



WHANGANUI DISTRICT HERITAGE INVENTORY

Register Item No: 284 **Type:** Building

Site & Building: Pre-1900 Archaeological Interest

Name: SAVAGE CLUB

Location: 55-65 Drews Avenue, Queens Park, Whanganui

Legal Description: Pt Section 549, Town of Wanganui

Current Details: Owner: Whanganui District Council
Occupier: Savage Club

District Plan Class: Class B

Original Owner: Wanganui Borough Council

Date: 1893; extended 1899 (with later minor additions)

Architect/Designer: Alfred Atkins

Builder: 1893: Arthur & Abram; 1899 addition: HT Johns

Status: Plan Change 15, 2009, Plan Change 29, 2013, Class B

Thematic Context: Cultural/Civic

Significance: Historic, Architectural, Cultural

Integrity: Substantially intact although original building has had further minor additions since 1899

Photo Reference:

WDC File Ref: Heritage/Inventory/B17 4m

Date: December 2003

See pp6-7 for additional photograph(s)



This building originally housed the Wanganui Public Museum. The left portion was completed in 1893 with the right wing added in 1899. It became the Savage Club hall in 1931

History:

Of the site:

Further research is needed to ascertain what part, if any, of the Rutland Stockade was on this site. Archaeological reports of Queen's Park will provide relevant information. The site was levelled by prisoners to accommodate the building; this work was undertaken under the supervision of the gaoler, Mr T Noble-Beasley, who "outside his official duties, takes great interest in the project" (*Yeoman*, 20 May 1893).

Of Samuel Drew and the origins of the Whanganui Regional Museum:

Samuel Henry Drew was born in Berkshire, England, the son of a watchmaker and jeweller. He immigrated with his family to Australia in the 1850s and was educated at Launceston Grammar School. The family came to New Zealand in 1860 but Samuel returned to England to train under a London watchmaker. He came back to Nelson and established his jewellery business there in 1864 and later moved to Wanganui in 1870. Drew's first Wanganui shop was in Taupo Quay but he moved to the Victoria Avenue site in 1872, the year he married to Catherine Beatson, the daughter of a Nelson architect.

Samuel Drew was not only a well-known watchmaker and jeweller in Wanganui, but also had a keen interest in natural history and geology. He collected specimens and established a museum in the family home above the shop. By the 1890s Drew's collection had outgrown the family premises so he agreed to sell it to the Borough Council for £600, half its value, to form the basis of the Wanganui Museum. Trustees were appointed when the Wanganui Public Museum was formally established in 1892 with the purchase of the collection.

Samuel Drew died suddenly at his shop on 18 December 1901; he had also contributed much to the cultural development of Wanganui through his involvement in the Orchestral Club and Harmonic Society and also belonged to the Wanganui Rowing Club. The marble bust commemorating Samuel Drew was unveiled at the Museum by the Premier, Richard Seddon, on 26 Nov 1903. This bust with a memorial tablet is now in the Whanganui Regional Museum. In 1909, the Borough Council decided to name the road outside the museum building "Drews Avenue" to commemorate Samuel Drew and his contribution to the development of the museum.

Of the Museum building:

The building was designed by Alfred Atkins to serve as the Wanganui Public Museum, with the main (eastern) hall constructed in 1893. As described in *The Yeoman* 20 May 1893, the building was designed to have "the largest amount of accommodation possible for the money to be expended" so its appearance was "necessarily plain on the outside, the walls being covered with corrugated iron (for increased safety from fire) relieved by timber facings and other woodwork about the gables". The front of the building had an entrance hall with committee room and Director's offices on either side, leading to the main hall which was divided into six bays on either side to provide space for display cases. The interior was lit by skylights above the coved ceiling and the walls were matchlined with oiled timber. Contractors for the building were Messrs Arthur & Abram; plumber was Mr Gellatly and the painting and decorating undertaken by Messrs R & E Tingey.

The Mayor, Freeman R Jackson, later complimented the architect, Alfred Atkins, on his "labour of love" in designing the building at no charge while also contributing to organising fundraising events such as the ball held in July 1893 when Atkins acted as MC. However, it was to be some time before the public of Wanganui would gain access to the Museum. George Anderson made the display cases (to Atkins' design) later in 1893 and by April 1894 it was reported that the museum would shortly be formally opened (but this did not occur). Samuel Drew organised the museum and its collection in his honorary capacity as Director, working after his shop closed, so it was not surprising that it took some time to get everything in place.

By December 1895, the Borough Council had agreed to fund a caretaker for the Museum and it could then be opened every day from 12-4pm. On opening day, two small boys turned up to become the first Museum visitors. No formal ceremony took place. *The Yeoman* reported on 28 December 1895 that it was surprising that the matter of the museum opening should be "treated so indifferently" and that "no fitting ceremonial should have been arranged to mark so important an event in the history of Wanganui".

Subsequent events during the Museum's occupation of the building:

1898 Alfred Atkins designed the addition to the building for Museum Trustees. Local builder, HT Johns secured the contract and the new wing was completed by March 1899. This (western) hall served as a lecture hall and was also being used for concerts by 1909.



- 1900 During the past year, 21,000 people visited the Museum, reported by Mayor Alexander Hatrick on the occasion of the Museum Annual fair.
- 1909 The Museum was repainted, in a colour scheme devised by Atkins, who was still Hon Architect to the Trustees although he now lived in Wellington. Hughes Allomes & Tarrant painted the body of the building cream with the woodwork, etc in brown.
- 1912 Trustees considered plans for alterations and additions, plans again prepared by Alfred Atkins. [This work may not have taken place as no further reference has been found.]
- 1914 Consideration was being given to a new building to house the Museum, Library and Art Gallery located in Queens Park where the Lion Monument was sited. [This is the site where the Gallery was eventually built.]
- 1916 Plans were still being made for another Museum; Mayor considered the old building could be used to house the Native Land Court [but they moved to Rutland Street in 1922].
- 1928 The new Museum was built and the old building became redundant. Some of the original Maori carvings were retained in situ, however.

Of the Savage Club:

The club has its origins in London in October 1857, when gentlemen “connected with literature and the fine arts” first met at the Crown Tavern off Drury Lane to discuss forming a social society or club. In 1885, the Wellington Savage Club was formed (and is still affiliated to the London club) and six years later in 1891 the Wanganui Savage Club was established. This group went into recess by the turn of the century and was forgotten until an old Minute Book was discovered in 1991.

In 1904, several well-known citizens of Wanganui began to entertain fellow Lodge members with songs and sketches. These men included Alexander Hatrick, Judah Keesing, Louis Salek, Louis Cohen and Messrs Bamber, Gatenby and Parsons. Following an impromptu roadside concert given by the group when their coach capsized en route to Apiti for a concert, the Orpheus Society was established. In 1907 this became the Savage Club and affiliated with other such clubs in New Zealand. The first Savage Club concert held that year included a Maori party from up river, thus developing the tradition of incorporating Maori songs, decorations and other tikanga in Club concerts or korero as they are still known. The club went into recess again at the outbreak of World War I.

However, another group of local entertainers, including Bert Fry, Rob Bond, George and Peter Swan and Tom Sperring, formed the Wanganui Swankers’ Club in 1914 to raise funds for Red Cross nurses. The Swankers continued to organise concerts and events in support of local charities until the early 1920s.

In 1929, the Savage Club was revived after a meeting called by Fred Spellerberg, then manager of the Bristol Piano Company in Wanganui. The club’s piano was collected from its safe deposit in the National Bank and meetings were held in the Drill Hall. In 1931, Club member Dr George Adams secured the lease of the old Museum building which has been home to the Wanganui Savage Club ever since.

The Savage Club was particularly active after the Second World War. By 1952 it had a membership of 250 (with others wishing to join) and a full orchestra of 30. An annual revue was being staged by 1956. While membership declined from the 1970s, the Wanganui Savage Club is still a flourishing part of the local cultural scene. Sunday afternoon concerts are held regularly during the winter months and members actively give concerts elsewhere in New Zealand, making “raids” into the territory of other such clubs.

Work on the building during the Savage Club’s tenure:

- 1945 Additions and alterations, changing the caretaker’s bedroom and bathroom.
- 1947 Renovations and extension to the annex to the main hall which houses the Committee Room and Dressing Room.
- 1949 Extended bedrooms and renovated the roof.
- 1958 Alterations to the hall. Notes it has concrete foundations. Work done by Lawson & Springer.
- 1959 Carport erected.
- 1960 Garage re-erected.
- 1962 Spotlight projection box built in.
- 1971 Building re-piled.
- 1988 New garage erected.

Description:

Single-storey timber-framed building clad with corrugated iron (and with iron roof). The main hall used by the Savage Club was the first wing of the Museum (built 1893); the adjoining hall was the new wing of the Museum opened in 1899. Several additions have been made to the building since the Savage Club took on the lease in 1931 but the main entrance porticos to both halls remain as designed for the Museum (except for a hood over the dance studio doorway). Inside, the main hall still has the side bays constructed for the Museum; today these house Savage Club memorabilia and portraits of past rangatira. The hall is highly decorated with Maori carvings (some from the Museum days) and murals depicting the Whanganui River which were originally painted by Bob Howell in the 1930s and copied in the 1970s by Ces Cornish onto ivory board. In contrast, the adjoining hall (used as a dance studio and as a refreshment venue for Club concerts) is undecorated.

Condition:

Appears to be in good condition, including exterior paintwork. However, the building is likely to need ongoing maintenance. A conservation plan will be needed to help inform the work that should be done to retain its character. A more sensitive “heritage” colour scheme for the exterior would be beneficial. Note that in 1909 it was repainted cream with brown features.

Resources Consulted:

Whanganui District Council Building files: Watt Street file contains papers dating from 1945.
Whanganui Borough Council Register of Building Permits, Archives Ref AAF 174:1 – no permits listed (outside “brick area” in 1898).
Whanganui Borough Council 1908 Insurance Assessment Plan – building not shown.
Yeoman, 20 May 1893 – description of new building, expected to be completed within 3 weeks. Notes all construction professionals.
Whanganui Herald 9 June 1893 – Committee, including Alfred Atkins, plans fundraising ball for Museum. Atkins acted as MC at ball (reported on 15 June).
Whanganui Herald 19 July 1893 – tender notice for Museum fittings. A Atkins, architect.
Whanganui Herald 14 July 1893 – FR Jackson, Mayor, compliments Mr A Atkins on his “labour of love” in designing Museum building for free.
Whanganui Herald 1 Aug 1893 – George Anderson’s tender accepted for building glass cases for Museum.
Yeoman 7 April 1894 – report on visit to new Whanganui Public Museum to view exhibits. Expected to be opened formally the next month [but formal opening did not occur].
Yeoman 28 Dec 1895 – report on opening of the Museum; caretaker employed and Museum to be open to the public each afternoon from January 1896.
Whanganui Herald 8 Aug 1898 – Museum Trustees approve A Atkins’ plan for additions to Museum and agree to call tenders.
Whanganui Herald 15 Aug 1898 – tender notice: additions to Museum for Museum Trustees. A Atkins, architect.
Whanganui Herald 9 Dec 1898 – HT Johns, contractor for additions to Museum, to start work.
Whanganui Herald 24 March 1899 – opening of new wing of Museum.
Yeoman, 30 June 1900 – report of Museum Annual Fair. Noted that Museum had 21,000 visitors the previous year.
Whanganui Herald 31 March 1909 – Borough Council decide to call road in front of Museum “Drews’ Avenue”.
Whanganui Herald 5 May 1909 – Annual report of Museum refers to Concert Hall as well as main hall.
Whanganui Herald 28 July 1909 – Museum AGM report notes A Atkins is Hon Architect. Has useful historical information about museum.
Whanganui Herald 18 Oct 1909 – A Atkins’ tender notice for painting Museum.
Whanganui Herald 24 Nov 1909 – Hughes Allomes & Tarrant to paint exterior of Museum, body of building to be painted a light cream and the facings to be brown.

Wanganui Herald 30 July 1912 – Museum Trustees meet to discuss plans for alterations and additions to Museum, prepared by Hon Architect to Museum, Alfred Atkins. [No tender found; may not have proceeded with work.]

Wanganui Herald 1 Aug 1914 – Committee considers new building to house Museum, Library and Art Gallery on Lion Monument site [where Gallery only was built].

Wanganui Herald 16 Oct 1916 – Mayor considers that Museum building could become Native Land Court once Gallery is built.

Wanganui Chronicle 7 July 1962 – article on history of the Swankers' Club, established in 1915.

Wanganui Chronicle 20 July 1966 – report of diamond jubilee of Wanganui Savage Club (says Club formed in 1894).

Wanganui Chronicle 26 Oct 1991 – report of Savage Club centenary; notes club formed in Wanganui in 1891; went into recess at the turn of the century and was revived in 1904 as the Orpheus Society and became the Savage Club again in 1907; went into recess during WWI and was revived in 1929.

Wanganui Midweek 27 May 1998 – report on Savage Club, 106 years young and to be filmed for Gary McCormick TV presentation.

Wanganui Chronicle 25 May 2002 – feature on Savage Club with photographs. [Original A3 copy] 1990 Heritage Study, Register Item #17/1 – included ATL photograph and very basic information. Recommended registration under Historic Places Act.

The Wanganui Story, MJG Smart and AP Bates, Wanganui, 1972. Includes details of 1903 annual report and visitor numbers to date.

www.savageclub.com – website of Savage Club in London with historical information about its origins.

Comments on Significance:

Historic

This is the second oldest “civic” building in Wanganui but unlike the 1882 Library, which has had extensive alterations, it retains much of its original character. It was built as the Wanganui Public Museum to house the collection developed by Samuel Drew and purchased in 1892 by the Borough Council following public fundraising and subscriptions. Drew remained as honorary curator of the Museum until his death in 1901. From 1931, the building has been home to the Wanganui Savage Club, one of the oldest such clubs in New Zealand.

Architectural

This is an excellent example of a late Victorian provincial museum building, designed to be built to a budget and to be as fire resistant as possible. Although the building has had additions, particularly since 1931 when the Savage Club moved here, it retains much of its original architectural integrity. It is also one of the few existing examples of the large buildings designed by Alfred Atkins in Wanganui during the period of the city's growth in the mid 1890s and is the only one designed for a public purpose.

Cultural

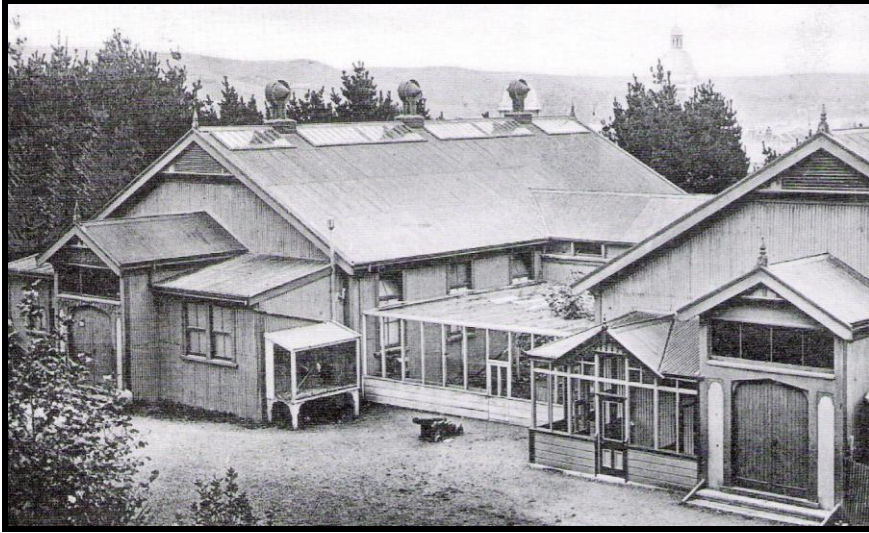
For 35 years this was Wanganui's first museum. Between 1895 and 1903, the Museum attracted 183,147 visitors, demonstrating the popularity of the institution and its importance to Wanganui's cultural scene. Since 1931, the building has been the hall and base for the Wanganui Savage Club, which was first established in 1891. Uniquely, the Savage Club combines its original European tradition of concert entertainment with Maori culture. This permeates all aspects of the Club's operations, including its korero and decorations in the hall.

Recommendations:

Register under Historic Places Act.

Date: 5 May 2005 (updated Dec 2005)

Research by: Wendy Pettigrew



An early photograph of the Museum building. (From *Memories of Old Wanganui*, Vol 2)



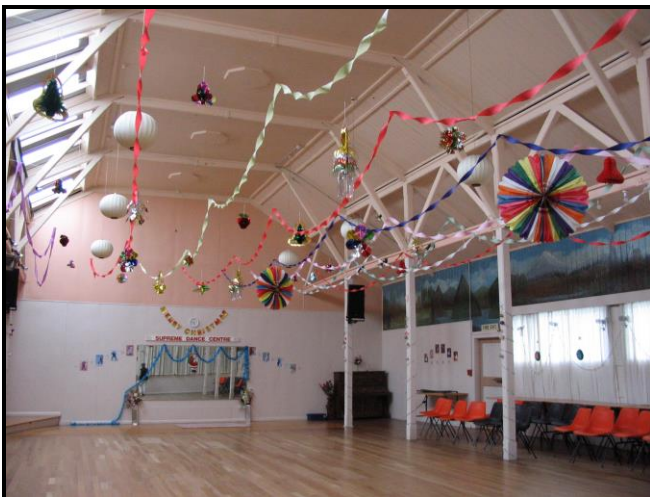
ATL 000127 G 1/1 – WJ Harding photograph above shows interior of the Wanganui Museum, mid 1890s. This is still the main Savage Club hall.



The interior of the Savage Club hall today.



Images of past Rangatira and club officials in the bays around the main hall.



The 1899 lecture hall extension which now houses a dance studio.