

**TIMARU DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**HISTORIC HERITAGE ITEM RECORD FORM**

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**HERITAGE ITEM NAME** former Unitarian Hall  
**ADDRESS** 65 Church Street, Timaru

**PHOTOGRAPH**



(Dr A McEwan, 11 July 2018)

**DISTRICT PLAN ITEM NO.** HHI80      **HNZ LIST No. & CATEGORY** n / a  
(at time of assessment)

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION** Lot 4 DP 1139

**VALUATION NUMBER** 2495000300

**DATE OF CONSTRUCTION** 1911-12

**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER/  
BUILDER** Harold Broadhead, architect

**STYLE** Neoclassical

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

Single-storey hall type church with rectangular footprint and gabled roof. Hip-roofed lean-to at rear. Facade is symmetrical about porticoed entry with semi-circular fanlight. Gable end on facade conceals roof beyond and is set with lancet louvre and rondel motifs flanking entry. Windows are casement-and-fanlight type with multi-pane uppers. Short side wings frame the facade. Pilasters along side elevations. Vehicle access to the rear of the site.

**MATERIALS/STRUCTURE**

Brick, cement plaster, corrugated metal.

**ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS**

Entrance porch enclosed (date unknown).

**SETTING**

The former church stands on the north side of Church Street, in the block bounded by Grey Road to the west and Theodosia Street to the east. To the east of the building are a number of historic ecclesiastical buildings, including the former Jackson Memorial Methodist Sunday School (1907) and the former Bank Street Methodist Church (heritage item # 51). The neighbouring streetscape is light industrial and residential in nature. The extent of setting is the land parcel on which the building is located, partly in view of the potential archaeological values of the site.

## **HISTORY**

The first Unitarian church to be erected in the South Island was built in Timaru in 1911-12. The foundation minister, the Rev James Chapple, had resigned from the Presbyterian Church in September 1910 following condemnation of his actions by the Timaru Presbytery in relation to his socialist views and involvement in the Unitarian church. The Unitarian congregation Chapple formed met in the Forrester's Hall until, with generous financial backing from local benefactors George and Mrs [sic] Wells, a hall was erected in Church Street. Unitarianism has its origins in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe and Britain and there was also an influential movement in the United States. The church was known for its commitment to gender equality and developed a strong women's club in Timaru. Tenders were called in September 1911 and the foundation stone was laid on 16 November of the same year. The church, hall and Sunday School was subsequently opened on 4 May 1912. The building was reported as having cost £2400, of which half was provided by the Wells. Chapple, who was Timaru librarian between October 1910 and March 1913, caused controversy and sparked protest action in May 1915 because of his support for New Zealand becoming a republic. He left Timaru in the same year and was later charged with sedition (May 1918) for speaking out against the war. Chapple was subsequently convicted and sentenced to eleven months imprisonment, after which he resumed his ministerial duties in Christchurch and, later, Auckland. He was to become the model for the central character in his grandson Maurice Gee's novel *Plumb* in 1978. The Timaru Unitarian Hall hosted services until the late 1920s and was also used for political meetings and social events. From c.1935 until 2010 it was occupied by the Church Street Bible Chapel. More recently it has been used as a dance studio.

## **HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Unitarian Hall has historical and social significance as the first Unitarian church built in the South Island. The former church has added historical significance for its association with James Chapple (1865-1947) and the Wells family, as well as the Church Street Bible Chapel.

## **CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Unitarian Hall has cultural and spiritual significance as a former place of worship and as a demonstration of the way of life of local families who worshipped and congregated in the church between 1912 and 2010.

## **ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Unitarian Hall has architectural significance as a building designed by Timaru architect Harold Broadhead. Broadhead (1887-1950) was the son of Timaru builder and contractor John Broadhead and he (Harold) appears to have commenced practise in 1911. Broadhead was registered as an architect in 1914 and, amongst a variety of residential, commercial and ecclesiastical commissions, he extended the Highfield Presbyterian Church in 1913 and added the porch to St Paul's Presbyterian Church in Totara Valley in 1925 (heritage item # 77). Broadhead also designed the Temuka Fire Station (1930).

## **TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Unitarian Hall has technological and craftsmanship value as an early 20<sup>th</sup> century brick building.

## **CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The former Unitarian Hall has contextual significance as a historic feature on Church Street and for its relationship with other heritage church buildings in Timaru, including the Anglican (heritage item # 50), Presbyterian (heritage item # 38) and former Methodist (heritage item #?) churches that are located closer to the town centre.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

Although the church post-dates 1900 its site has potential archaeological value relating to the earlier development of the property. A brick and timber duplex building is shown on DP 1139, which is dated June 1894.

## SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The former Unitarian Hall has overall heritage significance to Timaru and Timaru district as a whole. The church has historical and social significance for its association with JHG Chapple and the early history of the Unitarian Church in New Zealand and cultural and spiritual significance as a demonstration of the way of life of past congregations and their clergy. The former Unitarian Hall has architectural significance as a Neoclassical building designed by Timaru architect Harold Broadhead and technological and craftsmanship value for its brick masonry construction and detailing. The former Unitarian Hall has contextual significance as a historic feature in Church Street and in relation to other historic church buildings in the central city. The former Unitarian Hall has potential archaeological value in view of the property's pre-1900 use and development.

## HERITAGE CATEGORY

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## REFERENCES

- *Timaru Herald* 21 March 1911, p. 7; 16 September 1911, p. 3; 27 August 1912, p. 5; 24 September 1920, p. 7; 28 December 1920, p. 7.
- *Otago Daily Times* 14 September 1910, p. 4; 18 May 1918, p. 8; 1 September 1921, p. 3.
- *Evening Post* 17 November 1911, p. 3.
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- *Northern Advocate* 18 May 1918, p. 2.
- *Greymouth Evening Star* 23 March 1918, p. 7.
- *Grey River Argus* 17 November 1911, p. 5.
- *Rangitikei Advocate & Manawatu Argus* 5 October 1917, p. 8.
- *North Otago Times* 1 July 1912, p. 4.
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- *Poverty Bay Herald* 25 May 1915, p. 7.
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- <https://aucklandunitarian.org.nz/about/our-history/>
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Extent of setting, 65 Church Street, Timaru.



Rev James Chapple. Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand.