

## **Whitcoulls Building (Former)**

312 – 316 Lambton Quay



Photo: *Charles Collins, 2015*

### **Summary of heritage significance**

- The Whitcoulls building has architectural significance for its elaborate Edwardian Classical façade that is one of the finest on Lambton Quay. It is a very good example of the commercial architecture of Thomas Turnbull & Son, a prominent local architectural practice.
- The building is one of the few remaining Edwardian Classical buildings that were once common on Lambton Quay and its elaborate detailing and ornamentation make a pleasant contrast to the simpler repetitive forms of the predominately late 20<sup>th</sup>C streetscape of Lambton Quay.
- The building has a historic association with Whitcombe and Tombs (later Whitcoulls), a business that has been an integral part of publishing and bookselling across New Zealand throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>C. The ground floor retail space operated as a bookshop/stationers for over 100 years.

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| District Plan:           | Map 17, Symbol 189   |
| Legal Description:       | DP 9384  |
| Heritage Area:           | None WCC 2012  |
| HPT Listed:              | NZHPT Category II, reference 1455.<br>NZHPT South Lambton Quay Historic Area |
| Archaeological Site:     | Central City NZAA R27/270  |
| Other Names:             |  |
| Key physical dates:      | 1907-08: built   |
| Architect / Builder:     | Thomas Turnbull and Son / Campbell and Burke<br>(builders)                   |
| Former uses:             | Retail and commercial  |
| Current uses:            | Retail and commercial  |
| Earthquake Prone Status: | SR170173 Section 124 Notice Served   |

Extent: Cityview GIS 2012



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History<sup>1</sup>

Whitcoulls has its origins in the printing, publishing and retailing firm of Whitcombe and Tombs, established in Christchurch in 1882 by George Whitcombe and George Tombs. The firm expanded quickly, opening stores in London in 1889, Dunedin in 1890, Wellington in 1894, Melbourne in 1902, and Auckland in 1916. Later branches were opened in the Australian centres of Sydney, Geelong and Perth.<sup>2</sup>

Wellington operations were begun with the purchase of local booksellers Lyon and Blair. J.W. Blair was also an educationalist and Mayor of Wellington. Their building was demolished in 1896 and replaced with a new structure but this was in turn destroyed by the huge Lambton Quay fire of 1906. Plans for a new building were begun in 1907 and a permit issued in April that year. The building was designed by William Turnbull of Thomas Turnbull and Son. The contract price of the building was £9998 and the main contractors were Campbell and Burke.<sup>3</sup> Goods were brought to the building via a cart way from Boulcott Terrace, presumably today's Gilmer Terrace.<sup>4</sup>

The building was used as a printing house until 1913 when new premises were built on Boulcott Terrace. The firm changed its name to Whitcoulls in 1971 when Whitcombe and Tombs amalgamated with Coulls, Sommerville and Wilkie.”<sup>5</sup>

The building was modified in 1935 when the decorative parapets, entablature and ornamentation at parapet level were removed, most likely as a response to the 1931 Hawkes Bay Earthquake. The building was refurbished and strengthened in 1984 to designs by Warren and Mahoney. Parts of the parapet and decoration previously removed were replaced in lightweight materials at this time. Works to complete a 15-storey tower block at the rear of the building, with a street frontage to Gilmer Terrace was constructed at around this time. Later works include an internal fit-out of the building in 1998, and conversion of offices to a fitness centre from 2006 – 09. The building is currently undergoing enabling works to allow for earthquake strengthening.

Whitcoulls ceased trading from the 312-316 Lambton Quay property in early 2012, partly as a response to the earthquake-prone status of the building, and partly because of a merger with Borders, a similar retailer with premises at 226 Lambton Quay. The *Dominion Post* wrote that “Companies Office records show the building is ultimately owned by the estate of Melbourne-based property developer Herman Rockefeller, who was killed after a dispute with two members of the city's "swingers" scene in 2010.” Whitcoulls' Wellington regional sales manager Lisa MacKenzie noted that “It's sad to say goodbye to the old store - it has been a Wellington institution for many years and holds countless memories for customers and staff alike.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note: this report is an updated version of the WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref LAMB 13

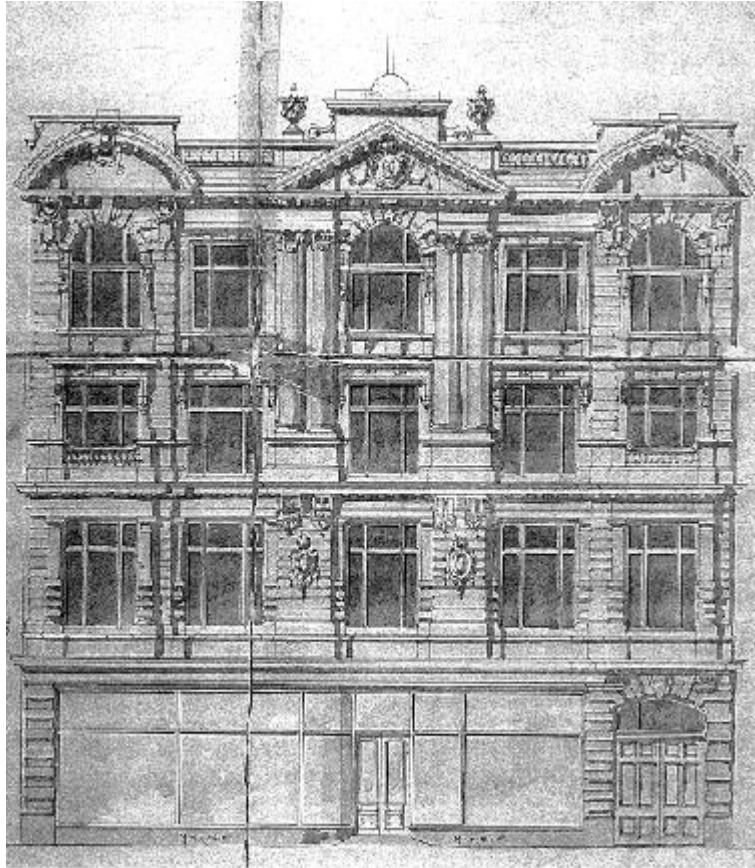
<sup>2</sup> History of Whitcoulls and its predecessors in Roger M. 1993, *Turning the Pages*, Whitcoulls, Wellington

<sup>3</sup> Permit and specifications for Whitcombe and Tombs building OC 7640, WCC Archives

<sup>4</sup> Permit and specifications for Whitcombe and Tombs building OC 7640, WCC Archives

<sup>5</sup> Wellington City Council Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings, LAMB 12

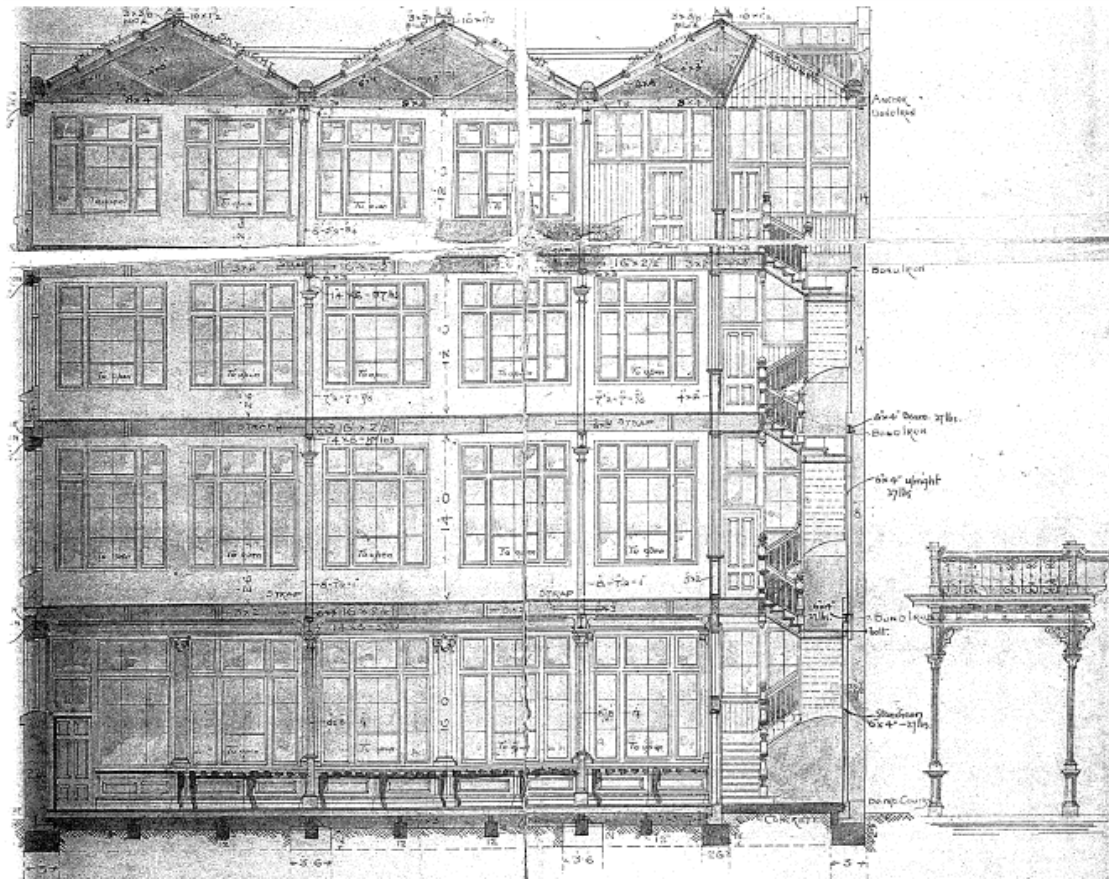
<sup>6</sup> Lane Nichols, Whitcoulls on Lambton Quay to close, *Dominion Post*, 23/04/2012



1907 elevation as proposed. SR 7640



1907 enlargement of the elevation to show the original parapet, entablature and decorative elements including urns. These decorative elements were removed in 1935, and partially reinstated in 1984.



1907 Section as proposed through the building. SR 7640. Note that the original verandah shown at the far right of this drawing was replaced in 1930.



Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, c1940. Note that the decorative parapets/entablature were removed in 1935 before this photograph was taken, they have since been replicated in lightweight materials. (ATL 1/1-021947)

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1907 | Building consent SR 7640  |
| 1930 | Replace verandah £2006, SRB9396   |
| 1935 | Demolish parapets £60, SR B13641  |
| 1940 | New shop fronts £200, SRB20822, Mezzanine SRB21144, £2200   |
| 1956 | Access bridge & life tower between 312-316 Lambton Quay and 8-10 Gilmer Terrace £35,000 SRC446, alterations to cart dock SRB39461   |
| 1986 | Application value: \$10,898,000. Note: Construction of a 15 storey office block accessed from Gilmer Terrace, and earthquake strengthening of the 4 storey building facing Lambton Quay. SR D2484 |
| 1998 | 312 Lambton Quay, internal fit-out. \$472,960. SR40353  |
| 2006 | 312 Lambton Quay, offices to fitness centre level 3, carpark to cafe and hairdresser, level 4. \$400,000. SR153314  |
| 2012 | Enabling works for earthquake strengthening scheme SR 272737  |

### 1.3 Architect

#### **Turnbull, William (1868-1941)**

#### **Thomas Turnbull and Son.**

Turnbull and Son was founded by Thomas Turnbull (1824-1907) who was born in Scotland and trained under David Bryce, Her Majesty's Architect for Scotland.<sup>7</sup> Turnbull moved to Melbourne in 1851 and then to San Francisco in circa 1860 where he became interested in earthquake resistant design, particularly for brick masonry buildings. He arrived in New Zealand in 1871, established a thriving business of which his son William (1868-1941) became a partner in 1891.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Turnbull is noted for the significant part he played in the transformation of the Wellington CBD from a town of two storey timber buildings to a city of "substantial masonry buildings."<sup>9</sup>

William Turnbull continued in practice after the death of his father in 1907 and retained the name of Thomas Turnbull and Son. William Turnbull was also a skilful designer and responsible for many of Wellington's "best and most convincing revivalist buildings"<sup>10</sup> and these include:

- Dr McGavin's house and surgery cnr Willis and Ghuznee Street (1907) – half-timbered Tudor style
- Whitcoulls Building 312-316 Lambton Quay (1907-8)
- Wellington Workingmen's Club Building, 107 Cuba Street (Building 2: 1908)
- Kirkcaldie and Stains Department Store Façade 165-169 Lambton Quay (1909)
- House for A Blacklock, 60 Tinakori Road (1910)
- Woolstore, 268 Thorndon Quay (1910)
- BNZ Te Aro Branch, cnr Manners and Cuba Streets (1912)
- Turnbull House, Bowen Street (1916) – Scottish Baronial style
- Northland Fire Station (1930)
- Free Ambulance Building, Cable Street (1932) – Art Deco style

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<sup>7</sup>Historic Places Trust, "Turnbull, Thomas - Architect", *Professional Biographies*, accessed September 25, 2012,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Turnbull,+Thomas>

<sup>8</sup> Historic Places Trust, "Turnbull, William (1868-1914) - Architect", *Professional Biographies*, accessed September 25, 2012,

[http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Turnbull,+William+\(1868-1941\)](http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Turnbull,+William+(1868-1941))

<sup>9</sup> Cochran, Chris, *Turnbull House Conservation Plan* (Wellington: Department of Conservation, 1991), 19.

<sup>10</sup> Cochran, *Turnbull House Conservation Plan*, 21

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## 2.0 Physical description

### 2.1 Architecture

The original drawings for the Whitcoulls Building show the structure as masonry load-bearing walls, timber floors supported on cast iron columns and beams, and timber trussed roof in three spans across the building. Although extensively altered inside, it is a good example of Edwardian Baroque - a deliberate dressing up of a utilitarian structure to reflect a particular image. In this case, the building presents itself as a kind of commercial Athenaeum, a temple of learning.

The facade has been designed as three shallow bays, each with a strong vertical emphasis and each capped by a pediment. The central bay dominates the building, and features a giant Ionic order rising through the second and third floors, and capped by a triangular pediment. The two flanking bays at either end of the building are rusticated and are capped with segmental pediments. The three main windows of the top floor are set in rusticated arches. The base and first floor of the building are also rusticated, with dentils and a projecting cornice between first and second floors, and rusticated Tuscan pilasters framing the two end windows. Overall, this is a heavily sculptured facade where the strong verticals of the giant order and flanking pilasters are countered by projecting cornices between all floors. The result is one of the finest Edwardian facades in the central city and a lively element in the local townscape.

### 2.2 Materials

WCC Archives OC 7640

- Verandah
- Timber trusses in roof, skylights
- Steel columns

An Evening Post Article of 1907 notes that the floor is constructed from... “specially strong joists of Australian jarrah, suitable for carrying heavy machinery”<sup>11</sup>

SR 132206 dated 19/07/2005 notes the presence of Hollowcore Flooring in the building. Hollowcore flooring is prone to structural failure under earthquake loads.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3 Setting

The Whitcoulls building is set on Lambton Quay between two late 20thC high rise office buildings. Lambton Quay has developed over time to become Wellington City CBD's “golden mile” of retail and commercial office buildings where banks, department stores and company head offices have traditionally built their highest quality buildings. This area has a high pedestrian ‘foot-count’ and is the key inner city retail shopping precinct. The street is characterised by the mix of modern office buildings and older heritage buildings, and many of the (modern) office buildings on the west side of Lambton Quay also have a street frontage or access to The Terrace commercial/office precinct. The heritage buildings make a fine contribution to a, sometimes bland, modern streetscape along Lambton Quay, and this building at 312 Lambton Quay is one of the few remaining Edwardian Classical buildings that were once commonplace on this street.

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<sup>11</sup> Evening Post, Volume LXXIV, Issue 67, 16 September 1907, Page 6

<sup>12</sup> L.J. Woods, R.C. Fenwick, D.K. Bull, ‘Seismic Performance of Hollow-core Flooring: the Significance of Negative Bending Moments.’ NZSEE conference paper 2008  
<http://www.nzsee.org.nz/db/2008/Paper24.pdf>



### 3.0 Sources

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CT WN351/155

Evening Post, 16 September 1907

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<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Turnbull,+Thomas>

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[http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Turnbull,+William+\(1868-1914\)](http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Turnbull,+William+(1868-1914))

Nichols, Lane. 'Whitcoulls on Lambton Quay to close', *Dominion Post*, 23/04/2012

Roger, M. 1993, *Turning the Pages*, Whitcoulls, Wellington

WCC Archives OC 7640

WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref LAMB 13

Woods, L.J. and R.C. Fenwick, D.K. Bull, 'Seismic Performance of Hollow-core Flooring: the Significance of Negative Bending Moments.' NZSEE conference paper 2008 <http://www.nzsee.org.nz/db/2008/Paper24.pdf>

#### 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?

The Whitcoulls building has architectural significance for its elaborate Edwardian Classical façade that is one of the finest on Lambton Quay. It is a very good example of the commercial architecture of Thomas Turnbull & Son, a prominent local architectural practice.

***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 one of the few remaining Edwardian Classical buildings that were once common on Lambton Quay and its elaborate detailing and ornamentation make a pleasant contrast to the simpler repetitive forms of the predominately late 20<sup>th</sup>C streetscape of Lambton Quay.

***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?

###### **Historic Value:**

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

The building has a historic association with Whitcombe and Tombs (later Whitcoulls), a business that has been an integral part of publishing and bookselling across New Zealand throughout the 20thC. The ground floor retail space operated as a bookshop / stationers for over 100 years.

The building also has an association with William Turnbull, of Thomas Turnbull and Son, which was one of the most significant architectural practices in Wellington at the time.

***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?

Central City NZAA 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?*

**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 exterior has had few intrusive modern alterations or additions in the past 100 years and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of the Lambton Quay Streetscape.

**Sentiment/Connection:** *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

The building has some sentimental value as the Wellington's main Whitcoulls retail outlet for over 100 years, although this has diminished somewhat since the closure of the bookstore in early 2012.

**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 Lambton Quay façade retains much of its early/original building fabric with the exception of the ground floor shop fronts and the 1984 decorative parapet / entablature.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

*Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?*

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**5.0 Appendix**
**Research checklist (desktop)**

| <b>Source</b>  | <b>Y/N</b> | <b>Comments</b> |
|--|------------|-----------------|
| 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)  |            |                 |