

Parsonage Chambers

A special meeting of the Methodist Church Trust Board was held in July 1907 to discuss building a new kindergarten school, renovation of Church and Sunday School buildings and a new two-storied parsonage. Eventually it was decided to canvass the whole of the circuit to solicit generous donations. At a meeting held on the 29th of August 1907 it was reported that this had been completed and generous response could be expected. A special thanksgiving Sunday was set aside and on that day when the collection was taken up it was found that over 1000 pounds had been donated much to the joy and satisfaction of all the congregation. Some of these funds were used to put concrete piles in place of wooden ones under the Wesley Church.

The question of building a new parsonage for "Wesley's" minister was again discussed at a meeting of Trustees on the 7th July 1910. Certain problems presented themselves making it difficult to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.

The four problems discussed were: Ways and means for raising of finance; disposing of the old two-storied parsonage; temporary residence for the minister; what type of parsonage to build and total cost. At the next meeting, held on the 26th July, the following report was presented: "That a temporary residence for the minister has been secured in the new house adjoining the Church property. (The occupant was about to be transferred to another town.) The old parsonage to be sold by public auction. That Mr A.D. Spiers (Architect) had been engaged to submit plans and specifications for a two-storied parsonage at the approximate cost of 1000 pounds."

The whole of the circuit was once more to be canvassed and donations solicited.

On 14th October the plans and specifications were submitted by Mr Spiers and approved by the Trustees. Tenders were called on the 1st November 1910 and opened on the 15th, the Architect being in attendance with a special committee appointed for the purpose. As all the tenders were above 1000 pounds, the architect was asked to modify his plans so that the total cost of the building would not be more than 1000 pounds, (less if possible). When this was done, the committee recommended that the lowest contractor, Messrs Pugh Bros. of Picton be given the contract on the modified plans, the price being 975 pounds.

Further discussions ensued between all the parties concerned and it was not until the end of December 1910 that the building contract was signed.

In the meantime, the old parsonage had been disposed of to allow building operations to commence early in the New Year. (We have been unable to discover what happened to it.) The work of the contractors was watched with eager eyes by every passer-by. It was still "horse and buggy" days and this was to be a two-storied building. Finally the parsonage was completed and handed over to the Trustees at the end of July 1911.

There was a flood in May 1923 but the Church and Parsonage were above flood level.

On the 6th August 1927 electric power was switched on in the town but the three Church buildings were not ready for electric light until the end of November.

Most of the above is from "Methodism in Marlborough 1840-1945" published in connection with the centennial of the Wesley Church, Blenheim, April 1965.

An Agreement was signed on the 19th September 1974 with the Trustees of the Methodist Church to purchase the Methodist Parsonage in the name of Parsonage Chambers Limited

by John Wain and John Drylie of the legal firm Wain & Drylie. Possession date was 1st February 1975. Between that date and Easter 1975, some conversion and refurbishing was done in readiness for the opening as legal office. A balustrade was designed by architect Tom MacArthur to replace the steep stairs so that elderly clients, people in wheelchairs and people pushing prams and pushchairs could gain access to the building.

At that stage there was a detached fowl house and garage on the property and part of the garage was converted into a PABX room for the telephone system. The upstairs bathroom which was large and cold had the toilet boxed in, the bath was removed and the room converted to an office. The four upstairs bedrooms were converted to offices. The fireplaces were not being used and had been boxed in. a strong room was constructed on the south-east corner with a concrete block floor and ceiling, concrete block walls and a steel door. The original kitchen was converted to a typist's room with a small partition fitted. A new interview room was built on the west side between the laundry and the front part of the building. The laundry was converted to a storage area retaining the existing hand basin, shower cabinet and toilet. Downstairs three large offices were converted from the original study, lounge and sunroom. The dining room was divided to provide a receptionist area and a waiting room. The original carved staircase and A1 Axminster carpet installed 35 years ago are still in existence proving the durability of quality materials. These are much admired as are the pressed metal ceilings in hallways and several rooms. Other features include diagonal timber dados, ornate skirtings, architraves, doorways, ornamental timber balustrades to the timber stairway, a coloured glass window, fireplaces and bay windows.

The grounds were redesigned by John Morton, a Christchurch landscape architect, in 1986 when the front hedge along High Street was removed.

In 1989 an English Architect, Mr Neil Charles-Jones, who was temporarily residing in Marlborough (he has now settled in Blenheim) was employed to draw plans for building extensions and alterations. These were built using materials in keeping with the original design. At ground floor level one new office and two interview rooms were built together with new toilet facilities and an extended hallway. The laundry and the interview room (which had been built at the time of conversion) were demolished. At first floor level one large office for typists was created together with a library and a separate staff tearoom.

After Christmas 1994 the front two rooms on the west side of the building were altered with the front room doorway being replaced by an arch to lead into a new reception area. The original dining room was returned to its former size and is used as the accounts office.

The building attracts a lot of general attention from passers-by and there are often people outside sketching or taking photographs. This is a good example of how a beautiful old building can be retained and enhanced and continue to be useful and an attraction in modern times.