

SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE PLACE

REGISTER ENTRY

Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

NAME: Epworth Building

PLACE NO.: 13389

ADDRESS: Karna Country
33/33B Pirie Street, Adelaide
CT 6132/476 F104979 A9
Hundred of Adelaide

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Designed by George Klewitz Soward in 1924 and completed in late 1927, Epworth Building demonstrates a high degree of aesthetic accomplishment and is an outstanding representative of the 'Inter-War Gothic' architectural style. The building simultaneously conveyed its ecclesiastic associations and its modernity, resulting in an aesthetically pleasing and visually arresting structure. Further, it is an excellent example of the 'Inter-War Gothic' style of architecture and demonstrates how it could be applied to a tall-building.

Epworth Building also has a special association with the work of the Methodist Church of Australasia, the unified body representing one of the oldest and once-largest Christian denominations in South Australia. Epworth Building served as the Methodist Church's South Australian administrative headquarters between 1927 and 1977. The Connexional Secretary and President had offices in the building, as did the foreign and home missions and departments devoted to social services. Accordingly, it was from here that major operations of the church were organised and administered, including outreach and welfare services. Epworth Building was additionally a major commercial venture intended to raise funds for the Church. After the Second World War, Epworth Building eventually became a major source of revenue for the Church, assisting it to fund its works.

RELEVANT CRITERIA (under section 16 of the Heritage Places Act 1993)

(e) it demonstrates a high degree of creative, aesthetic or technical accomplishment or is an outstanding representative of particular construction techniques or design characteristics.

Epworth Building demonstrates a high degree of aesthetic accomplishment and is an outstanding representative of the 'Inter-War Gothic' architectural style.

Known for designing Gothic-inspired buildings, architect George Klewitz Soward drew heavily from the style in his design for Epworth Building. In doing so, Soward adapted what was a traditional style typically associated with schools and churches to a box-framed tall-building, then a cutting-edge and modern building type. Once completed in 1927, Epworth Building simultaneously conveyed its ecclesiastic associations and its modernity. This fusion of old and new resulted in an aesthetically pleasing and visually arresting building.

Epworth Building has received critical recognition for its architectural contribution to South Australia. Contemporaries applauded its 'grace and beauty' and described it as a 'stately pile'. Decades later, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA, now AIA) included Epworth Building in its register of significant twentieth century architecture in South Australia. The building is also on the AIA's list of 'Nationally Significant 20th-Century Architecture'. In both cases, Epworth Building's Gothic exterior is noted.

Epworth Building is an outstanding South Australian example of Inter-war Gothic architecture. It features several of the key style indicators, notably:

- Vertical elements on skyline, displayed by the pinnacles, front parapet and side gables,
- Tracery, seen in the leadlight windows,
- Parapeted gables, expressed on the front pediment and side gables,
- 'Tower', in the form of a stylised mid-section of the front elevation,
- Free use of pointed arch form, demonstrated in the lancet windows, shafted jamb and hood mouldings.

Along with Lister House (now Tobin House, LHP), Epworth Building demonstrates how the style was applied to South Australia's first-wave of tall-buildings.

(g) it has special association with the life or work of a person or organisation or an event of historical importance

The Methodist church has been a part of South Australia's 'paradise of dissent' from the beginnings of the colony. It quickly emerged as a major non-conformist religious movement in the nineteenth century comprising several distinct branches. The branches united in 1900 to form one national Methodist Church, known as the

Methodist Church of Australasia. At that time the Methodist Church was second only to the Anglican Church in the State with nearly a quarter of the State's population identifying as Methodist in the 1901 census.

In 1924, the Methodists decided to erect a state-of-the-art commercial and office building, designed to reflect the adjacent Wesleyan cathedral church on Pirie Street and named after John Wesley's birthplace. Epworth Building's purpose was to raise revenue for the church and its work via rent, provide headquarters for the church and to house the Methodist Book Depot, later renamed Epworth Book Depot. During the 1920s the Methodists also erected about 100 new churches and halls, established the Memorial Hospital for First World War veterans in 1920 (Hospital – Memorial, SHP 13546), founded the Wesley Theological College, later Parkin College (Office, former Parkin College SHP 14148, relocating to new premises in 1997) and in the 1930s began developing aged care facilities.

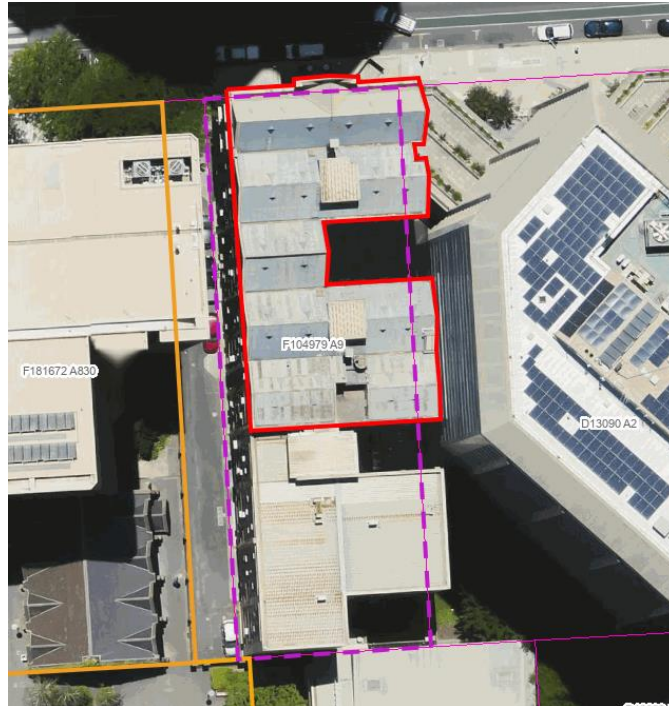
While the churches and halls demonstrate the everyday work of the Methodist Church and the college its theological underpinnings, it is Epworth Building that was Methodism's administrative headquarters for most of the twentieth century. Between 1927 and 1977, various key offices and departments were located in Epworth Building, including the Connexional Secretary and the President, as well as departments devoted to social services, including for women and children. The foreign and home mission offices were also situated in Epworth Building. Accordingly, it was from here that major operations of the church were organised and administered, including outreach and welfare services. Epworth Building additionally served as a major commercial venture that raised funds for the Church and its activities. During the post-war period, Epworth Building eventually realised its income generating ability to become a major source of revenue for the church, achieved through office and shop rentals.

SITE PLAN

Epworth Building

PLACE NO.: 13389

33/33B Pirie Street, Adelaide



Epworth Building, 33/33B Pirie Street, Adelaide, CT 6132/476 F104979 A9, Hundred of Adelaide. Red outline is indicative of elements of significance, noting imperfect alignment of aerial imagery with parcel cadastre.

Elements of heritage significance include (but are not necessarily limited to):




- Epworth Building,
- Original detailing to the northern and western elevations,
- Epworth Building signage on the front elevation (top and bottom),
- Roof and roofline, including gables,
- Shopfronts,
- Cantilevered awnings,
- Any original fixtures and fittings, including timber floorboards, timber door and window frames, timber and/or cast-iron stair balustrades and handrails, textured glass and decorative masonry.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of place include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- 1964 extension to southern side,
- Window-mounted air conditioning units,
- Recent service upgrades,
- Internal fitouts of office and retail spaces,
- Dropped ceilings in common hallways.

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LEGEND

-  Parcel boundaries (Indicates extent of Listing)
-  Existing State Heritage Place(s)
-  Outline of Elements of Significance for State Heritage Place

Summary of State Heritage Place: 13389

Provisionally entered by the South Australian Heritage Council on 5 September 2024

Confirmed by the South Australian Heritage Council on 8 May 2025

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COMMENTARY ON THE LISTING

Description and notes with respect to a place entered in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

Physical Description

Epworth Building is a six-storey office building with a structural frame of reinforced concrete with brick infill and a basement. Epworth Building has a dominant, street-facing, symmetrical front elevation with a return at the western end, demonstrating characteristics of interwar Gothic architecture.

Features of the front elevation façade and return include:

- a central frontispiece reaching from footpath to skyline, capped by a gable parapet, resembling a tower,
- Relief lettering 'Epworth Building' near top of frontispiece, with vent opening (covered) and hood mouldings above,
- a main entrance at the base of the frontispiece, set in a large, pointed arch with a shafted jamb,
- timber paired double doors to main entrance, with herringbone matchboard panels,
- bronze quotation plaque to main entrance re-entrant,
- terrazzo steps below main entrance (not original fabric),
- three lancet windows in Palladian configuration above entrance, with hood and sill moulds and decorative relief lettering 'Epworth Building' below,
- two shopfronts, flanking the entrance,
- two cantilevered awnings, one above each shopfront,
- horizontally-proportioned leadlight windows with tracery above entrance doors and shopfront awnings,
- triplet lancet windows to odd floors, with hood mouldings, sills and engaged columns to mullions,
- triplet rectangular windows to even floors with corbelled hoods,
- double-hung sash frames to window openings,
- ashlar detailing,
- pressed cement decoration including small gargoyles, corbels, modillions, crockets, etc.

Other features of the exterior include:

- gable parapets to eastern and western elevations,
- flush-rendered structural concrete frame,
- brick infill (painted),
- undecorated rectangular window openings to western elevation beyond façade return,

- leadlight muntins to some windows with rippled glass panes,
- full-depth light well on eastern side,
- extension to southern side (not significant fabric).

Remaining interior features include:

- timber floorboards, skirtings and architraves,
- timber door and window frames,
- timber doors,
- fibrous plaster ceilings, cornices and wall decoration,
- timber and/or cast-iron stair balustrades and timber handrails,
- decorative timber 'arch' in foyer,
- timber directory board in foyer.

Elements of Significance:

Elements of heritage significance include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Epworth Building,
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- Epworth Building signage on the front elevation (top and bottom),
- Roof and roofline, including gables,
- Shopfronts,
- Cantilevered awnings,
- Any original fixtures and fittings, including timber floorboards, timber door and window frames, timber and/or cast-iron stair balustrades and handrails, textured glass and decorative masonry.

Elements not considered to contribute to significance of place include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- 1964 extension to southern side,
- Window-mounted air conditioning units,
- Recent service upgrades,
- Internal fitouts of office and retail spaces,
- Dropped ceilings in common hallways.

History of the Place

Methodism in South Australia, 1836-1945

South Australia was established at a time of religious ferment in Britain, when the established Church of England had recently lost its effective monopoly over religion.¹ English society was 'deeply divided' between supporters of the established Church of England and Dissenters, comprised of British Protestant denominations that had formed outside of the established Church.²

Notable planners of the province of South Australia were Dissenters and other nonconformists who envisaged a 'Paradise of Dissent,' based on the principle of religious freedom.³ These individuals, such as George Fife Angas, deliberately recruited other nonconformists for migration, including Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and those from other Dissenting Christian groups.

Founded by Anglican clergyman John Wesley, Methodism began as a network of religious societies within the Church of England but emerged as a distinct denomination a few years after Wesley's death in 1791.⁴ Methodism later reached colonial South Australia, with the first service held at Glenelg on 22 January 1837.⁵ It quickly became the most 'potent religious movement in nineteenth century South Australia' and by 1870 most communities in South Australia contained at least one Methodist chapel.⁶

Divisions that proliferated within English Methodism were exported to South Australia, and by the mid-1870s there were four Methodist denominations in the colony, namely, Wesleyan Methodists, the Primitive Methodists, the Bible Christians and the Methodist New Connexion. Division remained a characteristic of South Australian Methodism throughout the nineteenth century, leading to duplication of religious effort in many communities as Methodist denominations competed against one another.⁷

Towards the end of the century, these divisions began to subside. In 1888, the South Australian branch of the Methodist New Connexion was absorbed into the Bible Christian branch of the church. Subsequently in 1900, the Wesleyan, Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian branches of Methodism amalgamated to create the Methodist Church of Australasia.⁸ By 1901, Methodism constituted the second largest Christian denomination in South Australia, comprising close to 25% of the population.⁹

Both before and after unification, Methodists believed they were linked to a central church authority. Once unified, the Conference became the central body responsible for all Methodists in South Australia.¹⁰ However, although the Pirie Street Church and Old Methodist Meeting Hall were used to accommodate the Conference's meetings and initially served as the de facto Methodist headquarters, the Conference, and by extension the Church, lacked a centralised 'office' or body to represent and administer its affairs. This issue was recognised during the late 1910s,

and the Connexional Secretary position was eventually established in 1924 during the annual Conference Meeting.¹¹

Methodist membership grew steadily during the interwar period from 23,112 in 1920 to 27,823 in 1940. 52 churches and 49 halls were built by Methodist congregations in South Australia during the 1920s.¹² Construction extended to erecting Wesley Theological College (Office, former Parkin College SHP 14148, relocating to new premises in 1997) and the Methodist Memorial Hospital for First World War veterans in 1920 (Hospital – Memorial, SHP 13546). Although age cared facilities were established during the 1930s, building of new churches was slowed first by the Depression and then by building controls during and after the Second World War.¹³

Adelaide's First 'Tall Buildings'

'Skyscrapers' first emerged in the United States during the 1880s, particularly in Chicago and New York. These buildings typically comprised ten or more storeys and towered over adjacent buildings.¹⁴ Their emergence was spurred by rising land prices and the desire to maximise the use of increasingly limited space, especially for profit.¹⁵ They were enabled by new materials and technological innovations, particularly the use of steel or reinforced concrete to build internal frames, rather than load-bearing external walls which had been the norm until then.¹⁶ The invention of the elevator, hydraulic plumbing systems and advanced fireproofing also facilitated their creation.¹⁷

Similar buildings were soon erected outside of the United States, including in Australia. Tall buildings up to six storeys began to appear in Australia in the 1860s and reached up to ten storeys by the 1880s in Melbourne and Sydney.¹⁸ Buildings continued to increase in height between the 1890s and early 1910s until state-based height restrictions were implemented, which remained in place until decades later.¹⁹

South Australia's 'first wave of tall building development' commenced in 1912 with the construction of the Verco Building on North Terrace, Adelaide (SHP 13363), designed by Eric McMichael.²⁰ After the Verco Building, further construction did not occur until the 1920s,²¹ the delay likely caused by the First World War and post-war social and economic adjustments.

Conditions began to settle by the early 1920s and a general sense of progressiveness and prosperity began to pervade South Australia.²² Reflective of this new outlook, construction of high-rise commercial buildings recommenced. However, in 1923, height restrictions were imposed by the *Building Act* preventing the construction of skyscrapers. This resulted in a suite of tall buildings between five and ten stories high which emerged on the Adelaide skyline over the following twenty years.²³

By the middle of the 1920s, the *Australian Home and Builder* noted that '[n]ever in the history of Adelaide has there been in progress such a costly and important

programme of commercial buildings'.²⁴ These buildings were concentrated on the southern side of North Terrace, with several others built nearby along King William Street and a few on Grenfell and Pirie Streets.²⁵

Observers considered these buildings to be symbols of the state's progress and modernity.²⁶ Much of this enthusiasm was buoyed by a desire to 'keep up' with developments occurring in other states, especially Victoria and New South Wales.²⁷ Although there 'had been no pressing necessity to build upwards in twentieth century Adelaide',²⁸ and while critics rejected tall buildings outright due to practical, medical or aesthetic concerns, the desire for Adelaide to be a 'real city' on par with its eastern counterparts was palpable.²⁹



Three of Adelaide's earliest 'tall buildings' on North Terrace, Adelaide, c.1935 (left to right): Liberal Club, Goldsbrough House, and Shell House

Source: SLSA B7092

Along with transforming the skyline, Adelaide's first 'tall buildings introduced a rectilinear edge of facades' to the streets, which 'helped to redefine and reinforce the order of the original City of Adelaide plan'.³⁰ During the nineteenth century, building in the city had developed erratically, in turn partially compromising the city's grid-based design. The tall buildings typically covered entire land parcels and conformed to strict street-frontage requirements, thereby instating orderliness and reaffirming Adelaide's intended rectilinear layout.³¹

Furthermore, tall buildings 'cooperated rather than competed in the process of transforming the capital from a city of mixed uses – administration, industry, manufacture, commerce, trade and housing – to one of commercial specialisation'.³² As most of these buildings were erected for large business enterprises, they helped consolidate Adelaide as South Australia's Central Business District (CBD). Together, they conveyed the commercial maturation of the city and secured its distinctiveness from its suburbs.³³

Though interrupted by the Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s,³⁴ construction continued afterwards until around 1943, when Commonwealth building restrictions enforced during the Second World War halted construction.³⁵ Including the Vero Building (1912), fourteen of these buildings were erected during this first wave of development.³⁶

Origins of Epworth Building¹

Wesleyan Methodists erected a cathedral church on Pirie Street in 1851. By 1862, they had built a hall towards its rear, Former Methodist Church Meeting Hall (SHP 10654).³⁷ That year, the Pirie Street Church Trust (hereafter the Trust) purchased Part Town Acre 204 for £1,212, located immediately to the east of the church. The Trust subsequently built a two-storey manse on the property, along with stables and sheds. The minister of the Pirie Street Methodist Church moved into the manse in early 1863.³⁸



Pirie Street Methodist manse (left) and Church (right), c.1905.

Source: SLSA PRG 631/2/1292

¹ This section draws from James D. Everett, *The History of the Epworth Building* (Unley: MediaCom Education Inc., 2006).

About a decade later, the Trust began to profit from the property. In 1875, it sold portions of Part Town Acre 204 for £1,100. In late 1878, the Trust decided to lease the Pirie Street manse to a commercial tenant for £1,000 per annum and the minister relocated to a residence in Hutt Street.³⁹ The Trust also erected a two-storey caretaker's cottage towards the rear.⁴⁰

The Trust considered selling the property in 1914 and again in 1923. However, neither proposal progressed further. The latter failed as the Trust was denied permission from the South Australian Methodist Conference, the Church's post-unification authority.⁴¹

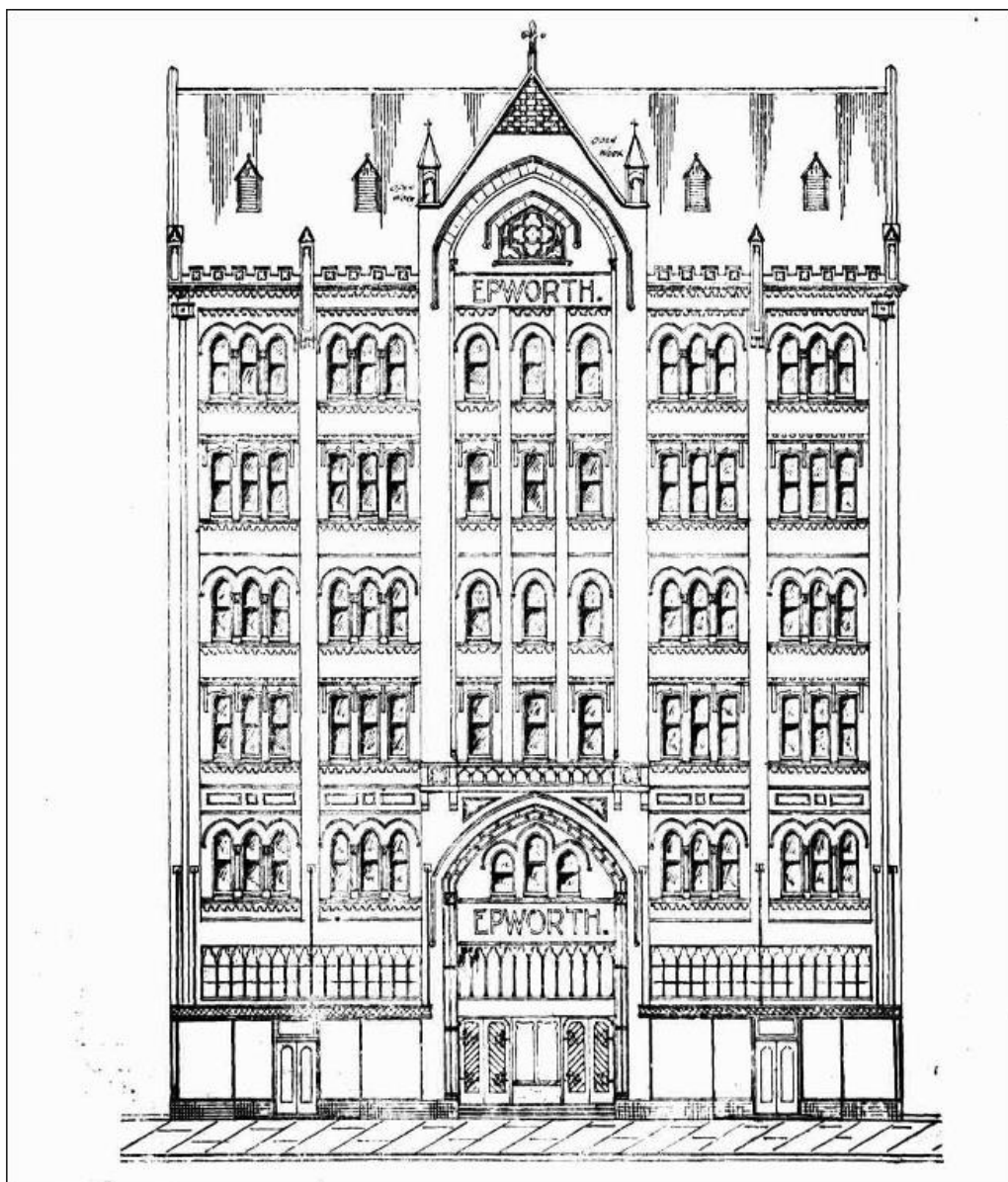
Well-known Methodist J. W. Gillingham proposed to redevelop the site in 1922 but went unheard.⁴² Beginning in 1923, influential figures within the Church, especially Reverend William Hutchinson Robinson, began to push seriously for a new building to occupy the site. Towards this end, in 1923 Robinson began corresponding with architect George Klewitz Soward, hoping to engage him on such a project. By late October, the Trust entered negotiations with Robinson and his fellow advocates on a potential lease agreement.⁴³

On 17 January 1924, the Pirie Street Building Board (hereafter the Board) met officially for the first time to prepare resolutions to be approved during the Methodist Conference in February. The resolutions sought to establish the terms of the Board and instate its authority to erect, finance and manage a building on Pirie Street.⁴⁴ Resolution (v) was for the 'name of the building to be Epworth Building' after John Wesley's home town, frequently adopted for Methodist buildings and organisations.⁴⁵ In February, the Board presented the resolutions to the Conference under the title the 'Pirie Street Connexional Buildings'.⁴⁶ The Conference accepted the resolutions and the Board met again on 27 March to begin planning the building,⁴⁷ by which time it was established that Epworth Building would have six storeys.⁴⁸ Soward's firm, English and Soward, was commissioned to develop the design and lodged working drawings with the City of Adelaide on 22 May, which were in turn approved on 15 June.⁴⁹

In November 1924, the Board accepted Soward's final design for Epworth Building and permitted him to solicit tenders to demolish the manse, eventually settling on W. J. Hinton's offer of £80.⁵⁰ The Board also requested a formal estimate for the building's construction. On 17 December, Soward advised the following:

My figures for the building, inclusive of the strong rooms and their doors, electric light and power, a new cast iron drain from the south of [the] new building to the sewer, basins in the offices, in addition to the lavatories provided, stairs, galleries, shop fronts, suspended verandah, drainage wells, underpinning and two passenger lifts, sum to: £64,745.⁵¹

Roughly around the same time, the Board asked the Trust to begin preparing a lease agreement for the land.⁵²



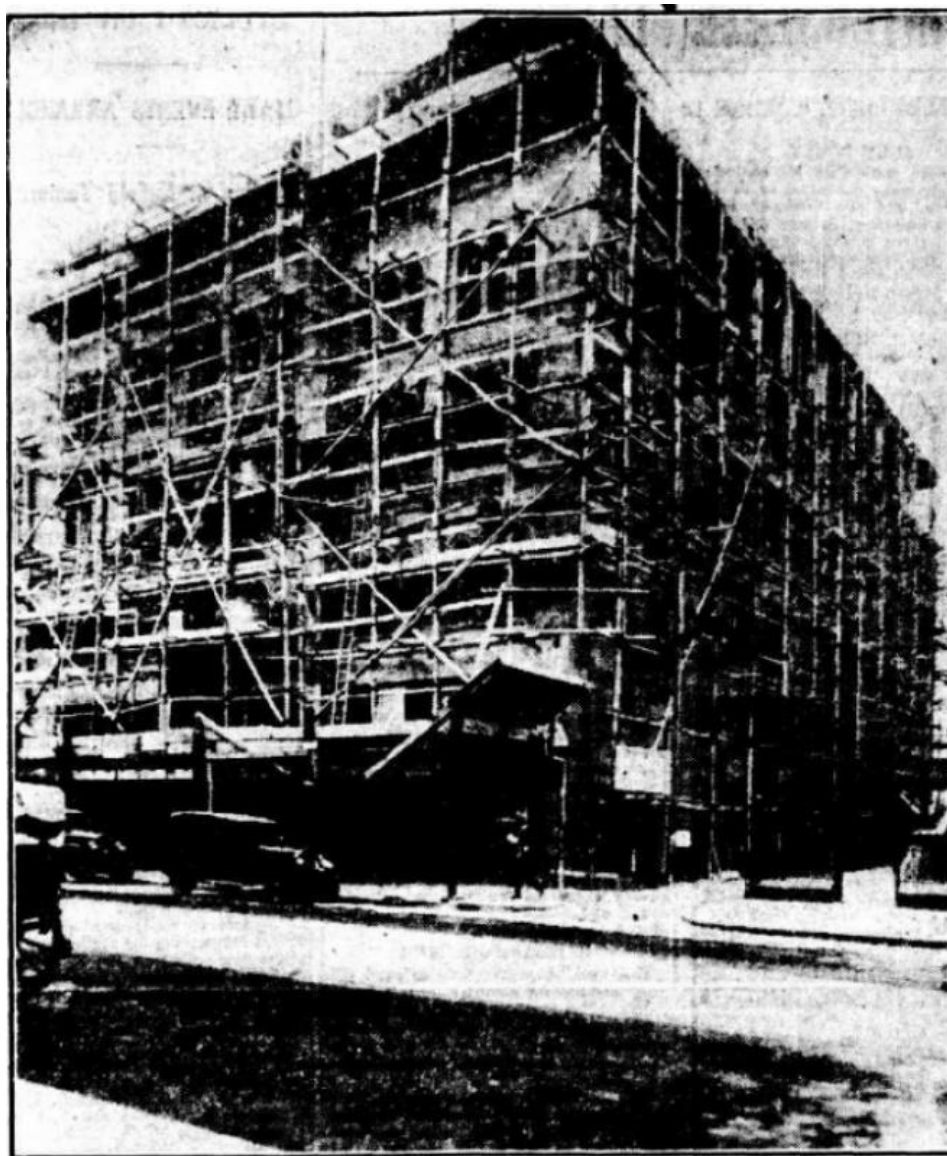
Soward's design for Epworth Building's façade, 1925.

Source: *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 1 May 1925, p.3; trove.nla.gov.au

Since at least March 1924, figures inside and outside the Methodist Church understood that Epworth Building would serve three main purposes: to raise revenue for the Church by leasing office and commercial space; to serve as the church's administrative headquarters; and to house the Methodist Book Depot.⁵³ Formal decisions about the use of the building were made in early 1925. Following discussions between the Board, Trust and Methodist Book Depot, it was confirmed that the Methodist Conference's headquarters would operate in the building and the Book Depot would be located on the ground floor, with access to one of the shopfronts.⁵⁴ The latter organisation would contribute financially to Epworth Building's construction.⁵⁵ A committee was also established to determine rents and identify prospective tenants. Already by March, the committee reported that the Bank of Adelaide had signed on to lease office space for £1,100 per annum.⁵⁶

Important financial and procedural progress was also made throughout 1925. In April, the Australian Mutual Providence Society (AMP) loaned £50,000 to the Board, set at 7% interest over a five-year term.⁵⁷ Also in April, the Board accepted C. H. Martin Ltd.'s offer to construct Epworth Building for £55,995, although the contract was not signed until 9 October.⁵⁸ The manse was demolished in May and the Board had raised additional funds from investors by the middle of the year.⁵⁹

Work on the foundations commenced thereafter and a clerk of works was employed in August. On 28 September 1925, the News reported that Epworth Building was 'beginning to take shape'.⁶⁰ In November, the lease agreement between the Board and the Trust was finalised.⁶¹ Major construction continued over the next two years and was fully completed by December 1927.⁶² The total cost was £68,469.⁶³



Epworth Building, Pirie street, new rallying point for South Australian Methodism

Epworth Building under construction, July 1926.

Source: News, 9 July 1926, p.9; trove.nla.gov.au



A completed Epworth Building, c.1927.

Source: City of Adelaide Archives LS0740

Opening and operating a Methodist office building

Epworth Building was well received, even prior to its completion. Before the scaffolding was removed, the *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, a Methodist newspaper, commented in July 1926 that Epworth Building would be among Adelaide's 'handsomest'.⁶⁴ Once the scaffolding started coming down in December, it described the building as a 'great pile' and added there were 'few buildings in the city that are equal [to] this one for grace and beauty'.⁶⁵ The popular press also paid close attention to the building, treating it as notable architecture. In March 1929, about fourteen months after its completion, the *News* praised Soward and Epworth Building, describing the latter as a 'stately pile' and a 'thing of beauty'.⁶⁶

Important Methodist organisations soon occupied Epworth Building. The Methodist Book Depot, renamed Epworth Book Depot in 1929, may have been operating there as early as May 1926.⁶⁷ Part of level two was reserved for the Methodist Conference.⁶⁸ Over time, the Connexional Secretary and President both maintained offices in the building, as did departments for social services and welfare, including for women and children.⁶⁹ Foreign and home missions were also organised from Epworth Building.⁷⁰ Accordingly, major operations of the church were organised and run from Epworth Building, including outreach and welfare services.⁷¹

With space provided for the church, Epworth's management sought to acquire external tenants. As observed by the Bank of Adelaide, this process began as early as 1925 and the building appears to have been occupied before it was finished. In 1926, the Board made enquiries that year about the possibility of tenant occupancy prior to completion.⁷² Lawyer Dorothy Summerville, one of Epworth Building's first and longest-running tenants, signed a rental agreement in August 1927, several months before its official completion.⁷³

Although the building featured a Gothic appearance, the Board promoted Epworth Building as thoroughly modern and progressive. A promotional pamphlet featured floor plans detailing the building's office spaces and amenities. A short description stressed its 'modern conveniences', including:

Electric Light and Power in every Office. Where Concrete Fireproof Floors are specified by the New Building Act, these floors are covered again with Wood Flooring. Two Modern Lifts. Wash Basins in every Office. Lavatories on each floor, alternate floors being for Ladies.⁷⁴

Evidently, the Gothic exterior was designed to complement the neighbouring church while the structure, layout and latest facilities were to appeal to commercial and professional clients. The Board sought to demonstrate that Epworth Building was one of Adelaide's premier tall buildings.⁷⁵

Despite initial enthusiasm, Epworth Building was less successful than the Board had hoped. South Australia's economy entered a recession in 1927, which was worsened by the global Great Depression in the 1930s. Consequently, the Board was faced with vacancies and reduced rental income throughout the decade.⁷⁶ It survived by instating various measures, including taking collateral for overdue payments, reducing rents and lowering wages.⁷⁷ The Board also sought to reduce the ground rent it paid to the Pirie Street Methodist Trust, culminating in a dispute between the two bodies. After mediation, the amount was reduced, and it was agreed rent would be renegotiated annually.⁷⁸ Epworth again experienced difficulties during the Second World War, owing in part to enlistments and wartime restrictions.⁷⁹

Conditions improved markedly following the war. Rents were restored to their earlier extent and Epworth Building was fully tenanted by 1948.⁸⁰ Importantly, the building

became profitable during the post-war period.⁸¹ In 1955, it was decided that the Board would pay half its net annual profits to organisations associated with the Church.⁸² Funds were also used to finance various repairs and upgrades to the building during this period.⁸³

In 1963, the Board decided to extend Epworth Building to increase office space and, in turn, revenue. Architectural firm Brown and Davies prepared drawings that year and Emmett & Co. were hired to construct the extension. The extension was located at the rear of the building, which required the demolition of the two-storey caretaker's cottage. The extension was completed in 1964 at a cost of £155,735 and added about 40% more office space to the building, as well as car parking.⁸⁴

In 1974, the City of Adelaide acquired the land containing the Pirie Street Methodist Church as part of its plan to redevelop the Pirie Street and Flinders Street area. It demolished the church in 1977 to build the Colonel Light Centre, a structure taller than Epworth Building.⁸⁵

Occurring also that year, the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches merged to form the Uniting Church of Australia, following twenty years of negotiation.⁸⁶ In response, a new constitution to govern the Board was enacted the following year.⁸⁷

Subsequent History

Following union, the Uniting Church operated its Synod and church departments from the first floor of Epworth Building, which it leased from the Board at a concessional rate.⁸⁸ On 22 September 1987, the land was vested in the Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust.⁸⁹

The Board and the Church began to seriously consider their future at Epworth Building during the late 1980s, including the future of the building itself. Changing legislative and economic conditions during the 1990s, as well as structural changes within the Uniting Church intensified this discussion and led to the sale of the property from the Church to the Board in October 1993 for \$1,150,000.⁹⁰ Major updates to the aging building were commenced that year, including upgraded fireproofing.⁹¹ Further improvements were implemented throughout the decade, including the addition of accessibility features.⁹²

Despite these upgrades, Epworth Building faced financial challenges during the 1990s, reflected by an average vacancy rate of 10%.⁹³ Major organisations associated with the Church also began to vacate Epworth Building during the decade. Epworth Book Depot ceased trading in 1990 and the Synod relocated to elsewhere in the city in 2000.⁹⁴

Due to these complications, the Board commenced discussions with the Synod to sell the building during the early 2000s. In 2002, the Synod permitted the Board to explore

this prospect.⁹⁵ After determining that it made more financial sense to disinvest from Epworth Building, the Board sold the property in 2003, with the settlement occurring in October. The board held its final meeting in April 2004 and wound up as a legal entity during the year.⁹⁶ The proceeds from the sale were held by the newly-created Epworth Trust, created to fund church endeavours.⁹⁷

Epworth Building has since been owned privately and continues to be occupied by various tenants. Renew SA has assisted with filling vacancies, leading to the presence of various creative startups in the building.⁹⁸

Chronology

Year	Event
1836	First Methodists arrive in South Australia.
1862	June: The Pirie Street Church Trust purchases Part Town Acre 24 from the Anglican Bishop of Adelaide. 28 September: Edmund Wright's plans for a manse on Part Town Acre 24 are approved, leading to its construction.
1870s	Four Methodist denominations exist in South Australia and most communities possess at least one Methodist chapel.
1879	October: the Pirie Street Trustees decide to lease the manse adjacent to the church as commercial premises. A caretaker's cottage is erected towards the southern end of Part Town Acre 24.
1900	Methodist union leads to the amalgamation of the Wesleyan, Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian branches of Methodism.
1914	The Pirie Street Trustees reject a proposal to sell Part Town Acre 24.
1920	The Methodist Church opens the Memorial Hospital in North Adelaide.
1920s	52 churches and 49 halls are built by Methodist congregations during the decade. Discussions commence regarding the future use and development of Part Town Acre 24.
1922	The Board of the Methodist Book Depot determines that new premises is required.
1923	The Pirie Street Trustees seek the Methodist Conference's permission to sell Part Town Acre 24 but are denied by Shirley Jeffries, a high-ranking church official. Rev. William Hutchinson Robinson, then belonging to the Alberton Parish, begins corresponding with architect George Klewitz Soward, hoping to engage his services.

- 22 October: the Pirie Street Trustees enter negotiations with interested parties within the Church to lease Part Town Acre 24.**
- 1924** **17 January: the Pirie Street Building Board (the Board) is established.**
February: the annual Methodist Conference takes place throughout the month. The Conference approves the establishment of a new Board tasked with erecting and operating a new building on Part Town Acre 24.
7 November: the Board approves Soward's design for a tall building and calls for tenders to demolish the manse. The Board accepts W. J. Hinton's tender of £80.
A lease agreement between the Trustees and the Board is prepared.
- 1924-1925** **Discussions are held between the Board, Trustees and Book Depot Board regarding the use of the building. It is agreed that the Methodist Depot will operate from part of the ground floor, have a shop front and contribute financially to the building's construction. It is further agreed that the Methodist headquarters will operate from part of the first floor.**
- 1925** A rent committee is established to identify prospective tenants and determine rents. By March, the committee reports that the Bank of Adelaide agreed to lease the front offices located on the eastern side for £1,100 per annum.
 The Board acquires a £50,000 loan from AMP at 7% interest over a five-year period.
Tenders are sought for the construction of a new building, which are due by 20 April.
28 April: The Board and Soward agree to accept C. H. Martin Ltd's tender to construct the building for £55,995. The Reinforced Concrete and Engineering Co. are responsible for the masonry.
 24 July: The Board approves Soward's proposal to include hardwood flooring.
9 October: The contract between the Board and C. H. Martin is signed.
10 November: The lease agreement between the Trustees and the Board is signed.
- 1925-1926** The Board accepts Newton and McLaren's tender to install two lifts and Gerrard and Goodman's tender to install electric lights and power.
- 1926** Although the building is incomplete, the Methodist Book Depot relocates to Epworth Building. A temporary roof is installed for this purpose.
- 1927** The Board approves Soward's proposal to erect two cantilevered awnings on the front elevation.
 April and May: The Board begins hiring staff to assist with administering and operating the building.

December: Construction of Epworth Building is complete.

- 1928 After utilising external agencies, the Board assumes responsibility for acquiring and managing tenancies.
- 1930s The Great Depression during the early 1930s results in reduced income from struggling tenants and vacancies in Epworth Building.
Fewer Methodist churches are built due to the Depression.
- 1934 Economic conditions improve and Epworth Building is fully tenanted.
- 1939-1945 Several tenants and staff of Epworth Building enlist to serve in the Second World War.
- 1945 The Board's loan from AMP is paid off.
- 1947 A plaque is attached to the front of Epworth Building, donated by tenants W. R. Hambridge and J. W. Gellert, both accountants.
- 1948 Epworth Building is fully tenanted and maintenance work including repainting is undertaken.
- 1950 Masonry features on the front elevation including crenelation and finials are removed due to natural decay.**
- c.1950 Timber directory board installed in foyer.
- 1950-1960 Epworth Building prospers financially.
- 1962 Brown and Davies prepare drawings for a new lift and alterations to the motor room of Epworth Building.**
- 1964 Brown and Davies prepare drawings for a proposed extension to Epworth Building.**
The caretaker's cottage towards the rear of Epworth Building is demolished to make way for the extension.
- 1965 May: extension to the rear of Epworth Building is completed.**
- 1967 Further repairs to Epworth Building are undertaken, including repainting.
- 1970 The Adelaide City Council announce plans to redevelop the Pirie Street and Flinders Street area.
- 1974 The redevelopment of Pirie Street and Flinders Street commences.
Adelaide City Council purchases the adjacent property containing the Pirie Street Church.
Light courts within Epworth Building are painted.
- 1977 The Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches agree to merge, forming the Uniting Church.
The Pirie Street Church is demolished by the City of Adelaide as part of the Pirie and Flinders Street redevelopment.

- 1978 A new constitution is enacted to govern the Board following the establishment of the Uniting Church. Epworth Building effectively transforms from a Methodist to Uniting Church-owned building.**
- 1979 Front and western elevations are repainted.
- 1980 Another tall building is erected on the eastern side of Epworth Building. Due to partial exposure of the eastern wall due to demolition of the previously adjoining building, the Board pay \$10,000 to have newly exposed wall rendered.
- 1986 Since its opening, Epworth Building has raised \$620,000 in revenue for the Methodist and Uniting Churches.
- 1988 The Brown Falconer Group prepare drawings for office refurbishments on the first floor of Epworth Building.
- 1990s The Board struggles with high vacancy rates throughout the 1990s, averaging around 10%.
- 1990 30 April: the former Methodist Book Depot, by then known as Epworth Books, ceases to trade.**
- 1993 Woodhead Australia prepare drawings for fire safety upgrading at Epworth Building.
October: Epworth Building acquires the land from the Uniting Church for \$1,150,000.
The Board hire Kennett Pty Ltd to undertake mandated fireproofing updates.
1994. Woodhead Firth Lee prepare drawings for external painting and repairs to Epworth Building.
- 2000 April: responsibility for acquiring and maintaining tenancies within Epworth Building is outsourced.**
The Uniting Church relocates its central offices and Synod from Epworth Building to another location in the city.
- 2001 1 November: The City of Adelaide lists Epworth Building as a Local Heritage Place.
- 2002 The Board enters discussions with the Synod to sell Epworth Building.**
- 2003 28 September: a farewell function for former Board members and staff is held.**
Epworth building is sold.
- 2004 12 February: the Board, incorporated as Epworth Building Inc., begins the process of winding up.
15 April: the Board gathers for its final meeting.

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SITE DETAILS

Epworth Building

PLACE NO.: 13389

33/33B Pirie Street, Adelaide

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:	Six-storey office building featuring Gothic-style design elements.
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:	1925 - 1927
REGISTER STATUS:	Identified: 20 March 1985 Provisionally entered: 12 September 1985 Rejected: 1 November 2001 Identified: 14 May 2020 Provisionally entered: 5 September 2024 Confirmed: 8 May 2025
LOCAL HERITAGE STATUS:	LHP, authorised 1 November 2001
CURRENT USE:	Office Building 1927 - present
PREVIOUS USE(S):	Methodist Church headquarters 1927 – 1977 Uniting Church headquarters 1977 - 2003
ARCHITECT:	George Klewitz Soward, 1924
BUILDER:	C. H. Martin Ltd., 1925 - 1927
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:	City of Adelaide
LOCATION:	Street No.: 33/33B Street Name: Pirie Street Town/Suburb: Adelaide Post Code: 5000
LAND DESCRIPTION:	Title CT 6132/476 F104979 A9 Reference: Hundred: Adelaide

PHOTOS

Epworth Building

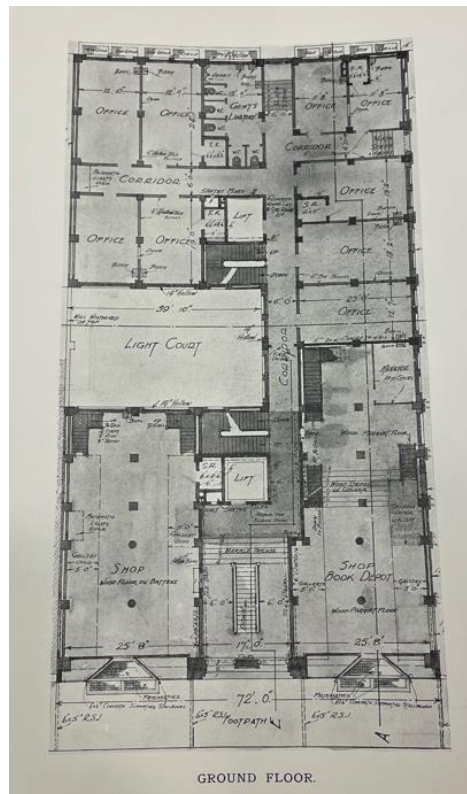
PLACE NO.: 13389

33/33B Pirie Street, Adelaide



Epworth Building (right of centre) next to the Pirie Street Methodist Church (bottom right), c.1927.

Source: SLSA B4361



Ground floor plan, c.1927.

Source: SLSA BRG 377, Box 8

Summary of State Heritage Place: 13389

Provisionally entered by the South Australian Heritage Council on 5 September 2024

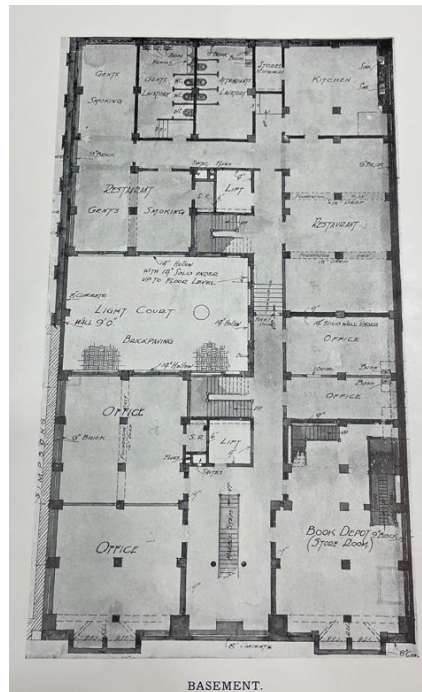
Confirmed by the South Australian Heritage Council on 8 May 2025

25 of 37

Epworth Building

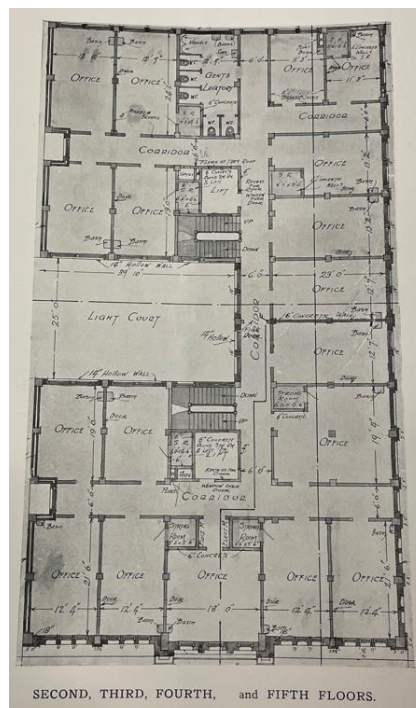
PLACE NO.: 13389

33/33B Pirie Street, Adelaide



Basement plan, c.1927.

Source: SLA BRG 377, Box 8



Upper floors, c.1927.

Source: SLA BRG 377, Box 8

Summary of State Heritage Place: 13389

26 of 37

Provisionally entered by the South Australian Heritage Council on 5 September 2024

Confirmed by the South Australian Heritage Council on 8 May 2025

Epworth Building

PLACE NO.: 13389

33/33B Pirie Street, Adelaide

*All subsequent photographs taken by DEW staff on 1 August 2024



Northern elevation of Epworth Building.



Shafted jamb entrance on front elevation.

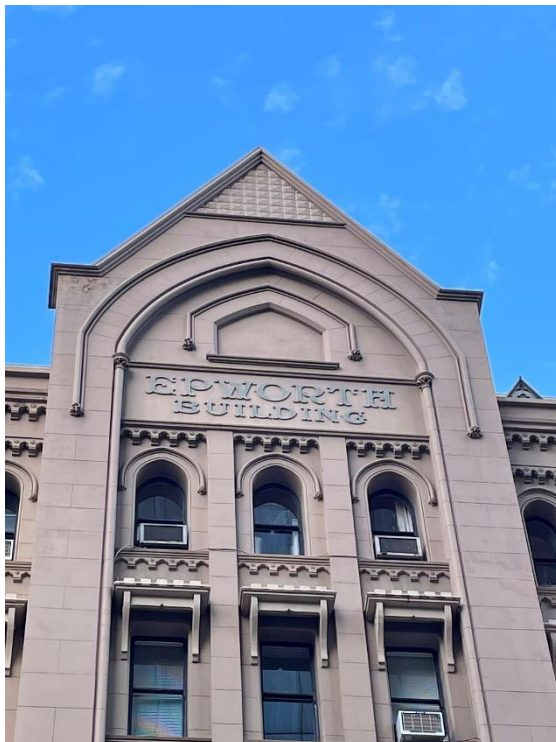
Epworth Building

PLACE NO.: 13389

33/33B Pirie Street, Adelaide



Signage, leadlight, and lancet windows in, and hood moulding around shafted jamb entrance.



Parapeted gable and original signage on front elevation.



View of eastern elevation.

Epworth Building

PLACE NO.: 13389

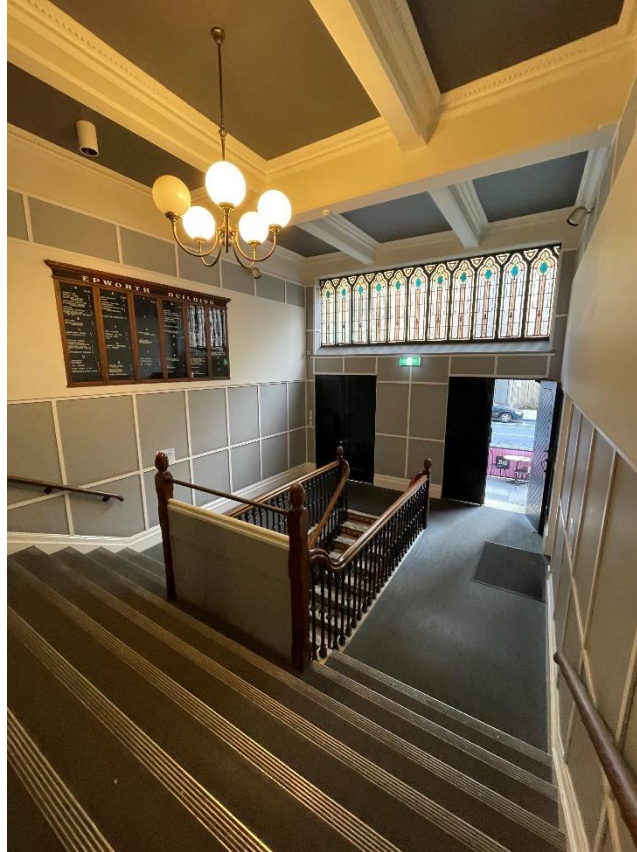
33/33B Pirie Street, Adelaide



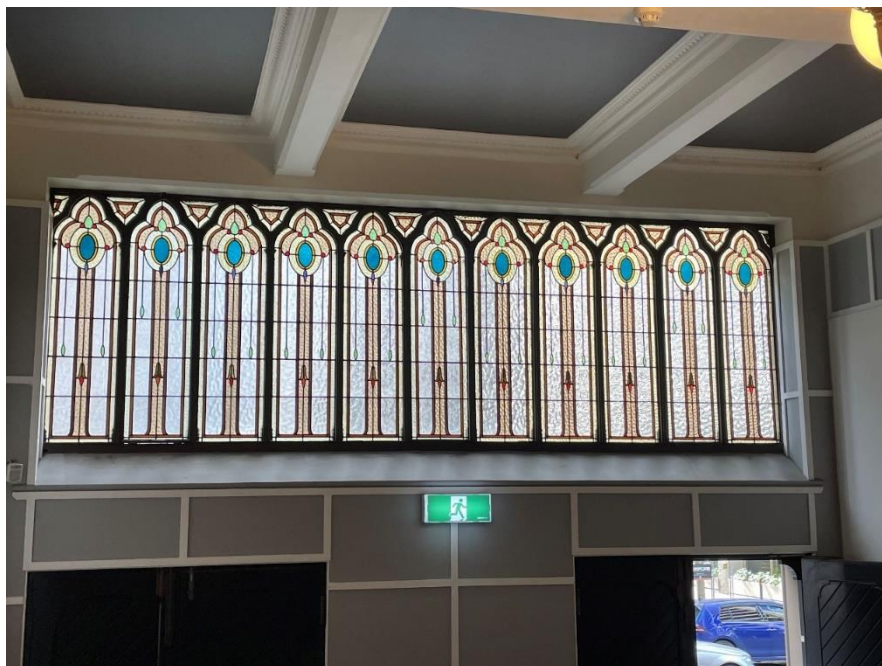
View of western elevation showing 1964 addition on the right.



Foyer showing stairway to the basement.



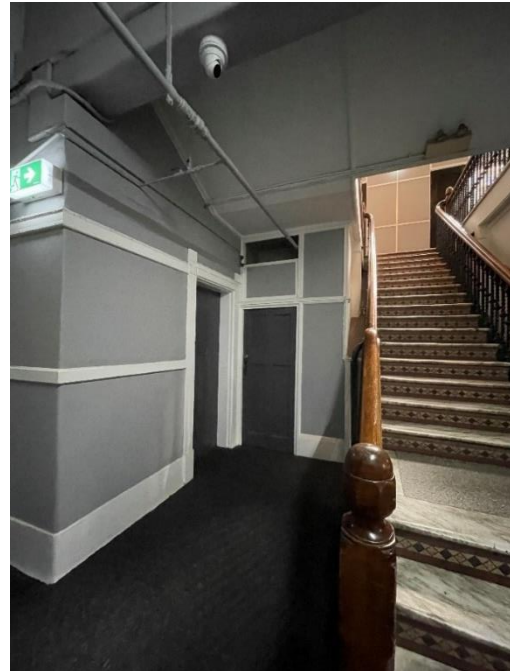
Foyer facing street entrance.



Leadlight window viewed from foyer.



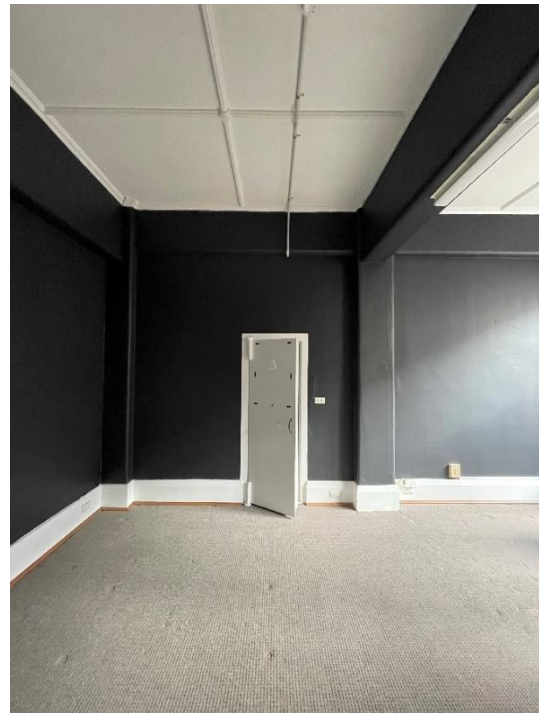
Basement staircase heading to foyer.



Indicative view of basement lobby.



Indicative office space.



Firesafe door in office.



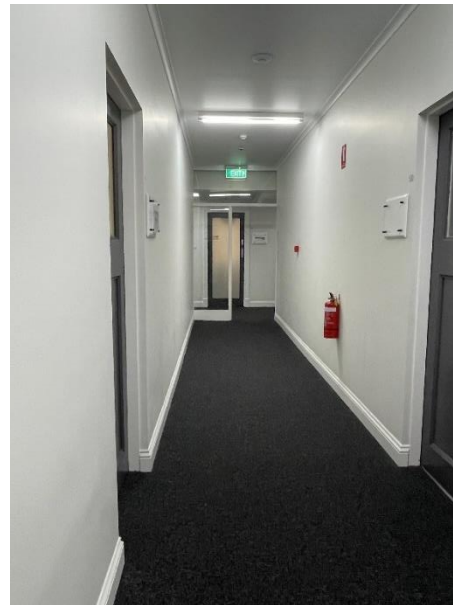
One of two original stairwells showing timber balustrading.



One of two original entrances to roof space.



Rippled glass in main corridor windows.



Typical corridor view.



Inside original main lightwell facing west.

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- ⁷ Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, p. 22.
- ⁸ Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, p. 15.
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- ¹⁹ Jackson, *Australian Architecture*, p.132 and p.173.
- ²⁰ Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.27 and p.29.
- ²¹ The next 'tall building', the Executor Trustee Building on Grenfell Street, was constructed in 1922. Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.28.
- ²² Michael Page, *Sculptors in Space: South Australian Architects 1836-1986* (Adelaide: Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 1986), pp. 133-134.
- ²³ Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', pp.28-31; *Building Act, 1923*, No. 1600 (SA).
- ²⁴ 'New Commercial Edifices in Adelaide: Some Striking Additions to City Architecture', *Australian Home and Builder* No. 8 (September 1924), p.24.
- ²⁵ See Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.29.
- ²⁶ See 'Adelaide Growing Up; Remarkable Progress in Metropolis', *Mail* (Adelaide), 15 May 1926, p.1 and 'Altering Adelaide's Skyline; Million Pounds' Worth of New Buildings; Modern Structures for a Progressive City', *News* (Adelaide), 10 June 1925, p.8. Skyscrapers and 'tall buildings' were generally conveyed by their advocates to be beacons of progress and modernity. See Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.25-26.
- ²⁷ Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.26.
- ²⁸ Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.26.

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- ²⁹ Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.26.
- ³⁰ Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.31.
- ³¹ Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', pp.31-32.
- ³² Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.32.
- ³³ Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.32.
- ³⁴ Except for Shell House (SHP 13103), constructed around 1931, there is a noticeable chronological gap between tall buildings erected during the 1920s and the 1930s/40s. The 'first wave' could thus be subdivided into two periods: one between 1922-1928 and the other between 1935 and 1943. The Great Depression almost certainly explains this division. Although the Wall Street Crash did not take place until October 1929 and the Great Depression swept much of the world thereafter, economic conditions had been declining in South Australia since 1927. Conditions only began to improve around 1934.
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- ³⁶ Collins, Ibels, Collins and Garnaut, 'Adelaide Rises from the Plain', p.29 and p.31.
- ³⁷ Jude Elton, 'Pirie Street Methodist Church', SA History Hub, History Trust of South Australia. <https://sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au/places/pirie-street-methodist-church> Accessed 30 July 2024.
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- ³⁹ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.11.
- ⁴⁰ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.11.
- ⁴¹ Gordon C. Brown, *An Historical Review of Epworth Building Inc., From 1923 to 1986*, December 1986, p.2.
- ⁴² 'Methodist Offices', *Recorder*, 3 March 1924, p.4.
- ⁴³ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.14-17.
- ⁴⁴ Pirie Street Building Board, 'Pirie Street Connexional Buildings', 1924 in Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.16-17.
- ⁴⁵ Pirie Street Building Board, 'Pirie Street Connexional Buildings', in Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.16; 'Methodism and the Name Epworth', *Register News*, 24 April 1929, p.8.
- ⁴⁶ Pirie Street Building Board, 'Pirie Street Connexional Buildings', p.16.
- ⁴⁷ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.17-18; Brown, *Historical Review*, pp.2-3.
- ⁴⁸ 'Methodist Offices', 3 March 1924, p.4.
- ⁴⁹ 'May 1925'. No.346: Methodist Conference in City of Adelaide, Register of Plans, 1st July 1924 to 31st December 1935, City of Adelaide Archives, Number 1170, Item 1, 14.
- ⁵⁰ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.22.
- ⁵¹ Letter from George Klewitz Soward to Reverend William Hutchinson Robinson, 17 December 1924. Business Records Group, State Library of South Australia, BRG 377, Box 8.
- ⁵² Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.18.
- ⁵³ See 'Progressive Methodists: Big Building for Pirie Street', *Daily Herald* (Adelaide), 3 March 1924, p.3; 'Methodist Venture: Large Building in Pirie Street', *Register*, 27 March 1924, p.5; 'Methodist Enterprise: Building Projects. New Headquarters', *News*, 2 June 1924, p.7; 'Methodism in Bricks and Mortar', *Observer*, 28 February 1925, p.59; 'Epworth Buildings', *Australian Christian Commonwealth* (Adelaide), 24 April 1925, p.9; and 'Building Enterprises', *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 4 December 1925, p.9.
- ⁵⁴ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.22.
- ⁵⁵ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.22.
- ⁵⁶ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.22.
- ⁵⁷ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.22.
- ⁵⁸ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.25.
- ⁵⁹ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.22-23; Brown, *Historical Review*, p.3.
- ⁶⁰ 'Epworth Building', *News*, 28 September 1925, p.7.
- ⁶¹ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.25.

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- ⁶² 'Epworth Building', *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 24 December 1926, p.3; Brown, *Historical Review*, p.3.
- ⁶³ Brown, *Historical Review*, p.3.
- ⁶⁴ 'Epworth Building', *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 2 July 1926, p.3.
- ⁶⁵ 'Epworth Building', 24 December 1926, p.3.
- ⁶⁶ 'Structure Designers. 5 – Mr. G. K. Soward. Epworth Building', *News*, 20 March 1929, p.12.
- ⁶⁷ 'Epworth Book Depot', *Advertiser*, 24 April 1929, p.10.
- Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.25; Brown, *Historical Review*, p.3.
- ⁶⁸ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.31.
- ⁶⁹ See 'Connexional Offices', *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 22 July 1927, p.3; 'Young People's Department', *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 24 September 1937, p.9; 'Methodist Women's and Girls' Welfare Department', *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 15 January 1937, p.15.
- ⁷⁰ 'Home and Inland Missions', *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 7 February 1936, p.12.
- ⁷¹ *Sands and McDougal* directories list the occupants of office buildings in Adelaide, including Epworth Building. The directories for 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970 and 1973 (the last available online) were sampled and together demonstrate that multiple Methodist offices and organisations operated from the building and relocated within it throughout the period examined.
- ⁷² Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.25; Brown, *Historical Review*, p.3.
- ⁷³ Lease agreement between Dorothy Christine Somerville and Epworth Building Board, 15 August 1927. State Library of South Australia, Business Record Group, BRG 377, Box 8.
- ⁷⁴ *Epworth Building, Pirie Street, Adelaide*. Promotional pamphlet prepared by Epworth Building Board, c.1926. State Library of South Australia, Business Record Group, BRG 377, Box 8.
- ⁷⁵ It is clear the Board had intended to convey the building's modern and progressive features from the outset. The *Australian Christian Commonwealth* commented in May 1925 that Epworth Building would have 'all modern conveniences for offices' and would 'be among the most up-to-date commercial chambers in the city'. 'Epworth Building', *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 1 May 1925, p.5.
- ⁷⁶ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.36-40; Brown, *Historical Review*, p.4.
- ⁷⁷ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.36-40; Brown, *Historical Review*, p.4.
- ⁷⁸ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.39.
- ⁷⁹ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.40-42.
- ⁸⁰ Brown, *Historical Review*, p.5.
- ⁸¹ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.42-46; Brown, *Historical Review*, p.5.
- ⁸² Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.44-45.
- ⁸³ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.42-46; Brown, *Historical Review*, pp.5-6.
- ⁸⁴ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.47-51; Brown, *Historical Review*, p.5.
- ⁸⁵ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.54-56; Brown, *Historical Review*, p.6.
- ⁸⁶ David Hilliard, 'Uniting Church' in *The Wakefield Companion* p. 562
- ⁸⁷ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.56.
- ⁸⁸ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.57; Certificate of Title Vol. 3752, Folio 40, Lease no. 4387470.
- ⁸⁹ Certificate of Title Vol. 3752, Folio 40, Application no. 6414889.
- ⁹⁰ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.60-61.
- ⁹¹ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.62.
- ⁹² Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp. 62.
- ⁹³ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.62.
- ⁹⁴ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.63.
- ⁹⁵ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.63.
- ⁹⁶ Everett, *Epworth Building*, pp.64-66.
- ⁹⁷ Everett, *Epworth Building*, p.68.
- ⁹⁸ Walter Marsh, 'Epworth Building: Gothic Icon gets a Colourful Revival', *Adelaide Review*, 21 November 2016. <https://www.adelaidereview.com.au/latest/news/2016/11/21/epworth-building-gothic-icon-gets-colourful-revival/> Accessed 30 July 2024; 'ACOLAB: nurturing growth Summary of State Heritage Place: 13389

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