

**Ngaroma (Apostolic Nunciature) Buildings and Water Tower**  
112 Queens Drive



Image: Charles Collins, 2015

**Summary of heritage significance**

- This building has architectural value as a rare and magnificent family home, designed by J M Dawson, one of Wellington's most important 20th century architects.
- The house has great historic significance as the family home of successful business man Hope Gibbons (1926-1947).
- The house also has historic value for its association with the Catholic Church, who have utilised the building first as the Polish Girls' Hostel (1947-1958), and then as the Apostolic Nunciature.

District Plan:	Map 4, reference 158
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 447710
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	No
Archaeological Site:	Risk unknown – pre 1900 human activity on site
Other Names:	Ngaroma Apostolic Church Buildings and Water Tower 1926
Key physical dates:	Built: 1926
Architect / Builder:	Architect: King & Dawson / Builder: Unknown
Former uses:	Private residence, Polish Girls' Hostel
Current uses:	Apostolic Nunciature
Earthquake Prone Status:	To be assessed 30/01/13 (SR 269394)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

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

Hope Gibbons was the name given to members of the second and third generations of the Gibbons family, a most successful merchant family. Hopeful Gibbons Snr (1856-1947) was the sixth of twelve offspring of Robert and Sarah Gibbons who arrived in New Zealand in 1862.<sup>2</sup> He was educated in Nelson and first reached prominence when he established the Patea Brewery in 1879. He later bought the Wanganui Brewery and went on to become a prosperous businessman, politician and local identity but, with the exception of some overseas trips, remained based in Wanganui.<sup>3</sup>

In 1905 the Gibbons family bought a 50 per cent stake in the business J.B. Clarkson Ltd., a cycle importing firm in Palmerston North. His eldest son Hopeful Barnes Gibbons (1882-1955) was in charge of the firm's expansion to Wellington in 1910. In 1916 the firm built its first building in Inglewood Place. By the 1920s the firm was supplying motor accessories, bicycles and motorcycles throughout New Zealand.<sup>4</sup> In 1921 the family took over the business and it was renamed Hope Gibbons Limited. In 1925 a taller and grander addition to the 1916 building was designed with a façade on Dixon Street. This building, along with the 1916 building, was designed by architect Joseph M Dawson, who had a long professional relationship with the family.

In 1914 H.B. Gibbons purchased a large block of land in Lyall Bay on which this house now stands. The land was part of 440 acres of farmland acquired by Alexander Sutherland c1840.<sup>5</sup> Sutherland died in 1877 and the land was subdivided in 1878. Henry Haywood bought the Queens Drive site, and built a large house on the property in the 1890s which was subsequently acquired by ironmonger George Winder. Gibbons bought the land from Winder in 1914.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Kelly and Chris Cochran, *Apostolic Nunciature, 112 Queens Drive* (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, 2001)

<sup>2</sup> Diana Beaglehole, "Gibbons, Hopeful - Biography," from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 30 October 2012, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3g5/gibbons-hopeful>

<sup>3</sup> Y. Dasler, "The Hope Gibbons" in *Wellington City Magazine*, August 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Beaglehole, "Gibbons, Hopeful – Biography"

<sup>5</sup> Historic Places Trust, *Apostolic Nunciature*, Proposal for Classification Report, date unknown

<sup>6</sup> CT 175/225, Land Information New Zealand, Wellington

In 1925 Gibbons had Dawson draw up plans for a “Tudor” style mansion<sup>7</sup> and outbuildings, including a garage and water tower. The three storey red brick house was completed the following year and he named it ‘Ngaroma’. The estimated cost on the building permit was £20,000, a huge sum of money at the time. The Gibbons were one of Wellington’s wealthiest families, and the style and grandeur of the house, which is unmatched by any other in Wellington, was clearly intended to reflect their prosperity.



View of Ngaroma c1930 (Ref: 1/4-028597-G, ATL)



Hope Gibbons Ltd staff standing on the entrance stairway and porch of Ngaroma (Photo: KE Niven, 1931 – 1940, Te Papa, C.002395)

The family only lived in the house for just over two decades. During this time H.B. Gibbons and his wife often hosted popular events at the house, such as garden parties, fetes, and dances, often to raise funds for groups such as the Red Cross and Plunket.

<sup>7</sup> Historic Places Trust, *Apostolic Nunciature*, Proposal for Classification Report, date unknown

In 1947 Gibbons sold the house to the Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> In December 1947 the house became the 'Polish Girls' Hostel' – a home for Polish working girls and school girls from the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua.<sup>9</sup> Run by the Ursuline Sisters, the hostel quickly filled up housing 120 girls at its peak. The Polish girls at Ngaroma lived a happy and busy life, and many have fond memories of the nuns and the years they spent here under their care.<sup>10</sup>



The Polish Girls' Hostel 'Ngaroma' in Lyall Bay, 1950. Image from: *New Zealand's First Refugees: Pahiatua's Polish Children*, (Polish Children's Reunion Committee, Wellington), 2004, page XVI

A Polish Boys' Hostel had been set up in Island Bay in 1946. The boys would often visit Ngaroma "to play games, perhaps dance or even take one of the girls to cinema."<sup>11</sup> As the girls grew into women the hostel "swarmed with young men" on the weekends, both Polish and new Zealanders.<sup>12</sup> Many marriages resulted and as the girls moved out to run their own homes, the number of inhabitants at Ngaroma dwindled. Many of the children of these marriages were brought back to the hostel to be looked after by the Sisters while the mothers worked. Eventually there were less than 40 ex-Pahiatua girls at the hostel, and the Sisters at Ngaroma were accepting young children of all nationalities into their care.

In May 1955 the Sisters and 'Ngaroma girls' celebrated the ten year anniversary of their arrival as refugees in New Zealand with a jubilee concert at Ngaroma.<sup>13</sup> The concert was attended by a representative of the Government, representatives of the Catholic Church, the Sisters, and both past and present Ngaroma girls. Speeches were followed by Polish dances and recitations, and a documentary of the arrival of Polish

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "THE POLISH HOSTELS, 1946-58," *New Zealand's First Refugees: Pahiatua's Polish Children*, (Polish Children's Reunion Committee, Wellington), 2004, page 328-333, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-PolFirs-t1-g1-g5-t1-g1-t9.html#n373>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., page 327

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., page 333

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., page 333. They arrived in New Zealand on 1 November 1944.

children in New Zealand (filmed by the National Film Unit) was received with much emotion.<sup>14</sup>

In 1957 the Ursuline Sisters were recalled to Poland. With much sadness homes were found for the remaining hostel children and the Sisters left New Zealand in March 1958.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1960s the house was given for the use of the Vatican's diplomatic representative, the Apostolic Nuncio, who remains its occupier. In 1972 the consulate was raised to full diplomatic status and the house formally vested in it. In 1986 the Polish Pope John Paul II stayed there during his visit to New Zealand.



The Ursuline Sisters farewell at St Anne's Hall, Newtown

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications

- 1926 Building constructed
- 1947 Building became the Polish Girls' Hostel

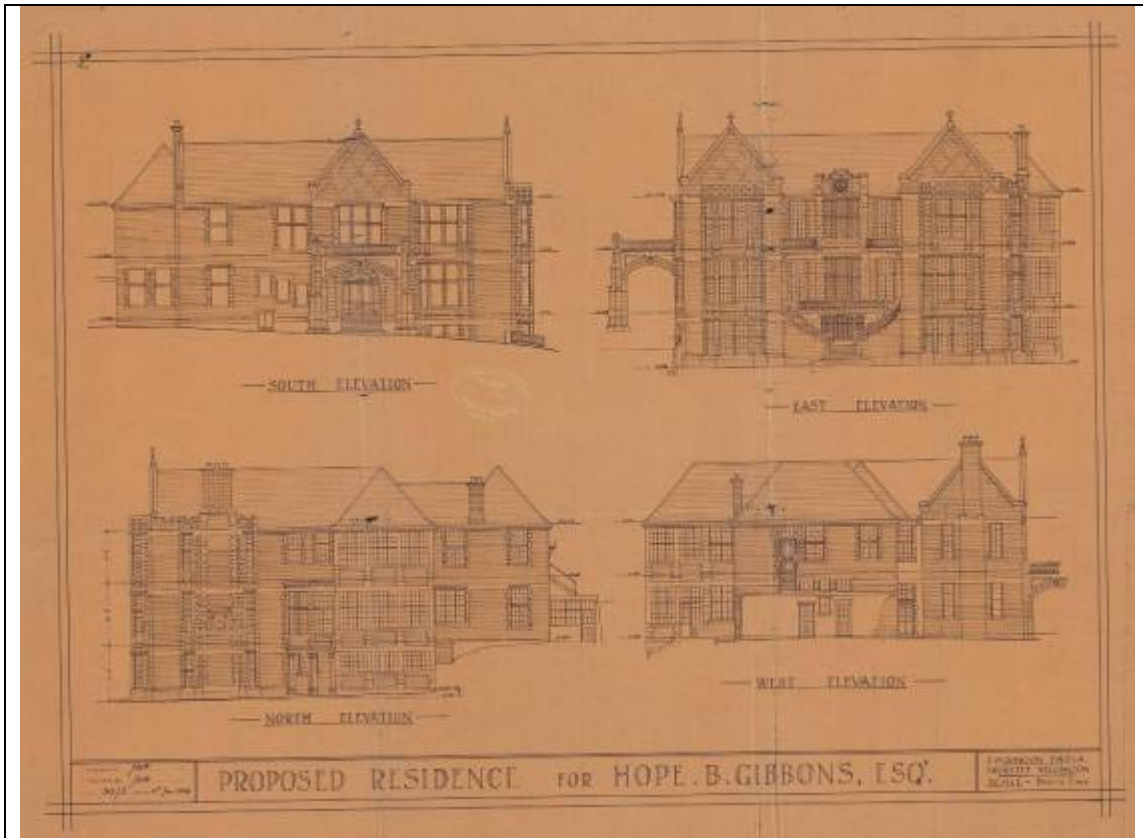
## 1.3 Occupation history

- 1926-1947 Private residence of H.B. Gibbons and his family
- 1947-1958 Polish Girls' Hostel
- 1958-present The Holy See-The Apostolic Nunciature

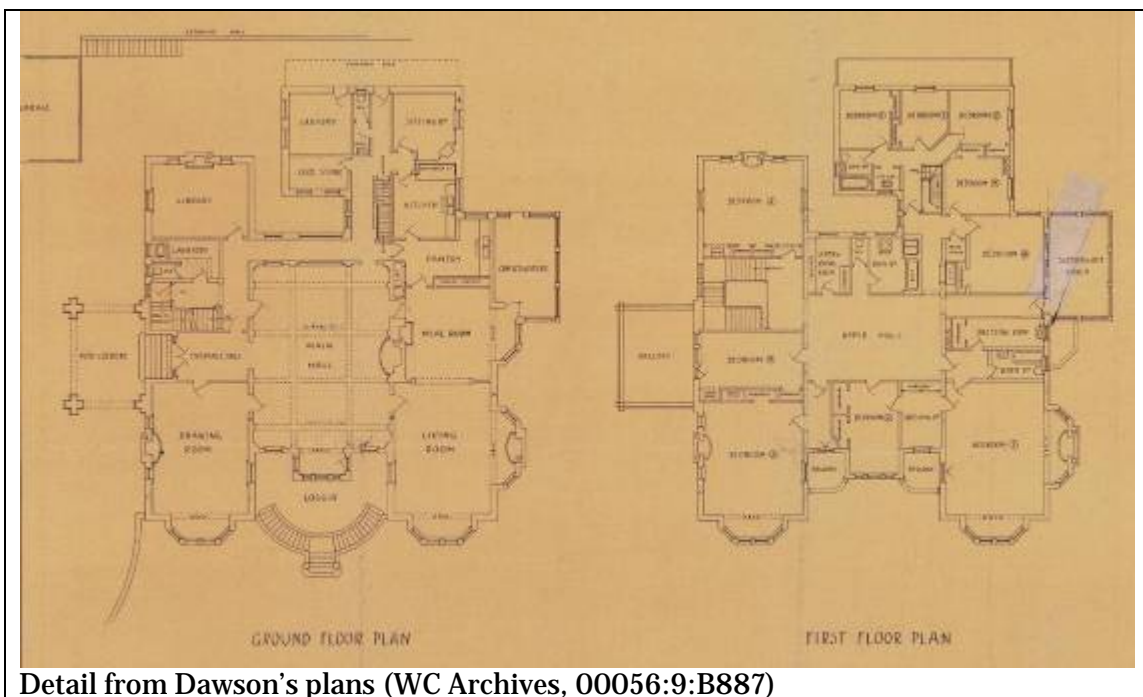
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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, page 334

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, page 327. The Polish Boys Hostel in Island Bay had closed in 1952.



Detail from Dawson's plans (WC Archives, 00056:9:B887)



Detail from Dawson's plans (WC Archives, 00056:9:B887)

## 1.4 Architect

### Joseph McClatchie Dawson (1877-1956)<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Dawson was born in the Wairarapa. His father was a contractor in the district and Dawson's education included a background in construction work. In 1900 he left New Zealand and travelled to South Africa, England and Australia, returning in 1906 to establish his own architectural practice in Wellington.

Dawson was an inaugural member of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, formed in 1905, and became a Fellow of the Institute in 1913. He was its president from 1938-1940. He formed close associations with the entrepreneurs of the burgeoning motor vehicle industry, designing showrooms, assembly plants and office buildings for, among others, Hatrick and Co. and the Colonial Motor Company.

In 1929 he appointed Jack Ian King (1900-1972) as his first partner. In 1946 Dawson entered semi-retirement, retiring in 1948. The firm he founded continues as King and Dawson.

Dawson designed a number of Wellington buildings, including:

- Columbia Hotel, Cuba Street (1908)
- T.G. Macarthy Building, Willis Street (1913)
- Hatricks Motor Garage (now Manthel Motors), corner Taranaki and Wakefield Streets (1913)
- CMC Building, Courtenay Place (1920)
- Hope Gibbons Building, cnr Taranaki and Dixon Street (1925)
- 'Ngaroma', Hope B. Gibbon's family residence, Queens Dr Lyall Bay (1926)
- Edilson's Building, 171-173 Cuba Street (1928)
- James Smith's 1932 refurbishment and new façade

## 2.0 Physical description

### 2.0 Architecture

The Apostolic Nunciature is an Elizabethan style building, characterised particularly by the strapwork (the patterned stone and brick surfaces, most evident in the high gables); the fenestration, which comprises small-paned sashes divided by stone mullions and transoms, and castellations which form the top of the parapet walls. The house is three storeys high, in brick construction, although it is presumed that there is reinforced concrete forming a significant structural component. It is most imposing on its east (garden) elevation where a generous flight of curved stairs with stone balustrade flows down from the first floor loggia. The south elevation, two storeys high, has the main entrance sheltered by a porte cochere. This opens into a generous hall with formal rooms (and the loggia) opening off it. On the first floor, the original plans show 10 bedrooms, the larger ones well supplied with wardrobes and dressing facilities, and three bathrooms; four small ones in the rear wing are presumably servant's rooms.

This most ambitious design has some stylistic links with Turnbull House in Bowen Street (1917), although no other private Wellington house can match its scale and grandeur (the interior not inspected in 2001.)

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<sup>16</sup> Historic Places Trust, "Dawson, Joseph McClatchie.", *Professional Biographies*, accessed 4 September 2012, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=47>



## 2.1 Materials

The building is constructed in brick and reinforced concrete, with Welsh slates on the roof.

## 2.2 Setting

The building is on a large block of land (almost 2 hectares) between Queens Drive, Sutherland Road, and Tavistock Road.

It is set in a large garden, and is seen only in glimpses from the road, so that its presence in the area is more felt than seen.

## 3.0 Sources

Beaglehole, Diana. "Gibbons, Hopeful - Biography," from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 30 October 2012, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3g5/gibbons-hopeful>

CT 175/225, Land Information New Zealand, Wellington

Dasler, Y. "The Hope Gibbons" in *Wellington City Magazine*, August 1985.

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Historic Places Trust, "Dawson, Joseph McClatchie.", *Professional Biographies*, accessed 4 September 2012, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=47>

Kelly, Michael, and Chris Cochran, *Apostolic Nunciature, 112 Queens Drive* (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, 2001)

"THE POLISH HOSTELS, 1946-58," *New Zealand's First Refugees: Pahiatia's Polish Children*, (Polish Children's Reunion Committee, Wellington), 2004, page 328-333, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-PolFirs-t1-g1-g5-t1-g1-t9.html#n373>

#### 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 house is a work of great architectural importance. It was designed by one of Wellington's most important 20th century architects, J M Dawson; it is a rare example in Wellington of the Elizabethan Revival style of architecture; it has a scale that is rare in private houses, and it displays the best quality materials and workmanship.

***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?

While the garden contributes to the open space quality of the area, the discreet siting means the house has little townscape or group value.

***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 house was constructed for Hopeful Barnes Gibbons, a second generation member of a relatively self-effacing but highly successful business clan. The Gibbons only lived in the house for 21 years and, for the majority of its life, the house has been in the hands of the Catholic Church. These two associations though give the house great historical significance, further enhanced by the occupancy, since 1972, of the diplomatic embassy of the Vatican.

***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?

Risk unknown

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

The plan of the house, and the facilities provided, give a socially important view of the ambitions of a wealthy family of the time.

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

The high quality of the materials and the workmanship used gives the building strong technical value, as a showcase of the best building practice that could be achieved at the time.

**Social Value:**

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

The building is likely to be held in high public esteem as the New Zealand Papal Nunciature

**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 building served as the Polish Girls' Hostel from 1947-1958. As a result, there is a huge amount of sentiment and connection for the building from the Polish community.

**Level of cultural heritage significance**

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

This is a rare example of a magnificent family home and grounds, and must rank as one of the grandest and most ostentatious of all Wellington houses.

**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?*

Despite changing uses several times (from home to hostel to Apostolic Nunciature), the building has a high level of authenticity as it remains largely intact and retains significant original building fabric.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

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

The building is of international significance for its status, since 1972, as the diplomatic embassy of the Vatican.

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**5.0Appendix**
**Research checklist (desktop)**

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