

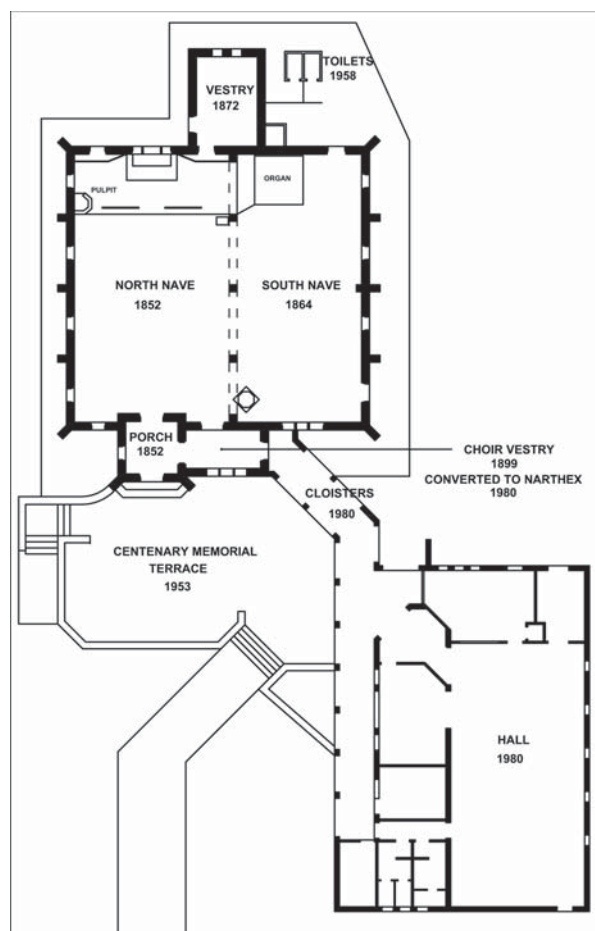
Chapter 11

THE CHURCH BUILDING

WHEN it was opened in 1852 St Michael's consisted of the present northern nave and the tower. The high-pitched roof was of wood shingles and sheets of calico filled the empty window spaces. For the first twenty years a curtained area in one corner probably served as the priest's vestry.

In 1864 the Church was enlarged by creating a second nave on the southern side separated from the original section by Gothic arches and pillars (Fig. 11-1). As a result the building is almost square, the internal dimensions being about 16.78 m x 15.29 m, with walls about 6.1 m high. Above the entrance porch is the lofty tower containing the bell chamber. The priest's vestry was added in 1872 and a choir vestry in 1899. When the Parish Hall and cloisters were built in 1980 the choir vestry was converted to a narthex. The Centenary Memorial Terrace dates from 1953.

Fig. 11-1 Plan of St Michael's Church showing major building phases, 1852 to 2001. (Ben Oborn)



This chapter is intended to provide a record of the major building phases and repairs that have occurred over the past 150 years. The interior furnishings and fittings are described in Chapter 12 and the design and construction of the Parish Hall in Chapter 14.

CONSTRUCTION: 1848–1854

Although the first services in St Michael's were held in October 1852 – four years after the foundation stone was laid – work continued on the building project for a further two years. The enthusiasm that accompanied the decision taken in August 1848 to build a church soon turned to frustration. The founding fathers experienced many trials and tribulations: not only were they always running out of money, but they also found that most of the skilled tradesmen had gone off to Ballarat or Bendigo in search of gold. These problems are described in Chapter 1.

The original plans for the Church were drawn up by William Weir who was one of the leading architects working in Adelaide at that time. He was involved in designing several other Anglican churches including the ones at Kensington and Willunga, as well as the beautiful Christ Church at North Adelaide.

Local Mitcham quarries provided abundant quantities of high-grade building stone, and it is almost certain that the stone used in the construction of St Michael's came from a quarry on the edge of the Village. This was on Lot 99 which, in 1848, was owned by John Grainger, one of the two men who constituted the Building Committee (see Fig. 1-1). Today this small quarry face can be seen on the left opposite the monument as you enter the Brownhill Creek Reserve. Remnants of identical quartzite and sandstone have been found at this site. The stone was cut and dressed by a local stonemason, John Heritage. Like Grainger, he was one of the thirty-two men who signed the original petition to build a church in Mitcham Village.¹

As was the usual practice the footings consisted of lengths of bluestone laid in shallow trenches. Although the foundation stone was laid on 30th September 1848, it was not until January 1850 – some fifteen months after work began – that the walls seem to have reached the stage where the architect was ready to call tenders for “carpenters willing to contract for the roof and windows”.²

There are no records of meetings of the Building Committee, however some pages at the back of the first Minute Book (begun in December 1852) appear to have been used as a cash book and they give details of receipts and expenditure from 1st July 1852 to 23rd December 1854. From these we can glean some information on the costs involved in constructing and fitting out the building.

Up to the end of July 1852 only £836 had been collected in subscriptions to build a church: half of this, £418, was donated by John Grainger! Charles Newenham (the other member of the Building Committee) and William Bartley both gave £50, but most of the other subscriptions ranged from one to ten pounds. Of the amount expended to that time, some £269 was paid to the mason (Heritage), £194 for stone and £156 for roofing (Haynes). Sundries included lime, water and sand for the foundations and cash for labour to dig them; timber and scaffolding; ropes, blocks, tackles, iron crabb etc., and blacksmith's work. To that date the architect had received £36 10s 0d as commission.

A notice in the *Adelaide Observer* on Saturday, 16th October 1852 advised that: "St Michael's Church, Mitcham, having been temporarily prepared will be opened for Divine Service on Sunday next, the 17th inst ..." The first entry in the Minute Book records that it was "... still unfinished, neither ceiled nor plastered, with temporary doors and calico windows" (Fig. 11-2). It would appear that building work was not completed for another two years, for in October 1854 Haynes and Gaskell were paid £124 for "windows, fixing bell and filling up doorways". Haynes was the carpenter who won the roofing contract in 1850. Between October 1852 and February 1854 the main contractor, Jacob Pitman, was paid £407.

The Bell

For nearly 150 years the bell in the tower of St Michael's has called the faithful to worship (Fig. 11-3). It has been rung joyfully to celebrate births, marriages and various important events. It has tolled in sorrow as funeral processions left the Church for the journey to the cemetery, and has rung with urgency to warn of impending disasters such as bushfires and floods.

An item of expenditure dated 9th July 1853 records: "Blyth for bell complete £16 1s 9d". This would have been a payment made to Arthur (later Sir Arthur) Blyth, an ironmonger, who served as one of the first Vestrymen. He and his brother Neville traded as Blyth Bros in Adelaide. As noted above, the bell was installed in the tower on 3rd October 1854 by Haynes and Gaskell. The mouth of the bell has a diameter of 420 mm and is estimated to weigh 50 kg.³

ADDITION OF THE SOUTH NAVE: 1863-64

By the early 1860s the population of the Village and surrounding areas had increased to the point where it was felt necessary to provide "increased accommodation for those who desired to worship in St Michael's".

Some problems seem to have arisen with the roof in 1858 when master builders English and Brown were asked to "examine the beams and if found necessary to have them varnished". Three years later, in April 1861, the Wardens were requested to "ascertain the cost of covering the roof of the Church with Galvanized Iron", but when the Vestry met again in August they were also asked to consider "the expediency of increasing the accommodation of the



Fig. 11-2

St Michael's Church, 1854.

(*The South Australian Almanack & General Colonial Directory for 1854*)

Fig. 11-3

The bell, believed to be the original one installed in 1854, is suspended from a roughly-cut log beam. (Hervey Bagot, 1983)



Church". A plan was laid before them, "furnished by Mr Weir the architect who built the Church, for enlargement by addition of choir, transepts, chancel & vestry. The roughly estimated cost being from £550 to £650". It was thought wise to obtain an amended estimate incorporating several alterations to Weir's plan. These included wood shingles instead of an iron roof, omitting the vestry and raising the chancel to the full height of the building. Subscriptions would be sought for a Building Fund, and the meeting was "then adjourned for a month".

Nearly two years passed before the matter was raised again. By then another architect, Edmund Wright, had submitted new plans and on 18th April 1863 he was asked "to invite tenders for the Enlargement of Mitcham Church according to Plan No.1 (omitting plastering, excepting the plastering of roof) and for the repair of the present roof". Several weeks later it was resolved "to have the present shingle roof repaired and the ceiling examined; and that the Enlargement of the Church be postponed until the end of August".

At this critical stage the incumbent, Reverend Richard Needham, resigned and during the interregnum a group of five Vestrymen formed themselves into "a Building Committee for the Church and Parsonage". On the 19th September 1863 they resolved to accept the tender submitted by Mr Bunday and to proceed at once "with the addition of a nave on the south side of the



Fig. 11-4 St Michael's Church, c.1869. The south nave was completed in February 1864. (MPA)

original one". Commenting on this in his 1902 history of St Michael's, Reverend A.W. Clampett wrote:

*One cannot but regret the decision of these five gentlemen, for in electing to add the southern nave, instead of adopting the plans of the church's original architect, Mr Weir ... St Michael's forfeited its claim to be one of the structurally handsome churches in the diocese. The records about this time are somewhat meagre, and give no suggestion why Mr Wright's plans were preferred to Mr Weir's – one's sympathies go out most fully to Mr Weir.*⁴

Work on the additional nave progressed swiftly, in spite of the fact that many buildings then under construction were experiencing "lengthy delays through want of the services of mason, bricklayers and labourers". In January 1864 it was reported that:

*Messrs Wright & Woods, architects, are just now superintending a very admirable improvement to this pretty ecclesiastical edifice... They widened the building to the extent of 23 feet, and having taken down the old south wall, erected arches in its place, and raised the south wall again at the distance above mentioned. This part of the building will be lighted by a beautiful stone window at the west end. The alterations will improve the conveniences of the church greatly, and when finished will cost between £500 and £600.*⁵

Within a few weeks the building, although not finished, was ready to be consecrated (Fig. 11-4). The *Register* of 22nd February 1864 gave further details of the construction (note, "northern wall" should read "southern wall"):

The consecration of the enlargement of St Michael's, Mitcham, took place on Sunday February 21st. It is considerably more than a year ago that it was found necessary to afford increased accommodation for the congregation assembly in this place of worship, although only a few months have elapsed since the work of enlargement had actually been commenced. The addition has been made latitudinally, the northern [sic] wall of

*the Church having been carried out some 15 or 20 feet, making the total width about equal to the length. The style of architecture is made to conform with that of the original erection, the walls being of hard grey or blue stone, with dressed freestone quoins and buttresses. The roof of the old building has not been altered, but one of similar construction has been raised over the addition, and the inner sides of both roofs are made to rest on masonry work raised on arches supported by square pillars running down the centre of the building. The western gable of the addition is set off by an ornamented window, and nearly the whole of the masonry in the eastern gable is enclosed within a large blind arch [see Fig. 14-5]. The interior of the enlargement, which is entered by a door at the north-east [sic] corner, is not completed, the walls being unplastered and the floor not yet supplied with permanent seats.*⁶

The walls remained unplastered until 1869 when it was reported at the Annual Vestry that: "Plastering the new portion of the Church was a work of real necessity, and it has apparently increased the hearing power". At that same meeting it was suggested "the ceilings of both portions of the Church ought to be made uniform – both of varnished wood ... and putting Jalousie windows [louvres] in the tower of the Church". It was also reported that water closets and a carriage shed had been built in the grounds.

PRIEST'S VESTRY: 1872

Early in 1872 a concert was held with the proceeds of £10 going "towards building a new vestry" (Fig. 11-5) and at the Annual Easter Vestry it was decided:

To proceed at once with the building of a vestry, for which plans and specifications prepared by Mr Woods, Architect, were produced... It was resolved also to take steps towards whitening the pillars, and to consult the Architect as to the best means of doing it: likewise to provide a clock.

Fig. 11-5 The priest's vestry was added in 1872. The blind arch in the gable of the south nave is just visible above the vestry roof. (Pamela Oborn, 2002)



A year later the Annual Vestry was held “in the new vestry. The financial statement to 31st March 1873 showed that £137 17s 0d had been spent on the project. The brick pillars between the two naves were “smoothed, jointed and painted at a cost of £21 6s 6d. An additional item of £4 15s 0d was for a “Dial for tower”. There is no evidence of any clock face ever being fixed to the exterior of the tower, so this probably referred to a clock being installed in the porch below.

DEMOLITION SUGGESTED: 1877

Reactive clay soils and poor footings have caused on-going problems with cracking of the walls. Within twenty-five years of the Church being opened the Vestrymen were seriously considering demolishing the building. In April 1877 they were told:

The Church walls having seriously cracked from settlement of foundations, the question was discussed, whether the Church should be repaired, or a new and handsome one be erected. In case the latter course were adopted two gentlemen promised £250 each towards the probable cost of about £4,000. The question was deferred to be reconsidered at the next meeting a month hence.

At a Special Vestry held on 1st May it was reported “that there seemed little hope of building a new Church, and the scheme was abandoned”. Mr Manton read a statement showing “that the needful repairs might be carried out for £184”. He was requested to prepare specifications and advertise for tenders. The report of Mr Woods on the state of the Church was also read in which he said the wall “was unsafe and might be taken down and rebuilt for £250.”

The two gentlemen mentioned, Messrs Manton and Woods, were both acknowledged experts. James T. Manton, a leading Vestryman who lived at Lower Mitcham, was a well-known civil engineer and served as the Colony’s Chief Surveyor. The architect, Edward J. Woods, was in partnership with Edmund Wright who designed the south nave and the priest’s vestry.

A year passed before the matter was raised again. On 13th May 1878 tenders for repairs of the Church were opened and considered, and that of Mr David Deans “was accepted conditionally – it being resolved that unless it should be found absolutely necessary, the roof should not be removed”. An urgent meeting, chaired by the Vicar-General, was called two weeks later at which it was announced to the stunned assembly that the incumbent, Reverend Henry Read, had resigned and “that the Cure was now vacant” (see page 28).

Mr A. Macgeorge [Minister’s Warden] reported that he had signed Contract with Mr D. Deans for the repair of the Church. Amount of Contract £200 the work to begin immediately, but it was resolved that in the changed circumstances of the Church caused by the Incumbent’s resignation it would be advisable to delay the work for a month ... requested to arrange with the contractor accordingly.

To add to the confusion, the expensive Bishop & Son organ was due to arrive from England on 10th June and was to be delivered to the Church, unpacked and checked.

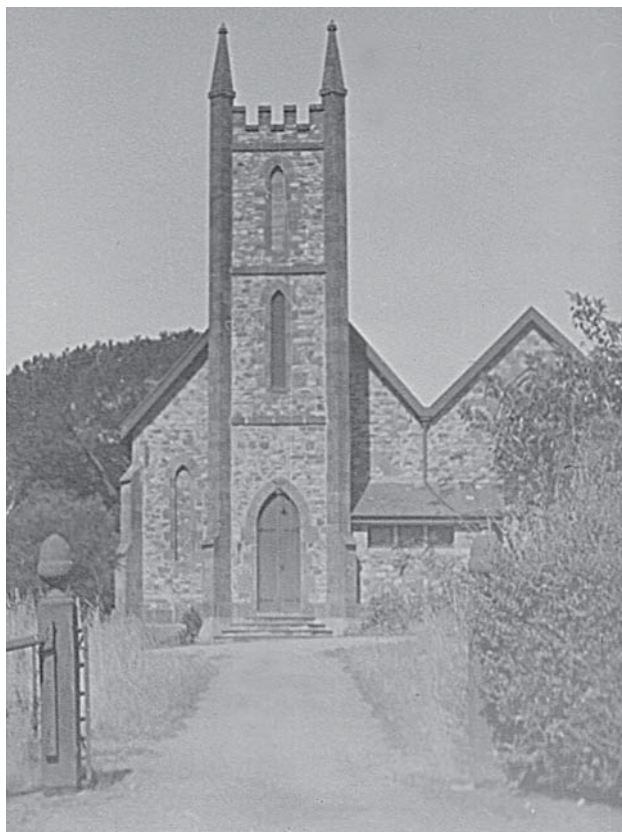
The contractor, David Deans, was also a Vestryman. Both he and Alexander Macgeorge had served as Chairmen of the Mitcham District Council: Deans in 1875 and Macgeorge in 1876.

CHOIR VESTRY: 1899

At the 1897 Annual Vestry the Wardens were asked to secure a report “re the underpinning and strengthening of the base and north-western corner of the Church tower”. Nothing seems to have been attempted at that time, however it is possible some work may have been done during construction of the choir vestry two years later.

At Michaelmas 1898 the choir wore cassocks and surplices for the first time and towards the end of that year the building of a choir vestry commenced. It was opened on Sexagesima Sunday 1899. This choir vestry (Fig. 11-6) approximately 4.4 m by 2.3 m, on the southern side of the tower was built of matching quartzite and sandstone. There are no records of who the architect was, but he was paid a fee of £5 5s 0d. The project cost £60, with a further £1 4s 6d spent on furnishings.

Fig. 11-6 St Michael’s as it appeared prior to construction of the Centenary Memorial Terrace in 1953. The choir vestry to the right of the tower was built in 1899. It now forms the narthex providing access between the porch and the cloisters. Until 1956 the main approach to the Church, for both vehicles and pedestrians, was through these entrance gates. (MPA)



When the new Parish Hall was built in 1980 an opening was made between the tower and choir vestry to form the present narthex (see page 232).

REPAIRS & RENOVATIONS: 1905–1920

In February 1905 the Rector spoke of the necessity of renovating the interior of the Church, saying:

The inside of the north wall is in a very bad state. The whole body of the Church is looking shabby, and requires the skill of workmen for a week. God's house should be the best kept in the Parish, but as the rain at present gets through the roof in many places it cannot be said that it is.

He asked for donations in aid of 'Renovations to Church', to which the Barr Smith's gave £50. A further £114 was raised at a Bazaar held in September, and by November it was reported that:

St Michael's church has undergone a thorough repairing, renovation, and cleaning. The roof, which has been a trouble to us for years, is now, we may safely say, in good order. The building has been painted inside and out, and now presents quite a new, orderly, and pleasing appearance. A handsome lincrusta paper, tastefully decorated in gold and browns, covers a large portion of the Sanctuary wall, and makes an effective and attractive finish. The incandescent light, with Rae's powerful burners, has been installed. The pillars have been chipped, the caps remoulded, and the whole covered and chamfered with King's Windsor cement. Wire netting now guards the eaves and the tower louvres from the ravages and furnishings of 'Jack' sparrow and his numerous friends, the starlings... New gutterings and down pipes have also been supplied. The worshippers at St Michael's can now feel that God's house, for the due maintenance of which they are responsible, is now in good order. All signs of neglect have gone; we must never allow them to be so manifest again.

As electricity was not installed until August 1919, it is presumed that "Rae's powerful burners" referred to new gaslights, the original ones having been installed in July 1893 when the tender of Mr W.A. Tucker had been accepted for the "removal of oil lamp fixings and the installation of gaslights".

Storm Damage: 1916

Writing in the *Parish Messenger* in August 1916, the Rector made reference to a storm which had caused considerable damage:

A 'hurricane' blow on Monday Evening, July 17th, lifted the roof from one side of the nave, and in its vigor made it fly over the avenue of pines leading to the Church, carrying the roof, timber and iron, across a road, and depositing it in a neighbour's back garden... All has been repaired, and no sign of the assault, apart from the damp on the walls of the Church, now remains.

Unfortunately there are no further references to this, so whether it was the roofing off the north or south nave remains unknown. Any outstanding repair work was probably done in August 1919 when the Rector reported that: "The Church has been thoroughly renovated within and without, the electric light has been installed in place of gas."

POST-WAR PROJECTS: 1946–1950

Very little money was available during the Great Depression or the Second World War to undertake any major repairs. Although building restrictions imposed during the War were still in force in 1946 the new Rector, Reverend Reginald Pearman, was able to report at Easter that during the past two weeks "some long overdue renovations to the southern annexe of St Michael's had been put in hand". If funds were available, "similar attention would be given to the north, west and east walls after Easter". In May he reported:

This dear old House of God is beginning to look rejuvenated. The southern portion was completed in time for the Holy Week and Easter services. Much of it has been replastered and the three walls of this south part were calcimined or painted. The old brown paint has gone, the organ partition has been grained and what a difference it has made to the appearance of the old building...

There was a willing and quick response to my appeal for further funds to continue the renovation work in the main part of the church to correspond with that done in the southern part. The work has only been made possible through the generosity of the Ladies' Guild, the members of which have made available from Guild funds something over £100. But this was not sufficient to do the whole of the church and porch and vestries, and while we have good workmen available and on the job it was also desirable to paint the outside of the church too... After an inspection of what was being done and after expressing appreciation of what the members of St Michael's have done and are doing to preserve and beautify the church, Mr F.W. Cornell of 'St Andrew's', Springfield, very kindly offered to accept the responsibility of raising at least £50 to complete the work of renovation inside and the painting outside. I have accepted Mr Cornell's offer on behalf of the congregation and we shall now be able to complete the whole of the interior and to paint exterior woodwork and guttering... I must not omit an expression of gratitude to Mr R.J. Nurse, of Springfield, who is the contractor doing the work, and to his men. I have many opportunities to see them at work and I feel sure that they are doing a thoroughly good and conscientious job, and I know we shall be pleased with the result.

Mr Frank Cornell was a generous benefactor of St Michael's. His home, 'St Andrew's', is now Mercedes College. A fête was held in the beautiful grounds in November 1947 to raise money to "complete renovation of exterior of Church and the installation of deep drainage (a long overdue necessity)".

War Memorial Chapel Planned

Concurrent with the above repairs and painting, the Rector was looking to the future. Writing in the *Parish Messenger* in April 1946 he said:

In six years time we shall be observing the centenary of St Michael's. At the coming Vestry meeting the Wardens and I shall ask for the formation of a representative committee to consider the proposal to:

- (1) Beautify the church by building a sanctuary, chancel, choir vestries, and organ chamber.*
- (2) Completely renovate the interior and exterior of the church and grounds.*
- (3) Other matters which I cannot mention in a 'Parish Messenger' until they have been formulated and put to the Vestry.*

The “other matters” which were to be put to the Vestry on 12th May concerned a proposed War Memorial. A committee was elected to frame a policy and report back. An unidentified handwritten note found amongst other papers in the Parish archives outlines this ‘policy’:

160 (2) (J) (VII)

Objects: To erect additions to St Michael's Church in the form of a sanctuary, chancel, vestries and their appurtenances together with a memorial chapel in the southern portion of the existing church premises and to name and dedicate them as a War Memorial.

Control: Control to be vested in a Committee to be elected at a public meeting to be held to establish a public fund. Fund to be independent of other funds.

App. given 10.9.46

However, it was noted that under the present conditions of building restrictions “NO permits are being given for extensions to churches”. Another three years passed without further reference to the proposed War Memorial. In May 1949, parishioners were reminded that “we are only three years from the keeping of our Centenary” and they were urged to attend the Annual Vestry as “preliminary steps must be taken in connection with certain plans for the suitable observance of our Centenary Celebrations”.

CENTENARY PROJECTS: 1952

In December 1951 letters were sent out appealing for funds for certain schemes to commemorate the centenary of St Michael's. The grandiose plans for a new sanctuary, chancel and memorial chapel had shrunk to “making alterations to improve that portion of the church immediately around the Altar and to renovate inside the church”. If funds permitted it was hoped to build “another choir vestry on the east end of the church and, if this is done, the present ladies' vestry at the side of the tower will be made into a main entrance porch”. To carry out these projects at least £2,000 would be needed.

Plans for the alterations to the sanctuary were drawn up by the architectural firm of Caradoc Ashton, Fisher, Woodhead & Beaumont Smith in July 1952 (Figs 11-7 and

11-8). They included removal of the old steps, elevating the altar onto a new step and building a new platform extending from the east wall westward as far as the first pillar. The brass altar rails, which were installed in 1899, enclosed the altar on three sides making it very difficult for two people to move easily within the area in the administration of Holy Communion. They were re-erected in one straight line along the edge of the new platform. At the same time the pulpit was lowered. The work was done by Mr G.A. Lindschau of Delamere Avenue, Netherby, “who gave his own labour and that of one of his employees for two whole days to alter the sanctuary area, and to put in the new flooring at a cost to the Church for materials only”. When complete, the whole area was re-carpeted with money raised by the Ladies' Guild.

In addition the Church had been “re-arranged and stain-polished, the lighting greatly improved and old circuits re-wired and the building woodwork treated to prevent future trouble from white ants”.

The other major work undertaken as part of the Centenary Celebrations – but not completed until the 101st anniversary – was the construction of the Centenary Memorial Terrace. This was also designed by Caradoc Ashton, Fisher, Woodhead & Beaumont Smith, and is described in Chapter 10.

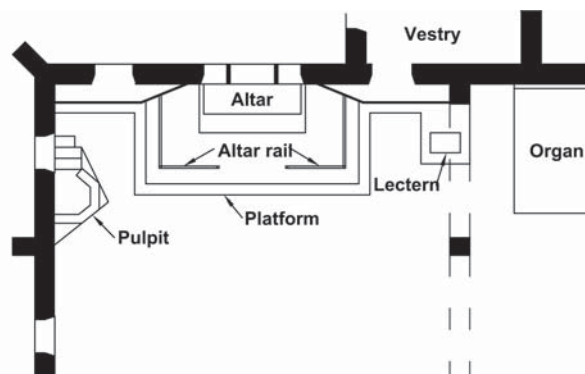
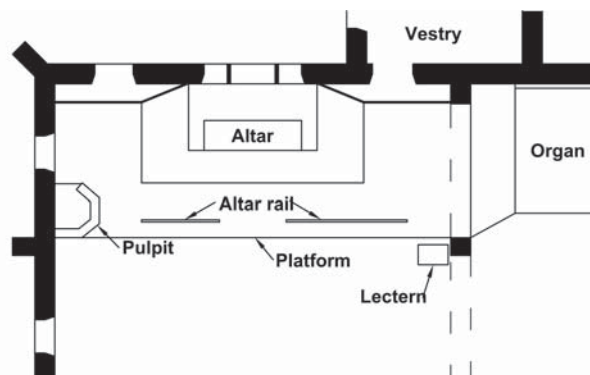


Fig. 11-7 Layout of the sanctuary area prior to 1952. Note the confined space around the altar which was surrounded on three sides by the brass altar rails. They were installed in 1899. (Ben Oborn, 2002)

Fig. 11-8 Current layout of the sanctuary area. The altar rails now run along the edge of the new platform built between the pulpit and first column. (Ben Oborn, 2002)



AFTERMATH OF THE EARTHQUAKE: 1954–1963

In the early hours of Monday, 1st March 1954 a substantial earthquake measuring 5.3 on the Richter Scale rocked Adelaide. It caused extensive damage to the old Rectory and to the Church. At the time of the earthquake the Church had only recently been renovated, re-carpeted and refurnished as part of the Centenary Celebrations. Ted Smith recalled walking into St Michael's that morning:

The lovely burgundy-coloured carpet in the Church was literally covered with white plaster. It was almost as though there had been a snowstorm... Much of the plaster was loosened to the extent that we became very alarmed, and with the aid of long poles we actually dislodged huge slabs of plaster from the walls to ensure the safety of anyone coming into the Church.⁷

Repairs to the Rectory were recovered from the underwriters, but the Church was not insured. Two months after the earthquake, Mr E.J. Barker from the architectural firm of Dean W. Berry, Gilbert, Barker & Polomka, reported that severe cracks existed in the Church structure and he expected the cost of repairs would be in the vicinity of £2,000. The extent of necessary work would be difficult to establish until operations were started, and that it would need to be carried out in sections. It took nearly a decade to complete the project!

Restoration of the South Nave & Tower: 1954–1957

The earthquake occurred five months after the completion of the Centenary Memorial Terrace. Ted Smith recalled that “somebody had the foresight to pour masses of concrete under the tower and that, together with the fact that steel bracings had been placed around the tower and across the Church in earlier times, saved the tower and that portion of the Church from very serious damage”.

Although the damage to the tower (Fig. 11-9) appeared minor from the ground, closer examination revealed some unexpected problems. In 1998 Maurice Neck, a former parishioner, was asked for his recollections about it. At the time of the earthquake he had recently graduated as a civil engineer and together with Colin Crisp, another young parishioner who was studying engineering, they were given permission to make a study of the damage. He wrote the following ‘Development & Technical Report’:

Visual inspection had revealed a broken purlin in the roof structure, and some cracks in inside walls, especially in the northern wall. A check of the mortar on the outside walls, especially the northern wall, revealed it was in a weak state. An examination of the tower, particularly the upper levels, was considered advisable. We used a ladder to gain entry to the belfry, noted the bell hanging on a roughly-cut log beam, and then being surprised to find we could see daylight through a one-inch width crack, about four feet long, tapering naturally to zero at both ends. We could not determine whether this crack, in NW buttress of the tower, was a direct effect of the earthquake or not. In order to gain an impression of the strength of the mortar on the inside of the tower we decided to remove one stone.

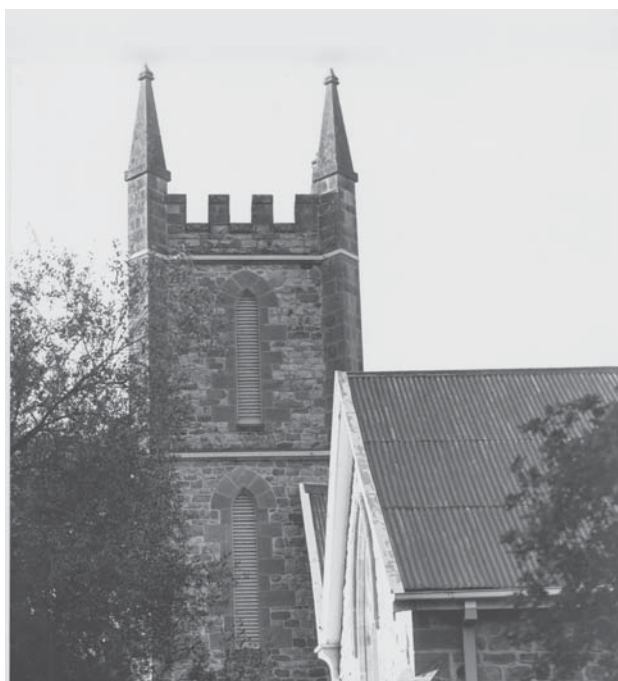
The mortar was easy to remove by scratching it out with a short metal rod.

We had hardly started this process, when the mortar from inside the western wall of the tower began to run out like sand from between the joints around the stones. Two more stones had now become loose, and the three stones were eventually removed. It was now obvious the mortar had, in places, no strength at all, and even in the better places its strength would have to be classed as very poor. We could not help but think that the tower in this condition could not survive another earthquake without damage. Using a low strength cement mortar, and working very carefully and slowly we gradually replaced the three stones.

The next objective was to examine the upper levels of the tower and if possible the roof of the tower... An inspection of the parapets did not reveal any movement or dislocation of any of the stonework. However, our attention was attracted to the four small spires. Each one comprised two stones, one on top of the other, forming a pyramid shape. The stones probably weighed between 100 kg and 150 kg. With a shock we realised that the joint between the stones contained no mortar at all – we assumed it had been blown away by the wind – and open joints were visible. Had dowel pins been used? We had no means of checking this. Bearing in mind that two of these spires were above and slightly offset from the main door entrance, we considered this to be a possible threat to churchgoers...

The Rector arranged for consultants Hurren, Langman & James who were, at that time, the leading Civil Engineering Consultants in Adelaide, to make a professional study of the structure of the church and to submit a report. Their report confirmed our earlier inference that the structure was in a perilous state, needed reinforcement, and was unlikely to survive another earthquake without serious damage.

Fig. 11-9 Close-up view of the tower showing details of the parapet and spires. (Tugwell Tetley Hardy Architects, 1980)



Writing in the Parish Magazine in September 1955, the Rector reported on “A Matter of Urgency” regarding the safety of the south wall:

... For safety reasons the architect felt obliged to take temporary measures to support this wall, and he now advises, that in his opinion, the south wall will have to be demolished and rebuilt. This is a serious matter and in view of other structural defects of which we are aware, both in the tower and in the NW corner of the building, when the architects report is in hand the Church Council and the whole congregation will have to be consulted as to ways and means by which the restoration work may be financed, and put in hand. It is now a matter of urgency if we are to prevent further deterioration of the fabric of the Church.

The architect estimated that the work would cost over £1,000. On top of this would be the cost of strengthening and restoring the tower and under-pinning the NW corner of the building: “At a very conservative estimate it looks as if we are going to need a Church Restoration Fund of at least £3,000. At the present we have only about £1,000 in hand.”

Another six months elapsed before it was announced in March 1956 that a tender had been submitted “for the rebuilding of the southern wall of the Church for not more than £1,850”. The architect, Mr Barker, made alternative suggestions to either build buttresses internally or to tie the existing wall to outside concrete blocks. The Vestry resolved to rebuild the southern wall and appeal for the necessary funds. Should these not be raised by 30th June 1956, the rebuilding was to be deferred. Writing in the June edition of the *Parish Messenger*, the Wardens made a spirited plea for donations:

Each one of us has witnessed the near collapse of our own homes and exerted every effort to remedy the damage, and now each one of us is asked to turn and face the challenge of our forebears and remedy the damage of our Church that its spiritual message may continue to be heard, that its beauty may be restored and that prayer for the betterment of our people may be given...

The same magazine carried a summary of the Rector’s report to the Easter Vestry in which he threw out a new challenge:

I wonder if we are wise in thinking merely to rebuild the wall as part of the Church. For years I have been conscious of the fact that we must – sooner or later – make provision for some building near the Church, where we can have various meetings such as Vestry and Church Council Meetings, or hold a Communion breakfast on special occasions, or small social gatherings after Evensong on Sunday nights... By taking the long view and making a venture of faith now, I wonder if we could consider some plan of building on to the main northern part of the Church by adding a Chancel, Sanctuary, Vestries, and an organ chamber. The Nave of the Church would then include ALL of that part of the building on the northern side, including

the present Sanctuary area; the choir and organ would be in a Chancel addition and new Vestries could be built in proximity to the Chancel and Sanctuary.

The present southern part of the Church could then be shut off from the Church by filling in the arches and the south part, with the addition of a kitchenette or even a small well appointed kitchen, could be useful for Church meetings as mentioned above. It is a matter to which we should give some real consideration before it is too late, or before anything further is done which will permanently exclude any further rebuilding. As Rector I make these suggestions so that Church members may turn the matter over in their minds and I hope discuss it and then do something about it.

Nothing seems to have come of this novel suggestion and by Christmas, with the required £1,800 in hand, the committee was getting “further advice” on just what they could do with the money so that it was used to the best advantage: “To rebuild the south wall and part of west wall near the big window where the two parts join is likely to absorb the whole amount ... at least £2,000 will be required to renovate the south part of the Church alone.”

By the time of the Annual Vestry on 24th April 1957, the Rector was able to announce that a builder, Mr R.J. Nurse, hoped to commence on the renovations soon after Easter:

The South wall of the Church will not be demolished, but will be underpinned, jacked back into position as near as possible and supported and strengthened with steel girders encased in cement. Under this scheme only one small part of the wall will need to be rebuilt ... the money in hand will not cover repairs to the tower or vestries, nor will it allow for redecoration of the interior after repairs, nor any external repair work.

A stalemate then developed because the builder would not provide a firm quotation and a contract could not be let. Frustrated by all these problems, plus others associated with the sale of the Rectory, the Rector wrote:

It is now three years since the earthquake damaged the building. It truly amazes me that while the Church is set in the midst of so many beautiful homes and well-to-do families the House of God has remained for years in its present dilapidated condition. Wealthy families, because of family tradition and old associations, use St Michael’s for weddings and baptisms. Yet for lack of finance God’s House is allowed to remain, year after year, in its present condition.

In mid-June Mr Nurse, the contractor, advised Mr Dean Berry (who was then listed as the project architect) that “no offence would be taken if another contractor were authorised to undertake the work”. Mr Berry interpreted this as being an invitation to ask for further tenders and suggested that Hansen and Yunken, then working on St Andrew’s Church at Walkerville, be approached. A meeting was planned for 18th June with their Manager, Mr Harry Sarah, “who would be a suitable person to provide an assessment of the problems”.

At last there was some action! In the August 1957 *Parish Messenger* it was reported that:

After years of seeing a dilapidated Church building, renovations have really commenced. The south wall is being attended to first, and is being strengthened with steel girders encased in cement, while portion of the top of the wall is being rebuilt. The other parts of the Church, i.e. the Tower, West Wall, and North-eastern corner will be attended to if and as our funds in hand permit. The position is that while we have between £2,000 and £2,500 in hand, the South wall alone will absorb about £900 of this amount. The roof also, is in bad shape so you see we shall need far more money than we have at present ...

On Sunday, 7th September the Rector told the congregation that services on the following Sundays would be held at St Wilfrid's as St Michael's would be "closed for repairs and renovation". When it re-opened six weeks later on 20th October 1957 – three-and-a-half years after the earthquake – parishioners were told "they would not find the Church completely restored and renovated" because there was not sufficient money given for the Restoration Fund. The work that had been done included "the whole of the south part of the Church building, with the complete renovation and almost complete remaking of the big west window, and restoration of the Ladies' Choir Vestry and the tower".

While the work was in progress on the south nave the architect and builders thoroughly inspected the northern portion of the Church and estimated that at least another £3,000 would be required. The inspection revealed that:

Several of the roof timbers (purlins) are broken and that to restore these the whole of the roof covering the north portion will have to be removed. In addition the whole of the present plaster in this part will have to be stripped from the walls and the walls re-plastered.

Years of Indecision: 1960–1962

Further work on the restoration of St Michael's ground to a halt while members of the two Parish Councils bickered over priorities for funding other projects (see pages 100 to 102). As well as the question of finance, the big problem was "getting advisers to give a definite and decided opinion on the best way to tackle the problem".

It was not until April 1960 that Consulting Engineers Hurren, Langman & James were asked to prepare a structural report on the Church. Addressing a meeting on 1st May 1960, Mr Langman told St Michael's Advisory Council:

From the test hole dug adjacent to the Northern wall it had been found that the church rested on very little by way of foundations, perhaps being set no more than 1'6" into the natural ground. Such foundation as there was consisted of bluestone flats with lime mortar, with some fills on top. He felt that there should be an extensive underpinning 5-6 feet below original ground level before the foundations would be adequate for the structure and the soil conditions.

Externally the lime mortar was fretting badly in many places, and the internal plastering was in a bad state of repair on the Northern & adjacent walls... Mr Langman agreed to submit a detailed report for the Advisory Committee's further consideration.

Another year passed before any further discussions took place and during this period it was reported that:

The floor in the south part of the Church was found to be infested with white ants, and when an inspection was made by an expert, the whole floor was in such a bad condition that the only sensible remedy was to pull it all up, thoroughly treat the whole ground area and put in a new floor. This has now been done in jarrah. In one corner the floor had sunk six inches. The cost – about £360. Fortunately the termites do not appear to have got into the organ woodwork.

In April 1961 Mr Langman told the Council he was prepared to give technical advice and supervision, but not the preparation of working drawings. He suggested an architect, Mr S. Chinnery, be approached to do this. Two quotes were needed: one to rebuild the northern wall and one to patch it. Mr John Sheppard, a former Warden, wanted to call in the original architects, but this was opposed by the Rector and others. Three months later it was reported that Mr Chinnery had made a detailed inspection and was preparing short and long term plans for repair work, ready in three to four weeks, and "was approaching Mr Nurse for a quote".

Early in 1962 it was announced that tenders would be called for doing the first stage of repairs – the roof. The architect was of the opinion that some of the present damage had been caused by the spreading of the roof principals: "These would have to be bolted and certain roof timbers need to be replaced, also some iron, and the box gutter. The work will not be put in hand before Easter."

At the Annual Easter Vestry held in May 1961, the Rector advised that he intended to resign at the end of the financial year, i.e. 31st March 1962. On 18th March, two weeks before his official retirement, the Advisory Committee voted "to accept the quote of M.L. Bailey & Co. to proceed with work as from 14th May" – three days after the new rector, Reverend James MacDonald, was due to be instituted!

Apparently the work did not proceed, for at a meeting held on 30th October 1962 Mr Chinnery was "requested to give an opinion on the probable life of the building after completion of repairs to the North wall and roof and after major repairs completed". He was also requested to provide "prices, estimates etc., by 21st Nov. 1962". In his report he made the following points:

1. *The fabric of the present building was in such a state of decadence that extensive repairs to it were considered not warranted.*
2. *The only firms of builders interested in the work were W.H. Blunden and M.L. Bailey.*
3. *The only basis on which these firms were prepared to do any work on the structure was that of "Charge up".*

By this time the Council was becoming disillusioned with both Messrs Chinnery and Bailey. Bailey was the contractor who built the new Rectory in 1958. At an important meeting held on 14th February 1963 two crucial decisions were taken. The first was to ask Chinnery to forward “at his earliest convenience” a certified account for the work already carried out by M.L. Bailey, together with one for his own services to date. Just what this “work already carried out” by Bailey was is not recorded, but it is understood to relate to the removal of portion of the roof. Chinnery was advised:

1. *That we are not prepared to accept any responsibility or liability for any unused materials which have been delivered to the Church property,*
2. *That we expect to be credited with the cost of such materials and*
3. *That we wish to terminate any previous arrangements with himself and M.L. Bailey.*

Following the reading of an independent report prepared by another structural engineer, Mr Arthur Boyes, the following motion was moved and carried: “That Mr J. Cheesman be approached for his advice as to whether or not the Church building should be repaired.”

The North Nave Restored: 1963

This momentous decision, taken in February 1963, to approach Mr J.D. Cheesman from the architectural firm of Cheesman, Doley, Brabham and Neighbour for advice was the turning point in this long, drawn-out saga. On 4th June Mr Jack Cheesman and Reverend Jim MacDonald (who were old friends) made an inspection of St Michael’s Church accompanied by Alec Bissland, a “very conscientious and skilled building contractor” from A.S. Bissland Ltd. They decided that the Church could be re-instated and a report was prepared for the Building Committee.

On 11th June Jack Cheesman was invited to address a meeting of the Council at which it was moved and carried unanimously that: “Mr Cheesman’s report be adopted, Mr A.S. Bissland to be appointed to carry out renovations, and work to commence forthwith under the terms of Mr Cheesman’s letter of June 11th, 1963.”

Fig. 11-10
Jack Cheesman.
(Courtesy
Catherine Mary
Cheesman)



In essence these two dedicated Anglicans (Figs 11-10 and 11-11) “offered their services to restore the building to the best of their ability with whatever finance was available”. Like all the other architects, engineers and builders who had prepared reports over the past nine years, they did not know what would be involved until work began: “It is impossible to give a quotation for this work, but with the money you’ve got, we think we can do quite a deal to restore the Church.” At least they were prepared to have a go!

External work started on 2nd July 1963 and the last service was held in the dilapidated old Church on 21st July, after which all services were transferred to St Wilfrid’s. Ted Smith recalled that:

Everything – I mean everything – was removed from the interior. They stripped off all the plaster from all the walls, raked out the joints between the stone, and repointed that with a force-fed mortar gun. They raked out the joints on the outside of the Church and repointed that. They renovated woodwork, door locks etc., and made a magnificent job of the whole thing. But half way through this exercise we found we had run out of cash ... we changed our thinking and decided we weren’t going to take two bites at the cherry, and so a Bank Loan was organised with a group of private guarantors from the congregation. The money was raised and the work was finished very successfully. So successfully, people were so thrilled about it that money contributions came in quite quickly and that loan was very soon repaid.⁸

An article in the *Mitcham Parish Herald* in early September recorded that the renovations had brought a new lease of life to the fabric of the building:

The deep pointing of the stone work from the tower to foundations has brought much beauty to the outside appearance. Repairs to the inside walls of the main nave required over twenty tons of sand and cement as rendering for the new plaster work. The strengthening of the northern roof with Rolled Steel joists and boxing of these together with the existing trusses give a most pleasing structural appearance. Outside timbers have been treated and painted, and after the plaster dries out, interior painting

Fig. 11-11
Alec Bissland.
(Courtesy
Con Bissland)



will be done. Special thanks go to the Architect, Mr J.D. Cheesman, and to the building contractor Mr A.S. Bissland for their untiring efforts to see the repair work properly carried out.

Within two months the building had been transformed and services recommenced in St Michael's on 22nd September 1963. A joyous Thanksgiving Service for the completion of the restoration was held on Sunday, 3rd November attended by His Grace, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Fisher and Lady Fisher who were holidaying in the Parish.

Noted Adelaide architect, John Chappel, describing the restoration project in an article in the *Advertiser* on 26th September, wrote:

With many old buildings in Adelaide facing the demolisher, it is refreshing to see the care and skill devoted to the preservation of St Michael's... The external stonework has been skilfully repointed in such a manner as to enhance its original appearance. The old heavy gauge iron roof first laid over the original shingles has been repaired and painted, and the red gum roof trusses originally hewn from surrounding forests have been strengthened... St Michael's Church could be regarded as a good example of a fine old building skilfully and sympathetically restored.

The cost of restoring the northern section of the Church is given as £7,900 – more than double the original estimate. When it began approximately £4,600 was held in a Building Restoration Fund, but as the project progressed it became obvious that additional funds would be needed as more and more unexpected problems were uncovered. As mentioned above, rather than “taking two bites at the cherry”, a Bank Loan of £3,500 was obtained on the personal security of fifteen members of the Council, plus Alec Bissland, as covenantors under a Deed of Covenant to the Bank of New South Wales. The cost of £7,900 consisted of £7,668 in contractor's fees, plus a further £100 for electrical work, £100 in architect's fees, and about £100 in sundries (see Appendix 5). One item is for a “new door and frame to new opening at rear of Church” at a cost of £88. This probably refers to the door in the east wall of the south nave within the blind arch.

GENERAL MAINTENANCE: 1970s to 1990s

Whether St Michael's can survive another severe earthquake is yet to be determined, but the problems caused by poor footings will always remain and will require ongoing maintenance. In some cases the problems have been exacerbated by poor planning, such as the removal of large quantities of soil on the northern side of the Church when the car park was made. Many of the problems along the south side stemmed from water damage. Much of this was caused by the direct discharge of large quantities of water from the organ to the area below the floor adjacent to the southern wall. There is also a natural seepage of water from springs on the hillside above the Church.

Over a period of six years, from March 1971 to April 1977, Ben Oborn (a Warden and consulting engineer)

recorded the movement of the most obvious cracks at thirty-seven positions around the Church using an optical gauge. A report prepared by Tugwell Tetley Hardy Architects in August 1979 noted:

On-site observations and information conveyed by Mr Ben Oborn substantiates a generally accepted theory that the primary cause of movement is due to the extremely reactive clays in the vicinity of the footings which, responding to variations in moisture content, are heaving and swelling with the resulting movement in the Building above ... aggravated particularly to the Northern Elevation by a lateral slipping action down and away from the building line, which is apparently caused by a lack of mass or solid retaining wall against the footings on the Northern side. The concealed nature of downpipes and underground storm water makes it difficult at this juncture to assess the efficiency of the storm water disposal away from the area of the building proper.

A third, but non-related matter which requires attention, is the research into and likely increase in the underfloor ventilation of the Building.

Finally, inspection has revealed that in many cases there is no external evidence of damp proof coursing, and whilst the apparent damage due to salt attack is at present restricted to the South East corner of the Building, it is reasonable to assume that if the damp proof course is breached, then an extension of this problem could be expected...

At this stage we do not consider that localised underpinning should be attempted, as it is clear from the Structural Engineer's comments that such a fixed bracing of a particular corner or wall could be even more destructive relative to the other section of the Building that will continue to move, and the expense would be great. Rather, our attitude is one of gentle restraint over the entire structure in an endeavour to minimise the Building movement in progressive experimentation, to reduce it to an acceptable level.

Recommendations included the installation of an agricultural drain to the south and east sides of the Church at a suitable depth to intercept the flow of ground water and to divert it away from the foundations, and also for a surface drain to intercept surface water and discharge it off the site. These drains were installed during the construction of the nearby Parish Hall in 1980.

The consultants felt that many of the problems relating to the north wall were caused by “lateral slide, due to the failure of the stone retaining walls to compensate for the excavations ... undertaken in the past to expand the car park”. They recommended that a new retaining wall be constructed and backfilled with stable material “so as to create a far more gentle transition between the footing level and the excavated ground level”. Large quantities of filling were laid against the northern retaining wall as a buttress during 1985 and the area subsequently graded to form the Garden of Remembrance (see page 160).

* * *

Listed below are some of the more important projects undertaken over the past twenty years. Most relate to items recorded in the Vestry Record Book [vb] by Fr Andrew Cheesman (who like his father, the architect Jack Cheesman, took a keen interest in the fabric of the building). There are also some extracts from *Pew Bulletins* [pb]. Details concerning the construction of the Parish Hall in 1980 can be found in Chapter 14:

19/8/81 [vb] Blind window NW corner knocked out in preparation for Angel Lancet. Architect Graham Hardy, Engineer Ben Oborn, Builder Jim Packer. Window installed on 25th September by artist Cedar Prest.

13/12/81 [vb] Large fall of plaster at Tower end of Nave – considerable movement at East end of South Nave.

2/4/82 [vb] aumbry inserted by A.S. Bissland (builder) with time capsule.

30/6/82 [vb] 3 soil core samples from ground adjoining SW corner of Church to ascertain cause of recent severe cracking to ‘choir corner’ of St Michael’s.

7/8/83 [pb] A recent survey of the tower by Ben Oborn and Hervey Bagot revealed that the builders of 130 years ago made preparation for a bell chamber. The tower is still sound. Bells are obtainable from England and Europe at reasonable prices. What a marvellous thank-offering a peal of bells would make (for our 150th, or sooner!) to ring out the joy of the Gospel.

22/10/86 [vb] Thorough patching of all external cracks around St Michael’s completed by mason Brian Elvey

26/10/86 [pb] Brian Elvey worked up to four barrow loads into each major crack. The whole operation has taken a fortnight and is a thank-offering from Warren Henderson, Master Builder.

6/12/87 [pb] New Church doors. A pair of handsome Australian oak doors have been supplied through the good offices of Mr John Evins. It was always the intention of Parish Council to replace the old doors, so carefully husbanded over the years by Ted Smith, when they had deteriorated beyond repair. That they should have been replaced so expeditiously and well is the result of John’s personal oversight and the fine skill of his craftsmen.

13/11/88 [pb] Parish Council approved electrical work and re-lighting of St Michael’s at a cost of \$9,300.

18/12/88 [pb] Note the progress achieved this week on the rewiring, lighting and ventilation of St Michael’s. Though the wiring in the northern nave was found to be sound, that in the southern nave was decayed and dangerous. It has now been replaced.

4/3/90 [pb] Work begins tomorrow on the repair of decayed and ‘drummy’ plaster. As the building will be uninhabitable until Fri 23rd March, all Sunday services will be conducted at St Wilfrid’s on 11th and 18th March.

27/3/90 [vb] Cedar Prest completed cleaning of Morris glass and fitting of acrylic shield to outside East wall of Church. East window in good order save for a few stress cracks – no bulging evident.

6/5/90 [vb] Repairs to ceiling of South Nave - Don Dunstone, joiner.

17/5/90 [vb] New concrete apron (with flexible joints) poured on South side of the Church. Bill Watson (mason)

and helper Jim Santoro rendering old footings on North side prior to pouring concrete. They continue to ‘touch-up’ cracks outside and inside.

27/1/91 [pb] Further masonry repairs have been effected and Don Dunstone has fitted protective acrylic to the West Window. Earle Scott took advantage of the scaffolding and arranged some painting maintenance in heritage colours.

3/2/91 [pb] Stone-coloured paintwork has enhanced the façade; parrot-ravaged louvres have been replaced.

4/1/92 [vb] Team of 20, under leadership of Roger Dyer, commenced painting of interior.

19/1/92 [pb] The pastel shades which now emphasize corbel and capital at St Michael’s have caused interest and comment. For those who may be hesitant it is suggested that the view from the pulpit towards the ‘cathedral window’ in the southern nave might help. The art nouveau glass there is a fine example of its kind, the colours of which inspired the present change. A wonderful spirit of unity and sense of achievement have been created by the ‘painting-bees’ over the past fortnight. More than 40 parishioners, young and not so young, have been involved: supervision, lunch support, furniture cleaning and vacuuming have all contributed to the splendid result.

15/12/92 [vb] New roof fitted to tower – ladder moved to point above valley.

18/4/95 [vb] Jim Santoro filled cracks on North wall and patched all outside cracks (a bad year for most after the long dry).

26/6/95 [vb] Violent storm 4.15 pm with subsequent leaks from box gutter and elsewhere into the Nave near font.

15/9/95 [vb] Repairs effected to NW corner of Church roof and ceiling. Original shingles revealed.

10/12/00 [vb] 11.45 am Special Vestry to approve in principle extensions to East End of St Michael’s (Rector’s vestry, altar preparation area, music room and toilet for disabled) 45 present. Carried.

28/1/01 [pb] On Thurs in trying conditions, a well-attended meeting heard John Dibben outline proposals for the funding of a new vestry, music room and toilet. Ted and Melva Smith’s generous benefaction will be the major source, with some parish input. Relief and approval were expressed, particularly that the salt damp and limitations of the 1870s vestry will be overcome.

4/3/01 [vb] Annual Vestry formally approved scheme.

VESTRY ADDITIONS: 2002

One of the proposals made in December 1951 in connection with the planned Centenary Celebrations was the raising of funds “to build another choir vestry on the East End of the Church and convert the present ladies’ vestry at the side of the tower into a main entrance porch”. The second part of that proposal, i.e. to integrate the old 1899 choir vestry into the main entrance porch, occurred in 1980 when the new Parish Hall was built (see page 232). It is now the narthex. In March 2001 – nearly fifty years after the Centenary Celebrations – Vestry formerly accepted Parish Council’s proposal to enlarge the priest’s vestry “at the East End of the church” and build an adjoining new choir vestry and music room.

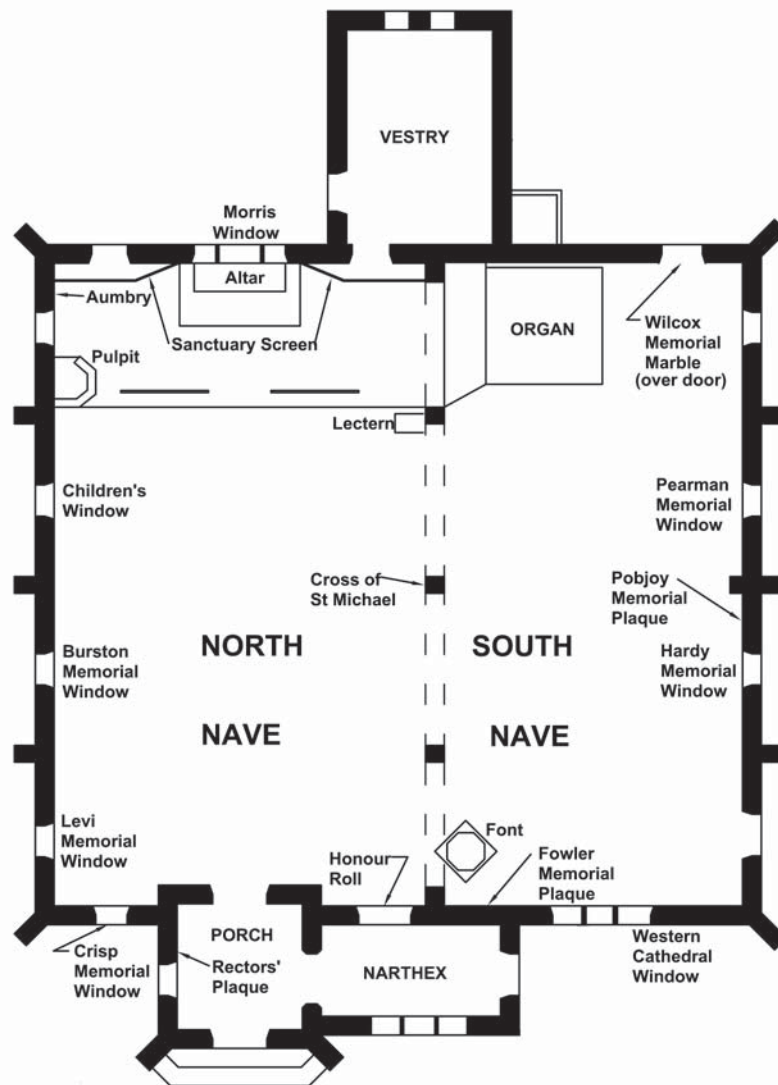


Fig. 12-1 Plan of St Michael's Church showing positions of main furnishings, fittings and memorials as at January 2002. (Ben Oborn)