

Petone is in a real sense the birthplace of New Zealand and it was there, on the wharf, that the official sesquicentennial celebrations were held in 1990.



The very first group of organised settlers to arrive in NZ, came to Petone Beach in January 1840. They confronted an arduous 3-month journey and vagaries of settlement with fortitude and faith. Then 12 years after arrival, built and opened the Christ Church in Taita.



The church itself has a rich history. When the settlers arrived on Petone beach, they were welcomed by Te Whiti, and his Atiawa people, who had a village on what is now the Wellington Rowing and Water-skiing clubs. The Te Atiawa tribe made the new arrivals welcome, sheltered and fed them, and fast developed a strong relationship with them based on trade.

They initially lived in pre-fabricated huts, which they bought with them in a village they named Britannia, on land which is now where the Petone Croquet Club is in Tennyson Street, Petone. When Te Rauparaha tried to drive out the settlers, the people of Te Atiawa fought on the settlers' side.

Further tough times arrived in the form of two major floods of the Hutt River, followed by the 1852 Earthquake. These caused such collective upheaval that it drove the settlers out. Some went to Port Nicholson, that later to become Wellington, and some to flood-free land up river at Taita.

Christ Church was the first substantial edifice built in the Hutt Valley after the settlers arrived there. It was built by the settlers themselves from pit-sawn timber and hand-wrought nails. It opened in 1854.



Still standing today, it's isolated from view because of the large industrial buildings around.

To make the church available to visitors and school groups, a Trust has been formed, of which I am the secretary. A visitor centre is to be established in the form of an authentic settlers' cottage. It will be staffed by volunteers, to allow visitors and school parties to see the church and displays to tell the many remarkable stories of those settlers' bravery and devotion.

