

The Little Church that Tried

**The story of the Anglican Church of St Jude
at Mercer**



Bruce B Owen

Cover Photo

A group photo outside St Jude's, with our friends from St Bride's, Mauku

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FOREWORD

It is incredible that a building like St. Jude's church still exists 110 years on.

It is with much pleasure that I recommend the reading of this book – ***The Little Church that Tried***, written so accurately and entertainingly by the Rev'd Bruce Owen. It goes without saying the hours that Rev'd Bruce must have spent, voluntarily, composing this book must have been huge. When you read it you will understand how appropriate the title is!

Many different people, over many years have poured enthusiasm into St Jude's in the hope of keeping this cute little church alive in Mercer. I am one of those people and although I only came to New Zealand 50 years ago, I have had an association with St. Jude's since 1975. I married into a very prominent family in Mercer. Not only did they own the Tavern, but several farms in the district, and so I feel that I can accept the honour and privilege of writing this foreword in their absence.

May I congratulate the Rev'd Bruce on bringing the history of St Jude's to us all, and although it is sad to see that St. Jude's, may at last, have to close its doors, never to be opened again, no one can say "*it wasn't for the want of trying*".

Angela Morey April 2024
Former Resident of Mercer



View of Mercer, circa 1900, looking north, with the Railway Hotel, centre, and the Mercer Railway Station to the right.

Source: Mercer Museum Facebook

INTRODUCTION

I am now in my 20th year in the parish of Bombay-Pokeno and during that time the question of the future of Mercer's church of St Jude kept getting raised. The number of services held at the church had continued on the basis of once a quarter, on the fifth Sunday of the month. The majority of those attending came from outside of Mercer, together with a handful of local people. More recently, even that local support has disappeared. In fact, it was not the quarterly services, nor the support of the local people that kept the church 'going', but the very successful Thursday School, a weekly Bible based activity programme run, after school, by Janet McRobbie and her team.

The future of the church has not been helped by a lack of running water on site and with no toilet facilities. The somewhat steep pathway from the roadside to the door does not help those who are unsteady on their feet. Also, the timber framing in the porch-way is rotten, a lot of the interior is riddled with borer and as the following story will tell, the bee swarms have taken up residence in the exterior walls on several occasions.

As the Mercer village grew at the beginning of the 20th Century, its existence was focussed on being an importance transport hub, connecting the railway with the Waikato River Shipping Company which carried passengers and cargo up and down the river, with Mercer an important port of call on the way. Not surprisingly, the village decided it would like its own church. That dream came to life when, in 1914, the church of St Jude was duly dedicated and opened. In its early years it was actively supported by local people with regular worship, weddings and funerals. Circumstances changed. With improvements to the Great South Road and the North Island Main Trunk railway, and the advent of the motorcar, the Waikato shipping operations having ceased, and so the village population began to decline. This, coupled with declining interest in church attendance in more recent decades, saw St Jude's struggling to survive.

The inevitable question of the church's future was raised on several occasions over the past 50 or 60 years, as our story will explain. Each time, a rallying call saved the day. But the time has now come. In 2024, at its Annual General Meeting, the Mission District of Bombay Pokeno passed a motion to close St Jude's, and through the Anglican Diocese of Auckland, to arrange for its sale.

I have chosen to write this account in two parts. The first part is centred on the story of the village of Te Paina - Mercer. In part, it is the tragic story of the local iwi Maori who wore the brunt of the colonial invasion of the Waikato, being the first settlement on the other side of the Mangatawhiri River line. It is also a story that reflects the changes in rural New Zealand over the past 150 years. Our story of St Jude, the second part of this account, is woven into this sequence of change.

There is much more to be told about the story of Te Paina – Mercer by others better qualified than myself, but I also commend the Mercer Museum to readers for the story it too, has to tell. I have merely scratched the surface.

Bruce Owen May 2024

Acknowledgements: *For the story of St Jude, I have relied on Vestry and Church Committee minutes and correspondence, as well as parish newsletters, and Newspapers Past. For the Mercer story I have used a variety of sources which I have acknowledged in the text.*

PART ONE:

TE PAINA - MERCER

In the beginning.

It would be very remiss to begin this story of the church of St Jude at Mercer, without first making a connection with the pre-colonial settlement, and thence to the settlement in colonial and post-colonial times.

The whenua, the land, is of course, of great significance to Māori and nowhere more so than the lower reaches of the Waikato River. Though much of the land south of what is now Huntly, used to be swampland and not so suitable for settlement, there are many areas on both sides of the Waikato River that are above swampland and therefore, in times past, settled, making use of the resources of the bush and river. Perhaps notable among these were the Pa at Meremere and Rangiriri. Just a few kilometres from the Meremere Pa was the Koheroa ridge, extending along the east side of the river from the Mangatawhiri Stream mouth to a point a kilometre or so to the south, jutting out to the side of the river. It was here that the Te Paina kainga (village) was situated. Te Paina translates to ‘the pine’ in Māori

Without question, the Waikato River was significant. In fact, it is said that the Waikato River is dominated by taniwha. As the Waikato River Authority comments, *‘Waikato taniwha rau, he piko he taniwha, he piko he taniwha’* (Waikato of a hundred taniwha, on every bend a taniwha). This saying attributes the power and prestige of the Waikato tribes to that of the river.

Source: Waikato River Authority



The western bank of the Waikato River at Mercer Photo: B Owen

Just to the north of the Mangatawhiri Stream lays the sheltered valley of Pokeno, nestled at the bottom of Puketutu, (Mt William). Despite its propensity for foggy winter days, the area was, in the past, a valuable source of kai and kai moana from the surrounding bush, streams, and the Waikato River, and significantly, within reach of the ocean beach at Putu-taka (Port Waikato). To say these settlements along the Waikato enjoyed a peaceful lifestyle, whilst mostly true, were not without their dramas. The Waikato River (flowing waters) was a main route north and south, with waka being hauled over the portage between Tuakau and Waiuku, linking the Manukau Harbour with the Waikato River. From there the journey would be to the Manukau Heads or Tamaki Makarau (Auckland) and even on to Te Tai Tokerau (Northland) for the more intrepid travellers of the day.

Peace Shattered.



The complexities of the so-called Musket Wars of the 1820's and beyond are well documented. In 1822 to avenge raids on Te Tai Tokerau by Ngati Whatua, Chief Hongi Hika made several raids on Tamaki Makarau, with significant loss of life on both sides. As well he made a foray on to the Hauraki Plains, likewise with devastating effect. It was in 1822 that he, and his large entourage of warriors and their waka, made the journey to Tamaki Makarau, across the portage to the Manukau Harbour and then to the portage from Waiuku to the Waikato River. Local tribes, mostly Ngāti Tamaoho, felled trees across the Waiuku portage to hinder their progress. As word spread that Hone Hika was on the way, local iwi took refuge in the bush. Hongi Hika and his waka taua (war canoes) ultimately travelled as far as the fortified pa of Matakītaki on the Waipa River, which they overran with great loss of life. *Source: NZ History online*

Hongi Hika -a sketch from an 1820 painting.

Image: Wikipedia

Colonial Settlement begins.

In the early days of colonial settlement after 1840 there was an interactive relationship between the local Māori and the early group of settlers. The Church Missionary Society had set up a Mission Station at Port Waikato and its influence on local Māori was significant. There was a willingness for them to embrace colonial ways of farming and housing, as well as clothing. They quickly learnt that by farming and trading they could increase their comforts.

In 1846 a Crown Purchase, known as the Ramarama Purchase, saw the purchase of some 35,000 acres from the Mangatawhiri Stream, by what is now Mercer, through Pokeno, Bombay, Drury to Papakura. Geologist, Ferdinand von Hochstetter in 1855, described a Māori kainga, to the east of Pokino (sic) as comprising *'about 20 huts, with about 100 inhabitants who are enjoying considerable wealth. They very recently had a neat flour mill built by an English Gentleman on a small stream flowing through the village. The volcanic soil of the neighbourhood is extremely fertile and there is no scarcity of horses, cattle, and pigs in these parts'*. Reports of the time record that Māori were also cultivating crops of wheat, maize, peaches, and potatoes, most destined for the Auckland market via Waiuku. Though Te Paina (Mercer) was to the south of the settlement of Pokeno, it still benefitted from the interaction with pakeha. *Source: Waikato District Council – Historic overview*

Rise of the Kīngitanga Movement.

The increase of land sales to the new arrivals to the country began to cause concern amongst tribal leadership. In 1858 several Māori chiefs placed their tribal lands under the mana of Waikato chief, Potatau Te Wherowhero, who was proclaimed king of the tribal grouping that year at the Ngaruawahia marae.

Prior to the beginning of the Land Wars in 1863 the relationship between the local Māori iwi and the newly arrived settlers was always uneasy. But reports of the time indicate that despite the unease there was a growing relationship between the two sides as Maori began to embrace colonial farming and trading to their advantage. But not all was well.



King Potatau Te Wherowhero

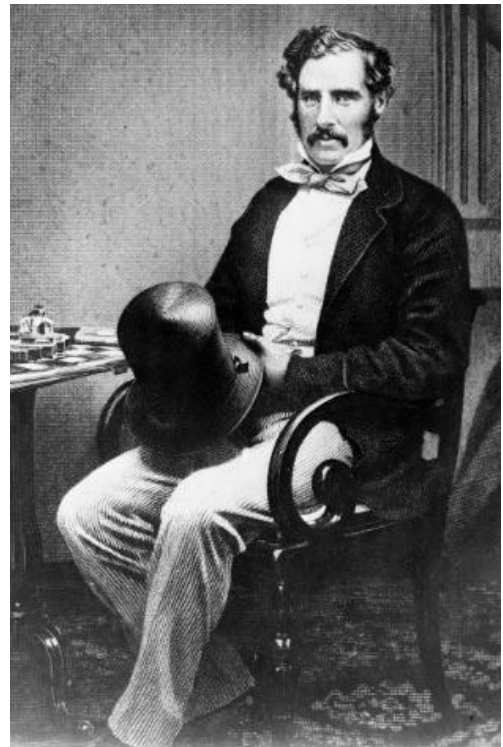
Image: wikitree

The Land Wars Begin.

Though the uneasy relationship between local iwi and the early settlers continued into the beginning of the 1860's, the Colonial Government, encouraged by Governor George Grey, were sufficiently concerned that there were still rebel iwi who continued to pose a threat to settlers. So much so, that stockades and blockhouses were constructed at strategic points around Auckland and outlying settlements so that residents could retreat to safety if an attack was imminent.

To protect Auckland from a potential invasion from the Waikato, Grey ordered the extension of Great South Road from Drury, over the Bombay Hills, to Pokeno where a military base was established at the Queen's Redoubt. Within a short time, several other Redoubts were built in the region.

On 9 July 1863, Governor Grey issued an edict that Māori living north of the Mangatawhiri Stream, the northern boundary of the Kīngitanga movement, swear an oath of allegiance to Queen Victoria or be expelled southwards. Local Ngāti Tamaoho were



Governor George Grey

Image: Wikipedia

divided, at first encouraged by Grey's offer of Māori autonomy, but eventually his other policies drove many to the Kīngitanga camp.

Fighting Starts.

On 12 July 1863, General Cameron crossed the Mangatawhiri Stream making his first moves against Māori entrenched at Te Paina, just across the stream. Subsequently, the numerous battles in the Waikato against the Kingites and Tainui that took place are well documented, with the Land Wars finally coming to a conclusion in April 1864, at the battle of Orakau. For the duration of the war though, the riverside area we know as Mercer became a strategic starting point for the gun boats and transport boats moving up stream to service and support the troops.

Rautapu – Confiscations.

Any research into the story of the settlement of Mercer would have to include comments on the land confiscations at the end of the Land Wars.

On 5 May 1863, Premier Alfred Domett sent a memorandum to Governor Grey proposing that Māori, who rebelled, have their lands confiscated as a punishment. Confiscations consequently took place under the New Zealand Settlements Act, 1863. Of the various confiscations that took place, the greatest were in Waikato and Taranaki, especially for Waikato Tainui.

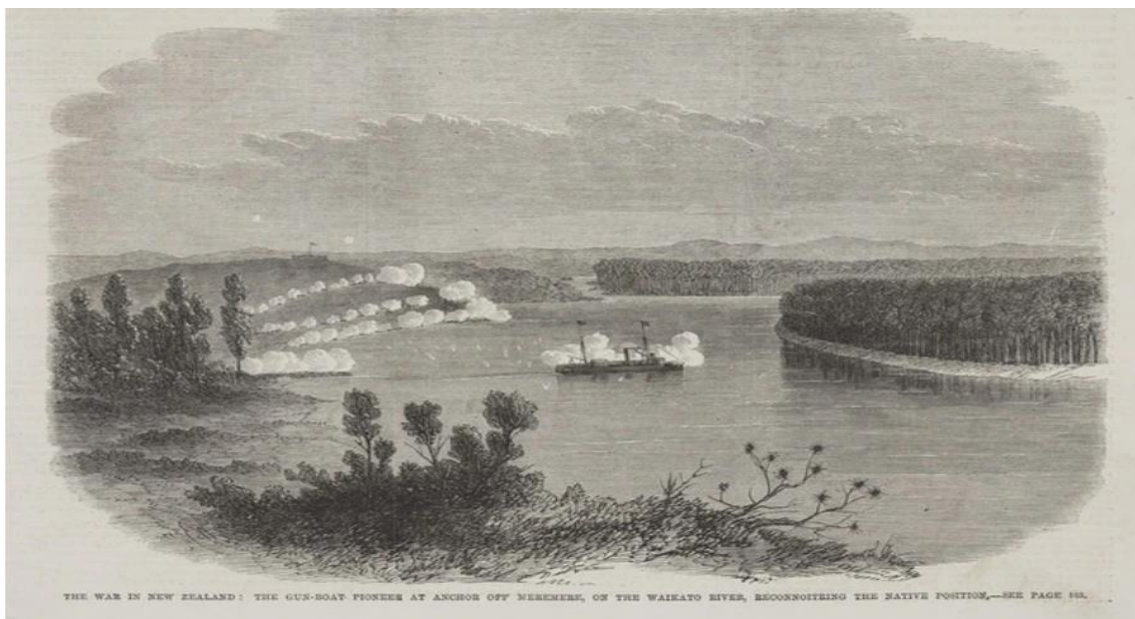


Image inscription- *The gun boat Pioneer at anchor of Meremere on the Waikato River reconnoitering the native (sic) position.*

Image: NZ history.govt.nz

The controversial practice of 'confiscation', rautapu, was in line with British colonial practice in the past, particularly in 17th century Ireland, but also in the southern African colonies.

As a result, the settlement now known as Mercer, was on confiscated land, which contrasted with the land to the north of the Mangatawhiri Stream, which was legitimately, even if somewhat cheaply, purchased as part of the 1846 Ramarama Purchase.

Source: Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand Rautapu- Confiscations

And so, to Colonial Te Paina - Mercer.

After the Land Wars were over, and as the area around Pokeno was being settled, especially with settlers from the ship *Helenslee*, there was an inevitability that a settlement would occur at the site now known as Mercer. Being a river terrace level, not so prone to flooding from higher than normal river levels, it was an ideal settlement site, nestling as it did between the river and the Koheroa ridge, with a headland jutting onto the riverbank to the south of where the road overbridge is now. This flat area of land is just to the south of where the Mangatawhiri Stream merges with the Waikato River. Journeying south in the past was hindered by the bluff extending to the river edge, as well as the extensive undrained swamplands to the south. In due course a ferry boat plied across, back and forth, to what is now known as Mercer Ferry Road leading to Pukekawa and Onewhero and other points west. Mercer also became a river port serving the Waikato upstream as far as Kirikiriroa, Hamilton, and to Port Waikato downstream.

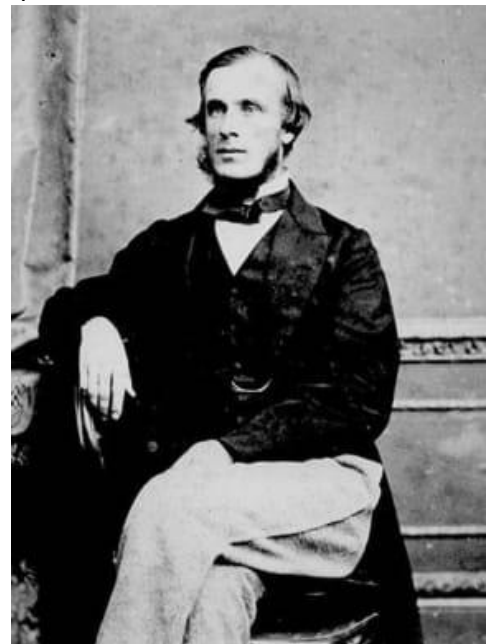
Point Russell.

Initially, Mercer was called Point Russell, after Thomas Russell, who was Minister of Defence during the Land Wars between 1863 and 1864. Born in Cork, Ireland, he journeyed to Australia with his parents in 1833. In 1840 they moved to New Zealand where they family first settled in Kororareka for a few months before moving to Auckland. Thomas Russell snr, was at first a farmer, then a carpenter, whilst his mother, Mary, ran a drapery store.

Thomas Russell, jnr, had a reputation for resourcefulness. One of the tales told related to the time when he had heard that there was a shortage of vegetables at the Californian gold rush diggings. Thomas Russell is said to have bought up all the onions he could find in Auckland and sent them to San Francisco where they sold for high prices!

Thomas trained as a lawyer, and as soon as he was licensed to practice, he set up a law practice of his own. As a lawyer, Thomas was very successful, working with his three brothers who were also lawyers. The practice, Whitaker and Russell became one of the wealthiest in the colony at the time.

In 1861 Thomas Russell began a very successful career in politics, and under the Dommett Government was made Minister of Defence in 1863. Russell's defence philosophy as Minister reflected the attitude of many settlers at the time, pursuing a policy of no compromise with what they deemed to be 'rebellious' Māori. He supported the idea of land confiscations (rautapu) to finance the wars, as well as recruiting militia from abroad and establishing military settlements.



Thomas Russell

Image: Dictionary of NZ Biography Te Ara

Interestingly, it is said that by 1864 Governor George Grey had become deeply uneasy at the scale of confiscations planned in the Waikato, and elsewhere, under the NZ Settlements Act

1863, falling out with his ministers in the process. Grey is said to have *‘developed an invisible distrust of Russell, whose enthusiasm for opening of the lands of Waikato, regardless of Māori rights seemed to serve the land buying schemes of his own legal practice.’*

The intrigue does not stop there! Thomas Russell’s law firm partner, Frederick Whittaker was also involved in politics, and in 1863/64 he was Attorney General. Whitaker also favoured a vigorous war policy of land confiscation and military settlement, a policy from which he, too, stood to benefit.

It was with this political background in mind that it was decided to name the new settlement Point Russell. There is no record available that indicates who made the choice.

Sources: Wikipedia: Thomas Russell and Dictionary of NZ Biography: y Thomas Russell, RCJ Stone

From Point Russell to Mercer.

It is unclear when Point Russell was changed to Mercer. One can assume that Russell’s pursuit of extensive land confiscations, which were at the time quite widely criticised, especially as he was found to benefit from his extensive purchases of previously confiscated land, as did numerous other speculators of the time, was the reason for the change.

The name Mercer was chosen to recognise the service of Captain Henry Mercer, who was killed at the attack on Rangiriri Pa in November, 1863. The settlement has continued as Mercer ever since, though there are current suggestions that the name revert to Te Paina.

Captain Henry Mercer.

Captain Henry Mercer was born in Northern Ireland in 1831. He joined the Royal Artillery and served in the Crimean Peninsula War (1853-56) before arriving in New Zealand in 1861. Mercer was posted to Taranaki and was engaged with the hostilities at Waitara. Mercer was then posted to the Albert Barracks in Auckland, where he lived in Symonds Street with his wife and three boys, taking an active part in the early life of Auckland. Mercer and his men were also engaged in the making of the Military Road between Drury and Queen’s Redoubt, Pokeno.

Mercer and his artillery unit were posted back to Taranaki where they were involved in several engagements against ‘hostile’ Māori. In due course, he and his men were returned to Auckland, being stationed at Queen’s Redoubt. From here Mercer helped supervise the construction of gunboats for deployment on the Waikato River.

The Waikato Wars had been going on for several months when in November 1863 Captain Mercer’s artillery unit was involved with General Cameron’s colonial troops attacking Rangiriri Pa. They met fierce resistance and were in fact driven back from the Pa. General Cameron issued the order that Captain Mercer, with 36 of his artillery men were to make a final attempt to breach the Pa. It was an act, which in the military jargon of the time, was called a ‘forlorn hope’. It was a term coined in the Crimean Peninsula War and referred to the practice of sending in a wave of troops into an attack mode that did not guarantee success. The casualty rate would invariably be high, with many deaths and frequently being led by a junior officer.

Mercer and his men attacked valiantly, but the strong resistance continued. Mercer was shot in the face and seriously wounded. He was dragged to a ditch where 20 other men lay dead or wounded. Two men were to receive the Victoria Cross that day, Assistant Surgeon William

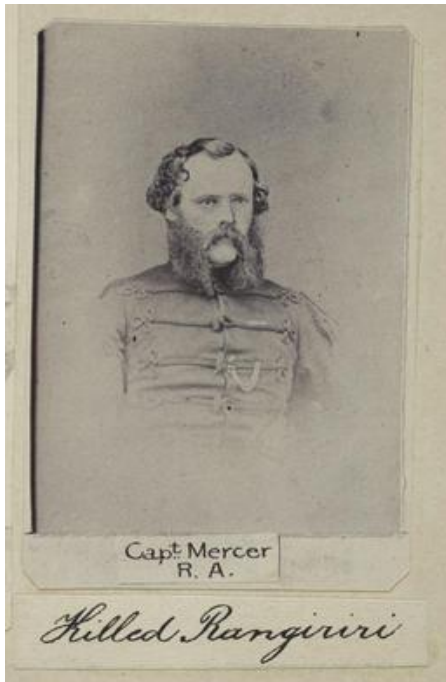


Image: Te Papa Tongarewa

Temple, who braved gun fire to attend to the wounded, including Mercer, and secondly, Lieutenant Arthur Pickard, who ran back through enemy fire to seek help and logistical support from General Cameron.

Mercer and the other wounded were taken back to the military hospital at Queen's Redoubt, Pokeno. Mrs Charlotte Mercer made the trip out from Auckland to visit her husband, who died after five days. His body was taken back to Auckland where he received a funeral with full Military Honours and lies buried at the Symonds Street Cemetery. Charlotte Mercer later returned to England with their three sons.

It was felt more appropriate to name the settlement after a heroic officer, than after a politician, who gained to profit from his controversial war policies.

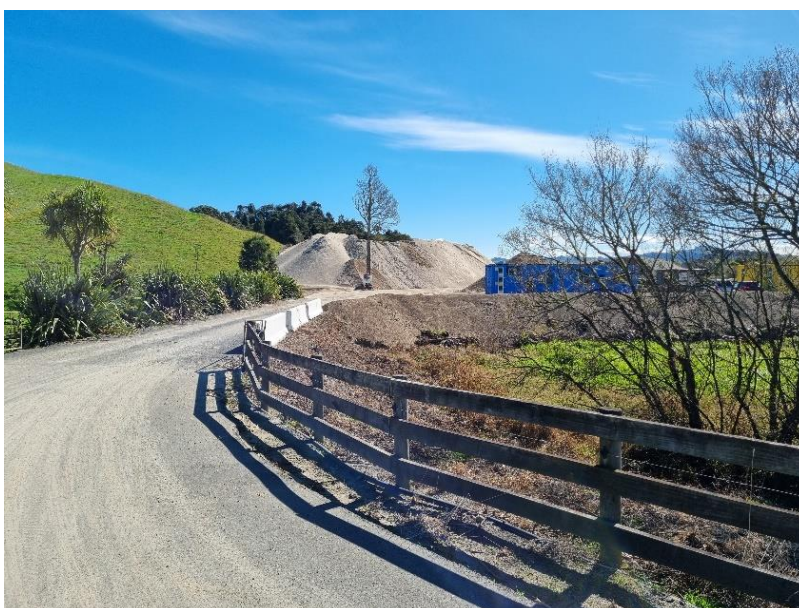
Sources: Queen's Redoubt Trust Newsletter, December 2013 and NZ Papers Past Daily Southern Cross 30 November 1863

Mercer flourishes.

For many years the road south from Auckland ended at Mercer for 'wheeled' traffic. Passengers and freight were then taken from Mercer up the Waikato River by paddle steamer. It therefore became an important stopping-off point. In 1866 construction of a wharf was begun.

The railway from Auckland reached Mercer in 1875. As this was the terminus at the time, river transport was still important.

By 1879 Mercer had a Hall, the Point Russell Hotel by the river with its stables, a store and the Railway Hotel, the school and sundry other buildings. It was also a centre for industry with several flax mills in the vicinity, a sawmill established in 1900, a creamery established in



1896, among other initiatives. The deep sand and pumice deposits were mined along the river flats to the north and south by a succession of companies, including that of Caesar Roose, which continue to this day, now run by Holcim.

*Holcim pumice
sand extraction
Mercer Ferry
Road in 2024.*

Photo: B Owen

Mercer School – Te Paina School.

The school opened in 1875 located at 35 Koheroa Road, just across the road and slightly downhill from St Jude's church. The schoolhouse was on the same site as the head teacher's residence. By 1901 there were 68 children on the roll. In 1963 the school moved to its present site on Glass Road. By contrast in 2024 there were 66 students on the roll, for this Year One to Eight school, which changed its name in 2021 to Te Paina School, to reflect the Maori heritage of the district. Former pupils include Princess Te Puea and Caesar Roose who attended the school at the same time.

Caesar Roose.

No coverage of the Mercer story would be complete without the inclusion of the story of



Caesar Roose. The impact he had on Mercer, the Waikato River valley and beyond were significant. Caesar Roose was variously, ship owner and operator, bridge builder, flax and timber miller, sand dredger, community leader and philanthropist. His story is worth reading and copies are available at the Mercer Museum, written by his daughter Jeanette Thomas.

Caesar was the son of Caesar Henry Roose, who was a German by birth and his mother Mary and born in July 1886 at Mercer on nearby Tuora Island, a 67 acre property owned and farmed by the family, adjacent to the Waikato River. Caesar grew up on the riverside learning its ways from a very young age. His entrepreneurial spirit started when, as a young man, he had bought his own flax mill.

But it was the river that attracted him and by the time he was 23 he had obtained his river steamer Master's Certificate and three years later his Engineer's Certificate.

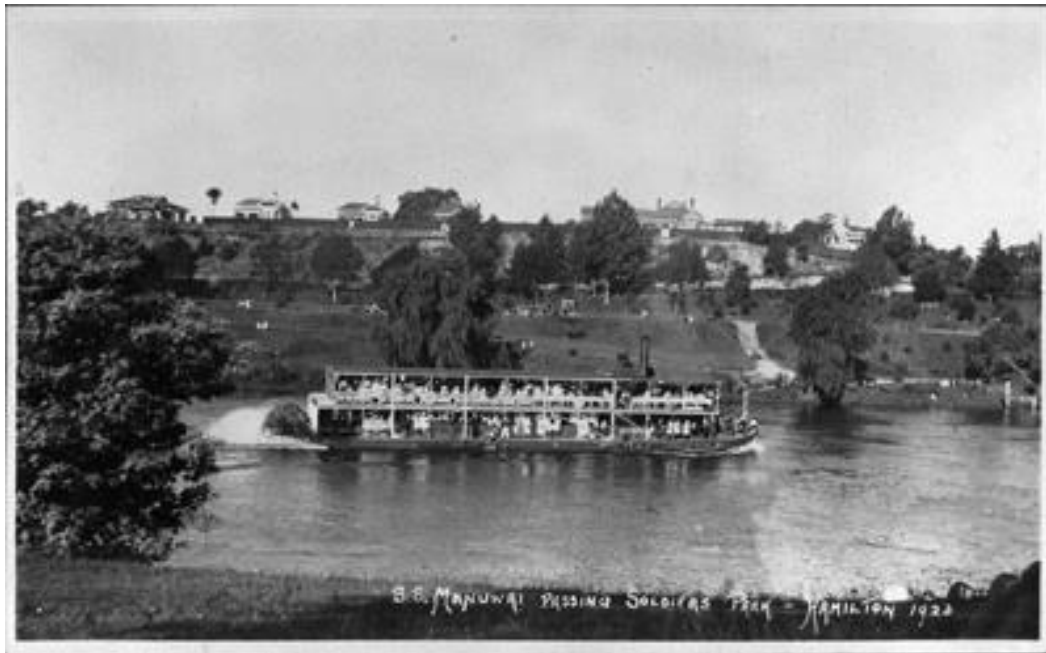
Caesar Roose

Photo: Hamilton City Library

Still in his mid-twenties Caesar Roose then started a shipping service on the river. So successful was it that he was able to build a five bedroomed homestead on Tuora Island, on the family farm. By 1915 he had started a regular river boat service between Mercer and Cambridge, though by 1916 he sold his boat to the Waikato Shipping Company.

During the First World War Caesar Roose, served at Trentham and Featherston Military Camps. On his return it was back to the river having a launch of his own, the Aurora, which was a charter vessel for duck shooting and fishing parties. As if this was not enough Caesar Roose also bought timber mills at Mercer and Katikati, becoming a major exporter of timber to Australia, as well as supplying kahikatea to a box factory in Tauranga. It must be understood that for many years kahikatea, or white pine as it was known as, was the preferred timber for butter box packing for export.

It is also interesting that Caesar Roose had a connection with Te Puea Herangi (Princess Te Puea, whose Mercer connection follows) having attended Mercer School at the same time. In 1921 Roose helped to transport Te Puea and her extended whanau from Mangatawhiri to the Turangawaewae Marae at Ngāruawāhia.



Paddle Steamer Manuwai on Waikato River Hamilton, 1923

Image: Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato

In 1922 Roose re-entered the shipping business forming the Roose Shipping Company taking over the Waikato Shipping Company. His vessels ran regular services up and down the River from Hamilton and Cambridge, and even up the Waipa River, down to Port Waikato and beyond. In 1925 he commissioned the paddle steamer *Rawhiti*, which was the largest vessel at the time, to ply the Waikato operating between Hamilton and Port Waikato.



The Caesar Roose Bridge on Mercer Ferry Road

Photo: B Owen

In 1931 Caesar Roose married Gladys, with their only child, Jeanette, born in 1934. Among his other achievements were to become a major shareholder in the Holm Shipping Company which was involved in the coastal cargo shipping around the New Zealand coast. But that was not all. His interests included the ownership of a coal mine (1922); building the Fairfield Bridge in Hamilton (1933-36); helping with the construction of the Ngāruawāhia road bridge and the Tuakau Bridge.

Some of Caesar Roose' other remarkable achievements include:-

- Purchasing an American tank landing craft which became the third Rawhiti and arguably the first 'drive on drive off' vessel in New Zealand, capable of carrying up to 3,000 tons of cargo. It operated throughout the Pacific.
- He served on the Auckland Harbour Board
- In the 1950's he was involved in the oil exploration in Taranaki and helped launched Egmont Wells Ltd.
- In the 1920's to 1930's he was involved in setting up a Children's Health Camp at Port Waikato.
- He gifted land to the Mercer Rowing Club for a pavilion, now the Counties-Manukau Rowing Club..
- Donated \$100,000 towards the cost of the bridge across the Waikato at Mercer linking with Mercer Ferry Road, which was opened in 1972, replacing the Mercer ferry! Appropriately the bridge is named The Caesar Roose Bridge.
- As well he campaigned vigorously in his lifetime as an advocate for river transport arguing for the dredging of the Waikato River and the building of a Waiuku-Waikato River canal for shipping, but also flood control.

He died in July 1967 and is buried at Mercer Cemetery, near his beloved Waikato River.

Source: Wikipedia, Caesar Roose



Lining up for the Mercer ferry 1927

Photo: Waikato District Council Libraries

The Railway Station.

Mercer Railway Station was opened on 20 May 1875. The original station building burned down in 1879, and its replacement burned down in 1900!! On both occasions it was rebuilt with the station being the first refreshment stop south of Auckland until 1958.

Initially, the railway station was the terminus with a short branch line connecting with the Waikato Steam navigation company boats who plied the Waikato River between Hamilton and Port Waikato. This was short lived with the main trunk line being completed over challenging swampland to Ngaruawahia by 1877. The Mercer Railway Station was well provided for with a large refreshment room and bar, a ladies' room, a public room, booking office, stationmaster's office and the post and telegraph office. Associated with the station was a large engine shed, a pump house, and coal shed. With 9 staff including the station master, porter cadet, two engine drivers, two firemen and two greasers, eight railway cottages were provided for the staff.

The poet A R D Fairburn had this to say about the Mercer refreshment rooms:

*The thought occurs to those who are entrained:
The squalid tea of Mercer is not strained'*

He must have struck a bad day!!! .

Sources: Wikipedia -Mercer Railway Station - Encyclopedia of NZ -Waikato Places

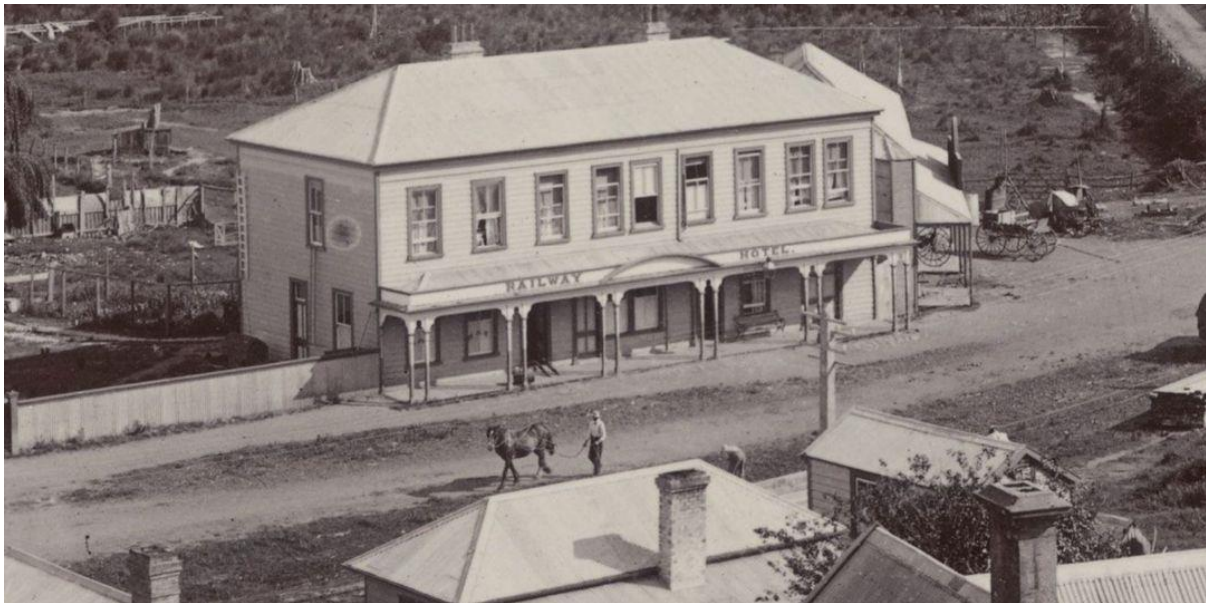


Mercer Station

Photo: Hamilton City Library

Mercer Railway Station was not without its dramas. In 1899 an engine cleaner died while trying to jump on to a moving train from the Mercer Station platform. The train was at the end of its run from Auckland and was in the process of moving to a siding and the engine shed. The cleaner sustained fatal injuries, including having his legs crushed. *(Source: NZ Herald, 1899)*

In October 1940, the Limited Express from Wellington jumped the rails about 400 yards from the Mercer station. The engine fell flat on its side, protruding over the rails causing serious damage to the carriage which ran past it. The engine driver and fireman were killed, and ten passengers were injured. *(Franklin Times, 30 October 1940)*



The Railway Hotel, Mercer 1900

Image: Auckland Public Library

The Mercer Police station and Magistrates Court.

The Mercer Police Station was situated close to the railway station. With the building constructed in 1877, there was a courthouse with a residence and a stable. The stipendiary magistrate held court once a month, with minor cases being overseen by local justices of the peace. The district, under the control of the local constable, extended from Tuakau to Rangiriri and from Miranda towards Raglan on the other side of the river. Quite an area given horseback transport being the only means of travel at the time!! The cells can now be found adjacent to Te Paina School, in need of restoration, having been moved there in the 1970's.

Source: Cyclopedia of NZ -Mercer

The Mercer Morgue.

Few people these days are even aware that cemetery morgues, especially in some rural areas, existed in New Zealand. In the early part of the twentieth century, it was incumbent upon local authorities to provide a facility in rural areas at a time when rapid transportation to city or hospital morgues was impossible. It provided a private place for a coroner or doctor to inspect the body to enable a cause of death to be established. Frequently, the custom had been for a local hotel to provide a space for the necessary inspections to take place, often in somewhat rudimentary conditions, as it was at Mercer.

The 1896 Morgues Act required cities or boroughs containing at least 1000 people to contain a public morgue. Licensed publicans continued to be required to take bodies if they were more than three miles from the nearest public morgue, as in the case of Mercer.

The Mercer Morgue, to be found in the Mercer Cemetery, was built in 1936. It succeeds the very unsatisfactory morgue facilities provided at the Mercer Hotel until then.

The Mercer Cemetery morgue construction was initiated by the exposure by the *NZ Truth* newspaper campaigning about poor morgue facilities, including '*the airless structure forming part of the Mercer Hotel*'.



The somewhat delapidated Mercer Morgue

Photo: B Owen

The article commented specifically on the state of the Mercer facilities *‘with a pigsty adjacent to the makeshift premises that held tupapaku (bodies) ahead of a coronial inquiry.’* Such a situation would be abhorrent to any family these days, but in the context of Māori tradition, it was quite unacceptable.

Within a month of publication, the Mercer Town Board commissioned and funded a purpose-built morgue, located at the Cemetery. The new morgue contained more up to date facilities than the hotel morgue, including up to date sanitary facilities, ventilation, washable surfaces and a water supply. The construction allowed for dignity and privacy. Because the facility in the past held both pakeha and Māori bodies, the site is tapu. The fact that Māori bodies or tupapaku were held there at all was a bone of contention with local iwi, being against their cultural traditions. It is understood that the Mercer Morgue continued to be used until the early 1960’s.

In 2021 the Mercer Morgue was granted Heritage status, with a category 2 listing, by Heritage New Zealand. The Rev’d Joanna Katipa, who grew up in Mercer and remembers the Morgue well. *‘It was a scary place. It was eerie. I went in there to have a look as a kid, but you never went there by yourself. We always went there as a group.’* She and fellow priest, the Rev’d Cruz Karauti-Fox have recently blessed the building. The Mercer Community Committee are looking to raise funds for the refurbishment of the Morgue which is certainly showing its age and lack of recent care.

Source: Heritage NZ -Mercer Morgue

The Mercer War Memorial Gun Turret

The War Memorial Gun Turret outside the Mercer Museum, on the corner of Roose Road and Riverbank Road, is not only unique, but internationally significant. The turret is one of the earliest surviving revolving gun turrets of its kind in the world. With its sister turret in Ngaruawahia, it was the first to be built in the southern hemisphere.

The turret itself is from the colonial gunship the *Pioneer*, an iron clad paddle steamer built in Australia, in 1863, for military operation on the Waikato River. The *Pioneer* saw significant service in the Land Wars of 1863-64, including the transportation of troops and supplies to the battlefields, the reconnaissance enemy positions, and shelling defended pa including the battles at Meremere and Rangiriri.

The revolving turret was an innovation introduced first in 1859, allowing gunships to fire in several directions, without having to manoeuvre into the traditional broadside position. The Mercer gun turret for the *Pioneer* was designed to include a 24-pound rotating artillery gun within the circular cupola, with four artillery ports through which the gun could be fired. It also included fifteen gun slits for rifle fire.



After the war the gun turret was removed from the boat and moved to the riverside at Mercer where it is said to have been used as a cell to hold drunken locals. The *Pioneer* boat itself was another victim of the Manukau Bar, sinking there in 1866.

In the early 1920's the turret at Mercer was converted into a War Memorial for local men who served in the First World War. It was officially unveiled by the Governor General, Lord Jellicoe in 1922.

There is no question that the Mercer gun turret is historically significant, not only for its historic value of one of the few remaining gun turrets of the era, but also as a weapon of war against Waikato Māori during the Land Wars. Consequently, as a war memorial it presents problems for local iwi. Source: Heritage NZ – 'Pioneer' Gun Turret and War Memorial

The Mercer War Memorial Gun Turret

Photo: B Owen

Call to Shift Gun Turret 'used to kill our people'.

Ngati Noho Trust, Chief Executive Hadyn Solomon, a resident of Mercer, declares '*It's not appropriate to have it in the middle of a community where people's tupuna (ancestors) were directly affected by war.*' Ngati Noho have approached the Waikato District Council with a view to moving the turret to the Pokeno Redoubt Museum, who have accepted the proposal. The suggestion is that the soldier statue on top of the turret remain at Mercer as part of a

redesigned War Memorial. Though the proposal to move the turret to Pokeno has the support of local Māori and many other residents, there are still some who are opposed to the change. As of July 2023, it was still a work in progress as the finer details are worked through.

Source: Waikato times: 11 July 2023

Mercer Opposition to the 1916 Conscription Act.

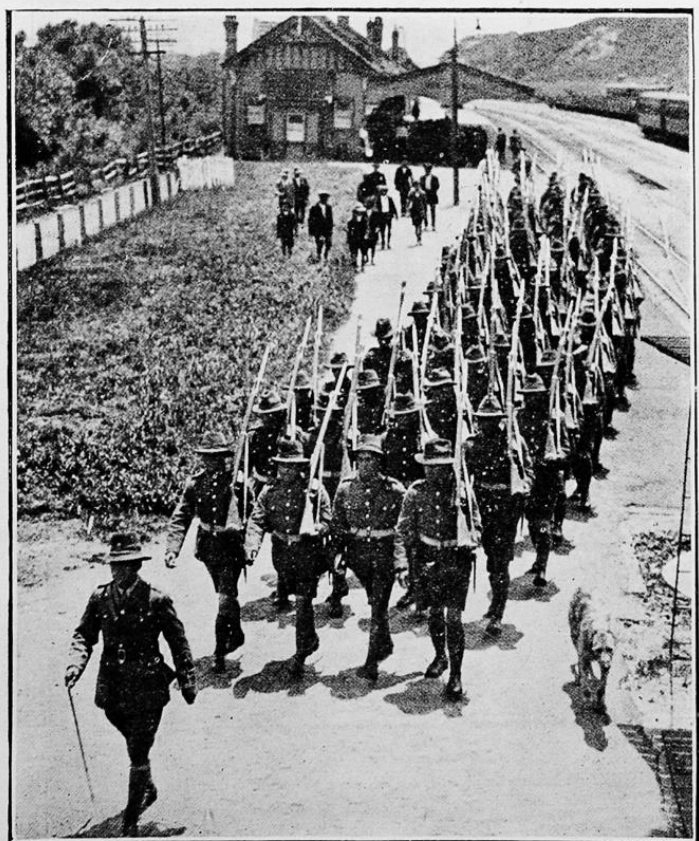
Whilst it is generally understood that conscription became part of New Zealand's contribution to the First World War effort, little is known about how that impacted Māori.

On 1 August 1916 the Military Service Act became law initially imposing conscription on Māori. In July 1917 the Conscription Act was amended to include Māori, but the target of this extension was Waikato Māori. The first ballot was drawn in May 1918. Just 59 of those called up reported for their medical exam, with half of those declared unfit for service. It was up to the police to find the 141 defaulters. The consequence of the non-appearance, unless they had good reason, would be that they would be arrested and taken to the Narrow Neck Military Camp in Auckland.

One of the alleged defaulters, Te Rauangaanga Mahuta, happened to be the youngest brother of the Maori King. Despite being 16 years old, and therefore not eligible for the ballot, a telegram was sent asking why he had not appeared. When no reply was received Hamilton police were instructed to arrest him. Because, at the time there was no legal requirement for Maori to register their births, he would have trouble proving his age.

About a week later, police learned that the young Te Rauangaanga was attending a big hui at Te Paina/Mercer. On 11 June 1918 a party of eight specially chosen police, including a former police officer stationed at Mercer, was sent out to the meeting. They found a group of 400 gathered at the Te Paina Pa. The hui was expecting them.

The police were escorted into the crowded hall where Princess Te Puea Herangi invited the police to state the purpose of their visit. The Police Sergeant in charge stated *'We have come to apprehend the men whose names appeared in the papers as having been balloted. We look to you, Te Puea to help us identify the men whose names I will read from the list. Although I would*



THE MEETING AT MERCER TO WIN MAORI RECRUITS: MAORI SOLDIERS FROM THE TRAINING CAMP AT AUCKLAND ON THE WAY TO THE GATHERING.

Image: Auckland Public Libraries -Sir George Grey Special Collections. Ref: AWNS-19161130-38-4

like it better if the men themselves would come forward as I read out their names’.

Rising to her feet, Te Puea greeted those present in the traditional manner before responding to the sergeant, *‘These people are mine. I will not agree to my people going to shed blood. Though your words be strong, you will not move me to help you. The young men who have been balloted will not go. You can fight your own fight until the end.’*

Strong words indeed!!

The Sergeant read the list of names. As expected, there was no response. The Sergeant ordered Te Rauanganga to be arrested as he was sitting in a place of honour at the front. He had to be carried out. Te Puia called after her young cousin, *‘Be patient. Let the spirit of your father and also the spirit of your ancestors be with you. God Bless you’.*

In the end only six other men were arrested, and reports of the time suggest that had it not been for Te Puea’s presence there could well have been bloodshed. The seven men were taken by train to Auckland where they were conveyed by ferry to the Narrow Neck Army Camp.

Source: NZ Herald on Sunday, 2 June 2019

Te Puea’s Vigil.

The story does not end here. In the last months of the War in 1918, Princess Te Puea established a temporary camp on Vauxhall Road at Narrow Neck, Devonport. Her presence provided visible support to the Waikato Māori forcibly held there. Acts of passive resistance continued for some within the camp, like refusing to dress in military uniform. For this they were punished, fed bread and water, made to parade in front of other conscripts, deprived of blankets and made to sleep on bare wooden boards. Some were even sent to Mt Eden goal and sentenced to hard labour.



Te Puea Herangi

Photo: Waikato Times

In the end only 74 Māori conscripts went to camp out of 552 men called up and none were sent overseas. When the War ended in November 1918 all the Māori in training were sent home and all outstanding warrants for arrest were cancelled. Others who were imprisoned were finally released in May 1919.

The imposition of conscription on the Waikato people had long lasting effects, even to this day, with the Waikato-Tainui Deed of Settlement signed in 1995.

The Mercer Domain.

The Mercer Domain Recreation Reserve adjacent to the Waikato River and the Mangatawhiri Stream confluence is not well known to many. It is perhaps better known in more recent times as a weekend motocross site and is largely hidden from the expressway and the Service Centre. Yet to local Ngati Naho and Ngati Tamaoho the land is culturally significant to them in

many ways. Apart from being the site of ancestral land, it was the land on which the colonial forces crossed the Mangatawhiri River line in an act of War. It is also the site where the police arrested those Māori who were objecting to Conscription, with the support of Princess Te Paea. As part of confiscated land, rautapu, there have been moves by local iwi to have the land returned to their care.

Currently the 40 hectare reserve is managed by the Department of Conservation. In 2022 a process of transfer to local iwi was begun by the Department. In 2024 it is still a work in progress.

Source: NZ Herald 21 July 2022

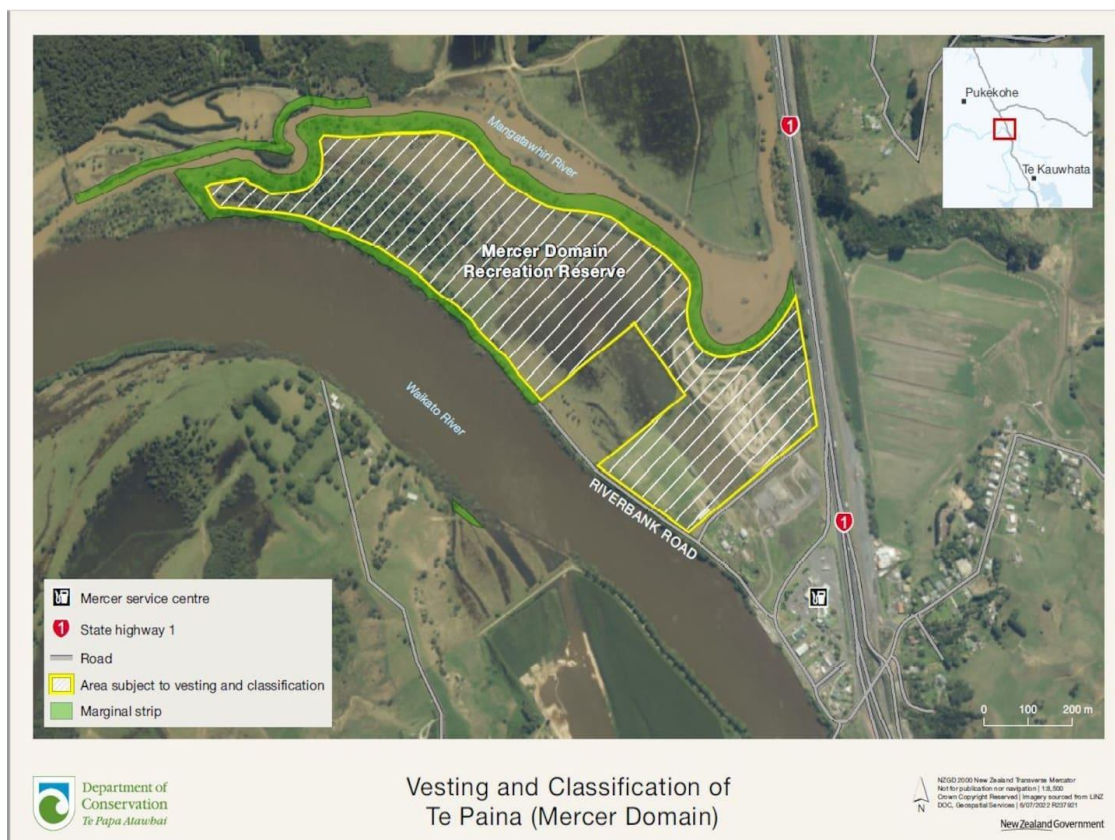


Image: Dept of Conservation

Mercer Rowing Club.

The Mercer Rowing Club was established in 1909 and continues to be a very successful Club to the present day. With the Waikato River having water that is suitable for training upstream and downstream, it is a Club that has, over the decades, produced regional and international representatives.



At the time of writing (2024) numerous local schools, Pukekohe High School, Te Kauwhata College, Onewhero Area School, Waiuku College and Tuakau College all share the equipment, facilities, and coaching, free of charge to the schools, and supported by a team of master rowers. The school teams compete for the Mercer Club for two thirds of

the year and then compete for their school in the last third, enabling them to compete in the

National Championships, if good enough. With its reputation, its facilities and proximity to Auckland the club has become increasingly recognised as a venue for training camps.



The new Rowing Club building on the west bank.

Photo: B. Owen

The Mercer Regatta is held annually in December, set on a 1500 metre course against the current! As the writer of this history, as a personal comment, I recall in the late 1950's rowing for Tauranga Boys' College A team at Mercer, not that we gained a place! At least the current upstream was not as fast and hard as the upstream course at Hamilton where the river is narrower, therefore causing faster river flow!!!

Source: Mercer Rowing Club



Left: The old Rowing Club building on the town side of the river, now home to the Counties Manukau Rowing Club. The hall above the boat sheds has been named *The Jeanette Thomas Pavilion*, after Caesar Roose daughter Jeanette.

Photo: B Owen

Mercer Service Centre



Mercer Service Centre

Photo: Bayley's Real Estate

No account of the settlement of Mercer would be complete without mention of the service centre. Anyone visiting today will be impressed by its busyness, in attractive surroundings by the Waikato River and adjacent to the Waikato Expressway. To be served by a MacDonalds, a café, or perhaps a full English Breakfast at Pokeno Bacon, together with a popular Irish Pub, what more could one want? By contrast, in the name of progress its construction saw the removal of much of Mercer's iconic past. Such is progress!

By the mid 1990's Mercer was undergoing some fundamental changes. It was in decline. Sand dredging on the Waikato Riverbed had ceased. The railway operations at the Mercer railway station had closed for good. The nearby Pokeno township had started to expand, but above all the Waikato Expressway was realigned to by-pass Mercer.

The Stevenson Group saw an opportunity, and having gained Franklin County Council consent, proceeded demolish or remove some of the iconic buildings of Mercer, such as the Railway Hotel, to form the new service centre. As the story of the church of St Jude is revealed, it will be noted that there was an opportunity to move the church from its current site in Koheroa Road, to a site on the new development. That story is for later!

The new centre opened progressively from 1997, incorporating a MacDonald's outlet, Pokeno Bacon, Esquire's Café and a Mobil Service centre. The popular Muddy Waters Irish Pub, is a nearby separate entity from the service centre itself.

The day to day 'busyness' of the site reinforces the demand for service centres along busy highways. Like it or not, it has given a new employment focus for the Mercer residents.

Source: NZ Herald, 14 October 2004

Mercer Cheese.

These days the name Mercer has become synonymous with Mercer Cheese. The energy behind the Mercer Cheese story is Albert Alferink, who emigrated to New Zealand in 1973 from the Netherlands. On one of his trips back to his home country, Alfred realised that his dream was to be able to make good cheese. In 1979 he found a job with a cheese factory in Rotterdam. When he felt he was experienced enough he returned to New Zealand bringing with him cheese making equipment.



Photo: B.Owen

Initially, he worked from a dairy farm near Meremere, using a building on the property that the owner let him use. Gradually he built up his herd of cows. 1983 was a pivotal year when Albert moved to another farm near Meremere buying milk from another farmer and made cheese. In the same year he opened his cheese shop in Mercer.

He got married to his wife, Ineke, in the early 1990's, eventually finding their own farm of 40 acres at Onewhero, including a building suitable for cheese making. As pressure of work increase Albert changed from dairy farm to cheese maker only, having a neighbour supply the milk.

Mercer cheese is a name synonymous with quality, with regular customers returning for their favourites including Gouda, herb cheeses, plus some goats cheese and walnut soft cheese among many other choices.

Source: Farmer Trader; 5 February 2008

Mainline Steam.

Readers will be aware that three steam locomotives have been in storage, laid up at the side of the North Island main Trunk line. These trains are owned by the Mainline Steam Train Trust. The plan is to make Mercer a focus for these and other steam trains of the past with a purpose-built facility which includes museum for truck and train, with railway works shops and a café.



One of the South African steam locomotives belonging to Mainline Steam, adjacent to the NIMT. *Photo: B Owen*

The proposal has the support of the local community and has Waikato District Council consent. At the time of writing (2024) the earthworks for the project are underway. As well as containing a large carriage shed and workshops, there will be a substantial truck museum and a café. It is a facility which when completed will put Mercer on the tourist map.

Source: Mainline Steam Train Trust



The concept plan for the Museum

Image: Mainline Steam Trust

Mercer Museum

The Mercer Museum was established by Jeanette Thomas in 2013 to showcase Mercer and its river trade and in honour of her father, Caesar Roose. The house was built by Arthur Glass, but since the 1930's had been owned by the Fatt family, who worked locally. The Museum opening hours are: Friday and Saturdays 10.00am to 2.00pm

Arthur Glass was born in England around 1858 and later emigrated to New Zealand where he met his wife Isabella when he was working on a sheep station in the Hawkes Bay for about five



years. They moved to Northland, where it is said he 'bush farmed', while his wife was Postmistress at Broadwood. Arthur and his family relocated to Mercer where he continued farming. One of his achievements was being founder of the New Zealand Farmers' Union. Glass Road is named after the family.

Source: Wikitree: Arthur Glass

Photo: B Owen

Mercer Fire Station (right)

‘The Mercer Fire brigade's station in 1972. This was the original building built to house the trailer pump in 1965. On the right of the station is the old Mercer Town Council office and to the right of this the Mercer Hall.’ (Franklin Courier, 26 August 1980,)



Photo: Mercer Museum Facebook

Mercer Fire station 1980-2021. (Left)
In 2021 the fire Service relocated to the new Pokeno Fire Station.



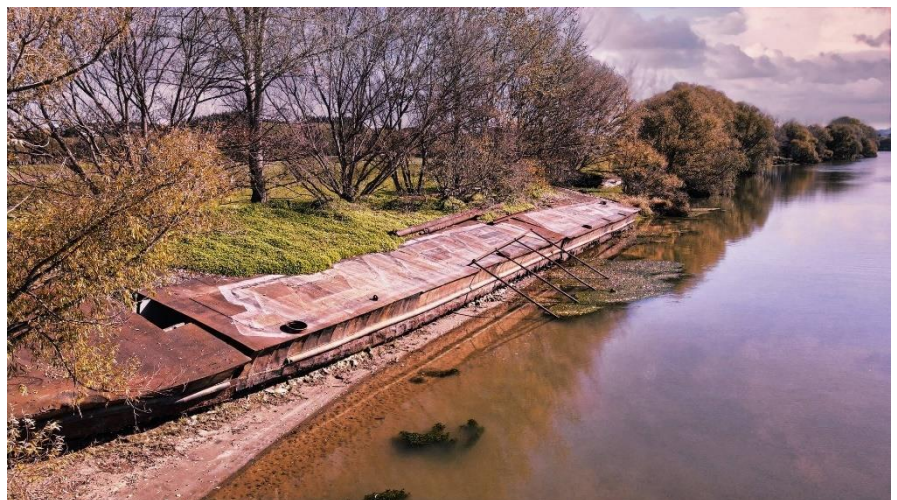
(Right): The original Mercer Police station cells, now located in Glass Road, by Te Paina School



Remains of the "Rawhiti II", Waikato River

The hulk of the old Waikato paddle steamer, the *Rawhiti II*, lies on the side of the Waikato River slowly being reclaimed by rust and creeper.

It is believed to be the last surviving remnant of the trading vessels of entrepreneur, Caesar Roose, whose launches, steamers and barges carried on a busy commerce on the lower Waikato River from the 1920's to the 1960's.



Source: Mercer Museum Facebook

The *Rawhiti II* was built in Glasgow to Roose's specifications (190ft x 35ft x 5ft) in 3/16th-inch steel and shipped to New Zealand in parts where it was reassembled at the Roose Shipping yard at Mercer. The rear paddle wheel had a diameter of 20ft and a width of 20ft. An interesting feature was the funnel, which was hinged so that it could be swung down to allow the craft to travel under bridges on the river. All the machinery and upper decks appear to have been removed before it was pushed on to the western bank about 1km south of Mercer.



Riverview Private Hotel and service station. Date unknown.

Photo: Mercer Museum Facebook

Mercer Post Office

The original Mercer Post Office, the right-hand building.

Photo: Auckland Museum Collections



The next Mercer Post Office was completed in 1929. It has remained derelict after being closed some years ago.

Photo: Mercer Museum Facebook

Mercer Sunday Markets

In 2024 the Pokeno Sunday Markets closed for good and moved to a site at Mercer across the road from the service centre. It continues to grow in popularity.

Mercer Service Centre and Waikato Expressway – aerial view



Google maps

Part Two

It is in the context of the story of Mercer that we can now look at the story of St Jude's Church.....

The The Little Church that Tried

A Seed is Sown

The Church Gazette, November 1903, records that vigorous attempts were being made by the local people of Mercer to build a church. It seems that this campaign was being initiated by the local Māori, but supported by the rest of the community. From the local iwi perspective it was desirable to build a marae and a church, though there was a willingness to consider a hall that could serve a double purpose.

To fund the project, local Māori committed to contributing a guinea, or a half guinea each, according to their means. Under the leadership of the Rev'd H B Wingfield, Vicar of Pokeno, the non-Māori community have raised £35, being the proceeds of a bazaar, raising funds for a church at Mercer. Offers of help to build a church came in the form of the Rev'd Wingfield offering to help with the plans and further financing; the local Māori Pastor, the Rev'd Nokora Tautau, offering to oversee the construction process, as he had carpentry experience, as well as a local resident '*promising to see the carpenter paid*'.

The article notes that if such a church is built, it will be the first church built in the area for local iwi since the Land Wars. At the time of publication some £69 had been raised. The church, if built, would be a further step forward in bringing Christianity to the Maori people of the Waikato.

There is no further evidence that such a church for local iwi was built, nor indeed why it might have failed to be built, given the initial support and enthusiasm.

A Seedling is Planted

Clearly, the desire to build an Anglican church, or as it would have been called in those times, a Church of England church, had been on the minds of local residents since the 1903 venture. In 1913 it is recorded in the Pukekohe and Waiuku Times, 17 July, 1914, *that 'an old resident of Mercer promised a substantial donation if a church could soon be erected'*. The article comments on the search for a suitable site for the church to be built on. At the time, it seemed that every suitable site was either not available, or too costly.

The Pukekohe and Waiuku Times on 1 May, 1914 announced that Mr C W Langdon of Mercer had '*presented the Rev'd L Foulkes, Vicar of the Pokeno Parish, of which Mercer is part, a section on which to build a church*'. The article records the gratitude of local people for this generous donation, thereby removing one of the main obstacles in the building of a church in the town. It was suggested that a church could be built in two months.

Mr Langdon was the local butcher, having a butcher shop at the Mercer shops. Mr Langdon was also involved in the Local Roads Board. The 12 June edition of the same newspaper recorded that Mr J K Ledger had the property surveyed and presented a plan free of charge. Mr George Lippiatt, together with family and friends organised a successful fundraising

evening at the Mercer Town Hall. Further newspaper reports of the time show that the local community got in behind the project. More money was raised, together with gifts of labour and materials, so that by Tuesday 14 July, 1914 the building was ready for opening.

A Grand Opening

The dedication service took place at 8.00pm on Tuesday 14 July, 1914. It is recorded in the Pukekohe Waiuku Times, 21 July 14, that the Bishop of Auckland, the Rt Rev'd Dr Averill was met at the train in Pokeno by Mr Francis Pyne of Pokeno, together with the Vicar of Pokeno, the Rev'd L Foulkes and several visiting clergy. All then proceeded to the residence of Miss Harriet Johnston of The Pines, Pokeno. A service was held at St Mary's at 3.00pm, with the Bishop preaching the sermon, based on the theme of the healing of the blind man at Jericho.

After the service the Bishop was taken to Mercer for the dedication of the church of St Jude.

A newspaper report of the occasion Pukekohe Waiuku Times, 17 July 1914, records that in spite of a terrific thunderstorm at the time, every seat was filled. Clergy in attendance were the Vicar of Pokeno, the Rev'd L Foulkes, with the Rev'ds J T McWilliam of Huntly, F B Dobson of Pukekohe, C A Vaughan of Waiuku and the Maori Pastor from Hopuhopu.



Bishop Averill National Library

The service began with Mr Tribe, on behalf of the congregation, requesting that the Bishop dedicate the church *'to the honour and glory of God and to the memory of St Jude'*.

In his sermon, the Bishop quoted from the Epistle of Jude, quoting the third verse, *'Contend earnestly for the faith was once for all delivered unto the saints'*. The newspaper



St Jude's Nave view

Photo: B Owen

reports a summary of the Bishop's message as *'Comparing the outspokenness of St Jude with the indifference of the present day'*; the Bishop pointed out that *'there was a wave of animalism passing through the world at the present time. Whereas God has given to man (sic) spiritual faculties that should be exercised by prayer, many men (sic) are satisfied to live without prayer, a life of ease and comfort lower than that of animals'*. A blunt message perhaps!!

In concluding his address, the Bishop congratulated the people of Mercer, noting that he would watch with interest the effect the church would have on the township. He also thanked all who had assisted in its building, especially to those who had given the land and a large contribution to *the cost*.

Reports of the time comment on the part that the Vicar, the Rev'd Foulkes played in the building of the church. It seems he was on the scene of operations every day, with his coat off, hard at work. *'He had to get up before daylight and did not arrive home again until after dark. It is due to his efforts that the church will be free of debt'.*

The church itself was described at the time as being forty feet long and twenty feet wide, with a high-pitched gothic roof, with handsome gothic windows and seating for 120 people. The original altar, with a handsome set of altar frontals, was the gift of the church in Epsom, presumably St Andrews, Epsom. The lectern was made by Mr Francis Pyne of Pokeno, with the prayer desk a gift of Mr Hill of Harrisville. Miss Harriet Johnston of Pokeno gave a 100 year old Bible. We assume that today the lectern and the prayer desks are the same, but there is no sign of the Bible, which would have been a quality one and of historic value today, had it still existed.
gifted



*Is this Francis Pyne's
lectern?*

Photo: B Owen

Who was St Jude?

Traditionally St Jude is the patron saint of hopeless, or lost causes. One could argue that if ever a church was aptly named it was the church of St Jude, Mercer!

St Jude was one of the original twelve apostles of Jesus. He is the reputed author of the letter of Jude, the shortest book in the Bible, found just before the Book of the Revelation.

John 14:22 mentions *'Judas, but not Iscariot'*, to avoid any connection with Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. It is suggested that the tradition of calling him Jude instead of Judas,



is to avoid such confusion. There seems to be a considerable debate among scholars as to whom Jude might be. For some he is named the brother of Jesus. The New Revised Version of the Bible names Jude as *'most likely the Judas, the brother of Jesus'*, with his letter being written around AD65. He is also described as Judas Thaddeus. The letter of Jude begins verse 1, *'Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James'*. It also must be noted that Judas is the Greek use of the word, whilst Jude is the English transliteration.

Tradition suggests that Jude preached the gospel in many countries associated with what we would now call the Middle East. It is also suggested that Jude was a farmer by background.

The medallion, hanging around St Jude's neck in the image, is an impression of Jesus, known as the 'Image of Edessa'. King Abgar of Edessa (now part of Turkey) was suffering from a serious illness. He had heard of Jesus healing others and called for Jesus to heal him. Jesus pressed his own face onto a piece of cloth and gave it to St Jude to present to King Abgar.

According to tradition, Jude suffered martyrdom around 65AD in Beirut, in the Roman province of Syria, together with Simon the Zealot. His bones are to be found in the crypt of St Peter's Basilica, Rome.

Source: Wikipedia

A Church for the Community

Very few records exist for the early years of St Jude's church. Though the parish has the Central Vestry minutes for the period, there is virtually no reference to St Jude's. Indeed, it is to Paper's Past that we can get the most information.

The first such article was about the occasion of a wedding held in August 1919. The article tells of a great occasion for a well-known family of the bride with the church being beautifully decorated and a crowded church. It is unlikely that this wedding is the only occasion and indeed no doubt there were funerals there as well.

Source: Pukekohe and Waiuku Times 8 August 1919

The First Twenty Years

Quite unlike the media of the 21st Century, all the local newspapers of the time reported on the activities of local areas in detail, whether it be for weddings, funerals, fund raising, welcomes and farewells and sports events and so on. The Franklin Times, for instance in November 1935 reports a surprise party for a Mrs Sellwood, put on by members of St Jude's church. It was a gathering of some 30 people, held at the Sellwood residence. The Vicar, of the time, the Rev'd H G Taylor, praised Mrs Sellwood for her many acts of kindness and wished her well in her move to Howick. Her gifts included an inscribed fountain pen, as well as a bouquet of roses and an asparagus fern.

A Coat of Paint

By 1937 the church had been open 23 years and it was time for a repaint for St Jude's. In July 1937 the *Franklin Times* reports that various fundraising events had taken place to raise the necessary finance for the project, which included a personal donation and a successful card evening. As we have no Vestry records for the period in question, we can only assume the painting was completed as planned.

The War Years

During the war years the Bombay and Pokeno church districts, including Mercer, came under the umbrella of Pukekohe Parish. This took place from 1942 to 1951. This means that records for that period are very limited.

It is interesting to note that the Church Committee of Bombay Pokeno met at St Jude's Church in September 1944. The Vicar of Pukekohe, the Ven T H C Partridge presided. Amongst other items it was reported '*Considerable discussion then ensued re: necessary alterations and*

renovations to the St Jude's building. Estimates were given for the cost of outside work being £17 10s 0d, with staining of the interior given as £14 0s 0d. The Ven. Partridge pointed out desirable alterations viz. entirely new altar, removal of a narrow step in front of the altar and setting back the altar rails dispensing with the choir seats. The meeting agreed to the work being done, as well as the felling of trees alongside the building'.

The November 1944 Church Committee meeting records that no progress had been made at St Jude's and the trees had not been felled. In March 1945 the meeting again noted that the trees should be felled without further delay, so that renovation work could begin. It was not until October 1945 that it was reported that the trees had finally been felled and that it was now possible for the renovations to begin. A discussion also followed as to whether it would be possible to move the church a few yards on to more level ground. It was also reported that for £7 a more suitable altar and other furniture could be obtained from the sale of property from the Papakura Army Camp.

The same meeting also reported that there was confusion with singing hymns at St Jude's because of different editions of the hymn books being used. Authority was given for the purchase of 12 hymn books at 3/6 (35 cents!!!) each.

The same meeting also decided to play 'musical organs' (author's interpretation). Previously, the Mercer organ had been loaned to St Mary's, whilst the St Mary's organ was loaned to the Island Block worship centre. Mercer, at that time, was closed with no services. The meeting agreed that St Jude's should receive its organ back and that the organ at Island Block be returned to St Mary's. To add to the complicated saga, it seems that St Jude's had two derelict organs, one reportedly belonging to the Presbyterians and the other to the Mercer Town Board. It seems both bodies denied ownership. It was agreed they should be sold or disposed of.

In July 1946 the Church Committee reported that the saga of repairs to St Jude's continued with work being done to the exterior but with urgent work still being required on the interior. In 1951 Bombay Pokeno is restored to a full Parochial District in its own right, separate from the parish of Pukekohe, a war time expediency.

A Question of Numbers

In a letter to Mr Lippiatt, People's Warden, in March 1951, Mr Alex McConnell expressed his concerns about the congregation numbers, on behalf of his wife. *'You may have heard how my wife tried to get the Church to start again (St Jude's) here and the best response she can ever got was 5 at any service the Rev Bell held'.* He further adds a damning indictment of the Mercer community, *'Mercer seems to me a real bad township, totally lacking in moral or spiritual virtue of any kind. We don't like bringing up a family in an environment of this kind, believe you me'.* He concludes by justifying not moving away by adding *'We have a lovely house, and I have a nice job, so it's got some recompense.'*

For the remainder of the 1950's church records are either non-existent or they contain no reference to St Jude's. The only references found include is a request in September 1953 for the evening service at St Jude's to be held at 6.00pm and in 1954 mention is made of altar curtains being made by the Guild, and Mr Coleman presenting 'a beautiful window' and

mention of '*the next step to have the church reblocked*'. There are no further indications that the reblocking ever took place.

Those Bees

Anyone having recent contact with St Jude's will be aware of an ongoing problem with bee infestations. Bee swarms had found the exterior wall at the north end of the building above the sanctuary area to be an ideal spot to establish their hives. In some years the infestations have been worse than others, despite various attempts to get rid of them. At various times bees have found their way into the building, with the consequence of finding dead bees all over the place when the church is opened up. Also beeswax and oozing honey have caused stains on the interior wall above the altar and over the decades more than one person has been stung by a bee, including children attending the more recent Thursday School programme with Janet McRobbie.

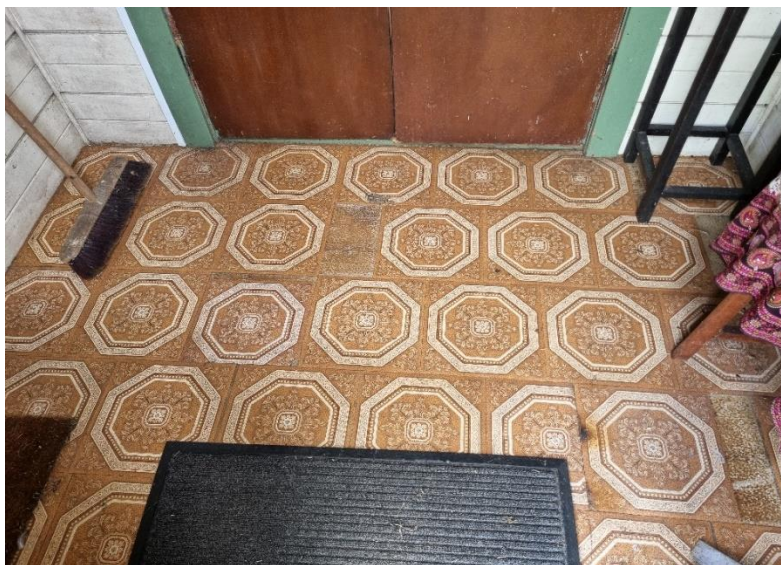
The first mention of a bee problem is found in the Mercer Church Committee minutes of February 1962 noting that there is a problem with bees. There is no reference to the action that might be taken. Over the following decades reports continued from time to time, with various suggestions about how to eradicate them.

The 1960's

We can now source our background information from several sources from the beginning of the 1960's, the Mercer Church Committee Minutes, the Mercer Ladies Guild, and the parish Magazine as well as the Central Vestry Minutes.

Maintenance in the 1960's

In each decade ongoing maintenance has been an issue. In February 1962 it was reported that the porch needed fixing, though it took a year before it was completed, which included lino being laid on the entrance floor.



Lino 1963 -2024

Great Service!

Photo: B Owen

In May 1963 it was proposed that the interior of the church be repainted. The colour chosen was 'Feather Blue' which was completed by March 1964. In the same year mosquito problems were reported with the suggestion that screens be installed. In the same year it was proposed

that an 80 gallon water concrete water tank be installed. However, there is no evidence in real terms, or with any mention that either of these proposals were actually completed!

By February 1967 discussions were being held about having the exterior painted as it would be about 30 years since the last exterior paint. The Vicar, the Rev'd Cecil Wright was reported to be kept busy keeping the gully beside the church clear of weeds and scrub.

The Altar Again

More discussion was held about replacing the altar which it was proposed should come from St Mary's. However, in February 1969 the Minutes show that the altar was brought in from Island Block/Kopu.



The Altar

Photo: B Owen

The 1970's

The average attendance during the 1970's was 6, with the highest recorded attendance being the Mercer School Centennial Service in 1976 when 120 attended. Even the Easter and Christmas services were not well attended, with Easter averaging 5 and Christmas faring a little better with 10. This resulted in Vicar, the Rev'd Brian Drake, to note the low attendances suggesting a review of the services being held in 1972. The concerns about low attendances were raised yet again in 1973 and 1974. The support from the local community was declining with St Jude's Ladies' Guild being the only womens' group in Mercer.

Those Bees Again

It seems that the bee problem reappeared in the mid 1970's. The first mention of the bees in this decade was early in 1974 when the bees were mentioned as a problem. During 1975 discussions were held about what should be done about the bees and who get to get advice from. By March 1976 the Minutes record that bee eradication was to be abandoned. It doesn't mention whether eradication procedures were successful or not, or whether the bees had declined of their own accord!

Gum Trees

In 1975 it was reported that five silver dollar gum trees were planted along the west side of the church as a screen. For those who were around in the '70's the silver dollar gum was the tree to plant. They were fast growers and many a 1970's garden had a silver dollar gum tree planted. Within a short period of time they became the curse of many suburban gardens. Within a couple of decades those trees at St Jude's had become a problem and most had to be removed.

Right: one of those gum trees still remains, leaning on a dangerous angle at the rear of the building.



Photo: B Owen

Now it is a Borer Problem.

The question of borer had been noted on numerous occasions, but in March 1978 it was resolved that quotes be obtained to repair the unsightly borer holes. A year later it is recorded that the borer holes have yet to be attended to. The Minutes for the Mercer Church Committee for the latter part of the decade focus on various maintenance issues. On a positive note, in 1977 it is recorded that carpet has been laid at the front of the church, which presumably means the sanctuary area.

The 1980's

The decade begins with reference to the fact that the borer holes, especially in the floor, still have not been attended to!! There has been no reference as to why there has been a lack of progress. Clearly the bees have reappeared as the March 1980 meeting of the Church Committee reports that the problem continues.

In March 1981 the future of the church is raised yet again by the Mercer Church Committee and it was resolved to raise the issue with Central Vestry.

More Maintenance Issues

A year later at their March 1982, Annual General Meeting, the Church Committee noted that the roofing iron was considered to be in need of repair and an offer to replace the roof was made. By the Annual Meeting in March 1983, despite the offer to cover the cost of replacing the roof, it was noted that nothing had been done.

Buzzzzzzz.....

The bees continue to buzz. During the first years of the decade the bees continued to be a problem with much discussion about what to do about the bees. Once again there was no easy solution it would seem.

The Future of the Church Hangs in the Balance

In March 1980 the question of the future of the church is raised. Low numbers in the congregation, together with the ongoing problems of maintenance cause concern. As an indication of the state of things at St Jude's, the 1984 Annual Meeting of the Mercer congregation was cancelled as no one turned up!! Only the Vicar, the Rev'd Chris Apthorp attended!!!

The next Annual Meeting of the St Jude's congregation was held in March 1985, and a long discussion about the future of St Jude's was held. The congregation had dwindled to such an extent that average attendance for the year was 5. Further, concerns were expressed about the church structure, its stability and safety. The Central Vestry were asked to investigate the closure of St Jude's.

The Mercer Vestry member of the time, Angela Morey sent out a letter in early 1985 pleading with local people to support St Jude's services, which at the time were held at 8.00am. Though the Vicar is reported to be open to services at another time, Angela Morey warned her readers, *'It is a major step to close a church, and possibly a very final one, as I personally can never see it being reopened again'*. According to the service register for 1985 there is no change, most services had two or three attending, the only exception being a service in September which was held at 10.00am, instead of 8.00am, that had 27 people attending. By contrast, the next two monthly services had one member of the congregation recorded as attending!

St Jude's is Shut down again

At the end of 1985 there was a decision to hold no more services in the meantime. It would be February 1988 before regular services were resumed under the new Vicar, the Rev'd R Hansen. The Vicar of the time the Rev'd Apthorp, announced in March 1986 in his Vicar's Annual Report to the Parish AGM, *'Following District meetings this year I now announce that services at Mercer will no longer be continued. The Mercer church will remain as it is. There is no intention of having the church deconsecrated'*. Several discussions in the intervening months took place about where the church furnishing might be placed, with Maramarua and Kaiaua congregations being interested.

In the meantime, Central Vestry continued its discussions about the future of St Jude's with the matter also being raised with the Diocesan Secretary, Alistair Parke in April 1985. Alastair Parke pointed out that there were, at the time, no provisions in the Statutes for the closure of a church building. However, he gave some advice. He pointed out that the land and building belonged to the General Trust Board of the Diocese who would need to work in consultation with the Standing Committee of the Diocese. The procedure to close could only take place after the support of a resolution approved by a General Meeting of the Parish. He also points out that because of its proximity to the Waikato Diocese and the Tuakau parish that these two bodies would need be consulted.

Is it Time to Close St Jude's for Good?

In August 1987 there was a special meeting of the Mercer congregation to discuss the future of the church. Opinions varied. Whilst many viewed the situation realistically and argued for

its closure, the Minutes record that a few in the meeting made a very strong plea for it to remain open.

One of the suggestions put forward was to move the building by St Mary's on the former Vicarage site at Pokeno to use as a meeting centre. (In 1953 the St Mary's Vicarage caught fire and was destroyed). A quote was arranged to get an idea of the cost of the removal. At \$24,000 it was deemed to be too expensive.

A motion that the Mercer church remain was eventually passed unanimously. By the Annual Meeting in February 1989, the Minutes record, *'The issue of the sale of the church has died. Thank goodness'*.

A Reprieve, but the Problems Remain

The St Jude's Church Committee noted in February 1988, that there was urgent need for maintenance to repair the spouting and a leaking roof. Consequently the leaks continued and the offer to replace the roof a few years previously, was never followed through.



Nearly 40 years later that spouting is still not fixed!

Photo: B Owen

Sadly, as well, vandals had started to create a problem and the door needed to be locked.

On a positive note, there was discussion raised about offering to make the church available to the local Marae and that the local Maori Pastor, the Rev'd Piripi Kapa be consulted.

In May 1989 the comment was made by the Vicar about the small attendances at Mercer and Pokeno, which he mentioned, was an embarrassment when visiting clergy had travelled long distances.

A New Decade Begins – the 1990's

With the average attendance being seven for the two services held in 1989, it was hoped that new Vicar, the Rev'd Iris Temple would bring new life to St Jude's. The Central Vestry Minutes in January 1990 record the Vicar as saying she would look at the Mercer situation to see if anything can be done to generate interest.

In the June 1990, the Vestry Minutes record that arrangements had been made for the Rev'd Piripi Haka, Maori pastor, to take a monthly service for the Maori community commencing in

October. There is no record to show whether the arrangement worked or not, nor indeed for how long.

The Minutes for the July 1990 Vestry meeting record that only seven turned up for church and that it was hard going running a service without power, which had been shutdown during the mid 1980's closure of the church. The next few months were no better. In August the attendance was 7, September 3, with 8 for November. It was very discouraging for a newly appointed Vicar.

There is Hope!

In 1991 there was a determination to improve things and congregation member, Jeanette Thomas, offered to underwrite the cost of the repainting of the exterior of the building which was quoted at \$7438, which Vestry promised to refund when funds were available. The Kaiaua church offered their organ, as they only used a piano and Joan Hills made an offer to paint the church porch. Later in the year, the underwriting of the exterior paint cost was paid back in instalments, with \$2500 from the Beef Account.

Not the Bees Again!!

The Vestry Minutes, September 1991, notes that there were six people in attendance at a recent service, together with '600 bees'!! However, by January 1992 the Minutes triumphantly record no bees, only to be followed in February, that the bees were back.

Burglary and Vandalism

Mention has already been made of some vandalism at the church, but In early 1992 the church was burgled, with the candlesticks, some vases and cloths being taken. Sadly, during the 1990's there were other mentions of theft and vandalism. In fact the church bell was removed as a precaution and taken into the care of Mac Lynch of Bombay.

Shut Down Again.

With numbers frequently in single figures, apart from the occasional special service, concerns were raised, yet again, about the viability of the church at Mercer. Accordingly, a decision was made to close St Jude's in the meantime, and focus on the other outlying centres like Kaiaua, Mangatangi and Maramarua.

Discussion inevitably started taking place about the future of the building.

The first mention of the next round of discussions about the future was a handwritten note from Vicar, Iris Temple-Davies written at the end of April 1993 responding to a query from a parishioner. *'At present Vestry are looking at the feasibility of resiting St Jude's at Pokeno, to be used as a much-needed hall.'*

Discussions get Really Serious.

In 1995 Mercer village centre was about to go through a major change. The iconic Railway Hotel, which was built in 1898, having replaced the Telegraph Inn which was opened in 1867, was to be demolished and the surrounding area to be designated a service centre including a MacDonalds's, cafes, a tavern and a petrol station. The land had been purchased by the W Stevenson group. This meant big changes for the small settlement of Mercer.

A Plan is Made

After much discussion the idea that St Jude's could be moved to the Service Centre area to become more than a church, but also a wedding venue as well, was formed. A tentative approach is made to Stevenson's about the idea. Initially, they showed interest followed by a willingness to set aside a site for the church.

The Vicar's memo to Geoff Clarke the Diocesan Secretary outlined the plan:

- To have St Jude's moved to the new service centre site.
- Apply for the church to be used for overseas visitors' weddings.
- Sell the St Jude's land, once vacant.
- Proceeds from the sale to renovate the interior of the church on its new site.

Iris Temple did, however, add a word of caution, indicating that the end wall would need to be removed to '*deal with an ongoing bee problem*'. Probably the understatement of the year!

What Could Possibly go Wrong???

In due course, a letter is received back from the Diocesan Secretary, Geoff Clark, mentioning that it was an innovative way to solve the future of the church. The Land Titles showed no reason to prevent it happening, '*but in slow time I will research the background to ensure there are no reasons to stop the plans from going ahead*'. Geoff Clarke cautions that approval will be needed from the Diocesan Council and the Resources and Planning Council and that the proposal to conduct overseas weddings will need to be discussed with the Bishop.

A short time after the beginning of May 1995 a letter was received from Geoff Clarke, confirming that the Resources Council and Planning Council had met and the proposal was agreed to in principle. However, he added a cautionary note saying that they also required approval from Komiti Tumuaki o te Wheke. Komiti Tumuaki is the equivalent of the Standing Committee of Te Pihopatanga, in short, the Maori branch of the Anglican church.

So far so good, but little did Vestry realise just how prophetic Clark's comments in 'slow time' would be.

Visit by the Bishop for the Southern Region

In late October 1995, the Rt Rev'd Bruce Moore, together with wife Diana, came out to the Parish for a visit covering a couple of days. As well as attending services on the Sunday at St Peter's, Bombay in the morning and St Mary's in the afternoon, they also visited the congregation at Kaiaua. Just as importantly, Bishop Bruce was taken to Mercer where he went to visit St Jude's, which he described as, '*now perched very precariously at the top of the valley, with pressure from the soil on the top side of it*'. He added that the church had not been used for some time, but that its condition was suitable enough to be moved.

Bishop Bruce reported that he was taken to the new Service Centre development and had a look at the plans. The Stevenson's representative explained the pros and cons of the church moving project. He did raise some valid concerns, such as noise from the expressway, the exact terms of the offer, which include the length of time on a peppercorn rental, the adjacent facilities and the freedom around the church to use for church activities.

Nothing is Straight Forward with St Jude's church.

There seemed to be little action during 1996. The church remained closed. Earlier in the year there was mention in the Vestry Minutes that a private buyer from Henderson might be interested in purchasing the church. No further reference is made so that did not progress. It is confirmed in the Minutes that Stevenson's have agreed to the move and that appropriate approvals and consents have been obtained from the Franklin County Council.

But...

A short time later in October 1996 there is a change. Stevenson's are now saying that the original site is not available, but they have another site at the Service Centre area which would also need Franklin Council consents to be agreed to. These consents were confirmed by Stevensons in February 1997.

In March 1997 the Diocesan Council in a letter from Diocesan Secretary, Geoff Clark, formally agrees to the move, subject to the usual legal precautions. However it also notes, yet again, that approval must also be given by the Manawa o Te Wheke, who clearly have yet to respond to the earlier request for approval, so far just short of two years. By adding '*that to enhance relations with the parish, no contribution to the Diocesan Development Fund be sought*', would suggest that the Diocesan Council are aware of a developing tension between Parish and Diocese over the delays in approvals. (Note: The Diocesan Statutes require that with any property sale by the ministry unit, a percentage of the sale price is passed over to the Diocese for future development).

Another Option Comes to the Table

In early July 1997, there is a new development. A local Family Trust have made an offer for the church, for their property at Clark's Beach. The offer is \$15,000, subject to Franklin County Council consents, the availability of a building removal company, and with the offer valid until the 31 July 1997. No pressure then!!!!

Things Start to get Confusing.

On 25 July, in a letter to the Vestry, Diocesan Secretary, Geoff Clark states that approval by the Diocesan Council for the new site at the service centre has been given. However, this is still subject to approval by Manawa of Te Wheke, who still have yet to respond! He also adds that with regard to the private sale the request will need to go to the Diocesan Council for approval. Vestry, in the meantime, have accepted the offer of the purchase of St Jude's by the Family Trust. This acceptance is conveyed to the Family Trust representatives.

Out of Left Field

Just as it looks as though progress is being made, in August 1997, Diocesan Bishop, the Rt Rev'd John Paterson insists that if St Jude's is to be moved, it must first be offered to the Purewa Cemetery Board who are looking for a suitable building for a chapel, if they want it. If they do not require it then it can be offered to the Family Trust. Purewa Cemetery Board began to show interest, with an offer of \$15,500. By making this offer based on the edict by the Bishop the Family Trust agreement is invalidated.

Things Get Tense.

In late August the Vestry Secretary of the time, Dorothy Cooper writes a very sharply worded message to the Diocesan Secretary, Geoff Clark. It starts by expressing Vestry's *'very deep unhappiness and feelings of betrayal'*. It then goes on to point out that the Parish had worked hard to find a buyer and put together a suitable package. She also points out the Family Trust members were very active members of the Anglican Church. *'Finally, we feel that it is iniquitous that Council should breach its obligations to the Parish in such an insensitive and arrogant manner as displayed in its veto of an almost concluded agreement to sell to the Family Trust'*.

A few days later a letter comes back from Geoff Clark. Dorothy Cooper's letter had been tabled at the Diocesan Council meeting. In summary the letter informs Vestry of the proper procedure that should have taken place when the application to sell the land and buildings was initiated:-

- Complete the appropriate form (a copy was enclosed).
- Sale to be discussed by the Resources and Planning Council first.
- Partner church asked to approve sale, in this case Manawa o te Wheke.
- Diocesan Council discuss and approve.
- Commercial valuations obtained by Parish and conveyed to Diocese.
- General Trust Board of the Diocese signs off the sale, if the sale reaches valuation.

He then points out that the Parish had not followed due process. He also adds that he has yet to have a response from Manawa o te Wheke. In recognition that things had not been handled well the Diocesan Council made a concession:- *'In short, the Diocesan Council have approved the sale to Purewa for \$15,500, and who will pay all costs including clearing the site after removal. Diocesan Council understands resentment felt towards the Diocese over past issues but feels it is time for Vestry to move on and look to the future'*.

In Hindsight

Certainly, with the vision of hindsight, it would seem that Vestry were poorly served with advice from the Diocese on how to proceed, or perhaps not proceed, with the disposal of St Jude's at the beginning of the process. The learning point for the future would seem to be to ensure that all parties understand the process to be followed. In reading all the documentation of the time, it is clear that the Diocese did not advise Vestry on the appropriate procedures to follow at the start of the process. A further complication that has to be taken into account was that there were three entities within the parish who had a say, St Jude's Church Committee, Central Vestry and the Vicar. One could also argue that the reluctance of Manawa o te Wheke to respond to the original request from the Diocese for over two years would also seem to be unhelpful. But then one could ask the question as to whether due process was undertaken by the Auckland Diocese.

But wait it is not all over yet...

At the end of September 1997 a further letter was received by Vestry from Geoff Clark, which, as well as containing some routine legal matters regarding the move to Purewa, adds, *'I am still waiting for final approval from Manawa o te Wheke'*.

A Bombshell

Having expected St Jude's to be taken to Purewa Cemetery to conclude a good outcome, Vestry receive a letter from Geoff Clark on 11 March 1998, *'The Purewa Cemetery Trust Board has now withdrawn its offer to purchase the church of St Jude, Mercer'*. The Purewa Trust Board decided that in the end a purpose built facility was more in keeping with their existing facilities. However, Clark added that the Diocese of Waikato were definitely interested to the extent that a deposit had been paid and that *the church would be gifted to Manawa o te Wheke 'who will place it at Hopu Hopu (the wartime Army Camp which was returned to Tainui)'*.

It took just under three years for Manawa o te Wheke to advise of their interest and intent.

A Strong Reaction

At the parish AGM in March 1998, Joan Hills, the Mercer representative on Central Vestry delivered her Annual Report. She outlined the various options that had evolved over the couple of years of negotiation, from having a place at the new Mercer Service Centre, followed by a changed location at the Service Centre. Then followed a private offer which the Parish had accepted and thought had been approved by Diocesan Council, only to find that they had been gazumped by the Purewa Cemetery Board, who declared they wanted the church as a cemetery chapel. With all these wheeling and dealings the Tikanga Maori, Manawa o Te Wheke Board had to give their approval. *'This left rather a bitter taste in the mouths of many Vestry members, but there was nothing to be done. All that was required was the approval of Manawa o te Wheke and St Jude's would go to Purewa'*.

Joan Hill notes *'In early March 1998 we were informed that Manawa o te Wheke want St Jude's themselves, to incorporate it into a Maori development at Hopu Hopu and maintain that, as everything to be sold must first be offered to Maori, they have first call, therefore overriding Purewa Cemetery Board'*.

Following the AGM Vicar, Iris Temple writes to Geoff Clark, Diocesan Secretary, on 22 March 1978, *'Following much debate at our Parish AGM and subsequent consideration of the matter by Vestry, we have decided to take St Jude's off the market'*. Her letter asks that he confirm that it is still OK to move the church within the parish, as it is suggested that St Jude's be moved to Kaiaua. The land would then be sold with the sale proceeds going towards the cost of removal and upgrade. Vestry Secretary, Mrs Quinn, sent a letter on behalf of Vestry on 7 April 1998 to the Kaiaua Presbyterian Church Property trustees to see whether moving St Jude's to the Kaiaua Presbyterian Church site was a possibility.

This proposal did not eventuate.

Back to Square One

In mid April 1998, Angela Morey, resident of Mercer and Vestry member, wrote to Vestry on behalf of local residents in Mercer. Her point was that that the people of Mercer were very concerned that St Jude's might leave the district altogether, which they opposed. *'After much thought we wish to request that Vestry consider that services resume at St Jude's on a monthly basis.'*

She adds that if Vestry agrees the local people will arrange a spring clean inside and out.

Vicar, Iris Temple a few days later wrote to Geoff Clark, Diocesan Secretary, to inform him that Vestry backs the Mercer people in their request to resume services. She further adds that Vestry have decided that *'St Jude's is no longer available for sale at this present moment'*.

Back in Action

Accordingly, a meeting was held at Mercer on 27 April attended by 13 people. It was resolved:

- Unanimously decided to restart services on the fourth Sunday in each month starting June 1998.
- Services to be family based with emphasis on children.
- MAF to be contacted about the bee problem.
- Church to be left unlocked so that cleaners can access.
- The prayer desk be returned from St Mary's.
- The bell which had been removed for security, to be rehung.
- Mercer Fire Brigade to be asked to supply water for exterior cleaning.
- To have a 'working bee' starting in May.
- Investigate the use of tapes for music.
- Adjacent tree to be topped.



St Jude's bell.

Photo: B Owen

Other ideas discussed included having some sheep in the gully to graze, together with a suggestion that some 'adventure playground' gear be put into the gully. However, they were not acted on.

In letter starting with the words *'To continue the saga..!'*, Vicar, Iris Temple contacts Geoff Clark to inform him that Vestry has resolved to support the people of Mercer in reopening St Jude's, and that it is no longer available for sale and that he inform the Diocesan Council accordingly.

But it was still not the end of the matter

Iris Temple was clearly not impressed with the way things had been handled by the Diocese and decided to write to the newly appointed Bishop's Chaplain for Development, the Rev'd Harvey Smith, to let him know in no uncertain terms how she felt by way of a series of questions:-

- when did the Purewa Cemetery Board withdraw their offer and when did the Waikato Diocese sign the contract and pay the deposit?
- she asked to see the contract.
- why did it take a week to let the Parish know?
- why was she not given the courtesy of being told when she and Harvey had been chatting together before a recent meeting they both attended?
- She asks why *'keeping in with the people of the Waikato Diocese is being more important than a small township in the Auckland Diocese?'*

She concludes with a blunt message:

"I have spoken with my Wardens, and they would like you to know that if necessary, we will have no hesitation of (sic) retaining Kent Quin of Penny Petel Law to represent us."

The Response is Immediate.

A day later Harvey Smith writes to the People's Warden, Mac Lynch. He pulls no punches by suggesting that Vestry was making decisions without consulting the Diocese. He points out that the Diocesan Secretary acted in good faith by selling the St Jude's to the Diocese of Waikato. On that basis a valid and legal sale existed.

Smith pointed out that in the meantime the Parish Vestry had reconsidered the request for the church to be sold, in favour of moving it to Kaiaua instead. Reference was made to a phone call between the Vicar and the Diocesan Secretary where it was pointed out to her that he did not have the power to cancel a sale and that had to come from the Diocesan Council. Further, Clark states *'that the Chair of Vestry should never have allowed the Vestry at its meeting of 27 April 1998, to make the decisions it did concerning St Jude's'*.

Smith took umbrage at the fact that the Parish were considering legal action. *'Mac, this is not how Christians behave towards one another'*.

He finishes by stating that he will recommend to the Bishop, as Chair of the Diocesan Council that the sale to Waikato is rescinded, St Jude's is returned to the care of the parish and that he be authorised to visit the Waikato to apologise. It must be pointed at this point that Harvey Smith had not long been appointed to the position of Bishop's Chaplain for Development.

And Finally...

In mid-June a short letter is sent to the Vestry Secretary from the Diocesan Secretary informing the Parish officially, that the Diocesan Council have decided not to proceed any further with the sale, confirming that St Jude's remains the responsibility of the Parish.

The Phoenix Rises from the Ashes...

One could be forgiven, as the last 18 months of the Twentieth Century unfolds, that St Jude's church really was a lost cause. So many negative points had been raised prior to the selling campaign, especially low attendance numbers, that it would seem to be more of the same.

But no! On the contrary, there is a renewed determination to make it work. On the initiative of local resident Angela Morey, an arrangement was made, using her work connections with the Corrections Department and a local Corrections officer, resident in Mercer, to negotiate the possibility of women prisoners from Mt Eden prison being used to repaint the interior of

the church. It was an initiative that worked with a team of women being brought out to Mercer each day to work on the repainting of the interior under supervision. Reports from the time indicated that the women involved in the project took a great deal of pride in their work, which they took on with enthusiasm, and which by the end of June 1998 had been completed.

An article in the magazine, *The Anglican* (September/October 1998) quotes Vicar, Iris Temple, as saying *'Parishioners, Joan and Gary Hills and Angela Morey in particular, had worked like trojans to get the church ready for the opening, while Keith and Anita Filkin's gift of carpet for the nave was an added bonus. But without labour from the prison, opening day would still have been off schedule.'*

New Beginnings

The plan was to have a grand re-opening service on 10 August, 1998, a fifth Sunday at 10.00am. It was planned as a Family Service, with invitations being sent out to the Mercer district as well as the Parish. It was to be a children focused service with the Sunday School children taking part. 81 people attended the service, making it a full church. In fact, the fullest the church had been for many years. The Sunday School children performed *'Jonah and the Whale'* and the congregation sang *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, *'Mine Eyes have seen the Glory'* as the closing hymn.

For the balance of the year services were held monthly with an average attendance of 26. The local community felt vindicated for their hard work in campaigning for the church to remain and for it to be given a new lease of life.

Is it Back to Square One?

For the last year of the Twentieth Century, things 'regressed' back 'normal'. Apart from a well-attended service on Palm Sunday 1999, the other monthly Sunday services average, with a congregation of 10, with the lowest three and highest 14. It was not very encouraging, after all the energy expended to get things going again.

A New Century Begins

As the old century faded away, there was a renewed spirit at Mercer. There was a determination by a small group of parishioners who lived in the area to keep things going, in spite of the lower numbers. Angela Morey and Joan Hills were at the forefront of this energy. With a newly decorated building inside and out, they were ready to go. Also, parishioner, Glenn Marsh had agreed to play the organ for the monthly services. Gary Hills was the 'Warden' and as such agreed to oversee the property ensuring it was clean and tidy and attending to all maintenance issues.

Thursday School

There was a determination to include children and initially it was an attempt to run a Sunday School. However, on the initiative of Janet McRobbie, an after-school programme was trialled in 2001. It was a success! In the Anglican News, September 2002, an article entitled ***'Thursday School Jumps for Joy'***, highlighted the success of the programme. *'Children of all ages come after school for a time of fun, faith, music and teaching led by Janet McRobbie'*

Janet, with her background as a teacher, was the ideal person for the programme. She had a vision and a dedication to prepare a programme that included some learning, some music, but also creative activity. The young people thrived on it. Perhaps it was the cup of juice waiting for them, with a biscuit or two, that enticed them. No matter what, it was always a joy watch in the few minutes after school had finished on Thursdays to see a stream of children running up the hill to St Jude's with big beaming smiles. Such was its success there would always be a group of at least a dozen to 20 or so children of all ages present, until they were picked up by their parents about an hour later.



Thursday School in action with Janet McRobbie

Photo: B Berwick

Janet was initially assisted by Margaret Overdeest, and then followed by Beverley Berwick. The Mercer Thursday School continued for over 15 years, until declining health caused Janet to step aside. Thursday School closed for good at the end of 2018.

Church Land Use Again

Vestry records for 2000 show that the Parish received another letter from Diocesan Secretary, Geoff Clark. Perhaps he and the Diocesan Council had been mulling over the dramas of the previous several years as associated with St Jude's future. The letter includes a copy of the Title, held by the General Trust Board. He states, *'In principle I think the Diocesan Council would be prepared to allow some of the land to be subdivided off or sold to the local authority for a playground'. He adds that to do so the parish would need the approval of the Mercer congregation and a decision of the Parish at a Special General meeting'.*

The suggestion for a children's playground had already been suggested for the church site. Clearly, Clark is out of touch with the reality of the situation, because the slope of the section would make it totally unsuitable for such a purpose.

A Couple of Snippets from the Beginning of the New Century

-Parish Newsletter notes indicate that in February 2003, the exterior of the church was painted.

-In mid-2004, the Maramarua branch church was closed and the pulpit from there was installed at St Jude's. This will explain why, from the perspective of the preacher, the sermon notes ledge faces awkwardly the wrong way.



The pulpit from Maramarua, currently used as a storage space!

Photo: B Owen

The Future Comes Up Yet Again

In 2013 discussions began again about the future of St Jude's. People's Warden of the time, George Trounce, discussed the issue with Diocesan Secretary, Geoff Clark who briefed him on the previous process of the mid 1990's. It was decided that a local meeting should be held at St Jude's giving everyone a chance to make their comments. Due notice was given to residents. Comments made include the following:-

- A local parent - Very enthusiastic about the Thursday School and would like the church to remain. Others spoke in a similar vein.
- Toilet provisions an issue with no running water. The section could be too small to sell. Septic tank installation an issue.
- If the building is removed, land would be liable for rates.
- Comments on needs for ongoing maintenance, and tree trimming.
- Reference was made to having been down this track before, and therefore against closure and sale.

The consensus was to acknowledge issues existed but no one was saying the church must go.

The summary by Bruce Owen to Vestry suggested:-

- Confirm that building should stay.
- To spray exterior with Wet and Forget.
- Replace west side guttering.
- Declutter inside of the church, especially the 'kitchen' area.
- Investigate painting the interior.
- Consider removing the unstable altar rails.
- Install outside water tank, with inside sink unit, and investigate toilets underneath the church.

In the end the only major decision of the time was to keep St Jude's, with the only maintenance being minor, such as basic tidying up and spraying with Wet and Forget and some minor work on the roof for which Vestry allocated \$500.

In 2014 on the recommendation of Treasurer, Margaret Overdevest and People's Warden, George Trounce, it was decided that St Jude's be insured for demolition only. The costs of insurance had increased significantly because of the Christchurch Earthquakes.

*Bee patches!
Ugly tape covering holes drilled
in the wall to poison the bees.*

Photo: B Owen

In an attempt to eradicate the bees, someone decided to bore holes in the wall above the altar to pump spray into the hive and then patch over with ugly grey tape, which remains to this day.



Only a few years later Vestry decided that it carry no insurance on St Jude's, which was probably a dubious decision because should a fire occur, or suffer other damage, then the Parish would have to cover the cost of any demolition, remediation or removal etc.

Local Maori Pastorate

In 2014 an approach was made by the Tikanga Maori church, centred at Tuakau to use St Jude's for their local community gathering and worship. A hui was held with members of the Parish and their Tikanga Maori representatives to discuss proposals. Initially, a local person Joanne Katipa would use St Jude's for the purpose of teaching young people in the area 'basic Tikanga and church music'. Canon Dawn Wihongi, of Thames, under whose jurisdiction Mercer and Tuakau came under the Tikanga Maori church, discussed the plans with Vicar, the Rev'd Kumar Anandanayagam and Priest Assistant, the Rev'd Bruce Owen beforehand. From this initiative it was hoped that services for local Maori families could be held once or twice a month.

Though the proposal had the approval of Vestry and it got under way in the second half of the year, the initiative folded up a few months later. Firstly, there was a lack of response from the local families, very similar to that being experienced by the Parish. Secondly, with its lack of toilets, and lack of water and relatively poor condition of the building it was felt to be an unsuitable venue.

It was an idea that could have had potential!

Three to Four Services a Year

Looking at the summary of services held in recent years, one could be forgiven for thinking that compared with times past, the numbers were looking good. However, the reality needs to be explained. Since 2009 the services held were only once a quarter and though the average numbers attending were in their teens and early twenties, most, if not all, were from families who lived out of Mercer and who attended St Mary's and St Peter's. At the time of writing, it was a long time since a local resident had attended any service at St Jude's.

Report to Vestry 2020

In September 2020, Parish Property Convenor, Bruce Owen, prepared a full report to Vestry on the state of St Jude's church. As well as providing a short summary of the beginnings of the church, and an analysis of attendances by decade, he provided a full summary of the building's state.

The Report shows:-

Exterior:

- Roof: the corrugated iron ok, but ridge flashing is rusting.
- Gutters: west side guttering ripped away some years ago and never replaced, in spite of being on past 'fix it' lists.
- Exterior paint: basically very poor condition, having been painted over several times before and needing regular 'Wet and Forget' treatment..
- Foundations: very basic and being on a slope they not up to earthquake standard.
- Entrance porch: exterior door frames quite rotten, doors in poor condition and don't close properly and the wooden framing is totally rotten where it sits on the ground.
- Nearby tree scraping side of the building.

Interior:

- A great deal of active borer evident in all interior timbers, problems with bees have persisted over the decades until recent past, rodent problems continue.
- Rear of church needs a good clean out.

Another Attempt to Revitalise

In 2021 and 2022 Priest in Charge, Andrew Beyer began discussions with the Waikato District Council to determine whether heritage funding might be available to help restore the building. At the same time he set up a dialogue with the Mercer Community Committee seeking their support. For a while the Community Committee used the church as a meeting venue. Ultimately, they too moved on, preferring to use the former Mercer Volunteer Fire Brigade station as their meeting venue.

Full circle

Sad though it is, at the time of writing, early 2024, Vestry have resolved to begin the process of disposing of St Jude's and the land at Mercer/Te Paina. The building itself needs major repair. The fact that it does not have toilets or running water is a challenge for use as a community gathering space/church etc. It is built at the top of a very steep slope which makes it a potential earthquake risk. With two other heritage listed church buildings and a vicarage to maintain, the Vestry cannot justify the cost of its continuing use. Accordingly, at the Annual General Meeting for the Mission District of Bombay-Pokeno in April 2024, it was resolved unanimously to close the church of St Jude, Mercer and to advise the Diocese of Auckland accordingly.

Who has the Last Say...

The 2024 Annual Meeting was advised that after several years of absence, the bees have returned. Need we say more!

Postscript

When I first started out on this project to find out a bit more about the story of our church of St Jude, little did I realise then, what a fascinating story I found. Thanks to the diligence of former parish and church committee secretaries, our records have been well kept. As I progressed it also became clear that Mercer itself had a story to tell.

Mercer is much more than a service centre alongside a busy expressway. It has a history of its own, much of which has long since been lost and forgotten. It has a history going back long before colonial times, with stories that also deserve to be told.

For Māori, the whakapapa is important. The connections with the past are important and as such are passed on from generation to generation. Sadly, in our present day and age, in the non-Māori context, that past is frequently lost in the name of change and progress, and no more so than in the small settlement of Mercer.

I acknowledge the foresight of Jeanette Thomas, herself a worshipper at St Jude's in the past, for her initiative of establishing the Mercer Museum. The whakapapa of Mercer will be preserved into the future.

The church of St Jude's was built in the 'heyday' of Mercer. Perched on the ridge of Koheroa Road, it overlooked the community it served. A community that in the past was a busy transport hub, centred on the Waikato River, the railway and the road and its attendant accommodation. After a promising start the journey of St Jude's falters, but then revives again, only to falter once more revives again then falters.....

Indeed, the Anglican Church of St Jude, Mercer, really was *The Little Church that Tried*.

Bruce Owen May 2024



Appendix One:

Aerial view of the church property showing approximate boundary of the site.



Image: Google maps

The church property, viewing the slope from the road.



Photo: B Owen

Appendix Two:

Analysis of attendance by year and decade

Year	Number of services for year	number of services per month	average attendance for year	average attendance for decade
1914-1915		2 services per month	no record of numbers	
1916	31	2 to 3	31	
1917	29	2 to 3	30	
1918	22	2 to 3	24	
1919	26	2	27	
<u>1914-1919</u>	<u>average</u>			<u>28</u>
1920	24	2 to 3	23	
1921	24	2 to 3	27	
1922	23	2 to 3	22	
1923	34	3 to 4	13	
1924	25	2-Mar	15	
1925	13	1 to 2	16	
1926	8	0-2	14	
	Thereafter no	records until 1930		
<u>1920-1926</u>	<u>average</u>			<u>19</u>
1930	15	2 to 3	23	
1931	27	2 to 3	13	
1932	20	2 to 3	22	
1933	25	2	20	
1934	24	2	15	
1935	56	weekly	26	
1936	57	weekly	9	
1937	28	2	10	
1938	10	1	5	
<u>1930-1938</u>	<u>average</u>			<u>16</u>
		No records from 1939-1952		
	Parish linked	with Pukekohe during war	years until 1952	
1953	6	2	13	
1954	18	1 to 2	12	
1955	34	2 to 3	15	
1956	30	2 to 3	12	
1957	14	2 to 3	14	June 1957
1958	16	2	12	to March 1958
1959	21	2	11	
<u>1953-1959</u>	<u>average</u>			<u>11</u>
1960	19	2	9	
1961	24	2	12	
1962	27	2 to 3	11	
1963	31	3	9	

1964	33	3 to 4	8	
Year	Number of services for year	number of services per month	average attendance for year	average attendance for decade
1967	18	2	6	
1968	12	1	4	
1969	15	1	10	
1960-1969	average			8
1970	12	1	7	
1971	28	3	4	
1972	26	3	3	
1973	incomplete record			
1974	13	1	5	
1975	13	1	7	
1976	14	1	10	
1977	13	1	7	
1978	13	1	4	
1979	13	1	5	
1970-1979	average			6
1980	11	1	7	
1981	9	1	7	
1982	5	every two months	10	
1983	6	every two months	9	
1984	8	1	4	
1985	11	1	5	
1986	no services			
1987	no services			
1988	7	every two months	8	
1989	2		6	
1980-1989	average			8
1990	6	every two months	6	
1991	10	1	11	
1992	6	every two months	6	
1993 - 1998	no services			
Aug-98	6	1	26	
1999	12	1	11	
1990-1999	average			15
2000	8	1	11	
2001	5	every two months	20	
2002	10	2	13	
2003	8	every two months	13	
2004	5	every two months	26	
2005	12	1	14	
2006	8	every two months	15	
2007	2	no services after February	15	
2008	no services			
2009	3	quarterly	29	

Year	Number of services	number of services	average attendance	average attendance
Year	for year	per month	for year	for decade
2011	3		19	
2012	2		19	
2013	4	quarterly	23	
2014	3	quarterly	23	
2015	3	quarterly	18	
2016	3	quarterly	20	
2017	4	quarterly	16	
2018	4	quarterly	16	
2019	3	quarterly	14	
2010-2019	average			<u>19</u>
2020	No Services Covid			
2021	2		20	
2022	3	quarterly	10	
2023	4	quarterly	14	
2020-2023	average			15

Footnote: In the period 2000-2024 the congregation attending were not from Mercer but those who regularly attended at Bombay and Pokeno. In the period from 2000 to about 2015 there may be one or two from Mercer but since then the congregation has been entirely from other parts of the parish.

Appendix Three: Certificates of Title



**RECORD OF TITLE
UNDER LAND TRANSFER ACT 2017
FREEHOLD
Historical Search Copy**



R. W. Muir
Registrar-General
of Land

Constituted as a Record of Title pursuant to Sections 7 and 12 of the Land Transfer Act 2017 - 12 November 2018

Identifier **NA233/158**
Land Registration District **North Auckland**
Date Issued 08 February 1915

Prior References

NA27/155 NA27/158

Estate Fee Simple
Area 541 square metres more or less
Legal Description Deposited Plan 9698


Original Registered Owners

The General Trust Board of the Diocese of Auckland

Interests

REGISTER

NEW ZEALAND.




Volume 233/158
 Transfer No. 233/158
 Application No.
 Order for R.O.T. No.

233/158
 233/158

CERTIFICATE OF TITLE UNDER LAND TRANSFER ACT.

This Certificate, dated the eighteenth day of February, 1900, was issued to the said parties
 under the hand and seal of the District Land Registrar at the Land Registrar's Office at Auckland, Witnessing that
The General Trust Board of the Diocese of Auckland

landed of an estate in the whole or part of such reserves, lands, tenements, premises, sites, and improvements as are certified by a memorial under written
 or endorsed licence, subject also to any existing rights of the Crown to take and lay off roads under the provisions of any Act of the General Assembly
 of New Zealand in the land hereinafter described, as the same is delineated by the plan annexed hereto, given, to be the several and successive
 estate more or less, that is to say: All that parcel of land containing twelve one and four tenths (12 1/4)
perches more or less being all the land as a plan deposited in
the Land Registry Office at Auckland under A 10497 which said
parcel of land is portion of Section 26 (twelve acres) of the Islands
of Auckland.


 District Land Registrar,

METRIC AREA IS 841 m²
541 m²

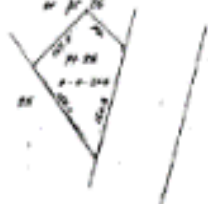


Image Quality due
 to Condition
 of Original

L. G. Gorman
 D.L.R.

233/158