

## **Plimmer House**

99 Boulcott Street



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

### **Summary of heritage significance**

- Plimmer House is a fine example of Carpenter Gothic architecture, a style that is relatively rare in Wellington. The picturesque quality of the turrets, steep gables, and decorative barge boards give the house significant aesthetic value.
- This house is associated with several notable Wellington families, in particular that of John Plimmer 'the father of Wellington'. Plimmer's grandson, Harold, bought the house in 1911 and it remained in the family until 1960.
- This house is held in high public esteem as the only 19<sup>th</sup> century building surviving in Boulcott Street, it has rarity value, and the decision to move it on its site rather than demolish show this. The establishment of a well regarded restaurant in this building has helped this building to remain popular and have ensured its survival.

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 34 <i>Heritage Order</i>
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 377864
Heritage Area:	
HPT Listed:	Category I, reference 225
Archaeological Site:	Pre 1900 Building
Other Names:	Boulcott Street Bistro
Key physical dates:	Built: 1872-74
Architect / Builder:	
Former uses:	Residential
Current uses:	Commercial – restaurant
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone – SR 207056

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## **1.0 Outline History**

### **1.1 History<sup>1</sup>**

Plimmer House, situated at 99 Boulcott Street, is associated with the Plimmer family of Wellington, after whom Plimmer's Steps, Plimmer's Emporium, and Plimmer's Ark are named. It is a rare example of the Victorian Carpenter Gothic style in Wellington City, and although it stands crowded by modern high rise buildings, it retains its original integrity and donates its heritage character to the streetscape.

The house is thought to have been designed by Charles Tringham for Eustace de Bathe Brandon, a son of Alfred de Bathe Brandon a well known early settler and the founder of the law firm which still bears his name. Eustace had the house built, costing £400, as a wedding gift for his new wife Anna Marie Watson. The house was constructed by Scoular and Archibald, later responsible for the construction of Government Buildings (1876), and they had a mortgage over the house.

Thomas Scoular bought the house from Brandon in 1878. In 1901 Scoular died and the house was bought from his estate by Frederick Roach, however, he could not meet the terms of his mortgage, and in 1911 the National Bank sold the house to Isaac (Harold) Plimmer, the son of Charles Plimmer and the grandson of the man dubbed the 'father of Wellington' John Plimmer.

The house was hardly lived in by the Plimmer family, as Harold Plimmer died at Gallipoli and left the house and all his other possessions to be divided among his remaining family – his father, mother, and two sisters, Girlie and Mollie – who lived nearby at 93 Boulcott Street. However, this letter did not come to light until Charles Plimmer's death and in 1934 a legal settlement of his estate gave the house to his sister Girlie. She did not occupy the house until the last years of her life and died in 1958. It is not known who occupied the house during the period it was owned by the Plimmers.

In 1960 the house was sold to wool broker Leo Tattersfield and used as a home, office, and store. He is responsible for renaming it Plimmer House. By 1969 the house was again on the market, and the Wellington City Council approved plans to re-use the house as a restaurant, to be named Ancoto. It finally opened in 1971, after considerable alterations were made. Thereafter the house was primarily associated with dining. In 1983 the house was under threat from the construction of a modern apartment building, it was finally decided to move the building forward on its site so that the new building could be erected behind it.

Since 1991 Plimmer House has been occupied by the Boulcott Street Bistro, a popular restaurant. The house has been through some alterations since being the home of Boulcott Street Bistro, but has retained its heritage values throughout, and its conversion to a restaurant has undoubtedly ensured its survival in an otherwise modern high rise environment.

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<sup>1</sup> History adapted from: Wellington City Council, "99 Boulcott Street", *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non Residential Buildings*, (Wellington City Council, 2001), BOUL4.

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications (original plans cannot be accessed)

1872-74	Construction
1922	Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, add bathroom (00055:1:A83)
1925	Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, garage (00055:50:A4720)
1948	Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, reinstatement (00056:350:B26954)
1971	Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, building additions and alterations (00058:733:C33195)
1972	Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, locker and store room (00058:767:C34599)
1983	Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, relocate and alter Plimmer house (00058:0:C62212)
1986	Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, Kitchen alterations (00059:0:D2588)
1991	99 Boulcott Street, restaurant alterations (00059:497:E23708)
1995	99 Boulcott Street, restaurant alterations (00061:163:15232)

## 1.3 Occupation history

Not assessed

## 1.4 Architect

### Charles Tringham<sup>2</sup>

Charles Tringham was born at Winforton in Hertfordshire, England, in 1841. Little is known of his education but it is thought that he acquired woodworking skills. Tringham arrived in New Zealand at Auckland in December 1864 and the passenger list records his occupation as a carpenter. Tringham moved to Wellington and established a partnership with a builder named William Lawes. At the end of December 1866 he left the partnership to establish himself as a builder and undertaker. Within a year he was advertising himself as an architect and gaining a considerable number of contracts for houses, churches, hotels and a variety of other commercial premises. Tringham married Margaret Hunter Bennett in April 1868, the daughter of Dr John Bennett, the first New Zealand Registrar-General, and this may have helped his social status in Wellington. Lucrative contracts followed, including the Italianate house 'Westoe' (1874) near Marton for Sir William Fox, and the extensions to William Clayton's former home in Hobson Street (now the nucleus of Queen Margaret College). Tringham was nearing the end of his architectural career in the 1890s and was elected President of the Wellington Association of Architects in 1895. He retired to the Wairarapa to farm and remained there until his death in 1916.

## 2.0 Physical description

### 2.1 Architecture

The main architectural feature of Plimmer House lies in the quality of its exterior decorations and elements. The style of the house is Carpenter Gothic, featuring a steep-pitched gable, decorated fretwork, and a pendant and finial. A small octagonal tower completes this asymmetrical composition. The house is a good example of what is a relatively rare style, particularly in an inner city context. The house is a typical nineteenth century timber construction and has technical value for this reason.

<sup>2</sup> Historic Places Trust, 'Charles Tringham', *Professional Biographies*, accessed 30 August 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Tringham,+Charles>

The decorative fretwork demonstrates the adaptability of timber in a skilled craftsman's hands.

The interior has been altered extensively, firstly in the 1960s when it was used as offices, and later in 1969 when the architects Craig, Craig and Moller were engaged to upgrade and modify the building for use as a restaurant. In 1983 when the building was moved forward on its site to allow for a high rise development behind, further alterations were carried out. The building was also altered in 1991 and 1995.

## **2.2 Materials**

- Rusticated weatherboard
- Timber joinery
- Iron roofing

## **2.3 Setting**

Situated on Boulcott Street, Plimmer House has a high streetscape value, particularly in comparison to surrounding high rise buildings. Its small scale is offset by the adjacent high-rise buildings, and it is set behind a small front garden with a picket fence which contributes a semblance of authenticity to its much altered setting.

### 3.0 Sources

Historic Places Trust. 'Charles Tringham'. *Professional Biographies*. Accessed 30 August 2013,  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Tringham,+Charles>

Wellington City Council. *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001.

#### **Wellington City Archive**

- 1922 Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, add bathroom (00055:1:A83)
- 1925 Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, garage (00055:50:A4720)
- 1948 Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, reinstatement (00056:350:B26954)
- 1971 Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, building additions and alterations (00058:733:C33195)
- 1972 Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, locker and store room (00058:767:C34599)
- 1983 Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, relocate and alter Plimmer house (00058:0:C62212)
- 1986 Unit 2, 99 Boulcott Street, Kitchen alterations (00059:0:D2588)
- 1991 99 Boulcott Street, restaurant alterations (00059:497:E23708)
- 1995 99 Boulcott Street, restaurant alterations (00061:163:15232)

## 4.0 Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

### **Cultural heritage values**

#### **Aesthetic Value:**

**Architectural:** *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

Plimmer House is a fine example of Carpenter Gothic architecture, a style that is relatively rare in Wellington. The picturesque quality of the turrets, steep gables, and decorative barge boards give the house significant aesthetic value.

**Townscape:** *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

This house has considerable streetscape values particularly in relation to the surrounding high rise buildings.

**Group:** *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

#### **Historic Value:**

**Association:** *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

This house is associated with several notable Wellington families, in particular that of John Plimmer 'the father of Wellington'. Plimmer's grandson, Harold, bought the house in 1911 and it remained in the family until 1960.

**Association:** *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

#### **Scientific Value:**

**Archaeological:** *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

Plimmer House is found within the NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270. This house was constructed pre 1900, although it has been moved from its original site. The risk of archaeological discovery is unknown.

**Educational:** *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

**Technological:** *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

There is some technical value in the construction of this house as it is a good representative of nineteenth century timber construction. The fretwork is an excellent example of the craftsmanship of the time.

**Social Value:**

**Public esteem:** *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

This house is held in high public esteem as the only 19<sup>th</sup> century building surviving in Boulcott Street, it has rarity value, and the decision to move it on its site rather than demolish show this. The establishment of a well regarded restaurant has helped this building to remain popular and have ensured its survival.

**Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual:** *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

**Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:**

*Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?*

*Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?*

This building contributes significantly to the sense of place and continuity in the central city of Wellington due to its long standing place in the streetscape.

**Sentiment/Connection:** *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

**Level of cultural heritage significance**

**Rare:** *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

Plimmer House is a rare example of the Carpenter Gothic style in Wellington city and is the only 19<sup>th</sup> century building remaining on Boulcott Street.

**Representative:** *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

**Authentic:** *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The exterior of this building retains significant authenticity although the interior has been through a number of alterations. These internal alterations have, however, helped this building to remain popular and have ensured its survival in an otherwise high rise environment.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

*Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?*

This house is important at a local level due to its association with early prominent Wellingtonians, its place in the streetscape, as a representative of a now rare style of architecture in the city, and its technical values.

## 5.0 Appendix

### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website		
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

### Background research

*Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:*

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*