

St Joseph's Church on Brougham Street (near the Mt Victoria tunnel) is soon to be demolished to make way for a new church. At last, the parish of St Joseph's is to get a permanent church, having occupied temporary buildings since it was established in 1885. The church has been part of Mt Victoria's spiritual and social life since 1933. Some of you will remember Jim Harper's account of dances in the hall, on the tour of Brougham Street.

HISTORICAL NOTE

St Joseph's on Brougham Steet

Originally, St Joseph's Roman Catholic parish was part of the wider area of Te Aro, including the southern and eastern areas of Wellington, and centred on St Mary of the Angel's in Boulcott Street. The first St Joseph's was built as the population of Newtown began to grow rapidly after the rush of immigrants in the late 1870's and early 1880's. It was constructed on land next to St Patrick's College, which was being built across the road from the Basin Reserve on the corner of Buckle Street and Cambridge Terrace and opened on 9 August 1885. It was described as a temporary building "as it is contemplated to erect a magnificent church in stone or brick on the same site before many years have passed." A unique octagonal building with a dome-shaped iron roof was constructed because of the need to obstruct as little as possible the view of St Patrick's frontage.

A permanent church might have been built not long after but the need to build a new cathedral, following destruction by fire of the original cathedral in 1898, took precedence. At one stage, it was proposed to build this on the St Patrick's College site, too, where it would also serve as the parish church for St Joseph's.

St Joseph's became a parish in its own right in 1913. In 1928, with a new administrator and still no prospect of a cathedral in sight, St Joseph's decided it was time for a permanent parish church. Plans were drawn up for one to be built on Buckle Street. A bazaar was held to raise funds and brought in £3,058. By the middle of 1930, however, it was clear that times were hard and that the ambitious plans for a new church must be put aside. The fundraising continued, though, and had reached £6,475 by March 1933. By this time, the original church was not in good repair.

Now new obstacles arose. The City Council was proposing to realign roads round the Basin Reserve and the approach to the new Mt Victoria tunnel and to widen Buckle Street. Talk of building a new cathedral was also revived, meaning that money would not be available.

Fr. McRae, the Administrator of the Parish, decided in the meantime, however, to build a parish hall in Brougham Street which could serve as a temporary church if necessary during the period of rebuilding. The new hall, built by the son of the builder of the first St Joseph's on Buckle St, opened with an inaugural dance on November 8, 1933. The Catholic News recorded that "A fine spirit prevailed amongst the dancers. Generous allowance was made for the initial "heavy-going" inevitable in the case of a new floor. As the evening wore on, conditions in this respect improved. The consensus of opinion was that so far as dancing went, the new hall fitted the bill. . . . Not the least pleasing feature of the evening was the dainty and surprisingly elaborate supper which was provided by a willing, energetic and limelight avoiding band of workers." The hall paid for itself over the following years through the proceeds from dances and socials.

Meanwhile, the fund for the new church continued to grow. During World War II, it became very clear that the church on Buckle Street would not last much longer. Buckets and umbrellas were required on rainy days and the creaking beams on windy days made congregations anxious. After the War, the Cathedral scheme for Buckle St looked set to be revived but was again shelved, this time because of escalating costs. Once again, plans for a new parish church for St Joseph's had evaporated. Finally, in March 1945 the hall in Brougham Street was closed and renovations were carried out to adapt it for life as a church. Two months later, the second St Joseph's church opened and it has been in constant use since then.

Further works on the roading around the Basin Reserve led to negotiations with the Council to ensure that enough of the church property would remain intact to enable a large church to be built facing the Basin Reserve. Next, however, motorway proposals put prospects of a new church in limbo again.

At last, in 2002, work is to begin on a new church for the parish of St Joseph's in Mt Victoria. After over 115 years, St Joseph's is at last to have a permanent church.