

# F.D.L Building (Former Glaxo Laboratories Building)

Campbell Road, Bunnythorpe

---

NZHPT Registration Number:	1186
NZHPT Registration Type:	Historic Place – Category II
NZHPT Registration Date:	2/07/82
City/District Council:	Palmerston North City Council
District Plan Status:	To be confirmed following recent boundary change



Photograph by William Stadtwald Demchick (Own work) [CC-BY-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

## Brief History

Glaxo Laboratories (NZ) Limited manufactured Glaxo milk powder and other products at this factory in Bunnythorpe. The forerunner of the Glaxo business, successful Wellington merchant business Joseph Nathan & Company, was established in 1873 by Joseph Nathan. Nathan was a prominent member of the Wellington Jewish community, held a number of directorships and became President of the Chamber of Commerce. His son Frederick Nathan was Mayor of Palmerston North from 1923 to 1927, and was instrumental in ensuring that the Turitea site was chosen for the proposed agricultural college (now Massey University).

Joseph Nathan & Company began milk powder production part of a butter factory at Makino in 1904. John Merrett, an English engineer with expertise in milk powder operations, was employed to oversee the establishment of production. After just a few months, it was decided that the factory was unsuitable for large-scale milk powder production, and a purpose-built factory was constructed at Bunnythorpe.

John Merrett drew up the plans for the timber and corrugated iron building and supervised its construction. He stayed on as Manager of the Bunnythorpe factory through its first year of production. At this time, the milk powder was marketed as Defiance Dried Milk. The factory was destroyed by fire in early 1906 and re-opened in 1907, with the milk powder sold under the new trademark, Glaxo. By 1908, Glaxo milk powder was being marketed in Britain as 'The Food that Builds Bonnie Babies'.

The current factory at Bunnythorpe dates from around 1918 and was originally of concrete and timber construction. Up until the 1950s when milk tankers were introduced, farmers delivered milk to the factory in cans by horse and cart and later by vehicle. Milk was dried on heated rollers and packaged onsite for the New Zealand market or export. Besides Glaxo baby food, the factory also produced cheese, casein, and other food products. During the First World War, increased demand for Glaxo, both as a baby food and as a milk substitute for troops, led to the establishment of three Glaxo factories in the Waikato. When the Waikato operations ceased in 1936, some of the staff and equipment were relocated to the Bunnythorpe factory. To accommodate this, the milk drying room, laboratory and pharmaceutical areas were renovated and an administration block was built. The business reregistered as Glaxo Laboratories (N.Z.) Limited in 1937. In 1944, a new concrete façade was added to the factory, bearing the name 'Glaxo Laboratories'.

In 1924 the London-based arm of the Company began production of Glaxo's first pharmaceutical product, vitamin D, marketed as Ostelin. The pharmaceutical side of the business grew in importance during the 1930s and 1940s. Among the pharmaceuticals manufactured at the Bunnythorpe factory were penicillin, vitamin A, and veterinary products. By 1945, it was clear that the factory's pharmaceutical production facilities were inadequate and in 1951 the new Glaxo Laboratories building on Botanical Road, Palmerston North, was officially opened. Baby food production continued at Bunnythorpe.

By the 1950s the Bunnythorpe factory had begun to be considered unsuitable for expanding milk powder production. In the late 1960s, the Company decided to build a replacement factory on a site near Bunnythorpe. However, increasing uncertainty surrounding the future of export markets resulted in this plan being abandoned and the Bunnythorpe factory closed in 1974. Since then, the factory has been used by several businesses and is currently occupied by Chris Gommans Contracting.

---

*Principal Sources:*

Brooking, T W H, *Massey, its Early Years: A History of the Development of Massey Agricultural College to 1943*, Palmerston North, Massey Alumni Association, 1977.

Davenport-Hines, R P T & Slinn, J, *Glaxo: A History to 1962*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Matheson, I R, *Council and Community: 125 Years of Local Government in Palmerston North 1877-2002*, Palmerston North, Palmerston North City Library, 2003.

Millen, J, *Glaxo: From Joseph Nathan to Glaxo Wellcome: The History of Glaxo in New Zealand* (2nd ed.), Auckland, Glaxo Wellcome New Zealand, 1997.

NZHPT BCC Field Record Form, F.D.L Building, New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 1982.