

Colonial Motor Company Building (former)

89 – 95 Courtenay Place



Courtenay Place elevation



York Street elevation

Images: Charles Collins, 2015

Summary of heritage significance

- The Colonial Motor Company Building is a rare local example of a ‘flatted-factory’ building designed for the car assembly industry. Although its main, Courtenay Place façade has been much-modified, it is notable for its York Street façade - which is in near-original condition.
- Historically it is associated with the Ford and Colonial Motor Company and the motor vehicle trade. This building was designed specifically to be a vertical assembly plant, with boxed parts arriving on the top floor and finished cars leaving from the ground.
- This building contributes to the creation of a group of historic buildings in the central city that are associated with the motor trade and Wellington’s industrial heritage.

District Plan:	Map 16, reference 67/3
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 73633
Heritage Area:	Courtenay Place Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	N/A
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	CMC Building, Ford Building
Key physical dates:	Built: 1920, Glass Curtain frontage: 1986
Architect / Builder:	Architect: J. M. Dawson; King and Dawson
Former uses:	Commercial – Car manufacture
Current uses:	Commercial and Retail - Offices
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake prone – SR 167863

Extent: Cityview GIS



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The Western end of Courtenay Place has had an innovative and long history with motoring and car manufacture. During the 1920s, motor vehicle dealers had established numerous showrooms and service facilities on both sides of the street.

Vehicle manufacturers had been active in Courtenay Place since 1859 when the Empire Coach and Carriage Company built a factory on a site between Taranaki Street and Courtenay Place. In 1911, the Colonial Motor Company took over the coach building premises. The Colonial Motor Company is associated with the Ford Motor Company and by 1920 a new building for the company was being designed. The original drawings for this building are titled “Proposed Nine Storey Steel Frame Building for the Colonial Motor Company”, a proclamation for what was a technically advanced structure at the time.¹ The building was designed by architect J.M Dawson to Ford plans, and was constructed by Hansford and Mills, and the estimated cost was £50, 000. The permit was issued in May of 1920 and was completed by 1922.² When it opened it was the tallest Wellington construction at nine storeys. The building was designed to be a vertical car assembly plant. This was the first motor vehicle assembly plant in New Zealand where vehicles would start out in boxes on the top floor and driving out completed at the bottom.³ Multi-level ‘flatted’ factories are common overseas, particularly in cities where land price is high, but this example of this building typology in New Zealand.



¹Cars ready for despatch from the plant at 89 Courtenay Place, Wellington, accessed 17/04/13, http://www.colmotor.co.nz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=4

The original purpose of this building as a vertical assembly plant had meant that this building had one of the highest floor loadings in the city. The original façade had few exterior openings, and the concrete framed structure with brick infill was painted with a huge FORD, making it one of the largest billboards in Wellington.

¹ ‘Proposed Nine Storey Steel Frame Building – Plans’, WCA 0005320211189

² Wellington City Council, “89-95 Courtenay Place,” *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Precincts* (Wellington City Council, 2001) COURT 18.

³ Wellington City Council, “89-95 Courtenay Place,” COURT 18.

The CMC building had been built back from the street frontage behind a 1913 building, which was the company's building prior to the construction of the nine storey tower and originally intended to be the site of an extension to the CMC assembly building.⁴ This previous building was demolished in 1990 as it was designated as being an earthquake risk. The main CMC building had been strengthened and upgraded in 1986, including the installation of the distinctive curtain wall which now hides the more functional 1920 façade from the Courtenay Place streetscape. The building was refurbished as a commercial office and retail space to designs of King and Dawson.

Although it is difficult to see the original industrial purpose of this building, due mainly to the glass curtain wall that hides the plain and functional design of the Courtenay Place façade, some indication of the original look of the building can be seen from York Street. Within the Central City there are several other buildings associated with the motor vehicle trade, including the Ford Workshop in Ebor Street, the Hope Gibbons Building, and Manthel Motors, both of the latter buildings also were designed by J. M. Dawson.



c.1920s Colonial Motor Company Building, Wellington. Ref: PA1-q-144-057. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22452064>

⁴ 'Proposed Nine Storey Steel Frame Building – Plans', WCA 0005320211189

1.2 Timeline of modifications (original plans – WCA 0005320211189 – hard copy available in “Heritage Building – 89-95 Courtenay Place”, 2007, 1041-06-COU89, Wellington City Council Records. Modifications based on Wellington City Council survey property details)

1920	Original Construction
1986	Building additions and alterations – retrofit of building, exposure of concrete frame, addition of façade in mirror-glass curtain wall, earthquake strengthening, and addition of floor
1990	Demolition of 1913 CMC building
2005	Alterations – interior fit out – new partitions, level 2
2006	Internal addition and alterations – installation of 2 doors in foyer including card readers and emergency exit buttons Internal alterations/refurbishment – combine dental surgeries
2007	Installation of Woosh wireless telecommunications transmitter
2008	Internal alterations – internal office, laboratory fit out
2009	Additions and alterations to upper level of building, addition of new door and access ladder
2010	Building addition – interior fit out for new hair salon on ground floor
2011	Commercial refurbishment of building front, main entry, and lift cars
2013	Commercial seismic upgrading – installation of 14 No. steel braces

1.3 Occupation history

Not assessed

1.4 Architect

Dawson, Joseph McClatchie – Architect⁵

J M Dawson (1877-1956) was born in the Wairarapa. His father was a contractor in this district and Dawson's education included a background in construction work. In 1900 he left New Zealand and travelled to South Africa, England and Australia, returning in 1906 to establish his own architectural practice in Wellington. His buildings include the T.G. McCarthy Building, Willis Street (1913), Hatricks Motor Garage (now Manthel Motors), corner Taranaki and Wakefield Streets (1913), and the Hope Gibbons Building, Dixon Street (1925).

Dawson was an inaugural member of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, formed in 1905, and became a Fellow of the Institute in 1913. He was its president from 1938-1940. Having appointed Jack Ian King (1900-1972) as his first partner in 1929 Dawson entered semi-retirement in 1946 finally retiring in 1948. The firm he founded continues as King and Dawson.

⁵ Historic Places Trust Professional Biographies, 'J.M. Dawson', accessed 17/04/13, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Dawson%2C+Joseph+McClatchie>

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Although the CMC building has a much-modified primary elevation to Courtenay Place, the secondary elevation to York Street remains in near-original condition.

From the south, the building rises as a tall nine-storey box, from the narrow service lane of York Street. This elevation is decorated with an attractive string-course above the first floor windows that is punctuated at each column by a stylised Art Deco plaque. The façade is undecorated until the cornice above the sixth-floor windows which is 'supported' by stylised brackets. Above the cornice line, the two end bays project forward from the wall, and each frame a single seventh and eighth floor window. These bays are topped with a stepped parapet that is decorated with a mix of Art Deco and stylised Classical motifs. The word 'Ford' is set on the central stepped parapet.

From the north the building shows only a vague resemblance to the production factory of the past. The c.1986 retro-fit has exposed the concrete frame, and sheathed the front façade in mirror-glass curtain walling. Major works in this period include the addition of a roof-extension to the CMC building and the demolition of its c.1913 northern neighbour.

2.2 Materials

The building is a steel framed structure, fully encased in concrete. Modern additions include a mirror glass curtain wall.

2.3 Setting

This building is a part of the Courtenay Place heritage area, but as it is set back from the street frontage, it only possesses minor streetscape values. It fits well with other buildings in the area in terms of size, but the Modern mirror glass façade is not particularly harmonious. The southern elevation is in near-original condition but is set on a narrow lane and, as such, has little townscape value.

The CMC building contributes to a rich collection of heritage buildings in the area. It is a part of a group of buildings that are related to the industrial and manufacturing heritage of Wellington. It is associated with other buildings of the motor vehicle trade such as the Ford Workshops in Ebor Street, the Hope Gibbons Building, and Manthel motors - both the latter buildings were also designed by J. M. Dawson.

Sources

Historic Places Trust Professional Biographies, 'J.M. Dawson', accessed 17/04/13,
<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Dawson%2C+Joseph+McClatchie>

Wellington City Council. "89-95 Courtenay Place," *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Precincts*. Wellington City Council, 2001

Online Sources

'Cars ready for despatch from the plant at 89 Courtenay Place, Wellington, accessed 17/04/13,
http://www.colmotor.co.nz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=4

Alexander Turnbull Library

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Ref: PA1-q-144-057.
<http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22452064>

Wellington City Archive

0005320211189

Wellington City Records

"Heritage Building – 89-95 Courtenay Place", 2007, 1041-06-COU89

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 Colonial Motor Company Building is a rare local example of a 'flatted-factory' building designed for the car assembly industry. Although its main, Courtenay Place façade has been much-modified, it is notable for its York Street façade - which is in near-original condition.

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?*

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 contributes to the creation of a group of historic buildings in the central city that are associated with the motor trade and Wellington's industrial heritage.

Historic Value:

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

This building is associated with J. M. Dawson, a prominent architect who designed a number of buildings in Wellington.

Historically it is associated with the Ford and Colonial Motor Company and the motor vehicle trade. This building was designed specifically to be a vertical assembly plant, with boxed parts arriving on the top floor and finished cars leaving from the ground. This association makes this building important in the industrial and manufacturing history of Wellington.

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?*

This building is a part of the NZAA r27/270 Central City archaeological area.

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?*

This building is of technical value due to its innovative construction with a heavy steel frame and high load bearing floors.

Social Value:

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

This building has historic association with the Ford and Colonial Motor Companies and this may provide it with some 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 is associated with the industrial and manufacturing history of Wellington, in particular the motor vehicle industry. CMC maintains an office in the building at present (2013) which gives this building some sense of continuity/traditional use value.

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?*

The building is an example of a 'flatted' or vertical factory, which although relatively common in some overseas cities, is a rare in New Zealand

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

This building is a good example of a functional and commercially influenced building design. Its heavy steel frame and high floor loading give this building technical importance.

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?*

Although this building has had a retrofit, it still maintains original materials, and the façade on the York Street frontage is significantly unmodified.

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 due to the contribution that it makes to the history of Wellington. It is associated with industry and manufactures, which few buildings in the central city are, in particular motor vehicle assembly. It contributes to a rich collection of heritage buildings in the area.

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*