

Whanganui District Heritage Inventory

Heritage Assessment and Statement of Significance

Item: **St Paul's Memorial Church**

Register Item No: **79**

Class: **A**

Address: **6 Te Anaua Street, Pūtiki**

Legal Description: **Lot 1 DP 11329 (RT WN462/9), Pt Church Mission Station Putiki Māori Reserve (RT WN672/22), Legal Road, Wellington Land District**

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga List Number and Category (if applicable): **9718; Category 1**

Heritage Values:

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



Figure 1: St Paul's Memorial Church, Putiki, photographed June 2025.

Statement of Significance

St Paul's Memorial Church is a place of outstanding heritage significance, both within the district and at a national level. Constructed in 1937, it continues a lineage of formal church worship at Pūtiki dating back to 1842, when the first permanent church was built.

The church is an expression of Māori engagement with and influence on the Church Missionary Society and the Anglican Church, and a number of significant clergy are associated with the church, including members of the Williams family and Richard Taylor.

Outstanding aesthetic, architectural, technological and cultural values are embodied in the church. Its interior decoration is considered an important milestone in the twentieth century revival of

Māori art forms, initiated in part by the School of Māori Arts and Crafts in the interwar period. The initial decoration, later construction of the parish hall and recent restoration work at the church has enabled consecutive generations to build and hone traditional and contemporary art and design capabilities.

Its highly ornamented interior both contrasts and complements its simple gothic exterior. Its intentionally unique and cohesive interior decoration and design adds greatly to its function as a collective memorial to the people of the Mission Station, and to the district's war dead.

Located within the grounds of the Pūtiki Mission Station, the church holds strong cultural linkages with the adjacent Parish Hall, urupā, vicarage, and Pūtiki Marae. The grounds around the church and the wider surrounding landscape are of high historical, spiritual, archaeological, and cultural significance, as a place of longstanding human settlement in Whanganui.

Physical Description

Entrance to the church is through a lych-gate, made of timber over block-work. St Paul's Memorial Church is rendered on the exterior, consisting of a single-storeyed nave, polygonal chancel, apse and vestry. The chancel and nave is slightly lower than the apse, featuring a gabled roof which is hipped at the outward end.

The bell tower is three-storeyed and accommodates the entrance porch and foyer of the church at ground level. A marble foundation stone is placed at the tower's southern base. An ornamented bellcote at the top of the tower is open to the elements, allowing a view of the bell from the ground. The church is roofed in corrugated iron or steel and the steeple is shingled in timber.

The interior of the church is richly decorated. The foyer is match-lined with tongue and groove boards and a number of memorials, pictures and paintings, plaques and taonga are on display.

The primary interior decoration in the church is of arapaki (tukutuku) panels, kowhaiwhai painted rafters, and kākaho lining. Tōtara flashing inlaid with pāua also features, and a dado rail under the windows separates the upper decorations from vertical timber panelling. The flooring is now partially carpeted.

Looking to the nave, the carved chancel arch references whareniui design, featuring maihi (bargeboards) resting on amo (supports), with a koruru figure at the apex extended downward below a cross-piece evoking the crucifixion.

Windows in the nave are of clear and coloured church glass with lancet tops; memorial windows in the angled chancel walls are of stained glass and sandblasted designs. Design elements in the church and on chattels are both pan-tribal and Whanganui specific (such as Whanganui Mūmū checkerboard patterns).¹

¹ For further detail on specific patterns, please refer to the Detailed List Entry for the church compiled by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, compiled for the New Zealand Heritage List Rārangī Kōrero

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.

Pūtiki Wharanui a Tamatea Pokai Whenua, often shortened to Pūtiki-wharanui or Pūtiki, is a longstanding settlement on the southern bank of Whanganui River.

Pūtiki and its surrounds have been settled for many centuries, and the wider Whanganui also has a longstanding history of Māori occupation. Te Atihaunui a Pāpārangi, the collective grouping of peoples of the river are named after the siblings and guardian tūpuna Hinengākau, Tamaūpoko and Tūpoho. Tūpoho settled in the lower reaches and is closely associated with Pūtiki.

As one of the largest settlements on the lower reaches of the river, Pūtiki came to be considered a matapihi (window) to Whanganui – for Māori to encounter European travellers and newcomers, and for Europeans to contact and engage with Whanganui Māori. Traders and whalers had visited Whanganui in the 1830s and from this period onwards, Pūtiki grew in prominence.

Wiremu Eruera Te Tauri, a lay-reader of chiefly Ngāti Te Rangi-ita, Ngāti Tūwharetoa descent, and married to Ripeka of Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi, had introduced Christianity to Pūtiki in the 1830s and it had a number of adherents by December 1839, when Missionary Henry Williams of the Anglican Church Missionary Society visited for six days. Accordingly it was agreed that Church Missionary Society would establish a mission station at a site offered by local rangatira and send a permanent missionary to the area.

The Mission Station was established in 1840 when Reverend John Mason was appointed inaugural missionary. A permanent brick church was opened in 1842, as was an urupā. In 1843, Reverend Mason became the second person to be buried there, having drowned in January of that year. Richard Taylor arrived shortly after that and he remained connected to the mission until his passing in 1873.

There were four successive churches built before the present one: in 1842, 1844, 1857, and 1887. The bell in the present church is from the second mission, made in 1845 by C & G Mears of London.

The current church is highly historically significant for both its place in a wider historic lineage of spirituality and historical connections at Pūtiki, but also for its role in the revival of toi Māori (carving, weaving, and other cultural practices) in the interwar period. This happened at a national level, steered in part by statesman Sir Āpirana Ngata through his direction of the School of Māori Arts and Crafts at Rotorua. While attending Victoria University of Wellington in the 1930s, Ngata's son Henare met Rora Metekingi who was from Putiki. She and Henare established a friendship and later married in 1940. This connection enabled kaumatua from Putiki to engage closely with Ngata

and the School, and to build the church with integrated Māori design over several years later on in the 1930s.² These individuals remain associated with the church and overall St Paul's is an important example of the wider Māori arts revival during the interwar period.

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, 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.

St Paul's Memorial Church is held in high regard by parishioners, members of the wider Putiki and Whanganui community, and those with an interest in the Māori Anglican church or the church more generally. It is an icon of the area with significant attachments to the past. Along with the wider landscape it sits in and alongside (such as Putiki settlement and the Whanganui River), it is of high significance to tangata whenua.

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.

Significance can be found in both the exterior and interior elements of the building. However, the degrees of significance, and specific subsets of values differ between the interior and exterior.

The interior is of outstanding accomplishment and quality, and is associated with a number of craftspeople – most local and some from further afield. Description of the interior and application of craft techniques can be found earlier in this assessment. The aesthetic and cultural values embedded in the building through its interior design are highly symbolically important, and arguably one of the most important examples of incorporation of toi Māori into twentieth century church architecture at the national level.

The exterior is in contrast more overtly European-influenced, and references earlier modes and approaches to ecclesiastical architecture through its design – specifically the designs of Frederick de Jersey Clere found across the North Island. The exterior shares design, massing and fenestration detailing with St Mary's Anglican Church in Pākaraka. Many elements of the interior furnishings such

² (Reweti 2019)

as the pews are also to the same basic design. This was the final church associated with Frederick de Jersey Clere, longstanding Diocesan Architect for the Anglican Diocese of Wellington although he took a hands off role, apparently only preparing final construction drawings. An account of the St Mary's Church consecration proceedings specifically emphasised the role of builder Arthur Cutler in drawing a sketch plan of the church, which was subsequently redrawn by Clere to essentially the same design as the original sketch. Cutler had also designed and made the furniture for St Mary's.³ Cutler was marketing his services in the 1930s as a "Joiner, Builder and House Designer" and used 33 Ingestre Street, a new house he designed and constructed for photographer Mark Luder Lampe as an exemplar home promoting his abilities.⁴

Early on in the Putiki project, Cutler was asked to undertake additional complex design work "when the original intention to create a purely European church was abandoned in favour of the happier and more difficult one to embody Māori art as well". As with St Mary's, Cutler designed furnishings for the church which were subsequently carved by others, under the overall tutelage and supervision of Pineamine Taiapa.⁵

Kowhaiwhai painting on the ceiling rafters was executed by Ōriwa (Oliver) Tahupōtiki Haddon. From 1925, Haddon had been stationed in Whanganui as a Methodist missionary, though he also maintained strong connections with T.W. Rātana and spent several years at Rātana settlement before relocating back to Whanganui in 1930 when he began commission work as an artist. In 1936 he was appointed as a broadcaster for the station 2ZB (in Wellington) and 5ZB (a travelling station) with his own programme sharing Māori history and stories while also finding time to assist with decoration of St Paul's.⁶

The oversight of Āpirana Ngata on the project brought an emphasis on local revival and perpetuation of forms of toi Māori such as whakairo and raranga (carving and weaving). Many Putiki locals were directly involved in the production of internal elements of the church, under supervision of kaiako (instructors) who had existing ties to Ngata's School of Māori Arts and Crafts. A great number of unrecorded community members therefore played a part in the construction of the church, though their individual names may not have been recorded. Local people have again been directly involved in the restoration of the church in more recent years.

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.

³ (Fine New Church: St Mary's at Maxwell 1933)

⁴ (Cutler 1933); (Page 1 Advertisements Column 5 1934)

⁵ (Just on a Century of Mission Work: Memorial Church at Putiki Consecrated 1937)

⁶ (Lineham 1998)

Although this scheduling assessment pertains to only the church, its interior, and the land parcel it sits on (including its entrance lychgate), the place is strongly connected to a much wider historical and cultural landscape context.

The church is one component of the Putiki Mission Grounds, which also incorporates an adjacent Parish Hall, urupā, and vicarage spaced out across the grounds with grazing areas in between. The Parish Hall was built in the 1950s and similarly to the church, features Māori art and design elements in its interior. Decorated by Dr Cliff Whiting (himself mentored in art by Pine Taiapa who was earlier involved with carvings in the church), the Parish Hall is an important inter-related building to the church.⁷

Beyond the Mission Grounds, the church contributes to a wider cultural heritage landscape, which includes the neighbouring marae, urupa and wahi tapu areas along the ridge to the east, and the Whanganui River. Age, history and use provide strong contextual coherence to the wider area. Tangata whenua value this cultural landscape greatly and its constituent parts are inter-related though not always contiguous.

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.

St Paul's is not itself likely to address archaeological research questions. It may be able to aid scientific investigation into historical toi Māori practices and restoration techniques.

The ground that the church sits on, and the surrounding mission grounds, are very likely to contribute new archaeological information about the history of Putiki if they were investigated. Other parts of the mission grounds likely hold elements of earlier iterations of St Paul's – they have not always stood at the same location.

Because the area was an important place for settlement and trade well before the nineteenth century, the area holds a number of archaeological sites and wahi tapu, both recorded and unrecorded.

⁷ (The Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi 2024)

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.

St Paul's Memorial Church is an outstanding example of the twentieth century revival of Māori art practice – especially its incorporation into church architecture. It is the only building in the district designed and built with the involvement of Sir Apirana Ngāta and his school of Māori Arts and Crafts.

Embodying cultural practices from it includes fabric from the nineteenth century Mission Grounds and earlier churches, for example the bell which is still in use. It is an important built expression of Māori spirituality in Whanganui and it retains its 1937 fabric and layout in its entirety, aside from any elements which have been incorporated in on a like-with-like basis as part of necessary conservation work in the 21st century.

Date: 22 August 2024

Research by: Scott Flutey

References

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[details/9718/St%20Paul%E2%80%99s%20Memorial%20Church%20\(Anglican\)%20and%20PC5%ABtiki%20Parish%20Hall](https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/9718/St%20Paul%E2%80%99s%20Memorial%20Church%20(Anglican)%20and%20PC5%ABtiki%20Parish%20Hall).

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Additional Photographs and/or images:



Figure 2: Photographs taken at St Paul's Memorial Church on the day of its consecration in 1937. Pictured attendees include Sir Āpirana Ngata and Te Riringi, Lady Ngata, and senior clergy of Te Pīhopatanga O Aotearoa (the Māori Anglican Church). Published in Supplement to the Auckland Weekly News, 8 December 1937, p. 54. Via Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections AWNS-19371208-54-02

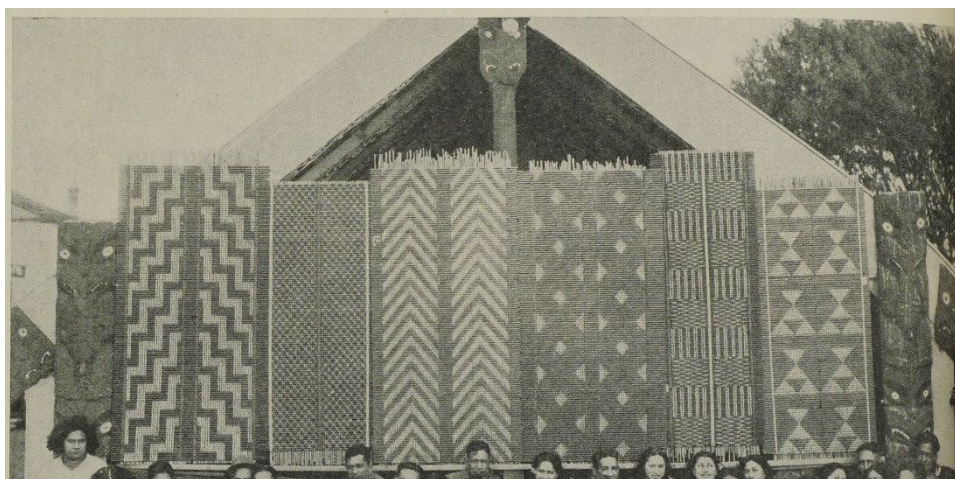


Figure 3: The interior furnishing of the church was undertaken largely by members of the Putiki community. This photograph taken in the final months of construction shows a group posed outside Te Paku-o-te-rangi, Putiki, alongside the arapaki (tukutuku) panels prior to their installation in the church. Members of the group pictured were among those involved in their production. Published in Supplement to the Auckland Weekly News, 13 October 1937, p.56. Via Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections AWNS-19371013-56-03



4: Interior photograph of the nave and chancel, representing interior heritage fabric elements. Photograph taken May 2025.