

# Whanganui District Heritage Inventory

## Heritage Assessment and Statement of Significance

Item: **Pepara Church**

Register Item No: **19**                      Class: **B**

Address: **Koriniti Marae, Whanganui River Road/  
Te Waiherehere and Poutama Koriniti Pā Road,  
Matahiwi**

Legal Description:

**Tauakira 2M No.4 Blk XV Tauakira SD**

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga List Number and Category (if applicable): N/A

### Heritage Values:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Cultural/Social
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Setting/Context
- Interior

### Statement of Significance

Pepara, also known as Koriniti Church, or Babel Church, is a part of the Marae grounds at Koriniti, or Otukopiri. Affiliated broadly with the Anglican Church though welcoming to all denominations, it is much valued by the community and was recently restored. Built over 1920-21, it is the third church built to serve the settlement, which was a centre for Christianity and Anglican mission life along the Whanganui River from the 1840s.

It was constructed by the people of Ngāti Pamoana with assistance from Ngāti Poutama, to the drawings of Frederick de Jersey Clere, who designed over one hundred churches in the lower North Island as Architect to the Anglican Diocese of Wellington.

The church retains associations with Clere, Canon Wilfrid Williams, and Sister Elsie Smith MBE who lived at the settlement for several decades ministering to the surrounding area. The church is considered to be of architectural, historical, social, cultural, and contextual significance.

### Physical Description

Pepara is a church built of timber board and batten-clad walls, with a corrugated iron roof. A corrugated iron fleche-styled spire tops the belfry. Lancet windows are present throughout the church and hinge from the bottom to allow for maximum ventilation. A small porch is at the west end of the church and a vestry on the north wall. The chancel of the church occupies about half of the building's length (9.7m by 5.4m, excluding the porch and vestry).

Pews in the church were donated by other churches in the diocese, with the names of donors stencilled on each one. A stone cairn stands in the church grounds and is dedicated to the memory of Sister Elsie Smith MBE (1881-1968).

## Historical Significance

None Low Moderate High **Outstanding**

*Whether the place is associated with important or representative themes or aspects of local, regional, or national history; whether the place is associated with historically important events, persons, groups, ideas, movements, social patterns, activities, or developments or advancements; and/or whether the place retains a use, function or integrity of association that contributes to the historical importance of the place.*

Pepara is the third iteration of a church to be built at the site. Operiki settlement was home to Ngāti Pāmoana hapū, of Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi. In 1848, the settlement relocated nearby to Otukopiri at which time Anglican missionary Richard Taylor renamed it to Koriniti, a te reo Māori transliteration of Corinth.<sup>1</sup>

Reverend Richard Taylor also instigated the construction of a church at the new settlement, also built in 1848. The replacement church of 1865 was used until it was badly damaged by gale-force winds accompanying the 1918 Raetihi fire. Susan Mclean notes that this church had been constructed of heart totara with an interior featuring whakairo and arapaki or tukutuku work prior.<sup>2</sup>

The second church was subsequently demolished in 1919. Reverend Wilfrid Williams recalled “a dilapidated Church, of rough, unlined timber, thickly hung with cobwebs and well coated with dust, and furnished with rough planks, supported on candle boxes round the walls”.<sup>3</sup> Frederick de Jersey Clere, architect to the Diocese of Wellington, was called upon to design a replacement church, also being required to design a replacement for St Mary’s Church in Raetihi which had been destroyed in the same conflagration.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of Pepara’s construction, the resident missionary in the Whanganui District (and Superintendent of Māori Mission work in the Diocese) was Reverend Wilfrid Williams. In 1931, Rev. Williams recalled that fundraising for the replacement church began in September 1919, with Whanganui hapū collectively donating £220, the H. and W. Williams Trust donating £100, and wider fundraising from individuals and other parishes resulting in an additional £450. The £870 raised in 1919-1920 would equate to \$93,193, 104 years later.<sup>5</sup> This enabled the purchase of building materials and furnishings, and the construction of the church was carried out on a voluntary basis by local residents of the area.<sup>6</sup> It was completed by 1921, and nearby Te Waiherehere meeting house (1845) was renovated at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

In 1923, a Miss Bennett came to the area to serve as a missionary. With nowhere in the vicinity considered appropriate for a woman missionary to live, she was required to live at the house of the Parikino schoolmaster. Fundraising began again to build a three room cottage at Parikino to provide accommodation for a nursing sister, and \$290 (\$35,039 in 2024) was raised in a two year period.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Walton 1994, p. 152)

<sup>2</sup> (Maclean 2003, p.116)

<sup>3</sup> (Williams 1931, p.111)

<sup>4</sup> (Maclean 2003, pp. 117-118)

<sup>5</sup> (Reserve Bank of New Zealand Inflation Calculator, 2024)

<sup>6</sup> (Williams 1931, p. 111)

<sup>7</sup> (Maclean 2003, p.117)

<sup>8</sup> (Williams 1931, p. 111)

Construction of the bungalow-style cottage was carried out primarily by Teko Chadwick using materials supplied by the Bassett timber company of Whanganui.<sup>9</sup>

The inaugural nursing sister was Nurse Beswick, arriving in 1925. As well as carrying out nursing work, she taught home nursing and first aid to people in the area.<sup>10</sup>

The most well known nursing missionary was Sister Elsie Smith, who arrived in 1930. Moving to New Zealand from England in 1926, she worked initially as matron at Waipawa's Abbotsford Home for Children, and then as deaconess at St Stephen's Church, Marton. Sister Elsie arrived in May 1930 and she would spend the next 33 serving the people of Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi.<sup>11</sup>

Five years later a mission house was built nearby to house Anglican Missionary Sister Elsie Smith MBE. In May 1930 Elsie Smith travelled up the Whanganui River to Koriniti, where she was to spend 33 years ministering as a nurse and missionary to Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi of the river's lower reaches, but mainly to Ngāti Pamoana.

"Sister Elsie" became a fixture of her district, which encompasses the area between Parikino and Pipiriki, and encompassing Matahiwi, Rānana and Jerusalem. Wearing a blue-belted smock with white collar, black stockings, and boots or gumboots, she travelled however she could to attend to those in need. Playing the organ and ringing the church bell on Sundays, she was initially forbidden by kaumatua to speak at services, as women were not allowed to speak at the marae. Rev. Williams eventually persuaded most parishioners to attend services where she was speaking, although some kaumatua remained reluctant.<sup>12</sup>

As road access to the area improved, she was able to focus less on nursing and more on spiritual ministry work, and she retired in 1954. In 1955 she was appointed a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) and then adopted by Ngāti Pamoana as a member.<sup>13</sup>

She visited her family in England in 1962 before returning to Koriniti. However she went back to England in 1963 to nurse her brother who had become unwell. She did not return and passed away on 4 May 1968 at Bradenham in Buckinghamshire.<sup>14</sup>

The church remains consecrated and used to this day, holding an ongoing function and integrity of association which strengthens its historic heritage values greatly.

## Social Significance

None Low Moderate **High** Outstanding

*Whether the place has a strong or special association with, or is held in high regard by, a particular community or cultural group for its symbolic, spiritual, commemorative, traditional or other cultural value; whether the place makes a significant contribution to the uniqueness or identity of the locality,*

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<sup>9</sup> (Mission to Maoris: Anglican Work on the Wanganui River 1925)

<sup>10</sup> (Mission to Maoris: Anglican Work on the Wanganui River 1925)

<sup>11</sup> (Kirk 1998)

<sup>12</sup> (Kirk 1998)

<sup>13</sup> (Kirk 1998)

<sup>14</sup> (Kirk 1998)

*district, region or nation; whether the place is an icon or marker that a community or culture (past or present) identifies with; and/or whether the place is significant to tangata whenua.*

Pepara is considered to be of high social significance in the Whanganui area.

It is held in high regard by Ngāti Pamoana for spiritual, commemorative and symbolic associations, and by the wider people and communities of the surrounding area. It is an important contributor to the unique identity of the locality and is a place that is significant to tangata whenua.

Its significance was affirmed in 1970 when a service was held to mark the 50th anniversary of the church. Preparations were made by having the Pepara Church repainted and repaired, and the Waiherehere Wharepuni and other buildings painted. The carvings from the old Poutama Meeting House which was dismantled at Raratia, were placed in the Pepara Church for safe keeping. A memorial cairn built of stones from the Whanganui River, with a stainless steel plaque inserted, was built by Messrs Panatahi Metekingi and Eric Fisher.

, and to dedicate a memorial to If only children were present she would afterwards take them all to the lawn in front of her cottage and give them lunch. Her hospitality was well known to many visitors and tourists after the road was put through as everybody was made welcome to her home. One of the proud moments of her life was when she would take her band of Maori women of the Mothers' Union to visit other Unions and districts. Their banner made of woven flax linen was much admired and still remains in the Pepara Church.

## Architecture, Technological and Construction Significance

None Low **Moderate** High Outstanding

*Whether the place has architectural value; whether the place belongs to important architectural styles or is a good example of vernacular architecture; whether the place has distinctive attributes of an aesthetic or functional nature (including massing, proportion, materials, detail, fenestration, ornamentation, artwork, functional layout, landmark status or symbolic value); whether the place demonstrates innovation or accomplishment, through design, use of materials or technology,, method of construction or of craft skill; and whether the place is associated with an architect, engineer, designer or builder who has made a special contribution to their profession or work.*

Pepara is a good example of Frederick de Jersey Clere's. It is one of his later churches, but is a return to some of the characteristics of his earlier designs. Vertical board and batten cladding, fairly simple hinged lancet windows, and sparing carpenter gothic details are present and distinctive features of Clere's smaller church designs, and although examples of such churches are found across the lower North Island, comparatively few have survived in the Whanganui District.

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## Setting and Contextual Significance

None Low Moderate **High** Outstanding

*Whether the place contributes to or is associated with a wider historical or cultural context whether the place contributes to the streetscape, townscape or landscape; whether the place has collective value as a part or member of a group of inter-related, but not necessarily contiguous, heritage features or places or a wider heritage landscape; and whether the place is part of a group of heritage features or places (contiguous or discontinuous), that, taken together, have a coherence because of such factors as age, history, appearance, style, scale, fabric or use.*

The church is an important contributor in its setting and wider landscape, as part of Otukopiri - Koriniti Marae.

The Ngāti Pamoana marae features two restored whare tupuna. Te Waiherehere is Koriniti's own original house, and Poutama, moved across the river from Karatia (Galatea) in 1967, is one of the district's finest meeting houses. Ōperika pā, the original home of Ngāti Pamoana, is a fine historic example of a fighting pā.

These buildings share a coherence through their history, fabric, appearance and use, and form a wider heritage landscape.

## **Archaeological and Scientific Significance**

**None** Low Moderate High Outstanding

*Whether the place has the potential to contribute new or important information about the history of the place or wider area through archaeological or scientific investigation; whether the place retains a physical form that can be appreciated by the community to aid in the understanding of past uses or history; whether the place has the potential to provide evidence to address archaeological or scientific research questions.*

N/A

## **Representativeness, rarity and integrity**

None Low **Moderate** High Outstanding

*Whether the place is a representative example of a particular class or type of place; whether the place or a component of it is rare, unique, the first such place or is the only such place in the locality, district, region or nation; whether the place retains a significant amount of original or early fabric, or fabric from an important period in the place's history.*

The church is a good representative example of smaller churches built with the involvement of Frederick de Jersey Clere in the lower North Island. Vertical board and batten cladding, fairly simple hinged lancet windows, and sparing carpenter gothic details are present and distinctive features of Clere's smaller church designs, and although examples of such churches are found across the former extent of the Diocese of Wellington, comparatively few have survived in the Whanganui District.

The integrity of Pepara is high, retaining a significant amount of fabric from the time it was constructed in 1920-21.

**Date: 15 October 2024**

**Research by: Scott Flutey**

## References

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**Additional Photographs and/or images:**