

Wharanui / former Stagecraft Theatre
15 Kensington Street (formerly 13 Tonks Ave)



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- Wharanui is a good representative example of a two-storey Edwardian house. Although the building has been much altered over the past 100 years, the exterior was restored in 2005, and the ornate Kensington Street elevation now resembles the original 1906 design.
- The building is one of a group of 13 heritage properties that were thought worthy of relocation and “preservation” as part of the works to form the Wellington Inner City Bypass. The relocation process was contentious and the group value of the buildings from Kensington Street / Tonks Avenue has been substantially diminished by the move to their new site.
- The building has some historic value for its association with the Tonks family, particularly Kate Tonks, a well known local matriarch, and for its association with the early years of the Stagecraft theatre company.

District Plan:	Map 16, reference 313
Legal Description:	LOT 1 DP 409651
Heritage Area:	None 2012
HPT Listed:	None 2012 (but note NZHPT Heritage covenant on certificate of title)
Archaeological Site:	Disturbed by 2006 road-works but Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Wharanui; Stagecraft Theatre Relocated from 13 Tonks Avenue (aka Tonks Grove) in 2005
Key physical dates:	1906 constructed 2005 relocated
Architect / Builder:	Not known
Former uses:	House, theatre
Current uses:	vacant
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 268775 Bdg StrengthInv status 'Outside Earthquake Prone Policy'

Extent: Cityview GIS 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

Wharanui was constructed in 1906 as a large house for Kate Tonks (c.1850 – 1937), a successful Wellington property owner.¹ Kate (nee Helyer) was born on the Isle of Wight and immigrated to Australia when she was 4.² The Helyer family moved to New Zealand in c.1862, and her sister, Miss Elizabeth Helyer, later became the head mistress of Mt Cook Girls School. Kate married Henry Edward Tonks, who was a Māori interpreter in the law courts; he also owned a steam mill, land agency, and grocery shop and acted as a wood and coal merchant.³

The Tonks family had a long association with Cuba Street dating from c.1842 when Henry's parents, William and Jane Tonks, arrived in Wellington. The couple built a house at 270 Cuba Street (now 17 Kensington Street) in 1862 and the family built several workers cottages in Tonks Grove (later renamed Tonks Avenue). The extended family were involved in many early business enterprises including the establishment of several brickworks; the reclamation of land between Panama and Waring Taylor streets; the supply of gravel and fill for various Wellington construction projects; and they also acted as merchants and importers, owned a shipping line, blacksmith shop, flour mill and bread factory.⁴

Henry Tonks was declared bankrupt in 1877⁵ and his estate was claimed by his many creditors.⁶ He died in 1884 at the age of 40, and left Kate to raise five children. The large section at the end of Tonks Avenue came to Kate in 1894 via her brother-in-law Enoch Tonks.⁷ It is possible that Enoch had held the land in trust to avoid claims by Henry's creditors.

Kate subsequently constructed at least four buildings in Tonks Avenue and owned other buildings within the city, in Karori and beyond.⁸ Surviving buildings in upper Cuba Street that are associated with Kate Tonks include: -

- 272 Cuba Street (now 274 Cuba Street) – constructed as a shop for Kate Tonks and let as a bootmaker's.
- 274 Cuba Street (now 268 Cuba Street) – constructed as a shop for Kate Tonks and let as a butcher shop.
- 276 Cuba Street – a known early residence
- 12 Tonks Avenue (now relocated to 23 Kensington Street) - a large two storey house designed for Kate Tonks in 1905 by J.M. Dawson (later of King Cook and Dawson).

¹ NZTA website accessed Dec 2012 <http://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/wicb/buildings/13-Tonks.html>

² "OBITUARY," *Evening Post*, Volume CXXIII, Issue 137, 11 June 1937, Page 14

³ NZTA website accessed January 2013

<http://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/wicb/resources/pdf/Newsletter-200508.pdf>

⁴ Ian Bowman, "13 Tonks Ave, Wellington: Heritage Inventory" 2001; NZTA website accessed January 2013 <http://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/wicb/resources/pdf/Newsletter-200508.pdf>

⁵ TELEGRAMS. *Tuapeka Times*, Volume X, Issue 667, 9 May 1877, Page 5

⁶ SUPREME COURT. IN BANKRUPTCY. Saturday, 28th April. (Before his Honor the Chief Justice.) *Evening Post*, Volume XV, Issue 100, 30 April 1877, Page 2

⁷ CT vol.39 folio 118

⁸ For example Kate & her sons purchased 600 acres at Gladstone in 1895 see "Gladstone Farm Homestead Association". *Feilding Star*, 2 October 1895, Page 2

Wharanui was constructed in 1906 and is particularly significant as it is known to have been occupied by Kate Tonks in the years before she died in 1937. She is said to have lived there with her spinster sister, and to have operated the large, eight bedroom property, as a boarding house. Her obituary of that time noted her long-standing membership of the Salvation Army⁹ and that she was survived by three of her sons, thirteen grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren.

The land was owned by the Tonks family until 1950 when it was sold to Godfrey Phillips (NZ) Ltd. It was taken by proclamation for the purpose of road widening by the Wellington City Council in 1960. Wharanui, one of six houses on the site, later became the Stagecraft Theatre.

Stagecraft was formed in 1958 by Keith Bennett and a group of former Worker's Education Authority (WEA) drama students. The group moved to 13 Tonks Avenue in 1962 and described the building as a former "boarding house, brothel and squatter's flop" with no basic services such as electricity, water or drainage.¹⁰ The group refurbished the building and opened a 50 seat "studio theatre" in 1964. The theatre attracted many well known speakers and trainers including Grant Tilly, Rosalie Carey, Bruce Mason, George Webby and Ken Blackburn. Wharanui closed as a performance venue in c.1994 but club nights and rehearsals continued in the building until 2002 when Stagecraft moved to 22 Ghuznee Street. The 'Gryphon Theatre', a new 90 seat performance venue, opened in Ghuznee Street in March 2003.

Wharanui was relocated in 2005 to its current site on Kensington Street as part of the works to construct the Ngauranga – Basin Reserve motorway. Planning for Wellington's urban motorway began in the late 1950s¹¹ and the Thorndon section was built in the years between 1967 and 1972. The site at Tonks Avenue was gazetted in 1977 for the construction of the subsequent section of the motorway – the inner city bypass.¹² Transit applied for resource consent for the bypass in 1996 but the route was contentious and consent for the project was resolved in the Environment Court in 1999. The Environment Court decision required the relocation and "restoration" of the heritage properties on the route, as a way to mitigate the adverse effects of the new road.¹³ The project to construct the bypass commenced in 2005 and the route opened in 2006.

The certificate of title for Wharanui is now subject to a heritage covenant held by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT). The heritage covenant prohibits demolition or relocation; it requires the owners to maintain the building interior and exterior in good repair; and it calls for the written consent of the NZHPT for any alterations. NZTA has since sold the building to a group of private individuals, and it was converted into two residential flats in 2012.¹⁴

⁹ OBITUARY. *Evening Post*, 11 June 1937, Page 14

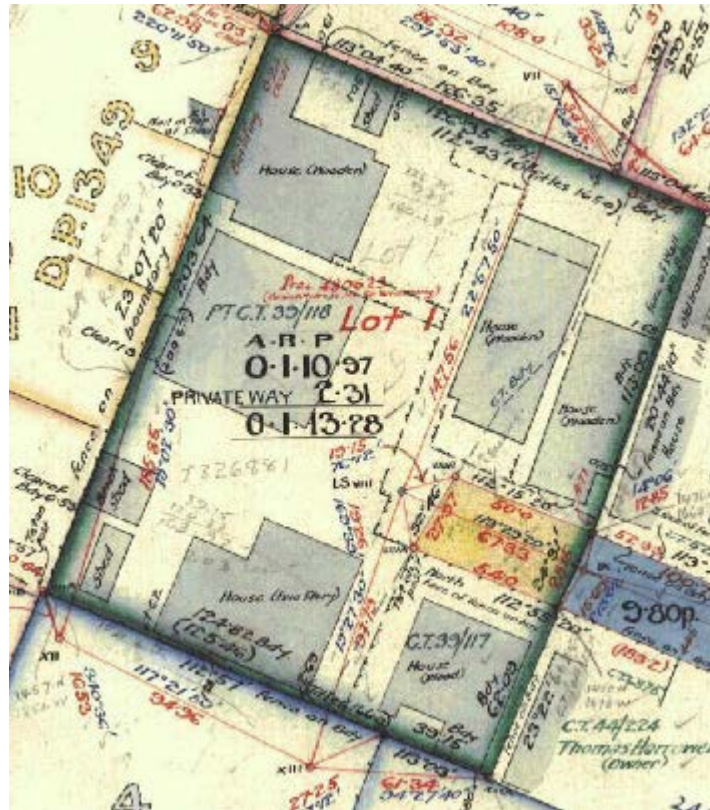
¹⁰ "Stagecraft's history" Stagecraft website accessed December 2012
<http://www.stagecraft.co.nz/history.html>

¹¹ "History 1939 – 1972 ..." WCC website accessed December 2012
<http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/history/1939.html>; note that several properties on the proposed route of the Kaiwharawhara to Basin Reserve section were gazetted or purchased in the 1940s including Thistle Hall in 1943 http://www.thistlehall.org.nz/pdfs/thistle_hall_history-web.pdf, and 286 Willis Street in 1949 (CT69/178).

¹² CT vol. 556 folio 237

¹³ Transit Website accessed January 2012 <http://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/wich/schools/>

¹⁴ SR 261780



1939 part of DP11821 that shows six houses on Lot 1. The drawing was “Approved” by J C Tonks “for self & co proprietors”.



This 2002 WCC aerial photograph shows Wharanui located at the end of Tonks Avenue (at the bottom of the image) it was moved to the site outlined at the top of the image in 2005, and rotated 180 degrees so that the front (east) elevation now faces west.



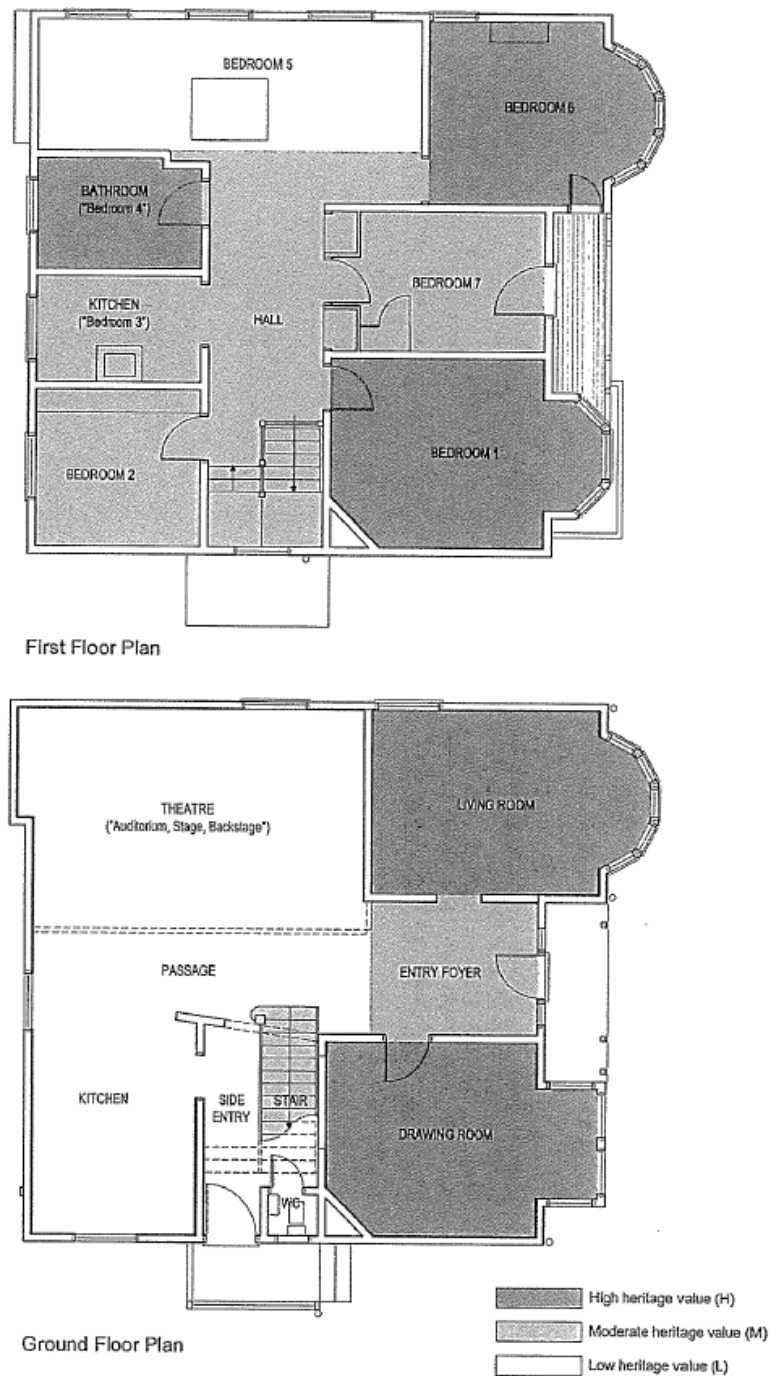
This WCC 2007 aerial map shows that the former site of Wharanui now forms part of Karo Drive.



1996 photograph of Stagecraft Theatre¹⁵ before relocation to Kensington Street. The main elevation, including the fence and gate posts is similar to the current (2012) arrangement with the exception of the ground floor entrance porch that has since been reinstated/ replicated.

¹⁵ WCC Heritage Inventory 1996

1.2 Timeline of modifications



2010 floor plan as existing¹⁶

1906	Construction
1960s	Converted to theatre
2005 – 06	The building was relocated and the exterior refurbished
2012	Conversion to two residential flats

¹⁶ NZHPT Heritage Covenant for 15 Kensington Street, Wellington (2012)

Ownership history

The original site – Lot 1 of plan 11821

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1885 | The site was owned by Enoch Tonks, Wellington brick maker. ¹⁷ |
| 1894 | Transmission 1429 under the Trustee Act of 1883 whereby the estate of Enoch Tonks became granted in W Helyer. The land was transferred from Walter Helyer (deceased) to Kate Tonks Helyer, spinster and Walter James Helyer (& possibly others but illegible) as executors. Drainage rights were then transferred to the WCC. |
| 1897 | Transmission from the probate of the will of Walter Turnbull to Alexander Horsburgh Turnbull, Robert Horsburgh Turnbull and Charles Effingham Capper (possibly as executors of Walter Helyer's estate rather than property owners). |
| 1898 | Transmission from Charles Effingham Capper – illegible. Again this was possibly only a transfer of the role of executor as the property appears to have remained in the ownership of the Tonks / Helyers. |
| 1907 | Mortgaged by Kate Tonks, Elizabeth Helyer and Walter James Helyer to the Crown |
| 1938 | Caveat by Katherine Leonora Jameson |
| 1939 | Transmission to Henry Edward Helyer Tonks and Walter James Helyer Tonks monumental masons and Joseph Clement Tonks, settler, all of Wellington |
| 1939 | Transfer from the registered proprietors to Henry Edward Helyer Tonks, Walter James Helyer Tonks and Joseph Clement Tonks. Joseph Clement Tonks interest in the property was then cancelled. |
| 1950 | Transfer from the registered proprietors to Godfrey Phillips (NZ) Ltd. |
| 1960 | Proclamation 480423 that took the land for the purpose of street widening by the WCC. ¹⁸ |
| 1961 | The site was owned by the Wellington City Council. ¹⁹ |
| 1969 | Proclamation for the Ngauranga-Basin Reserve Motorway then various gazette notices declaring part of the site to be a road and vested in the Crown (2005 – 2009). |

The building was moved to a new site with the legal description of Lot 1 DP 409651 in 2005.

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2010 | The site was owned by the Crown. Gazette Notice – restricted the erection of structures on the site and there are various easements /rights of way across the site – see CT 435297. See also the NZHPT heritage covenant. |
| 2012 | Transfer to new private owners with an encumbrance to the NZTA. ²⁰ |

¹⁷ CT vol.39 folio 118

¹⁸ CT vol. 556 folio 237

¹⁹ WN934/47

²⁰ CT 435297

1.3 Architect

Unknown

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

15 Kensington Street is a two-storey Edwardian timber house clad with rusticated weatherboards. The roof is corrugated mild steel. The principal (now east) elevation to Kensington Street is asymmetrical with a central entrance door set in a two storey timber verandah / entrance porch. Most of the ground floor decorative fretwork, verandah posts and verandah posts were reconstructed as part of the c.2005-06 renovation, but the ornamentation on the first floor and above is generally original.

The two-storey bay window to the south of the entrance is segmental in plan with 5 equal width sash windows on each storey. The bay to the north of the main entrance is made up of a rectangular bay at ground floor with a 3-part segmental bow or bay at the first floor. The side and rear elevations have little if any ornamentation although the north elevation has a small side entrance porch. The building sits on a modern concrete foundation, and the (false) chimney and pots are a modern reconstruction.

²¹

The timber fence has been rebuilt on a new concrete plinth, and the gate posts are either original or a good facsimile.²²

2.2 Materials

Concrete foundations

Timber structure with rusticated weatherboards

Corrugated mild steel roof

Timber sash windows

Replica false chimney and pot

2.3 Setting

The building nominally faces Kensington Street, but is bounded to the south by Karo Drive, a major three-lane arterial route that leads to the motorway onramp.

Wharanui is part of a group of relocated buildings that line Karo drive, most notably 17 Kensington Street (formerly 270 Cuba Street) a single storey c.1860s cottage with decorative verandah, and 19 and 21 Kensington Street, a pair of similarly styled two storey timber houses both with a single rectangular bay window and verandah that were relocated from Kensington Street and Tonks Avenue.

Kensington Street is a quiet inner city cul-de-sac lined with (generally) two storey villas of a similar age and style as Wharanui (although none are as grand /well ornamented). The adjacent building to the north of Wharanui is a large galvanised corrugated steel shed / garage and a large timber house with an unfortunate two-storey addition to its street elevation. This property is adjoined by a pleasant two storey brick warehouse-style building with an unfortunate light-weight additional (third) storey addition.

²¹ NZHPT Heritage Covenant for 15 Kensington Street, Wellington (2012)

²² WCC Heritage Inventory 1996 – see photograph

3.0 Sources

Bowman, Ian. *13 Tonks Ave, Wellington: Heritage Inventory*, 2001

Cook, Megan. 'Marriage and partnering - Marriage in the 19th century', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 24-Jul-12 URL:

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/marriage-and-partnering/2>

Certificates of title CT69/178, CT vol. 556 folio 237, CT vol.39 folio 118, CT vol. 556 folio 237, WN934/47, CT 435297

"Gladstone Farm Homestead Association". *Feilding Star*, 2 October 1895

"History 1939 – 1972 ..."WCC website accessed December 2012

<http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/history/1939.html>

NZHPT Heritage Covenant for 15 Kensington Street, Wellington (2012)

NZTA website accessed Dec 2012

<http://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/wicb/buildings/13-Tonks.html>

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"Stagecraft's history" Stagecraft website accessed December 2012

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Thistle Hall website accessed January 2013

http://www.thistlehall.org.nz/pdfs/thistle_hall_history-web.pdf

Transit Website accessed January 2012

<http://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/wicb/schools/>

WCC Archives ref SR 261780

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?

Wharanui is a good representative example of a two-storey Edwardian house. Although the building has been much altered over the past 100 years, the exterior was restored in 2005, and the ornate Kensington Street elevation now resembles the original 1906 design.

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?

The building has townscape value for its prominent position on the Karo Drive inner city bypass route.

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?

The building is one of a group of 13 heritage properties that were thought worthy of relocation and “preservation” as part of the works to form the Wellington Inner City Bypass. The relocation process was contentious and the group value of the buildings from Kensington Street / Tonks Avenue has been substantially diminished by the move to their new site.

Historic Value:

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

The building has some historic value for its association with the Tonks family, particularly Kate Tonks, a well known local matriarch, and for its association with the early years of the Stagecraft theatre company.

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?

The site has been much disturbed by 2006 road-works but is located within the Central City NZAA R27/270.

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?

Social Value:

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

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?

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

The heritage properties around upper Cuba Street, Abel Smith, Tonks Avenue and upper Willis Street that were affected by the Wellington Inner City Bypass route were a focus of strong community sentiment. This can be seen from the objections raised to the roading scheme including in submissions to the Environment Court.

This building was the subject of particular interest because of the association with the Tonks family and with the Stagecraft theatre company.

Level of cultural heritage significance

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

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

The building is a good representative example of an Edwardian house.

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?*

Although the building has been much altered the exterior was restored in 2005 and many of the original features were repaired or reconstructed.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

5.0Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	None	
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	None	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	None	
Plan change?	63?	
Heritage Area Report	None	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	None	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	None	
HPT files	none	
Conservation Plan	Y	
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*