

St Peter's Church



Location: 75 Koromiko Road, **Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga**
Gonville, Wanganui **List Number:** 992

Physical Description: The church is a tall, gable, timber framed structure with a nave, lower and narrower chancel, lean-to side aisles, and a crenelated tower on the north east corner. A vestry with gable at right angles to the nave is near the south east corner. The centrally located main entry, with a low pitched hipped roof at the west end and faces the central courtyard. The west wall has been strengthened with a reinforced concrete portal frame. The church is one of several buildings on the campus, with offices, meeting rooms and main hall built around the courtyard.

Other known names: Christ Church (1866-1921)

Current Use: Anglican Church

Former Uses: Anglican Church

Heritage Status: Heritage NZPT List **District Plan Class:** Class B
(Cat. 2)

Architectural Style: Gothic revival **Date of Construction:** 1866,
relocated 1922

Register Item Number:

13

Building Type:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Recreation
- Institutional
- Agriculture
- Other

Significance:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Cultural

Thematic Context

- Early Settlement
- Residential
- Industry
- Agricultural
- Commerce
- Transport
- Civic/Admin
- Health
- Education
- Religion
- Recreation
- Community
- Memorials
- Military

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Materials: Painted timber shiplap weatherboards and joinery, concrete foundation wall, corrugated steel roofing

Registered owner:

Legal Description: Lots 50-52 DP 2260

History: St Peter's is now the oldest public building still in use in Wanganui.

St. Peter's Anglican Church at Gonville has the distinction of being the oldest public building still in use in Wanganui. It served as the second Christ Church between 1866 and 1920, and was then dismantled and relocated to the present site, where it has served the Gonville community since 1922.

The Christ Church era

The first Anglican Church in Wanganui, known as the Episcopal Church, was built in late 1843, and was opened on 7th January 1844 with a service by the Rev. Richard Taylor, attended by about eighty people. It was described as a rectangular frame-building, capable of seating about 200 people, and with lancet shaped windows and a shingle roof. *"At the west end is a square entrance-tower, with louvre windows on each face of the upper square; but alas! This is surmounted by a pyramidal roof – a pigmy spire. In the absence of a proportionate spire, 'pointing to the skies,' the summit of the tower should be square, at least so thinks mine eye!"*¹

Despite being a relatively cash-strapped parish, by 1857 plans had been prepared to build a new church. In January 1862 it was unanimously decided to proceed with building a new parish church as the old one was *"too small and 'ruinous' for the celebration of divine service."* The Standing Committee of the Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) duly approved the new church's plans in 1863 and made a grant toward its construction.²

The booklet, *'A Visitor's Guide to Historic St. Peter's Anglican Church, Wanganui'* (p. 14) states that the church was designed by civil engineer and surveyor, Henry Claylands Field.³ He was the Wanganui Town Board's surveyor

¹ *New Zealand Gazette & Wellington Spectator*, 23 December 1843, p. 3 (description), 3 January 1844, p. 3 & 24 January 1844, p. 2 (opening)

² J.B. Bennett, *Christ Church, Wanganui: The Continuing Story* (Wanganui, 1976), p. 67. The 'Standing Committee' of the S.P.C.K.. See: <http://www.spck.org.uk/about-spck/index/>

³ Also re launch of a biography of H.C. Field, *Wanganui Chronicle*, 12 October 2004: <http://www.wanganuichronicle.co.nz/news/city-father-remembered-in-print/935436/>

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between 1862 and 1870, and was also appointed a licenced surveyor under the Native Lands Act in mid-1866 - at about the time the work on the church will have been completed.⁴ This transition into land survey work led to his better known surveying and road-constructing career. It is not known what other buildings Field designed before tackling this church, however, he did build his home, which survives at 246 Somme Parade, Wanganui (and is No. 45 in this study). He had been an articled pupil of Sir John Rennie, the engineer who built London Bridge, and for several years prior to migrating to New Zealand in 1851, he had held a position with the English Railways.⁵

Another “*architect*” who puts in an appearance was a Mr J.E. Murray, about whom nothing else has been located during this study. The *Wellington Independent* of 2 June 1866 (p. 7) records that he had just presented two tablets to the new church, which were to be placed on either side of the chancel arch, and which it was hoped would “*long remain as an ornament to the building and a memento of the liberal donor.*”

These tablets, which are still in the church (now flanking the main entrance), read: “*Presented by J.C. Murray July 1866 (sic) – The carving by Gegan - written and illustrated by C.F. Allen – the gilding by E. Fox at the cost of J. Lockett Christmas 1870*”⁶

The foundation stone was laid by the Right Rev. Charles John, Lord Bishop of Wellington, on 16th October 1865, assisted by the Rev. Richard Taylor and the Rev. Basil Taylor. The new church was by that time named ‘Christ Church’.⁷ It is not known who built the church, however, given the large church and the limited funds, this may reflect a community effort. The foundation stone recorded that the Church’s Building Committee consisted of Rev. C.H. Nicholls, Thos. Powell

⁴ *Wanganui Times*, 3 July 1866, p. 2 (both H.C. Field and fellow church man/architect G.F. Allen both appointed as licenced surveyors under the Native Lands Act at the same time); M.J.G. Smart & A.P. Bates, *The Wanganui Story* (Wanganui, 1972), p. 252

⁵ Des Bovey & Kathleen McDonald, *Wanganui Buildings of Historic Interest* (Dunedin, 1979), pp. 36-37; *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 July 1909, p. 2 (letter)

⁶ While some of this is unexplained, ‘Gegan’ is possibly a woodcarver and cabinetmaker working in the Dunedin area in the early 1860s (*Otago Daily Times* 10 November 1862, p. 8); and C.F. Allen may be Caroline Frances Allen, wife of G.F. Allen who was involved with the church. J. Lockett is almost certainly Jonas Lockett, a long-time Churchwarden (*Wanganui Herald*, 21 April 1874, p. 2 – ‘Testimonial’)

⁷ *Wellington Independent*, 26 October 1865, p. 8; Note that Bennett p. 67 stated that Bishop Abraham laid the foundation stone, however, his name is not mentioned in the reports of the event.

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(Chairman), Henry C. Field (Secretary), David Porter, Henry Hurley, William Kells and Jonas Lockett.⁸

On 16th July 1866, Christ Church was consecrated by the Bishop of Wellington, having cost “upwards of £1,200” to build.⁹ A description of the church from 1871 described it as being built in ‘Early English’ style with the building consisting of a nave sixty feet long, aisles, chancel and tower. Adjoining these were the vestry room and organ chamber.¹⁰

The church had been designed to accommodate 592 people, with seating for 484 people. By comparison, its eventual replacement was designed to accommodate only 450 people.¹¹ Another design feature of the new church perhaps harks back to the abovementioned criticism of its predecessor. The summit of the square tower on the new church - was also square.

At the time of the installation of a special new stained window in the “east window” of the church (described as a “triplet”), the *Wanganui Chronicle* of 2 April 1877 (p. 2) commented that new carpets and various drapery were soon to be installed, and that: “*With these further improvements Mr Field’s pretty little Chancel will compare favourably with any in New Zealand.*”

Subsequent extensions to the church included extending the Sunday School by 20 ft. in 1897, which was done by Mr. J. Randal for £74.10.0 – the architect being W. Pinches. For an extra £37, Randal was also prepared to extend the lean-to portion of the Sunday School a similar distance.¹² In late 1898, plans were again drawn up by Mr W. Pinches, this time to enlarge the church to accommodate another 118 sittings at an estimated cost of £275. These plans were then sent to the Diocesan architect for approval, and within a month the tenders were at hand. The tender of Mr T.H. Battle (then a builder and later an architect), for £271.7.6, was duly accepted.¹³ In 1906, G.F. Allen, architect and former choirmaster and churchwarden at Christ Church at the time of the laying

⁸ *Wellington Independent*, 26 October 1865, p. 8

⁹ *Wellington Independent*, 27 September 1866, p. 6

¹⁰ B. Potts, *A Visitor’s Guide to Historic St. Peter’s Anglican Church, Wanganui, and a Short History of the Gonville Parochial District* (Wanganui, 1995), p. 14

¹¹ Bennett, p. 67

¹² Bennett, p. 81; also *Wanganui Chronicle*, 24 April 1897, p. 3 (tenders)

¹³ Bennett, p. 83; also *Wanganui Chronicle*, 9 September 1898, p. 3 (tenders)

of the foundation stone, referred to some of these additions (the ones facing the street) as looking like “assorted dog-kennels.”¹⁴

By 1917, plans were being made to replace the church, with an Invercargill architect, Edmund R. Wilson, being appointed to design it. At this time its future site had yet to be selected. Wilson’s initial proposal was for a church that seated 1,000 people. In the end, this church was never built, with what was intended to have been temporary accommodation (a new Christ Church Sunday School, designed by H.M. Helm) becoming the basis of the present Christ Church.¹⁵

The foundation stone for the ‘temporary church’ was duly laid on 24th May 1920. With the completion of that building, the old 1866-built Christ Church became redundant.¹⁶

The St. Peter’s Church era

The story of the development of the church in its new life is covered in B. Potts’ booklet, *A Visitor’s Guide to Historic St. Peter’s Anglican Church, Wanganui, and a Short History of the Gonville Parochial District*. This states that until 1912, the residents of the thriving new Gonville suburb had been obliged to travel in to Christ Church for their services. However, from 6th October 1912 services were held in the new Gonville Town Hall. Plans were soon underway to build a church room at Gonville, and this was opened on 18 July 1913. However, before long the next stage in the transformation occurred.

The architect, T.H. Battle, who had previously built the 1898 extension of the building, was engaged to draw up plans for shifting the building. The contractor appointed was G.F. Bengé, a local builder.

In September 1921, the task of dismantling the former Christ Church began. Sections of the building were loaded onto motor lorries and transported to the new site, where the sand surface meant that flat-topped drays pulled by horses had to cart them part way. A traction engine also pulled some up the larger sections up the hill to the site.

¹⁴ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 6 June 1906, p. 2

¹⁵ Bennett, pp. 97-99

¹⁶ Bennett, pp. 98-100

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The task of dismantling and rebuilding the church on its new concrete foundations, was achieved in six months, despite adverse weather conditions and other complications. In the course of the rebuilding process, the church was reverted to much the appearance it had when new in 1866. However, the tower was relocated to the other side of the church from the original, in order to improve the church's appearance from Koromiko Road. Two side entrance porches were also incorporated into the building.

Finally the church was dedicated under its new name of St. Peter's, on 19 February 1922. It also became the centrepiece of the new Gonville Parochial District that had been formed in 1921. The 1913 church room was also retained as part of the complex.¹⁷

One thing that was not located during the deconstruction on the old site was the foundation stone, which had been laid in 1865. All that was found was the hole in the ground where it had been.¹⁸ It is perhaps fortunate, therefore, that its contents were published in the newspaper at the time of installation.¹⁹

The provision of a well-furnished church allowed the new parochial district to progress quickly, with other land and buildings being added. Soon its Sunday School was the largest in Wanganui, with some 70 children attending.²⁰ However, the Depression of the 1930s placed a great strain on the parish's finances. The *Evening Post* of 29 May 1933 (p. 3) records the plea of the vestry of St. Peter's, appealing *"to all those many Church of England people in the world, who, at some time or other in their lives, have got help and inspiration, or have in some way had benefit from the old Parish Church of Wanganui, which was for so many long years a landmark in the Avenue. The old Christ Church, with its many historic associations, was moved to Gonville, and is now known as St. Peter's Church. It sadly requires repairs and a coat of paint to prevent its going into decay. At the present time the amount required for this - £200 at least - is quite beyond the capacity of the vestry, but they confidently make the appeal to the many who must have fond memories of association with it to send at least one shilling to the restoration fund..."* The plea for help went on to

¹⁷ Potts, pp. 16-18

¹⁸ Potts, p. 17

¹⁹ *Wellington Independent*, 26 October 1865, p. 8

²⁰ Potts, 18

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describe its former associations with the various schools which had sent pupils to the weekly services over the decades. They also sought help from the people who were baptised, confirmed and married in it, and anyone else with kind memories toward it.

The result of the 1933 appeal is not known, beyond the obvious that it survived the Depression. In 1955, an architect's report suggested that some £2,000 would extend its life from 15 to 20 years, while a second opinion from another architect suggested full replacement of the building within 10 years. A proposal to follow that route reached planning the new building and setting the date for unveiling its foundation stone in 1959. However, the old church was saved through an abrupt change of heart and the spending of £2,600 on restoration instead.²¹

In July 1966, the church celebrated its Centenary with former clergy and parishioners coming to Wanganui for the event. Then on 10 April 1968, the 'Wahine Storm' caused the whole building to sway from side to side and come in close danger of collapse. The result was \$5,500 spent on reinstatement, and the installation of steel girders to prevent a re-occurrence of such damage in future storms.²²

In 1977, the church was designated a Historic Place on the Wanganui Town Plan.²³ It was then registered with the Historic Places Trust on 12 June 1982, with a Category 2 listing.²⁴

The various forms of maintenance and restoration required by the old building over the years, included the replacement with opaque glass of many of the leadlight windows in 1978. This was because they were leaking due to corrosion and general deterioration. However, a number of the leadlight windows remain.²⁵ Other work that has also been a consequence of retaining such an old building has included adapting modern improvements to be compatible with it. In particular this includes the St. Peter's Community Centre, which was dedicated

²¹ Potts, pp. 19-20

²² Potts, p. 21

²³ Potts, p. 22

²⁴ ID. 992, NZ Historic Places Trust:

<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=992>

²⁵ Potts, pp. 10, 22

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in 1994.²⁶

In October 2006, the church's 140th and 85th Anniversary celebrations were held, and these included planting a flowering cherry commemorative tree.²⁷

Bibliography

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Christ Church, Wanganui: <http://www.christchurchwanganui.org.nz/about-us/history>

Smart, M.J.G., & Bates, A.P., *The Wanganui Story* (Wanganui, 1972)

Potts, B., *A Visitor's Guide to Historic St. Peter's Anglican Church, Wanganui, and a Short History of the Gonville Parochial District* (Wanganui, 1995)

St. Peter's Church, Gonville:

http://wn.anglican.org.nz/parishes_churches/wanganui_plateau/st_peter_s_gonville_wanganui

Also newspapers and online articles as referred to in the footnotes.

Architect/Designer: Henry Claylands Field (relocation: T.H. Battle)

History of changes: Relocated to Gonville over six months 1921-1922

Date Period: 1866, relocated in 1922

²⁶ Potts, p. 25

²⁷ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 October 2006: <http://www.wanganuichronicle.co.nz/news/st-peters-church-celebrations/968746/>

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Rarity / Special Features: The church is the oldest public building in Wanganui.

Integrity: From a cursory visual inspection, the church is in a fair condition and was being painted at the time of the inspection.

Representativeness: The church is designed in the Carpenter Gothic style, which is a typical style for the period.

Context/Group Value: The church is one of several buildings relating to the church including the lychgate, the hall, office and vicarage.

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: As a timber building, it is potentially at risk from fire.

Summary of Significance:

Architectural Qualities

The design of the church follows common church planning with a central nave, chancel, aisles either side of the nave, a vestry to one side off the chancel and a tower, all expressed as individual elements. The style of the church is also common for the period where Gothic was seen as the only appropriate church style, but adapted and simplified for construction in timber. As is characteristic for Carpenter Gothic, the church has weatherboard cladding, steeply pitched roof, prominent gabled roofs, pointed arched openings, a tower, a clerestory and planning described above. The church is associated with the local, early engineer and surveyor, Henry Claylands Field.

In its new location it has become a local landmark in Gonville as one of the largest buildings in the suburb and with a prominent tower. Associated with its relocation was locally significant and prolific architect T H Battle.

Historic Qualities

As the oldest church in Wanganui, it is representative of the desire of the early settlers to construct a church and in doing so to create a sense of familiarity, home and permanence in the new colony. The church is associated the clergy and congregation of the former Christ Church and current Sty Peter's over the past 146 years who have served and worshipped in the building and include Bishop Charles John who laid the foundation stone in 1866 and who

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consecrated it in 1871. The history of the church since its relocation in Gonville reflects the early growth of the parish in the 1930s as well as the struggles to maintain the building. The small campus of buildings built from the late twentieth century surrounding the church suggests that the church is a well-used and needed community resource.

Technical Qualities

The relocation of the building represents the technology of the time, which included horses and rays and traction engines. The building is typical of construction techniques and materials of the period.

Cultural Qualities

The building has significant sentimental values as a place of worship for the local Anglican community as well as containing several memorial tablets and stained glass windows commemorating the lives of parishioners.

Reference Source:

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Val Burr