

Castlecliff Fire Station



Location: 6 Bryce Street, Castlecliff

**Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga
List Number:**

Physical Description: The building is constructed around a courtyard so that the two storied main entry and fire engine exit wing faces Bryce Street, the two storied eastern wing faces Thatcher Street and the single storey western wing completes the 'U' shaped plan. The general style of the building is Edwardian Baroque with the central front elevation feature a triumphal arch styled opening for the fire engine exit above which is a large "Diocletian window". This element is crowned with a raised, flat parapet with cornice and repeated roundel decoration. The elevation is slightly asymmetrical with double windows to the west of the engine bay exist and a single main entry door with triple window above to the opposite side. The side elevations are more utilitarian with simple double and single windows to both floors.

The low pitched hipped roof with slight flare at the base and roofed with Marseille tiles is reminiscent of the Georgian style.

Other known names: Castlecliff Fire Sub-station, ODL Belmont

Current Use: Commercial premises

Register Item Number:

338

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

Built Heritage Inventory



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Former Uses: Fire Station

Heritage Status: District Plan Class: Class C

Architectural Style: Edwardian **Date of Construction:** 1925-26
Baroque/neo-Georgian

Materials: Cement rendered masonry, timber joinery and roof soffit, Marseille tile roofing

Registered owner:

Legal Description:

History: The former Castlecliff Fire Station is prominently located on the approach into Castlecliff. It is identified by the name of its original occupant, the "Wanganui Fire Brigade" appearing in the plasterwork on the building's upper façade, along with the lettering "19 Sub-Station 25" also featuring to indicate that the Castlecliff sub-station had been built in 1925.

Wanganui had graduated from buckets and hooks bought by the Wanganui Town Board in 1862, to operating the first self-propelled fire engine in Australasia in 1903. However, by 1918, dissatisfaction with the brigade was mounting, and a municipal investigation of the brigade following the loss of Foster's Hotel on Taupo Quay, in the early hours of the 22nd February 1918,¹ recommended the establishment of permanent firefighters. This took effect in 1919, and in 1921, a large, two-storied chief fire station was commissioned on the corner of Guyton and Wilson Streets. The Gonville Fire Brigade, which had been formed in 1910², was then absorbed into the Fire Board in 1924.³

The proposal to form a Castlecliff Fire Brigade in 1913, was received without great enthusiasm. However, by 1920, there was sufficient interest to build a reel house on the corner of Cornfoot and Rangiora Streets. However, this was soon deemed insufficient and premises were sought to house a fire engine and volunteer fire brigade. In 1921, an addition to the Cornfoot Street end of the

¹ For example, the *Wanganui Chronicle* of 22 February 1918, p. 5, records that the brigade's hoses had leaked in various places, a hydrant and snapped in two places, a twist in a hose had hampered operations at a critical point, the Westinghouse steamer was brought into use about 45 minutes after the alarm, but its value was in doubt. Firstly the locked railway gates prevented access to the wharf, so the steamer was relocated. Then, while the suction pump was being laid, a "carelessly thrown match" set fire to some benzine on the machine. So for a while, a minor fire on the steamer saw it in danger of blowing up. Furthermore, the *Chronicle* of 4 April 1918, p. 4, covering the commission cited comments on inadequate water pressure, a drunk impersonating the firemen, amateur firemen breaking equipment and a hose being cut through a car driving over it.

² *Wanganui Chronicle*, 21 February 1910, p. 3

³ Gavin Maclean, *New Zealand Tragedies: Fires and Firefighting* (Wellington, 1992), p. 165

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Town Hall became the Volunteer Fire Brigade's headquarters, with the double doors used by the fire engine opening onto Bryce Street. Laraine Sole, in her book *Castlecliff: The Community on the Coast* (p. 259), states that the relationship between the Fire Brigade and the Town Board was not always a happy one.

The Castlecliff Town Board amalgamated with Wanganui Borough on 1st April 1924, and in December 1924, a permanent Fire Brigade replaced the volunteer Brigade. However, the new Brigade remained housed in the Castlecliff Town Hall for a further two years.

In 1925, the Brigade leased a property from the Harbour Board, and plans and specifications were drawn up to build a new purpose-built fire station there. The lowest tender was duly accepted – that of J.C. Gopparth for £5,655. After the building was erected, S.I. Freeman's tender of £107 19s was accepted for electrical installation. The total cost was £6,105 0s 9d.

The new Castlecliff Fire Station was occupied on 21st January 1926, and officially opened on 10th February 1926. The *Wanganui Chronicle* of 11 February 1926, commented that the formal opening was more than a pleasant gathering. It must also: *"have caused great gratitude among the residents of that portion of the city to receive assurances of the adequacy of the steps taken by the Wanganui Fire Brigade for their protection."* The Castlecliff branch would also add to the strength of the city's fire-fighting resources. The new station was led by Superintendent Williams.

Since the Wanganui Fire Board was instituted in 1919, expenditure had included the following: the Wilson Street site £2,400, station building £16,500, Dennis engine £2,675, Ford motor £140, alarm system £1,200, fire station at Castlecliff £5,655, lighting contract £108, furnishing £200, new engine £1,295, fire alarms £2,100, hot water service £125, architect and legal costs £517, new plant and equipment £3,200, extension of the fire alarm system £960. This included a Dennis engine to be based at Castlecliff.⁴

When the new fire station opened, it housed the aforementioned Dennis fire engine, which was capable of carrying seven men, along with a light Ford Model T. The ground floor of the building housed the single men's quarters (two

⁴ *Wanganui Chronicle* 11 February 1926, 6(4-5, 8)

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bedrooms), the kitchen and bathroom, the boiler room, battery rooms, and another set of rooms for the resident motorman and his family. The watchroom was also on the ground floor, where it housed the duplex alarm system indicators, which corresponded with eleven street boxes. Sole writes (p. 260) that to sound the alarm, the watchman operated two switches. One switch rang the fire bell on the hillside above the station. The other switch turned on the pilot lights so the men could see in the dark.

Upstairs was a billiard and card room, where the firemen relaxed between fires, along with the quarters for the District officer. The building thus housed two flats (married quarters for residential staff), one upstairs and one downstairs, and these were described by Sole (p. 262) as *“both being on the side nearest the hotel.”*

Centralisation, changes to duty hours, and the modernisation of the vehicle fleet over the years, resulted in the Castlecliff Fire Station becoming redundant, and it officially closed at 1800 hours on the 2nd May 1972. The building was then put up for tender and sold.⁵ In 1981, the city’s fire-fighting services were relocated to a new building in Maria Place.⁶

The current occupant of the old fire station is ODL Belmont, a firm that deals in explosives.

Architect/Designer: Unknown

History of changes:

Date Period: 1920s

Rarity / Special Features:

Integrity: From a superficial external inspection the building appears to be in reasonable condition with a number of the original features intact.

Representativeness: The building style and type are representative of the period.

Context/Group Value: The station has remained in its original location which was initially sited in order to service the catchment.

⁵ Laraine Sole, *Castlecliff: The Community of the Coast* (Wanganui, 2008), p. 263

⁶ Maclean, p. 165

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Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: The building remains in commercial use. As a masonry building, it is potentially vulnerable to earthquake damage.

Summary of Significance:

Architectural Qualities

The building is designed in Edwardian Baroque style with Georgian influences with a central front elevation with a triumphal arch motif with a large diaclesian window. The design replicates large and moderate sized fire stations where accommodation and recreational facilities were provided on-site above and behind the engine bay.

Historic Qualities

The building exemplifies the history of the fire service in Wanganui.

Cultural Qualities

Despite some of the political spats that occurred over the need for a fire station in this location it provided an essential emergency service for the community.

Reference Source:

Maclean, Gavin, *New Zealand Tragedies: Fires and Firefighting* (Wellington, 1992),

Sole, Laraine, *Castlecliff: The Community on the Coast* (Wanganui, 2008)

Also newspapers and online articles as referred to in the footnotes.

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

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