

METHODIST CHURCH OF NEW ZEALAND
BIRKENHEAD CIRCUIT

SEVENTY-FIFTH
ANNIVERSARY
1880 --- 1955

and

*The Past
Fifteen Years*
1955-1970

BIRKENHEAD METHODIST CHURCH

THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

1880-1905

Next time you are in Church, just glance up at those beautifully proportioned beams that support the roof.

Just think of the excitement when the first one was hoisted in place away back in that summer of 1885 and how imposing the framework must have looked in the semi-rural area as it would be then.

Just breathe a quiet prayer of thanks to those early Church workers who laboured so hard and so willingly to give the Birkenhead folk the opportunity to worship God.

The first church was actually built in 1880, five years earlier, and we can go back even further than that as the very first place of worship in the district was a portion of the present North-cote Anglican Church where people of every denomination gathered week by week.

It was not long, however, before "Cottage Meetings" were being held in various homes, and soon the first Methodist Church was built in Birkenhead and is, in fact still being used as the infant class-room at the rear of the hall. This Church was opened, debt free in 1880; was designed by Mr. W. F. Hammond and built by Mr. C. Johnstone. The actual site had been given for that purpose several years before by Mr. Creamer, one of the earliest settlers on the Northern shores of the Waitemata.



The first Church, opened in 1880.

Birkenhead Methodist Church -1880-1970

The name "Zion Hill" has often intrigued people, and it apparently came from a Presbyterian Minister, Rev. McCallum, who stood on the summit of the hill, entranced at the softly rolling country and the sea and hills beyond and who quoted the Psalmist's words—"Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mt. Zion".

The first church was connected with the Pitt Street Circuit. Services were held at 3 p.m. preceded by Sunday School at 2 p.m.

In 1882, however, Birkenhead was included with Devonport and Takapuna to form the North Shore Circuit, morning and evening services were held, with Sunday School in the afternoon, and with the rapidly growing population the little church became too small. In 1885 the present Church was built, not debt-free, but burdened heavily with a debt that took many years to pay and we would lie ungrateful indeed if we did not thankfully remember those early workers.

Several names appear now, linked with those early days—

Johnsons, Dickens, Dines, Wilsons, Forghams are but some of those who worked so willingly for the Kingdom of God, and there is one name that goes right back to the very earliest beginnings. Alexander Wilson and his wife were among the first members and for over 30 years they served gladly in the Birkenhead Church, and it was a rare thing when they were absent from any of its services. Mr. Wilson was a tireless temperance worker too, and it could be rightly said that it is due to his efforts that there is no hotel in Birkenhead. Mr. Allan Wilson, his son, and Mr. Norman Wilson, a grandson, have worked equally hard in this circuit, and Mr. Allan Wilson has been associated with both Sunday School and Church since their opening in 1880. A wonderful record for any circuit.

Mr. A. G. Clow would notice a difference in the musical part of our services today. When Mr. Clow was precentor there was no choir, no organ, and his only instrument was a tuning fork, but in spite of this it must have been good to have heard those early Methodists sing! Mr. Clow's younger brother was very musical too, and right through the history of the Church the Clows have been associated with music and song.

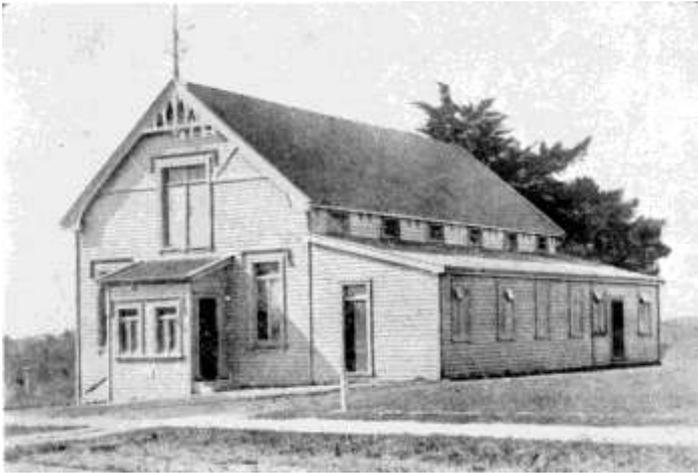
The first choir conductor was W. H. Thompson, then W. Taylor, T. Chapman, Mr. Le Petit, D. R. Davies, Joseph Woods, Colin Peace, Joseph Wright, Lindley Stewart and now Mrs. Peoples is our Choir Mistress.

Birkenhead has always been fortunate in its Sunday School Superintendents, and two especially gave long years of service - Mr. A. L. White and Mr. Albert Hadfield, who is rarely missing from our Sunday Services to-day.

The actual Birkenhead Methodist Sunday School was built, without the present classrooms, in 1902, by Mr. Fred Souster and was designed by Mr. Arthur White.

Birkenhead Methodist Church -1880-1970

The close of the first 25 years was during the ministry of Rev. W. Greenslade, who had come to Birkenhead from the goldfields of Waihi, and he was the first Minister to occupy the first Parsonage which is still standing next to the Church in Onewa Road.



The present Hall, built in 1901, as it appeared some years after being opened.

THE SECOND TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

1905-1930

After the Rev. Greenslade came Rev. G. S. Cook, and it was during this second twenty-five years that Birkenhead Church began to spread its influence further afield still. Services were being held at Northcote although a Church was not built until 1894, and the present Church in 1901. G. S. Cook, according to earlier records was a "gifted preacher, a splendid organiser, and a keen debater", and it was during his ministry that the Birkdale Church was built, opposite and below where the Birkdale School now stands. It was during this time also, that the Birkenhead circuit was formed and the next minister, Rev. T. G. Garr consolidated and further, extended this new circuit, and by this time the Birkenhead Methodist Tennis Club was in full swing, the courts having been opened about 1908.

The Glenfield Mission Hall was erected during the next minister's term, the Rev. T. F. Jones, and this remarkable little Hall was opened debt-free and sprang up, complete, in one day! Birkenhead Circuit was extending rapidly and who knows what may not have further developed, but for events overseas.

The Great War burst upon Birkenhead at this period and our roll of honour gives some indication of the lives that were affected during this upheaval. Our other Minister during this war period was Rev. Harold Sharp, young, energetic, and eventually appointed Chaplain to our men in camp.

Four more Ministers complete this next twenty-five years of Birkenhead Methodism-Rev. P. Cooke, Rev. W. A. Burley, Rev. J. H. Alien and Rev. W. W. Avery, each with his own special attributes and each leaving the circuit a richer place than it had been before.

It was during these years that the Northcote Sunday Schoolroom was built and the "Y.C.L." and "Old Folks Gathering" was instituted.

And so ended an era, another twenty-five years that will remain as a tribute to those who worked so hard and achieved so much.

THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

1930-1955

Rev. W. W. Avery is the link between the second and third quarter centuries, and it was during those early years of the '30's, the depression years, that he guided the steady progress of the Church.



The Church as it is today.

Rev. W. Gatman followed, and it is easy to understand the delight with which the children, and the adults, would listen to his talks and sermons. The Rev. H. H. Jeffreys then, and it was about this time, in 1939, that the old historical primary room, with its peculiar octagonal design, was raised and attached to the main Sunday School room and two other rooms as well were added. There were further developments also at Beachhaven, where a small new church was built. The Rev. A. J. Johnston was appointed to the circuit during the early years of the Second World War, and he must hold a unique position among Methodist ministers, as during his years with us he occupied no less than three parsonages (at different times, of course).

The first parsonage, at the top of Onewa Road, was proving costly to maintain and was therefore sold. The second was a temporarily rented house, and the third the old Birkdale Church which was carefully dismantled and rebuilt as a parsonage near Pupuke Road. The present parsonage was opened in February, 1951. It would be a wonderful asset in any Circuit Its completion marked the end of years of negotiation and numerous delays, caused by building controls and increased prices. The house is a great credit to the builder, Mr. John Hall who literally went the second mile, not only in putting in the best workmanship at a very low comparative cost but also in

Birkenhead Methodist Church -1880-1970

including many extras. Tribute must also be paid to the way in which everyone in the Circuit worked in the raising of the necessary finance, and to the women for the time and monetary support they put into the furnishing arrangements. At the opening Mr. and Mrs. Allan Wilson were deservedly given the privilege of opening the door.



The present parsonage, opened February, 1951.

We are well into our own time now, and Rev. G. R. H. Peterson, and the Rev. Athol Penn bring the record up to date. What a fine record it is, and what a tremendous debt we owe to the foresight and sacrifice of those who made these things possible.

There are others we are indebted to as well—to Rev. J. W. Bayliss, Rev. A. Blakemore and Rev. W. H. Wilson for service so gladly given, to a whole army of Sunday School workers, Youth Leaders, Officers and hard working members of our Church. To our Choir too, who many years ago began a fund which has resulted in the organ we are enjoying at these Anniversary functions.

The youth work of the Church has always been a dominating feature of the Birkenhead Church.

As far back as 1924 Bible Class Camps have been attended regularly at Easter, and as the years went by accommodation has had to be increased. The old Church became the Primary Room, extra classrooms were added to the main Hall, and folding partitions put inside the Schoolroom. With the new room put underneath the Primary room, another class could be housed.

We urgently require another 2 or 3 rooms yet, to adequately cater for our Youth.

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Apart from Sunday School and Bible Class work, the G.L.B. and Boys' Brigade, together with the Cadets and Life Boys each have their share of the week's programme.

With Tennis in Summer and Badminton in Winter, sporting activities are catered for.

The Local Youth Council was formed in 1941 and has been a means of coordinating these organisations.

A strong and enthusiastic Youth Fellowship has been meeting in the Parsonage after Church on alternate Sunday nights and has proved to be a means of deepening the spiritual life of our young people. To the Teachers and Leaders of our youth we pay our tribute for the way in which they have brought a proper balance into their young lives.

To celebrate this 75th Anniversary the congregation decided on a programme of improvements to the Church and Hall properties. The whole interior of the Church has been redecorated and the Chancel remodelled and carpeted. A willing band of workers have put in many hours of voluntary labour, without which the scheme could not have been carried through! What has been done has made the sanctuary a more beautiful and worthy place of worship. It will add dignity and assist in creating a spirit of reverence.

A long cherished dream also materialised at the celebrations with the installation of a new organ - an Everett Orgatron. This will assist greatly the musical side of our worship. We acknowledge here our indebtedness to Mr. T. L. Hames (from whom the organ was purchased) for his generosity. The organ was dedicated as part of the Anniversary celebrations, and also in memory of those men of the congregation who gave their lives in the two World Wars.

It is intended to carry on work after the Anniversary functions as more remains to be done, especially in the Hall. The balance of the special Anniversary Fund, after the work completed has been paid for will be used for these further improvements.

And now what of the future?

The Rev. G. R. Peterson put it well in 1940. "Have we adopted a policy of defence against, rather than attack upon, the indifference to spiritual things so prevalent today? . . . ' advance is possible only as the Gospel is presented faithfully by precept and example, and under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The object and aim is that of the early Church -the Salvation of man and the Glory of God".

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SATURDAY, JUNE 11th

6 p.m. - ANNIVERSARY BANQUET.

Admission 3/-.

SUNDAY, JUNE 12th

11 a.m. – President of Conference (Rev. C. O. Hailwood).

Dedication of Organ.

7 p.m. – The Chairman of the District (Rev. E. W. Hames, M.A.).

TUESDAY, JUNE 14th

7.30 p.m - YOUTH DEMONSTRATION

THURSDAY, JUNE 16th

MUSICAL FESTIVAL.

Cantata, "The Great Light" (Finlay Lyons); and Organ Recital.

SUNDAY, JUNE 19th

11 a.m. - Rev. P. I. COOKE (Former Minister).

7 p.m.-Rev. A. R. PENN (Present Minister).

*Zion Hill Methodist Church
Birkenhead*



*The Past
Fifteen Years*

1955 - 1970

This brief resume of the past is designed to bring our records up to date and follows on the "Seventy Five Years of Methodism". One important difference is that this time we deal mostly with Zion Hill as the other parts of the circuit have become more or less separate identities and are developing their own histories.

Birkenhead Methodist Church -1880-1970

The Rev. A. Penn, who was superintendent minister for the last few years of our previous record, completed the year and was followed in 1956 by the son of a previous minister, the Rev. R. H. Alien. With the opening of the harbour bridge in 1959, there were some rapid changes in the district. The population was increasing so rapidly that another full time minister, the Rev. R. W. Widdup, was appointed to Beach Haven, and a part time minister to Northcote, replaced later by a third full time Minister. This of course meant two more parsonages, as well as a new church hall in Northcote Central. These affected the mother church in Birkenhead, as increased finance was needed to meet the needs of the growing Circuit. To meet the drain on finances a stewardship campaign was launched. Unfortunately this did not quite come up to expectations, and it was necessary to raise extra money for most of the work we wanted done to our own buildings. In spite of the shortage of finance the south side of the hall roof was replaced in 1956. Further seating was installed in the Church in 1957, and at the same time the pulpit was altered.

Some of the dummy buttresses were rotting, and most were removed before the Church was repainted in 1958. The kitchen of the hall was also modernised and enlarged at this time. We were assisted by Mr. M. Corley under the Order of St. Stephen for some of this work. Also during the Rev. R. H. Alien's time advantage was taken of the chance to obtain a small two roomed cottage from the Northcote College for £5 (ten dollars). This was shifted to its present site by Mr. Davern of Henderson free of charge. The partition was removed and youth of the Church have had the benefit of a very useful club room.

The Rev. D. Sherson took over the reins in 1962 while we were still struggling to keep pace with a rapidly growing district. "Don" with his quiet unruffled way helped us over a very difficult period.

Improvements still went on. In 1964 the entrance porch and vestry were considerably enlarged and have proved valuable assets. As these were built entirely by voluntary labour a considerable saving was made. Shortly after this the families of two of our faithful workers, Mrs. Beatrice Price (Thompson) and Miss Jean Wilson, made a donation for a memorial to them in the shape of a large illuminated cross, which was erected on the peak of the gable on the Church. Advantage of the scaffolding erected for this was taken to repaint the whole exterior of the church. Gratitude was expressed particularly to a few who gave weeks and months of full time voluntary labour. To finish the job concrete paths were laid from Onewa Rd. to Glenfield Rd.

To make way for modern trends, and the necessity to provide off street car parking, the main tennis court was converted into a car park. This was a disappointment to many who remembered the happy evenings and Saturdays with, at times since its inception in 1909, a very active and keen tennis club. This, with the regular Saturday night socials, has gone and nothing seems to have taken its place. However, a loyal

Birkenhead Methodist Church -1880-1970

band of young people continued to give good service in S.S., B.C. and in such groups as the Boys Brigade and Girls Brigade. The Badminton Club is still strong.

With our homes having more general comforts the church had to improve its amenities, and in 1966 our outdated heaters were replaced and cushions purchased for the seats. The Women's Fellowship provided the latter.- Heaters-were installed in the hall three years later.

During the period following the opening of the bridge there was a phenomenal growth in Birkenhead, especially in Highbury, and from a few shops this suddenly became one of the main business centres of the Shore, making Zion Hill and its beautiful site more prominent and valuable than ever. Unfortunately the high hopes of a big increase in church attendance with the increase in population did not materialise. The church it seems, no longer is the centre of community life.

The Rev. J. H. Woolford was appointed in 1968 as Superintendent and Rev. D. Sherson appointed to Northcote. At the beginning of this jubilee year Northcote became a separate circuit. The Rev. F. Peterson at Beach Haven still assists in the Birkenhead Circuit.

In spite of difficulties, maintenance to our buildings still goes on. As a result of two successful fairs the north side of the hall roof, and roof above the class rooms were replaced, the hall roof repainted, and the floor which had literally worn thin was overlaid with chip board. The remodelling of the toilets and side entrance completes the picture to date.

What of the future? In a time when tremendous changes are taking place in every area of life the church must also change if it is to adequately fulfil its role in the world. One of the lessons learnt from looking back over the past is that the faith and courage of those who served in years gone by inspires us to greater efforts to meet the challenge of our day.

Yet always bearing in mind the words of Rev. Gordon Peterson: "The object and aim is that of the early church — the Salvation of man and the Glory of God."

Birkenhead Methodist Church -1880-1970

90th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL SERVICES

Sunday, 24th May, 1970

Church Service at 10.30 a.m.

Conducted by the President,

Rev. J. J. Lewis M.A., B.D., Ph.D. followed by a luncheon in the Hall

Sunday, 24th May, 1970

Special Youth Service at 7.00 p.m.

Conducted by the Chairman of the District »

Rev. R. F. Clement, M.A. followed by a Coffee Hour in the Hall

Sunday, 31st May, 1970

Family Service at 9.30

Conducted by our Superintendent Minister

Rev. J. H. Woolford, M.A.