

All Saints, Howick

CHURCHES IN AUCKLAND

Our way of building here in New Zealand seems to respond only very slowly to changes in our social, cultural, and economic conditions. While our pinot-and-satay diet or our communication tools were inconceivable even a generation ago, our houses are made in much the same way as those of our great grandparents. Ironically, the buildings commissioned by the Church, often understood as among our most conservative institutions, that have closely reflected changing times.

Church architecture in NZ began with George Augustus Selwyn (1809-78), the nation's first Anglican Bishop. Selwyn arrived in 1842, a time when expanding European settlement created a demand for substantial church buildings. European architecture at the time was in the thrall of Eclecticism, with the architect's chief task being to decide which style – Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, etc. – was most suitable for a given building. Selwyn was an "Ecclesiologist" – in the search for authenticity, this group dismissed Classical buildings as pagan and held that only medieval Gothic was suitable for church design, believing that a return to medieval forms would spiritually revive the church. This linking of dogma and design has a strikingly Modern ring to it – good design was not only theologically sound but morally improving.

Selwyn's first two churches, designed in a Gothic style and built in stone, began to disintegrate soon after their completion. Problems with materials and workmanship made the use of masonry difficult, and it was reluctantly concluded that local conditions called for a more "temporary" architecture in timber. Selwyn turned to the vernacular wooden buildings of medieval times to provide models, and this combination of strict ideology and tectonic pragmatism produced a form of proto-modern architecture.

Supervised by London-trained architect Frederick Thatcher (1814-90), many early churches made use of prefabrication techniques – building elements were prepared by students in the workshops at St. John's College and shipped to their sites. The resulting buildings were characterised by steeply pitched roofs, vertical board-and-batten exteriors, stained timber interiors, and exposed structures. These early churches often held up as an example of a thoroughly indigenous architecture. Although the Group's stated references were to wool shed and *whare* precedents, their attempt a century later to define a Kiwi architecture employed a remarkably similar vocabulary: board-and-batten; rationalised, exposed timber structures; sarked interiors; a high-minded, buildings-can-change-the-world rhetoric.

Through the early part of the 20th century, Eclecticism continued to dominate. The Liturgical Movement declared that stylistic rules – such as those of the Ecclesiological school – no longer applied. Instead, they sought churches that were physically configured to encourage active participation in services by congregations. The resulting new buildings and bold refurbishments opened up hierarchical layouts. Modernist ideas began trickling into the country, but many older architects treated Modernism as simply another style to apply when useful.

Post-war, the key influence on church design was the conscious desire among Kiwi architects to define a regional architecture. John Scott's Futuna Chapel (1961) became an exemplar of architecture which found the common ground between international trends and local traditions. Here in Auckland, All Saints Ponsonby (1959) was explicit in its adaptation of Maori forms to a Modern vocabulary.

In recent years, as NZ has secularised and churches have lost their central role in their communities, parishes have sought new ways of drawing people in. Holy Trinity Cathedral (1995) was designed for maximum flexibility – the nave's square plan, movable seating, and hydraulic stage allow it to be used for cultural and community events as well as church services. Other parishes have chosen to strip themselves of "churchy" cultural baggage. At Holy Cross Church in Albany (2001), informal services take place in a space built in the raw concrete and steel vernacular of industrial buildings. *Andrew Barrie*

Sources:

The photographs are by Andrew Barrie; the drawings are used with permission from *Home & Building* magazine. Many thanks to Jeremy Hansen for his assistance.

Auckland's early churches form a key part of New Zealand's architectural heritage, and a great deal of information is available. Most useful are John Stacpoole's *Colonial Architecture in New Zealand* (A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1976), C R Knight's *The Selwyn Churches of Auckland* (A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1972), and Geoffrey Thornton's *Worship in the Wilderness: Early Churches of New Zealand* (Reed Publishing, Auckland, 2003). The large book produced by the Historic Places Trust and edited by Frances Porter, *Historic Buildings of New Zealand: North Island* (Cassell, Auckland, 1979), is especially useful for those interested in visiting sites. The Historic Places Trust website (www.historic.org.nz) is also a readily accessible source of detailed information.

Many of the 20th century churches are discussed in our general histories: *Architecture 1820 – 1970* (A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1972) by John Stacpoole and Peter Beaven, and Peter Shaw's *A History of New Zealand Architecture* (Hodder Moa Beckett, Auckland, revised edition 2003).

1

1847

St. Andrew's Church
Symonds Street, City
Walter Robertson



Standing in a prominent location near what was at the time of its construction NZ's government centre, St. Andrew's is the oldest building in the central city. It is also NZ's earliest remaining Presbyterian church, and the oldest intact stone church of any denomination in the country. Known simply as the Scotch Church, the city's first Presbyterian church, this building was originally a simple, well-lit, rectangular meeting house. Reflecting the prosperity of the local Presbyterian community, in the early 1880s this box was adorned with an impressive Doric portico and ornate steeple in a Greek Revival style designed by Matthew Henderson.

2

1847

All Saint's Church
Cnr Selwyn Rd & Cook St, Howick
Frederick Thatcher & R. Wood



The second oldest church in New Zealand, this was the first building erected in the area. It is the only surviving example of the eight prefabricated churches made in the workshops at St. John's College - its pre-made elements were carried to the site by water and erected in a single day. The braces of the external timber frame are simplified diagonal rather than the more complicated arched braces of chapel at St. John's. Internally and externally, the timber board are painted white, with structure and braces painted black. Originally a Latin cross plan, an extra aisle was added in 1862 to accommodate a growing congregation. Make a point of wandering the grounds, where many early settlers are buried.

3

1847

Chapel of St. John the Evangelist
208 St Johns Road, Meadowbank
Fredrick Thatcher



This building was built as the chapel for a community - including a theological college, collegiate school, infant school, Maori teachers' school, Maori boys' school, and hospital - that Bishop Selwyn established on this site in 1843. The building consists of a single skin wooden structure on a stone base. Its exposed structural timber frame was a key feature of Thatcher's buildings, but the arched bracing at St. John's is distinctive. The theological college Selwyn established is still in operation and the chapel, designed to be temporary, continues to be in daily use.

4

1848

St Stephen's Chapel
12 Judge St, Judges Bay, Parnell
Fredrick Thatcher



Though open for use by others, the original building on this site was privately commissioned by Bishop Selwyn as a chapel for his own use. However, the masonry structure of building, designed by Kempthorne, began to disintegrate soon after it was built. Thatcher's tiny replacement is a Greek cross plan composed of five 10 foot by 10 foot units, the central crossing surmounted by a belfry. The exterior is simple vertical boards, the structure is being expressed internally. With only a few tiny windows, the dark-stained interior has the atmospheric gloominess typical of the Selwyn Gothics. History was made here in 1857, with the signing of the first constitution of the Anglican church in NZ, following a conference called by Selwyn and held in the chapel. A global first, the constitution gave lay people and clergy equal rights in managing the affairs of the church.

5

1885

St. Patrick's Cathedral
41 Wyndham Street, City
Mahoney and Son



Currently being restored, this brick and plaster structure was completed in 1885 and expanded by the original architect in 1907. Best bits: a light, expansive interior, and the adjacent public square. The neighbouring presbytery, also designed by Edward Mahoney and Sons is also worth a look - a two-storey brick structure in a Gothic Revival style, it was built in 1888 as a priests' residence and administrative centre for the Catholic Diocese of Auckland.

6

1888

St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral
Parnell Road, Parnell
Benjamin Mountfort



St. Mary's, built as interim Anglican cathedral, replaced a 1859 structure by Thatcher. Benjamin Mountfort, who designed more than forty churches around the country, originally proposed a church in brick and stone. When this proved to be too expensive, it was redesigned in wood and completed in sections. With the distinctive jagged roofline and stunning stained timber interior, St. Mary's is regarded by many as the best example of wooden Gothic Revival architecture in the world. The church was moved across the road to its present position in a single day in 1982. While here, take a look at Selwyn Court at 8 St. Stephen's Ave. The complex, which includes a library, baptistry and bell tower, was designed by Thatcher as a residence for Selwyn and is still occupied by the Bishop of Auckland.

7

1902

St. Matthew's-in-the-City
134 Hobson Street, City
Frank Loughborough Pearson



Frederick Thatcher, the architect of the Selwyn Gothic buildings, later became a priest and was the parish's first vicar. A wooden church constructed during his tenure was replaced by a design by Pearson, an English architect, with construction supervised by local architect Edward Bartley. Built of Oamaru stone, it is arguably NZ's best building in the Early English Gothic style. The simple, largely undecorated use of stone create a strong vertical emphasis. On the interior, the vaulting of choir and aisles emphasise vertical dimension, the space ascending to an exposed timber roof. Thanks to funding from Sky City across the street, a recent restoration by Salmond Reed Architects has left the church in excellent condition.

8

1930

Church of St. Michael
4-6 Beatrice Road, Remuera
Tole and Massey



This brick church was built in an Italian Romanesque style that was fashionable for Catholic churches in the 1920s and 30s. Externally, the most striking element is the arched entry, the double doors each being flanked by twisting Spanish columns. The interior is remarkable - the simple basilica plan is enclosed by a dramatic barrel vault. The building won an NZIA Gold Medal in 1933. In his day, Horace Massey was regarded as progressive architect, but it is his slightly later Cintra Flats in Whitaker Place which contemporary architects prefer to remember him for. While in the neighbourhood, pop over and see Philip Herapath's St. Mark's at 85-89 Remuera Road.

9

1959

All Saints Church
1 Ponsonby Terrace, Ponsonby
Richard Toy



Exploring the points of contact between Modernism and indigenous forms, the appropriation of Maori forms was an idea much in the air in the 1950s. At All Saints', Toy combines the wide gabled porch and rectangular plan of the whare with a dynamic interior defined by folded ceiling planes and walls. A number of sophisticated moves have been made in the building's planning—note the way in which a chapel space is created behind the sanctuary, such that the altar can operate in two directions. The building is listed in Bannister Fletcher's history, and was once judged the nation's best post-war public building.

10

1959

Dilworth School Chapel
Erin Street, Epsom
Abbott, Hole & Annabell



Riffing on aspects of Selwyn Gothic – steeply pitched roofs and exposed timber roof structure – this building was described by Peter Shaw as part of an attempt to find a “means of expression which could properly be called a New Zealand vernacular”. With all the school's buildings employing a similar vocabulary, it seems less a vernacular than a slightly kooky “Dilworth style”. It's worth strolling across the fields to Diocesan School for Girls to see St. Barnabas' Chapel. Completed in 1866, St. Barnabas' was originally built as Selwyn's private chapel at Bishopscourt in Parnell, but was moved to Dio in 1910.

11

1964

Maclaurin Chapel
18 Princess Street, City
Hoadley, Budge & Gummer



Standing on the campus of the University of Auckland, this building was designed as the institution's spiritual heart. Drawing on the work of contemporary British architecture, this building skillfully combines spaces of different scales to create flexibility of use and smooth links to a variety of outdoor spaces around the building. Especially successful are views out to adjacent trees and the subtle play of light within the high-ceilinged chapel space.

12

1966

Bond Memorial Chapel
53-63 Allendale Road, Mt. Albert
Haughey, Fox & Partners

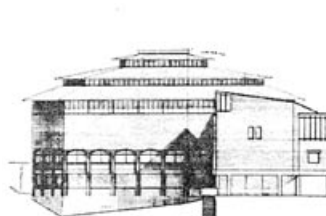


This building, sited within the Everill Orr Village retirement home, references the later idioms of Frank Lloyd Wright. Sloping landscape walls enclose a heavily planted garden within which the chapel sits; the completely glass-walled sanctuary looks out on all sides to greenery. The garden chapel intention misfires somehow, with the too-close planting and low ceiling creating a disconcertingly domestic effect. The building won an NZIA Merit Award in 1969, the jury being somewhat equivocal in its praise: “There is a pleasant scale and handling of the building that is direct and simple, though the Jury found the roof supports disturbing.” See *Home & Building* June 1969.

13

1968

Synagogue & Community Centre
108 Greys Avenue, City
John Goldwater



While not a church, as one of the city's best spiritual spaces this building could not be omitted. The complex was awarded an NZIA Silver Medal in 1969 and a NZIA 25 Year Award in 1995. The citation for the later read: “This important community and school building continues to show an enduring design quality. It was described in the 1970s as ‘an unselfconscious piece of architecture embodying a sense of community akin to the monastic tradition’. The beauty, coherence and exquisite sculptural elements of the spaces, in particular the strong urban qualities of the central courtyard, remain as fresh today as they were then. Dealing superbly with variations of scale and embracing changed patterns of use, this building has worn exceptionally well.” See *Home & Building* April 1970 and *Architecture New Zealand* May/June 1995.

14

1958-1995

Cathedral of the Holy Trinity
Parnell Rd, Parnell
Charles Towle, Richard Toy



In pre-modern Europe cathedrals took centuries to erect, the buildings' various sections often reflecting evolving architectural styles. Holy Trinity took less than 40 years but it demonstrates both the huge shifts in NZ architecture and the post-modern collaging of the time of its completion. Following a huge bequest in 1935, plans began for the construction of a cathedral to replace the ‘temporary’ St. Mary's. A neo-Gothic design by Charles Towle won a subsequent design competition, but with the outbreak of war in 1939 both fundraising and construction were suspended. Due to inflation, the over-ambitious competition design was scaled down, only a first stage eventually being constructed between 1958 and 1973. Toy's wide-span nave was built between 1990 and 1995. A highlight: stained glass windows by English artist John Baker and eminent local artists Shane Cotton, Robert Ellis, and Nigel Brown.

15

1999

Holy Cross Church
222 State Highway 17, Albany
Richard Priest Architects



Historically, urban church buildings have been of two types – monumental, stand-alone edifices, usually built in relation to a civic square, or those that were tucked behind a façade, the volume of the building absorbed into the city block. This development is one of the few examples in New Zealand of the later type. Standing on Albany village's commercial strip, this project combined a new church and commercial offices within a single building. Despite the adjacency, the two functions are clearly expressed as distinct. On the interior, the raw concrete, plywood, and steel of industrial building vernacular are frankly expressed. The development received an AAA-Cavalier Bremworth Design Award in 1998. See *Architecture New Zealand* Jan/Feb 1999 and Nov/Dec 2001.

Other Addresses:

St. Andrew's Church (1868)
100 St. Andrew's Road, Epsom
John Kinder with Reader Wood Kinder, a clergyman best known for his contribution as an artist, produced this now much expanded church in a “Selwyn Gothic” style.

Baptist Tabernacle (1885)
429 Queen Street, City
Edmund Bell
The huge pedimented Corinthian portico of this brick building gives entry to an ornate auditorium.

Methodist Central Mission (1964)
Queen Street, City
Stephenson & Turner
This modernist gem houses a chapel and community centre.

One time Group architect James Hackshaw contributed a number of excellent churches to the Auckland scene. We will be covering these in an upcoming BLOCK itinerary.



St. Mark's, Remuera