Rev. James Buller held Divine Service aboard the "Aurora" and found several Cornish Methodists among the emigrants. These, on going ashore, built their huts in a row close to the Hutt River, and with the help of later arrivals they planned their own Divine Services. But floods came and a number of these early settlers removed to Wellington, where the Rev. John Aldred had been stationed as the first Methodist Minister in December, 1840. An entry in his diary is the first record of organised Methodist services in Petone.

"February 14th (1841): Sunday at Petoni. Preached twice in native and twice in English. Baptized four English infants."

Thereafter, during his stay in Wellington, he regularly visited Petone, preaching and making pastoral visits to Maori and European alike. Those visits were mostly conducted on foot and one re-cord states that, although ill the previous evening, he got home very well "by slow walking." At that time the road from Wellington to Petone was but a very rough track that could only be negotiated in parts at low tide.

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The Quarterly returns for March, 1844, showed a Church membership of 11 for Petone and 14 in December 1845. Thereafter, for some years, Petone, as a preaching place disappeared from the plan as a Church was erected at the Hutt or Aglionby, as it was so often called, near the old cemetery close to the western approach to the old Hutt Bridge. The Petone people were regularly visited, however, by succeeding ministers from Welling-ton, until in 1850 when the Rev. John Aldred was sta-tioned in the Hutt as second minister in the Wellington Circuit.

FROM OUR FIRST MINISTER

Here are some extracts from a Jubilee message received from the Rev. E. P. Blamires, at present organising Home and Family Weeks in Australia.

"As the first Methodist minister appointed to Petone I arrived in April, 1900, as a probationer, and remained two years. I came by ship from Sydney. I was only 22 years of age and had not been to a theological college, but I was a "son of the manse," one of five brothers who all became ministers. I had already been a Home Missionary at Bay of Islands for two years.

Wellington had a population of about 50,000 at that time. Petone's population was about 3000. The shopping centre in Jackson Street did not extend beyond Britannia Street and the residential area did not have many houses beyond Buick Street. A road had been made up the steep hill above the railway station and people began to build there at what we called "Skytown." Petone was a busy little town with its three notable industries— Railway Workshops, Gear Meat Co. and Woollen Mills. The road from Petone to Wellington at that time was a narrow strip between the railway line and the hills, and in winter was almost a muddy canal. I tried to cycle it once but never again until dry weather. The Anglican vicar was beloved Rev. J. D. Russell and the Presbyterian energetic Rev. A. Thompson. The Anglican Church was near the Gear Company, the Primitive Methodist in Sydney Street.

Petone Methodist Church was part of Hutt Circuit and the places on the plan were in addition , to Lower Hutt and Petone, Wainui-o-Mata (how I remember pushing my bike up that hill), Belmont, Taita, Stokes Valley and Whiteman's Valley. My superintendent minister was the Rev. W. B. Marten who lived in an ancient two-storeyed parsonage which had sometimes been flooded. Lower Hutt was a quiet place and Petone was much more progressive. My stipend was £110 per annum and I paid 25/- per week board and lodging in Nelson Street.

Our church at that time was a T-shaped building and was well attended. Years later it was incorporated in the present church. We had a good choir and I still possess a photograph of same. In the vestry we had meetings of strong organisations—a class or fellowship meeting, a Christian Endeavour Society, a Junior C.E., and a Ladies' Guild. The Sunday School assembled in the Church and once a month there was a Band of Hope.

One Sunday evening in the summer we doubled our congregation by holding an open air service on a vacant allotment almost opposite the church at the corner of Jackson and Nelson Streets."

Mr. Blamires' message tells much about the folk of those days and the events grave and gay during his ministry in Petone. It will be read at a Jubilee function.

PETONE — THE PRESENT

Our Church to-day is in good heart. There have been days when it was stronger and days not long past when it was weaker. There are grounds for hoping that the most difficult years are behind us and that our Jubilee will usher in as fine a chapter as any in our history. There is a band of loyal and able leaders of which any Church could be proud.

Every month the Church is well filled for a Family Service. On a number of other occasions in the year it is packed with worshippers. Each Sunday morning there is a fine attendance of children and young people at church and a faithful group of older folk. Each Sunday-evening about 50 to 70 folk gather for worship. Last year, membership year, saw a fine group of adult men and women come into the full membership of the Church. They have brought an enthusiasm and faithfulness which has been of inestimable strength to the Church, and some of them are doing fine jobs of leadership to-day. Finances are healthy, we have no debts, and the business of the Church is efficiently done. We have about 600 persons under our pastoral care. The minister conducts five Bible in Schools classes a week and is also minister of Wainui-o-Mata Union Church.

Youth work is steadily growing. There are 46 on our cradle roll, 84 in our Sunday School and 40 in our Bible Classes, a net increase of 16 B.C. members in the past year. We have 20 Youth leaders and teachers, some of them doing two or three jobs. Each quarter Youth Services are held and at these 26 have taken the C.Y.M.M. Pledge. We have a Junior Choir 25 strong at our morning Services. The Girls' Life Brigade has 26 members, the Cadets 16, and the Tennis Club 24. Games evenings, teas and socials are held regularly and other Youth activities supported. It is hoped to form a Boys Brigade Company very shortly, and a Life Boy team later on. Our Senior young folk are preparing for reception into full Church membership. Although quarters are rather cramped, we have good plant for our work, including games materials, a filmstrip projector, and other visual aids. Three times in the past year we have engaged in serious religious drama. We have had a successful Children's Mission.

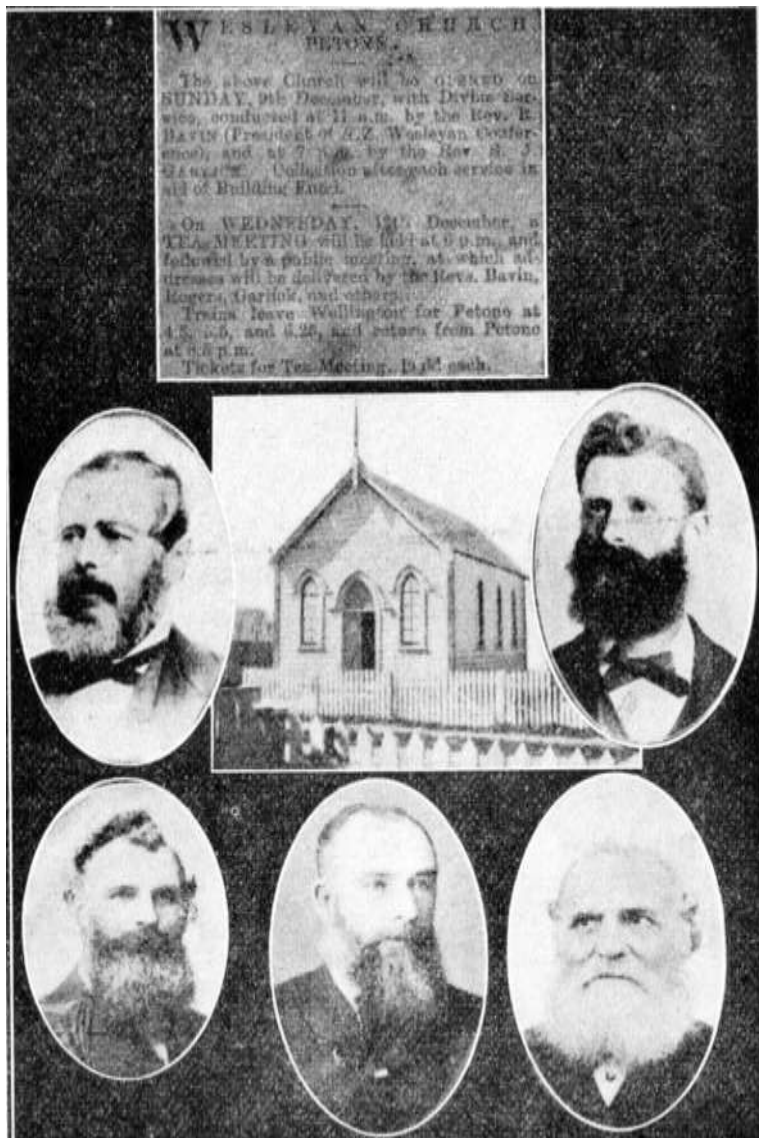
The senior folk of the Church are engaged in a number of activities. The Choir most worthily leads our evening worship and is a true fellowship. Three class meetings meet in homes each fortnight. Their members seek to sit at the feet of the Master that they may grow more like Him. These groups have a membership of over 40 and an average total attendance of 24. There are three women's societies. The Ladies' Guild helps in many phases of our work, the Missionary Auxiliary raised over £50 for missions last year, and the Fireside Fellowship meets each fortnight at the Parsonage. A Men's Fellowship meets each month, 25 strong, and runs an indoor bowls evening each Friday. "Lo, here is fellowship."

PETONE CHURCH — THE FUTURE

The 1933 Jubilee Booklet records how in 1922 a property was purchased behind the Church, in order that a new Church might be built. It was felt in 1933 that Petone being an industrial town needed a "Mission" rather than an ornate Church. It was decided therefore that the Jubilee should see the launching of a project to build a Sunday School to seat 200 with classrooms, kitchen and platform. The Church was then at its peak in strength and looked forward to an even brighter future. These hopes proved unfounded, for depression and war brought their problems, and the church has never been as strong since. It was found necessary to sell the property concerned, although something of the proceeds are still retained by the Trust. In the booklet we read: "It is not enough to look back; we must look forward also." This is more than ever urgently true today, for our buildings are 20 years older, and though sound and well maintained are becoming inadequate for our work.

Uncertainty about the future development of Petone has been a source of indecision which is now removed. It was believed for years that the present Nelson Street area would become fully industrialised, and it would be imperative to rebuild our church, halls and parsonage in another area. The town plan has now been fixed and the Nelson Street area has been designated residential, while the cost of building to-day would have made such a move prohibitive. It would seem we are here to stay in the foreseeable future. It is also true that Petone young folk shift in many cases from the town in order to obtain homes and this was felt to menace the future of the church. However, today the Hutt Valley itself is becoming fully housed, while Korokoro is a new housing area, and future rehousing is being planned for Petone, thus providing good prospects of future population to be served by the Church. At the same time the need for extension of our witness to the Pipe Bridge area and Korokoro itself is becoming increasingly urgent.

The trustees have given much thought to the matter of future developments. From this a short term and a long term programme have crystallised. It is now hoped in the next year or two to first of all bring the interior of the Church into conformity with modern worship standards, and then to extend the Sunday School building to the limits of the present property, modernising it and providing a stage and kitchen and a lobby and cloak-rooms linking it to the church building, with a new entrance from the street on the south side of the church. This should provide for our wants during the next ten to twenty years. The long term target is the conversion of the present church into a modern Christian community centre and the erection of a new church, probably on the present tennis court site. We hope to see these plans a little nearer realisation this Jubilee year, and we invite the help of past and present members.



— 1883 —

- (1) Advertisement in the "Evening Post" announcing the opening.
- (2) The Church as originally built.
- (3) Early Trustees: Mr. Edwin Jackson. Mr. William James Kirk.
Mr. Hart Udy. Mr. James Knight. Mr. Wm. Lockwood.

Petone Church – The Past

The land on which the present church stands was given by Mr. Edwin Jackson, a member of Hutt Church, after whom Jackson Street is named. Some of the first trustees are shown in our photos. (William Kirk and his brother were sons of Rev. W. Kirk and grandsons of Rev. John Hobbs, who visited Petone in 1839.) They met on 23rd June, 1883, under the chairmanship of the Hutt minister, Rev. S. Garlick, and within about five months a church was built, the first services being held on 9th December that year. Our church is the mother free Church of Petone. In early days others worshipped in the building as well, including Presbyterians, Baptists, Church of Christ, Salvation Army, Primitive Methodists and Seventh Day Adventists. One by one these churches established their own causes, and sometimes re-turned to Nelson Street when their attempts did not at first meet with success. The trustees' minutes of 1887 tell how the Presbyterians in closing down their services gave to the Wesleyans their balance of £4 7s 3d with the request that it be used to build a shelter for the minister's horse.

The original Church quickly proved inadequate. It was lengthened and a transept built in 1888 and a back vestry was added the following year. A large front porch was attached in 1908, and again a year later the church was widened and lengthened and the gallery built. The porch became the front vestry and the whole was covered with a new roof. From that date it has been known as "Wesley Church." The pipe organ was in-stalled in 1915 at a cost of £325. It is now worth about ten times that sum. The buildings to-day are substantially as they were 45 years ago. The present Sunday School was erected in 1902 for the Young Men's Institute and enlarged in 1921. The present Primary Department building was built, again for the W.Y.M.L, in 1909. In 1950 the present very convenient kitchen and vestries were provided by remodelling the back portion of the church building. The buildings have been repainted and renovated from time to time and the church has been lined with plaster board and hardboard. The interior of the church has been painted with modern plastic paint in pastel tones this past year. All this recent work has been carried out by the men of our church led by the Trust.

The parsonage and tennis court sections were bought by means of 3d a week envelope subscriptions in 1903, costing £455, and the parsonage was built in 1908 for £677.1s.10d. Strong pressure upon the Trustees, presumably from the young folk, persuaded them to lay down the tennis court in 1910.

Petone Church commenced as a church in the Hutt Circuit. In 1895 and 1903 attempts were made to have a separate circuit constituted but these were unsuccessful. However, the Petone circuit was set up in 1910 and included the present church and Wainui-o-Mata, which was founded in 1847. Wainui-o-Mata Church has become the

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home of a Union Church in this Jubilee year and the present Petone minister is the first minister of the newly-formed Union Parish. The Sydney Street Primitive Methodist Church came into the circuit on the Church Union in 1913, and was removed to Jackson Street. This move was not a success. The new church never really got on its feet and it was sold about 1920 for £850. One other property venture by the circuit was the purchase of a cottage and land in Richmond Street, backing on to the present church, in 1922, which it was hoped would be used for the erection of new buildings. However, this property was sold in 1947. Church membership has varied with the years. In 1906 it was 120. The peak was reached in 1931 when 207 members were recorded, but after revision of the roll 160 were returned in 1933. The roll was 121 in 1950, 102 after revision in 1951, 120 in 1952, and at June this year stood at 132.

The fiftieth Jubilee booklet gives valuable records of the personalities and families who served the church through the years. We cannot mention all here, so will mention none. The church has been well served by its ministers. Until 1900 they were the superintendent ministers of Hutt Circuit, from 1900 to 1910 they served under the Hutt superintendents, and since 1910 they have superintended Petone Circuit.

They are as follows:—

Rev. S. J. Garlick, 1883-6;
Rev. D. J. Murray, 1886-9;
Rev. W. J. Watkin, 1889-92;
Rev. T. N. Griffin, 1892-3;
Rev. T. G. Carr, 1893-6;
Rev. J. H. Gray, 1896-1900;
Rev. E. P. Blamires, 1900-2;
Rev. W. R. Tuck, 1902-4;
Rev. A. B. Chappell, 1904-6;
Rev. R. Wilson, 1906-9;
Rev. A. J. Seamer, 1909-12;
Rev. J. J. Lewis, 1912-16;
Rev. A. McBean, 1916-9;
Rev. C. Blair, 1919-24;
Rev. J. A. Lochore, 1924-29;
Rev. B. J. James, 1929-33;
Rev. L. C. Horwood, 1933-5;
Rev. E. E. Sage, 1935-40;
Rev. H. J. Tozer, 1940-42;
Rev. A. O. Harris, 1942-47;
Rev. H. W. Payne, 1947-52;
Rev. J. B. Dawson, 1952.

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Through the years many societies and activities have been carried on as a part of the Church's life and work. There has been a Sunday School throughout the whole 70 years, meeting over the greater part of that time in the afternoon in the Church. Mr. W. J. Kirk was Superintendent for 18 years, Mr. E. Godber for 9 years, Mr. W. H. Melhuish for 30 years, and others for lesser periods. The roll has fluctuated through the years. It built up slowly to a peak roll of 203 scholars and 22 teachers in 1932, declined to 66 in 1942, and has since been steadily rising. Bible Classes have also met for many years, and Christian Endeavour Societies and Bands of Hope have also nourished at times.

The Church has been well served by its Choir, its organists and its choirmasters. There has been a Choir since a few weeks after the church was opened. Mr. W. J. Kirk was the first choirmaster, Mr. C. S. Gamble held the position for 17 years, Mr. W. Hepplestone for eight years, and Mr. E. Ackroyd for 17 years. Others served for shorter periods. The present choirmaster, Mr. F. Bryant, has served for 20 years. The Choir had a very large membership in days gone by. Lack of space makes it impossible to sketch the history of other equally important phases of the Church's life. There have been strong women's societies through the years. The Church has been faithfully served by a goodly succession of Circuit Stewards, Trustees and other officers. War and depression have added their toll to the difficulties weathered by the Church. Uncertainty as to the future development of the town industrially and residentially has caused difficulty and uncertainty. These days are neither the easiest nor the hardest, the Church has seen. Many have laboured and we have entered into their labours.

CHURCH OFFICIALS:

Guild President: Mrs. E. D. Holdaway.
W.M.A. President: Mrs. H. Bucknall.
Women's Fellowship President: Mrs. E. Penny.
Men's Fellowship President: Mr. W. Bain.
Sunday School Superintendent: Mr. E. D. Holdaway.
Primary Superintendent: Miss O. Jacobson.
Youth Secretary: Miss P. Patrick.
B.C. Leaders: Mr. J. George, Misses P. Patrick, J. Ainslie, M. Bucknall.
Foreign Missions Secretary: Mr. J. Clayton.
Home Missions Secretary: Mr. C. Dixon.
Cradle Roll Superintendent: Mrs. T. Galbreath.

Jubilee Committee

Rev. J. B. Dawson (Chairman), Mr. O. Silbery (Organiser), Mesdames F. Bryant, A. Bowden, F. Hale, E. Holdaway, E. Penny, E. Stewart, Misses J. Ainslie, O. Jacobson P. Palleson, D. Parker, P. Patrick, J. Silbery, Messrs. T. Galbreath, W. Dixon, E. Holdaway, G. Glover, G. Hughes, J. Lyth, E. Watson.

Board of Trustees 1953

Secretary: Mr. E. C. Watson.
Treasurer: Mr. O. Silbery.
Church Steward: Mr. W. Dixon.
Other Trustees: Messrs. W. J. Simpson, T. W. Treen, E D Holdaway, E. Cashmore, N. H. Harris, T. H. Galbreath, J. H. Bucknall, J. B. Lyth, G. Harris, J. S. George.

Youth Leaders, 1953

Messrs. E. D. Holdaway, R. Bowden, C. Dixon, G. Glover, J. George, T. Martin, G. Hughes, G. Bostwick, Mrs. T. Galbreath, Misses P. Patrick, C. Jacobson, M. Bucknall, J. Ainslie, P. Pallesen, C. Strong, R. Jacobson, D. Parker, P. Hounsell, J. Silbery, C. Leslie P. Jacobson, B. Floyd, H. Omundsen, A. Heron.

Petone Choir/ 1953

Mr. F. Bryant (Choirmaster),
Mesdames C. Parnell (Secretary), A. Millward, P. Tocker, N. Harris, G. Glover, C. Dopson, Misses S. Kent, P. Patrick, M. Bucknall, D. Parker, V. and P. Jacobson, J. Hardingham, P. Pallesen, J. Silbery, J. Ainslie (Organist).
Messrs. J. Holmes, M. Allister, J. Pallister, J. Bucknall, T. Galbreath, R. Davies.

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Saturday, 12th, at	2.30 p.m.: Tennis Opening. 7.30 p.m.: Jubilee Reception.
Sunday, 13th, at	8 a.m.. Holy Communion; 11 a.m. and 7 p.m., Preacher, Rev. J. H. Allen, President of the Conference. 3 p.m., Married Couples' Service, Rev. E. Sage.
Monday, 14th, at	8 p.m.: Reception to the President.
Wednesday, 16th, at	5.30 p.m.: Youth Night.
Thursday, 17th, at	8 p.m.: Combined Choirs.
Friday, 18th, at	8 p.m.: Jubilee Social, Labour Hall. Beach Street.
Saturday, 19th, at	2.30 p.m.: Old People's Social.
Sunday, 20th, at	11 a.m.. Rev. A. O. Harris; 7 p.m., Rev. J, B. Dawson. Holy Communion.

Minister: Rev. J. B. Dawson, B.A.
Circuit Stewards: Messrs. T. H. Galbreath and J. B. Lyth.
Organist: Miss J. Ainslie.
Choirmaster: Mr. F. Bryant.