

ŌPŌTIKI NEWS

\$1.20 | Thursday, April 17, 2025

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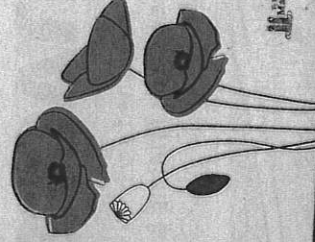


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ANZAC 2025

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**WEATHERTIGHT
ISSUES:** Muriel
Smith-Kelly and
Veronica Tawera
shelter from the
rain in front of the
church, which is
no longer
weathertight.
Photo Paul Charman
E5346-03

Trade chaos a threat to roof job

Paul Charman

PARISHIONERS of an historic Catholic church east of Opotiki hope trade wars will not delay re-roofing of their historic building ahead of the winter rains.

The Church of Our Lady (COOL) faces onto Motu Rd at the bottom of the gentle rise ascending to Waiaua Marae.

Damage to the historic building's roofing iron has made it leak-prone,

leaving the church's friends and supporters with no option but to re-roof.

"The full price of re-roofing our church will be \$30,000; the cost of the materials is \$15,000 with another \$15,000 to be paid upon completion of the re-roof. That payment is to cover the cost of scaffolding, labour and any incidentals incurred," parishioner Veronica

Continues P2

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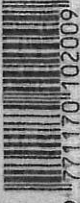
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IN AN EMERGENCY
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Roof job under threat

■ From P1

Tawera said. "We feel time is of the essence, otherwise building materials could get caught up in supply chain issues caused by the current trade wars.

"We hope those who are keen to pre-serve a unique part of history can help us meet our target, volunteer their time and skill, or both. The idea is to get the roof on as soon as possible before the big rain sets in.

"Our roofers quoted an excellent price for the project which will include cleaning the area between the sarked ceiling and the iron roofing. Netting will be installed to protect the building from starlings. Waste timber and iron will be recycled where possible."

The arrival of the church building at Waiaua Marae followed the chaos of the Spanish Flu Pandemic in 1918.

Soldiers returning from World War I brought the deadly virus to this country between October and December that year. It went on to kill an estimated 9000 New Zealanders, including many Māori.

"At this time, the church was situated below the Omaramutu Marae, the hapu being Ngāti Rua," Mrs Tawera said.

"The hapu consisted of the Ringatu and Catholic denominations and traditionally, the kawa of the Omaramutu marae was that no food or hot drinks were to be consumed in the whareniui, a sacred place.

"However, it became clear to the Catholic parishioners that this kawa was not supporting the people's recovery."

Ms Muriel Smith Kelly, a long-time Waiaua Valley resident said at the time the flu was wiping the people out in a frenzy. Desperate situations required desperate measures and nursing the people back to health was paramount."

Her mum, Mrs Edith T Kelly, knew that cold water alone would not be sufficient in healing the sick people.

"So, despite the kawa, they administered hot water drinks and nourishing broths for sustenance to aid the recovery of flu victims," Ms Smith Kelly said.

"Warm water was also utilised for bathing purposes. But unfortunately, this desperate intervention was not accepted by the Ringatu and resulted in the Catholics moving the church building away to its present site.

"Moving the church was a huge job for our Catholic community. We believe they partially disassembled the structure and put it on giant rollers to bring it to the present location.

"The menfolk re-assembled the building, making necessary repairs, while the womenfolk took care of all the support services, like washing and feeding the workers."



PANELLING: Veronica Tawera and Muriel Smith-Kelly stand in front of tukutuku panels that were installed in 2021.

Photos Paul Charman E5346-01



LEAKS: This image shows where water is seeping through the church's sarked ceiling.

E5346-02

Today the church has a beautifully polished totara interior and is adorned with tukutuku panels that were installed in 2021.

Ms Smith-Kelly recalled the many years The Church of Our Lade kept the community together, with big Sunday meetings of local Māori attending in their finery to celebrate mass.

"We walked or rode horses and some came in cars. There was so much love at these church gatherings and the singing was out of this world," she added.

She recalled early morning milking before church with a hot drink in the morning but no breakfast. The family fasted from midnight till after the service. The journey to church was a walk across neighbouring farms.

"Ladies' ensembles were complete with hats and gloves, while some preferred mantillas (a traditional silk veil), and the church was always packed. The church was beautifully decorated by the women in the congregation ... Kath Coleman was a well-remembered organist."

"I had a great fondness for Father Murray who was with us for many years. Not the same fondness for the sermons of the day though, which prom-

ised eternal fires of hell for unrepentant sinners. As a young child I struggled to come to terms with the sermons of that time. I refused to believe in an unforgiving God. I believed in a God of compassion, forgiveness and love.

"Following the service was a social time and catchup. On celebratory occasions a hakari would be shared at the Marae. . . Priests spent much of their time with the families. There was also a sleeper room for priests at the church and, of course, a garage for his car.

"Most times we headed back to our homes for the traditional Sunday roast. The meat would have been cooked away in our absence. We're getting quite envious by now as you will appreciate the journey to church was not a hop in the car and a five-minute buzz trip.

"The vision for the Church of Our Lady is to nurture and foster the growth of our tamariki, mokopuna ia ra, ia ro i roto i te hahi Katorika.

"He taonga tapu i tuku iho o te Atua i runga rawa ki ngā tipuna o Ngāti Patumoa."

Meanwhile, Waiaua Marae is well known for another historical reason.

One of its three urupa is the final resting place of Mokomoko, the chief wrongly convicted of murdering missionary Carl Völkner in 1866.

Despite not being involved in Völkner's death, Mokomoko was arrested after Ōpōtiki Pā was looted and burnt to the ground by colonial forces.

He surrendered to them on the condition that his tribe be left alone, but was convicted of the crime, and executed with several others in Auckland later that year.

Following Mokomoko's execution, large areas of land around Ōpōtiki were confiscated under the New Zealand Settlements Act of 1863 and sold to settlers.

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