

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Douglass Residence (Former)

Address

51 Dawson Street, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

Originally constructed during 1922 as the private residence of motor salesman Percy John Douglass and his wife Bertha, this prominent Dawson Street landmark has since been converted into commercial office space; although largely retains its original layout and form. Associated with a historically important period of rapid growth and relative economic prosperity in New Plymouth, the building was designed by accomplished New Plymouth architects Messenger, Griffiths and Taylor, who contributed significantly to the built environment of New Plymouth during the 1920s. A good and representative example of the types of architecturally designed English Domestic Revival style houses constructed in New Plymouth during the 1920s, this building's lively colour scheme and largely original exterior ensures it makes a strong positive contribution to the character of the surrounding streetscape.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description Northern Moiety Section 701 Town of New Plymouth

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1922

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals Messenger, Griffiths & Taylor (architects), William Francis Trevorrow (builder)

History

Town Section 701, on which 51 Dawson Street is located, has an interesting history stretching back to the early period of European occupation in New Plymouth. It is known to have been occupied since at least 1860, when Thomas King moved his family into a small cottage on the property following the loss of their farmhouse during the First Taranaki War.¹ A prominent early settler, Thomas King was the father of well-known local businessman Newton King, and also Sir Truby King, who together with his wife Lady Plunket, established the Plunket Society in 1907.²

Following demolition of the original cottage, Town Section 701 was subdivided by local builder Luke Langdridge and the northern portion was purchased by Mr Percy John Douglass during December of 1921.³ Born at New Plymouth, Percy Douglass later shifted to Hawera where he was manager of Prices' Cycle Works, and later James & Gillman Motors Ltd.⁴ During 1920, Percy and his wife Bertha relocated to New Plymouth, where Percy entered into business on his own account importing and selling cars and motorcycles; the firm traded as Douglass Motors Ltd and had premises in Devon Street.⁵ The firm appears to have been quite successful, entering the New Plymouth market at a time of rapid local population growth and relative economic prosperity.

Soon after purchasing the property, the Douglass' engaged accomplished local architects Messenger, Griffiths & Taylor to design a new house for the section. The firm of Messenger, Griffiths & Taylor (Frank Messenger, Horace Victor Griffiths & William Henry Taylor), was formed in 1920 upon the addition of William Taylor to the existing partnership of Messenger & Griffiths (formed in 1917).⁶ One of the most important local architecture firms of the 1920s, Messenger, Griffiths & Taylor were responsible for a large number of commissions between 1922 and 1930. Many of these buildings were either reinforced concrete commercial and industrial premises, or, as in the case of the former Douglass Residence, large residential buildings in the English Domestic Revival style.

¹ Gooch, Mike, 'King Family Home (Cnr Dawson and Vivian Street)', *Kete New Plymouth*, <http://ketenewplymouth.peoplesnetworknz.info/en/site>; accessed 21 August 2019.

² Ibid.

³ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

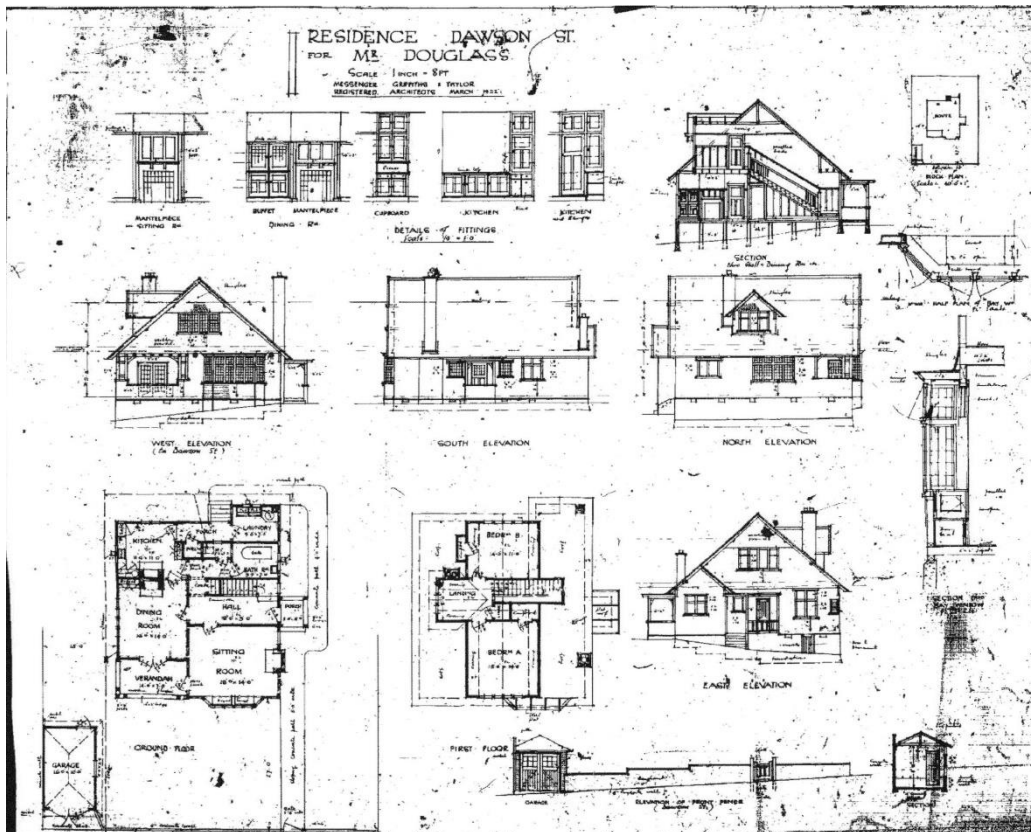
⁴ *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 12 August 1918, page 4

⁵ *Stratford Evening Post*, 4 November 1925, page 7

⁶ Pritchard, Ian. *Frank Messenger, Architect: The work of a New Plymouth architect* (New Plymouth: Ian Pritchard, 1994).



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Copy of Original Plans, Messenger Griffiths & Taylor, 1922, NPDC Archives

By March 1922, tenders for the construction of a “two-story residence in Dawson Street for Mr P. J. Douglass” were invited by the architects.⁷ Later, on April 29th 1922, a building permit was issued to Percy Douglass by the New Plymouth Borough Council; the builder was noted as William Francis (Francis) Trevorrow, with the building expected to cost about £1,400.⁸ Whilst it seems likely the Douglass’ moved into their new home sometime during late-1923, they are not listed as residing in this location until the 1924 edition of Wises Post Office Directory.⁹

Percy is last noted as the occupier of this property in the 1934 edition of Wises Post Office Directory, the Douglass’ relocating to a property in Glen Almond Street and subsequently renting out the Dawson Street house for a period.¹⁰ Charles Haslam seems to have occupied the house from about 1936 until 1939, with Arthur Robertson the occupier from about 1940 until 1945.¹¹ Percy passed away on September 12th 1942 and Bertha shifted back into the Dawson Street house a short time later; ownership was transferred to Bertha at this time.¹²

Bertha continued living at the house until her death on July 13th 1955, with ownership passing to Francis Stanley Grayling and Bertha’s son from her first marriage, Edward Henry Jacka, as executors.¹³ Edward Jacka acquired the property as his family home during April 1956, he becoming joint owner with his wife

⁷ *Taranaki Herald*, 22 March 1922, page 7

⁸ NPBC Building Register Book 1922-27, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

⁹ Wises Post Office Directory, 1924

¹⁰ Wises Post Office Directory, 1934

¹¹ Wises Post Office Directories, 1936-45

¹² CT TN125/82, Land Information New Zealand

¹³ *Ibid.*



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Thelma in June 1959.¹⁴ During September 1960 the property was purchased by John Richard McLachlan, his wife Dorothy becoming a joint owner the following month.¹⁵ The McLachlan's retained ownership until August 1970, when the house was purchased by real estate agent Anthony Rich and his wife Felicity.¹⁶ Ownership was transferred to Anthony's company Rich Real Estate Ltd during August 1973; the firm retaining ownership until July 1981, when the property was purchased by Ashley David Brownrigg.¹⁷ Subsequent ownership changes occurred in 1982, 1995, 2001, 2004 and 2005, before being purchased by the present owners in 2012. The building is presently (2019) occupied by Juffermans Surveyors Ltd (JSL) and Traffic Management Solutions (TMS).

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

Description

The former Douglass Residence is located on the eastern side of Dawson Street on the fringe of New Plymouth's central city. Located atop a small rise above street level, a concrete retaining wall and modern timber fence extends along the frontage. A driveway passes through the site of the former garage (long since demolished) to a carpark at the rear of the building; this being shared with 74 Vivian Street (Lot 1 DP8351). Whilst the house is rather substantial in appearance, it was designed with just two (large) bedrooms and reflects the small size of Percy and Bertha's family.

A good example of the English Domestic Revival style in the local vernacular, the former Douglass Residence retains a high degree of integrity, with many original features surviving intact. The two-storey timber-framed building is largely confined within a wide NE-SW gable, principally clad in timber weatherboards with shingled upper gable ends; the foundations are concrete, and the roof is sheathed in corrugated steel. A substantial single-flue chimney rises through the roof near the front of the building, whilst a two-flue chimney rises near the rear; both are finished with stucco plaster and glazed ceramic pots.

The main front elevation faces roughly southwest towards Dawson Street and incorporates a large veranda which has since been enclosed with glazed timber French casements sympathetic in style to the original joinery. An angled bay window is positioned south of the porch and incorporates six timber casements with fanlights, each featuring square leaded glazing. The first floor is stepped-out and corbelled, with a central window incorporating narrow fanlights and a mixture of plain and leaded clear glass providing light to the original master bedroom space. The shingled upper gable end is bell-cast, whilst heavy timber purlins extend beneath the eaves.

On the north-western elevation, a divided timber casement is fitted into the original porch recess, a set of four timber casements with fanlights (each featuring square leaded glazing) lights the original dining room space, and a pair of clear glazed timber casements lights the original kitchen; exposed rafters are feature of the sloping eaves. At first-floor level, a large gabled dormer housing the stairwell landing projects from the sloping roof. This features a shingled gable end and exposed timber purlins, with a timber casements and fanlights enabling a view across central New Plymouth towards the Tasman Sea.

A shallow ground floor gable and lean-to extend from the rear of the building; fitted with timber casements, these rooms originally housed the laundry and an enclosed porch. A pair of timber casements with fanlights provide additional light to the kitchen, whilst a set of casements with two narrow fanlights provide light to what was originally the second first-floor bedroom. The upper gable end is bell-cast and heavy timber purlins extend beneath the eaves.

¹⁴ CT TN125/82, Land Information New Zealand

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.



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A small glazed entrance porch projects from the south-eastern elevation, with a timber panelled and glazed door seemingly the original main entrance for visitors. Timber casements with patterned and leaded glazed are positioned either side of the original sitting room fireplace. On the eastern side of the porch is a further patterned and leaded window, whilst a pair of timber casements with fanlights provide light to the bathroom. As on the north-western elevation, the sloping eaves feature exposed rafter's characteristic of the period.

Assessment:

Historical	Constructed for successful local motor vehicle salesman Percy John Douglass, this building is associated with a historically important period of rapid growth and relative economic prosperity in New Plymouth. The building is the work of noted New Plymouth architecture firm Messenger, Griffiths and Taylor, who contributed significantly to the built environment of New Plymouth during the 1920s.	✓
Importance to Community	-	
Architecture & Construction	A good example of the English Domestic Revival style in the local vernacular.	✓
Setting and Context	Sited on a small rise in a highly visible CBD fringe location, the former Douglass Residence is a prominent visual landmark and makes a positive contribution to the surrounding streetscape.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	The former Douglass Residence is a representative example of the types of architecturally designed English Domestic Revival style houses constructed in New Plymouth during the 1920s. The exterior of the building retains a high degree of integrity and remains much as it was when first constructed.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓