



WHANGANUI DISTRICT HERITAGE INVENTORY

Register Item No: 300 **Type:** Building **Site:** Pre-1900 Archaeological Interest

Name: ACCOUNTANTS' CHAMBERS

Location: 26 Maria Place, Whanganui

Legal Description: Pt Lot 3, DP 4289 (Pt Section 194, Town of Wanganui)

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

Occupier: Sewell & Wilson, Accountants

Original Owner: EM Silk

Date: 1919

Architect/Designer: CR Ford

Builder: Walpole & Patterson

Status: District Plan Class: Class B, 2013

Thematic Context: Industry/Commerce

Significance: Historic, Architectural, Context

Integrity: Substantially intact (including much of the interior)

Photo Reference:

WDC File Ref: Heritage/Inventory/B26 19m

Date: July 2004



The Accountants' Chambers designed by Reginald Ford are still serving their original purpose.

History:

Of the site:

Thomas Battle, Wanganui builder and architect, had his house and workshop on this site in 1908. The Battle family were still in residence in 1914; Miss Emily Battle ran her dressmaking business from the family home at that time.

Of Silk's:

Edwin Martell (Mat) Silk established his public accountancy and land agency firm of Fairburn and Silk in Wanganui in 1905, in Ridgway Street offices that are today part of the Rutland Arms Hotel. Mat Silk had been in Wanganui since 1902, first as accountant to the Union Bank of Australia. Fairburn & Silk moved to new premises in Victoria Avenue in 1912 (State Insurance site). After the war, Silk dissolved his partnership with John Fairburn and entered into partnership with Arthur Haworth, who had previously been secretary of the Southern Cross biscuit factory. Fred Hill later became a partner and the firm was then known as Silk, Haworth & Hill. Mat Silk's son, Bryan, joined the firm in 1937 and remained as the senior partner after his father's retirement in the mid-1940s. Bryan Silk was well-known as a champion amateur golfer. In 1971 the firm merged with Barkman, Wilson and Gilberd to become Barkman, Silk & Co. Further changes took place in 1977 when they joined forces with the Wellington firm of Clarke Menzies & Co, which eventually became Touche Ross in 1983. In 1990 the local Touche Ross partners decided to become associates of the international company and changed their name back again to Silks. The company is now based in Bell Street.

Of the building:

This was the first of two office buildings in Wanganui commissioned by **Edwin Martell Silk** (the other being Wakefield Chambers, although he also organised the company that built Broadway Buildings). Local architect, C Reginald Ford, designed the building in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, when Wanganui experienced one of its many pre-1930 building booms. The Wanganui Jockey Club and local dentist, Robert Grummitt, had also commissioned architects to design buildings on the same Maria Place section. The building permit issued on 1 August 1919 was the last of these three buildings and also the least expensive, at £3,470. The builders were Walpole & Patterson.

The date "1919" over the entrance indicates that it was completed that year, although advertisements for **Silk, Haworth & Co** in their "newly-erected building" at (then) 44 Maria Place start to appear in the local newspapers from March 1920.

Silk Haworth & Co remained in the building until 1930 when Mat Silk moved his firm to Wakefield Chambers. Arthur Haworth remained at Maria Place and by 1941 was joined in practice by RI (Dick) Sewell. By 1955, the firm was known as Haworth, Sewell and Christie, having been joined by EH Christie. Angus Wilson was also in the practice by this time and later joined Dick Sewell to established the **Sewell and Wilson** partnership. Their sons, Michael Sewell and Douglas Wilson, are today the senior partners in Sewell and Wilson.

This is one of the few buildings in Wanganui that has continued to house the business for which it was built – a local firm of public accountants.

Description:

Two-storied concrete and brick building. The classical façade is enlivened with the central door case and brick quoins rising through the two floors. The insertion of air conditioners in the two upper windows detracts from the symmetry of the façade. The upper parapet is intact and original as are most of the windows. A dignified and delightful building that has always served its original purpose – Accountants' Chambers. [Need to visit interior to complete description.]

Condition:

Good.

Resources Consulted:

Whanganui District Council Building file – only paper of consequence refers to new entrance giving access to Maria Mall, 1989.

Whanganui Borough Council Building Permit Register, Archives Ref AAF 174:1 – includes permit issued 1 August 1919 to EM Silk, Maria Place offices, Walpole & Patterson, £3,470.

Whanganui Borough Insurance Assessment Map, 1908 – shows wooden building occupied by Battle (Thomas Battle and his sisters).

Whanganui Herald, 20 March 1905 – news that John Fairburn & EM Silk have gone into partnership in “new & up-to-date offices in Rutland Buildings next to Government Insurance Dept.”

Whanganui Chronicle, 31 March 1920 – advert for Silk Haworth & Co in “newly erected building, 44 Maria Place”.

Whanganui Chronicle, 31 March 1990 – article by Athol Kirk on the history of Silk’s.

Robert Young, information confirming architect of building as CR Ford (Paul Waite at the Tate Gallery in London has undertaken research into Ford).

Whanganui Regional Museum – CR Ford’s blueprint of building elevations and specs, A51 in Talboys Collection. Don McCallum has plans of building (information from Paul Waite, March 2005).

1990 Heritage Study, Item 26/1.

Wise’s Directories: 1914, 1929, 1941, 1955

Note: No tender notice has as yet been found for this building.

Comments on Significance:

Historic

Two long-established public accountancy firms have been associated with this building since its construction: Edwin Martell Silk’s firm of Silk, Haworth & Co and then the current owners, Sewell & Wilson. Constructed to serve as accountants’ chambers, the building is still serving its original purpose.

Architectural

This is an excellent example of CR Ford’s work, being his only small-scale office building in Whanganui. (Empress Building (1916) and Victoria Court (1920) are both larger buildings.) The Accountants’ Chambers was one of many buildings constructed in the 1919 post-war building boom in Whanganui.

Context

This building provides a critical architectural contribution to Maria Place, where many buildings have been demolished in the 1990s, together with its neighbours on the same side of the street.

Recommendations:

Consider for registration with Historic Places Trust.

Date: 12 October 2004

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