



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND
POUHERE TAONGA

New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero – Report for a Historic Place **Palmerston North Plunket Rooms (Former), PALMERSTON NORTH** **(List No.9847, Category 2)**



Palmerston North Plunket Rooms (Former), 26 April 2022, Miranda Williamson, Heritage New Zealand

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to provide evidence to support the inclusion of Palmerston North Plunket Rooms (Former) in the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero as a Category 2 historic place.

Summary

The Palmerston North Plunket Rooms (Former) located at King Street in Palmerston North, were purpose-built for the Plunket Society and opened their doors to care for parents and their infants in 1929. The Neo-Georgian building has architectural significance, and also historic significance, representing the flourishing of the Plunket Society's work in the township. The building provided a welcoming and comfortable place where parents could meet to learn 'mothercraft' (the skills of child care) and find support to learn the fundamentals of caring for young children. Plunket nurses based at the Plunket Rooms taught Dr Frederic Truby King's (1858-1938) methods; he advocated for a regime which promoted the importance of domestic hygiene, breastfeeding or the preparation of 'humanised milk', as well as the necessity of plenty of fresh air, exercise, routine and sunshine as requirements to enable all babies and young children to thrive. Today the building continues to have cultural significance to many Palmerston North parents who have nostalgic memories of a place where Plunket culture flourished for nearly 70 years.

The township of Palmerston North was built on the former site of a large forest clearing, called Papaiōea, where a pā associated with important Rangitāne tūpuna was located. These tūpuna were descendants from the explorer Whātonga who arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand on the vessel *Kurahaupō*. The remains of the pā in Papaiōea were still present when the Crown acquired the wider area in 1864 and set about surveying the township based around a focal point known as The Square. Settlement intensified from the 1870s and the township was renamed Palmerston North in 1873. The Plunket Society's Palmerston North branch was formed in 1908, lapsed and was again formed in 1921; in its early years it was based at Collinson and Cunninghame Limited, one of Palmerston North's department stores.

The single storey, domestic scale, brick building is a characteristic example of the Neo-Georgian style, designed by prominent local architectural practice LG West and Son and constructed by local builder Alfred Stenberg. It is an accomplished representation of the style with characteristic features integrated into the design which include two pavilions with a kicked tiled hipped roof framing an open

portico with supporting Tuscan columns. The pavilions extending from a hipped roof, an open portico, Tuscan columns, quoins and multi-pane sash windows, all built to a symmetrical design. Access is up ramps and through a portico to an internal timber vestibule. Inside, the rooms were designed with a central waiting place from which several smaller rooms opened off. The rooms are large and airy, lit with a flood of natural sunlight. The design was in keeping with Truby King's stipulations for creating a healthy space for infants and their care-givers. The exterior of the rooms retain their original fabric and much of their internal layout is original, including the windows, dado, trim and glass lights.

The building was well-used by the Palmerston North branch of the Plunket Society, initially under the capable care of Plunket Nurse Agnes Kearns (1886-1962). It then found new use as a health care centre when it was transferred to the Manawatū Polytechnic (later Universal College of Learning - UCOL) in 1997, catering to the health needs of the institution's students and the wider academic community. The Palmerston North Plunket Rooms (Former) was closed to be renovated and earthquake strengthened by UCOL in 2021. In 2022 it reopened as a hub for UCOL students and academics to gather for meetings and conferences.

1. IDENTIFICATION¹

1.1. Name of Place

Name

Palmerston North Plunket Rooms (Former)

Other Names

Agnes Mary Kearns Building; Central Palmerston North Plunket Rooms; Kearns Building; King Street Plunket Rooms; Manawatū Polytechnic Student Health Centre; Palmerston North Plunket Society Rooms; Plunket Building; Royal New Zealand Plunket Society Rooms; UCOL Block 11; UCOL Polytechnic Student Health Centre

1.2. Location Information

Address

140 King Street

PALMERSTON NORTH

¹ This section is supplemented by visual aids in Appendix 1 of the report.

Manawatū

Additional Location Information

Easting: 1821957.57 (NZTM) Taken from approximate centre of land parcel.

Northing: 5529790.84 (NZTM) Taken from approximate centre of land parcel.

Local Authority

Palmerston North City Council

1.3. Legal Description

Pt Lot 103 DP 223 (RT WN388/19), Wellington Land District

1.4. Extent of List Entry

Extent includes the land described as Pt Lot 103 DP 223 (RT WN388/19), Wellington Land District and the building known as Palmerston North Plunket Rooms (Former) thereon. (Refer to map in Appendix 1 of the List entry report for further information).

1.5. Eligibility

There is sufficient information included in this report to identify this place. This place is physically eligible for consideration as a historic place. It consists of land and a building that are fixed to land which lies within the territorial limits of New Zealand.

1.6. Existing Heritage Recognition

Local Authority and Regional Authority Plan Scheduling

Scheduled in Palmerston North City District Plan Operative May 2018 (as amended May 2019), Ref. 19 in Section 17A Schedule of Buildings and Objects of Cultural Heritage Value, Category 1. Demolition and relocation are discretionary activities.

2. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

2.1. Historical Information

The nucleus of what became known as the township of Palmerston North was built radiating out from an 800-acre central forest clearing, covered by flax, fern, manuka trees and light

scrub, known as Papaiōea.² The large clearing, surrounded by dense, heavy bush, extended from Featherston Street in the north to Ferguson Street in the south, from Cook Street in the west to Brightwater Terrace in the east.³ At the southern side of this clearing was a pā belonging to important Rangitāne tūpuna who descend from the eponymous ancestor and grandson of explorer Whātonga, who arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the *Kurahaupō*.⁴ These tūpuna, including the rangatira Rākaumauī, were the first of this line to settle in Manawatū. Rākaumauī's wharepuni at the pā is said to have stood on the current site of the statue of Te Peeti Te Awe Awe in the Square, facing east.⁵ Recent archaeological finds have included hangi stones at the Square.⁶

Although abandoned, 'crumbling remains' of the pā site at Papaiōea were still present when the Crown, after protracted negotiations, acquired this and the wider area from iwi in 1864.⁷ Before then there was limited European entry into, or settlement of, the Manawatū.⁸ However, in 1866 Palmerston township (renamed Palmerston North in 1873) was surveyed and the Square was created as a central focal point for the settlement, still within the location of the original clearing, Papaiōea.⁹ In the 1870s Rangitāne and Ngāti Raukawa provided a Māori name for the Square 'Te Marae o Hine (the Courtyard of the Daughter of Peace)'.¹⁰ The environment of the original clearing, which included what later became known as King Street, was subsumed into the township of Palmerston North as European settlers felled the surrounding forest in the 1870s and 1880s and laid streets. At this time settlement in Palmerston North and the surrounding district gained momentum as the government's

² Michael Taylor and Annetta Sutton, 'Initial Inventory of Rangitāne Heritage Sites in Palmerston North City', Archaeology North, Dec 1999, Section 13, n.p.

³ *ibid*

⁴ Malcolm McKinnon, 'Manawatū and Horowhenua region - Early Māori history', Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/manawatu-and-horowhenua-region/page-4>, accessed 24 Mar 2021

⁵ Taylor and Sutton, Section 13, n.p. The statue was erected in 1907.

⁶ Taylor and Sutton, Section 13, n.p.

⁷ 'Rangitāne o Manawatū Claims Settlement Act 2016', New Zealand Legislation, 8.3, <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2016/0100/latest/whole.html>, accessed 24 Mar 2021; Taylor and Sutton, Section 13, n.p.

⁸ 'Palmerston North', *Manawatu Standard* (supplement), 26 Feb 1927, 2

⁹ Opus International Consultants Ltd et. al., 'Palmerston North Landscape Inventory: Stage One of the Landscape Study', Palmerston North City Council, Oct 2011, 41, https://www.pncc.govt.nz/media/2630582/dms-849846-v1-palmerston_north_landscape_inventory_2011.pdf, accessed 24 Mar 2021

¹⁰ *ibid*.

immigration and public works schemes enticed more people to the area, as did work in sawmills and flaxmills.¹¹ The area soon earned the moniker ‘the home of the flax trade’.¹²

The Plunket Rooms (Former) are located approximately 250 metres away from the Square but still within the original area known as Papaiōea.¹³ Being centrally located, the Palmerston North Plunket Rooms’ future neighbourhood was developed for commercial and residential purposes. For example, the site and surrounding area was up for auction in 1881 and described as ‘valuable...[and] so quickly and well-settled’, contributing to Palmerston North becoming ‘the most flourishing and important [town] in the North Island’.¹⁴ At the time, the parcels either side of King Street at its intersection with Princess Street (called Duke Street at the time) were owned by prominent businessman Joseph Edward Nathan (1835–1912).¹⁵ By the early twentieth century various residences, shops, stores, offices, a private school and private hospital were in this part of Palmerston North, and Palmerston North Technical School from 1909.¹⁶

Plunket

The organisation known to most today as ‘Plunket’ has undergone several name changes. Originally ‘The Society for the Promotion of the Health of Women and Children’ from 1907 to 1914, it was rebranded as ‘the Plunket Society’ between 1914 and 1980. It was then the ‘Royal New Zealand Plunket Society’ from 1980 to 2018. Today it is known as ‘Whānau Āwhina Plunket’, or simply ‘Plunket’.¹⁷

¹¹ Malcolm McKinnon, ‘Manawatū and Horowhenua places - Palmerston North’, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/manawatu-and-horowhenua-places/page-5>, accessed 24 Mar 2021. For example, the census recorded 193 people living in and around Palmerston North in 1874, but this had risen to 880 four years later: ‘Chapter 14 Cities and Towns, 1874 and 1878’, Census of the Colony of New Zealand, Feb 1880, n.p., https://www3.stats.govt.nz/historic_publications/1878-census/1878-results-census.html?_ga=2.895475.398488339.1605746790-1417294207.1603071752#idchapter_1_8158, accessed 24 Mar 2021; Malcolm McKinnon, ‘Manawatū and Horowhenua region - Rapid change: 1870–1880’, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/manawatu-and-horowhenua-region/page-6> accessed 28 April 2022

¹² Malcolm McKinnon, ‘Manawatū and Horowhenua region - Māori and European newcomers, 1820–1870’, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/manawatu-and-horowhenua-region/page-5> accessed 28 April 2022

¹³ A search of Archsite did not yield anything to suggest that there was anything significant to Māori at the particular location of the Plunket Rooms (Former).

¹⁴ ‘Borough of Palmerston North’, *Manawatu Times*, 9 Nov 1881, 3

¹⁵ Record of Title (RT) WN65/223; RT WN117/220, Wellington Land District

¹⁶ *Wise’s New Zealand Post Office Directory*, Dunedin, H Wise and Company, 1909, 706, 708–09; Palmerston North Technical School (Former), Category 2 historic place (List No. 1266)

¹⁷ Lynne Giddings, ‘Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, 1907–’, NZHistory, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/royal-new-zealand-plunket-society>, updated 2018, accessed 31 Mar 2021

Despite these branding changes, what has been constant is their reputation as New Zealand's most well-known organisation supporting parents by providing services and teaching focused on baby- and child-care.¹⁸ In an atmosphere of heightened political and social awareness of the importance of infant welfare, Dr Frederic Truby King (1858-1938) founded Plunket in 1907. Truby King's approach to baby care proved hugely influential and was to dramatically reduce infant mortality both in New Zealand and overseas. At this time some infants unable to be breast-fed were missing out on crucial nutrition, fed on various fluids, including 'condensed milk, dried milks and patent foods, cow's milk, water and barley water'.¹⁹ Truby King promoted breastfeeding or specially prepared 'humanised' milk for bottle-fed babies. He emphasised the importance of domestic hygiene as well as advising the necessity of plenty of fresh air, exercise, and sunshine as fundamental for all babies and young children to thrive.²⁰ Plunket nurses, in addition to their basic midwifery qualifications, completed additional training to learn, then teach, Truby King's approach to maintaining infant health and preventing disease.

The Society was named after Lady Victoria Plunket (1873-1968), who was married to Governor General Lord William Plunket (1864-1920). She was a charismatic speaker and popular figure in her own right and, working closely with the indefatigable Truby King, undertook a lot of initial promotion for the Society around the country.²¹ Lord and Lady Plunket had a close connection to Palmerston North because the vice-regal residence was there, at Woodhey (now called Caccia-Birch House (List No. 196)), between 1908 and 1910, and their youngest child (of eight) was born in the house early in February 1909.²²

Lady Victoria Plunket and Truby King presented free public lectures about mothercraft in Palmerston North in July 1908.²³ These talks attracted the largest 'assemblage of ladies' in

¹⁸ Nancy Swarbrick, 'Women's networks and clubs - Family-focused organisations', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/womens-networks-and-clubs/page-2>, accessed 24 Mar 2021

¹⁹ 'Against Nature: Trend of Present-Day Mothers Valuable Address By Plunket Nurse Parlane', *Manawatu Standard*, 21 March 1919, 7

²⁰ Lloyd Chapman, *In a Strange Garden: The life and times of Truby King*, Auckland: Penguin, 2003, p.133

²¹ 'Plunket Society formed', NZHistory, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/foundation-of-the-plunket-society>, updated 24 Dec 2020, accessed 25 Mar 2021; 'Lady Victoria Plunket', Plunket Whānau Āwhina; 'The Plunket Nurse', *Manawatu Standard*, 3 Jul 1908, 4

²² Woodhey was later renamed Caccia-Birch: Category 1 historic place (List No. 196); 'Social and Personal News', *New Zealand Times*, 8 Feb 1909, 2

²³ Linda Bryder, *A Voice for Mothers: The Plunket Society and Infant Welfare 1907-2000*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2003, 28-30, also <https://wcl.overdrive.com/media/0146289E-5209-4003-B0BF-72C68CE70A45#>, accessed 1 Apr 2021; 'The

the town's history.²⁴ In addition to speeches, Lady Plunket undertook demonstrations on preparing 'humanised' milk.²⁵ Inspired by these addresses, the people of Palmerston North established a Palmerston North branch of the Society.²⁶ They sent a request to Truby King's Karitane Babies' Hospital in Dunedin for 'a registered and highly qualified [Plunket] nurse' to oversee the work in Palmerston North.²⁷ The capable and experienced Plunket Nurse Henderson was soon appointed.²⁸ Under her guidance, the branch undertook 'remarkably good work'.²⁹ They were supported by local fundraising efforts, which included an Orchestral Concert at the Palmerston North Opera House.³⁰ Yet the Society, for 'some unknown reason' was 'allowed to lapse' and Palmerston North became 'merely a branch' of the Marton Centre and a Plunket nurse visited Palmerston North from there twice a week.³¹

From the 1920s there was a surge in building Plunket Rooms around the wider region. Rooms, often in conjunction with women's rest rooms, were opened in Shannon, Levin, Foxton and Feilding.³² A Palmerston North branch was again formed in 1921. At a meeting of the District Nursing Guild that October it was decided that 'the time had arrived when Palmerston North should [again] assume the responsibility of maintaining a [Plunket] nurse for the town' and Palmerston North again formed an independent branch of Plunket with the support of a local Plunket Nurse Committee.³³ From 1921-22 their membership totalled 58; by 1923 membership had increased to 272, with a corresponding jump in income.³⁴ There was no designated Plunket Rooms for the branch, but for many years it was based in a rent-free room at Collinson and Cunninghame Limited, one of Palmerston North's leading

Plunket Nurse', *Manawatu Standard*, 3 Jul 1908, 4; 'Amusements', *Manawatu Times*, 27 Oct 1908, 1

²⁴ 'The Plunket Nurse', *Manawatu Standard*

²⁵ For example: *Manawatu Standard*, 3 Sep 1908, 4; *Manawatu Standard*, 15 Oct 1908, 4; *Manawatu Standard*, 19 Dec 1908, 4

²⁶ 'The Plunket Nurse Society: Palmerston Branch Formed...', *Manawatu Times*, 3 July 1908, 5

²⁷ 'Untitled', *Manawatu Standard*, 1 September 1908, 4

²⁸ 'Untitled', *Manawatu Times*, 3 September 1908, 4

²⁹ 'Against Nature: Trend of Present-Day Mothers Valuable Address By Plunket Nurse Parlane', *Manawatu Standard*, 21 March 1919, 7

³⁰ 'Orchestral Concert', *Manawatu Standard*, 3 September 1908, 5

³¹ 'Against Nature: Trend of Present-Day Mothers Valuable Address By Plunket Nurse Parlane', *Manawatu Standard*, 21 March 1919, 7

³² *Horowhenua Chronicle*, 21 December 1928, 8; *Horowhenua Chronicle*, 12 June 1931, 3; *Horowhenua Chronicle*, 10 April 1930, 2; *Feilding Star*, 1 April 1933, 4

³³ 'Plunket Work: Nurses Activities Extended', *Manawatu Standard*, 7 October 1921, 3

³⁴ 'Plunket Society', *Manawatu Standard*, 19 May 1923, 3

department stores.³⁵ By 1925 there were ‘many people in this town and district whose children ... benefited from the skilled treatment and advice of the Plunket nurses’.³⁶

Plunket continued to prosper around the country and many women became involved in a voluntary capacity. Although the local Plunket volunteer committees around New Zealand generally started off as being the domain of each community’s Pākehā women from the upper echelons, this had changed by the 1920s. The demographic of committees was still primarily Pākehā, but the women involved ‘on the whole reflected the make-up of their ... communities’.³⁷ This grass-roots commitment was essential because, while there was some government funding and income from Karitane products (after 1927), the bulk of Plunket’s funding was raised by the Plunket committees which supported the branches.³⁸ The benefit for the women involved was Plunket work was ‘seen as a respectable and respected activity within the community; it provided an opportunity for women to meet away from the traditional environs of church and family, and increased their confidence and self-esteem’.³⁹

Māori mothers and their infants were initially less involved in Plunket than Pākehā - primarily due to a health system which hindered an integrated approach to maternity services. In its early days the Society was ‘slow to respond’ to Māori needs and sometimes described as ‘out of touch with Māori issues’.⁴⁰ Statistics show a higher mortality rate for Māori infants when compared with those from Pākehā homes.⁴¹ Plunket had no Māori branches and few Māori Plunket nurses.⁴² However, Dr Māui Pōmare (1876-1930) is said to have greatly admired Truby King’s work and tried to foster it within Māori communities.⁴³ When the first Plunket Society branches were established there were very few Māori babies in their care.⁴⁴

³⁵ Dorothy Pilkington, ‘Collinson, Leopold Henry’, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* in Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4c26/collinson-leopold-henry>, accessed 24 Mar 2021; Collinson & Cunninghame Ltd, Broadway, 1966, Manawatū Heritage, 2009P_BC411_BUI_2548, <https://manawatuheritage.pncc.govt.nz/item/f30579c9-0414-419a-abe5-b4d4faa169605>, accessed 24 Mar 2021

³⁶ ‘The Plunket Society’, *Manawatu Standard*, 18 March 1925, 4

³⁷ Lloyd Chapman, *In a Strange Garden: The life and times of Truby King*, Auckland, Penguin, 2003, 169, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-ChaStra-t1-body-d17.html>, accessed 31 Mar 2021

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Giddings, ‘Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, 1907-’

⁴⁰ Sullivan, 2007, p.190

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Giddings, ‘Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, 1907’

⁴³ Erik Olssen, ‘Truby King and the Plunket Society: An analysis of a prescriptive ideology’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 15:1, 1981, 11, http://www.nzjh.auckland.ac.nz/docs/1981/NZJH_15_1_02.pdf, accessed 31 Mar 2021

⁴⁴ Jim Sullivan, *I was a Plunket Baby: 100 Years of the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society (Inc)*, Random House, Auckland, 2007,

Much of this work was undertaken by the Native Health Nursing Service, established in 1911 by the Department of Health.⁴⁵ By the mid-1920s it was established practice for the Department of Health to look after Māori babies and for Plunket's primary focus to be Pākehā babies.⁴⁶ In the early period many of King's writings were translated into different languages, but it was only when Māui Pōmare took action in 1916 that they appeared in te reo Māori.⁴⁷ Where necessary Plunket nurses were able to step in to assist Māori mothers, by arrangement with the public health governing department/board, to cover areas where a district nurse was unavailable.⁴⁸

Increasing urbanisation after the Second World War went some way towards disrupting this segregation between Pākehā and Māori mother- and child-care.⁴⁹ By the 1980s Plunket had taken on the challenge of 'confront[ing] this [racial] issue publicly' to provide a service which met the needs of all New Zealanders.⁵⁰ The first Māori health workers were employed by Plunket from 1989 and from 1990 money from various fundraising activities began to be allocated to Māori health initiatives.⁵¹ There was also historically a similar lack of engagement with Pasifika mothers - a relationship also hampered by the barriers of language and cultural differences - but from the 1980s they have benefited from similar efforts by Plunket to 'break down barriers'.⁵²

Overall, the organisation kept careful records and can today point to statistics showing a declining infant mortality rate nationally, due in part to the efforts of the Society. By 1931 New Zealand's infant mortality rate had dropped to 3.2 per cent, making the country an acknowledged world leader in the field.⁵³ Nationwide, in 1906-10 the infant mortality rate was 40.57 per 1000 live births; this dropped to 9.5 by 1936-40.⁵⁴ This decline in infant

p.186.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Sullivan, 2007, p.186

⁴⁷ Chapman, , 2003, p..169,

⁴⁸ *Born in New Zealand*, National Film Unit short film, 1958, NZOnScreen, approximately 24:30 mins, <https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/born-in-new-zealand-1958/availability>, accessed 31 Mar 2021

⁴⁹ Bryder, 2003, p.xv; Sullivan, 2007, p.191: In 1962 39% of Māori were living in cities, compared with 78% by 1981.

⁵⁰ Bryder, 2003, p.xv⁵⁰

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Sullivan, 2007, pp.192-3

⁵³ Chapman, 2003, 165. New Zealand's infant mortality rate was among the lowest in the world even prior to Plunket's establishment, at 7.1 per cent: Bryder, 2003, 28; this is probably non-Māori.

⁵⁴ Bryder, 2003, x

mortality rate was not just the result of the implementation of Dr Truby King's ideas, but other factors played a part too, including the benefits reaped by widespread improvement of sanitation in the home.⁵⁵

After the Second World War public maternity and Plunket services found it hard to keep up with the demand created by the 'Baby Boom'.⁵⁶ They continued to seek ways to assist parents. During this time there were isolated outbreaks of diphtheria, typhoid and tuberculosis, however it was polio that became the 'most alarming' infectious disease.⁵⁷ Waves of polio epidemics swept through New Zealand until the 1960s and Plunket successfully stepped up to ensure that children around New Zealand were immunised.⁵⁸ Although this was a challenging period, the society managed to keep its independence and continued to be run 'from Dunedin by the fur-coat brigade'.⁵⁹

Into the 1990s Plunket continued to be relevant to both babies and their caregivers and Plunket babies came from increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds.⁶⁰ The reach of the Society is evident in the statistics - in 1991 Plunket nurses saw 92 per cent of the country's mothers with newborns.⁶¹ The organisation proved its relevance once again when it spearheaded legislation which made the use of car seats compulsory for infants. A car seat loan scheme they set up grew from a pilot programme in Dunedin 1981 was a major success and made the practical implementation of the policy possible.⁶² But in 1992 government posited changes to the way in which health care was provided to mothers and babies. They suggested the introduction of a 'contract system', a suggestion that would challenge 'the primacy of the society in the delivery of healthcare to mothers and children'.⁶³ This met strong opposition nationwide and there was an outpouring of support for Plunket, which

⁵⁵ Giddings, 'Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, 1907'

⁵⁶ Chapman, 2003, 167

⁵⁷ Geoff Rice, 'Epidemics - The polio era, 1920s to 1960s', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/epidemics/page-5>, accessed 16 March 2022

⁵⁸ Chapman, 2003, 167

⁵⁹ Chapman, 2003, 167, 169. The executive moved to Wellington in the 1970s, reflecting the fact that 75 per cent of its branches were based in the North Island

⁶⁰ Bryder, 2003, p.ix

⁶¹ Giddings, 'Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, 1907'

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

culminated in the organisation of rallies and marches around the country, and a petition signed by 100,000 people was delivered to Parliament.⁶⁴

Palmerston North Plunket Rooms

The nationwide network of Plunket Rooms was crucial to the success of Plunket's endeavours. It was commonplace for local communities to fundraise, then build, their own Plunket Rooms. In Palmerston North, the local growth of the Society's activities, as well as its successes, seems to have motivated the Borough Council's decision to donate a site to the Society in 1926 and the land transfer details were formalised by 1928.⁶⁵ Around the same time they also donated and constructed the Technical School Workshops next door.⁶⁶ Having secured the site for the Plunket Rooms, public fundraising for the building began in earnest in that year to help the Society create '[u]p-to-date accommodation and a building worthy of its noble work'.⁶⁷ The appeal to raise £2,000 to build and furnish the building was a resounding success - the 'generosity of the public [meant] the building was opened free of debt'.⁶⁸

The architect of the Palmerston North Plunket Rooms was Ernst Vilhelm West (1886-1961), of the notable local architectural practice started by his father Ludolph Georg West (1846-1919) in the late nineteenth century, which became known as LG West & Son by 1912.⁶⁹ The practice designed many local buildings.⁷⁰ They were also involved in local politics, with Ludolph serving as a Mayor and Borough Councillor and Ernst as a Borough Councillor from 1921 to 1925.⁷¹ Tenders to build the Palmerston North Plunket Rooms were called for in 1928. Builder Alfred Stenberg was the successful tenderer at a cost of £1,957 and the

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ 'Gift of land to Plunket Society', *Manawatu Times*, 22 Jun 1926, 8; 'Plunket Society', *Manawatu Time*, 2 Aug 1927, p.11. CT WN388/19, Wellington Land District

⁶⁶ 'New Work-shops For Technical School', *Manawatu Times*, 17 December 1927, 6

⁶⁷ Quote from: 'Proposed Building in King St P.N.', *Manawatu Times*, 16 Jul 1928, 8; 'Mother and child', *Manawatu Times*, 16 Jul 1928, 11

⁶⁸ Quote from: 'Plunket Society Work', *New Zealand Herald*, 16 February 1929, 12; 'Mother and child', *Manawatu Times*

⁶⁹ 'L.G. West and Son', Palmerston North City Library Community Archive, <https://archives.pncc.govt.nz/wfSearchResults.aspx?ID=8712&&IndexCardID=1646&&Description=west%20and%20son&&ToPicture=0&&LevelID=3&&IndexType=1>, accessed 24 March 2021; 'LG West Land Agency Building, <https://manawatuheritage.pncc.govt.nz/item/cc51de8f-3bc5-427c-828d-b6d33c62f1c1>, accessed 10 March 2022

⁷⁰ Including Category 2 historic places: Palmerston North's Soldiers Club Building (List No.1263); Ward Brothers Building (List No.7360); House (List No.4062)

⁷¹ Bowman and Kelly, 'Palmerston North CBD Heritage Inventory', 43

building was completed and opened the following year.⁷² The *Manawatu Times* described the rooms as 'splendidly finished and most artistically furnished ... [with] large comfortable airy rest rooms', a well-supported 'splendid humanitarian institution' and a credit to the township.⁷³ The spacious consulting and work rooms, opening off a central waiting room, reflected the practical implementation of Truby King's ideas about the paramount importance of fresh air and ventilation to create a healthy environment.

Achieving the aim of a purpose-built and Plunket-owned facility was important because it provided on-going surety for provision of their nursing services. At the Palmerston North Plunket Rooms these included specific courses, including those in 'mother-craft' (the skills of child care) and domestic hygiene. The first Plunket Nurse to roll out these courses out from the new King Street premises in Palmerston North was Agnes Kearns (1886-1962).⁷⁴ Nurse Kearns completed her midwifery training and from there she undertook additional studies to qualify as a Plunket Nurse, finishing her training in 1921.⁷⁵ Kearns played a key role in establishing the Plunket Society in Palmerston North and 'endeared herself to a great number of mothers in numerous little acts apart from her professional duties'.⁷⁶ Her tenure of service lasted until 1942; it was in recognition of her long service that she was awarded an MBE in 1959. Later owner, the Universal College of Learning (UCOL), was to rename the building the 'Kearns Block' in honour of her historic connection to it.

Plunket Rooms around the country became important gathering and community support places for women, especially in the early to mid-twentieth century.⁷⁷ Having the Plunket Rooms meant creating a permanent base and facilitated the informal networks that developed among the mothers who attended.⁷⁸ The support began with antenatal classes and carried through to care of older children. The many hours of voluntary work undertaken by so many women running committees like the one in Palmerston North is today

⁷² 'Campaign for new Plunket building', *Manawatu Times*, 4 July 1928, 6; 'Plunket Society Work', *New Zealand Herald*; 'Plunket Rooms', <https://manawatuheritage.pncc.govt.nz/item/7e819b57-1670-48b5-b8a0-91e3349c9b5b#tab-item-description>, accessed 10 March 2022

⁷³ 'New Plunket Rooms', *Manawatu Times*, 9 February 1929, 8

⁷⁴ 'City's First Plunket Nurse Dies', *Manawatu Standard*, 23 March 1962, p unknown; 'Obituaries', *The New Zealand Nursing Journal*, May 1962, p.23

⁷⁵ 'Successful Nurses', *Evening Post*, 1915, p.8

⁷⁶ 'Obituaries', *The New Zealand Nursing Journal*, May 1962, p.23

⁷⁷ Swarbrick, 'Women's networks and clubs - Family-focused organisations'

⁷⁸ Giddings, 'Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, 1907-'

acknowledged.⁷⁹ It was this bedrock of volunteers and the hundreds of voluntary hours they contributed to the running of the Society which enabled it to retain control of the organisation's future'.⁸⁰

From infant health to student health

The Plunket Rooms in Palmerston North continued to be owned by Plunket and operated as Plunket Rooms for much of the twentieth century. It is remembered fondly as a comfortable work environment by those who worked or volunteered there.⁸¹ The King Street rooms were transferred to The Universal College of Learning (UCOL), then known as Manawatū Polytechnic, in 1997 when Plunket relocated to new rooms at nearby 229 Cuba Street.⁸² UCOL's institutional history in Palmerston North goes back to 1896, with other campuses since established in Whanganui, Wairarapa and Horowhenua.⁸³ In the early 1990s more than 40 per cent of Palmerston North's population were involved in the education sector as students or staff, leading to it being dubbed the 'Knowledge City'.⁸⁴ It was important that the polytechnic could continue to contribute to that status and it was given a boost of confidence in 1996 when the development of a single central city campus became feasible through a \$22 million dollar contribution from the government.⁸⁵ The acquisition of the former Plunket Society property was part of this project to significantly expand its Palmerston North campus in the late twentieth century and, in keeping with its original health-related purpose, the building was used as UCOL's Student Health Centre.⁸⁶

Some UCOL Manawatū campus buildings, including the health centre and neighbouring former workshops, were assessed for seismic resilience following the Canterbury earthquake

⁷⁹ Giddings, Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, 1907-'

⁸⁰ Sullivan, 2007, p.27

⁸¹ Pers. Comm. Helen Luke, 30 March 2022

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ 'About UCOL', UCOL, <https://www.ucol.ac.nz/about-ucol#:~:text=An%20educational%20institution%20with%20a,students%20develop%20in%2Ddemand%20skills>, accessed 9 March 2022

⁸⁴ Tennant, 2020, 229

⁸⁵ Dougherty, 1999, 145-148

⁸⁶ 'Historic flats being restored to old glory', *Manawatu Evening Standard*. Palmerston North Plunket Rooms Plaque, Manawatu Branch New Zealand Historic Places Trust, n.d. and 'Old Plunket Rooms restoration', UCOL, <https://www.ucol.ac.nz/news/2019/05/08/old-plunket-rooms-restoration>, accessed 21 March 2022

in 2010 and closed as a result in late 2011.⁸⁷ The Safer UCOL Buildings Project was completed with the exception of work on the workshops and Plunket Rooms, ‘pending developments in construction techniques so that we can make these buildings safer in an economic way’, according to UCOL Chairperson Trevor Goodwin.⁸⁸ The Plunket Rooms were left empty until they were upgraded with a seismic upgrade and fit-out by UCOL, reopening in 2022 as UCOL’s Student Support Hub, providing meeting and conference space for the institution’s students and staff.⁸⁹

Associated List Entries

Palmerston North Technical School (Former), Palmerston North (List No. 1266)

2.2. Physical Information

Current Description

The Plunket Rooms (Former) are located in Palmerston North’s central business district, on the southern side of King Street, a one-way street bounded at either end by Princess Street and Rangitikei Street. There is a green space and various shops and cafes within sight when standing on King Street outside of the Rooms. Today the Plunket Rooms (Former) is part of land and buildings which together form the nucleus of UCOL’s Manawātū campus. There are a range of other adapted or purpose-built buildings within the locality, the majority of which reflect the popular architectural styles and principles of their respective eras, dating from the 1920s through to the early twenty-first century. The Plunket Rooms (Former) are immediately flanked by the Palmerston North Technical School (Former) and a small access road.

The architectural style of the Plunket Rooms (Former) is Neo-Georgian. Neo-Georgian architecture developed in New Zealand around the World War One period and was particularly popular in the 1920s and 1930s.⁹⁰ This style lent itself well to the building’s purpose – because it was associated with domestic buildings and created a dignified yet welcoming atmosphere for users. In keeping with Neo-Georgian style, the building has two

⁸⁷ Lee Matthews, ‘Shake and rattle and but not roll’, *Manawātū Standard*, 23 May 2012, <https://www.pressreader.com/new-zealand/manawatu-standard/20120523/281925950056809>, accessed 24 Mar 2021

⁸⁸ Trevor Goodwin, ‘Chairperson’s Report’, in *Annual Report 2012*, Palmerston North, Universal College of Learning, 2012, 4. In 2019 UCOL announced it would strengthen and restore the former Plunket Rooms: ‘Old Plunket Rooms restoration’, UCOL, 8 May 2019, www.ucol.ac.nz/news/2019/05/08/old-plunket-rooms-restoration, accessed 24 Mar 2021

⁸⁹ ‘Old Plunket Rooms restoration’, UCOL, [https://www.ucol.ac.nz/news/2019/05/08/old-plunket-rooms-restoration](http://www.ucol.ac.nz/news/2019/05/08/old-plunket-rooms-restoration), accessed 21 March 2022

⁹⁰ Peter Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, Auckland, Hodder Moa Beckett, 2003, 92

pavilions with a kicked tiled hipped roof framing an open portico with supporting Tuscan columns. Other neo-Georgian Classical features integrated into the exterior design include the use of quoins and numerous multi-pane sash windows. As is characteristic of this style, the building's exterior is pleasingly symmetrical. Overall, the exterior has a high level of authenticity.

The main entrance to the building faces King Street, the symmetrical design making a central feature of the double doors. Access inside is up ramps (particularly helpful for those pushing prams) and through a portico (a convenient space to park the same prams). A pair of automatically opening double doors recess to admit access to a vestibule inside the building. The vestibule has two large lights through which the interior can be seen and access to the interior is through either side of the vestibule space. The timber structure is an original feature which still dominates this side of the room.

The central space which was the original waiting room today functions as a central meeting space filled with computer desks and chairs. At the rear of the central space there is a small modern kitchenette. All rooms (including the short corridor leading to a door to the service lane) open off it. The ceiling is uniformly high and there are suspended fluorescent lights as well as numerous sash windows on all four sides of the building which admit a flood of natural light. The rooms are subtly decorated with a wooden dado comprised of painted vertical panels, the narrow rail which tops it in varnished timber. The three original varnished timber doors on the right-hand side of the room have a handsome timber trim that connects to timber skirting board of the same type and shade of varnish. Each of these internal original doors features a borrowed light above - a single panel of minster obscure glass also framed by an extension of the timber trim. These lights also contribute to the sense of light and space in the building.

The windows are a dramatic feature of the building. Those at the front on the King Street elevation are sash windows, the lower panes also featuring panels of minster glass. Other windows on the other three elevations are multipaned, some of which are unable to be opened; others open as casement windows. The windows which face the gap between the Plunket Rooms (Former) and the Technical School (Former) next door, are protected by sheets of safety glass fixed over all the windows on this elevation.

Inside, two of the timber doors on the right-hand side of the room lead to smaller meeting rooms. The central third door leads to the corridor which accesses the small room designated to accommodate a photocopier and printer, a small additional accessible toilet and door leading to the service lane. This side door is set into a recessed space with several panes of glass above and sheltered by a flat concrete canopy jutting out onto the lane.

The left-hand side of the building interior has seen more alteration, the original wall dividing the spaces has been removed and replaced with modern glass doors in an aluminium frame, which slide open to create a larger space.

The rear of the building is less ornate. There is a small, original toilet in a space that extends out from the rear elevation. Beside it is a cupboard containing a hot water cylinder and another door allowing access to the rear lot. A row of air-conditioning equipment is fixed below the windows.

Construction Professionals

Ernst Vilhem West (Architect)

LG West and Son (Architect)

Alfred Stenberg (Builder)

Construction Materials

Brick, concrete, glass, terracotta tiles, timber

Key Physical Dates

1928-29	Constructed
2021-22	Structural Upgrade

Uses

Education	[Polytechnic]
Education	[Adult Education/Training] (Former)
Health	[Clinic] (Former)
Health	[Doctor's surgery] (Former)
Health	[Plunket Rooms] (Former)

2.3. Chattels

There are no chattels included in this List entry.

2.4. Sources

Sources Available and Accessed

Several books have been written about Sir Truby King, his life and beliefs. *In A Strange Garden: The life and times of Truby King* is particularly thorough. For a detailed examination of the history of the Plunket Society Linda Bryder's book *A Voice for Mothers: The Plunket Society and Infant Welfare, 1907-2000* gives a thorough and extensive overview of the development of the Society around New Zealand. 'Royal New Zealand Plunket Society 1907' <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/royal-new-zealand-plunket-society> (accessed **31 March 2022**) also provides a useful overview.

There are a number of relevant newspaper articles, particularly from the *Manawatu Standard* which can be used to trace attempts to establish the Palmerston North Plunket Society in 1908, and again in 1921. They give some glimpse into the activities of the Committee and use of the Plunket Rooms.

Contributing to the heritage value of the building are the relatively few changes made to it since it was built in 1929. Original plans with room usage detailed on them were helpfully provided by staff at Te pūrangā korero a Ian Matheson / the Ian Matheson Archives of the Palmerston North City Council. The Universal College of Learning (UCOL) provided the 2021/2022 seismic strengthening and fit-out plans.

Further information about the importance of the rooms to the community was acquired through a phone conversation on 30 March 2022 with volunteer, Palmerston North resident and mother Helen Luke who described her perspective of the building's use between the 1970-1990s.

Further Reading

Linda Bryder, *A Voice for Mothers: The Plunket Society and Infant Welfare, 1907-2000*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003.

Lloyd Chapman, *In A Strange Garden: The Life and Times of Truby King*, Auckland: Penguin, 2003.

Jim Sullivan, *I Was A Plunket Baby: 100 Years of the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society (Inc)*, Auckland: Random House, 2007.

‘Royal New Zealand Plunket Society 1907’

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/royal-new-zealand-plunket-society> accessed 31 March 2022.

3. SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT⁹¹

3.1. Section 66 (1) Assessment

This place has been assessed for, and found to possess architectural, cultural and historical significance or value. It is considered that this place qualifies as part of New Zealand’s historic and cultural heritage.

Architectural Significance or Value

The Plunket Rooms (Former) have architectural value as an accomplished representation of the Neo-Georgian style. Neo-Georgian architecture developed in New Zealand around the World War One period and was particularly popular in the 1920s and 1930s. The characteristic features of this style are integrated into the Plunket Rooms’ design. This includes two kicked pavilions extending from a hipped roof, an open portico, Tuscan columns, quoins and multi-pane sash windows, all built to a symmetrical design. Inside, the rooms were designed to be large and airy and flooded with natural light – a cornerstone of Plunket’s founder, Dr Truby King’s (1858-1938), stipulations to create a healthy and nurturing space for the thriving of infants. The building retains a high level of authentic fabric in both interior and exterior.

Cultural Significance or Value

As the Palmerston North Plunket Rooms, the building has cultural significance as a locale where Plunket culture flourished for a period of nearly 70 years. The building was a purpose-built space where Plunket ideas, values and culture (largely stipulated by Dr Truby King) were disseminated to Palmerston North’s parents through ‘mothercraft’ classes. The dedicated

⁹¹ For the relevant sections of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 see Appendix 4: Significance Assessment Information.

space provided a supportive environment where mothers could share knowledge, advice and experiences.

Historical Significance or Value

The building has historic significance because it represents the flourishing and focal point of the Plunket Society's work in Palmerston North, and the services the building facilitated were especially important to the health and welfare of mothers and young children. They could be educated about the ideas and teachings of Dr Truby King who founded what became Plunket in 1907. It provided a space where parents, particularly women, were able to come together to learn about modern teachings about child and mother care, in particular the importance of proper feeding and nutrition, fresh air, routine, and hygiene as these ideas changed how parents cared for their infants.

3.2. Section 66 (3) Assessment

This place was assessed against the Section 66(3) criteria and found to qualify under the following criteria a and b. The assessment concludes that this place should be listed as a Category 2 historic place.

(a) The extent to which the place reflects important or representative aspects of New Zealand history

Concerningly high child mortality rates in New Zealand in the nineteenth and early twentieth century provided the impetus for Dr Truby King to form the Society for the Promotion of the Health of Women and Children, later Plunket, in 1907. The need for the Plunket Rooms in Palmerston North reflects the success of his dissemination of ideas around New Zealand.

(b) The association of the place with events, persons, or ideas of importance in New Zealand history

The Plunket Rooms (Former) is closely associated with of health reformer, innovator and founder of Plunket, Dr Frederic Truby King (1858-1938). It is also associated with Lady Victoria Plunket (1873-1968) who gave her name to the organisation. They worked together to promulgate a regime of routine, fresh air, appropriate feeding practices and hygiene for babies and their parents. Lord and Lady Plunket had a close connection to

Palmerston North because their vice-regal residence was there, at Woodhey (now called Caccia-Birch House), where they resided between 1908 and 1910. Their youngest child was born there.

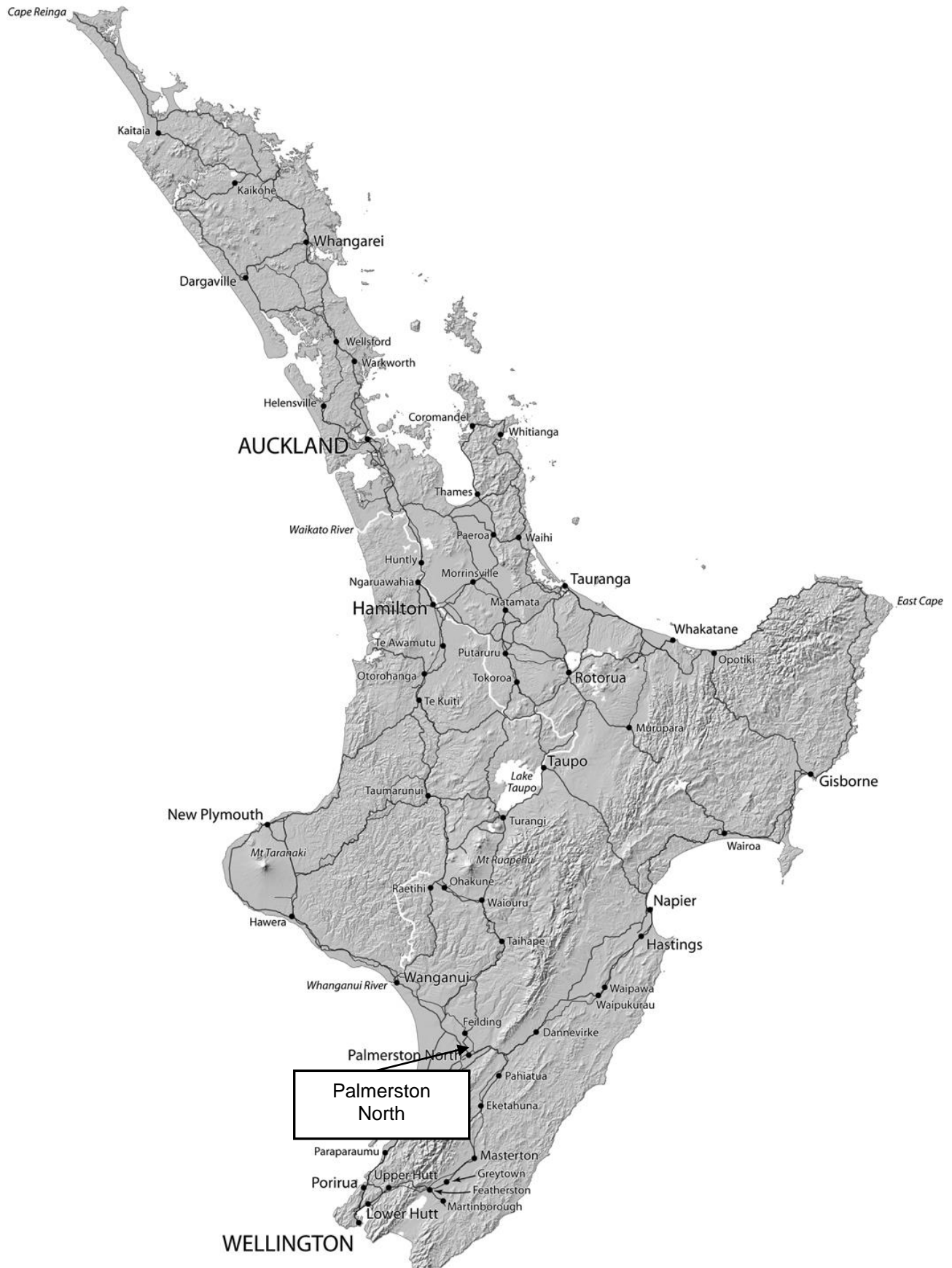
Summary of Significance or Values

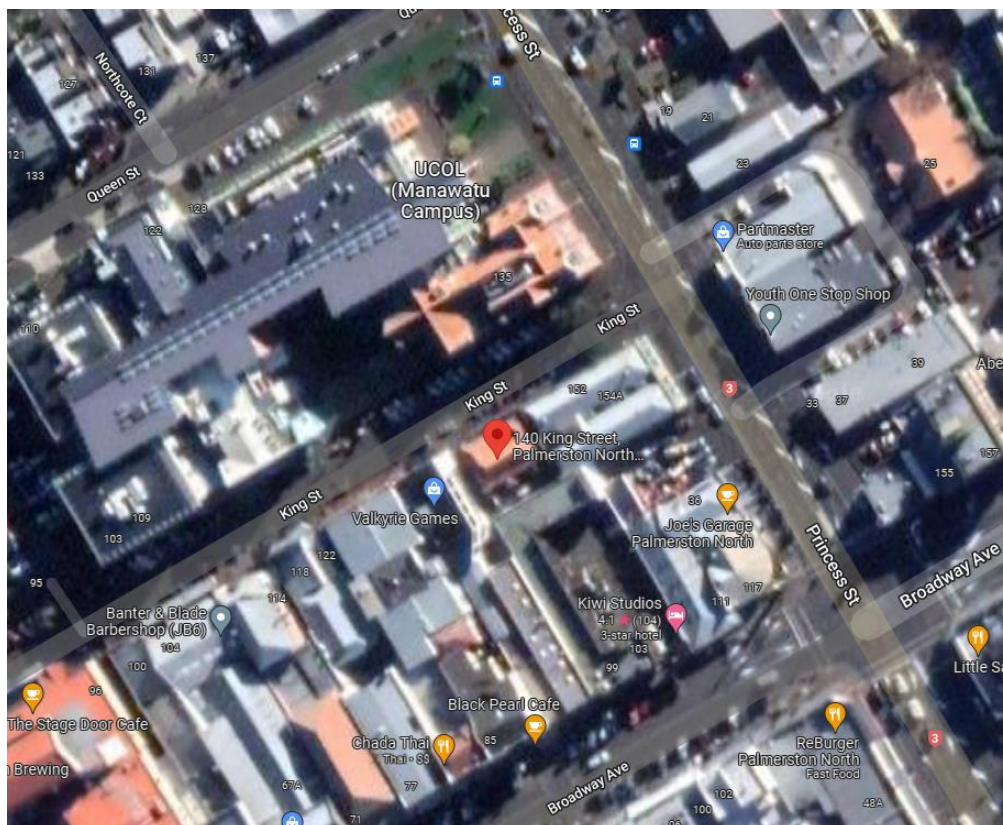
The Palmerston North Plunket Rooms (Former) have historic and cultural significance because it represents the flourishing of the Plunket Society's work in Palmerston North, and the services the building facilitated were especially important to the health and welfare of mothers and young children. The building also has architectural value as a characteristic example of prominent local architectural practice LG West and Son's and their accomplished implementation of the Neo-Georgian style.

4. APPENDICES

4.1. Appendix 1: Visual Identification Aids

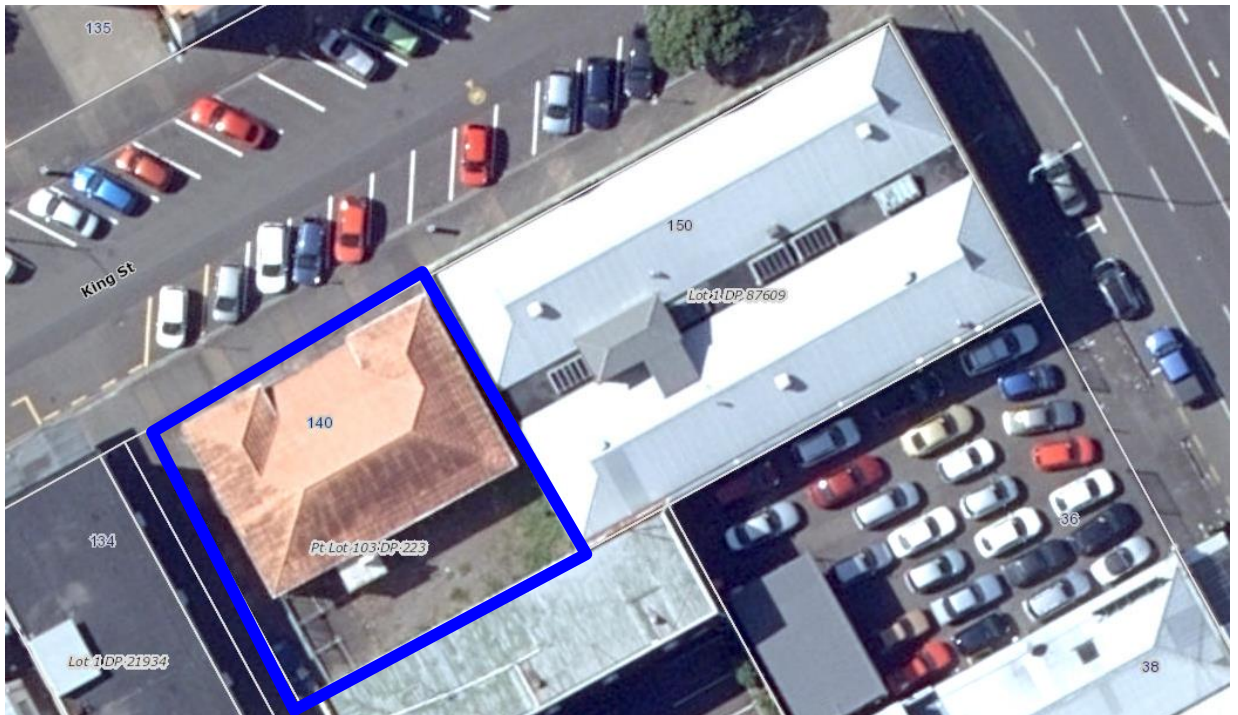
Location Maps





Plunket Rooms in relation to the UCOL campus
Source: Google Maps

Map of Extent



Extent includes the land described as Pt Lot 103 DP 223 (RT WN388/19), Wellington Land District and the building known as Palmerston North Plunket Rooms (Former) thereon.

Source: PALMY Local Maps



**RECORD OF TITLE
UNDER LAND TRANSFER ACT 2017
FREEHOLD
Search Copy**




R. W. Muir
Registrar-General
of Land

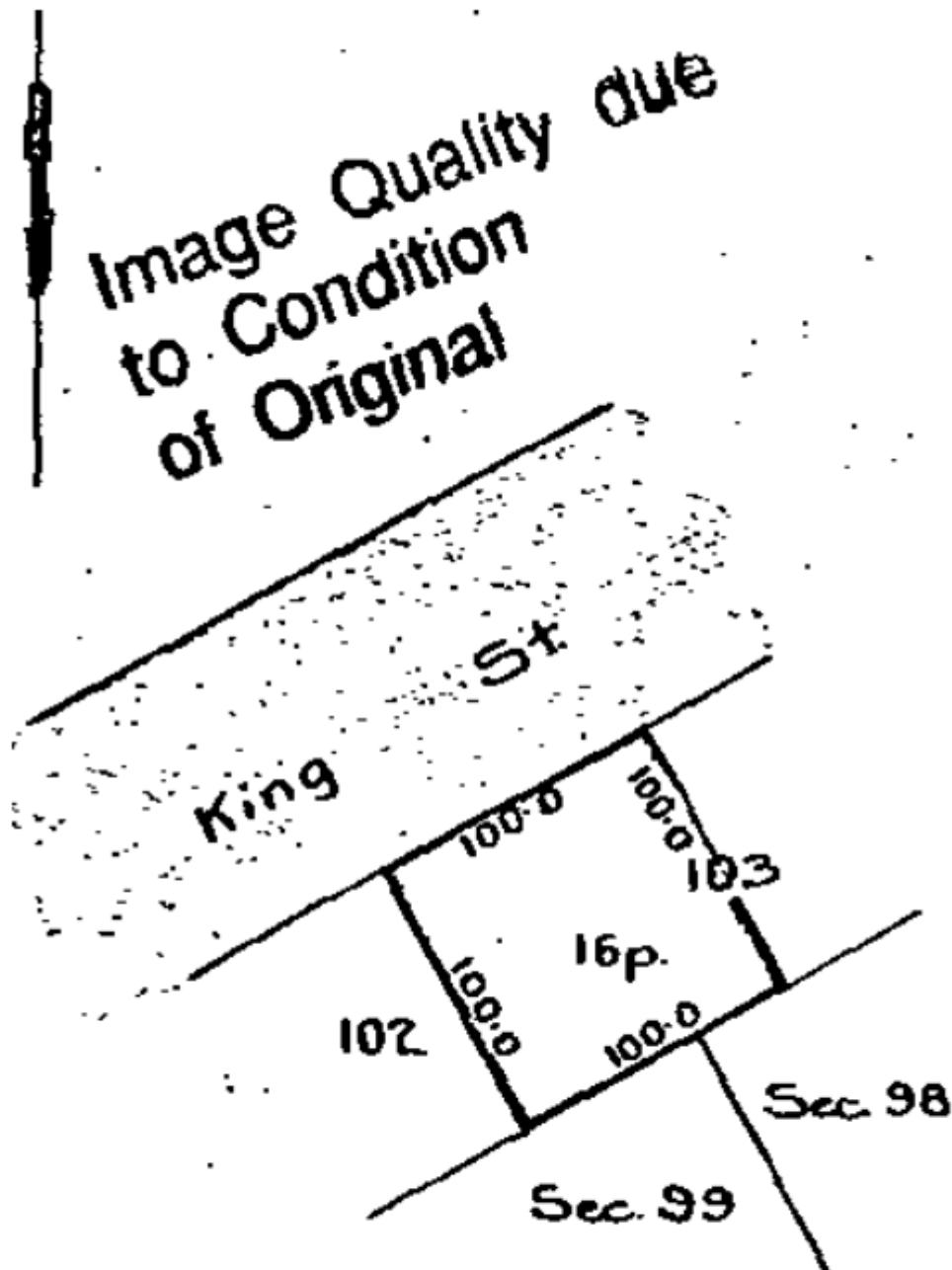
Identifier **WN388/19**
Land Registration District **Wellington**
Date Issued 24 May 1928

Prior References
WN147/152

Estate	Fee Simple
Area	405 square metres more or less
Legal Description	Part Lot 103 Deposited Plan 223
Purpose	Tertiary education
Registered Owners	Her Majesty the Queen

Interests

B799441.5 Lease Term 33 years commencing 1 February 1998 (Right of Renewal) Record of Title 970875 issued -
Produced 29.8.2000 at 3:28 pm and entered 14.12.2000 at 9:00 am



4.2. Appendix 2: Visual Aids to Historical Information

Historical Plans

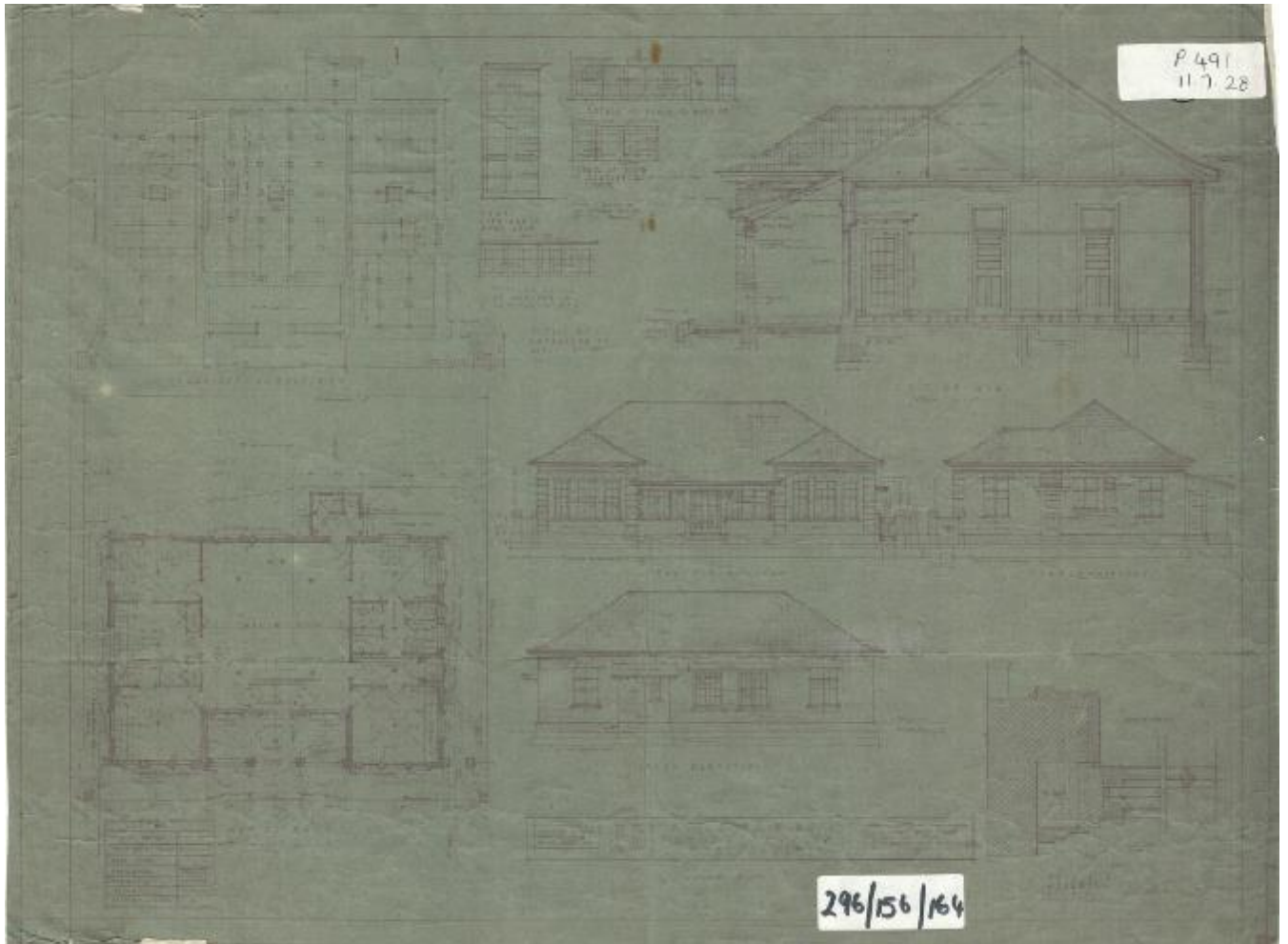


Fig. 1: L. G. West and Sons, 'Design for Plunket Society Building, King Street', PNCC 4/16/3:0:296/156/164, Ian Matheson City Archives, Palmerston North.



Figure 2: 'Proposed Building in King St P.N.', *Manawatu Times*, 16 Jul 1928, 8



Figure 3: 'Central Palmerston North Plunket Rooms, 136 King Street' Plunket Society Rooms, Manawātū Heritage, Digitisation ID: CC-BY 2007N_H40_BUI_0230

4.3. Appendix 3: Visual Aids to Physical Information

Current Plans

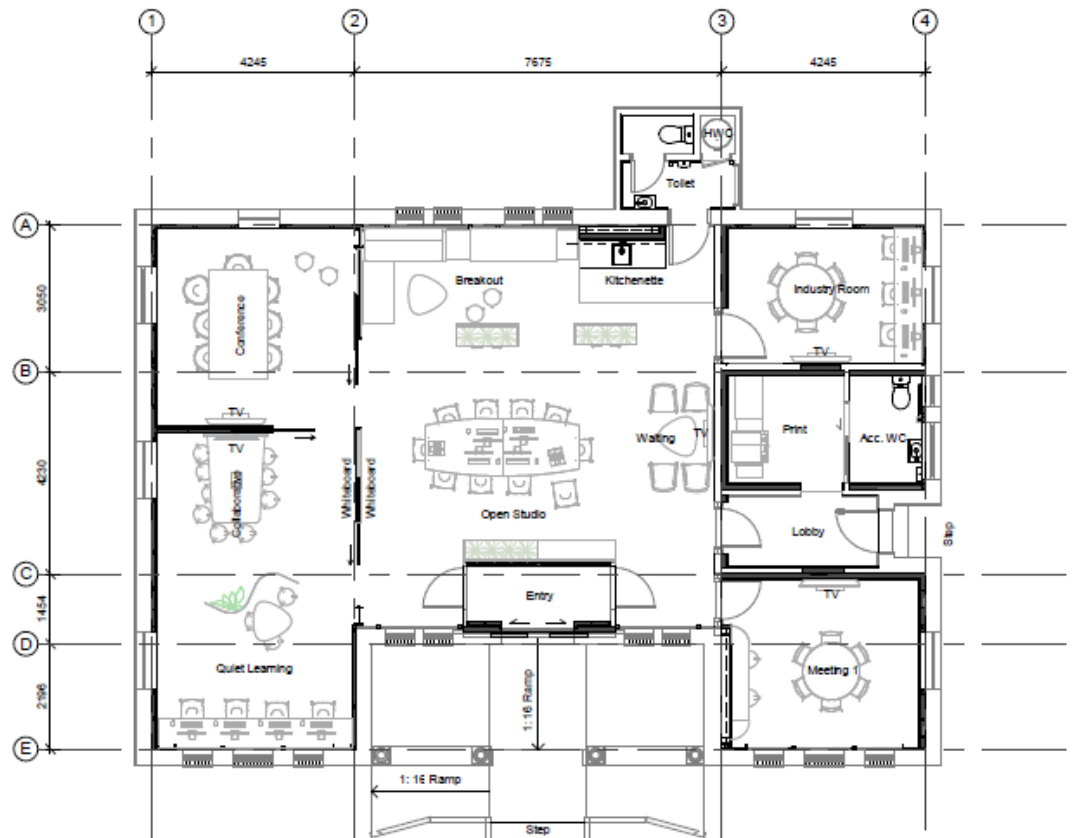


Fig 4: Plans for Seismic Upgrade and Fit-out by Stapleton Elliott, 2022

Current Photographs of Place



Fig 5: The central interior space with kitchenette on the right



Fig 6: Central interior space featuring the vestibule with main entrance



Fig 7: Meeting room



Fig 8: Side access under concrete canopy to service lane

4.4. Appendix 4: Significance Assessment Information

Part 4 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014

Chattels or object or class of chattels or objects (Section 65(6))

Under Section 65(6) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, an entry on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero relating to a historic place may include any chattel or object or class of chattels or objects –

- a) Situated in or on that place; and
- b) Considered by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga to contribute to the significance of that place; and
- c) Proposed by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga for inclusion on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero.

Significance or value (Section 66(1))

Under Section 66(1) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga may enter any historic place or historic area on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero if the place possesses aesthetic, archaeological, architectural,

cultural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, technological, or traditional significance or value.

Category of historic place (Section 66(3))

Under Section 66(3) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga may assign Category 1 status or Category 2 status to any historic place, having regard to any of the following criteria:

- a) The extent to which the place reflects important or representative aspects of New Zealand history
- b) The association of the place with events, persons, or ideas of importance in New Zealand history
- c) The potential of the place to provide knowledge of New Zealand history
- d) The importance of the place to tangata whenua
- e) The community association with, or public esteem for, the place
- f) The potential of the place for public education
- g) The technical accomplishment, value, or design of the place
- h) The symbolic or commemorative value of the place
- i) The importance of identifying historic places known to date from an early period of New Zealand settlement
- j) The importance of identifying rare types of historic places
- k) The extent to which the place forms part of a wider historical and cultural area

Additional criteria may be prescribed in regulations made under this Act for the purpose of assigning Category 1 or Category 2 status to a historic place, provided they are not inconsistent with the criteria set out in subsection (3)

Additional criteria may be prescribed in regulations made under this Act for entering historic places or historic areas of interest to Māori, wāhi tūpuna, wāhi tapu, or wāhi tapu areas on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero, provided they are not inconsistent with the criteria set out in subsection (3) or (5) or in regulations made under subsection (4).

NOTE: Category 1 historic places are 'places of special or outstanding historical or cultural heritage significance or value.' Category 2 historic places are 'places of historical or cultural heritage significance or value.'