ST JOHN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

ADDRESS: 221-225 Beechworth Road, Wodonga

STUDY NUMBER: 2C HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

DATE: 1965

CONDITION: Good

INTEGRITY: Good



(RBA, June 2024)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

What is significant?

St John's Anglican Church at 221-225 Beechworth Road, Wodonga - both the original church and the narthex - are significant. The modernist brick church was designed by the eminent architects Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell in 1964 and completed during the following year. It was constructed by the Hurst Building Company and the flèche was built by Tom Bartleston. The original smaller narthex was replaced with the extant one to a design by Ken Young of Howden and Wardrop in 1983 and was complete in July 1984 by the builder Lawrence Humphries.

The significant elements are the form, copper flèche textured concrete bricks, timber-framed glazed entry, array of stained glass windows (rose window group to the gable ends, descending set either side of the entry, southern aisle, etc.). Internally, the significant elements are the black granite altar and baptismal font, *Christus Rex* sculpture above by Jeffrey Wilkinson (1964), pipe organ by S J Laurie, pulpit (African mahogany, TBC), parquetry floors and timber pews.

The non-significant elements are Dawn Richardson Memorial Hall (2003) and the steel shed to the west facing Cummings Street.

How is it significant?

St John's Anglican Church at 221-225 Beechworth Road, Wodonga is of historical, aesthetic, and social significance to the City of Wodonga.

Why is it significant?

St John's Anglican Church is of local historic significance as evidence of the continuing growth of the Anglican Community in Wodonga, established during the mid-19th century, during the mid-20th century and the adoption of a more open, less hierarchical planning related to changing approaches to church design at this time. It remains a landmark building a half century after its construction, acting as a beacon to the faithful. (Criterion A)

The church is of aesthetic significance for its refined, late 20th century Modernist design, which nonetheless references traditional steep gable (gothic) roof form which is clad in slate. Other detailing is more interpretive such as the various stained-glass windows including the deconstructed rose window type to the gable ends and band of highlights to the southern aisle. However, the most striking element is undoubtedly the soaring copper flèche surmounted by a cross. The later narthex is sympathetic to the original design with its curved canopy, window wall entry and flanking series of narrow stained-glass windows. The intact interior is a time capsule of mid-1960s Modernist aesthetic that was designed and furnished with carefully chosen elements to create a complimentary sacred space. (Criterion E).

The church is of social significance to the Anglican congregation in Wodonga as it has contributed to the community for over half a century with a provision of religious services and a wide range of social/community programs. (Criterion G)

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

St John's Anglican Church is a complex with several components and is indicative of Modernist ecclesiastical design.

The church is comprised of two distinct parts – the original western section including the nave, aisles and sanctuary/altar and the latter eastern narthex. Both sections are faced with elongated textured/split-face light concrete bricks in stretcher bond with an internal steel frame.

The nave has a steeply pitched gabled roof, clad in slate, and surmounted by a copper flèche (a slender spire, usually at the intersection of the nave and transepts) that is lightly fixed to the roof and surmounted by a cross that soars 70 feet above the ground. Extending along most of the ridge is a ventilating element with smaller copper crosses at both ends.

The east and west walls feature a series of small circular stained-glass windows in the form of a (deconstructed) rose window, comprising 17 separate openings (1 central surrounded by 2 bands of 8). Some traditional gothic style/pointed arched windows are evident in the east wall but largely obscured by the narthex. There are other smaller stained-glass windows to the sides of the sanctuary/altar.

The flanking aisles – the southern is wider - have a skillion roof with metal cladding, with four dormer lanterns to the north side, and a row of highlight windows with stained glass in a geometric design to the south elevation.



Nave, west end with interpretive rose window and flèche



Southern aisle, highlight windows with stained glass in a geometric design (RBA, June 2024)

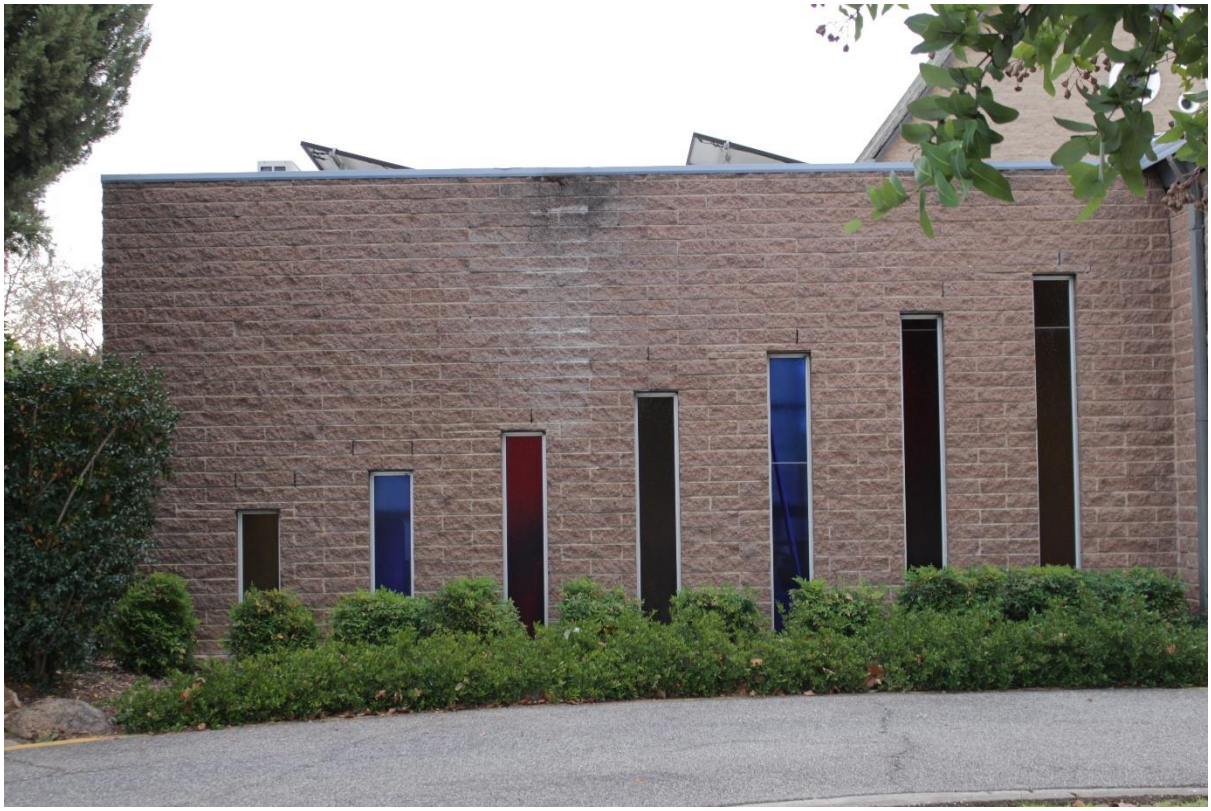
The church accommodates about 250 people. The internal face brick walls have been painted, the floor is parquetry, and timber pews are original. A notable feature of the interior is the sculpture *Christus Rex* by Jeffrey Wilkinson which hangs over the man altar. A 'Warrior Chapel', commemorating victims of World War I and II, is attached to the south side and there is a black

granite baptismal font near the entrance to match the materiality of the altar. The pipe organ manufactured by S J Laurie of Moorabbin is located at the west end of the south aisle. It has two manuals, four ranks and mixture extension, electro-pneumatic action.



Interior in April 2017, with organ on left, altar, pews, and parquetry floor (James Flores, OHTA)

The later narthex is connected by a link to the original section. The central entry, which has a segmental arched roof that extends forward as a canopy and is lined in sheeting, has a timber-framed, glazed wall that includes three sets of double doors. The side wings have a flat roof behind a parapet and a descending sequence of narrow rectangular, stained-glass windows.



Narthex, southern end, built circa early 1980s (RBA, June 2024)

The Dawn Richardson Memorial Hall designed in a similar idiom to the original church is located to its north-west.



Bell, south side of narthex (Biosis, 2022)



Dawn Richardson Memorial Hall, north-west of the church (Biosis, 2022)

HISTORIC THEMES

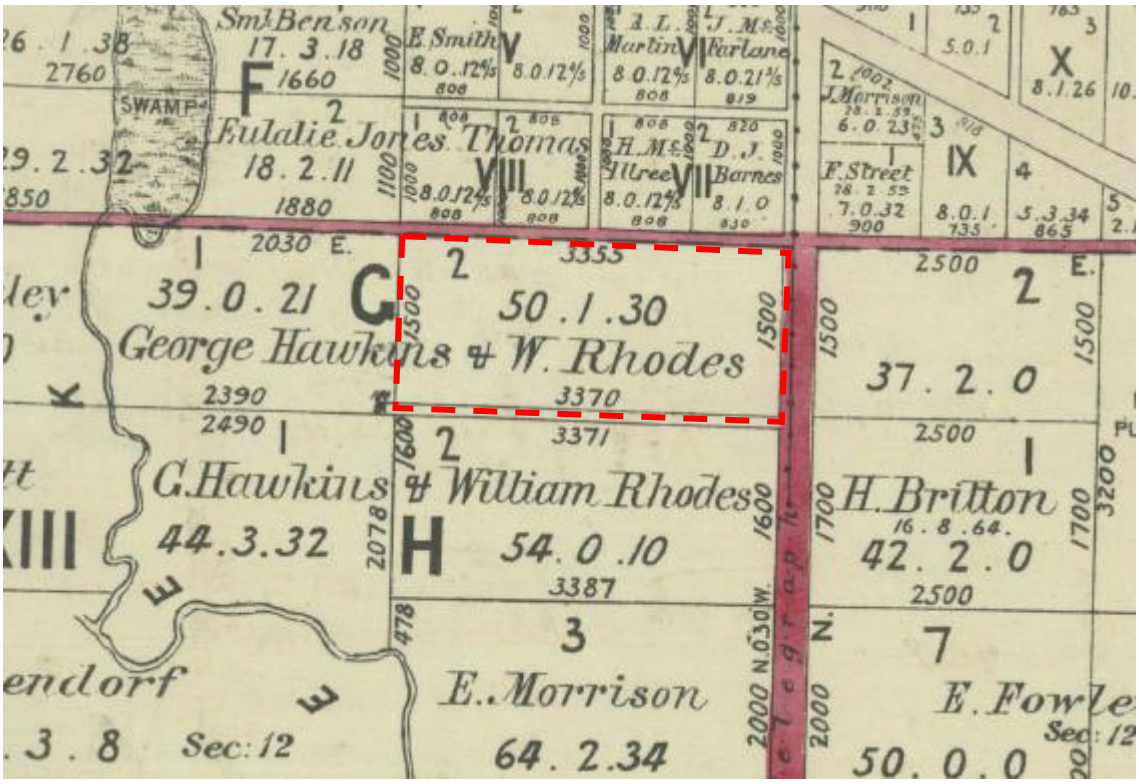
6.5 Living in country towns

8.1 Maintaining spiritual life

8.4 Forming community organisations

HISTORY

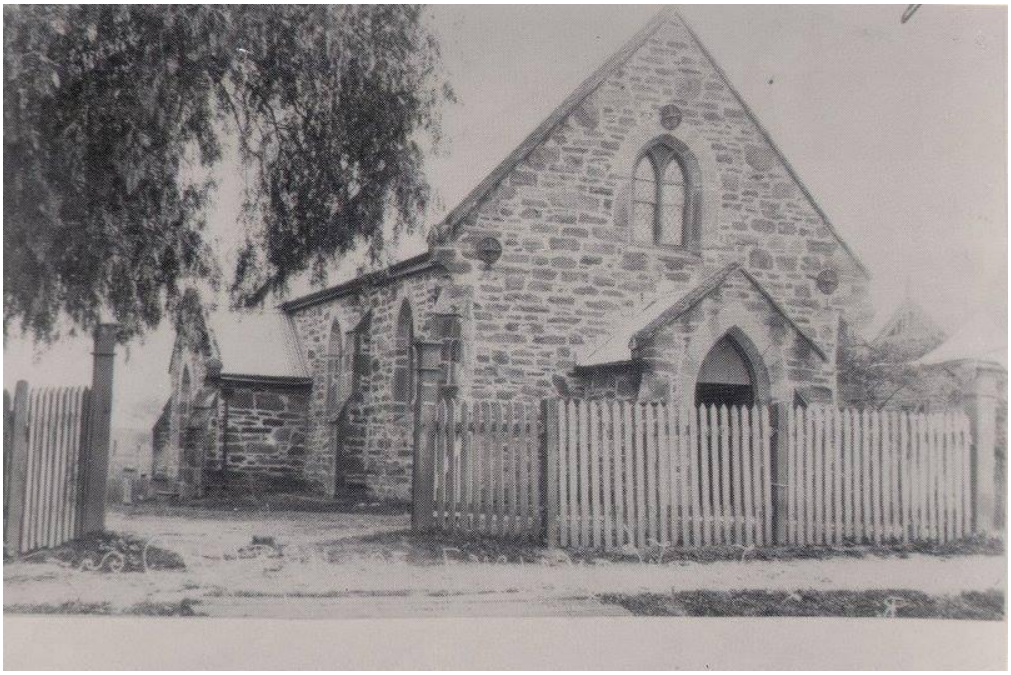
The subject site formed part of Crown Allotment 2, Section G in the Parish of Wodonga, which was initially comprised of over 50 acres and acquired by George Hawkins & William Rhodes (no date), who purchased other adjacent parcels of land. This area was located south of the original township boundaries (Wodonga Parish Plan).



Wodonga Parish Plan with Crown Allotment 2, Section G highlighted (PROV, W308, Sheet 5)

The Anglican community in Wodonga originally occupied another site further north at the corner of South and Church streets on which an earlier church, St Luke's, was completed in 1863 (*Border Morning Mail,* 1948).

Rising maintenance costs to the 1860s church were growing excessively and in the late 1930s, plans were made to construct a new church alongside the existing at the corner of South and Church Streets. Fundraising was slow and hampered by the 1930s Depression and World War 2 (Bruce Ellis, 'A history in celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the dedication of the church,' 2005, p2). It was not until the 1960s that the church was in a position to relocate and commission a new building ('About Us,' *Anglican Church Wodonga,* accessed November 2024).



The original Anglican church, St Luke's, situated on the corner of Church and South streets (now demolished). (ca.1950s, Wodonga & District Historical Society)

Two blocks of land in Beechworth Road were purchased in 1960 with an additional block purchased in 1965, where the present rectory is situated. Shortly thereafter, an army hut was relocated to the site for use as a Sunday school (Ellis, 2005, p3). Plans for the construction of the new church began in late 1962 with the vestry sending a letter Melbourne architects Mockridge Stahle & Mitchell inviting them to an onsite meeting to discuss the design requirements (Ellis, p4).

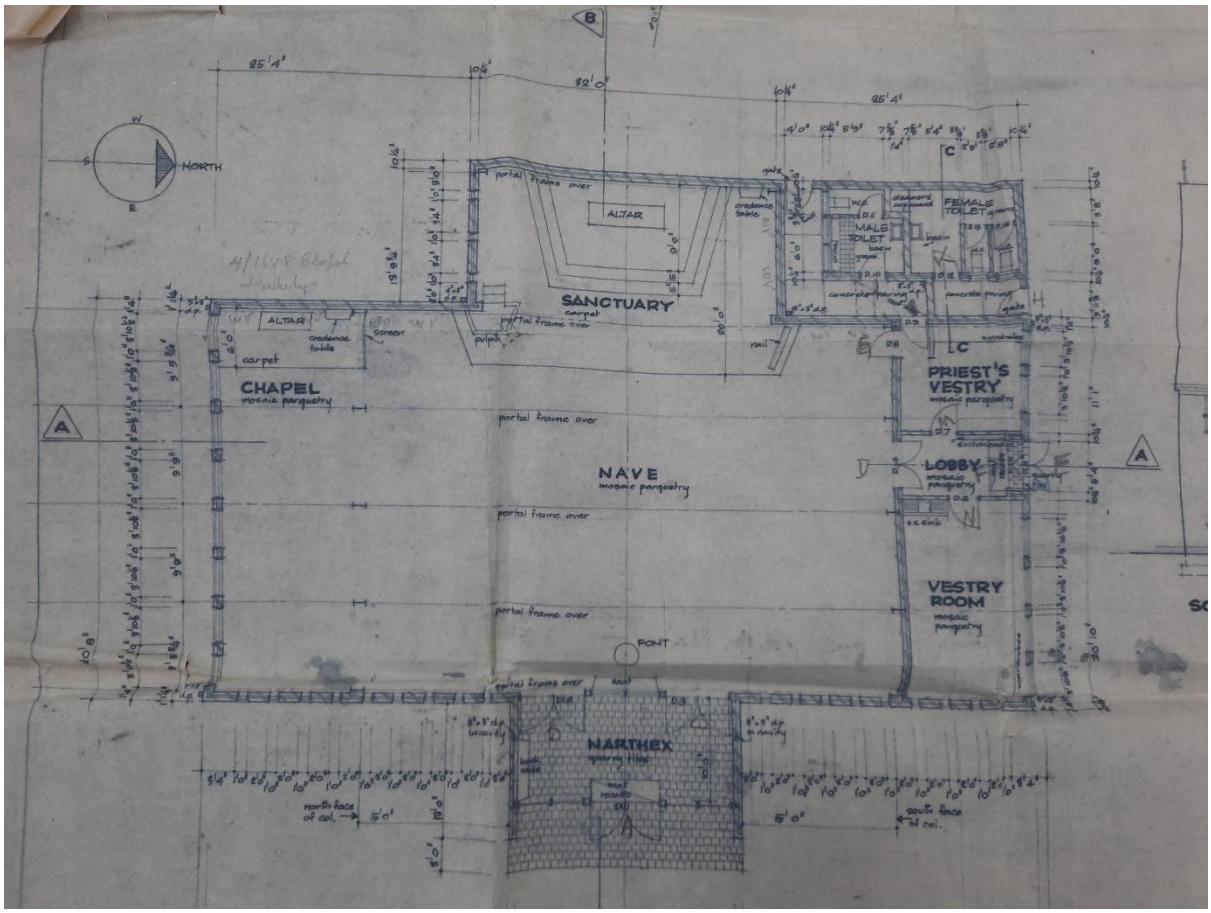
The foundation stone for the new church, now named the St John's Memorial Church, was laid by the Governor of Victoria, Major General Sir Rohan Delacombe on Sunday 31 May 1964 (Ellis, p5). George Mitchell was the lead architect and was built by the Hurst Building Company for £40,000 over the course of a year between 1964 and 1965 (Ellis, 2005, p5). The flèche/spire was manufactured by Tom Bartleston (Wodonga Heritage Assessment, 2004).

A press release was issued following the dedication of the church in November 1965, which provided a description of the newly completed building stating:

> The new St. John's Anglican Church has recently been completed at Wodonga and is to be dedicated by the Bishop of Wangaratta, The Right Reverend Theodore McCall on 6th November. Designed by Architects Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell, the church is constructed in concrete masonry and has a dramatic slate roof of steep pitch surmounted by a copper spire. A generous arched Narthex leads into the high nave of gothic proportions which has walls finished in pure white.
>
> Rose windows pierce the walls at east and west ends. The plan of the building was designed to enable a broad arrangement of pews across the nave, thus bringing the whole congregation close to the altar. The choir stalls are at the rear [of the chapel].
>
> All windows are glazed with French Antique stained glass giving a mellow glow to the interior. The pulpit and chapel screen are constructed of African mahogany and all metal fittings and furnishings are pewter. Suspended over the black granite altar is a striking modern sculpture of the reigning Christ executed by Melbourne Sculptor, Jeffrey Wilkinson. Also included in the accommodation are a Warrior Chapel and separate vestry rooms for the Rector and the Choir. (Ellis, 2005, p7)

The original St Luke's Church was demolished after competition of the church in 1968 due to its poor condition and the rising maintenance costs associated (Jones, *Wodonga City*, p121).

The architects, Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell (active from 1948 to 1983), were a prominent and award-winning practice during the 1950s and 60s especially, undertaking many large ecclesiastical and educational commissions (schools, colleges and universities) and smaller private residences (W Callister). St Faith's Anglican church in Burwood (Melbourne) of 1959 is a notable example of their contemporary output with a circular plan but also surmounted by a copper flèche.



Plan of church by Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell (Public Building File 13,812, VPRS 7882/P0001, PROV)

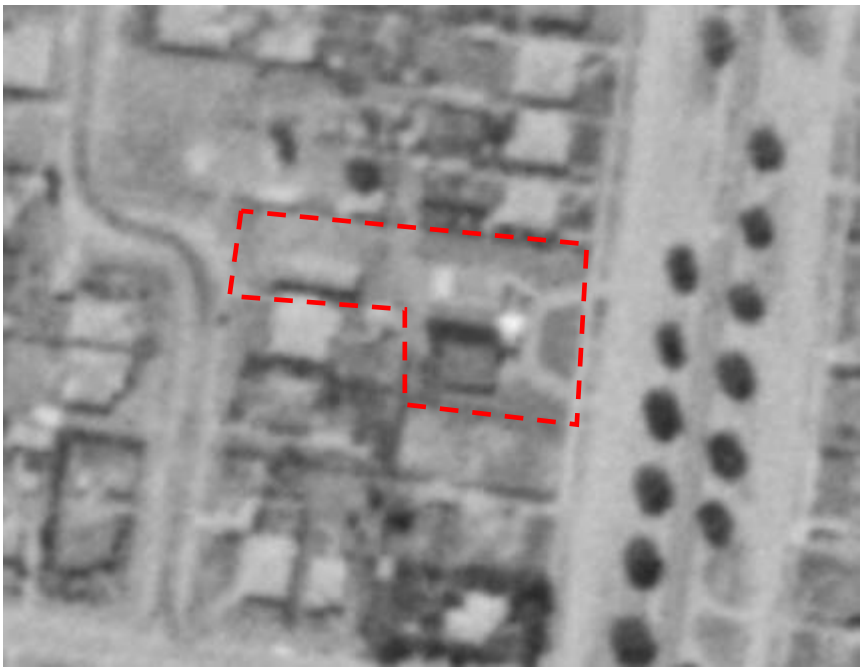
The interior also included a font donated by St Matthews Albury, which was made of the same rough-hewn black granite to match the altars. The pipe organ was built by S J Laurie of Moorabbin and installed in 1966. It was enlarged twice, once in 1985 and once in 1990 (Organ Trust).

The sculpture, noted in the press release, over the main altar - *Christus Rex* - was commissioned in 1964 (*Jeffrey Wilkinson*, 2017). 'It is regarded by the art world to be one of the best pieces of Ecclesiastical Sculpture in the state and features in several art books (Ellis, 2005, p5).' One of three made by the sculptor Jeffrey Wilkinson.

The bell, purchased from W O & B Adams P/L, was originally located below the spire, however, there was dissatisfaction when it was discovered that the electric hammer mechanism required repair only a year after construction had been completed. The congregation requested that the architects remediate the issue or replace it all together. Discussions between the church and

architects led to the bell being repositioned in 1967 to the southern side of the Narthex addition near the door leading to the rectory (Ellis, 2005, p6).

The following aerial of 1966 shows the earlier buildings on the three parcels of land which constitute the site with the earlier timber army hut to the rear/west (demolished).



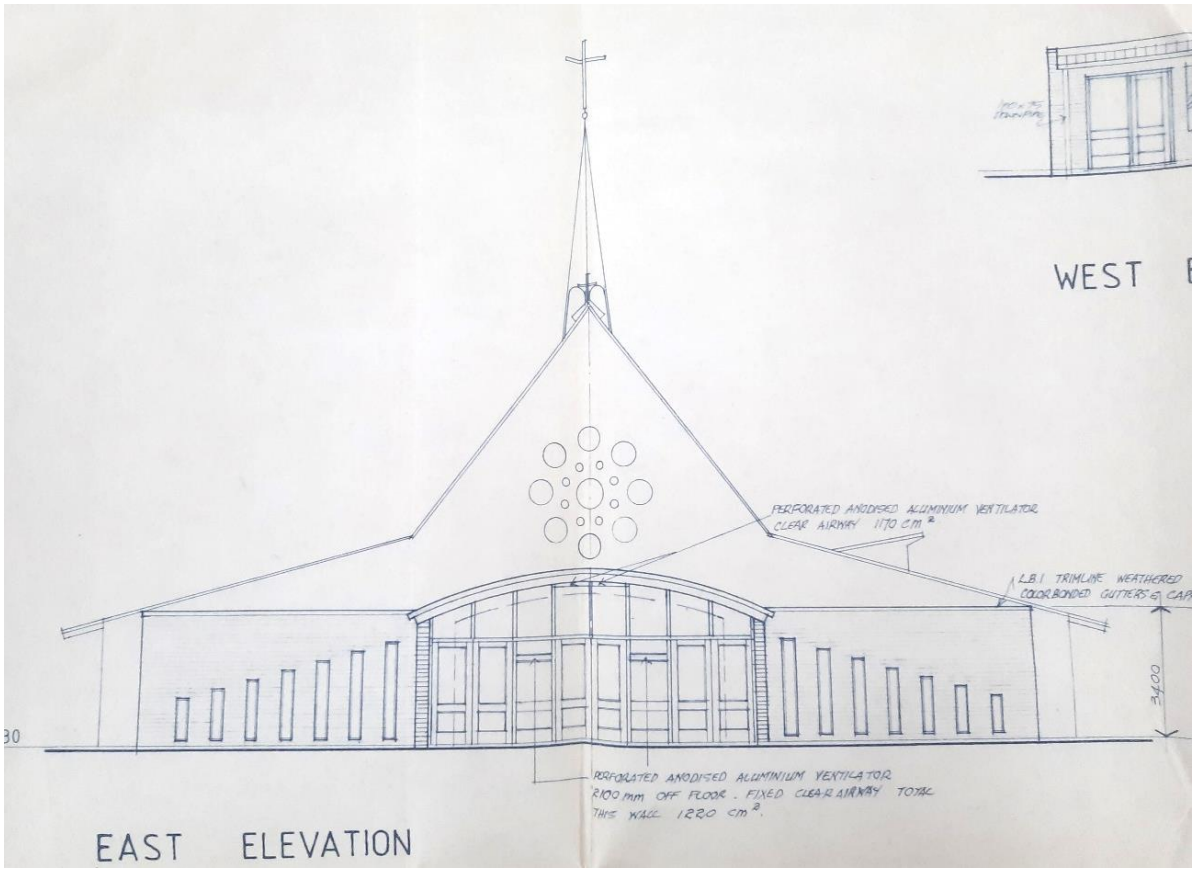
1966 aerial with subject place highlighted. Not the rectory had not been built yet (CACD 18, Frame 100, Geoscience Australia)

The following image shows the original smaller narthex, which similarly had a curved roof as the central part of the existing iteration.



Façade with original entry January 1972 (University of Melbourne, Melbourne History Workshop)

The decision to construct the larger narthex addition came about in 1976 to provide space for the Sunday school and hall that had to this point been housed in the former army hut. Following a recommendation by one of the original church architects, George Mitchell, it was determined that the addition would be best situated to the front of the existing building as the clearance to the building's north was thought to be too narrow to accommodate these facilities. A local architect, Ken Young of Howden and Wardrop, was engaged to design the Narthex in 1983 and in July the following year, its construction was completed by the builder Lawrence Humphries (Ellis, 2005, pp8-9, Public Building File).



Drawings of 1984 Narthex addition by local architect Ken Young (Public Building File 13,812, VPRS 7882/P0001, PROV)

In 1999, the congregation received a bequest of $25,000 from the family of Dawn Richardson for the construction of a hall. Dawn and her family were members of the church with Dawn dedicating much of her time to volunteering at the church as well other various local community organisations. In 1992, she was recognised for her efforts by being named Wodonga Citizen of the Year. Designs were put forward by both Ken Young and Van Ree Designs, with the final design likely being that of Van Ree. The hall was completed in August 2003 (Ellis, pp9-10).

The following view from 2009 allows an understanding of all the relationship of the narthex to the main part of the church when the planting to the front was less established.



St John's Anglican Church, Wodonga, 2009 (Dimech 2009)

COMPARISON

Two churches have been included to date on the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay - HO33 and HO39 – which both date to earlier periods and are less distinctive or have been altered.

HO33 – Former Methodists church, 15-17 Church Street, Wodonga. Constructed in 1936, this red brick building in English bond has a light Gothic influence by way of its pointed arched windows and buttressing. Traditional in form, the gable façade is however surmounted by a low tower-like element (pedestal) with a cross above.

HO39 - Free Serbian Orthodox Church, 54 High Street, Wodonga. Completed in 1891 for the Presbyterian community to a design by local architects, Gordon and Gordon. It was sold in 1964 to the Free Serbian Orthodox Church and subsequently remodelled. The pointed arched windows have been converted to a semi-circular profile and the original face brick walls were rendered and painted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

EXTENT OF LISTING

It is recommended that *St John's Anglican Church* at 221-225 Beechworth Road, Wodonga is included in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Wodonga Planning Scheme with some internal controls.

The extent of the heritage overlay should include ¾ quarters of the parcel of land (TP961960) on which the church stands as outlined below. Note it excludes the presbytery/vicarage at no. 225. Could possibly exclude the yellow section.



(Nearmap, 22 June 2024)

PLANNING SCHEME CONTROLS

Planning Controls	Y/N
External Paint Controls Apply?	N
Internal Alteration Controls Apply?	Y - organ, *Christus Rex* sculpture, altar, pews, pulit?
Tree Controls Apply?	N
Solar Energy System Controls?	Y
Outbuildings or Fences Not Exempt Under Clause 43.01-4?	N
Included on the Victorian Heritage Register Under the Heritage Act 2017?	N
Prohibited Uses Permitted?	Y
Aboriginal Heritage Place?	N

REFERENCES

('About Us,' *Anglican Church Wodonga,* accessed November 2024

1948, 'St Luke's (Wodonga) 85th Anniversary', *Border Morning Mail,* 29 May, p6

https://www.ohta.org.au/organs/organs/WodongaAng.html

Callister, Winsome, 'Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, P Goad & J Willis (eds), *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture, pp461-462*

Dimech A 2009. 'St John's Anglican Church, Wodonga', https://www.flickr.com/photos/adonline/3294144451/in/photostream/.

Ellis, Bruce [cmpl] 2005, Saint John's Anglican Church Wodonga (a history in celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the dedication of the church)

Jones, Howard, 1998 *Wodonga City: A Jubilee History*, p121

Jeffrey Wilkinson, 2017., *Design and Art Australia Online*, accessed 16 May 2022, https://www.daao.org.au/bio/jeffery-wilkinson/biography

PROV, Public Building File – PB 13812 Plan 463 St Johns Memorial Church, VPRS 8044/P0003

PROV, Public Building File – PB 13812 St Johns Memorial Church, VPRS 7882/P0001

Wodonga Heritage Assessment, 2004.

Organ Historical Trust of Australia, website, https://www.ohta.org.au/organs/organs/WodongaAng.html (accessed 24.03.25)