

BAPTIST CHURCH

71-75 Flinders Street

The Baptist Church in South Australia is strongly identified with the earliest years of the colony and the religious dissenters who helped expand the mercantile and pastoral influence of Adelaide. However, for the first twenty-five years, dissension and separatism were rife within the denomination.

In 1860 George Fife Angas, the Reverend George Stonehouse and William Kyffin Thomas (proprietor of the *South Australian Register*) met to establish a strong and unified church in the city. They sponsored a young minister from England, the Reverend Silas Mead, to act as a focus for the cause of the Baptist congregation in South Australia. His innovative and passionate approach to the pastorate, and his fervent spousal of consolidation of the Baptist cause found root, the testament to his influence being this Baptist Church complex in Flinders Street:

A new spirit worked in the murky atmosphere of disunion, a new charity in men's hearts, was generated, and they began to think imperially. The influence of a few stalwarts with empires in their brains began to completely change the situation and an effective check was given to that unfortunate drift which had been so long prevailing and which threatened our extinction.

Mead preached in Ebenezer Chapel, Rundle Street, and at White's Assembly Rooms until the new church was completed. He is closely identified with the erection of the church 1861-63, the hall 1869-70, and the manse (now offices/kindergarten) 1877, which together form in Adelaide the finest group of working ecclesiastical buildings dating from the nineteenth century.

Mead was well known for his advocacy of missionary endeavour, and while foreign missions claimed his sympathy and service, he also encouraged churches to be established in country settlements and in the suburbs. During the 1880s the Baptist Church in Flinders Street ministered to its largest congregation ever, in excess of 500, which was a major achievement considering that twenty years previously worshippers numbered only twenty-six.

Mead's pastorate lasted from 1861 until his retirement in 1897 when he returned to London. He came back to live in Western Australia until his death in 1909. Mead was the first president of the South Australian Society of Christian Endeavour, a president of the YMCA and was thrice president of the Baptist Union which he fought strenuously to form. During his ministry he received 1900 persons into the church fellowship.

The erection of the church was a bold and expensive undertaking ' . . . which succeeded admirably in stimulating the formation of the South Australian Baptist Association' (later the Baptist Union), and which attracted even dissenting members of the congregation.

Robert George Thomas prepared plans for the building in the Gothic style. He probably owed the commission to the influence of his brother William Kyffin Thomas. R.G. Thomas also designed Stow Memorial Church (now Pilgrim Church) and later became colonial architect.

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He was noted for his admiration of the Gothic style and his sense of detail, particularly Baptist Church and Stow Memorial Church bear witness to his English education as a civil engineer and architect and his understanding of the accommodation needs of dissenting congregations in Britain.

The foundation stone of the church was laid by David Randall (of Mount Crawford) on 18 December 1861, and English and Brown were the contractors for the work, the church being dedicated for public worship on 26 April 1863.

The church admirably represents the fortitude and influence of South Australia's religious dissenters and is also a fine example of the art of the mason, being constructed of roughly coursed bluestone with finely finished sandstone dressings. One report summarised well the architectural impact of its design:

The most striking peculiarity of the building is perhaps the simple uniformity of its main design combined with utility and profuse diversity of detail where ornament is admitted . . . all in perfect keeping with the style and character of the edifice.

The rich tracery of the Flinders Street facade was admired for its elaborately carved capitals and ' . . . curiously contrasted stone colours' The 'curious' use of contrasting stone to arches indicates the influence of two notable architectural publications compiled by John Ruskin: *The seven lamps of architecture* (1849) and *The stones of Venice* (1851 and 1853), publicising the use of certain 'Continental' or 'Italian' design elements. These can be seen in the Baptist church, possibly the earliest instance of the incorporation of Ruskinian influences in a building in South Australia. These influences were highly fashionable in England before Thomas' return to South Australia.

The coherence of the design is enhanced by the strongly axial layout of the church, dominated by the superbly detailed porch and rose window to the Flinders Street elevation. The nature and condition of the detailing remains particularly good. The addition of a gallery constructed in 1872 is regarded as part of the historical development of the church.

The church, the pre-eminent building in this most important ecclesiastical complex, has been the cathedral church for the Baptist denomination in South Australia since its erection. It is of major historical importance, architecturally meritorious and a significant streetscape element which, with Mead Hall and the former manse, forms an ecclesiastical complex of great rarity and visual importance.

ACA, Smith Survey 1880; *Baptist Record*, 15 March 1931; Burgess, H.T., *Cyclopedia of South Australia*, Vol. 2, 1909, pp. 55-6; *Flinders Street Baptist Church*, Jubilee souvenir, 1911, pp. 12-13; Hughes, Rev. H.E., *Our first hundred years - the Baptist Church in Adelaide*, 1937, pp. 29-30, pp. 172-5; MLSA, Historical photographs (Town Acre 273); Morgan, E.J.R., & Gilbert, S.H., *Early Adelaide architecture 1836 to 1886*, 1969, p. 46; Ruskin, J., *The seven lamps of architecture*, 1849, *The stones of Venice*, 1851; *South Australian Register*, 1 November 1861, 19 December 1861, 27 April 1863.

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The property described in this Information Sheet is included in the Register of State Heritage places. A heritage listing does not mean or imply right of access by the public to such properties.

The heritage related Principles of Development Control as well as the Precinct specific objectives and Principles of Development Control are contained in the Adelaide (City) Development Plan. These should be referred to in whole when contemplating any development.

Further information on the Heritage Incentives Scheme, an initiative of Council to sponsor timely and appropriate conservation action is available upon request of the Customer Service Centre.



CITY OF ADELAIDE HERITAGE STUDY

The City Heritage Register-Definition of Items

Prepared by the Dept. of Planning and Development

Item	BAPTIST CHURCH	Building No 11/0207-1
Address	71-75 Flinders Street; 1-19 Divett Place	CT 4236/854

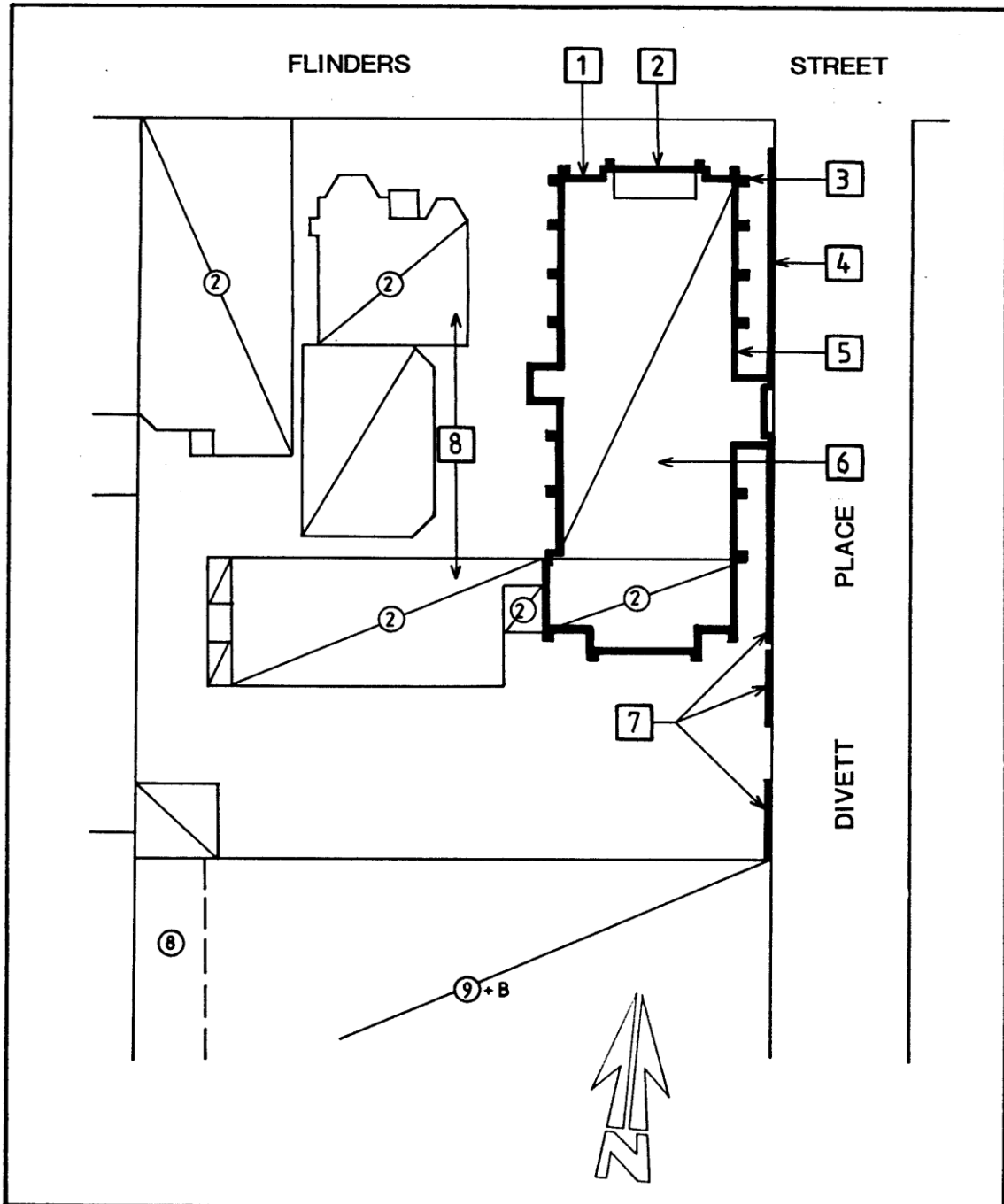


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NOTES:

1. Coursed random bluestone with drafted sandstone quoins and sandstone enrichment.
2. Note columns, arches and tracery.
3. Buttresses.
4. Bluestone and cast iron fence.
5. Leadlight windows.
6. Note sheet iron rolls roofing.
7. Bluestone fence.
8. Mead hall and church office also listed.