

Wellington Railway Station

2 Bunny Street



South Elevation

Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*



North Elevation

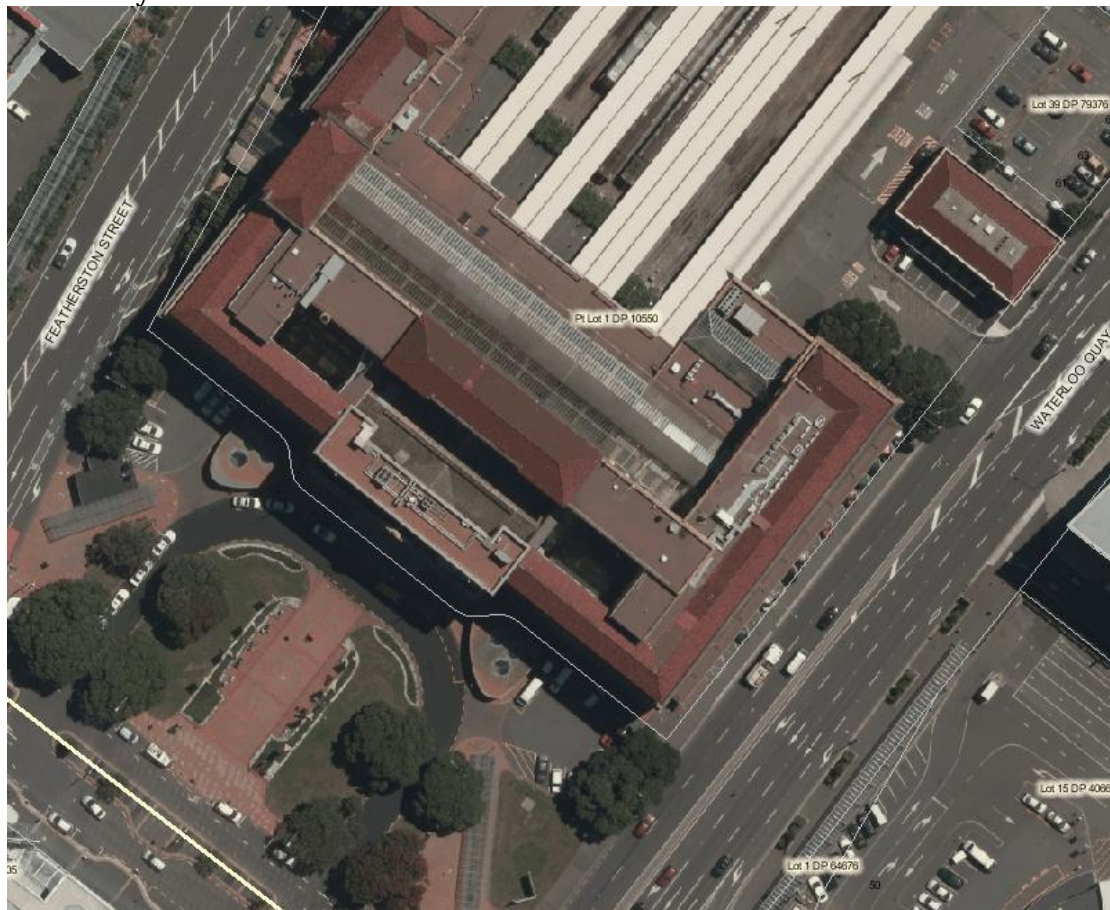
Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The Wellington Railway Station has significant architectural values. The design is bold and influenced by the world's great railway stations, possessing a generous forecourt and sweeping driveways leading to the impressive colonnade. The internal spaces, particularly the booking hall, are a continuation of this tradition. It is a fine example of one of the city's leading architectural firms Gray Young, Morton, and Young. It has been recognised as one of the best 20th century buildings in New Zealand for its architectural qualities.
- The Railway station is associated with a number of historically important events including the focal-point of the funeral cortege for Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage, as a casualty clearing station in the aftermath of the *Wahine* disaster, and as part of the home-front defence system during World War Two.
- This building has immense townscape value; it defines the Waterloo Quay, Featherston, and Bunny Street area. It is a landmark building that is used by, and seen by, thousands of commuters daily.

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 44
Legal Description:	Pt Lot 1 DP 10550
Heritage Area:	N/A
HPT Listed:	Category 1, reference 1452
Archaeological Site:	Pre-1900 reclaimed land, pre-1900 human activity on site. NZAA Central City R27/270
Key physical dates:	Built: 1937
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Gray Young, Morton, and Young. Builder: Fletcher Construction. Engineer: Peter Holgate
Former uses:	Transport – Railway Station Government and Administration – Office Building Civic Facilities and Recreation – Hall/Concert
Current uses:	Transport – Railway Station Government and Administration – Office Building Education – University Retail and Commercial
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not EQP – SR 201780

Extent: Cityview GIS



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

Although not the first Railway Station in Wellington, the Bunny Street Station is by far the grandest. It has dominated Wellington's northern gateway since its opening in 1937. It was constructed at the climax of an extensive governmental programme to upgrade the city's railway facilities.

The first station was built at Pipitea Point in 1874, but destroyed by fire four years later.¹ In 1880 the Government erected a new station in what is now Featherston Street, which in 1885 was moved on rollers to a new site near the intersection of Thorndon and Lambton Quays to improve access to the wharves, here it became known as the Lambton Station.² The Government had funded the construction of a rail route over the Rimutaka Ranges but would not do so for the proposed line up the West Coast to the Manawatu. Instead a consortium of businessmen created the Wellington-Manawatu Railway Company and built the line themselves and in 1886 opened their own station, and yard, at the bottom of Davis Street in Thorndon on reclaimed land. In 1893 the Government line was extended to Te Aro and a new station was built on a site near the current intersection of Tory and Wakefield Streets. The Te Aro section was to be the first part of a railway system that would extend to Island Bay - but this plan was abandoned³, and the Island Bay route was later served by trams.

Meanwhile the Railways department had been planning to construct new offices for its head office staff. In June of 1901 the foundation stone was laid and a substantial building in permanent materials arose, dwarfing the well-used timber Lambton Station. Improvements and extensions to the lines continued following the purchase of the successful Wellington-Manawatu Railway Company by the Railways' Department and in 1908 the North Island Main trunk line was completed, connecting Wellington and Auckland. This resulted in an increase in rail traffic and it became apparent that there was a need for a central Wellington station. In 1910 George Troup, railways' architect, made preliminary plans for a new station, however, it would be many years before the plans for a new station would come to fruition.⁴

Before construction could begin there was the problem of land to deal with, the substantial amount of land that was needed for the project was to be provided from the inner harbour reclamation – from Kaiwharawhara to Waterloo Quay – which was reclaimed between 1924 and 1927. New designs were drawn up by architects Gray Young, Morton, and Young in 1929 and a contract had been let to Fletcher Construction at a price of £339,173 the following year. The project was, however, delayed as the economy began to falter and the Great Depression set in. Finally in 1933 the project was revived and the plans completed by Gray Young were altered to reduce the building cost. Work began in 1934 and the huge task created much needed employment over the next four years.⁵

¹ J.D. Mahoney, *Down at the Station: A study of the New Zealand Railway Station*, Palmerston North, 1987, 100.

² Geoffrey B. Churchman and Tony Hurst, *The Railways of New Zealand: A journey Through History*, Wellington 2001, 149.

³ D.G. Hoy, *Rails out of the Capital*, Wellington, 1970, 11.

⁴ Athfield Architects, *Wellington Railway Station Conservation Management Plan*, prepared for Her Majesty the Queen, 2004,14.

⁵ Wellington City Council, "Bunny Street," *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 2001), BUNN 1.

The construction of the proposed station had begun as early as 1928, when a test bore was drilled as part of the foundation and pile design process. Information was sought from a number of sources such as the British Steel Piling Company on their patented 'Vibro' concrete pile system, and from Gummer and Ford (who had recently completed the Auckland Railway station), regarding the relative costs of a patent vs. a precast pile system. The latter (pre-cast system) was chosen in 1933 after much consideration. By the beginning of 1934 work was underway excavating the site, and by late October of that year over 1500 piles had been driven, and arrangements were made for the laying of the foundation stone. On December 17 1934 the Duke of Gloucester laid the foundation stone in front of thousands of spectators, the Prime Minister, and representatives of the trade and industry, local and national government, as well as the legal, military and banking professions. The Duke made a joke that because the site for the building was on reclaimed land that it may have been more appropriate to launch it with a bottle of champagne.⁶ By this time a skeleton of steel could be seen rising into the air, this was symptomatic of a focus on earthquake resistance that had been raised by both the Government and building industry. The station was designed with a steel structure encased in concrete with outer walls clad in brick held together with steel reinforcing rods that had been inspired by the structural-design of modern Japanese buildings. The bricks were specially made with holes so that the vertical reinforcing rods could be inserted through them. This station was the first large brick building in New Zealand to use vertical steel reinforcing throughout.⁷

Construction continued through until 1937, when on June 19th the building was officially opened. Acting Prime Minister Peter Fraser told the crowd that the station was "worthy of Wellington and worthy of the capital city".⁸ The front entrance was an impressive sight with eight massive columns reaching up to a fourth floor. Coromandel granite provided the base of the building while the red brick exterior featured bands of purple and green decorative tiles. Inside, the vaulted ceiling of the booking hall presented a grand appearance above a terrazzo floor with a decorative compass design. Bronze, glass, marble, and decorative plasterwork were used extensively in the elegant interior. The new station's success was reflected in increased business, in its first year of operation its revenue had increased by 41% and improvements in the rail services were soon being planned. Just over a year after the official opening the first electric trains were introduced, and over the next seventeen years the rest of the Wellington suburban train network would be fully converted to electric engines. The station's success allowed for the completion of the Featherston Street wing extension. This wing had been shown on the original plans, but had been omitted to reduce costs during the Great Depression. In 1938 new plans were drawn up for a multi-floor addition to be built above the existing single storey Featherston Street wing, and with a new single storey extension beyond. Tenders for the extension were called for, and in November of 1938 the contract documents were signed by Fletcher Construction. Work soon began on the additions.

The role of the railway station, and the provision of rail services, changed in the war years of the 1940s. The station served as a venue for the first volunteers of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Forces, who held a farewell ceremony in Wellington before leaving to fight in the Second World War. The war had a major effect upon the Railways' Department, with increases in passenger and goods traffic, depleted staff, coal shortages, and the conversion of railway workshops to manufacture war supplies. Members of the public grew frustrated with the cancellation of services and delays that were the result of material and manpower shortages, and the railways

⁶ 'Duke in Wellington', *Auckland Star*, Volume LXV, Issue 298, 17 December 1934, 8.

⁷ Athfield Architects, *Wellington Railway Station Conservation Management Plan*, 2004.

⁸ Wellington City Council, "Bunny Street," 2001.

never quite recovered the public confidence that they had possessed prior to the war. Throughout the war parts of the station were closed and given over for defensive purposes, and plans were drawn up for bomb shelters in the basement, and for accommodation on the first, second, and third floors for people in the event of an attack. The building would be defended by machine guns that had been installed on the roof of the building; these were later replaced by anti-aircraft guns, which were dismantled after the war.

In the post-war years the station retained a crucial role in the city's civil defence network. The building had long been designated as a casualty clearing station for the city of Wellington, particularly in the case of a major earthquake, as the building was noted for its innovative earthquake-resistant design. It was, however, a disaster of another kind that would call upon the building to serve its civil defence function. On the 10th April 1968 Wellington was battered by a storm. The Littleton to Wellington ferry, *Wahine*, was blown off-course and struck Barrett's Reef at the entrance of the harbour, before drifting and capsizing near Seatoun. Those survivors whose injuries did not require hospitalisation were brought to the Wellington Railway Station.

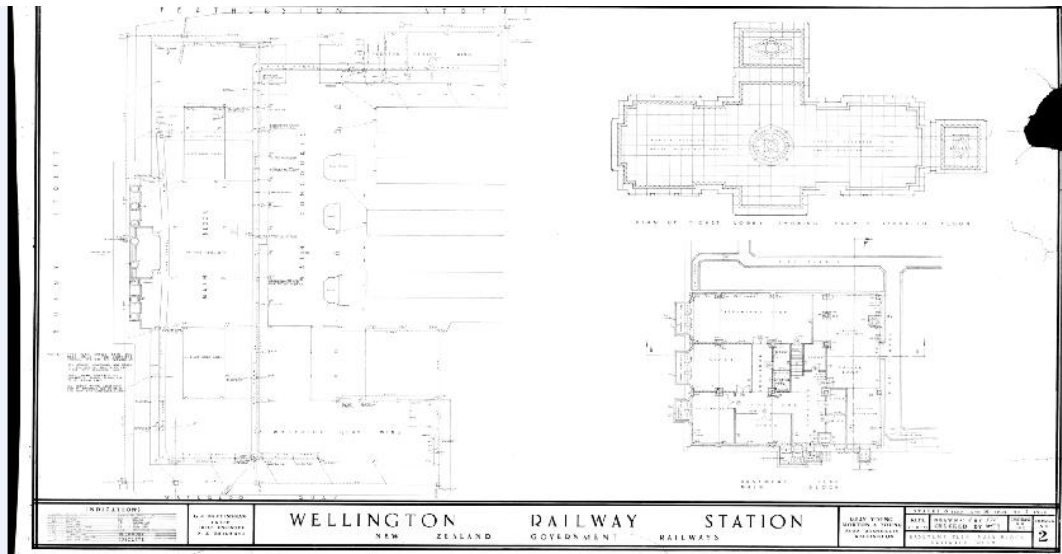
By the 1970s the station had seen numerous proposals to solve its staff office accommodation problems, upgrade the facilities, and deal with the growing problem of vagrants and alcoholics. The Railways were operating at a loss, and use of the system was in decline. The 1980s and 1990s saw much of the network close and massive restructuring of the organisation leading to the creation of a new company called New Zealand Rail Ltd, the changes, however, did not end there with the culmination of the restructuring being the sale of NZ Rail in 1993 by the Government to private interests. The era of change that was brought about by this sale would not leave the station building unaffected, and during the late 1980s and much of the 1990s the building was upgraded. This resulted in the removal of many original load bearing walls and much of the original fabric. In 2000 Tranz Rail relocated their head office from the Wellington station to Auckland - leaving part of the building empty. This has now been redeveloped by Victoria University.

Despite the changes that have been made over time, the main elevations and a number of interior spaces of the Wellington Railway Station are little-altered. The building is in remarkably original condition and remains a prominent and significant building.

The building owners are about to begin a significant seismic mitigation programme that will upgrade the structure of the building (2014).⁹

⁹ SR 297212 Outline Plan of Works

1.2 Timeline of modifications (Based on history)



1937	Original Construction
1938	Addition – Extension
1939	Interior spaces in many parts of the building altered
1950	Addition – Extension to platform 2, installation of platform 1
1985	Extensive alterations to interiors – Walls removed
1989	Modification
1990s	Modifications – Changes to platforms and canopies, building of ramps and walkway to Westpac Trust Stadium. Refurbishment and rebuilding of office accommodations
1999	Building modification
2003	Building modifications
2006	Building modifications
2007	Building modifications

1.3 Occupation history

Not assessed

1.4 Architect

Gray Young, William

The architect Gray Young was born in Oamaru. When he was a child his family moved to Wellington where he was educated. After leaving school he was articled to the Wellington architectural firm of Crichton and McKay. In 1906 he won a competition for the design of Knox College, Dunedin, and shortly after this he commenced practice on his own account.

He became a prominent New Zealand architect and during his career of 60 years he designed over 500 buildings. His major buildings include the Wellington and Christchurch railway stations (1936 and 1954 respectively), Scot's College (1919), Phoenix Assurance Building (1930), and the Australian Mutual Provident Society

(AMP) Chambers (1950). At Victoria University he was responsible for the Stout (1930), Kirk (1938), and Easterfield (1957) Buildings, and Weir House (1930). Gray Young also achieved recognition for his domestic work such as the Elliott House, Wellington (1913).

His design for the Wellesley Club (1925) earned him the Gold Medal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1932. He was elected a Fellow of the Institute in 1913, served on the executive committee from 1914-1935 and was president from 1935-36. Gray Young was also elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and achieved prominence in public affairs.¹⁰

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Wellington Railway Station was designed to provide an impressive gateway to the capital city and, despite the subsequent changes to freight and passenger transportation, the building continues to fulfil that function with an, almost, unmatched style and integrity. Its only near-rival as a formal, grand, complete, high-status, public building is perhaps the former Dominion Museum building on Buckle Street. The influence of Beaux Arts planning can be seen in the sweeping drive and lawn that form the forecourt of the building, and the grand symmetrical façade of the main elevation. This is dominated by eight huge Doric columns that rise through three storeys to support a massive entablature across the middle portion of the building. This in turn supports a large and ornate clock. Through the portico, a high barrel-vaulted booking hall with a coffered ceiling is one of the most impressive public spaces in the city, its inspiration drawn from the Pennsylvania Station in New York. Beyond this space the concourse of concrete arches and glazed roof are utilitarian in style; the concourse gives access to the platforms which run from the enclosed U-shape of the main office part of the station. The internal spaces have particularly fine acoustic qualities.

The building design, materials and workmanship are of a particularly high quality. The elaborate entrance door cases are particularly fine, and are made up of bronze pilasters with Corinthian capitals that support a full entablature; these door cases act as a visual counter-point to the heavy Doric columns at the portico. Other notable features include the innovative reinforced brick cladding, the decorative ceramic-tiled spandrel-panels, the distinctive terracotta roof tiles, and the Neo-Classical Revival decorative urns over the Featherston Street entrance.

2.2 Materials¹¹

The Wellington Railway Station was designed in the aftermath of the Napier Earthquake and subsequently was at the forefront of a new series of building code regulations. The issue of seismic strengthening was understandably topical and the design employed an advanced steel frame encased in concrete and supported on groups of reinforced concrete piles. The bricks used for the outer façade were designed to rake vertical reinforcing rods and these were tied back to the structural members.

¹⁰ WCC Heritage Inventory 1997 (from Elliott House Listing)

¹¹ Athfield Architects, *Wellington Railway Station Conservation Management Plan*, 2004, 44-46.

-Foundations

1,438 reinforced concrete piles, set in groups and sunk to bedrock

-Structural Frame

Steel frame, encased in concrete. The suburban concourse consists of reinforced concrete arched ribs.

-Floors

Concrete reinforced floor slabs on concrete supporting beams. Floor coverings generally linoleum, rubber, terrazzo, Trinidad Asphalte, or carpet.
Reinforced concrete stairs.

-Walls

Coromandel Granite Base. 18 inch thick brick walls in old English bond to floor, hollow brick walls, remaining floors, reinforced and tied back to the steel framework. 'Gasco' pressed brick face work. Faience decorative tile work. Rendered plaster finish to some external walls.

Granite door lintels and sills.

Original internal partition walls are hollow brick construction.

Stourbridge white glazed brick partitions to toilets.

-Roof

Timber framed roofing in heart Rimu or Totara, timber sarking, and terracotta tile roof cladding.

Concrete reinforced slab roofing on concrete supporting beams, originally coated in pure Trinidad Asphalte.

Copper guttering, copper or cast iron rainwater heads and downpipes.

-Joinery

Steel window joinery

Brass external door joinery, replaced sections in anodised aluminium

Rimu and selected native internal door joinery

-Internal Linings

Solid plaster walls, tiled, timber panelled, or marble veneer

Solid plaster or fibrous plaster ceilings

2.3 Setting

The Wellington Railway Station is an imposing building that was designed to provide an impressive gateway to the Capital City. With the Waterloo Hotel and Shed 21, it forms a small precinct of heritage buildings in the Waterloo Quay/Bunny Street/Featherston Street area.

2.4 Sources

Athfield Architects. *Wellington Railway Station Conservation Management Plan*. 2004.

Churchman, Geoffrey B. and Hurst, Tony., *The Railways of New Zealand: A journey Through History*. Wellington, 2001

Hoy, D.G., *Rails out of the Capital*. Wellington, 1970.

Mahoney, J.D., *Down at the Station: A study of the New Zealand Railway Station*. Palmerston North, 1987.

Wellington City Council. "Bunny Street," *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001.

Wellington City Council, 'Elliott House' Heritage Inventory 1997.

Papers Past

Auckland Star, Volume LXV, Issue 298, 17 December 1934

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 Wellington Railway Station has significant architectural values. The design is bold and influenced by the world's great railway stations, possessing a generous forecourt and sweeping driveways leading to the impressive colonnade. The internal spaces, particularly the booking hall, are a continuation of this tradition. It is a fine example of one the city's leading architectural firms Gray Young, Morton, and Young. It has been recognised as one of the best 20th century buildings in New Zealand for its architectural qualities.

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?*

This building has immense townscape value; it defines the Waterloo Quay, Featherston, and Bunny Street area. It is a landmark building that is used by, and seen by, thousands of commuters daily.

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?*

With the Old Government Buildings, Waterloo Hotel and Shed 21, it forms a small precinct of heritage buildings in the Waterloo Quay/Bunny Street/Featherston Street area.

Historic Value:

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

This building has a range of historic associations that give it significant value. It is a fine example of one the city's leading architectural firms Gray Young, Morton, and Young. It was designed as the main Railway Station and Offices for the Railways Department and was the culmination of 65 years of railway development in Wellington.

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

The Railway station is associated with a number of historically important events including the focal-point of the funeral cortege for Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage, as a casualty clearing station in the aftermath of the *Wahine* disaster, and as part of the home-front defence system during World War Two.

Scientific Value:

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

Pre-1900 reclaimed land, pre-1900 human activity on site. NZAA Central City
R27/270

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

The Railway Station has educational value for its contribution to the Railway history of New Zealand.

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

This building has technical value for the innovation of its construction. It was designed using the latest technology utilising steel framing and reinforced concrete and bricks to withstand earthquakes. At the time it was constructed it was one of the largest buildings in New Zealand and its size, scale, and construction on reclaimed land provided a significant building challenge that was overcome by the architects and engineers.

Social Value:

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

This building is held in high community esteem. It has significant heritage values for the people of Wellington.

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?*

This building has traditional values for the community of commuters who use it daily. It has been in continuous use as a station since its construction.

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 building is a focus of community identity as it is a major landmark building for the city of Wellington. The retention of this building has helped to promote a sense of continuity in Wellington with its history. As a major development from the Railways Department in the 1930s, it also contributes to a sense of continuity for the presence of the railways in Wellington.

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

This building is a focus of community sentiment and connection – it is a public space that is still in use.

Level of cultural heritage significance

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

This building is of outstanding heritage significance for its architectural, historical, townscape, technical, public education and esteem, values.

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

This building is an excellent example of the work of Gray Young, Morton, and Young designed in the Neo-Classical Revival style with Beaux Arts influenced interiors. It is also influenced by Modernism and Art Deco, making this building a good representative of New Zealand interpretations of these architectural forms.

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 authenticity and integrity as it retains significant original materials. Modifications and additions have been carried out in mostly harmonious ways.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

This is a nationally important building for its architectural, historical, townscape, technical, public education and esteem, values.

3.0 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*