

## Spinks Cottage

129 Dixon Street/ 170 Willis Street



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

### Summary of heritage significance

- The Spinks' Cottage is an artisan built middle class dwelling dating to c.1860. The cottage is a typical, although larger than usual, example of early domestic architecture and the exterior is in remarkably original condition.
- The cottage is part of a group of buildings that make up the St John's Church Heritage Area; St John's is the most historically significant of Wellington's Presbyterian churches and has been used for worship by generations of Wellingtonians, including former prime ministers, mayors and other notables.
- The cottage contributes greatly to the sense of place and continuity in the St John's precinct and more widely in central Wellington. It is associated with the early development of Wellington and with the St John's Church, helping to create a sense of place and continuity in central Wellington.

District Plan:	Map 16, reference 102
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 72762
Heritage Area:	St Johns Church Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Category I, reference 4704
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270 (NB: Building has been relocated)
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	Built: c.1860
Architect / Builder:	-
Former uses:	Residential
Current uses:	Religious/residential
Earthquake Prone Status:	Unknown at time of writing

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

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

The Spinks Cottage is a part of the St Johns in the City Church property on the corner of Willis and Dixon Streets in central Wellington. The cottage is one of the oldest remaining cottages in Wellington City, and is the oldest building in the St Johns precinct. The cottage has been relocated twice since its construction, being moved to its present site in 1982.

William Spinks set up a business as a storekeeper on the corner of Manners and Herbert Streets and in 1854; Spinks purchased part of section 168, the property in Willis Street that is now occupied by St John's Church. The other part of the section was bought by members of the Free Scottish Church (St John's).

The first confirmed record of the cottage on the property is a sketch dated to 1863 that clearly shows the cottage to the left of the first St John's Church. That year, the Wellington almanac also listed William Spinks as a resident of Willis Street. The cottage was constructed well back from the street frontage and was a generously sized house for the time, with large rooms on the ground floor and bedrooms in the high pitched roof space. It was constructed in a vernacular style, influenced by Gothic. In many ways the cottage is a prototype to the bay villa, with a projecting gable enclosing the concave roofed verandah to the street. At the back of the house there was a single storey gabled lean to that housed the kitchen and scullery. The materials used to build the house were local timbers, and the construction methods, such as solid corner boards and mortised joints, are typical of artisan built houses of that period before mass production of building materials. The cottage uses double hung windows which are divided into small panes.

The house was primarily a residence for the Spinks', but it was also used to house a private school that was started by William's daughters. The school closed in the late 1870s and in 1884 Spinks sold the property to the Trustees of St John's Church. He died two months later and his wife died soon after that same year.

The present St John's Church is the third incarnation in Wellington. The first was built in 1856 on the corner of Willis and Dixon Streets, Gothic in style, and relatively small (only seating 200). In 1858 a nave had been added along the Dixon Street side of the building and a hall built. By 1874 planning began for a new larger church. Thomas Turnbull was commissioned to design the new building. The new church opened in 1875 and was Neo-Classical in style, albeit with a spire, fronting Willis Street with a temple portico and a formal split stair. Unfortunately nine years later the church and the Sunday school hall burnt down. In this fire the Spinks cottage was also damaged.

The disaster prompted St John's to look at expansion, and they approached the Spinks' family, and purchased the house in 1884. This enabled St John's to plan and build the church that is still in use in present day. Again Thomas Turnbull was commissioned to design the church, and to facilitate its construction Spinks' cottage was moved up and across the site towards the back of the new church. A new larger Sunday school hall was also built at this time.

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<sup>1</sup> History adapted from: Graeme Burgess, *Spinks Cottage Dixon Street Wellington*, prepared for the Wellington Boy's and Girl's Institute, June 2004 and Wellington City Council, 'Spinks Cottage', *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 1995*, (Wellington City Council 1995).

The cottage was kept as a custodian's house, and was used as a church house until 1966. In 1967 it was refurbished to house students as an overflow for Troup House, the church student flat on the southern boundary near the south west corner of the church.

By the 1970s, declining congregations and rising maintenance costs had caused St John's to reassess its needs, with serious consideration being made into the state and future use of Spinks cottage. Based on considerable public and institutional interest, the New Zealand Historic Places Trust commissioned Craig Craig Moller architects to examine the condition and future use of the cottage. The reports highlighted the value that the cottage had and were used to convince the Trustees of St John's that the cottage was an essential component of the history of the church in Wellington.

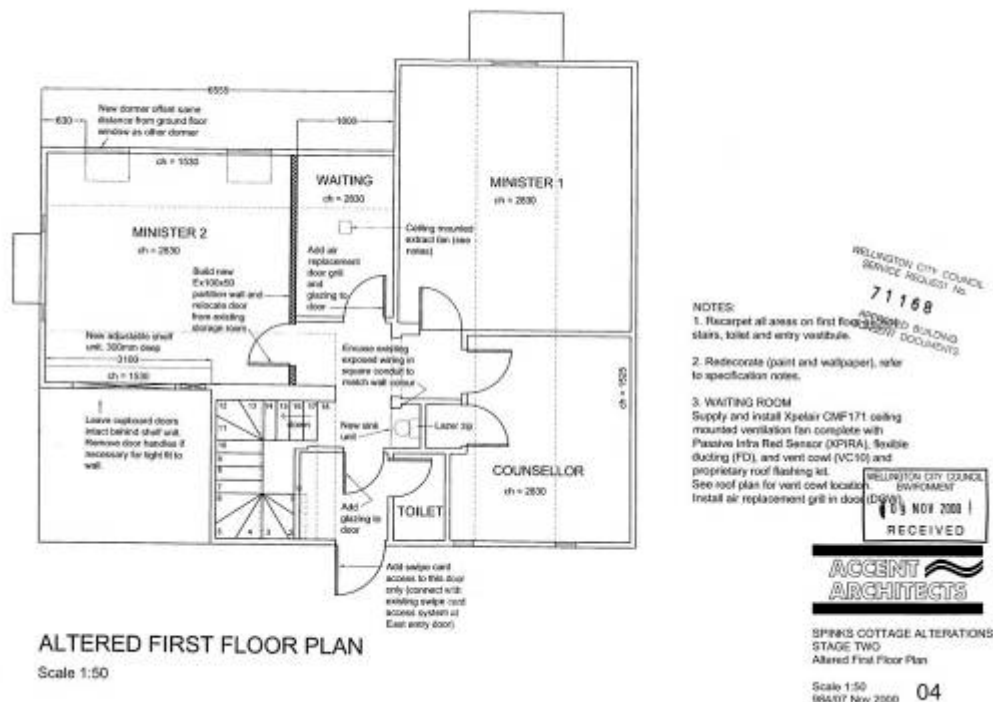
The church, however, were eager to develop the site to better match their needs. Negotiations between the church and NZHPT over the fate of the cottage continued for several years before it was decided that the NZHPT would pay to have the cottage moved to new foundations on the St John's property (its present site). The cottage was moved by July 1982, and once moved repair and reconstruction work was undertaken. This work included the replacement of all large multi pane sash windows, a third of the weatherboards, relining and repapering the walls, and installing sprinklers in the cottage. A verandah was also rebuilt based on the remaining elements attached to the cottage.

In 1988 the church underwent a major redevelopment, designed by Ampersand Architects and constructed by Fletcher development and construction. The works included the demolition of the old 'Sunday school' building fronting MacDonald Crescent, the Troup House flat, the 1896 'Bible Class Hall', and 'Morse Hall'. A new four storey concrete, steel, and timber office building was built along the MacDonald Crescent frontage and a new conference centre was built along the southern boundary of the site. The MacKay Chapel was also built as a part of this contract. The only work that directly affected Spinks cottage at this time was the construction of an accessibility ramp at the back of the cottage.

In 2000 further work was carried out on the cottage to make offices for the church counsellors. The upper floor was re-planned, including the relocation of some internal walls, and a new dormer, matching the style of the building, was added to the front of the building.

This building is an excellent and important example of a middle class dwelling of the 1860s, and the buildings exterior has survived in near original condition, and it is typical of the style and construction common to the period. The building is intimately associated with the history of the area and with the St John's Church, and Spinks cottage is a historical reminder of the early settlement of Wellington.

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



2000 1 MacDonald Crescent, installation of dormer window, relocation of internal wall, refurbishment of first floor level of Spinks Cottage (00078:1013:71168)

## 1.3 Occupation history

c.1860-1884 William Spinks and family  
1884-present The Presbyterian Church Property Trustees

## 1.4 Architect

Unknown

## 2.0 Physical description

### 2.1 Architecture

The Spinks' Cottage is an artisan built middle class dwelling dating to c.1860. The size, form, and finishes of this house indicate the relative prosperity of the Spinks family. The cottage is a typical, although larger than usual, example of early domestic architecture and the exterior is in remarkably original condition. The windows are double hung, with six small panes of glass. There is some ornamentation of the gables and under the eaves. There is a brick chimney at either side of the house, these are reconstructions of the 1884 chimneys, and there was a third chimney at the back of the building which was demolished along with the lean to in 1982. The verandah was reinstated in 1982 using remnants of the original pilastered post elements at the outside line of the verandah.

## **2.2 Materials**

The cottage is constructed of pit sawn timber, with timber joinery, brick chimneys, and colour steel roofing.

## **2.3 Setting**

The cottage is situated in the St John's Church Heritage Area which makes up the corner of Willis and Dixon Streets. Included in this heritage area is also the St John's Church. The house is intimately associated with the church both of which are now clearly visible from Dixon Street and up Dixon Street from the Willis Street intersection.

### **3.0 Sources**

Burgess, Graeme. *Spinks Cottage Dixon Street Wellington*. Prepared for the Wellington Boy's and Girl's Institute. June 2004.

Wellington City Council. *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 1995*. Wellington City Council 1995.

#### **Wellington City Archive**

2000 1 MacDonald Crescent, installation of dormer window, relocation of internal wall, refurbishment of first floor level of Spinks Cottage (00078:1013:71168)

## 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?*

The Spinks Cottage is an artisan built middle class dwelling dating to c.1860. The cottage is a typical, although larger than usual, example of early domestic architecture and the exterior is in remarkably original condition.

**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 cottage is situated in the St John's Church Heritage Area which makes up the corner of Willis and Dixon Streets. The cottage is clearly visible from Dixon Street and up Dixon Street from the Willis Street intersection and contributes significantly to the streetscape.

**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 cottage is part of a group of buildings that make up the St John's Church Heritage Area; St John's is the most historically significant of Wellington's Presbyterian churches and has been used for worship by generations of Wellingtonians, including former prime ministers, mayors and other notables.

#### **Historic Value:**

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

The building is intimately associated with the history of the area and with the St John's Church, and Spinks cottage is a historical reminder of the early settlement of Wellington.

**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 cottage is pre 1900 and included in the NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270, and although it has been relocated, archaeological value remains.

**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?*

The cottage is part of the St Johns precinct, and has been owned by the church for over 100 years. It is currently used as a youth centre and is an important part of the church complex.

**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?*

The cottage contributes greatly to the sense of place and continuity in the St John's precinct and more widely in central Wellington. It is associated with the early development of Wellington and with the St John's Church, helping to create a sense of place and continuity in central Wellington.

**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?*

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

The cottage is a typical, although larger than usual, example of early domestic architecture and the exterior is in remarkably original condition.

**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 interior of the cottage has been significantly altered, although some original features do remain in place. The exterior maintains authenticity through the retention of original materials and the reinstatement of the verandah.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

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

The Spinks Cottage is of local importance for its aesthetic contributions to the streetscape, its historical associations, and its social values. As a part of the St Johns Church heritage area it is of national importance.

## 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)		