



The Melville Chapel – the war years



The Wesleyan Methodist Church, c1945. NT Library Russell Collection



Rev. Chris Goy and Rev. Clyde Toft standing outside the Wesleyan Methodist Church c1940. NT Library Steenholdt Collection

The Wesleyan Methodist Church was used as a chapel during World War II and renamed the 'Melville Chapel' by the Royal Australian Navy.

Rev. Chris Goy and Rev. Clyde Toft were Presbyterian and Methodist Ministers who preached on alternate Sundays during the 1940s. With the influx of service men and women, the church soon filled to capacity. This prompted the Ministers to remove the metal weatherboards from the church walls to allow seating and lighting to be placed on the surrounding verandahs.



Interior of the Methodist Church, c1940. NT Library Steenholdt Collection

The Royal Australian Navy donated new furnishings and an organ to the Church. Rev. Arch Grant recalls, "I visited the Church one day to get some music for the organ and was dismayed to find that termites were busy eating all the sheet music. Investigation revealed that they had a nest raised above ground directly under the organ, had built their mud tunnels up into the organ, ignoring all the treated wood of the organ and were concentrating their attention on the paper music."

Nancy Gathercole carried a bouquet of gladioli when she stepped through the doors of the Church to marry Henry Lee on 13 May 1950. Like other weddings in the Church, gladioli were used as they were the only commercially available flowers in Darwin.

The Padres claim that it was a great thrill to preach through the studs to a larger congregation than those assembled inside, while the mighty volume of praise which echoed throughout the town is still remembered by those who heard it'.

Rev. N. Pearce, c1960.

The need for more space resulted in the construction of transepts on either side of the church. Naval carpenters also fabricated new furniture for the church and installed a pulpit, lectern, communion table and a number of prayer desks.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church was a place of worship for the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches during the war years and, when normal civilian services resumed in 1946, this inter-church arrangement was expanded to form the Uniting Church in North Australia. The congregation successfully applied to Methodist authorities in Sydney to rename the church the 'Melville Church'.



Marriage of Henry Lee to Nancy Gathercole in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Photographs: Nancy Lee.

