

ST SIMON AND JUDE – 9 Ouse Street, Rongotea



Architect: Frederick de Jersey Clere

Construction date: 1895

Visible materials: Timber cladding & joinery, corrugated steel roofing

Architectural style: Edwardian Carpenter Gothic

Use/building type: Church

Date and Compiler: Ian Bowman, 2015

Heritage New Zealand listing: 2

Proposed category: B

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Outline history

Rongotea was made available for settlement as early as 1872, however this did not take place until after 1876. The first settlement was called Campbelltown, which was changed to Rongotea in 1894. A Methodist lay preacher Mr W T W Bull held the first church service in Rongotea in 1878. Early Anglican services were held at the schoolhouse by Archdeacon Russell but it wasn't until the 1890s that the settlers could afford to construct churches.

At a meeting presided over by Mr Russell in 1894 it was decided to construct a church and at the meeting £54.1s.0d was pledged. Significant individual donations were made by Mr Costall of £20, Mr Davis £20, while offers for assistance with clearing the ground, carting timber, fencing and piling were also made.

In 1895 Rochelle and Co, builders of Palmerston North constructed St Simon and Jude from the plans of Frederick de Jersey Clere. Supervision of the project was undertaken by Mr Carl Anderson of Rongotea. The final cost of the church was £341.10s.9d.

The church was consecrated by Bishop Wallis on October 28, 1895 after only twelve months of fund raising. It is noted that a considerable amount of personal labour was given by members of the

congregation. Other clergy present at the service were Archdeacon Towgood, Rev A S Innes-Jones, G Atkins, and J D Russell, the vicar.

Additional land was purchased by the congregation for the use of the church, with two sections adjoining the church for the construction of a Vicarage. The total cost of the additional land was £700.

Initially part of the Bulls-Sandon Parish, in 1907 Rongotea became a separate Parochial District until 1932 when the parish was merged with Bulls. It was then known as the Parochial District of Bulls Rongotea.

Architect: Frederick de Jersey Clere¹

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 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.

¹ Maclean, Susan. 'Clere, Frederick de Jersey 1856 - 1952'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 April 2006 URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

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

This timber framed and clad church is designed in the Carpenter Gothic style, a vernacular 'builders' adaptation of Gothic architecture using the forms but few of the details of academic Gothic. The style was most commonly used for churches of modest scale and was popular with the Ecclesiological Society. These churches often had exposed timber framing on the exterior with board linings fixed on the inside, steeply pitched roofs of shingles, slate or corrugated steel, with wide, although usually not decorated, bargeboards. Planning was usually simple and windows were commonly simple lancets.

In the press accounts of the opening, the church is described as 60 feet long by 25 feet wide with a wall stud height of 12 feet and an apex height of the roof of 36 feet. The belfry is an additional 24 feet above the ridge of the roof. Seating 156, the church reflected the expansion of the diocese at the time.

McLean has categorised this church with three others, St Alban's Pauatahanui, St Mary Magdelene, Ashhurst and St Mary's Levin, as being "middle sized" in the 1890s. Clere classified his timber churches into two main groups, whether they accommodated up to or more than 200. These four (the Levin church has been dismantled) accommodated about 150. St Simon and Jude is similar in design to St Albans.

The plan of the church is a simple nave with apsidal chancel the same width as the nave. The gabled vestry and entrance porch are located on opposite sides of the church.

The interior was inspected in 1996 and, then was clad in timber match lining with a dado and timber strip flooring. The ceiling has exposed roof framing with knee braced main rafters and collar ties. Additional strengthening of the roof is provided with steel tie rods. Windows are generally diamond patterned lead lights with two painted glass leadlight windows, one of which was made by Whitefriars. One of the stained glass windows graces the small gable in the chancel.

Consistent with the style, the church has a steeply pitched roof, a tall rectangular form, and trefoil window design. The use of clearly expressed timber framing and cladding and hand made details all follow the general philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement. While the palette of forms and materials of Clere's small country churches are similar, the design of each is unique for each site, also following the Arts and Crafts precepts.

The use of the apse form dates back to the English Norman period where single cell apsidal churches were constructed after the conquest. Very few of these churches survive in England, with St Andrew at Winterborne Tomson in Dorset a good example. It is clear that this Norman building form is an influence in the design of St Simon and St Jude. A Norman influence in the design of other churches by Clere can also be seen.

The church is located in a small residential area of Rongotea and has a picket fence to the street frontage. The juxtaposition of the scales of the church and houses is a valuable contribution to the urban design of the small rural village.

No plans of the building have been sighted and the interior was not inspected in 2015.

REVIEW OF REPORT

Based on a review of the report and viewing of Council files, the assessment undertaken in 2015 for this building is still applicable as at April 2021.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

The church has **high local** significance for **architectural, representivity, authenticity, group, associative, 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 steeply pitched roofs, no external decoration, simple planning, and Gothic styled trefoil windows. The church uses typical materials for the style – timber framing, weatherboards, board and batten cladding and corrugated steel roofing. Its use of an apsidal chancel followed Norman Gothic principles and was used in other churches designed by Clere.

The church has **low rarity** values but **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, 20 of which are located in the Manawatu/Rangitikei region.

The exterior appears to have **high authenticity** with little obvious external changes.

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 associated with Vicars and parishioners throughout its history.

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

The design and construction of the church has **high pattern** and **educative** 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.

The church is listed with Heritage New Zealand category 2.

SOURCES

Former NZHPT Manawatu Branch Committee files

Paperspast

On-line Dictionary of New Zealand Biography

Maclean, S. *Architect of the Angels The Churches of Frederick de Jersey Clere*