

John Chambers Building

2-14 Cable Street, 119 Jervois Quay



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- This building has high townscape value due to its plain, bold exterior and wedge shaped form and its positioning on a busy city thoroughfare. It has strong form and presence and plays a role as a landmark building.
- The John Chambers Building is part of an important group of heritage listed buildings found between the waterfront and the city. These buildings include the former Free Ambulance Building, the Odlin's building, and Shed 22.
- This building contributes to a sense of place and continuity of Cable Street and Jervois Quay. It continues to have a high amenity value and relevance to the city today.

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 48
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 454438
Heritage Area:	
HPT Listed:	
Archaeological Site:	Unknown
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	1917 – 1918
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Hoggard, Prouse, and Gummer
Former uses:	Commercial/Industrial
Current uses:	Commercial
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone – SR 175264

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

This building was constructed in 1918 for John Chambers and Son, an engineering firm which was established in Auckland. The firm began in 1892 when John Jnr. returned to New Zealand after studying in Britain. He went into business with his father, who since his immigration in 1863, had been a partner in or worked for a number of engineering firms before establishing his own business in 1886. They established premises in central Auckland and expanded quickly, taking on some of the largest engineering contracts in the country up to that time. The firm collected a lot of work in the North Island gold mining industry, and were representatives of other British firms in New Zealand.

The firm of Hoggard, Prouse, and Gummer were the architects of the building – it is not known which architect had principle responsibility for the design. Preparatory work on the site had begun in 1915 when a permit was issued for the construction of the foundations. These were built in 1916 by Campbell and Burke. The permit for the building proper was issued in February 1918, and the construction was carried out by Mitchell and King. The design is stylistically advanced for its time, having features such as long horizontal bands of windows that are more typical of the Moderne style of the 1930s. The plain bold exterior and the wedge shaped form on a busy city thoroughfare give this building high townscape value, and its construction in concrete make it technically interesting. The Wellington building was intended to be a warehouse, workshop, and offices and the construction of what is essentially an industrial building on the periphery of Wellington's commercial zone was a statement of considerable confidence on behalf of the business.

The ultimate fortunes of the company are not known, but they remained in the building (at least partially) until the early 1940s.

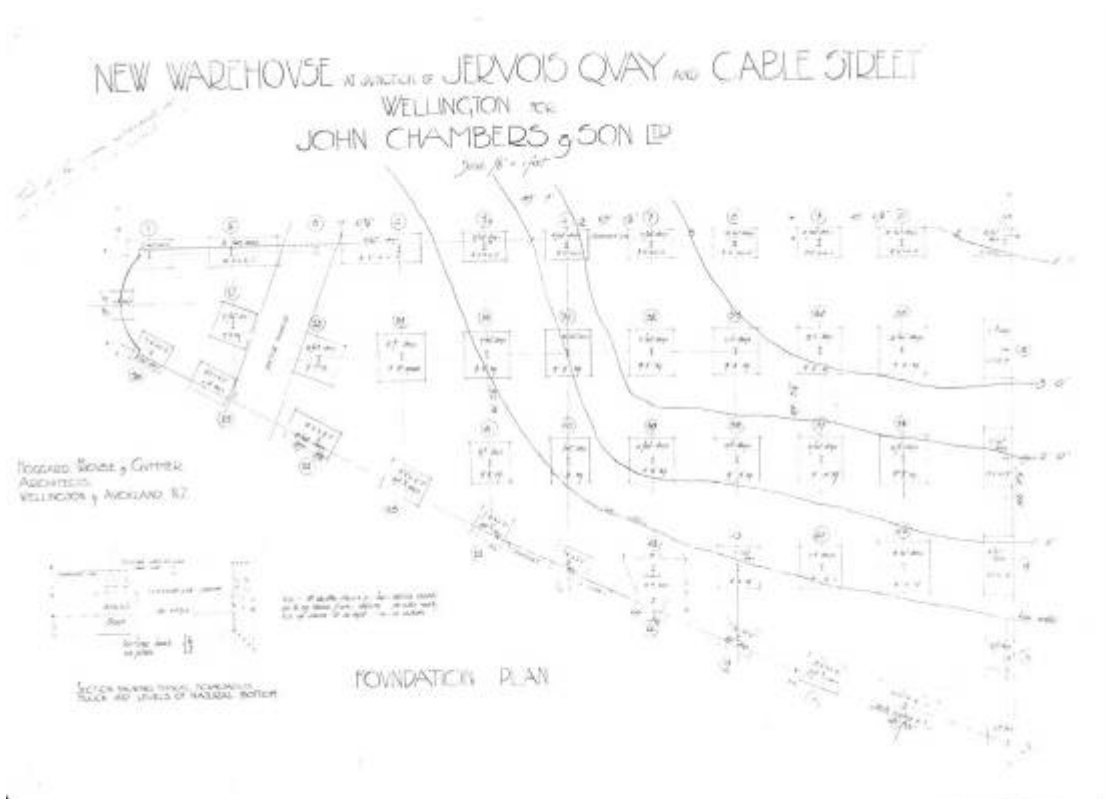
Following John Chambers & Son, the building was occupied by Fisher and Co. until the 1970s. The building was refurbished in the 1990s to house the New Zealand Film Archive and Film Centre, and the Rialto Cinema. The Film archive fit-out was designed by Athfield Architects and comprised of internal modifications (the construction of 3 cinemas, new office spaces) and exterior modifications (new square windows, louvers in existing window openings, new entrances, and covering of some existing windows). In the 2000's the building and the adjoining Wakefield Street Market building (demolished) were purchased to make way for a major upgrade and redevelopment. A number of major tenancies were secured for the building and over 2011-2012 extensive refitting and strengthening was carried out.

¹ History based on Wellington City Council, "119 Jervois Quay," *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 2001), JERV 5.

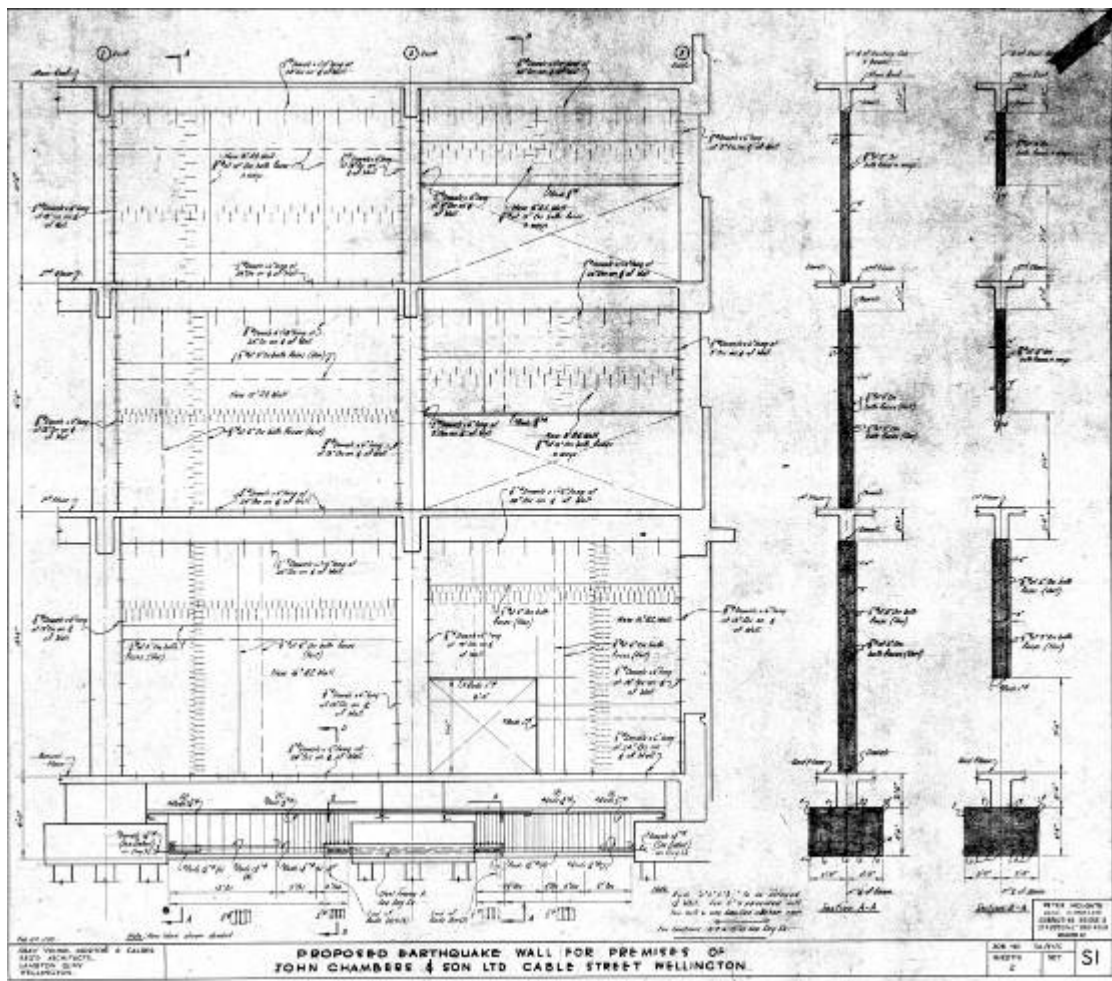


Eileen McSaveney. 'Historic earthquakes - The 1942 Wairarapa earthquakes', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 21-Sep-12
<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/4515/john-chambers-building-jervois-quay>

1.2 Timeline of modifications



- 1915 Foundations. Applicant: Campbell and Burke. Owner: John Chambers and Son. Architect: Hoggard, Prouse, and Gummer. Application value £3,200 (00053:185:10180).
- 1918 Warehouses and offices constructed. Applicant: Mitchell and King. Owner: John Chambers and Son. Architect: Hoggard, Prouse, W.H. Gummer. (00053:194:10662)
- 1934 Building addition – Boiler and chimney. Owner and Builder: John Chambers. Application Value £120 (00056:145:B13099)
- 1937 Building addition – Strong room. Owner: John Chambers and Sons. Builder: O.A. Jorgensen. Application Value £229 (00056:185:B16178)
- 1943 Reinstate earthquake damage. Owner: John Chambers and Sons. Builder: A.V. Swanson. Application Value £4,250. (00056:283:B22749)
- 1948 Office alterations. Owner: John Chambers and Sons. Builder: A.V. Swanson. Application Value £1,000. (00056:391:B27258)
- 1950 Modification – Boiler Room. Owner: John Chambers and Sons. Builder: A.V. Swanson. Application Value £180 (00056:391:B30126)
- 1951 Building addition – Earthquake wall. Owner: John Chambers and Sons. Builder: A.V. Swanson and Sons. Application Value £2,982. Architect: Gray Young, Morton, and Young. (00056:411:B31603)



WCA 00056:411:B31603

1959	Building alterations and lift shaft. Owner: John Chamber and Sons. Builder: Irwood and Shaw. Application value £2,183 (00058:122:C5899).
1966	Building alterations. Owner: Bank of New Zealand. Builder: Nicholls and Rearce. Application value £5,000. Architect: Stephenson and Turner. (00058:473:C20318). Building alterations – Cargo store and booking office. Owner: Air New Zealand. Builder: E.R. Glass. Application value £4,850 (00058:473:C20323).
1967	Building alterations – showroom layout. Owner: F.J. Fisher and Co Ltd. Builder: F.E.Webster. Application value £9,000 (00058:499:C21503).
1993	Building alterations – refurbishment of first and second floors, including toilet and café. Owner: New Zealand Film Archive. Applicant: Athfield Architects. Application value \$850,000 (00060:4:129). Office fit-out. Owner: New Zealand Film Commission. Applicant: Gardyne Architecture. Application value \$200,000 (00060:49:1895).
1995	Building alterations – Cinema 1 and foyer. Owner: New Zealand Film Archive. Applicant: Rialto Cinemas. Application value \$460, 000 (00061:35:11004). Building reinstatement. Owner and applicant: New Zealand Film Commission. Application value \$250,000 (00061:90:12847). Building alterations. Owner and applicant: Kelly Rodgers – Rialto Cinemas. Application value \$20,000 (00061:96:13122) Building Alterations – Cinemas 2 and 3, alterations to foyer. Owner: Rialto Cinemas. Applicant: Worley Arch Ltd. Application value \$50,000 (00061:136:14406).
2004	Addition – Sign: Installation of billboard to face of building. Owner: Look Outdoor. Applicant: Webb Property Services. Application value \$2,000 (00078:1205:111895).

1.3 Occupation history

1915 – 1959	John Chambers and Sons
1966	Air New Zealand
1967	Fisher and Co Ltd
1993	New Zealand Film Commission
1995	Rialto Cinemas
Present	Morrison and Co; Xero

1.4 Architect²

Hoggard, Prouse, and Gummer.

Prouse, William John – Architect³

Prouse (1878-1956) came from a timber merchants' family. Although receiving no formal architectural training, Prouse practised in Wellington for 46 years. He was one of the first to use steel frame construction in New Zealand. With John Hoggard he established the partnership of Hoggard and Prouse about 1907. They were joined by William Henry Gummer in 1913 and the three were admitted to the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1914, Prouse as an Associate, Hoggard and Gummer as Fellows. The firm was responsible for many public buildings throughout New Zealand including Brittain's Building (1909), the State Fire Insurance Building (1919), the Majestic Theatre (1928), all in Wellington, and the Masonic Hotel, Napier (1932).

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture⁴

The John Chambers Building is remarkably modern in its design, despite having been commissioned and built at the time of the First World War. It occupies a dramatic and highly visible wedge-shaped site between Cable Street and Jervois Quay, its Jervois Quay elevation following the curve of the road. The building has faint Classical overtones, particularly in the bracketed cornice at first floor level supported by plain pilasters, and in the detailing of the Jervois Quay entrance. The first and second floors, however, are stripped clean of any embellishment, and are dominated by strong horizontal bands of steel-framed windows that give an impression of the Moderne style of the 1930s. This impression is strengthened by the curve of the facade around the nose of the building. Horizontality is emphasised by the continuous first floor cornice and the plain parapet at roof level, each running around both street elevations. The townscape value of the building is high because of its strong form on a busy city road. Although a no-nonsense industrial building, originally used for warehousing, there is enough interest in the detail and in the idiosyncratic service rooms on the roof to attract attention. It is one of a group of important period buildings, including the former Free Ambulance Building, Odlin's and Shed 22 on the opposite side of Cable Street and, more distantly, Manthel Motors in Taranaki Street. It provides an anchoring role to this disparate heritage grouping.

There is technical value in the all-concrete construction of the building, and a reasonable level of authenticity, certainly in the exterior form. The interior has been modified in an intelligent way to provide for the dramatically different use of cinema. The design was by Athfield Architects, sympathetically adapting the original design of another important architectural practice, Hoggard, Prouse & Gummer.

² There is some confusion over the architects of this building, with some sources asserting it as a Gummer and Ford design. The plans, and building permit applications, strongly suggest that Hoggard, Prouse, and Gummer are responsible for the design. No single, principal architect is noted as being responsible.

³ Historic Places Trust. "John William Prouse". *Professional Biographies*. Accessed 24 May 2013 <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Prouse%2C+William+John>

⁴ this repeats WCC Heritage Building Inventory 2001 ref JERV 5

2.2 Materials

The building is constructed in reinforced concrete, brick masonry, with steel window joinery. It has been seismically strengthened.

2.3 Setting

The John Chambers Building occupies a dramatic and highly visible wedge shaped site between Cable Street and Jervois Quay, with the Jervois Quay elevation following the curve of the road. The building has a strong form in a busy area of the city.

It is part of a group of important heritage listed buildings including the Former Wellington Free Ambulance Building, the Odlin's Building, and Shed 22 (now Mac's Brewbar). It provides an anchoring role to this group of buildings.

3.0 Sources

Historic Places Trust. "John William Prouse". *Professional Biographies*. Accessed 24 May 2013.

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Prouse%2C+William+John>

Historic Places Trust. "William Henry Gummer". *Professional Biographies*. Accessed 24 May 2013..

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Gummer%2C+William+Henry>

McSaveney, Eileen. 'Historic earthquakes - The 1942 Wairarapa earthquakes', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 21-Sep-12. Accessed 24 May 2013.

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/4515/john-chambers-building-jervois-quay>

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

Wellington City Archive

00053:185:10180

00053:194:10662

00056:411:B31603

00056:145:B13099

00056:185:B16178

00056:283:B22749

00056:391:B27258

00056:391:B30126

00056:411:B31603

00058:122:C5899

00058:473:C20318

00058:473:C20323

00058:499:C21503

00060:4:129

00060:49:1895

00061:35:11004

00061:96:13122

00061:136:14406

00078:1205:111895

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 John Chambers Building is a particularly early example of a Moderne-style commercial building in Wellington.

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 high townscape value due to its plain, bold exterior and wedge shaped form and its siting on a busy city thoroughfare. It has strong form and presence and plays a role as a landmark building.

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 John Chambers Building is part of an important group of heritage listed buildings found between the waterfront and the city. These buildings include the former Free Ambulance Building, the Odlin's building, and Shed 22.

Historic Value:

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

This building, for most of its history, has been associated with one company, John Chamber's and Sons although the ultimate fortunes of the company are not known.

It is also associated with the architectural firm of Hoggard, Prouse, and Gummer, an important architectural practice in its own right, but whose members went on to construct some of New Zealand's most significant buildings.

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?*

Unknown risk. The site is a former beach/or shallow water located near Te Aro Pa. Taranaki Street wharf was reclaimed in c.1900.

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?*

There is technical value in the all concrete construction of this building, but the materials and construction are typical of its time.

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 building contributes to a sense of place and continuity as it has a high amenity value and relevance to the city today. It has received seismic strengthening and the interiors have been refurbished in an intelligent way to provide this building with use value into the future.

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?*

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?*

This building retains authenticity as the exterior, while being refurbished, has not been significantly modified.

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 of local importance for its association with a Wellington business, a prominent architectural firm, its significant townscape and group values, and the contribution that it makes to the character and sense of place in Wellington city.

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*