



## WHANGANUI DISTRICT HERITAGE INVENTORY

**Register Item No:** 293      **Type:** Building      **Site:** Pre-1900 Archaeological Interest

**Name:** PLUNKET ROOMS

**Location:** 4 Campbell Street, Whanganui

**Legal Description:** Lot 1, DP 25178 (Previously Section 15, Deeds 363)

**Current Details:** Owner: [Contact Whanganui District Council for details]

Occupier: Royal New Zealand Plunket Society

**Original Owner:** Wanganui Hospital and Charitable Aid Board

**Date:** 1915

**Architect/Designer:** TH James and WT Higgins

**Builder:** JW Alderton

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**Status:** District Plan Class: Class B, 2013

**Thematic Context:** Social/Civic

**Significance:** Historic, Architectural, Cultural, Context

**Integrity:** Substantially intact especially exterior

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**Photo Reference:**

WDC File Ref: Heritage/Inventory/Camp2

Date: 2009

*See p5 for additional photograph(s)*



The Plunket building after its major renovation works in 2008/09.

## History:

### *Of the site:*

Names of occupiers of previous houses on the site are still to be confirmed. Thomas Lane, bootmaker, may have lived there in 1883; by 1903 Richard Barnard, surgeon and Jas J Stewart lived on this side of Campbell Street. The house next door (on the currently vacant section) was built in 1873 for Rev Richard Taylor who died not long after it was finished. His widow, Caroline, continued to live there until her death in 1884. Dr Wall lived there much later (listed in 1929 Wise's) and the house was later converted to become the Palm Lounge. It burnt down in 1999.

### *Of the building:*

The Wanganui Hospital and Charitable Aid Board was established in 1894 and the first part of the new hospital was opened at Heads Road in 1897. By 1914 the Board decided it needed premises, both for Board meetings and the secretary's office which ran the business of the hospital and its charitable activities, including the orphanage. There was some indecision over the best site, whether to build on land the Board owned on the corner of Guyton and Campbell Streets or at the hospital site in Gonville. The decision was finally made to build on the Guyton & Campbell Street site in June 1915 and the hospital board architect, TH James, drew up plans for the new building. At this time, James was in partnership with the Marton architect, WT Higgins and their tender notice for the office building was published in the *Wanganui Herald* on 17 July 1915. A subsequent tender notice was published by the architects in the *Herald* on 3 Aug 1915 for the purchase (and possible removal) of old buildings from the Campbell Street site, shortly in advance of the building permit being issued by the Borough Council for new Hospital Board offices, cnr Guyton & Campbell Street. The successful contractor was JW Alderton, who specialised at the time in brick buildings. The contract cost was estimated at £1,258. An additional building permit was issued on 27 Sept 1915 to Alderton to erect scaffolding for the new Hospital Board offices in Campbell St; presumably construction was about to start at this time.

The new offices would have been completed by late 1915 and possibly occupied early in 1916 (no newspaper article about the opening of the offices has been obtained as yet). However, the Hospital Board's occupation of the Campbell Street building did not last long. By 1920 the Board decided to build new offices in the hospital grounds as it had proved difficult to collect patients' fees at a location some distance away from the hospital. In the end, the secretary's office was built adjoining the existing hospital buildings as the construction of a special building in Gonville was deemed too expensive. The Board then called for tenders to lease the Campbell Street premises and received just one tender, from the Wanganui Branch of the Plunket Society who offered to rent the building for £100 per year. Apparently the Board rejected this offer but did negotiate with Plunket who were then able to take on the tenancy of the building.

The official opening of Plunket's new headquarters in the Campbell Street building took place on 3 February 1922. The President of Plunket in Wanganui at the time was Mrs Hope Gibbons and the Mayor, TB Williams, presided at the ceremony. He noted that "the new rooms are essential if the work of the Society is to proceed in the interest of the mothers and children of this community." A new nurse was needed at the time as the call on Plunket services was growing rapidly. Afternoon tea was provided at a cost of 6d.

Two years later, Plunket were able to take over ownership of the building, while still leasing the land from the Hospital Board. This came about through the generosity of Mr & Mrs WR Tuck who purchased the building from the Board in May 1924, with the original intention that Plunket should pay off a loan for the building. Subsequently, on 15 September 1924 the Deeds to the building were handed over by Mr Tuck to Lady Jellicoe, wife of the Governor General, who then presented them to Mrs AJ Crawford, president of Plunket in Wanganui, and unveiled a brass tablet in the building to commemorate the occasion. By this time, Plunket nurses were making some 6,000 visits a year to homes in Wanganui while 8,000 adults and babies had called at the Campbell Street offices.

While Plunket used most of the building, it appears that the Public Health Dept maintained a presence here in Campbell Street up to the early 1940s. In addition, a School Dental Clinic was there for some time. Plunket's lease of the land was set at £14 10s per year from 1924, but in 1938 the Society asked the Board to waive the rental, which by then was just £11 12s per year. The Hospital Board agreed to this provided that the land continued to be used by the Plunket Society.

Plunket added its first garage in 1926 (built of wood and konka and designed by RG Talboys) with later garages being built in 1986 and 1991; the car seat rental service required storage otherwise not available within the main building. However, substantial renovation work was not done on the building until the

major project in 2008/09, following the installation of a new colour-steel roof. Plunket moved out of Campbell Street for some six months while work was undertaken to renovate the building internally, installing a new heating system as well as electrical and plumbing work. The opportunity was also taken to secure the front parapet of the building by tying it back and the front porch was tied back with hidden steel struts. Internal and external painting finished off the work and Plunket celebrated the official opening of their renovated building on 14 May 2009.

*Of the Plunket Society in Wanganui:*

In 1907 Dr Truby King established the first Karitane Home for Babies in Dunedin, where the Society to promote the health of women and children was initiated. Lord and Lady Plunket, as Governor General at the time, were patrons of the new society, whose first nurses were to be known as Lady Plunket Nurses. The society was incorporated in 1912, the year Dr Truby King embarked on a national lecture tour to encourage the establishment of local committees. In Wanganui, the first meeting to discuss having a Plunket Nurse in the town was held in July 1912 at Mrs D'Arcy's house; Truby King gave a lecture at the Opera House on 1 August and the first "committee" meeting took place in the Borough Council chambers on 2 August. Just three weeks later, the Wanganui District Society for the Health of Women and Children advertised for its first nurse; Miss Nan Edmonstone who was currently training in Dunedin was appointed to the post. (She left in 1915 for war service and died in Wellington in 1961.) Truby King lectured again in Wanganui in September 1912 and by this time Mrs JC Williamson was Hon Sec of the local Society. Some important members of Wanganui society were behind the founding of the city's Plunket Society – Mrs JL Dove, wife of the Collegiate School headmaster led the group for a short while; Mrs CE Mackay, wife of the mayor and Mrs EE Porritt, wife of a noted local doctor (and mother of Arthur Porritt, later to be Governor General) were among the first vice-presidents.

Plunket in Wanganui opened the third Karitane home in New Zealand in 1919 in the former house of John Tiffin Stewart, who died in 1913. Stewart had bequeathed his Plymouth Street home for such a purpose and Plunket were able to access government funds to renovate the two-storey residence for its new purpose. Lady Liverpool, wife of the then Governor General, opened what was named the Stewart Karitane Home in October 1919; the first matron was Miss Wilson, succeeded by Sister Begbie in early 1920. The Stewart Karitane hospital closed in 1979, the last of the six hospital closed at that time.

To reach out to mothers and babies in an expanding Wanganui, Plunket developed sub-branch committees. Wanganui East was the first in 1916, but their official sub-branch was established in 1942, the same year as the Aramoho sub-branch. Gonville had a committee from 1929 and its sub-branch from 1942. The Gonville Plunket centre in Koromiko Road was built in 1953 largely by volunteer labour. Durie Hill had a sub-branch from 1943 and St John's Hill the year later, with Castlecliff the last area to open a sub-branch in 1953 (still operating from the centre in Cornfoot Street). The Plunket Karitane Centre in Heads Road was opened in 1997.

Plunket in Wanganui now looks forward to celebrating its centenary in 2012.

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**Description:**

Two-storey brick building with new blue coloursteel roof. The brick exterior is relieved by stucco cladding on first floor front elevations, with exposed brick window surrounds. The building has a distinctive front entrance porch roof and parapets which are all original, as are the windows; these are mainly double-hung with upper lights divided in six while there are casement windows above the front entrance. There is a distinctive front office window as well as a curved fanlight above the porch. The interior also retains its original features with offices downstairs and a wooden staircase leading to the large upstairs room, which was probably designed as a meeting room for the Hospital Board. There was originally a chimney on the Guyton Street side with a fireplace in the upstairs meeting room. The mantelpiece remains but the chimney has long been dismantled.

**Condition:**

Excellent following extensive internal renovations plus new roof, parapet and porch strengthening and exterior and interior painting.

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**Resources Consulted:**

Wanganui District Council Building files: No original plans but papers from 1926 (RG Talboys plan for wood and konka garage), 1928 lean-to shed, 1986 new Quin garages, 2008 internal alterations and parapet strengthening (Wally McKeown, architect, Bycroft Petherick, parapet & porch plans, Pellow builders).

Wanganui Borough Council Register of Building Permits, Archives Ref AAF 174:1 – Permit issued 24 August 1915 for new offices, 6 rooms, Hospital Board, JW Alderton builder plus permit on 27 Sept to Alderton to erect scaffolding for new Hospital Board offices, Campbell St.

Wanganui Borough Council 1908 Insurance Assessment Plan – block not included.

*Wanganui Herald* 24 July 1912 – meeting at Mrs D’Arcy’s house to discuss having Plunket Nurse in Wanganui.

*Wanganui Herald* 22 Aug 1912 – advert for Nurse for Wanganui District Society for the Health of Women & Children.

*Wanganui Herald* 7 Sept 1912 – Dr Truby King lecture in Wanganui, St Paul’s Hall. Mrs JC Williamson, Hon Sec of Wanganui District Society for Health of Women & Children.

*Wanganui Herald* 12 Oct 1912 – Miss N Edmonstone appointed nurse; currently training in Dunedin. Article lists all annual subscribers and donations.

*Wanganui Herald* 12 Dec 1914 – Wanganui Plunket Society monthly meeting report.

*Wanganui Herald* 27 Jan 1915 – notes Wanganui Hospital Board wanting freehold site for offices.

*Wanganui Herald* 17 Feb 1915 – Hospital Board decides to erect offices on its own land, cnr Guyton & Campell Streets [was this site on other corner where radio station is now?]

*Wanganui Herald* 19 May 1915 – Hospital Board discuss erection of new offices; decide not to build on Gonville site. Still looking for suitable site.

*Wanganui Herald* 16 June 1915 – Hospital Board decide to build offices on Campbell St site.

*Wanganui Herald*, 17 July 1915 – James & Higgins tender notice for new offices for Hospital Board.

*Wanganui Herald*, 3 August 1915 – James & Higgins tender notice for purchase of old buildings for Hospital Board (Campbell St site).

*Wanganui Chronicle* 18 Jan 1917 – report of previous day’s street collection for Plunket. Lists all ladies involved and their collection points. (Similar reports of other street collections can be found.)

Kai Tiaki, Nurses Journal, Jan 1920 – reports on opening in Oct 1919 of Stewart Karitane home in Wanganui.

*Poverty Bay Herald*, 8 May 1920 – advert for probationers for Stewart Karitane Home; apply to the Secretary, Mrs Wickham, Wanganui East. News item in same issue reports that Sister Begbie had been appointed Matron of the newly-opened Stewart-Karitane home in Wanganui.

*Wanganui Chronicle* 3 Feb 1922 – Advert: Plunket rooms to be opened by Mr Williams, Mayor on Friday afternoon at 2:3pm. Afternoon tea 6d.

*Wanganui Chronicle* 4 Feb 1922 – report on opening of Plunket Rooms.

*Wanganui Herald* 15 Sept 1924 – presentation of Deeds for Plunket Society headquarters.

*Wanganui Chronicle* 13 April 1957 – photos and caption re Campbell Street building and Stewart Karitane home.

*Wanganui Chronicle* 13 Jan 1961 – “Death of former Wanganui nurse”, Miss Johanna (Nan) Edmonstone aged 78 in Wellington. Details her WWI service.

*Wanganui Chronicle* 11 Aug 1962 – “Fifty years of Plunket Work in Wanganui” – full page feature.

*Wanganui Chronicle* 5 July 2008 – “Taking care of our brick beauty” feature by Karen Wrigglesworth on structural strengthening of building.

*Wanganui Chronicle* 13 May 2009 – “Plunket refurbished rooms” – feature prior to opening of renovated building. Includes historical information about hospital board and decision to move office to Gonville.

RE Wright St Clair, *Caring for People: A history of the Wanganui Hospital Board*, 1987.

Linda Bryder, *A Voice for Mothers: The Plunket Society and Infant Welfare 1907-2000*, Auckland University Press, 2003.

[www.plunket.org.nz](http://www.plunket.org.nz) – website has brief history of Plunket plus timeline.

Wise’s Directory – 1929 and 1941 editions note Public Health Dept as well as Plunket in the building.

*Wanganui: The River City of New Zealand*, Centennial Publication, Wanganui City Council 1940. Includes photograph of Plunket building showing gate for “Prams” and chimney on Guyton St side.

Not yet accessed: Plunket Society archives.  
Hospital Board archives at WRM – any plans of building there?

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**Comments on Significance:**

*Historic*

The building was purpose-built for a health organisation – the Wanganui Hospital and Charitable Aid Board – and since 1922 has been the headquarters of the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society in Wanganui. When Plunket celebrates its Wanganui centenary in 1912, this building will have been its permanent home for 90 years.

*Architectural*

The architect, Thomas Harvey James, was the Hospital Board architect at the time. His partnership with WT Higgins of Marton was active at the time this building was designed, and is one of the few remaining office buildings designed by that partnership. The building retains all its original external features as well as many internally, so is an important example of a building of the WWI era, when few buildings of note were under construction in Wanganui.

*Cultural*

Plunket has played a vital role since its inception in Wanganui in 1912 and this building reflects the long-standing relationship of Plunket with families in and around the city.

*Context*

With the demolition of St Mary's Presbytery in 2008 and the loss of the Palm Lounge (originally Richard Taylor's house), the Plunket building is an important feature in this block of Campbell Street which now only has St Mary's church plus a private home in this part of town with its visual links to Queen's Park and its cultural institutions.

**Recommendations:**

List in District Plan Heritage Inventory.

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**Date:** October 2009    **Research by:** Wendy Pettigrew

Historical photographs: To obtain: [1930s Bethwaite photo at WRM.](#)



Nurses and babies on the front steps of the Stewart-Karitane Hospital, 1922.  
Tesla Studios, Alexander Turnbull Library, 1/1 016980-F.