



Whiteley Memorial Methodist Church,  
60-66 Liardet Street

1961

**Themes in development:** early settlement, cultural and social.

**Cultural heritage values:** historical, architectural, technical, symbolic, townscape and group values.

**Not registered.**

**Owner**

Methodist Church Trustees  
c/- Treasurer  
58 Liardet Street, New Plymouth

**Title**

Pt 3 DP 7654  
ID: 013773

**Use**

Church

## **Description**

The design of the Whiteley Memorial Methodist Church was a serious attempt to find modern architectural expression for the Christian faith in the 1960s. Its design departs from all historical precedent except for the general concept of nave and chancel, and an inheritance from the Gothic tradition of the soaring quality of the main space. This space is a very high A-shape, structured with steel portal frames (left exposed) that crank out at the bottom to form loosely defined "aisles". They focus the nave on the altar, behind which are radiating fins that make a dramatic setting for the cross. These same radiating fins are used in the pattern of glazing in the opposite (east) end wall, visible above the main entrance. There is a strong geometric quality in all the elements, with the plan of the building, porch and aisle roofs, door openings, brick piers, even the altar and pulpit, being composed as angled or cranked shapes.

The main materials are structural steel, concrete and Roman bricks with long-run aluminium roofing. Flooring, ceiling and furnishings are native timbers, including totara, kauri and rimu.

## **History**

This church commemorates the Reverend John Whiteley, who in the words of the commemorative stone, "Commissioned the first Christian mission at Ngamotu 1839. His self-sacrificing death at Parininihi (White Cliffs) on 13th February 1869 was a major factor in restoring harmony between Maori and Pakeha". Whiteley was ordained in 1832 and arrived in New Zealand the following year. He undertook many missionary journeys, mostly on foot, and was influential in persuading the Waikato people to free their Atiawa slaves. He settled in New Plymouth in 1856, an unsalaried Native Land Commissioner and a fluent speaker of Maori.

The first Whiteley Memorial Church was built in 1897 and was destroyed by fire in 1959, the foundation of the present church being laid (on the same site) on 16 September 1961 by the minister Rev W H Greenslade. The contractors were Chas S Limey and Co Ltd and the contract price £57,400 excluding furnishings. The church was opened and dedicated on 19 October 1963 and continues in regular use today.

## **Architect**

The architect was F John Bowering in association with Abbott, Hole and Annabell, Auckland; the structural engineers Brodie and Thomson, New Plymouth.

### **Statement of Significance**

The Whiteley Memorial Church commemorates an important historical figure in the district, one who established the first Christian mission in 1839. It has architectural significance as a building of the modern period, breaking with tradition to find an appropriate form for present-day worship; in this respect its Presbyterian neighbour of thirty years earlier provides a telling contrast. It has some technological interest in the use of modern materials, structural steel in particular. The building has high townscape value on its prominent corner site, and with St Andrews it has a landmark quality, marking in views from the west in particular the edge of the commercial area of the CBD.

### **Sources**

*New Zealand Institute of Architects Journal*, October 1964, pp. 276-279.