

## Onehunga, Saint Peter's Church

Name of church: Saint Peter's Church  
Physical location: 184 The Mall (Main Street), Onehunga, Auckland.  
Corner of the Mall and Church Street, Onehunga, Auckland  
Anglican diocese: Auckland  
Further information: Steele John. *'No Ordinary Man - The Extraordinary Life and Times of Dr Arthur Purchas'* (David Ling Publishing Ltd; 2019)  
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Email: [admin@stpetersonehunga.org.nz](mailto:admin@stpetersonehunga.org.nz)  
Cemetery website: [www.graveinsightstonehunga.nz](http://www.graveinsightstonehunga.nz)  
Informant: John McAlpine

### 1840's

In 1847, Onehunga was designated by Bishop Selwyn as a 'parish district' (this 'district' included Epsom, Otahuhu, Waiuku and Mauku). A Crown grant of one acre in Onehunga was made to the bishop "as a site for the erection of a church." The first church, designed by the founder-vicar, **Arthur Guyon Purchas**, was built in timber on this site in 1848 (one of the earliest church buildings in Auckland). The first service was held on Saint Peter's Day, 29 June 1848. This site has remained a centre of worship and parish life ever since.

As the parish grew, under the guidance of Purchas, so the original wooden church was extended into a much larger building. Porches were added, the nave and the sanctuary were extended, the tower was moved from its original position, and alterations were made to the heights of both roof and windows. All these alterations were Purchas-designed, then Purchas-built or at least Purchas-supervised. By 1875 (when Purchas moved from the parish), the church had reached semi-permanence. It remained almost unchanged for the next 55 years and was known and loved as a fine example of the 'Selwyn' style of church building. The bell (360 lbs) purchased from *James Barwell, Birmingham, England*, was installed in the tower in October 1877, replacing the much smaller (56 lbs) bell.



St Peter's Anglican Church, Onehunga, 1860s. Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, 957-192-1.

## 1920-1930's

In the 1920's a decision was made to rebuild the church in permanent materials. 1930 saw the wooden chancel, sanctuary and tower demolished. The transepts were shifted thirty feet, and a new chancel, sanctuary and tower were designed by New Zealand architect Daniel Boys Patterson (1880-1962), and built of reinforced concrete with a light sandstone finish. The 1877 bell was hung in the new tower.



St Peter's Anglican Church, Onehunga, 13 October 1933. Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, 4-4513.

## 1970-1980's

By the 1970's, it was apparent that the old timber nave, which had been attached roughly to the 1930 tower block as a 'temporary nave', was needing major repairs and extension if it was to meet the needs of the parish. The congregation discussed all the possibilities of retaining the old building, but finally in 1974 they made the decision to build a new church in permanent materials wrapped around the 1930 tower block.

In 1980, construction of the new church began, after the congregation had moved their worship space to the parish hall (Grey Street). The old wooden nave was donated to the Auckland School of Architecture on the condition that they took it apart, took it away, and cleared up any remaining mess. Thus, the architectural students discovered the secrets of building a 'Selwyn Church' as they deconstructed and then reconstructed the old building on a piece of disused railway land near the vicarage (Grey Street). That reconstructed building still stands and is privately owned. The new church was designed by local architect, Graeme Pearce. The congregation shifted back to the new church in time for Christmas 1980, even though work was not finished. The new building was completed and paid for in time for its consecration on Saint Peter's Day, 28 June 1981, the 133<sup>rd</sup> birthday of the parish.

## Today

The church complex now combines the function of church and community centre. In the main church area, all the furniture can be moved easily to suit the needs of services, meetings, and other activities. The 1930 section of the building can be closed off from the main area by folding doors, thus creating a chapel space for smaller services and private prayer.

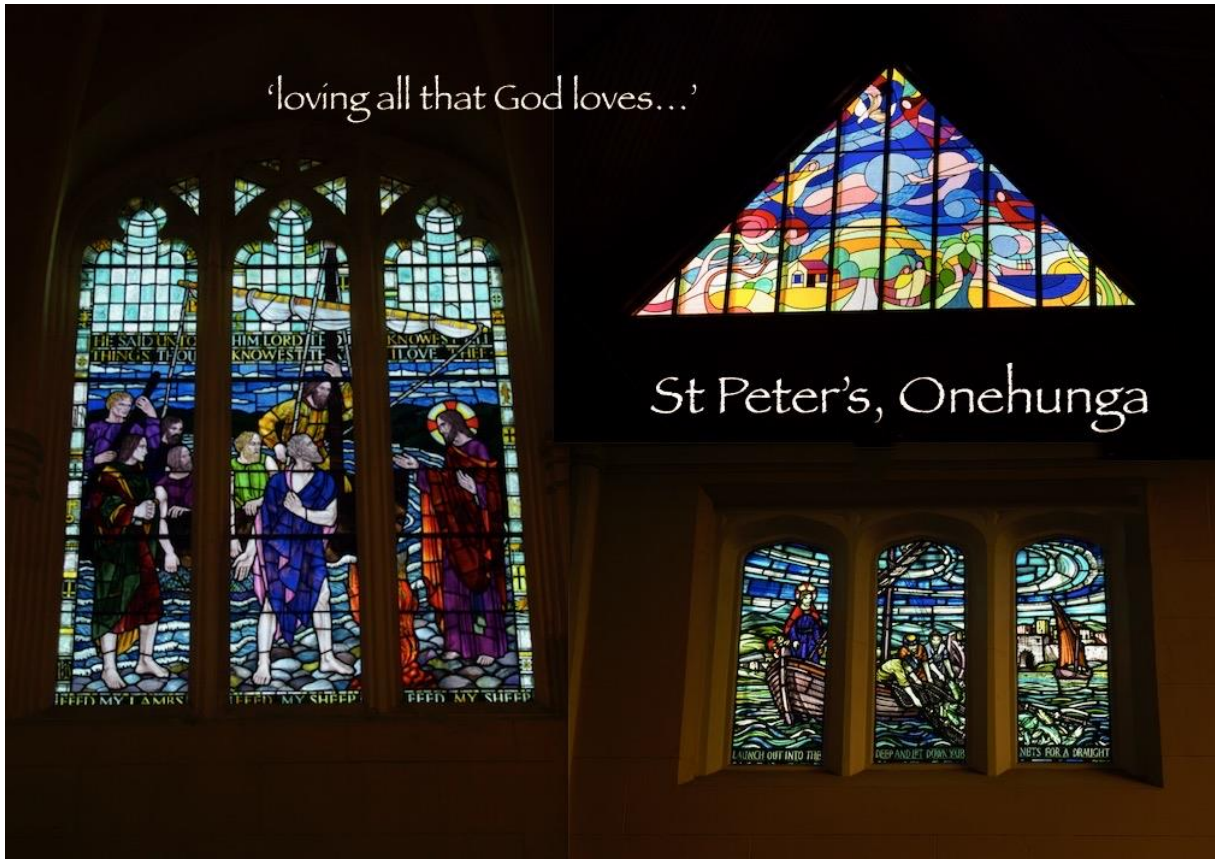
Suspended high between the main church area and chapel is a cross made from timber from the original church. In the chapel can be seen the original permanent baptismal font that dates back to the early 1850's. Also, the two 'Saint Peter Stained-Glass Windows' i.e., 1) the 1930s *'Feed my Sheep'* window (believed to be designed by New Zealand artist and art teacher Frederick Vincent Ellis, born 1892 in Halifax (UK), migrated to New Zealand 1922); and 2) the *'Let down your Nets'* window, designed by Ken Bunton (UK), crafted by Roy Miller of Dunedin, and installed in 1966. The organ, built by *George Croft and Son* in 1952, and extensively rebuilt and extended in 1981, is recognised as a fine instrument, ideally suited to the size of the building.

At the other end of the main church area is a contemporary stained-glass window (designed by Bill MacCormick and crafted by Mary Taka) that depicts Onehunga, past-and-present. This window was dedicated on 8 July 2001.

At the Onehunga Mall (Main-Street) end of the building is a parish lounge named *'The Bridge'*. It acts as the church's 'shop-front' linking church, shops, local businesses, commercial enterprises and the wider Onehunga community.



Saint Peter's Church, now.



A Collage of the Church's Windows, collated for the 170<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Parish, 2018



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A sketch of Saint Peter's Church, by Bill MacCormick