

Wellington East Girls' College main building

131 Austin Street



WCC(2012) ref IMG_5810

Summary of heritage significance

- The building is a good representative example of an early 20th century educational building. The exterior has been much-modified but is well proportioned, and the façade can be read as a complete Stripped Classical scheme. The building's interior is notable for the quality of design, materials and workmanship, particularly to the entrance foyer, stair and principal's office.
- The building is the original purpose-built Main College block. It has a historic association with many former students and teachers of Wellington East Girls College who have since gone on to play prominent roles in New Zealand society.
- This building is held in high public esteem, and this can be seen from the campaign to save the building when it was threatened with demolition in 1981. It has social value for its contribution to the sense of place, identity and continuity of the college.

District Plan:	Map 6 Reference 20
Legal Description:	Pt Town Belt of Wellington
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Category I reference 1445
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270 Maori Site of significance – SR9201029
Other Names:	Wellington East Girls 131 Austin Street
Key physical dates:	1925
Architect / Builder:	Architect: C.A. Lawrence - Swan Lawrence Swan Builder: E.S. Knight
Former uses:	Education
Current uses:	Education
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 202437 (124 Served) – expires 31 July 2021 (Bldg A Main Block)

Google Maps 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

Wellington East Girls' College was established in 1924 to ease pressure on Wellington Girls' College which, at the time, was the only Government run girls' college in Wellington city. The site chosen for the new school was on land owned by Wellington College which had previously been used for grazing cows.¹

The first building to be constructed was the main college building which was completed in 1925. It was designed by the firm Swan Lawrence Swan (Charles Lawrence's signature is on the plans) and the main contractor was E.S. Knight. Lawrence was described as the school's architect.²

Originally the college was staffed only by women, and throughout much of the school's history female teachers have traditionally continued to make up the majority. The school's development was steady, with tennis courts being built in 1926 and front gates being constructed in 1927. The first addition made to the building was in 1930 when a matching wing incorporating four classrooms, also to designs by Swan Lawrence Swan, was built on the west.

Much of the building's prominent decoration has been removed. After the 1942 earthquake the cornices were removed and the columns on the main facade were removed in 1948-50. Considerable strengthening of the building also took place at this time affecting much of the original interior fabric.

With rolls rising quickly new buildings were constructed. A new library and staff room were added in 1950, the Homecraft Block in 1953, the baths in 1960, gymnasium in 1963 and, in 1966, the south wing and hall extensions. Capacity was further increased with extensions in 1968 and in 1979.³ However, in 1981 concern over the main building's ability to resist an earthquake, despite the strengthening work already done, led to calls for its replacement. The Old Girls' Association strongly resisted the move⁴ and, in the end, the decision was taken to retain and strengthen the building.⁵

The building was assessed by engineers as an 'earthquake-prone building' in 2011 and almost immediately vacated pending seismic strengthening works.⁶ These works are currently underway (2013).

¹ M. Gambrill, *Our First Fifty Years: A history of Wellington East Girls College*, (Wellington: Jubilee Committee of Wellington East Girls College, 1975), p.1.

² Ibid.

³ See Permit list: 131 Austin Terrace, Wellington East Girls' College, Wellington City Archives.

⁴ *Dominion*, 30 September 1981.

⁵ History taken from: Wellington City Council, 'Wellington East Girls,' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings* (Wellington City Council, 2001), AUST1.

⁶ Michelle Duff, 'We won't risk kids' lives, Wellington School says' *Dompost* 08/11/2011

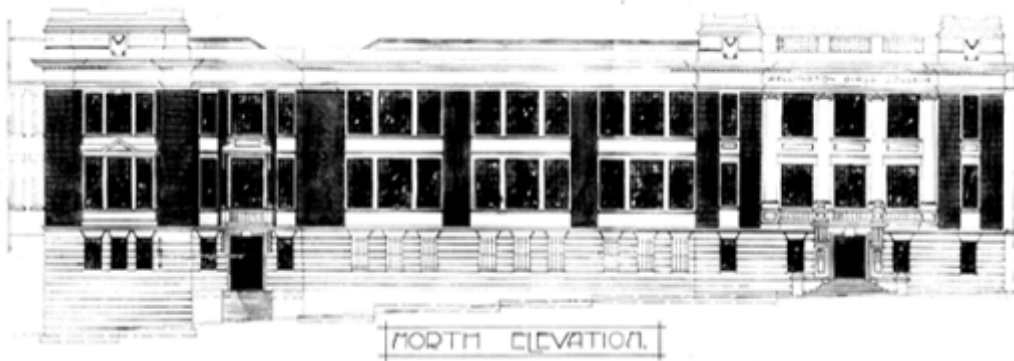


View over Wellington East Girls College and Wellington College, 1931. Dominion post (Newspaper): Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post and Dominion newspapers. Ref: EP-Education-Secondary Schools-Wellington College-12. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.



Interior (2012):WCC ref 9 Aug 2012 022

1.2 Timeline of modifications



'Paterson Street (131 Austin Street), main building,' 12 March 1924, 00055:28:A2629, Wellington City Archives.

- 1924 Erect main building 00055:28:A2629
- 2013 Earthquake strengthening Main Block SR 241174, SR241945

1.3 Occupation history

- 1925 Wellington East Girls' College

1.4 Architect

Swan, Lawrence, Swan was an architectural firm formed by John Sydney Swan (1874-1936), his brother Francis Swan (1885-1956) and Charles Lawrence. John had originally trained under Frederick de Jersey Clere and from 1901-1905 he partnered with Clere. From 1906-1916 he practiced on his own, designing Erskine College in Island Bay (1906) and St Gerard's Church (1908-1910).

In 1915 he was joined by Francis and their practice was known as Swan and Swan. They were soon joined by Charles Lawrence who had previously worked with Francis Penty. Swan, Lawrence, Swan was responsible for buildings such as the Home of Compassion Crèche on Buckle Street (1916). Firth House at Wellington College (1924) and the main building at Wellington East Girls (1925). When Charles Lawrence died in 1933 John left to establish Swan and Lavelle with Jim Lavelle. Francis continued Swan and Lawrence but then later went to work on his own.⁷

⁷ Biography taken from: Wellington City Council, 'Wellington Architects,' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings* (Wellington City Council, 2001), Appendix III.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The main building was designed as a collegiate version of the inter-war Free Classical style. The removal of ornamental features such as the heavy stepped parapets and Ionic columns from the front facade has given the building a more stripped Classical character. However the pleasant proportions and the balance of window void to plain surface of the original have been preserved. The main building rises two storeys over a rusticated base and is asymmetrical. Notable features include the vertical bay division, plain surfaces, large areas of glazing, balustraded balconies and vestigial classical entablature.

Construction is load-bearing brick masonry reinforced by concrete bands under ground, first floor and roof levels. The foundations and piles are of reinforced concrete. The roof is clad with Welsh slate. The most important part of the interior is the entry foyer, stairwell, and principal's office, which retain original features such as egg-and-dart cornices, timber wall panelling, architraves and skirting.⁸ The remainder of the interior has been modified following earthquake strengthening.⁹

2.2 Materials

- Load bearing brick masonry

2.3 Setting

The Wellington East Girls' College main building is situated on the school grounds at the northern front entrance. The grounds themselves are situated at the foot of the eastern Town Belt, overlooking SH N1 before it enters the Mount Victoria tunnel. The eastern end of the building is connected to modern additions. To the south there are further buildings. An access road, followed by a bush covered incline separates the western end of the building from the grounds of Wellington College. Because the building is situated on the school grounds it is therefore not accessible to the general public. It can however be viewed from the front gates at the south end of Austin Street.

⁸ Architecture taken from: Wellington City Council, 'Wellington East Girls,' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings* (Wellington City Council, 2001), AUST1.

⁹ WCC Heritage Building Interiors Project, 'Wellington East Girls' College' 1997.

3.0 Sources

Gambrill, M. *Our First Fifty Years: A history of Wellington East Girls College*. Wellington: Jubilee Committee of Wellington East Girls College, 1975.

Wellington City Council. 'Wellington East Girls.' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001. AUST1.

Wellington City Council. 'Wellington Architects.' *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001. Appendix III.

Newspapers

Dominion. 30 September 1981.

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 a good representative example of an early 20th century educational building. The exterior has been much-modified but is well proportioned and the façade can be read as a complete Stripped Classical scheme. The building's interior is notable for the quality of design, materials and workmanship, particularly to the entrance foyer, stair and principal's office.

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 some townscape value for its site on the eastern slopes of Mount Victoria that can be seen from many parts of Wellington.

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?*

Historic Value:

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

The building is the original purpose-built Main College block. It has a historic association with many former students and teachers of Wellington East Girls College who have since gone on to play prominent roles in New Zealand society.

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?*

Maori site of significance and the grounds of the school lie between the former Te Akatarewa Pa and the Hauwai cultivation 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?*

Social Value:

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

This building is held in high public esteem, and this can be seen from the campaign to save the building when it was threatened with demolition in 1981.

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 symbolic and traditional value as an institution of education for pupils, both past and present, of Wellington East Girl's College.

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 building is a focus of identity for pupils, both past and present, of Wellington East Girls' College.

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

The building has sentimental value to former pupils and teachers of Wellington East Girls' College.

Level of cultural heritage significance

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

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?*

The building has retained a significant amount of its original fabric, therefore it has some authenticity.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

Because of its historic role as an education provider in Wellington, as well as being a landmark on the Wellington townscape, the building is important on a local level.

5.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
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	Y	
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

Background research



Wellington East Girls College west wing under construction, 1930. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: EP-1314-1/2-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.