

Return to glory

IT may not be a towering cathedral or contain priceless artefacts, but St George's Chapel, in Crownthorpe, is just as valuable to the residents in the small Hawke's Bay rural community and one that is worthy of the \$300,000 restoration it is undergoing. Story – Page 2



Chapel stands strong

By Rural Reporter Juliette Sims

ST George's Chapel, in Crownthorpe, has been the centre of worship in the rural community for 80 years, and is a link to the early European settlement of the area.

A memorial plaque in the foyer reads: "For King and Country. To the memory of Herbert Napier Coleman (owner of the Crownthorpe Estate) 2nd Lieutenant 28th Reinforcements. NZ Expeditionary Force. Killed in Action, in France April 13, 1918. This chapel was erected by his loving father, J. H. Coleman."

The plaque will remain there, as a three-year restoration project finally comes to completion in June, ensuring the chapel will stand strong through the years to come.

James Henry Coleman, father of the fallen soldier, came from Crownthorpe, in East Anglia in 1833, the second son of a family of 15. At the age of 26, he emigrated to New Zealand and found work managing the Te Aute estate. He pioneered a method for crushing fern, which according to sources of the time, was head high in parts of Hawke's Bay. Purchasing 9500 acres at Longlands in 1865, James continued farming there until 1872.

Rather late, at the age of 58, he married Hannah Watt in 1880 and inherited her three children. The couple's first son died shortly after birth, then Herbert Napier was born in December 1884. Another son followed.

Herbert Napier farmed several properties in Hawke's Bay and it was on the Te Aute Estate that he met and married Mary Swinburn. They were married in 1910. In 1911, James bought 3107 acres of Whakamarumaru, on the Whana Whana Road, west of Hastings. Covered in scrub and fern, it had the potential to be made into good grazing land.

Despite his age, and now with four young children, when war came, like many others, Herbert enlisted and left to fight in Europe in 1917. He is buried in Somme, France, where he was killed in April, 1918. Two of his sons later became farmers and the youngest, a decorated bomber pilot, was killed in World War 2.

"We're immensely proud of our heritage," says David Hildreth, who is a member of the of St George's Chapel Restoration Committee.



From left: David Hildreth, his wife Jocelyn and Peter Hyslop of the St George's Restoration Committee.

"There are some very old families in the district.

"We're between the two rivers as it were, so we're an island in a way and like all good districts there's tremendous pride. You can't get past that.

"If something needs to be done, there's always somebody willing to do it.

"There are members of more than 40 families buried here, and what's interesting is that this graveyard is the only one on the East Coast that is owned by the church and not by a local council. Because we own it, we can say who rests here."

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One of the beautiful stained glass windows in St George's Chapel.

Restoration a community effort

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That sense of pride in the area's history and heritage also led to the publication of *West to the Annie* by the RD9 Historical Committee in 2003, which David contributed to, writing about Mangawhare with David Ward.

"It wasn't that the chapel was in a major state of disrepair, but we realised something had to be done to preserve it and ensure it could be maintained in a good condition."

The chapel stands against the background of the Ruahine Range and the Ngaruroro river valley on Matapiro Road. Built in 1921, it was designed by architect Charles Tillard Natusch, who also designed the Hawke's Bay homesteads of Gwavas in 1890 and Matapiro in 1906, which is close to St George's.

Natusch also designed other more well-known churches: Te Aute College Chapel, a chapel at St John's Cathedral, Napier, and St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, in Hastings.

Wellington conservation architect Chris Cochran and Graham Linwood, of Linwood Architects Hastings, worked together on a restoration plan for the chapel's conservation. The building work has been carried out by Morgan Building and Joiners, Hastings.

The plan says it is "a building typical of early 20th century church architecture in New Zealand". The chapel has strong Roman or Norman character, especially in the square tower, the round headed window openings, and in the layered semi-circular moulding over the main doors.

In its original form, with a crenellated top to the tower, the Norman origins of the design were even stronger. The building has elements of gothic architecture in the configuration of the spaces and in the steep pitched gables and the buttressed wall.

Crenellated means it looked like it had battlements. Unfortunately the original construction drawing was probably lost in the Hawke's Bay earthquake in 1931. The tower was replaced in 1949 due to water leaks, which may have also been due to the earthquake.

"We held a meeting about preserving the chapel, which was well attended, with about 40 parishioners," David says. "Graham (Linwood) put us in touch with Chris, who is an expert in restoration work."

"We did have some concerns about the state of the concrete. Being old we thought it might be in bad order, but it turned out that it's half as strong again as anything they can build today."

There was, however, some deterioration of the timber parts of the church and the cedar tiles on the tower have been renewed.

The restoration has cost \$300,000, about half of which came from the Lottery Grant Board, and further contributions came from the Eastern and Central Community Trust and the J N Williams Trust. The community raised \$70,000.

"There are about 70 families around here who have given us money one way or another," David says. "Some gave more and some gave less, but it worked out to a thousand dollars a family."

"The chapel has always been well used, and well attended on special occasions, and we

have regular services taken by our clergy Bill Chapman and Craig Kilgour. But, even though some of those who have contributed might not use the church much, they still want it, because it is part of the district."

St George's Chapel was consecrated at a service in 1921. Records from the time record there "was far from sufficient room in the building for all the numbers who were present, including returned soldiers from far and near", and it is likely the small church will be full again when it reopens with a service in August.

While David says the area could do with a restaurant, there is little chance this humble chapel will, like many other rural churches, be renovated and put to another use.

"It can never be sold because there are conditions against it, and you could never shift it either, it's concrete."

Herbert Napier and his father can rest in peace for many years yet.

FOR KING AND COUNTRY.

**TO THE MEMORY OF
HERBERT NAPIER COLEMAN.**

[OWNER OF THE CROWNTHORPE ESTATE]

2ND LIEU.

28TH REINFORCEMENTS.

N.Z. EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

KILLED IN ACTION

IN FRANCE

APRIL 13. 1918.

**THIS CHAPEL WAS ERECTED BY HIS
LOVING FATHER. J. H. COLEMAN.**

Well remembered:

This inscription
reminds us of
Herbert Coleman's
sacrifice.