

## Home of Compassion Crèche (Former)

18 Buckle Street



Image: *New Zealand Historic Places Trust*



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

### **Summary of heritage significance**

- Built in 1914 this building has architectural value for the adept use of ecclesiastical Gothic ornamentation on a domestic-scale building.
- The building has historical value as it is the oldest remaining purpose-built crèche in New Zealand and was the first crèche dedicated to assisting working class mothers.
- The building is associated with Mother Susanne Aubert and the Catholic religious order she founded, the Sisters of Compassion. It is also the only building occupied by St Patrick's College in its original location that still stands.
- The building has retained a significant amount of its original exterior and interior fabric and has authenticity.

District Plan:	Map 16 reference 42
Legal Description:	Pt Sec 263 Town of Wellington Pt Lot 1 DP 4469
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Category I
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270 Māori site of significance
Other Names:	Unknown
Key physical dates:	1914
Architect / Builder:	John Swan
Former uses:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crèche</li> <li>• Library</li> </ul>
Current uses:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offices</li> </ul>
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 171256 – expires 16/12/2026 (124 Served)

Extent: Cityview 2012



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History

Built in 1914, at a time when New Zealand society still expected women to remain at home, the Home of Compassion Crèche was a pioneering institution in that it helped set the standards for later crèches which allowed New Zealand women to enter the workforce.<sup>1</sup> The crèche was commissioned by Mother Mary Aubert (1835-1926), the founder of the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion (later re-christened the Sisters of Compassion), New Zealand's first indigenous religious order.

Mother Aubert, with three of her sisters, came to Wellington in 1899. Inspired by St Joseph's protection of his poor family, Mother Aubert worked to look after the poor and destitute of Wellington at a time when there was no social welfare and poverty was widespread in the slums of Te Aro. At the request of Wellington's Catholic community she opened the St Joseph's Relief Centre in Buckle Street. A soup kitchen, the first in New Zealand, was established there, along with a day nursery for the children of poor working mothers who were often unmarried or from broken marriages. Nearby, on the corner of Buckle and Tory Streets was St Joseph's Church, while St Patrick's College (1885) was immediately to the north.

By 1913, the original crèche buildings were in poor condition. Mother Aubert was away in Europe seeking Papal recognition and financial independence from the local diocese. In her absence, plans were commissioned for a new building.<sup>2</sup> Designed by John Swan, the new crèche was opened in 1914. Because Aubert had connections with Truby King, the founder of Plunket, the crèche was the first organisation in Wellington to use his standards of childcare.<sup>3</sup> The Plunket Society aimed to raise awareness of the importance that domestic health and maternal wellbeing played in a child's life.<sup>4</sup>

The Sisters were later forced to move their order to a new location on Sussex Street as a result of the State Highway One developments. For a while the crèche was used as a library for St Patrick's College until it moved to Evans Bay in 1979. Following the demolition of St Patrick's, the building has had mixed fortunes: it was untenanted for a number of years; it became an art studio in 1983, and later a car-parts shop.<sup>5</sup> It is currently being used as offices.

---

<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Home of Compassion Crèche (Former),' accessed 25 September 2012, <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=3599>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Brookes, 'King, Frederic Truby – Biography,' from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10, accessed 19 October 2012, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2k8/1>.

<sup>5</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, *C & D Listed Buildings*, (1993).



Home of Compassion Crèche (third building from the right, next to the empty section, 1929).  
Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: EP-0654-1/2-G. Alexander Turnbull Library,  
Wellington, New Zealand.

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications

1914 Crèche (00053:178:9840)

## 1.3 Occupation history

1914	Sisters of Compassion
1974 (?)	St Patrick's College library
1983	Art Studio
2012	Offices

## 1.4 Architect

Swan, Lawrence, Swan was an architectural firm formed by John Sydney Swan (1874-1936), his brother Francis Swan (1885-1956) and Charles Lawrence. John had originally trained under Frederick de Jersey Clere and from 1901-1905 he partnered with Clere. From 1906-1916 he practiced on his own, designing Erskine College in Island Bay (1906) and St Gerard's Church (1908-1910).

In 1915 he was joined by Francis and their practice was known as Swan and Swan. They were soon joined by Charles Lawrence who had previously worked with Francis Penty. Swan, Lawrence, Swan was responsible for buildings such as the Home of Compassion Crèche on Buckle Street (1916). Firth House at Wellington College (1924) and the main building at Wellington East Girls (1925). When Charles Lawrence died in 1933 John left to establish Swan and Lavelle with Jim Lavelle. Francis continued Swan and Lawrence but then later went to work on his own.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Biography taken from: Wellington City Council, 'Wellington Architects,' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings* (Wellington City Council, 2001), Appendix III.



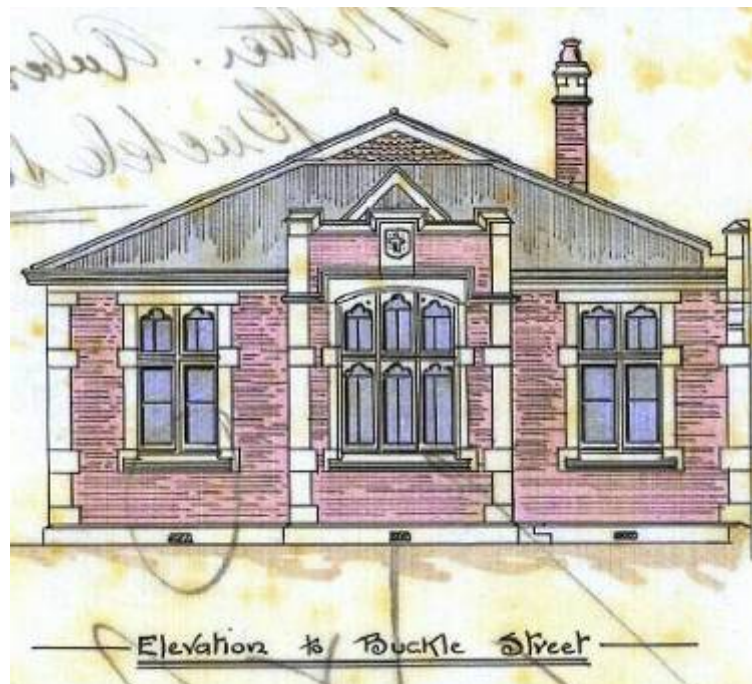
## 2.0 Physical description

### 2.1 Architecture

The Home of Compassion Crèche is a purpose-built crèche in an inner-city context. When looking at it today it appears unusual in that it is highly ornamented for a domestic scale building. It has to be remembered, however, that when it was built it was in the vicinity of the original St Patrick's College which was a strong example of ecclesiastic Gothic architecture. The Home of Compassion reflects the architecture of St Patrick's through its own ecclesiastical Gothic style which is evident in the crenulated parapet and the triple arched windows representing the Holy Trinity.

The two side elevations have heavy walls of reinforced concrete with a shallow parapet and concealed guttering behind. One end features a heavy bracket which hides the eaves of the front façade. The windows are double hung with small fan lights above. They feature heavy, flat headed arches in cement render. At both ends of the building the roof is a gabled hip, clad in corrugated iron.

The plan was simple. A central passageway had a large playroom and sleeping room on one side, and two smaller amenity rooms, as well as a pantry, bathroom, and WC, on the other. The rear main window is a three-sided bay window with an enclosed verandah on one side.<sup>7</sup>



'22 Buckle Street, Crèche,' 24 April 1914, 00053:178:9840, Wellington City Archives.

### 2.2 Materials

- Concrete
- Masonry

<sup>7</sup> Permit: '22 Buckle Street, Crèche,' 24 April 1914, 00053:178:9840, Wellington City Archives.

### **2.3 Setting**

The former crèche is located on the northern side of Buckle Street, opposite the north-western corner of the Basin Reserve. To the west it is bordered by an empty allotment, while to the east it is bordered by a small park. Since it is the only building left on the block between Taranaki Street and Cambridge Terrace its distinctive form provides visual interest to Buckle Street in the vicinity of the Sussex Street intersection.

### 3.0 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?

The building has architectural value for the adept use of ecclesiastical Gothic ornamentation on a domestic-scale building.

***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 only building left on the north side of the Buckle Street block between Taranaki Street and Cambridge Terrace, the former Home of Compassion crèche's Gothic ornamentation provides significant townscape value to the area surrounding the Sussex Street intersection.

***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?

The building is associated with Mother Susanne Aubert, one of the most significant figures in the history of Catholicism in New Zealand, the religious order of the Sisters of Compassion that Mother Aubert founded, and the Catholic Church. It is the last surviving building occupied by St Patrick's College, New Zealand's oldest Catholic secondary school, on its original site.

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

The building has historical value for a number of reasons. It is the oldest remaining crèche building in New Zealand and was built at a time when attitudes towards the role of women in New Zealand society were starting to change. The building is also associated with the charity work undertaken by the Sisters of Compassion in Wellington, and stands as a reminder of the former Catholic institutions which once stood in the vicinity, including the former St Patrick's College.

##### **Scientific Value:**

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

Since Mount Cook was the site of Pukeahu pa the area will contain pre-1900 human activity. The building is also located in the Central City archaeological site reference 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?*

The building has spiritual value as it was founded by the Sisters of Compassion on Catholic principles that were inspired by St Joseph.

**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 is a reminder of the focus of Catholic activity in this part of Te Aro, which included the institutions run by the Sisters of Compassion, St Patrick's College and St Joseph's Church.

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

The crèche has sentimental value to the sisters and supporters of the Home of Compassion and those who attended it as children.

**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?*

**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 building has retained a significant amount of its exterior and interior fabric, therefore it has authenticity.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

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

The building has national importance as it was New Zealand's first crèche dedicated to assisting working mothers.

## 4.0 References

Barbara Brookes, 'King, Frederic Truby – Biography.' From the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Updated 1-Sep-10. Accessed 19 October 2012. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2k8/1>.

New Zealand Historic Places Trust. *C & D Listed Buildings*. 1993.

New Zealand Historic Places Trust. 'Home of Compassion Crèche (Former).' Accessed 25 September 2012. <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=3599>.

New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Professional Biographies. 'John Sydney Swan.' Accessed 16 August 2012. <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=209>.

Wellington City Council. 'Wellington Architects.' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001. Appendix III.

### Newspapers

*Evening Post*. Volume LXXXVI, Issue 147. 18 December 1913. Page 6.

### Wellington City Archives

'22 Buckle Street, Crèche.' 24 April 1914. 00053:178:9840.

### 3.0 Appendix

#### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
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	Y	
HPT files		
Conservation Plan	Y	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

#### Background research



Crèche, 1958. Aerial view of Wellington. Whites Aviation Ltd: Photographs. Ref: WA-47346-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

Admirers of the great work which the Rev. Mother Aubert and her band of sisters are doing in this Dominion, particularly in this city, will have an opportunity of assisting in the work in a practical way by purchasing tickets for the concert which takes place to-morrow evening at the Town Hall. Mr. D. A. Kenny, in whose hands the arrangement of the programme was left, has been successful in securing the services of the following ladies and gentlemen: Misses A. and R. Segrief, Eileen Driscoll, Betty Purdom, Cara Denhard, and Ruby Scott, Messrs. Bernard F. Page (city organist), Hamilton Hodges, J. F. Carr, Charles Hickmott, Norman Aitken, Frank Johnstone, A. W. Newton, and J. Culford Bell. Never in the history of the city institutions controlled by Mother Aubert has financial assistance been more needed than at the present time. There are some eighty infants in the Home of Compassion, Island Bay, all ranging in ages from the infant of a few hours' existence to the child of five or six years, whilst the Home for Incurables contains some 40 or 50 of poor, aged, and incurable beings, all tenderly tended by these devoted ladies. Other forms of activity are displayed by these ladies, such, for instance, as the Creche, Buckle-street, a sort of repository for the children of mothers who are forced by circumstances to earn their own living. These mothers leave their children on their way to their employment, calling for them on their return. During the interval they are well cared for by the sisters. Then there is the distribution of food and clothes to the needy poor of the city, and many other similar works. The homes are for all classes, irrespective of creed or nationality, and can at any time be inspected by the public, who can see for themselves the great work accomplished, and which is being hampered for lack of funds.

*Evening Post*, Volume LXXXVI, Issue 147, 18 December 1913, Page 6.