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EXCAVATIONS AT THE UCOL SITE, WANGANUI

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Town Sections 77 and 79 in Wanganui were surveyed by the New Zealand Company in 1840. They were not taken up at the time and were subsequently granted by the Crown: Section 79 to William Russell in 1852 and Section 77 to Henry Churton in 1853. By 1858 blacksmith Thomas Bamber had a leasehold on Section 79, which he seems to have purchased in the next decade and where he set up his forge and later built a house. The house was owned by plumbers after his death in 1915 and finally demolished in 1995. By 1857 Churton had sold Section 77 to John Dunleavy who, with his wife, is presumed to have built and owned the Wanganui Hotel though successive proprietors are listed in the records. From the mid 1890s Mrs Dunleavy ran the establishment as a boarding house and it was demolished by 1903 (Walzl 2006).

The Bamber house site and the Wanganui Hotel site were located on land that was being developed for the Universal College of Learning (UCOL) Whanganui campus. They were excavated in December 2006.

The Bamber House Site

The Bamber House site had been scraped down hard by machinery during demolition of the house, making it difficult to establish phases of activity, as the stratigraphic relationships of many features were lost. It was clear from the archaeology that there had been two houses on the site and this, combined with historic photographs, allowed us to establish the sequence of events (Table 1).

Some of the earliest features included a group of iron-filled rubbish pits from beneath the footprint of the first house. The largest of these (Figure 3) was densely packed with sheets and bars of scrap metal, cast-iron cut offs and items for recycling. Four black beer bottle bases in the pit suggest a date in

the 1860s or 1870s. These features would have been associated with Bamber's blacksmithing on the adjacent lot. Other rubbish pits from this phase also suggest a date in the 1860s.

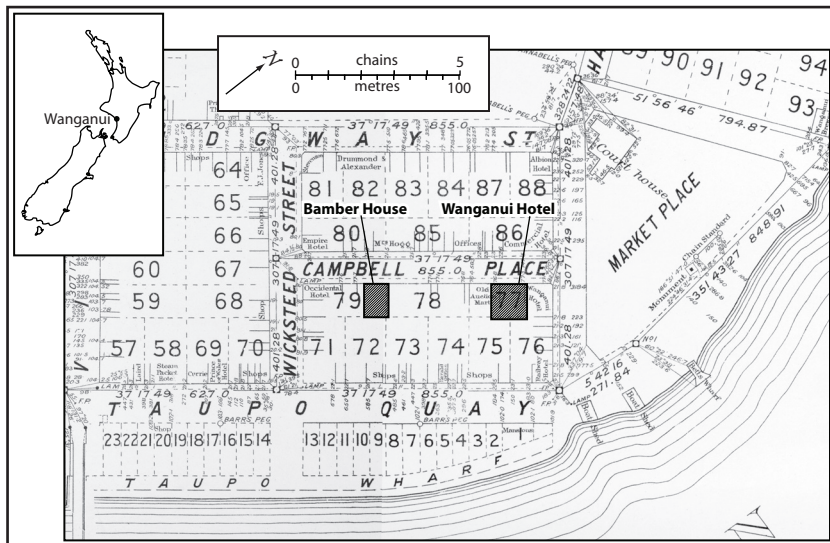


Figure 1. The location of the UCOL excavations.

1	Pits pre-Bamber House 1
2	Building 1 (early Bamber House) and first well
3	Building 2 (post 1870s Bamber House) and second well
3a	Verandah and fence associated with Building 2
G	Garden shed

Table 1. Summary of phases of the Bamber House site.

Three alignments of postholes outlined the first house (Phase 2), which is shown in historic photos on the section in the 1860s (Figure 4, left). One of these postholes contained a lot of artefacts (fifteen ceramic vessels decorated with shell edge, Blue Willow, and Japan Flowers amongst other patterns, and two clay pipes) dating to the mid nineteenth century, presumably in use in the house and buried when it was demolished.

A well lay just to the north east of Building 1, within the footprint of Building 2. This was approximately 1500 mm in diameter and at least 1700 mm deep. A test pit was dug in the centre of it but its base was not reached. If the well had once been lined with bricks they had been removed, as was the case

for all wells on both sites, and the upper sides had collapsed. It contained very few artefacts. Other rubbish pits were located within the Building 2 footprint that probably relate to this phase.

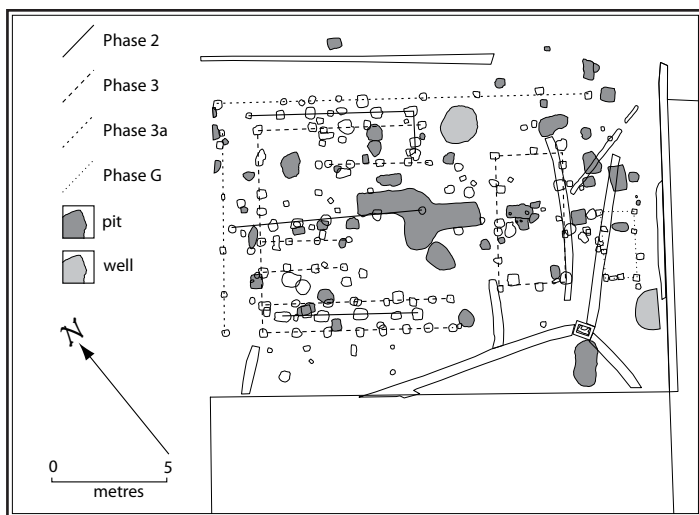


Figure 2. Features excavated at the Bamber House site. The main phases are highlighted.



Figure 3. Feature 3, iron-filled rubbish pit, during excavation. The bins contain only some of the contents.

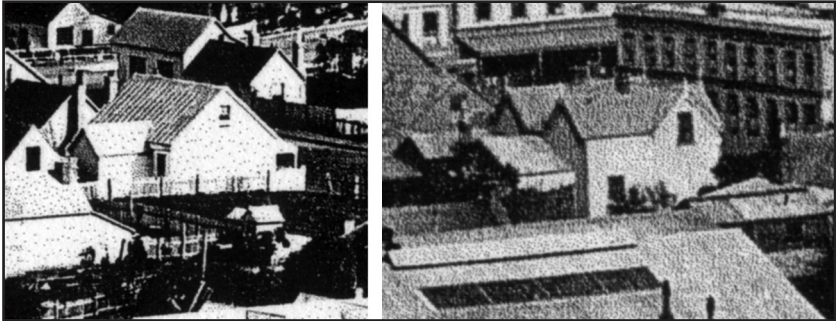


Figure 4. *Thomas Bamber's house in ca. 1865 (left) (National Library ref. no. 234) and in the 1870s (right) (National Library ref. no. 11815).*

The grid-like pattern of uniform postholes from the second house (Phase 3) was clearly visible. They were generally distinct squares with depths varying between 60 and 550 mm (mostly less than 200 mm) and almost all contained the remains of a wooden post. One of these was analysed and shown to be totara.

Historic photographs show that Bamber House was greatly modified and extended during the late 1870s or early 1880s. Figure 4, left shows that the house began as a medium-sized, one-and-a-half storey cottage with a single gable roof, a small lean-to room on the back and a chimney on the southern side. Photographs dating to about the late 1870s (Figure 4, right) show the house as much larger, with a double-gabled second storey (the new gables facing streetward) and extended lean-to at the back. The external chimney is now on the eastern instead of southern side and there are two internal chimneys. The Phase 3 structure is this second house, which includes the lean-to out the back.

A well was found at the back of the property where its top was cut by a modern brick wall that bounded the east end of the section. The well was excavated to a depth of 2600 mm, though this was not the base. A test pit reached the water table at 3000 mm. The fill comprised successive layers of dark soil containing lenses of coal. Metal, ceramics, glass and bone artefacts were dispersed throughout the fill, but largely concentrated towards the middle. This well contained the largest assemblage of artefacts, other than metal, from the Bamber House site: 90 ceramic vessels, six clay tobacco pipes and 28 items of glassware. These date mostly to the late 1860s or early 1870s.

Phase 3a, not necessarily exactly contemporaneous with house construction, consisted of a row of smaller postholes along the street side mark-

ing the verandah and a similar row that ran along the TS 79/TS 78 boundary representing a fenceline.

The only other structure on site was a small outbuilding that could not be related to any other phase. This is referred to as Phase G, as it perhaps represents some sort of garden shed. Numerous other features were scattered across the site that could not be phased either – these were typically postholes on no particular alignment or pits with few diagnostic artefacts.

The Wanganui Hotel site

At this site buildings were added to the section in addition to replacing others. The sequence of intercutting features, dates of artefact assemblages and historic records and photographs were used to establish phasing (Table 2).

1	pre-hotel ploughing
2	features predating the hotel middle building and annexe
3	hotel foundations and associated features
3a	yard buildings of hotel
4	corn merchant's premises and stables in hotel yard
4a	building adjoining the stables
5	late features associated with the hotel
6	Thompson and Lewis factory extension

Table 2. Summary of phasing of the Wanganui Hotel site.

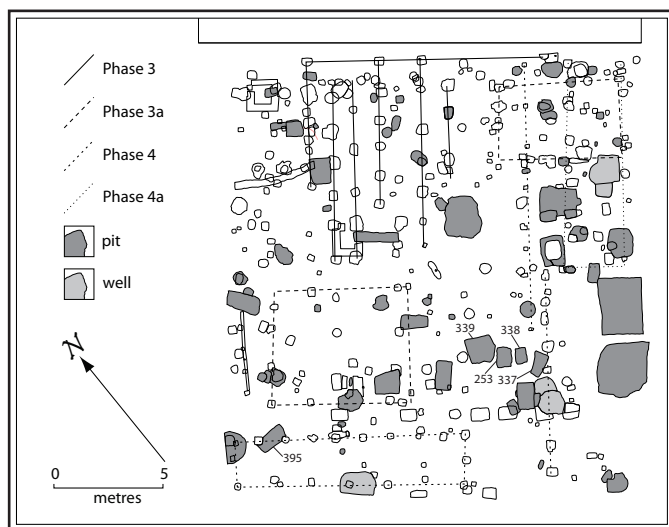


Figure 5. Features excavated at the Wanganui Hotel site. The main phases are highlighted.

The earliest sign of activity on the site was plough marks in the surface of the natural subsoil (Phase 1). These did not disturb the surface of any features indicating that the site was ploughed before the building of any of the identified structures. This was probably an informal use of the site from as early as the 1840s.

Scattered features (Phase 2) were excavated within the footprint of the Wanganui Hotel annexe (Phase 3). These included rubbish pits as well as pits with no artefacts in them.

Early photographs of the hotel clearly show that by the mid 1860s it was made up of three adjoining buildings: one small one-and-a-half storey building on the corner of Market Place and Campbell Place (Rutland Street); a second, larger two storey one behind this on Campbell Place; and a small single storey annexe behind this (Figure 6). The building on the corner was almost certainly the first, with the middle building and annexe added afterwards.



Figure 6. The Wanganui Hotel in the 1870s showing the three adjoining buildings with annexe out the back (National Library Ref. No. 222).

The one-and-a-half and two storey buildings lie beneath the still standing Public Trust building dating to 1914, and only the annexe lay within the development area; this is what was excavated (Phase 3). While not as uniform as the Bamber House foundations, postholes for the Wanganui Hotel buildings were evident in the northwest quadrant of the excavated area, representing the annexe building. Some, but not all, contained wooden posts, one of which was analysed and found to be totara. The brick bases of two of the hotel fireplaces were uncovered, one matching the chimney between the two storey building

and the annexe in Figure 6, while the second fireplace does not seem to match the chimney in the centre of the annexe gable.

There were a number of rubbish pits including bottle dumps around the section, most of which were associated with the hotel rather than any other phases of occupation (Figure 7). Several of the pits contained almost all bottles – these are listed in Table 3. Feature 253 contained a much greater density of glass as nearly all of it was broken: only 13 were recovered whole and 415 of them were alcohol bottles. Whether they were smashed to make more room or just for fun, or both, is hard to tell.



Figure 7. Bottle Pit 339 during excavation. Pit 253 next to it has been excavated.

Feature	volume (m ³)	glassware MNV	MNV/m ³
253	0.43	458	1069
337	0.79	164	207
338	0.13	38	282
339	1.87	1082	580
395	1.02	525	517

Table 3. Density of glassware in the bottle pits at the Wanganui Hotel site.

Because of the freely draining, relatively pH neutral sand, and the fact that the pits were sealed from a fairly early date, paper labels survived very well on the bottles from these pits. These are discussed in greater detail below. The embossings and surviving labels on the bottles, as well as many of the

ceramics, all indicate dates in the 1860s to 1870s for the rubbish pits on site, with a few possibly as early as the 1850s.

Another large, regular pit, 1770 x 1650 mm x 1500 mm deep, may have been a cellar or cool store, though no superstructure could be seen. Halfway down the walls a band of iron staining 200–400 mm wide indicated a metal brace supporting the walls, which in places were extremely soft as the subsoil contained layers of loose pumice sand. No evidence of steps or ladders was found to indicate how the cellar, if cellar it was, was accessed.

A probable well was excavated in half section. Like the well at the Bamber House site its surface appearance was irregular becoming an even shaft 1000 mm in diameter at a depth of 300 mm. If originally lined with bricks (and given the softness of the subsoil it must have been) these had been removed. It was cut by a Phase 4 posthole and so belongs to an early phase, most probably the hotel. Artefacts date to between the 1850s and 1870s.

Phase 3a was marked by rows of postholes in the hotel yard that are most likely outbuildings associated with the hotel, one at the back of the annexe and one to the north east.

Two early buildings associated with the corn merchant and livery business of Isaac Freeth can be seen in early 1870s photos and are described in rates rolls. These were added to the section after the construction of the Wanganui Hotel and have been assigned to Phase 4. Postholes along the southern and eastern edges of the excavation area appear to represent two buildings shown in historic photographs with the occupants noted in rates rolls. Freeths's corn merchant's premises was found in the south west corner of the excavation area, and a stables at the south east end of the site.

Several changes are apparent in the hotel yard during Phase 4. A well was dug to the east of the hotel annexe, probably to replace the earlier well that was covered over by the corn merchant's building. This well was not excavated to its base. A fenceline was also found separating the corn merchant's premises from the hotel. This would have resulted in a reduction in size of the hotel yard and several pits were dug against the fence at the back of the new yard. Another fenceline was found to the east of the hotel separating the hotel building and the stables.

Joseph Chadwick, an auctioneer, had the lease of the hotel from 1877–1880 and replaced the wooden building with a larger two storey building. This building was not found during excavation and probably lies beneath the still extant Public Trust Building, dating to 1914 and fronting onto Market Place.

Later features associated with the hotel are mainly rubbish pits with artefacts dating to the 1870s and 1880s (Phase 5). The final phase was the extension of the Thompson and Lewis factory, originally on Town Section 78,

in the early 1900s, marked by a series of large regular postholes at the south of the site.

Material Culture

The Bamber House site

The artefact assemblage from the Bamber House site is fairly typical of a modest small to medium sized domestic household from mid to late nineteenth century New Zealand. A total (MNI) of 325 ceramic vessels and 131 items of glassware were recorded. The ceramics are all domestic in nature with the most common pattern being Blue Willow. No specialised serving forms other than large oval platters are present suggesting that dining in the Bamber household was a largely informal affair. Notable among the ceramics are several early patterns and styles, including the transfer prints Japan Flowers, Acadia, and Moss Rose, all of which were most likely produced in the 1840s – these vessels may well have come from Scotland with the Bamber family.

The glassware is made up of around 50% alcohol bottles, followed by condiments and pharmaceuticals, which is what one would expect from a domestic household. Like the ceramics some of the glassware dates from the mid nineteenth century, suggesting that some of the rubbish pits and the well at the back of the property were filled from the early 1860s.

The Wanganui Hotel site

A much larger assemblage of artefacts were recorded from the Wanganui Hotel site, an MNI of 568 ceramic vessels and 3260 items of glassware. The material is dominated by rubbish generated from the commercial running of the hotel but also reflects the domestic occupation of the site where the proprietors and their families lived on site.

The hotel ceramics largely derive from large rubbish pits and date from the late 1850s–1880s. The most common pattern is Blue Willow and a number of vessel forms are present including tureens, serving platters and covered vegetable dishes. Patterns which may have been purchased as small sets for use in the hotel include Genevese and Kulat. Many of the ceramics were also recovered largely complete, including a stack of four Morea dinner plates from a well, suggesting deliberate disposal of out of fashion sets. This feature also contained a large number of domestic items including children's footwear and dolls.

The glassware is made up largely of alcohol which accounts for 76% of the assemblage. This compares well with the Victoria Hotel site in Auckland, where alcohol made up 80% of the total (Brassey and Macready 1994: 87).

Most of the alcohol bottles came from pits dug for the hotel specifically to discard bottles.

The most notable feature about the glassware assemblage is the preservation of a large number of paper labels (Figure 8). A typology of the different labels was established and includes seven beer labels, nine spirit labels, four champagne labels, eleven condiment labels and one bitters label. Some of the best preserved labels were from tall aqua bottles containing gin. Both the names of the producer and the variety 'Old Tom' could be identified. Beer labels were less well preserved but included varieties such as 'India Pale Ale'. One of the more interesting labels was found on salad oil bottles which had a J. T. Morton 'Red Cabbage' pickle label with a 'Raspberry Syrup' label pasted over the top. Two black beer type bottles were also found with 'Superior Lemon Syrup' labels, showing that bottle type cannot always be used to imply contents.

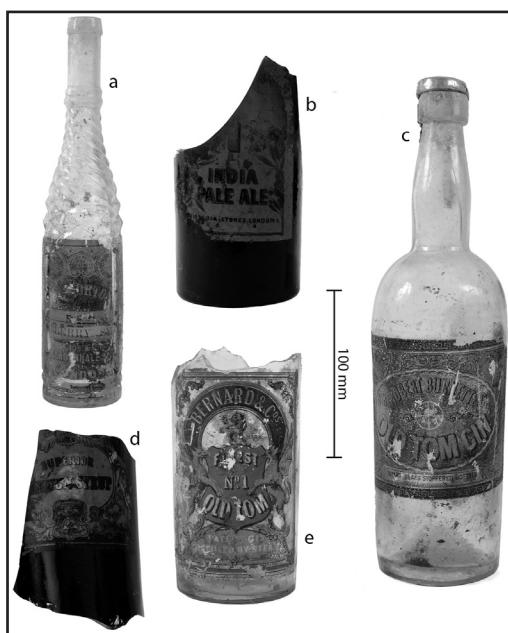


Figure 8. Paper labels preserved on bottles from the Wanganui Hotel site: a, J.T. Morton 'Raspberry Syrup'; b, India Pale Ale; c, Sir Robert Burnett and Co's Old Tom Gin; d, 'Superior Lemon Syrup' labels on a black beer bottles; e, Bernard and Co's Finest No 1 Old Tom gin.

Faunal remains

There appeared to have been differing rates of bone fragmentation between the Bamber House site and Wanganui Hotel site assemblages, where the former suffered much higher rates of fragmentation. However, both assemblages show similar rates of bone modification, sawing, chopping and cut marks. The composition of the butchery cuts from the two sites was revealing: overall, higher quality beef cuts dominated the Wanganui Hotel site assemblage compared to relatively fewer high quality cuts at the Bamber House site.

Faunal remains at the Bamber House site were dominated by cattle, though with still significant amounts of sheep and pig. In contrast, pigs dominated the Wanganui Hotel assemblage by NISP though the significant amount of cattle remains would have provided far more beef than pork (almost all the faunal remains can confidently be associated with the hotel). Crania and mandibles are the most frequent pig elements at both sites and butchery marks indicate that they were probably consumed as brawns, stocks and soups. The age-mortality profiles of the pigs indicated there was likely a common supply for both sites and that specialised pork production was taking place. In contrast, the different mortality profiles of cattle may reflect procurement from different beef suppliers.

Different subsistence practices appear to have been operating at each site. The Wanganui Hotel site had a much greater taxonomic diversity including mainly European domesticated mammals and birds supplemented with wild bird, fish, shellfish and mammal taxa. Some of the wild taxa included delicacies such as mutton bird and wood pigeon. Fishing was focused on inshore species such as snapper and kahawai. Small amounts of European introduced rabbits were also hunted for the menu as shown by their fragmented and uneven element distribution and butchery marks on a number of the bones.

The Bamber House site, on the other hand, had a much lower taxonomic diversity and relied mainly on the three European introduced domesticates with some domesticated birds and a very small amount of fish. This is not an unexpected result as the hotel would need a varied menu to cater to their clientele.

Though the bird assemblages from both sites was small they nicely illustrate the differences between the commercial hotel and domestic house consumption patterns typical of nineteenth century New Zealand. From urban domestic settings only domestic poultry are found while at hotels native birds were served to the clientele as novelty or prestige cuisine (Hawkins et al. in press). The greater diversity and prevalence of high-quality cuts in general at the Wanganui Hotel site confirms this trend. In contrast, the Bamber

House site material indicated the simpler consumption patterns of a domestic household.

Discussion and conclusion

The density of features, particularly postholes, and the lack of stratigraphy at both sites caused some difficulty in interpretation. The availability of historic photographs was invaluable in sorting out phasing. At the Bamber House site we had thought there was only one building on site, substantially remodelled in the 1870s. The archaeology made clear that in fact this was a new building. Similarly, we could never have phased the buildings at the Wanganui Hotel site or assigned them to particular historic records without the photographs.

The contrasts between the two sites are contrasts between commercial and domestic occupations. The complexity of the Wanganui Hotel site archaeology contrasts with the relative simplicity of the Bamber House site. Similarly, the range of dumped domestic wares and of faunal remains was significantly less at the Bamber House site.

The Bamber House site was used by a single domestic occupant throughout the later 19th century. In contrast, the Wanganui Hotel site had numerous commercial occupants, changes of boundary and alterations, extensions and demolitions of buildings. Most rubbish pits, and all the larger ones, can be assigned to the hotel. The paper labels surviving on many of the bottles in particular give an insight into the hotel business. A close examination of these, where pickle or beer bottles can be labelled 'Syrup' is a reminder that, in archaeology, nothing can be taken for granted.

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