

The Gill St Baptist Church.

The first Baptist church to be built in New Plymouth was situated on the northeast corner of the Liardet St/Gill St intersection, fronting on to Gill St. Despite the confusion as to dates in the records of the Baptist Church it is certain that the foundation stone was laid on the 11 March 1868, by Rev. John Whiteley; if the stone had been laid in 1865 the Taranaki Herald in 1868 would not have several times treated an event of three years previous as forthcoming. The church was built with red pine: the exterior walls were of board and batten construction, the interior walls board lined, the floor wooden, and the roof ^{shingles} slates. Described by the Taranaki Herald as "unique in design and roomy in construction," it was estimated as being capable of holding about 130 persons.¹ The church was held in trust by Josiah Flight, William Bayley, Thomas Billing, Richard Hart, and George Hoby.

After the laying of the foundation stone, nothing further is recorded of the church until 1887. Wells wrote in 1878 that "the building was in due time completed, but up to this date it has never been opened up for Divine service."² When mention of the building is next available in 1887, the Church of Christ was renting it and conducting services there. No references to any Baptist use of the building can be found. Apparently the Baptists responsible for the erection of the church migrated to Nelson during the Anglo-Maori Wars and so were unable to use the church.³ More Baptists gathered in New Plymouth and the congregation of the church became a fusion of Baptists and Christians.⁴ With the arrival, in 1893, of Rev. William Drew a Baptist Church was formed, and subsequently affiliated with the Baptist Union of Churches of New Zealand. Rev. Drew served as pastor for several years, and, on retirement, was succeeded by first Rev. Hinton, then Revs. Ings, Woolley, Laird, and Hales. In 1913, wanting a more central building, the Baptists vacated the Gill St structure and moved to a tabernacle on their present Liardet St site.

The Baptist Church sold the Gill St building. The subdivision of the site (plot 863)⁵, in addition to the re-orientation of the building,⁶ has rendered the tracing of the successive owners difficult. William Charles Nixon, a plumber and electrician, acquired the part of the plot adjacent to plot 864 on the 23 February 1914. The portions nearest

Molesworth St were subdivided in 1924. On the 12 July 1928 Nixon acquired the residue of the plot, bordering on Liardet St, and transferred his property in it to Grundy's Motors Limited on the 28 July 1944. This part of the plot was, in turn, transferred to Raedic Developments Limited on the 12 February 1975.

The nature of the owner of the building indicates its use. After serving as a place of divine worship, it functioned as a plumber and electrician's workshop, then as a garage and service station. It currently houses the Avis Rent-a-Car offices.

According to the usage various alterations to the building have been effected. In 1894, while still a church, classrooms were added to the building; the lean-to addition (shown in the drawings) is probably the classroom addition. The orientation of the whole building has been turned by 90 degrees so that it now fronts on to Liardet St. Neither the reason nor the date of this resiting are clear. However, since Baptist Church members say that it was not done during their occupation and Mr Grundy recalls that it had been completed before his occupation, it was probably moved between 1914 and 1944. Either present or past occupants have blocked in the curved section of the windows. Similarly, the front entrance has been filled in. The addition of rooflights and loading bay doors make it impossible to judge where the original openings were. Inside, two metre high partitions have been installed to form three offices. The reception area has been lined but the rest of the building still has the original board lining. The floor of the lean-to addition has settled at a level lower than that of the church, so has been replaced near what has been used as a loading bay. A garage building and a verandah have been annexed to the east and south faces respectively, somewhat altering the external appearance of the building.

The current internal condition of the building is good: the painted boards are sound and the woodwork around the windows is in excellent repair. Externally, however, the state of the wood is poor.

The building is presently for sale.

See plans for site T.H. Dec 8/9/10 1980

Bibliography

Butler Index.

Elliot, Mr D., member of the Baptist Church. (pers comm)

Grundy, Mr F., Former owner of the building. (pers comm)

Lands and Deeds Dept., Certificates of Title.

Mullon, Mr H.D. (pers comm)

Taranaki Herald

Valuation Dept.

Wells, B., The History of Taranaki, New Plymouth, 1878.

Records of the New Plymouth Baptist Church.

Footnotes

1. Taranaki Herald, 14.3.68.
2. Wells, B., The History of Taranaki, p. 134.
3. Elliot. * see note.
4. Records fo the New Plymouth Baptist Church.
5. Lands and Deeds Dept.
6. see below.