

ST MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS – 466 Beaconsfield Valley Road, Beaconsfield



Architect: Frederick de Jersey Clere

Construction date: 1911

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 ranking: B

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY¹

Outline history

About 1886 Anglican services were established in Beaconsfield with services being held in the school. In 1888 a group of locals including Mr and Mrs Bensemman, Mr and Mrs Cunningham, Mr and Mrs Campli, and Mr and Mrs Wilhelm, decided to erect a church, and a site from his property was donated by Mr Sinclair (note that Susan McLean states it was a HP Lance who gave the site). This first church, erected shortly after the meeting, was named the “Cosmopolitan Church” as the funding for its construction was inter-denominational. While Anglicans contributed towards its construction, it is believed no Anglican services were held at the church.

A proposal for an exclusively Anglican church was made in 1910 and the church, designed by Frederick de Jersey Clere, was opened by Rev Casell, Archdeacon of Waitotara and former vicar of the Parish, on July 11, 1912. The land on which the church was constructed was donated by Mr Lance whose

¹ Maclean, S. *Architect of the Angels The Churches of Frederick de Jersey Clere*, Steele Roberts, 2003, pages 171-72

home church was 'Buckland St Mary's', after which Beaconsfield's St Mary's was named. St Mary's cost £400 and accommodates approximately 40 people.

Architect: Frederick de Jersey Clere²

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 articulated 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.

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.

² Maclean, Susan. 'Clere, Frederick de Jersey 1856 - 1952'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 April 2006 URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

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 were 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.

The church comprises a gabled nave with gabled transepts and porch. A flèche is located above the front entrance. The cruciform shape of the plan is unusual in a church the small size of St Mary's. The vestry and a small chapel located in the transepts. The chancel is denoted only by the chancel arch with the nave and chancel one space.

The exterior cladding of the church is timber board and batten with an external 'dado' of splayed shiplap weatherboards. The joinery and fleche are also of timber. The roofing is corrugated steel with sparrow iron to the flèche. Windows are trefoil within square headed openings, with two triple windows within a sharp pointed arch.

Based on an inspection of 1996, the interior of the church has exposed timber deep arch braced collar rafter roof. The match lining on the ceilings and walls is also exposed. Unusually for Clere rural churches, the stud is comparatively low creating a more intimate space than others of his design.

The cruciform plan of St Mary's is unusual in such a small church, while the external use of board and batten and splayed shiplap weatherboards is easily recognised as part of the New Zealand domestic Arts and Crafts style. 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.

Inside the church are many plaques commemorating local families who have been involved over the years. Many of these plaques commemorate those who served during World War 1 and World War 2. The church is located on its own, nestled at the base of a small hill. The forms and colours of the church are a picturesque contrast to the adjacent rural rounded land forms. The large timber gates and neatly clipped hedge are reminiscent of an English setting.

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

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, rarity, 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.

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, 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.

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*

Information from Anglican Parish of the Oroua, 9 February 2022