



WHANGANUI DISTRICT HERITAGE INVENTORY

Register Item No: 297 **Type:** Building **Site:** Pre-1900 Archaeological Interest

Name: VICTORIA COURT

Location: 92-96 Victoria Avenue, Whanganui

Legal Description: Lots 1, 2, 3 4 DP 4672

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

Occupiers: Left side: Community Law Advice Centre, (shops) Woolmart, Carpet Company. Right side: ex Credit Co, What Café, (shop) Gemtime Jeweller. Rear: McLaren Toplis, Loss Adjusters, Gallery.

Original Owner: CL Duigan & Wanganui Meat Freezing Company

Date: 1919/1920; altered 1982

Architect/Designer: CR Ford & RG Talboys, 1919; alts R Low, (Belchambers Low & Assocs), 1981.

Builder: Walpole & Patterson; Titter Construction, 1981/1982

Status: District Plan Class: Class B, 2013

Thematic Context: Industry/Commerce & Farming

Significance: Historic, Architectural (including part interior), Context

Integrity: Altered sympathetically

Photo Reference:

WDC File Ref: Heritage/Inventory/B17 18m, n & o

Date: Dec 2003

See p4 for additional photograph(s)



Victoria Court, the right side built for the Wanganui Meat Freezing Co and the left formerly the offices of Norwich Union Insurance (B17 18n).

History:

Of the site:

Livery stables previously occupied the site, run by Canadian-born James Smiley in 1883 to his death in 1895. Smiley came to Wanganui in 1870, having been a Cobb & Co coach driver in both South and North Island. He first ran the Rutland Livery Stables before moving up the Avenue to the Victoria Court site. Chas Jefferson ran the stables here in 1903 and by 1914 the building housed a motor garage and was described in the *Wanganui Herald*, 2 June 1919, as being an “old and well known wooden building” shortly before its demolition.

Of the building:

While Victoria Court was almost certainly built in stages, all the construction took place during the period 1919/1920. The only existing Ford & Talboys plans on the District Council file are dated 2 July and 4 Sept 1919, while four building permits appear to have been registered that relate to Victoria Court: (1) issued 4 July 1919 to the Wanganui Meat Co to erect shops and offices in the Avenue (Walpole & Patterson builder, cost £5,500; (2) issued 13 Aug 1919 to Duigan & Co to erect a building in the Avenue (Walpole & Patterson, £6,000); (3) two issued 24 Nov 1919, one to the Wanganui Meat Co and the other to Duigan & Co (both Walpole & Patterson, both for £3,000). It is possible that one or more of these building permits replaced a previously issued permit, but the register does not indicate this. On 12 June 1919, the *Wanganui Herald* noted that “the Wanganui Meat Company intend to erect substantial buildings which will add greatly to the appearance of this portion of the Avenue.”

Victoria Court was one of a number of buildings erected in the immediate aftermath of WWI, when Wanganui experienced a building boom. It was designed to take an additional storey, with space left for a future lift well, as were several other buildings in town, eg Selwyn and Broadway Buildings. There was a great deal of confidence in the expected future growth of Wanganui at the time; however, none of these buildings designed to take another storey ever had such an addition put in place.

Although part of Victoria Court was erected to house the offices of the **Wanganui Meat Freezing Company** (of which CL Duigan was a Board Member), the Company did not remain there for very long. The principal events in the building’s history are as follows:

1926 – alterations to Wanganui Meat Freezing Co premises, creating two shops (RG Talboys). A butcher’s shop was downstairs, with offices having half-hinged doors.

By 1929: occupiers in the right building included finance agents and Fred Bourne, accountant; the left side housed solicitors, the State Coal Office and a costumier (Wise’s Directory).

By 1941: occupiers included accountants, Thomas Ballingall and Holland & Brown, with fabric retailers, Callaghan & Haworth installed in the right shop. Government departments such as the Income Tax and Labour Dept were also in various offices, with Eric Lind, the insurance agent, Bradley’s Fur Stores and Letica Bros restaurant (Wise’s Directory).

By 1955 – occupiers included the same accountants, with the addition of David Barkman, plus Guardian Assurance and various other people, including the National Party and a couple of dressmakers (Wise’s).

1956 – Norwich Union moved into the left side; DA Wilson and EE Belchambers designed the alterations for their offices, replacing windows and renovating the interior. Further alterations were made to Norwich Union offices 1964-1967.

1981/82 – major alterations, including roofing the courtyard area, designed by Belchambers & Low. In addition, the Norwich Union offices were renovated (Earles & Co designers). The total cost of renovation was \$125,000. Occupiers at this time were: Norwich Union, Wanganui Credit Co (who had taken over the old Meat Freezing Co offices, formerly housing various accountants, in 1960), Callaghan & Haworth, Broadheads Jewellers and Smith’s Fashions in the shops; Capers Restaurant in the rear, plus an antiques shop, kitchen shop and Petre Gifts. The *Wanganui Herald*, 18 Feb 1982 described Victoria Court as “Wanganui’s newest mall” and noted that, from Victoria Avenue, “images of streets throughout the world come to mind” with the overall impression that of “a bustling Victorian England backstreet.”

1993 – Norwich Union moved out of their offices; later occupied by CLAW (Community Legal Advice Wanganui).

1997 – Callaghan & Haworth closed their fabric store and Broadhead’s Gemtime Jewellers moved into their shop.

Late 1990s – Zanzibar restaurant took over the old Capers’s site; this became What? Café in 2003.

2004 – Wanganui Credit Co moved out of their offices.

Of the Wanganui Meat Freezing Company and Charles Duigan:

The Meat Freezing Company was established in 1891 and erected the first freezing works at Castlecliff, originally capable of handling 500 sheep and 25 cattle per day. In August 1891, the Company shipped the first instalment of frozen meat from Wanganui, onto the SS “Duke of Sutherland” bound directly for London. *The Yeoman*, 8 August 1891, noted this event “should be marked in red letters in the annals of Wanganui.”

Subsequent enlargement of the works meant that by 1911 the Company was processing 3,000 sheep and 100 cattle daily, with associated fellmongery and manure departments. The Company had several shops in town and owned two oil-engined lighters, “Thistle” and “Shamrock”, enabling them to load onto ships waiting outside the river bar. The company thrived until 1916, when the South Island-based New Zealand Refrigerating Company opened its freezing works at Imlay. This was considered a major event for Wanganui in November 1916 but by 1924 the Wanganui Meat Freezing Company was already suffering from the competition of the Imlay works. The Company’s Castlecliff works were later occupied by Wanganui Meat Packers.

Charles Duigan was a local businessman who established building societies in Wanganui to assist with the development of the town. He was also an estate agent and finally managed to become a Director of the Wanganui Meat Freezing Company by 1922. The development of Victoria Court for the Meat Company was one of his major projects in Wanganui.

Description:

Two-storied stucco-clad masonry building constructed in two adjoining parts surrounding a courtyard with pitched iron roofs. Each side of the building matches identically, with the exception of the front facades where the left side has Ionic pilasters between the upper windows and the right Corinthian. The frieze below the parapets is also different on each side, perhaps identifying the two original owners of the buildings – CL Duigan and the Wanganui Meat Freezing Co. It is the only building in Wanganui of its kind, having been designed as two separate buildings with identical features.

The upper front and lower shop windows have been replaced, but many of the internal windows appear to be original. The bay windows and concave awning over the entrance were installed in the 1981/82 renovations, as was the covered roof and coloured glass above the entrance.

The interior of the left building (ex Norwich Union offices) has been altered considerably. However, the right building (designed for the Meat Freezing Company) retains much of its original interior features: the wooden staircase with cast-iron balusters, the doors and panelled walls, including the front “Public Office” with its embossed doors and enquiry counter. The Boardroom in the middle of this building still retains its tiled fireplace and plaster ceiling, and was being refurbished in Dec 2003.

The rear twin parts of the building still retain their original staircases and the unusual upper-hinged doors in ex-Wildflowers Massage premises at the rear were designed by Talboys for the Meat Freezing Company’s shop and offices in 1926 and subsequently relocated during the 1981 refurbishment.

Condition:

Good, except the rear roofs need replacing. The original condition of much of the interior, especially the right building, is quite remarkable and should be retained in any further renovation of this building.

Resources Consulted:

Wanganui District Council Building files – for 92-94, 92-96 and 92a Victoria Avenue. Includes part of the 1919 Ford & Talboys plans for the building, plus 1926 Talboys alterations.

Wanganui Borough Council Building Permit register, Archives Ref AAF 174:1.

1990 Heritage Study Item No 17/8.

Wanganui Herald 12 June, 1919 – article which notes construction about to commence.

Wanganui Herald 22 June 1981 – article on renovation work about to commence.*

Wanganui Herald 18 Feb 1982 – feature on newly-renovated Victoria Court.*

*Note that some historical facts about the building in both these articles are incorrect.

Familiar Faces, 1907 – included Charles L Duigan.

The Yeoman, 3 August 1895 – obituary for James Smiley.

Wanganui Coronation Souvenir 1911 – article on Wanganui Meat Freezing Company.

The Yeoman, 8 Aug 1891 – article on first shipment of frozen meat from Wanganui to London.

Wanganui Chronicle 7 Sep 1922 and 5 Nov 1924 – articles on Wanganui Meat Freezing Company.

Wanganui Chronicle 12 June 2004 – article on history of frozen meat shipping from Wanganui.

Comments on Significance:

Historic

The building was erected to serve as offices for the Wanganui Meat Freezing Company, which was responsible for the first shipment of frozen meat to be sent directly from Wanganui to London in 1891. This company was the only processor and shipper of frozen meat in Wanganui until the NZ Refrigerating Company built the Imlay Works. The Company's offices in Victoria Court have retained their original features and provide an important historical link with the development of Wanganui's meat processing industry. The building is also an important example of those built in the immediate Post WWI era when the future prospects for the growth of Wanganui seemed particularly bright.

Architectural

The twin buildings which make up Victoria Court are unique in Wanganui; they were also designed by the short-lived architectural partnership of CR Ford and RG Talboys, who are both important figures in New Zealand's architectural history. The interior of the building also retains much of the original architectural features, particularly in the old Meat Freezing Company's offices as well as the rear staircases.

Context

Victoria Court is an impressive building that complements its neighbour, the National Bank, as well as Perrett's Buildings across the Avenue. The 1981/82 alterations have not compromised its original architectural style.

Recommendations:

Date: 15 April 2004

Research by: Wendy Pettigrew

Historical photographs to obtain and scan:

Victoria Court 1922 – Tesla Collection, ATL, G 16484 1/1 (copy with 1990 Study photographs)

Rendezvous –Victoria Court shop fronts, 1922 ATL 16416 1/1

1920 photo of CR Ford and Walpole, builder, on top of part of Victoria Court under construction. ATL 16650 1/1.

Memories of Old Wanganui, p44 – photo showing both fronts of Victoria Court beside Chavannes Hotel (pre 1929)