

## The Big Move

‘Quick, there’s hail coming!’ Gordon’s call brought everyone in the house running with rugs and blankets to cover their precious Fairlane, but by the time the hail abated the once spotless duco was pitted like orange peel.

Of course, they were not the only ones to suffer. In half an hour the 18 March 1990 hailstorm damaged 55,000 cars, brought down numerous trees and power lines, unroofed houses and caused insurance companies a king-sized headache.

The Moyes’ personal loss was trouble enough, but much worse was the ever-present worry over mission finances and building the new premises.

‘It’s not all bad news’, Gordon told the September meeting of the WCM committee. ‘Rotary has sent us a cheque for \$175,000 to help the growing number of street-kids in the inner city.’

As a change from money worries, Gordon launched a new project with a widely publicised ‘pub with no beer’ opening in Erskineville. In an effort to remove residents further from the city, the mission renovated and de-licensed a hotel to provide a home for an initial ten people who formerly lived at Edward Eager Lodge. Newspapers had a field day reporting every aspect of the move and stressing the fact that the hotel-residence would be a ‘pub with no beer’.

‘I’m keeping my fingers crossed that the media won’t find out that while the renovations were in progress the hotel was still fully licensed’, Gordon smiled as he shared his secret with a friend. ‘I shudder to think of the headlines if that had become public. Can’t you just see them in big black letters: “Great temperance advocate holds hotel beer licence”?’ Fortunately for him the newshounds did not sniff out that information.

From April onwards plans for opening the new Wesley Central Mission occupied a lot of Dr Moyes’ time. Dozens of committees took charge of the various aspects of the planned opening. Martin Johnson and his crew made videos of the new centre for the benefit of staff and members.

The excitement of at last moving into the new premises almost obliterated the memory of the eleven-year-long design, demolish, relocate and rebuild era of makeshift and trauma, and everyone from Gordon to the humblest employee was on a spiritual high.

Preceded by a thirty-hour continuous vigil of prayer and thanksgiving, the June 1991 opening of the new centre was something that will go down in Wesleyan history.

Anyone who had any part in building the new forty-storey Wesley Centre was

justifiably proud of the splendid accomplishment. From architect to bricklayer, fundraiser to furbisher, the hundreds, perhaps thousands, who assisted the project felt relieved that it had reached a successful conclusion. And what a conclusion! Instead of the hundred million dollar estimate of a decade earlier, the total project had cost \$320 million, and it was being opened DEBT FREE.

The month-long festivities began with a triumphal march complete with brass bands, banners and all the trimmings so beloved by the boy from Box Hill. From the temporary premises at 600 George Street to their new home at 220 Pitt Street the procession stopped the normal traffic flow. Led by staff, church members, friends, supporters and the general public, the joyful Christians swept through the shining glass doors, thus initiating the first of a total of thirty-six separate ceremonies held during the celebrations.

Inside, subdued lights and soft music set an atmosphere of peace, a haven from the bustling city streets. Great masses of specially selected plants and floral arrangements decorated each floor. From the ground level cafe the aroma of coffee struggled to mask the odours of new paint and freshly laid carpet.

Refreshments of some sort accompanied most of the opening ceremonies: morning tea, afternoon tea, lunch, dinner, supper. Reverend Moyes and his committees all believed in the mellowing effects of good food and drink — non-alcoholic!

Each department of the mission hosted its own opening ceremony in its own way. There were children's choirs, youth choirs and mission choirs, police bands, military bands and rock bands. There were thanksgivings and concerts, pipe-organ recitals and reunions, public and private ceremonies and special teas. More than a hundred persons served on the various committees in charge of arrangements.

An estimated thirty-five thousand people — everyone who was anyone — attended at least one of the ceremonies, including the prime minister (Bob Hawke), the governor-general (Bill Hayden), the lord mayor of Sydney (Jeremy Bingham), all former moderators and superintendents of the mission, and other secular and church dignitaries too numerous to mention.

Former director Dr Frank Rayward's wife had passed away in March, and he was not far off his one-hundredth birthday, but he gallantly came along to recall the past and admire the present. Dr Alan Walker and his wife made time in their busy schedule to be present and offer congratulations. A *Sydney Morning Herald* photographer published a splendid photograph of the three doctor-directors who had devoted so much of their lives to the work of the Wesley Central Mission, now to be known simply as Wesley Mission.

It would have taken an act of God to keep Gordon away from any of these joyful functions. If he wasn't actually delivering the address or taking an active part in proceedings, he mingled with the crowd, beaming and benevolent, accepting congratulations with a gracious nod or a deprecating wave of his hand. Another of his dreams had come true.

Perhaps the most pleasing part of the whole project was revealed when the committee praised God that most of the furnishings and features of the new centre had been donated by church members and friends, and the whole complex — what Gordon proudly referred to as ‘the largest church construction in Australia during the twentieth century’ — was being dedicated without any unpaid accounts or loans, a marvellous achievement for a church that less than a decade earlier had been heavily in debt.

The opening celebrations continued for more than four weeks and even that was not the end. In July Gordon persuaded the lord mayor of Sydney to hold a civic reception to congratulate Wesley Mission on their new building and their many charities and civic-minded outreaches to the community.

The building that resulted from Gordon’s radical idea is situated on two acres of prime land in the heart of Sydney’s central business district opposite the Hilton International Hotel. From outside, the \$320 million, 686,000 square feet, plate-glass and chrome development does not look like a church; it more resembles a modern new office block.

Furthermore, Wesley Mission has an up-market three-storey shopping complex, ‘Piccadilly’, as part of its use of the land owned by the church, and this opens into David Jones store, one of Sydney’s premier emporiums.

Wesley Mission is open seven days a week, and thousands of people enter its doors. Its theatre-convention centre was a finalist in the New South Wales Best Tourism Convention Centre Competition in 1995, and in the Sydney CBD it is surpassed only by the Darling Harbour Convention Centre. The WM restaurant is one of only thirty ‘Gold Licensed Restaurants’ serving the public in Sydney. Its concierges and front of house staff are trained to the same standard as those trained in the Hilton International Hotel. Its soaring storeys of office space mark it as one of the city’s high-rise towers.

Well might the WCM Building Committee be proud of their achievement. Massive plate-glass doors shut out the noise of the bustling city streets and open into a spacious carpeted foyer which bespeaks peace. Quiet elegance is the keynote of the reception area, and a multitude of stairs and passageways lead to a honeycomb of functional features.

In the reception area the Wesley Bookshop offers the public a large range of Christian books, videos, tapes and CDs. Adjoining it, the Wesley Restaurant hosts hundreds of city business people each day for breakfast, lunch and dinner or for morning and afternoon tea. Wesley Mission catering facilities also provide for office functions, conferences, conventions and up-market packages for special meetings and celebrations.

Wesley Church seats five hundred and is used for Sunday worship and weekday services as needed. The church has a baptistery and a magnificent new pipe organ. The stained-glass windows which beautified the old Wesley Chapel now provide a touch of nostalgia in the new church.

Another public area known as the lyceum opens off the lounge. It is also used for worship, mostly by Chinese and Rotumans. Both church and lyceum provide facilities for multilingual translations.

The level below contains function and activity rooms, some large enough for several hundred people, others designed for smaller groups. The parish kitchen is on this level, and it is large enough to provide hundreds of hot meals at one sitting.

Also on this floor are the offices of the operational staff and the Pastoral Division. This is where people come for individual counselling or instruction. The Dunbar Library, of some fifteen thousand volumes, offers church members opportunity for reading and study.

A smaller chapel, known as the John Lees Chapel, named after a pioneer of the Methodist Church, is used for prayer and meditation or for small weddings. An impressive three-metre-long carving of the Last Supper is the focal point of this chapel.

Wesley theatre, with its thousand cushioned seats rising tier upon tier above a spacious stage, is a major attraction for internal use and external hiring. The theatre has a music podium, a unique Christie Theatre Organ built high into one wall, a wide screen for films, and an electronic computerised system for sound and lighting, all of which make this theatre suitable for any type of performing arts, conferences or displays. When Gordon preaches in the Wesley Theatre each Sunday night, a computer displays the Scripture passages on the screen above him.

In other areas a score of telephone lines cater for personal telephone counselling. State-of-the-art toilet facilities, and underground parking for 375 vehicles complete the picture.

Above the levels occupied by the church activities rises a massive office tower. One level houses Wesley Mission's City Effect Employment, a training centre for long-term unemployed. Then there is the School for Seniors, where classrooms each seat up to a hundred persons, with a total enrolment of 1,350, none of whom is under fifty years old.

Another level houses offices of about a hundred senior staff of the church. A computer network links them with the church's ministry in three hundred other buildings across the city. In these hospitals, orphanages, hostels, refuges and varied centres close to two thousand full-time paid staff minister on behalf of the congregation. Besides the regular staff there are more than 3,500 volunteers, all of whom have undertaken some type of training (1996 statistics).

The remaining levels are leased or rented to city businesses. It was these leases, as Gordon predicted, that paid the total construction costs.

However, Gordon was not one to be content with past achievements. He always felt conscious of the need for new methods and ideas of management. In October 1991 he undertook a senior management training program at Mount Eliza, Victoria. This two-week program was geared to senior company executives leading their corporations into the twenty-first century. Gordon gained respect among these high-profile business people for what he had already achieved at Wesley Mission, and he worked hard on MBA projects with the various professors.

By flying back and forth he managed to meet his Sunday preaching and radio commitments and also lead the 17th Annual Meeting of the parish. All members appeared happy and satisfied with the Wesley Mission's achievements and didn't object when their chairman flew off again to conclude his studies at Mount Eliza.

He had scarcely reached home after completing his course when he took part in what some derided as a 'publicity stunt'. The Blessing of the Fleet is an annual event in Sydney, but in September 1991 Gordon blessed a circus. At the invitation of Johnny Allen, the Events and Entertainments Manager of Darling Harbour, Gordon carried out the ceremony of Blessing the Grand Marquee of Circus Sonelli. The warm thanks of the D H Authority and the assurance that 'your kind words were most appreciated and let us hope that the Blessing leads on to a long and safe season of the circus at Darling Harbour', were conveyed to him by letter, and the newspapers carried photos of Rev Moyes in flowing robes high in the bigtop on the flying trapeze!

Not everyone considered that everything Gordon said or did was sacrosanct. Some even accused him of going to any lengths to get publicity. Near the end of November he received a long letter from the general secretary of the Uniting Church in Australia, kindly but firmly rebuking him for 'inaccuracies and unhelpful publicity' in a sermon Gordon had titled 'Corrupted Minds'. However, Gordon stood his ground on the issue of moral corruption among the clergy.

November passed in a mad whirl of activity, and at the beginning of December Gordon took stock of the situation. 'I haven't had a day off for a month.' He made the announcement to Beverley as if she had not already noticed the fact.

'And you won't be getting one for another month', she retorted. 'You've already agreed to speak at thirty-six Christmas parties, besides the one with the Sydney municipal employees.'

'Ah yes, the municipal employees', Gordon smiled. 'My old friends the garbage collectors. I meet with them twice a year.'

'You won't even get a holiday for Christmas Day', Beverley pointed out. 'You are eating at the annual Christmas Day luncheon at the Wesley Restaurant with all the lonely ones.'

'Yes', Gordon nodded. 'I think there will be about a hundred people there. But I'll be home with you and the family at night.'

'At least you won't be expected to make a speech at our own Christmas party', Beverley assured him. 'There'll be so much noise from the grandchildren that you wouldn't be heard if you did.'