

Courtenay Chambers
15 Courtenay Place



Photo: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- Courtenay Chambers was designed by well known Wellington architect, Llewellyn Williams, and is a good representative example of Chicago-style Stripped Classical architecture. The building is notable for its restrained palate of Classical ornamentation, the well-proportioned composition of its Courtenay Place façade, and for the quality of its design and workmanship.
- The building is part of an important group of heritage buildings which together form the Courtenay Place Heritage Area.
- The building has had an uneventful history that is typical and representative of many of its neighbours on Courtenay Place.
- The building is a local landmark and is one of the tallest buildings within the Courtenay Place Heritage Area.

District Plan:	Map 16, Reference 63/2 (<i>front façade – first floor and above</i>)
Legal Description:	Lot 2 DP85056
Heritage Area:	Courtenay Place Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Not listed.
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Adelphi Finance Building
Key physical dates:	1927
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Llewellyn Williams, Builder: L. Driscoll
Former uses:	Offices
Current uses:	Offices
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR169677 (124 Served)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

Courtenay Chambers, with its elegant Classical proportions, was designed in a 'Chicago'-esque style by Wellington architect Llewellyn Williams for Courtenay Chambers Ltd in 1927.¹ The tall and narrow 7-storey building stands tall above Courtenay Place, a street where two and three-storey buildings predominate. Its height and form give an indication of how this part of the city may have developed in the inter-war period if the commercial and banking interests had no concentrated in the Lambton Quay and Featherston Street area.

Courtenay Chambers Ltd formed as a private company in 1918 with a capital of £8000. Subscribers included H. Marment, R.C. Renner and J.R. Morris, and the company was formed with an intention 'to acquire certain land and buildings, and in particular land situate in Wellington with buildings.'² The company built a 3-storey reinforced concrete building in 1920³ on the south of this site with an entrance from 12 Alpha Street. This building was designed by Clere and Williams, and was also originally known as 'Courtenay Chambers'⁴ but later renamed 'Haydon's Building'.⁵

Architect Llewellyn Williams called for tenders to construct a seven storey steel and concrete office-block at the north of this long narrow site in April 1926. The office building had a street entrance from Courtenay Place, and was built by local building contractor, L. Driscoll. It was a grand new development for a street that was (and still is) occupied predominantly by two and three storey buildings. That the building was well-regarded can be seen in an illustrated advertisement for 'British Burnside' strong-rooms in 1927 that grouped Courtenay Chambers with other substantial newly-built commercial buildings including the Evening Post Building on Willis Street, the AMP Society Building and the T&G Mutual Life Society Building on Lambton Quay. The strong-rooms were said to be 'fire, thief, explosive and blow-pipe resisting'⁶, features that would have been useful in the original (1920) building when it was damaged in a fire in September 1927.⁷ The new seven storey building opened in August 1928 and its rooms were advertised as 'attractive premises [that] are highly suited for all professions, club rooms, show rooms, office, etc. They are exceedingly well lighted, and sunny, and have the very latest modern convs.'⁸

Courtenay Chambers Ltd retained ownership of the building until was purchased in 1966 by Phyllis Mary Jessen, a married woman, who owned the property until her death at age 74 in 1985.⁹ The building then changed hands several times and is today owned by Geneva Investments.¹⁰

¹ "15 Courtenay Place, building", 1927, 00056:34:B3303, Wellington City Archives.

² NEW COMPANIES Evening Post, 30 March 1918, Page 10

³ Untitled Otago Daily Times , 8 July 1919, Page 4

⁴ Page 1 Advertisements Column 9 Evening Post, 2 October 1920, Page 1

⁵ WCC Archives 00056_34_B3303; 0053_198_10934

⁶ Page 7 Advertisements Column 1 Evening Post, 29 June 1927, Page 7

⁷ FIRE IN ALPHA STREET Evening Post, 29 September 1927, Page 8

⁸ Page 3 Advertisements Column 2 Evening Post, 27 August 1928, Page 3

⁹ Land Title Service, CT WN384/299; "Phyllis Mary Jessen", Wellington Cemeteries website, Accessed 17 October 2012, <http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/cemeteries/>

¹⁰ Land Title Service CT WN 31C/940

The early occupants of the building were a varied assortment of small and medium-sized businesses. In the 1930s these included everything from Martin's 'Busy Boot Store' and Madam Claire's 'matrimonial agency' to McDonald & Croker, Barristers & Solicitors. In the 1930s many of the tenants were involved in the arts. Eric Meier (a well-known Wellington violinist) taught music in the building, Maude & Edna Cotterell operated a costumier business and Mavis Pearce operated a dance studio. Several businesses associated with the movie-theatre business also occupied offices in the building. Other Wellington businesses who tenanted the building in this period include Courtenay Place Investments Co. Ltd and Goodwin & Chichester Ltd., land agents. In the 1940s several Wellington company offices, including the Wellington Co-o Taxi Owner-Driver's Assn. Ltd and the Wellington Master Butchers Co-op Society Ltd were based in the offices.



The Courtenay Chambers, 1920s
(1/1-015371-G, Gordon Onslow Hilbury Burt Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library).

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1920 - 3-storey building constructed to the south of the site (0053_198_10934)
1927 – Courtenay Chambers constructed at the north of the site (00056:34:B3303)
1966 – Fire escape. (00058:450:C19318)
1986 – Business additions and alterations. (00059:9:D3378)
1987 - Partitions on Level 6. (00059:83:D5975)
1988 – Office fit-out. (00059:253:D11492)
1989 – Business additions and alterations. (00059:314:E18070)
1994 – Altered shop front. (00060:123:4495)
1997 – Office fit-out Level 5. (00078:184:33085)

1.3 Occupation history

Ground floor: Martin's Ltd., boot importers (Stones 1930). Martins Boot & Shoe Stores Ltd. (Stones 1935 - 1945; Wises 1950-51 to 1955); Lamphouse Ltd., electrical goods (Wises 1961-2 to 1980).

First floor: Ultra Violet Ray Ltd. (Stones 1930 - 1945; Wises 1950-1 to 1955); Courtenay Place Land Agency; Second floor: Healey's Varex Treatment, Nurse A Colquhoun; Claire Madam, matrimonial agency & registry office.

Third floor: Kemball Theatres Ltd.; De Luxe Theatre Co.; Picture Enterprises (Petone) Ltd. (Stones 1930 - 1935); New Princess Theatre Co.; Hastings Picture Ltd.; De Luxe Advertising Co. (Stones 1930); Lyall Bay Pictures; Picture Supplies & Kemball Ltd.; Carterton Picture Co. Ltd.; Stratford Theatres Ltd.; Woodville Amusements Ltd.; Otaki Amusements Ltd.; Napier Amusements Ltd; Paramount Amusements Ltd (Stones 1935); NZ Motion Pictures Exhibitors Assn (Incorp.), J. Robinson (MP) Dominion Secretary (Stones 1940); R.C. McDonald Ltd., importers & exporters (Wises 1955 - 1961-2).

Fourth floor: McDonald & Croker, Barristers & Solicitors; Eric Meier, violin teacher (Stones 1930 - 1940); Courtenay Place Investments Co. Ltd.; Maude & Edna Cotterell, costumiers (Stones 1930).

Fifth floor: Mavis Pearce, dance teacher; British International Oil Co. (Stones 1930).

Sixth floor: Goodwin & Chichester Ltd., land agents; Guildford Timber Co.; Millar Chair Co. Ltd. (Stones 1930); British Empire Films Ltd. (Stones 1935 - 1945; Wises 1950-1) & British International Pictures Ltd. (Stones 1935 - 1940); Wellington Co-o Taxi Owner-Drivers Assn. Ltd. (Stones 1940 - 1945; Wises 1950-1). NZ Registered Nurses Assn. (Wises 1967-8 to 1975). NZ Nurses Christian Fellowship (Wises 1971-2 to 1985). Master Butchers (Wtgn) Co-op Society Ltd. (Wises 1967-8 to 1975). Oticon NZ Ltd. (Wises 1980 - 1990). NZ Federation of Film Societies (Wises 1985). Gibson Film Productions (Wises 1980).¹³

¹³ Wellington City Council, *Courtenay Place Heritage Area spreadsheet*. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006).

1.4 Architect

Llewellyn Williams

Llewellyn Williams migrated to New Zealand in 1919 after studying in France and Italy. He was well known for his work in the Art Deco style and the buildings that he designed include the Chevening Flats (1929), part of the Kirkcaldie and Stains Department Store (1928), the De Lux (now the Embassy) Theatre (1924), the Regent Theatre in Greymouth (1933) and the Avon cinema in Christchurch (1934).¹⁴

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The building is a good example of the Chicago style, with a clear definition of the base, a tall shaft of four storeys emphasised by continuous columns rising between the windows, and a recessed seventh floor capping the top. This has plain windows and a straight cornice with dog-tooth moulding and parapet. While a modern verandah detracts from the ground and first floors, the rest of the facade is completely authentic. It is a well proportioned and detailed building of its period, and a good example of the work of Llewellyn Williams.¹⁵

The interior of the building has been totally modified, the only indication of interior style being the marble stair from the ground to first floors.

2.2 Materials

Reinforced concrete structure including foundations, walls, floors and beams.

2.3 Setting

Courtenay Chambers dwarfs its immediate neighbours at the eastern end of Courtenay Place, rising to 7-storeys in an area where two and three storey buildings predominate. It forms an exclamation in the townscape, and a prominent termination to the view south along Blair Street.

The row in which the Courtenay Chambers is set is characterised by a continuous line of buildings between Cambridge Terrace and Tory Street which emphasise the original survey line. The buildings are diverse in nature and age but, despite some particularly intrusive modern buildings, have a high streetscape quality which contributes significantly to the heritage value and character of Courtenay Place as a whole.¹⁶

¹⁴ Historic Places Trust, "Llewellyn Williams", Accessed: August 2012, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=239>

¹⁵ Wellington City Council, "Courtenay Chambers", *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001, COURT 3.

¹⁶ Adapted from: Michael Kelly and Russell Murray, *Courtenay Place Heritage Area Report*. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006).

3.0 References

CT WN 46/173, Land Information New Zealand

CTWN384/299, Land Information New Zealand

CTWN31C/940, Land Information New Zealand

Historic Places Trust, "Llewellyn Williams", Professional Biographies.

Accessed: August 2012,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=239>

Kelly, Michael and Russell Murray, *Courtenay Place Heritage Area Report*.

Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006.

"Phyllis Mary Jessen", Wellington Cemeteries website, Accessed 17 October 2012,

<http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/cemeteries/>

Wellington City Council, *Courtenay Place Heritage Area spreadsheet*. Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006.

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

Newspapers

"Page 1 Advertisements Column 1", *Evening Post*, Volume CIX, Issue 127, 2 June 1930, Page 1.

Wellington City Archives

"15 Courtenay Place, building", May 26, 1927, 00056:34:B3303, Wellington City Archives.

"15 Courtenay Place, building additions - fire escape", April 21, 1966, 00058:450:C19318, Wellington City Archives.

"15 Courtenay Place, business additions and alterations", 1986, 00059:9:D3378, Wellington City Archives.

"15 Courtenay Place, partitions, level 6", 1987, 00059:83:D5975, Wellington City Archives.

"15 Courtenay Place, office fitout", 1988, 00059:253:D11492, Wellington City Archives.

"15 Courtenay Place, business additions and alterations", 1989, 00059:314:E18070, Wellington City Archives.

"15 Courtenay Place, shop front", May 11, 1994, 00060:123:4495, Wellington City Archives.

“15 Courtenay Place, office fit-out, level 5”, December 6, 1995, Wellington City Archives.

“15 Courtenay Place, office fit-out, level 5”, 1997, 00078:184:33085, Wellington City Archives.

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?*

Courtenay Chambers was designed by well known Wellington architect, Llewellyn Williams, and is a good representative example of Chicago-style Stripped Classical architecture. The building is notable for its restrained palate of Classical ornamentation, the well-proportioned composition of its Courtenay Place façade, and for the quality of its design and workmanship.

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 is a local landmark and is one of the tallest buildings in the Courtenay Place Heritage Area.

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 is part of an important group of heritage buildings which together form the 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 building has had an uneventful history that is typical and representative of many of its neighbours on Courtenay Place.

Scientific Value:

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

This building is included in the NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R 27/270.

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?*

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 façade above ground floor level has had few intrusive, modern alterations or additions and the building contributes to the sense of place and continuity of the Courtenay Place Heritage Area.

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?*

The building retains much of its early or original external built fabric and is in near authentic condition above verandah level.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international 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)	Y	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	Y	
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website		
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

WCC Permits

00056: 34:B33 03	15 Courtenay Place, building	Owner: Courtenay Chambers. Builder: L Driscoll. Legal description: Town Acres 284 and 285. Application value: £20,800. Note: Pier construction steel frame, concrete floors and roof, 8 foot deep foundations, continuous fill. Courtenay Chambers.	Building Permit/Co nsent	26 May 1927
00058: 450:C1 9318	15 Courtenay Place, building additions - fire escape	Legal description: Town Acre 284 and 285. Owner: Courtenay Chambers Limited. Builder: Chadwick Construction Co Limited. Application value: £500. Note: Courtenay Chambers.	Building Permit/Co nsent	21 Apr 1966
00059: 9:D337 8	15 Courtenay Place, business additions and alterations	Owner: Courtenay Chambers. Builder: Freear Philip Ltd. Legal description: Lot 1 DP 61326. Application value: \$37,000.	Building Permit/Co nsent	1986
00059: 83:D59 75	15 Courtenay Place, partitions,	Owner: Phonographic Performances. Builder: Maycroft Construction. Legal description: Part Sections 284-285 Town of Wellington. Application value:	Building Permit/Co nsent	1987

	level 6	\$20,000.		
00059: 253:D1 1492	15 Courtenay Place, office fitout	Owner: Lake Geneva Investments. Builder: MacRitchie Bros. Legal description: Part Lot 1 A Plan 84, Part Section 284 Town of Wellington, share in Lots 1-2 DP 61326 [Lot 1 DP 85056, half- share in Lot 1 DP 61326]. Application value: \$21,200.	Building Permit/Co nsent	1988
00059: 314:E1 8070	15 Courtenay Place, business additions and alterations	Owner: Lake Geneva Investments Ltd. Builder: Wayne Joseph. Legal description: Sections 284-285 Town of Wellington. Application value: \$24,000.	Building Permit/Co nsent	1989
00060: 123:44 95	15 Courtenay Place, shop front		Building Permit/Co nsent	11 May 1994
00061: 168:15 386	15 Courtenay Place, antenna		Building Permit/Co nsent	06 Dec 1995
00078: 184:33 085	15 Courtenay Place, office fit-out, level 5	Owner: Lake Geneva Investments (No.101) Ltd. Applicant: Mallinson Rendel Publishers Ltd. Legal Description: Part Lot 1 A Plan 84, Part Section 284 Town of Wellington. Application Value: \$15,000.	Building Permit/Co nsent	1997

Background research



Courtenay Chambers, 2007¹⁷

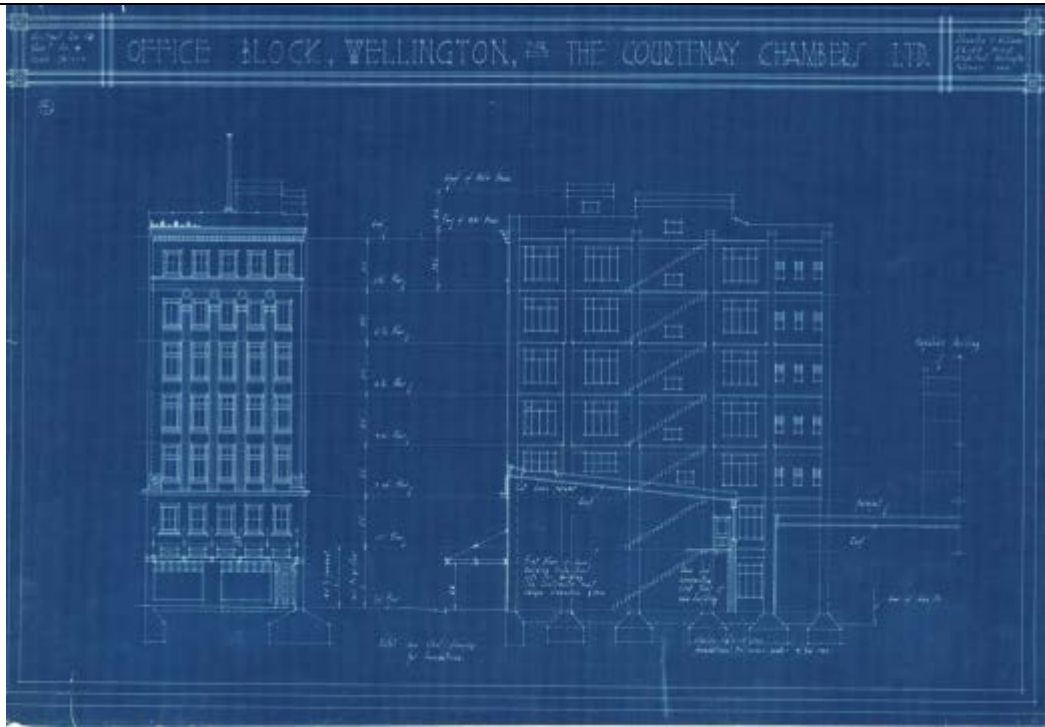
Fire broke out a few minutes after midnight last night at 12, Alpha street, in a concrete building of three floors, owned by Courtenay Chambers, Ltd., and insured in the New Zealand Insurance Office for £6000. The flooring on the ground floor, which is occupied by Christensen, Oldfield, and Son, motor body builders and painters, was damaged by fire and water, and a motor-car, owned by Ernest James Trevor, of 37, Stoke street, and insured in the Norwich Union Office for £200, was also damaged. The machinery and stock-in-trade on this floor, which were insured for £350 in the Queensland Office, suffered slightly from smoke. The first and second floors, occupied by Haydon's, Ltd., clothing manufacturers, escaped damage, the plant and stock being only slightly affected by smoke. The insurances on these floors are not available.

Evening Post, Volume CIV, Issue 78, 29 September 1927, Page 8



The Courtenay Chambers, 1920s.
(PAColl-5584-26, Library Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library).

¹⁷ WCC Archives File: 2007:11:1:14:15



Original plans, 1927. (00056:34:B3303)