

The Uniting Church (previously Methodist) was an influential part of my early years as both my parents were keen members. Dad became Sunday School Superintendent from around 1955 to 1965, which took up most of his Sundays (I resented this at the time). They both attended church services regularly. Unfortunately, I was not as enthusiastic, but found the youth club of interest around age 14 as there were some nice girls there. I had faded away by around 1960. The original church was built in 1895; it was later rebuilt had several remodels and extensions, a major one in 1954-55. The church changed in name to "Uniting" in 1977.

The church had quite a few outings and early on I remember "car-drives" to Wisemans Ferry. These were popular in 1954-56 as not everyone had a car. There were also Sunday School picnics to Avalon Beach, by bus. I remember one Sunday at church around 1957 that was exciting, as Richie Benaud attended with his wife; most boys (and many dads) were acting silly. The ministers I remember are: Arnold Towner, Carl Dempsey, Stan Reddin and Doug Bliss. My sister Helen was good friends with daughter Diana Bliss. Not sure of the order or periods of these clergy. Carl Dempsey was a very good landscape artist, and I have a framed watercolour coastal scene by him that he gave to my parents. It's on the wall. But I first remember him at Primary school, as they used to have weekly religious sessions of about 30 minutes, for the different denominations. He used to actively illustrate his bible stories with rapid chalk drawings on the board which captured our attention.



Left: Methodist Church in 1954 (ex 8 mm movie) before remodel. Right: as Uniting Church 82 Beecroft Road after several makeovers with the newer Bentley units at the rear. [Google image 2020]

There was a major church event on Saturday 6 November, 1954, the Methodist Spring Fair which was held on the grounds of 152 Beecroft Road, Cheltenham, the home of Mr and Mrs Wesley Johns. Mr Johns died around 1957. This fair was preceded by a grand match along Beecroft Road to the house. One policeman was on standby at the church starting point, but as it was midday Saturday there was not much traffic. The march was led by a full pipe band and the marchers were the local youth organisations: scouts, cubs, guides, brownies, and some church groups. It was led by a police car. The Johns house was right opposite CGHS, then bushland. Dad made an 8 mm movie of this, from which some blurry photos are captured. I presume this was also linked to the coronation year festivities and there was a union jack on central display. Below the parade marches past the School of Arts led by a police car.

