

Cook Islands High Commission
56 Mulgrave Street



Images: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- 56 Mulgrave Street is a fine Victorian Italianate villa that was built as an upper-middleclass residence in the 1870s. It is notable for its ornate street facades, and for its elegant Classical proportions.
- This building has had a fairly uneventful history that is representative and typical of many of its Thorndon neighbours.
- This building is one of a group of heritage listed buildings in the Pipitea/Thorndon precinct, in particular the nearby Bishop's Court (WCC 18/223) - a large Victorian Italianate house that is owned by the Anglican Church.

District Plan:	Map *15, 18 reference 442
Legal Description:	Sec 1 SO 35926
Heritage Area:	N/A
HPT Listed:	N/A
Archaeological Site:	Pre-1900 Construction – Archaeological site <i>HPA</i> 1993
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	1875-1876, 1909
Architect / Builder:	Architect: unknown
Former uses:	Residential
Current uses:	Residential – Cook Island High Commission
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone – SR189705

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

56 Mulgrave Street, a characteristically imposing Thorndon house, was constructed around 1875 - 1876.² Located prominently on the corner of Mulgrave and Pipitea Streets, its house was constructed on Town Acre 543. It was a large two-storeyed house of ten rooms, with a verandah on the two street frontages.³ Despite the fact that this land was in close proximity to the Pipitea Pa, Alexander McDonald was awarded a crown grant for the section in 1845.⁴ This award was not overturned by any subsequent enquiries.

In 1855, McDonald sold the portion of the section of which the house would be built to Thomas Warburton for £150.⁵ Warburton in turn sold the plot to John Liverton, a farmer of the Hutt Valley, in 1874.⁶ Liverton died the next year and his wife Mary Ann, along with Thomas Burt, a Hutt Valley storekeeper, and Thomas McKenzie, the owner of the *New Zealand Mail*, were made executors of his estate. It appears that Mary Ann Liverton constructed the first dwelling. She owned the property until her death in September 1901. By 1903 Thomas McKenzie was the only surviving executor, and he sold the property to George Cunningham, a company director of Wanganui, and Frank Maddox, a chemist of Wellington. Maddox had in fact rented the house at some point in the decade prior to the sale.⁷

Martha Wylie purchased the property in 1907.⁸ She was the wife of Andrew Wylie, a prominent Wellington lawyer who was a partner in Chapman, Skerrett, Wylie, and Tripp, the forebear to current well-known firm Chapman Tripp.⁹ It is highly likely that, in practice, Wylie was the owner. It was common at this time for men to purchase property in their wives' names. Wylie and his wife, who occupied the house until it was sold in 1921, were responsible for its present appearance. Wylie commissioned noted architectural firm Thomas Turnbull & Sons to design the alterations. Given that the same architect or firm responsible for the original building carried out later alterations to many houses in Thorndon, it is conceivable that Thomas Turnbull himself designed the first house.¹⁰

The Wylies sold the property to the Litchfield family in 1921.¹¹ Murray Litchfield was a dentist, and that year a waiting room was added to the Pipitea Street side of the house.¹² This may have attracted the new owner, Dr. Douglas Cameron. In fact, during the 1920s and part of the 1930s the house was owned, lived and worked in by medical practitioners.¹³

¹ Note this repeats: Murray, Russell. *Cook Islands High Commission 56 Mulgrave Street*. Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 53, 2005.

² Rate Book 1875-1876 records a dwelling valued at £100. Wellington City Archives (WCA).

³ Thomas Ward Survey Map 1891. WCA.

⁴ Deeds Index 4/543, Land Information New Zealand (LINZ).

⁵ Deed 2/365, LINZ.

⁶ CT WN2/112.

⁷ *Stones Wellington, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki Directory*, 1891-92, 1900.

⁸ CT WN2/112.

⁹ Ross Gore, *Chapman Tripp & Co: the First 100 Years* (Chapman Tripp & Co, Wellington, 1975), p.85

¹⁰ Pers. Comm Tony Burton, Thorndon Society, 6/9/2006. Thomas Turnbull was practicing in Wellington in 1875-1876. See Cochran, Chris, 'Turnbull, Thomas 1824-1907'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 April 2006. URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>

¹¹ CT WN2/112.

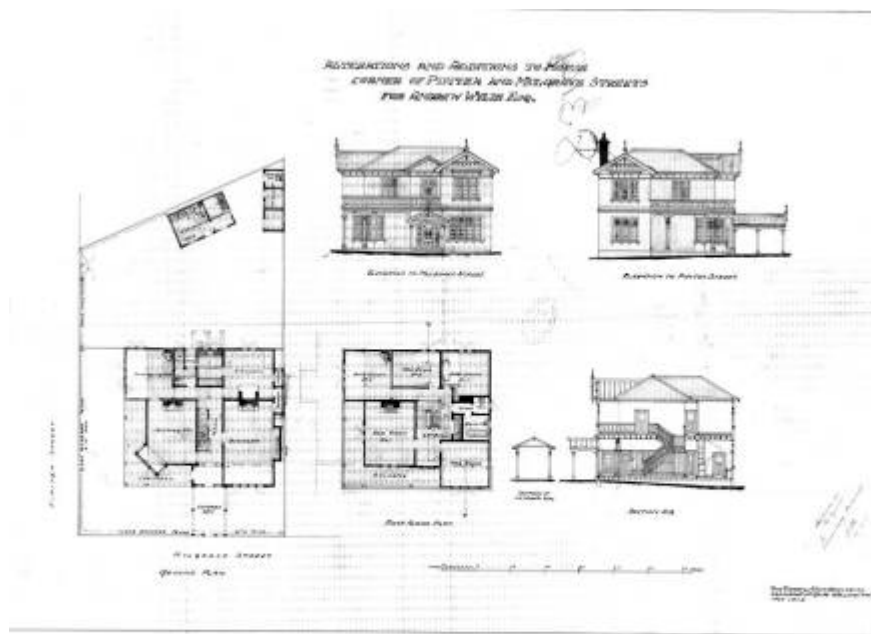
¹² Building Permit 00053:207:11433, 12/3/1921. WCA.

¹³ CT WN2/112; *Stones* 1925, 1930.

From 1931 until 1941, the Public Trustee administered the property, and it was rented to a series of women tenants.¹⁴ It was purchased by Catherine Kilroy in 1950, and she occupied the house until 1963, when it was taken by the Crown and added to its property portfolio.¹⁵ It was used for a variety of government purposes, including Ministry of Works offices, the Children and Young Persons' Court, and the coronial offices of the Justice Department.¹⁶ The present owners, the Cook Islands Property Corporation (N.Z.) Limited, acquired the property in 1993.¹⁷ It now houses the Cook Islands High Commission.

The house was renovated and redecorated by the High Commission in c.2001.

1.2 Timeline of modifications (Original plans could not be located – Plans from 1909 alteration and 1921 alteration included)



WCA 00053-150-8319-001

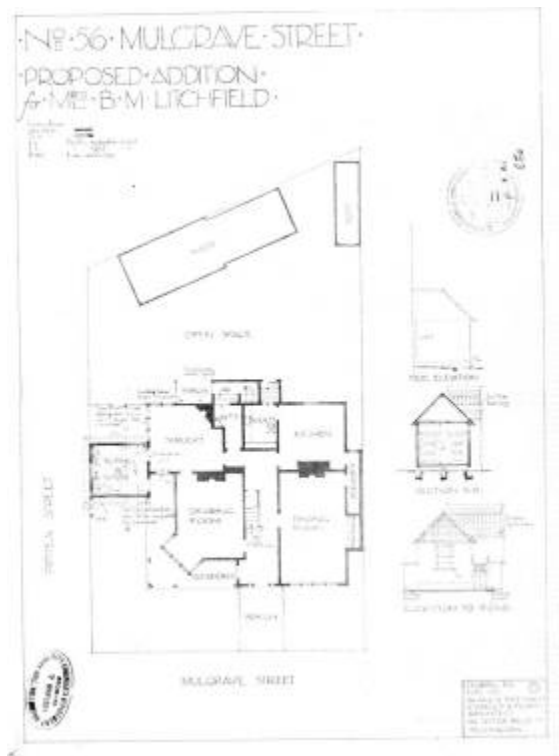
1875-76	Construction of original building on site
1909	Alterations and additions to existing building – Applicant and architect: Thomas Turnbull and Son. Owner: Andrew Wylie. Application value £750 (00053: 150: 8319)
1921	Addition to building – Add waiting room to dwelling. Applicant: Melton. Owner: B.M. Litchfield. Architect: Stanley W. Fearn. Application value £190 (00053: 207: 11433)

¹⁴ CT WN2/112; *Stones* 1935, 1940, 1945.

¹⁵ CT WN2/112; *Wises Post Office Directory*, 1955, 1961-62.

¹⁶ *Wises* 1967-68, 1971-72, 1980, 1985, 1990.

¹⁷ CT WN35B/140.



WCA 00053-207-11433-001

ca. 1990
2010-11

Partial repainting of exterior
Repainting, repair and maintenance work including: repair to rotted and deteriorated timbers on each façade, verandah including quoins, weatherboards, facings, and trims; treatment of exposed timbers; replacement of verandah deck membrane (new plywood substrate and apron flashings); replacement of ca. 1980 verandah balustrade with new structure following 1909 plans; partial replacement of verandah posts and installation of new footings; maintenance of existing doors including glass replacement; replacement of steel roofing with corrugated coloursteel, straightening 1960s guttering; installation of anti-pigeon system; partial replacement of piles.
NB- Received BHIF grant 2010.

1.3 Occupation history

Not assessed

1.4 Architect

1875-76
1909
1921

Architect unknown but possibly Thomas Turnbull and Son.
alterations designed by Thomas Turnbull and Son.
alteration designed by Stanley W. Fearn.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture¹⁸

No. 56 Mulgrave Street started life as a single residential dwelling. The 1909 Turnbull plans clearly show the extent of that house. The original house was a two-storey villa, rectangular in plan, with a corner bay window facing the intersection and a verandah and balcony above wrapping around the two street façades of the house. Turnbull's alterations included extending a bay at both of the two principal corners of the house, a new covered way leading to the front door and a new internal stair, chimney and bathroom. The external features still exist. Outbuildings included a wash-house, coal store and, as an interesting early feature, a darkroom. The 1921 work added a waiting room, with a hipped roof, to the Pipitea Street side of the house which extended out to the street frontage; this still exists today.

The external form of the house today remains much as it was in 1909; although the 1921 addition is prominent in the streetscape, it is offset from the house and has a lack of ornament and somewhat incongruous form and detail (double-hung windows and bevel-back weatherboards) that helps set it visually aside from the house itself.

The basic architectural composition is an elegant arrangement built around a two-storeyed gable end set at each of the two principal corners of the house. The balcony and verandah below fill in the corner between the gable ends; the building line is at the back of the balcony and is covered by a complex hipped roof; a secondary gable is set back from the main gable at Mulgrave Street. A bay window faces the street corner at the ground floor. The covered way to the front door, a simple gabled roof supported on posts with gently arched beams between, faces out to Mulgrave Street. This appears to be the original Turnbull structure. The 1921 addition, a single storey box covered with a steep hipped roof, juts out to Pipitea Street.

The house is given prominence by its neo-classical ornament and detailing. Like Bishopscourt (and the Government Buildings nearby), it is prominently quoined and rusticated, much as a stone building – a way of conferring associations of tradition and durability on timber construction, then regarded as second-quality work. This was a style characteristic of Turnbull's domestic architecture.

The strongest visual details of the façades are the distinctively bracketed and broad eave line, with large and closely spaced brackets, oversailed by the two main gables which both have deep overhangs and infill boarding in the top third of the gable. The stonework look of the house is highlighted by the external corners with chamfered quoining and the deeply rusticated weatherboards that line the walls. The ensemble is trimmed with a carefully-composed array of multiple-sash windows, each divided into small lights, with large hoods on moulded brackets. The balcony is supported on large chamfered posts with simple head and base trims – arched infill panels span between the posts and define the verandah below.

The original outbuildings at the east of the site have long since disappeared and the space today is a parking area. The site is fenced with a modern arrangement of roughcast concrete piers and metal infill panels. The Mulgrave Street side is planted with a variety of shrubs and trees, including a distinctive pair of nikau palms.

The interior of the house was not inspected. Accessible ramps and handrails indicate further alterations, by their detail associated with the Cook Islands High Commission, but the effect of such work on the internal arrangement of the building and the surviving extent of original internal fabric is not known.

¹⁸ Repeats: Murray, 2005

2.2 Materials

- Timber
- Modern plywood
- Corrugated coloursteel roofing
- Galvanised spouting

2.3 Setting¹⁹

No. 56 Mulgrave Street occupies a prime corner site in Pipitea. It has principal elevations to the north and west. It is positioned hard to the south boundary of its trapezoidal site, with generous set-backs to both street frontages.

To the east, along Pipitea Street, is a large group of timber houses of the 1880s, all two storied, on narrow sites and built to the street front. No. 56 has high group value with these houses, and their presence gives this side of Pipitea Street a high level of authenticity. These houses are under threat from a proposed high-rise development.

There are a number of buildings of a similar era nearby on Mulgrave Street, in particular Bishopscourt, a large residential structure of similar external form and detail, the former Thorndon Fire Station, and Old St. Paul's. Together with the Pipitea Street houses and No. 56, these buildings give the immediate area a strong sense of historical authenticity and continuity. The incongruous Hitachi Tower, a particularly out-of-scale high-rise for this area, has a significant visual impact on all of these buildings, its great height dominating the surroundings. In particular, it presents a nearly blank nine-storey concrete wall to the common boundary with No. 56.

Across the street, the setting is rather less authentic. On Pipitea Street is Wellington Girl's College, principally a collection of austere 1960s and 1970s multi-storey buildings, although a number of old houses belong to the college which contribute to the historical setting of the area. Mulgrave Street is dominated by the large-scale buildings, including the unsightly lump of the new Defence building, the Old St. Paul's Apartments complex, a large area of three-storey townhouses and a supermarket.

The wider area includes the Pipitea Marae, an assortment of buildings associated with the government (Courts, Archives, National Library and the like), and the residential buildings – a variety of single houses, townhouses and apartments.

3.0 Sources

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¹⁹ Repeats: Murray, 2005

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Land Information New Zealand

CT WN2/112

Deeds Index 4/543, Land Information New Zealand (LINZ).

Deed 2/365, Land Information New Zealand (LINZ).

Stones and Wises Directories

Stones Wellington, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki Directory, 1891-92, 1900.

Stones 1925, 1930.

Stones 1935, 1940, 1945.

Wises 1967-68, 1971-72, 1980, 1985, 1990.

Wellington City Archive

Building Permit 00053:207:11433, 12/3/1921.

00053-150-8319-001

00053-207-11433-001

00053: 150: 8319

00053: 207: 11433

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?

56 Mulgrave Street is a fine Victorian Italianate villa that was built as an upper-middleclass residence in the 1870s. It is notable for its ornate street facades, and for its elegant Classical proportions.

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 building is a local landmark and has townscape value for its location on a prominent corner site at the junction between commercial and residential Thorndon.

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?

This building is one of a group of heritage listed buildings in the Pipitea/Thorndon precinct, in particular the nearby Bishop's Court (WCC 18/223) - a large Victorian Italianate house that is owned by the Anglican Church.

Historic Value:

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

This building has had a fairly uneventful history that is representative and typical of many of its Thorndon neighbours.

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?

Parts of this building were constructed pre-1900 making this site of archaeological value under the *Historic Places Act* 1993. It is also closely associated with the Pipitea Pa site – a Site of Significance to Maori, M64 & M65.

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?

This building has been constructed in materials and with technologies that are representative of its time.

Social Value:

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

This building is well known in the Thorndon Community and enjoys a moderate level of public esteem for its contribution to the streetscape and as a representative of its era.

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?*

The building is currently home to the Cook Islands High Commission and has cultural value as a diplomatic residence.

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?

The building has had few modern alterations or additions over the past 140+ years and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of 'historic' Thorndon.

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

As this building now houses the Cook Islands High Commission it has a high level of community connection for Cook Islanders in Wellington and New Zealand.

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?*

This building is a good example of a Victorian Italianate villa that was designed for an upper middle-class owner/occupant.

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?*

This building retains significant amounts of fabric from the 1909 alterations, and may still retain some of the original fabric from the 1975-76 building. It has authenticity for this reason. All modern alterations have been carried out in a thoughtful and visually cohesive way, enhancing the value of this building.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

This is a locally important building for the role that it plays in the Mulgrave/Pipitea streetscape. It is also an archaeological site that could provide archaeological information about pre-colonial and colonial New Zealand. As it is now the Cook Islands High Commission is also has some social and cultural value.

4.0 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*