

St Mary of the Angels

17 Boulcott Street



Image: Charles Collins, 2015

Summary of heritage significance

- St Mary of the Angels is a fine example of a late Gothic Revival-style church. The building is notable for its fine proportions, for its exterior form and detail, and for the elegance of its Gothic interior.
- The site of St Mary of the Angels has considerable historical significance, as it was the place where Wellington's first Catholic Church was built in 1843. St Mary's is the third church to be built on the site. The site and the church are associated with people and events of local historical significance, notably Fr Jeremiah O'Reily who was the first Catholic priest in Wellington, and the Society of Marist priests.

- The building is an enduring landmark on Boulcott and Willis Streets and makes a strong contribution to the sense of place and continuity of its site and the streetscape.
- St Mary of the Angels has spiritual significance for a large number of people, from the Catholic community and beyond, and it continues in active and full use today.

District Plan:	Map 17 reference 35
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 70132
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Category I Reference 36
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Church of St Mary of the Angels (Roman Catholic)
Key physical dates:	1922
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Frederick de Jersey Clere Builder: Fr Stanislaw Mahoney
Former uses:	Church
Current uses:	Church
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 163340 (124 Served) - expires 27/04/2027

Extent: Cityview 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

St. Mary of the Angels is the third church to occupy this site. Wellington's first Catholic Church was established here in 1843, some weeks after the arrival of the first parish priest, Fr Jeremiah O'Reily (1799-1880). The Church of the Nativity (also known as Fr. O'Reily's Chapel) was enlarged several times until a decision was made to erect a new church in 1873. The new church, the first St Mary of the Angels, was built at a cost of just £1500, and was blessed and opened on 28 April 1874.¹

The church burned down in May 1918 and this presented the church authorities with the opportunity to build in permanent materials. The commission to design a new church was given to Frederick de Jersey Clere. Construction began in April 1919. The original contractor, H.E. Manning, went bankrupt and the construction of the church was left largely in the hands of its parish priest, Fr Stanislaw Mahoney, aided by a close friend, Martin Maloney, and a group of largely unskilled workers. After four years of planning and construction the church was blessed and opened by Archbishop Redwood on Sunday 26 March 1922.

St Mary of the Angels has been the scene of many important events. Among them are the funeral of Mother Mary Aubert in 1926, the investiture of Archbishop O'Shea as Metropolitan in 1935, and the Eucharist Congress in 1940. The church also has a standing connection with the Society of Mary, the Marist order. In 1883 the Pope, through Archbishop Redwood, granted the parish to the Society of Mary in perpetuity, formally securing an arrangement that has lasted until the present.²

Following an earthquake in 1942 repairs were made to the exterior of the building. Further repairs were made to the church during 1950-1951 as rusted steel reinforcing and hairline fractures were causing issues for the concrete.³ In 1955 the gutter was raised and re-plastering, painting and finishing of the doors was undertaken. The interior was altered to accommodate liturgical changes that followed Vatican II.⁴ Extensive interior and exterior renovation was planned and carried out from 1985-1988. During this time the original Welsh slate roof was replaced with copper in order to deal with the storm water collection. It is thought that the slate roof possibly still remains beneath the copper roof. The work on the roof also saw the seismic loads being directed towards the stronger elements at either end. In 1996 epoxy injections were made to the cold joints to improve their strength.⁵

St Mary of the Angels is no longer a parish church but has instead become the centre of an inner-city ministry and continues to be well supported by the Catholic community. The building's exterior and interior have been thoroughly restored and renovated within the past decade.⁶

¹ Ian Bowman, 'St Mary of the Angels Conservation Plan,' (Wellington: Wellington City Council, 1994).

² Ibid.

³ Michael Kelly, 'St. Mary of the Angels,' unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council (1998), p.5.

⁴ St Mary of the Angels, 'Enduring concrete award 2010,' accessed 2 August 2012, <http://www.smoa.org.nz/about/concrete-award.php>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ History taken from: Wellington City Council, '17 Boulcott Street,' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings* (Wellington City Council, 2001), BOUL2.

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1919	Church	(00053:197:10874)
1950	Reinstate church	(00056:395:B30376)
1990	Structural upgrading	(00059:376:E19886)

1.3 Occupation history

1922 St Mary of the Angels church

1.4 Architect

Frederick de Jersey Clere (1856-1952) was born in Lancashire, the son of an Anglican clergyman, and was articled to Edmund Scott, an ecclesiastical architect of Brighton. He then became chief assistant to R J Withers, a London architect. Clere came to New Zealand in 1877, practising first in Feilding and then in Wanganui. He later came to Wellington and practised there for 58 years.

He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1886 and held office for 50 years as one of four honorary secretaries in the Empire. In 1883 he was appointed Diocesan Architect of the Anglican Church; he designed more than 100 churches while he held this position. Clere was a pioneer in reinforced concrete construction; the outstanding example of his work with this material is the Church of St Mary of the Angels (1922), Wellington.

As well as being pre-eminent in church design, Clere was responsible for many domestic and commercial buildings including Wellington's Harbour Board Offices and Bond Store (1891) and Overton in Marton. Clere was also involved in the design of large woolsheds in Hawkes Bay and Wairarapa. He was active in the formation of the New Zealand Institute of Architects and served on their council for many years. He was a member of the Wellington City Council until 1895, and from 1900 a member of the Wellington Diocesan Synod and the General Synod. He was also a member of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts.⁷

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

St Mary of the Angels is a fine example of late Gothic Revival church architecture, designed with a distinct perpendicular emphasis,⁸ and constructed in reinforced concrete. The architect, Frederick de Jersey Clere, was, at the time of design, the pre-eminent architect in Wellington, specialising in ecclesiastical architecture.⁹

The main facade is apparently modelled on the Cathedral church of St Michael and St Gudula in Brussels, and therefore takes its inspiration directly from medieval sources.¹⁰ However, the use of steel-reinforced concrete has allowed the architect to achieve particularly delicate proportions which traditional masonry construction, for reasons of structural stability, would have forbidden.

⁷ New Zealand Historic Places Trust Professional Biographies, 'Frederick de Jersey Clere,' accessed 2 August 2012,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=54>.

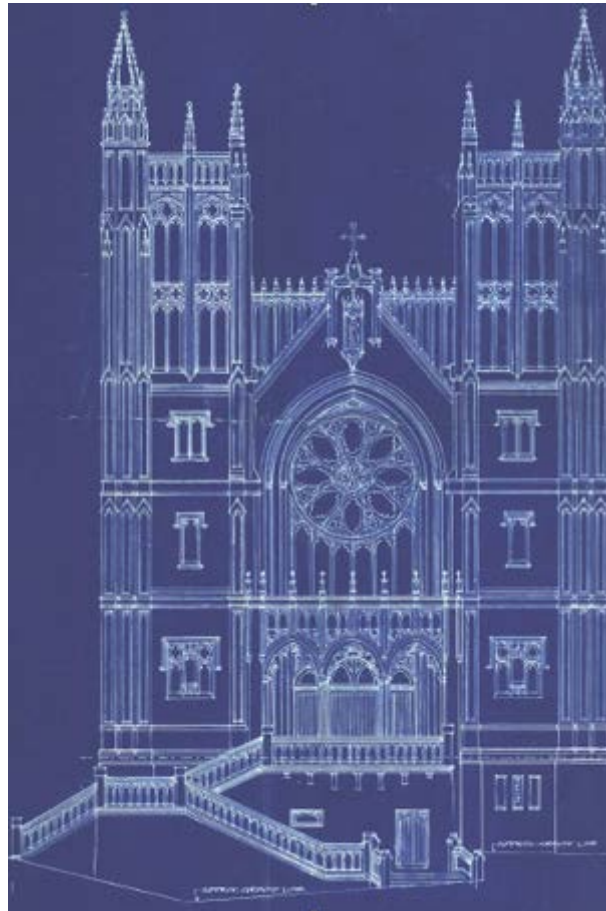
⁸ P. Shaw & R. Morrison, *New Zealand Architecture*, (Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), p.110.

⁹ Bowman, 'St Mary of the Angels Conservation Plan.'

¹⁰ Shaw, p.110.

This is particularly evident in the slender open tracery and pinnacles in the two towers flanking the high gabled wall of the church. The rose window, too, is rich in delicate tracery, and this traditional element remains a central focus on the main facade. St Mary of the Angels is also a good representative example of the innovative use of reinforced concrete construction

Extensive interior and exterior renovation was planned and carried out from 1985-1988. New floor coverings were laid inside, new lighting installed, and the interior was cleaned and painted. A carpeted area, with seating and a small altar, was formed by St Joseph's sanctuary, on the left side of the church. ¹¹



'17 Boulcott Street, church,' 09 May 1919, 00053:197:10874, Wellington City Archives.

2.2 Materials

- Reinforced concrete foundations, structure, floors & stairs
- External wall brick cladding set between rendered concrete elements – note that the original 'stucco' or render colour may have been 'Oxford Oxide'
- Pitched roofs are clad in copper (c.1985 – 1988) with perhaps the original Welsh slate roof under, all on timber structure
- Flat roofs are reinforced concrete clad in asphalt
- Totara doors, Jarrah exposed internal timber,

¹¹ Architecture taken from: Wellington City Council, '17 Boulcott Street,' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings* (Wellington City Council, 2001), BOUL2.

2.3 Setting

The church is perched on the hillside between The Terrace and Willis Street and is accessed via Boulcott Street. The skyline has changed since it was first built and today it is now surrounded by modern high rise buildings. Below it, on the corner of Willis and Boulcott Street stands the Hotel St George (1929) while to the north, directly across Boulcott Street, stands the Majestic Tower building (1991). Despite now being overshadowed by these, the church still remains visually impressive, especially when viewed directly from the corner of Willis and Manners Streets.

3.0 Sources

Bowman, Ian. 'St Mary of the Angels Conservation Plan.' Wellington: Wellington City Council, 1994.

Kelly, Michael. 'St. Mary of the Angels.' Unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council. 1998.

New Zealand Historic Places Trust Professional Biographies. Frederick de Jersey Clere. Accessed 2 August 2012.

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=54>.

Shaw, P. & R. Morrison. *New Zealand Architecture*. Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991.

St Mary of the Angels. Accessed 2 August 2012.

<http://www.smoa.org.nz/about/concrete-award.php>.

Wellington City Council. '17 Boulcott Street.' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001. BOUL2.

Wellington City Archives

'17 Boulcott Street, church.' 09 May 1919. 00053:197:10874.

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?*

St Mary of the Angels is a fine example of a late Gothic Revival-style church and was designed by Frederick de Jersey Clere, who was the leading ecclesiastical architect in New Zealand at the time of its construction. Clere was known for his use of reinforced concrete and he used this material with great skill to construct the delicate proportions of this church. The building is notable for these fine proportions, for its exterior form and detail, and for the elegance of its Gothic interior.

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 church is a local landmark and is situated on a prominent elevated site above the intersection of Manners Street, Willis Street and Boulcott Streets.

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?*

Historic Value:

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

The site of St Mary of the Angels has considerable historical significance, as it was the place where Wellington's first Catholic Church was built in 1843. St Mary's is the third church to be built on the site. The site and the church are associated with people and events of local historical significance, notably Fr Jeremiah O'Reilly who was the first Catholic priest in Wellington, and the Society of Marist priests.

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

Scientific Value:

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

The building is located in the Central City archaeological site reference NZAA R27/270.

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

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

The building is a relatively early example of reinforced concrete construction and is notable for the delicate proportions of the open tracery, the fine rose window and the

detailing of the towers that may have been difficult to achieve in traditional stone or brick masonry.

Social Value:

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

The building is held in high public esteem.

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?*

St Mary of the Angels has spiritual significance for a large number of people, not just the Catholic community, and it continues in active and full use today.

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?*

The building is an enduring landmark on Boulcott and Willis Streets and makes a strong contribution to the sense of place and continuity of its site and the streetscape. The church also provides a sense of identity and continuity to the Wellington Catholic community who have been associated with this prime, inner-city, site for over 170 years.

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

The building has been a place of worship since 1922 and continues to be associated with the key events in the life of members of the congregation including the births, marriages, deaths of individuals. It is a centre of community sentiment for this reason.

Level of cultural heritage significance

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

The building is a relatively rare example of a fine Gothic Revival church constructed in reinforced concrete by one of the leading ecclesiastic architects of the day.

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

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?*

Although it has undergone some modifications over the past 90 years the church has retained a significant amount of its original fabric.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

The building is important on a local level, for although it is not the seat of the Archbishop of Wellington, it plays an important role in the life of Wellington's Catholic community and is an iconic landmark for the wider Wellington community.

5.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website	Y	
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

Background research



Exterior view of St Mary of the Angels catholic church, Boulcott St, Wellington, 1970. Winder, Duncan, 1919-1970: Architectural photographs. Ref: DW-4412-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.