

Dunedin churches



Top of the class

When it was built in 1877, St Dominic's Priory in Tennyson Street was the largest unreinforced concrete building in the Southern Hemisphere. The Dominican Sisters left the building in 1983. The building is now being redeveloped into apartments.



Hey guess what?

The treble bell rung by the First Church Bell Ringers Association is the southernmost bell in the world hung for musical ringing, and the tower holds the southernmost set of hung bells.



Digging deeper...

One of Dunedin's greatest ironies is the positioning of the Anglican Cathedral in the city's prime position at the head of the Octagon, while the Presbyterian First Church stands away from the city's hub. Initially it was the Presbyterians holding pride of place with First Church built on top of Bell Hill in the centre of the city, while the Anglicans were left to build at the Octagon – at the time thought to be rather out of the way.

In addition to being important places of worship for generations of locals, Dunedin's past and present places of worship have become the focus of much secular interest. For some, the appeal is their architectural interest and role in the history of the city.

The first church buildings in Dunedin were wooden, built by whalers and farmers whose building skills were honed in the construction of their own homes. The Wesleyan Mission house at Waikouaiti also acted as the missionary's home, the schoolroom and the public hall, and was the very first designated place of worship in Otago.

The goldrush provided the catalyst for rapid growth in Dunedin. Church groups suddenly found themselves with many more members and a great deal more money with which to realise their visions of creating permanent places of worship. The Presbyterians began a building fund to erect a grand, gothic church in brick and stone on the highest point of the inner town. First Church, completed in 1873 with carvings by Louis Godfrey and a 56m spire, is visited by locals and tourists alike. Also much visited are the slightly less grand Knox Church at the northern end of town and St Paul's Anglican Cathedral and Belfry in the Octagon, reputed to have the only stone vaulted nave in New Zealand.

St Joseph's Roman Catholic cathedral in Rattray Street is the work of F W Petre, one of New Zealand's finest Victorian architects. It was opened on 14 February 1886. The original plan was for a magnificent cruciform cathedral with a tower and spire 60.8m high but the building was not completed. The stonework, however, is particularly fine as are the stained glass windows, made by the Royal Factory in Munich.



Dunedin's First Church, completed in 1873



Knox Presbyterian Church, on George Street

