

The Executive Wing of Parliament ('the Beehive')

Bowen Street



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- 'The Beehive' is the Executive Wing of Parliament and is notable as a bold example of Brutalist architecture. The building has a quality of finishes, artworks, materials and workmanship that give it a high architectural and aesthetic value.
- This building has historical value through its association with the New Zealand Government. As the executive wing it has held many formal receptions in honour of varied guests.
- The Beehive has townscape value for the part that it plays in defining the Bowen and Molesworth Street Parliament area. It is a self-contained, recognisable building that has become a landmark and synonymous with Wellington as the capital city, and with central government in New Zealand.

District Plan:	Map 18, reference 36
Legal Description:	Sec 1 SO 38114
Heritage Area:	Parliamentary Precinct Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Government Historic Area, reference 7035
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City R27/270
Other Names:	The Beehive
Key physical dates:	Construction: 1965-1981
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Sir Basil Spence/ The Ministry of Works
Former uses:	Government and Administration
Current uses:	Government and Administration
Earthquake Prone Status:	N/A

Extent: Cityview GIS



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The Executive Wing of Parliament, known to most as the Beehive, houses the offices of the Prime Minister and of Ministers of the Crown. It is a landmark building in Wellington and is a unique piece of architecture that has become synonymous with the Capital City.¹

Wellington became New Zealand's capital in 1865, with Parliament officially sitting in the city for the first time on 26 July 1865. The Colony's capital was originally established by Governor William Hobson at Kororareka (Russell) in the Bay of Islands. After 1841 it had been sited in Auckland before its final move to Wellington.²

The Beehive occupies an important site; it was initially the site of the house of Colonel William Wakefield, the de facto head of the Wellington settlement in its earliest days. The land surrounding his house had been designated a Government Reserve.³ Wakefield's house was purchased to house Lieutenant Governor Eyre, Governor Grey's second in command. It was used as a hospital for victims of the 1848 earthquake. This building was also used as the Provincial Council Building in 1857 and was later converted into Parliament House in 1866 and enlarged to house the General Assembly.

In 1870 the Colonial Architect, William Clayton, designed a replacement Government House to be built on the site and it was completed the following year. The house was large, Italianate, and built in timber. This building was used as a Parliamentary debating chamber after the disastrous fire of 1907 which burned down the General Assembly Building. The Parliament buildings that are now present on the site were designed to replace the loss of these timber buildings. The Governor General was moved to Palmerston North until a new Government House was built near the Basin Reserve in 1912.

In the late 1950s it was proposed that the Parliament Buildings, that has been left unfinished in 1922, should be completed. The Government of the time, however, decided that a completely new building should be constructed on the site. The British architect Sir Basil Spence was engaged to contribute plans for a new building in 1963. It is rumoured that he was contracted after meeting the Prime Minister Keith Holyoake and sketching the design for a round building on a napkin.⁴ The Ministry of Works is credited with the detailed design and production of drawings and specifications, as well as the supervision of the construction.

Work on the new building did not begin until 1969 when the former Government House was demolished. Construction took some time and was not formally completed until 1981. At the time, the building attracted considerable criticism for the impracticality of the internal arrangements. In 1997 there was some consideration put into moving the Beehive to the site of the just demolished Broadcasting House and completing the Parliament Buildings, but this did not eventuate.

¹ The history is an updated version of the WCC Heritage Building Inventory 2001 ref BOWE1

² History of Wellington 1865 – 1890, accessed March 2013, <http://wellington.govt.nz/about-wellington/history/history-of-wellington/1865-1890>

³ Cook, R. *Parliament: The Land and Buildings from 1840*, (Wellington: Parliamentary Service, 1988) 9

⁴ Kernohan, D. *Wellington's New Buildings* (Wellington: VUW Press, 1989)

The building was refurbished by architectural firm Warren and Mahoney between 2001 and 2006. This was undertaken to improve way-finding, improve usable floor area, incorporate new technology, and update the interior design. The entrance and mail handling areas were both redesigned to improve security.

The building has an ongoing association with the government of New Zealand and, since it opened in 1981, has housed all the Prime Ministers, cabinets and parliamentary staff from Sir Robert Muldoon's government of 1975-1984 onwards.



Old Government House, Wellington. Hill, Morrie: Negatives of Wellington and national events and personalities. Ref: 1/2-177172-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22842847>



Alexander Turnbull Library (with permission of Parliament) Reference: A260-013
<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/beehive-drawing-basil-spence>



The Beehive under construction, Wellington. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper.
Ref: 1/4-022262-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23209583>

1.2 Timeline of modifications

Original plans are held by Archives New Zealand.

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1999 | 1 Molesworth Street, The Beehive, Executive Wing: Refurbishment stage 1: Lift installation (00078:406:60365)
Molesworth Street, The Beehive, Executive Wing: Stage 1 refurbishment (00078:1686:50523) |
| 2000 | 1 Molesworth Street, The Beehive, Executive Wing: Refurbishment of floors 4 – 10, stage 3 (00078:1718:68059) |
| 2001 | 3 Molesworth Street, The Beehive, Executive Wing: Refurbishment stage 1, Bellamy's egress corridor upgrade (00078:602:72527) |
| 2002 | 3 Molesworth Street, The Beehive, Executive Wing: Refurbishment: Sub-basement, new operable door installation, minor demolition (00078:983:89644)
1 Molesworth Street, The Beehive, Executive Wing, Parliament Building, Level 1, coffee shop fit- out (00078:992:95719) |
| 2004 | 1 Molesworth Street, The Beehive, Refurbishment and upgrade of services to levels basement, ground floor, levels 1 & 2 and executive wing, parliament central, Wellington (00078:1822:116423) |
| 2008 | 1 Molesworth Street, The Beehive, installation of a new plant room in existing car park area \$ 15, 000 (00078:3437:180057) |

1.3 Occupation history

Not assessed

1.4 Architect

Note: this repeats the Dictionary of Scottish Architect's entry for Sir Basil Spence.⁵

Sir Basil Spence (1907 – 1976)

Sir Basil Spence was a Scottish architect noted for his designs in the Modernist/Brutalist style. Spence was born in Bombay, India and educated at the John Connon School, operated by the Bombay Scottish Education Society. He then was sent to Scotland to attend George Watson's College in Edinburgh from 1919 – 1925. He enrolled in the Edinburgh College of Art in 1925, studying architecture, where he secured a scholarship on the strength of the "unusual brilliance" of his work. He won a number of prizes while at college.

In 1929 – 1930 he spent a year as an assistant in the London office of Sir Edwin Lutyens, whose work had a great influence upon Spence's style. While in London, Spence attended a number of evening classes and in 1930 returned to the Edinburgh College of Art. During the final year of his studies, he was appointed as a junior lecturer, despite the fact that he was still a student. He continued to teach until 1939 at the college.

Following his graduation, Spence set up a practice with William Kininmonth (1904 – 1988) based in the offices of Rowand Anderson & Paul in Edinburgh. In 1934 the Kininmonth and Spence practice merged with Rowand Anderson & Paul and following the death of Arthur Balfour Paul in 1938 the practice was renamed Rowand Anderson & Paul & Partners. Kininmonth and Spence were in charge of this practice and Spence began focussing on working on exhibition design and country houses.

In 1939 Spence was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant into the Camouflage Training and Development Unit of the British Army. He was initially based in Surrey, but took part in the D-Day landings in 1944. He was demobilised in September 1945, having reached the rank of major. Following the war Spence returned to Rowand Anderson & Paul & Partners before setting up his own practice, Basil Spence & Partners, with Bruce Robertson. He was awarded an OBE in 1948 for his work in exhibition design. In 1951 he opened a London office, moving there permanently from 1953. From 1958 – 1960 Spence was the president of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

He leapt to prominence during the Festival of Britain in 1951 as chief architect for the Exhibition of Industrial Power in Glasgow and the designer of the Sea & Ships Pavilion, perhaps the best of all the displays on London's South Bank. In the same year he won the competition to design the new Coventry Cathedral, and he was subsequently responsible for ten parish churches. He built several schools both in Scotland and England. Although often criticised as a picturesque designer unconcerned by the dictates of structure, his nuclear physics building in Glasgow confirmed his mastery of complex technological briefs and led to some fifty university buildings in Scotland and England, including three major campuses at Nottingham, Southampton and Sussex. His remarkable versatility allowed him to turn his hand to major projects as diverse as the Hutchesontown C redevelopment in the Gorbals (1965) and Abbotsinch Airport (1966) in Glasgow, Hyde Park Cavalry Barracks in London (1970), and the Chancery of the British Embassy in Rome (1971).

By this date he was withdrawing from everyday involvement with the three architectural practices of which he was the head.

⁵ 'Biography: Sir Basil Spence' Dictionary of Scottish Architects, accessed March 2013, http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=203352

Andrew Renton had left to practise independently in May 1961, with Spence continuing his own London practice in the same office at Canonbury Place. In 1963 the London practice split: the Canonbury Place office was renamed Sir Basil Spence OM RA, with his son-in-law Anthony Blee as partner and his son John Urwin Spence as consultant; and a new office was opened at Fitzroy Square as Sir Basil Spence, Bonnington & Collins, John (Jack) Bonnington and Gordon Collins having been taken into partnership as based at Fitzroy Square. These changes having been made, at the beginning of 1964 the original practice at Moray Place, Edinburgh had become Sir Basil Spence, Glover & Ferguson. Jimmy Beveridge was taken into partnership in 1968; Andrew Merrylees in 1972; and John Legge in 1973.

Spence retired in 1972, although he continued to act as a consultant to the firm. In his last years he retreated to his holiday villas on Malta and Majorca, stung by a reaction against his work which was in sharp contrast to his previous popularity, but he nevertheless remained a prolific designer with a number of foreign commissions.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture⁶

Completed in 1980 to the singular design of prominent English architect Sir Basil Spence, this eccentric building, known formally as the Executive Wing and rather better by its eponymous form, is one of the most recognisable buildings in the country.

Infamously originated on the back of a napkin, the design of the Beehive defies a straightforward stylistic description. In architectural terms it is not a successful building: its cone shape does not relate in scale or form to John Campbell's neighbouring Parliament Building of 1911, and there is something essentially graceless and squat about its detail and proportions.

The 72 m high building is a stepped conical mass consisting of a total of ten floors above ground, and four below, built on a concrete primary structure surrounding a central cylindrical service core. The bulk of the building oversails a large, predominantly single-storey, rectangular plinth rising from the forecourt level and is capped by a tall central flagpole.

The plinth, featureless to the east, is faced in white marble panels and brings the double-height principal floor of the Beehive more or less to level with that of the adjacent Parliament House, to which the Beehive is connected with enclosed bridges at two levels. At the rear of the complex, the plinth is stepped up to include an additional floor of offices and has extensive glazing; a new security entrance has recently been constructed at the north-west corner. At Bowen Street, there is a secondary entrance (now redundant) at street level into the Executive Wing.

The main bulk of the building is given character by the tall main floor which has a continuous curtain wall recessed back from the perimeter of the building and surrounded by an open arcade of 30 structural fins intended to resonate with the proportions of the adjoining Parliament House; this detail is amplified in the subsequent stories which are fully glazed and have pre-cast concrete fins at every mullion line, and further elaborated in the prominent rounded two-tier cap covered in weathered standing-seam copper which has discrete panels of large vertical fins

⁶ Michael Kelly et al, 'Parliamentary Precinct Heritage Area' unpublished report for WCC DPC 48, 2006

shading windows at the upper level. The building contains the National Civil Defence Centre in a stoutly-reinforced basement and the terminus of the conveyor-belt link to Bowen House.

Various modern changes have affected the plinth, most recently a security lobby installed in the gap between the Beehive and Parliament House, but the building otherwise retains its original appearance.

Internally, the Beehive is notable for the peculiarities engendered by its radial plan, particularly evident in the principal public spaces. As David Kernohan remarks, 'The building exhibits many of the problems inherent in a circular building with oddly-shaped spaces requiring custom-designed furniture and fittings. The central lift lobby is wholly disorientating, and the banqueting hall has the unusual quality that only the Prime Minister can see all his or her guests.'⁷

The building has recently undergone a major internal upgrade to remedy some of the intrinsic deficiencies in way finding and the use of space generated by the original design.

2.2 Materials

Reinforced concrete structure
Metal window joinery
Copper roofing
Stone cladding

2.3 Setting

This building is a landmark building in Wellington, it is a unique piece of architecture for its circular form, and has become synonymous with Wellington as the capital city. It is on a prominent site and contributes to a crucial node in the city centred around the Cenotaph, Parliament Grounds, and the commercial and financial sections of the city which meet at this point.

The Beehive is a part of a group of buildings of diverse and distinct styles that is one of the most important in New Zealand. The beehive provides an important counterpoint to the Classicism of the 1912 Parliament Buildings and the Gothic of the 1899 Parliamentary Library.

⁷ Kernohan D. 1989, *Wellington's New Buildings*, VUW Press, Wellington p.9 as quoted in Boffa Miskell and Chris Cochran, *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001*, for Wellington City Council BOWE1

3.0 Sources

The Beehive under construction, Wellington. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: 1/4-022262-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23209583>

Beehive drawing, Alexander Turnbull Library (with permission of Parliament) Reference: A260-013, accessed March 2013, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/beehive-drawing-basil-spence>

'Biography: Sir Basil Spence' Dictionary of Scottish Architects, accessed March 2013, http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=203352

DoCoMoMo- International working party for the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites, and neighbourhoods of the modern movement – The Beehive, accessed March 2013, http://www.docomomo.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/Beehive_Wellington.pdf

Old Government House, Wellington. Hill, Morrie: Negatives of Wellington and national events and personalities. Ref: 1/2-177172-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22842847>

Wellington City Council, "Bowen Street – The Beehive," *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 1999) BOWE 1.

Image of The Beehive, accessed March 2013, <http://www.vroomvroomvroom.co.nz/content/wellington-car-hire.asp>

Wellington City Archives – Building alterations list – permission to view required.

Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

'The Beehive' is the Executive Wing of Parliament and is notable as a bold example of Brutalist architecture. The building has a quality of finishes, artworks, materials and workmanship that give it a high architectural and aesthetic value.

Townscape: *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

The Beehive has townscape value for the part that it plays in defining the Bowen and Molesworth Street Parliament area. It is a self-contained, recognisable building that has become a landmark and synonymous with Wellington as the capital city, and with central government in New Zealand.

Group: *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

The Beehive has group value for its contribution to the Parliamentary Precinct Heritage Area.

Historic Value:

Association: *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

This building has historical value through its association with the New Zealand Government. As the executive wing it has held many formal receptions in honour of varied guests.

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

This building is built on the same site as a number of pre 1900 buildings. It is included in the NZAA R27/270 Central City archaeological area.

Educational: *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

This building has technical value in the unique nature of its design. There are few buildings that have been built in the same way as the Beehive. The construction of a central core through the building is innovative and functional.

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

The building is one of the nation's most recognisable buildings and is held in high public esteem. This can be seen by the number of reproduced images of the building that appear on postcards, tourist information leaflets and merchandise, and political and satirical cartoons.

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

The building has become synonymous with New Zealand central government and has significant symbolic and cultural value.

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

*Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?
Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?*

The Beehive is a relatively recent addition to the enclave of buildings within Parliament Grounds. Its prominent site, distinctive form, and use as the Executive Wing of Parliament, ensure that it contributes to national identity, and local sense of place.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

This building is an unusual design and almost unique in New Zealand.

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

This building is a good example of the Brutalist style of architecture. It has a high level of finishing's, and the interiors have been refurbished to a high standard.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

This building has had little modification so maintains an extremely high level of authenticity and integrity. All additions have been carried out in a manner cohesive with the rest of the design.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

This building is important at a local and national level as well as being internationally recognisable.

It is important at a local level due to the contribution it makes to the townscape of the Parliament area. It is important at a national level as it houses the Executive Wing of New Zealand Government.

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website		
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

Background research

Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*