

Margaret Watt Children's Home



Location: 12 Clarkson Avenue, Westmere, Whanganui
Heritage NA Pouhere Taonga List Number: Nil

Physical Description: The large and expansive house is constructed around a courtyard, forming a 'U' shaped plan, with the main entry and front elevation facing north. This elevation is symmetrical about the main entry with bay windows projecting either side of a long, deep verandah. The main roof has three visible low chimneys. The verandah roof is a continuation of the main roof and splays slightly towards the fascia. The bay windows have their own hipped roofs projecting forward of the main roof and have a series of six windows with leaded toplights above each. Sills to these and the other, mainly triple windows, are of brick.

The dominant medium pitched hipped roof with Marseille tiles, wide dentilled soffit, simple but substantial Classical verandah posts and symmetry suggest the neo-Georgian style with English Domestic Revival influences.

Other known names: : Margaret Watt Orphans' Home

Current Use: Home, private residence

Former Uses: Children's home

Register Item Number:

337

Building Type:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Recreation
- Institutional
- Agriculture
- Other

Significance:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Cultural

Thematic Context

- Early Settlement
- Residential
- Industry
- Agricultural
- Commerce
- Transport
- Civic/Admin
- Health
- Education
- Religion
- Recreation
- Community
- Memorials
- Military

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Heritage Status: District Plan Class: Class B

Architectural Style: Neo-Georgian, **Date of Construction:** 1931
English Domestic Revival

Materials: Cement rendered walls, timber joinery, verandah posts, soffit and fascia, Marseille tile roofing, brick base and window sills

Registered owner:

Legal Description:

History: The Margaret Watt Children's Home – originally called the Margaret Watt Orphans' Home - was built in 1931, and was officially opened by the Mayor of Wanganui, Mr N.G. Armstrong, on December 5th of that year. Clifford Newton Hood had designed it in a competition in 1930, and Messrs Hood & Duffell became the supervising architects.ⁱ It cost £7,000 to build and stood on a 53½ property - which had been bequeathed by William Hogg Watt for this purpose.

William Hogg Watt's very detailed Will has been published in various forms in the *Wanganui Chronicle* of 21 November 1912 (p. 7) and in Delphine Turney's book *Our Heritage Forever...: The First 150 Years of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Wanganui* (pp. 74-76).

The timeframe set within the terms of the Will was very lengthy. It was signed by W.H. Watt on 2nd February 1880, and wasn't to come into effect until both he and his wife were dead. He died on 7 March 1893, aged 74, and his wife, Frances Margaret Watt died on 14 November 1912, aged 82. The Will next added that the trustees were to then use the money to accumulate interest and dividends from the estate and to continue this fundraising until 21 years after the death of the couple's son, James Paton Watt. He died in 1930, aged 70 years – meaning that in fact the orphanage should not have been opened until 1951.ⁱⁱ How the orphanage came to be built only one year after James' death has not been researched, but given the Great Depression, it was a practical decision.

The Will, which included many details of how the institution must be run, required that the food be plentiful and wholesome. The boys were to dress in a naval pattern similar to the clothing "*boys wore on Training Ships in the Colony*", (blue jackets and trousers on weekdays and white trousers on Sundays) and the ribbon on their hats was to read "Margaret Watt". Meanwhile girls could dress as the trustees saw fit. The boys must learn agriculture while the girls learnt needlework. Details of permissible punishment were also described. The

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property Watt had left them was in 1880 called 'Ferndale', and he also left them a town section in Ridgway Street. He also hoped that one of his descendants with the surname Watt would always be one of the trustees.

Watt further required that *"there shall be erected on some part of the highest land, and maintained in proper repair, a flagstaff, and there shall always (be) provided and kept a flag of the pattern of St. George's ensign, with the letters 'M.W.O.H.' worked thereon, which flag shall be hoisted on every Sabbath morning at 8 o'clock, and kept flying during the day until sundown, and at such other times as the trustees may think fit, and such flag shall also be hoisted half-mast high on the 11th of September in each year."*

Margaret Watt

Margaret Watt, aged 28 and the eldest daughter of the familyⁱⁱⁱ, was one of 104 people who lost their lives in the sinking of the Wellington-bound sailing ship 'Avalanche' in the English Channel, on the night of 11th September 1877. The ship was carrying 59 passengers and 34 crew, and of the passengers, 21 were returning to Wanganui or had connections to it. In the course of a gale, the ship collided with the Nova Scotian vessel 'Forest', when both chose to turn in the same direction when attempting to take evasive action. Within two minutes the 'Avalanche' was sinking, followed shortly thereafter by the 'Forest'. Nine survived from the 'Forest' and three crew from the 'Avalanche' – with some bodies being washed ashore in Portland.

The Margaret Watt Children's Home became one memorial to the people lost on the 'Avalanche'. Others include plaques installed by relatives at Heads Road Cemetery, and a variety of memorials in various churches in and around Wanganui^{iv}. The Avalanche Memorial Church of St. Andrew was also erected at Southwell, Portland, in 1979, in memory of those lost, and with contributions made by relatives of the deceased. The people from this community had become the pallbearers and mourners to the bodies that washed ashore.^v

The Watts also lost a second of their daughters at an early age. Julia Ball Watt, the youngest daughter, died at the family home, Sandridge Hall, on 26 January 1888, aged 23.^{vi}

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The Opening

The opening day on 5th December 1931 drew a large number of people, including over sixty cars, with many being old residents of the area who had known Margaret Watt – or those who also lost relatives on the ‘*Avalanche*’. The ceremony included the raising of two flags – the Union Jack that flew every Sunday at ‘Sandridge’ (the Watt family home) and the ‘Scottish Standard’. Both flags were the gift of Margaret Watt’s sister, Mrs Fleetwood, who was the last surviving member of William Hogg Watt’s family. Mrs Watt said that *she* “was grateful to God that she had been spared to be present and that the memory of her sister was being perpetuated for all time in such a useful institution.”^{vii}

The official function included the key being inserted in the lock by Miss Nellie Watt, eldest grand-daughter of William Hogg Watt. Then the Wanganui Pipe Band and the Salvation Army Band played a number of pieces.

The *Wanganui Chronicle* of 7 December 1931 (p. 6) recorded that the architect, Newton Hood, had worked to incorporate the latest and best in what was then being designed for such a building. The Child Welfare Department’s suggestions had also been incorporated into it. As a result there was “*no building in New Zealand more suited for its purpose.*” Also thanked for their contributions were Mr Gopperth, the contractor, and his workmen, as well as: “*two men, Messrs Titter and McKinlay, (who) had worked from daylight to dark, and after dark on many occasions, in getting the grounds ready.*” In addition, Mr and Mrs Robert Rule had been appointed from the Berhampore Home to run the property.

The trustees had capitalised £50,000 and as the money came available, they also hoped to establish other buildings and a chapel in a few years’ time. They hoped that three more institutions would be built in close proximity to the first one, and that this would then allow accommodation for 120 children. It was proposed to teach the children all forms of small farming, and that the orphanage farm would become self-supporting.^{viii}

The *Wanganui Chronicle* article also stated that: “*In the front hall there was an oaken memorial tablet, in the reception room an oil painting of the late Mr Watt, which was loaned by Mrs Fleetwood, and would eventually be given to the orphanage in memory of her father. There was also an oil painting of Miss Margaret Watt, and two crayon drawings by Miss Watt when she was 16 years*

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of age, which would show how great had been the loss in her passing.”^{ix}

Subsequent Times

The first master and matron of the home, Mr & Mrs R.D. Rule, possibly brought some of their charges up from Berhamphore, as the Junior Boys Home there temporarily closed in 1932 as a partial result of the opening of the Wanganui home.^x The Rules evidently remained at the home for some years.

During the week the children attended the small Mosston School, and on Sundays they attended St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church in Wanganui.^{xi} One boy, when in his late 70s, wrote of his time at the home in its early years. He recalled that the children were always hungry and that their food included bread and dripping.^{xii}

The website Oldfriends.co.nz includes a number of Mosston School entries, representing many years, which were written by children from the home who had attended the school. Kay, from 1943-46, recalled that she was known as one of the “Home Kids or Rule Kids” while at the school. Pamela, who was there in 1969-75, recalled being one of the “Watties Kids”. Daniel, who was at the school in 1981-87, recalled playing on the ropes and swimming while at the Home.^{xiii}

In 1939, L.J.B. Chapple & H.C. Veitch, in their book *‘Wanganui’* (p. 163) recorded that there were then twenty-seven children in residence, and that during the seven years the home had then been open, another seventeen children had left it *“well equipped to take their place in community life.”* The farm, which included fifteen acres of pine plantation, was farmed to provide the home’s needs.

Over the years, children had both long and short stays at the facility, and in November 1977, when an article was published on it in the Whanganui Historical Society’s *Historical Record* magazine, there were sixteen children there.^{xiv}

In early 1992, the Home celebrated its 60th Anniversary with a church service, barbecue and open day. However, Turney (p. 150-51), recorded that the provisions of the ‘Children and Young Persons and Their Families Act, 1989,

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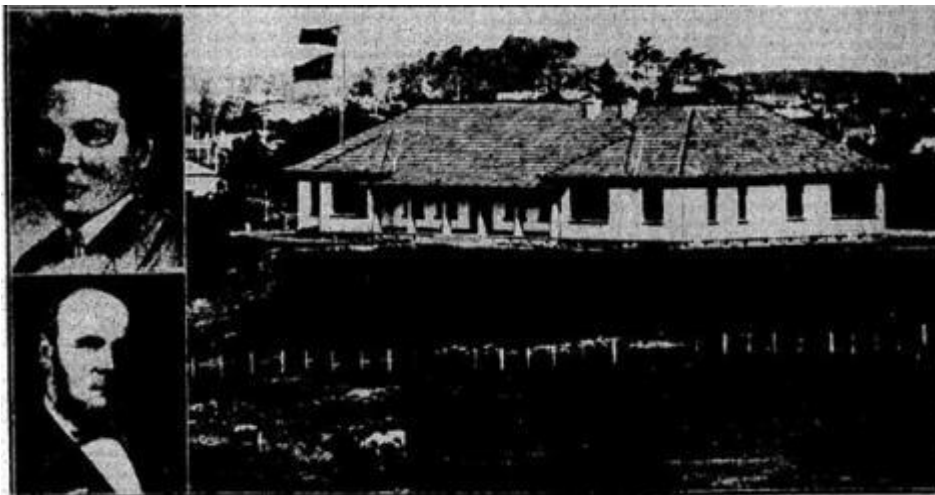


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meant that change was inevitable at the home. It became a challenge to keep within both the spirit of the Trust and the terms of the new Act^{xv}, and so from 1st June 1999, *“the Trust has operated in partnership with Barnadoes, based on the preventative model which aims to help families to help themselves.”*^{xvi}

The closure of the Home is not covered in the 2003 book, suggesting it may still have been operating to some extent. The Margaret Watt Children’s Home Trust Board had been incorporated as a charitable trust on 9th July 1930, although the name at that time appears to have been the Margaret Watt Orphans Home Trust. In June 2005, its name was changed to the Margaret Watt Children’s Trust, and this trust is still operating.^{xvii}

By June 2009, the property had been transformed into two new subdivisions by Wanganui developer, Lance Attrill – who, in turn, had also transformed the former orphanage building into his home. Part of the former farm had become the Belmont Estate, with fourteen one-hectare residential sections. The remainder comprised nineteen industrial Lots named the Westbourne industrial estate, while a former \$12 million timber-processing mill on the site had been given a face-lift and a considerable amount of scrap and machinery associated with it had been disposed of.^{xviii}



The caption to this *Evening Post* photograph reads: *“The Margaret Watt Memorial Orphanage at Wanganui – Opened by the Mayor of Wanganui (Mr N.G. Armstrong) on Saturday afternoon. It stands in extensive grounds of about 55 acres, and cost £7,000 to build, the necessary money having been left by the late Mr. W. Hogg Watt. The building is erected to the memory of his daughter,*

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Margaret Watt, who lost her life when the ship Avalanche was wrecked in the English Channel in 1877. At left, Margaret Watt and her father, William Hogg Watt.^{xix}

Bibliography

Chapple, L.J.B., & Veitch, H.C., *Wanganui* (Hawera, 1939)

Pettigrew, Wendy, *St. Mary's Upokongaro: The Church by the River* (Wanganui, 2005),

Turney, Delphine, *Our Heritage Forever...: The First 150 Years of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Wanganui* (Wanganui, 2003)

'Margaret Watt Home', in Whanganui Historical Society's *Historical Record* (Vol. 8, No. 2), p. 27. Photos of the building also appear on unnumbered pages in this booklet.

Newspapers and online articles as referred to in the footnotes.

Architect/Designer: Clifford Newton Hood

History of changes:

Date Period: The building operated as an orphanage from 1931-2003.

Rarity / Special Features:

Integrity: The building has been maintained and the orphanage operated from 1931 until a change in legislation rendered it impossible to continue with its original use for which the Trust was set-up. The Margaret Watt Orphans Home Trust however replaced the original trust and is still operating. The building on superficial inspection appears to be in reasonable condition.

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Representativeness: The building has been designed in the neo-Georgian style with some English Domestic Revival style influences.

Context/Group Value: The building remains on the original site but the surrounding land has been lost to subdivision.

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: The building remains in use. As a masonry building it is potentially at risk from earthquake damage.

Summary of Significance:

Architectural Qualities

The home is a substantial and attractive building, with typical features of the neo-Georgian style. The characteristics of the style, as seen in the building, is the low pitched hipped roofs, symmetry, Classical entry, a columned portico/verandah, the use of brickwork, boxed eaves with flat modillions, and plinth.

Historic Qualities

The orphanage has played a positive role in society providing over a stable and safe home environment over more than 70 years of uninterrupted operation.

Cultural Qualities

The bequest enabled the establishment of an orphanage that housed many children over a 70 year period thus enabling them to grow up in a safe "family" type environment prior to taking a place in society.

Reference Source:

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Val Burr

ⁱ Notes dated 8 February 2012 by Wendy Pettigrew supplied by her to Val Burr.

ⁱⁱ *Wanganui Herald*, 7 March 1893, p. 2; *Wanganui Chronicle*, 15 November 1912, p. 4; James Paton Watt's death registration on www.bdm.govt.nz

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- iii Margaret Watt was born 8 February 1849: Passengers of the Avalanche:
http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/Shipwrecks/Avalanche_and_Forrest/Passengers_and_crew_of_Avalanche.html
- iv For example, Wendy Pettigrew, *St. Mary's Upokongaro: The Church by the River* (Wanganui, 2005), p. 7, 31; and Delpine Turney, *Our Heritage Forever: The first 150 years of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Wanganui* (Wanganui, 2003), p. 20
- v NZ Disasters & Tragedies – Avalanche:
<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~sooty/avalanche.html> ; Also: The Loss of the Avalanche:
<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nzbound/avalanche.htm>
- vi *Wanganui Chronicle*, 28 January 1888, p. 2
- vii *Wanganui Chronicle*, 7 December 1931, p. 6 (7-8)
- viii *Evening Post*, 7 December 1931, p. 8
- ix *Wanganui Chronicle*, 7 December 1931, p. 6 (7-8)
- x *Evening Post*, 25 November 1932, p. 12
- xi Whanganui Historical Society's *Historical Record* (Vol. 8, No. 2), p. 27
- xii Turney, p. 77
- xiii Mosston School on Oldfriends.co.nz. Surnames are not used here to protect the privacy of the people concerned.
- xiv Whanganui Historical Society's *Historical Record* (Vol. 8, No. 2), p. 27
- xv The Trust Deed was altered in 1989 presumably to reflect this: 'Margaret Watt Children's Trust', No. 210222: www.societies.govt.nz
- xvi Turney, pp. 142, 150-51
- xvii 'Margaret Watt Children's Trust', No. 210222: www.societies.govt.nz
- xviii *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 June 2009: <http://www.wanganuichronicle.co.nz/news/55m-subdivision-developer-defies-recession/1005118/>
- xix *Evening Post*, 7 December 1931, p. 7