

## **Bishop's Court**

32 Mulgrave Street, Thorndon



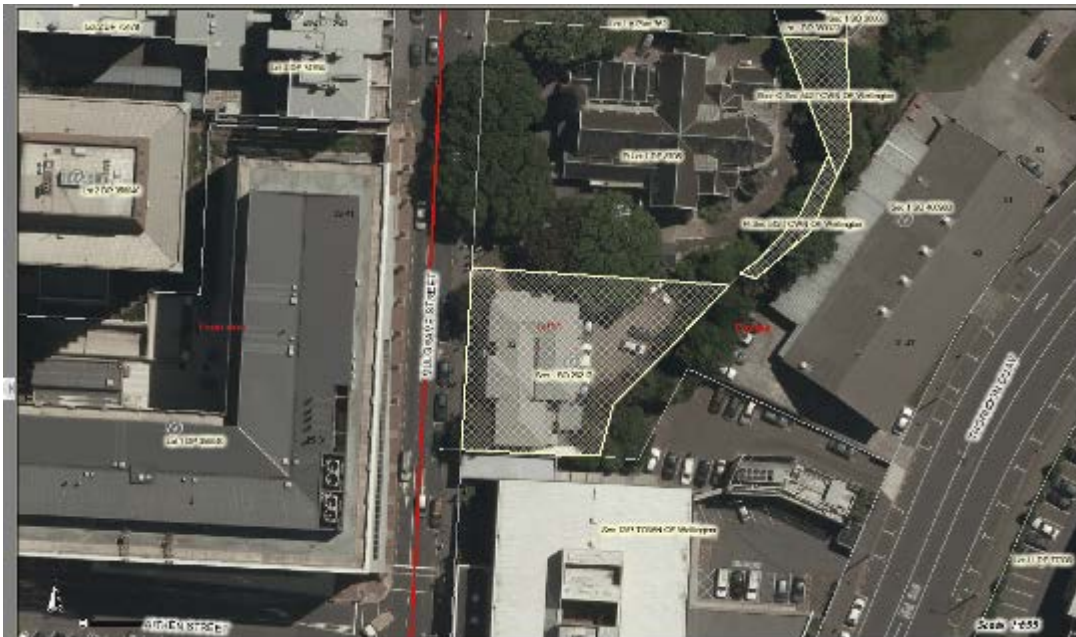
Bishopscourt, Thorndon. (Photo: *Charles Collins, 2015*)

### **Summary of heritage significance**

- Bishop's Court is a fine example of a large Victorian residence in the Italianate style. Its size, status and grandeur made it a fitting residence of the Bishop of Wellington, one of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century's highest ranking and influential semi-public figures.
- Bishop's Court is historically significant because it was the private residence to Wellington's first four Anglican bishops. It is also an example of the work of William Charles Chatfield, a prominent local architect who became the first president of the New Zealand Institute of Architects.
- The building has substantial group value due to its historic association with its well known, and much loved, neighbour – Old St Paul's Cathedral.

District Plan:	Map 15, 18, Reference 223
Legal Description:	Sec 1 SO 26217
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Category 2, Register number 1361
Archaeological Site:	Pre-1900 building Maori site of significance M65 Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Bishopscourt
Key physical dates:	1879 (construction)
Architect / Builder:	William Charles Chatfield (architect) Mitchell & Thompson (builder)
Former uses:	Bishop's residence Boarding house and apartment accommodation Government offices Courthouse
Current uses:	Offices for the Anglican Church
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not earthquake prone: SR 189703

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History

The present Bishop's Court is the second Bishop's residence to be built on the Mulgrave Street site. AG Tollemache, an early settler, gifted the site of Bishop's Court in 1860 in trust to the Diocese of Wellington for the purpose of a Bishops residence. In the same year Bishop Selwyn and Sir George Grey gifted the adjacent land 542 for the site of a new Cathedral church (Old St Paul's – WCC ref 18/221). The present Bishop's Court building was constructed in 1879, replacing the original bishop's residence that had been built some time around 1862.<sup>1</sup> The original building had fallen into disrepair, and was observed to be 'hardly safe to occupy'.

In 1879 the old house was demolished and construction began on the new house designed by W C Chatfield. The new residence was an imposing 560m<sup>2</sup>, and included a servants' wing. Constructed by Mitchell and Thompson the house cost about £4000 pounds. The house became something of a financial albatross for the church, as the overall cost was approximately double the original estimate for which funds had been raised.<sup>2</sup> The Diocese was forced to borrow the remaining £2000, the repayments were expensive, and it was not until the sale of land in 1905 that the Diocese was able to clear the debt.

Bishop's Court's first occupant was Bishop Octavius Hadfield, who lived there for fifteen years. He was a figure of importance, not only in the church, but also in the social and political life of his time, and often found himself opposing popular opinion. He was a staunch advocate for his church; education – both denominational and secular; and Maori rights. He is credited with persuading Te Rauparaha and his followers from sacking Wellington following the Wairau Affray in 1843.<sup>3</sup> He also worked towards the defeat of the Wanganui Endowed School Bill in 1876, which could have "set a precedent for the expropriation of land vested in denominational trusts set up for Maori religious, charitable and educational purposes."<sup>4</sup> His popularity with Pakeha also suffered when he actively encouraged Maori to exercise their right to vote. Bishop Hadfield achieved new levels of notoriety when he pushed for an investigation into the Waitara purchase and the recall of Governor Gore Browne. His efforts saw him frequently attacked in the press and eventually summoned to Parliament for judicial questioning.<sup>5</sup> Bishop Hadfield's position ensured that the numerous rooms of the house were frequently used.

<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Bishop's Court', Wellington: NZHPT, 2007  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1361>

<sup>2</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Bishop's Court', Wellington: NZHPT, 2007  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1361>

<sup>3</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Bishop's Court', Wellington: NZHPT, 2007  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1361>

<sup>4</sup> June Starke, 'Hadfield, Octavius - Hadfield, Octavius', 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/1h2/hadfield-octavius>

<sup>5</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Bishop's Court', Wellington: NZHPT, 2007  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1361>

The house was used as the Bishops residence until 1940 (save a brief period from 1910-1917 during which the house was sublet). In total, four bishops resided there: Bishop Hadfield (until his retirement in 1893), Bishop Frederick Wallis (1893-1910), Bishop Thomas Henry Sprott (1917-1936), and Bishop Herbert St Barbe Holland (1936-1940).<sup>6</sup> During this period the character of Thorndon had altered significantly from semi-rural to urban/city-fringe. With the train station nearby and the development of the city Thorndon became an important hub, and Bishop Wallis struggled to cope with the noise, dust, and bustle of the area. His health suffered and in 1910 he moved to a residence in Kelburn. Following his retirement in 1916 and the expiration of the subletting agreement of Bishop's Court, Bishop Sprott moved back to the house in 1917. His successor, Bishop Holland, was also to suffer ill-effects to his health related to the Thorndon area, and so moved to an alternate residence.<sup>7</sup> From 1940 to 1963 the building was let as a boarding house and apartments.

In 1963 Bishop's Court was sold to the Ministry of Works and Development, who converted the house into an office building. Part of the conversion saw the removal of the back staircase in order to expand the library. The Ministry occupied the residence until 1969. The State Services Commission took control of the building, and until 1993 Bishop's Court was occupied by various divisions of the Justice Department, including the District Family Courts who occupied it from 1982-1992.

In 1993 Bishop's Court was re-sold to the New Zealand Anglican Church Pension and Missions boards. They still occupy the building today.

Bishop's Court's primary heritage value comes from its relationship with Old Saint Paul's Cathedral and its link to the early days of the Anglican Church in Wellington and New Zealand. The importance of Old St Paul's to Wellington's heritage is well known and well documented – the city takes a special pride in the church.

The site of Bishop's Court has been the place of residence for St Paul's bishops from 1862, and Bishop's Court itself from 1878 to 1940. Those bishops were important figures in Wellington's history, and also entertained other important figures at the house. Politics took place there and decisions were made – some of which continue to resonate, and to shape our national identity, a hundred and fifty years later.

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<sup>6</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Bishop's Court', Wellington: NZHPT, 2007  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1361>

<sup>7</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Bishop's Court', Wellington: NZHPT, 2007  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1361>



c.1860 – the original Bishop's Court<sup>8</sup>



c. 1879 – 1880s The second Bishop's Court with Old St Paul's in the foreground.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications<sup>10</sup>

*Need archives to complete: check file 00053:91:5229 for plans*

<sup>8</sup> (The original) Bishop's Court, Mulgrave Street, Wellington. Creator unknown : Photographs of Wellington, from the Dorset album. Ref: 1/2-021166-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23175806>

<sup>9</sup> Mulgrave Street, Thorndon, Wellington, showing St Paul's Anglican Church and Bishop's Court. Davis, William Henry Whitmore, 1812-1901 :Photographs of Wellington and district. Ref: 1/1-039674-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23529301>

<sup>10</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Bishop's Court', Wellington: NZHPT, 2007 <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1361>

- Original Construction: 1879 (circa)
- Other: 1894 (circa)
- Addition: 1903 (circa) – directed by Bishop Wallis so he and his wife could better entertain guests.
- Modification - Original north wall removed.: pre-1917
- Other: 1922 (circa)
- Modification: 1922 (circa) - 1927 (circa)
- Modification: 1936 (circa)
- Modification: 1940 (circa) - 1960 (circa)
- Modification: 1961 (circa)
- Modification: 1963 (circa)
- Modification: 1968 (circa)
- Original Construction: 1976 (circa)
- Modification: 1977 (circa)
- Addition: 1978 (circa)
- Addition: 1980 (circa)
- Modification: 1982 (circa)
- Modification: 1985 (circa)
- Modification: 1996 (circa)
- Other: 1891 (circa)
- Other: 1917 (circa)

### **1.3 Occupation history**

- 1878-1893: Bishop Octavius Hadfield
- 1893-1910: Bishop Frederick Wallis
- 1910-15: Mrs M. Peters
- 1915-17: Mrs Nicholson
- 1917-1936: Bishop Thomas Henry Sprott
- 1936-1940: Bishop Herbert St Barbe Holland
- 1940-1963: Boarding house and apartments
- 1963-1982: Various divisions of the Justice Department
- 1982-1992: District Family Court
- 1993-present: The New Zealand Anglican Church Pension and Missions boards

### **1.4 Architect**

#### **William Charles Chatfield**

From the Historic Places Trust's biography of William Chatfield:

William Chatfield (1851/52-1930) was born in Sussex and educated in Brixton, Surrey.<sup>11</sup> He came to New Zealand at the age of sixteen in 1867 and was immediately engaged in architectural work. He joined the Public Service in 1872 as Chief Draughtsman and Assistant Paymaster and Engineer in the Engineer's Department of the Wellington Province. He held these positions until 1876 when provincial government was abolished. During this time he worked on the Thorndon reclamation and designed many bridges. He went into private practice in 1876 and designed several large office and warehouse buildings such as Kings Chambers, corner Willis and Willeston Streets (1902), the Wellington Opera House (1886) and the Colonial Mutual Insurance Building, corner Customhouse Quay and Willeston Street (1897).

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<sup>11</sup> NZHPT, 'Bio: William Charles Chatfield', at <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Chatfield,+William+Charles>



Stewart Dawson's Building (1900) Chatfield's buildings were characterised by their enormous strength resulting from the use of heavy masonry reinforced with railway irons for foundations, cornices and columns.

During the building of the E.W Mills Ltd Building architect W.J McKeon writes (in 'Architects I Have Known') that he distinctly remembered as a small boy seeing the excavations to the old sea bed and the enormous masses of railway iron and concrete in the foundations.<sup>12</sup> So strong were the foundations of the P Haymans Building that was gutted by fire that in building the Dominion Life Building on the same site extensive use was made of the old foundations.

Chatfield was known to be always impeccably dressed and a figure demanding respect, sporting a wide white moustache and rimless glasses on a black ribbon. Chatfield was active in the advancement of his profession, contributing to the foundation and development of the New Zealand Institute of Architects.<sup>13</sup> The institute elected Chatfield its first president for the 1905-6 term, and he was re-elected for the following term, 1906-7, and again in 1914-15.

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture**

This large, two-storey Victorian residence has been designed in a plain Italianate style. The original house consisted of two double-storey bays, capped by hipped roofs, flanking a central entrance portico. The later addition of a south wing, and a lean-to addition on the north elevation, have been designed in a matching style, although the pleasing symmetry of the original has been altered.

The facade has been skilfully proportioned, with a pleasing ratio of window void to wall surface, and sound, unpretentious detail that builds up an understated sculptural effect. The extensive use of quoins on the facade hints at masonry construction but is really a decorative feature. The brackets under the projecting eaves have a similar effect, as do the bracketed eaves over the ground-floor bay windows. The house is clad in heart totara weatherboards while the original slate roof has been replaced with corrugated iron.

The interior has been significantly altered but retains a modest level of authenticity. The original room dimensions on the ground floor have been preserved, along with the Italianate entrance hall, staircase, original doors, skirtings and architraves.<sup>4</sup>

Together with Old St Paul's, Bishops Court preserves a strong link with the former Anglican ecclesiastical community and is an important nineteenth-century component of the Thorndon townscape.

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<sup>12</sup> Wellington City Council, 'Bishop's Court', Heritage Inventory, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> NZHPT, 'Bio: William Charles Chatfield', at <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Chatfield,+William+Charles>

## 2.2 Materials

- Kauri, totara heartwood
- Slate roof replaced with corrugated iron

## 2.3 Setting

Bishop's Court stands on Mulgrave Street with the multi-storey former Government Printing office building (now Archives New Zealand) to the immediate south; the beautifully ornate Old St Paul's Cathedral to the immediate north; and directly across the road from the imposing Defence House. Those three neighbours are all of tremendous importance, for varying reasons. Yet with those weighty neighbours, Bishop's Court still manages to carve out an identity and stand proudly by itself. This is because of the close position of Bishop's Court to the street, and the scale and attractive aesthetic of house, and the contrast the house makes with the aforementioned neighbours and other office buildings in the area.

Bishop's Court also forms part of the wider Thorndon heritage landscape (although it is not within the official character area). It is also located near the Parliamentary Precinct, the railway station and the CBD.

## Sources

Moore, D. *Old St Paul's: The First 100 Years*. Wellington: Government Print, 1970

New Zealand Historic Places Trust. 'Bio: William Charles Chatfield', at <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Chatfield,+William+Charles>

\_\_\_\_\_. 'Bishop's Court', Wellington: NZHPT, 2007  
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Starke, June. 'Hadfield, Octavius - Hadfield, Octavius'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Updated 30 October 2012. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/1h2/hadfield-octavius>

Wellington City Council. 'Bishop's Court'. *Heritage Inventory*, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. '32 Mulgrave Street, Bishop's Court'. *Heritage Inventory*, 1999.



## 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?*

Bishop's Court is a fine example of a large Victorian residence in the Italianate style. Its size, status and grandeur made it a fitting residence of the Bishop of Wellington, one of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century's highest ranking and influential semi-public figures.

**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?*

Bishop's Court is a fine example of Victorian NZ domestic architecture and contributes to the heritage character of Thorndon, giving a sense of Wellington in the mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**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?*

Bishop's Court has a strong historic association with the neighbouring Old St Paul's – Wellington's first Anglican Cathedral.

It is similar in style to its near-neighbour at 56 Mulgrave Street - a large Victorian Italianate house that is now the Cook Islands High Commission.

#### **Historic Value:**

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

Bishop's Court is strongly associated with the Anglican Church of New Zealand and the bishops it housed; especially Bishop Octavius Hadfield, an important figure in early Wellington's Maori and settler communities.

The building was the work of William Charles Chatfield, a prominent local architect who became the first president of the New Zealand Institute of Architects.

**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?*

Pre-1900 building  
Maori site of significance M65  
Central City NZAA R27/270

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

There is educational value in the building's construction methods and its evocation of the era in which it was constructed.

**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 building is likely to be held in high public esteem for its historic association with its neighbour – Old St Paul's

**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?*

Bishop's Court holds special traditional and cultural value for the Anglican Church in its link to the church's early and continued presence in Wellington. Now that the building is once again owned and occupied by the Anglican Church, that link has been reaffirmed.

**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 relatively few modern external alterations or additions over the past 130+ years and contributes to a sense of 'old Thorndon', especially when viewed together with its neighbour - Old St Paul's.

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

Bishop's Court is likely to be the focus of some community sentiment and connection. It contributes to modern-day Thorndon's connection to its past and serves as a reminder of Thorndon's role in the settlement of Wellington.

**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?*

Bishop's Court is a fine example of a large Victorian residence in the Italianate style.

**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?*

Bishop's Court has undergone significant internal renovations but the modifications have not detracted from the building's integrity.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

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

Bishop's Court is a locally significant building for Wellington.

### 3.0 Appendix

#### Research checklist (desktop)

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

#### 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*