

Futuna Chapel

Futuna Close, Karori



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- Futuna Chapel is an influential 1960s building that has become a symbol of its time. It is notable for the way in which it has successfully synthesized Maori and Pakeha architectural traditions to create a genuinely local modern architecture. The internal artwork and sculpture, by artist Jim Allen, is original to this building and has significant aesthetic and cultural value.
- The building has historic value for its association with the Marist Brothers, and is named after a tragic event in Marist religious history.
- The building is held in high public esteem, particularly by the architectural community, and this can be seen by the support of a wide network of interested people when the building was threatened by the c.2000s housing development.
- The building continues to have spiritual significance to the religious community that, for forty years, used the Chapel as part of their religious retreats. Public access to religious and secular events at the Chapel is supported by the building's new owners.
- The building is considered by many architects as a seminal work of New Zealand architecture and this is noted by the award of both the NZIA Gold Medal and 25-year Award.



South-East Corner



West Elevation

Images: Charles Collins, 2015

District Plan:	<p>Map 11, reference 124</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Including the whole interior and all movable fittings and furniture forming the fabric and spatial qualities of the Chapel at the time of completion</i> • <i>The area of land (including the reflective pools on the south east and north west corners of the Chapel) identified in Appendix 5 of Chapter 21:</i> <p>Refer to Appendix 5 of Chapter 21 of the District Plan for specific rules</p>
Legal Description:	Lot 6 DP 326794
Heritage Area:	None – but note area of land included in listing
HPT Listed:	Historic Place Category 1 ref 7446
Archaeological Site:	
Other Names:	62 Friend Street, Karori 67 Futuna Close
Key physical dates:	1958 - 61
Architect / Builder:	John Scott / built by the Marist brothers
Former uses:	Retreat Chapel
Current uses:	Venue for meetings / events / performance
Earthquake Prone Status:	266547 Bdg StrengthInv -Yet to be Assessed (Nov - 2012)

Extent: CityView GIS 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

Futuna Chapel was once central to the Futuna Retreat Centre in Karori, and despite the sale and redevelopment of the site in c.2000, the building continues to be an important landmark in New Zealand's architectural history.

The Futuna Retreat Centre was founded in 1948 by priests and brothers of the Society of Mary (Marists) from the conversion of "Kennoway", an Edwardian villa that had been built for Sydney Kirkcaldie in 1906. The Marist order was founded in Lyons, France, in 1824, and was established in New Zealand with the arrival of Bishop Pompallier and companions in 1838 in the Hokianga. The name "Futuna" derives from the tiny island of Futuna, 20 km north-east of Fiji, where the Marist proto-martyr of Polynesia, Fr Pierre Chanel, was murdered on 28 April 1841. Pierre Chanel was canonised in 1955.²

The initial sketch design for the Chapel was prepared in 1957 by one of the lay brothers, Albert Kelly, who was an architect before his vocation to the order. This design was rejected by the order, and with the appointment of Fr James Beban, Futuna's third superior, architect John Scott was invited in 1958 to prepare designs. These early sketches include initial designs for the Chapel drawn beside sketches of Wharenui and are evidence of the deliberate fusion between Maori and Pakeha architectural traditions in the Chapel's design.³

John Scott was the first Maori student at the School of Architecture, Auckland University. When he was appointed architect of the Chapel he had been in practice for 6 years, during which time he had built several houses, a school, and a chapel for his *alma mater*, St John's College, Hastings.

Scott's designs were somewhat controversial at the time, particularly with Albert Kelly who continued to be a vocal critic, but were finally approved by a meeting of the Provincial Council of the Society of Mary in April 1959.⁴ The permit was issued by the WCC in August 1959 and building commenced soon afterwards. The Chapel was built by seven of the Marist brothers, who carried out almost all of the work on site. The only tradesman employed was an electrician, as none of the brothers were suitably qualified. Work began by excavating and backfilling the former Kirkcaldie family tennis court to a depth of 18 inches (45cm). The work was arduous, particularly the construction of the Chapel's almost 8m high walls, the concrete for which was wheelbarrowed into place via a network of ramps. Artist and sculptor Jim Allen designed the coloured acrylic sheet windows, the 'Stations of the Cross', (some) mosaics and a fine mahogany Christ sculpture.

The opening ceremony took place on 19 March 1961. In "a simple and moving ceremony, accompanied by the Otaki Maori choir and in the presence of more than 2000 invited guests, the Archbishop of Wellington Peter McKeefry, blessed and declared the Chapel open".⁵ Futuna Chapel was awarded the NZIA Gold Medal for the best building of 1968, and the inaugural 25 year Award from the NZIA in 1986.

¹ Note: this document is an updated version of WCC 2001 Heritage Inventory ref FRIE1.

² WCC unpublished report "Futuna Chapel, it's surroundings, heritage values and national significance" c.2000

³ Chris Cochran et al, *Futuna Chapel*, unpublished Conservation Plan for The Friends of Futuna Charitable Trust, (2006), 7

⁴ Cochran (2006), 6

⁵ Russell Walden, "Voices of Silence: New Zealand's Chapel of Futuna" (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1987), 64

Russell Walden in his 1987 book “Voices of Silence” saw the building as a metaphor as a transition from the ‘colonial’ period of New Zealand’s architectural history, (where ‘good’ design was effectively copied from overseas), to a kind of cultural maturity that was manifested by a “living regional architecture ...[that] embrace[d] Maori and Pakeha values.”⁶ To Walden, this Chapel building was one of a very few “authentic example[s] of indigenous New Zealand architecture.”⁷

In 2000 the site was sold to developers who applied to redevelop the 5 ½ acre bush-clad garden site as a housing estate/retirement village. Concerns were raised about the density and design of the development, and about damage to the Chapel (particularly the roof, windows, pews and Christ statue) once work began on site. These issues led eventually to a change in the heritage rules for the Chapel which were amended in DPC 13 in March 2003 to provide protection for the building’s interior and setting.⁸ These rules were too late to prevent the loss of the Chapel’s original setting, and this is something that continues to be mentioned by the housing development’s many critics.⁹ But the plan change was able to effectively prevent the development of the Chapel into residential units, and the construction of further houses in its immediate surrounds.

The Friends of Futuna Charitable Trust purchased the Chapel in 2003 with some assistance from the WCC who now hold an encumbrance (2007) on the title to prevent the building from being altered, demolished or allowed to fall into disrepair. Trustees have included many architects or professionals in the construction industry, the former Minister of Culture and Heritage, a former Environment Court judge, local residents and members of the Scott family. Architects and others within the construction industry also make up the majority of the commercial sponsors, and this can be seen as a testament to the architectural and aesthetic significance of the building.

The Chapel was used as a builder’s site accommodation/ storage during the construction of the housing development and when the trust took possession of the property it was found that the mahogany Christ statue and the NZIA Gold Medal had been removed, along with the copper guttering and flashings. The trust carried out immediate repairs to make the building water-tight, and negotiated for the return of the NZIA gold medal. The mahogany statue of Christ was not recovered at this time. In 2009 works were carried out to (partially) re-roof the building, repair the floor and doors, upgrade the electrical installation, and install new gas heating and WC facilities. Further refurbishment work is planned to repair the timber work, roofs, coloured windows, and to decorate and landscape the building’s exterior.

The mahogany statue of Christ was found on an empty rural property in Taranaki in 2012, and returned “under a heavy police escort”¹⁰ in September of that year for a blessing ceremony before it was taken to Te Papa for conservation assessment and restoration.¹¹ The Chapel is currently in use as a venue for religious and secular events including meetings, lectures, performances and seminars. There are plans to extend the use of the Chapel as a spiritual and architectural retreat, and a home for the John Scott archive.¹²

⁶ Russell Walden, “Voices of Silence: New Zealand’s Chapel of Futuna” (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1987), 20

⁷ Walden (1987) 15

⁸ WCC see various files for DPC 13

⁹ For example the John Scott.net website accessed November 2012

<http://www.johnscott.net.nz/pages/futuna.html>

¹⁰ Shabnam Dastgheib, “Futuna’s Jesus sculpture returned”, *Dominion Post*, 04/09/2012

¹¹ “Lost statue of Christ found on farm” *Dominion Post* 31/08/2012

¹² Friends of Futuna Charitable Trust website accessed November 2012 <http://www.futunatrust.org.nz/>

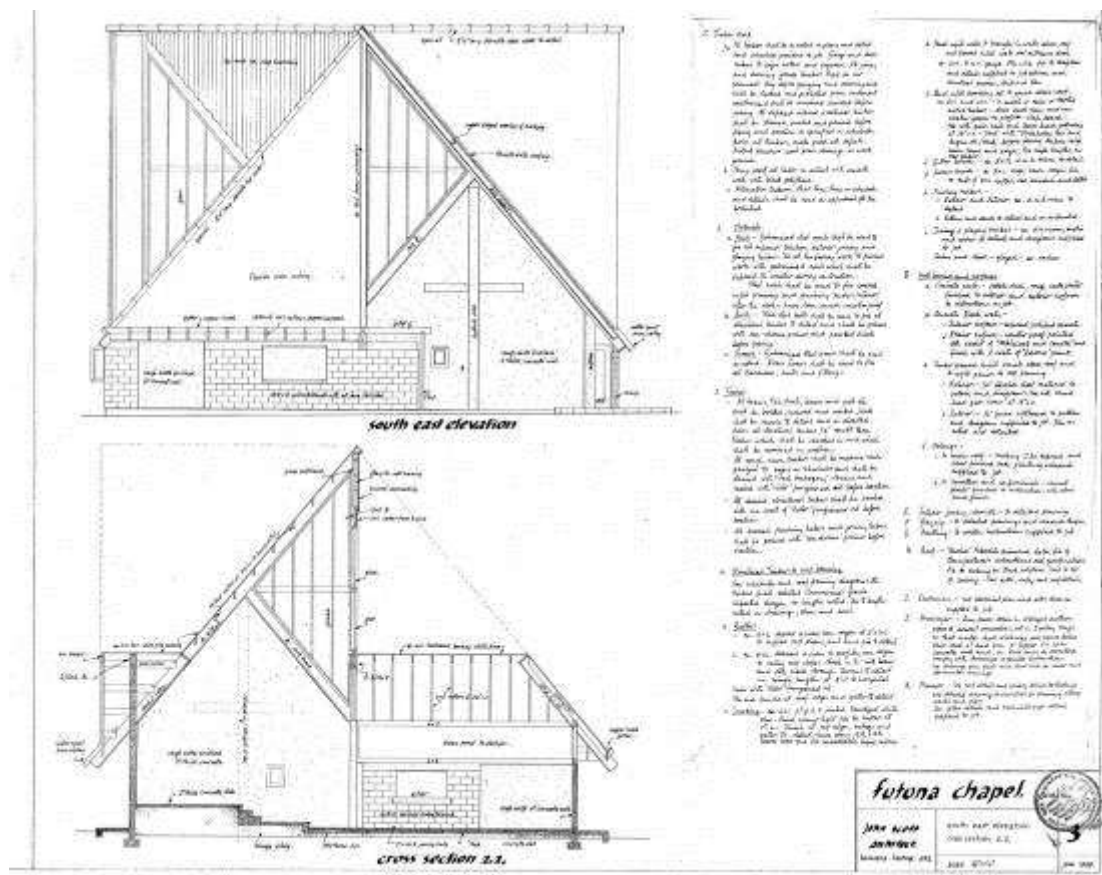


c.2003 – This image shows the area for which heritage rules set out in District Plan Change 13 apply. Note that the road (Futuna Close) had been constructed in approximately its current location by this date. The original retreat buildings to the south-west had been demolished, but the retreat building to the north-east still stood (both have now replaced by town-houses).



2009 Aerial photograph –The Friends of Futuna Charitable Trust site ownership is limited to the demise shown above. The open area noted in DPC 13 to the north-west and south-east continues to be associated with the Futuna Close housing development.

1.2 Timeline of modifications



¹³ Cochran (2006), 23

1.3 Architect / Artist

Architect

Scott, John Colin (1924 – 1992)

John Scott was born and raised in Haumoana in the Hawkes Bay as the third son of Charles Hudson Scott (Scots / Te Arawa descent) and Kathleen Hiraani Blake (Taranaki / English & Irish descent).¹⁴ He trained with the RAF in 1945 but was released from service without seeing combat at the end of WWII. He attended the School of Architecture at Auckland University College from 1946-1949 but felt uncomfortable in the academic environment and continued to study part time while working for Ralph Pickmire in Auckland. He went on to work in various Auckland architectural practices before returning to Haumoana where he established an architectural practice as a sole practitioner (although he also worked with Len Hoogerburg in offices in Hastings in the 1960s & 70s).¹⁵ His practice designed houses that were generally, in the early years, influenced by Vernon Brown and Group Architects. He later developed his own architectural style that was a unique fusion of Maori and Pakeha architectural traditions.¹⁶ His significant public buildings include the St John's College Chapel (1954), a Hastings Catholic school where Scott had been head prefect and captain of the first XV, Futuna Chapel (1961), the Maori Battalion Memorial Centre in Palmerston North (1954–64), and the Urewera National Park headquarters at Aniwanuiwa (1974–76), now best known for the theft and return of the large Colin McCahon painting.

He was awarded the NZIA Gold Medal in 1968 and the inaugural NZIA 25-year award in 1986 for Futuna Chapel, and was awarded a further NZIA Gold medal posthumously in 1999 for this contribution to architecture.

Artist

Jim Allen (1922 -)

Jim Allen was born in Wellington and attended the Wellington Technical Institute between 1939 and 1940. He joined the army in WWII and served in the Middle East and Italy where he studied sculpture at the Institute di Arte in Florence. He graduated from the School of Fine Arts at Canterbury University (NZ) in 1948 and travelled to London on a NZ Art Society travelling scholarship. He lectured at Elam School of Fine Arts at Auckland University in 1960 and was an early proponent of conceptual and post-object art in New Zealand. By the late 1950s / early 1960s Allen had collaborated with mixed success with various architects in New Zealand and was initially suspicious when approached by John Scott to design the coloured windows for Futuna Chapel.¹⁷ Scott and Allen established a rapport, and the artist was asked to design the Stations of the Cross, Christ statue and mosaics.

Allen left New Zealand after years of “hostility and homage”¹⁸ due to his (then) radical views on sculpture as object and was programmes director of the Sydney

¹⁴ NZHPT Professional Biographies accessed November 2012

[http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Scott,+John+\(1924-1992\)](http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Scott,+John+(1924-1992))

¹⁵ John Scott: biography, John Scott.net website accessed November 2012

<http://www.johnscott.net.nz/pages/biography.html>

¹⁶ Russell Walden. 'Scott, John Colin - Biography', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10

URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5s7/1> ; Cochran (2006), 13

¹⁷ Walden (1987), 83

¹⁸ Cochran (2006), 11

College of Arts from 1977. He is now based in Auckland and continues to exhibit. A recent project is the development of his website “Image and Text” which serves as a virtual gallery ‘dedicated to the internet as an art medium and platform for critical discourse.’¹⁹

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

By any standards, Futuna Chapel is an outstanding contemporary building. It has been described as a “faithful celebration of Maori and Pakeha, a poignant demonstration of canopy and cave, and a remarkable aggregation of South Pacific values.”²⁰ Notable Wellington architect Ian Athfield has described it as “a very successful building. It’s become the symbol of something for its time. It’s well executed. It retains mystical feelings... It’s taken on an ageless quality which I think is the point of good building.”²¹ John Scott, the architect of Futuna Chapel, has drawn on a variety of sources, Pakeha and Maori, indigenous and exotic, and crafted a building of exceptional originality. There are echoes in the plan and the exterior of Matisse’s Chapel of the Rosary at Vence, France, and the famous pilgrimage Chapel at Ronchamps by Le Corbusier. But the end product is a New Zealand original of persuasive power and enduring significance.

The Chapel is built on the plan of a Greek cross, of roughcast concrete and timber beams and roof sarking. Natural materials have been chosen: granite for the altar, serpentine marble for the floor, mahogany for the huge crucifix. The pews have the rough-hewn quality of the pews at Ronchamps; the multi-pane gable of coloured glass throws a tapestry of colour that moves with the sun.

The interlocking gables of the roof, held up by a massive central totara post, are the most distinctive exterior feature of Futuna Chapel, while the central post with radiating struts is a significant reference to a Wharenuui.

Amidst its suburban setting, the Chapel is an important local landmark, and is arguably the Capital’s most distinguished contemporary building.

2.2 Materials

Concrete walls, timber framed roof framing, light-weight tiled roof

2.3 Setting

The Futuna Chapel was designed as a chapel set within a 5 ½ acre bush clad retreat located in the centre of suburban Karori. The site was redeveloped as a high density housing estate in the early 2000s and the new development somewhat overwhelms the quiet dignity of the original building. The Chapel is approached from the south via an asphalt carpark for the housing estate. The townhouses to the east and north-east of the building have been constructed to the approx footprint of the original retreat building, but the lawns to the rear (north-west) of the Chapel remains, as have the reflecting pools and some landscaping.

¹⁹ <http://www.imageandtext.org.nz/> Viewd 6/10/2006 in Cochran (2006), 11

²⁰ Walden (1987), 64

²¹ Walden (1987), 149-150

3.0 Sources

Cochran, Chris et al. *Futuna Chapel*, unpublished Conservation Plan for The Friends of Futuna Charitable Trust, (2006)

Dastgheib, Shabnam. "Futuna's Jesus sculpture returned", *Dominion Post*, 04/09/2012

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Walden, Russell. "Voices of Silence: New Zealand's Chapel of Futuna" (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1987)

Walden, Russell. 'Scott, John Colin - Biography', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10
URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5s7/1>

WCC unpublished report "Futuna Chapel, it's surroundings, heritage values and national significance" c.2000

WCC - see electronic folder for DPC 13

Wellington City Archive

00058:107:C5223

Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

Futuna Chapel is an influential 1960s building that has become a symbol of its time. It is notable for the way in which it has successfully synthesized Maori and Pakeha architectural traditions to create a genuinely local modern architecture.

The internal artwork and sculpture, by artist Jim Allen, is original to this building and has significant aesthetic and cultural value.

Townscape: *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

The Chapel has been somewhat compromised by the construction of the modern housing development that now replaces the original Marist retreat buildings on the site. But the scale, materials and roof profile of the Chapel continues to fit into the quiet suburban streetscape and makes a contribution the character and sense of place of its immediate surroundings.

Group: *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

Historic Value:

Association: *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

The building has historic value for its association with the Marist Brothers, and is named after a tragic event in Marist religious history.

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

Educational: *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

The building has technological value for the innovative use of coloured acrylic panels in the windows and 'Stations of the Cross'.

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

The building is held in high public esteem, particularly by the architectural community, and this can be seen by the support a wide network of interested people when the building was threatened by the c.2000s housing development.

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?

The building continues to have spiritual significance to the religious community that, for forty years, used the Chapel as part of their religious retreats. Public access to religious and secular events at the Chapel is supported by the building's new owners.

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

*Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?
Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?*

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

The building is a master-work by an influential New Zealand architecture and has assumed significance as a heritage building well before any of its less architecturally successful contemporaries. The combination of the building form and the art-works by the artist Jim Allen has created an outstanding work of modern architecture that has been recognized by the NZIA with two significant national awards.

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The building is a good representative example of a 1960s religious building.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The building retains much of its original built fabric with the exception of the original diamond pattern roof with copper flashings that has more recently been replaced with imitation pan-tiles. The installation of WC facilities is also a modern intervention.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

The building is considered by many architects as a seminal work of New Zealand architecture and this is noted by the award of both the NZIA Gold Medal and 25-year Award.

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	Y	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?	DPC 13	
Heritage Area Report	n	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	n	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	y	
HPT website	y	
HPT files	n	
Conservation Plan	y	2006 Chris Cochran
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		