



Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Urenui Post Office (Former)

Address

24 Ngakoti Street, Urenui



Statement of Significance

This building was constructed in 1930-31 as the combined Urenui post office and residence; it replaced an earlier post office, located further south along Ngakoti Street, which was destroyed by fire on the 6th of March 1930. The former Urenui Post Office is representative of the government designed post offices erected in smaller regional towns and city suburbs during the 1920s and 1930s. The original structure largely retains its original form and key architectural features, and aside from some minor modifications, the exterior remains much as it was when first constructed. As an attractive domestic-scale building positioned on the street boundary, the former post office contributes positively to the surrounding streetscape and is one of a number of buildings in Ngakoti Street which contribute to the rural village aesthetic.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description Section 1 SO 12948

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1930-31

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals John T. Mair (architect), George MacIntosh Bennett (builder)

History

The first post office at Urenui was opened on the site of a military redoubt (former Pihanga pā) in May 1867 under the charge of Captain Thomas Good.¹ However, this office only operated for a short period before closing on the 31st of December 1867, and it wasn't until 1877 that the first permanent post office was established in Charles Rowe's recently opened store at the south-western corner of Ngakoti and Nikorima Streets.² Rowe remained postmaster until 1903, when owing to increased patronage, the first dedicated Urenui post office was erected on the site of present 4 Ngakoti Street.³ Tenders were called for the construction of a post office and adjoining postmasters residence in March-April 1903, and the building was officially opened by the Premier Sir Joseph Ward on the 17th of December 1903.⁴

Miss Teresa A. Honan was appointed non-classified postmistress to take charge of the new office from 17th December 1903.⁵ Honan wasn't to become a permanent staff member until 1908, a short time before her replacement by Miss A. M. Hickson later that year.⁶ Hickson was replaced by Mrs M. L. Hovell in 1910, who remained until 1913, when D. Oliver took over duties.⁷ F. A. Hansmann replaced Oliver in 1914 and remained in the role until 1918, when Mrs E. F. Sullivan entered the position.⁸ Miss M. McCarthy filled the role for a short period during 1922, before being replaced by G. Toms later that year.⁹ In 1925, during Toms tenure at the office, a large fire almost destroyed the building, but through the efforts of local residents who formed a bucket brigade it was spared from the flames; although several buildings along Ngakoti Street were destroyed.¹⁰

Toms' vacated the position the following year when Mr G. Loveridge was appointed postmaster as part of the permanent staff. Loveridge resided in the adjoining residence with his wife and children and was seemingly well liked by local residents.¹¹ Several years into Loveridge's tenure a large fire again took hold in Ngakoti Street; this time the post office would not be so lucky. On the night of March

¹ *Taranaki Herald*, 27 May 1931, page 4

² Startup, Robin & McNiven, Andrew. *Postmark Taranaki*. New Plymouth: Tarapex 86, 1985.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Taranaki Daily News*, 20 March 1903, page 3; *Taranaki Herald*, 17 December 1903, page 5

⁵ Startup, Robin & McNiven, Andrew. *Postmark Taranaki*. New Plymouth: Tarapex 86, 1985.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Taranaki Herald*, 11 May 1925, page 6

¹¹ *Taranaki Herald*, 27 May 1931, page 4



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6th 1930 a fire broke out in a nearby store occupied by Roy Fitzgerald and despite the best efforts of volunteers, the fire spread to the post office and the building was completely destroyed.¹² Whilst the building was a complete loss, through the frantic efforts of local residents, post office records, valuable equipment such as the telephone exchange, and almost all of the Loveridge's possessions were removed from the premises before the flames took hold.¹³

Following the fire, a temporary post office was hastily opened in premises on the opposite side of Ngakoti Street whilst arrangements were made for the erection of a new post office building.¹⁴ Later in 1930, it was decided to construct a new post office on a larger section situated further north along Ngakoti Street opposite the town hall; post office records indicate that Section 73 of Urenui Township was purchased by the Department for this purpose during 1930.¹⁵ The building appears to have been designed by Public Works Department architect John T. Mair, whose name is stamped on a copy of the original plans now held by Archives New Zealand.¹⁶ The successful tenderer for the construction of the new office was builder George MacIntosh Bennett of New Plymouth, with the construction cost being £1518.¹⁷ It is somewhat surprising given the recent history of conflagration in Urenui's commercial centre that timber was again chosen as the principal construction material for the new post office. Whilst the shops at 6-10 Ngakoti Street were reconstructed using reinforced concrete in response to the 1925 and 1930 fires, it may be that the new post office site was considered far enough away from other structures to be deemed safe from the threat of fire.

Construction commenced on the 20th of November 1930, however, owing to unfavourable weather, the building was not completed until the 10th of March 1931.¹⁸ The new post office was officially opened by the Postmaster General, the Hon. J. B. Donald, on the afternoon of Tuesday 26th May 1931.¹⁹ A committee chaired by local resident Mr R. H. Piggott was responsible for opening day festivities, with flags hung in the street contributing to a cheery atmosphere.²⁰ Amongst those gathered for the ceremony were Urenui School children, local MP Mr W. J. Polson, and New Plymouth's chief postmaster Mr F. E. Beamish.²¹ The Hon. Mr Donald spoke of the history of the post office at Urenui and also took the opportunity to announce new broadcasting regulations to come into force in the near future.²² On unlocking the front door the Minister declared the post office open and invited all those present to inspect the new building.²³ Following an afternoon tea in the Urenui Town Hall opposite (present building at 23 Ngakoti Street), the Minister met with a deputation of local ladies who wished the old post office site be set aside for a ladies rest room; as a result of these talks the present building at 4 Ngakoti Street was erected as a ladies rest room and later served as a Plunket room.²⁴

The post office and residence were initially lighted by a 'Wizard' gas lighting system, installed by Messrs Early Bros of Wellington at the time of construction.²⁵ Electric lighting superseded gas in 1935, with lights and hot points installed in both the post office and residence on the 21st of October; the

¹² *Taranaki Herald*, 7 March 1930, page 3

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Startup, Robin & McNiven, Andrew. *Postmark Taranaki*. New Plymouth: Tarapex 86, 1985.

¹⁵ New Zealand Post Office, Urenui [Record Book 1930-54], ARC2001-167, Puke Ariki (PA).

¹⁶ [Public Works Plans – Urenui Post Office], John T. Mair, circa. 1930, Item ID R19485623, Series 22541, Box 2645, Record 119143, Archives New Zealand (ANZ).

¹⁷ New Zealand Post Office, Urenui [Record Book 1930-54], ARC2001-167, Puke Ariki (PA).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Taranaki Herald*, 27 May 1931, page 4

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

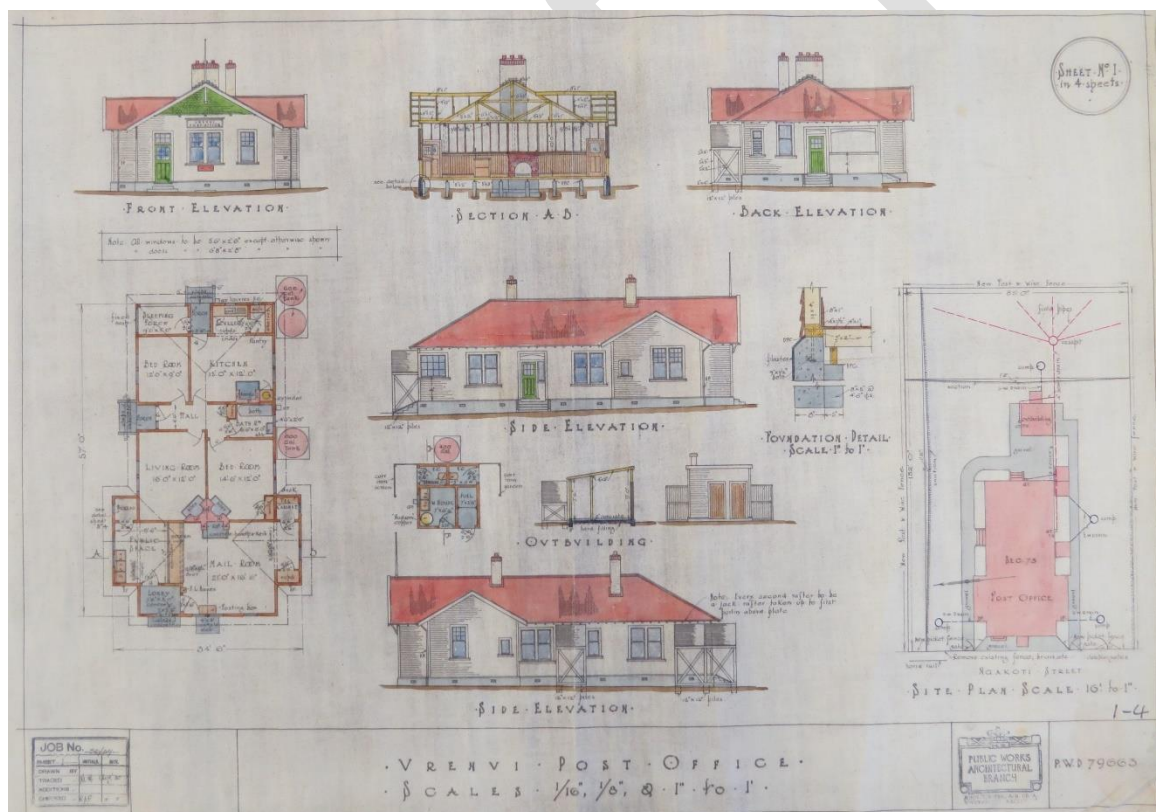
²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ New Zealand Post Office, Urenui [Record Book 1930-54], ARC2001-167, Puke Ariki (PA).

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contractor was William Edward Bennett of Rawhiti Street, New Plymouth.²⁶ Other work undertaken in the following decades includes construction of the detached garage with coal/wood storage, which was erected by H. Drewery between December 1940 and March 1941 at a cost of £160 7s; a 32ft well was sunk on the site at a cost of £14 2s 6d in 1946; the front southern gable was enlarged in 1946-47; and the telephone exchange was upgraded to automatic working in 1968.²⁷

Postmasters/mistresses following Loveridge's departure in 1933 include D. J. McCorkindale from 1933 until 1940; Oliver H. Cross from 1940 until 1955; R. G. Haigh from 1955 until 1962; T. R. Folly from 1962 until 1967; J. R. Martin from 1967 until 1972; Mrs A. Cooper from 1972 until 1977, Mrs J. M. Clarke from 1977 until 1980; G. Ahuriri from 1980 until 1984; and Mrs Bev Terrill from 1986 until the offices' closure on Friday 30th June 1989.²⁸ It seems the impetus for the closure was upcoming government deregulation of the postal service, whereby the market was being opened up to private competitors. A postal service centre offering a smaller range of services was set up in the Urenui Garage following the post office's closure.²⁹ The building and section was sold by New Zealand Post Ltd. to private owners in 1990.



[Public Works Plans – Urenui Post Office], John T. Mair, circa. 1930, Item ID R19485623, Agency ACHL, Series 22541, Record Group W5, Box 2645, Record 119143, Archives New Zealand (ANZ).

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid;

²⁸ Startup, Robin & McNiven, Andrew. *Postmark Taranaki*. New Plymouth: Tarapex 86, 1985

²⁹ *The Daily News*, 1 July 1989, page 3; *Waitara and Inglewood Press*, 5 July 1989, page 1



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Description

The former Urenui Post Office is located on the eastern side of Ngakoti Street, in Urenui Township, about 30 km north-east of New Plymouth city. Urenui Township began as a military settlers' settlement around the Urenui redoubt in 1865, and whilst it still retains a number of older buildings constructed between the 1870s and 1930s, development pressures since the 1990s has seen the construction of many modern dwellings in the wider township area. To the immediate south of the former post office is the former Dunbar residence (circa 1910s), whilst directly opposite is the now much modified former Urenui Town Hall (1892) and St Paul's Church (1887).

The main form of the building is a steeply-pitched half-hipped gable with asymmetrical projecting front gables. The building is of a domestic scale and style and incorporates features from the bungalow and English Cottage styles popular at the time. The building is wooden-framed on concrete foundations, the walls are clad in horizontal bevel-back weatherboards and the roof is sheathed in mild corrugated steel. A large three-flue brick and plastered chimney rises from the centre-front of the main gable, with a further single-flue chimney offset at the rear.

The asymmetrical main front elevation faces roughly west into Ngakoti Street. Within the main gable end is a centrally positioned pair of sashes with nine-light divided upper sash and a single-pane lower sash. These are flanked to the south by a single double-hung sash with nine-light divided upper sash and a single-pane lower sash, and to the north by a now boarded-over entrance door with six-light fixed casement above. The upper gable end is sheathed in timber shingles and finished in a bell-cast with corbels; decorative elbows support the eaves at either end.

The main front entrance door, timber panelled and glazed, is located beneath a simple shallow sloping porch added as part of the 1946-47 additions, which more than doubled the size of the southern projecting gable. A further entrance door is located on the western elevation of the northern projecting gable. These entrances can be reached via separate concrete ramps and steps.

The southern projecting gable end incorporates a pair of sashes with nine-light divided upper sash and a single-pane lower sash, whilst a single sash of identical style is positioned further east. The rear living quarters incorporates further double-hung sashes fitted with single clear panes. A safe vent is visible to the rear of this elevation near the water tanks, whilst the eaves feature exposed rafters.

The northern projecting gable end incorporates pair of sashes with nine-light divided upper sash and a single-pane lower sash, with a small casement located adjacent. Further east, the main entrance to the rear living quarters is located within a small porch, whilst additional light is provided to interior spaces through a pair of double-hung sashes and smaller rectangular divided casement. A lean-to extension fitted with timber casements extends from the northern half of the rear elevation.

Assessment:

Historical

This building has historic significance as the premises of the Urenui Post Office for almost sixty years from 1931 until its closure in 1989. The construction of this building was necessitated by a conflagration in Urenui's commercial area (one of several major blazes in the settlements history), which completely destroyed the old post office. ✓

Importance to Community

This building remains an important element in the community's consciousness, with many Urenui residents still recalling a time when this building was a functioning post office at which they conducted their business. ✓



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Architecture & Construction	This building is a good example of a smaller government designed post office building incorporating features from the bungalow and English Cottage styles popular at the time.	✓
Setting and Context	Positioned on the street boundary, the former Urenui post office contributes positively to the surrounding streetscape and is one of a number of buildings in Ngakoti Street which contribute to the rural village aesthetic.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	This building is representative of the government designed post offices erected in smaller regional towns and suburbs during the 1920s and 1930s. The building largely retains its original form and key architectural features, and aside from some minor modifications, the exterior remains much as it was when first constructed.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓

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