



New Zealand  
**Historic Places Trust** *Pouhere Taonga*

# Victory Memorial School

140 Springfield Rd, St Albans, CHRISTCHURCH



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## Registration Type

Historic Place Category 2

## Register Number

7486

## Date Registered

6-Apr-2001

## Legal Description

PT RS 257

## City/District Council

Christchurch City

## Region

Canterbury Region

## Summary

The Victory Memorial School was opened in 1922 replacing the original St Mathew's Day School. The small primary school was built as a World War One memorial, to commemorate the fallen soldiers of the Anglican Diocese.

The school was closed in 1966 when the roll dropped from 120 to 55. However, the building continued running as a school under the control of St Margaret's College. Later the building was used as a Rudolf Steiner school. In 1982 the school was sold to the Full Gospel Fellowship, later renamed the Beulah Christian Fellowship. A large church hall has been built on the front of the site and the original building, towards the rear of the site, continues to function as a Sunday school, creche and meeting venue.

## Historical Significance

The school's greatest significance is as First World War memorial. The Anglican Diocese, like other organisations and communities throughout New Zealand, wished to commemorate those who had served in the war and it was decided that the most appropriate memorial would be a new school building to replace the out-dated existing St Matthew's Church Day School that opened in 1884.

In 1918 the Synod established a Board of Education and one of its most energetic members, Canon Wilford, formed a band of devoted church people known as the Association of the Love of God who raised £10,000 for the new school. The Association later built St George's Hospital. An original War Loan Certificate, given by a widow, formed the basis of the Victory Memorial Fund.

The school is very distinctive in being not only a utilitarian memorial, as the vast majority of war memorials of the time were more ornamental in purpose, but it is also believed to be the only entire school built as a First World War memorial in the country. Although many schools from this period had memorials of some type installed such as memorial halls, libraries, gates or arches, stained glass, monuments or plaques, this is the only known example of an entire school, albeit a small one, constructed for this specific purpose.

The school memorial and its history embody different strands of memorial philosophy in New Zealand history. It includes the commemoration of the sacrifice of soldiers, the history of sacrifice by the community to build and maintain the school, and the role the school played as a 'Living Memorial', a philosophy that became more fashionable after Second World War.

The building was a focal point in the life of the church, school and community. As a church school, the Victory Memorial School's predecessor, St Matthew's was one of many schools established in the early years of the Canterbury settlement by the Anglican Church who wished to have a central role in education.

## Physical Significance

### AESTHETIC:

While the school is an attractive example of Victorian school architecture with influences from the Arts and Crafts movement in England it is considered that the school is not of sufficient aesthetic value to meet this criteria

### ARCHITECTURAL:

The school is a transitional model in the design of educational facilities for primary school children of the 1920s. It demonstrates the move away from high windowed, large-sized classrooms with toilet facilities in a separate building, to a more practical and modern alternative oriented to the sun with wide bands of windows on the northern aspect with staff and toilet facilities conveniently attached at the rear of the classrooms. The toilet facilities are accessible from inside the classroom and from the playground. A ventilation turret, unusual for the time, rises centrally from the roof, providing for the circulation of air in the principal internal space. It was in the next decade that 'open air' classrooms were fully developed. The 'open air' philosophy involved sun and health aspects that are part of a wider Western movement that was vogue in the 1920s and early 1930s. Most of the school buildings that were influenced by the 'open air' movement were timber structures with long bands of windows oriented to the sun, with immediate access to the playground.

The design of the school is influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement in England. The main construction materials being stone and plastered brick, with terracotta roof tiles. It is a symmetrical building with a central stone gable providing a strong accent to the north elevation. The floor plan reveals a simple compact layout providing six generous classrooms

for relatively small classes. The main central space functioned as an assembly hall or as two classrooms divided by large folding doors. This area has a barrel vaulted ceiling and once held a large, ornately gothic-style wooden Honours Board that recorded the names of the Anglican Diocese who died in the war. Unfortunately, this Honours Board was removed some years ago.

Terracotta roof tiles in the 'Pompeii' shape (flat with a rounded semi-circular shape over the joins) were specially imported for the roof. While terracotta tiles are not rare in Christchurch, the school is one of only a few buildings in Christchurch that has the 'Pompeii' shape.

The architects, M. and J. Guthrie, were one of the most active and respected architectural firms in Christchurch in the early 20th century. They produced many distinctive and innovative buildings, helping to introduce new styles to Christchurch. The Guthrie Brothers were versatile architects, designing commercial buildings, churches, hotels and schools. Their better known works include Christchurch Boys High School, built 1923-26 (registered Category I) and St George's Hospital, built 1926 (registered Category II). Indeed, M.J. Guthrie designed memorials at Halswell and Rakaia, and a shrine at Christchurch Boys' High School. The Guthrie Brothers offered their services free of charge, designing the school at no cost.

## **Cultural Significance**

The school serves as a unique purpose-built utilitarian war memorial to the men of the Diocesan who had sacrificed their lives in the First World War. It is a symbol of the ideals held at the time of the educative value of memorials to the younger generation and also reflects the value placed on education by the early settlers of the Canterbury Association.

### **SPIRITUAL:**

Its function as a Christian school and war memorial is indicative of its place of spiritual importance to the community. Substantial efforts were also made over many years by the community to complete and maintain the building that was central to the Christian education of the children in the area. While the building is still linked to a religious group, the building is not considered to possess significant spiritual value.

### **TRADITIONAL:**

The school is an example of the strong tradition in Canterbury of church school education by the Anglican Church. The Canterbury Association placed a strong focus on education and the Anglican Church played a major role in establishing the first schools here: Christ's College, St Michael's and Cathedral Grammar School. Primary schools were established at different suburban parishes.

## **Summary of Assessed Criteria**

a) The extent to which the place reflects importance or representative aspects of New Zealand history:

The school serves as an example of the development of New Zealand memorial tradition. The majority of memorials were funded by local communities and were intended as permanent memorials. They played an important role in a growing assertion of national identity throughout the first half of the 20th century.

The design of the building is a transitional style between high windowed and large classrooms and the modern 'open air' plan of the 1930s with more flexible room arrangement, and reflects progressive developments in education.

b) The association of the place with events, persons or ideas of importance in New Zealand history:

The decision to build a new primary day school and to rename it the St. Matthew's Victory Memorial School is indicative of a strong need in the Anglican community to commemorate the memory of fallen soldiers after the First World War. The school was built in 1922 at a time when there was considerable debate surrounding utilitarian memorials. Most of the World War One memorials were of an ornamental nature.

The school memorial idea had wide appeal particularly regarding its role in educating children about the Anzacs that would be an inspiration to future generations.

Victory Memorial School can thus be regarded as a transitional form between the purely commemorative nature of earlier memorials from the South African Boer War and World War One, and the later 'community facility' type of memorial such as a library, town hall, swimming baths, and Plunket Rooms that proliferated after World War Two.

c) The potential of the place to provide knowledge of New Zealand history:

The Victory Memorial School can provide knowledge on educational, architectural, cultural, social and religious aspects of New Zealand history.

d) The importance of the place to tangata whenua:

It is considered that the school has no special significance for tangata whenua.

e) The community association with, or public esteem for the place:

It is believed that there is considerable public esteem for the school particularly from past pupils, the church community and the local community. The school was built with community funds and there has been ongoing support throughout the school's life from pupils' parents. As the school closed in 1982 there has been considerably less general community contact with the building. However, the school building still plays a role for the Beulah Christian Fellowship.

f) The potential for the place for public education:

It is considered that there are few opportunities for public education at this time.

g) The technical accomplishment or design or value of the place:

The school was designed by prominent architects in a recognised transitional design. The design of the building is a transitional style between high windowed and large classrooms and the modern 'open air' plan of the 1930s. Several features are of particular note and include the ventilation tower; barrel vaulted ceiling in the main assembly room and specially imported 'Pompeii' terracotta roof tiles.

h) The symbolic or commemorative value of the place:

The school is especially significant in its role as a unique war memorial school building.

i) The importance of the identifying historic places known to date

from early periods in New Zealand settlement:

The Victory Memorial School replaced St. Matthews Day School on Caledonian Rd (now the site of the present Scottish Society Hall), that was built in 1884, as one of the early Anglican Church primary day schools built in the suburban

parishes of Christchurch. The history of the school as an institution, dating from 1884 until its closure in 1966, is embodied in the replacement building. However, the present building does not date from an early period of Canterbury settlement.

j) The importance of identifying rare types of historic places:

The school is thought to be the only entire school built as a war memorial commemorating the fallen soldiers of the First World War in New Zealand. Of the 452 World War One memorials recorded by Maclean & Phillips (1990) in *The Sorrow and the Pride*, a definitive work on war memorials in New Zealand, only 23 halls, seven libraries, and one hospital are listed as utilitarian memorials. Several bridges are also listed although some, like the decorative Bridge of Remembrance in Christchurch can hardly be termed purely functional. Including the bridges the utilitarian types amount to less than 8% of the total, leaving 92% of the World War One memorials as ornamental styles such as obelisks, statues and monuments.

k) The extent to which the place forms part of a wider historical and cultural complex or historical or cultural landscape:

The Victory School performed two commemorative roles by fulfilling the ideals behind the dominant memorial policies of both the First and Second World Wars. At the time of its construction the school satisfied the collective need for a 'diocesan war memorial' and contributed to the move towards utilitarian memorials that were later favoured as 'living memorials', after the Second World War.

## **Current Use**

Education - Church School

Religion - Religion - other

## **Former Use**

Education - School

Commemoration - Memorial - World War One

## **Themes**

War Memorial

## **Construction Professionals**

Guthrie, John Steele and Maurice James - Architect

## **Construction Dates**

Original Construction: 1922 (circa)

## **Other Information**

A fully referenced registration report is available from the NZHPT Southern region office

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