

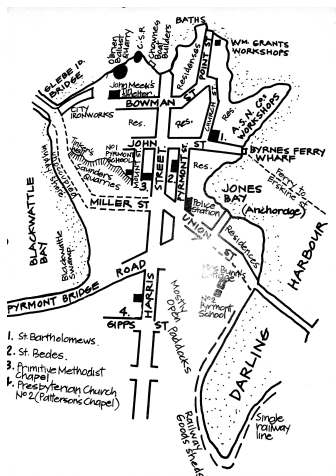
Presbyterian /Uniting Church History Pyrmont /Ultimo

The Presbyterians were the first to establish a church in Pyrmont in 1846 at 11 Mount Street Pyrmont, by Rev Dr John Dunmore Lang. In 1823 he arrived in Sydney, as the first Scottish Presbyterian minister.

He was said to be a Patriot, Republican, Statesman, Evangelical and Enigma. As a controversial figure in the church and parliament in the early colony, he thought too many poor Irish immigrants were coming into the country. Lang was a critic of the Government Bounty scheme deciding to do something about it. So he went back to Scotland and organized an immigration scheme for thousands of Scots to come and settle in Eastern Australia. As Pyrmont was known for its sandstone quarries and the Scots were highly regarded as stone masons Pyrmont was a natural place for many to settle. There is a statue of Rev Dr John Dunmore Lang in Wynyard Park, opposite Scotts Church (Presbyterian). In Margaret Street Sydney



Pyrmont was a busy industrial community at that time so the first church grew rapidly. With many families a school began in the rickety wooden cottage at the top of Mount Street. It used to shake in high winds, by 1860 the school was obtained by the education department. **In 1864** the church members built a wooden chapel on leased land in Harris Street, between Millar Street and Pyrmont Bridge Road.



The Pyrmont Presbyterian congregation had over 100 members. They built a wooden chapel but wanted to build a more substantial church. Meanwhile, John Harris, whose family estate owned all the land in Ultimo, had bequeathed in his will land in Ultimo to the Synod of the Church of Scotland for a church. By the 1860s this entity no longer existed as the Presbyterians had split into four sects. The congregation lived in Pyrmont, and this block in Quarry Street Ultimo was described as a barren hill where performers had entertained the carnival crowds. Ultimo seemed a long way off in those days.¹ The members wanted to sell the Ultimo land and use it to expand in Pyrmont. Due to the name change there were legal problems.

In 1874 the church administration attempted to get a private bill through parliament allowing sale of the land in Quarry Street to pay for their Harris Street property. The Harris family objected to this and the struggle went all the way to the level of a parliamentary select

¹ Lord Worsley - Shirley Fitzgerald p32

committee.² When the Harris family won, the Pymont church decided to pay out their option on the Harris Street lease for 500 pounds, they promptly sold it again for 1100 pounds. Then they took up ownership of the land bequeathed in Quarry Street Ultimo to build a church.

Construction began using local stone, maybe quarried from the quarry at the bottom of their street where Ultimo Public School now stands. Back in 1878 when a large crowd gathered on the grass for the laying of the first foundation stone, Reverend R S Patterson spoke with half an eye cocked in the direction of the *Glasgow Arms (now the Lord Wolseley Hotel)*, then being built on the opposite corner across the street. The church, he said would provide 'a fountain of living water in a parched land whither the weary and thirsty may repair, drink and be refreshed'. It would be a beacon to guide many a tempest-tossed barque over sunken rocks and quicksand's of false doctrine and naughty modes of moral conduct'.³

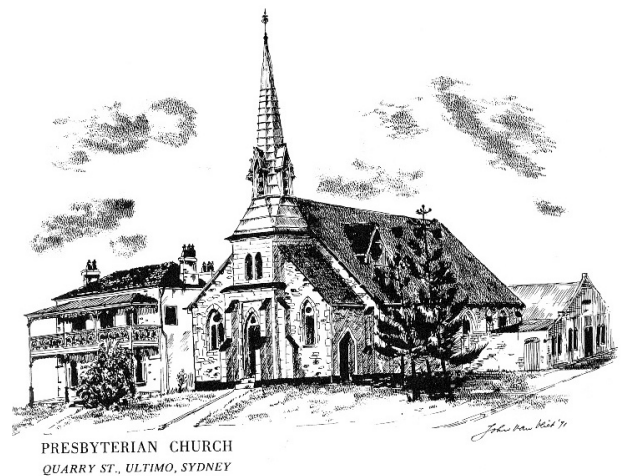
The new church that was named 'Pymont Presbyterians in Ultimo' was completed in 1883. The Manse followed soon after and the hall was completed in 1902.

A centenary celebration of the hall was held in 2002 and two plaques we placed on either side

of the hall door. Reverend R S Patterson remained at the church until his retirement in 1900. Over the next thirty six years five more ministers faithfully served in the church living in the manse next door. After the First World War and depression changes were taking place in the community. In 1936 The Ultimo church congregation couldn't support a minister of their own, industries moved out, rows of houses demolished, population decimated - so the Presbyterian home mission committee put them under the charge of St Luke's' Redfern.

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The manse became deaconess house for a period - Deaconess Chris Anderson who died in

2 Michael Matthews – Pymont & Ultimo A History p 36

3 Shirley Fitzgerald – The Lord Wolseley p33

4 Ferguson Memorial Library

5 Michael Matthews – Pymont & Ultimo A History p 37

her 90's recently, recalls what it was like when she came in 1940 as a voluntary worker. – In those days the inner city was know as a slum, ultimo was a workman's area, know for its wool stores, flour mills, print / engineering works and the small goods factory along Harris Street. Men worked on the wharves, the railway goods yard and at darling harbor. There was a pub on every corner, sometimes two. Then there were the smells – they came from Bushels tea and coffee warehouse where the TAB now is in Harris Street, the wool stores, smog from the power stations, and the alley cats, plus the streets were putrid.

The noises were oppressive, they came from the trams rattling down Harris St, the shunting at the ultimo tram depot, power station, darling harbor goods yards, with steam trains coming in 24 hours a day, and shipping at the wharves with their sirens.



At night time these sounds were magnified. The basic wages was 4 pounds 5 shillings people were very poor, many had large families of 10-12 children living in a 2 bed tiny cottage with no bathroom, just a dunny out the back and a bath in backyard, where the water was emptied after all the family had their weekly bath.

After the second world war over 12,000 Dutch immigrants arrived in Sydney each year. There was a need for a Presbyterian church with services in Dutch where they could share their experiences,. So beneficial stewardship of the Ultimo property was given to the Dutch community. Reverend C Ulidam was the minister for over twenty years.

Jack a Dutch church member recalls what it was like –There was Sunday school, social life, fete's people came from all over Sydney, the church was always seen as a period of integration for new immigrants from Holland.

Tjerkje Wiersma came to Australia on a special youth program in 1967, she had to stay there for at least one year or two years maximum. Recently she was on a holiday in Sydney recalling her memories of belonging to the Dutch Ultimo Church. I used to go there nearly every Sunday and liked meeting people



6 Michael Matthews – Pyrmont & Ultimo A History p74

and drinking coffee after the services. Apart from the church services there were also discussion groups once a month, held at the house of church members, where she went as well. February 1968 they went on a sailing boat trip, to the Botany Bay and from there they sailed to a little island where they had a barbecue picnic.

She says, “Very pleasant such invitations. We did this twice”. They would go out to Glenorie where some church members lived and have excursions to Blue Gum Forest in the Blue Mountains where they camped for the night. They had an evening for square dance, these are some of the pleasant things I did in Sydney, due to the Dutch church.

Jack said - Sometimes the minister lived in the manse but others wouldn't. It was run down with one outside toilet. There was no-one living in the community around there at that time. The Manse was so derelict. the congregation couldn't afford the repairs it and wanted to sell it but members of the Harris family objected. Once again there was a dispute with the Harris Family.

There is a heavy cross high above the door as you entre from the vestibule. Eugene Gotland-Godulski, a Polish sculptor living in Australia, made this. It was completed in 1974. The cross was made for the Dutch community of Sydney as an act of gratitude, because Dutch people in the Second World War saved the sculptor's life. The cross is composed of several small crosses to symbolize the suffering of so many people. All these crosses come together in the cross of Christ.



There was a bequest 1972 from the estate of the late George Harris for welfare work for the poor in the Ultimo/Pymont area. The University NSW School of social work did a survey for the best use of the fund. As a result the Harris Community Centre began in the manse next to the church, funded from the bequest and with State & Federal help. The University was involved for many years, Miss Anne MacCullum was the first social worker in the centre to service this decaying and congested inner city area.

After 99 years the Lease ran out for the Buckland estate in 1977. It was bought in 1894 for 8,000 pounds during the depression – This parcel of land in front of the church, comprised of Harris/ Fig / Bulwarra / Quarry Streets. The Church tried to buy some properties low cost housing to help the residents but was unsuccessful. The small houses sold for \$20,000, five years later they were selling for \$120,000. In 1998 they were worth 450,000 and today 2017

they sell for 1.400 million.

After 20 years of meetings, planning and negotiations the three denominations of Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational came into Union forming “The Uniting Church of Australia” in 1977. All the Methodist & Congregational churches came into union. The Presbyterian left it to each church to vote whether they would go – The Dutch Presbyterian Ultimo church voted unanimously to go into union becoming Ultimo Uniting Church.



The few Presbyterian churches you see around today voted not to go into union. The Harris Centre was passed on to Uniting Care when the Ultimo church went into union.⁷

During that period 1960 – 1997 the Dutch church had six ministers. By 1997 only a handful of members attended the Ultimo church and they lived in retirement village at Graystones.

Meanwhile a small group The Mustardseed, led by a resident, Robin Davies had started in Pyrmont in 1996 meeting in St Bebe’s Catholic Church, Pyrmont. Robin was studying theology at the United Theology College in Parramatta. When the Dutch church moved out of the Ultimo Church property the Sydney Presbytery gave beneficial stewardship over the Ultimo property to the Mustardseed group. So “Kafe Kirk” began at Ultimo once a month as a café style church (coffee cake and conversation) with regular service the other weeks. Why was it called Mustardseed ? There is a two parables told by Jesus:-

“ I tell you the truth if faith as small as a Mustard seed you can say to this mountain to move from here to there – nothing is impossible for you”. Matt 17:20 *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."*
Matt 13: 31-32

In 1997 the first Anzac Day service was held and a year later the Mustardseed church started Carols in Union Square. They continued until 2008 when due to construction works in Union Square and threat of a railway station being built there, the Carols with nativity were moved to Quarry Green outside the church. Some very exciting camels were added to the donkey and sheep.



Sandra Nori, State MP and Frank Sartor, Lord Mayor

⁷ Ferguson Memorial Library



Reverend Robin Davies

The Mustardseed became a Uniting Church Faith Community and Robin was commissioned as a Community Minister in 2002 the same year the Sydney Presbytery announced they were closing the church as the floor was unstable. A survey of the properties by Ultimo building committee was done to document the cost of refurbishing and repairs, it totaled \$500,000.

The Synod wouldn't commit to financing this so they decided the Sydney City Council would be the best people to refurbish the church maybe as an art gallery. Believing that the church should always remain as a church the members of the Mustardseed objected and said they'd raise funds to restore the church. The urgent works to be done were assessed at \$70,000 which was much more achievable. After donations and many fund raising activities by the members they raised the money with the help of a sizable Heritage grant from the federal government.

The church was rededicated in 2006, when the refurbishment was completed café church continued every week with the church set up like a café. Fresh coffee and homemade cake is at the door, people sit at tables, interact with one another. It has become a flourishing and vital community church.



1997 Before restoration



After restoration 2002

In 2009 Robin was ordained as a 'Uniting church minister of the word' and the church had grown so the members decided to become a Uniting Church Congregation. There have been many improvements to the church and hall. The hall was refurbished to provide wheelchair access and toilets were added. On community days sponsored by Lend Lease, a kitchenette was installed in the church and walls of storage



Other ministers that were instrumental in growing the Mustardseed church. Rev Ken Cornwell Past Moderator, associate member 1998 – 2009 Rev Peter Goodwin, musician and Presbytery Mission Officer, associate member 2004-2010 Rev Niall Reed. Past Moderator, church member 2009 - 2015 Rev Kent Crawford. CEO of Sydney Presbytery and church member. 2017 -

2015 after 19 years Rev Robin Davies retired, and a new minister was called Rev David Gore. As the Ultimo Manse was used by Uniting Care for the Harris Community Centre a new manse was bought opposite the church by Sydney Presbytery in Quarry Street Ultimo. After spending nineteen years as the Minister at Manly Uniting Church, he moved to Ultimo and lives with his wife Jo and two children. Rev Gore is also the Uniting Church Chaplin at the University of Technology and chairperson of The Tertiary Resource and Oversight Committee (TROC) at Sydney Presbytery.

Today Mustardseed Uniting Church Ultimo is a vibrant, community based center bringing many services and activities to the community. Each Sunday morning there is café church at 9.30, with coffee, homemade cake and conversation. Usually this is followed by more coffee or tea at the powerhouse or once a month BBQ and a friendly neighborhood cricket match in Quarry Green. Prayer Meeting Thursdays @ 7am, Bible Study Wednesday evening 7pm. Playtime Friday morning @ 10am.



Reverend David Gore

More recently the church together with the Harris Centre have opened a new op shop in the front of the Harris Centre's federation house. The op shop is open Tuesdays – Friday 11am – 4pm and Saturdays 11am – 3pm.

The MustardSeed is partnering with the Harris Centre to provide a hub for the local

community services and connections. They plan to revive some favorite activities like Second-hand Saturday and family fun days. The Uniting Harris Community Centre works with individuals, families, groups, workers, students and the community in Ultimo, Pyrmont and surrounding areas. They develop and implement relevant educational, social and recreation activities and projects that aim to create community harmony. They distribute 100 hampers at Christmas to needy families in the community and provide food and clothing to the homeless in the area. They also support the local elderly Chinese with programs and services.

Resources and references: Michael Mathews - Pyrmont & Ultimo A History Shirley Fitzgerald – Pyrmont & Ultimo under siege & Lord Wolseley Hotel
Ferguson Memorial Library of the Presbyterian Church

Contacts

Mustardseed Uniting Church Ultimo: www.mustardseed.unitingchurch.org.au/

Mustardseed Op Shop: www.facebook.com/ultimogem/

Harris Community Centre: uniting.org/our-services/services/uniting.../uniting-harris-community-centre

Author Rev Robin Davies, February 2017