

ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH KOMAKO – 1921 Pohangina Valley East Road



Architect: Robin Hood

Construction date: 1926

Visible materials: Timber cladding & joinery, corrugated steel roofing

Architectural style: Carpenter Gothic

Use/building type: Church

Date and Compiler: Ian Bowman, 2017

Proposed category: B

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY¹

Introduction

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church is a small church in the Pohangina Valley beyond the well-known Totara Reserve and the Highland Home Christian Camp. One source² sighted during this study incorporated a classic Kiwi slang term to describe its remote location: "*Komako Church, Wop Wops, Pohangina Valley.*" This church has a unique history, in that it apparently came into existence due to a conveniently-located bluegum tree. More typically though, it reflects the generosity of the community that had it erected, and this aspect has also ensured its ongoing survival where so many other small rural churches have disappeared or have been converted into residences.

Background

The story of this church begins with the role played in its construction by some significant benefactors then living in the Komako district. Of particular note were Hamilton Vetch Rutherford, and his wife Agnes Rebekah (nee Makgill), who donated the land it stands on; and also Charles

¹ Former NZHPT Manawatu Branch Committee files

² A 1993 record located in the Manawatu District Council Building Permit file for '1921 Pohangina Valley East Road, Komako'.

Holmes Handley and his wife Stella, who donated the cost of church itself and some of its furnishings.



Figure 1 The new church on the day of its consecration – 16 March 1926 (Source: *Auckland Weekly News* Supplement, 1 April 1926, p. 49, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19260401-49-6 ¹)

Waimarama in 1912, and then had a sheep run at Waiheke “for some years”, before taking up the land in the Pohangina Valley. They were already living at Komako in October 1920 when Mrs Rutherford and her daughter left on a trip to India and Siam (Thailand), where the daughter was to marry. Mr Rutherford died at Napier on 3 June 1927, aged 62, and Mrs Rutherford died on 14 January 1938, aged 70.⁴ While neither is buried locally, the farm at Komako remained in their family.

Charles Holmes Handley was born in Staffordshire England. He and his wife Stella then married in Warwickshire. According to their headstone at Kelvin Grove Cemetery, they came to New Zealand, or at least settled at Komako, in 1904. Then in early 1905 Mr T. Rimmer, of Ashhurst, made “extensive additions and improvements” to their house at Komako.⁵ In February 1907, Mr Handley was elected unopposed to become the councillor for the Tamaki Riding of the Pohangina County Council.⁶ In 1915, he was elected synodsmen for the Parochial District of Pohangina.⁷

It was reported at the time of the church’s fiftieth anniversary, that prior to leaving England Mr Handley had experienced a “bad car accident”. However, as cars were still very rare at the time they

Both couples had seen a lot of the world. Mr Rutherford was the youngest son of Colonel Rutherford, of the Bengal Artillery. Mrs Rutherford, who had been born in India, was the eldest daughter of Captain Sir John Makgill, of the Royal Engineers, who had been based in Madras at the time of her birth. Lord Haldane was her maternal uncle.³ Sir John Makgill and his family had subsequently settled at Waiuku, and in 1891 Hamilton and Agnes married. They had six children, including a set of triplets, and at one time the farm they then owned was so remote that the nearest white woman lived 15 miles away. The family left their farm at

³ ‘Richard Haldane, 1st Viscount Haldane’: Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Haldane,_1st_Viscount_Haldane

⁴ *NZ Herald*, 11 June 1927, p. 1, 15 January 1938, p. 16; *Free Lance*, 13 October 1920, p. 11; The Peerage: A genealogical survey of the peerage of Britain as well as the Royal families of Europe: Person Page – 35531: <http://www.thepeerage.com/p35531.htm> (Agnes’ father held a number of titles, including 10th Baronet Makgill)

⁵ *Manawatu Standard*, 25 February 1905, p. 8

⁶ *Manawatu Standard*, 28 February 1907, p. 1, 4 August 1976, p. 18; ‘Charles Holmes Handley’: in Ancestry.com.au:

http://search.ancestry.com.au/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=CharlesHolmes&gsln=Handley&msbdy=1872&msbpn ftp=Mount+Rose+Hill+Handsworth%2C+Staffordshire%2C+England&msddy=1950&msdpn ftp=North+Palmerston%2C+New+Zealand&cpxt=0&catBucket=rstp&uidh=000&cp=0&gl=42&so=2&geo_a=r&o iid=41016&o lid=41016&o sch=Web+Property

⁷ *Manawatu Standard*, 30 April 1915, p. 7

will have left England, it is more likely that the accident concerned was the one that occurred at Eskdale on 1 June 1923. The couple were en route home from Taupo, when their car skidded in shingle and went over a 12ft bank. Luckily the car landed in a bluegum tree and they crawled out uninjured from beneath the vehicle.⁸ The article published at the time of the church's fiftieth anniversary, in describing the contribution of the Handleys to the church, recorded that: "He was a wealthy man and had no family; so, in thanksgiving for his recovery, he built the church and endowed it."⁹

An indication of the size of the property held by the Handleys may be deduced from a failed attempt in 1910 to lease a 200 acre property in the Pohangina Valley. The Wellington Land Board refused Stella Handley's application with the comment that if the lease went through, the couple would have held some 2,036 acres.¹⁰

In 1921, after the couple returned from a visit to England and the United States, the *Manawatu Standard* published an extensive article on their trip. The couple's conclusion after their lengthy and complicated trip was that there was no place like home – and that was now New Zealand.¹¹

The Handleys appear to have been a socially active and generous couple, in addition to their contribution to this church. The local newspapers record Mrs Handley singing at local concerts, and taking part as a competitor in flower shows.¹² They donated generously to such fundraisers as the Belgium Relief Fund, the Pohangina Empire Defence Fund, the memorial fund to local WWI victim, Dr A.A. Martin (whose work they had also supported during his lifetime); along with gifts for on-selling at the Palmerston North Patriotic Shop (to raise funds to support the troops etc.).¹³ Noticeably, the couple tended to donate on the high side in the published lists sighted, and so donating a church was not an unusual thing for them to do – even if the cost was much greater in the latter case.

The couple later moved into Palmerston North, where they lived in Te Awe Awe Street. Mr Handley died in 1950, aged 77, and Mrs Handley (by then of Batt Street) died in 1957 aged 81. Their fairly simple headstone states that Stella's maiden name was Worden and that the couple had lived in Komako and Palmerston North between 1904 and 1957. Their dates of death etc. were not recorded.¹⁴

The New Church

Prior to the construction of this church, the district's Anglican services were held in the Komako School, and certainly in 1903, these services were being held there every alternate Sunday.¹⁵

⁸ *Manawatu Standard*, 4 June 1923, p. 6

⁹ *Manawatu Standard*, 4 August 1976, p. 18

¹⁰ *Manawatu Standard*, 23 December 1910, p. 3

¹¹ *Manawatu Standard*, 9 February 1921, p. 5

¹² For example, *Feilding Star*, 2 October 1906, p. 2, *Manawatu Standard*, 30 January 1911, p. 6, 4 December 1919, p. 3

¹³ For example, *Manawatu Standard*, 4 December 1914, p. 6, 1 April 1918, p. 3; *Manawatu Times*, 5 July 1915, p. 2, 14 March 1917, p. 8; *Feilding Star*, 28 September 1914, p. 4

¹⁴ Kelvin Grove Cemetery, Area G, Block 001, Plot 01A: While Stella's date of death is easily located through her burial records, Charles' date of death was elusive in the various records. His Death Registration is 1950/28963

(<https://www.bdmonline.dia.govt.nz/>) which indicates that he died in 1950. He was evidently cremated, possibly at Karori Cemetery as Palmerston North did not yet have a crematorium. The records of All Saints Church might locate him, as Stella's funeral was held there. The date might then lead to an obituary in the local newspapers. Also *Manawatu Standard*, 18 January 1957, p. 1; Kelvin Grove Cemetery database: <http://www.pncc.govt.nz/services/onlineservices/cemetery-and-cremation-search/>

¹⁵ *Manawatu Standard*, 20 January 1903, p. 2

Things appear to have moved relatively fast at Komako once the Handleys' decided to pay for the church. For example, in terms of the timeframe, the survey plan of the site where the church was to be built, is dated July 1924.¹⁶ Then, two years later - and three months after the church was consecrated - this land was transferred into the name of the Wellington Diocesan Board of Trustees, which still owns it.¹⁷



Figure 2 An early undated view of the church. (Source: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, 4-6495 ¹)

Rutherford, and the church had been built by Messrs W.S. Maunder and Sons, of Ashhurst. Palmerston North architect, Robin Hood, had designed the building. The article's writer was very impressed with the building, describing it as being *"of great beauty and richness and of excellent construction."* The writer considered that the church *"should stand for many decades as a witness to the people's faith in God and their spiritual 'home'."*¹⁸

On 13 March 1926, the *Manawatu Standard* announced that the following Tuesday, 16th March, would be a notable day in the history of the Pohangina Valley. Starting at 11:00 am on that day, the Bishop of Wellington, Dr. Spratt, would be officiating at the consecration ceremony the new Anglican Church at Komako. The article stated that the church and some of its furnishings were the gift of Mr and Mrs C.H. Handley, while many other parishioners and friends had also provided other furnishings. The land had been gifted by Mr and Mrs H.V.

The consecration ceremony duly took place before *"a large attendance of ministers and laity,"* with ministers coming from as far afield at Whanganui and Foxton. Described as *"a really splendid edifice of the smaller class of church architecture,"* it was the first church in the diocese to be dedicated to St. Bartholomew. *"It is beautifully situated overlooking the native bush along the valley and is calculated to serve the needs of the Anglican community at Komako for a number of years to come."* The bishop described it as *"one of the most beautiful country churches in the Wellington diocese."* The new building was already free of debt – thereby permitting it to be able to be consecrated. After the ceremony, the participants adjourned to a picnic down at the river.¹⁹

Thereafter the church then settled down to a lifetime of activities applicable to a small country church. This phase was not researched at this time.

Fifty Years Later

The church community celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1976, and the *Manawatu Standard* of 4 August 1976 accorded the celebration a detailed article:

"Twenty miles from Ashhurst, along the Pohangina Valley, the little Komako church is celebrating its half-century. For 50 years it has stood. Close to the Apiti road, looking rather incongruous in its small enclosure among bare paddocks.

¹⁶ 'Plan of Lot 1 of Pt Run 47, Blk III, Pohangina Survey District', by H.R. Farquhar, July 1924: Dept. of Lands & Survey, NZ. Although only semi-legible, the Plan appears to have originally been numbered 141/9.

¹⁷ Certificate of Title No. 362/229 (July 1926)

¹⁸ *Manawatu Standard*, 13 March 1926, p. 9(1)

¹⁹ *Manawatu Standard*, 17 March 1926, p. 11(5)

“An ordinary wire fence separates it from the grazing sheep on Mr Hamilton Rutherford’s property (Hamish to his friends and neighbours).

“A few shrubs, now softening its hard outlines, look as though they have grown with the reluctance with which the busy farmers must have spared the time to plant them.

“Faithfully their families have come in all weathers to worship there; the services conducted by the succeeding vicars, resident in Ashhurst.

“Faithfully their wives have kept it swept and dusted; found flowers from their gardens for the small vases...”



Figure 3 The interior of St. Bartholomew’s Church early in its life and in recent years. Note the early furnishings that are still present in the later photo. (Sources: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, 4-6496; & Parish of Pohangina website.¹)

The article then went on to describe the contributions of the Handleys and the Rutherfurds to the construction of the church. Duncan Rutherford, who was interviewed for the article, then explained how the area had been developed over the years. It was difficult country to farm, could be cold, wet and sometimes snow-covered, but despite this, it was the most beautiful of valleys, with Totara Reserve providing picnic spots and swimming holes in the river. With regards to the church, he hoped it would continue to be of service to the community for many years to come.²⁰

In April 2000, an unusually bad flood in the Makawakawa Creek near the church, dumped shingle beneath the Kamako Bridge and forced the floodwaters onto the surrounding farmland, and also into the church’s grounds. The following morning the church was still surrounded by water.²¹

Additions to the Church

The Building Permit file for the church contains records connected to two permits, however, one from 1947 (Permit No. 107) relates to repairs to a verandah for Mr H.D. Rutherford. There is nothing suggesting that it is for the church and therefore it might relate to the neighbouring property.

However, in 1982 a permit was issued to add an extension to the Sunday School, and also to add toilets. This work was designed by J.F. Finlay, N.Z.C.D. (Arch.), and the work was done by Mr G. Eames, of Utuwai. This work consisted of a substantial addition to the back of the church, and

²⁰ *Manawatu Standard*, 4 August 1976, p. 18

²¹ *Manawatu Standard*, 11 April 2000, p. 1. The Makawakawa Creek feeds into the Pohangina River.

included a wheelchair ramp.²² This work also included a kitchenette. Funds to build it were raised locally, and these were also boosted by a gift from a trust.²³

A cross-shaped columbarium - a structure with niches in it for storing funeral urns – also stands in the church’s grounds. This was designed, financed and constructed using local labour, as a place to store the ashes of some of the church’s former membership.²⁴

The interior of the church is lined with totara and possibly rimu, while historical photographs and documents also decorate the walls.²⁵



Figure 4 An early working bee at the church – undated. (Photo: Feilding Library: POH: 21: <http://feildingphotos.mdc.govt.nz/nodes/view/17698>)

The Anglican Parish of Pohangina

The website of the Anglican Parish of Pohangina, to which St. Bartholomew’s belongs, records some of the parish’s wider history. It states that, while early records are sketchy, it is known that an Anglican layman read services in an Ashhurst home in 1878. Then in 1892, the Parochial District of Pohangina was created – being so-named due to the Pohangina Valley flowing down through the valley. The little villages of Ashhurst and Bunnythorpe grew as farming was developed, and the parish also ministered to new congregations at Awahou, Pohangina, Komako, Mt. Richards and Utuwai. After WWII, easier travel meant that amalgamation of the various congregations started to occur. This included the Bunnythorpe parishioners joining with those at Ashhurst – and attending Ashhurst’s St. Mary Magdalene Church. St. Bartholomew’s also became more of a regional church in the 1960s.²⁶

The first vicar to serve the Komako Anglican community in their new church was Canon F.M. Kempthorne. He had arrived in the parish in 1919, and then departed in 1929. Amongst the series of vicars that followed was Victoria Cross recipient, the Rev. Keith Elliott, who served there between 1956 and 1959. He had been born at nearby Apiti in 1916.²⁷

²² Manawatu District Council Building Permit file for ‘1921 Pohangina Valley East Road, Komako.

²³ ‘St. Bartholomew’s’: Parish of Pohangina: <http://parishofpohangina.net/our-service-info/st-bartholomew-s/>

²⁴ ‘St. Bartholomew’s’: Parish of Pohangina: <http://parishofpohangina.net/our-service-info/st-bartholomew-s/>

²⁵ ‘St. Bartholomew’s: Information and Pictures’: <http://parishofpohangina.net/our-service-info/st-bartholomew-s/>

²⁶ ‘A Brief History of the Parish’: Anglican Parish of Pohangina: <http://parishofpohangina.net/more-information/brief-history/>

²⁷ ‘Keith Elliott’, in Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5e3/elliott-keith>

The Present Day

Nowadays St. Bartholomew's Church and St. Mary Magdalene Church, in Ashhurst, are the two churches that serve the Pohangina Parish. Church services are held at St. Bartholomew's Church at 10:00am every second, fourth and fifth Sunday of each month. The church is also available as a wedding venue, where it can comfortably hold about seventy people.²⁸

Architect: Robin Hood 1880-1953

Robin Hood was born in Dunedin in 1880 to Ellen and William Hood; William being an upholsterer, wood carver and sculptor. Robin moved to Feilding in 1908 where he spent time labouring while studying to be an architect. By the time of his marriage to Ethel Moore in 1912m he had established a practice in Feilding as an architect. By 1920 the Hoods moved to Palmerston North where he continued to practice architecture, with his offices at the Manawatu Racing Club Building at 84-94 Rangitikei Street.

Robin Hood designed a significant number of buildings in the Manawatu, Rangitikei and Palmerston North districts. These include the following buildings, amongst many other houses in Palmerston North, Feilding, Marton and elsewhere:

- Coronation Building, Progress Building, Broadway Chambers on Broadway, Palmerston North;
- The Strand Building, the Square Palmerston North;
- The Shop and Post Office, Snells Butchers at Terrace End, Palmerston North;
- St Columbas Church at Ashurst;
- Catholic Church, Dannevirke;
- 86, 90, 103 Fergusson Street, Feilding;
- 78 Pines Court, Feilding
- 566 Church Street, Palmerston North;
- 73 North Street, Palmerston North.d

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

The single storey timber framed and clad church has a nave, chancel, northern transept and an extension towards the rear at an angle to the church. Above the western end of the nave is a small, open bellcote. The roofs of the original church are all gables with a 45 degree pitch and have timber crosses at their apex. Each has plain bargeboards.

The walls of the church have shiplap weatherboards up to the sill level above which is half timber framing with a smooth rendered finish (check). Nave and transept windows are double shallow pointed segmental arched with diamond leaded casements. The lower sashes are fixed and upper casements are opening. The chancel has a triple lancet window, also with diamond leaded glass. The gables have timber shingles and the nave gable facing west has timber louvres.

The addition mimics the cladding and general design of the original church but is at a slight angle to it.

Roofing is corrugated steel and joinery is timber.

²⁸ 'Weddings': Anglican Parish of Pohangina: <http://parishofpohangina.net/contact-us/weddings/>

The style of the church is Carpenter Gothic, which was popular in New Zealand from the 1860s to the 1920s. This typically has an exposed timber frame, medium to steep pitched roofing, prominent timber gables, a bellcote, weatherboard cladding and Gothic shaped windows. Interiors usually had exposed ceiling framing. The style was popular particularly for rural churches.

The church is located close to the road on a grassed, flat area of land that slopes towards the river. The street boundary has a timber picket fence and concrete paths lead to the new ramp and entry in the addition. Several large trees and smaller bushes line the perimeter of the section. A signboard near the road gives the name of the church and its date of construction.

No plans of the building have been sighted and the building was viewed from the road only so that the interior was inspected.

REVIEW OF REPORT

Based on a review of the report and viewing of Council files, the assessment undertaken in 2017 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, authenticity, group, people, events, pattern** and **educational** heritage values.

The church has **high architectural** and **representivity** values as a good example of the Carpenter Gothic style with typical characteristics of moderately pitched roofs, half timber framing, prominent gables, a bellcote, weatherboard cladding and Gothic styled windows. The church uses typical materials for the style – timber framing, joinery and cladding with corrugated steel roofing.

The church has **moderate rarity** and **group** values as one of several churches designed regionally by architect Robin Hood.

The exterior appears to have **moderate authenticity** with the replacement of the original porch with an extension housing the Sunday School, toilets and kitchen.

The church has **moderate associative** values with Robin Hood, a well respected regional architect, as well as the Rurthurfurd and Handley families who donated the land and funds to construct the church. Although not researched to any great degree, the church is also likely to be associated with the Vicars and parishioners over its 91 year history.

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

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

SOURCES

Printed Sources

Manawatu Standard (accessed via Palmerston North Central Library resources)

Online Sources

Ancestry.com: <http://ancestry.com> (as per footnote)

Anglican Parish of Pohangina: <http://parishofpohangina.net/> (as per footnotes)

Auckland Libraries: <http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/dbtw-wpd/heritageimages/index.htm> (Search word: 'Komako'): *Auckland Weekly News* and the 'Sir George Grey Special Collections'

Births, Deaths & Marriages, NZ: <https://www.bdmonline.dia.govt.nz/> (as per footnote)

Feilding Library photo collection: <http://feildingphotos.mdc.govt.nz/> (as per footnote)

Palmerston North City Council: Kelvin Grove Cemetery database:

<http://www.pncc.govt.nz/services/onlineservices/cemetery-and-cremation-search/>

Papers Past: <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers> (*Feilding Star*, *Free Lance*, *Manawatu Standard*, *Manawatu Times*, *NZ Herald*) - (as per footnotes and text)

Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/> (as per footnote)

The Peerage: A genealogical survey of the peerage of Britain as well as the Royal families of Europe:

<http://www.thepeerage.com/> (as per footnote)

Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org> (as per footnote)

Other Sources

Historic Places Manawatu-Horowhenua Inc.: File No: 320011, 'St. Bartholomew's Church, Komako' (Held at Te Manawa, Palmerston North)

Manawatu District Council: Building Permit file for '1921 Pohangina Valley East Road, Komako';

Certificate of Title No. 362/229 (July 1926), and 'Plan of Lot 1 of Pt Run 47, Blk III, Pohangina Survey District', by H.R. Farquhar, July 1924: Dept. of Lands & Survey, NZ