



WHANGANUI DISTRICT HERITAGE INVENTORY

Register Item No: 428 **Type:** Building **Site:** Pre-1900 Archaeological Interest

Name: AD WILLIS FACTORY

Location: 17 Drews Avenue, Whanganui

Legal Description: Pt Section 68, Town of Wanganui; Lot 1, DP 936

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

Occupier: Teresa Goodin Studio (gr floor)

Original Owner: AD Willis Ltd

Date: 1918

Architect/Designer: TH Battle

Builder: EH Ashwell

Status: District Plan Class: Contributory, in Old Town Conservation Area

Thematic Context: Industry/Commerce

Significance: Historic

Integrity: Substantially intact since 1958 façade renovation (which retained the original windows), although the 1964 plastering did not enhance the building.

Photo Reference:

WDC File Ref: Heritage/Inventory/B5.8m

Date: December 2003



The AD Willis Ltd factory on Drews Avenue, which still has some of its original character (B5 8m).

History:

Of the site:

In March 1900, CM Burrell, plumber, moved from his old premises in Taupo Quay to new premises in Wicksteed Place, just around the corner – “the premises having just been finished” as noted in the *Herald* on 31 March. [Did they rebuild in 1909/1910 – see B5.7 file]. The building was altered in 1913 when it became a boarding house and then burnt down in 1918.

The site was owned by Allan Robinson from 1911-1918, when he sold it to AD Willis Ltd. (See Valuation Rolls information below.)

Of the building:

Built in 1918 for **AD Willis Ltd** to serve as a factory, probably for their print works. Thomas Battle’s tender notice for “a Factory, Wicksteed Place” was published in the *Herald*, 20 May 1918. The *Herald’s* Local & General news on 31 May noted that Mr EH Ashwell’s tender of £2,125 had been accepted for the “erection of a Factory in Wicksteed Place for AD Willis Ltd.”

On 26 June 1918, Mrs AD Willis laid the foundation stone which is still at the rear of the building. The *Wanganui Herald* reported that “an unostentatious but interesting ceremony took place this morning at the rear of the firm’s [AD Willis Ltd] premises in the Avenue, when Mrs AD Willis laid the foundation stone of the new brick structure which is to replace the building destroyed by fire some months ago.” The newspaper also noted that it was 46 years since the late AD Willis commenced business in the Avenue as a bookseller. Willis had erected premises in Taupo Quay in 1899/1900 and the new building was designed as an extension to those premises, providing additional factory and bulk storage space. The building permit was issued 28 August 1918 for “AD Willis Factory”; the builder was EH Ashwell and the estimated cost was now £2,600. The 1952 Talboys’ plans show the original “Wicksteed Place” façade with brick lintels above the windows.

AD Willis Ltd operated out of the building for the next 33 years until 1951 when the company was sold to **Weeks Field**. RG Talboys & Associates were then commissioned in 1952 to undertake major works on the old Willis buildings, including this one which was still described as the “Factory”. The name “Weeks Field” would have been placed on the building at this time, although the plans do not indicate that the façade was altered. Further alterations were made for Weeks Field in 1958, when John Jones & Sons plastered the façade, removing the window surrounds but otherwise retaining the existing windows.

In 1964, **UEB** Printing moved into this building and others previously occupied by Weeks Field. Frederick Ost, Architect and Industrial Designer from Wellington, was commissioned by UEB to upgrade all the buildings in their complex. This included plastering to a common format, although this particular building probably received less attention from Ost than many of the others since it had already had the façade plastered in 1958. UEB remained in Wanganui until 1985 when they closed their operations here.

Since then, the building has had temporary occupants. Andy Deighton established his screen printing business here in 1991, but moved up the street to the old Hood’s building in 1992 (see B5.6). The ground floor showroom is now an artist’s studio.

Of AD Willis Ltd:

This printing and stationery company was founded in 1872 by **Archibald Dudingston Willis**, who had arrived in Wanganui in 1864 and later became a partner with John Ballance in founding the *Wanganui Herald*. Willis’s “Caxton Lithographic and Printing Works” became one of the most prominent in the country, producing stationery as well as printing books. Willis was also a pioneer of the use of chromolithography in New Zealand. Archibald died on 27 August 1908 and his son Alfred became manager of the business in 1912 when the previous manager, Charles Poynter, left to set up his own bookselling business.

Description:

Two-storey masonry building with corrugated iron roof and plastered façade on Drews Avenue. The windows at the front have kept their original shape despite the 1958 renovations. The foundation stone at the rear of the building has this inscription: “This stone laid by Mrs AD Willis the 26th day of June 1918”. The name “Weeks Field Ltd” at the top reflects the purchase of AD Willis Ltd by Weeks Field in 1951.

Condition:

Reasonable. Note that strengthening work has been done on the building, but this was mainly to reinforce the floors to take heavy loads. The walls are not reinforced and would require earthquake strengthening (although the 1952 specifications for work on the building indicate that some earthquake strengthening was done at the time.)

Resources Consulted:

Whanganui District Council building files – 17 Drews Ave file, which has 1958 plan for proposed renovation of premises for Weeks by John Jones & Sons, showing this brick building next to the large timber-frame building (B5.9). Also, Misc Drews Avenue box, with 1952 RG Talboys & Assocs plan for work on the building, with drawing of existing elevation before 1958 plastering over brick window surrounds. These files include a 2002 report from engineers, Bycroft Petherick, on this building and others in the area, as well as a heritage report from Penny Robinson.

Whanganui Borough Council Building Permit Register, Archives Ref AAF 174:1 – permit issued 28 Aug 1918 for EH Ashwell for AD Willis factory, cost £2,600. Previous building on site: 30 June 1913, issued to CM Burrell for 15 room dwelling, Wicksteed Place, brick & wood. Builder: Britton & Gurvey, £1111 (see C Newton Hood tender notice, 24 June 1913).

Whanganui Borough Council Valuation Rolls – entries for Allan Robinson (owner of site 1911-1918). Burrell the plumber was noted as being “previous occupier”, together with William Nathan, road inspector, in 1910/11 when Robinson is first noted as being the owner of Pt Section 68. The building is referred to as a “shop” until 1913/14, when it becomes “Boarding House”, but at the same valuation. By 1915/16 it is a restaurant and the 1918/19 valuation roll records that the occupier is now Alfred A Willis, stationer and the owner AD Willis Ltd.

1908 Whanganui Borough Council Insurance Assessment map – shows Burrell & Sigley on site, in wooden building with brick side walls.

Whanganui Chronicle 26 April 1900 – CM Burrell, plumber, intending to move to new premises in Wicksteed Place. Mr Sigley to manage the tinsmith side of the business.

Whanganui Chronicle, 24 June 1913 – C Newton Hood’s tender notice for extensive alterations to business premises, Wicksteed Pl. Plans & specs at Mr CM Burrell’s premises, Wicksteed Place (see Building Permit issued 30 June 1913).

Biographical Index, Whanganui District Library, Heritage Room – entries for Archibald Dudingston Willis. Whanganui Regional Museum – Founders Card for AD Willis. Also, information on 2004 printing exhibition that Weeks purchased AD Willis Ltd in 1951.

Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Vol 2 – entry for Archibald Dudingston Willis.

Whanganui Herald & Chronicle, 28 Aug 1908 – obituaries for AD Willis.

Whanganui Herald, 20 May 1918 – tender notice, TH Battle, architect, for a Factory, Wicksteed Place.

Whanganui Herald, 31 May 1918 – L&G notes that the tender of Mr EH Ashwell accepted for erection of a Factory in Wicksteed Place for AD Willis Ltd. Price. £2,125.

Whanganui Herald, 26 June 1918 – Local & General report on laying of factory foundation stone.

Illustrated Guide to the West Coast of the North Island, NZ, by RW Pownall, 1885 – printed by AD Willis, Printer, Caxton Buildings, Victoria Avenue.

Whanganui Coronation Souvenir 1911 – entry for AD Willis with interior photographs of premises.

Comments on Significance:

Historic

This building provides an important reminder of AD Willis Ltd, especially as it is the only building built by that company in the CBD that retains an element of its original architectural character, particularly with its windows. (Willis’s shop in the Avenue is hiding behind a 1975 façade and verandah while all the architectural features on the Taupo Quay warehouse were removed in the 1964 modernisation for UEB.) The foundation stone at the rear of the building is an important feature of the building, although it is not in a prominent position and is seldom seen by passers-by.

Recommendations:

Date: 5 August 2004