

South British Insurance Building (Former)

326 Lambton Quay



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The South British Building is a carefully crafted example of a neo-Georgian design expressed on a Chicago-styled office building.
- The South British building is one of a number of tall office buildings erected in the 1930s that bolstered Wellington's post-Depression economy and helped shape the 20th century character of the city.
- The building has an historic association with the South British Insurance Co. It is Wellington's sole, tangible reminder of one of the few internationally successful insurance companies begun, and fully owned and operated, from New Zealand.
- The building façade is relatively unaltered and retains much of the original building fabric. It is a rare surviving example of a Chicago style high-rise building in Wellington's 'Golden Mile'

District Plan: Map 17, Symbol 190.1
Legal Description: Pt Reserve N5 Town of Wellington Plan A/2853, CT 168 / 299
Heritage Area: BNZ / Head Office Heritage Area
HPT Listed: NZHPT Category II ref 1430
South Lambton Quay Historic Area ref 7041
Archaeological Site: Wellington CBD & pre 1900 human activity on site
Other Names: South British Building
London Bookshop Lambton Quay
1936 construction
Key physical dates: 1976 a 6 storey addition was constructed at the rear of the building
Architect: M.K. Draffin (Auckland)
Architect / Builder: Engineer: Grey and Gulliver (Auckland)
Contractor: Fletcher Construction Co. Ltd
Former uses: Commercial offices – insurance. 2 x retail units at ground floor level. Apartment at level 6.
Current uses: Commercial offices and retail with caretaker's flat at roof level.
Earthquake Prone Status: 161433 Bdg StrengthInv notice posted 8/05/2012

Extent: Cityview GIS 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The South British Insurance Company was founded in 1872, in Auckland, largely as a response to the high premiums being charged for marine insurance by overseas based companies¹. The first premises were at 29 Queen Street, and business commenced on 2 September 1872.² Expansion was swift. By 1875 there were representatives in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Hobart. Within a decade the company had set up offices or agents in the Pacific, India, Japan, South Africa and the United States. By 1883 South British had expanded to 20 countries on all seven continents. From the late 19thC onwards South British made many acquisitions of rival insurance companies in ambitious expansion plans.

South British's first Wellington office was designed by Thomas Turnbull in 1878³ and built for the Colonial Bank of New Zealand. The building was composed of two adjoining brick, plastered structures of two storeys, the south portion of which was occupied by the bank while the north end, 326 Lambton Quay, was leased by South British. It is not known when South British first occupied their portion but they were certainly in the building by the 1880s.⁴ South British bought their half of their building by the 24th September 1881⁵ and it remained their Wellington offices until it was demolished in 1936 to make way for the construction of the present building. The Commercial Bank of Australia bought the bank's portion in 1914. Curiously, although these buildings used exactly the same design elements, the C.B.A portion had three arched windows in the equivalent space occupied by two on South British.⁶ C.B.A removed their portion of the building two years before South British demolished the other.

The new South British Building was designed by Auckland architect M.K Draffin, who also designed the building the Auckland office it occupied. This was the only occasion where the company had its own building designed and built, and it had occupied the building from the start. The engineers were Gray and Gulliver, of Auckland and the builders Fletcher Construction.

When finished the building completed a group of three similarly sized commercial buildings along the western side of Lambton Quay that include the CBA Building(1936) and the Prudential Assurance Building (1934-45). When first built, the building was largely filled with South British Insurance Co. employees and it remained that way until the company departed the building. Guardian Trust and Executor's of New Zealand was an early tenant that was closely linked to South British and occupied the building as long as its landlord. Guardian Trust was later joined by United Insurance and for a period three insurance companies lived under the same roof.⁷

¹ This history is based on the research prepared for the WCC Sunset Clause review committee by Michael Kelly 1998

² Ibid. P.14

³ Hodgeson, T. 1990, Colonial Capital: Wellington 1865 – 1910, Random Century, Auckland, P.124.

⁴ Photo 10818 ½, "Wellington Streets, Lambton Quay", photographic collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁵ Lands and Deeds, CT 28/15

⁶ Photo 16216, "Wellington Streets, Lambton Quay", photographic collection, Alexander Turnbull Library

⁷ Wises Post Office Directories 1936- 1966 – a scan of selected directories between those years

In 1976, approval was given for a six storey building to be erected at the rear of the original building, and this was duly completed the following year.⁸ An earlier proposal for the erection of a podium/tower building on the amalgamated sites of South British and C.B.A was approved in 1971,⁹ but no further steps were taken, perhaps because of the ultimate merger of South British with N.Z.I in October 1982 and the C.B.A. with the Bank of New South Wales.

The merger resulted in the immediate sale of the Wellington building. It was bought by Prudential Insurance Ltd., already with a mind to the possibilities offered by a larger site. The following year the adjacent C.B.A. Building was purchased, thus reuniting the three portions of land for the first time since the first town acres were subdivided in the early 1840s.

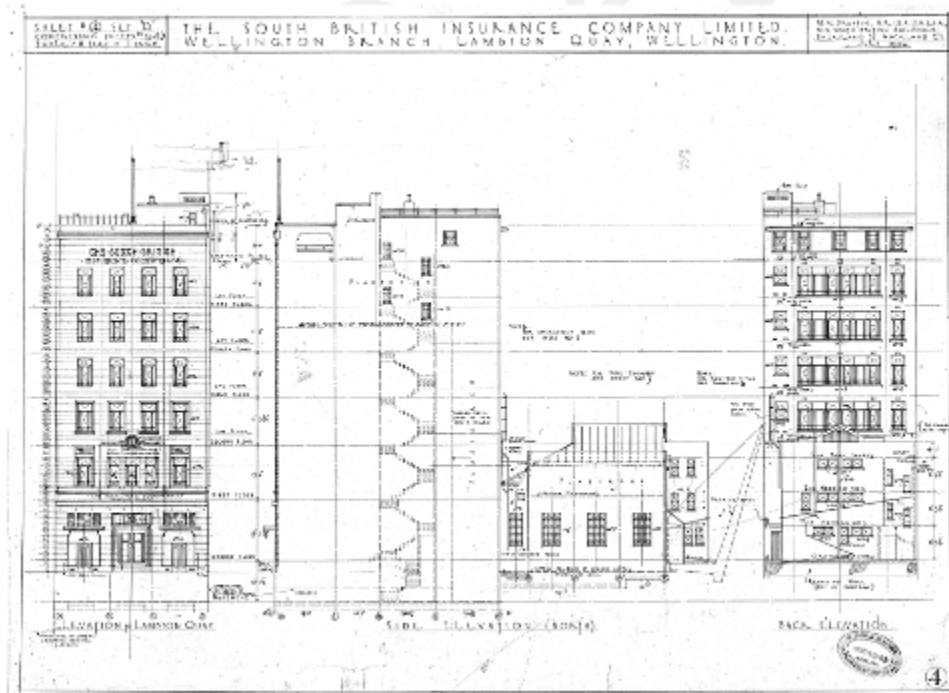
In the late 1990s a developer applied for consent to demolish all three Prudential owned buildings and replace them with a single tall tower. This was opposed by the NZHPT, provoked a public outcry, and was finally resolved by the Environment Court. The tower was never built and the South British Building has been regularly tenanted since Prudential bought the building.



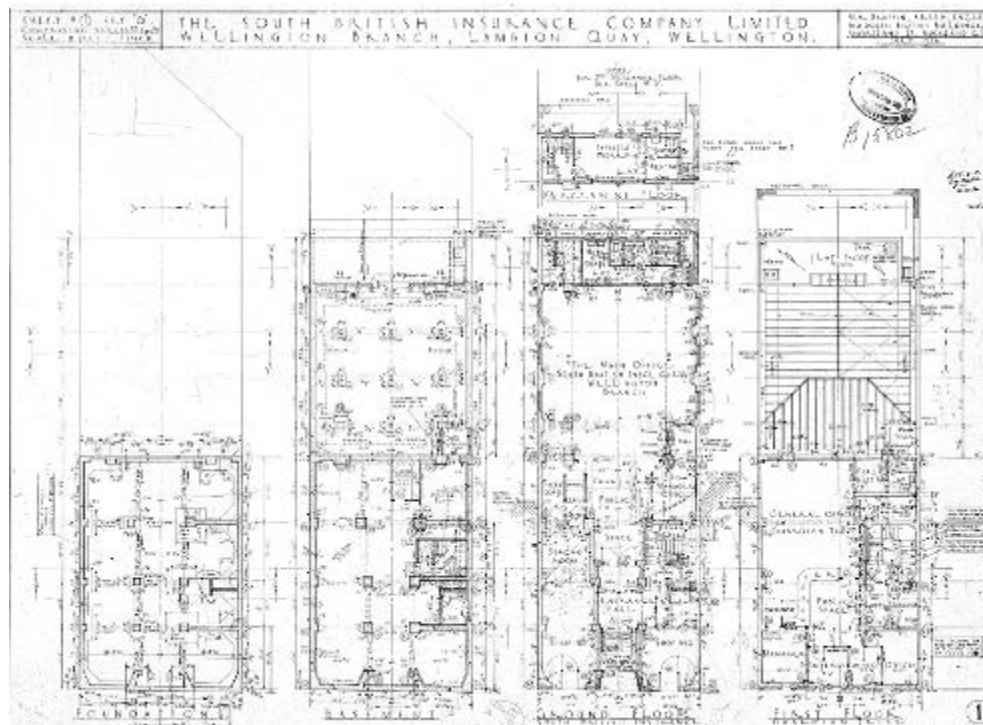
Circa 1880s view of Lambton Quay with the original South British Insurance Building as the first building to the left of the photograph. Image: Burton Brothers ATL BB-2209-1/1-G

⁸ WCC Building Permit Card, south British Insurance Co. Building.

⁹ Wellington District Committee NZHPT, Research File – South British Insurance Company Building, Lambton Quay



Proposed elevations. Image: WCC Archives ref 00056-180-B15802-001



Proposed basement, ground and first floor plans. Image: WCC Archives ref 00056-180-B15802-001



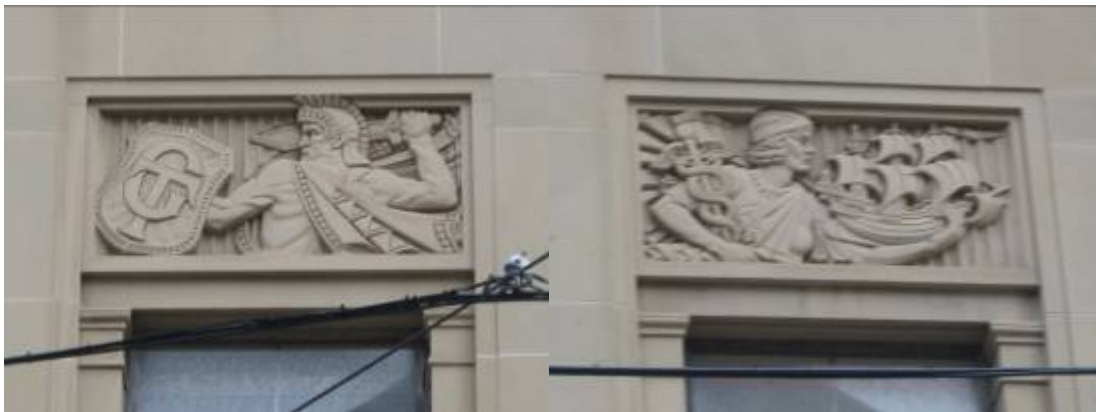
Circa 2008 scheme to alter the ground floor retail units. Note that the main entrance to the offices above is now to the far right of the building rather than central as the original plans. This alteration was made as part of the earlier (1976) building alterations. Image (2008): WCC ref photo 015



Circa 2008 photograph of the façade. Note the carved panels above the first floor windows, and the copper clad window sills. Image: WCC ref P1010327



Image: WCC ref P1010330.



Allegorical carved panels. Image: WCC ref 7290 & 7291



Bronze windows, and the outline of the original lettering at high level. WCC ref 7292 & 7293

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1936	Construction of the current South British Insurance Building
1944	Air raid shelter (ref B22237)
1976	A 6 storey addition was constructed at the rear of the building (ref C46887) by Fletcher Development

1.3 Architect

M K Draffin (1891 – 1964)

Malcolm Draffin was born in Auckland and educated at Auckland Grammar School. His architectural apprenticeship began in 1906 with J.W. Walker and in 1910 he joined Edward Bartley. He became a full partner in 1914 when the firm became known as Edward Bartley and Son and M.K. Draffin.

Draffin served with the N.Z. Field Engineers in World War I and following the war he travelled in Europe and attended the Architectural Association School in London.

On his return to New Zealand he became sole partner in the firm of Edward Bartley and Son and M.K. Draffin. In 1922 he joined in partnership with H.C Grierson and K.W. Aimer when they jointly won the competition to design the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Their design subsequently won them the New Zealand Institute of Architects gold medal. The partnership was dissolved in 1932 and Draffin and his son later went into partnership as M.K. and R.F. Draffin. In 1960 this became M.K. and R.F Draffin and Lawry. Draffin was president of the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1951-2.

Some of M.K. Draffin's best known work includes (with Grierson, Aimer and Draffin) the Auckland War Memorial Museum (completed in 1929), Parnell Public Library, Auckland (1923), Wellington Citizens War memorial (1929) and the former South British Insurance Company buildings, Auckland (1927 – 28) and Wellington (1936). On his own or in partnership with his son he designed the Northern Roller Mills, Auckland (1941 – 43), the Bank of New South Wales, Auckland, and the substantial additions to the rear of the War Memorial Museum.

Note: Based on the Michael Kelly, Report for the WCC Sunset Review Committee, 1998¹⁰

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The South British building is an example of a neo-Georgian design expressed on a Chicago-style office building. It is a comfortable neighbour to two other contemporary buildings alongside, the three forming an important townscape feature along Lambton Quay at its highly visible junction with Featherston Street.

This six-storey (with basement) building has been designed in a *palazzo* format, with a rusticated base of piers and wide openings, and a *piano nobile* level above that is more sophisticated, in design and detail, than the rest of the floors. The facade is dignified and unpretentious, faced in Darleydale sandstone from Derbyshire (an unusual feature in a New Zealand context). There is a distinct trace of (Chicago-esque) Georgian simplicity in the treatment of the upper windows and the dignity of the building's proportions. This is particularly evident in the window to wall space, which has been carefully designed to ensure that there is no undue accentuation of either the horizontal or the vertical elements.

Decorative detail has been kept to a minimum, and is most evident on the first floor where a main group of three windows projects very slightly from the centre of the facade and is framed by pilasters and small attached columns. A meander-pattern and company crest have been cut into the stone above. There are two allegorical panels above the flanking windows. The second-floor windows have understated sills and architraves and serve as a subtle transition from the ornament below to the simplicity above. The building is capped by a plain cornice and pediment.

The modern sloped glass verandah is a modern insertion that detracts from an otherwise fine Chicago-style building. While parts of the original entrance remain, the shop-fronts below the verandah are modern. The exterior above verandah level retains a high level of authenticity and the building makes a distinct and valuable contribution to the Lambton Quay townscape.

The building was altered and extended in 1973 and the interiors were much altered but a 1996 visit for the WCC 1996 Heritage Interiors Project noted that the entrance, staircase and stairwell retained some of the original building fabric including timber handrails, black marble stringers, wrought iron decorative balustrades and bronze window frames.

¹⁰ Sources: NZHPT 1990, Glossary of Architects, Engineers and Designers, NZHPT, Wellington; Salmond, J. 1996, *Auckland War Memorial Conservation Plan*, Salmond Architects, Auckland.

2.2 Materials

Cast in situ reinforced concrete structure
Darleydale (Derbyshire) stone cladding
Bronze windows, with copper sill 'flashings' / cladding to sills, marble sills (internal)

2.3 Setting

The Prudential Building (1934 - WCC 17/ 190.3), the CBA Building (1936 – WCC 17/190.2) and the South British Insurance Building (1936 – WCC 17/190.1) form a terrace of similar Art Deco / Chicago styled buildings. These three buildings, along with the fine MLC Building (1939-40) give prominence to the intersection between Hunter Street and Lambton Quay.

The buildings are all part of the BNZ / Head Office Heritage Area. This Heritage Area incorporates several groups of heritage buildings that together form one of the most significant and highly regarded streetscapes in New Zealand. The area mainly occupies land reclaimed between 1857 and 1863, but it also includes a part of the city, a stretch of southern Lambton Quay, that has been permanently settled since 1840.¹¹

The centre-piece is the block containing the former BNZ buildings – four buildings associated with the Bank of New Zealand, only one of which was built by the BNZ, plus the MLC Building. The area also includes a significant cluster of late Victorian / Edwardian commercial buildings around the Stewart Dawson's Corner, a row of very fine 1930s' head offices built for insurance companies and banks on Lambton Quay and one of the finest 20th century buildings in Wellington – the AMP building on Customhouse Quay.

The oldest of the buildings is the former National Mutual Life building (1883), later incorporated into the BNZ complex, on the corner of Hunter St and Customhouse Quay. The most recent buildings are modern structures on Lambton Quay, although they are not considered contributors to the area. In between is a collection of buildings that offer a broad and interesting sweep through a range of architectural eras, incorporating a variety of styles and materials.

The heritage area is nationally significant for its association with both the early physical development of Wellington, the establishment of the city's financial centre and the development of Wellington as the country's financial and corporate capital.

¹¹ Repeats Kelly, 2006

3.0 Sources

- Alexander Turnbull Library – photographic collections
- CT WN28/15, Land Information New Zealand
- Hodgeson, T. 1990, *Colonial Capital: Wellington 1865 – 1910*, Random Century, Auckland
- Kelly, Michael. Unpublished research report prepared for the WCC Sunset Clause review committee (1998)
- NZHPT 1990, Glossary of Architects, Engineers and Designers, NZHPT, Wellington;
- Salmond, J. 1996, *Auckland War Memorial Conservation Plan*, Salmond Architects, Auckland.
- Vennell C.W. 1972, *Risks and Rewards: A Centennial History of South British Insurance*, Wilson and Horton, Auckland
- Wises Post Office Directories 1936- 1966 – a scan of selected directories between those years
- WCC Building Permit Card, south British Insurance Co. Building.
- WCC Heritage Building Inventory 2001 ref Lamb13
- WCC Old Shoreline Heritage Trail 1996 (2nd ed. 2005)
- WCC website accessed June 2012
<http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/history/1972.html>
- Wellington District Committee NZHPT, Research File – South British Insurance Company Building, Lambton Quay

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 South British Building is a carefully crafted example of neo-Georgian design expressed on a Chicago-styled office building. It is notable for the restrained elegance of the Lambton Quay facade, and for the use of high quality building materials such as bronze windows and Darleydale Stone cladding.

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 CBA Building, the South British Insurance Building and the Prudential Assurance Building form a terrace of similar Art Deco / Chicago styled buildings that date from the mid 1930s. These three stylistically similar former head-office buildings, along with the fine MLC Building, give prominence to the intersection between Hunter Street and 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?*

The South British building is one of a group of head-office buildings that were erected in Wellington in the 1930s in the area around the southern end of Lambton Quay. These form part of the BNZ/Head Offices Heritage Area.

Historic Value:

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

The building has an historic association with the South British Insurance Co. It is Wellington's sole tangible reminder of one of the few internationally successful insurance companies begun, and fully owned and operated, from New Zealand. The Wellington office was the only building the company erected on its own land, and was constructed during a period when a number of major commercial buildings were erected in post-Depression central Wellington.

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

It is one of a group of head-office buildings that were built at the southern-end of Lambton Quay in the 1930s. It has a historic association with both the early physical development of Wellington, the establishment of the city's financial centre and the development of Wellington as the country's financial and corporate capital.

Scientific Value:

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

The building is located in the Central City archaeological site reference 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?*

The building is likely to be held in high public esteem and this can be seen by the public campaign to 'save' the building from demolition in the 1990s.

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's Lambton Quay façade has remained (relatively) unaltered on Lambton Quay for over 75 years and makes a strong positive contribution to the sense of place and continuity of the BNZ / Head Office Heritage Area. The building's use as a former head-office, and its contribution to the BNZ/Head Offices Heritage Area is pertinent to Wellington's identity as country's financial and corporate capital.

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

South British is no longer a commercial concern and is therefore unlikely to be strongly associated with their former Wellington office in people's minds. However any such sentiment has gradually been replaced by a growing public appreciation of the South British Building as a key element of an older precinct of Lambton Quay buildings.

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

The building is a rare surviving example of a Chicago style high-rise building in Wellington's 'Golden Mile'

The building is notable for its use of British (Derbyshire) sandstone cladding, which is rare or even unique in New Zealand.

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

The building is a good representative example of an early twentieth century 'high-rise' office building.

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 façade is relatively unaltered and retains much of the original building fabric.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

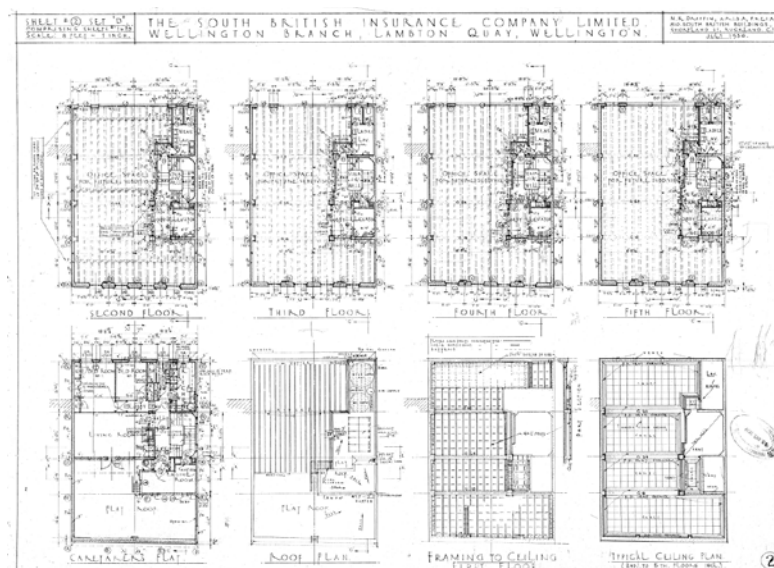
5.0 Appendix

Background research

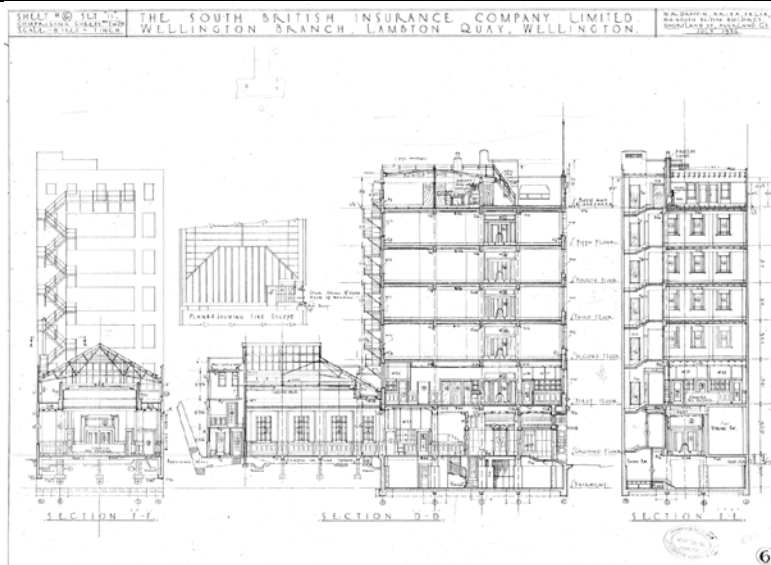
Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	y	+ sunset clause review
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	y	
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	
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		none
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		none

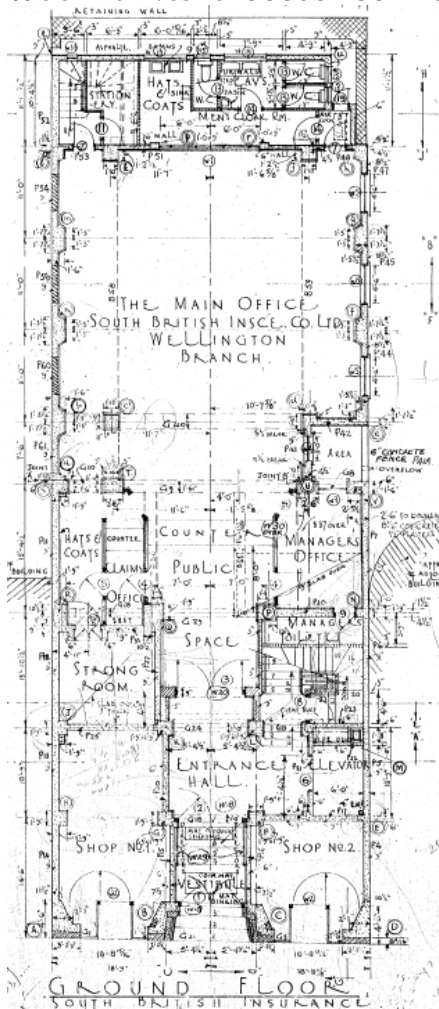
5.1 plans and sections



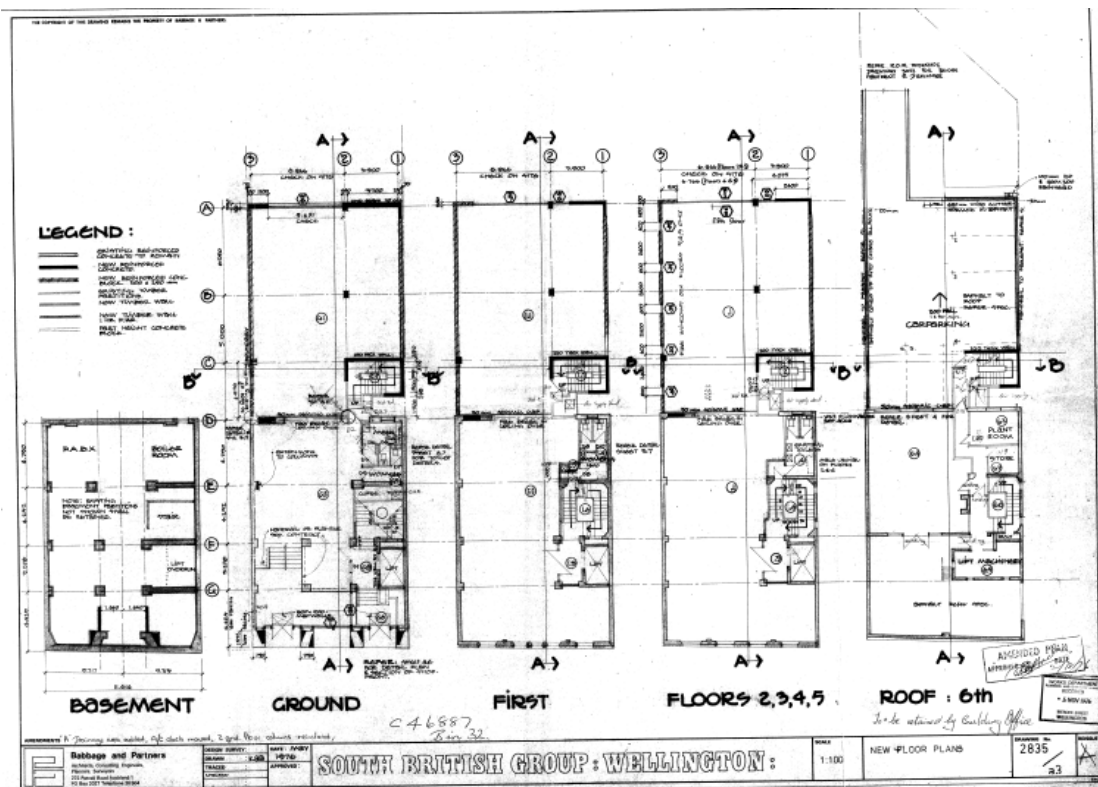
Proposed second to sixth floor plans including caretaker's flat. Image: WCC Archives ref 00056-180-B15802-001



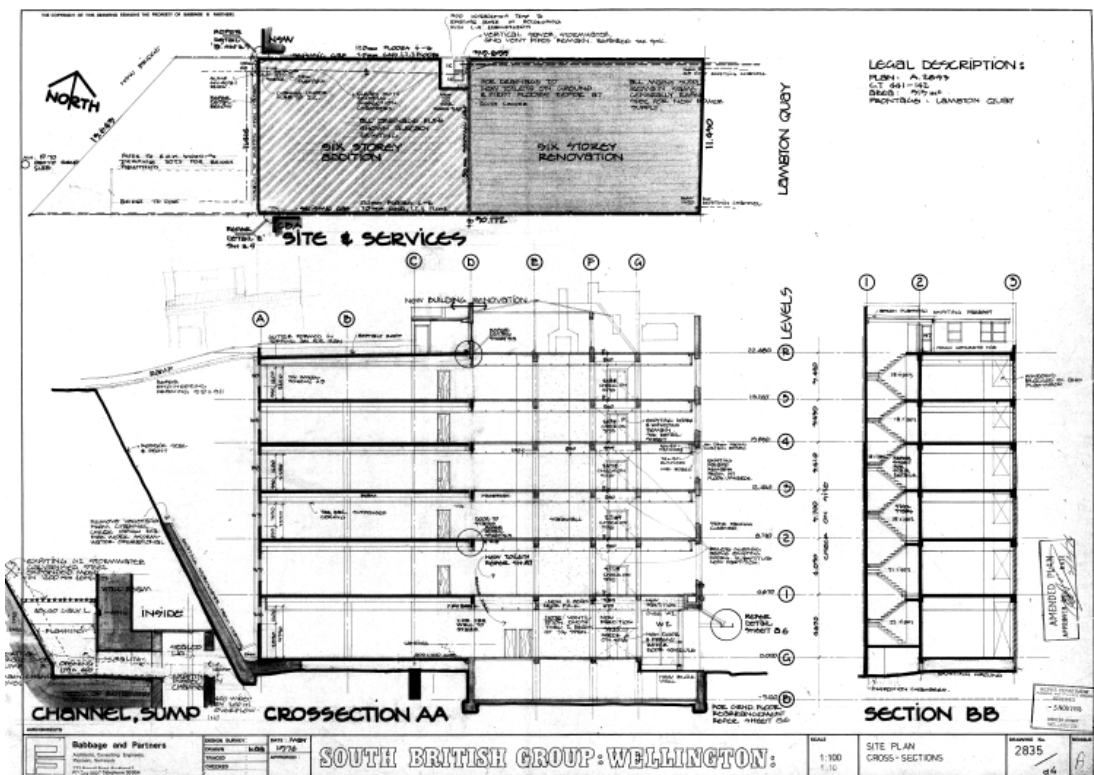
Proposed sections through the building and original insurance 'hall' (since demolished). Image: WCC Archives ref 00056-180-B15802-001



Enlargement of ground floor plan to show the entrance, separate retail units, and insurance hall / public space / counters.



Babbage and Partners (Auckland) 1976 proposed plans for the addition to the South British Insurance Building constructed to replace the original single storey insurance 'hall'. Image: WCC archives ref 00058_1083_C46887_001



Babbage and Partners (Auckland) 1976 proposed section. Image: WCC archives ref 00058_1083_C46887_001

5.2 WCC permits and consents

SR Code	SR Type	SRI Description	SRI Status	Current Updated
9086622	Bldg Cons<500K	Bus Adds and Alts, Site Address is 326 Lambton Quay	Completed	20/04/1988
8014524	Bldg Cons<500K	Bus Adds and Alts, Site Address is 326 Lambton Quay	Completed	1/08/1988
1750	Bldg Cons<500K	Plumbing Alteration, Site Address is 326 LAMBTON QUAY	Completed	12/10/1993
786	Bldg Cons<500K	Office Bldg Alts, Site Address is 326 LAMBTON QUAY	Completed	9/08/1993
9200688	Property Featur	BUILDING HERITAGE ITEM (DISTRICT PLAN): Details migrated from RHS #688, (Restrictions and Hazards System - RHS System 1991-2006) on 28-06-2006	To be verified	24/01/1995
20266	RC - a Res.Con	Resource Consent for to place the doors in line with the front of shop at	Passed to Holding	19/07/1996
20277	Bldg Cons<500K	Install new wall & door to rear of shop	Completed	8/04/1997
86941	Bldg Cons<500K	Demolition of existing offices to create a showroom	Completed	21/06/2002
62231	Bldg Cons<500K	Office Fitout	Completed	4/07/2002
76223	Bldg Cons<500K	Office conversion to apartment. Level 6	Completed	15/11/2002
92970	Bldg Cons<500K	Convert office space into 5 bedroom sleeping residence.	Completed	26/02/2003
59755	Bldg Cons<500K	Office subdivision Level 4.	Completed	12/03/2003
141571	Complaints	Noise from outdoor speakers	Completed	10/11/2006
150262	aBLDG CONSENT	3.1 Commercial - South British Building - Level 5 - Gut office space and reinstate with new partitions and accessible WC.	Completed	10/05/2007
196156	aBLDG CONSENT	2.2 - Commercial - Revamp shop front to original design - South British Insurance Building	Completed	12/01/2010
174639	aBLDG CONSENT	3.1 Commercial - South British Building - Refurbishment of existing retail store, new shop front, signage, internal partitions and plumbing. (Unit G1)	Completed	28/01/2010
199185	aBLDG CONSENT	3.2- Commercial - Construct mezzanine for storage - Level 1 - The South British Building.	Completed	22/06/2010
161433	Bdg StrengthInv		Earthquake Prone?	8/05/2012
55924	BC Smallworks	Ground floor tea sink wit pumped waste system. Cold water supply only	Completed	3/10/2002