

Men's Toilets (Former)

Courtenay Place



Images: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The former Courtenay Place Men's Toilets are a good representative example of a utilitarian, municipal, Edwardian building. It is notable for its semi-subterranean design, and for its use of high-quality building materials.
- The toilets are part of the public health infrastructure that was built by the Wellington City Council in the 19th and 20th centuries. The toilets are associated with the growth and development of Courtenay Place, the tramway system, and the original layout of the city. They are also associated with the hotels that once populated the city and the social scene that this produced.

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| District Plan: | Map 16, reference 61 |
| Legal Description: | No separate land title for the land on which the building is sited |
| Heritage Area: | Courtenay Place Heritage Area |
| HPT Listed: | N/A |
| Archaeological Site: | NZAA Central City R27/270 |
| Other Names: | Courtenay Place Toilets (former), Tommy Millions Pizza |
| Key physical dates: | Constructed 1910 |
| Architect / Builder: | City Engineer: William Hubbard Morton. Contractors: Frederick George Mace and James Nicholson. |
| Former uses: | Public Conveniences – Men’s Toilets |
| Current uses: | Commercial – Restaurant |
| Earthquake Prone Status: | <i>Unknown at time of writing</i> |

Extent: Cityview GIS



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The former men's toilet, found in the triangle at the Taranaki Street end of Courtenay Place, is one of the oldest buildings in the vicinity. It has been heavily modified and now houses a Pizza and Gelato kiosk.

Courtenay Place was a busy tram route and the first public conveniences are likely to have been built in about c.1895. The demolition or removal of the toilets was problematic for local hotel proprietor, D. Sullivan, who complained to the town clerk that the public had been making 'a general convenience of my premises for their personal comfort. I feel that the authorities should relieve matters somewhat'.¹

Work began on the new public conveniences in 1910 and the construction was finished the following year. The tender documents are dated 7 September 1910 and a drainage plan indicates that the work was completed in March 1911. The City Engineer, William Hobbard Morton, drew the plans and the construction was carried out by contractors Frederick George Mace and James Nicholson. The toilets were built partly underground with an entrance from both the Courtenay Place and Taranaki Street ends. The walls were constructed in brick with a concrete roof on steel joints. All walls, floor, and roof were covered with mineral asphalt with the floors also being coated with red arkilite. The toilets included six urinals, three toilets and an attendant's room. The exterior had two cast iron lamp standards and was surrounded by a cast iron fence.² The toilets were kept clean by a custodian but as the conveniences were frequented mostly by patrons of the local hotels they soon gained a reputation as a "rendezvous for undesirables, more especially is this so at 6 o'clock, when the hotel in the vicinity has been closed'. According to the custodian they gathered there to drink beer and he was unable to stop them from doing so.³ The police were asked to investigate and deal with the situation.

By the early 1960s it was reported to the Council by the City Engineer that toilets had become antiquated and it was probable that they would need to be relocated for a new intersection to be laid out. In 1964 and 1965, the City Engineer again reported on the state of the toilets, noting that they were difficult to maintain and were badly sited. He stated that a triangle site was available between Dixon and Manners Street, and that a modern ground level structure was needed.

Despite these reports the toilets remained. From the 1970s onwards many unfavourable letters were sent to the Council regarding the toilets, and these continued for the next two decades. Up until the 1990s it had been expected that the toilets would be combined with the new complex being built at Te Aro Park, but it was decided that they should be renewed or replaced. All the while, the newspapers had been reporting disparagingly about the toilets and the clientele who frequented them. It was decided in 1994 by the City Council to close the toilets.

In 1997 Wellington City Council held a workshop to attempt to find a new use for the site. Despite this the building remained empty for many years. Several applications were made to the Wellington City Council to adapt the building between 2000 and 2010. These adaptations ranged from recreating the building as a hub for multi-

¹ Town Clerk's Files, Box 499. 11/89, Wellington City Archive.

² Ian Bowman, 'Courtenay Place Toilets Conservation Plan', Unpublished Conservation Plan prepared for Wellington City Council, 1999,7.

³ Michael Kelly and Russell Murray, *Courtenay Place Heritage Area Report* (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006).

media artists, to a wine bar. In 2011 the site was leased to Scopa Café Cucina for development as a pizza and gelato kiosk.



'Courtenay Place 1920-1930', Evening Post :Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post newspaper, Reference Number PA-Group-00287

<http://mp.natlib.govt.nz/detail/?id=44563&t=items&q=&f=tapuhigrouprefSPA-Group-00287&u=0&s=da&l=en&tc=0&recordNum=0&numResults=20&p=0>



Interior of the Men's Bathrooms 1998, 'Sport 29: Autumn 2001', accessed 15 March 2013, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/etexts/Ba26Spo/Ba26Spo084a.jpg>

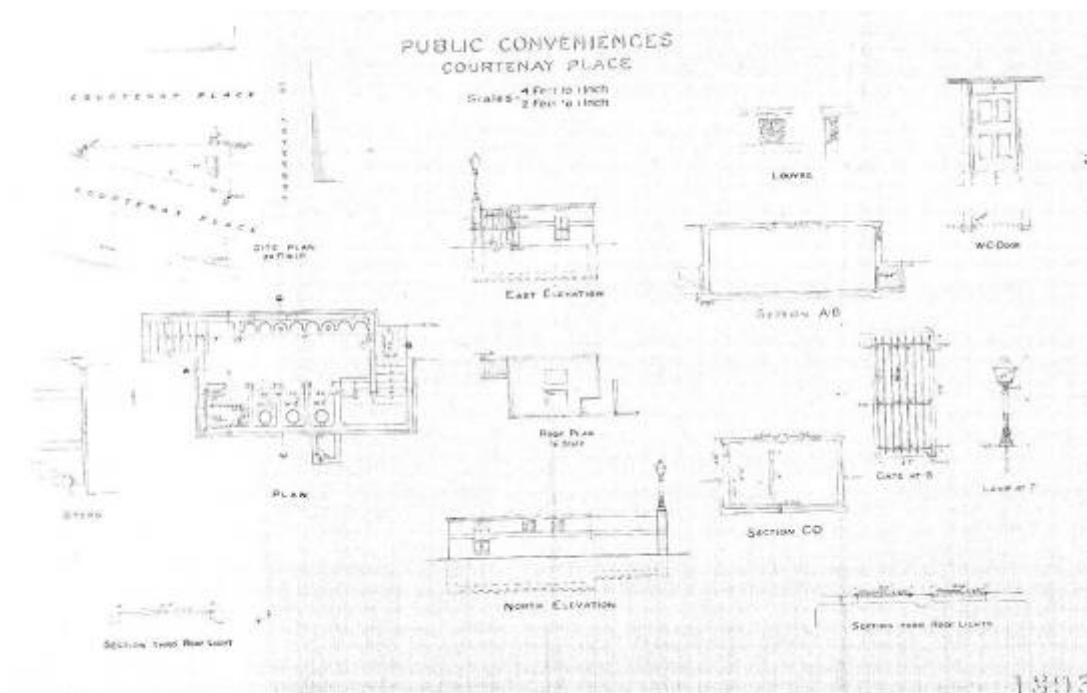
These public toilets were one of the last examples of underground public conveniences to be found in New Zealand, and were an important aspect of the social scene of Wellington City. The toilets are associated with the development of

Courtenay Place as an entertainment district since their construction in 1911. Their location is also an indicator of the prominence that the tramway system once had in the city and the triangular site is a visual reminder of the original layout of the city.⁴

The building has now been modified to house a pizza and gelato kiosk and elements of the exterior are all that remain. The exterior façade has been restored to a high level as an element of the adaptation of the building. All interiors were removed, with the cast iron fences and the prismatic skylights being preserved by Wellington City Council.

1.2 Timeline of modifications

Modifications based on history and Ian Bowman, 'Courtenay Place Toilets Conservation Plan', unpublished Conservation Plan prepared for Wellington City Council, 1999.



Original Plans, "Heritage building – Courtenay Place-Public Conveniences Taranaki Street Public Toilets", 1997, 1041-06-COU, Wellington City Council Records.

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|------|--|
| 1910 | Construction begins |
| 1911 | Building completed |
| 1947 | City Engineer instructed to grout all cracks in floor with neat cement, re-plaster concrete round toilet pans, clean down ceiling and paint with waterproof cement paint, and clean down and paint all woodwork. |
| 1961 | A fire in the caretaker's room (11 July 1961) burns out switch board damages walls and ceiling in that room. Switchboard replaced, charred window frames replaced and attendant's cubicle repainted. |
| 2011 | Building redeveloped - Scopa Café Cucina 'Tommy Millions' Pizza and Gelato. |

⁴ Bowman, 1999, 5.

1.3 Occupation history

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|------|---|
| 1910 | Courtenay Place Men's toilets |
| 2011 | Scopa Café Cucina 'Tommy Millions' Pizza and Gelato |

1.4 Architect

City Engineer - William Hobbard Morton (1866 - 1923)⁵

Born 26th July 1866, Died 26th June 1923. He was educated at Scotch College, Melbourne (Victoria), and received his practical training under the late Mr M H Steel, MInstCE, Inspector-General of Public Works, Victoria, between the years 1883 and 1888. He was Assistant with the late Mr A C Mountain, MInstCE, City Surveyor of Melbourne from 1888 to 1904, when he was appointed City Engineer of Wellington, New Zealand.

In Wellington and Melbourne, his professional career, after the completion of his pupilage, was spent in municipal activities. The principal works with which he was associated in this Dominion were:- Waterworks, tramways, sewerage, road formation and improvements (wood, concrete and bitumen), abattoirs, parks, and public reserves, etc.

He was elected an Associate Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers on January 10th 1905; and a Member on March 11th 1913. He was elected a Member of the New Zealand Society of Civil Engineers (Incorporated) on 11th September 1914, and was a member of the Council and Honorary Secretary up to within a very few months of his decease. Note: that the Morton dam, an early water supply dam in the Wainuiomata headwaters, built during Morton's time as Wellington City Engineer, is named for him.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The former Courtenay Place men's toilets were most likely designed by the City Engineer William Hobbard Morton. They were built to address a need for the city, and were an innovative design, utilising a half-buried structure to impact less upon the overall setting of the building. The building was constructed in brick, in a vernacular style that was influenced by Edwardian Classicism, the popular architectural style of the time.

2.2 Materials

The toilets were built partly underground with an entrance from both the Courtenay Place and Taranaki Street ends. The walls were constructed in brick with a concrete roof on steel joints. All walls, floor, and roof were covered with mineral asphalt with the floors also being coated with red arkilite. The toilets included six urinals, three toilets and an attendant's room. The exterior had two cast iron lamp standards and was surrounded by a cast iron fence.

⁵ IPENZ, 'William Hobbard Morton', *Professional Biographies*, accessed 15 March 2013, <http://www.ipenz.org.nz/heritage/bio-detail.cfm?id=35>

2.3 Setting

The toilets were constructed in a discreet location and were half buried to reduce their impact upon the design of the city. Trees were planted alongside to further reduce the visibility of the building. The toilets were built to fit a purpose, and while most hotels have now disappeared from the area and bars now have more relaxed closing times, the toilets were a visual reminder of this element of our social history.

3.0 Sources

Bowman, Ian. 'Courtenay Place Toilets Conservation Plan', Unpublished Conservation Plan prepared for Wellington City Council, 1999.

IPENZ, 'William Hobbard Morton', *Professional Biographies*, accessed 15 March 2013, <http://www.ipenz.org.nz/heritage/bio-detail.cfm?id=35>

Kelly, Michael and Murray, Russell. *Courtenay Place Heritage Area Report* Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006.

'Sport 29: Autumn 2001', accessed 15 March 2013, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/etexts/Ba26Spo/Ba26Spo084a.jpg>

Papers Past

Evening Post :Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post newspaper, Reference Number PA-Group-00287
[http://mp.natlib.govt.nz/detail/?id=44563&t=items&q=&f=tapuhigrouppref\\$PA-Group-00287&u=0&s=da&l=en&tc=0&recordNum=0&numResults=20&p=0](http://mp.natlib.govt.nz/detail/?id=44563&t=items&q=&f=tapuhigrouppref$PA-Group-00287&u=0&s=da&l=en&tc=0&recordNum=0&numResults=20&p=0)

Wellington City Council Records

"Heritage building – Courtenay Place-Public Conveniences Taranaki Street Public Toilets", 1997, 1041-06-COU, Wellington City Council Records.

Wellington City Archives

Town Clerk's Files, Box 499. 11/89, Wellington City Archive

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 former Courtenay Place Men's Toilets are a good representative example of a utilitarian, municipal, Edwardian building. It is notable for its semi-subterranean design, and for its use of high-quality building materials.

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 toilets were built on a, once prominent, traffic island in the centre of Courtenay Place, but were designed to be semi-subterranean to reduce the visibility of the building from the street. Although the street alignment has been altered over the years, the toilets remain an unusual and well-known landmark on Courtney Place.

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?

This building and the 'Taj Mahal' on Cambridge Terrace have group value as historic toilets that are located within Courtenay Place Heritage Area.

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 toilets are part of the public health infrastructure that was built by the Wellington City Council in the 19th and 20th centuries. The toilets are associated with the growth and development of Courtenay Place, the tramway system, and the original layout of the city. They are also associated with the hotels that once populated the city and the social scene that this produced.

Scientific Value:

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

The building was constructed on the site of a pre-1900 structure and is also included in the NZAA Central City archaeological area R27/270.

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?

The materials and construction were typical of the period. It was noted in the conservation plan for these buildings that there was technical value in the engineering of the waste pipes and the way that they dealt with the high water level. The interiors, however, were removed in the adaptation of the building and these are likely to have since been removed.

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?

The building has been part of the streetscape for 100+ years and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of Courtenay 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?*

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

Although it has been adapted for a new use, this building remains a good representative of a municipal, Classically influenced, toilet that was once a relatively common building typology in many New Zealand cities.

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 a significant amount of its exterior fabric, most of which has been well restored. External modifications and additions have been carried out in a way that is cohesive with the heritage value of the building.

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 level, it is an important reminder of several elements of Wellington's history. These were the last remaining toilets of their kind in New Zealand, so the retention of much of the exterior fabric adds to the value of the building, but the loss of the interior fabrics and loss of context are detrimental to its heritage value.

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

| Source | Y/N | Comments |
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| 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*