

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT REPORT

NAME: Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church

PLACE: 26594

ADDRESS: Karna Country

106 Goodman Road, Elizabeth South

This heritage assessment considers that the place meets criterion (a). Refer to Summary of State Heritage Place for final approved wording, including criteria statements.



Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church

Source: DEW Files, 15 July 2024

ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Heritage Significance:

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church, opened in 1957, has a strong association with postwar migration and demonstrates the important role the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) played in building communities in its planned developments in metropolitan Adelaide and regional South Australia. Elizabeth was developed from 1955 by the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) as the state's second largest city, after Adelaide, to support the industrialisation of South Australia and more than half of Elizabeth's population were migrants from Europe. Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church was built at Elizabeth South, the first of ten neighbourhood units and was the third church to open. Following the SAHT's intention to establish a stable social unit, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church offered not only religious services and fellowship but was also a focal point for community-building activities.

Relevant South Australian Historical Themes

2. Peopling Places and Landscapes

2.4 Migrating to South Australia

4. Building Settlements, Towns and Cities

4.1 Shaping the suburbs (pre and post World War 2)

6. Developing Social and Cultural Life (supporting and building communities)

6.1 Supporting diverse religions and maintaining spiritual life

6.7 Continuing cultural traditions

6.8 Marking the phases of life

Comparability / Rarity / Representation:

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is associated with Presbyterianism, late twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture, postwar places of worship, and the establishment of Elizabeth, South Australia. Each is considered in turn.

Presbyterianism in South Australia

There are 9 State Heritage Places associated with Presbyterianism in South Australia. One was built after 1945, the Former Hospital, Church and Manse of former Ernabella Mission, Ernabella, 1949-1952 (SHP 18723). Additional examples include:

- Church – Scots, 1851-1858, 237 North Terrace, Adelaide (SHP 13370),
- Church and Grave Site - Presbyterian – Former, 1873, Law Road, Monarto (SHP 10982),
- Religious Building – St Andrews Uniting Church, 1871, 26 Elizabeth Street, Mount Gambier (SHP 10232),
- St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, 1874, 6 Church Street, Naracoorte (SHP 10252),
- Church - Presbyterian - St Andrew's, 1865-1938, Alfred Street, Strathalbyn (SHP 10918).

There are also 12 Local Heritage Places associated with Presbyterianism in South Australia. None of these places were built after 1945.

Late twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture in South Australia

Before 1945, churches were generally designed in decorative historicist styles derived from ancient or medieval precedents. However, after the Second World War, traditional decorative styles became less prevalent for several reasons. Notably, the loss of skilled trades and the time involved in traditional construction techniques led to increased costs, making traditional styles less economical.¹ Further, architects who followed the Modern movement in architecture tended to reject the decorative nature of historical styles, deeming it to be superficial, regressive and 'dishonest'.²

Apperly, Irving and Reynolds identify two styles associated with places of worship constructed in Australia since 1945: the post-war ecclesiastical style (c.1940-1960) and the late twentieth-century ecclesiastical style (c.1960-1990). The late-twentieth century ecclesiastical style is understood to continue and extend the trends exhibited by the post-war ecclesiastical style but demonstrating a tendency towards more unusual floor plans and roof shapes.

The late twentieth-century ecclesiastical style is characterised by the following key style indicators:

- radical plan shapes, responding to liturgical change,
- steel, reinforced concrete or glulam portal frames, especially when exposed inside the building as an architectural feature,
- distinctive roof shapes, designed to set churches apart from secular buildings and connote a religious function,
- coloured glass windows,
- windows with accentuated mullions,
- windows with vertically proportioned openings, frames or panes,
- clerestory or skylight windows,
- plain wall surfaces, of undecorated face brick or concrete blockwork,
- play of light from unseen or unexpected sources to create a special mood,
- unbroken straight lines emphasising verticality,
- inverted V shapes reminiscent of Gothic pointed arches,
- elements reminiscent of Gothic flèches or spires, pointing 'heavenward',
- architectural 'distinctiveness' achieved through experimentation in space and form,
- integration into community expressed through familiar, 'humble' materials such as brick and timber, with domestic associations,
- utilisation of newly available structural materials facilitating dramatic shapes.³

In *Postwar Places of Worship in South Australia 1945-1990*, Burns outlines a typology of nine common types associated with postwar churches in South Australia,⁴ based on typical roof shapes of such places. Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is associated with the 'gable' type.

The gable type is the most frequently occurring roof type associated with postwar churches in South Australia. The type is characterised by a gable roof with a pitch gentler than forty-five degrees, overhanging eaves, a level ridgeline, and a worship space located under the main gable, which is longer than it is wide.⁵



Immanuel Lutheran Church, North Adelaide, 1956 (left) and St Margaret Mary's Catholic Church, Croydon Park, 1968 (SHP 26521) (right) are both gable-roofed churches.

Source: Google Maps/DEW Files

Postwar places of worship

Fourteen post-1945 places of worship are State Heritage Places. Examples include:

- St Maximillian Kolbe Catholic Church, 1984, Agnes Street, Ottaway, criteria (f) and (g) (SHP 26473),
- Holy Cross Catholic Church, 1969, 159-165 Goodwood Road, Millswood, criteria (d), (e) and (g) (SHP 26498),
- St Alphonsus' Catholic Church, 87 George Street, Millicent, criteria (a), (d) and (e) (SHP 26544),
- Naracoorte Church of Christ, 1966, 64 Jenkins Terrace, Naracoorte, criteria (d) and (e) (SHP 26550),
- Cathedral of Angels Michael and Gabriel Greek Orthodox Church and Bell Tower, 1966, 282-288 Franklin Street, Adelaide, criterion (f) (SHP 13205),
- Shri Ganesh Temple, 1990s, 3A Dwyer Road, Oaklands Park, criterion (f) (SHP 26361).

The Australian Institute of Architects South Australian Chapter has identified four extant postwar places of worship as significant examples of twentieth century architecture in South Australia:⁶

- St David's Anglican Church, 492 Glynburn Road, Burnside, 1962 (SHP 26553),
- Nunyara Chapel, 5 Burnell Drive, Belair, 1963 (SHP 14785)
- Immanuel Lutheran College Chapel, 32 Morphett Road Novar Gardens, 1971 (subject of a future assessment),
- Jubilee Chapel, Centennial Park, 760 Goodwood Road, Pasadena, 1987.



Nunyara Chapel (SHP 14785)

Source: DEW Files

Elizabeth: establishment and early community formation

There are no State Heritage Places and six Local Heritage Places associated with the establishment of Elizabeth and early community formation within the new town:

- Former Elizabeth South Methodist Church Hall, 1956, 114 Harvey Road, Elizabeth Grove (subject of a separate assessment); the first community building completed in Elizabeth,
- GMH Office Building, c.1958, 180 Philip Highway, Elizabeth South; part of the GMH factory complex which played an important role in the establishment and development of Elizabeth, only the front metal grille is listed, not the façade,
- Former Anglican Mission, 1959, 91-93 Elizabeth Way, Elizabeth; community centre and one of the first such buildings established in Elizabeth,
- Grandstand, Elizabeth Oval, 1959, 10 Goodman Road, Elizabeth,
- Shedley Theatre, 1965, 7 Frobisher Road, Elizabeth; remnant of two linked civic theatres, demonstrates very low integrity,
- Clock Tower, 1967, 3 Windsor Square, Elizabeth; part of the former Elizabeth Council Chambers, associated with local government in Elizabeth.

Three notable unlisted places with the same associations are:

- Ridley Reserve clubroom complex, 1957, Ridley Road, Elizabeth; built for the Elizabeth Football Club, associated with the early provision of sport and recreational facilities in Elizabeth, appears highly intact,
- Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church, 1957, 6 Goodman Road, Elizabeth South (subject of this assessment); associated with early community formation and provision of early social services,
- Former John Bull Association Hall, 1965, 31 Homington Road, Elizabeth North; community hall associated with British migration to Elizabeth.



Former Anglican Mission, 1959 (LHP) (left) and Ridley Reserve clubroom complex (right), note recent awning structures, 1957

Source: Google Street View

Assessment against Criteria under Section 16 of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*. All Criteria have been assessed using the 2020 Guidelines.

(a) it demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should be closely associated with events, developments or cultural phases which have played a significant part in South Australian history. Ideally it should demonstrate those associations in its fabric.

Places will not normally be considered under this criterion if they are of a class of things that are commonplace, or frequently replicated across the State, places associated with events of interest only to a small number of people, places associated with developments of little significance, or places only reputed to have been the scene of an event which has left no trace or which lacks substantial evidence.

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is associated with the historic themes Peopling Places and Landscapes and its subtheme Migrating to South Australia; Building Settlements, Towns and Cities and its subtheme Shaping the suburbs (pre and post World War 2); and Developing Social and Cultural Life (supporting and building communities) and its subthemes, Supporting diverse religions and maintaining spiritual life, Continuing cultural traditions, and Marking the phases of life.

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church demonstrates the important role the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) played in building communities in its planned developments in metropolitan Adelaide and regional South Australia. The SAHT developed the Elizabeth new town from 1955 to support the industrialisation of the South Australian economy, which was facilitated in large part through the postwar settlement of migrants. The SAHT, as the de facto planner for metropolitan Adelaide and instrumental in the planned expansion of industrialising regional towns in South Australia, transposed the successful planning and community-building ideas implemented and lessons learned from Elizabeth across the State.

Community and the establishment of a 'stable social unit' was considered essential to the SAHT's plan, and churches were encouraged to establish facilities at Elizabeth before or soon after residents moved in. Built in 1957 and associated with Elizabeth South, the first of ten neighbourhood units built at Elizabeth, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church was the third church to open and is the second-oldest remaining. As well as serving as a place of worship and religious fellowship, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church was a focal point for community activities during Elizabeth's establishment phase, including community meetings, social gatherings, amateur theatre, organised sporting competitions, and kindergarten. Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church offered not only a place where new migrants could worship, but also one where new migrants, including those who were non-churchgoers, could meet new people, form friendships and contribute to building community.

It is recommended that the nominated place **fulfils** criterion (a).

(b) it has rare, uncommon or endangered qualities that are of cultural significance.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should demonstrate a way of life, social custom, industrial process or land use which is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost, or is of exceptional interest. This encompasses both places which were always rare, and places which have become scarce through subsequent loss or destruction.

Places will not normally be considered under this criterion if their rarity is merely local, or if they appear rare only because research has not been done elsewhere, or if their distinguishing characteristics have been degraded or compromised, or if they are at present common and simply believed to be in danger of becoming rare in the future.

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is associated with the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is one of numerous Presbyterian or former Presbyterian churches in South Australia. Worship within the Presbyterian Church is an ongoing practice in South Australia, and while some congregations have declined in recent decades, others have grown in strength. Consequently, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is not considered to demonstrate cultural qualities that are rare, uncommon or in danger of becoming lost.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (b).

(c) it may yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the State's history, including its natural history.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should provide, or demonstrate a likelihood of providing, information that will contribute significantly to our knowledge of the past. The information should be inherent in the fabric of the place. The place may be a standing structure, an archaeological deposit or a geological site.

Places will not normally be considered under this criterion simply because they are believed to contain archaeological or palaeontological deposits. There must be good reasons to suppose the site is of value for research, and that useful information will emerge. A place that will yield the same information as many other places, or information that could be obtained as readily from documentary sources, may not be eligible.

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church was built on a suburban allotment in Elizabeth South which was previously farmland. The land is not believed to contain any archaeological deposits beyond what would be considered commonplace in a rural context. Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is well documented by a variety of primary and secondary sources. There is no evidence (documentary, oral history or physical) to suggest that the place may yield information that will contribute meaningfully to an understanding of the State's history beyond what is readily available.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (c).

(d) it is an outstanding representative of a particular class of places of cultural significance.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should be capable of providing understanding of the category of places which it represents. It should be typical of a wider range of such places, and in a good state of integrity, that is, still faithfully presenting its historical message.

Places will not be considered simply because they are members of a class, they must be both notable examples and well-preserved. Places will be excluded if their characteristics do not clearly typify the class, or if they were very like many other places, or if their representative qualities had been degraded or lost. However, places will not be excluded from the Register merely because other similar places are included.

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is associated with the class of place known as postwar churches. Postwar population growth resulting from migration and the baby boom, suburban and regional development, and the evolving role of churches in community life led to the construction of 650 new churches between 1945 and 1990 in South Australia. Churches constructed during this time played a prominent role in South Australia's physical, cultural and spiritual development.

The principal attributes of the class of place postwar church comprise a range of physical elements including the setting and exterior form of the building; materials and the layout; and furnishing and decoration of the interior spaces. Outstanding representatives of the class of place will possess a range of both exterior and interior characteristics that define the class. Outstanding representatives of the class of place will also be either churches built in a single construction phase or in several stages according to a preconceived master plan, resulting in a cohesive architectural expression, and demonstrate a considered engagement with site and context.

Principal characteristics of the class include:

- distinctive roof forms employed to set the church apart from secular buildings,
- adoption of commonplace materials with domestic connotations employed to integrate the church into its community,
- adoption of newly-available materials, processes and technologies,
- expression in mid- or late twentieth-century ecclesiastical styles,
- provision of community facilities or amenities,
- a considered engagement with site and context,
- and the presence of bespoke artworks created as an integral part of the church's design.

While Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church demonstrates several of the principal characteristics of the class, it is not considered to demonstrate these characteristics of a higher quality, intactness or historical relevance than is typical for the class. It is not considered to contain physical characteristics of design, technology of materials that were copied in subsequent places of the class. It is also not considered to encapsulate a key evolutionary phase in the development of the class. As such, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is not considered to be an outstanding example of the class of place, postwar church.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (d).

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

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should show qualities of innovation or departure, beauty or formal design, or represent a new achievement of its times. Breakthroughs in technology or new developments in design would qualify, if the place clearly shows them. A high standard of design skill and originality is expected.

Places would not normally be considered under this criterion if their degree of achievement could not be demonstrated, or where their integrity was diminished so that the achievement, while documented, was no longer apparent in the place, or simply because they were the work of a designer who demonstrated innovation elsewhere.

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is a simple, utilitarian building which demonstrates some of the attributes of late twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture, such as coloured glass windows; plain wall surfaces of undecorated concrete blockwork; and integration into community expressed through familiar, 'humble' materials such as concrete blockwork and timber, with domestic associations.

While well-resolved and functional, when compared to places such as Naracoorte Church of Christ (SHP 26550) and St Alphonsus Catholic Church (SHP 26544) (see Comparability / Rarity / Representation), the Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is not considered to be an outstanding example of late twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture, nor is it considered to demonstrate the key attributes of late twentieth-

century ecclesiastical architecture in a way that exceeds what is typical in South Australia.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (e).

(f) it has strong cultural or spiritual association for the community or a group within it.

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place should be one which the community or a significant cultural group have held in high regard for an extended period. This must be much stronger than people's normal attachment to their surroundings. The association may in some instances be in folklore rather than in reality.

Places will not be considered if their associations are commonplace by nature, or of recent origin, or recognised by a small number of people, or not held very strongly, or held by a group not widely recognised, or cannot be demonstrated satisfactorily to others.

From 1957 until the present, the Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church has been a place of worship for the local Presbyterian community. While the Presbyterian Church as a whole may be considered a group that resonates broadly across the state, there is no evidence to suggest this group collectively has a strong cultural or spiritual connection with Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church, as it is only one of numerous Presbyterian churches in South Australia. Any subset of the larger group, with such a connection, would be unlikely to be considered to resonate broadly across the State as a group of significance to South Australia.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (f).

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

Criterion arguments have considered the *Guidelines for State Heritage Places*:

The place must have a close association with a person or group which played a significant part in past events, and that association should be demonstrated in the fabric of the place. The product of a creative person, or the workplace of a person whose contribution was in industry, would be more closely associated with the person's work than would his or her home. Most people are associated with many places in their lifetime, and it must be demonstrated why one place is more significant than others.

Places will not generally be considered under this criterion if they have only brief, incidental or distant association, or if they are associated with persons or groups of little significance, or if they are associated with an event which has left no trace, or if a similar association could be claimed for many places, or if the association cannot be demonstrated. Generally the home or the grave of a notable person will not be entered in the Register unless it has some distinctive attribute, or there is no other physical evidence of the person's life or career in existence.

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is associated with the Presbyterian Church in Australia. In 1973, the Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church congregation voted not to enter national church union with the Australian Methodist and Congregational Churches. It was only one of 14 South Australian Presbyterian Churches not to do so at that time. The Presbyterian Church was and remains strongest in the South East due to the large Scottish presence there and long-established links with the Victorian Presbyterian Church. While Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is one of several Presbyterian churches in South Australia there is no evidence to suggest that it has made a strong, notable or influential contribution to the history of the Presbyterian church in South Australia nor does it have associations with the Presbyterian church that would be considered to be beyond the ordinary. Therefore, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is not considered to meet criterion (g) at the State level.

It is recommended that the nominated place **does not fulfil** criterion (g).

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is a single-storey church complex comprising a chapel, hall wing and semi-detached toilet block, all with load-bearing concrete blockwork walls. The chapel has a low gable roof with eaves, while the hall has a flat roof, also with eaves, both clad with corrugated steel sheeting.

Additional exterior features include:

- rectangular chapel, with long axis perpendicular to the street,
- wide, footing-to-eave opening forming front entrance, with glazed, timber-framed, double doors and side lights and stud infill wall above, with vertical tongue-and-groove board cladding,
- flat-roofed open porch over main entrance, supported by four tubular steel posts, paired,
- raised concrete slab to porch,
- structural blockwork piers dividing chapel side walls into seven bays,
- window openings in bays 2-5 down both sides of chapel,
- timber frames with clear and amber rippled glass to chapel window openings,
- double-door opening in bay 6 on southern side,
- freestanding chain-mesh fence structure protecting windows on southern side,
- square footprint to hall, positioned at northern corner of chapel,
- timber-framed window and door unit to front wall of hall, forming entrance,
- fibro-asbestos-lined studwork section to hall side wall, with two windows comprising a pair of stacked, timber-framed awning windows,
- timber-framed clerestory windows to hall rear wall, with alternating fixed and awning-opening frames,
- gable-roofed toilet block located behind chapel, attached to hall wing by a blockwork wall,
- two bronze plaques adjacent to front entrance,
- bronze plaque adjacent to hall entrance.

Additional interior features include:

- pine floor to hall,
- meranti tongue-and-groove board-lined studwork narthex with flat mezzanine ceiling,
- perforated Masonite to studwork entrance wall lining above narthex,
- concrete blockwork internal walls (painted),
- exposed timber trusses in chapel, with vertical, steel tie rods,
- hardwood floor to chapel (karri or similar),
- pine platform at front of chapel forming sanctuary,
- stamped sheet-metal reredos behind sanctuary, displaying an arrayed nailhead pattern,
- pendant light fittings in chapel (not significant fabric),
- kitchen located behind chapel, with access doors at both ends (kitchen fitout not significant fabric),
- exposed welded-steel web truss supporting hall roof rafters.

Elements of Significance:

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

- Church building completed in 1957 and hall completed in 1958,
- Original exterior and interior materials and material finishes, including concrete blockwork walls, clear finished timber and coloured glass.

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

- Air conditioning,
- Pendant light fittings in chapel,
- Kitchen fitout,
- Solar panels,
- Trees, landscaping and front fence.

HISTORY

Postwar church-building in South Australia

Over 650 new places of worship were built in South Australia between 1945 and 1990. Most were churches built by Christian denominations, and most were built during an intensive church-building boom, which occurred between 1953 and c.1967. The end of building restrictions in January 1953 heralded the beginning of postwar church building. Migration and the baby boom led to suburban expansion and regional development and each denomination sought to establish footholds in newly subdivided areas by building churches.⁷ Simultaneously, the congregations of established churches swelled, leading to the replacement or augmentation of some smaller buildings with new churches.⁸

From the late 1960s, Church attendance in South Australia entered a long, steady decline,⁹ as dissatisfaction with traditional organised religion turned large numbers of

young people away from churches. Notably, the generation of children who attended Sunday School in the 1950s did not typically transition to adult churchgoing.¹⁰

Churches that were constructed after the building boom typically resulted from, and were funded by, the rationalisation and sale of existing church properties, sometimes due to dwindling congregations, but especially resulting from denominational unions leading to a surplus of church buildings.¹¹ In many Protestant denominations, these purpose-built late twentieth-century churches responded to a shift towards more informal worship styles, which traditional church buildings did not easily accommodate.

Presbyterianism in South Australia

Presbyterianism arose from the English-speaking Reformed Church based on the teachings of John Calvin. In 1560, Scottish minister John Knox led the reformation of the Scottish church, and, 'following a long struggle,' Presbyterianism emerged as the established state church in Scotland from 1690. Throughout South Australian history, Presbyterians have been 'a scattered minority ... beset by the problems of small congregations with insufficient means.' Between 1839 and 1851, three branches of Presbyterianism were established in South Australia, uniting in 1865 to form the Presbyterian Church in South Australia, which in turn became part of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in 1901.¹² Presbyterianism was strongest in the South East of South Australia, where local congregations formed part of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. South Australian Presbyterianism was also subsidised by the Victorian church from 1925 to 1967.¹³

Presbyterianism is closely associated with the creation of the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) and the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). From 1911, Presbyterian minister Rev John Flynn (b. 1880 – d. 1951) developed the existing Smith of Dunesk Mission at Beltana into the Australian Inland Mission.¹⁴ Later Flynn played a critical role in the creation of the AIM Aerial Medical Service, which became known as the RFDS in 1954.¹⁵

The South Australian Housing Trust

The state government created the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) in 1936. In part, its creation was tied to the industrialisation of South Australia, with the SAHT to provide mass housing as a means to reduce the cost of living and increase the competitiveness of South Australia to support the Playford government's industrialisation policy.¹⁶ The postwar drive to further enlarge the manufacturing sector was challenged by labour shortages. To overcome the problem, the Playford government successfully negotiated with the Commonwealth to receive a disproportionately larger share of migrants in the first two decades after the Second World War.¹⁷ Consequently, South Australia experienced unprecedented levels of migration which, when combined with the baby boom, exacerbated a housing shortage that had existed in South Australia since the Great Depression.

In response, the Playford Government imposed building controls after the war, designed to channel resources into housing and maximise the number of new housing units that could be built.¹⁸ In the 1940s, the SAHT developed mass housing for rent and purchase in suburban Adelaide, a process that led to strident criticism due to its perceived failure to provide requisite services and facilities. In response, the SAHT sought a large tract of undeveloped land which it could develop according to the latest planning principles.¹⁹

The Elizabeth new town, constructed on farmland to the north of Adelaide, would become the largest project undertaken by the SAHT and resulted in the construction of what became South Australia's second-largest city.²⁰ Its planning was based on British New Towns and North American neighbourhood unit planning ideas that aimed to create functioning communities from the beginning of the development. This challenged the usual pattern of subdivision in South Australia whereby community facilities and often basic community necessities, such as playgrounds, shops, schools and churches, would only emerge over time.²¹

The SAHT transposed its planning activities and lessons learnt at Elizabeth to other parts of the metropolitan area such as at Noarlunga and in regional South Australia, including towns such as Whyalla. In lieu of adequate planning legislation to control development, the SAHT became the State's 'de facto planning authority.'²² The SAHT would go on to influence other government agencies such as the South Australian Land Commission, which replaced the SAHT as a suburban land bank, and private developers as residents' expectations around the provision of amenities at the point of subdivision grew.

Elizabeth and the church establishment

Elizabeth was designed by a small team of in-house architects led by Harry P Smith, many with firsthand experience of the British New Town planning model, notably at Stevenage and Harlow. Elizabeth was divided into 8 neighbourhood units each with a population of around 5,000 people. Key to Elizabeth's planning was the provision of community facilities and services such as kindergartens, open spaces, schools, shops and churches.²³ Ten neighbourhood units were ultimately built:

- Elizabeth South, 1955
- Elizabeth North, 1956
- Elizabeth Grove, 1957
- Elizabeth City Centre, 1957
- Elizabeth East, 1958
- Elizabeth Vale, 1960
- Elizabeth Park, 1960
- Elizabeth Downs, 1961²⁴
- Elizabeth West, 1961 (not part of original plan, now part of Davoren Park)
- Elizabeth Field, 1963 (not part of original plan, now part of Davoren Park)²⁵

The SAHT 'deliberately fostered'²⁶ a sense of community at Elizabeth in an attempt to establish a 'stable social unit.'²⁷ Community formation was based around each of the

neighbourhood units. The SAHT was so successful at supporting community formation at this level that in later years it had to work to foster an Elizabeth-wide sense of community. Thereafter in the areas it developed across South Australia, the SAHT would focus on fostering community formation at a larger scale. For instance, at Noarlunga where it developed 6 neighbourhood units, the focus on community building was regional.

Community formation was especially important for recently-arrived migrants, most of whom did not have established social support networks. The SAHT selected individuals to move to Elizabeth, often as small business owners, who had past experience establishing sporting clubs and other community-based activities. Churches were also encouraged to establish facilities at Elizabeth as new residents arrived rather than waiting for these voluntary organisations to grow on their own.²⁸ Sites for churches were designed into the Elizabeth plan, which the SAHT then made available for the central church at cost price.²⁹ The SAHT also provided access to architectural services and building materials.

In the 1950s, the SAHT became involved in migration schemes, establishing an office in London to attract people from the United Kingdom to South Australia.³⁰ The SAHT also developed the Migrant House Purchase Scheme (MHPS) specifically to channel migrants into Elizabeth to populate the city as quickly as possible.³¹ As a result, the population of Elizabeth was comprised of nearly 50% British migrants. By 1971, more British migrants had settled in Elizabeth than in any other South Australian local government area.³² Other European migrant groups also moved to Elizabeth, but their numbers were much smaller. In 1961, Dutch people comprised the next largest migrant cohort in Elizabeth, followed by Germans, and Italians.³³ Most of the growth of Elizabeth occurred prior to 1961, with a downturn in migration markedly slowing growth from 1967.³⁴

The number of new churches required to serve the projected population of Elizabeth strained the financial resources of all denominations.³⁵ To avoid competition and duplication of effort, the Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians cooperated with the SAHT and each other through a Consultative Committee, to allocate sites for new churches across the six original Elizabeth neighbourhood units.³⁶ The Methodists were allocated Elizabeth Grove, Downs and West, the Presbyterians Elizabeth North and South, and the numerically small Congregationalists were allocated Elizabeth East.³⁷

The first churches built at Elizabeth were simple, inexpensive, multi-purpose halls with a sanctuary that could be screened off, allowing the church to be used for social activities during the week.³⁸ The churches provided pastoral care, a place to worship,³⁹ and social services to the broader community through various structured and unstructured activities, organisations and events. As occurred elsewhere in South Australia, Anglican and Protestant Sunday Schools boomed in Elizabeth, experiencing growth into the mid-1960s.

While many Christian denominations 'flourished' in Elizabeth,⁴⁰ the largest groups

measured by the 1966 census were the Anglicans, followed by the Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians and Lutherans. Notably, due to British migration, Elizabeth was home to substantially more Anglicans and Presbyterians than was typical elsewhere in South Australia, and notably fewer Methodists and Lutherans. Dutch migration also contributed to the Presbyterian population at Elizabeth.⁴¹

Membership of religious denominations in Elizabeth, 1966⁴²

	Number	% of population in Elizabeth	% of population in South Australia
Anglicans	12,540	38	26.2
Catholics	5,724	17.3	20.2
Methodists	4,300	13	20.8
Presbyterians	1,915	5.8	3.9
Lutherans	866	2.6	5.43

Numerous denominations with small congregations also established places of worship in Elizabeth, including the Baptists, Churches of Christ, Seventh-day Adventists, Salvation Army, Assemblies of God, Christadelphians, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁴³ By 1965, twenty different religious organisations owned more than forty sites across Elizabeth.⁴⁴ In October 1969, the Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Elizabeth formed a united parish, known as the Elizabeth United Parish.⁴⁵

Regardless of denomination, most Elizabeth churches were built on generously-sized allotments, allowing for planned future expansion. However, while dedicated single-use replacement churches were foreseen, in most cases development did not proceed beyond simple extensions to the original buildings.

The Elizabeth churches offered secular as well as spiritual service to their local communities. For example, 'colourful'⁴⁶ and 'unconventional'⁴⁷ Anglican priest Howell Witt facilitated various community activities, including dances and organised sport, and St Theodore's Anglican Church at Elizabeth South (now demolished), where Witt was based, served as 'kindergarten, youth club, old folks' home-from-home, welfare agency, bargain mart, scout hut, guide hall, theatre, gymnasium, assembly room [and] dancing academy.'⁴⁸

Notably, the Presbyterian Churches in Elizabeth played an important role in the creation of the Elizabeth Counselling Centre, sometimes referred to as the Elizabeth Counselling Service, a non-denominational organisation established by Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist clergy with assistance from the SAHT. The organisation provided both personal and financial counselling to the local community and was staffed by volunteers, most of whom were drawn from local churches.⁴⁹ Later, it became known as the Para Districts Counselling Service, offering professional counselling.⁵⁰

From the late 1960s, low attendance led to many of the Elizabeth churches closing.⁵¹ Some were taken over by other church groups. Meanwhile rationalisation of property ownership within and/or across denominations led to the construction of a few new churches, such as Holy Cross Anglican Church, opened in 1981.

Presbyterianism in Elizabeth and Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church

The first houses in Elizabeth were occupied on 17 November 1955 at Elizabeth South. In response the Gawler Presbyterian parish was extended to Elizabeth South in early 1956 and the first service held at the Elizabeth South Primary School on 11 March. This was the second major denominational service to be held in the new town, the Catholic service having begun fifteen minutes earlier in an adjoining room.⁵²

The Victorian Home Mission Committee, the Presbyterian Fellowship of Australia in South Australia (a church youth organisation) and Mrs G. Pitcher helped pay for both the purchase of a large block of land on Goodman Road and construction of the church. The land had previously been set aside for the construction of a Presbyterian Church by the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT).⁵³

Like the other early Elizabeth churches, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church was designed as a multi-purpose hall with no fixed seating, allowing it to be used for a variety of secular, community activities besides religious worship. The congregation acquired pews from the former Smithfield Presbyterian Church, which closed earlier that year.⁵⁴ The building featured a large, self-contained kitchen (since refitted), accessed from the worship space through doors on either side of the sanctuary.

Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church was opened on 25 August 1957 and named after the widow and 'devoted secretary'⁵⁵ of John Flynn, founder of the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) and the Royal Flying Doctor Service.⁵⁶ Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church was the third church to open in Elizabeth, after the Elizabeth South Methodist Church Hall (opened 3 November 1956, subject of a separate assessment) and a Lutheran Church, also at Elizabeth South (opened 1957, now demolished).⁵⁷

By the time Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church opened, the local population had grown to 6,000 and continued to rise.⁵⁸ A fenced netball court, paved with asphalt was later built on the allotment to the south of the church.



The newly-completed Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church, c.1957

Source: Playford's Past

In 1958, the church was extended with the addition of a hall, increasing the flexibility of the church building and allowing services and Sunday School to be held simultaneously. The hall was opened on 23 November 1958 by Rev J. Priestley, commissioner of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia.⁵⁹ On the same day, another Presbyterian church, St Stephens, was opened on Womma Road, Elizabeth North. Seven years later, demand from the large number of Presbyterian churchgoers settling in Elizabeth led to the construction of a third Presbyterian church, St Andrew's at Elizabeth Vale (1964, now Potters House Christian Church).⁶⁰

Besides pastoral care to members, the Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth provided social services to its local community. Members of the Jean Flynn and St Andrew's Presbyterian congregations played an important role in establishing the Elizabeth Counselling Service. Kindergartens were also established in the Jean Flynn and St Stephen's halls, fulfilling an important community need. This service operated into the mid-1980s. The Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth also organised social programs and events, including badminton and other sports, amateur theatre, social gatherings, and community meetings, as well as structured and unstructured religious youth groups.⁶¹

In October 1969, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church joined with the other Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist congregations in the City of Elizabeth to form the Elizabeth United Parish. However, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church was one of the 14 South Australian Presbyterian congregations which chose not to join the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977.⁶²

In recent decades the kitchen fitout was replaced. In c.2010, the netball court to the south of the church was subdivided and the resulting land sold as housing allotments. In 2024, the former Jean Flynn congregation is now known as Northern Suburbs Presbyterian Church.

Chronology

Year	Event
1560	Scottish minister John Knox leads the reformation of the Scottish church.
1690	The Presbyterian church becomes the established state church in Scotland.
1851	Three branches of Presbyterianism are active in South Australia.
1865	Three branches of Presbyterianism unite to form the Presbyterian Church in South Australia.
1894	Presbyterian minister Rev Robert Mitchell initiates the Smith of Dunesk Mission at Beltana.
1901	The Presbyterian Church in South Australia becomes part of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.
1911	Presbyterian minister Rev John Flynn begins developing the Smith of Dunesk Mission into the Australian Inland Mission.
1928	The AIM Aerial Medical Service is established.
1946	Australia signs a migration agreement with the United Kingdom, enabling British citizens to migrate for free or with assisted passage.
1947	Non-British European refugees begin arriving in Australia under the Commonwealth Mass Resettlement Scheme for Displaced Persons.
1950s	More than half of all South Australian children aged 5 to 14 attend a Protestant Sunday School.
1953	January, the end of post-Second World War building restrictions heralds the beginning of a postwar church-building boom in South Australia, driven by postwar migration and the baby boom. The Commonwealth Mass Resettlement Scheme for Displaced Persons concludes.
1954	The AIM Aerial Medical Service becomes the Royal Flying Doctor Service.
1955	The South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) begins developing the 'New Town' of Elizabeth on open farmland north of Adelaide. 16 November, Elizabeth is officially established. 17 November, the first houses in Elizabeth South are occupied.

- 1956 The Gawler Presbyterian Parish is extended to Elizabeth South.
11 March, the first Presbyterian service in Elizabeth is held at the Elizabeth South School.
On behalf of the Gawler Parish, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of South Australia Incorporated negotiates with the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) to acquire land on Goodman Road, Elizabeth South, for the purpose of building a church.
- 1957** 31 March, Smithfield Presbyterian Church closes.
25 August, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church hall is opened by Rev. J. Priestley, commissioner of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia.
- 1958 A netball court is paved and fenced on church land south of Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church.**
St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Womma Road, Elizabeth North, is opened by Priestley on the same day.
- 1959 American Baptist evangelist Dr. Billy Graham visits Adelaide.
- 1964 St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, at Elizabeth Vale is opened.
- 1965 Twenty different religious organisations own more than forty sites across Elizabeth.
- c.1967 The postwar church-building boom ends in South Australia.
A downturn in migration slows the development of Elizabeth.
- 1969 October, Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church joins with other Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist congregations in Elizabeth to form the Elizabeth United Parish.**
- 1973 September, the Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church congregation votes not to enter into a national union of the Australian Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches, one of 14 South Australian Presbyterian congregations to do so.**
- c.2010 The netball court to the south of Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church is subdivided and sold as housing allotments.**
- 2024 The former Jean Flynn congregation is now known as Northern Suburbs Presbyterian Church.**

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SITE RECORD

NAME: Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church **PLACE NO.:** 26594

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE: Single-storey concrete blockwork church

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1957

REGISTER STATUS: Nominated 18 August 2022

[\[Date of Provisional Entry\]](#)

CURRENT USE: Presbyterian place of worship

1957 – present

LOCAL GOVERNMENT City of Playford

AREA:

LOCATION: **Street No.:** 106

Street Name: Goodman Road

Town/Suburb: Elizabeth South

Post Code: 5112

LAND DESCRIPTION: **Title** CT 5663/32 A725 D6033

Reference:

Hundred: Munno Para

MAP REFERENCE 34°43'50.87"S 138°39'35.62"E

PHOTOS

NAME: Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church

PLACE NO.: 26594

All images in this section are from DEW Files and were taken on 15 July 2024, unless otherwise indicated.



Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church, showing chapel (left) and hall (right)



Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church, front elevation of chapel

PHOTOS

NAME: Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church

PLACE NO.: 26594



Interior of chapel, view towards sanctuary



Interior of chapel, view towards entry

PHOTOS

NAME: Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church

PLACE NO.: 26594



Narthex structure in chapel



View from chapel looking into narthex



Interior of hall viewed from entrance



Interior of hall looking towards entrance



Freestanding chain-mesh fence structure protecting windows on southern side



Dedication plaque adjacent to chapel entrance

SITE PLAN

NAME: Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church

PLACE NO.: 26594



Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church (CT 5663/32 A725 D6033 Hundred of Munno Para)*

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


- Church building completed in 1957 and hall completed in 1958,
- Original exterior and interior materials and material finishes, including concrete blockwork walls; clear finished timber; and coloured glass.

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

- Air conditioning,
- Pendant light fittings in chapel,
- Kitchen fitout,
- Solar panels,
- Trees, landscaping and front fence.

N ↑

LEGEND

 Parcel boundaries (Indicates extent of Listing)

 Outline of Elements of Significance for State Heritage Place

*Red outline is indicative of elements of significance, noting imperfect alignment of aerial imagery with parcel cadastre.

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- ⁶ RAI A Significant 20th Century Architecture Card Index (RAIA Collection S301/2 AM); https://web.archive.org/web/20160304002703if_/http://www.architecture.com.au/docs/default-source/act-notable-buildings/120-notable-buildings.pdf accessed 31 January 2021
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- ¹⁸ Chris Burns 'Postwar Places of Worship' p. 22
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- ²⁰ Susan Marsden, *Business, Charity and Sentiment* p. 266
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