

ST JOHN'S CHURCH – 16 Camden Street, Feilding



Architect: Frederick de Jersey Clere

Construction date: 1882

Visible materials: Timber cladding & joinery, corrugated steel roofing

Architectural style: Victorian Free Gothic

Use/building type: Church

Date and Compiler: Ian Bowman, 2016

Heritage New Zealand listing: Category 1

Proposed category: A

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Introduction

Feilding's Church of St. John the Evangelist was erected in the latter half of 1881 and entered use in early 1882. It was then consecrated on 15th February 1882. It is the earliest surviving work of architect Frederick de Jersey Clere, who had arrived in New Zealand in December 1877, aged 21. He began his design work on the church in 1879, after the completion of the Feilding Town Hall, which was also his design. The church was proposed for registration by Feilding Borough Council in 1980 as part of a register of objects compiled by Philip Whyte.¹ The building was listed with the NZ Historic Places Trust (now Heritage NZ) on 28 June 1990, where it has a Category 1 status.² St. John's is one of seven churches in the Anglican Parish of Oroua, although it is now the only one that holds weekly services. Its grounds are also the home of the Parish's office.³

¹ Whyte, Philip, "Proposed Register of objects and places of historic interest of natural beauty" (Feilding Borough Council, 1980): Ref: MDC A/2012/2 : 1568, Archives Central, Feilding

² 'St. John the Evangelist Church', Heritage, NZ: <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/189>

³ Anglican Parish of the Oroua: <http://www.oroua.org.nz/>

Background



Figure 1 St. John's Church showing the attached Sunday School at right that was built in 1885 and burnt down in 1909. (Source: Feilding Library, ID: CHS:ce1: <http://feilding.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/17573>)

the newly-appointed Rev. Henry Bevis, of Palmerston North, and Rev. Towgood of Marton, had been left covering this very wide area.⁴ Rev. Bevis had arrived in about August 1875, and was to officiate at Palmerston North's new Anglican Church, which was then under construction. He was to hold one service every Sunday morning and evening alternately in Palmerston North, and the same in Feilding. He had held his first Sunday morning service at Palmerston North on 29 August 1875. Prior to this the Anglicans had been reliant on both the Wesleyans (Methodists) and Presbyterians, as *"otherwise we should have been entirely without any public recognition of the Sabbath."*⁵

The *Wanganui Herald* published a letter from its Feilding correspondent on 11 September 1875 (p. 2): *"Sept. 6: Yesterday, being Sunday, was passed by the Church of England congregation, in a most edifying-manner. The Rev. Mr Beavis (sic), the newly arrived clergyman, who resides in Palmerston, having come over, Divine Service was held in the school-house at 11 a.m. The number of souls present would be perhaps fifty, and what with the assistance of some ladies who led the singing, and the musical well attuned voices of the flock, one almost could fancy they were at an afternoon service in a Cathedral. The rendering of the 'Te Deum', would not have disgraced a trained choir. The sermon was really good orthodox teaching, the text being taken from St John's Gospel, twenty-first chapter and seventh verse. I fear, however, that the new pastor is imbued with 'High Church – principles; at least I judged so. I hope I am mistaken, and should I be so, no one will be more ready to offer my best apology. May the day be far distant when Puseyism shall be permitted in the Protestant Church of New Zealand."*

Bevis' service a fortnight later (19th September 1875) was perhaps more acceptable to the *Herald's* Feilding correspondent. It was again held in the Feilding Schoolhouse, and Mrs Halcombe had ridden over from Marton to play the harmonium to help make the *"church service acceptable and pleasing to the congregation."*⁶ However, after fifteen months, Rev. Bevis felt that it was time for him to move on, and with reluctance at the parting on both sides, he held his last service on 17 February 1877. Three months later he was reported as being an inmate of the Nelson General Hospital, and it would appear that he had mental health issues throughout the 1870s at least. Feilding people were also amazed to discover that he kept feed for his horse under the altar at the immigration barracks.⁷

⁴ *NZ Times*, 6 October 1875, p. 2

⁵ *Wanganui Herald*, 1 September 1875, p. 2

⁶ *Wanganui Herald*, 25 September 1875, p. 2

⁷ *Wanganui Herald*, 27 January 1877, p. 2; *Manawatu Times*, 17 February 1877, p. 2; *Evening Post*, 2 May 1877, p. 2; See also 'Bevis, Henry' in the *Blain Biographical Directory of Anglican clergy in the South Pacific ordained*



Figure 2 St. John's Church with its original shingle roof (Source: Feilding Library, ID: CHS:ce4: <http://feilding.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/17625>)

By 1877, regular church services were being held in Feilding's immigration barracks, with Arthur Follett Halcombe officiating as a lay reader, while Mrs Halcombe ran a Sunday School. Bishop Hadfield also visited from time to time. In 1877, the decision was made to build a parsonage, rather than a church, and that work was completed in time for the arrival of Feilding's first vicar, the Rev. Joshua Jones, in February 1879. The congregation then set about the process of building a church.

Building the Church

The site for the church had been the source of some disagreement. The first site had been in Manchester Street, however, after A.F. Halcombe offered to donate the present Camden Street site, the latter was accepted and the Manchester Street section was sold. The work of designing the church was then passed over to the parishioners' warden – the young architect, Frederick de Jersey Clere.⁸

Accordingly, the *Wanganui Herald* of 23 December 1879 (p. 2) provided some early information on the plans to build the church. Feilding's Town Hall was about to be officially opened, and that new building was being described in the article. The article concluded with:

"The architect is Mr F. de St. Clare (sic), who is a resident of Feilding, and on whom most of the carrying out of the work has devolved in consequence of the contractors having failed during the erection, but fortunately the progress payments had been carefully, and with judgment, paid, therefore funds were in hand for the completion. Mr F. de St Clare is a young man, and as far as we know the Town Hall of Feilding probably is his first job in this country, and we wish him success, and feel sure he will meet with it if he goes on as he has commenced.

"Plans are in course of preparation for a new building for the Church of England. They are being prepared by Mr F. de St. Clare, and if ever carried out will put Christ Church, Wanganui, quite in the shade. The memorial window will cost over £200, and the building is estimated to cost £2000."

Tenders were called to erect the church in June 1881.⁹ The contractor who won the tender was Mr W.D. Nicholas, at a cost of £564. The task of building the church then took four months.¹⁰ On 30 September 1881, while the church was being built, the land was transferred into the (semi-legible)

before 1931: http://anglicanhistory.org/nz/blain_directory/directory.pdf (Note that Bevis' father appears to have been the author of a book named *The Popery of Puseyism: Two Sermons* [published in 1845], and that might have been the basis of the reference to the word in the *Wanganui Herald*)

⁸ D.A. Davies & R.E. Clevely, *Pioneering to Prosperity 1874-1974: A Centennial History of the Oroua County and the Feilding Borough* (Feilding, 1981), p. 66

⁹ *Manawatu Times*, 22 June 1881, p. 3 (col. 3)

¹⁰ O'Brien, Rebecca, report dated 1st May 2003, in 'St. John the Evangelist Church', Heritage, NZ: <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/189>

names of the various individuals who doubtless then were the members of The Wellington Diocesan Board of Trustees, which body remains the owner.¹¹

The foundation block was in due course laid before a large number of people, in the partly built church on St. Andrews's Day, 30th November 1881, by the Bishop of Wellington, the Rev. Octavius Hadfield.¹²



Figure 3 This photo was taken after the 1909 fire that destroyed the Sunday School. It is from a postcard that is postdated 21 January 1915. (Photo: Val Burr, postcard collection)

(Wednesday, February 15th 1882), the Anglican Church of St. John the Evangelist, at Feilding, had been consecrated by the Bishop of Wellington, before some 200 people. The reporter commented that although the church then still appeared very much unfinished on the outside, due to the absence of boarding *“in the upper stage of the tower and the four pinnacles that crown that portion of the building, the interior, with the exception of oiling or varnishing, is very nearly completed. Mr Nicholas, the builder, has very faithfully put the ideas of the architect into execution. The outside presents a picturesque appearance, with a tower 60ft high which is above the Baptistery. At present the want of paint is very apparent, but the building is pleasing both inside and out. Mr Walter Watts acted as foreman of the works.”*¹⁷

In Frederick de Jersey Clere's 'Early Recollections of Feilding' (compiled in 1951), he wrote that: *“The original church had no vestry, the northern transept being partitioned off to serve this purpose. The south porch was large enough only to take the double doors and the present one was added some years later. When opened for services the church was unpainted. The first roof covering was of split totara shingles which were later covered with the present asbestos slates. There was no actual foundation stone laid, there being no stone available, but a large totara block was placed under the font in place of one. The bell was cast by E.W. Mills & Company's foundry...”*¹³

The 1951 history of the church commented that: *“It is of passing interest to note that the tower was to be surmounted by a spire, which idea, apparently because of the added cost, was abandoned.”*¹⁴ However, Rebecca O'Brien's 2003 report on the church for the NZ Historic Places Trust, wrote that the original contractor, Mr W.D. Nicolas, had made a mistake in his tender, and as a result, he had been unable to erect the spire.¹⁵

The church's history book also quotes an article that had been published in *The Rangitikei Advocate and Manawatu Argus*, of February 17th 1882.¹⁶ This article states that two days previously

The annual meeting of parishioners which was held in July 1882, covers some noteworthy points on the new church's developments during the year ending 30th June 1882:

¹¹ Certificate of Title, WN26/276. The 1881 names listed included the Rev. Octavius Hadfield and three others.

¹² *St. John's, Feilding 1876-1951* (St. John's Church, Feilding, 1951), p. 5

¹³ Frederick de Jersey Clere, 'Early Recollections of Feilding' (compiled in 1951) located in Historic Places Manawatu-Horowhenua Inc's File No: 200002

¹⁴ *St. John's, Feilding 1876-1951*, p. 5

¹⁵ O'Brien, Rebecca, report dated 1st May 2003, in 'St. John the Evangelist Church', Heritage, NZ:

<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/189>

¹⁶ Note that there is a severe lack of local newspapers for this period, as the *Manawatu Times*, *Manawatu Standard* and *Manawatu Herald* are all missing for 1882 and the *Feilding Star* started publication in June 1882.

¹⁷ *St. John's, Feilding 1876-1951*, p. 7

“...The income from offertory has considerably increased, and since the opening of, the new Church, the average has been nearly £2 each Sunday, whereas the average last year was £1 7s, and there is good reason to hope for still further improvement. Special calls made for church furniture and other purposes have also been liberally responded to. The one great feature of the year, in our local Church history, is the erection of a beautiful and commodious Church at a cost, all things included, of about £700; the funds which had been accumulating for this purpose for the previous two years were, however, far below the requirements of the case, and it was found necessary to incur a debt of £400 at 8 per cent per annum, for which two members of the Vestry have become responsible, their own interests being secured by the mortgage of a lease of 21 years on the parsonage, and Church property. Your Vestry venture to hope that their successors may see their way to a reduction of this debt, which now forms a drain of £32 per annum upon our local income.

“The Church urgently needs painting, and some subscriptions have been obtained for this purpose, but as the amounts are not yet paid in to the Church Wardens, no statement of this fund appears in the present balance sheet.

“A difference of opinion as to the disposal of the seats in the Church having arisen between the Vestry and certain parishioners, the matter was referred to the Bishop of the Diocese for solution, and was by him referred to the judgement of this meeting. The Vestry do not press their own view of the matter; so as to prejudice the free actions of the parishioners at this meeting, and they hope that the experience gained by four months use of the church, without alteration of seats, will prove to be an assistance to the parishioners in forming a more correct judgement than at the time of the opening of the Church.

“The general fund of the Diocese has hardly met with the support which was anticipated in this district, during the year, and your Vestry have to discount their otherwise congratulatory report by this statement, that in general the deficiency of Diocesan funds in this district is not faultless. But the local deficit arises chiefly from the absence of two large subscribers, who, it is believed, will yet meet their arrears. Meanwhile, exclusive of these absentees, the future prospect is very hopeful, as the number of small subscribers, upon which class the fund in this district must mainly depend, is continually increasing. The united districts are now assessed at £220 per annum, and of this the Halcombe portion has been fixed at £45...”

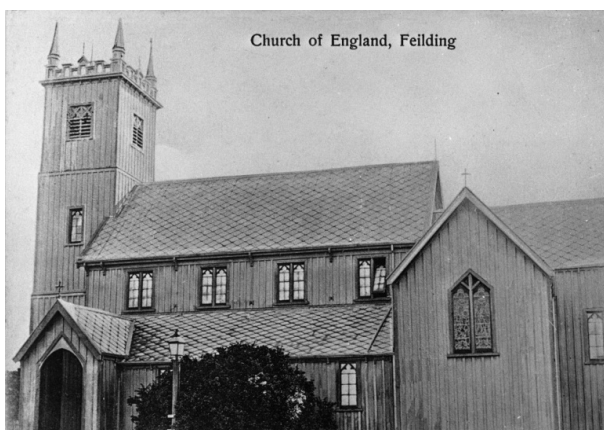


Figure 4 This photo is of a postcard that was posted in 1910. It shows the original entrance to the church that was altered in 1921. (Source: St. John's Church: Feilding Library, ID: CHS:ce10: <http://feilding.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/16529> ; also Manawatu Museum Postcards collection, as copied in [the Historic Places Manawatu-Horowhenua Inc: File No: 200002](#))

By this time it was already apparent that a room for the Sunday School would need to be built. In addition, lamps had been ordered from Birmingham, England, in order to replace the “*present unsightly and incongruous arrangements*” with lamps deemed more compatible with the “*beautiful interior of the Church.*” The church’s community were also bickering over seating in the church. Some of the church’s expenses over the previous year were also outlined, including: Nicholas (seats in Barracks) £4.6.6, Nicholas (building Church) £583.3.11, Clere (Architect) £28.1.0, Goods for Bazaar and Church furnishings £35.15.3 [Note: The bazaar was a fundraiser], Mills, Church bell £28.10.0, Freight for Church bell £0.9.0, Draft for

London (purchase of lamps) £20.7.3, Making paths £2.15.0.¹⁸

Evidently the church was not decorative enough for some people, as the *Feilding Star* on 20 September 1882 (p. 2) recorded that: “Those of the congregations of St. John’s Church, Feilding, who have felt the want of decoration about the east end of the otherwise well-appointed building, must have been pleased on Sunday last to notice the handsome reredos placed over the alter-table. The work, which we understand is a present from one of the congregation, consists of three cusped and moulded panels, the first and third having the letters Alpha and Omega placed on them, and the centre one containing a gothic cross, composed of Native black maire, and Scotch oak from Dunblane Abbey.¹⁹ The design, which is by Mr F. de J. Clere, was placed in the hands of Mr Jas. Anderson, of Denbigh Street, who has executed the work in the most satisfying manner.”

In Clere’s ‘Early Recollections of Feilding’, he wrote that James Anderson, whom he described as a “clever joiner”, had brought the oak from Dunblane Cathedral with him when he emigrated to New Zealand. The oak had previously been discarded during restoration work at the Scottish cathedral.

More Additions and Alterations

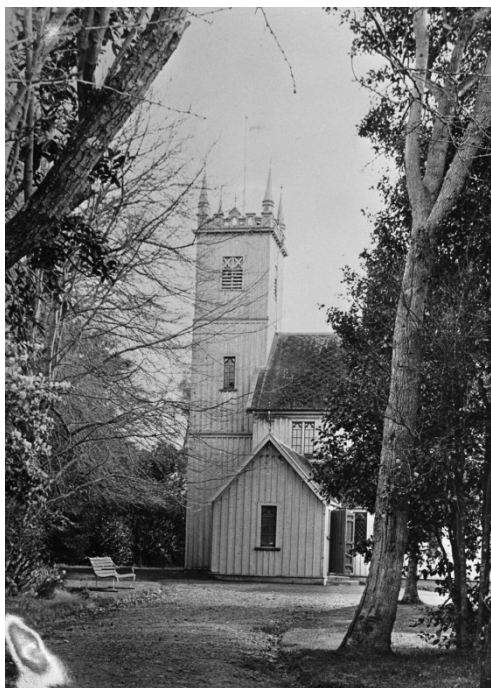


Figure 5 This photo shows the present entrance to the church that was installed in 1921. (Source: Feilding Library: ID: CHS:ce5:

<http://feilding.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/16192>

)

and the re-erection of the buildings, including felting and iron on the roof, which they estimated would cost £358. Whether the Church was removed or not it would cost at least £150 to put the building in

Tenders were called to build the new Sunday School building on the church grounds, in January 1885. The architects were ‘Atkins and Clere, Diocesan Architects’ – thus Frederick de Jersey Clere was again involved. It was duly opened on 6 May 1885, with some 170 people in attendance.²⁰ However, this building was destroyed by fire in 1909.²¹

The location of the church on the outer edge of the settlement was blamed for causing the sparse attendance that the church suffered for a number of years around the turn of the century. Several determined efforts were made to have the church moved to a more central location, but these were defeated.²²

On December 4th 1903, about 70 of the parishioners met in the Borough Council Chambers, to consider moving the church to a more central position. The Rev Innes Jones (the vicar of the time) stated that it had always been felt that the present site was not a convenient one and he considered this was an opportune time to move it. The various Diocesan authorities either had agreed to this or were likely to have no objection. Messrs C. Bray and W. D. Nicholas had provided an estimate “for the taking down

¹⁸ *Feilding Star*, 22 July 1882, p. 2

¹⁹ Note that Dunblane Cathedral’s restoration occurred from 1889, and so the timber that came from that building, preceded that restoration. Ref: Historic Environment Scotland:

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/dunblane-cathedral/history/>

²⁰ *Wanganui Herald*, 29 January 1885, p. 3 (Col. 1); *Feilding Star*, 7 May 1885, p. 2

²¹ *St. John’s, Feilding 1876-1951*, p. 7

²² *St. John’s, Feilding 1876-1951*, p. 13

order." A motion was duly put to those present: "That in the opinion of this meeting it is desirable that the Church and Sunday School be removed to a more central position." Mr W. D. Nicholas (who had built the church) considered that any person who wanted to go to Church would not think it too far to walk - and he would be sorry to see it moved. The eventual vote was 19 for the removal, and 29 against it. "A number did not vote."²³

In March 1904, the *Feilding Star* outlined the consequences of the decision not to shift the church: "A short time ago a meeting of parishioners was held for the purpose of considering the question of moving the church buildings from the present site to a more central position. A resolution affirming the desirableness of such a move was negatived by a large majority. The cost of the proposed undertaking could at that time have been provided for by the sale of certain sections which the Diocesan Pension Fund trustees were willing to hand over for that purpose. The projected removal and re-erection of the buildings necessarily included the renovating of the same. The cost of renovating the buildings will now have to be provided by the parishioners. The church requires a new roof, the top storey of the bell tower, which is in a state of decay, will have to be repaired, and the whole of the buildings want painting. It has been estimated that the restoration of the buildings will cost at least £150. The St. John's Sewing Guild has already raised £10 towards the roofing fund, and the members of the Guild are now making final arrangements to supplement their efforts by a sale of work in the Drill Hall next Friday, which it is to be hoped will be well patronised. Details- of the sale and entertainment appear in our advertising columns."²⁴

This work resulted in the church roof being converted from totara shingles to the asbestos slate tiles that in turn were replaced in the mid-1990s.



Figure 6 Looking west from Denbigh Street, towards St. John's Church (at right) in 1908. (Source: Feilding Library: ID: STS:ca1: <http://feilding.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/16396>)

The arrival of a new vicar, the Rev. F.H. Petrie, in 1921, saw a number of developments at the church. In his first issue of the 'Parish News', he asked for "a pipe organ, a Choir Vestry, a porch at the west end of St. John's Church, and a curate. And it was not long before some of these requests were met. The porch and the Choir Vestry were added before the year was out, and the pipe organ was installed and dedicated on February 9th, 1923." Rev. Petrie also began a lively movement toward a proposed new church in a more central location, and a £1,000 was raised or promised for the task. A

plan for the new church was also obtained at great expense, however, partly as a result of "national

²³ *Feilding Star*, 5 December 1903, p. 2

²⁴ *Feilding Star*, 23 March 1904, p. 2

and international affairs" (the Depression and WWII), the matter was allowed to go to sleep and it stayed asleep.²⁵

At the time the first booklet on the history of the church was written in 1932, the only alterations to the church since new were two porches added to the exterior, and some minor changes to the interior. These included moving the altar from the eastern wall to the sanctuary, and the removal of two inner rows of the chair stalls. Meanwhile, the church's architect, who is now one of its most significant features, is not named in the body of the text, but is simply described as "a young man, only lately from the Old Country, who had received his training in the offices of Mr Edmund Scott and Mr Robert Jewell Withers, both eminent for the high quality of their ecclesiastical work..."²⁶

During WWII, much of the necessary work on the church building needed to be shelved, but after the war, and with a new vicar (from 1946), the Rev. F.O. Ball, work began again. The church was placed on concrete foundations and its interior was cleaned and varnished. New carpet was laid, and modern conveniences were installed in the church grounds. The gardens were also well cared for.²⁷

The Church post-1951



Figure 7 An undated view of the interior of the church.

(Source: Feilding Library: ID: CHS:ce6:

<http://feilding.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/16203>)

Manawatu District Council's Building Permit file for the property contains reveals various developments at the site in recent decades. For example, the church hall had been added to the back of the church grounds in 1966-67 (the plans were dated November 1966).

One potentially devastating threat fortunately did not happen during these years. The church "survived the string of arsons that destroyed many old Feilding churches in the 1960s. Parishioners at one point slept in the church to keep a 24/7 watch until the arsonist was caught."²⁸

The church was partially repiled in 1989, with the exterior skirting boards also being replaced at that time.²⁹

In 1992, the Historic Places Trust allocated \$2,500 toward the cost of repairing the church's roof, the money being granted as a result the report of Trust conservator, Chris Cochrane. The church then had until June 1994 to carry out the repairs.³⁰

²⁵ *St. John's, Feilding 1876-1951*, p. 14-15

²⁶ Fitzpatrick, W.A., *St. John's Anglican Church: The First 50 Years* (Feilding, 1932). This typed extract from the booklet was obtained from the Historic Places Manawatu-Horowhenua Inc.'s File No: 200002

²⁷ *St. John's, Feilding 1876-1951*, p. 17

²⁸ *Manawatu Standard*, 10 February 2012, p. 9 'Old sketches bring 1970s Feilding to life'

²⁹ O'Brien, Rebecca, report dated 1st May 2003, in 'St. John the Evangelist Church', Heritage, NZ:

<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/189> ; also Manawatu District Council Building Permit file for '16 Camden Street'.

³⁰ *Feilding Herald*, 25 June 1992: located in Historic Places Manawatu-Horowhenua Inc's File No: 200002

By 1994, the tile roof, which had lasted almost nine decades, was failing badly. Services on rainy days were often accompanied by the sound of water dripping into strategically placed buckets, while the carpet beneath the buckets was also rotting. *“Sometimes water running down the overhead beam is interrupted by a light fitting and drips off a florescent tube, which is quite shocking to watch,”* so the church’s archdeacon stated in a *Feilding Herald* article describing the situation. The stale tiles had lifted, and this let the water in. *“This filters to the felt underlay, runs down the sarking and emerges some distance from the leak, often in a different place from the leak the day before.”* The galvanised iron sheathing on the bell tower was also giving problems.³¹

Attempts had been made to obtain a subsidy for the work from the Historic Places Trust, but in order to achieve this, the Trust required that the asbestos tiles be replaced with similar tiles. However, the church’s leadership wished to have the roof replaced with long-run colour steel. The work, which was expected to cost around \$25,000³², was done as long-run colour steel later in 1994.³³

A Building Consent application from 2005 contains the specifications for additions and alterations to the church. These had been prepared by Chapple Architects. The work involved removing most of the seating and replacing one or two of the upholstered seats. The pews were to be rearranged to allow different formats within the church. The application stated that they wanted to use timber from existing pews, but a number of them were suffering from extensive rot. A new porch was also to link to the parish hall, and the Sunday School building was to be altered.

The background recorded in relation to the 2005 work, stated that the interior of the church was basically unaltered since its construction. The exterior also remained much as it was when constructed, although the slate roof had been replaced by corrugated iron about ten years previously. A Sunday School room had been added by moving the structure from another site and connecting it to the church. A crèche had also been added ‘some time ago.’ The church exterior was repainted in 2021 with some building repairs. Joinery and rotten boards in particular were replaced at the same time as the repainting. The stained glass window joinery is scheduled to be repaired in 2022.

William Dennis Nicholas – the original Contractor

William Dennis Nicholas arrived in New Zealand in the early 1850s and settled in Wellington, before moving to Feilding in 1877. He was a builder and contractor, and one of his contracts was St. John’s Anglican Church. After giving up the building trade, he became supervisor for public works, where amongst the bridge constructions he supervised were the original Lower Gorge Bridge (the Ashhurst Bridge – which was washed away in 1895), the Aorangi Bridge, and the Apiti Bridge. For some years, Nicholas was a Colour-Sergeant in the Manchester Rifles, where he was a popular officer, who took a great interest in the work of the corps. He also spent time at Parihaka during one of the actions that occurred there. Nicholas was a strong supporter and worker at St. Johns Church. For some years he was the choirmaster, and he was a warden there for a lengthy period. He also represented the parish on the Wellington Provincial Synod. He died at Feilding on 25 June 1909, aged 70.³⁴

Walter Watts – the original Foreman

³¹ *Feilding Herald*, 13 January 1994, p. 3: located in Historic Places Manawatu-Horowhenua Inc’s File No: 200002

³² *Feilding Herald*, 13 January 1994, p. 3: located in Historic Places Manawatu-Horowhenua Inc’s File No: 200002

³³ O’Brien, Rebecca, report dated 1st May 2003, in ‘St. John the Evangelist Church’, Heritage, NZ: <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/189>

³⁴ *Feilding Star*, 26 January 1886, p. 2, 1 June 1886, p. 2 (re: Ashhurst Bridge), 25 June 1909, p. 3

Walter Watts was born in Wellington in 1844, and (after some years in Picton) he arrived in Feilding in 1878, where he established his building and contracting business. As well as being foreman on the contract to build this church, Walter Watts also undertook building contracts in his own right. His work included a house at Kiwitea designed by F. De J. Clere for Mr W.F. Jacob in 1883³⁵; a house in Denbigh Street for Mr Cobbe in 1892³⁶; and a private residence in Feilding for the Rev. Dawson.³⁷ In addition, the *Wanganui Herald* of 17 March 1906 (p. 7) stated that Watts had built all the Stevens & Gorton/Gorton & Son Ltd. saleyards for the previous 20 years. Stockyard construction work he is known to have undertaken included saleyards at Hunterville for Stevens & Gorton in 1890 that were described at the time as *“the best and most substantial of the kind on the coast, and probably in the colony.”*³⁸ He also built their Pahiatua stockyards in 1892³⁹, undertook extensive additions to the Feilding yards in 1894,⁴⁰ and then in 1906 built Gorton & Son’s Apiti saleyards - which were described as a ‘distinct credit to the builder’.⁴¹ In addition, Watts is known to have built the circular Palmerston North saleyards for Abraham & Williams prior to 1897, to the design of Palmerston North architect L.G. West.⁴² He also served as a Feilding Borough Councillor and other public roles. He died in late May 1928, aged 83.⁴³

The Celtic Cross War Memorial

The project that became St. John’s Church’s war memorial began in 1919 as a proposal to erect and dedicate an entrance gateway to the church. However, this plan was replaced by the Celtic Cross, which was unveiled by Major W.H. McLean on Sunday, February 20th 1920.⁴⁴ The *Manawatu Times* of 21st February 1921 (p. 5) described the unveiling under the headline: ‘Touching Ceremony at Feilding’: *“Facing the entrance to the Anglican Church, Feilding stands an emblem to the memory of members of that parish, including Halcombe and Stanway, who fell in the great war. The memorial, which is a striking piece of sculptural work, takes the form of a Celtic cross, and the whole structure is carved out in Melbourne bluestone. The cross, which is closely akin in design to that of the Cornish emblem, is almost an exact replica of a famous memorial which stands on the Island of Iona, off the West Coast of Scotland. The unveiling took place yesterday morning, before a very large gathering. Inscribed on the base are the words: ‘To the men of this parish who died for their country, 1914-1918. Their names liveth for evermore.’”* Thereafter followed the names of 21 men.”

Major William Henry McLean, M.C. subsequently unveiled the Halcombe War Memorial on 27th July 1921.⁴⁵ He had been a Feilding school teacher before his military service in WWI. He had sailed for the Middle East in 1916 as commander of the 10th Reinforcements, Wellington Infantry Battalion, B Company, having been promoted to major shortly before departure.⁴⁶

³⁵ *Feilding Star*, 31 January 1883, p. 2

³⁶ *Feilding Star*, 2 June 1892, p. 2

³⁷ *Feilding Star*, 3 November 1896, p. 2

³⁸ *Feilding Star*, 23 September 1890, p. 2

³⁹ *Feilding Star*, 5 April 1892, p. 2, 12 May 1892, p. 2

⁴⁰ *Feilding Star*, 29 January 1894, p. 2

⁴¹ *Wanganui Herald*, 17 March 1906, p. 7. Also *Feilding Star*, 12 January 1905, p. 3

⁴² *The Cyclopaedia of NZ*, Vol. 1 (Wellington, 1897), p. 1171

⁴³ Manawatu District Council: http://www.mdc.govt.nz/online_services/find_it/cemetery_search (Search ‘Walter Watts’); *The Cyclopaedia of NZ*, Vol. 1 (Wellington, 1897), p. 650; *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand [Taranaki, Hawkes Bay & Wellington Provincial Districts]* (Christchurch, 1908): <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc06Cycl-t1-body1-d3-d20-d10.html>

⁴⁴ *St. John’s, Feilding 1876-1951*, p. 13

⁴⁵ *Manawatu Times*, 28 July 1921, p. 4

⁴⁶ *Feilding Star*, 26 February 1916, p. 3; ‘Cenotaph’, Auckland War Memorial Museum: <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C64546>

A tablet inscribed with the names of those lost in WWII was in due course added to the memorial. This was unveiled by Mr A.G. Murch on Anzac Day 1947.⁴⁷

Comment

The hand-written report on the church dated March 1989 that is located in the Historic Places Manawatu-Horowhenua Inc. No: 20-0002 files, states that the original plans for this building were then held in the safe at the Vicarage Office, 13 Camden Street, Feilding. As of 2022, there are some original plans by Frederick de Jersey Clere stored in the church safe, and one of the original plans was framed in 2021 for display in the church. Some plans and documents were also taken to the Coach House archives for safe keeping.

Architect: Frederick de Jersey Clere⁴⁸

Frederick de Jersey Clere was born at Walsden, Lancashire, England, on 7 January 1856, the second son of Ellen Vaughan and her husband, Henry Clere, an Anglican clergyman. Frederick was educated at St John's School, Clapton, and then at the age of 16 articled to the architect Edmund Evan Scott of Brighton. From 1875 to 1877 he was chief assistant in the London office of Robert Jewell Withers.

Clere emigrated with his family to New Zealand in 1877, arriving at Wellington on the Hurunui on 12 December. After working briefly in Wellington, he practised in Feilding from 1879 to 1883 and in Wanganui from 1883 to 1886. He married Mary Goodbehere at Feilding on 18 April 1883; they were to have three daughters and two sons. In 1886 Clere and his family moved to Wellington, where he was a partner in a succession of architectural firms.

The scope of Frederick Clere's work illustrates his versatility. From 1883 to 1888 he was architect to the Wanganui Education Board. He designed large country homes, such as Overton near Marton, and many houses in Wellington. His surviving commercial buildings include Wellington's AMP building and two harbour board buildings on Queen's Wharf, Wellington. Clere's early houses and his commercial and public buildings were generally conservative in design. His building techniques, however, were more innovative, particularly in their attempt to minimise earthquake and fire damage.

Clere is chiefly known, however, for the more than 100 churches he designed as architect to the Wellington Anglican diocese from 1883. Until 1904 these were of timber and were mostly in country districts; they are exemplified by St John's in Feilding. For urban churches on a larger scale Clere made increasing use of brick, as at All Saints' in Palmerston North, and ferro-concrete, notably for St Mary's in Karori, St Matthew's in Hastings, St Mary of the Angels in Wellington, and St Andrew's in New Plymouth. Almost without exception Clere's churches were an economical and unostentatious adaptation of the contemporary Gothic Revival style, expressed particularly by the pointed arch and a variety of roof-truss constructions and forms of tower or belfry. About 85 of these churches still stand.

Clere was elected an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1882 and a fellow in 1886; he was honorary New Zealand secretary for many years. He resigned from the institute only in 1948 at the age of 92. Clere also served as president of the Wellington District Branch of the Association of

⁴⁷ *St. John's, Feilding 1876-1951* (St. John's Church, Feilding, 1951), p. 17; Also, *The Feilding Express*, 28 April 1947, in *The Feilding Express Scrapbook 5: 1 August 1946-30 July 1948*, Feilding Library:

<http://feilding.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/18527#idx21668>

⁴⁸ Maclean, Susan. 'Clere, Frederick de Jersey 1856 - 1952'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 April 2006 URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

Architects, and was a foundation member, treasurer and later a fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Architects. He published a number of articles, on art and architecture.

Apart from his involvement in his profession, Clere served on the Wellington City Council, the Lower Hutt Borough Council, the Anglican diocesan and general synods, and the licensing bench. He was a life member of the Waiwhetu Lodge of Freemasons and of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, with whom he exhibited watercolours. Clere was awarded the King George V Silver Jubilee Medal in 1935.

Mary Clere died at Lower Hutt on 7 April 1904. On 17 October 1905, at St Paul's Cathedral Church, Wellington, Frederick Clere married Elizabeth (Bessie) Johnston Ingles; they were to have two daughters. He died at Wellington on 13 August 1952, at the age of 96; Bessie Clere had died in 1920. A devoted family man of deep personal integrity, he cared greatly for the reputation of his profession. In both his personal and professional lives he rejected affectation and excess. As an architect he is highly regarded for his success in marrying European styles to New Zealand conditions.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

The church follows the cruciform plan with each space clearly expressed on the exterior of which the High Victorian followers of Gothic would have approved. This comprises a nave, with clerestory, aisles, chancel, transepts, baptistery under the tower, and entrance porch. The vestry is located on the north side of the building, while the tower is centrally located at the west end, and the porch at the south.

The exterior cladding of the church is timber board and batten with timber string courses around the tower and a high base of horizontal wide boards. The roofing is corrugated steel and windows are trefoil within square headed openings.

The interior of the church has exposed timber framing and cladding with butt purlin hammer beam collar truss roof frame to the nave. The chancel arch is a butt purlin deep arch braced collar truss. The ceiling to the chancel is barrel vaulted with both ceilings clad in exposed timber match lining. Cross bracing to the tower is exposed as is the framing and match lining to the aisles. The four bay arched opening to the aisles also follows the High Victorian precedent.

The Victorian period saw the church builders of the Established church promote Gothic architecture with an almost spiritual zeal. Significant in the period was the rise of the Romantic movement where a quest for a past golden-age was entwined with English nationalism and an academic study of Medieval architecture. The result was a promotion of English Gothic architectural styles, especially for churches, which was initiated by Augustus Northmore Welby Pugin. Pugin considered Early English appropriate for remote and 'primitive' areas but the Decorated or Middle Pointed was the preferred style. The expression of the means of construction, materials and structure were paramount to the Victorian Gothic architect.

The most prolific architect in the Victorian period was George Gilbert Scott, while academically John Ruskin had taken over from Pugin in influence. He advocated size and simplicity of outline, simple openings with strong contrast between light and shade, and a preference for smooth walls without buttresses. Edmund Street, Butterfield and Burges were High Victorian architects who elaborated on

Ruskin's ideas creating a 'Free Gothic' churches which were bold, soaring simple buildings externally but were highly decorated and complex on the exterior.

The Arts and Crafts movement, initiated by John Ruskin, was brought to fruition by William Morris in the 1860's. A major tenet of the Arts and Crafts movement was the use of local materials and building traditions, expressed honestly and to be seen to be hand made. The design was to be suited to the particular site rather than using a standardized plan for all similar buildings. Arts and Crafts architecture, therefore, developed into a simplified, non-copyist architecture, but which, at the same time, took into account tradition. The Arts and Crafts response to church architecture was different to that in America where the use of academically correct architecture was promoted.

In general plan form, the church follows the Early English or Decorated cruciform with central western tower, nave with clerestory, chancel and vestry to the north. The bold tall forms follow the High Victorians with simple openings and plain walls, while the tower has a 'Perpendicular' parapet and pinnacles. The interior hammer beams roof was developed at the end of the fourteenth century which makes it between the Decorated and the Perpendicular Gothic periods. The rounded trifoliated windows are from the Early English period while the sharp pointed arched windows are from the Norman period.

The tall gable forms of the chancel and nave have an Anglo-Saxon muscularity, while the tall transepts of almost equal prominence to the chancel is unusual in such a small church and is reminiscent of cathedral proportions in miniature scale.

The freedom of design, which draws on the various periods and forms of Gothic architecture defines the Free Gothic style, of which this is a good example. The external timber cladding and celebration of the use of timber on the interior fully comply with the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement.

As was described in the early literature, the church is located in a large park like setting, which has the church as its focus.

No plans of the building have been sighted.

REVIEW OF REPORT

Based on a review of the report and viewing of Council files, the assessment undertaken in 2016 for this building is still applicable as at April 2021.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

The church has **low** to **high local** significance for **architectural, representivity, rarity, technological authenticity, group, associative, events, public esteem, pattern** and **educational** heritage values.

St John's has **high architectural** and **technological** values in its Free Gothic style, use of materials and interior design. Clere has freely taken from all English Gothic styles, creating a successful balance of form, detail, and richness of internal space while following the Arts and Crafts philosophy. The church is a unique and seminal contribution to timber church architecture in New Zealand and therefore has **high rarity** and **low representivity** values.

The numerous additions to the church over many years indicate a **low** level of **authenticity**.

The church has **high group** values as one of the more than 100 churches designed by Frederick de Jersey Clere mainly in the lower half of the North Island between 1881 and 1933.

The church has **high associative** values with Frederick de Jersey Clere, one of New Zealand's most prolific and highly regarded church architects. Although not researched to any great degree, the church is also likely to be associated with the Vicars and parishioners over its 134 year history. The building is also associated with the various families and individuals **commemorated** by plaques and the donations of items in the church.

The church has held many **events**, including services, including weddings, baptisms and funeral, which would be significant locally to a **low** or **moderate** extent.

The design and construction of the church has **high pattern** values reflecting the history of the growth and development of the Anglican Church in the Manawatu and lower North Island in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Given the numerous heritage values associated, the church has **high educational** values in the areas of New Zealand church design and the history of the Anglican Church.

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