

St Mary Magdalene Church (Anglican)

Corner, 67 Cambridge Avenue and Winchester Street, Ashhurst

NZHPT Registration Number:	1194
NZHPT Registration Type:	Historic Place – Category II
NZHPT Registration Date:	30/04/10
City/District Council:	Palmerston North City Council
District Plan Status:	Category 2



Brief History

Construction of Ashhurst's St Mary Magdalene Church began in 1897 and the building was consecrated in 1900. It was the town's second Anglican church and it replaced a smaller timber structure built in the 1880s. The need for a larger church to accommodate the growing Anglican community in the area came as the town's population increased due to a rise in European settlement. One of the major influences was the English-based Emigrant and Colonist's Aid Corporation which owned the section of land on which Ashhurst is situated, part of the Manchester Block. The Government also assisted settlement of the area by providing employment for immigrants through its public works and immigration scheme, such as on the new railways which ran through the block.

In 1897 the Church commissioned the diocesan architect Frederick de Jersey Clere to design the new building. Clere had already designed three similar wooden churches in the area at Halcombe (1881), Feilding (1882) and Rongotea (1896), and for Ashhurst's church he was asked to follow the design of his St Simon and St Jude Church at Rongotea. The form of St Mary Magdalene Church is almost exactly that of the church at Rongotea with the exception

of some distinguishing features, such as the design and position of the windows, the form of the steeple, and the opposite positioning of the vestry and porch to that of St Simon and St Jude Church. Clere was asked to provide seating for as many as possible within the constraints of the £300 budget.

Funds for the new church were raised both in England and by the local community. A substantial contribution of £100 was made by Lucy Ashhurst, the sister of Henry George Ashhurst (d. 1882), after whom the town had been named. Upon making the contribution, Lucy Ashhurst pointed out that the town's name had been misspelt as Ashurst, and the error was subsequently corrected. Lucy Ashhurst also donated the church's font in memory of her brother in 1899.

Clere's design was in the Gothic Revival style of church architecture popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The church's timber construction, steep pitch gable roof and sharp-angled steeple are all typical of this architectural style. Also characteristic of the style is the extensive use of native timbers for the church's interior linings and fittings. Many of the interior fittings such as the pews and altar furniture were conceived by Clere himself, who took a holistic approach to his building design. Some of these are included in the NZHPT registration but the original pews have been replaced. Clere was also asked to design a pedestal and lid for the font. Not only does St Mary Magdalene Church exemplify the architectural style for which Clere was noteworthy, it also demonstrates his skill in individualising his smaller wooden churches.

Two principal changes have been made to the church's exterior appearance since its consecration in 1900. Initially, the original Anglican church was retained as an annex to the new building, but was later relocated to Bunnythorpe and then on to a marae near Rata. In 1997, the Church was extended to the north and west with the addition of a larger porch accessible by ramps. Overall, St Mary Magdalene Church has retained its original form and character and has been maintained in excellent condition by the local community. The vestry was refurbished in 1995 and a series of quilted hangings made by members of the community have been completed over the last 25 years.

Principal Source:

St Mary Magdalene Church (Anglican), NZHPT Register no. 1194, 30/11/2009, Karen Astwood, NZHPT.

