

High Commission of the Republic of the Fiji Islands

(Former VSA Building)

31 Pipitea Street



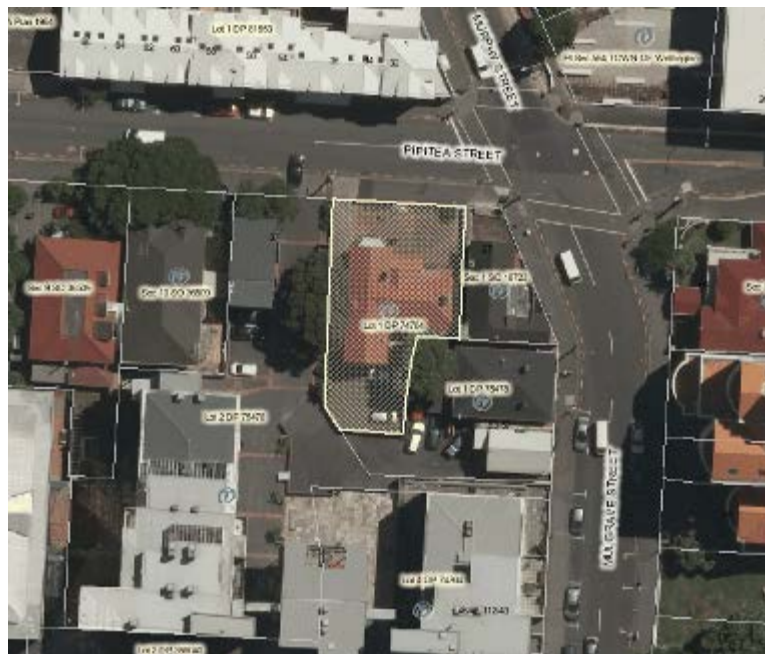
Photo: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The former VSA building at 31 Pipitea Street is a representative example of a Domestic Revival house, and was designed by William Gray Young, a prominent Wellington architect.
- The building is one of a group of older, single household residences on Pipitea Street that have survived the redevelopment of the area into a commercial office precinct, and as such makes a positive contribution to the sometimes bland commercial south Thorndon streetscape.

District Plan:	Map 18, Symbol 250
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 74764
Heritage Area:	Not in a Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Historic Place – Category II
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	1924
Architect / Builder:	Architect: William Gray Young, Morton and Young Builder: Webley & Field
Former uses:	Retail and Commercial - Office building/Offices
Current uses:	High Commission of the Republic of the Fiji Islands
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 207046 (124 Served)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The land this house occupied was leased from the Wellington Hospital and Charitable Aid Board in the name of Edith Maud Rhind in 1924.¹ Edith and Vivian Rhind commissioned a design from noted Wellington architect William Gray Young. The house was built by Webley & Field in 1925.²

Mr. Vivian Rhind came from a prominent and artistic Australian family. He was the son of the Mr. William Rhind, who held various important positions in Australia until he was appointed the inspector of the Bank of New South Wales in New Zealand.³ Rhind was employed in Wellington by the Gear Meat Company for over a decade, until in 1914 he was appointed manager in New Zealand for R. W. Cameron and Co., of New York.⁴

The Rhind family occupied the property for over 40 years.⁵ Vivian Rhind and his family were very involved in both musical societies and theatre. Both Rhind and his architect, William Gray Young, were foundation members of the National Repertory Theatre in 1926, which changed its name in 1932 to the Wellington Repertory Theatre and continues to operate under that name today.⁶

In 1971 they sold the building to Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA), whose aim was 'to promote friendship and understanding between the peoples of the world'.⁷ They occupied the building for over 20 years and gave the building the name 'VSA House', for which it was widely known.

In 1992 it was purchased by the Government of the Republic of Fiji and now houses their High Commission.⁸ They constructed the carport in 1993.

¹ Land Title Service, CT WN 401/53

² "31 Pipitea Street - residence", October 24, 1924, 00055:38:A3602, Wellington City Archives.

³ Cyclopedia Co. Ltd. "Mr William Graham Rhind", *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand: Wellington Provincial District*. (Wellington: The Cyclopedia Company Limited, 1897), accessed July 10, 2012, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc01Cycl-t1-body-d4-d28-d3.html>

⁴ "Trove", Accessed: July 2012, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/28568123>

⁵ Wises Directory 1926 and 1967/8

⁶ "Wellington Repertory Theatre", Accessed: July 2012, <http://www.wellingtonrepertory.org.nz/>

⁷ *Wises Street Directory* 1971/2

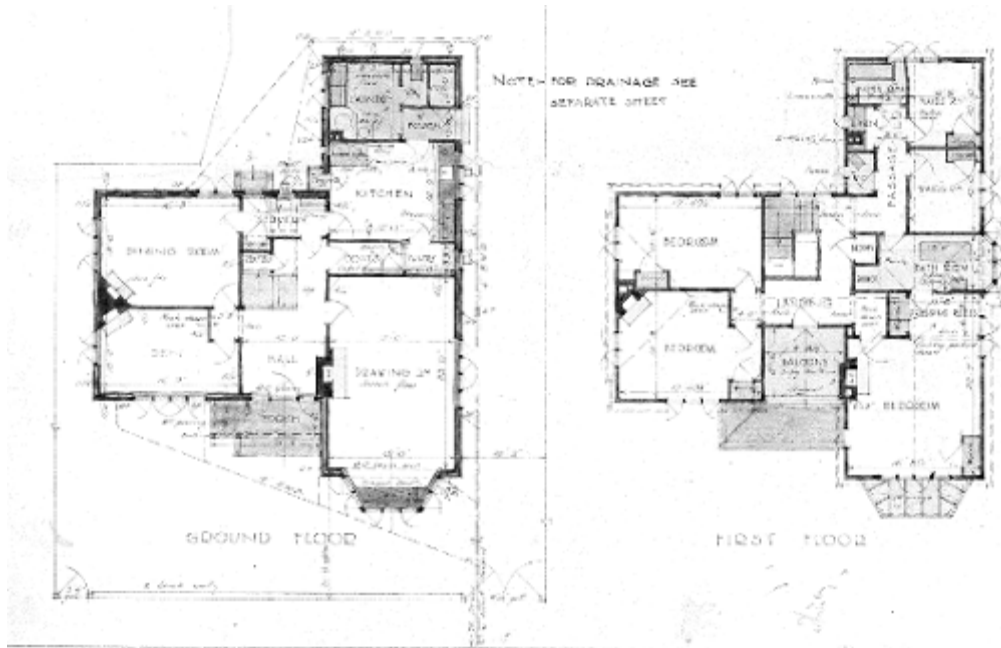
⁸ Land Title Service CT WN41C/961



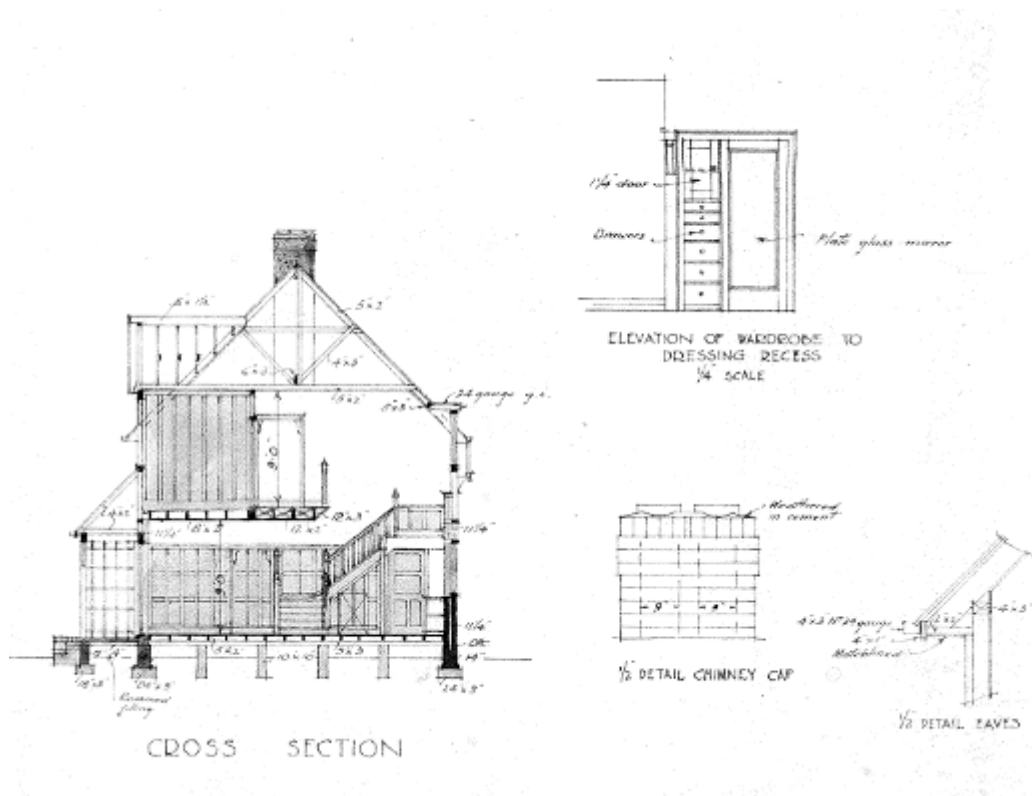
Original 1924 Plans, enlargement showing the north elevation. (00055:38:A3602)



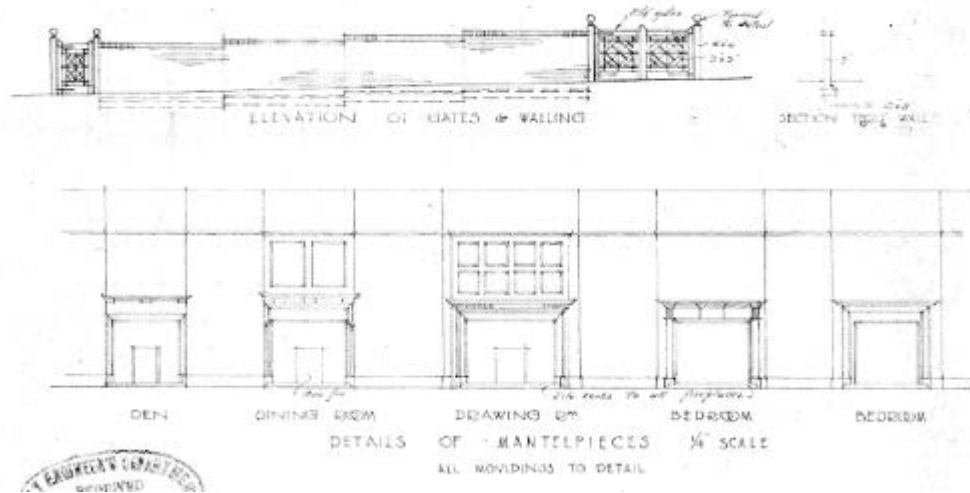
Original 1924 Plans, showing all four elevations. (00055:38:A3602)



Original 1924 Plans, showing ground floor and first floor layout. (00055:38:A3602)



Original 1924 Plans, showing the cross section and details of chimney, eaves and wardrobe, (00055:38:A3602)



Original 1924 Plans, showing the elevation of gates and walling and details of mantelpieces. (00055:38:A3602)

1.2 Timeline of modifications

- 1924 Building constructed. (00055:38:A3602)
- 1928 Garage built. (00056:65:B6240)
- 1993 Carport constructed. (00060:97:3541)

1.3 Occupation history

- 1925 Rhind family. (00055:38:A3602)
- 1971 Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA).⁹
- 1994 Fiji Embassy.¹⁰

1.4 Architect

William Gray Young (1885-1962) was born in Oamaru. When he was a child his family moved to Wellington where he was educated. After leaving school he was articled to the Wellington architectural firm of Crichton and McKay. In 1906 he won a competition for the design of Knox College, Dunedin, and shortly after this he commenced practice on his own account. He became a prominent New Zealand architect and during a career of 60 years he designed over 500 buildings. His major buildings include the Wellington and Christchurch Railway Stations (1936 and 1954 respectively), Scot's College (1919), Phoenix Assurance Building (1930) and the Australian Mutual Provident Society (AMP) Chambers (1950). At Victoria University College of Wellington he was responsible for the Stout (1930), Kirk (1938), and Easterfield (1957) buildings, and Weir House (1930). Gray Young also achieved recognition for his domestic work such as the Elliott House Wellington, (1913). His design for the Wellesley Club (1925) earned him the Gold Medal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1932. He was elected a Fellow of the Institute in 1913, served on the executive committee from 1914-35 and was President from 1935-36.

⁹ Wisers Directory 1971/2

¹⁰ Wisers Directory 1994

He was also elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and achieved prominence in public affairs.¹¹ He designed over 500 buildings,¹² including several of the early 'state' houses in Petone near Wellington.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The former VSA building is a converted two storey domestic residence constructed in the English Domestic Revival style. The building is constructed from brick masonry at the ground floor level, and clad in weatherboards at the first floor. The original specification notes that the finish to the weatherboards should be timber stain, but the weatherboards have since been painted. The roof is clad in Marseille tiles, and the timber casement windows are divided into many small panes. The large paned modern window on the first floor above the entrance porch encloses an original small inset balcony and the window is out of character with the remaining original windows.

2.2 Materials

Brick walls to ground floor levels.

Timber structure and weatherboard cladding to first floor external walls.

Marseille tile roof cladding.

Timber casement windows.

2.3 Setting

The house is one of the few domestic residences still standing in this part of Thorndon; the encroachment of the Government Centre, and the proliferation of office blocks and apartments have long ended the predominantly residential character of the area. However, Pipitea Street still retains some of its older houses and forms something of a precinct of two-storey timber and brick houses with those still standing on the eastern side of Murphy Street.

Adjacent to the houses are developments of modern high density townhouses, high rise modern commercial buildings, and several large state and private schools.

Pipitea Street at its western end is made up of large office buildings, generally owned or tenanted by the state sector / government organisations. There is a large empty site opposite the State Services Commission on the north of Pipitea Street, and this is flanked by a new high density development of bland taupe and teal coloured townhouses. These townhouses continue from the vacant site at the northwest end of Pipitea Street to the intersection of Pipitea and Murphy Streets to the east, and lie directly opposite the former VSA House. On the south of Pipitea Street is the bland modern St Paul's office / retail building, and its neighbour the former Ministerial House at 41 Pipitea St (1941), and the circa 1890 Italianate Villa at 39 Pipitea Street (both listed on the WCC District Plan). A sympathetically designed modestly scaled modern building at 37 Pipitea Street acts as a gatehouse to the high rise St Paul Apartment block that lies to the west and south of the former VSA House. A two storey timber clad house, of a similar size, age and style to VSA House (but with some intrusive modern alterations) completes the street block to Murphy Street.

¹¹Historic Places Trust, Accessed: July 2012

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=88>

¹² Wellington City Council, "VSA Building (Former)", *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 1995*. (Wellington City Council, 1995)

Further east along Pipitea Street is Wellington Girls College a large secondary school with a diverse range of buildings, and the Cook Islands High Commission, a two storey Italianate villa wedged uneasily in the corner of the new Revera House on Mulgrave and Pipitea Steets. Another building of note in the precinct is Old St Paul's Cathedral (HPT Category I) at 34 Mulgrave Street.

3.0 Sources

CT 401/53, Land Information New Zealand

CT WN41C/961, Land Information New Zealand

Cyclopedia Co. Ltd. "Mr William Graham Rhind", *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand: Wellington Provincial District*. Wellington: The Cyclopedia Company Limited, 1897. Accessed July 10, 2012, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc01Cycl-t1-body-d4-d28-d3.html>

"Trove: Digitised Newspapers and More", Accessed: July 2012, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/28568123>

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

"Wellington Repertory Theatre", Accessed: July 2012, <http://www.wellingtonrepertory.org.nz/>

Wises Directories – 1926, 1967/8, 1971/2 and 1994.

Wellington City Archives

"31 Pipitea Street - residence", October 24, 1924, 00055:38:A3602, Wellington City Archives.

"31 Pipitea Street, garage", 5 Nov 1928, 00056:65:B6240, Wellington City Archives.

"31 Pipitea Street, carport", 9 Dec 1993, 00060:97:3541, Wellington City Archives.

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 former VSA building at 31 Pipitea Street is a good representative example of a Domestic Revival house.

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 building makes a positive contribution to the Pipitea Street 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 building is one of a group of older, single household houses on Pipitea Street that have survived the redevelopment of the area into a commercial office precinct.

The building is part of a group of buildings in the Thorndon / Pipitea Street area that serve as a high commission or embassy.

Historic Value:

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

The building has a historic association with the VSA.

The building is currently in use as the High Commission of the Republic of the Fiji Islands.

The house was designed by William Gray Young, a significant Wellington architect.

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?*

There was pre-1900 human activity on this site. Although some of the sites have been altered by rebuilding or landscaping or subdivisional change, there is archaeological value in the immediate surrounds.

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?*

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?*

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 building is a representative example of an early twentieth century Domestic Revival style house.

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 facades are relatively unaltered (although the original stained timber weatherboards may have since been over-painted, and a first floor balcony enclosed) and the exterior retains much of its 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?

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	Note there is an anomaly for the image of the house used for the 1995 inventory
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	N	Not listed
WCC Records – building file	N	No file
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	N	No file
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	N	Not listed
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	Y	
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

Background research

WCC Permits

00055:38:A3 602	31 Pipitea Street, residence	Owner: D Rhind. Builder: Webley & Field. Legal description: Lots 1 and 5 Town Acre 539 [Lot 1 DP 74764]. Application value: £3,500.	Building Permit/Consent	24 Oct 1924
00056:65:B6 240	31 Pipitea Street, garage	Owner: V G Rhind. Builder: E S Knight	Building Permit/Consent	05 Nov 1928
00060:97:35 41	31 Pipitea Street, carport		Building Permit/Consent	09 Dec 1993