

## St Anthony's Chapel



**Location:** 12 York Street, Gonville, Whanganui  
**Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga List Number:** Nil

**Physical Description:** The chapel is a single storey, moderately pitched gabled building with a rectangular plan located parallel to York Street. The street elevation has a combination of multi-paned windows, semi-circular headed windows and the entry door in a slightly asymmetrical design. The wall is divided into seven bays by brick pilasters extending up from the continuous brick wall under the window sill. The multi-paned windows extend the width of the bay, while the semi-circular headed windows are set in the centre of a rendered wall.

The walls at either end of the chapel are symmetrical with stepped gabled parapets above the roof and have full height brick pilasters dividing the walls into four bays. The coping to the parapet has a toothed effect which, with the rounded headed windows indicates a Romanesque influence to the design. At the apex of the gable is a brick cross. There are four truncated roof ventilators on the roof ridge.

**Register Item Number:**

339

**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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**Other known names:**

**Current Use:** Society of St. Pius X Catholic Church

**Former Uses:** Mainstream Catholic Church

**Heritage Status:**

**District Plan Class:** Class B

**Architectural****Style:**

Neo-

**Date of Construction:** 1924-25

Romanesque

**Materials:** Painted cement render, brick window heads, walls and pilasters, timber joinery, corrugated steel roofing

**Registered owner:****Legal Description:**

**History:** St Anthony's Catholic Church stands prominently on a sandhill ridge overlooking the intersection of York and Alma Streets, in Gonville, and is one of a complex of buildings there now owned by the Roman Catholic Society of St. Pius X. These buildings also include two private schools and the convent of the Dominican Sisters of Wanganui.

By 1925, Wanganui was the fifth largest city in New Zealand, with a population of 24,000, and Gonville was a very fast-growing suburb. As a result, in the early 1920s the priest and Catholic parishioners in the vicinity decided the time was right to build a church hall. As a result, St. Anthony's Church (hall) came to be built in brick by Messrs Ross & Beckett, to the design of Wanganui architect, Clifford Newton Hood, at a cost of £3,734.

The new building was also to double as a school during the week. St. Anthony's Primary School had been due to open at the beginning of the 1925 school year, however, a polio epidemic saw it finally open on 10 April 1925. Seventy-five pupils were enrolled on the first day, and soon the first two founding Sisters were joined by a third, the three living at the Sacred Heart Convent on St. John's Hill.<sup>i</sup>

Because of the building's dual role, each Monday the desks had to be set out, and then each Friday they had to be moved against the walls again, and the seats put out for Sunday Mass. This procedure lasted for five years, until finally in 1930 a house at the back of the church was purchased and converted into classrooms to cope with the increases in the school role.<sup>ii</sup>

St. Anthony's Primary School closed in 1983 and its pupils were transferred to

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the nearby St Marcellin School. At this time, Catholic schools were being integrated into the State education system, and St. Anthony's School was one of those local Catholic schools whose buildings and physical plant were considered *"so woefully below standard that they were unlikely to be accepted for integration."*<sup>iii</sup> The buildings were considered to be an earthquake risk and therefore not suitable for continued use by a school.

The Gonville Josephite community moved out in April 1987 when their house and property were sold by the parish.<sup>iv</sup>

The website of the Dominican Sisters of Wanganui<sup>v</sup>, provides some background on the more recent history of the church. Although the date is not given (although probably in 1987), the St. Anthony's parishioners found themselves with their church up for sale. In response, those who were to become the founding members of the parish to which St. Anthony's now belongs, had promised St. Anthony (1195-1231) that if he got them the church that had been their original Parish church, that they would hold an annual procession in his honour.

Using a 'front man', and despite the efforts of the Bishop of Palmerston North to find out who was buying the church, the St. Anthony's parishioners became the owners of their church. The purchase also included a presbytery section, with presbytery, a convent section, which was empty (following the aforementioned departure of the Josephites), and a school section, also empty. As a result of their promise to St. Anthony, their parade is held each year, and the length of the procession gives an indication of the growth of the parish.

At this church, Mass is celebrated in the traditional Latin style, including covering the head in church, unlike mainstream Catholics. This insistence on tradition has made for a tense relationship for the past four decades between the Pius X Society (which is based in Switzerland) and the Catholic hierarchy in Rome.<sup>vi</sup> Worshippers now come to this church from throughout the Whanganui region.

Other activities on the Gonville site include St. Dominic's College (for boys and girls separately), a new St. Anthony's Primary School, and the convent of the Dominican Sisters of Wanganui, who teach at the schools.<sup>vii</sup> The body operating

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these facilities is the Parish of St. Anthony's & St. Edmond's Catholic Church, Wanganui.

The exterior of the church is largely as it was when built, although some windows have been changed – perhaps at the time it ceased to be used by the school. The interior retains many of its original features, including the pews and the layout preferred by those who celebrate Mass in a traditional format. The Society of St. Pius X wishes to continue using the church as a place of worship, and aims to strengthen the building, without altering its intrinsic character.

## Bibliography

'St. Anthony's, Gonville, Wanganui' Notes prepared by the Whanganui Regional Heritage Trust, October 2011, supplied by Wendy Pettigrew, Wanganui, 2012.

Stevens, Diane, *In Step with Time: A History of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Nazareth, Wanganui New Zealand* (Wanganui, 2001)

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

**Architect/Designer:** Clifford Newton Hood

**History of changes:** The church was jointly used as a school/church between 1925 and 1930. It was purchased by the Society of St. Pius X and converted to their favoured 'traditional' layout probably in the latter 1980s.

**Date Period:** 1924-1925 with a dual use of school and Church.

**Rarity / Special Features:** The celebration of Latin Mass, as the norm, at the Church makes this form of religious worship unusual for the modern Catholic Church.

**Integrity:** The exterior of the church remains largely intact both on the interior and the exterior.

**Representativeness:** The Neo-Romanesque style, materials and form of construction are typical for the period.

**Context/Group Value:** St Anthony's Catholic Church is part of a complex of related buildings and is located in a visually prominent position on the intersection of York and Alma Streets in Gonville.

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## Diversity (Form and Features):

**Fragility / Vulnerability:** The Society of St. Pius X wishes to retain the use of the church and aims to strengthen the building while retaining its heritage values.

## Summary of Significance:

### **Architectural Qualities**

The building remains substantially intact both on the exterior and interior. This level of originality adds to the heritage values of the building. The architect was Clifford Newton Hood, a relatively unknown architect.

### **Historic Qualities**

The site has had continuous education and religious use since 1924. The Church maintains strong Catholic traditions including the celebration of Latin Mass and remaining true to their promise to St Anthony by holding an annual procession.

### **Cultural Qualities**

The Church celebrates Mass in the traditional Latin style and as a result draws its congregation from throughout the Whanganui region. The church has long historic traditions both spiritual and educational for a number of members of the community.

## Reference Source:

## Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Val Burr

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<sup>i</sup> Diane Strevens, *In Step with Time: A History of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Nazareth, Wanganui New Zealand* (Wanganui, 2001), p. 86

<sup>ii</sup> Strevens, p. 86

<sup>iii</sup> Strevens, p. 166

<sup>iv</sup> Strevens, p. 200

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- v The Dominican Sisters of Wanganui: History and their work in Wanganui: [http://www.sspxasia.com/Documents/Society\\_of\\_Saint\\_Pius\\_X/Vocations/Womens-Communities/Chap-9-Dominican-Sisters-of-Wanganui.htm](http://www.sspxasia.com/Documents/Society_of_Saint_Pius_X/Vocations/Womens-Communities/Chap-9-Dominican-Sisters-of-Wanganui.htm)
- vi *Wanganui Chronicle*, 11 December 2010: <http://www.wanganuichronicle.co.nz/news/conservative-leader-visiting-faithful/1037481/>
- vii The Dominican Sisters of Wanganui: <http://dominicansisterswanganui.blogspot.co.nz/>