

TIMARU DISTRICT COUNCIL
HISTORIC HERITAGE ITEM RECORD FORM

HERITAGE ITEM NAME former Chalmers Presbyterian Church / St George's Coptic Church

ADDRESS 2 Elizabeth Place, Timaru

PHOTOGRAPH



(Dr A McEwan, 9 July 2018)

DISTRICT PLAN ITEM No. HHI52 **HNZ LIST No. & CATEGORY** 7107 / 2
(at time of assessment)

LEGAL DESCRIPTION Lot 2 DP 484240

VALUATION NUMBER 2500059200

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION 1903-4

ARCHITECT / DESIGNER / BUILDER JS Turnbull, architect; W Petrie & Son, contractors

STYLE Gothic Revival

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Gothic Revival hall-type church with rectangular footprint and gabled roof forms. Entrance tower with spire, buttresses, two ranks of lancet-arched windows along the nave. Short transepts and single-storeyed gabled vestries at the south-western end of the building flank an apsidal chancel. Louvred gablets and ventilators mounted on the principal ridgeline. Multi-coloured slate roof.

MATERIALS / STRUCTURE

Brick, cement plaster, timber, Welsh slate and zinc tiles.

ADDITIONS / ALTERATIONS

Stained glass windows installed (various dates). Restoration plaque laid (1998).

SETTING

The church is laid diagonally across a corner site bounded by Elizabeth Street to the north and Bank and Sophia Streets to the east. The former church hall (1905/1926) is located to the west and south-west of the church. The extent of setting is the land parcel on which the church is located.

HISTORY

The first Presbyterian church in Timaru, built of bluestone, opened on 7 July 1867. It stood in Barnard Street and was replaced, on an adjacent site, in 1876. Until the early 20th century, Trinity was Timaru's only Presbyterian church. In 1902 around 170 members of the congregation decided to leave the church because of a difference of opinion about calling a replacement when the minister resigned. The dissidents, numbering around 400, held their first services in the Theatre Royal. When the Presbytery finally gave approval for a second parish in Timaru, those who had separated from Trinity called a minister of their own, who was inducted on 15 May 1902. A site for a new church at the corner of Elizabeth and Bank Streets was purchased and local architect JS Turnbull engaged to design the building. The foundation stone of Chalmers Church was laid on 14 May 1903 by the Rev George Barclay and the completed church dedicated on 11 September 1904. A Sunday school hall was built beside the church in 1905 (extended 1926). Chalmers, like Trinity, opened branch Sunday schools elsewhere in Timaru and at Washdyke and Rosewill. The Sunday school at Highfield, where a hall was erected in 1907, became a separate charge in 1920. Trinity Church closed in 1957 and was subsequently demolished in 1964. The congregations of Trinity Church (erected 1965 in College Road, Parkside), St Stephen's, St Paul's and Chalmers were amalgamated in 2009. In response to dwindling attendance, insurance premium increases and the projected cost of earthquake strengthening, Chalmers Church was put on the market in August 2013 and decommissioned in 2014. The building was purchased by the Coptic Christian community in 2015 and is now known as St George's Coptic Church.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The former Chalmers Presbyterian Church has historical and social significance as a place of Presbyterian worship and communion from 1904 until 2014. The building remains in religious use and its recent association with the Coptic Church demonstrates the growth of that faith community in South Canterbury.

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The former Chalmers Presbyterian Church has cultural and spiritual significance as a demonstration of the way of life of the two church communities (Presbyterian and Coptic), and for its continued use as a place of remembrance and commemoration. One of the stained-glass windows installed in the church in c.1924 commemorates Alexander Grant, whose retirement home 'Aigantighe' is now an art gallery (heritage item # 12).

ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

The former Chalmers Presbyterian Church has architectural significance as the work of local architect JS Turnbull. Timaru-born James Turnbull (1864-1947) trained in Melbourne and then established a practice in Timaru in c.1895. The son of Richard Turnbull, a prominent Timaru businessman and politician, Turnbull also designed Job Brown's Beehive Stores (heritage item #117, 1901-2) in Temuka, the Grosvenor Hotel (heritage item #23, 1915) and a large number of Timaru houses. Turnbull went into partnership with Percy Watts Rule in c.1920, after which time Rule was the principal designer in the firm. The firm designed the Temuka Library (heritage item #118, 1926-27), St Mary's Hall in Timaru (1928-29), St James' Anglican Church at Franz Josef (1928-31) and the 1930 additions to the Bank Street Methodist Church (heritage item #51).

TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

The former Chalmers Presbyterian Church has technological and craftsmanship significance for its plastered brick construction and the quality of its architectural detailing. Fiona Ciaran has catalogued the 15 stained-glass windows installed in the church from c.1891 in her PhD dissertation.

CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The former Chalmers Presbyterian Church has high contextual significance as a historic landmark within the town centre and for its relationship with both the former Chalmers Church hall and other heritage churches in central Timaru, including the former Methodist (heritage item # 51) and Anglican (heritage item # 50) churches that are located to the south and south-east.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

Although the church post-dates 1900 its site has potential archaeological significance relating to the earlier use and development of the property. A plan of Timaru drawn in 1875 shows a number of buildings, presumably houses, on the site of the church. Parr's windmill (c.1871, demolished 1888) stood immediately to the west of the church and hall site.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

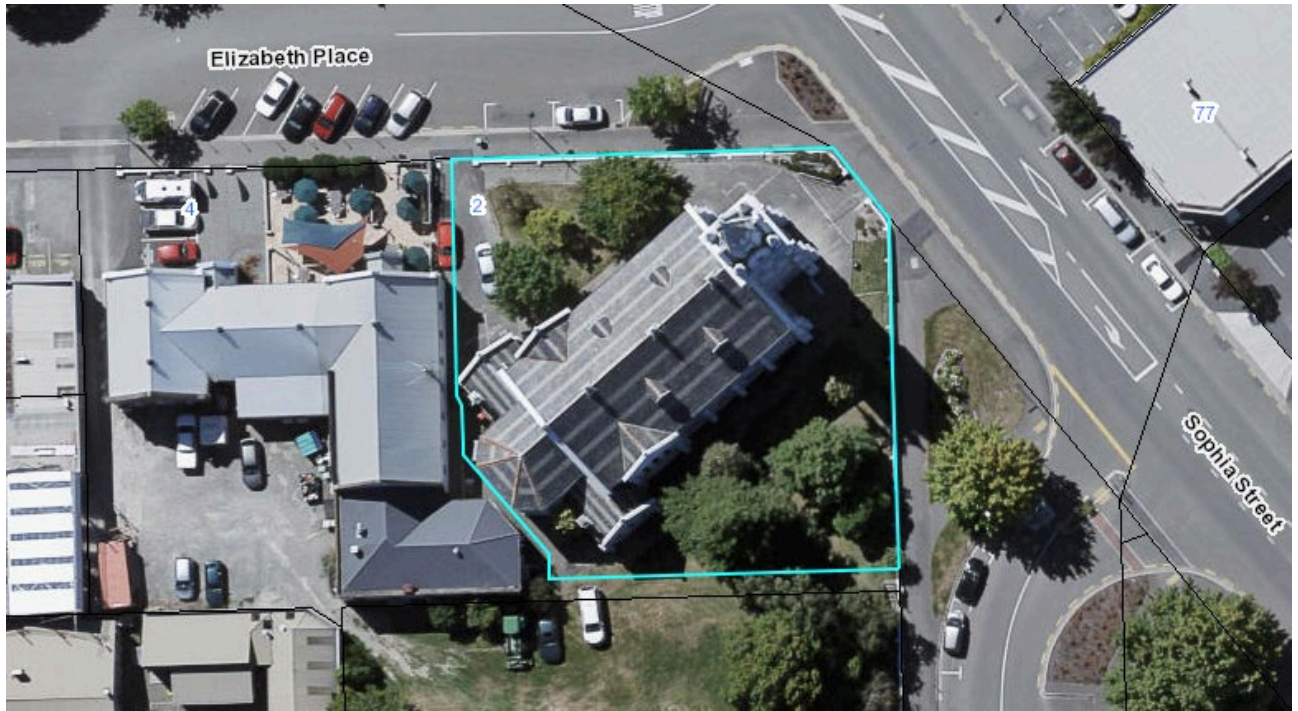
The former Chalmers Presbyterian Church has overall heritage significance to Timaru and Timaru district as a whole. The church has historical and social significance for its association with local Presbyterians for over a century and cultural and spiritual significance as a place of Christian worship and fellowship. The former Chalmers Presbyterian Church has architectural significance as a Gothic Revival style building designed by JS Turnbull and technological and craftsmanship significance for its masonry construction and detailing. The former Chalmers Presbyterian Church has high contextual significance as a local landmark and in relation to other historic churches in the central city. The site of the former Chalmers Presbyterian Church has potential archaeological significance in view of its pre-1900 development.

HERITAGE CATEGORY

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REFERENCES

- *Timaru Herald* 20 June 1866, p. 3; 17 December 1875, p. 7; 31 December 1875, p. 4; 17 October 1876, p. 2; 5 November 1878, p. 5; 14 June 1902, p. 1; 20 June 1902, p. 4; 11 October 1902, p. 1; 17 November 1902, p. 4; 19 February 1903, p. 3; 15 May 1903, p. 3; 3 May 1905, p. 3; 3 November 1905, p. 3; 16 August 2013, 6 May 2014 & 23 March 2017 (available online).
- *Otago Witness* 12 April 1905, p. 43.
- *Cyclopedia of New Zealand – Canterbury Provincial District* Christchurch, 1903; available online.
- J Wilson 'Timaru's Collection of Old Churches' *Historic Places* June 1989, pp. 7-10.
- F Ciaran 'Stained Glass in Canterbury New Zealand, 1860-1988' PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 1992.
- <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7107>
- <https://cathnews.co.nz/2014/09/30/coptics-want-buy-timarus-chalmers-church/>



Extent of setting, 2 Elizabeth Place, Timaru.