

Church at Mangamahu



Location: Mangamahu Road, **Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga**
Mangamahu **List Number:** Nil

Physical Description: this simple, gabled, timber framed, Gothic styled church sits above the road facing west. The front façade is symmetrical with small gabled entry in front of the nave, a lancet shaped window either side, the name of the church above the entry and a triangular louvred opening above. Each of the gables has a cross at the apex with curved bracket supports at the base. The three windows on each side elevation match the front windows.

Other known names: Mangamahu Presbyterian Church

Current Use: Church, Uncertain. Occasional use

Former Uses: Presbyterian Church with Anglican services

Heritage Status: **District Plan Class: Class B**

Architectural Style: Carpenter Gothic **Date of Construction:** 1907

Materials: Painted timber rusticated weatherboards, coverboards, joinery, corrugated steel roofing

Registered owner:

Legal Description:

Register Item Number:

352

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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History: European settlement at Mangamahu dates to the 1870s. The *Wikipedia* website states of Mangamahu, that: “In 1879 Arthur Ellis and Allan Robinson bought 140 hectares on the site of the present Mangamahu village. To assist the many settlers and labourers moving up and down Hales Track, they developed a supply store to which a post office was attached in 1889. Then in 1891 they built an accommodation house, and by 1894 this was a licensed 12-bedroom hotel. A blacksmith’s shop and saddlery were added and served customers as far away as Taihape and Raetihi.”¹

The *Wanganui Chronicle* of 29 December 1893 (p. 3) refers to the town’s church services as then being held in the Mangamahu Hall. Meanwhile, the book *The Road to Mangamahu*, by M.H.Campion, P.M. Garland and J.D. Morris (p. 60) mentions that marriages and baptisms were held in various private homes in the district’s early years.

An early sign that the decision had been made to build a church at Mangamahu, appears in the minutes of the Wanganui Presbytery, published in the *Wanganui Chronicle* of 12 February 1902 (p. 3). This states that: “*The Presbytery recommended that a grant of £25 should be made to Mangamahu from the Century Fund for the purchase of a church site.*”

In about January 1906, a meeting of the managers of the Presbyterian Church at Mangamahu, held a meeting after the church service (doubtless in the Mangamahu Hall), to discuss building a church. After taking time to think things over, “*a large and representative public meeting was held, the Rev. B. Hutson in the chair.*” Hutson advised that a section had been secured and that there was about £40 in the bank. The meeting considered that it was time that the community had a church – and passed a resolution to this effect unanimously. The meeting further decided that the managers of the local Presbyterian and Anglican Churches would form a committee and carry out this resolution. As well as the £40, Mr D.S. Polson promised £25 if others could raise at least £75.²

The subsequent meeting, of 7th April 1906, showed that progress was being made by the members of both local denominations. However, the site that had earlier been purchased, had subsequently been partly covered by a slip and

¹ *Wikipedia*: Mangamahu: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mangamahu>

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

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therefore the decision was made to abandon it and find an alternative site. This committee meeting also made the “*decision to build a good comfortable little church, seating about 70 people. The chairman (Rev. Hutson) and Rev. Deane to see to the plans and secure the services of an architect.*”

When planning to fundraise, the two groups concluded that as their membership had “*for a considerable time liberally contributed to the stipend funds, and...subscribed to the funds for buildings at both Matarawa and Fordell,*” that therefore they should be entitled to substantial help from the churches at both places. By the conclusion of the meeting, funds in hand or promised totalled £120.³ In September 1906, the Wanganui architect, A. McFarlane, advertised calling for tenders to build the church, the tenders to close on September 12th.⁴

Campion, Garland & Morris (p. 59) state that the vestry minutes of 3 December 1906 record that: “*It was moved by Mr Blythe – that owing to a land slip the section purchased for a church site at Mangamahu is unsafe for building. As Mr W. Kellick has generously agreed to give another section in exchange the consent of the Presbytery is sought by the Church Property Trustees with effect to the exchange with Mr Kellick*”

The Wanganui Presbytery then duly granted permission to exchange the original church site for a replacement at its December 1906 meeting.⁵

The church was built by Messrs Walpole & Darlington. Costings calculated by the committee treasurer were: Contract £198.0.0, Extra pointing windows £1.0.0, Architect's fee £5.0.0, Advertising tenders £1.10.0, Levelling site £5.6.0, Fencing materials £5.11.11, Additional cost of cartage, wire, battens, gravel, etc. £28.19.0. Bringing the total to £245.6.4.⁶

Then in April 1907, Fordell's Presbyterian Minister (also the Rev. B. Hutson) announced that the new church at Mangamahu would probably be opened on Sunday, 26th May. He hoped that as many Fordell people as possible would

³ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 17 April 1906, p. 8

⁴ *Wanganui Herald*, 5 September 1906, p. 1

⁵ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 15 December 1906, p. 5

⁶ M.H. Campion, P.M. Garland & J.D. Morris, *The Road to Mangamahu: A History of the Whangaehu River Valley from Reid's Hill to Mt View* (Wanganui, 1988), p. 59. Note that this book erroneously states that the church opened in 1909.

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travel up to the event.⁷

The *Wanganui Chronicle* of 29 May 1907 (p. 7) recorded under the heading 'Opening of Mangamahu Church', that: *"Contrary to expectations and weather forecasts, Sunday was fine, enabling the Mangamahu folk to assemble in comparative comfort for the opening of their new church. It was a bit soft under foot, but that is a trifle when one is used to it. Several friends came from Fordell to take part in the opening, and to show their interest in the work of the church. The seating accommodation was taxed to the utmost, but chairs were brought from the hall to provide for the overflow. The Rev. B. Hutson conducted the service...."*

In describing the essential things for a Christian church, Rev. Hutson commented that *"The Christian church is to be as a city set on a hill, and we have built this church to remind all who pass this way that they are in a Christian land."* The collection at the service also added £7.17.9 toward the church's building fund.

"After the service the congregation adjourned to the hall, where all partook most heartily of the good things provided by the Mangamahu friends. An early breakfast, a twenty-mile drive, service at 11:30am, lunch at 1pm, is a splendid tonic to give one an appetite on a winter's day. On behalf of the Mangamahu friends, as requested, Mr Thompson thanked the friends from Fordell for the interest taken in the opening of the church and their presence with them that day. Also, on behalf of the Fordell friends, for the kindly hospitality shown to them.

"At 2pm all were on the road again, and as far as we know, arrived home safely. At 7pm the minister was in the Fordell pulpit. A common Sabbath Day's journey for him had been travelled; but take note all ye who think a mile a long way to go to a church. There were also several men and women, in the congregation who travelled the whole 40 miles, and still found pleasure in the services of the sanctuary."⁸

The first child christened in the church, on 11 October 1909, was Mabel Anne

⁷ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 27 April 1907, p. 2

⁸ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 29, May 1907, p. 7

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Kellick. One of the earliest weddings, if not the first, was the marriage of Ida Annie Campbell and Herbert John Tod. This occurred in 1915. Other early Presbyterian Mangamahu weddings appear to have been held in larger and more accessible churches – such as St. Paul’s in Wanganui.⁹

Delphine Turney’s book, *Our Heritage Forever...: The First 150 Years of St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church Wanganui* (p. 137) states that the Mangamahu Church was part of the Bulls-Turakina-Fordell parish. The parish celebrated 100 years of worship in 1983, however, by 1987 Fordell was struggling with only ten active members. A proposal was then made to amalgamate with St. Paul’s in Wanganui. The book records that while the Fordell church required upkeep and repair, “the small Mangamahu Church, part of the Fordell Parish, was maintained by the Kellick Bequest.” The amalgamation duly occurred on 1 July 1988. After this, a service was held at Mangamahu at 5:00pm once a month, alternating with the Anglican Vicar of St. Barnabas.

The Mangamahu Church celebrated its centenary on 10 June 2007, with a service at the church and the planting of a Rhododendron tree in front of it. A series of photos of the event were published online by the Archer family.¹⁰

On 23 December 2009, a stained glass window that depicts the Mangamahu Church in the background behind the (then) newly rebuilt Bridge 47 at Mangamahu, was installed in the Wanganui District Council’s Council Chamber. This window had been sponsored by the Mangamahu Community.¹¹

Architect/Designer: A. McFarlane

History of changes:

Date Period: 1900s

⁹ Campion, Garland & Morris, p. 60, the Tod-Campbell marriage on the Births, Deaths & Marriages website: <https://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz/home/> and *Wanganui Chronicle* 22 July 1909, p. 8 (Farley-Morgan), 15 September 1919, p. 4 (MacFarlane-McDonald)

¹⁰ Mangamahu Church Centenary photos: http://archerpix.com/Mangamahu_church/index.html

¹¹ Wanganui District Council: ‘Community Link’, 31 December 2009: <http://www.wanganui.govt.nz/news/commsLink/issue447.asp>

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Rarity / Special Features: The building is typical of the Gothic style.

Integrity: From a superficial visual inspection the building appears to be largely intact.

Representativeness: The building is typical of the Gothic style.

Context/Group Value: The building is located in a prominent visual position above the road at the entrance to the township.

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: The building appears to be used periodically for church services. Timber buildings are at a risk of fire.

Summary of Significance:

Architectural Qualities

The style of church is Carpenter Gothic with a simple symmetrical church plan of the entrance facing the street and a simple gabled knave behind. The main stylistic characteristics can be seen in lancet shaped windows and steeply pitched roofs. The church is located in a prominent position above the road, leading towards the settlement. The building is associated with architect A. McFarland, and builders Walpole & Darlington.

Historic Qualities

The building has over a century of religious and spiritual use by the Presbyterian Church.

Cultural Qualities

The church, having celebrated its centenary in 2007, has been the spiritual and social home of the Presbyterian community in local area. Many special events related to life, death and marriage would have occurred here.

Reference Source:

Campion, M.H., Garland, P.M., & Morris, J.D., *The Road to Mangamahu: A History of the Whangaehu River Valley from Reid's Hill to Mt View* (Wanganui, 1988)

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Turney, Delphine, *Our Heritage Forever...: The First 150 Years of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church Wanganui* (Wanganui, 2003)

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

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Val Burr