

Plumbers Building (former)

122-124 Wakefield Street



Photo: The former Plumbers Building

Summary of heritage significance

- Plumbers Building is a good representative example of a 1920s Stripped Classical warehouse, designed by well-known Wellington architect William Fielding.
- This building retains much of its original street frontage and is an important streetscape element in Wakefield Street
- The building is one of several buildings on Wakefield Street that contribute to the character of the Cuba Street Heritage Area. These buildings represent a diverse group of purposes and architectural styles which neatly encapsulates the history of 20th century development in this area.

District Plan:	Map 17, Symbol 326/2
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 83937
Heritage Area:	Cuba Street Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Not listed
Archaeological Site:	
Other Names:	Mutual House
Key physical dates:	Built: 1923. Additional storeys added: 1933
Architect / Builder:	Architect: William Fielding (1923 & 1933) Builders: McLean & Gray (1923) / Higgs & Arcus (1933)
Former uses:	Commercial
Current uses:	Commercial / residential
Earthquake Prone Status:	s124 served 26 April 2010, expires 25 April 2025 (SR163147)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The original three-storey building was designed by prominent Wellington architect William Fielding. It was built in 1923 for Plumbers Ltd. of Wakefield Street by McLean and Gray for an estimated cost of £9,117.¹ The ground floor had two offices, a showroom, and a warehouse at the rear. The plans show the first and second floors were designed as warehouse spaces. Loading and delivery were provided through yards to the building's rear. Along with Plumbers Ltd., one of the first occupants was Alexander & Co Ltd., who had a factory on one of the floors of the new building where they produced "frocks, evening wear, underwear etc."²

Plumbers Ltd. was a private company set up by hardware merchant Arthur W. Thompson and F.T. Warring of Wellington, and J.A. Brown of Dunedin. Its aim was to 'carry on the business of mechanical engineers, metal workers and plumbers etc.'³ Just two years after its completion, there was a fire in the building but only some packing cases and a window were damaged.⁴

In 1933 Plumbers Ltd. had an additional two storeys added to the building, again the architect was Fielding. The addition, over the full area of the building, was made in reinforced concrete. The work was carried out by Higgs & Arcus Builders for an estimated cost of £3,690.⁵ The 1933 addition is indicated by the extant, original cornice between the second and third floors.



Looking south west across the intersection of Wakefield and Cuba Streets, Wellington, showing the Dental & Medical Supply Co Ltd building (foreground) and the Plumbers Building at 122-124 Wakefield Street (right of centre). Photograph taken in the early 1950s by Gordon Burt of Wellington. (ATL 1/1-015405-F)

¹ WC Archives 00055:17:A1654

² Evening Post, Volume CVIII, Issue 50, 27 August 1924, Page 3

³ Evening Post, Volume XCVII, Issue 108, 9 May 1919, Page 10

⁴ Evening Post, Volume CX, Issue 37, 12 August 1925, Page 3

⁵ WC Archives 00056:139:B12581, and Evening Post, Volume CXVI, Issue 91, 14 October 1933, Page 5

Plumbers Ltd owned and occupied part of the building until 1970 when the building was sold. In the late 70s the ground floor was converted to a “tearoom and takeaway”.⁶ In 1995 the building was converted to apartments⁷, and a rooftop penthouse, consisting of two apartments, was added.⁸



The building in 1994, prior to the penthouse addition (1995 Inventory).



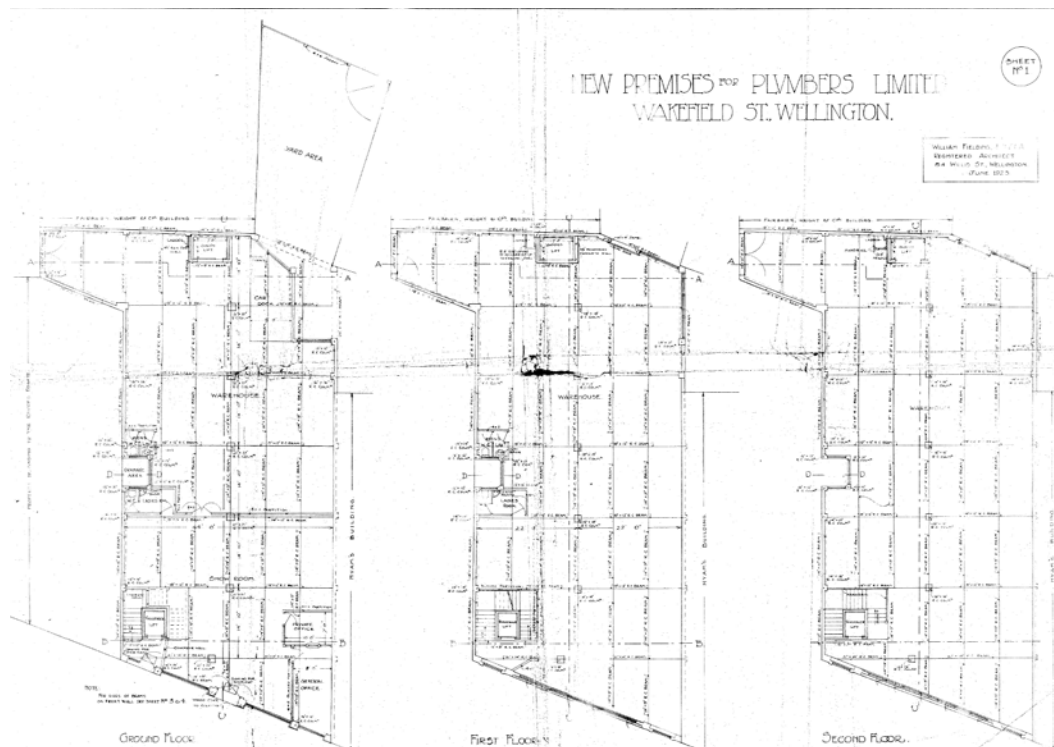
The building c2000. Note the 1995 penthouse addition visible above the parapet (2001 Inventory).

⁶ WC Archives 00058:1149:C49530

⁷ WC Archives 00061:115:13761

⁸ WC Archives 00061:116:13793

1.2 Timeline of modifications



Detail from the original 1923 plans (WC Archives 00055:17:A1654)

- 1923 construction (00055:17:A1654)
- 1933 Two additional stories & verandah (00056:139:B12581)
- 1964 Building alterations, new lift (00058:348:C14972)
- 1969 Toilets (00058:659:C30317)
- 1975 Fourth floor partitions (00058:1004:C43863)
- 1976 Fire escape (00058:1022:C44582)
- 1978 Convert ground floor to tearoom and takeaway (00058:1149:C49530)
- 1994 Seismic upgrade of party wall and minor alterations (00060:180:6519)
- 1995 Conversion to apartments (00061:115:13761)
- 1995 Seismic upgrading (00061:126:14105)
- 1995 Additions & alterations – penthouses – 2 apartments (00061:116:13793)
- 1995 Residential development, third floor and balconies (00061:138:14483)
- 1996 Car park at rear of building (00061:211:16707)
- 1996 Alterations to entrance canopy (00078:572:20016)
- 2001 Strengthening of deck & structure below to accommodate spa pool (00078:622:73307)
- 2004 Internal fit-out for restaurant (00078:1242:113004)
- 2005 Shop alterations (00078:2075:134202)

1.3 Occupation history

Plumbers Ltd (Stones 1925, 1930, 1935, 1940, 1945, Wises 1950-51, 1955, 1961-62, 1967-68).

Tenants include:

Alexander & Co, soft-goods manufacturers & importers (Stones 1925, 1930),
Warner Brothers First National Pictures Ltd (Stones 1935, 1940, 1945,
Wises 1950-51, 1955, 1961-62),
Irish Linen Spinning & Weaving Co (Stones 1935, 1940, 1945, Wises 1950-51, 1955,
1961-62),
Poland Spalding & Wickham Jones Ltd, skin importers (Stones 1935, 1940, 1945,
Wises 1971-72),
Hillcastle NZ Ltd, general merchants (Wises 1950-51, 1955, 1961-62),
H.E Perry Ltd, photographic supplies (Wises 1971-2, 1975, 1980, 1985),
Armed Forces Canteen Council (Wises 1975, 1980, 1985),
City Limits Cafe (Wises 1985, 1990)

1.4 Architect

William Fielding (c1876 – 1946)

William Fielding⁹ was born in Lancashire, England and worked as an architect in Manchester where he was made a junior partner. He married Lily Midgley in 1900 and the family, with daughter May (born in 1904), emigrated to New Zealand in 1908. The family established themselves in Hataitai and son Robert was born in 1921.¹⁰

William Fielding established an architectural practice in 1911 and his work includes:-

- Congregational Church, Cambridge Terrace (1916)
- Mutual Building; former Plumbers Building (1923 & 1933) 124 Wakefield Street
- Evening Post Building, Willis Street (1927)
- Wellington Trades Hall 124-128 Vivian Street (1927)
- Methodist Church, Hataitai (1928)
- Block of flats at 2 Hawker Street, Mt Victoria (1941) & another at 93 Brougham Street, Mt Victoria (1935)

He was also, for a time, the chair of the Wellington branch of the NZIA.

⁹ Wellington City Council Heritage Building Inventory 2001 – Appendix III Wellington Architects

¹⁰ Hataitai Local History website accessed July 2012 <http://www.heritagehelp.co.nz/locals.html> note that the website references Evening Post articles of 26th and 29th July 1946 (possibly Mr Fielding's obituary)

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture¹¹

Plumbers House, a 1920s Stripped Classical building, is six stories tall consisting of five older storeys (three floors of original (1923), with two floors added in 1933) and a recent roof-top addition.¹²

Plumbers Building is a transitional building that is influenced by both Classicism and Modernism. The principal feature of the facade is the very wide central window span permitted by the use of load-bearing reinforced concrete beams. The slender metal joinery and large glazing areas permit a generous degree of natural lighting to the upper floors.

The facade is symmetrical, with two flanking “piers”, and is capped by a simple parapet. Decorative detail is confined to egg-and-dart moulding under the entablature, decorative metal grills at the top of the piers, and a strip of moulding at first-floor level. An interesting surviving feature is the original cornice between the second and third floors.

The building retains much of its original street frontage, despite being capped with an unrefined roof-top addition.¹³

2.2 Materials

The construction is reinforced concrete foundations, walls, floors and columns, with internal timber joinery of redwood and rimu.¹⁴

2.3 Setting¹⁵

The Plumbers building is one of several buildings on Wakefield Street that are included in the Cuba Street Heritage Area. These buildings represent a quite diverse group of purposes and architectural styles which neatly encapsulates the history of 20th century development in this area.

The Plumbers building is flanked on the west by Hyams Building, a tall four storey masonry building in a simple early Edwardian Classical style, now less its original parapet. Both of these buildings retain much of their original street frontages. This pair is flanked with modern buildings to the Cuba Street corner. The first is Wakefield Apartments, a conversion of a simple but well-proportioned late 1950s Structon Group office building which is very interestingly detailed at the main street entrance and which also retains much of its original street frontage. It is nine original stories high with a roof-top addition. The corner building is a modern apartment block with large projecting balconies and arcade at street level.

¹¹ Wellington City Council, “122-124 Wakefield Street”, *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 2001), CUBA 50.

¹² Kelly, Michael and Russell Murray, Section 32 Report - *Cuba Street Heritage Area*. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006).

¹³ Michael Kelly and Russell Murray, *Cuba Street Heritage Area Report*. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006).

¹⁴ WC Archives 00055:17:A1654

¹⁵ Adapted from: Michael Kelly and Russell Murray, *Cuba Street Heritage Area Report*. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006).

3.0 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?

Plumbers Building is a good representative example of a 1920s Stripped Classical warehouse, notable for its very wide central window span which allows natural light to flood into the upper floors.

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?

This building is an important streetscape element in Wakefield Street, and contributes to the character of the Cuba Street Heritage Area.

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 Plumbers building is one of several buildings on Wakefield Street that are included in the Cuba Street Heritage Area. These buildings represent a quite diverse group of purposes and architectural styles which neatly encapsulates the history of 20th century development in this area.

Historic Value:

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

The building has historic value for its association the architect William Fielding, a well-regarded local 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?

It is known that there has been pre-1900 human activity on the site; hence this site has potential archaeological value.

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?

This building is part of a group of commercial buildings on Wakefield Street which contribute to the sense of place and continuity of the Cuba Street 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?*

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

The building is a good representative example of a 1920s Stripped Classical warehouse.

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 retains much of its original street frontage, despite being capped with an unsympathetic roof-top addition.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

This building is of local importance, as it contributes to the Cuba Street Heritage Area.

4.0 Sources

Wellington City Council Heritage Building Inventory 2001 – Appendix III Wellington Architects

Hataitai Local History website accessed July 2012

<http://www.heritagehelp.co.nz/locals.html> note that the website references Evening Post articles of 26th and 29th July 1946 (possibly Mr Fielding's obituary)

Wellington City Council, "122-124 Wakefield Street", *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 2001), CUBA 50.

Kelly, Michael and Russell Murray, *Cuba Street Heritage Area Report*. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006).

WCC Records, 1041-06-WAK124

WC Archives

00055:17:A1654

00056:139:B12581

00058:1149:C49530

00061:115:13761

00061:116:13793

Newspapers

Evening Post, Volume CVIII, Issue 50, 27 August 1924, Page 3

Evening Post, Volume CXVI, Issue 91, 14 October 1933, Page 5

5.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report	Y	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	Y	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	N	Not listed
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	Nothing found

Background research

Evening Post, Volume CV, Issue 143, 18 June 1923, Page 8
 “a three-story warehouse for Plumbers, Ltd., will shortly be started on a site adjoining the corner of Cuba-street.”

Evening Post, Volume CVIII, Issue 50, 27 August 1924, Page 3

MACHINISTS WANTED IMMEDIATELY.
K. ALEXANDER AND CO., LTD.—
 The Company's new factory in Plumbers' Building, Wakefield street, offers first-class conditions, and good wages, to experienced hands, in the making of Frocks, Evening Wear, Underwear, etc.
 Apply personally at the above address.

Evening Post, Volume CX, Issue 37, 12 August 1925, Page 3

FIRE IN WAKEFIELD STREET

A number of packing cases and a window were damaged in a fire which occurred shortly after 1 o'clock this morning at 122, Wakefield street, a building occupied by Plumbers Ltd. The building was insured for £4000 in the Ocean Office and for £2000 in the Phoenix Office, while the contents were covered by a policy for £6000 in the Royal Insurance Company.

Evening Post, Volume CXVI, Issue 91, 14 October 1933, Page 5

Two extra storeys are being added to the building in Wakefield Street owned and occupied by Plumbers, Ltd. The addition is being made in reinforced concrete, over the full area of the building, and will cost about £4000. Messrs. Higgins and Arcus are the contractors. Mr. W. Fielding is the architect.

1996 strengthening – grant - encumbrance

What's New Ltd. Applied for assistance from the Earthquake Risk Building Fund in 1996 to assist with strengthening. What's New were offered a grant of \$34,157.39. *The work was carried out*, however, the money was not released as conditions of the agreement were not met (The release of any money was only to be made upon completion of a legal agreement to ensure that the building is retained for a specified number of years and a memorandum of encumbrance is lodged against the title accordingly).¹⁶

¹⁶ WCC Records, 1041-06-WAK124

ARCHITECT
William Fielding (1876-1946)

‘There is little information available about William Fielding. He was an English architect. Fearnley states that he was “one of those steady but undramatic designers who neither sought, nor was subjected to, the limelight”. He designed the Evening Post Building, the Trades hall, and the Working Men’s Club, Wellington. Bruce Orchiston, another Wellington Architect, described him as “a kindly soul interested in church architecture” in the 1970s.’

http://architecture.dot5hosting.com/about/archive/2004_wellington_architecture_week/church_tour.pdf

<http://www.heritagehelp.co.nz/locals.html>

William Fielding (ca 1875-1946)

William Fielding was born in Lancashire, England around 1875 and began his architectural career with a firm in Manchester. He later became a junior partner there. In 1900 he married Lily Midgley and their daughter May was born in 1904. About 1908 the family migrated to Wellington, and they lived in Matai Rd for many years. A son named Robert was born in 1921.

Mr Fielding was the architect for several prominent buildings in Wellington including the Congregational Church in Cambridge Tce (1916), the Evening Post building in Willis St (1927), and the Methodist Church in Waitoa Rd, Hataitai (1928). He was for a time chairman of the Wellington branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, and in his private life was a member of the Hataitai Bowling Club and the Hataitai Municipal Electors' Association. William was a member of the choir at the Congregational Church, and fittingly, his funeral took place there in July 1946. Lily died in 1951 and their son Robert died at sea during a yacht race only two weeks after his mother. May married Paul R Coloney of the US Navy and died in Florida in 1990.

Sources: Evening Post, 26 and 29 July 1946; other sources.

2001 Inventory – Appendix III

“...He carried out a great deal of sound and important work, the first of which in NZ is reported in 1911, two years after he arrived here from England where he was born. His practice in New Zealand included churches, residential work, and such projects as the Working Men’s Club, The Trades Hall and the Evening Post Building, Wellington.”

1995 Inventory

William Fielding (1876-1946) was one of those steady but undramatic designers who neither sought, nor was subjected to, the limelight. He carried out a great deal of sound and important work, the first of which in New Zealand is reported in 1911, two years after his arrival here from England, where he was born. His practice in New Zealand included churches, residential work, and such projects as the Working Men's Club, the Trades Hall and the Evening Post Building, Wellington. (2)