

**Holy Trinity Church**  
639 Ohariu Valley Road



Image: WCC ref IMG\_6721

**Summary of heritage significance**

- Holy Trinity Church is a good representative example of the many small, rural church buildings that were constructed throughout New Zealand in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The building is notable for its simple symmetrical design that incorporates Gothic elements such as the lancet windows and exposed timber roof trusses in the nave.
- The Holy Trinity Church has historic value as the oldest Anglican Church still in regular use for church services in the Wellington Region.
- Holy Trinity Church is an enduring landmark on the Ohariu Valley Road and makes a strong contribution to the sense of place and continuity of the rural settlement of Ohariu Valley. Many local families have long-term and ongoing ties to the church, and the building is cared for and maintained by the efforts and goodwill of the local community.

District Plan:	Map 25, reference 233
Legal Description:	Sec 154 SO 32643 & Pt Sec 21 Ohariu Dist Blk 6 Belmont SD
Heritage Area:	None 2013
HPT Listed:	Category II reference 1367
Archaeological Site:	Pre 1900 building
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	1870
Architect / Builder:	George Kilsby - builder
Former uses:	Anglican Church
Current uses:	Anglican Church
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 268486 Bdg StrengthInv status 'Yet to be Assessed'

Extent: CityView GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History

Ohariu Valley was considered to have great potential as a farming settlement but it was not until after the first road was put through in 1856-58 (today's Old Coach Road) that settlement in the valley began in earnest. By 1870 the predominantly Anglican community was in a position to erect a church.

It was built on land subdivided and sold by Richard Woodman.<sup>1</sup> To the west of the site is a paper road that runs along the top of a steep bluff, and the church site lies on a narrow wedge-shaped site between the paper road and the actual road to the east. The architect of the church is not known but, as it is quite a simple design, it is possible that builder, George Kilsby, designed it. Kilsby was assisted by his son, also George. An alternative theory is that it followed a general design for country churches prepared by Frederick Thatcher.<sup>2</sup>

The weatherboards and framing timbers were pitsawn and the roof was split shingles. Some of the latter reputedly remain under the corrugated iron which was first laid on the roof in 1888. The timber is likely to have been sourced locally from one of the many sawmills in the valley at the time.

The first service was held on 12 June 1870 and the building was opened by Archdeacon (later Bishop) Octavius Hadfield (1814? – 1904). At that time the building was unlined and the roof not braced, and according to the Diocesan Year Book of 1877, it 'creaked like a ship in a gale and often the Minister's voice could not be heard.' The church was lined, braced and a vestry and porch were added in 1877. The bellcote appears to have been added at an unknown later date by Joe Bryant and Walter Broderick but there were repairs to the bellcote noted in 1888 when the timber shingle roof was replaced with corrugated iron. Other minor alterations include the replacement of timber sills at a working bee in 1887.<sup>3</sup>

The construction of the Ohariu Valley Road and Holy Trinity Church, and the settlement of Ohariu Valley all have a connection to the settler ship *Oliver Lang*, which first sailed to Wellington in 1856. Labourers who travelled on the *Oliver Lang* are credited with the construction of roads in Johnsonville, Ngauranga and Ohariu.<sup>4</sup> Several prominent Ohariu families travelled on the *Oliver Lang*, including the Kilsby and Best families who are associated with the Holy Trinity Church, and the Bassett family who were associated with St Joseph's Chapel (a nearby Catholic Church which has since been demolished). The *Oliver Lang* was beached at Kaiwharawhara in 1858 after it collided with a barque in Wellington Harbour. The ship's bell is said to hang in the bellcote at Holy Trinity Church, but there is no evidence to confirm this and

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Fearnley, 'The Church of the Holy Trinity, Ohariu Valley, Wellington' in *The Onslow Historian* Vol.5 No.2 1975, p.3. The original source was Lands and Deeds Register, Land Titles Office.

<sup>2</sup> Vivienne Morrell, *Holy Trinity Church (Anglican), Ohariu Valley, Wellington (Register No. 1367)*, unpublished registration report for the NZHPT (Wellington, 2012), 3; Margaret Alington, *An Excellent Recruit: Frederick Thatcher, Priest and Private Secretary in early New Zealand*, (Auckland: Polygraphia Ltd, 2007) 210

<sup>3</sup> Heather B. Matthews, 'One Hundred Proud Years: A History of Holy Trinity Church, Ohariu Valley (1870 – 1970)' (Ohariu Valley, NZ: Holy Trinity Church, 1970); Charles Fearnley, *Early Wellington Churches*, (Wellington: Millwood Press, 1977) pp 114 - 119

<sup>4</sup> Michael Kelly, *Old Coach Road Johnsonville-Ohariu Conservation Plan (Draft)* unpublished conservation plan prepared for the WCC May 2012

there is a rival account that the bell was also hung at the Old Hutt School (1875-1903).<sup>5</sup>

Although the overall form of the church remains unchanged since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> there have been some alterations in the past century. The church was refurbished in the 1940s before it was re-dedicated in 1948.<sup>6</sup> The vestry and entrance porch are likely to have been rebuilt in c.1979, but appear to be a good facsimile of the original.<sup>7</sup> The Ohariu Valley Road was widened in 1981 and the churchyard was reduced in size by 274m<sup>2</sup> with the loss of a mature row of holly trees. The paper road to the west of the site was added to the churchyard in 1982 and this added 1463m<sup>2</sup> to the site. The church gates were replaced in 1989 and the roof was replaced in corrugated mild steel in 1991.

The building has never been a parish church, but was initially associated with the Porirua Parochial District, and then the Johnsonville Parish from 1912. Services continue to this day. Associated with the church is a graveyard, which contains the names of many of the district's pioneers, some of whose descendants remain prominent in the community.

The relationship between the church and the local community, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, appears to follow the national norm, where church buildings and church attendance were a vital and routine part of community life in.<sup>8</sup> At Holy Trinity, community involvement can be best seen through the various working-bees and fundraising events that were organised to raise money to build and maintain the church.<sup>9</sup> This work continues under the aegis of the Ohariu Valley Ladies' Guild, a community organisation that was formed by Betty Ahradsen in 1955, and which continues to fundraise and care for the church.<sup>10</sup> Community interest and involvement in the building can be seen in the 1991 campaign to replace the existing roof cladding. Local newspapers at the time reported that although only eight families worshipped regularly at the church, over eighty families from the valley contributed money and labour to the project.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Lower Hutt Borough Council, *Lower Hutt Past and Present: A Centennial and Jubilee Publication* (Lower Hutt News Printing and Publishing Company, 1941) 10

<sup>6</sup> Matthews (1970) 12 & 15

<sup>7</sup> See Photograph by Deric Bircham, NZHPT, file copy held at WCC archives

<sup>8</sup> John Stenhouse, 'Religion and society - Church adherence and attendance, 1840–1920', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 13-Jul-12 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/religion-and-society/page-2>

<sup>9</sup> See various entries in Matthews (1970) regarding community fundraising events and working bees

<sup>10</sup> Morrell (2012), 9

<sup>11</sup> Morrell (2012), 10





**2011** – North and west elevations of the church taken from the top of the tall bank to the west of the building. Images WCC ref IMG\_6718, IMG\_6715



**2011** - Bellcote (top left), east elevation (top right), church interior (bottom). Images: WCC ref IMG\_6726, IMG\_6644, IMG\_6770

## **1.2 Timeline of modifications**

1870	Constructed
1877	internal wall and ceiling linings, internal bracing were added. A porch and vestry were constructed.
1887-88	The timber shingle roof was over clad with corrugated iron; bellcote repairs
1940s	Church refurbishment and rededication
c.1979	Vestry and Porch rebuilt
1981 – 82	Road widening
1989	Church gates replaced
1991	Roof coverings replaced with corrugated mild steel

## **1.3 Architect**

Unknown

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture**

Holy Trinity church has been built in the plainest and most economical of timber Gothic styles and shows every sign that it was designed by its builder. It is a good example of the adaptability of timber-frame construction, with parts, such as the bellcote, porch and vestry, added and integrated after the initial construction. The plan is a simple rectangle, topped with a steep pitched roof clad in corrugated iron. There is no guttering. The three-part window behind the altar is framed with simple label moulds. An interesting feature is the design of the window heads which have been formed as simple triangles to imitate the pointed arch of traditional Gothic design. On the side elevations the window heads carry up to the top plate and are recessed under the eaves soffit, a practical carpenter's improvisation.

Decorative detail is simple and consists of turned brackets at the foot of the gables, the moulding and the profiling of the barge-boards, and a pendant under the gable. The interior is lined in diagonal tongue-and-groove boarding, with a simple truss roof system.

Holy Trinity belongs very much to a pattern of simple timber churches that are found all over the country in rural communities. <sup>12</sup>

### **2.2 Materials**

Timber structure, weatherboards, internal wall linings & flooring.  
Corrugated mild steel roof cladding

### **2.3 Setting**

Holy Trinity Church is located in the small rural settlement of Ohariu Valley. Ohariu Valley is sparsely populated and the church is a local landmark when driving north along Ohariu Valley Road. The churchyard is a large field, surrounded by a post and wire fence and planted along the east with a belt of native trees and shrubs. The church is approached through pair of white painted picket gates set in a matching fence. The path to the church curves through the church cemetery towards the church porch. To the immediate west of the building is a high bank that leads to a flat terrace

---

<sup>12</sup> From WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref OHAR1

of farmland. This bank may be a feature associated with the nearby Ohariu Fault. The fence-line to the west and the apex of the site to the north are planted with a several windswept and contorted macrocarpa pines that are typical of many rural New Zealand landscapes.<sup>13</sup>

The topography of the land, the planting to the north and south, and the road cutting to the east all contribute to the sense of seclusion of the church within the church yard. Views from the church are limited to views from the porch to the western hills, and from the nave, through the sanctuary and to the fields beyond.

Other associated buildings in the immediate surrounding area include the former Ohariu Valley Model School (now closed), the cemetery of the St Joseph's Chapel Catholic Church (now demolished) and the Ohariu Valley Community Hall (WCC heritage inventory ref 443). Other rural churches nearby include St Matthias (Anglican) Church Makara (1921) and St Patrick's (former Catholic) Church Makara (1873).

### 3.0 Sources

Alington, Margaret. *An Excellent Recruit: Frederick Thatcher, Priest and Private Secretary in early New Zealand*. Auckland: Polygraphia Ltd, 2007.

Bircham, Deric. NZHPT photograph of the Holy Trinity Church (1979)

Fearnley, Charles. *Early Wellington Churches*. Wellington: Millwood Press, 1977.

Fearnley, Charles. 'The Church of the Holy Trinity, Ohariu Valley, Wellington' in *The Onslow Historian* Vol.5 No.2 1975

Kelly, Michael. *Old Coach Road Johnsonville-Ohariu Conservation Plan (Draft)* unpublished conservation plan prepared for the WCC May 2012

Lower Hutt Borough Council, *Lower Hutt Past and Present: A Centennial and Jubilee Publication*. Lower Hutt News Printing and Publishing Company, 1941.

Matthews, Heather B. *One Hundred Proud Years: A History of Holy Trinity Church, Ohariu Valley (1870 – 1970)*. Ohariu Valley, NZ: Holy Trinity Church, 1970.

Morrell, Vivienne. *Holy Trinity Church (Anglican), Ohariu Valley, Wellington (Register No. 1367)*, unpublished registration report for the NZHPT (Wellington, 2012)

Stenhouse, John. 'Religion and society - Church adherence and attendance, 1840–1920', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 13-Jul-12 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/religion-and-society/page-2>

Wassilieff, Maggy. 'Trees in the rural landscape - Macrocarpa and other conifers', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 13-Jul-12 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/trees-in-the-rural-landscape/page-3>

WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref OHAR1

---

<sup>13</sup> Maggy Wassilieff. 'Trees in the rural landscape - Macrocarpa and other conifers', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 13-Jul-12 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/trees-in-the-rural-landscape/page-3>



## 4.0 Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

### ***Cultural heritage values***

#### **Aesthetic Value:**

***Architectural:*** Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?

Holy Trinity Church is a good representative example of the many small, rural church buildings that were constructed throughout New Zealand in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The building is notable for its simple symmetrical design that incorporates Gothic elements such as the lancet windows and exposed timber roof trusses in the nave.

***Townscape:*** Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?

The Holy Trinity Church is visible from the main road that runs through the rural settlement of Ohariu Valley, and is a local landmark.

***Group:*** Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?

Holy Trinity Church can be seen as part of a group of religious site and community buildings that are located on the Ohariu Valley Road.

#### **Historic Value:**

***Association:*** Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?

The Holy Trinity Church is the oldest Anglican Church still in regular use for church services in the Wellington Region.

***Association:*** Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?

The building has a historic association with the Anglican Church in New Zealand. It is representative of the history of rural settlements in New Zealand in that church buildings and church attendance were a vital and routine part community life.

#### **Scientific Value:**

***Archaeological:*** Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?

Pre 1900 building

***Educational:*** Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?

The building, including its collection of original fixtures and fittings, has educational value as an early, rural church building.

***Technological:*** Does the item have technological value for its innovative or

*important construction methods or use of materials?*

**Social Value:**

**Public esteem:** *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

The building is held in high public esteem by the local community. This can be seen by the work of the Ohariu Valley Ladies' Guild that continues to care for the church and raise funds for its ongoing maintenance.

**Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual:** *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

Holy Trinity Church has spiritual significance to its present and past congregation.

**Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:**

*Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?  
Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?*

Holy Trinity Church is an enduring landmark on the Ohariu Valley Road and makes a strong contribution to the sense of place and continuity of the rural settlement of Ohariu Valley.

**Sentiment/Connection:** *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

The building has been a place of worship since 1870 and continues to be associated with the key events in the life of members of the congregation including the births, marriages, deaths of individuals, their friends and their family.

**Level of cultural heritage significance**

**Rare:** *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

The Holy Trinity Church is significant as an example of an early small rural church that continues in its original use.

**Representative:** *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The building is a good representative example of a simple gothic rural church

**Authentic:** *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The building has had few intrusive alterations or additions and retains much of its original building fabric – with the notable exception of the roof coverings and the reconstructed vestry and porch.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

*Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?*

## 5.0Appendix

### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	none	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	Y	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	y	
Plan change?	N	
Heritage Area Report	N	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	N	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	Y	
HPT files	Y	
Conservation Plan	Y	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

### Background research