

179 Riddiford Street, Newtown



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The building is composed in a formal late Victorian neo-Classical style and has undergone several important changes over time. The prevailing impression of the building today is one of its time as a picture theatre.
- This building contributes to the Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area.
- Sited on a particularly prominent street corner, the former Ascot Theatre is a grand late-Victorian building.
- The building has a strong association with cinema in Wellington and was a meeting place for many local residents.

District Plan:	Map 6, Symbol 403
Legal Description:	PT LOT 1 A 1463
Heritage Area:	Newtown Shopping Centre Heritage Area
HPT Registered:	Not registered
Archaeological Site:	City Central NZAA 27/270, Maori Site of Significance
Other Names:	Newtown Hotel, Our Theatre, Ascot Theatre
Key physical dates:	1902, 1916
Architect / Builder:	unknown
Former uses:	Hotel, Theatre
Current uses:	Commercial, retail
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 232457 (s124 served, and expires 27 July 2027)



City View, 2012

1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

Newtown was originally surveyed by the New Zealand Company in 1840 as part of the new settlement of Wellington. Newtown was farmland for its first few decades and only lightly settled. The relocation of Wellington Hospital and the extension of the tram system to the suburb in the 1880s spurred subdivision. Within 40 years, the suburb was effectively filled.

The Newtown Central suburban centre has a largely uninterrupted streetscape of Victorian and Edwardian buildings. Most of the buildings are two storey and timber and date from the period of the suburb's early development. Almost all are the first buildings to occupy their sites. The suburb's early self sufficiency was epitomised by the range of shops, specialised or otherwise, that lined Riddiford Street. Many shops had the same occupants for decades. The second half of the century saw much change, with the end of the trams in 1964, the closing of many long-standing shops, families moving out to suburbs further afield, and the influx of immigrants.

Occupying this key corner of Constable and Riddiford Streets, the Ascot Theatre is the name most commonly associated with this building. However, it started life in 1902 as the Newtown Hotel, as a replacement on the same site for the original Newtown Hotel, a timber building dating back to 1876. The 1902 version was in brick. The hotel was soon stripped of its primary purpose when Newtown's residents voted the district dry in 1907.

After a period of disuse the building was converted into a picture theatre, known as 'Our Theatre', by the Newtown Picture Co. Revamped at a cost of £8,000 in 1916, the building included shops on its ground floor. No designer is associated with the work but the applicant was Shaw and Payne.² Shops were formed on the building's ground floor and a confectioner was a constant occupant from the beginning. Later (ca. 1939) renamed the Ascot Theatre, it was a successful suburban theatre during the heyday of the cinema, but by the 1960s, local theatres were in decline as television penetrated New Zealand homes, and most closed by the end of the decade; the Ascot finally shut down in 1976. It was revived briefly in 1981 but shortly thereafter closed for good. In the following period it was used as a dance hall, nightclub and market. The ground floor shops remain in regular use; the upper floors are presently let as office space.

¹ The text was extracted from Wellington City Council, *Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area, Riddiford Street, Constable Street, Rintoul Street*, October 2008.

² 00053:187:10297, Corner Constable Street and Riddiford Street [179 Riddiford Street], conversion to theatre, Owner: Newtown Picture Co. Applicant: Shaw and Payne. Legal description: Part Town Acre 819. Application value: £8,000. Note: Convert Newtown Hotel to picture theatre and shops. Known as the Ascot Theatre, 2-Jun-16



Looking south east along Riddiford Street, photograph taken by Muir & Moodie, 1904, ATL, BB-2291-1/1-G



Photograph by Frank Clark, Wellington City Archives, ref: 00508:1:1067, 1975

ASCOT THEATRE, NEWTOWN.

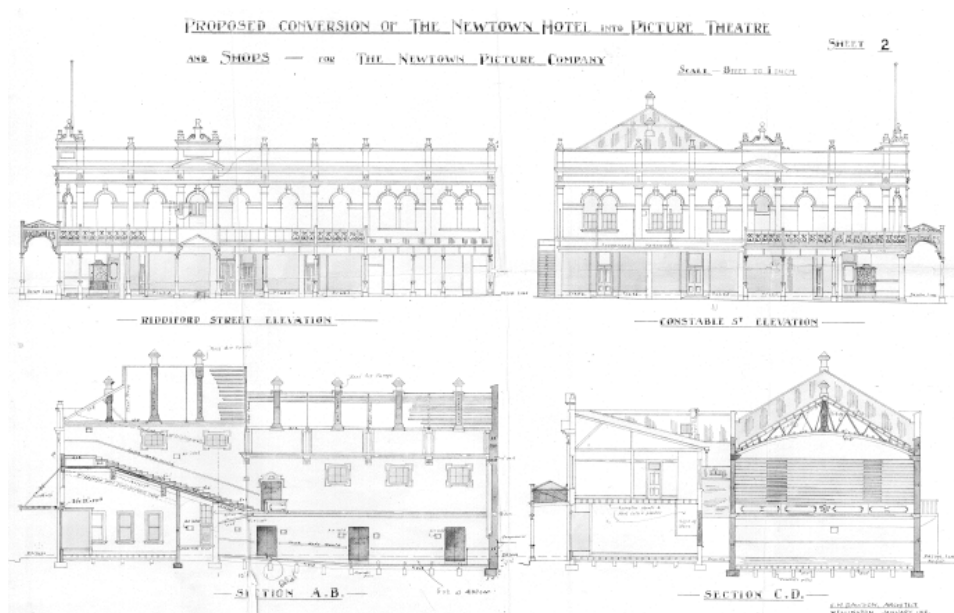
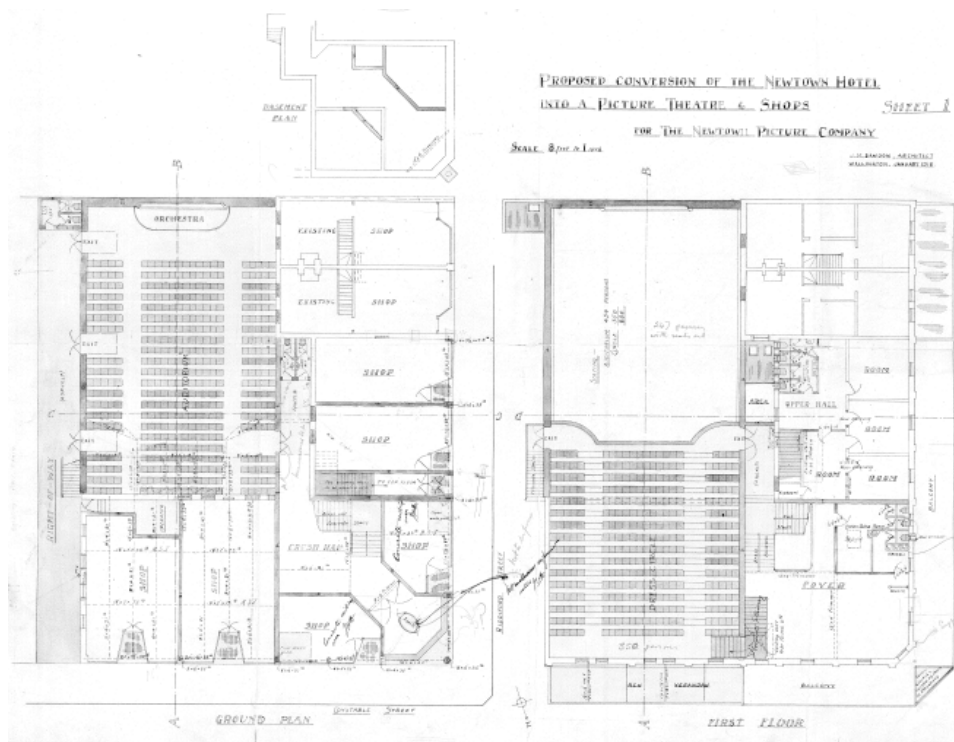
Under the new name of Ascot Theatre, Our Theatre, Newtown, which has been completely renovated, will reopen on Saturday night with a splendid double-feature programme. The main feature will be "Sweethearts," starring Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy. Despite their success together in "Naughty Marietta," "Rose Marie," "Maytime," and "Girl of the Golden West," the stars establish still another milestone for the film musical in "Sweethearts." A new warmth and vividness of personality colours all their efforts, and whether the cause includes the story, the dress, or the technicolor they emerge as even brighter luminaries of the Hollywood firmament. The associate film will be "Night of Mystery," with a surprise cast. On the stage will be Judy Cooper and other well-known concert performers.

Evening Post, Volume CXXVIII, Issue 41, 17 August 1939, Page 7

1.2 Timeline of modifications

- 1916 Conversion of Newtown Hotel to a picture theatre and shops
- 1939 Sign erected
- 1944 Extension of the conveniences
- 1959 New verandah and repairs to existing verandahs
- 1964 Awning installed
- 1988 Additions and alterations made to the shops and flats
- 2012 Internal alterations in Unit 9 to bathroom and kitchen, new bathroom, remove walls in kitchen/dining area

The full list of modifications and the corresponding Wellington City Archives' reference numbers are listed under section "Background Research".



2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture and Setting

Sited on a particularly prominent street corner, the former Ascot Theatre is a grand late-Victorian building in most aspects – intent, scale and streetscape presence. Of masonry construction, the building is a tall two and three-storey structure, its height amplified by a tall solid parapet. It has two main facades – one to Constable Street and one to Riddiford Street, composed in a formal late Victorian neo-Classical style. The building has undergone several important changes over time; the prevailing impression of the building today is one of its time as a picture theatre. The building has a strong corner entrance and stayed horizontal verandahs on both sides. The corner entrance appears to have been modified, and the Classical ornamentation removed on the chamfered end and flanking bays at second floor and parapet levels – perhaps to give the building an Art Deco aesthetic as this was a style that was associated with cinemas in the early to mid 20th century.

The most distinctive architectural features are the long rows of arched windows and the bold cornice and pediment. The windows are double-hung and set in elaborately moulded surrounds, separated into bays with elaborate high pilasters, and with a horizontal string course tying the springing points of the window arches together; above the mock keystones is a further string course. The pilasters rise further above this and engage with the cornice by complex moulded brackets; two bays back from the corner on each side, there is a segmental-arched pediment across one bay of the façade. Above the cornice, the solid parapet is divided into bays by extensions of the pilasters; some acroteria remain. The major differences in the façades are in the two southernmost bays, which have paired windows, and in the three easternmost bays that have pairs of plain rectangular windows and clearly show three storeys on this side of the building.

Aerial photos reveal a complex roof-scape, with the theatre space occupying the eastern side of the lot, and the western side divided into three by party walls. The picture theatre roof can just be glimpsed over the parapets.³

2.2 Materials

- Masonry construction
- Double hung sash windows
- Render finish

2.3 Heritage Area

This building contributes to the Newtown Shopping Centre Heritage Area. A detailed outline of the heritage area can be found in the Wellington City Council report "Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area: Riddiford Street, Constable Street, Rintoul Street", 28 October 2008.

This building became part of the heritage area in District Plan Change 75.

³ Text extracted from Wellington City Council, *Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area, Riddiford Street, Constable Street, Rintoul Street*

3.0 Sources

Wellington City Council, *Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area, Riddiford Street, Constable Street, Rintoul Street*, Wellington City Council: unpublished report, October 2008.

4.0 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 building is composed in a formal late Victorian neo-Classical style and has undergone several important changes over time. The prevailing impression of the building today is one of its time as a picture theatre.

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 building has townscape value for its prominent location at the corner of Riddiford and Constable streets.

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 building has group value for its contribution to the Newtown Shopping Centre Heritage Area. The precinct is a largely uninterrupted streetscape of Victorian and Edwardian buildings. Most of the buildings are two storey, timber built (unlike this one), and date from the period of the suburb's early development.

Historic Value:

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

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

The building has a very strong association with cinema in Wellington. It was a successful suburban theatre during the heyday of the cinema, but by the 1960s, local theatres were in decline as television penetrated New Zealand homes, and most closed by the end of the decade.

Scientific Value:

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

There was pre-1900 human activity on this site. Although some of the sites have been altered by rebuilding or landscaping or subdivisional change, there is archaeological value in the immediate surrounds.

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?*

Social Value:

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

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?*

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?

This prominent building contributes to the sense of place and continuity in the Newtown Shopping Centre Heritage Area.

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

The building is likely to be a focus of community sentiment and connection for the many locals who visited the building during its time as a cinema, although this association will have diminished somewhat in recent years.

Level of cultural heritage significance

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

The building contributes to a consistent historic streetscape. Such a streetscape is rare in Wellington, especially so close to the city centre.

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

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?*

Local/Regional/National/International

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

6.05.0 Appendix

Formatted: Bullets and Numbering

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	y	
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	y	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?	y	Plan Change 75
Heritage Area Report	y	Newtown Central Shopping Centre Heritage Area
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	n	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	n	
HPT website	n	
HPT files	n	
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

Background research

Table of permits from Wellington City Archives

00053:18 7:10297	Corner Constable Street and Riddiford Street [179 Riddiford Street], conversion to theatre	Owner: Newtown Picture Co. Applicant: Shaw and Payne. Legal description: Part Town Acre 819. Application value: £8,000. Note: Convert Newtown Hotel to picture theatre and shops. Known as the Ascot Theatre.	Building Permit/Consent	02 Jun 1916
00053:19 0:10474	Corner Riddiford Street and Constable Street [179 Riddiford Street], alterations to shops 7 and 8, and floors above	Owner: South Wellington Picture Investment Co Ltd. Applicant: Shaw and Payne. Legal description: Part Town Acre 819. Application value: £500. Note: Architect - J M Dawson.	Building Permit/Consent	15 Mar 1917
00056:23 0:B19474	Constable Street [179-181 Riddiford Street], alterations to theatre	Owner: South Wellington Picture Investment Co. Builder: Lawrence and Arcus. Legal description: Town Acre 819. Application value: £1,590.	Building Permit/Consent	07 Jul 1939

Report Date: October 2012

00056:23 5:B19765	Corner of Constable and Riddiford Street [179-181 Riddiford Street], erect sign	Owner: Ascot Theatre. Builder: Claude Neon. Application value: £80.	Building Permit/Consent	13 Sep 1939
00056:29 6:B23510	Constable Street [179-181 Riddiford Street], extend conveniences	Owner: Ascot Theatre. Builder: Wellington Builders Limited. Legal description: Part Town Acre 819. Application value: £70.	Building Permit/Consent	11 Sep 1944
00056:51 8:B38633	179-181 Riddiford Street, theatre alterations	Owner: South Wellington PIC Investment Co Ltd. Builder: B W Scott. Legal description: Part Town Acre 189. Application value: £1,500.	Building Permit/Consent	11 Oct 1955
00058:11 9:C5786	179-181 Riddiford Street, new verandah and repairs to existing verandahs	Legal description: Town Acre 819 DP 3832 (Pt Sec 819 Town Of Wellington). Owner: Ascot Theatre. Builder: Broom. Application value: £750	Building Permit/Consent	30 Nov 1959
00058:28 2:C12443	Constable Street [171-179 Riddiford Street], building alterations	Owner: TAB. Builder: Chadwick Construction Co Limited. Legal description: Town Acre 819. Application value: £5,600.	Building Permit/Consent	01 May 1963
00058:36 3:C15580	179-181 Riddiford Street, awning	Legal description: Town Acre 819. Owner: Mrs Topp. Builder: Airflow Blinds Ltd. Application value: £105. Note: Known as Ascot Theatre.	Building Permit/Consent	24 May 1964
00058:42 9:C18360	Constable Street [179-181 Riddiford Street], building alterations	Owner: Ascot Enterprises. Builder: M Rangi. Legal description: Town Acre 819. Application value: £750.	Building Permit/Consent	22 Nov 1965
00058:83 8:C37470	Constable Street [179-181 Riddiford Street], shop alterations	Owner: Montana Wines Limited. Builder: Church Bros Limited. Legal description: Town Acre 819. Application value: \$2,621.	Building Permit/Consent	29 Mar 1973
00059:0: D3150	2 Constable Street [179-181 Riddiford Street], additions and alterations	Legal description: Town Acre 819 Town Of Wellington. Owner: Aztec Investments Ltd. Applicant: B W Williams Ltd. Application value: \$3,000.	Building Permit/Consent Microfiche	30 Apr 1986
00059:15 8:D8211	179 Riddiford Street, additions and alterations	Legal description: Part town acre 819. Owner: Ascot Markets. Builder: Progressive	Building Permit/Consent	11 Jan 1988

Report Date: October 2012

		Construction & Developments Ltd. Application value: \$50,000.		
00059:24 5:D11197	179 Riddiford Street, flat additions and alterations	Legal description: Part town acre 819. Owner: Aztal Investments. Builder: BW Willman Ltd. Application value: \$186,000.	Building Permit/Consent	16 Nov 1988
SR Code	SR Type	SRI Description	SRI Status	Current Updated
207220	aBLDG CONSENT	2.2 - Multi-Residential - Internal alts to bathroom and kitchen, new bathroom, remove walls in kitchen/dining area. Unit 9	Responded-2	3/10/2012
232457	Bdg StrengthInv	Notice Expires 27/07/2027.	Yellow Notice Issued	25/07/2012