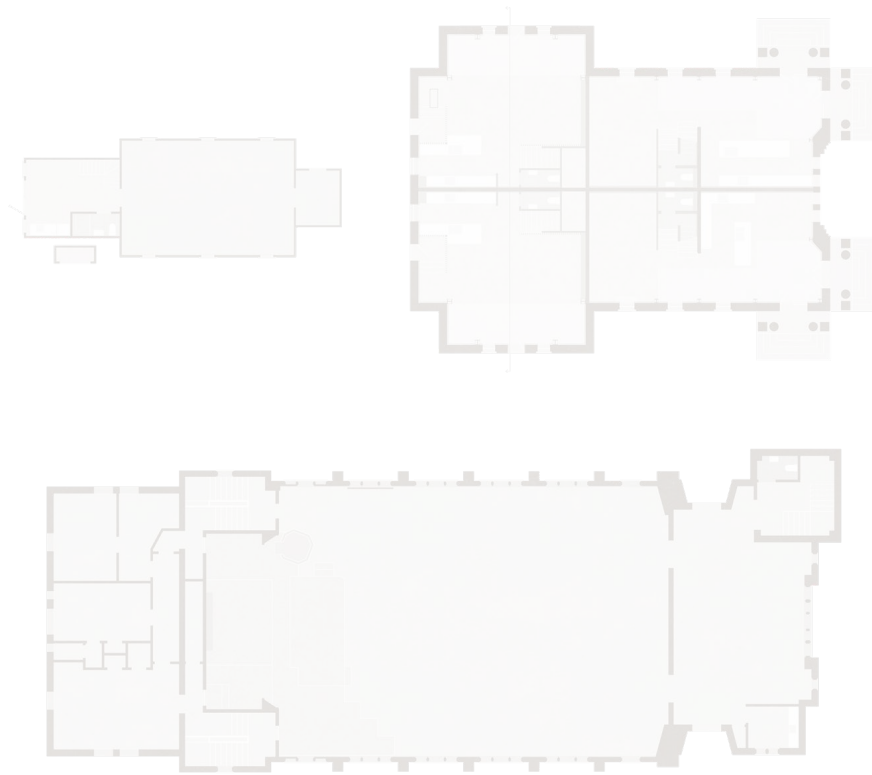


The Adaptive Reuse of Heritage Churches in Auckland

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing decline in religious affiliation in New Zealand has resulted in shrinking congregations and the increasing redundancy of church buildings. This prompts important questions about their future use and how they can remain relevant without losing their cultural value. However, limited research has focused on how adaptations impact the heritage significance these places hold.

This research focuses on how successfully the adaptive reuses of scheduled historic heritage churches in Auckland have balanced the preservation of heritage values with the functional demands of new uses. This paper follows a four-part methodology: a literature review, a study of historical and demographic context, a macro-level analysis of scheduled churches in Auckland, and an examination of three recent case studies.

The research found that outcomes are highly variable and mainly depend on factors such as the compatibility of new functions with the church's original purpose, the degree of physical changes, and the owner's goals. Church size and urban context further influence the strategies undertaken. Uses that are accessible to the public and allow the conservation of spatial integrity better align with the symbolic and spiritual qualities of the church buildings. This research provides valuable insights into current adaptive reuse practices and offers lessons to guide the future preservation of redundant heritage churches.

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GLOSSARY

ADAPTATION	The process of modifying a place “to change its capacity, function, or performance.” ¹
ADAPTIVE REUSE	The process of modifying a building’s functional and physical components, whether slightly or extensively, to accommodate new uses, ranging from subtle to radical. ²
AUTHENTICITY	The quality of a place being genuine to its original character, reflected through its form, fabric, context, use, traditions, spiritual essence, and sense of place, including tangible and intangible values. ³
COMPATIBLE USE	A use that is consistent with the value of a place, incorporated without excessive change, and has little or no negative impact on its authenticity and integrity. ⁴
INTANGIBLE VALUE	The immaterial value of a place, its “meanings or associations”, including “historical, social, spiritual, symbolic, or traditional” aspects. ⁵
SENSE OF PLACE /SPIRIT OF PLACE	The identity or essence of a place, shaped by its tangible and intangible qualities. Revealed through the “contextual relationship between people and history, and how this is represented through the layering of changes to the physical building fabric.” ⁶
TANGIBLE VALUE	The physically perceptible value of a place. ⁷

¹ James Douglas, *Building Adaptation* (Butterworth Heinemann, 2006), 1.

² Bie Plevoets, and Koenraad van Cleempoel, *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage: Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline* (Routledge, 2019), 23.

³ ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand, *ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value* (2010), 9.

⁴ Christopher Cochran, *Guidelines for Altering Heritage Buildings* (New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 2000), 4.
ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand, *ICOMOS New Zealand Charter*, 9.

⁵ ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand, 10.

⁶ Johnathan Djabarouti, “Symbolism and Spirituality,” in *Critical Built Heritage Practice and Conservation: Evolving Perspectives* (Routledge, 2024), 147.

⁷ ICOMOS Aotearoa New Zealand, *ICOMOS New Zealand Charter*, 11.

INTRODUCTION

The adaptive reuse of heritage buildings has become an increasingly relevant topic in urban planning and conservation practices. In New Zealand, the decline in religious affiliation has led to a rise in the disuse of church buildings. As Christian churches are left without active congregations, the reuse of these places of worship is inevitable. While there is growing literature on adaptive reuse practices, limited research focuses on how such adaptations impact the heritage values of buildings, particularly in the case of churches in Auckland.

RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This research aims to assess how successfully the adaptive reuses of scheduled historic heritage churches in Auckland have balanced heritage values with the requirements of their new use. For this purpose, the following objectives were defined:

- To analyse patterns in the adaptive reuse of scheduled heritage churches.

- To assess the heritage outcomes resulting from their adaptive reuse.

- To determine the extent to which adaptive reuse impact their heritage values.

METHODOLOGY

This research examines the adaptation of heritage-designated former churches into new uses. It was conducted over four months as part of an internship with Auckland Council's Heritage Unit.

The first stage involved a literature review of academic resources from the past 25 years, focusing on the conservation landscape, adaptive reuse practices, and the transformation of former religious buildings within international and New Zealand contexts. The aim was to identify key literature and to contextualise the complexities of church adaptive reuse in evolving scholarship. The second stage involved a contextual analysis of the historical development of church architecture in New Zealand, including its origins, characteristics and evolution. It also incorporated demographic research to examine religious disaffiliation in New Zealand, which provided context for the increasing adaptation of former churches.

Next, a macro-level analysis of heritage church buildings included in Schedule 14.1 of the Auckland Unitary Plan was undertaken. The first objective was to identify the recurring heritage values and compare the values assigned to churches and those assigned to all other scheduled places to outline

the unique heritage values of religious places. This was done using a Context Analysis spreadsheet of Schedule 14.1 provided by Dr. David Bade, Built Heritage Specialist at Auckland Council. The second objective was determining how many scheduled church buildings no longer served their initial purpose. To address challenges in categorising current use due to limited access to interior modifications, buildings were grouped as ongoing religious use or adaptively reused. Searches of each scheduled church's name and address on Google provided a variety of sources, such as individual churches or denominations' websites, Facebook groups, listing sites, and street-level imagery. For the adaptively reused churches, current uses were further categorised.

Lastly, three case studies were analysed. Initial online research provided information about the disuse and subsequent decision to adapt them to new uses. Supporting documents, including plans and reports, were obtained through the Heritage Unit, online sources, and project participants. These documents were reviewed to identify key insights into the ongoing adaptations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals involved in the selected case studies, providing further qualitative context.

SCOPE

This report explores the current practices of adaptive reuse of heritage churches in Auckland by analysing three case studies and assessing their heritage outcomes. This work does not provide an in-depth evaluation of these projects' design, retrofitting techniques, or strengthening methods. Neither does it address the economic implications often associated with retrofitting heritage buildings. Instead, the focus is on exploring the values attributed to these places, providing a context in which these adaptive reuse projects occur, and assessing how successful the new uses are in preserving heritage values. Although the case studies were chosen to reflect a range of intervention types, they cannot represent the full spectrum of church adaptations in the region.

LIMITATIONS

The absence of a straightforward, neutral method for assessing heritage outcomes, especially in terms of how adaptive reuse impacts a building's intangible values, was a significant limitation. Intangible values, such as social value, even when reflected in the physical space, are difficult to evaluate consistently; this limits the ability to compare adaptations objectively and reinforces the need for case-by-case assessment. Lastly, the semi-structured interviews offered insight into the adaptation processes and involved individuals in various roles, from design to ownership; however, these viewpoints do not create a consistent context for all case studies.

STRUCTURE

Chapter I offers a literature review on the concepts and historical developments of the conservation and adaptive reuse discourse through national and international literary works from the last 25 years. Specifically, it addresses the values of religious heritage and the challenges of transforming former places of worship to accommodate new uses. Concluding with a premise of what encompasses successful adaptive reuse outcomes.

Chapter II provides a background to the thesis topic by outlining the decline in religious affiliation in New Zealand and providing an overview of the reasons and motivations behind the transformation of church architecture from its beginnings in the 1840s to the 1960s, when religious belonging started to decline drastically. Additionally, this chapter illustrates four early national examples of adaptive reuse of heritage churches with vastly different heritage outcomes.

Chapter III focuses on the scheduled church buildings in Schedule 14.1 Historic Heritage Places in the Auckland Unitary Plan. This chapter centres around the heritage values attributed to churches and the current function of the 146 church buildings, to show an overview of the ongoing role these places play in Auckland's urban and cultural landscape.

Chapter IV analyses three recent case studies of adaptively reused churches, illustrating the context and practice of transforming former places of worship to residential and community spaces. The adaptive reuse of the Kohekohe Presbyterian Church near Waiuku, St. David's Presbyterian Church in Grafton, and St. James Church in Mt. Eden reveal the challenges involved in the adaptation processes, as well as the recurrent themes and heritage outcomes achieved.

CHAPTER I:

Literature Review

This chapter explores the literature on the intersection of built heritage conservation, adaptive reuse, and the unique challenges of transforming religious buildings for reuse. It provides an overview of key concepts and debates within international and New Zealand contexts. This review highlights how adapting religious structures for new purposes differs from the reuse of other building types, particularly in balancing tangible and intangible heritage values.

Most sources are English-language books or book chapters published in the last 25 years, prioritising recent literary works grounded in academic scholarship. By examining historical and theoretical perspectives,⁸ this review aims to contextualise the complexities of religious building adaptation within evolving cultural and conservation landscapes.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE

Books like Miles Glendinning's *The Conservation Movement* and Jukka Jokilehto's *A History of Architectural Conservation* outline the basis of the conservation movement that started in the eighteenth century, noting a shift in the last three to four decades towards more people-centred approaches and the recognition of environmental contexts and intangible cultural heritage.⁹ For Jokilehto, the main issue in modern conservation is “the question of values.”¹⁰ He states that the interpretation and management of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, have long been shaped by competing value judgements. Glendinning agrees, noting that conservation values and ideologies have evolved significantly, with more recent debates concerning authenticity.¹¹ Without a clear definition, heritage is *identified* using established *criteria* based on significance or value. Heritage identification is an ongoing, layered process that responds to changing perspectives on what merits preservation.¹² Numerous institutions and organisations, both at international and local

⁸ Francesca Lanz and John Pendlebury's categorization of sources has provided an initial notion, specifically regarding adaptive reuse. They established three categories: handbooks, atlases of examples, and theoretical monographs.

“Adaptive Reuse: A Critical Review.” *The Journal of Architecture* 27, no. 2-3 (2022): 441-462.

⁹ Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation* (2nd ed. Routledge, 2018), 2.

¹⁰ Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, 29.

¹¹ Miles Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation: Antiquity to modernity*. (Routledge, 2013).

¹² Martin J. Jones, “Heritage Identification” in *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands: National Experiences and Practice*, eds. John H Stubbs et al. (Routledge, 2024), 251.

levels, have emerged during and since the twentieth century to identify, evaluate, and protect heritage places, employing such criteria and creating heritage lists or schedules.¹³

Within New Zealand, several works were published around the turn of the millennium about the conservation of historical buildings. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust (now Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga) issued guidance brochures for the proper alteration of built heritage, including Christopher Cochran's *Guidelines for Altering Heritage Buildings*¹⁴ and Greg Bowron and Peter Richardson's *Guidelines for Altering Historic Churches*.¹⁵ Significantly, Alexander Trapeznik's edited book, *Common Ground?: Heritage and Public Places in New Zealand*,¹⁶ united specialists from various fields to write on issues regarding the built environment and historic buildings. In his chapter "From Dead Ducks to Historic Buildings," renowned conservation architect Jeremy Salmond highlighted that most heritage buildings are preserved through ongoing use rather than formal conservation.¹⁷

Trapeznik's book remains a key work on the subject, with only a recent source providing a more current perspective. The second chapter of a 2024 multi-authored book, *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands: National Experiences and Practice*, discusses "Aotearoa New Zealand"¹⁸ and comprehensively reviews the country's history of conservation, heritage identification and legislation, the setting of the *ICOMOS New Zealand Charter*,¹⁹ Māori architecture and the adaptation of the built environment. On this last subject, conservation architect Robin Byron states that there is an "inexorable and inevitable need for modification and change" of historical buildings.²⁰ With growing demands for redevelopment and denser use of sites featuring historic places, as well as changes such as seismic strengthening, sustainability, and compliance with modern standards, there is an intrinsic need for heritage places to change. If done well, she states that

¹³ For example, UNESCO and Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga utilise ten criteria categories for their heritage lists, while Auckland Council has eight to identify significant heritage places. In Auckland, historic heritage places are protected through their scheduling in the Auckland Unitary Plan.

¹⁴ Christopher Cochran, *Guidelines for Altering Heritage Buildings* (New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 2000).

¹⁵ Greg Bowron and Peter Richardson, *Guidelines of Altering Historic Churches*, (New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 2000).

¹⁶ Alexander Trapeznik, ed., *Common Ground?: Heritage and Public Places in New Zealand* (University of Otago Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Jeremy Salmond, "From Dead Ducks to Historic Buildings. Heritage Terminology and Conservation Planning," in Trapeznik, *Common Ground?*, 46-47.

¹⁸ John H Stubbs et al., eds., "Aotearoa New Zealand," chapter 2 in *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands: National Experiences and Practice*, eds. John H Stubbs et al. (Routledge, 2024).

¹⁹ The *ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value* was first issued in 1993 and subsequently revised in 2010 to incorporate more inclusively intangible heritage, community involvement, multi-disciplinary approaches, and more. "Aotearoa New Zealand," 268.

²⁰ Robin Byron, "The Inevitability of Change," in Stubbs et al., *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands*, 287.



Fig. 1 *The Theatre of Marcellus in Rome. The additional upper two storeys were added during the 13th century to adapt it to a residence; it has had multiple interventions since then. Engraving by Giovanni B. Piranesi, ca. 1757. Metropolitan Museum of Art. 37.45.3(51)*

adapting heritage sites through new work can maintain their integrity and cultural relevance, ensuring they remain functional, sustainable, and meaningful in contemporary life.²¹

Literature centred on the reuse of buildings for new purposes narrates a more pragmatic and longer history, as abandoned buildings have been appropriated and reused since the sixth century in Europe.²² Although not valued as a discipline until comparatively recently, the history of adaptive reuse is interwoven with the history of architectural conservation, as many historical buildings owe their preservation to their practical reuse. The term *adaptive reuse* was first used in 1973,²³ but other terms like adaptation, rehabilitation, remodelling, alteration, and renovation are often used synonymously with it.²⁴ Nowadays, literature often addresses adaptive reuse through the lens of urban regeneration and sustainability.²⁵

In New Zealand, the adaptive reuse discourse materialised in a 1980 symposium led by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, due to the increasing concern about upgrading and reusing the existing stock of buildings, particularly regarding “the pressure of safety, obsolescence, inappropriateness and demands of urban renewal.”²⁶ From the 1980s onwards, the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings for commercial and residential use was progressively promoted²⁷ through public

²¹ Byron, “The Inevitability of Change,” 287-296.

²² Françoise Astorg Bollack, *Old Buildings, New Ideas: A Selective Architectural History of Additions, Adaptations, Reuse and Design Invention* (RIBA Publications, 2023), XIV.

²³ Liliane Wong, *Adaptive Reuse: Extending the Lives of Buildings* (Birkhäuser, 2017), 30.

²⁴ Bie Plevoets, and Koenraad van Cleempoel, *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage: Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline* (Routledge, 2019), 20.

²⁵ Plevoets, and van Cleempoel, *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage*, 52-78.

²⁶ David Reed, *New Lives for Old Buildings: The Proceedings of a National Symposium Held in Wellington, New Zealand on 14-16 April 1980* (New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 1982), 9.

²⁷ Gavin McLean, “Where Sheep May Not Safely Graze. A Brief History of New Zealand’s Heritage Movement. 1890-2000,” in Trapeznik, *Common Ground?*, 40.

campaigns as countermeasures to the widespread demolition of historic buildings caused by economic shifts and earthquake regulations.²⁸

Since historic buildings require some degree of intervention or adaptation over time, the extent of the work varies by the place's significance. Sometimes, heritage value only becomes a profound part of the discussion when legal constraints apply, as seen in James Douglas's handbook, *Building Adaptation*.²⁹ This showcases the importance of heritage scheduling, as the contemporary adaptive reuse practice has numerous other motivations, mainly driven by economics.³⁰

RELIGIOUS HERITAGE BUILDINGS: VALUES AND ADAPTATION

Historically, until the twentieth century, the reuse of religious buildings was not due to decreasing numbers in religious attendance, as it is now. Often, buildings were sold for political, social, and economic reasons, especially during Europe's Reformation and Enlightenment periods. Thomas Coomans's text, "Reuse of Sacred Places: Perspectives for a Long Tradition," addresses the pragmatic reuse of sacred places, arguing that churches were reinterpreted and reimagined as places of power and decision-making, as centres for education, and perhaps more significantly, as cultural spaces.³¹ Moreover, Liliane Wong's chapter "Religion" in her book, *Adaptive Reuse in Architecture: A Typological Index*, addresses how changing cultural and social norms in the late twentieth century, integral to religious disaffiliation, have contributed to the recent rise of church adaptive reuse projects.³² In New Zealand, perhaps one of the earliest studies of the adaptation of former churches was done by Keith Small in 1990. His thesis, "Re-use of religious architecture", illustrates four national examples of the emerging movement of church adaptation during the 1980s.³³

²⁸ Ben Schrader, "Evolution of Historic Preservation, 1900-1990" in John H. Stubbs et al. *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands*, 238.

²⁹ Douglas states that "initially if not ultimately financial considerations will be paramount" in the decision to adapt a building. It is only when considering a (listed) historic building that its "architectural and historic sensitivity" is vastly considered, whose adaptation "may require a less invasive and more sympathetic approach."
James Douglas, *Building Adaptation* (Butterworth Heinemann, 2006), 94 and 109.

³⁰ Wong, *Adaptive Reuse*, 33.

³¹ Thomas Coomans, "Reuse of Sacred Places: Perspectives for a Long Tradition," in *Loci Sacri: Understanding Sacred Places*, ed. Thomas Coomans et al. (Leuven University Press, 2012), 221-241.

³² Liliane Wong, "Religion," in *Adaptive Reuse in Architecture: A Typological Index* (Birkhäuser, 2023), 141-148.

³³ Keith Small, "Re-use of religious architecture" (BArch thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1990).



Fig. 2 A church transformed into Leiden University's library after the Reformation.
Etching by Jan Cornelis Woudanus, 1610.
The British Museum. 1875,0814.737.



Fig. 3 The Selexyz Dominicanen Bookstore, housed in a 13th-century church adapted by Merckx + Girod architects in 2005.
Photograph by Roos Aldershof, 2007.

Marie Clausén, in her book *Sacred Architecture in a Secular Age*, observes that former places of worship converted into venues for musical and theatrical performances, art galleries, or bookshops are reinvigorated with “new relevance and resonance.”³⁴ She argues that this phenomenon builds upon longstanding historical connections: the arts have been deeply intertwined with religious practice, music has had an integral role in church services, and books have a dual connection as the scriptural focus of the faith and the historical role of monastery book production.

Church conservation and adaptive reuse can be examined regarding the relationship between the secular framework and the intangible values assigned to religious heritage. For Cooman, reusing a religious building is more delicate than any other kind of building. It should not only regard physical materiality or function, given that sacred spaces have “a symbolic and ideological dimension.”³⁵ Similarly, Andrea Longhi, in his book chapter titled “Decommissioning and Reuse of Liturgical Architectures: Historical Processes and Temporal Dimensions”, reports that secular conservation frameworks continue to prioritise historical value and physical authenticity, even though in the Christian architectural imagery, the “focus is more on places than on buildings.”³⁶ It is suggested that religious heritage is rooted more in intangible values than in the buildings' physical attributes, often complicating suitable conservation practices.

While the role of faith and spirituality in determining collective values and the reuse of religious heritage remains debated, their connection to collective identity remains significant. Cooman states

³⁴ Marie Clausén, *Sacred Architecture in a Secular Age: Anamnesis of Durham Cathedral* (Routledge, 2016), 3-4.

³⁵ Coomans, “Reuse of Sacred Places”, 221.

³⁶ Andrea Longhi, “Decommissioning and Reuse of Liturgical Architectures: Historical Processes and Temporal Dimensions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Space*, ed. Jeanne Halgren Kilde (Oxford University Press, 2022), 87-88.

SYMBOLIC



social codes
sign-systems

SPIRITUAL



experiential
perceptual

Fig. 4 *Traits of symbolic and spiritual values.*
Adapted from Djabarouti, "Symbolism and Spirituality,"
151.

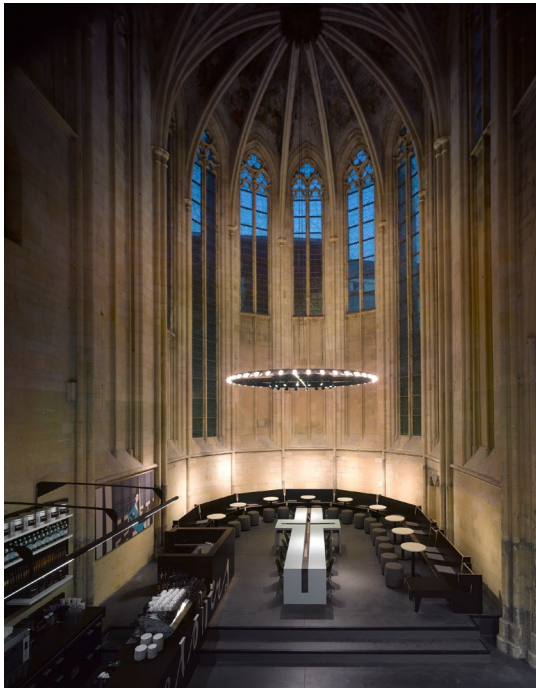


Fig. 5 *According to Wong, in the Selexyz Dominicanen Bookstore, the wine bar is thoughtfully placed in the church's former altar, referencing sacred rituals and connecting the building's spiritual past with its contemporary function.*
Photograph by Roos Aldershof, 2007.

that because faith is a decisive factor in people's and communities' identity, "more than any other building types religious buildings crystallize a complex range of symbolic, psychological and ideological values."³⁷ Whereas Longhi observes that, given the historical dynamics of decommissioning and transforming places of worship in Europe, recent transformations have not prompted theological debate, yet they have attracted the attention of those "whose sensitivity and opinions are inspired by such matters as protection, memory, and collective identity rather than spirituality or liturgy."³⁸

According to conservation architect Johnathan Djabarouti, heritage buildings hold symbolic and spiritual values, which he describes as primarily concerning "the meanings and associations imposed upon built heritage assets by people."³⁹ Symbolism focuses on the meanings and codes embedded in the place, while the spirit of place draws attention to "the unique and subjective qualities and identities of a place by giving additional weight to perceptual experience(s)."⁴⁰ For instance, churches' architectural forms carry significant symbolic meanings, especially where space and rituals converge;⁴¹ whereas the space's intangible emotional and experiential qualities further define their distinct character and identity.

Wong notes that recognising the essence of the existing structure "distinguishes a project of adaptive reuse from that of a simple change in function," as seen in successful church conversion projects in which purpose-defined spatial programs allude to

³⁷ Coomans, "Reuse of Sacred Places," 222.

³⁸ Longhi, "Decommissioning and Reuse of Liturgical Architectures," 85-86.

³⁹ Johnathan Djabarouti, "Symbolism and Spirituality," chapter 7 in *Critical Built Heritage Practice and Conservation: Evolving Perspectives* (Routledge, 2024), 140.

⁴⁰ Djabarouti, "Symbolism and Spirituality," 150.

⁴¹ Pier Vittorio Aureli, "Rituals and Walls: On the Architecture of Sacred Space," in *Rituals and Walls: The Architecture of Sacred Space*, edited by Pier Vittorio Aureli and Maria Shéhérazade Giudici (Architectural Association London, 2016), 16-18.

Christian rituals.⁴² This symbolic embrace is encouraged by some church denominations, instructing that the new use of a repurposed religious building “must still appropriately reflect its past spiritual manifestation as a divine place of indwelling” and that these adapted buildings “should always have something prophetic.”⁴³

Preserving the original spatial arrangement of heritage churches is crucial for maintaining their authenticity. The authors of *Guidelines of Altering Historic Churches* indicate that to respect their heritage values when altering historic churches, “the separate spaces of nave, aisle and chancel should be retained intact as far as possible, without vertical or horizontal separation.”⁴⁴ English Heritage, in its guidance brochure *New Uses for Former Places of Worship*, states that the most appropriate type of conversion would be one that preserves the building’s original ‘single vessel’ character, as the primary function of these buildings was bringing together a large number of people into one open space.⁴⁵ These ideas coincide with Wong’s critique of the church-to-condominium conversion type, where “the maximization of revenue through the insertion of floors of apartment units into the grand church interior destroys [its] authenticity.”⁴⁶

Certainly, public perception of adapted religious buildings, as it relates to how new uses integrate with the building’s identity, aligns with the notion of authenticity. A 2007 PhD thesis by You K. Ahn shows how the public is more empathetic towards the adaptive reuse of historic church buildings when adapted into community or cultural spaces than other secular building typologies. In contrast, residential use had the most negative response according to public perception, as this was perceived as the most radical change in the interior space.⁴⁷

DEFINING SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES: COMPATIBILITY AND VALUES IN ADAPTIVE REUSE

Multiple authors have explored the requirements for a successful adaptive reuse project in theoretical terms, including Liliane Wong in her book, *Adaptive Reuse: Extending the Lives of Buildings*, and Bie Plevoets and Koenraad van Cleempoel in their book, *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage: Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline*. Wong distinguishes two aspects: the importance of the host building’s identity and the compatibility between the existing building and the new use. She defines the ‘Frankenstein Syndrome’ as the failure of the “introduction of a new and incompatible order

⁴² Wong, *Adaptive Reuse*, 63-64 and 138.

⁴³ Lieke Wijnia and Todd H. Weir, “Religious Heritage between Scholarship and Practice,” in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Heritage in Contemporary Europe* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 8.

⁴⁴ Bowron and Richardson, *Guidelines of Altering Historic Churches*, 4.

⁴⁵ Nick Chapple, *New Uses for Former Places of Worship* (English Heritage, 2012).

⁴⁶ Wong, *Adaptive Reuse*, 155-157.

⁴⁷ You Kyong Ahn, “Adaptive reuse of abandoned historic churches: Building type and public perception” (PhD thesis, Texas A&M University, 2007).

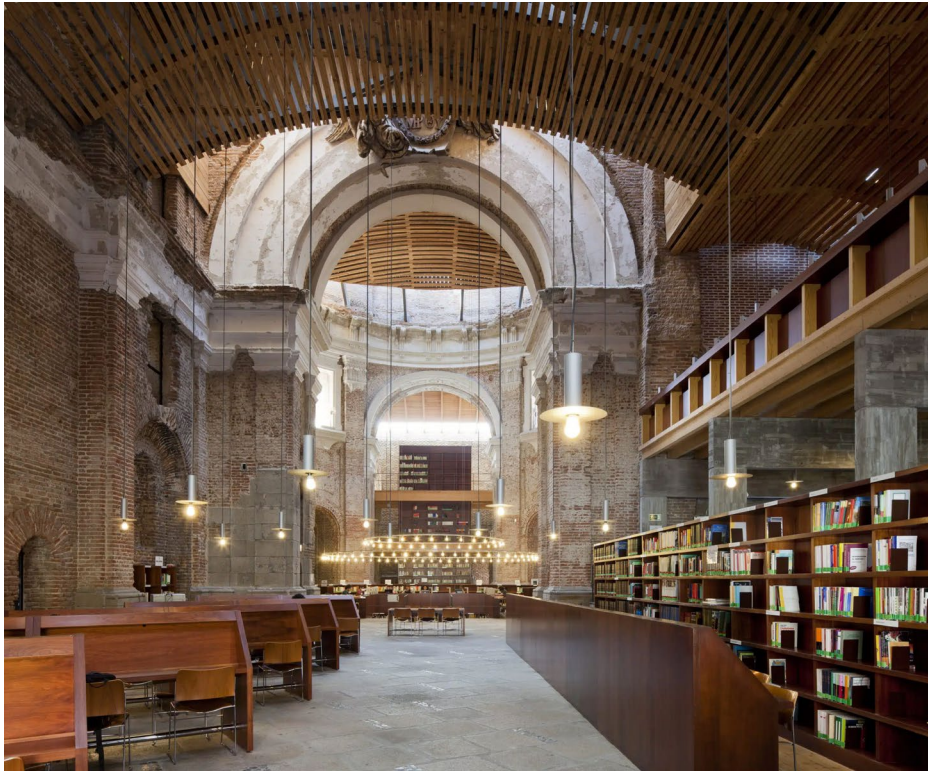


Fig. 6 In *Escuelas Pías de San Fernando*, Madrid, church ruins were transformed into a university library by Linazasoro & Sánchez Arquitectura in 2004. Preserved in its raw state since being burned during the Spanish Civil War, the contemporary intervention thoughtfully enhanced the qualities of the space and intensified the site's unique *genius loci*. Photograph by ImagenSubliminal.

within an existing one.”⁴⁸ In New Zealand, conservation architect Chris Cochran states that finding a compatible use for any historic building is one of the key principles of adequate conservation practices. He describes compatible use as one that “can be incorporated into the building without excessive change and without significant reduction of heritage significance.”⁴⁹ So, compatibility with the new use should preserve the building’s authenticity.

This perspective is deepened in Plevoets and van Cleempoel’s discussion of *genius loci*, or spirit of place, which expands the conversation beyond authenticity to include more personal or subjective interpretations between place and memory.⁵⁰ Most importantly, for the authors, “rather than preserving all objectified and individual values of a building or site, altering existing buildings requires a sensitive judgement regarding which values to add, which to enhance or remember, and which values to let go.”⁵¹

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER I

This literature review has examined theoretical frameworks and historical developments of the conservation and adaptive reuse discourse, with particular attention to religious heritage. The

⁴⁸ Wong, *Adaptive Reuse*, 34.

⁴⁹ Christopher Cochran, *Guidelines for Altering Heritage Buildings* (New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 2000), 4.

⁵⁰ The authors consider authenticity ambiguous and directed mostly towards historical values, which fails to recognise the merits of the contemporary intervention.

Plevoets, and van Cleempoel, *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage*, 79-93.

⁵¹ Plevoets, and van Cleempoel, 91.

adaptive reuse of church buildings presents a distinct set of challenges and opportunities within the broader field of built heritage conservation. More than other building types, former places of worship are deeply embedded with symbolic, spiritual, and social values that extend beyond their material fabric. Successful adaptation projects depend not only on physical compatibility with new uses but also on a sensitive negotiation of the building's identity, authenticity, and sense of place. Both international and New Zealand sources emphasise that the most effective outcomes preserve the spatial integrity of churches and resonate meaningfully with their former roles. These insights provide the conceptual foundation for this research project on the adaptive reuse of churches in Auckland.

CHAPTER II:

Religion, Architecture, and Adaptive Reuse in New Zealand

Understanding the setting of contemporary adaptive reuse within Auckland's heritage churches requires a contextual and multifaceted approach. This chapter explores New Zealand's evolving religious landscape and the unique architectural heritage of its Christian structures. It covers the introduction of Christianity through early missionary efforts, the development of denominational architecture, and the decline in religious affiliation since the mid-twentieth century. This chapter concludes with an overview of foundational adaptive reuse cases across the country, offering insights and precedents that inform contemporary projects in Auckland.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE SETTLER POPULATION



Fig. 7 Māori assembled to celebrate the Lord's Supper, New Zealand.
The Ecclesiologist, 1845.

The early success of the Christian mission in New Zealand, which began in 1814,⁵² was partly due to the missionaries' willingness to adapt their services to be conducted outdoors or within Māori meeting houses. Raupō shelters and structures, built by Māori for their own use before the arrival of Pākehā settlers, played a vital role in the development of New Zealand's earliest places of worship.⁵³ However, due to the pagan associations of these structures, the new inhabitants determined to construct their own buildings.⁵⁴

Nineteenth-century New Zealand churches played a significant role in the nation's formation. They were central to community building, with their church buildings commonly among the earliest and most prominent structures in new settlements. In immigrants' minds, churches were integral and anticipated features of both society and townscapes, especially regarding recalling their homeland. Thus, social conventions played a significant role in the construction of churches during this time.⁵⁵

⁵² Mark Derby, "Cultural go-betweens – Missionaries," *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed 9 June 2025, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/cultural-go-betweens/page-3>.

⁵³ Bill McKay, *Worship: A History of New Zealand Church Design* (Godwit, 2015), 283.

⁵⁴ Peter Lineham, "The House of God," in *Sunday Best: How the Church Shaped New Zealand and New Zealand Shaped the Church* (Massey University Press, 2017), 52.

⁵⁵ McKay, *Worship*, 185.

CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE IN AUCKLAND: 1840 TO 1960

Perhaps no man is more linked to the beginnings of Auckland church architecture than George Augustus Selwyn. He was appointed Bishop of New Zealand by the Anglican Church in 1842 and began working on erecting ecclesiastical buildings in the Auckland region two years later.⁵⁶ Selwyn's views on religious architecture followed those of the Ecclesiological Society,⁵⁷ whose main architectural principle was that "churches should be modelled after the buildings of the English Middle Ages, which were thought to be more a pious time, and a period in which Gothic design reflected the virtues and values of Christianity."⁵⁸

After some unsuccessful attempts at stone churches, Bishop Selwyn understood that local conditions and materials played a part in the success of the structures; therefore, the true problem was how to translate "the ideas of the Ecclesiological Society into a colonial context where timber was ubiquitous."⁵⁹ Selwyn employed architect Frederick Thatcher and developed what is now recognised as a New Zealand vernacular structure. It featured exposed roof framing, steep roofs, timber walls, and vertical weatherboard cladding. Two admired examples can be found in the parish church of All Saints in Howick and the collegiate chapel of St John's in Meadowbank.



Fig. 8 Interior view of the church of All Saints, Howick.
Jane Ussher, *Worship*, pp. 302

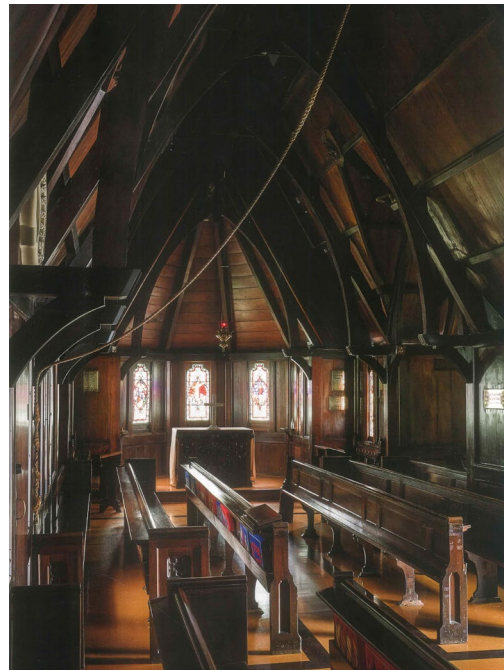


Fig. 9 Interior view of St. John's Chapel.
Jane Ussher, *Worship*, pp. 298

⁵⁶ Auckland had just become the new capital and the headquarters of the Anglican Church.

George Matthew Fowlds, *The "Selwyn" Chapels and Other Century-Old Churches in the Auckland Province* (Auckland Regional Committee of the N.Z. Historic Places Trust, 1968).

⁵⁷ The 'Cambridge Camden Society' was founded in 1839 for the study of ecclesiastical art, specifically of the building and decoration of churches. It was renamed the 'Ecclesiological Society' in 1846 and was active until 1868.

⁵⁸ McKay, *Worship*, 284.

⁵⁹ McKay, 284.

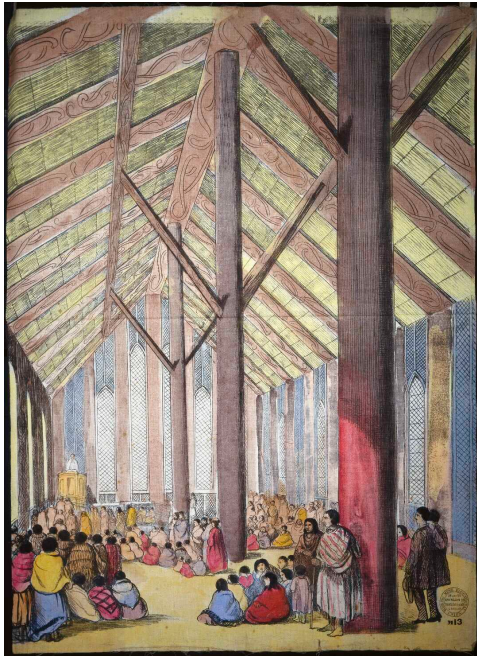


Fig. 10 *Interior of Rangiatea Church, Otaki, by Charles Barraud, 1850s.*
Alexander Turnbull Library. D-010-002

In parallel, interesting amalgamations of Māori and Pākehā Christian architecture appeared in the 1840s and 1850s.⁶⁰ Later on, significant innovations in Māori architecture can be seen as a “reaction to the European-style church.”⁶¹ The development of the wharenui, or meeting house, and the whare karakia, or church, utilizing Western technology whilst sustaining Māori identity, rivalled churches in their scale and interior space.⁶²

As a result of increased immigration during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a boost in congregations and church construction in New Zealand, as seen in figure 11.⁶³ Along with the creation of new buildings, old churches underwent significant modifications to suit changing needs. There was a belief that many nineteenth-century timber churches were not meant to be permanent, and congregations were eager to replace them when financially possible. At the beginning of the 1900s, a widespread desire emerged for permanent structures offering greater capacity and lower upkeep costs.⁶⁴ For example, by the end of the nineteenth century, St Matthew’s Anglican Church on Hobson Street had already replaced its original timber building with a second timber structure, and soon after, a larger stone church was constructed to better meet the congregation’s needs.⁶⁵

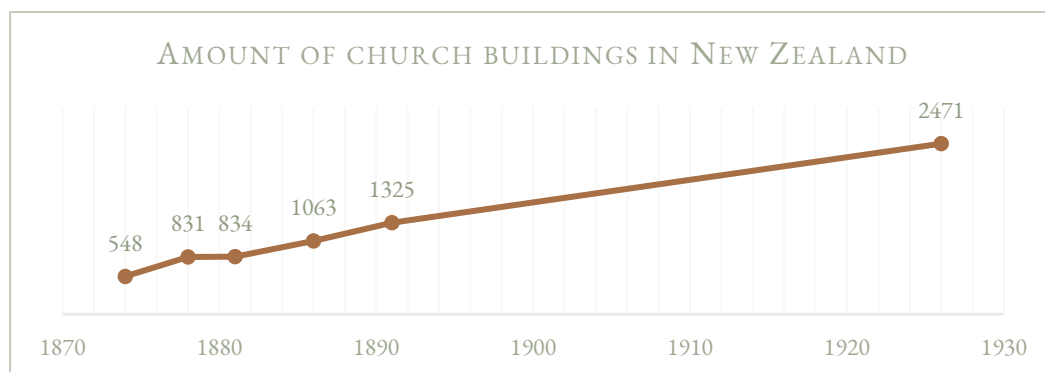


Fig. 11 *The number of church buildings in New Zealand from 1874 to 1928.*
Data source: Lineham, “The House of God.”

⁶⁰ McKay, 247, 283-286.

⁶¹ McKay, 250.

⁶² McKay, 250-251.

⁶³ Lineham, “The House of God,” 62-63.

⁶⁴ Lineham, “The House of God,” 90.

⁶⁵ “The Consecration of St. Matthew’s,” *The New Zealand Graphic*, 18 March 1905, Papers Past.



Fig. 12 First (left foreground) and second (centre) buildings of St. Matthew's church, 1870s.
Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections. 918-11



Fig. 13 Third (centre foreground) and second (right) churches of St. Matthew's.
Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections. 35-R0089

Moreover, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the different denominations tried to distinguish themselves through design, and the European 'Battle of the Styles' was exemplified by the notion of Gothic revival challenging classical dominance. In New Zealand, the Anglican-dominated Gothic configuration began to diminish as the Catholic,⁶⁶ Presbyterian, and Methodist denominations followed classical models at the end of the century.⁶⁷ For instance, some prominent examples of classical revival architecture from the 1870s onwards can be seen in Auckland: the Baptist Church's Tabernacle in the intersection of Queen Street and Karangahape Road, and the portico and tower additions made to the Presbyterian Church's St. Andrews at Symonds Street. Nevertheless, despite changes in architectural trends, certain examples from this period illustrate the ongoing application of the Gothic Revival style, showing its enduring presence: the Catholic Church's brick and stone Cathedral of St Patrick, in Wyndham Street, and the Anglican Church's timber Cathedral of St Mary in Parnell.⁶⁸

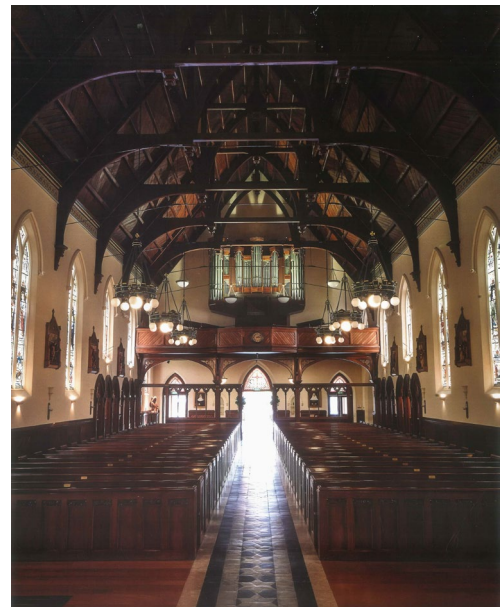


Fig. 14 Interior of the St Patrick's and St Joseph's Cathedral.
Jane Ussher, *Worship*, pp. 218

⁶⁶ Given that the Gothic revival's architectural models were rooted in pre-Reformation Catholicism in England, Catholics were at the beginning in agreement with the Anglicans' ideas of church construction; yet they soon opted to follow classical Roman and early Christian architecture.

⁶⁷ McKay, *Worship*, 187-189.

⁶⁸ McKay, 212-233.

During the first half of the twentieth century, working architects began building in a variety of styles beyond the Gothic or classical, such as Spanish Mission, Romanesque, and Baroque. Undeniably, Auckland's best example of this period is the Catholic Church's Romanesque-style basilica of St Michael in Remuera, built by Horace Massey in 1930.

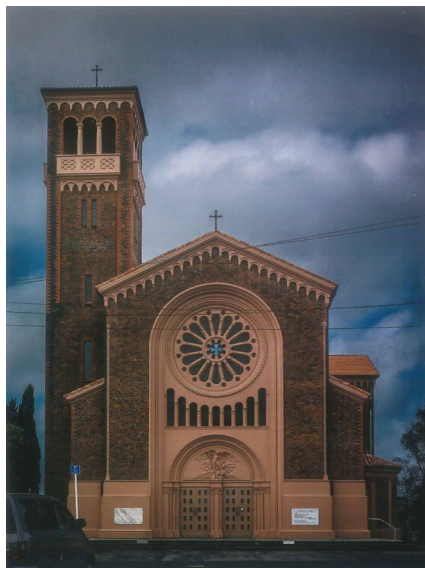


Fig. 15 *Facade and interior of St. Michael in Remuera.*
Jane Ussher, *Worship*, pp. 146-147

Eventually, changing times caused others to use new technology and materials in the era of Modernism, with the introduction of reinforced concrete. Yet, perhaps most importantly, the centennial commemoration of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1940 generated a new architectural debate regarding New Zealand's identity and distinctiveness, which prompted an interest in Māori buildings.⁶⁹ In Auckland, two churches best exemplify these: the Anglican Church of All Saints in Ponsonby, a regional modernist building with references to the wharenui, and the Catholic Church's modernist concrete and brick St Joseph in Grey Lynn, considered a synthesis of art and architecture.⁷⁰

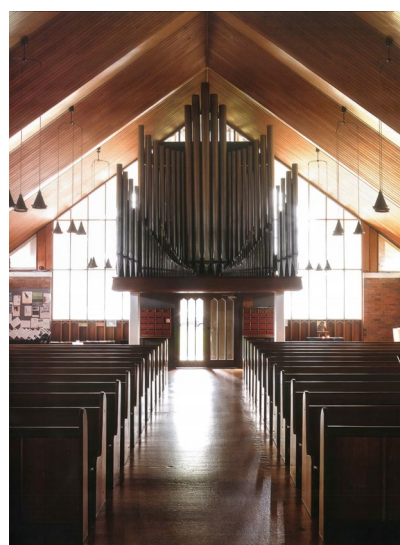
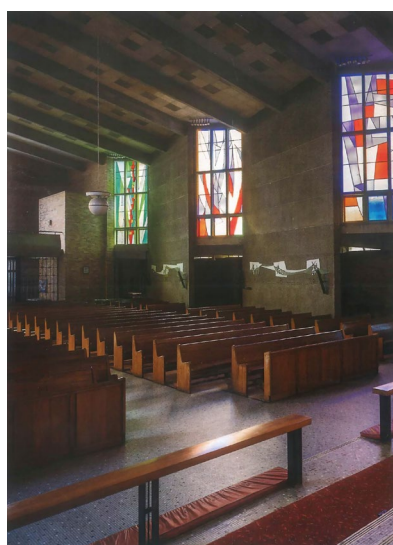


Fig. 16 (left) *Interior of St Joseph Church in Grey Lynn.*
Jane Ussher, *Worship*, pp. 87

Fig. 17 (right) *Interior of All Saints Church in Ponsonby.*
Jane Ussher, *Worship*, pp. 98

⁶⁹ McKay, 124.

⁷⁰ McKay, 84-87, 98-103.

THE DECLINE OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION IN NEW ZEALAND

After a stable state from the mid-nineteenth century to the first few decades of the twentieth century, the religious landscape in New Zealand started to change dramatically from the mid-1960s onwards. Denominations began to diversify, and most Protestant churches declined in religious adherence and service attendance.⁷¹ This transformation began to develop more quickly, as in all Western societies, due to cultural and social changes and immigration from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, around 90% of New Zealanders defined themselves as Christians in 1960; forty years later, this number dropped to around 60%. Similarly, weekly church attendance was at an all-time high of above 30% in the 1890s, declined to around 20% in 1960, and to 10% in 2000.⁷² Most importantly, research has shown that church buildings in New Zealand have never been heavily used,⁷³ and combined with the current decline of religious adherence, this has led to an increasing number of church buildings becoming obsolete.

Recent data from Auckland reveals that while more people identify as following no religion, with an increase from 21% in 2001 to 45% in 2023, Christian religious affiliation remains the same, with around 36% of the population.⁷⁴ This can be understood when considering that some churches are ‘growing’ in congregation numbers due to new Christian immigrants, a fact that Ward argues could mask “the real crisis facing the churches in New Zealand.”⁷⁵ For example, the rise of Catholicism compared with other Christian denominations, such as Anglicanism, is linked to immigration, mainly from Asia, as seen in figure 18.

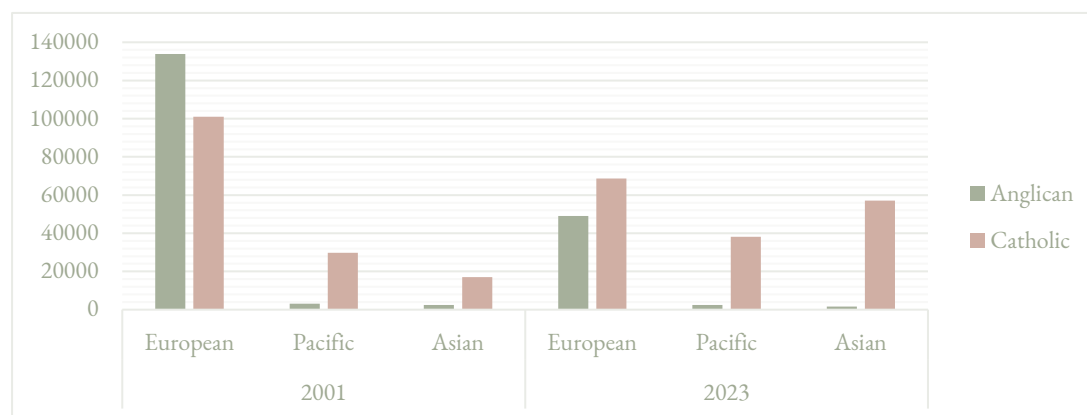


Fig. 18 Comparison of Anglican and Catholic religious affiliation between European, Pacific, and Asian populations in the Auckland region, 2001 and 2023. Data: Stats NZ.

⁷¹ Stenhouse, “Religion and society.”

⁷² Kevin Ward, “Christianity and Churches in New Zealand since 1960: Sociological Perspectives,” in *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand*, edited by Geoffrey Troughton and Stuart Lange (Victoria University Press, 2016), 172-173.

⁷³ For example, a 1882 census of churches in Auckland indicated that for the population size of around 37,000 people, city churches had half of that number of seats available, yet only around 27% of Aucklanders attended Sunday morning services.

Lineham, “The House of God,” 62.

⁷⁴ Stats NZ, *Aotearoa Data Explorer*, Religious affiliation in the 2001, 2006, and 2013 censuses and the 2013, 2018, and 2023 censuses, <https://explore.data.stats.govt.nz/>.

⁷⁵ Ward, “Christianity and Churches in New Zealand,” 177.

EARLY CASES OF ADAPTIVE REUSE OF HERITAGE CHURCHES IN NEW ZEALAND

In New Zealand, churches have been dismantled and reassembled elsewhere, sometimes for other purposes, since at least the 1910s,⁷⁶ and many of today's buildings are the third or fourth iterations within a specific location.⁷⁷ Above all, due to diminished or altered congregations, the redundancy of church buildings had been reported in local and national newspapers since the early 1920s.⁷⁸ Given all the varied transformations of church buildings, this section will only include those adaptive reuse projects where the church was already considered to have heritage value⁷⁹ and had formal heritage identification prior to its building adaptation.



Fig. 19 A church is being towed by traction engine to a new site, in November 1911.

Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections.
NZG-19111115-0019-02

As stated in the literature review, the discourse on adaptive reuse in New Zealand came into full force at the beginning of the 1980s. In regards to religious buildings, heritage professional John Wilson stated in 1981 that “the time may be approaching, however, when [...] inner city churches will become conservation problems” and when local and national bodies will have to step in “to ensure that important church buildings are converted to new uses rather than demolished.”⁸⁰ He alluded to the increased abandonment of churches and the increasing practice of adapting them to new uses.

One of the earliest publicly debated cases of a church no longer being used primarily for religious services was that of the Old St Paul's Cathedral in Wellington. After plans to build a new cathedral were set into motion in the mid-1950s, which meant dismantling the 1866 historic church, strong opposition arose for the preservation of the building.⁸¹ It was ultimately purchased by the government in 1966, and after a restoration, it reopened in 1970 as a public venue, dedicated to music, art, opera, and theatre.⁸² Although no significant change was made, it can be argued that this

⁷⁶ “Moving a Church,” *The New Zealand Graphic*, 15 November 1911, Papers Past.

⁷⁷ McKay, *Worship*, 7.

⁷⁸ “Closing of a church,” *The New Zealand Herald*, 1 September 1922, Papers Past.

⁷⁹ The growing discussion about the value of historic religious buildings was highlighted by efforts to preserve the Old St Paul's Cathedral in Wellington during the 1950s and 1960s.

⁸⁰ John Wilson, “Warning light shining on inner-city churches,” *The Press*, 28 July 1981, Papers Past.

⁸¹ Ben Schrader, “Evolution of Historic Preservation, 1900-1990,” in Stubbs et al., *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands*, 236.

⁸² “Historic St Paul's church in new role,” *The Press*, 26 September 1970, Papers Past.

project exemplified the beginning of church reuse in the country, where the building maintained its heritage values and has been continuously used by the community since then.

Subsequently, one case stands out in national editorial pieces: the fate of Christchurch's St Paul's Trinity Pacific Church in the early 1970s. The 1875 church building was placed on the market in 1973, expecting future buyers to conserve it, given its preservation order from the City Council.⁸³ Some debate arose on the future use of the building because of the substantial costs associated with acquiring the church, with projects considered involving restaurant services.⁸⁴ Ultimately, the plan evolved into an intimate theatre and arts centre project when the neighbouring State Insurance Office bought it. It opened in late 1975 after costly renovations as the State Trinity Centre.⁸⁵

Fig. 20 *Interior of the State Trinity Centre before its opening in 1975.*
Christchurch City Libraries.
CCL-StarP-03319A



Fig. 21 *Interior of the State Trinity Centre during a recital in 1976.*
The Press, "The Ilam Wind Ensemble," 1976.



⁸³ "Old church may be sold," *The Press*, 19 July 1973, Papers Past.

⁸⁴ "Preserving the Trinity Pacific Church," *The Press*, 24 June 1974, Papers Past.

⁸⁵ The Company purchased the property for \$175,000 and invested an additional \$150,000 to renovate it.
"Church opens as intimate theatre," *The Press*, 24 November 1975, Papers Past.



Fig. 22 (above) Alteration work on the First Church of Christ Scientist's façade, April 1984.

(below) Facade of the new Chug Wah II restaurant, 1984.

Christchurch City Libraries. CCL-ToCH-0009 & CCL-ToCH-0020

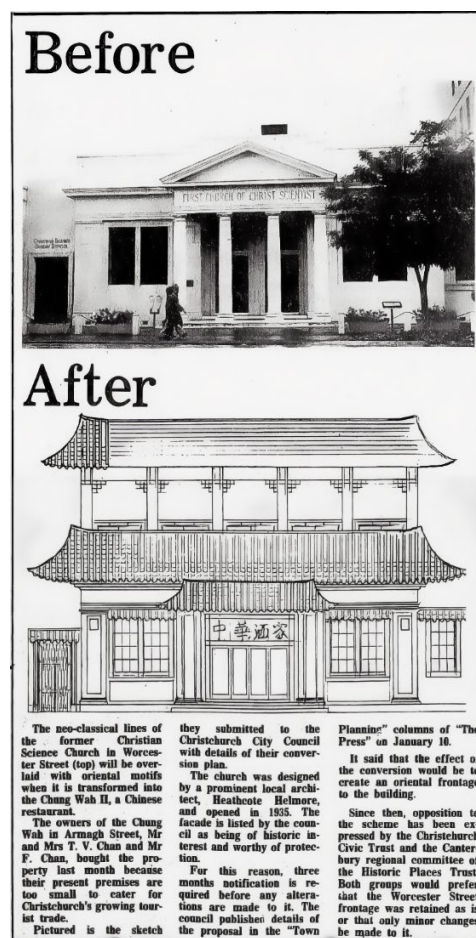


Fig. 23 Newspaper article showcasing the adaptation proposal.

The Press, "Before | After," 1984.

Unlike the favourable previous cases, a project from the 1980s highlights the controversy over how effectively buildings were protected for their heritage values. New owners of the former First Church of Christ Scientist in Worcester Street, Christchurch, wanted to convert the 1935 religious place into their second Chinese restaurant in the city in 1984, which meant the modification of the church's neoclassical façade and interiors to introduce more oriental motifs.⁸⁶ This proposal was opposed by the Historic Places Trust and the Christchurch Civic Trust, who claimed that the frontage should be conserved. However, the conversion was approved, and the restaurant's highly publicised opening occurred a few months later. The transformation into the new 'Pagoda-style' restaurant, Chung Wah II, caused the building to lose its heritage values and was consequently removed from the Historic Places Trust List in 1993.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ "Church to be Chinese restaurant" and "Before | After," *The Press*, 12 December 1983 and 18 January 1984, Papers Past.

⁸⁷ The former Science Church had been listed as Category 2 since 1981.

New Zealand Historic Places Trust. "N.Z. Historic Places Trust Buildings Record Form No. 4911."

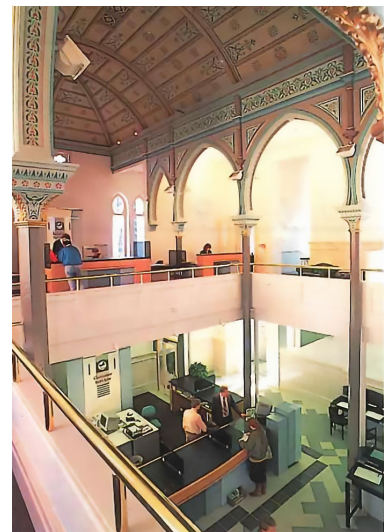
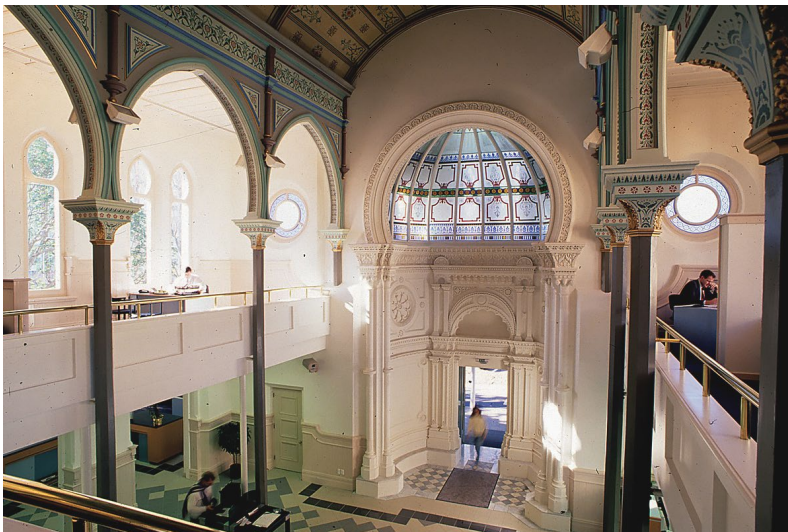
In Auckland, perhaps the first adaptive reuse of a religious building was not done to a Christian church but to a Jewish temple. The 1885 Auckland Synagogue had closed its doors in the late 1960s, when the congregation moved into a larger building on Greys Avenue, leaving its earlier premises in the hands of the City Council. After years of neglect, the building was in a poor state, prompting the start of its adaptation for commercial purposes in 1985.⁸⁸ The former synagogue was restored and transformed into a branch of the National Bank by architects Jeremy Salmond and Marshall Cook. This adaptation project gained widespread recognition and resulted in the architects receiving the inaugural Preservation Award for Property Developers by the Historic Places Trust in 1989.⁸⁹



Fig. 24 *Interior of the old Jewish Synagogue in Princes Street. Pictured between 1900 and 1915.*
Auckland Museum PH-2019-13-7-7

Fig. 25 *(below, left) Interior of the synagogue after adaptation. A new access was provided by opening the ark to enhance the building's relationship with Princes Street.*
Architecture Now, "2018 Gold Medal

Fig. 26 *(below) Interior of the synagogue after adaptation.*
Photograph by Paul McCredie, "Synagogue Renewal," 1989.



⁸⁸ Peter Shaw, "Refurbishment: Synagogue Renewal," *Architecture New Zealand*, Sept/Oct (1989): 44-47.

⁸⁹ Shaw, "Synagogue Renewal," 44.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER II

This chapter has demonstrated that the history of church buildings in New Zealand reflects how the evolving architectural styles and construction methods were shaped by the broader social and cultural transformations in the country. As Andrew Barrie notes, despite their conservative image, church buildings in New Zealand have been surprisingly responsive to change,⁹⁰ offering a unique lens through which to view shifts in identity, belief, and community. Christianity was established by Pākehā settlers in the early 19th century and expanded across various denominations, though affiliation has declined significantly since the mid-20th century. Early adaptive reuse projects of heritage religious buildings reveal differing causes of abandonment, some resulting from declining congregations, while others from communities relocating to newer premises, and were often repurposed for community-oriented uses such as art or music centres. These pioneering cases ranged from highly sensitive and celebrated adaptations to those that were poorly received or commercially driven. These early church adaptations continue to offer valuable lessons for present-day practice, illustrating how outcomes vary depending on the balance achieved between physical preservation, symbolic meaning, and the sensitivity of the intervention.

⁹⁰ According to him, church buildings have closely reflected social, cultural, and economic changes in New Zealand, more so than other types of buildings.

Andrew Barrie, “Churches in Auckland,” *Block: The Broadsheet of the Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects* Itinerary No. 2, 2007.

CHAPTER III:

Values and Use of the Scheduled Churches of Auckland

Besides their recognition as places of religious worship, churches may be significant due to their historical setting, social associations, technical accomplishments, design or style representativeness, and aesthetic or landmark qualities. In the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP), 146 Christian churches and chapels are scheduled for their heritage values (Schedule 14.1 Historic Heritage). This corresponds to 6% of the 2280 scheduled historic heritage places. This chapter aims to analyse the values, legal protections, and current uses of scheduled churches in the Auckland region to identify the heritage qualities of this group of buildings and provide a contextual overview of their contemporary functions.

THE HERITAGE VALUE OF SCHEDULED CHURCHES

As outlined in previous chapters, the value of heritage places is recognised by utilising established criteria. Under the Resource Management Act 1991, regional councils in New Zealand are required to identify and evaluate significant historic heritage places. In the AUP, eight criteria are outlined in chapter B5 “Ngā rawa tuku iho me te āhua - Historic heritage and special character”: historical, social, Mana Whenua, knowledge, technology, physical attributes, aesthetic, and context.⁹¹

The *historical* criterion is perhaps the most closely associated with Auckland’s heritage churches, as a significant portion of these are linked to an area’s development, representing the initial establishment and growth of the local community. Of all scheduled churches, 81% were primarily

⁹¹ Auckland Council, “B5. Ngā rawa tuku iho me te āhua – Historic heritage and special character,” *Auckland Unitary Plan*.

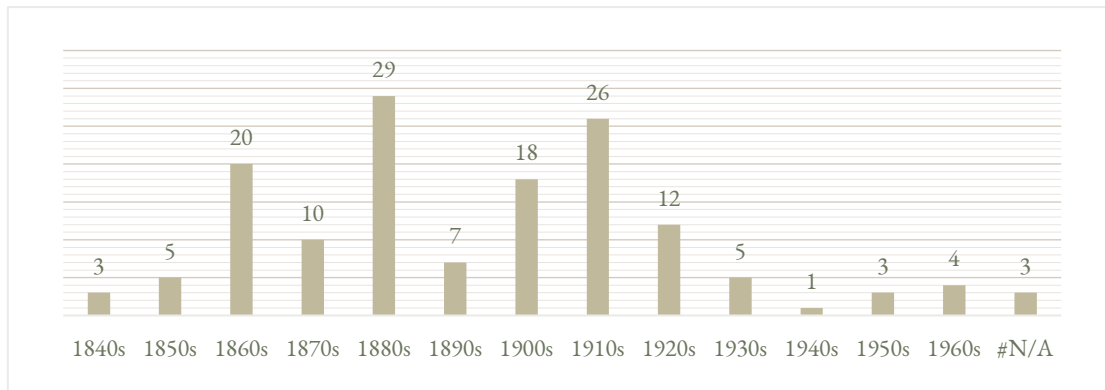


Fig. 27 Decade of main building activity of the scheduled churches in Schedule 14.1 (AUP).
Data from 'Context Analysis' spreadsheet. Compiled by Elisa Aguirre.



Fig. 28 The St Columba hall in Grey Lynn, used for church purposes until 1930. Photographed in late 1920s.
Digital NZ.



Fig. 29 The new St Columba Church in Grey Lynn, photographed in 1931.
Digital NZ.

built⁹² before the 1920s (figure 27). However, most of the remaining churches in the schedule were built to replace earlier ones or constructed once local communities reached a critical size and secured the necessary resources. For example, in the case of St Columba Church in Grey Lynn, a parish community was formed in 1915, and fifteen years later, a permanent church was built. The parishioners sold the site of their former timber hall and used the proceeds to build a brick church nearby that still stands today.⁹³

Certainly, significant *social* attributes can be recognised in these initial church buildings. Typically funded and constructed by local settlers,⁹⁴ churches served as social cornerstones, exemplified by the Glenfield Church in the city's northern outskirts. This building, now used as a community venue and known as Glenfield Mission Hall, had the particularity of being built in a single day in 1915 through collective local effort.⁹⁵ Moreover, along with their initial creation, churches have long-standing community and social values through their ongoing function as spiritual places for worship,

⁹² Meaning, the church's main structure was constructed during that decade. Some buildings might have been altered or extended later on by adding new chancels, towers, chapels, among others.

⁹³ They considered their previous site "unsuitable for church purposes owing to the noise of passing vehicles." New Zealand Herald, "New Anglican Church," 22 February 1930, Papers Past.

⁹⁴ Lineham, "The House of God," 58.

⁹⁵ New Zealand Herald, "Built in one day," 6 September 1915, Papers Past.

playing a significant role in the meaningful occasions of people's lives, or through community use for social gatherings.⁹⁶

Fig. 30 *Glenfield Church, built in a day by locals, 1915.*
Auckland Libraries
Heritage Collections.
T6359



Fig. 31 *St. Paul's Church is highly regarded for its contextual and aesthetic values.*
Source: RayWhite



In some cases, churches contribute to streetscapes, establishing themselves as physical landmarks within an area. St Paul's Church, located in Symonds Street, is a clear example of a church with high *aesthetic* and *contextual* values. The church's built form, size, design, and material selection directly responded to the community's resources, needs, and joint aspirations in the mid-1890s, carrying forward the legacy of Auckland's first Anglican church, which had been demolished years prior.⁹⁷

Lastly, *physical attributes*, which might encompass the craftsmanship, design, or association to a prominent architect, can vary widely; from the timber structural expression at St. John's Chapel, linked to George Selwyn, to the representativeness of the Romanesque basilica form of St. Michael's Catholic Church, designed by Horace Massey.

⁹⁶ Auckland Council, "PC82 – Reviews Devonport Takapuna Local Board Part 1."

⁹⁷ This is why this building is considered the 'Mother Church' of the city.

"St Paul's Church (Anglican)," Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, accessed 29 April 2025, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/650/650>.

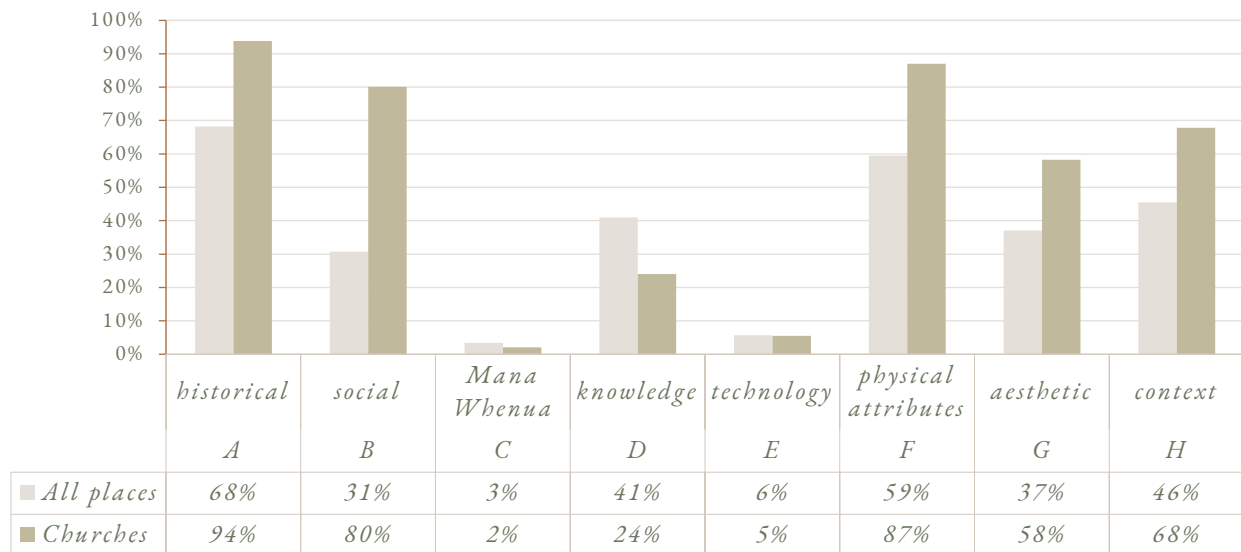


Fig. 32 Comparison of heritage values of churches and all places in Schedule 14.1 (AUP).
Data from 'Context Analysis' spreadsheet. Compiled by Elisa Aguirre.

Moreover, as shown in figure 32, scheduled heritage churches have a much higher proportion of historical, social, physical, aesthetic, and contextual values compared to all scheduled historic heritage places.⁹⁸ For instance, 94% of scheduled churches hold historical value, significantly higher than the 68% of all scheduled places. Concerning their physical attributes, there is a 28% difference compared to all other historic heritage places. The most significant disparity is seen in the social value, as 80% of churches pertain to social value, much higher than the 31% of all places.

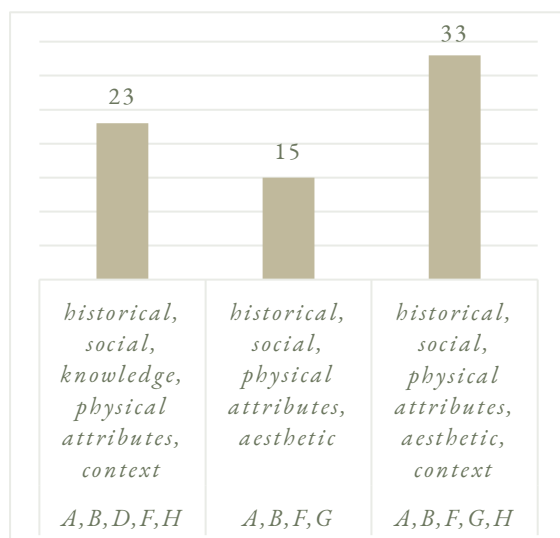


Fig. 33 The three most prominent combinations of heritage values of churches in Schedule 14.1 (AUP).
Data from 'Context Analysis' spreadsheet.
Compiled by Elisa Aguirre.

In terms of the number of heritage values pertaining to a place, 69% of scheduled churches possess four or more values for scheduling, while 89% have three or more. In terms of the most common combination of values found, around half of all scheduled churches (49%) belong to three specific groups, each containing between four and five criteria (figure 33). The most common combination of values, found in 33 of the 146 scheduled churches (23%), is historical, social, physical attributes, aesthetic, and context.

Lastly, as discussed in the literature review, churches derive much of their cultural heritage significance from intangible values, especially spiritual and symbolic qualities, which are not always sufficiently

⁹⁸ Data analysis from information included in Auckland Council's "Schedule 14.1 Schedule of Historic Heritage," via 'Context Analysis' spreadsheet.

recognised within the criteria used by secular conservation frameworks. In Auckland Council's criteria, spiritual and symbolic significance appear within the broader category of the social value criterion.

THE CURRENT USES OF SCHEDULED CHURCHES

To determine the current use of scheduled churches, it was first essential to define which buildings⁹⁹ could be considered as retaining their original function. 'Ongoing religious use' was then defined as churches that hold regular worship services, understood in this context as Sunday services taking place at least once a month. As it happens in some cases, particularly in the region's rural areas where congregation numbers are low, a few church buildings may be utilised in rotation to ensure the spaces remain in use and do not fall into disrepair. For instance, the Wainui Early Settlers Church, built around the 1850s, is looked after by the Hibiscus Coast Presbyterian Church, which holds services there on the first Sunday of each month.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, a notable number of churches have also welcomed new uses while remaining functioning places of religious worship, providing ample space for community events while ensuring funds for the structure's preservation. For example, St Matthew-in-the-City has become a multipurpose venue, hosting events ranging from banquets to concerts.¹⁰¹ However, given that it is still used for its initial purpose, and it primarily responds to the extended role of contemporary churches, it cannot be considered an adaptive reuse project.

In contrast, regular Christian services have ceased to exist in some other examples of scheduled churches, yet the buildings can be hired for religious ceremonies such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals. These churches now operate as flexible venues for hire, for both religious ceremonies and secular events, highlighting a shift from their original dedicated use.



Fig. 34 *St Matthew-in-the-City pictured in its everyday setting, and for an evening event featuring special dining arrangements.*
Photographs: NZ Venues.

⁹⁹ Although in Schedule 14.1 other structures may be listed within a place's entry, for example, church halls, this study is limited to the analysis of church buildings that last served as places of worship.

¹⁰⁰ HBCPC Administrative Officer, email message to author, 30 April 2025.

¹⁰¹ "Your Event Guide," St Matthew-in-the-City, accessed 30 April 2025, <https://www.stmatthews.nz/your-event-guide>.

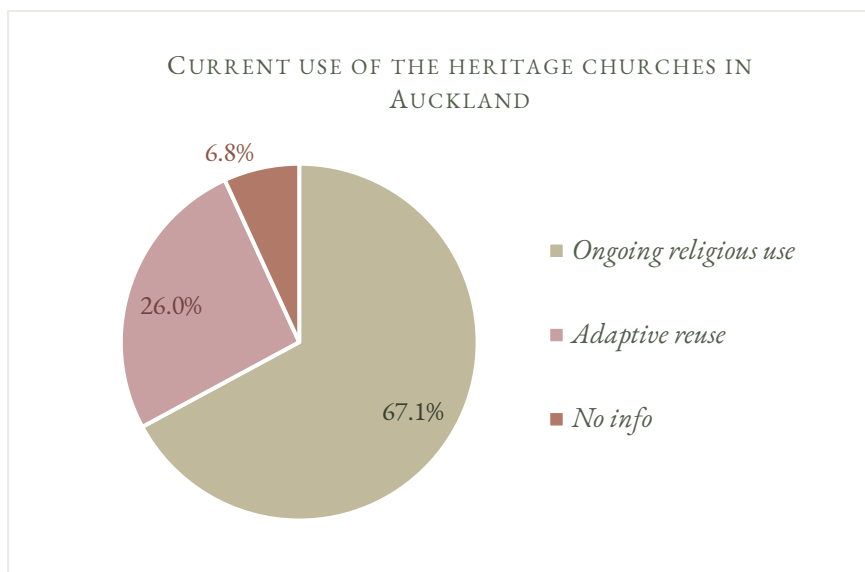


Fig. 35 *Current use of scheduled churches in Auckland.*
Data compiled from online research. By Elisa Aguirre.

Notably, the adaptive reuse of built heritage varies in its degree of physical adaptation. The degree of change does not necessarily define whether a building has been adaptively reused or just reused. According to Plevoets and Van Cleempoel, adaptive reuse can involve “a few minor changes to an interior.”¹⁰² In the case of churches, they do not need to be significantly altered to be used for community gathering purposes, given the ample, unpartitioned interior space and flexible furniture. On the contrary, a greater level of alteration is most widely seen in the case of transforming churches to commercial or residential uses. The online research conducted for this section couldn’t certify the degree of physical intervention in places that are used as venues for hire. Therefore, all places that no longer hold ongoing religious services were categorised as ‘adaptive reuse’ cases.

Following that criterion, the research showed that 98 of the 146 scheduled churches continue having regular Christian services, representing 67% of places, as seen in figure 35. Meanwhile, 38 heritage churches have changed their original function, signifying that less than a third have ceased to have an adequate parish due to religious decline or the cost of maintaining the building became too high.¹⁰³ Of the ones considered to have new uses (figure 37), more than 70% are now used for various purposes involving collective use, such as music, religious, or other types of venues, museums, and daycares. Residential use accounted for 24% of the conversions, with eight becoming single-family residences and one converted into multi-unit apartments. There were only two commercial adaptation cases, accounting for 5% of the adapted churches.

¹⁰² Plevoets and Van Cleempoel, *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage*, 23.

¹⁰³ It is important to note that this number only reflects the heritage protected churches, and the real number of all disused churches in Auckland, converted to new uses, could be significantly higher.

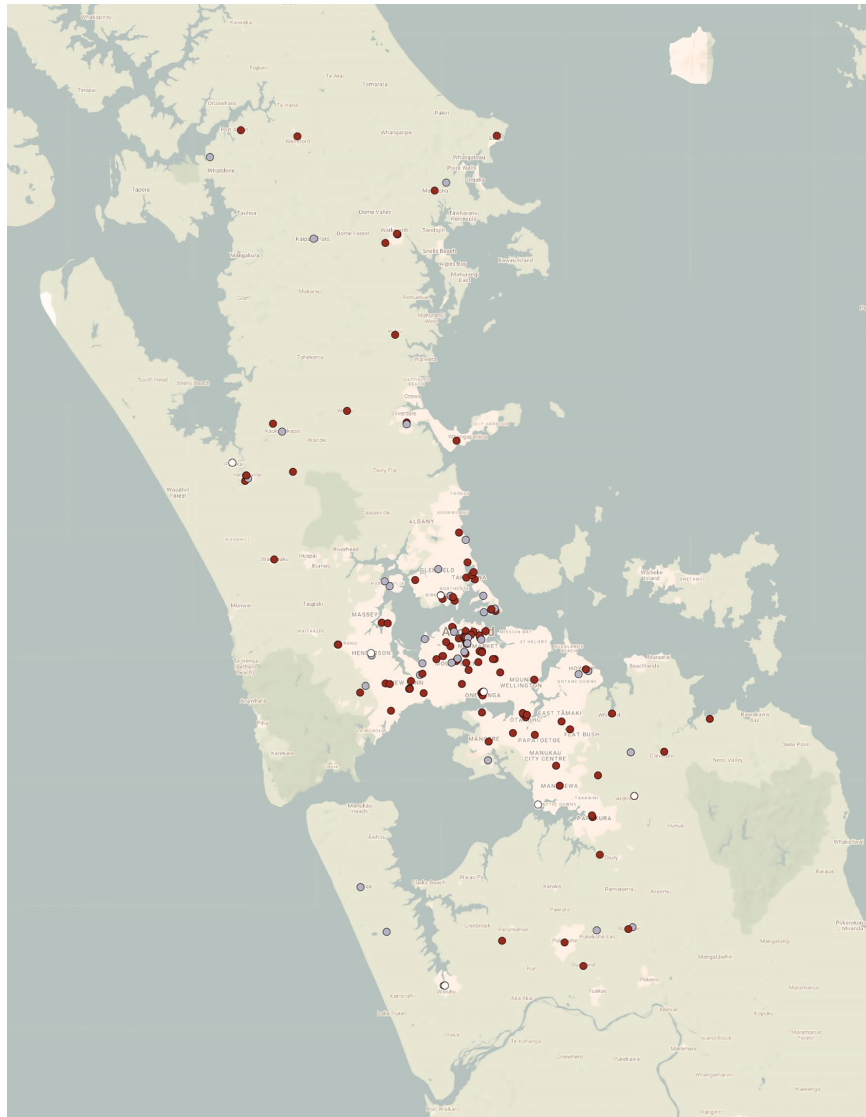


Fig. 36 *Location of scheduled churches in Auckland, classified by their current use.*
By Elisa Aguirre.

- *Ongoing religious use*
- *Adaptively reused*
- *No info*

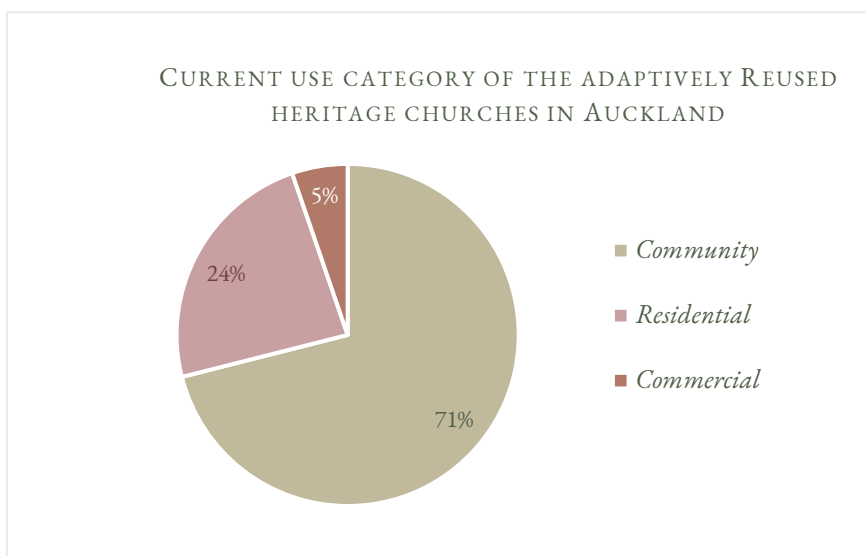


Fig. 37 *Defined use in the adaptively reused heritage churches in Auckland.*
Data compiled from online research. By Elisa Aguirre.

HERITAGE PROTECTION

The AUP states that one of its objectives is for its identified historic heritage places to be “protected from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development.”¹⁰⁴ The extent of protection, however, may vary depending on particular features or elements of scheduled places considered to have significant heritage value. In other words, each entry in Schedule 14.1 may specify ‘exclusions’ from protection for components that do not possess historic heritage value. In practice, discrepancies between what merits an exclusion in the AUP are mainly due to the inconsistent former district councils’ controls before the amalgamation into the regional Auckland Council in 2010.¹⁰⁵ Frequently, this takes the form of excluding all interior fabric of the buildings from protection. As seen in figure 39, inner city churches are more widely protected through their heritage designation than those located in the rural north. In terms of adaptive reuse, this is a significant aspect to consider when contemplating the alteration of a historic building.

When compared to all scheduled buildings, approximately 1393 out of 2280 scheduled places,¹⁰⁶ church interiors receive notably greater protection (figure 38). Almost half of all listed churches include interior protection (47%), in contrast to less than one-third of all buildings (29%). This distinction can be attributed to their high level of craftsmanship, evident in features such as exposed structural elements and richly detailed architectural elements, as well as their primary function as gathering spaces. Not surprisingly, scheduled churches that have been adaptively reused have a lower percentage of their interiors protected (34%).

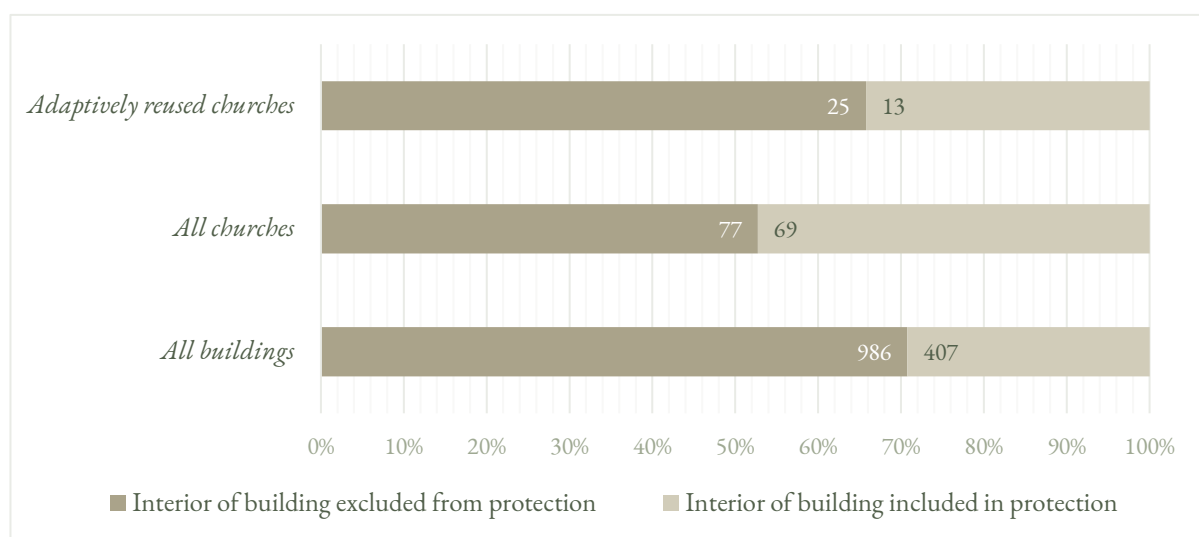


Fig. 38 *Heritage protection comparison between all buildings and churches in Schedule 14.1 (AUP).*

Data from ‘Context Analysis’ spreadsheet. Compiled by Elisa Aguirre.

¹⁰⁴ Auckland Council, “B5. Ngā rawa tuku iho me te āhua – Historic heritage and special character,” in *Auckland Unitary Plan*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Dan Windwood, Interview by Elisa A. Aguirre G., Auckland, 29 May 2025.

¹⁰⁶ The considered ‘buildings’ were those categorised as residential, industrial, commercial, civic, and religious places.

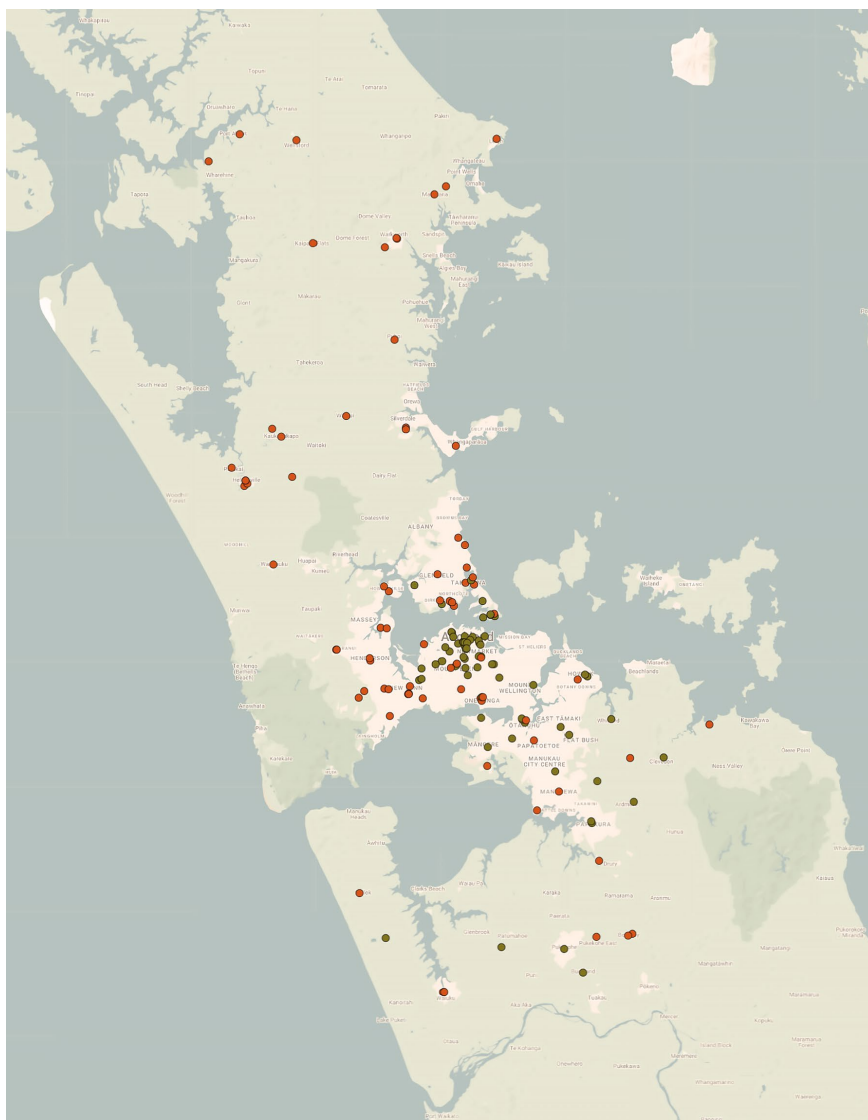


Fig. 39 *Location of scheduled churches in Auckland, classified by their heritage protection.*
By Elisa Aguirre.

- *Interior excluded from protection*
- *Interior protected*

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER III

This chapter has shown that the churches scheduled under Auckland Council embody the region's early settlement patterns, architectural evolution, and lasting community presence, holding a higher concentration of historical, social, physical, aesthetic, and contextual values. While almost 70% continue to directly serve Christian congregations, a growing number have reinterpreted their spaces to accommodate alternative functions, ensuring they remain active and meaningful to the wider public. Either by holding ongoing religious services or transforming into multipurpose venues, the vast majority have retained their role as places for gathering and connection. Overall, the level of heritage protection remains uneven, especially in the buildings' interiors, a crucial space for understanding a church's material and symbolic heritage.

CHAPTER IV:

Contemporary Case Studies of Church Adaptations in Auckland

This chapter details three varied case studies of adaptively reused churches in Auckland: the Kokehoke Church, adapted to a residential country retreat; St. David's Church in Grafton, converted into a centre for music and community; and St. James Church in Mt. Eden, adapted to four residential apartments. Each entry discusses the historical context of the former churches, the historic heritage values attributed to them, what prompted their adaptation, and the work done to adapt them to their new use. The main aim is to identify recurring factors and the extent to which these adapted churches have managed to balance the preservation of their heritage values with the demands of their new uses.

In Auckland, all alterations or modifications to scheduled historic heritage buildings must incorporate a heritage assessment by a heritage specialist as part of the resource consent process. These documents provide a professional evaluation of the effects of the proposed work on the overall significance and heritage values of the building.¹⁰⁷ In conjunction with the themes explored in Chapter I, these heritage assessment reports were used in this chapter to determine the impact the work has had on the heritage values of these case studies.

¹⁰⁷ Auckland Council, "D17. Historic Heritage Overlay," *Auckland Unitary Plan*, 27.

KOHEKOHE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Kohekohe Presbyterian Church is located on 1189 Awhitu Road, in the southern part of the Auckland region. It is positioned in a rural coastal area, with its closest town being Waiuku, around a 10-minute drive away through Awhitu Road. It was scheduled as a Category B historic heritage place in 2019.¹⁰⁸ The church was described in its *Historic Heritage Evaluation* as having considerable historical significance as it “demonstrates the process and pattern of the spread of Presbyterianism throughout Southern Auckland,” and exceptional aesthetic values as a visual landmark, where “the interrelationship between the church and its natural backdrop reinforces the strong picturesque qualities of both.”¹⁰⁹

The establishment of the Kohekohe Church dates to the late nineteenth century. Hugh Douglas, a member of the local Presbyterian parish community, donated the land where the church was constructed after previous venues were deemed inadequate as places for worship.¹¹⁰ The church was designed in 1886 by John Makgill and constructed that same year, under the supervision of William Douglas, Hugh’s brother.

The Kohekohe Church opened on 14 November 1886. Besides being a place for worship, it was soon used for Sunday School, youth bible study, and temperance meetings. A few decades later, in 1923, the church became a worship centre when the Methodist Church also began providing weekly services.¹¹¹ However, during this time, church attendance was dwindling. The Kohekohe area was once the district’s centre, but several factors shifted its population towards the south. As local families aged, and farming technology provided newly productive southern land, which encouraged young families to relocate, only a sparse population remained.¹¹²

From the 1940s, due to ministers’ commitments in more urban areas on Sunday mornings, country congregations had to settle for less convenient afternoon or evening services, which further prompted a decline in participation.¹¹³ Ultimately, in 1975, due to diminishing attendance, the Kohekohe Church was deconsecrated and sold.¹¹⁴ During the sale, most pews were dispersed, two commemorative wall plaques were transferred to another Presbyterian church, and only the pulpit remained.¹¹⁵ The building stayed in the hands of one family for about forty years and was sometimes

¹⁰⁸ A plaque was formerly scheduled; however, the church building was first fully scheduled in 2019.

Auckland Council, “Plan Change 7: Additions to Schedule 14 Historic Heritage,” *Auckland Unitary Plan* (29 August 2019).

¹⁰⁹ Auckland Council Heritage Unit, “Historic Heritage Evaluation: Kohekohe Presbyterian Church (former),” (June 2017), 16.

¹¹⁰ Previous venues had been Hugh Douglas’s own house, and later, a local school.

Heritage Unit, “Historic Heritage Evaluation: Kohekohe,” 4.

¹¹¹ Heritage Unit, 4.

¹¹² Heritage Unit, 4.

¹¹³ Clyde Hamilton, “The Kohe Kohe Church History and the Douglas Family,” unpublished (2017), 5-6.

¹¹⁴ Heritage Unit, “Historic Heritage Evaluation: Kohekohe,” 4.

¹¹⁵ Hamilton, “The Kohe Kohe Church History,” 6.

used to store farm equipment.¹¹⁶ It became a wedding venue in 2013 after new owners restored it.¹¹⁷ This occasional rental use continued until the 2020s, at which point the building was bought by the Auckland-based Quartermain family, who began transforming it into a country retreat with the assistance of architect John Gardiner from Architext.

The church was constructed as a relatively small one-storey building, with a vestibule and a main gathering area. Similar to the vernacular style discussed in Chapter II, it has Gothic influences in its pointed windows and pitched roof, and utilizes kauri claddings externally (overlap) and kauri linings internally.

Prior to its adaptation, which began in mid-2022,¹¹⁸ the building was experiencing serious structural distress. A structural report noted the deterioration in the foundations, weatherboards, and wall bracing due to the age of the building, but mostly intensified by the strong winds due to its location.¹¹⁹ To strengthen the lateral stability of the existing structure, plywood bracing was installed on the gable end walls. It then had to be lifted and relocated on site, allowing for the removal of the previous timber foundation piles and replacing them with new ones.¹²⁰ A concrete surround was employed in each pile, and two reinforced concrete foundation walls were placed under the gable end walls.¹²¹ Notably, a farm shed was first built on site to allocate the necessary workshop instead of utilising the interior of the building.



Fig. 40 *The Kohekohe Church before its adaptive reuse. Temporary supports were placed to stabilise the building due to the imminent risk of collapse.*
Photographs courtesy of Guy Quartermain.

¹¹⁶ The Aucklander, “At home, at church,” The New Zealand Herald, 12 October 2006.

¹¹⁷ NZ Herald, “Trade Me church’s lease of love,” The New Zealand Herald, 18 March 2014.

¹¹⁸ Architext Registered Architects Limited, “Kohekohe Church 1189 Awhitu Road. Heritage Construction Management Plan” (July 2023), 4.

¹¹⁹ Architext Registered Architects Limited, “Heritage Impact Assessment: Kohekohe Church Structural Strengthening, Proposed Addition and Proposed Farm Shed” (2 November 2021), 4.

¹²⁰ Architext, “Heritage Construction Management Plan”, 3.

¹²¹ EQSTRUC, “Kohekohe Church [Structural Plans],” July 2023.



Fig. 41 *Construction activity on the Kobekobe Church. Re-piling and new structure.*
Photographs courtesy of Guy Quartermain.

Rather than altering the main space, the design proposal involved an addition on the rear (western) side of the church. According to owner Guy Quartermain, they wanted to ensure the interior space remained almost intact and that the views and vistas were retained as much as possible.¹²² This also meant the positioning of the amenities on the added structure. Special regards were made in terms of the scale of the addition, so as not to alter the church's dominance and readability.

Initially, the addition was proposed with different cladding materials on its exterior, intended to provide legibility between the original structure and the addition,¹²³ encouraged within current conservation practices. However, this was modified to match the existing horizontal weatherboards of the original building, mostly due to the owners' desire to maintain a unified composition.¹²⁴ This stance is also visible on the extension's west elevation, where the central upper window emulates the

¹²² Guy Quartermain, Interview by Elisa A. Aguirre G., Auckland, 3 June 2025.

¹²³ Architext, "Heritage Impact Assessment," 6.

¹²⁴ Quartermain to Aguirre G.

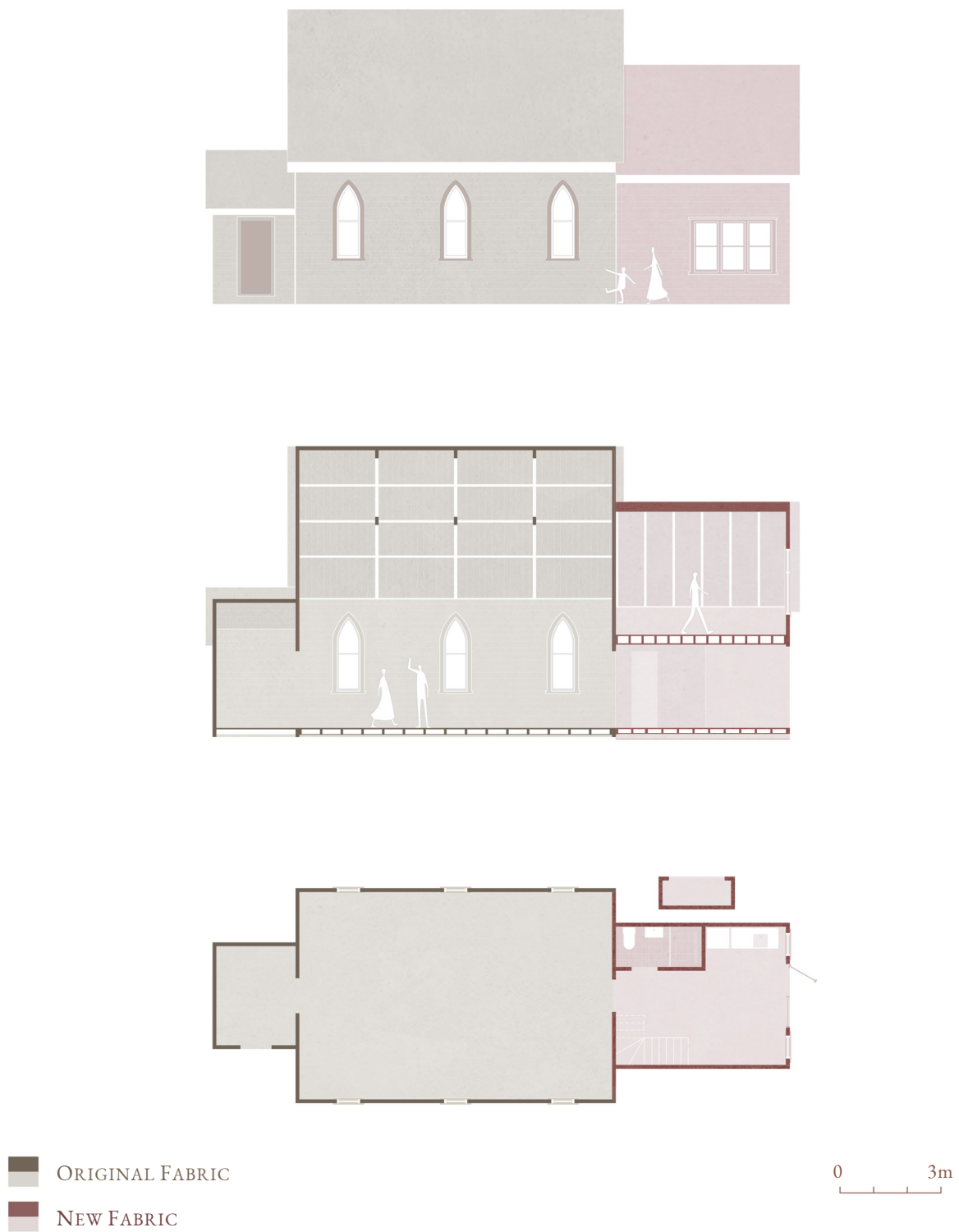


Fig. 42 *Kohokobe Church's adaptive reuse: original and new fabric.*
Illustration by Elisa Aguirre.

original lateral windows of the church. This fact, however, is hidden from most views, as one can only see the more distinctly modern set of three windows on the side elevation. The heritage impact assessment indicated that:

The addition has been designed to maintain the legibility of the original church. The scale of the addition is smaller than the original and will not dominate or significantly detract from the church proportions when viewed from the road. [...] The effect on the heritage values are mitigated by maintaining the legibility of the existing church. [...] The overall effect of this project is a positive effect, achieved by allowing the preservation and re-purposing of a heritage building important in its local context.¹²⁵

Although the project does not fully align with standard conservation principles, such as clearly differentiating new work from the original,¹²⁶ the adaptive reuse of the Kohekohe Church can still be considered a successful example of how an owner's vision, rather than strict adherence to guidelines, can result in a respectful and functional outcome. In this case, compatibility was achieved by preserving the core spatial qualities of the church and locating the modern services in the additional structure, reducing the intervention on the building's original fabric. Overall, its historical and aesthetic heritage values were not significantly compromised. Public appreciation of the building's aesthetic qualities remains evident, particularly through their continued engagement in photographic documentation.

¹²⁵ Architext, "Heritage Impact Assessment," 9-10.

¹²⁶ Robin Byron, "The Inevitability of Change," in Stubbs et al., *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands*, 288-290.



Fig. 43 *Exterior views of the Kohekohe Church post-adaptation. The addition at the rear is largely concealed from the road due to its smaller scale and strategic positioning.*
 Photographs courtesy of Guy Quartermain.

ST. DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

St. David's Church is located at 70 Khyber Pass Road, a mixed-use area within Auckland's Isthmus. In 2018, the church gained heritage status as a Category A place due to its exceptional historic, social, physical, and contextual values, as well as considerable knowledge, technology, and aesthetic values.¹²⁷ This high heritage designation was mainly due to its significance as a memorial church dedicated to New Zealand soldiers who fought in WWI, therefore displaying not only local significance but regional and national significance as well.¹²⁸

The story of the parish of St. David's is long and eventful, stretching back to its origins in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1880, a new timber church replaced an old structure at the junction of Khyber Pass Road and Symonds Street.¹²⁹ Decades later, in 1902, the building was moved to its current site, a fact that caused public interest as "no building of such a size had been moved in Auckland up to that time."¹³⁰



PROPOSED NEW BUILDING FOR ST. DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.
Perspective drawing by the architect, Mr. Daniel B. Patterson, of the church which it is proposed to erect on the site of the present wooden building in Khyber Pass.

Fig. 44 *The unveiled design published in a 1925 newspaper article.*

New Zealand Herald, "Proposed new building."

During WWI, over one hundred men connected to St. David's had joined the forces, some losing their lives.¹³¹ That loss contributed to the church's decision to open a building fund to raise money for the construction of a new permanent church in 1920, to be dedicated to the soldiers.¹³² Architect Daniel Patterson's design was unveiled in 1925 and "very appropriately, the foundation stone of the Soldiers' Memorial Church was laid on Anzac Day 1927."¹³³ The previous building was removed to an adjoining place within the site. When the new church opened, it was described as "an image in stone of two foundations of religion, solidarity and inspiration."¹³⁴ The building featured the main church on the upper level, while the lower level provided rooms for Bible classes and women's organizations.¹³⁵ In the following years, the

¹²⁷ Graeme Burgess, and Lilli Knight, "Historic Heritage Assessment: St David's Memorial Church" (Burgess & Treep Architects, August 2015), 70.

Salmond Reed Architects Limited, "Peer Review: Historic Heritage Assessment St David's Memorial Church" (April 2017), 7.

¹²⁸ Paul Baragwanath, Interview by Elisa A. Aguirre G., Auckland, 11 June 2025.

¹²⁹ William Morton Ryburn, *The Story of St. David's Presbyterian Church, Auckland, 1864-1964* (Len Bolton & Company, 1964), 9-13.

¹³⁰ Ryburn, *The Story of St. David's*, 29-30.

¹³¹ Ryburn, 47.

¹³² Ryburn, 60-61.

¹³³ Ryburn, 62.

¹³⁴ "Massive but Graceful," *The Sun* Auckland, 13 October 1927, Papers Past.

¹³⁵ "Massive but Graceful," *The Sun*.



Fig. 45 View from Khyber Pass Road, showing the old (left) and new (right) St David's Presbyterian Church, 1927.
Digital NZ.



Fig. 46 The new St David's Memorial Church in 1927.
Digital NZ.

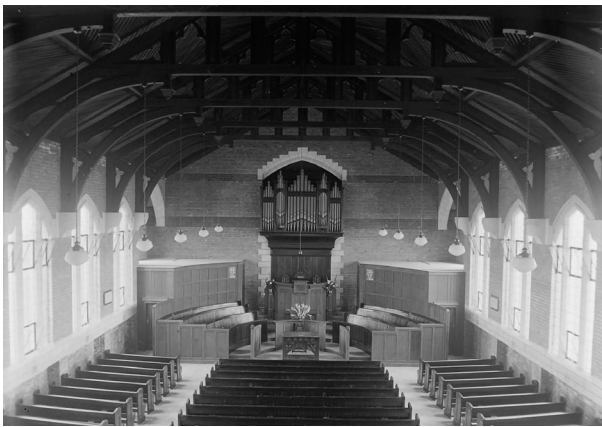


Fig. 47 Original interior of the church, 1927.
Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections. 4-1544.



Fig. 48 Interior of the church after Massey's intervention.
Possibly 1940s or 1950s.
Presbyterian Research Centre Archives. P-A70.42-99

church faced deterioration, and architect Horace Massey was hired in 1937 to carry out the repair work and remodel the chancel.¹³⁶ Since WWII, stained-glass memorial windows have been installed to honour those who served in both World Wars.¹³⁷

In 2014, the building was headed towards demolition, as the high maintenance costs were deemed unjustifiable for its small congregation.¹³⁸ The minister noted that the church was “awaiting permission from the Presbyterian Church Property Trustees, the building's legal owners, before it [could] apply for resource consent to demolish it.”¹³⁹ Realising that the building had no heritage protection, the Friends of St. David's Trust, led by Paul Baragwanath, was founded to try to save the building.¹⁴⁰ Without direct affiliation with the church, the group launched *The Art of Remembrance* fundraising project in 2015.¹⁴¹ This campaign marked the centenary of WWI and raised “more than

¹³⁶ Burgess and Knight, “Historic Heritage Assessment,” 26.

¹³⁷ Burgess and Knight, 43.

¹³⁸ Jess Lee, “Can a city church avoid demolition?” *Stuff*, 17 September 2014.

¹³⁹ Lee, “Can a city church avoid demolition?”

¹⁴⁰ Kathryn Ryan, host, *Nine To Noon*, “Saving St David's: Paul Baragwanath on transforming a church into a centre for music,” Radio New Zealand, 30 November 2023, Podcast, 23 min., 40 sec.

¹⁴¹ Paul Baragwanath, Interview by Elisa A. Aguirre G., Auckland, 11 June 2025.



Fig. 49 The facade of St. David's Church during 'The Art of Remembrance' fundraising project, revealed on Anzac Day 2015.
Photographs by Jessica Chloe Gernat.

\$1 million, the largest amount ever raised through a charitable art project [in New Zealand]."¹⁴² It involved the installation and sale of 7,000 brass quatrefoils, gifted by artist Max Gimblett.¹⁴³

The money raised allowed for the campaigning towards the scheduling of the church, which included ongoing art projects and the commissioning of multiple documents, including a business plan and a historic heritage assessment report. Following further professional assessment¹⁴⁴ and significant public backing, St. David's Church gained Category A heritage status in 2018.¹⁴⁵

In 2021, the property was put on the market, prompting the Trust to propose transforming the former church into a centre for music.¹⁴⁶ Baragwanath noted this new use would preserve its role as a community gathering space, take advantage of its acoustics to support local choir groups, and honour it as a living memorial.¹⁴⁷ Additional fundraisers allowed the charitable trust to buy the former church¹⁴⁸ and renamed it Kāhui St. David's – Kāhui meaning 'the gathering' in Te Reo

¹⁴² Caitlin Sykes, "Art and minds: Ambitious projects and volunteer effort have helped secure the future of a central Auckland church," *Heritage New Zealand*, 157 (winter 2020), 32.

¹⁴³ Baragwanath said he was inspired by the 2014 World War I remembrance project of ceramic poppies by artists Paul Cummins and Tom Piper in London. The poppies were sold to raise money for service charities. Sykes, "Art and minds," 32-34.

¹⁴⁴ Auckland Council commissioned Salmond Reed Architects in 2017 to peer review the 2015 Historic Heritage Assessment report by Burgess and Knight.

¹⁴⁵ Sykes, "Art and minds," 31.

¹⁴⁶ NZ Herald, "Historic Auckland church St David's put up for sale outrages community groups," *The New Zealand Herald*, 24 April 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Baragwanath to Aguirre G.

¹⁴⁸ The property was first bought by Ted Manson, patron of the Trust, who secured the building's ownership in 2021. The Trust officially bought it soon after.

Anne Gibson, "Philanthropist Ted Mason buys historic soldier's church, three Grafton properties," *The New Zealand Herald*, 6 July 2021.

Māori.¹⁴⁹ Today, the building's maintenance and expenses are entirely reliant on grants, donations, and venue bookings.¹⁵⁰

As part of the process to adapt the building to its new use as a centre for music and community, minimal changes were required, and no substantial work was done besides considerable maintenance and repairs. Furthermore, some work was required for compliance with building standards and functionality, including ventilation upgrades and heater installations, or for the protection of the original fabric, seen in the installation of secondary exterior glazing to protect the stained-glass windows. The new use, however, required an improved and enlarged performance space, which was solved through the extension of the chancel dais (platform) and the careful installation of lighting fixtures in the roof trusses. Further modifications were considered; however, due to economic implications and the probable alteration of heritage fabric, it was resolved that most of these changes were not truly essential.¹⁵¹ The heritage impact assessment concluded that:

The proposed works are well considered [...] to ensure they respectfully work in with form and fabric of the building and local area. [...] The proposed internal alteration does not involve any loss of heritage fabric, achieved by integrating the dismantled front panel of the west Choir Stalls into the existing Sappers Memorial Chapel. [...] We consider the visual impact of the new lights is mitigated by the positive contribution to the long-term viability, use and retention of the place.¹⁵²

Although currently highly dependent on external funding to sustain its operation, this new use is entirely compatible with the building's previous religious function. As a result, no significant changes needed to be made, and the pews and pulpit were kept in their original configuration. Basically, no heritage values were compromised, and it can even be said that this new use has enhanced the heritage values by reinvigorating its public use. Above all, it has kept its identity as a gathering place, reinforcing its social value and spirit of place.

¹⁴⁹ "About," *Kāhui St Davids*, accessed 6 June 2025, <https://www.kahuistdavids.nz/about>.

¹⁵⁰ "About," *Kāhui St Davids*.

¹⁵¹ Baragwanath to Aguirre G.

¹⁵² Salmond Reed Architects Limited, "Assessment of Environmental Effects and Heritage Impact Assessment: St. David's Memorial Church, Grafton, Auckland" (July 2023), 27.

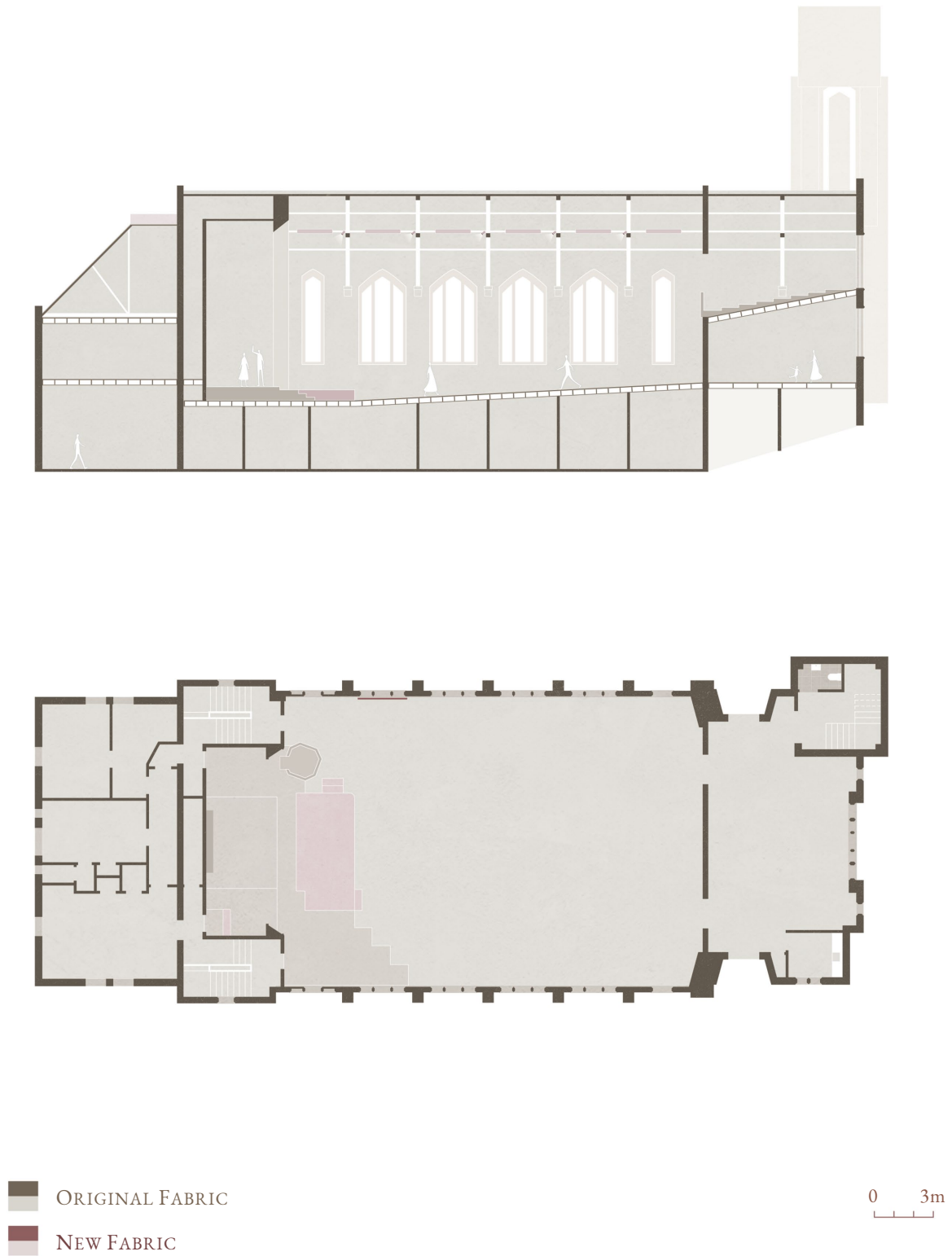


Fig. 50 *St. Davids Church's adaptive reuse: original and new fabric.*
Illustration by Elisa Aguirre.



Fig. 51 *Partial interior and exterior views of Kabui St. David's, showcasing its adaptation. Internally, the stage platform has been enlarged, and new lighting and heaters have been installed for its new function. Externally, secondary glazing is being added over the stained-glass windows to protect these heritage elements.*
Photographs by Elisa Aguirre

ST. JAMES CHURCH

The former St. James Church is located at 31 Esplanade Road, in Mount Eden, one of Auckland's oldest suburbs. It received its heritage designation in the 1990s as a Category B place, which included both its exterior and interior fabric. Four heritage values were noted in the building: social, physical, aesthetic, and context.¹⁵³ According to the building's *Conservation Plan*, the church's significance is attributed to being a representative example of an early 1900s neo-classical brick masonry building, its scale and prominence at a notable corner site, and symbolizing the suburb's transition from rural to residential. In terms of social value, the church had stood as a "symbol of community life," a role it had maintained as both a place of worship and a gathering place for over one hundred years.¹⁵⁴

St. James Church's history began in the late nineteenth century, when the Congregational Union parish backed the construction of a church in the corner of Esplanade and View Roads, which opened in May 1885.¹⁵⁵ This original Victorian Gothic concrete building served both as a Sunday school and a church.¹⁵⁶ Significantly, it was located "to the rear of the site to allow for a more generous building [...] to be placed on the remainder of the site in the future."¹⁵⁷ In 1899, members of the Mount Eden Congregational Church decided to build the new church building, "one that would be an ornament to the district,"¹⁵⁸ reserving the original as a Sunday school and a hall. The new church was designed by architects Mitchell & Watt in a Classical Revival style and officially opened in August 1900.¹⁵⁹



Fig. 52 *Mount Eden in 1903. St James Church and hall visible at the centre left of the image.*
Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections. 1-W1071



Fig. 53 *The Mount Eden Congregational Church, photographed in the 1910s.*
Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections. 35-R0112

¹⁵³ Its significance, following the criteria included in the Auckland Unitary Plan, was assessed in its *Conservation Plan* prepared by DPA Architects. The building's original 1993 evaluation sheet provided other criteria.

¹⁵⁴ Dave Pearson Architects Ltd, "St James Church: A Conservation Plan" (November 2015), 43-44.

¹⁵⁵ "Mount Eden Congregational Church," *The New Zealand Herald*, 6 May 1885.

¹⁵⁶ Matthew Campbell, and Wesley Maguire, "St James Sunday School, Esplanade Road, Mt Eden: archaeological assessment" (CFG Heritage, 29 August 2016), 5.

¹⁵⁷ Campell and Maguire, "St James Sunday School", 6.

¹⁵⁸ "Mount Eden Congregational Church," *The New Zealand Graphic*, 20 July 1901.

¹⁵⁹ "Mount Eden Congregational Church," *The New Zealand Graphic*.



Fig. 54 *Original interior of the St James Church, 1901.*
Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections. NZG-19010720-0121-02.
Colorised by Elisa Aguirre.



Fig. 55 *Interior of St James before abandonment, 2014.*
NZ Herald, “Blessed with special features.”

In 1968, the Mount Eden Congregational Church merged with the Presbyterians of Beresford Street, who took over the building the following year and renamed it St. James Presbyterian Church. During the following decade, membership diminished, and in 1979, the building was handed over to a Cook Islands community.¹⁶⁰ Later on, the building was known as the Mount Eden Pacific Islanders Presbyterian Church.¹⁶¹

In 2012, St. James Church hall was issued a dangerous-building notice.¹⁶² However, by this time, the church also began to present signs of deterioration. Despite fundraising efforts, the parish was “unable to pay for major repairs, including earthquake strengthening,”¹⁶³ which led to the closing of the church and its offering for sale two years later. A 2016 resource consent approved conversion of St. James Church into four residential units, despite initial opposition from the Built Heritage Implementation Team.¹⁶⁴ The project stalled, possibly due to the reported difficulties faced by the developer regarding the proposed demolition of the adjacent church hall,¹⁶⁵ which caught fire in 2018.¹⁶⁶ In 2021, Gel Architects was approached by a new developer to redesign the four-unit project within the church and four townhouses on the footprint of the former hall, as part of a development named Esplanade Heights.

¹⁶⁰ Angelo, “Centres of Community Life,” 42-43.

¹⁶¹ Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 3003-0507. “Mt Eden Pacific Islanders Presbyterian Church, sign, 2017.”

¹⁶² Bernard Orsman, “Historic hall and church under threat,” *The New Zealand Herald*, 2 May 2012.

¹⁶³ NZ Herald, “Blessed with special features,” *The New Zealand Herald*, 20 November 2014.

¹⁶⁴ Auckland Council, “Built Heritage Specialist Memo,” 16 February 2016.

¹⁶⁵ The architect involved in that initial proposal stated that the former Sunday school couldn’t be saved, so there was a plan for “a new building of 18 apartments on its footprint.” According to the images provided, that second building would have been five storeys.

NZ Herald, “Church gets a second chance,” *The New Zealand Herald*, 21 November 2015.

¹⁶⁶ According to Radio New Zealand, when the church sold the site to the developer in 2014, “the sale would only go through if the hall was demolished. The council blocked that demolition.”

“Mt Eden church fire treated as suspicious,” *RNZ*, 30 December 2018.



Fig. 56 Inside the abandoned and decayed St. James Church in 2021, before adaptation work began.
Photograph courtesy of Gel Architects.



Fig. 57 Exterior of St. James Church in 2017.
Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections. 3003-0506.

The church was originally designed as an unreinforced brick structure with a cement-plastered exterior. Its façades were decorated with Greek motifs, mostly concentrated on the two most visible façades of the corner building. Symmetrical Greek porticos gave access to the interior vestibule through steps on the corner of the façades nearest to View Road. Internally, the church had a sloped timber floor and was lined with colourful timber boards and decorated with classical-inspired timber architraves, pilasters, trims, and ceiling fretwork panels, seen as a “free treatment of classical styling.”¹⁶⁷ Remarkably, besides the addition of an office area in the western side of the transept and the relocation of the organ and pulpit, it hadn’t been significantly altered.

The adaptation of the church required support from a large external consultant team.¹⁶⁸ The most significant modification in its adaptation into units is the loss of interior open space, and therefore, its sense of place has been completely altered. Basically, two units are located within the nave, nearest to the former main entrances, while the remaining two are within the transept and crossing. The vertical subdivision into three storeys, to allow each unit to have three bedrooms, meant the transformation of the original sloping floor into two different base floor heights, and the repositioning of its ceiling fretwork panels. The heritage impact assessment stated the following:

The conversion of the church into apartments will result in a loss of the spatial qualities of the church interior. From within, the building will no longer ‘read’ as a church. This will negatively impact on the building’s heritage values. This will be partly mitigated by the provision of voids [...] which will enable an appreciation of the full height of the original space. [...] There are, however, notable positive effects of the proposal. These include the fact that care has been taken to preserve as much of the heritage fabric as possible. [...] The building in its new form will have a long-term viable use which will ensure its survival.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ DPAL, “St James Church,” 15.

¹⁶⁸ Tim Daniel, Director of Gel Architects, Interview by Elisa A. Aguirre G., Auckland, 4 June 2025.

¹⁶⁹ DPA Architects Ltd, “Esplanade Heights – Chapel. 31 Esplanade Road, Mt. Eden, Auckland: Heritage Impact Assessment” (July 2021), 22.

Indeed, the much-needed seismic upgrade and restoration work have prevented the church's further decay after its vacancy. The loss of the church's interior wall linings, which are protected under the building's heritage designation, was mitigated by the minimal invasion of the new steel beams and ties. These were placed along the perimeter walls and anchored into the masonry using tie rods and plates.¹⁷⁰

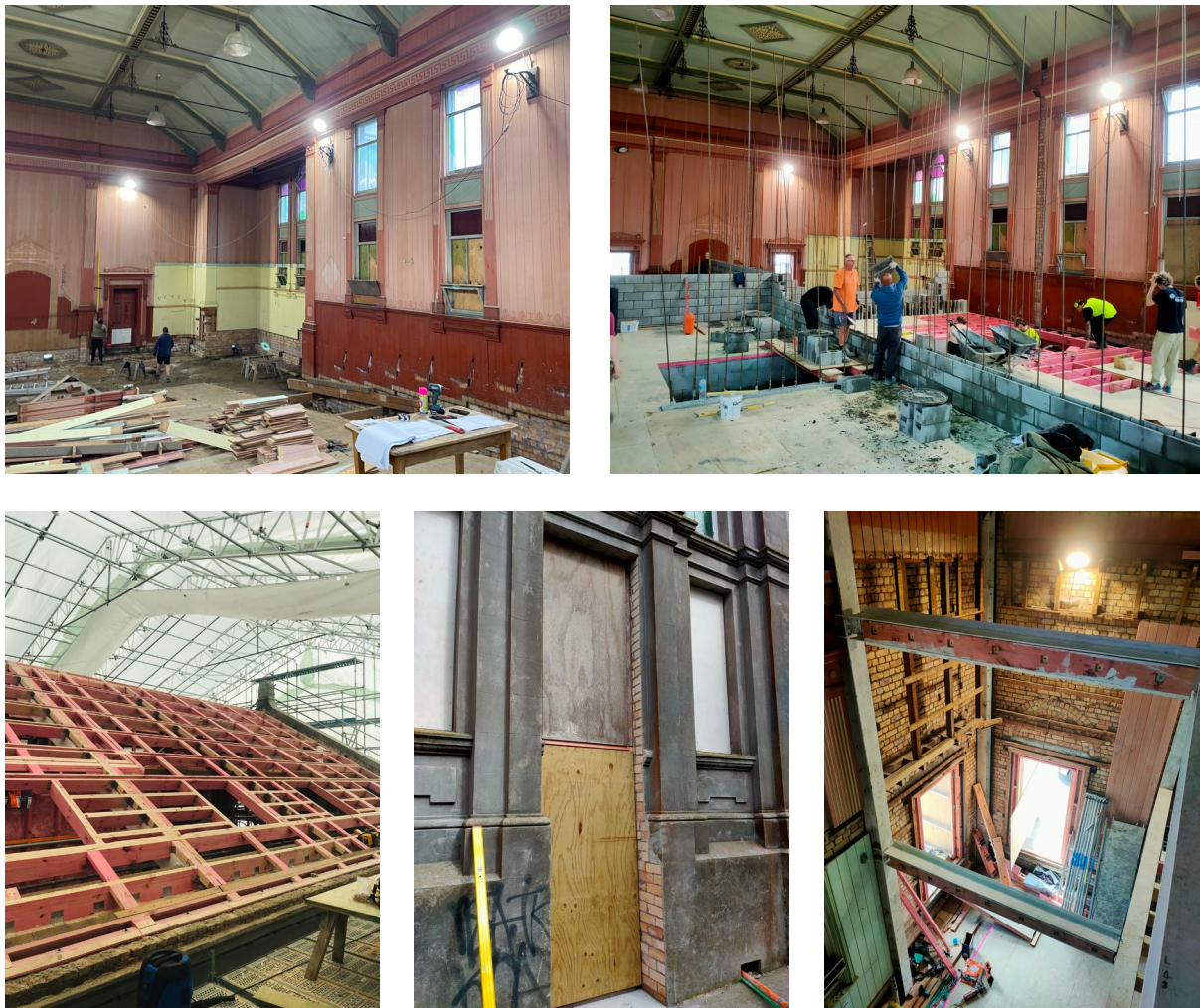
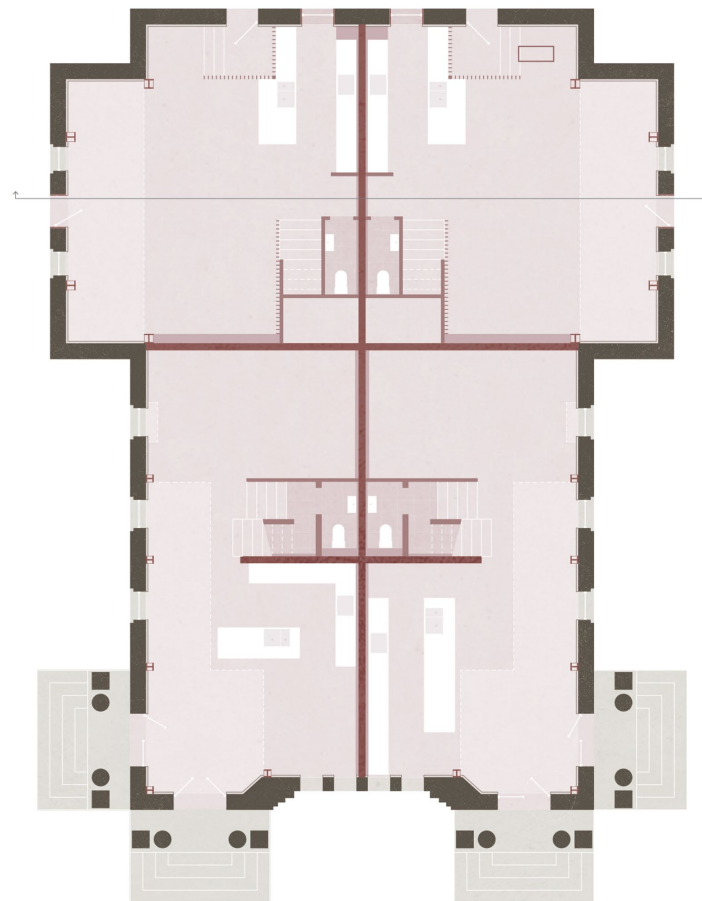
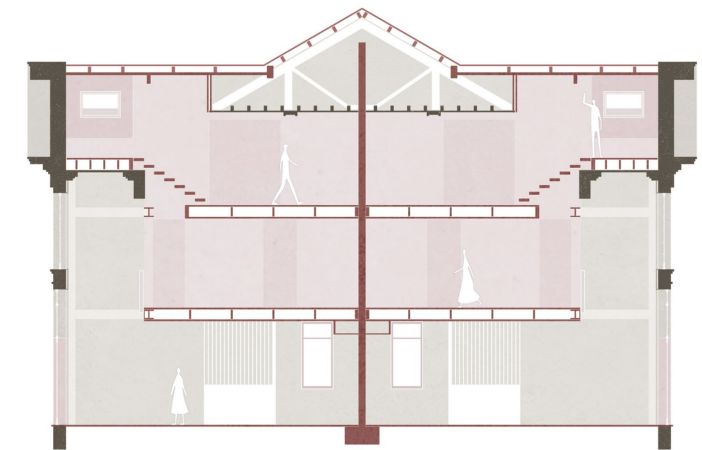


Fig. 58 Views of the construction stages of St. James Church's adaptation into four apartment units.
Photographs courtesy of Gel Architects.

¹⁷⁰ DIZHUR Consulting, "31 Esplanade Road, Mt Eden. 70% NBS, IL2 Seismic Strengthening Works," October 2021.



 ORIGINAL FABRIC
 NEW FABRIC

0 3m

Fig. 59 *St. James Church's adaptive reuse: original and new fabric.*
 Illustration by Elisa Aguirre.

However, perhaps more so than the other two case studies discussed, this project highlights the complexities of balancing a church's heritage values with the requirements of its new multi-residential use. In terms of design, the main challenge was "how to seismically upgrade and insert modern apartments into a heritage building... with as little interference as possible."¹⁷¹ Particularly when addressing modern living demands in terms of natural light, warmth, ventilation, accessibility, connection between indoor and outdoor spaces, and more, the existing façade configuration constrained what could be done, especially the window layout and entryways. This meant that some of these requirements needed to be tackled through mechanical and hydraulic services, in a similar way to commercial buildings, without penetrating the façade. For example, as the original windows could not be altered, which meant no natural ventilation to the interior of the units, there was a need to incorporate a series of extractors throughout the levels that expel stale air to the roof, while other vents supply fresh air from the exterior.¹⁷² In relation to light, voids were introduced to allow maximum daylight into the ground floor living areas, while new skylights were installed on the roof, and the south façade was altered to create new window openings.¹⁷³ In some other instances, the preservation of heritage values and original fabric took precedence over full compliance with the building code, such as in meeting the requirements of adequate thermal resistance.¹⁷⁴

Ultimately, while the adaptive reuse of St. James Church has ensured the building's long-term viability, the extent of internal intervention has significantly compromised its heritage integrity. The design approach has mitigated some impacts through thoughtful structural intervention and small alterations to exterior elements. However, the interior spatial qualities have been mostly lost, and therefore, the former church's sense of place has been altered. Despite efforts to preserve heritage fabric and achieve a balance with modern living requirements, the outcome cannot be considered a compatible reuse in terms of heritage. The building no longer functions as a community gathering space, nor does it retain the symbolic or social values once related to its role as a church. While the public can continue to appreciate its external architectural qualities, the adaptation represents a clear example of how intangible heritage values can be diminished, even when physical preservation is effective.

¹⁷¹ Daniel to Aguirre G.

¹⁷² Mark Wall, Interview by Elisa A. Aguirre G., Auckland, 3 June 2025.

¹⁷³ The new south-facing windows and skylight windows are the only ones to open and provide natural ventilation.

¹⁷⁴ Daniel to Aguirre G.



Fig. 60 Exterior and interior views of the newly transformed Esplanade Heights. The southwestern unit's design features a void in the former church's transept. Changes like a relocated ceiling fretwork panel in the main bedroom, and new skylight and south-facing window openings enhance natural light, ventilation, and adapt to the new internal layout.
Photographs by Elisa Aguirre.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER IV

This analysis of the adaptive reuse of heritage churches shows that while each case presents unique circumstances, several recurring themes determine the challenges and actions involved. Most notably, these examples exhibit how owners' intentions influence the outcomes achieved. Additionally, structural vulnerability and economic feasibility also play a significant role in the process. All three churches required structural upgrades prior to their adaptation, highlighting the importance of strengthening interventions in preserving heritage buildings and the high costs involved.

As discussed in Chapter I, not all heritage values can or should be preserved. Adaptive reuse requires thoughtful judgment and balance about which values to retain, enhance, or let go. Success varies depending on which values are prioritised. St. David's Church stands as the most compatible example, where minimal physical change, strong community support, and a use aligned with its original function allowed both tangible and intangible values to be retained. In the adaptation of the Kohekohe Church, careful design choices preserved the building's landmark and aesthetic qualities despite its shift to private residential use. Its success was achieved through low-impact intervention and the sensitivity to the building's character. In contrast, the adaptation of St. James Church into apartments reveals the limits of adaptive reuse when heritage compatibility is secondary to development viability. While its external form was preserved, the loss of interior space and social meaning represents a diminished heritage outcome.

Ultimately, the success of church adaptation depends on the compatibility of values between the old and new uses, which impacts the degree of physical intervention. In most cases, it is also significant whether the building preserves the spirit of social gathering. While not all churches share the same set of values, their symbolic presence remains distinctive.¹⁷⁵ Respecting their sense of place, through public use, community input, or sensitive design, is often what distinguishes successful adaptive reuse from just a practical reuse.

¹⁷⁵ All interview participants consistently noted the churches' unique symbolic role. As one contributor stated, "a church will always be a church."

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to evaluate how successfully the adaptive reuses of scheduled historic heritage churches balanced the preservation of heritage values with the requirements of their new use. In addition, the research sought to identify patterns, assess the heritage outcomes, and determine the extent of impact on heritage values of the adaptively reused churches.

Chapter I established the conceptual basis for the research. Through the literature review, key theoretical works surrounding the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings and religious built heritage, provided an initial framework for assessing adaptations. They established the importance of maintaining the building's authenticity by selecting a compatible use. For former places of worship, this involved spatial integrity and public access. Chapter II traced the evolution of church buildings in New Zealand and contextualised the current religious landscape in the country. It also examined early examples of adaptively reused church buildings that offer valuable lessons by illustrating the range of possible outcomes and approaches, both positive and negative. Chapter III focused on the heritage churches scheduled in Auckland. The research showed that overall, churches are more highly regarded as places of social value than all other places scheduled, with 80% of churches having social value against the overall 31%. Currently, almost 70% of church buildings continue to have ongoing religious worship. On the other hand, of the adaptively reused churches, 71% of them serve a new use that provides public access to the building, including through religious or secular events.

Lastly, Chapter IV showcased, through the analysis of three case studies, that despite the diversity in adaptive reuse church projects, outcomes are often influenced by recurring factors, such as the owner's objectives and the financial viability of the adaptation. The success of balancing heritage values with new work depends on which heritage values are prioritised. From the three case studies, St. David's Presbyterian Church offered the most compatible example of new use, a centre for music and community, and can be seen as either maintaining or enhancing the original heritage values of the place. As the new use closely aligns with the original function, its adaptation required minimal alteration and presented a strong community backing. However, this dedication to conserving all heritage values, despite the absence of substantial financial support, poses significant challenges to its current operational sustainability. The Kohekohe Church adaptation into a country residence, which involved a thoughtfully planned addition to its rear end, allowed for the retention of its landmark and aesthetic significance. This low-impact residential conversion helped maintain the assigned heritage values of the place. Lastly, the St. James Church highlights the limitations of adaptive reuse projects regarding an incompatible new use. Though carefully constructed, the loss of interior space and lack of public use result in a weaker heritage outcome. The horizontal and vertical subdivision to allocate its new four-unit configuration transformed the essence of the

building, showing the complexity of inserting residential use into a larger church building. It is possible to argue that in smaller church buildings, single residential use might integrate more easily without compromising spatial integrity. Evidently, physical context and church size play a key role in the decision-making process regarding potential new uses and adaptation strategies.

This research report shows that adaptive reuses of scheduled historic heritage churches in Auckland achieve varying degrees of success in balancing heritage values with new functional requirements. By analysing patterns across policy, history, and practice, this research found that heritage outcomes are mostly shaped by the compatibility of the new use, the preservation of spatial and symbolic qualities, and, to a lesser extent, the scale and context of the church building. For urban churches with high social value, the research shows that successful adaptive reuse depends not only on physical preservation but also on maintaining their significance as public and social spaces, rooted in collective memory and identity. These findings highlight the need for context-sensitive and values-led approaches in future church reuse projects. This will ensure heritage churches remain relevant and appreciated within Auckland's evolving urban environment.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This research report demonstrates that the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings – and of church buildings in particular – is fertile ground, with much to be learnt from previous examples, to help inform the preservation of more redundant heritage buildings in the future through carefully considered adaptive reuse. Future research could explore public perceptions of the adaptive reuse of church buildings, with particular focus on how new uses and levels of public access influence community attitudes. Although decisions around these projects are largely shaped by private property rights, it would be valuable to explore whether communities feel a continued connection to these buildings and have an interest in how they are adaptively reused.

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