

Post Office (Former)

Corner, 64 Bamfield Street and Cambridge Avenue, Ashhurst

NZHPT Registration Number:	1198
NZHPT Registration Type:	Historic Place – Category II
NZHPT Registration Date:	30/04/10
City/District Council:	Palmerston North City Council
District Plan Status:	Category 2



Brief History

The former Post Office in Ashhurst was constructed in 1897 in response to increasing demand for postal services due to population growth of the town and surrounding area. It replaced the original post office which operated within a general store, and like its predecessor, provided not only postal and telecommunications services, but banking and other financial services as well. In addition to these functions, the former Post Office was an important place for people to meet informally, network, and find out the latest local, national and international news.

In the late nineteenth century, the Public Works Department created standard designs for common public buildings such as post offices and railway stations which were replicated throughout New Zealand. This stemmed from a rise in construction of these buildings brought about, in part, by the government's Public Works and Immigration Scheme. The south-facing original 1897 section of the building follows a design called 'Style1QW' very often used for smaller towns. This is a simple single-level design using wooden construction and a hipped roof. The detail and decoration of the front façade shows Queen Anne and Stick style influences. This use of decoration indicates that by the 1890s aesthetic appeal was considered more important than previously in the design of public buildings.

Like many other Post Offices, the former Post Office contained a residence for the postmistress which continued to be used throughout much of the 20th century. Having an owner or manager live onsite was a feature of many other businesses, such as banks and shops, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The building was subsequently expanded to increase capacity as the town's population grew and to accommodate evolving operations. In 1909 a west wing was added to the north of the original section. This created an additional bedroom and expanded the kitchen and utility areas. At this time, a lean-to was also added to the east side of the building, which housed an increased number of private boxes and a telephone bureau. The building was extended eastwards in 1947, replacing lean-to, and an east wing added at the same time. These additions enlarged the public space and provided for improved staff facilities including a staffroom, kitchenette and toilet. The symmetry of the front façade was lost as a result of the extension to the east. During the 1960s, the Post Office underwent a series of renovations including re-piling and modernisation of the interior, including the residential space which was still in use for that purpose.

The Post Office closed in 1992 as a result of the trend towards centralisation of services and changes in postal operations. Postal services were relocated to a Post Shop set up within an established store. The Palmerston North City Council purchased the building in the same year and adapted it to become a branch of the Public Library. The interior layout was altered to accommodate its new use at this time, and other minor changes have been made subsequently. The position of the former rooms can still be distinguished in the interior and by the positioning and type of windows. The building continues to function as a branch of the public library and as a community meeting space.

Principal Source:

Post Office (Former), NZHPT Register no. 1198, 17/12/2009, Karen Astwood, NZHPT.