



## WHANGANUI DISTRICT HERITAGE INVENTORY

**Register Item No:** 385      **Type:** Group of Buildings

**Site:** Pre-1900 Archaeological Interest

**Name:** MELBOURNE HOUSE DRAPERY

**Location:** 42 Victoria Avenue, Whanganui

**Legal Description:** Lot 2, DP 15137 & Lot 3, DP 33313 (previously Pt Section 62, Town of Wanganui)

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

Occupier: [Victoria's Secrets 2012]

**Original Owner:** Alfred Burnett

**Date:** B5.21 & B5.21a: 1905; B521b: 1908, addition 1913

**Architect/Designer:** B5.21 & B521a: Alfred Atkins; B5.21b: 1908: TH James; 1913 addition: TH James & WT Higgins

**Builders:** Mr Burton (1905); Mr Bengé (1908); W Knuckey (1913 addition)

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

**Thematic Context:** Industry/Commerce

**Significance:** Historic, Architectural, Cultural, Context

**Integrity:** Substantially intact, except for shop front (B5.21), altered unsympathetically in 1972 but reversible.

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**Photo Reference:**

WDC File Ref: Heritage/Inventory/B5 21m; B5 21n; B5 21am; B5 21bm; B5 21bn

Date: January 2004      See p7 for additional photographs



Melbourne House Drapery, with 1972 shop front and awning (B5 21m).

**History:**

*Of the site:*

**Joseph Burnett**, the Fordell farmer who lived at Oneida, owned the site from the 1870s. By 1872 a dwellinghouse and shop owned by Burnett was occupied by **Charles Decimus Barraud**, the chemist, who had opened a branch of his Wellington pharmacy in Wanganui by this time. Barraud is, of course, better known as one of New Zealand's most prominent artists of the Victorian era. This pharmacy was run by Robert G Burns from 1874 to the late 1880s.

By 1888 the shop was occupied by **George Cremer**, who dealt in "fancy goods" as well as Charles Ashworth, an accountant. Cremer was still running his shop up to 1904, with John Shelly running a restaurant (the Buffet) in part of the building, when the old premises were leased to the draper, **Joseph J Buckrell**.

Buckrell had immigrated to New Zealand to work as a draper with his uncle, Joseph Paul, who moved his business to Wanganui in 1879. He became the junior partner in Paul's drapery until 1898 when he decided to set up in business on his own and bought out the firm of Eastwood & Co. His first shop was at Victoria House until the 1901 fire; he later occupied various premises including the shop at (then) 57 Victoria Avenue (Heritage Inventory Item #B16.12) where he remained until 1905.

*Of the buildings:*

In 1894, **Alfred Burnett** became the owner of the property after the death of his father. Burnett planned to build new premises to house **Joseph Buckrell's** drapery by February 1905, when his brother Cornelius noted in his diary that "Alfred is very full of a brick wall as he is about to build fresh premises in Avenue where Cremer's and the Buffet are, for a draper." Details of the new premises for Buckrell's drapery were first announced in the *Wanganui Herald* on 29 March 1905 with Alfred Atkin's tender notice published the following day.

The building permit was issued to A. Burnett for "brick shop, Avenue" on 11 April 1905 by the Borough Council, the same day that the work of demolishing the old buildings commenced (with an auction planned to sell off the old timber, etc). The *Herald* comments that, when this building and the new Bank of New Zealand are completed, "the appearance of the Avenue will be considerably improved."

The *Wanganui Herald* has a number of references to the new building while it is under construction, commenting on 19 June that "the handsome new building" will be completed in about six weeks. By 22 August 1905, Buckrell and his staff are able to start moving in, although the showroom had not yet been completed – it was to be "artistically fitted up" for displays.

The new premises were opened by 31 August 1905 and comprised the main shop (B5.21) with dressmaking and tailoring departments upstairs, together with the Ladies' Showroom at the rear (B5.21a). The *Wanganui Chronicle* described the "fine new shop" as having "magnificent plate glass windows" and considered that the Ladies' Showroom was "perfectly lighted by lantern lights. In fact, the lighting of the showroom is the outstanding feature and the designer is certainly to be complimented upon his work." The *Herald* added the view that "the building is of Italian Renaissance style and presents a very ornamental exterior as viewed from the street." Mr Buckrell was asked why he had chosen to shift further down the Avenue; the response was that "the lower end of the Avenue was much better suited for his class of business"

As well as naming the architect (Alfred Atkins) and builder (Mr Burton), the *Chronicle* and *Herald* both noted that Mr J Jones was the bricklayer, Messrs R & E Tingey the painters and glaziers, and Mr D May the plumber. Buckrell's advertisements at this time stressed "Our Bright New Shop" and he named his premises "**Melbourne House**" noting it was the "new brick building near the Fountain." [The name "Melbourne House" had been given to George Flyger's tailoring and drapery business in Wanganui as early as 1886; he may have sold out to Paul's Drapery at some time.]

Cornelius Burnett went for an evening stroll around Wanganui on 23 September 1905 to view the new shop his brother, Alfred, had built for Buckrell, which he thought was "looking very fine".

After a year in business in his "fine premises known as Melbourne House", Buckrell was reporting in the *Wanganui Herald*, 31 Oct 1906, that "The Ladies' Showroom has been responsible for a most satisfactory return, due to the very up-to-date goods displayed generally and especially to the excellence of the trimmed millinery, added to the room itself which is large and beautifully lighted." Business in the district had generally not been very good over the past year, apparently.

In 1907, a brick building (part B5.21b) accessed from Ridgway Street was built as offices for the barrister and solicitor, **Cecil J Wray**. Architect TH James noted in the *Wanganui Herald* on 14 Oct 1908 that he had accepted Mr Benge's tender for offices in Ridgway Street to be occupied by CJ Wray. The *Herald* continued: "We understand that the contract price was over four figures and that the building is to be in brick, plastered throughout. The location will be behind the Meat Freezing Co's shop and the entrance will be by means of a glass-covered right of way running between the Meat Co's shop and the National Mutual office. The building is planned to be divided into four offices and a strong room on the ground floor and two large offices on the first floor." The building was completed by August 1908 when Cecil Wray advertised that the upstairs room and a large room suitable for board meetings was available to let. Hine and Bond, the land and commission agents moved here by October 1908 and in 1911, Newcombe typewriter supplies moved into the upstairs offices.

Educated at Wanganui Collegiate, Cecil Wray knew his architect, Thomas H James, as both men were at school together and were keen members of the Wanganui Rowing Club. Wray practised in Wanganui from these premises until the First World War, when he went to England to serve as Platoon Commander in the "Old Boys Corps". He remained in England after the war, but continued his connections with New Zealand. For 23 years he represented New Zealand on the English Rugby Union. In 1924, he edited and added to William Pember Reeves' classic book *Long White Cloud – Ao Tea Roa*. Wray was honoured with an MBE and died in England in 1955. His Wanganui partner, Cyril Brown, had continued to practise from the Ridgway Street offices until 1918 when he moved the practice across the road.

In 1910, Buckrell's business foundered and his Melbourne House drapery was put up for sale. Buckrell later moved to a smaller drapery shop further up Victoria Avenue. After the War, he moved his drapery business to Hawera where he died in 1940.

The new owner of Melbourne House from 1910 was a Welshman, **Thomas E Thomas**, who arrived in Wanganui having had extensive experience in the drapery business in London. Thomas developed the business considerably, including the dressmaking, millinery and tailoring departments. He became a well-known personality in Wanganui, fostering recreational activities for children and contributing to the Wanganui-Waitotara Patriotic Association during the First World War.

By May 1913, Thomas had decided to extend his premises, advertising a "Great Extension of Premises" sale in the *Wanganui Herald*. On 30 June 1913, Thomas obtained a Building Permit for brick additions to his shop, costing £1,633 (builder William Knuckey), which is the extension to the solicitor's offices (B5.21b). A tender notice in the *Wanganui Herald* on 21 June 1913, with a closing date of 27 June, is most likely related to this extension – the architects being TH James and WT Higgins, who were based in Wanganui and Hawera respectively. By February 1914, James & Higgins gave their address in tender notices as "Paul's Right of Way, Victoria Avenue" which confirms the 1918 Valuation Roll information that **Thomas H James**, the architect, occupied the upstairs rooms while Thomas, the draper, occupied offices and showrooms in this building.

In 1920, the architect H H Helm planned an addition costing £1,200 to Thomas's drapery establishment. This created a further showroom between the old "ladies' showroom" No 1 with its lantern lights and the solicitor's office building, which was noted on the plans as being altered to create a "new" Showroom No 3 (with the "present" Showroom No 4 in the extension next door). The **Bristol Piano Company** moved into the showrooms by 1921, probably occupying the downstairs portion of the rear brick building. (This company had plans in 1923 to move into another Victoria Avenue shop, but these may not have proceeded.)

By 1929 Thomas's drapery had closed and 25 years of drapery business on this site ended. Thomas James, the architect, still had his upstairs rooms which, by 1941, were occupied by fellow architect, **Clifford Newton Hood**. Both James and Hood are important architects who contributed much to the building of Wanganui in the period from the late 1890s to the 1950s.

Bellamy & Co, seedsmen had moved into the shop by 1929, together with Albert Foster, a manufacturer's agent who probably had offices upstairs. The Wanganui Produce Co, seed merchants, were still there in 1941, together with offices for the Mutual Life and Citizens Assurance.

In 1950, **Phoenix Wine and Spirit** moved into the premises, which were still owned by the Burnett Estate. Phoenix took over the ground floor shop as well as the office building at the back where they bricked up

various openings to create their ground floor wine store, accessed from a loading bay at the rear. Phoenix's offices were in the upstairs rooms of the rear building. Mrs Kitson, the dressmaker, and Les King, a hairdresser, had rooms above the Phoenix shop, and may have been there for some time. Another architect, Don Wilson, also had his offices above the shop during the 1960s. Phoenix made significant alterations to the premises: in 1960 the verandah was replaced; in 1972 interior alterations made the first floor above the shop into offices (designed by SW Palmer for Gemini Pepper Developments) and, most significantly, the original shop front was taken out in 1972 and today's four-bay shop front inserted to plans of Belchambers, Low and Associates. In 1973, interior alterations created offices for Phoenix, a staff canteen and a new access to the rear part of the complex. For the 38 years that the building was occupied by Phoenix Wine and Spirit, it was one of Wanganui's most popular liquor stores. The sign directing customers to the rear loading bay is still in place at the back of the Embassy Theatre.

When Phoenix left the building, it became the Laser Strike Complex with an amusement centre in the shop. The 1988 development of the buildings for this complex included converting upper areas into flats. By 1997 Laser Strike had closed and what had been a gymnasium in the upper floor of the rear building also became an accommodation unit.

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**Description:**

B5.21: Two-storeyed masonry building with stonework above five semi-elliptical double-hung windows at the front. Corrugated iron roof. The original parapets are intact with stone and decorative plasterwork. Distinctive features of the parapets are the minaret finials at each side. The words "Estd 1898" and "Buckrell" were originally on the parapet; Mr Thomas had removed "Buckrell" by 1911. A side door at the front leads to the first floor. The new shop front installed in 1972 detracts considerably from the street appeal of the shop. The awning is also a replacement; originally there was a bull-nosed corrugated iron verandah.

B5.21a: This single-storey masonry building was constructed in 1905 as the "ladies showroom" for the drapery store. Its height is extended due to the 7-light clerestory windows at the top. A distinctive feature of these "lantern lights" is the rounded shape to the upper roofline. Inside, the roof still has its original wood strip ceiling plus the archway connecting the showroom to the drapery shop in front. Corrugated iron on both roofs.

B5.21b: Two-storey masonry building, the oldest part of which has an elevation towards Ridgway Street. This has some of the original double-hung windows in place, but others have been replaced with aluminium hinged windows. Note the chamfered edges to the windows and their stone upper lintels. The chimney is still in place. There is an external door on the car park elevation. The two-storey masonry addition to this building extends around to the rear of George's Fisheries. It has a corrugated iron roof, partly concealed behind gables. Concrete belt courses run around the building at the ceiling line of both the ground and first floors. Again, some windows have been replaced but the original casement windows, with upper leadlights, are still in place on the elevation facing George's. The style of these windows confirms that the building was designed to serve as offices or showrooms, not as a warehouse. The side entrance in the alleyway by The Embassy gave access to the "upstairs rooms"; Phoenix Wine and Spirit would have installed another entrance by the loading bay when this building included their wine store. Phoenix also blocked up some openings in 1950.

An additional small building lies between the end of B5.21a and B5.21b. This was built in 1920 to provide a further drapery showroom, but is not part of the original 1905 structure. This plastered masonry building has hinged windows and a corrugated iron roof.

**Condition:**

Needs re-roofing (B5.21 and B5.21a). Internal inspection of the rear buildings shows them to be in poor condition with little original features remaining, apart from cast iron pillars with Corinthian capitals in the 1913 extension and pressed-tin ceilings. Iron supports in the masonry walls of B5.21a and B5.21b indicate that strengthening has taken place at some time. The masonry walls of the front building are likely to need

strengthening. The front facade is in excellent condition and well painted. However, the 1972 shop front and the awning should both be replaced. The interior of the Ladies' Showroom is in good condition, although damp penetration on one wall would need to be addressed (probably caused by ineffective gutters). The original wood strip ceiling is still in the showroom, as is the archway between the front shop and showroom.

A bull-nosed corrugated iron verandah should also be installed to replace the current awning, supported by four cast iron pillars.

The original name of the drapery store – Melbourne House – could be put on the parapet, with the date “1905” to recall when it was built (rather than “1898” which was the date Buckrell set up in business).

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#### **Resources Consulted:**

Wanganui District Council Building file – 42 Victoria Avenue, includes papers and plans from 1920.

1908 Borough of Wanganui Insurance Assessment plan – shows “Wray, Solicitor” and Buckrell as occupiers of both brick buildings.

WDC Building Permit Register, Archives Ref AAF 174:1 – permit issued 11 April 1905 to A. Burnett for brick shop, Avenue. (Note entries are missing in the register for the latter part of 1907.)

WDC Valuation Rolls Database 1863-1922 – entries for Wray as Occupier and Burnett (Joseph & Alfred) as Owners.

Alexander Library Biographical Index – entries for Buckrell and Wray.

*Yeoman*, 7 Jan 1882 – “Melbourne House” tailoring and drapery business run by George Flyger. (Also mentioned in 1886 and other dates.) First use of this name for drapery in Wanganui.

*Wanganui Chronicle* 27 Sep 1898 – report on presentation to Mr JJ Buckrell on leaving Paul's Drapery.

*Wanganui Herald*, 29 March 1905 – Business Improvements: plans for Mr Buckrell's new premises.

*Wanganui Herald*, 30 March 1905 – Tender notice: for erection of premises in Victoria Avenue. A. Atkins, FRIBA. Plus report that Mr Buckrell intends to sell all his existing stock before moving to his new building.

*Wanganui Herald*, 11 April 1905 – notes that the “work of demolishing the old building known as Cremers and the City Buffet was started this morning and the erection of the big brick shop to be occupied by Mr JJ Buckrell will be commenced as soon as the site is cleared.” Also refers to the new Bank of NZ premises and notes that “when these two new buildings are completed, the appearance of the Avenue will be considerably improved.”

*Wanganui Herald*, 12 April 1905 – Business Notes: “Farmers and others in want of cheap building materials for sheds, etc will have a good opportunity to secure their requirements on Saturday next – auction by Duigan & Co on late site of Cremer's shop and the Buffet. Iron, sashes, bricks, etc for sale.”

*Wanganui Herald*, 19 June 1905 – Business Notes: “The handsome new building now in the course of erection for Mr JJ Buckrell's drapery establishment will be completed in about six weeks.”

*Wanganui Herald*, 1 Aug 1905 – Local & General news: “Mr JJ Buckrell to new premises next Mr J Forbes, Victoria Avenue” is one of a number of changes amongst local business men.

*Wanganui Herald*, 22 Aug 1905 – Business Notes: “In the grey hours of dawn this morning, Mr JJ Buckrell and his staff commenced the work of removing their stock into the new premises just below the Fountain, and by noon the fine new shop was stocked and the staff ready for business”.

*Wanganui Herald*, 23 Aug 1905 – Business Notes: Mr JJ Buckrell fully prepared for business in his new premises, except for the showroom which is being artistically fitted up and which will be completed tomorrow.”

*Wanganui Herald*, 31 Aug 1905 – Mr JJ Buckrell's new premises (similar report to Chronicle). Names architect, builder, etc.

*Wanganui Chronicle*, 7 Sep 1905 – report on “Mr JJ Buckrell's new premises” (plus WC 18 Sept 1905 for advertisement and 2 Sept 1905 for Business Notes relating to Buckrell's drapery).

*Wanganui Herald*, 5 Mar 1906 – Mr Buckrell has made improvements to the interior of his fine new shop in the Avenue.

*Wanganui Herald* 31 Oct 1906 – report on Melbourne House drapery business and comments on the Ladies' Showroom.

*Wanganui Herald* 21 Sept 1907 – tender notice for offices, Ridgway St, closing date 30 Sept. Architect: TH James.

*Wanganui Herald* 14 Oct 1907 – Local & General news item: TH James accepts Bengé’s tender for offices in Ridgway St for CJ Wray (with description of planned building).

*Wanganui Chronicle* 19 July 1908 – report on Melbourne House tailoring department.

*Wanganui Herald* 6 Aug 1908 – advert for upstairs room and large room suitable for board meetings to let, apply CJ Wray.

*Wanganui Herald* 12 Oct 1908 – auction at Social Hall over Mr Cecil Wray’s new legal chambers, Ridgway Street.

*Wanganui Herald* 23 Oct 1908 – Notice that Messrs Hine and Bond, Land and Commission Agents, have moved to Cecil Wray’s buildings.

*Wanganui Herald*, 18 Oct 1910 – Notice: Transfer of Business: Premises of JJ Buckrell will be closed on Thurs & Fri next and all outstanding accounts must be paid. By order of Trustees.

*Wanganui Herald*, 20 Oct 1910 – “A new drapery firm” – Mr TE Thomas takes over Buckrell’s business.

*Wanganui Herald* 31 Jan 1911 – Notice that CEH Newcombe, typewriter suppliers, to conduct business in Wray & Brown’s building (upstairs).

*Wanganui Coronation Souvenir*, 1911, p94 – entry for TE Thomas & Co, successor to Buckrell at Melbourne House.

*Wanganui Herald*, 20 May 1913 – Thomas’ advert for Extension sale – and 21 June 1913 – James & Higgins’ tender notice for “erection of premises (in brick) in Wanganui”.

*Wanganui Herald* 10 Feb 1914 – Hospital Board tender notice for James & Higgins giving their address in extended building, off Paul’s Right of Way (which indicates the date the building was completed).

*Wanganui Herald* 16 May 1918 – Notice that Wray and Brown move to new premises, 71 Ridgway St, almost opposite previous address.

*Wanganui Chronicle*, 4 March 1935 – obituary for Mr TE Thomas.

*Wanganui Chronicle* 8 April 1940 – obituary for Mr Buckrell.

*Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol 1, pub c1897, p1417 – entry for Mr JJ Buckrell, partner with Joseph Paul.

*Wanganui Collegiate School Register* – entry for Cecil J Wray, pupil 1883-1886.

*Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* Vol 1, p17 – Biography #8: Charles Decimus Barraud.

Wise’s Directories – 1903, 1914, 1929, 1941, 1955.

1990 Heritage Study, Register Item No 5/5. Recommended registration under Historic Places Act.

Cornelius Burnett’s Diaries, Whanganui Regional Museum, Archives Ref: 1975.83.

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### Comments on Significance:

#### *Historic*

The occupiers of these buildings have included two important independent drapery firms (Buckrell’s and Thomas’s), plus Cecil Wray (the solicitor and historian) and local architects, including Thomas James. The first owners of the premises, the Burnett family, were also leading businessmen and landowners in Wanganui’s history. Many other buildings erected by the Burnetts were lost in the 1994 Ridgway St fire.

#### *Architectural*

The drapery complex was purpose-built by Alfred Atkins, one of Wanganui’s most important architects during the period 1880-1919 and was considered to be a “fine new shop” when it opened in 1905. This complex is substantially intact with its showroom and shop and is the only Edwardian drapery left in Wanganui. (The Economic/DIC has been demolished; Warnock’s compromised by the 2004 demolition of its workroom and Paul’s became the Embassy Theatre. Other drapers, eg McGruers who also opened in 1905, are associated with later buildings, having moved from their original premises.)

#### *Cultural*

Melbourne House is a reminder of the Edwardian period when the business of drapery firms included tailoring as well as ready-to-wear clothing. Ladies’ dressmaking, men’s tailoring and millinery departments all operated as part of the Melbourne House drapery with workrooms designed for this purpose. The buildings also have other important cultural links – with the solicitor and historian, Cecil Wray, and the three local architects: Thomas James and Clifford Newton Hood who all had “upstairs rooms” in the rear building and Don Wilson who had his office above the shop. Phoenix Wine & Spirit for at least 38 years supplied the citizens of Wanganui with their alcoholic requirements from these premises.

*Context*

This is an important complex of buildings in the Old Town and one of the few in the Bridge Block of Victoria Avenue that has its original façade. The building next door, George’s Fisheries, also has its original façade and these two buildings together contribute much to the architectural interest of the Bridge Block. (Other buildings on this side of the Avenue block, including Fosters, The BNZ and Hallensteins, do have their original facades but they have all been altered to an extent.) The rear brick building is also an important feature and contributes much to the townscape as viewed from the car park or the Ridgway Park, as does the clerestory-windowed former “ladies showroom”.

**Recommendations:**

Registration with the Historic Places Trust should be considered for the Drapery shop and Showroom.

**Date:** 9 March 2004 (rev 1 December 2005) **Research by:** Wendy Pettigrew B5.21 B5.21a B5.21b



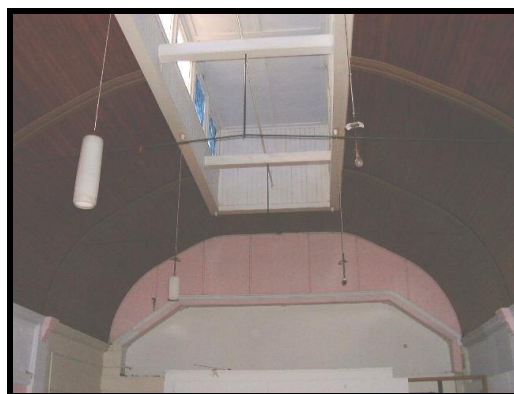
The “Ladies Showroom” with its distinctive Lantern lights (B5 21am)



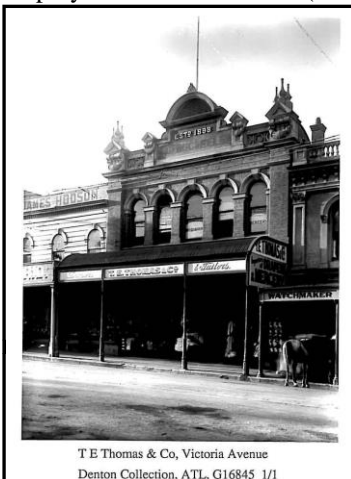
Ridgway Street façade of building first used as Solicitor’s office (B5 21bm)



Casement windows with leadlights in upper floor drapery office & showroom (the 1913 addition).



The interior of the Ladies Showroom showing the ceiling and lantern lights.



T E Thomas & Co, Victoria Avenue  
Denton Collection, ATL, G16845 1/1

Second historical photograph to obtain and scan:  
ATL Denton photograph, 21629 1/1 – taken 1907 with “JJ Buckrell”  
and “1898” on upper parapet. Shows original shop front windows