

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

Saint Bride's Church, Mauku: A Frontier Church in the Midst of Conflict

Author: Warren Limbrick

(AHS Newsletter 46; April 2011)



After a sketch by G. Newbury, 1863

Saint Bride's Church, Mauku, with Stockade, 1863

The following article was first offered as a talk at the Anglican Historical Society's meeting at St Bride's Church on 3rd October 2010. It is not fully referenced, but some notes below will enable those interested to pursue the story further. For a detailed history and chronicle of St Bride's church and its congregation see *The Church of St Bride, Mauku, 1861-2001* by Heather A. Walden (2002). The name St Bride is a variant of St Bridget of Kildare (born c. 455 CE), abbess and a patron saint of Ireland.

In the year of its sesquicentennial, St Bride's is a church to be truly celebrated, the building and its community of faith. The first settlement in the Franklin district to the west of Pukekohe began about 1854. Although the mouth of the Mauku stream afforded a safe landing place for sailing vessels crossing the Manukau Harbour from Onehunga, the settler village developed further upstream on superior land following the clearing of totara forest. It became typical of bush frontier settlements and in common with similar settler villages lay initiatives that soon laid the foundations for worship.

The first Anglican worship in Mauku was conducted in settler homes, and then in a slab hut on the sloping ground between the present

church and road. Such small buildings of split timbers were common through the colony where original forest land was cleared for farming. Early clergy visitors to conduct worship included Bishop Selwyn on his diocesan visitations, and Robert Maunsell who was based in the lower Waikato at the Kohanga mission. John Coleridge Patteson ('Coley', as the future Bishop of Melanesia was familiarly known) led an informal service at Major Speedy's home on one occasion in 1855. The Revd Dr Arthur Guyon Purchas, resident clergyman at Onehunga, was a regular officiant, and, perhaps as a preliminary to the commencement of building work, Selwyn visited to lead the service on 1st November 1860, for a congregation of forty-five.¹

Planning for a permanent church building had begun at a meeting at the Speedy farmhouse on 28 Nov 1858. A church committee was formed with Dr Purchas as chairman, with members Dr Giles, Joseph Crispe, Robert Lusk and Samuel Vickers. Eventually 3 acres at the Finlay Road site were 'conveyed to Bishop Selwyn by a Crown grant, in trust for the Church of England in New Zealand.'² Fundraising then began for a new church with Dr Purchas taking a lively and dominant interest, offering his own plans and specifications, together with an added incentive of £25 towards a church spire if his design was endorsed! And indeed, it was!

The Church Erected, 1861

Although difficulties with tenders and contracts were encountered, by December 1860 construction was under way. Nearby kauri and totara had been felled, sawyers and carpenters had done their work, and on Sunday, 14 July 1861, after a total expenditure of around £300, Dr Purchas presided at the first service in the new St Bride's. Contemporary testimony indicates the difficulty of fund raising in a small rural settlement, although Selwyn, Governor Gore Browne, 'Coley' Patteson and General Cameron all made significant donations. As in other settler communities, the church was open to Presbyterian and Wesleyan Methodist congregations as well.

Dr Purchas was a remarkable man: a surgeon of note as well as general practitioner, clergyman, musician, architect and inventor, a priest with competence in so many fields. His design for St Bride's is characterised by 'simplicity and elegance' in the opinion of one architect.³ The well-proportioned tower and spire (almost 20m high) lends 'character and distinction' to the colonial design.⁴ It has the same profile as his original design for Holy Trinity, Otahuhu (now Selwyn Church, Mangere, although sadly that tower is truncated) and his design for St Stephen's Church, Tuahiwi (a small settlement

located between Woodend and Rangiora.

Built on the crest of the hill (Selwyn loved such sites) the design may at first sight seem merely typical of a nineteenth century colonial church. Several elements distinguish it however and justify the Historic Places Trust 'B' classification.⁵ As Peter Sheppard wrote, the building is original in both structure and use, very well proportioned with Gothic Revival influences. The scissor roof trusses, and chancel arch are well executed, and the diamond-paned windows of the 'Selwyn style' have an added flourish of foliated rather than square heads. But it is the rifle loopholes which fascinate! Why?

St Bride's as Refuge and as Garrison in the Anglo-Māori Wars

When I came to Auckland from the south, thirty years ago, it took me some time to grasp the reality that this diocese was formed in time of war. In the north, Christ Church, Russell, witnesses to the attack on Kororareka and the ministries of Henry Williams and Bishop Selwyn in that turmoil. St Michael's, Ohaeawai, built by Nga Puhi to symbolise peace on the site of Kawiti's defensive pa, has a churchyard holding the dead of both races from that 1845 battle, and reminds us of the tragic historical context. St Bride's, St John's, Drury, St Paul's, Rangiaowhia and St Mary's, New Plymouth, with many others, were places of refuge or garrison, and today have become memorials of conflict and reconciliation.⁶

In Oct 1860, before St Bride's was built, hostilities between settler and Māori were narrowly avoided when Eriata, a Māori, was found shot dead in the bush at Patumahoe. The moderating influence of Wiremu Tamehana restrained the taua which sought revenge, and the intervention of Selwyn, Purchas and Maunsell, combined to avoid conflict. It was later concluded that Eriata's death was accidentally self-inflicted.⁷ An isolated incident, it indicates the rising tension.

General Duncan Cameron's decision to begin a military campaign in the Waikato against Māori Kingite tribes in July 1863 had dire consequences for South Auckland. The military front was south of the Hunuas, where Cameron made his first incursion with the 14th Regiment crossing the Mangatawhiri on 17 July. The hostilities which followed in South Auckland have been called the 'war behind the front line', for the serious skirmishes had the character of a guerrilla campaign. Such attacks by Māori were designed to sever or hinder communication and lines of supply between Auckland and the imperial troops at Queen's Redoubt near Pokeno.⁸ We often forget the scale of this conflict; Cameron had 6,000 men ready to embark on the Waikato Campaign by the end of August, and the Māori forces holding a line from Meremere comprised up to 2,000 men. Dozens of small incidents tied up a large number of British forces.

A skirmish at Martin's Farm near Drury was the first of six such attacks on convoys, weakly defended posts and isolated settlements. The Drury engagement in July left 5 dead and 11 wounded, all British.⁹ Over the next 3 months, before the major battle at Rangiriri, the death toll was of the order of 138 (a quarter of whom were British). Papakura, Wairoa Rd, Camerontown, Paerata and Pukekohe East saw similar engagements.

So, We Come to the Battle at Titi Hill, Mauku.

Apart from some partly cleared grazing land, the 10 km from Titi Hill to the Waikato River was dense bush which gave potential cover to attackers and made settlers feel very vulnerable. It was not idle scaremongering which led to the stockading of St Bride's, for it found itself in the war zone. Local women and children were evacuated to take refuge in Waiuku for three weeks at the height of the alarm. At that blockhouse, 70 volunteer militia with forty to fifty settlers, women, and children, huddled together at nights 'like herrings in a barrel.' Forty-

three women and children subsequently became refugees in Onehunga, where the Onehunga Ladies Benevolent Society was founded to give them relief (the Society still exists as the oldest such organization in New Zealand). St Bride's itself was often used as a refuge, with many anxious nights spent within its walls. Split slabs of timber and small trunks palisaded the outer walls to a height of 3m, and 54 rifle loopholes were cut for possible defensive action. They are still clearly visible.

Fortunately, hostilities never occurred at the church itself. But in late October 1863 at Titi Hill, only 2 kilometres south, a fierce hand-to-hand battle could be seen from the church; it resulted in many casualties, including nine militia and an unknown number of Māori killed in action. As well as detachments of Imperial Regiments backing up the Forest Rifle Volunteers (a local militia), Mauku was for a short time the base of the Forest Rangers (well-known through the exploits of Gustavus Von Tempsky).¹⁰ In all, there may have been 600 troops encamped at the church.¹¹ The memorial cairn on the Pukekohe-Waiuku Road, in sight of the church spire, is inscribed 'Titi: Eight Europeans and an estimated sixteen Māori warriors died fighting here in the Waikato War, 23 October 1863.' Sources suggest a further militia man died of wounds. There is some discrepancy regarding names and numbers but eight of the 1st Waikato Regiment are named on the memorial obelisk in the churchyard at St John's, Drury.¹² It is thought that the Māori dead were removed from the battle site by their people.

Such events engender a deep sadness. The Māori community in Auckland and environs, upon whose gardens the settlers had often depended for provisions, had fled. Conflict in the Lower Waikato and over the Hunua and Bombay hills led to settler backlash against Māori who virtually abandoned Auckland. A special oath of allegiance had been required of Māori residents

in Auckland but, rather than take this ignominious test, most fled from the town and its southern districts to their tribal areas. Sir John Gorst, later a magistrate in Waikato, described in detail the looting and plunder of Māori possessions by both settlers and colonial forces. 'It looked strange', he wrote, 'in the eyes of the natives, that a Government which was about to make war on Waikato because the chiefs could not prevent lawlessness, should itself be unable to restrain its subjects from unjust acts.'¹³

As the bush was cleared for farmland, St Bride's developed much as other rural churches. With the development of Waiuku the Vicar resided there from 1882. Bishop W.G. Cowie consecrated St Bride's in 1885.¹⁴ It was said that Selwyn had refrained from consecrating the church in order that it might be used by worshippers other than Anglican.¹⁵ The parish clearly had lay people with initiative. The diocesan Synod of 1894, the year after the Electoral Act enfranchised New Zealand women, saw a motion brought by the longstanding lay-reader and Mauku synod representative Heywood Crispe. He moved that women be given the franchise in all church matters. Regrettably George MacMurray, Vicar of St Mary's, Parnell, amended it (with negative effect) seeking to await the opinion of the Lambeth Conference, 1897.¹⁶

A Link with St Bride's, Fleet Street

Joseph Crispe, one of Mauku's church founders, had in earlier life attended St Bride's, Fleet Street, which had made a donation to assist the building of the Mauku church, and after which the new church was named. Receipt of that small donation linked it indelibly with the famous Fleet St church bombed out during the Luftwaffe's blitz on 29 Dec 1940 which left only the tower

standing. Six months later, in 1941, the Mauku church's 80th anniversary was a poignant occasion when Dean Fancourt's sermon alluded to the tragic bombing of the Christopher Wren-designed London church. Mauku's congregation responded with food parcels and £100 towards restoration.

A further bond was yet to be expressed. At St Bride's Centennial in 1961 the Vicar, the Revd David Braddock, and the two Wardens were made liverymen of the Guild of St Bride and invested with medallions bearing the symbols of the guild, sanctioned by Edward III in 1375. The enameled medallions have subsequently been mounted on the wardens' staves and are a treasured part of the church's furnishings. The Whitefriars stained-glass windows are exceptional with luminous colouration and themes suggested by David Braddock. Clearly St Bride's is maintained by a devoted congregation. It is a taonga of the Diocese of Auckland and wears its 150 years lightly. The 150th anniversary will be held on 10 July 2011.



Saint Bride's Church, Mauku

Endnotes

¹ F.J. Lownsborough, *A History of St Bride's Church Mauku:1861-1961* (1961) p.4.

-
- ² Heywood Crispe, *The Early History of S. Bride's Church, Mauku*, in *Church Gazette*, 2 June 1884, pp.54-55.
- ³ P. Sheppard, *Historic Places*, May 1993, p.18.
- ⁴ C.R. Knight, *The Selwyn Churches of Auckland*, (1972), p.70.
- ⁵ P. Sheppard, *Historic Places*, May 1993, pp.18-19.
- ⁶ Auckland Diocese extended to Taranaki until 1926. N. Prickett, *Landscapes of Conflict: a field guide to the New Zealand Wars* (2002) gives a readable and fully illustrated account of the wars and includes details of churches which were close to scenes of action.
- ⁷ James Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars* (1955), Vol.1, p.297. This classic description of sites used narratives from both sides of the conflict. On interpretations of the dynamics of the war, the book is less reliable. An account is also in H.W. Tucker, *Memoir of the Life and Episcopate of George Augustus Selwyn*, (1879), Vol II, pp.166-172.
- ⁸ J. Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, (1986), pp.133-136.
- ⁹ N. Prickett, *Landscapes of Conflict*, p.72.
- ¹⁰ An extended account of the battle is found in Cowan, op. cit., Vol 1, pp.300-305. An internet search of 'Titi Hill Battle' renders much information.
- ¹¹ Crispe, op.cit.
- ¹² A monument on the Glenbrook-Waiuku Road records the death of Pte Worthington in the same action.
- ¹³ J.E. Gorst, *The Māori King*, (Reprint, Hamilton & Auckland, 1959), p.247.
- ¹⁴ New Zealand Herald, 22 Feb 1885.
- ¹⁵ Lownsborough, p.9.
- ¹⁶ *Church Gazette*, November 1894.