

Newest shop—oldest building

Hawera's oldest building has been given a new lease of life — as a handcraft shop.

Opposite the Post Office and Courthouse in Princes St, the building is a small single storey one next to Caplen Buildings. From the date on its pediment, 1881, until 1957 it housed commission and estate agents.

Mrs Yvonne Burr, who started the handcraft shop a few weeks ago, said she was taken by the old world look of the building, then found it was for rent. So a coat of paint on the bits that mattered and Cobweb Crafts came into being.

LOCAL STOCK

Her stock comes from local handcrafters and includes pottery, the products of spinners and weavers, knitters, basketry, leatherwork, silver jewellery and other crafts.

The title deeds of the property record William Joseph Furlong, settler, as the first owner in 1879. He sold it to James Mitchell, settler, in 1883, and it was sold to James Livingston of Hawera Republic fame in 1889. Furlong bought it back in 1890 and leased it to Charles Edwin Major, a land broker.

Mr Major was a well-known "father" of Hawera, being mayor of the town from 1886 to 1888, and from 1892 to 1901. He was a councillor at the age of 21, and became mayor at 23, thought to be the youngest mayor in the empire at that time.

He was also a Liberal Member of Parliament from 1900 to 1910.

When Mr Furlong died in 1893, his executors sold the building to Mr Major. Mr Major sold it to Mr Athol Grant in 1914.

Mr Grant, who still lives in the town, started work in 1900 as Mr Major's office boy. His name is still recorded in a land agency housed next door. Grant, Henderson and Co. He was in partnership in a land agency in the building with another mayor of Hawera, Mr J. E. Campbell, from 1920 to about 1930.

STOREROOM

Mr Grant retired in 1945, but the building continued to be used by the firm until 1957 when it was sold to Mr E. B.

Black, who used it as a storeroom for his wool shop.

It still belongs to the Black family, although Mr Black died about two years ago. Oddly enough, Mrs Burr discovered she was related to the Black family.

The building survived the great fire in Hawera in 1888. There is a four inch gap between it and the Caplen building next door. There is a story about this gap, which so far cannot be authenticated.

A Jewish gentleman, whose name does not appear on the title deeds, was supposed to have occupied it prior to the fire. When Mr Caplen was building his office next door, he wanted to build a brick fire wall and asked his neighbour to pay half the cost.

He refused, so the wall was built one brick thick instead of two hence the gap. But it must have been efficacious, because the Caplen building was destroyed in the 1888 fire, which also destroyed the Egmont Hotel, but the brick wall saved the little building.

Thought to be the oldest

building still standing in Hawera, it has corrugated iron walls and roof, but a front of what must be one of the best examples of "wooden Grecian" in the country, complete with pediment.

The conceit indulged in by our forefathers of building wood to look like stone, is one which never fails to delight visitors from England.

But like the old Hawera borough chambers which were refaced some years ago although about 20 years younger, the wooden front has

suffered the ravages of time and would possibly be too expensive to restore to its former state.

At one time, Mr Grant built a verandah on its front to cover the footpath, but this was dismantled many years ago.

THOUGHT TO BE the oldest building in Hawera and used for storage since 1957, this building is now a handcraft shop. BELOW: The building photographed just after World War I, from right, Mr Athol Grant, office girl Miss Doris Stone, and Mr J. E. Campbell, stand in front of their land agency.

