

## **Emeny House**

1 Ranfurly Terrace



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

### **Summary of heritage significance**

- Emeny House is of architectural value for its Victorian villa styling and the high quality of its interior and exterior. It is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century artisan class dwelling that is typical of double bay villas built nationwide at the turn of the century. The house is lifted beyond the typical by the elaborate plasterwork, and because of this is an important example of Wellington domestic architecture from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- There is considerable technical value in the lath and plaster wall and ceiling linings. The latter in particular as it is now rare and its survival in the house in such good condition is testimony to the quality of the craftsmanship.
- Ranfurly Terrace has remained relatively unchanged since the time in which Emeny House was constructed, and it sits in a group of 12 relatively intact Edwardian houses. The wider area also contains a collection of buildings and houses unchanged from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

District Plan:	Map 12, 16, reference 415
Legal Description:	Lot 4 DP 855
Heritage Area:	-
HPT Listed:	-
Archaeological Site:	Pre 1900 Building
Other Names:	Emeny House
Key physical dates:	Built: 1898
Architect / Builder:	
Former uses:	Residential
Current uses:	Residential
Earthquake Prone Status:	EQ Not Necessary, Outside EQ Policy – SR 269395

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

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

Emeny House, situated at 1 Ranfurly Terrace, has considerable heritage values associated with it. It was owned and occupied by the same family for 109 years, 108 of those continuously by its owner Irene Emeny.

The house was originally constructed as speculator housing by builder Richard Keene, who had purchased Town Acre 715 from William Beck a hotelier, in 1897. Keene received approval from the Wellington City Council for a 17 lot subdivision of the land in October of that year and began selling lots and building houses soon after. It appears that the land had a water course of some sort running through it as a Deed of Grant on the title refers to the necessity of the city to divert a stream and maintain a culvert.

The permit for the dwelling at 1 Ranfurly Terrace was issued by the Wellington City Council on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1898 and the estimated cost was £350. The property was sold to Mary Emeny (née Heffernan, 1869-1953), the wife of Charles Emeny (1868-1940), on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1898. Charles Emeny was a self employed plasterer, and is responsible for the plaster work in the interior and built the ornate front fence.

The Emeny family consisted of five children – two boys, Charles and Robert (Bob), and three daughters, Kathleen (Mabel), Irene (Rene), and Alexandra (Ophir). All the children attended Mt Cook School, just a short distance north at the intersection of Tasman and Buckle Streets. Bob attended secondary school at Wellington College, but the girl's education did not extend beyond primary school, as was typical for the time.

Charles Emeny was a successful plasterer, being able to purchase a property from the Wellington City Corporation in Adelaide Road in 1906, and two years later he hired architect John Swan to extend the Ranfurly Terrace house. Swan was by this time an established architect and this must have been a modest commission. Swan's design added a billiard room, bathroom, and bedroom, along with porch and pantry. The washhouse, a separate structure was moved to accommodate the extensions. The kitchen was also altered at this time. The extension, like the rest of the house, bore the stamp of Charles Emeny's work.

Although he had put a significant amount of work into the house, some time after World War I, Charles and Mary separated and he moved in with relatives in Oriental Bay, never living in the house again.

While the boys left home, none of the girls married or left the house to live elsewhere, possible due to pressure placed on them by their mother and the change in her own marital circumstances. All the girls had working careers; Rene worked in the Town Clerk's office for 42 years, serving five Town Clerks. Ophir worked as a clerk at the Milk Department, just a short distance away in Tory Street. Mabel ran the sweet shop at the Majestic Theatre for many years and her sisters often helped in the evenings. It is thought that Mabel acquired the concession through her father's work on the theatre's plastering.

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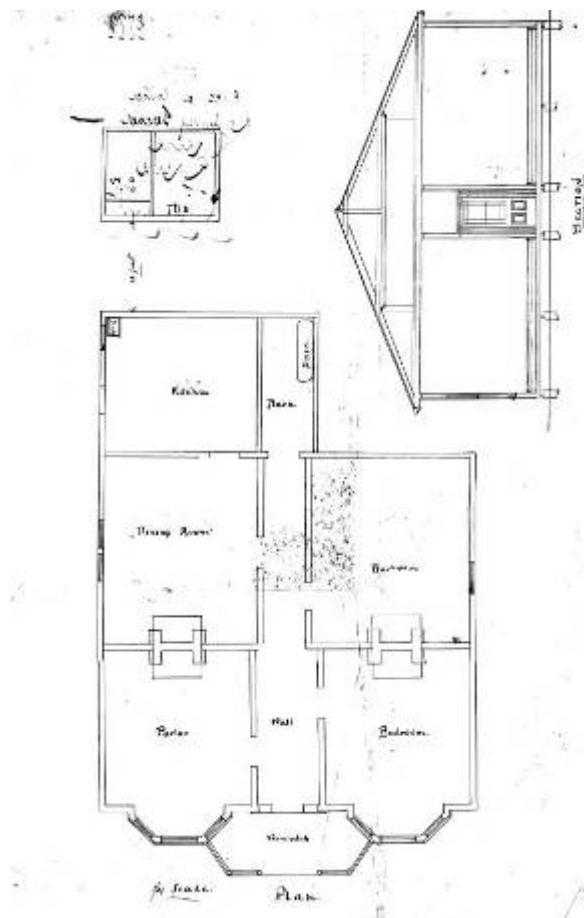
<sup>1</sup> History adapted from: Michael Kelly and Chris Cochrane '*Emeny House – 1 Ranfurly Terrace*'. (Unpublished Heritage Inventory prepared for Wellington City Council, 2007), 2-4.

Mary Emeny died in 1953, and the Emeny sisters, or 'the girls' as they were known by their friends and family, now middle aged, were free to do more with their lives. They began collecting art, travelled to England 1958 and again in 1965, and in 1970 took a cruise to the Expo in Japan. They continued their parents' pride in the presentation of the house and were keen gardeners. They are noted as being private and discreet women, but hospitable and generous.

Mabel died in 1978 and Ophir in 1992. Rene stayed on in the house, turning 100 in 1998, and a family reunion was held to mark the occasion. In 2000, at the age of 102, she distinguished herself by carrying the Olympic Torch during its passage through Wellington, setting what the *Dominion Post* described as a 'cracking pace'. She was profiled by the newspaper in 2006 and it was then that the continuous occupation of the house came to public attention. Irene Emeny passed away on 5 February 2007 and a service in her honour was held in St Mark's Anglican Church on 9 February.

Following her death the property was taken over by executors. The contents of the house were sold separately, although with some exceptions, most notably the billiard table. The house was put on the market and sold to Debra and Tony De Lorenzo in October 2007. They remain the owners and have carried out extensive restoration and renovation. As the only home in Wellington with an exterior and interior district plan listing, the renovations have stayed true to the original structure.

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications (original plans)



Original 1898 plans (00053:43:2779)

- 1898 1 Ranfurly Terrace, dwelling (00053:43:2779)  
1908 1 Ranfurly Terrace, additions and alterations (00053:143:7949)  
1965 1 Ranfurly Terrace, repile dwelling (00058:407:C17419)  
2007 1 Ranfurly Terrace, repile dwelling (00078:3080:169993)

### 1.3 Architect

There is no architect known for the house, which was a standard speculative villa, common in Mt Cook and Wellington and indeed the whole of New Zealand.

#### **Additions:**

#### **Swan, John<sup>2</sup>**

Swan (1874-1936) practised architecture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He formed part of the last group of architects to follow the traditional Gothic and Classical styles. He was articled to Frederick de Jersey Clere, working with Clere on many major designs such as the Wellington Rowing Club building (then known as the Naval Artillery Boat Shed, 1894) as well as smaller provincial buildings such as the Church of the Good Shepherd, Tinui. The firm was known as Clere, Fitzgerald and Richmond and was one of the most prominent architectural practices in Wellington. From 1901 to 1906 Swan was in partnership with Clere, practising on his own account from 1907. The first major design produced by Swan in this new practice was the Karori Crematorium (1907) which served to establish his architectural identity separate from Clere. During his long and varied career Swan produced a large and wide range of work, including a number of banks for the National Bank such as the head office building in Wellington (1907), educational buildings for the Wellington Technical College with William Gray Young (1922), and a number of major buildings for the Catholic Church including St Gerard's Church, Mt Victoria (1910), Sacred Heart Convent (later Erskine College), Island Bay (1909), and Wanganui Convent (1912). He was an architect of imagination as evidenced by the design of his own house 'The Moorings', Glenbervie Terrace (1905).

## 2.0 Physical description

### 2.1 Architecture

#### Exterior:

The house is a single storey timber dwelling and has a north facing façade addressing Ranfurly Street. The overall form of the dwelling is a double bay central plan villa with a hipped roof. The house has rusticated weatherboards, bracketed eaves, and column like mouldings that frame the three sided bay windows. The entrance porch is sheltered by a shallow hipped roof and carried on two slender posts. Decorative fretwork helps to establish the entrance as the focal point of the façade. The front door has sidelights, but these are partially obscured by a modern screen door. The house is lit by double hung sash windows on all four sides and has a corrugated iron roof, interrupted by two chimneys at the front of the house and a flue at the rear. The rear exit is via the kitchen on the eastern side.

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<sup>2</sup> Historic Places Trust, 'John S. Swan', *Professional Biographies*, accessed 20 September 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=209>

## Interior:

Following the 1908 alterations and additions the house remained in almost typical villa style, with the entrance hall running straight from the front door to the rear of the house. The house was separated into two halves on either side of the hall. To the west (running north-south) are the four bedrooms and the billiard room; to the east (running north-south) are the lounge and dining room, kitchen and bathroom.

The walls and ceiling are lined with lath and plaster, almost certainly the work of Charles Emeny. Solid plasterwork – cornices, roses, arches etc. – is evident in almost every room. There is also a great amount of timber joinery – mainly doors, skirting and architraves facing the hall. All of the formal spaces, and most of the bedrooms, contain plasterwork of varying levels of ornamentation. The most decorative room is the billiard room, which is Rococo like in the richness of the decoration and colour, highlighted by painted portraits on the ceiling.

## 2.2 Materials

- Timber
- Plaster
- Corrugated iron roofing

## 2.3 Setting

The house occupies almost the full width of a narrow rectangular section running north-south on the southern side of Ranfurly Street. The house sits back off the street, while the front boundary to the property is defined by an ornate masonry fence. There is a flagpole in front of the house alongside a neatly tended formally arranged garden. More broadly Emeny House is in a relatively unchanged setting from the time of its construction. The street is made up of a group of 12 relatively intact Edwardian houses, and with the exception of a modern commercial block and an apartment building, the wider area contains a collection of buildings and houses unchanged from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3.0 Sources**

Historic Places Trust. 'John S. Swan'. *Professional Biographies*. Accessed 20 September 2013,  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=209>

Kelly, Michael and Chris Cochrane. '*Emeny House – 1 Ranfurly Terrace*'. Unpublished Heritage Inventory prepared for Wellington City Council, 2007.

#### **Wellington City Archive**

1898 1 Ranfurly Terrace, dwelling (00053:43:2779)  
1908 1 Ranfurly Terrace, additions and alterations (00053:143:7949)  
1965 1 Ranfurly Terrace, repile dwelling (00058:407:C17419)  
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## 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?

Emeny House is of architectural value for its Victorian villa styling and the high quality of its interior and exterior. It is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century artisan class dwelling that is typical of double bay villas built nationwide at the turn of the century. The house is lifted beyond the typical by the elaborate plasterwork, and because of this is an important example of Wellington domestic architecture from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

***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 house is of significant townscape value contributing to the visual interest of Ranfurly Terrace. Set back from the street, the front boundary is defined by an ornate masonry fence, and a flagpole and neatly tended garden add to the character of the site.

***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?

Ranfurly Terrace has remained relatively unchanged since the time in which Emeny House was constructed, and it sits in a group of 12 relatively intact Edwardian houses. The wider area also contains a collection of buildings and houses unchanged from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Historic Value:**

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

Emeny House has considerable historic value from its association with one family for 109 years, being continuously occupied by one woman, Irene Emeny, for her entire life until her death in 2007.

***Association:*** Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?

This house also has general historical value as an example of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century dwelling that is typical of double bay villas built nationwide at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **Scientific Value:**

***Archaeological:*** Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?

The house was constructed pre 1900 making it an archaeological site. It is also included in the NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270.



**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?*

There is considerable technical value in the lath and plaster wall and ceiling linings. The latter in particular as it is now rare and its survival in the house in such good condition is testimony to the quality of the craftsmanship.

**Social Value:**

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

By the end of her life, Irene Emeny had achieved some fame, and the extraordinary parallel between her own life and that of the house became public knowledge.

**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?*

There is rarity value in the lath and plasterwork in the house, particularly as the ceiling plasterwork is now a rare feature.

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

The house is a fine representative example of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century dwelling, typical of bay villas built nationwide at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**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?*

This house has considerable authenticity, retaining significant amounts of interior and exterior materials as well as authenticity of setting.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

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

This house is the testament to the lifetime of one family, with the fittings and furnishings being the product of the seven people who lived there between 1898 and 2007. It is of local value for its historical associations, architectural and aesthetic qualities, its technical values, and as a representative of late 19<sup>th</sup> century dwellings.

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## 4.0 Appendix

### Research checklist (desktop)

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

### 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*