

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa

We Build Forever - A History of St David's Church, Wiri

Author: Earle Howe

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The first Europeans came to the Wiri area in 1843. It is understood that the area of Wiri is named after a local Rangatira, Wirihana Takaanini.

Perhaps the earliest indication of Māori settlement in the area are the stone-field gardens which date back as far as 1300.

In 1867, Wiri was renamed 'Woodside' by a local resident, Robert Coxhead Snr, after his hometown of Woodsend in Aldbourn, Wiltshire, in England. It retained this name until around 1900, when the original name was reinstated, to avoid confusion with another town of the same name elsewhere in New Zealand.

During this time Woodside was an important settlement midway between Otahuhu and Papakura. It had a coaching-house, 'The Raglan', complete with stables and other amenities for travelers (This coaching-house was located opposite the present Telstra Pacific Events Centre, on the Great South Road). There was a

school (which opened in April 1873), two churches after 1880, two stores, a blacksmith and a butcher. The coaching-house, or hotel, also included a Post Office named Papatoitōi. (This Post Office was renamed Woodside in 1870, and in 1875 it was relocated to one of the stores. The Post Office continued with this name until 1897). The Methodist Church, opened in 1854, was near the present entrance to Rainbow's End, on Wiri Station Road. In 1863, on the opposite side of the Great South Road from the Methodist Church, near the present Southern Motorway, the St John's Redoubt was built to accommodate soldiers during the New Zealand Wars.

The first European to own the land on which St David's Church stands was the missionary William Thomas Fairburn (Church Missionary Society). In 1842, the 40,000 acres that Fairburn had acquired was reduced to 5495 acres by the Land Claims Commission. When the seat of Government was being established in the Bay of

Islands, land owned by James Reddy Clendon was wanted, but the Government could not pay for it in full. Clendon was offered 10,000 acres of the Fairburn land as part payment. The land on which St David's Church stands is legally described as 'A portion of Clendon's Grant in Papakura Parish.'

In the early days of Woodside (as the area was then called) church services were held in the Woodside School (beginning in 1871). The School was on the corner of Kerrs Road and Great South Road. The first services were conducted by the Rev. Frank Gould at a stipend of £20 per annum. The services were held monthly on Sunday mornings; however, at a meeting on 29 January 1872 it was agreed that evening services be held when there was sufficient moonlight. The first recorded Anglican baptism in the Woodside district was that of Lydia McLamon, on 7 December 1873, by the Rev Frank Gould, in the schoolroom. On 16 February 1875 at a general meeting of church members a discussion was held regarding the desirability of building a church on its own site. It was agreed that a suitable site be obtained as soon as possible. On 3 December 1878, it was resolved that one acre of ground next to the school ground be obtained as the site for the church, but it would be necessary to have £100 in hand before commencing to build. On 12 July 1879 a general meeting of church members was held, and it was reported the acre of land which the church now stands had been purchased for £12. A working committee was then elected with full powers for the erection of a church. The proposal at this meeting was for a building twenty feet by fifteen feet.

These early services at Woodside were attended by people from beyond the Wiri district e.g., Weymouth. In an undated Stewardship brochure for the Manurewa Parish there are these comments:

'Weymouth history commences with the Karaka ferry (used by Bishop Selwyn) across the

Manukau to Waiuku and the South.

'In 1857, Weymouth was surveyed into town lots and small holdings - streets were planned as we see them today, and many Church sites set aside. A Crown Grant was made to George Augustus Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand, by Governor Grey in 1867, but with the construction of a metaled Great South Road to Drury some 10 years earlier, Weymouth had not developed as visualized.

'Services moved to Woodside. It is said that folk arrived on horses that came some of the way by swimming alongside boats that plied the Manukau; and that the Misses Martha and Rebecca Laurie would walk to Woodside, along the beach, through ti-tree tracks and across farmland to arrive hot and thirsty at Church.'

(The Weymouth ferry began operation in late 1860, and Anglican Church services began in Weymouth in 1887)

On 2 March 1880, a General Meeting was held, and a committee was authorised to proceed at once to make arrangements for the erection of the church. On 20 July 1880, it was moved that the opening of the church be held on the last Sunday in August 1880. It was also moved that ten seats together with two fixed benches on each side of the door be made, as well as a churchyard gate. The seats and gate were made by a Mr. Baker. The spare table belonging to the District School was also purchased for seven shillings and sixpence, to be used as a communion table. Spare forms belonging to the district school were also purchased and it was agreed to buy as many as were required for the church at the purchase price of one shilling per form. It was agreed at this meeting that the new church be named St David's.

The church was duly consecrated on Sunday 29 August 1880 by Bishop Cowie, with the Rev. Frank Gould saying Morning Prayer. There was an overflowing congregation, with many being unable to obtain seats in the building. The

offertory amounted to between £2 and £3. It was announced that future services were to be held at 11 am on the last Sunday of the month and 2.30 pm every other Sunday.

St David's Church is a simple building, influenced by the Gothic Revival style promoted in New Zealand by Bishop Selwyn. Typical Gothic details include the exposed roof structure, the belfry, the pointed arch entrance to the sanctuary, and the simplified windows. Although it was built after the departure of Bishop Selwyn, St David's has other details that are reminiscent of the various 'Selwyn churches' around Auckland. It was built of timber with a steeply pitched roof with the interior walls being stained timber.

In 1883, permission was given to grant Mr. R. G. Boler £5 towards enlarging the Church. This allowed for a rounded chancel being added at the rear. In 1886, kneeling cushions and chancel carpet were added to the church. By 1887 the church was extended again to the specifications of Richard Heath Harris by removing the back porch, putting in another section with two windows and then attaching the back porch again. A copy of the plan with a time clause has been framed and is still inside the church. These alterations enlarged the church from twenty feet to thirty-five feet and seating from 60 to 80 people.

Bishop W. G. Cowie wrote in his diary on Thursday, 30 June 1887 details of his visit to Woodside (Wiri):

'In the evening, I went to Woodside (about thirteen miles) to the re-opening of the little church, S. David's, after the addition of an apsidal chancel. Such additions to our country churches are tokens of the faithful work of the clergyman in charge of the district. Woodside (the Māori Papatoitoi) forms part of the Rev. O. R. Hewlett's charge, whose headquarters are at Papakura; where he visits many congregations, receiving from them about £150 per year, on which he contrives, by strict economy, to subsist. His

people are willing to increase this poor maintenance, but are at present unable to do so, owing to the general agricultural depression. At the Woodside service Evening Prayer was said by the Rev. F. Gould, of Otahuhu, who was in charge of the district when the original church was built; and one of the Lessons was read by the Rev. H. Hayward, who has a small farm in the neighbourhood, but has no pastoral charge in the diocese.'

In 1887, a small bell tower along with a good bell were erected. The bell was cast in Mr. Masefield's foundry at a cost of £46. The porch and the vestry were built in 1901. On 1 November 1902, seeing the church accounts were in a satisfactory position, it was decided to obtain a new classic altar table and a new organ at a cost not to exceed £25. The altar table was made by one of the parishioners Mr. H. Rollett while Mr. C. W. Clark saw that it was properly furnished.

About the beginning of the twentieth century an ornamental surrounding of trees was planted and two more native trees were planted in 1918 as a memorial to those who paid the supreme sacrifice in World War I. Around the walls of the church are Wiri Rolls of Honour and Memorials for some of the people who lived in the district. One is in memory of Rev Middlewood Kirkbride who was Vicar of the district from 1889-1913. The lectern of polished oak was dedicated on 31 August 1919 in memory of the Costar family's two sons killed in World War 1. Still standing today in front of the church grounds is a plaque inscribed 'An Oak Tree was planted on 25 August 1968 in memory of Glynn Bassett Clayton faithful vestryman of this parish for 35 years.' In 1987, a hall, relocated from St Saviour's Blockhouse Bay, was added to the church complex. Parish life included the annual church picnic at local farms on Boxing Day. The Church Gazette of 1893 under Woodside described the day:

'On Boxing Day, the annual church picnic was

held at the farm of Mr. A. Colley, Papakura Valley. The weather was all that could be desired, the attendance was large, provisions were plentiful, there were games and amusements without stint and the 200 people present enjoyed themselves thoroughly. Mr. Colley's considerate kindness was thankfully appreciated. Misses McLamon and Harris assisted by Messrs. John Kerr and James McLamon were the committee for making the needful arrangements and they did their work well indeed.'

Another annual picnic described in February 1895 was held 'at the bush known as 'The Puriris', kindly lent for the occasion by Mr. G. Smith:

'A splendid day, abundance of eatables, and the general sociability of all present combined to make the whole affair a very decided success, and the thanks of the congregation are due to Mrs. Doull, Miss Burnside, Miss Trimble, and Mr. J. Kerr, for their able services as members of Committee of Management.'

'On the evening of St David's Day, the Harvest Festival was held in St David's Church, Woodside. The church was very prettily decorated, and the generosity of the settlers was shown by the abundance of fruits of the earth were supplied fruits and forwarded a day or two afterwards to the Parnell Orphans Home, but notwithstanding this, a congregation assembled to join in a thoroughly hearty service. The Minister of the day preached the sermon. The offertory collection was later to form the nucleus of a fund for painting the church.'

Ground maintenance was discussed at the meeting on 12 July 1893: 'Mr. W. J. McLamon carried the meeting with him when he proposed that as soon as possible gravel be put on the path which reaches from the main road to the door of the church.'

It was mentioned again in the Church Gazette of August 1894: 'During the past half year the church has been painted and a good roadway made and graveled and now it is proposed to try

and raise the means to supply the timber for lining the church. Mr. Doull and Mr. A. Rollett having kindly offered to do the work gratis, and Mr. J. McLamon to cart the timber free of charge.'

Fundraising events included what was referred to in the October 1894 Church Gazette as Entertainment:

'An entertainment was given in the Woodside School on the evening of Wednesday, 19th September, to aid in procuring funds to line S. David's Church. The members of the Holy Trinity Young People's Union, Otahuhu kindly came and gave nearly all the program which included Mrs. Jarley's waxworks. It was pleasing to see such sympathy as was expressed by the young people of another parish - it draws us closer together in bonds of love and friendship, and we have to express our warmest thanks to them for the service they have so willingly tendered us. After the concert, refreshments provided by several ladies of the congregation were dispensed to our Otahuhu visitors by Mrs. Bengé, Miss McLamon, and Miss A. Dawson.'

Other fundraising events as outlined in the January 1895 Church Gazette were described as a soiree and concert. The Rev. N. D. Boyes, of Papakura, managed the event held on 23 November while Major Pirie, of Auckland played the accompaniments and Mr. Bengé lent his piano. The lining of the church was done free of charge by church members namely Mr. Doull and Mr. Rollett as was the carting of the timber by Mr. J. McLamon and Mr. Gladding.

Annual Meetings seemed well attended. An extract from the September 1898 issue of the Church Gazette reads: 'Hearty vote of thanks were accorded to: Messrs Clark and Lupton for the assistance rendered by them as lay readers to the Vicar; to Rev M. Kirkbride to Mr. C. W. Clark and Miss C. Burnside for their valuable services as Sunday school teachers: to Misses Burnside, Leith and Trimble as Collectors and to

Misses Burnside, Leith, McLamon, Morgan and Rollett for their highly appreciated services as organists.'

A speech on the Litany after the 1898 Annual Meeting by Mr. Clark was well received and a hearty vote of thanks given by those present. At the Annual Meeting, 9 August 1899, it was unanimously agreed 'That this meeting is of the opinion that the ladies of the congregation should have a vote at parish meetings: and it was further decided to hold an evening service once a month on the Sunday preceding a full moon.'

On Wednesday October 18th, Miss Burnside, the organist and Sunday School teacher, and Mr. J. Kerr were married:

'The Rev Kirkbride conducted the service. The couple left Woodside on their way to Wellington during the afternoon. In anticipation a farewell social was given to Miss Burnside a few days ago, when the Vicar, on behalf of the members of the church presented her with a marble clock and silver cruet. On the clock is inscribed: Presented to Miss Burnside on the occasion of her marriage by the congregation of St David's Church, Woodside as a token of esteem and appreciation for her services as organist and Sunday school trading.'

For some years the church was used for dedication services at the opening and closing of the Pony Club Season. Members of the club would arrive on their horses and leave them in an enclosure while the service was in progress.

Originally St David's Church was part of the Parish of Otahuhu, later as part of the Papakura Parish, then part of Mangere Parish. About 1926, Manurewa was given separate parochial status and the parish boundaries included Weymouth and Wiri. From 1938-1951 Manurewa, Wiri and Weymouth were amalgamated with the Papatoetoe Parish. One example from this period shows the dedication of those who have taken responsibility for services at St. David's. Arthur Holmes, who had been a Lay Reader in several

parishes over his long lifetime, used to walk from Papatoetoe to take services at St David's - when he was over 80 years old (he died in 1947).

Services at St David's Church were suspended on 16 May 1948, but were recommenced on 18 June 1950, under the jurisdiction of the Parochial District of Manurewa. Mrs. M. Pickering and Mr. and Mrs. M. Clayton were leading figures in this new beginning at St David's.

For many years it has been a highlight each year on the last Sunday of August to hold an Anniversary Service to mark the opening of the church. Some of these annual services have been significant events. The 70th anniversary in 1950 attracted 107 people to the service, at which the Venerable A. E. Prebble, Archdeacon of Manukau, was the preacher. In the evening a social event was held in the Wiri Hall. During the 1950s and 1960s the Wiri Pony Club were key participants in the annual Anniversary Services.

But no Anniversary to date has been more significant than for the Centenary in 1980. Plans were made well in advance by the committee consisting of the Chairman Ransom Smyth, Anne Smyth, Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Barnes, Mr. and Mrs. M. Clayton, Mrs. R. Jepson, Edgar and Audrey Burnside, Myra Price, and Mrs. M. Pickering. As part of the celebrations a restoration fund was established, raising \$5,500, so that the church roof and bell tower could be repaired, and a toilet block constructed. Assistance in the work was given by the Detention Centre of the Justice Department, Otahuhu. Their clients helped paint the Church, build the toilet block, lay concrete paths, clean up the grounds, and clean the tombstones in the Cemetery, contributing over 1000 hours work.

The Centennial Service was well attended, with an overflow congregation housed in a temporary shelter erected alongside the Church. Archbishop Sir Paul Reeves and Bishop Godfrey Wilson officiated at the service, assisted by several clergy, including the Vicar, the Rev. Harry Poole.

Sir Roger Douglas MP and Sir Lloyd Elsmore, Mayor of Manukau City, were also present. After the service the visiting dignitaries were transported, by vintage car, to Friendship House, Manukau City for a reception.

In the 1960s and 1970s attendances were very good with a range from 20-70 persons, but for the rest of its life to date St David's has attracted around 10-20 for each service. Until the late 1980s there had usually been a fortnightly Sunday service in St David's. Since then, there has been a weekly service, and for a short while in the early 1990s there was a midweek service as well. In 1986, inconclusive consideration was given to amalgamating the St David's area with the Otara Mission District, including St Paul's Church, Flat Bush. Also, in the late 1980s a second service was held on Sunday mornings, when the Rev Edward Prebble was seeking to build up church life in the district.

In 1989 a small hall was gifted to St David's by the Parish of St. Saviour's, Blockhouse Bay. Soon after that a walkway was added to connect the Church and the Hall. In 1992 paving stones were added to the parking area outside the Church.

St David's Church has, until comparatively recently, been located in a rural or semi-rural context. In its earliest days it was in a farming community, and this was so until in the 1970s when a large number of houses were erected between Kerrs Road and Wiri Station Road. On the southern side of St David's there is still a large block of undeveloped land. This land had been acquired by the Dilworth Trust Board in the 1920s. It was their intention to use the land to build a new school there, in order to cater for the expanding school roll. Plans were drawn up and some initial site work was commenced, including a bridge over the Puhinui Stream. This bridge is still standing and is clearly visible from St David's. However, the onset of the Depression meant that development plans were suspended, and indeed never resumed. (The Trust Board had planned to

build the new school in brick, and the 1931 Napier earthquake was also a factor in the change of plans). In 1972 the Government took over the land with the intention of building a new hospital there, to replace Middlemore Hospital. In the mid-1990s when it became known that a major hospital would not be built there in the foreseeable future, the Dilworth Trust Board initiated legal action in order to regain their land holding at Wiri. The case was eventually heard by the Privy Council, but the Trust Board was unsuccessful. So, the land is still largely undeveloped, although a Super Clinic was opened near the Browns Road end of the land in 1995.

In 1976 the Rev Chris Pryor and his family took up residence in Kerr's Road, in a house on the old Dilworth Farm, and not far from St David's. He was a non-stipendiary priest and was licensed as a priest in the Manurewa Parish with the role of 'community minister' in Wiri. It was hoped that he would particularly work amongst the residents in the new subdivision being developed between Kerr's Road and the new Manukau City Centre. This housing project, initially known as Wiri Park West, was undertaken by Wiri Village Ltd. It was envisioned that Chris Pryor would link people with the services of Friendship House, the newly opened ecumenical Church Centre in Manukau City. There was little progress with this initiative, and it came to a halt when the Rev Chris Pryor became ill and died in 1981. However, others were to take up the challenge. In 1988, the Sisters of Mercy relocated from Otahuhu to Wiri. The women quickly established a strong community profile and now have a Community Centre alongside the Wiri School. Links between Friendship House and St David's developed in other ways, with Margaret Howe (no relation to the author), organist at St David's. Margaret was a key figure in the Drop-in Centre at Friendship House for many years, from 1976 onwards.

In 1990, 2023 square metres of land at the rear of the Cemetery were exchanged with Counties

Manukau Health for a piece of land alongside the Church, with frontage on to the Great South Road. This had two advantages: it made the management of the Cemetery much easier, and it provided for the possible building of a Vicarage or a new Church building. There have been other developments in recent years, across the road from St David's. There is the settlement known as Rata Vine, and in 2005 the Telstra Pacific Events Centre was opened just to the north of St David's.

Interred in the Cemetery which is behind the church are the remains of many well-known Wiri families like Bassett, Brown, Burnside, Clayton, Coxhead, Dawson, Dreadon, Gladding, Grant, Hall, Harris, Holmes, Kerr, Lyon, McLamon, Rollett, and Trimble. A recent Cemetery development has been the provision of a Remembrance Garden for the burial of ashes. Myra Price made the suggestion and, along with her husband Jack, made sure that her vision became a reality.

The present congregation continues the historical pattern of being a collection of people

who travel to St David's, rather than living alongside St David's. People come from Papatoetoe, Manukau, Manurewa, Clendon, Weymouth, Wiri, and even from as far away as Ramarama, for Sunday worship, baptisms, weddings, funerals.

The following words of John Ruskin have been quoted at previous significant events at St David's:

'When we build let us think we build forever
Let it not be for the present delight
nor for the present alone
Let it be such work
as our descendants will thank us for
And let us think as we lay stone upon stone
That a time is to come
when those stones will be held Sacred
because our hands have touched them.
And that men will say as they look
upon the labour
and wrought substance of them:
See! This our Fathers did for us'

(John Ruskin:
Seven Lamps of Architecture - The Lamp of Beauty)