

Whanganui District Heritage Inventory

Heritage Assessment and Statement of Significance

Item: St John's Bowling Club (Pavilion and Entranceway)

Register Item No: **480** Class: **B**

Address: **Corner of Pitt and Peat Street (Entranceway); 82 Peat Street (Pavilion)**

Legal Description: **Part Reserve L Wanganui Town Belt**

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga List Number and Category (if applicable):

Heritage Values:

Archaeological

Architectural

Cultural/Social

Historic

Scientific

Technological

Setting/Context

Interior



Entrance gate to the bowling club, 6 April 2022.

Statement of Significance

The St John's Bowling Club complex is a place of local heritage significance, in nearly continuous community use since 1909. The St John's Bowling Club was formed shortly after the opening and dedication of Laird Park, in a green belt within the area known then as St John's. As a community recreational institution, it was an important focal point for socialising and sports in an area undergoing change, from predominantly rural to newly suburban.

The pavilion opened in 1909 and was added to in stages over the decades, but then substantially rebuilt in the 1950s on the same footprint, though a unique decorative set of doors were recycled and hold pride of place in the entrance porch.

By the early 2010s, St John's Bowling Club had left the site, the pavilion was sold into private ownership, and the club's ground lease with Whanganui District Council came to an end. The integrity of the heritage setting around the pavilion has remained intact, however. The fence, arched-over entrance gate and side gate were uniquely designed for the site and incorporate some design influences from the Arts and Crafts Movement, particularly on the gates. They now form the oldest surviving sports club entranceway in situ in Whanganui.

Extent of controls

The elements of the former bowling club which are scheduled for their heritage significance are the pavilion, the corrugated iron and timber moulding fences, the corner and side gates, and the rendered archway over the corner gate.

Physical Description

The corner of Peat Street and Pitt Street is the historic entranceway to the bowling club and features an archway (presumably rendered brickwork), with raised lettering stating "St John's Bowling Club (Inc) 1907". A large Arts and Crafts style mortice-and-tenon gate allowed access through the arch although trees and vines now block access through. The fence on either side of the gate is of corrugated iron with decorative timber mouldings along the top. A smaller side gate is found at the Peat Street far end of the fenceline, in a similar style to the main gate.

Two former bowling greens are placed side by side behind the fenced area, with two blockwork shelters in between. The former pavilion is on the other side of the greens and is a steel frame structure with blockwork side walls. The roofline is gabled, with corrugated iron roofing. A verandah is integrated under the roof structure facing toward the old greens. Three additional corrugated iron sheds are located next to the main pavilion.

Historical Significance

None **Low - Moderate** High Outstanding

Whether the place is associated with important or representative themes or aspects of local, regional, or national history; whether the place is associated with historically important events, persons, groups, ideas, movements, social patterns, activities, or developments or advancements; and/or whether the place retains a use, function or integrity of association that contributes to the historical importance of the place.

The place is of low significance in the place of Whanganui regional history, but of moderate local significance as a key recreational institution in the old St John's area over the twentieth century.

St John's Bowling Club was established in 1907 and operated out of the northern end of Laird Park. The club was a local expression of the booming popularity of lawn bowls in suburban areas in the early 1900s, and also of the suburban expansion happening in the outer edges of Whanganui township at that time. By the 1920s, every major suburb in Whanganui had its own local bowling club.

When the club was formed, there was some discussion around what it should be named. Suggestions raised included Petre (the short-lived name of the town associated with the New Zealand Company), Kaiherau (the te reo Maori name for St John's Hill), and St John's, which the area was then known as.¹ Ultimately, the latter was adopted. The area between present-day Victoria Park and Whanganui Collegiate School had been named St John's Wood in the 1840s, with an important early battle of the New Zealand Wars taking place there, and although it was deforested in the mid nineteenth century, use of the name remained in the locality. Until about the 1920s, the area was generally known as St John's, separately to St John's Hill. References to the locality were also to be found in a historical ward of the Borough Council, the now demolished St John's Railway Station on the Wanganui Branch Railway (sited on the block of London Street bounded by Peat and Bell Streets), and the former St John's Post Office, still standing in upper Victoria Avenue.

St John's Bowling Club was a holdout amongst the above institutions but ceased operation in the 2010s, at a time when many long standing suburban and community recreational clubs were thinning in membership, closing, or merging with adjacent groups. The site has retained recreational function and usage by community groups however, with the former pavilion owned by River City Dance & Leisure Incorporated and leased to community groups. Additionally, a ground lease is also held at the site by Special Olympics Whanganui.

Social Significance

None Low **Moderate** High Outstanding

Whether the place has a strong or special association with, or is held in high regard by, a particular community or cultural group for its symbolic, spiritual, commemorative, traditional or other cultural value; whether the place makes a significant contribution to the uniqueness or identity of the locality, district, region or nation; whether the place is an icon or marker that a community or culture (past or present) identifies with; and/or whether the place is significant to tangata whenua.

The former bowling club makes a substantial contribution to the uniqueness and identity of Laird Park and the surrounding environs. The arched gateway is particularly symbolic of the social importance the site held locally with its raised lettering identifying the grounds of the club.

It is also a reminder of the ongoing use of Laird Park for recreation over a century, and of the suburbanisation of the area.

Architecture, Technological and Construction Significance

None Low - **Moderate** High Outstanding

Whether the place has architectural value; whether the place belongs to important architectural styles or is a good example of vernacular architecture; whether the place has distinctive attributes of an aesthetic or functional nature (including massing, proportion, materials, detail, fenestration, ornamentation, artwork, functional layout, landmark status or symbolic value); whether the place

¹ (Correspondence: St. John's Bowling Club 1908)

demonstrates innovation or accomplishment, through design, use of materials or technology,, method of construction or of craft skill; and whether the place is associated with an architect, engineer, designer or builder who has made a special contribution to their profession or work.

The entrance structure is considered to be of moderate architectural and construction significance; the pavilion is of less significance.

The entrance, consisting of an archway with gate underneath, corrugated iron fencing, and an additional side entrance gate on the northern side of the grounds, dates to the early twentieth century, potentially from 1907-08. It is in the Arts and Crafts style and is of high quality (though currently in poor condition and could benefit from restoration).

The initial pavilion was designed and constructed by Ernest Coles, a local carpenter who at the time owned a house on nearby Alexander Street.²

Plans for the 1907 design are not held in institutional archives, but a number of photos of the earliest iteration of the pavilion have survived. Early photos show a single-gabled weatherboarded domestic-style structure, with an integrated verandah under the roofline and featuring fretwork and decorative brackets along the verandah, and a flagpole affixed at one gable end. Based on these photographs, it is likely there were only one or two rooms inside.

Substantial alterations, and additions to either side of the pavilion, were added in 1926 by builder Montague (Monty) Douglas Morris. Changes included an additional verandah along the north-west end of the building, a toilet block and small office along the south-east end of the building, and a separate freestanding ladies toilet. Several existing doors and windows were reused to accommodate these changes according to the drawings for this job. M.D. Morris and Son remains in business as a local building firm to this day.³

In 1957, the Bowling Club Committee made the decision to build a new pavilion of steel portal frames with blockwork exterior walls. Unusually, this replacement was built around and over the existing building and on the same floor level, and when the new building was complete the old building was demolished from the inside out.

However, a set of Edwardian-era French doors with an “St John’s Bowling Club” etched into the glass were placed in the porch of the replacement building, and are of extremely high quality. Other examples of the doors exist in the 1912 Wanganui Chronicle Building on Drews Avenue, the 1911 Liberty Building at 55 Victoria Avenue, and Hikurangi House on Bastia Hill. It’s not clear whether the French doors were from the earlier pavilion, or recycled from a different building and installed with newly etched lettering in 1957. In any case, they demonstrate a high level of accomplishment in design and craft skill, and if the lettering was done at the time of the new building, was likely carried out by the Wanganui Glass Company whose contribution to architecture and design nationally is being increasingly recognised.

² Wanganui District Council Property Rolls indicate Ernest Coles was a property owner on Alexander Street from 1903-1911.

³ (Celebrating 100 years of business in Wanganui 2023)

Setting and Contextual Significance

None Low **Moderate** High Outstanding

Whether the place contributes to or is associated with a wider historical or cultural context whether the place contributes to the streetscape, townscape or landscape; whether the place has collective value as a part or member of a group of inter-related, but not necessarily contiguous, heritage features or places or a wider heritage landscape; and whether the place is part of a group of heritage features or places (contiguous or discontinuous), that, taken together, have a coherence because of such factors as age, history, appearance, style, scale, fabric or use.

The St John's Bowling Club – particularly its fenceline, corner entrance, and side gate, is an important heritage feature in the Laird Park area. They can be seen from the surrounding parkland and residences and indicate a wider ongoing recreational use of the site.

The pavilion, being set back from the road and behind the fence, is less of a contributor though retains an important contextual relationship with the wider grounds and parkland because of the openness of the reserve grounds.

Archaeological and Scientific Significance

None Low Moderate High Outstanding

Whether the place has the potential to contribute new or important information about the history of the place or wider area through archaeological or scientific investigation; whether the place retains a physical form that can be appreciated by the community to aid in the understanding of past uses or history; whether the place has the potential to provide evidence to address archaeological or scientific research questions.

N/A

Representativeness, rarity and integrity

None Low **Moderate** High Outstanding

Whether the place is a representative example of a particular class or type of place; whether the place or a component of it is rare, unique, the first such place or is the only such place in the locality, district, region or nation; whether the place retains a significant amount of original or early fabric, or fabric from an important period in the place's history.

The grounds of the bowling club retain a moderate amount of early fabric and collectively they form a good representative example of a suburban bowling club – though it is far from the only example. By the end of the interwar period, every suburb in Whanganui had its own bowling club. Some of these have closed down or been merged with other clubs, however. The fence and two gates hold high integrity of fabric and have become the oldest surviving street entrance to a sports club's

grounds in Whanganui. They are a significant feature in the landscape with strong potential to be restored.

Date: 1 September 2024

Research by: Scott Flutey

References

Celebrating Whanganui Spring/Summer 2023. 2023. "Celebrating 100 years of business in Whanganui." 20 October.

https://issuu.com/apn_mediaservices/docs/whanganuispring_summer2023.

Horwood, Michelle, and Michael Taylor. 2011. *Wanganui District Council Historic Place and Archaeological Site Identification Project*. Whanganui: Archaeology North Ltd.

Wanganui Chronicle. 1908. "Correspondence: St. John's Bowling Club." 5 October: 8.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WC19081005.2.66>.

Whanganui District Council. n.d. "Whanganui District Council Property Rolls Search."

<https://wdc.whanganui.govt.nz/propertyrolls/search.aspx?>

Additional Photographs and/or images:



Figure 2: St John's Bowling Club in use shortly after opening. From *The New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal*, 14 May 1913, p.31, via Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections NZG-19130514-0031-01, <https://kura.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/digital/collection/photos/id/152501>



Figure 3: Gathering at St Johns Bowling Club. Photograph taken in 1922 or 1923 by Mark Lampe of Tesla Studios. Ref: 1/1-017007-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [/records/22703084](https://records/22703084)

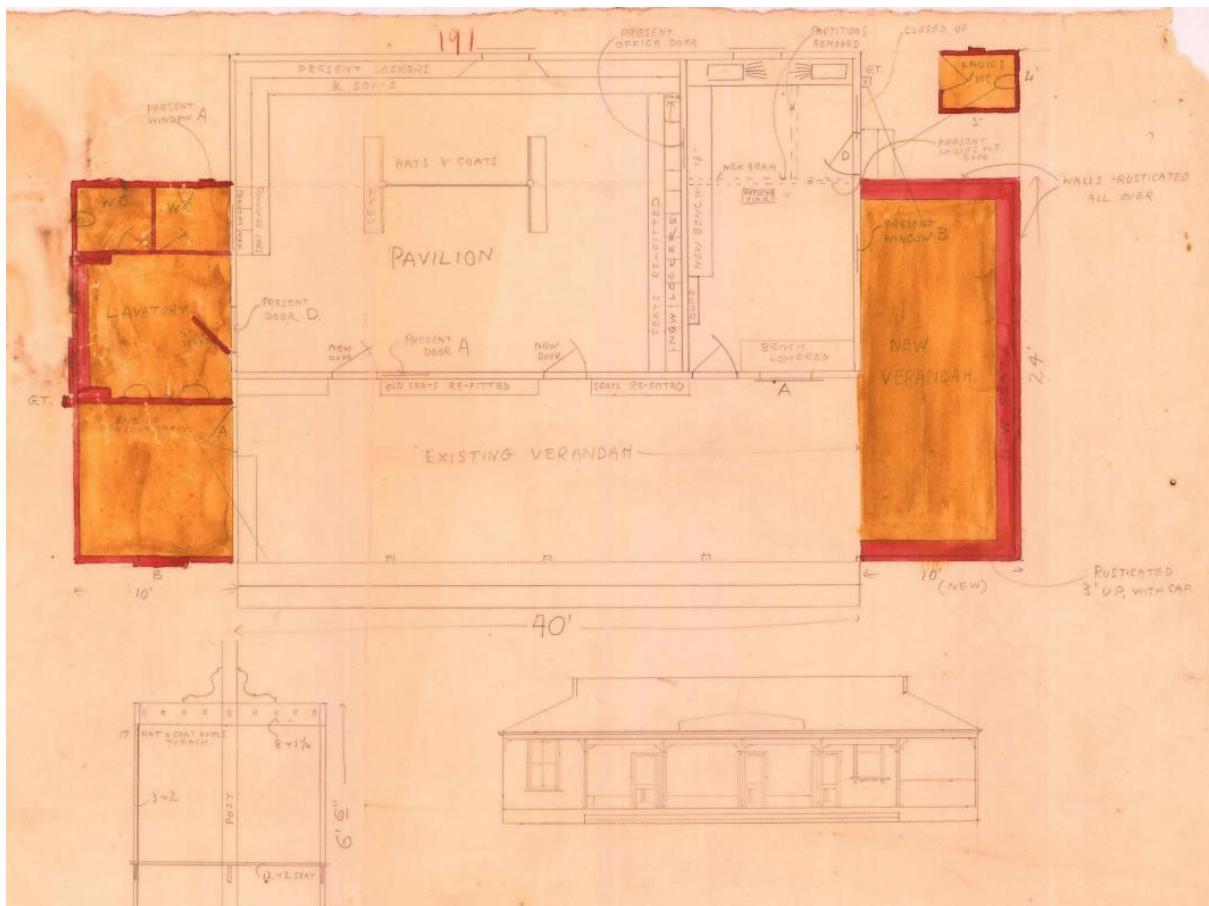


Figure 4: 1926 additions to the pavilion by M.D. Morris, builder. Via WDC Building Register, ref. BP-191A.

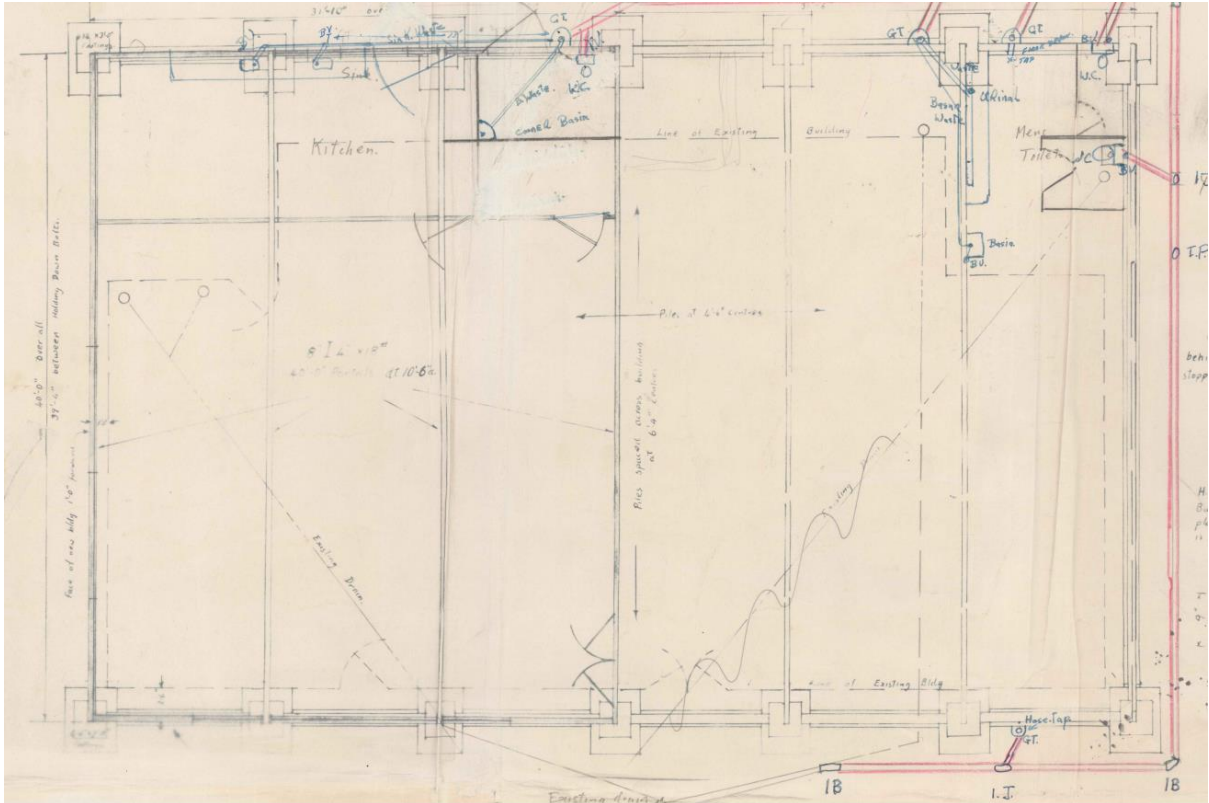


Figure 5: Partial section of the 1957 building permit file, showing the footprint of the new blockwork pavilion which was to be built over the footprint of the old one, and then demolished. Via WDC Building Register, ref. BP--7298



Figure 6: The 1957 pavilion, photographed 6 April 2022.



Figure 7: The entrance doors to the pavilion, photographed 6 April 2022.