

St Gerard's Church and Monastery

73-75 Hawker Street



Image: Charles Collins, 2015

Summary of heritage significance

- This building is a significant example of the Gothic revival style of architecture in New Zealand. Its style, scale, materials, quality, and craftsmanship all give St Gerard's architectural value. It is also a representative example of two of Wellington and New Zealand's most prominent architects, John Swan and Frederick de Jersey Clere.
- This building is associated with the Redemptorist faith, and the Church is the first in the world to be dedicated to Italian saint Gerard Majella.
- This building has substantial townscape value for the part it plays in defining the Mt Victoria and Oriental bay areas. It is situated on a prominent cliff top and as such provides a visual land mark for the city.

District Plan:	Map 12, reference 143 and 144
Legal Description:	Lot 3 DP 76510
Heritage Area:	-
HPT Listed:	Category I references 226 and 227
Archaeological Site:	Pre 1900 building on site; risk unknown.
Other Names:	-
Key physical dates:	Building constructions 1908 and 1932
Architect / Builder:	John Swan and Frederick de Jersey Clere
Former uses:	Church/Monastery
Current uses:	Church/mission centre
Earthquake Prone Status:	Building Strength Inventory status 'Earthquake Prone' (SR201708)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

St Gerard's Church and Monastery is one of Wellington's most significant and distinctive landmarks, sited on the cliffs above Oriental Bay. St Gerard's is made up of two parts, the Church built in 1908 and the Monastery built in 1932. The buildings are the combined effort of two of Wellington's most well known architects, John Swan and Frederick de Jersey Clere, and although having been built just over two decades apart the balanced form and Gothic revival detailing hold together a powerful architectural composition.²

The site on Hawker Street has a long history of occupation, having been purchased by James Edward Fitzgerald as part of a parcel of land. Fitzgerald also had built a large, two storey wooden house there in 1871 which became known as 'Fitzgerald's Folly'. After his death, his children divided up the land and sold part to the Redemptorist fathers. The fathers used this building as their New Zealand headquarters and in 1906 their congregation had grown so much that a new building was needed. The order approached John Swan to design a church to sit beside 'Fitzgerald's Folly'

After having one design declined in 1906 due to budget constraints a 1908 design was chosen. The tender was won by contractors Campbell and Burke at a cost of £4,998 and 10s. On the 26 April of 1908 construction began. The church was constructed in un-reinforced brick masonry and plastered internally. The altar was designed by Swan, and built by Hickmott and son of Wellington of white Carrara Marble, red Devonshire marble, and green Galway marble. The sacristy furniture and two Kauri altars for the side chapels were built by Brother Lawrence Watters. The Church is the first in the world to be dedicated to the Italian saint Gerard Majella, and was erected for the Redemptorists, an order that dedicated itself to reviving the spiritual lives of Catholic parishioners. After the installation of the pipe organ in 1910 the congregation began to grow and the Church's choir, widely regarded as one of the best in the country, was regularly featured on National radio's Sunday service.

By 1932 the parish had grown so much that a monastery was needed to house the growing needs of the brothers. The building was designed by Frederick de Jersey Clere and kept with the design of Swan's earlier church. As a consequence of this harmony many attribute the entire design to Clere. The designs for the monastery are dated 1931 and tenders were called in May of that year, and that submitted by J.L. McMillan for just under £22,000 was accepted. The Redemptorists vacated 'Fitzgerald's Folly' and demolition commenced. The monastery was completed in 1932 and the brothers moved in. From this time it has been called St Gerard's Monastery although it is not one in the true sense as the Redemptorists are not monks.

Broadcasts of the St Gerard's devotions continued through the 1920s and 1930s and the Church was a source of comfort and hospitality throughout the Depression and World War Two. St Gerard's became a centre for civil defence during the Second World War due to its landmark qualities and the building was sandbagged to protect it from fire as authorities believed that its destruction would be damaging to morale.

¹This history is adapted from Chris Cochran, 'St Gerard's Monastery Hawker Street, Wellington'. Unpublished Conservation Plan prepared for International Catholic Programme of Evangelisation, New Zealand Branch 73-75 Hawker Street Wellington. 1995.

² Wellington City Council, "75 Hawker Street," *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 2001), Hawk 1.

In 1944 concrete steps and retaining walls were erected in an effort to improve the grounds.

The 1960s saw a number of changes, particularly related to those associated with Vatican II. Alterations were made to the sanctuary of St Gerard's to bring it in line with the liturgical practices outlined by Vatican II. Plans were made to build a car park at the Hawker Street entrance of the Monastery which would be designed so that a squash court and social centre could be built underneath this platform. In 1982 fundraising was carried out by the Wellington community for the purpose of waterproofing the exterior of the building, the campaign reached a \$100,000 goal. At this time the bell from the tower was also removed, partially for structural reasons and partly as a gesture of goodwill towards members of the Mt Victoria community who did not enjoy the 7am wake up. By the late 1980s it had become apparent that the premises were too large and too expensive for the Redemptorists to continue occupying and the decision was made to sell St Gerard's. The International Catholic Programme of Evangelisation (ICPE) had used the monastery in 1988/89 for a training programme and was interested in purchasing the site, conditionally doing so in 1990. It is still owned by the ICPE and is used as a mission centre.

In 2012/2013 the Church and Monastery were identified as being earthquake prone. Subsequently there have been a number of options promoted for strengthening or demolishing the building. These options have led to public outcry in the print and general media. It has been estimated that the buildings will need up to \$10 Million to strengthen the Church and Monastery. The outcome of this is yet to be clarified.³



St Gerard's Church and Monastery, Oriental Bay, Wellington, and Father Clunie. **Ref:** PAColl-6477-01. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

³ 'Public appeal mooted for St Gerard's', accessed 12 June 2013, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/business/commercial-property/8524180/Public-appeal-mooted-for-St-Gerards>; <http://ionapannett.blogspot.co.nz/2013/04/cash-needed-for-st-gerards-earthquake.html>; <http://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/player/ondemand/xfapr9gordon>



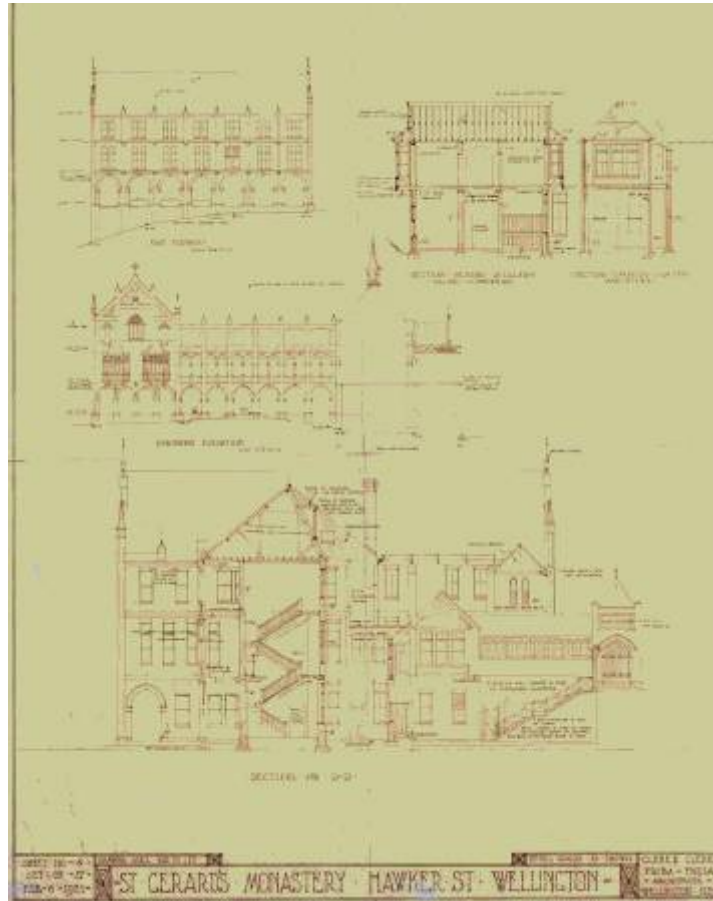
St Gerard's Monastery, Mount Victoria, Wellington. Photograph taken for the Evening Post newspaper of Wellington by an unidentified staff photographer.

Ref: EP/1955/3002-F

1.2 Timeline of modifications



Plans of St Gerard's Church (WC Archive 00053-143-7959-Plans)



Plans for St Gerard's Monastery (WC Archives 00056-121-B10979-Plans)

- 1908 Building construction-Church (00053:143:7959)
- 1909 Stained glass window installed
- 1910 Pipe organ installed
- 1931-1932 Building construction – Monastery (00056:121:B10979)
- 1953 Addition-Steps and retaining wall (00056:457:B34738)
- 1961 Church alterations (00058:178:C8216)
- 1969 Addition-3 Garages (00058:629:C29243)
- 1970-1971 New car parking platform built at entrance of monastery (00058:718:C32614)
- 1982-1983 Waterproofing carried out on exterior of the Church and Monastery-financed partially through public appeal. Strengthening work carried out to roof diaphragms of the Church
- 1976 Upgrade of fire escapes and addition of smoke partitions 00058:1064:C46215
- 1983 Alteration-structural roof bracing (00058:0:C61757)
- 1984-1985 Strengthening work carried out on the floor diaphragm of the Church (00058:0:C67600)
- 1991 Refurbishment of St Gerard's Monastery (00059:518:E24411)
- 1997 Seismic work for existing buildings (00078:663:26979)
- 2007 Additions-installation of new bathroom and kitchen including new wall between existing tailors room on first floor (00078:2613:163765)

1.3 Occupation history

1908-1990 Redemptorist Church

1990-present International Catholic Programme of Evangelisation

1.4 Architect

John Swan - Church

Swan (1874-1936) practised architecture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He formed part of the last group of architects to follow the traditional Gothic and Classical styles. He was articled to Frederick de Jersey Clere, working with Clere on many major designs such as the Wellington Rowing Club building (then known as the Naval Artillery Boat Shed, 1894) as well as smaller provincial buildings such as the Church of the Good Shepherd, Tinui. The firm was known as Clere, Fitzgerald and Richmond and was one of the most prominent architectural practices in Wellington. From 1901 to 1906 Swan was in partnership with Clere, practising on his own account from 1907. The first major design produced by Swan in this new practice was the Karori Crematorium (1907) which served to establish his architectural identity separate from Clere. During his long and varied career Swan produced a large and wide range of work, including a number of banks for the National Bank such as the head office building in Wellington (1907), educational buildings for the Wellington Technical College with William Gray Young (1922), and a number of major buildings for the Catholic Church including St Gerard's Church, Mt Victoria (1910), Sacred Heart Convent (later Erskine College), Island Bay (1909), and Wanganui Convent (1912). He was an architect of imagination as evidenced by the design of his own house 'The Moorings', Glenbervie Terrace (1905).⁴

Frederick de Jersey Clere – Monastery

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.⁵

⁴ Historic Places Trust, "John Swan", *Professional Biographies*, accessed October 17, 2012, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Swan,+John+Sydney>

⁵ Historic Places Trust, "Frederick de Jersey Clere", *Professional Biographies*, accessed 17 October, 2012 <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Clere,+Frederick+De+Jersey>

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

St Gerard's is made up of two main parts, the church built in 1908 and the monastery built in 1931-32. They have been structurally integrated to form one cohesive building although the materials used in each construction are different. The architectural style of the building was set by Swan's use of Gothic forms in the construction of the church. The high west-facing gable of the Church was reproduced by Clere in the design of the Monastery giving a balanced composition. Gothic forms are evident in the design, with pointed arched openings, lancet windows, pinnacles, stepped buttresses, steep pitched roofs and bell turret. These features all contribute to a strong vertical composition.

The interior is simple, with plain profiles to finishing timbers, and decoration is limited to some leaded windows with coloured glass, and carved tops to the main staircase newel posts.

Relatively few changes have been made to the fabric of the building, the most significant being the construction of an open car park deck in the front of the building. This resulted in the demolition of the original entrance and cloister, an intricate composition of brickwork forms that the building is poorer for losing. Inside several fire-stop doors have been added. Inside the church altar rails and other liturgical items have been removed but the form and fabric is unaltered.

2.2 Materials

Church

The church is a one storey, unreinforced brick masonry building in cavity construction. The roof structure comprises eight heavy king-post trusses spanning across the nave. The roof sarking is diagonal tongue and groove boarding and the sheathing is slates. The floor is timber.

Monastery

The monastery is cast in-situ reinforced concrete with a plaster finish. The floors are concrete with structural steel beams encased in concrete in a number of locations. The cladding is brick veneer to the external walls and Welsh Countess slates to the roof on heavy timber framing.

2.3 Setting

St Gerard's acts as an important landmark and defines the Mt Victoria and Oriental Bay area. St Gerard's is situated on a prominent cliff top and as such provides a visual land mark for the city. It contributes considerably to the character of Wellington when viewed from the city, and particularly when viewed as a part of a view shaft with the Victoria University Hunter building, sited on an opposite hill.

3.0 Sources

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Photographer unidentified. St Gerard's Church and Monastery, Hawker Street, Oriental Bay, Wellington, circa 1907-1909. Father Patrick Clunie stands alongside. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Accessed 17 October 2012.
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Wellington City Archives

Wellington City Archives 00056-121-B10979-Plans

Wellington City Archive 00053-143-7959-Plans

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?*

This building has value as a significant example of the Gothic revival style of architecture in New Zealand. Its style, scale, materials, quality, and craftsmanship all give St Gerard's architectural value. As a whole it is also a representative example of two of Wellington and New Zealand's most prominent architects, John Swan and Frederick de Jersey Clere.

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?*

This building has substantial townscape value for the part it plays in defining the Mt Victoria and Oriental bay areas. It is situated on a prominent cliff top and as such provides a visual land mark for the city. It contributes considerably to the character of Wellington when viewed from the city, and particularly when viewed as a part of a view shaft with the Victoria University Hunter building, sited on an opposite hill. St Gerard's is an unmistakable element of the Wellington landscape.

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?*

St Gerard's is made up of two buildings – the Church and the Monastery, which relate to each other as a set. They are coherent in history, use, scale, and materials.

Historic Value:

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

This building has played a role in the lives of Wellingtonians for over a century and as such has significant historical value for the city. This building is primarily associated with the Redemptorist faith, while the Church is the first in the world to be dedicated to Italian saint Gerard Majella. It is also associated with prominent architects John Swan and Frederick de Jersey Clere.

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

This building is associated with the development of religious life in Wellington city and has had the role of ambassador to the general populace due to its historical associations with national radio. As a centre of World War Two civil defence this building is also associated with the community and reactions to wartime on the home front.

Scientific Value:

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

Central City NZAA R27/270 – The St Gerard’s site has been occupied since before the turn of the century, so it is likely that there will be archaeological deposits on the land.

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

There is educational value in the design of St Gerard’s Church and Monastery for the insight that it can provide into the history of architecture in Wellington City, the design of Churches and Monasteries in New Zealand, and the history of the Redemptorists as an element of wider Catholicism.

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

This building has technological value in the harmonious integration of two buildings that are separated by just over two decades. The St Gerard’s building as a whole can be used to demonstrate the way that buildings were constructed early in the 1900s and the new technologies that were developed in the time between, particularly in relation to earthquakes e.g. reinforced concrete.

Social Value:

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

This building is held in high public esteem as a fine example of John Swan and Frederick de Jersey Clere’s Gothic-revival architecture. Its position on the cliffs of Mt Victoria above Oriental Bay make this building easily identifiable from almost anywhere in the city and as such it has a high public value. Recent public reactions to the proposal of demolition show that this building is an important feature for both religious and secular Wellingtonians.

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?*

This building contributes to a sense of national and international spiritual identity through its connections with the Catholic Church. As the first purpose-built monastery established by the Redemptorists in New Zealand the building reflects the strengthening of their position in this country. It is also the first mission centre established by ICPE in New Zealand. Its continuing use as a centre for the work of the Catholic Church gives the building a strong spiritual significance

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?*

From its superb site overlooking Wellington Harbour St Gerard’s Church, remains a highly visible symbol of commitment and devotion for members of the Catholic Church as well as the general public. The spectacular location of the church and its combination with the large and impressive monastery has made the building one of Wellington’s most significant and well-known landmarks.

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

This building has been a landmark in Wellington for a century contributing greatly to a sense of community connection and sentiment. The high level of authenticity has led to it being one of the most recognisable and significant landmark buildings in Wellington.

Level of cultural heritage significance

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

Overall this building is of outstanding cultural heritage significance. St Gerard's is an important example of Gothic Revival architecture practiced in New Zealand by some of the most prominent architects in our history. Its landmark status, townscape value, and value as two buildings that have been successfully integrated have led to St Gerard's as a whole becoming iconic.

St Gerard's also possesses extremely high social values in terms of its long history and associations with Wellington and New Zealand. As the first church dedicated to Italian saint Gerard Majella in the world it has substantial cultural heritage significance.

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

St Gerard's Church and Monastery is a good example of the Gothic Revival style of architecture as it was practiced in New Zealand. It is representative of the changing needs of the church over time and the design is a good representative of the technologies and materials that were available at the time used to a very high standard.

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 level of authenticity of the building is very high, with all main spaces relatively unaltered and the finishes and joinery intact. Few modifications have negatively affected this building and it retains a great deal of original integrity.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

The St Gerard's Church and Monastery is important at all levels, it is a highly significant heritage building not only for Wellington but for New Zealand. A case can also be made for international importance but this is secondary to its national relevance.

Locally (1) for the role it plays in the Wellington townscape as an important and attractive landmark, (2) for its long association with Wellington and the part that it has played in the history of Wellington, particularly during times of crisis such as the Great Depression and World War Two; regionally as it is has been a Wellington provincial parish church; nationally due to (1) the popularity of the Church choir and the feature of the church devotions on national radio from the 1920s to the 1960s (2) as the first purpose-built monastery established by the Redemptorists in New Zealand (3) its role in World War efforts as a civil defense centre; and internationally as it was the first Church in the world dedicated to Italian saint Gerard Majella.

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
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	N	
Conservation Plan	Y	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

Background research