

TIMARU DISTRICT COUNCIL
HISTORIC HERITAGE ITEM RECORD FORM

HERITAGE ITEM NAME former Government Buildings / Timaru Post Office

ADDRESS 12-16 Sophia Street, Timaru

PHOTOGRAPH



(A McEwan, 9 July 2018)

DISTRICT PLAN ITEM No. New **HNZ LIST No. & CATEGORY** n / a
(at time of assessment)

LEGAL DESCRIPTION Lot 3 DP 56548

VALUATION NUMBER 2500053800

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION 1879-1881 +

**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER/
BUILDER** RA Lawson, architect; Messrs Tubb & Targus[e],
contractors

STYLE Italianate

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Two/three-storey building with slightly irregular rectangular footprint and multiple hipped roof forms. Principal elevations, facing north-east and south-east, have rusticated walls and classical door and window surrounds. Two-storey wing overlooking King George Place has symmetrical façade with centre and ends composition. Off-set balustraded first floor balconies above entries with entablatures and Doric columns. Single storey elevation on Sophia Street has balustraded parapet and classical portico motif. Building is three stories in height at rear due to sloping site. Double-hung sash windows other than where modern fenestration has been installed.

MATERIALS/STRUCTURE

Brick, cement plaster, concrete, corrugated metal.

ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS

Telephone exchange added (1885). Additions along Sophia Street (1919-22). Removal of clock and demolition of tower (1933). Masonry detailing at parapet level removed (c.1950). Windows cut down to ground level on Sophia Street frontage (date unknown).

SETTING

The building stands on the southern portion of the triangular block bounded by Perth and Sophia Streets and King George Place. On the opposite side of King George Place are the Timaru District Council offices (heritage item # 48); the South Canterbury Museum is across Perth Street to the west. To the north-west is St Mary's Anglican Church (heritage item # 50)

and to the north across Sophia Street is the Royal Arcade. The extent of scheduling is the land parcel on which the former post office stands; it includes the former post & telegraph garages and the stone wall on the Perth Street/King George Place boundary.

HISTORY

Timaru's first post office was erected in c. 1862; it was replaced in 1879-81 by Government Buildings built to the design of Dunedin architect RA Lawson. The new premises housed the town's post and telegraph offices as well as the Government Insurance Office, the Customs office, and the Board of Education. A new telephone exchange was opened in the building on 16 October 1885. The importance of the government precinct in the town's civic affairs was underlined with the erection of the Wrecks Monument on the north corner of the site in 1883/1885 (heritage item #49) and a drinking fountain to mark the jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign outside the main entry in 1887. The latter was later moved to the botanic gardens (1960). By 1903 the exchange had 174 subscribers and the South Canterbury Board was responsible for 70 schools, between the Rangitata and Waitaki Rivers. The building began as a two-storey block on King George Place with a lower-level wing at the rear. It was enlarged to the north in the early 1920s and safety concerns prompted by the 1931 Napier earthquake led to the clocktower being removed in 1933. The clock that had been installed in the tower in 1913, a gift from Mayor James Craigie that replaced the original clock, was then transferred to the council chambers across the road. A new automatic telephone exchange was built directly to the north of the post office in 1957. The building is no longer occupied by the Post Office and has been in commercial use for some time.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The former Government Buildings / Timaru Post Office has historical and social significance for its association with the development of the town's governmental infrastructure and the former staff and their customers of the various government departments housed in the buildings over the years.

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The former Government Buildings / former Timaru Post Office has cultural value as a site of community identity and as a demonstration of the working life of dozens of government employees over many decades.

ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

The former Government Buildings / former Timaru Post Office has architectural significance as the work of leading New Zealand architect RA Lawson. Lawson (1833-1902) had earlier designed the Lawrence Warden's Court/Post Office (1866) and he secured the commission for the Timaru Post Office and the Seacliff Lunatic Asylum (1878) at a time when the Public Works Department had devolved responsibility for South Island public works to its Dunedin office. Born and trained in Scotland, Lawson emigrated to Australia in 1854 and arrived in New Zealand in 1862. Known for his design of First Church (1862-73) in Dunedin, Lawson designed over 40 churches and was also responsible for an early Bank of New Zealand building in Timaru (demolished). Lawson designed Larnach Castle (1871-76) on Otago Peninsula and the Dunedin Municipal Chambers (1878-80), which was the model for his Timaru Post Office design. He moved to Melbourne in 1890 but returned to Dunedin in 1900. Lawson died during a family visit to Sutherlands near Pleasant Point in 1902.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

The former Government Buildings / former Timaru Post Office has technological and craftsmanship value for its brick construction and the quality of its classical detailing. Messrs Tubb & Targus[e] were Dunedin contractors.

CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The former Government Buildings / former Timaru Post Office has contextual significance as a notable historic feature on the edge of the Timaru town centre. The building forms a civic and governmental precinct with the Timaru District Council buildings on the south side of King George Place.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

As the building pre-dates 1900 its site has potential archaeological significance relating to the colonial development of the government precinct within the town centre.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The former Government Buildings / former Timaru Post Office has overall heritage significance to Timaru and Timaru district as a whole. The building has historical and social significance for its association with the provision of central government services in the township and cultural value as a demonstration of the way of life of its former staff and their customers. The former Government Buildings / former Timaru Post Office has architectural significance as the work of preeminent Dunedin architect RA Lawson and technological and craftsmanship value for its plastered brick masonry construction and classical detailing. The former Government Buildings / former Timaru Post Office has contextual significance for the contribution it makes to the governmental precinct in King George Place and its site has potential archaeological significance in view of its pre-1900 development.

HERITAGE CATEGORY

B

REFERENCES

- *Timaru Herald* 18 July 1879, p. 2; 13 March 1880, p. 2; 30 July 1880, p. 3; 14 September 1880, p. 2; 22 October 1914, p. 3; 14 May 1919, p. 6; 8 November 1919, p. 2; 28 August 1920, p. 10; 31 January 2009 (available online).
- *Otago Daily Times* 22 September 2013 (available online).
- *Otago Witness* 26 July 1879, p. 9.
- *Temuka Leader* 11 December 1879, p. 2; 19 October 1911, p. 3.
- *Lyttelton Times* 31 July 1879, p. 6.
- *South Canterbury Times* 24 August 1880, p. 3; 7 January 1882, p. 3.
- *Progress* 1 December 1919, p. 23; 1 April 1922, p. 24.
- *Cyclopedia of New Zealand – Canterbury Provincial District* Christchurch, 1903; available online.
- Peter Richardson 'Building the dominion: government architecture in New Zealand, 1840-1922' PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 1997. Available online.
- <http://www.timarucivictrust.co.nz/activities/timarus-chief-post-office>
- <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/215/lawson-robert-arthur>
- Archives New Zealand.



Extent of setting, including former post & telegraph garages on Perth Street and stone wall on Perth Street/King George Place boundary, 12-16 Sophia Street, Timaru.

