

The Cyril Young Open Air Memorial Chapel



The Young family were committed and well respected YMCA members. In 1935, Cyril Young became the Senior Prefect in Melbourne YMCA and in this capacity was on the Boys Camp Committee. He subsequently continued on this Committee. In 1938, Cyril Young became Chairman of the Camp Buxton Committee. He and his younger brother Ivan were “always keen and enthusiastic workers at Buxton”. Both went to fight during World War 2. Cyril, a Captain in the Australian Army, 27 Brigade Ordnance Field Park AAOC. died as a prisoner of war in 1945. His brother Ivan joined the Royal Australian Air Force and became a Pilot Officer in 450 Squadron. He was shot down in June 1942 over Alamein.

In 1945, following the end of the Second World War, the Shoreham Camp Committee decided to raise money for a memorial to the members of the Camp who had served in the forces. The first memorial was to be an open air chapel, and called the Cyril Young Open Air Memorial Chapel. The General Secretary of the YMCA Mr Alex Moodie said in a press release in March 1951 when the chapel construction was almost completed ‘the chapel will be known as the Cyril Young Memorial Chapel because he was a person who typified the best type of YMCA member’.

In 1946-7, the first design for the Chapel was drawn up by an Architect Mr Walter Guerardin, a former Camper and property owner in Marine Parade. Money was to be raised by distributing ten shilling stamp books to all boys who would sell the three pence stamps therein. The aim was to raise 50 pounds. This was achieved by 1948 when all the books were called in. When Mr and Mrs Stan Young, the parents of Cyril and Ivan, were advised of the plan for the Chapel, they offered to bear the cost of the pulpit and asked that the pulpit be regarded as a special memorial to Flight Lieutenant Ivan Young.

In 1948, several YMCA leaders questioned the proposed design which was to be made of bricks. Their concerns were that the Chapel should look as natural as possible, and catch the shade, rather than be in full sun. It was also decided at this time that the rostrum and pulpit be made of natural rock, Moorooduc facings, and the rear of the chapel consist of a hedge or rockery rather than a wall.

A subcommittee was formed to manage the building process. YMCA ex-servicemen offered assistance to help with the construction, and senior boys were invited to make the work part of their community service. Work camps over the next two years were dedicated to the Chapel construction, and local expertise was called in to choose appropriate materials, and to provide expertise and skills to carry out construction works, particularly of the pulpit and surrounding platform. Towards the end of 1950 the Warden had started to make the concrete legs to hold the timber planks which would form the seating. The pulpit had been completed, and the area of the chapel had been levelled and spread with crushed rock. The hope was to finish the Chapel by Christmas 1950, but although it was used during the summer camps of 1950 the chapel was not completed until the seating of dressed jarrah had been finished and the plaques prepared by the YMCA Men's Club with wording finalised by Mr Stan Young.

The Memorial Chapel was opened on December 22nd 1951 with a service and camp open day for members, visitors and friends. It was reported as a 'most impressive ceremony and members attending the camp planted trees alongside the chapel.

Sunday services during camps were held in the chapel with the Camp Director or a visiting Church Minister officiating. There were YMCA books for hymns and songs. Special Easter services were conducted in the Chapel. It became a place for campers to spend time in quiet devotion and prayer.

In 1957, the Open Air Chapel required work to clear the weeds, and more trees were planted. A new entrance to the Chapel was considered. Seats were revarnished.

Mr Barry Furness, who had attended many camps as a youngster, and later worked as General Secretary of the YMCA, was employed as the resident Camp Director in the 1960's. At this time, the Shoreham camps were for the younger group of boys, the older age groups went to Manyung YMCA Camp in Mornington. The camps provided many and varied activities. He emphasises that the Chapel had an important place during the camps, with a Sunday service and during the camp week with regular, sometimes daily, times for meditation –Thought and Prayer Sessions -TAP Sessions. The YMCA philosophy of finding balance between of mind, body and spirit was emphasised during camps. The chapel was an important place for Christians, but also it was the place where some significant and life changing things were experienced by campers – where young people decided to make changes in their lives, to live a different way. It was an integral part of camp life.

In 1957, the Open Air Chapel was mentioned in the Camp Buxton report as work was required to clear the weeds, and more trees planted. A new entrance to the Chapel was also considered. Seats were revarnished.

The Buxton Camp was sold by the YMCA in the 1980's, and secular school camps were held at the Camp site for some years. The Chapel gradually fell into disrepair, with some maintenance being done from time to time by a neighbour and the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council.

In 2013, Christopher Akehurst wrote in the local newsletter Hill 'N' Ridge in an article about the Chapel, 'only the chapel on the fringes of the site has been left as it was...probably too small, too undistinguished, too far decayed to be taken into care as a heritage monument'.

However numerous local residents were aware of the Chapel, and valued it as a quiet and beautiful place.

Ann Renkin

July 2017