

Prudential Assurance Building
332-340 Lambton Quay



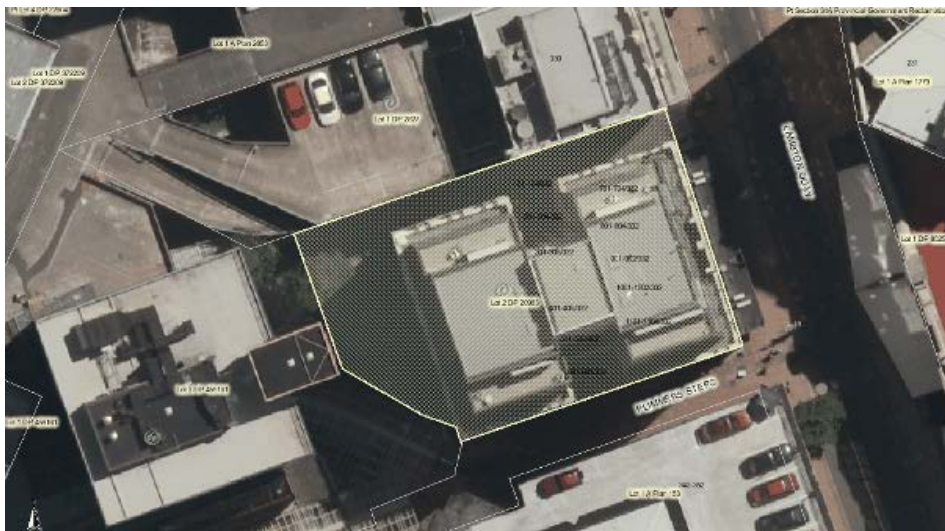
Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The Prudential Assurance building is one of the finest examples of Art Deco in Wellington. The building is notable for the articulation and strong vertical emphasis of all four of its external facades, and for its distinctive Art Deco ornamentation.
- The Prudential Building was built just 10 years after the company was established in New Zealand and has historic significance both for its association with the company, association with government economic policy during the Great Depression. Prudential was a relative latecomer to insurance and investment in New Zealand, but grew to become a major player in the industry.
- The building contributes to the BNZ/Head Office Heritage Area

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 190-3
Legal Description:	Lot 2 DP 20963
Heritage Area:	BNZ Head Office Area/South Lambton Quay Historic Area (HPT)
HPT Listed:	Historic Place Category 2, Register No. 1417
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	1934
Architect / Builder:	Hennessy and Hennessy, Gray Young Morton & Young / Lewis Construction
Former uses:	Retail and commercial
Current uses:	Retail, commercial, residential
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone (SR 188851)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

Prudential Assurance was already one of Britain's largest insurance & investment companies when it opened its first office in New Zealand in Auckland in 1923. In 1932 the company's head office was relocated to Wellington, the year the company bought the former Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute, a famous landmark designed by Thomas Turnbull in 1877. The institute had stood on that site from 1844.

Drawings were prepared by the Melbourne firm of Hennessy and Hennessy in association with local architects Gray Young Morton and Young. An early perspective drawing of the proposed development showed a much larger complex stretching up the hill alongside Plimmer's Steps and behind the present building.¹ The Institute building was demolished in 1934. The new building was constructed by Lewis Construction of Wellington and was quickly completed by April the following year. Construction was brought forward by the company to help New Zealand's recovery from the Depression and, in return, the Government contributed to the cost of the building.² The building was opened by Prime Minister Gordon Coates on 10 April 1935.³

Prudential Assurance initially occupied part of the ground floor and the entire first floor, with an impressive main office (now largely gone) at the rear of the ground floor. There were other retail outlets on the ground floor, with tenants occupying the upper floors. Gradually over a number of decades the company took over the entire building. In an attempt to accommodate its expanding staff and with a view to building on a larger site, Prudential Assurance bought the adjacent South British Insurance Building (WCC ref 190-1) in 1982 and the Commercial Bank of Australia Building (WCC ref 190-2). in 1983.

In the late 1990s a developer applied for consent to demolish the three 1930s former head-office buildings and replace them with a single tall tower. This was opposed by the NZHPT, provoked a public outcry, and the buildings were finally saved in a decision by the Environment Court. In the mid-2000s four storeys of apartments were added to the rooftop of the Prudential Building.

The Prudential Building has compelling heritage value for a number of reasons. Firstly, it has architectural value as an outstanding work in the Art Deco style. Secondly, the building is a reminder of an important historical time - its construction was a conscious attempt to help New Zealand recover from the Depression. The building's construction gave confidence to the Wellington and New Zealand economies, and arguably helped inspire the construction of the neighbouring CBA and South British Insurance buildings and the MLC Building across the road. Its local significance at the time of construction can be seen in the five-page newspaper article that followed its completion.

Finally, the building makes a significant contribution to the BNZ/Head Offices 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

¹ *Building*, 12 June 1933, p 12

² Julia Gatley, 'Prudential Building', NZHPT, Wellington, 1996, p 6

³ *Dominion*, 11 April 1935

also includes a part of the city, a stretch of southern Lambton Quay, that has been permanently settled since 1840.⁴

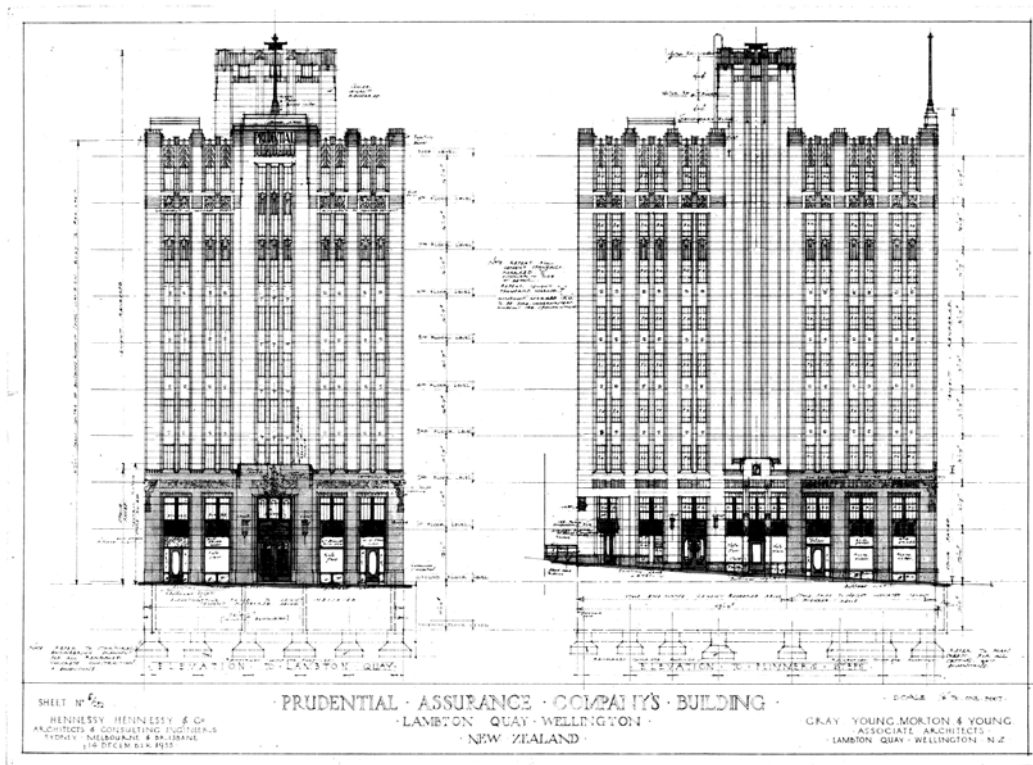


Alexander Turnbull Library, Gordon H. Burt Collection (PA-Group-00743)
Reference: 1/1-015619; F. Photograph by Gordon Burt⁵

⁴ Michael Kelly et al, 'BNZ/Head Offices Heritage Area', WCC unpublished heritage report for DPC 48, 2006

⁵ ATL image in Alan Henderson. 'Insurance - Early life insurance', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 10-Jul-13
URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/24130/prudential-assurance-head-office>

1.2 Timeline of modifications



WCC Archive File 00056:145:B13110

- 1934 Construction (00056: 145: B13110)
- 1956 Addition – Caretaker's flat (00056: 545: B40161)
- 1962 Building alterations – 6th and 7th floor (00058: 227: C10263)
- Building alterations (00058: 250: C11095)
- 1963 Building additions – Lunch room (00058: 270: C11937)
- 1964 Building alterations – Offices (00058: 338: C14540)
- 1965 Building alterations – 3rd and 5th floors (00058: 390: C16668)
- Building alterations – Fire egress (00058: 390: C16669)
- 1966 Building alterations (00058: 442: C18947)
- Building alterations (00058: 472: C20288)
- Building alterations – 3rd and 5th floors (00058: 476: C20473)
- 1968 Building additions – Verandah (00058: 583: C27636)
- 1969 Building alterations (00058: 601: C28243)
- 1969 Building additions – Mezzanine floor (00058: 622: C29055)
- 1972 Building alterations – Offices (00058: 808: C36236)
- 1975 Building alterations – Partitions, 4th floor (00058: 961: C42176)
- 1977 Building alterations – 1st floor office partitions (00058: 1108: C47920)
- 1981 Building alterations – Ground floor alterations to offices (00058: 1311: C55347)
- 1983 Building alterations – Lunchroom extension (00058: 0: C61059)
- Building alterations (00058: 0: C61058)
- 1985 Building alterations – Alterations to retail area, ground floor (00059: 0: D1246)
- 1988 Addition – Sign (00059: 235: D10825)
- 1989 Addition – Sign (00059: 337: E18717)
- Business additions and alterations (00040: 1: E681523)
- Addition – Sign (00040: 3: E681676)

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- 1990 Business additions and alterations (00059: 399: E20629)
Restaurant additions and alterations (00059: 426: E21421)
 - 1992 Business additions and alterations (00059: 535: E25000)
 - 1992 Alterations – Office building, partitions (00059: 567: E25935)
 - 1993 Alterations – Partitioning (00060: 36: 1386)
 - 1994 Alterations – Toilets (00060: 184: 6657)
 - 1998 Alterations – Alterations, shop fit out (00078: 144: 43119)
 - 1999 Alterations – Fit out, Paul Clements and Associates Ltd (00078: 241: 55406)
Alterations – Office fit out (00078: 242: 56703)
 - 2000 Alterations – Removal of internal partitions, levels 1-8 (00078: 633: 67350)
 - 2002 Alterations – Convert to apartments, stage 1 (00078: 1461: 94441)
Alterations – Convert to apartments, stage 2 (00078: 2499: 96074)
 - 2005 Alterations – Creation of one retail outlet from two tenancies, level 1 (00078: 1513: 124766)
 - 2006 Addition of rooftop apartments
 - 2009 Additions – Install three signs to lower ground level one area (00078: 4695: 179402)
 - 2012 Alterations – Internal alterations to fit out an existing tenancy (00078: 4156: 255920)

1.3 Occupation history

Not assessed

1.4 Architect⁶

The Prudential Building was designed by the Australian architectural and engineering firm of Hennessy Hennessy & Co, in conjunction with the Wellington firm of Gray Young Morton & Young.

Hennessy and Hennessy's head office was located in Sydney, but, at the time of the Prudential Building's construction, the firm also had offices in Melbourne and Brisbane. The firm built a number of buildings for the Catholic Church, with one of the partners, Jack Hennessy, being good friends with an archbishop.

Gray Young Morton & Young was one of the pre-eminent mid-20th century architecture practices and was responsible for the design of many large-scale commercial, civic and education projects including the Wellington Railway Station and the Easterfield Building at Victoria University. The practice was established by William Gray Young in 1907, and Gray Young was later joined by Hubert Morton and Jack Young. Gray Young Morton & Young traded from 1923 – 1951 and later evolved to become Calder, Fowler, Styles and Turner Architects Ltd.

⁶ Information about the architects is taken from Gatley, pp 12-13

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The Prudential Assurance building is immediately recognisable as an Art Deco design. It is constructed of reinforced concrete with an artificial stone veneer – Benedict stone⁷ – on the ground and first floors and coloured cement render, lined out to resemble stone blocks, on other floors. Unfortunately the facade has been painted and this detail is now difficult to distinguish. Each floor is supported on square columns and the windows are steel framed. The building is rectangular in plan and symmetrical around the Lambton Quay facade but above the ground floor the building is broadly H-shaped, with the facades on the north and south elevations interrupted with a prominent indentation.

The building is unusual in that all four facades are treated almost exactly the same. These facades are characterised by narrow piers alternating with equally narrow spandrels and windows openings, which combine to emphasis the strong verticality on what was originally only an eight storey building. The building is highly decorated, with chevron patterns, birds of prey (corner gargoyles), Deco-style bas-reliefs, and moulded spandrels. There is no conventional cornice, just the introduction of some panels above the seventh floor to imply horizontality. The parapet caps the various elements of the facade in a stylised crenellation.

The interior was designed in a less adventurous fashion. The interior plan was to some extent dictated by the arrangement of the load-bearing columns. Virtually nothing of the original treatment of the building exists in most offices beyond the concrete walls. The main vestibule/shopping arcade retains original elements, notably its marble finishes, as do some corridors. It is the main stairwell with its marble terrazzo finish, wrought iron balustrading and oak rail that remains the most authentic of any interior space.

The four storey addition to the Prudential Building c.2003-2006 was unfortunate. Designed without sympathy to the building beneath it, the addition jars in style and colour. The Prudential Building, one of Wellington's Art Deco classics, deserved better.

2.2 Materials

Concrete and 'stone'

⁷ Gatley, p 13

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 1840.⁸

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.

⁸ Repeats Kelly, 2006

Sources

Building. 12 June 1933

Dominion. 11 April 1935

Gatley, Julia. 'Prudential Building'. New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Wellington, 1996

New Zealand Historic Places Trust. 'Submissions and Evidence on Behalf of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, in respect of Prudential Assurance Company of New Zealand Ltd Resource Consent Application Under Section 88 of the Resource Management Act 1991 to Demolish the Facades of Three Heritage Item Buildings and Develop the Site for Office, Retail, and Commercial Activities Together with Servicing, Parking and Ancillary Facilities.' Unpublished. c.1997-1998.

Wellington City Council Archive Files:

Heritage – District Plan Appeals – Prudential Assurance, 1041-04-12-07 Vol. 1

District Plan: Heritage Building – Prudential Building 322 Lambton Quay, 1041-06-LAM322 Vol. 1

District Plan: Heritage Building – 326-340 Lambton Quay – Prudential Building South British Insurance Building GBL House The CBA Building, 1041-06-LAM326 Vol. 3

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 Prudential Assurance building is one of the finest examples of Art Deco in Wellington. The building is notable for the articulation and strong vertical emphasis of all four of its external facades, and for its distinctive Art Deco ornamentation.

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 Prudential 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 Prudential Building was built just 10 years after the company was established in New Zealand and has historic significance both for its association with the company, association with government economic policy during the Great Depression. Prudential was a relative latecomer to insurance and investment in New Zealand, but grew to become a major player in the industry.

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 Prudential Building 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?*

Level of cultural heritage significance

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

The Prudential Building is an outstanding example of a commercial Art Deco building.

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

The Prudential Building is instantly recognisable as Art Deco, making it a good example of its class.

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 exterior has retained much of its original built fabric.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

3.0 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)	Y	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
Plan change?	N	
Heritage Area Report	Y	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	Y	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	Y	
HPT files	Y	
Conservation Plan	N	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	