

WHANGANUI DISTRICT HERITAGE INVENTORY

Register Item No: 384 **Type:** Building **Site:** Pre-1900 Archaeological Interest

Name: GEORGE'S FISHERIES

Location: 40 Victoria Avenue, Whanganui

Legal Description: Lot 3, DP 15137

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

Occupier: George's Fish Shop and Restaurant

Original Owner: Adelaide Whitbread

Date: 1902

Architect/Designer: JJ Collins & RD Harman of Christchurch

Builder:

Status: District Plan Class: Class B, 2013, in Old Town Conservation Area.

Thematic Context: Industry/Commerce

Significance: Architectural, Context

Integrity: Substantially intact

Photo Reference:

WDC File Ref: Heritage/Inventory/B5 20m

Date: December 2003



George's Fisheries, a 1902 building designed for Forbes, the jeweller (B5 20m).

History:

Of the site: Adelaide Whitbread owned the site from at least 1888 (as noted on Valuation Rolls), although it may have formed part of Joseph Burnett's holdings prior to that date. Mrs Whitbread was the widow of Capt Edmund J Whitbread, of the 73rd Regiment, who died in Wanganui as a result of an accident in 1868. She returned to England at some time, dying at Bexhill on Sea in 1917 (probate granted on her will in Wanganui).

Various people occupied the old shops on the site to 1903, including William Russell, an agent, in the 1890s. John Forbes, watchmaker and jeweller, moved here by the early 1900s.

Of the building:

The notice published in the *Wanganui Chronicle*, 2 January 1902 invited tenders for "the Erection of Shops and Offices in Victoria Avenue for Mr A S Whitbread [sic]. Plans and specifications may be seen on application to **Mr John Forbes, Jeweller.**" The architects, Collins and Harman, had offices at 203 Gloucester Street, Christchurch. JJ Collins and RD Harman had joined the Christchurch architectural practice of WB Armson in the 1880s. They became "probably the most prominent Canterbury architects of this period", designing buildings from the 1890s through to the 1920s. (See *A History of Canterbury* Vol II).

Mr Forbes moved to temporary premises while the new building was being constructed. The work was completed by July when, on Friday 25 July, Forbes' advertised "A Promenade" when his new premises were "Thrown open to the Public" for all to inspect "the really wonderful display of Absolutely New Goods, such as have never been shown before in Wanganui." As well as his jewellery business, Forbes now had room for an art china showroom filled with Dresden and English china. The *Chronicle* described "the massive, brick two-storied building" as having "been designed, built, finished, fitted and furnished regardless of cost. The walls are delicately tinted, the ceilings are works of art and upwards of £130 worth of mirror glass has been included in the general furnishings."

Forbes remained in the shop until 1916. From 1904 -1909 he also rented space for his crockery and glassware in a warehouse behind the shop which had been built in 1904 by Cornelius Burnett. This brick building had replaced an old bakehouse run by Hales, and was probably used for many years by George Simpson, the flour merchant, until being demolished to make way for the Council car park.

Various people occupied the building up to the 1950s. A tailor, Dick Greenwood, was there in 1929 and a hairdresser, Edward Nixon, by 1941. Bill Moffett, estate agent and valuer, occupied the building by 1955 but in 1957 it became a fish shop, which it has remained ever since. Tony Cvitanovich ran the first fish shop – **Tony's Fish Supply** – until the 1970s when it became **George's**, owned and occupied by George Matsis and his family. Alterations were made at this time to the design of SW Palmer.

The shop was extended in 1961 to create living quarters and in 1968 the first floor was converted to living quarters.

Description:

Two-storey masonry building with corrugated iron roof. The upper façade is original and incorporates a baluster parapet. The design and detailing are classical, with pilasters on each side incorporating Corinthian tops. The three double-hung windows have rounded tops. The shop and restaurant street fronts have been replaced, but the verandah is in its original position. The painted "George's Fisheries" sign on the centre of the parapet is recent, but entirely in keeping with the style of the building. It is a delightful building that complements its neighbour, the "Melbourne House Drapery", built three years later.

Condition:

Externally in good condition with recent paintwork. The roof may need replacing and the masonry walls may need strengthening.

Resources Consulted:

Wanganui District Council Building envelopes for 38 and 40 Victoria Avenue – papers from 1957.

1990 Heritage Study, #5/4.

Wanganui Borough Council Valuation Rolls Database 1863-1922 – gives Adelaide Whitbread as owner from 1888.

Evening Herald, 6 May 1868 – report of accident that killed Capt EJ Whitbread. NZRGO's Marriage Index has Edmund Jacob Whitbread marrying Adelaide Thornton Murray in 1863 (Cert No. 88).
Wanganui Chronicle 2 Jan 1902 – tender notice for the building.
Wanganui Chronicle 25 July 1902 – review of Forbes' new shop (without details of architect or builder).
Wanganui Chronicle 30 July & 2 Sep 1902 – Forbes' advertisements re his new shop.
Wanganui Coronation Souvenir 1911 – article on Forbes' shop.
Wise's Directories 1903, 1914, 1929, 1941 & 1955 – give occupiers.
A History of Canterbury, Vol II, WJ Gardner, 1971 – pp486/487 gives details of the architects.
Biographical Index, Heritage Room, Alexander Library – information on John Forbes.

Comments on Significance:

Architectural

The only known* work in Wanganui by Christchurch architects, Collins and Harman, this building is an important example of early Edwardian architecture in the CBD. It is also substantially intact with its classical façade still incorporating its original balustraded parapet.

[*There is a tender notice for another Collins & Harman building in Wanganui later in 1902; this has not yet been identified and may not have been built.]

Context

With its neighbour, the “Melbourne House Drapery”, this is one of the few sets of Edwardian buildings in the Old Town that are original and, as such, make a substantial contribution to the streetscape.

Recommendations:

Registration with the Historic Places Trust should be considered.

Date: 21 Sept 2004: Wendy Pettigrew