

St John's Anglican Church,
Trentham
1863-2013

Mother Church of the Upper Valley

*An account of the origin, construction and expansion of this Anglican church, the
parish and its community setting, for the past 150 years*

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Front cover: Pencil drawing of St John's Church 2012 by Allan Paterson. Used by permission.

CHAPTER 5

THE GROWING COMMUNITY, NEW PARISHES AND A BIGGER CHURCH



The peaceful countryside and service town of Upper Hutt was too close to the capital city to stay that way for ever. Just 2856 people lived in the upper valley in 1926, and farmland predominated west of the main road.

Twenty years and another world war later, while the population had nearly doubled to 5620¹, Upper Hutt was still little more than a country town, straggling along the main highway to Masterton. But Wellington's regional planners had their eye on it, both as a centre for light industry and for residential housing for the post-war needs of Lower Hutt and Wellington. Town planning was undertaken by central government, employing the Austrian architect Ernst Plischke (who had fled to New Zealand with his Jewish wife in 1939). Plischke, now a community planner, was set to designing the present day layout of Trentham (and also Naenae, Taita and Epuni in the Wellington region, and hydro and sawmilling towns further north)².

In 1949, the Dunlop factory opened and soon afterwards the rail line was electrified, speeding up the journey to Wellington and making commuting to the city possible. Just ten years after the end of World War II the population had doubled to 11,100, many of them living in the new subdivisions surrounding St John's. A church seating just over a hundred people was clearly not going to be big enough.

This map of Upper Hutt drawn in May 1929 shows the major property owners and Trentham settlement beginning to focus around the military camp and racecourse. Upper Hutt City Library, Heritage Collection, A/Ref 126.

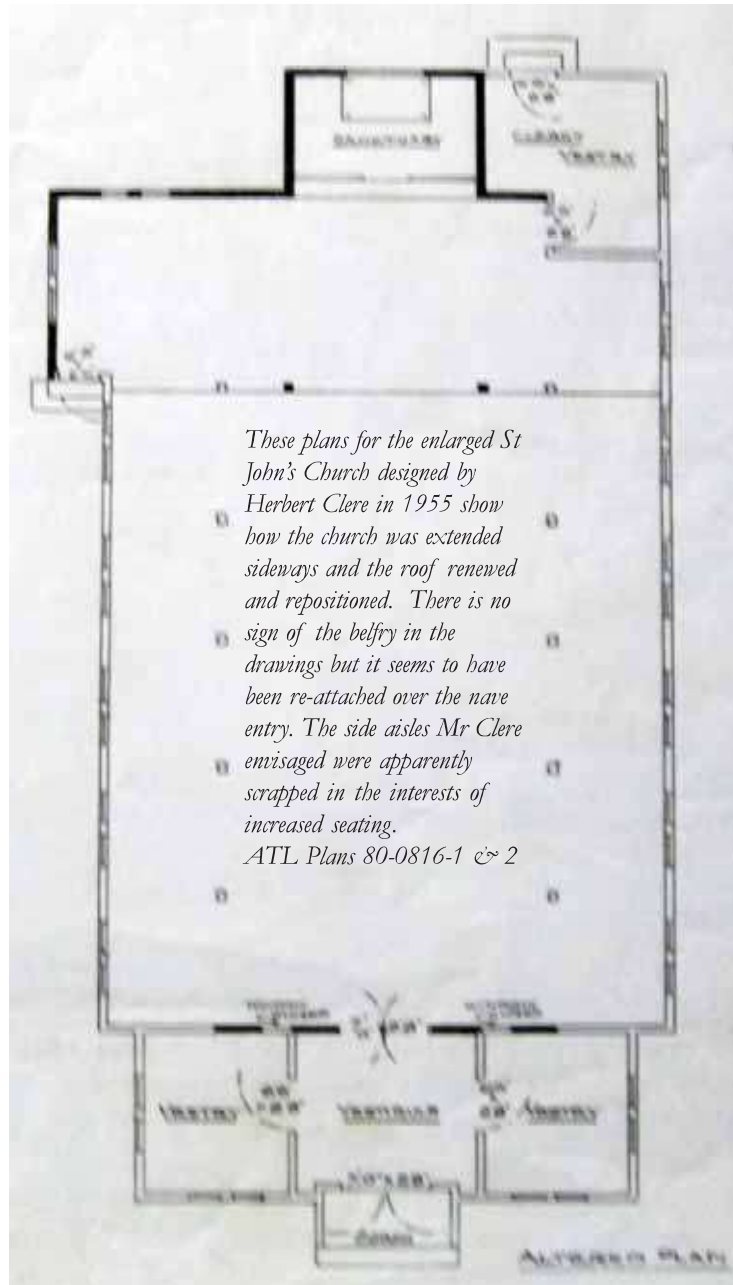
Talks about splitting the parish in two, focusing on St Hilda's in the north and St John's in the south, began in 1949 but it took five years for the division to take effect. In mid-1952, with the talks on the two-parish proposal under way, Vestry appointed a sub-committee to undertake a comprehensive review of the parish's property. They found the northern area included the St Hilda's land and buildings on the main road (worth £1475), the adjacent hall and vacant land (another £1875 worth) and two sections at Akatarawa (£1200) and Wallaceville (£75).

In the south, St John's church, hall, vicarage and vacant land totalling 4.1 acres was worth £5600. The Silverstream church building and adjoining land was worth another £2730, there was a 1.25 acre section at Pinehaven (£300) and Mr Cottle had just offered a two-acre block adjoining St John's (but without road access) worth £1500.³

The revised parish of Upper Hutt and the new parish of Trentham finally came into being at midnight on 28 February 1955. There was a bit of negotiation about the apportionment of funds, in which St John's Vestry felt the parish had not received fair treatment, and an inquiry was held to reach 'amicable agreement'.⁴ But St John's was bursting with confidence and vision. They approached the diocesan architect's firm Clere & Clere, which submitted a plan for extending St John's in June 1955. 'Herbert Clere drew up a scheme which greatly increased the seating capacity by adding an aisle on each side of the nave, and provided three more vestries and a vestibule beyond the porch,' wrote Susan Maclean in 2003. 'It offended the purists, who stood for the preservation of the original character of the building at the expense of convenience.'⁵ The design also included lowering and changing the pitch of the roof.⁶ The exterior roof covering was replaced with heavyweight roofing iron which came from the Ford Motor Company's surplus left after building armoured vehicles for World War II.⁷ It has weathered sixty years and, provided it is regularly repainted, looks good for a few decades more.



In this 1925 landscape photo, the road running diagonally is Ward Street, which led from the Wallaceville Hill road to the main northern highway lined with trees. Moonshine (also known as Cottle) Road is sparsely settled; the church is just visible on the mid-left of the photograph. Upper Hutt City Library Heritage Collection, P3-23-88.



Tenders were called in August 1955⁸ and a month later, Mr Smallfield was asked by Vestry to approach Mr Cottle regarding finances for the new design. 'Mr Cottle will put the funds in the hands of his solicitor,' he reported to Vestry on 8 September, and some weeks later the money was in the St John's No. 2 account.⁹

Work by Hutt Valley contractor Mr H G Rock began in July and proceeded apace, while the congregation worshipped in the parish hall and weddings and a confirmation were held at St Mary's. The church was ready enough for Christmas Day 1955 services to be held there.

The cost for the reconstruction was £2769,¹⁰ but further work turned out to be needed. 'Mr [Alan] Marryatt brought to the notice of members the state of the floor boards... and the amount of borer in them.'¹¹ The old floor in the nave was replaced, costing another £90, and the Clere designs for pews to fit the new church would take yet another £900, mostly funded by Leonard Tripp who gave £700 towards their cost.¹²

While parishioners were no doubt delighted with their new building, some work remained. A report of the Works Sub-Committee on 8 September 1956 noted that Mr Clere was to inspect the pews, and 'certain errors made by the contractor to be rectified.' Holes were visible in the roof, and immediate renovations were needed at the rear of the building to combat bird mess.¹³

Unfortunately no details of the church's reconstruction were preserved, other than the sketch plans now lodged in the Turnbull Library, so there is little information about the materials used. There is speculation that the sarking boards lining the ceiling interior were cut down and re-used, and certainly they bear the marks of early-style circular-sawing. However, Alington notes that 'the interior woodwork of the nave roof as it stands today does not reflect Thatcher's detailing',¹⁴ so even that claim may not stand. So apart from the belfry and a few boards around the entry-way into the nave, no materials from the original church remain. The iron which sheathed the side walls was destined to be used in the renovations at St Mary's.

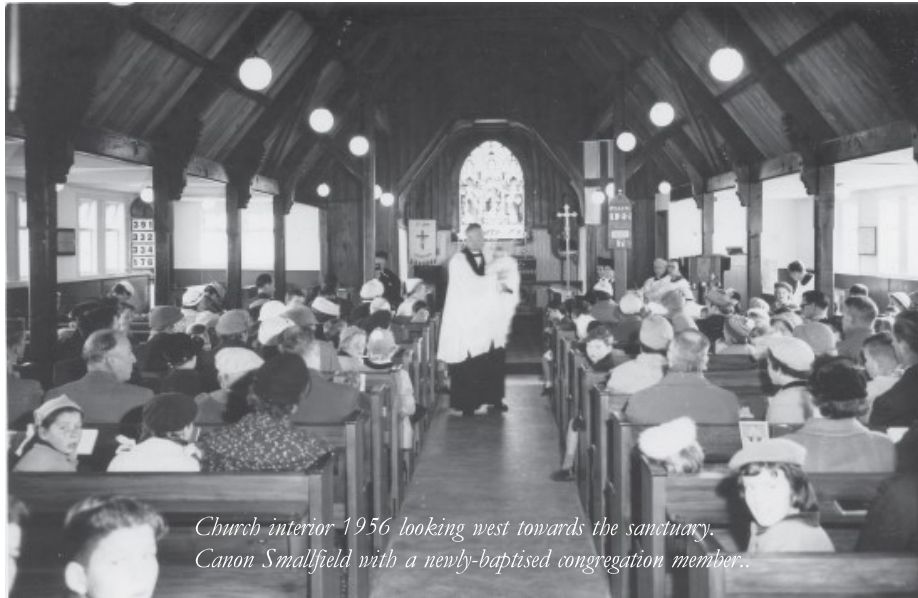


The newly-completed and extended church in 1956, as seen from Moonshine Road. Wells Fundraising booklet 1957.



SUNDAY SCHOOL AT ST. JOHN'S

St John's interior looking towards the new entryway and showing the side extensions. The red stained glass window (see chapter 6) possibly appears as a faint triangle in the woodwork above the new glass doors. Wells Fundraising booklet 1957.



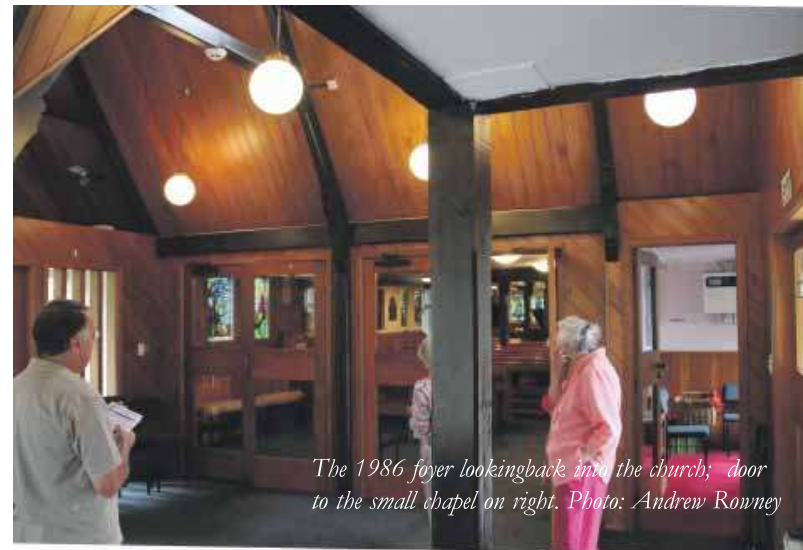
*Church interior 1956 looking west towards the sanctuary.
Canon Smallfield with a newly-baptised congregation member..*

Once the new floor in the nave was re-carpeted, the church was now in order, said Mr Smallfield triumphantly, 'and on the afternoon of Sunday February 24th 1957, Bishop Rich consecrated the additions and the new furnishings. The congregation, which was large, took tea in the parish hall at 3.45 o'clock.'¹⁵

Parish energy was undiminished. In 1957 a Wells canvass programme raised funds for a new parish hall. A new vicarage was built in 1958 (funded by sale of three sections on the main road frontage) and St Mary's in Silverstream was extended in 1960. The central portion of St John's was repiled and the sanctuary and chancel refloored in 1976, with roof repairs and partial replacement the same year¹⁶ and installation of new stained glass during the Pearson regime (see chapter 6).

The new foyer was the next and final extension to the church building. Initiated by the Revd Peter Stuart and designed by local architect Bill Pearson, the proposal was agreed to by a Special General Meeting in July 1984. Removing the south-eastern vestry room and installing folding glass doors leading to the light and airy foyer, added significant extra space and seating. The only construction issue was the need to strengthen the gable wall into the chancel, one of the original load-bearing walls of the church, and this was done with plywood reinforcing. A 'crying room' with a small window to the chancel provided a place for young families to retreat. (This has now been converted to a chapel for daily worship, and houses the gradine from the sanctuary.)

The foyer was opened and dedicated by the Bishop of Wellington, the Most Revd Brian Davis, in October 1986 as part of the 125th anniversary celebrations. It cost nearly \$100,000 and was funded by a loan (repaid in 1991) from the Friends of St John's plus proceeds from the sale of a parish-owned section in Whiteman's Valley.¹⁷



The 1986 foyer lookingback into the church; door to the small chapel on right. Photo: Andrew Rowney