

Castles The Chemist

139 Riddiford Street, Newtown



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- Castle's Chemist shop is a good representative example of a two storey Victorian shop/residence. It is notable for its Classical proportions and ornamentation, particularly the mock 'crenulations' that are a visual pun on the name Castle.
- This building contributes to the Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area.
- Due to the building's long association with the Castle Family and continuance as a chemist since 1898, it is a Newtown landmark and held in high regard.
- Castle's is one of a number of early buildings of modest scale that define the character of the central commercial part of Riddiford Street.

District Plan:	Map 6, Symbol 260
Legal Description:	PT LOT 2 DP 80
Heritage Area:	Newtown Central Shopping Centre
HPT Registered:	Not registered
Archaeological Site:	Pre 1900 building, Maori Site of Significance
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	1898
Architect / Builder:	Hawthorne and Crump
Former uses:	Chemist
Current uses:	Chemist
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 197622 (s124 Served, and expires 8 June 2027)

Extent: City View 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

Newtown was originally surveyed by the New Zealand Company in 1840 as part of the new settlement of Wellington. Newtown was farmland for its first few decades and only lightly settled. The relocation of Wellington Hospital and the extension of the tram system to the suburb in the 1880s spurred subdivision. Within 40 years, the suburb was effectively filled.

The Newtown Central suburban centre has a largely uninterrupted streetscape of Victorian and Edwardian buildings. Most of the buildings are two storey and timber and date from the period of the suburb's early development. Almost all are the first buildings to occupy their sites. The suburb's early self sufficiency was epitomised by the range of shops, specialised or otherwise, that lined Riddiford Street. Many shops had the same occupants for decades. The second half of the century saw much change, with the end of the trams in 1964, the closing of many long-standing shops, families moving out to suburbs further afield, and the influx of immigrants.

Built in 1898, 139 Riddiford Street was occupied by descendants of the original business owners, the Castle family. Both the building and business have survived largely intact in that time and there are few institutions in the city that can claim such longevity. Castle's The Chemist is a Newtown landmark.

It is not known where John Castle operated his first retail outlet but in 1898 he built new premises in Riddiford Street. This would seem to have been a combined development, for the original permit described the new building as shops for Messrs Wylie and Castle.² The architect is not known but the plans suggest that it was designed by the builders, Hawthorne and Crump. The flat above the Castle shop was used as a family home by the Castle family and was later a doctor's surgery.

John and Anne Castle had seven children and, remarkably, five of them (three sons and two daughters) qualified in pharmacy. They each set up separate Castle's chemist shops until there were five in operation in Wellington; as each retired, the shops were sold and eventually only the Newtown shop remained. It was run in later years by youngest son Ronald, who kept the appearance of the shop much as it would have been in his father's day. Material returned from the other Castle shops eventually ended up in a museum on the first floor. The family was also well known for its collection of antique musical instruments.

Ronald Castle retired in 1981. Although the contents of the museum were sold to the pharmaceutical Association in 1984³ when Ronald died, the shop retains some of its late Victorian ambience, as well as its original function as a chemist.

¹ Text extracted from Wellington City Council, *Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area, Riddiford Street, Constable Street, Rintoul Street*, October 2008.

² Permit OC 2902, Wellington City Archives

³ Evening Post 8 November 1984.



September 1981, ATL, EP-Industry-Medicines and pharmaceutical-01



Pharmacist Ronald Castle stands behind the till, September 1981, ATL EP-Industry-Medicines and pharmaceutical-02

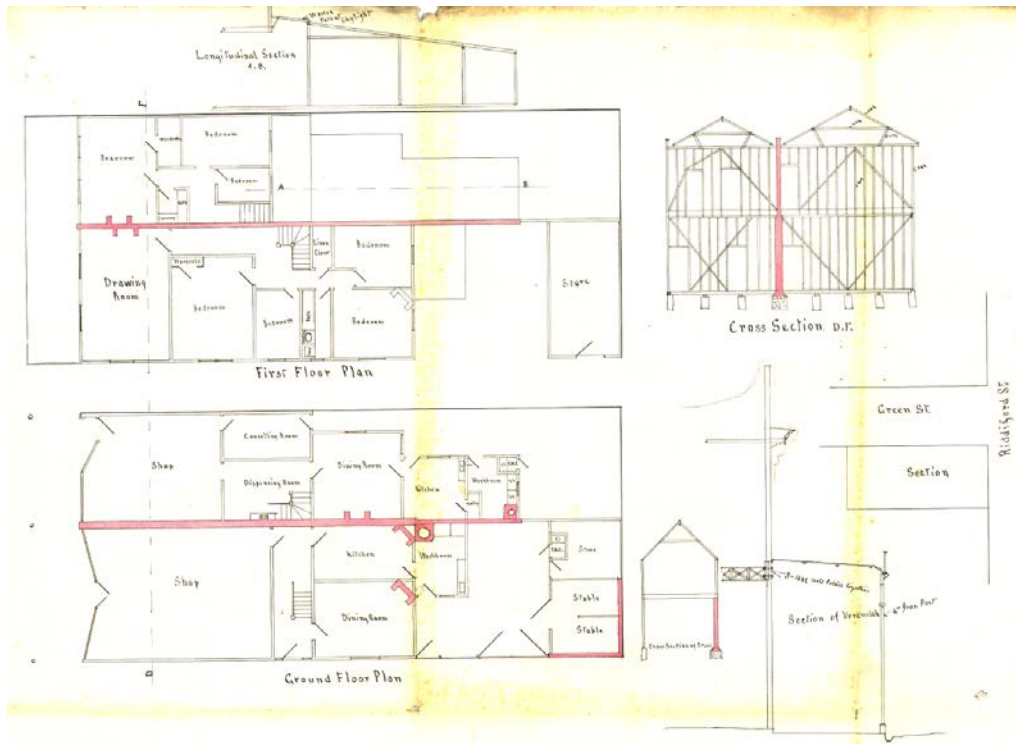


Members of the Castle family, from Newtown, Wellington. Left to right, back: Ronald, Raymond and Mervyn. Front: Mona, John Castle senior and Mavis. Photograph taken by S P Andrew Ltd, circa 1929; ATL, PAColl-8983-28

1.2 Timeline of modifications

- 1898 Consent granted to Hawthorn and Crump for a semi-detached shops and dwellings plus a shed
- 1928 Alterations made to the shop
- 1981 Alterations to the shop front; included a new shop window designed by Craig Craig Moller
- 1985 Building partly re-piled
- 1986 Alterations made to the flat and shop
- 1990 Alterations and additions to the office building
- 2012 Building consent granted to install a steel portal frame to span across shop front at ground floor to first floor level as part of earthquake strengthening.

The full list of modifications and the corresponding Wellington City Archives' reference numbers are listed under section "Background Research".



Wellington City Archives, ref 00053_45_2902, 1898

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

It is a modest two-storey timber building designed in a simple but forthright late-Victorian commercial style, with a hipped roof concealed behind the high parapet. Below the verandah is an awkward modern shop-front that partly masks an interesting interior – this still has many of the original display cabinets and shelves.⁴

The verandah has some old fabric visible, including a section of pressed metal tiles in the soffit, and it appears to be on the original line, although the posts are modern steel ones. Above the verandah, the upper façade is in quite authentic condition. It has a central array of four double-hung windows in a weatherboarded wall (the sash windows are a sensitive, modern alteration that date from post-1981); the two brick party walls on either side of the building are projected out from the wall face and are ornamented with panelled pilasters at either side of the façade and further decorated with elaborate bosses at the cornice line. The large moulded timber cornice separates the upper wall from the parapet, which has an elevated central pediment and is particularly distinctive for its quirky mock crenulations, referring back to the name of the business.

⁴ Text extracted from Wellington City Council, *Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area, Riddiford Street, Constable Street, Rintoul Street*

2.2 Materials

- Timber and brick construction
- Double hung sash windows
- Weatherboards
- Pressed metal tiles to underside of verandah

2.3 Setting

Castle's The Chemist is one of a number of early buildings of modest scale that define the character of the central commercial part of Riddiford Street.

Castle's plays a role in establishing townscape qualities in Newtown, its well-known name and longevity in the street adding to its physical qualities.

2.4 Heritage Area

This building contributes to the Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area. A detailed outline of the heritage area can be found in the Wellington City Council report "Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area: Riddiford Street, Constable Street, Rintoul Street", 28 October 2008.

This building became part of the heritage area in District Plan Change 75.

3.0 References

Wellington City Council, *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*, Wellington City Council, 2001.

Wellington City Council, *Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area, Riddiford Street, Constable Street, Rintoul Street*, Wellington City Council: unpublished report, October 2008.

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?*

Castle's Chemist shop is a good representative example of a two storey Victorian shop/residence. It is notable for its Classical proportions and ornamentation, particularly the mock 'crenulations' that are a visual pun on the name Castle.

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 contributes to the Newtown Central Suburban Centre Heritage Area, a precinct that has a largely uninterrupted streetscape of Victorian and Edwardian buildings. The building is a local landmark for its association with the long-established business 'Castles the Chemist' and for its unusual 'crenulated' parapet.

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 has group value as one of a number of early buildings of modest scale that define the character of the central commercial part of Riddiford Street. Most of the buildings, like this one, are two storey and timber built and date from the period of the suburb's early development.

Historic Value:

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

Both the building and business have survived largely intact for over 110 years and there are few institutions in the city that can claim such longevity. The association of the Castle family with both the shop and their pharmaceutical collection, and the old world ambience of the building's interior, have made it well known in 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?*

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?*

Due to the building's long association with the Castle Family and continuance in use as a chemist since 1898, it is a Newtown landmark and held in high regard

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 building has been in continuous use as a pharmacy for over 110 years, during which time there have been few intrusive alterations to its external form (with the notable exception of the modern shopfront). The building contributes to the sense of place and continuity of the Newtown Central Suburban Centre Heritage Area.

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?*

The building contributes to a consistent historic streetscape. Such a streetscape is rare in Wellington, especially so close to the city centre.

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?*

Local/Regional/National/International

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

5.0 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)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	n	
Plan change?	y	Plan Change 75
Heritage Area Report	y	Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	n	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	n	
HPT website	y	Not registered
HPT files	n	
Conservation Plan	n	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	n	

Background research

Table of permits from Wellington City Archives

00053:45:2902	139 Riddiford Street [139-141 Riddiford Street], semi-detached shops and dwellings plus sheds	Applicant: Hawthorn and Crump. Owner: Wylie and Castle	25 Jul 1898
00056:51:B4983	139 Riddiford Street, alterations to shop	Legal description: Lot part 2 DP 779. Owner: J Castle. Builder: E Jorgensen. Application value: £485. Floor area: 280 square feet. Note: Building permit index card has remark 'Agreed to by Council'	27 Mar 1928
00058:1322:C55720	139 Riddiford Street, shop front alterations	Legal description: Lot part 2 DP 779. Owner: J Castle. Builder: Martine Leciner. Architect: Craig Craig Moller. Application value: \$3,280. Note: John Castle pharmacy building	1981
00059:0:D80	139 Riddiford Street, part repile	Legal description: Part Lot 2 Town Acre 779 DP 180 Part Lot 2 DP 80. Owner: R Bhikha. Applicant: Denis J Morgan Ltd. Application value: \$3,900. Note: Permit contains application documentation and specifications only, does not contain plans.	12 Apr 1985
00059:12:	139 Riddiford Street,	Legal description: Part lot 2 DP 80.	1986

D3505	flat additions and alterations	Owner and builder: R Bhikha. Application value: \$20,000.		
00059:34 2:E18855	139 Riddiford Street, office building additions and alterations	Legal description: Lot 2 DP 80. Owner: Bhikha Manchhi, Raman and Mohan. Application value: \$7,000.		1990
SR Code	SR Type	SRI Description	SRI Status	Current Updated
197622	Bdg StrengthInv	Notice Expires 8/06/2027.	Yellow Notice Issued	8/06/2012
240243	aBLDG CONSENT	2.1 - 2.2 Commercial - Strengthening of existing building for an earthquake of two thirds of new building standard. Install a steel portal frame to span across shop front at ground floor to first floor level.	Inspection	6/08/2012
241456	RC - a Res.Con	Land Use: Earthquake strengthening of a heritage building	Passed to Holding	28/11/2011