



WHANGANUI DISTRICT HERITAGE INVENTORY

Register Item No: 313 **Type:** Building **Site:** Pre-1900 Archaeological Interest

Name: TRINITY BUILDINGS

Location: 170-188 Victoria Avenue, Whanganui

Legal Description: DP 11788 (prev Sections 373, 374 & 375, Town of Wanganui)

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

Occupiers of shops: Phillips Lighting, Save the Children Fund, Shambezi, Jagged Edge, Eides Sports World, Extremely Gifted

Original Owner: Trinity Methodist Church Trustees

Date: 1927

Architect/Designer: RG Talboys

Builder: John Jones & Sons

Status: District Plan Class: Class B, 2013

Thematic Context: Industry/Commerce and Cultural

Significance: Historic, Architectural, Context

Integrity: Substantially intact

Photo Reference:

WDC File Ref: Heritage/Inventory/B38 20m & n

Date: Sept 2004

See p4 for additional photograph(s)



The bulk of Trinity Buildings dominates the upper block of Victoria Avenue (B38 20m).

History:

Of the site:

The Avenue frontage of the Wesleyan church sections had no buildings on it in 1908 (see Insurance Assessment map). The church was replaced in 1965 (see B38.4) and built closer to Wicksteed St. The dwelling on Section 375 would have had gardens facing the Avenue prior to the construction of Trinity Buildings.

Of the building:

On 20 March 1925, **Trinity Methodist Church Trustees** met to discuss plans for building on their Victoria Avenue frontage, having secured the offer of a loan from the AMP Society to finance 55% of the cost of the venture. They agreed to approach an architect to prepare plans and Robert Talboys was commissioned to undertake this work. His outline plans were drawn up by June 1925, when the Trustees submitted them for approval to the Church Building & Provident Fund Committee in Christchurch. The Trustees met again on 12 August 1925 and approved the plans and instructed Talboys to prepare detailed drawings for the building. (Note that the plans on file show the building to have been designed by Talboys, with “ELM” or “GLM” preparing the drawings. “GLM” could be George Lewis Maclachlan, if he was working with Talboys by this time, having retired from his own architectural practice.)

Tenders were called on 28 January 1926 for a building in reinforced concrete, the Trustees having decided that importing steel from England would be too expensive. The successful contractor, John Jones & Sons, applied for the building permit on 29 June 1926. The proposed 10 shops and offices would cost £19,144 and would require 1165 cu yds of concrete. The building was designed to take up to two additional storeys at a later date. In common with other such buildings, eg Selwyn and Broadway Buildings and Victoria Court, the additional storeys were never built.

By September 1927, sufficient progress had been made with the construction to allow the first three shops to be opened. The *Wanganui Herald* noted on 23 Sept that “The development of business up the Avenue has been watched with keen interest... When completed, the block [Trinity Buildings] will be a most valuable addition to our business premises.” By this time, provision was made for eight shops, not the original 10 as proposed earlier.

The Trinity Trustees decided on 29 November 1927 that the new building should be known as Trinity Buildings. Work was complete by December and the official opening ceremony took place on 13 December 1927. *The Trinity Story* notes: “This was a great success. The Church Parlour was packed to overflowing”. The speakers included Rev Cox, His Worship the Mayor (Mr WJ Rogers), Messrs Webb-Jones (Chairman of the Trustees), John Jones and RG Talboys. “The ladies handed around a splendid afternoon tea and afterwards those present were invited to go through to inspect the new building.” The *Wanganui Chronicle* on 13 December 1927 also noted that the Trustees’ objective in constructing Trinity Buildings was “not merely commercial”. They wanted to construct a new church and considered that in 25 years’ time they should be able to donate £1,000 from rental profits from Trinity Buildings to the building fund.

The first tenants, listed in 1929 Wise’s Directory were: Nelson & Giles, tearooms; Mrs Stella Cuthbertson, milliner; Wanganui Shirt Manufacturing Co; Christian Naumann, violin teacher; Reg Sayer, manufacturer’s agent; DL Foreman, health foods; Mrs Mary Sheridan, ladies outfitter; Mrs Lila Bain, gown specialist; JE Wilson, bookseller; Samuel Edwards, blind manufacturer; Crockerries Ltd, china merchants; Lewis Glynn, draper; Sid Hewgill, cycle agent; William Fitchett, jeweller.

By 1941, **Oscar Eide**, tent maker had moved into Trinity Buildings. Eides Sports World is still a key tenant with their shop selling sports goods. The Wanganui Shirt Manufacturing Company was still a tenant in 1955, although by that time the dressmakers had ceased their operations. **Doug Flower** moved his bookshop here in 1955, when he was joined by his partner, Lou Bennett. After Flower’s death in 1971, Bennett continued to run Flower’s Bookshop until the 1990s. It later became Tilley’s Bookshop which moved out in 2002. Another well-known tenant was watchmaker, **DW Cimino**, who placed a clock above the verandah to advertise his shop. **Gedye Cycles** were also located here from at least 1955 to the 1980s.

RG Talboys & Assocs undertook further work on Trinity Buildings in 1959 and 1960, adding fire escapes and undertaking maintenance. Alterations were made to shops during the period 1944-1979, but the main work undertaken on the building since its construction was the renovation of the shop fronts in 1981

(Lamont Bycroft & Partners with Wight Construction). This cost \$59,000 and would also have included replacement of the verandah. In 1993, the original external toilets at the rear were replaced.

Description:

Two-storey reinforced concrete building extending over the width of three town sections in Victoria Avenue. The length of the building is broken up by three bays with classical-style pediments on each side of the windows. Decorative plasterwork under each set of windows gives relief to the façade. Access to Trinity Methodist church and the upper floors is through the central part of the building.

Condition:

Very good, with a recent paint scheme that enhances the architectural features of this building.

Resources Consulted:

Wanganui District Council Building files – 170-188 & 184 Victoria Ave & 183 Wicksteed Street. Contains original Talboys plans and specifications for Trinity Buildings, plus building permit issued 29 June 1926 to John Jones & Sons, £19,144 to erect shops and offices in Avenue.

Wanganui Borough Council Building Permit Register, Archives Ref AAF 174:1- lists 1926 permit.

Wanganui Herald, 23 Sept 1927 – news that three of the eight new shops in Trinity block have opened.

Wanganui Chronicle, 14 Dec 1927 – “Fine Buildings: The Trinity Block” article on the opening ceremony.

The Trinity Story: 125 Celebrations 1873-1998 – includes information about the funding and constructing of Trinity Buildings.

1990 Heritage Study, Item 38/3.

Wise’s Directories: 1929, 1941, 1955.

Turning the Pages: The story of bookselling in New Zealand, A Rogers and M Rogers, Reed, 1993 – includes information on Flower’s Bookshop.

Not yet consulted:

Trinity Methodist Church archives, including Trustees Minute Books and other records relating to the fundraising and construction of Trinity Buildings. Contact Lynne Phillips c/o Trinity office.

Comments on Significance:

Historic

The Wesleyans established their church on this site in 1873 and their connection is maintained in the name “Trinity Buildings” which is known by all but not actually noted on the building itself.

Architectural

Taking up three whole sections fronting onto the Avenue, this is the longest single mass of building in Wanganui’s town centre. Talboys’ design is a most effective solution to a site that could have been overpowered by a more ornate proposal. Architecturally, Trinity is the most significant of the three church buildings in the Avenue. The Anglican’s “Selwyn Buildings” is shorter in length and not as imposing while the Presbyterian’s “136 Avenue” is a 1990s replacement for the 1913 buildings originally erected on their church site.

Context

Trinity Buildings is the most important building in the upper block of Victoria Avenue. It provides an anchor for the other buildings in this block, many of which are of architectural interest dating from the Edwardian era to the 1960s.

Recommendations:

Consider for registration with Historic Places Trust.

Date: 1 October 2004 **Research by:** Wendy Pettigrew



Detail of one of the three bays of Trinity Buildings (B38 20n).