

## Alexandra Building

175-179 Cuba Street



Photo: 175-179 Cuba Street (*Charles Collins, 2014*)

### Summary of heritage significance

- This three-storey masonry building has architectural value for its simple neo-Classical façade which retains a high level of authenticity despite modifications to the parapet and shop fronts.
- The building has historic value for its connection to several successful Wellington businessmen and as a representative example of a commercial mixed use investment property built during the growth and development of Cuba Street in the Edwardian period.
- This building is part of a group of Edwardian commercial buildings on Cuba Street which contribute to the sense of place and continuity of the Cuba Street Heritage Area.

District Plan:	Map 16 reference 86/2
Legal Description:	Part Sec 153 Town of Wellington
Heritage Area:	Cuba Street Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Deficient registration (Category II reference 5342)
Archaeological Site:	
Other Names:	Alexandra Buildings (HPT), Leather Direct, Wilsons Army, Navy & Western
Key physical dates:	1905 - Built 1942 - Front parapet replaced following earthquake 1996 – Seismically strengthened
Architect / Builder:	Architect: James O'Dea / Builder: Murdoch and Wallis
Former uses:	Commercial / residential
Current uses:	
Earthquake Prone Status:	s124 served, expires 19/08/2026 (SR 163479)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2012



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History

Architect James O'Dea designed this three-storey building for Messrs McArdle and Wylie. The builders were Murdoch and Wallis and the permit was issued in September 1905.<sup>1</sup> The ground floor was fitted out as shops, and the two upper floors contained three separate residential apartments.

McArdle and Wylie purchased the section in 1903 from Dr John Teare for £6,400.<sup>2</sup> O'Dea was commissioned to design the building called 'Alexandra Buildings'<sup>3</sup> as an investment property.

Born in Scotland, Andrew Wylie came to New Zealand as a child in the 1860s.<sup>4</sup> He trained as a lawyer and worked for a number of law firms in Wellington until 1892 when he entered into a partnership with Charles Perrin Skerrett (later Chief Justice of New Zealand).<sup>5</sup> Andrew Wylie was also a shareholder in the J. Staples Company.<sup>6</sup> In 1909 the legal partnership evolved into Chapman, Skerrett, Wylie and Tripp, a forebear of the well-known law firm Chapman Tripp. A "well-known old resident of Wellington", Wylie retired from his firm in 1912, and died at Heretaunga in 1930.<sup>7</sup>

Owen McArdle was born in Ireland and immigrated to New Zealand in the 1870s.<sup>8</sup> He joined his cousins, the Gilmers, on the West Coast where they were running a hotel. In subsequent years he was employed by the Staples and Co. Brewery as secretary, and later the Wellington manager. He is known to have had an interest in other properties, such as the Maguire Building (1901) which still stands at 168-174 Cuba Street, which he invested in with his cousin Hamilton Gilmer (a member of the Legislative Chamber) and Allen Maguire, both directors of Staples and Co. Brewery.<sup>9</sup> McArdle did not live long to experience the rewards of his property ventures, as he died suddenly of a heart attack in Masterton in 1908 where the three men were inspecting the new Empire Hotel Building.<sup>10</sup> His obituary noted he was a "very well-known citizen of Wellington".<sup>11</sup>

McArdle and Wylie's estate owned the building until 1911 when it was sold to Edwin Moulton for £9,000.<sup>12</sup> Moulton made a considerable profit on the building, selling it for £16,250 in 1922 to pharmacist Robert Johnson.<sup>13</sup> Johnson operated a pharmacy from 179 Cuba Street until he died in 1956. The building was administered by the Public Trustee until 1985 when it was acquired by the Salvation Army Property Trust. This

<sup>1</sup> James O'Dea, "175-179 Cuba Street, three shops and dwellings", September 23, 1905, 00053:121:6748, Wellington City Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Deed 144/527

<sup>3</sup> Kerry Pollock, *Alexandra Buildings: 175-179 Cuba Street* (Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report), July 21, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Cyclopaedia Co. Ltd, "Barristers and Solicitors," in *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand: Wellington Provincial District* (Wellington: The Cyclopaedia Company Limited, 1897), accessed 19 September, 2012, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc01Cycl-t1-body-d4-d26-d6.html>

<sup>5</sup> G.P. Barton, "Skerrett, Charles Perrin – Biography", in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated July 4, 2012, accessed September 19, 2012, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3s21/1>

<sup>6</sup> Pollock, *Alexandra Buildings: 175-179 Cuba Street*.

<sup>7</sup> "Mr Andrew Wylie", *Evening Post*, Volume CX, Issue 137, 8 December 1930, Page 13.

<sup>8</sup> Pollock, *Alexandra Buildings: 175-179 Cuba Street*.

<sup>9</sup> "Death of Mr O. McArdle", *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Volume LVIII, Issue 8979, 1 February 1908, Page 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Deed 192/121, Archives New Zealand (ANZ)

<sup>13</sup> Deed 247/411, ANZ

organisation sold it a year later to the Patel and Parag families. The present owners purchased the building in 1995 and continue to lease the shops and apartments.

Records show an interesting mix of tenants in the shops over the years, including a series of restaurants, a boot maker and various shoe shops, chemists, a furniture store, and a record store.<sup>14</sup> The street directories do not record the residential tenants; however it is likely that various residential tenants have occupied the apartments. Correspondence from the 1980s held by the Wellington City Archives suggests that tenants at this time tended to be drawn from artistic and musical circles, attracted by the cheap rents and central location.<sup>15</sup>

The building has been subject to various alterations since it was constructed, the shop fronts in particular have been considerably altered. In 1942 the building suffered damage in the Wairarapa earthquakes.<sup>16</sup> Repairs were made to the cracked façade of the building and the ornate parapet and decorative urns were removed.<sup>17</sup> This was not unusual - many buildings in the central city were damaged in the earthquakes and high-level masonry features were removed either because they were damaged or as a precautionary measure.<sup>18</sup>

In 1996 the building was seismically strengthened with frames and wall bracing.<sup>19</sup> The building owner received a \$37,000 grant towards this work from the WCC Earthquake Risk Building Fund.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Wellington City Council, *Cuba Street Heritage Area spreadsheet (block 4)*. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Pollock, *Alexandra Buildings: 175-179 Cuba Street*.

<sup>16</sup> Eileen McSaveney, "Historic earthquakes - The 1942 Wairarapa earthquakes", *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated March 2, 2009, accessed September 20, 2012, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/historic-earthquakes/9>

<sup>17</sup> "179 Cuba Street, reinstate shop and dwelling", December 8, 1942, 00056:280:B22502, Wellington City Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Kelly and Russell Murray, *Cuba Street Heritage Area Report* (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006), 25.

<sup>19</sup> "175 Cuba Street, strengthening", 1996, 00078:18:22703, Wellington City Archives.

<sup>20</sup> "Heritage building - 175-179 Cuba Street", 1997, 1041-06-CUB175, Wellington City Council Records

1905 Building constructed (three

- 
- Roofing removed and covered
- Roofing removed
- Roofing removed
- Substructure
- Roofing removed
- FRONT ELEVATION

These 1942 plans detail repairs to the building and the removal of decorative masonry features such as the parapet and urns (Wellington City Archives, 00056:280:B22502).

1915	Gallate & Karantze, restaurateurs (175) (Stones 1915-16)
1920	Petro Gerondis, restaurateur (175) (Stones 1920, 1925)
1930	Queen's Café (Stones 1930)
1920	Edward Mann, boot maker (177) (Stones 1920, 1925, 1930)
1930	Robert Johnston, chemist (179) (Stones 1930, 1935, 1940, 1945, Wises 1950-51, 1955)
1935	Halls Shoe Company Ltd (177) (Stones 1935, 1940, 1945, Wises 1950-51, 1955, 1961-62)
1967	G. M Bruce Ltd, chemists (179) (Wises 1967-68, 1971-72)
1971	Apperly Footwear Ltd (175) (Wises 1971-72, 1975)
1980	John's Shoes Ltd (Wises 1980, 1985)
1980	House of Oak, furniture (Wises 1980, 1985)
1990	Silvios Records (Wises 1990) <sup>21</sup>

Various residential tenants on first floor.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



## 1.4 Architect

### James O'Dea

James O'Dea was established his architectural practice in New Zealand in 1882.<sup>22</sup> He worked in Auckland and Hawera before arriving in Wellington in 1888.<sup>23</sup> He had premises on the corner of Willis and Willeston Streets (then Harbour Street) and later on Grey Street. O'Dea enjoyed the patronage of the Catholic Church and wealthy Catholic laymen such as Robert O'Connor, T.G. McCarthy and Martin Kennedy. However, O'Dea, an enthusiastic litigant, ended up in legal disputes with both McCarthy and Kennedy later in his career.<sup>24</sup>

O'Dea designed a considerable number of houses and commercial buildings in Wellington in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly around the turn of the century. His work included significant building such as the main block at the Home of Compassion, Island Bay (1907) and the Royal Oak Hotel (1899), along with a number of buildings on and around Cuba Street. Together with a number of houses, those buildings still standing include 58-60 Cuba Street for T.G. McCarthy (1897), the Tramway Hotel, Adelaide Road (1899), the People's Palace, 203 Cuba Street (1904), 175-170 Cuba Street (1905) and the Kennedy Building, 33-39 Cuba Street (1905)

O'Dea was a keen advocate for reinforced concrete buildings in an earthquake prone environment and wrote on the subject many times in letters to local newspapers.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.0 Physical description

### 2.1 Architecture

This building is three tall stories high with a simple neo-Classical façade featuring paired windows, segmental arched at the first floor and fully arched at the second, all set off with strong horizontal cornice lines and a bull-nosed verandah. The latter, likely to be substantially original, is supported on cast-iron posts at the street edge. The façade reads as incomplete as the original parapet and decorative urns have been removed and steel fire escapes have been added at an unknown date.<sup>26</sup> The replacement parapet is a plain, unembellished addition and presents a moderately discordant appearance in comparison to the decorative window arches.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cyclopedia Co. Ltd, "Other Architects, Civil Engineers, etc.," in *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand: Wellington Provincial District* (Wellington: The Cyclopedia Company Limited, 1897), accessed September 19, 2012, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc01Cycl-t1-body-d4-d33-d10.html>

<sup>23</sup> *Evening Post*, Volume XXXV, Issue 123, 26 May 1888, Page 3

<sup>24</sup> *Evening Post*, Volume LXXXII, Issue 18, 21 July 1911, Page 4; and *Evening Post*, Volume LXXXIII, Issue 39, 15 February 1912, Page 8

<sup>25</sup> *Evening Post*, Volume LXXXI, Issue 117, 19 May 1911, Page 2

<sup>26</sup> Adapted from: Michael Kelly and Russell Murray, *Cuba Street Heritage Area Report* (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 48, 2006), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Pollock, *Alexandra Buildings: 175-179 Cuba Street*.

## **2.2 Materials**

The construction is load-bearing brick masonry (English bond), with concrete foundation walls, cornices, and lintels reinforced with railway irons. The floor joists and roof trusses are totara.<sup>28</sup>

## **2.3 Setting**

The building sits among a row of masonry buildings of a variety of scales and architecture on Cuba Street between Swan Lane and Vivian Street. The immediate area is predominantly low-rise and older in character, with the exception of two very large, modern buildings on the opposite side of the street. The building is close to the mid-point of the Cuba Street Heritage Area in a part of the precinct that retains a high concentration of heritage buildings. The narrowness of the streets means that broader views are not easily obtained.

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<sup>28</sup> Wellington City Council, “175-179 Cuba Street”, *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 2001), CUBA 25.

### 3.0 Sources

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"Heritage building - 175-179 Cuba Street". 1997. 1041-06-CUB175, Wellington City Council Records.

#### Newspapers

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"Death of Mr O. M'Cardle", *Wairarapa Daily Times*, Volume LVIII, Issue 8979, 1 February 1908, Page 5.

*Evening Post*, Volume LXXXI, Issue 117, 19 May 1911, Page 2.



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“Mr Andrew Wylie”, *Evening Post*, Volume CX, Issue 137, 8 December 1930, Page 13.

## 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?*

This building retains a reasonable level of architectural authenticity, despite the removal of decorative elements in 1942.

**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 scale, materials and style of this building contribute to the townscape of Cuba Street.

**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 one of a group of Edwardian commercial buildings which make a positive contribution to the character of the Cuba Street Heritage Area.

#### **Historic Value:**

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

The building has historic value for its connection to several successful Wellington businessmen.

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

The building also has historic value for its association with the strong growth and development of Cuba Street during the Edwardian period, which resulted in the building of many fine commercial buildings.

#### **Scientific Value:**

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

It is known that there has been pre-1900 human activity on the site; hence this site has potential archaeological value.

**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?*

This building is part of a group of Edwardian commercial buildings on Cuba Street which contribute to the sense of place and continuity of the Cuba Street 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?

The building is representative of the architecture and history found on Cuba Street.

***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 façade of this building remains largely intact with a high level of original building fabric, despite modifications to the ground floor shop fronts and the removal of the pediment and decorative features.

***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 contribution to the Cuba Street Heritage Area.

## 2.0 Appendix

### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report	Y	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	Y	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	Y	Deficient registration – not currently online but the text is saved in the electronic folder.
HPT files	Y	Registration report
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

### Background research

MAY 1906 – O'Dea recently completed or working on... Alexandra Buildings

<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=P19060501.2.12&srpos=1&e=-----10-P-1-----00%27Dea+Cuba-->