

A & T Burt Ltd Building (Former)/ St James Theatre Foyer
87 Courtenay Place



Image: Charles Collins, 2015

Summary of heritage significance

- 83- 87 Courtenay Place is a good representative example of a commercial Art Deco façade. The aesthetic and architectural values have been somewhat reduced by the over-sized second-floor addition, and by the extensive internal alterations.
- The building has been adapted to form the foyer, bar, box office and function spaces for the adjacent St James Theatre. The building gains some historic, social, townscape and continuity-of-use values from this association.

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

This building began its life as the commercial premises for the company of A & T Burt. The company was well established in Dunedin by the 1880s, having won the contract to provide the gas lighting for the 1865 New Zealand Exhibition. The firm quickly expanded and was well known for their plumbing, brass moulding, coppersmithing, and metal finishing. In 1908 the company opened a branch in London, and by the time the firm celebrated its 50th jubilee in 1912 it was known throughout the country, with branches from Invercargill to Auckland.¹

The Wellington branch of A & T Burt was established in 1893 in a warehouse on Manners Street fronting Luke's foundry. The company soon outgrew those premises and secured the present site on Courtenay Place in 1900. The site was occupied by two buildings – a two-storey shop/showroom/office building with a street-frontage to Courtenay Place, and a larger warehouse to the rear (south) – both appear to have been designed by William Turnbull.²

There are some suggestions that a new building was designed for A & T Burt in 1919 by Young and Fearn, and built by Fletchers Construction, but the location and source for this information is unclear.³ A heavy commercial-Classical, Victorian (or Edwardian) façade is clearly visible in photos of the late 1920s⁴, and this suggests that the Turnbull designed scheme survived until at least 1927. In 1929 the building was modified by architects King and Dawson, possibly as a result of a fire that had significantly damaged the building in July that year.⁵ The two-storey Art Deco façade is likely to date from this time. Photographic evidence confirms that the Art Deco façade was complete by 1932.⁶

The building remained in the ownership of A and T Burt Ltd., until the late 1960s / early 1970s. It then had a number of owners and occupants including the National Mutual Life Association, R. M. Renner and Sound Expression Limited, and Chicken George Limited. By the late 1980s the building had been purchased by the Chase Corporation, who at the time also owned the St James Theatre and several other adjoining properties. At this time, the fate of this building became intertwined with its grand theatre neighbour. The Chase Corporation sought to demolish the theatre and adjoining buildings, and to develop the land. This led to one of New Zealand's largest heritage battles involving Wellington City Council, the Historic Places Trust, and the Wellington public.

¹ Gordon Parry. 'Burt, Alexander - Burt, Alexander', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30-Oct-2012,

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/1b53/burt-alexander>

² *Evening Post*, Volume XCVIII, Issue 76, 1 April 1919, Page 10; Interior Views, A. & T. Burt's Foundry, Dunedin. *Progress*, 1 November 1906, Page 10

³ WCC Heritage Inventory 1995

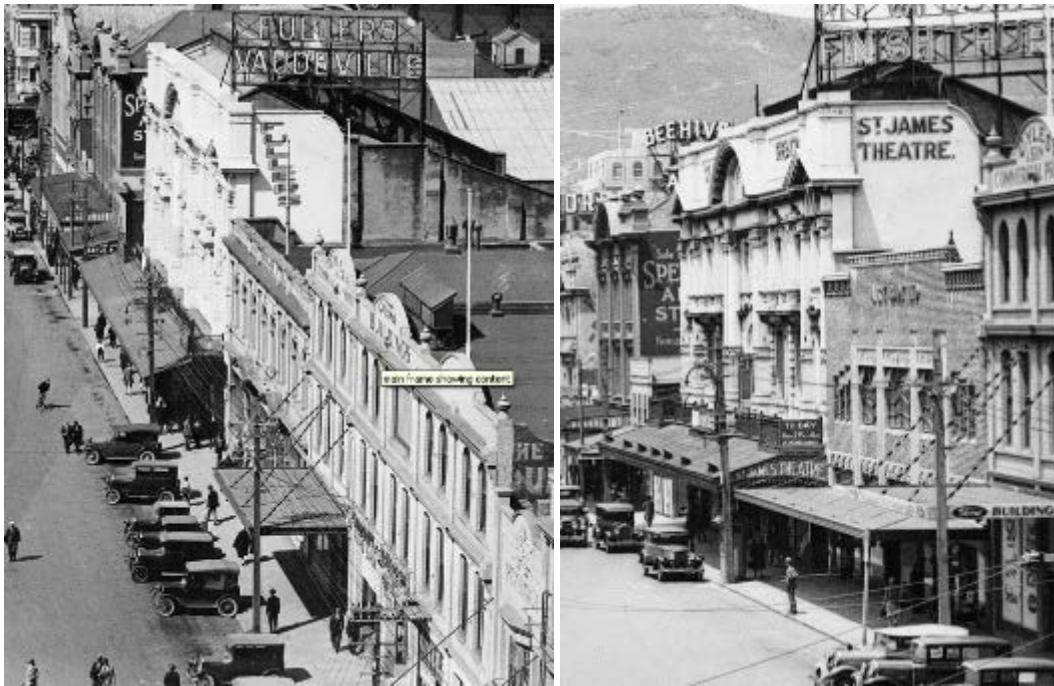
⁴ Courtenay Place, Wellington. Ref: PAColl-5744-20. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22513706> ; Overlooking Courtenay Place, Wellington. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: 1/2-089999-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22336388>

⁵ 'Hardware Shop Damaged', Auckland Star, 9 July 1929, Page 9, accessed 30 October 2013, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=AS19290708.2.116&srpos=1&e=-----10--1---OA+and+T+Burt+Wellington+Courtenay+Place-->

⁶ Courtenay Place, Wellington. Evening post (Newspaper. 1865-2002) :Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: PAColl-5482-043. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23233851> ; Overlooking Courtenay Place, Wellington. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: 1/2-089999-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22336388>

There was a huge public campaign to save the theatre and in 1993, following many years of failed deals and opposition, the St James was purchased by the Wellington City Council. An \$18.5 million restoration plan was set out in 1995 and with Council, Wellington Community Trust, Lottery Board, and public contributions, the restoration commenced.⁷ The A and T Burt Building was included in this renovation and was extensively altered internally to house a reception area and a café/bar area. At this time the exterior walls were strengthened to 100% of the then building code and the rooftop addition was constructed.

The building is now an integral part of the St James Theatre complex. The ground floor provides space for a large foyer, café/bar, and box office, and allows for access, via elevators, to the NZ Ballet offices, wardrobe and rehearsal rooms. The first floor is let as a large, multi-use function venue / exhibition space.



1927 The Counties Building with a two-storey Classical facade⁸ and c.1927 – 32 The Counties Building with a two-storey Art Deco facade⁹

⁷ Chris Cochran, 'St James Theatre, Courtenay Place Wellington: Cultural Heritage Assessment', Unpublished Cultural Heritage Assessment for the NZHPT, 1998.

⁸ Courtenay Place, Wellington. Ref: PAColl-5744-20. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22513706> ; Overlooking Courtenay Place, Wellington. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: 1/2-089999-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22336388>

⁹ Courtenay Place, Wellington. Evening post (Newspaper. 1865-2002) :Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: PAColl-5482-043. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23233851> ; Overlooking Courtenay Place, Wellington. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: 1/2-089999-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22336388>

1.2 Timeline of modifications

- 1929 86 Courtenay Place, factory additions (00056:75:B7226)
- 1929 86 Courtenay Place, building (00056:89:B8360)
- 1938 83 Courtenay Place, erect sign (00056:206:B17906)
- 1956 86 Courtenay Place, penthouse (00058:5:C235)
- 1968 86 Courtenay Place, reinstate mezzanine floor (00058:594:C28016)
- 1969 87 Courtenay Place, alterations to office partitions (00058:646:C29863)
- 1978 86 Courtenay Place, upgrade premises (00058:1150:C49569)
- 1978 83 Courtenay Place, demolition (00058:1146:C49426)
- 1978 83 Courtenay Place, mezzanine floor for storage (00058:1176:C50593)
- 1984 83 Courtenay Place, shop fittings, restaurant take away (00058:0:C66316)
- 1986 83-87 Courtenay Place, sign (00059:28:D4051)
- 1986 83-87 Courtenay Place, sign (00059:28:D4051)
- 1987 83-87 Courtenay Place, business demolition – shops (00059:95:D6330)
- 1987 83-87 Courtenay Place, business demolition – shops (00059:95:D6330)
- 1991 87 Courtenay Place, business additions and alterations (00059:503:E23909)
- 1996 77-87 Courtenay Place, St James Theatre redevelopment, stage 1 (00078:30:24006)
- 1996 77-87 Courtenay Place, St James Theatre redevelopment, stage 2 (00078:44:24785)
- 1996 77-87 Courtenay Place, St James Theatre redevelopment, stage 3 (00078:961:26340)

1.3 Occupation history

Not assessed

1.4 Architect

King and Dawson – façade

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

This building façade has been designed in a restrained Art Deco style, which at the time of its construction was the popular expression of the Modern movement. This building uses a slight ziggurat form, angled glazing bars, and panels of bass-relief. These panels show many motifs of the style including sunbursts above the verandah, wavy chevrons along the roof, and fern frond friezes above the windows.

The simple stepped form contrasts with its closest neighbour, the Edwardian Baroque St James Theatre, but the stylised Ionic columns do help to tie the two buildings together.

The modern addition on the top of this building detracts from its architectural and aesthetic values.

2.2 Materials

The building is constructed with a brick structure, painted cement render, and painted steel joinery.

2.3 Setting

The former A & T Burt Building (now part of the St James Theatre complex) is one of the few Art Deco buildings on Courtenay Place, or in the nearby Courtenay Place Heritage Area.

Adjoining the eastern side of this building is the Edwardian Baroque St James Theatre, a significant heritage building on Courtenay Place. Adjoining the eastern side, but set back from the street is the former CMC Building, which has had a modern mirror glass curtain wall placed around the original facade.

The St James Theatre is a local landmark for its size, scale, and for its bold, symmetrical, Edwardian Baroque façade. It is well-known as one of Wellington's best known performance venues – most specifically as home to the NZ Ballet.

The Art Deco theatre foyer is one of many heritage buildings on Courtenay Place. Most, but not all, of these buildings can be found in the nearby Courtenay Place Heritage Area which includes the distinct warehouse precinct of Blair and Allen Streets, the mixed-use streetscape of northern Kent Terrace and Cambridge Terrace, and the street-wall of (predominantly) early 20th c commercial Classical buildings that line the road from Tory Street to Kent Terrace.

3.0 Sources

Cochran, Chris. 'St James Theatre, Courtenay Place Wellington: Cultural Heritage Assessment.' Unpublished Cultural Heritage Assessment for the NZHPT, 1998.

Haast, H.F. Von. 'William Beynon Austin Quick' in *The Spike or Victoria University College Review*, 1916 http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-VUW1917_31Spik-t1-body-d7-d3.html

Parry, Gordon. 'Burt, Alexander - Burt, Alexander', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30-Oct-2012, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/1b53/burt-alexander>

Papers Past

Evening Post, Volume XCVIII, Issue 76, 1 April 1919, Page 10

'Hardware Shop Damaged', Auckland Star, 9 July 1929, Page 9, accessed 30 October 2013, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=AS19290708.2.116&srpos=1&e=-----10--1---0A+and+T+Burt+Wellington+Courtenay+Place-->

Wellington City Archive

- 1919 Original construction
- 1929 86 Courtenay Place, factory additions (00056:75:B7226)
- 1929 86 Courtenay Place, building (00056:89:B8360)
- 1938 83 Courtenay Place, erect sign (00056:206:B17906)
- 1956 86 Courtenay Place, penthouse (00058:5:C235)
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- 1996 77-87 Courtenay Place, St James Theatre redevelopment, stage 3 (00078:961:26340)

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?*

83- 87 Courtenay Place is a good representative example of a commercial Art Deco façade. The aesthetic and architectural values have been somewhat reduced by the over-sized second-floor addition, and by the extensive internal alterations.

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 association with the St James Theatre – one of Wellington's best known performance venues that is home to the NZ Ballet

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 has some group value as one of the few Art Deco buildings on Courtenay Place, and its association with the St James Theatre.

Historic Value:

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

This building is associated with A and T Burt Limited., a successful company that had branches throughout New Zealand. It is also associated with prominent architectural King and Dawson.

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

The building is now closely associated with the St James Theatre – see WCC ref 16/67.1

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 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?*

Social Value:

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

The fate of this building is so closely associated with that of the St James Theatre, and is now an integral element in the theatre complex. The Edwardian Baroque St James Theatre is held in high public esteem, and is protected by a Heritage Order.

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?

Although the building has had a number of intrusive modern alterations and additions it continues to make a contribution 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?*

This building is a good representative of the Art Deco style

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 unfortunately only has exterior authenticity as the interiors were almost completely demolished in the 1990s. It does maintain authenticity of exterior design, craftsmanship, and setting.

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 locally significant building due to its architectural and aesthetic values, its historic associations with a successful company and prominent architects, its archaeological value, its social values, and as a representative of its time.

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*