

**Anscombe Flats**  
212 Oriental Parade



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

**Summary of heritage significance**

- Built in 1937 this building is a fine example of a Moderne style apartment building. It contains features such as the curved glass windows which were considered a technical achievement for their time.
- The building is associated with Edmund Anscombe, an innovative and successful architect who embraced Moderne architecture and designed some of his best buildings in the idiom.
- The building has townscape value for its distinctive architecture which sets it apart from the surrounding modern apartments. It is also visible from some parts of Oriental Parade.

District Plan:	Map 12, Ref. 214
Legal Description:	LOT 1 DP 9855
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Category II
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Unknown
Key physical dates:	1937
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Edmund Anscombe
Former uses:	Residential
Current uses:	Residential
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 194166 (124 served) – expires 15/06/2027

Google Maps 2012



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History

Anscombe Flats are named for Edmund Anscombe (1873-1948) one of New Zealand's most distinguished 20th century architects. In 1933, at the age of 60, he bought a property on Oriental Parade and planned an apartment building to live in and rent out. He may well have had his mind on future retirement, although his greatest triumph, the Centennial Exhibition buildings, was still to come.

Plans for the building were prepared and the permit was granted in March 1937.<sup>1</sup> Anscombe's choice of Oriental Bay was noteworthy in that apartment blocks had begun appearing in the harbour side suburb from the 1920s onwards and the views and proximity of the beach would have been an attraction. Work on the building was completed before the end of the year. Anscombe occupied the top flat and may have used the attached penthouse as a studio. The rest of the floors were leased out. In 1940 the penthouse was converted into a self contained flat with a kitchen and bathroom and a housekeeper's flat was built to the south of the building.<sup>2</sup> Anscombe remained in the flat until his death in 1948. His wife had predeceased him and he was survived by two married daughters who presumably inherited the building, although their names do not appear on title transactions.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the building was placed in the hands of their respective husbands, George Penlington and James Bennie, both architects in their own right, and solicitor Donald McIlroy in 1958, who most likely administered the estate.<sup>4</sup>

In 1969 a private company, Anscombe Flats Ltd (the present owner), made up of the building's tenants, bought the property. Each tenant acquired 28,900 shares in the company as part of their purchase of an apartment licence.<sup>5</sup> Among those owner/tenants was George Amos (1890-1982), chairman of Soma-President Textiles Ltd, and a prominent Wellington community leader. Anscombe Flats Ltd. continues to own the building.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> '212 Oriental Parade, residential apartments,' 09 March 1937, 00056:186:B16294, Wellington City Archives.

<sup>2</sup> '212 Oriental Parade, additions and alterations,' 02 July 1940, 00056:249:B20679, Wellington City Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Land Titles Service CT 312/19.

<sup>4</sup> Land Titles Service CT 312/19.

<sup>5</sup> Anscombe Flats Occupation Licence, see: Land Titles Service CT 312/19.

<sup>6</sup> History taken from: Michael Kelly, '212 Oriental Parade: Anscombe Flats,' unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council, 2001.



Oriental Bay, Wellington, 1949. Smith, Sydney Charles, 1888-1972: Photographs of New Zealand. Ref: 1/2-048881-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications (summary)

1937	Residential apartments 00056:186:B16294
1940	Additions and alterations 00056:249:B20679
1997	Glass Balustrade to Penthouse SR36072
2000	replacement aluminium windows and doors to conservatory SR 66228
2001	External alterations to a heritage building SR76511
2007	Reinstatement of conservatory roof SR67520 (& SR68857 2000)
Unknown date	Replacement of original windows in aluminium.

## 1.3 Architect

Edmund Anscombe (1874-1948) was a prominent architect in inter-war New Zealand. His embrace of new styles was remarkable in a man approaching retirement and his greatest work, of which his own apartment building is an example, took place later in his life. Anscombe was born in Sussex and came to New Zealand as a child. He began work as a builder's apprentice in Dunedin and in 1901 went to America to study architecture. He returned to Dunedin in 1907 and designed the School of Mines building for the University of Otago. The success of this design gained him the position of architect to the University. Five of the main University buildings were designed by Anscombe, as well as Otago Girls' High School and several of Dunedin's finest commercial buildings including the Lindo Ferguson Building (1927) and the Haynes building.

Anscombe moved to Wellington about 1928 and was known for his work as the designer of the Centennial Exhibition (1939-1940). Anscombe had travelled extensively and had visited major exhibitions in Australia, Germany and America. The practice of Edmund Anscombe and Associates, Architects, had offices in the Dunedin, Wellington and Hawkes Bay districts, and Anscombe's buildings include the Vocational Centre for Disabled Servicemen, Wellington (1943), Sargent Art Gallery, Wanganui, and several blocks of flats including Anscombe Flats, 212 Oriental Parade (1937) and Franconia, 136 The Terrace (1938), both in Wellington. As well as being interested in the housing problem, Anscombe held strong views concerning the industrial advancement of New Zealand.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture**

The building is four storeys, one apartment per floor, with a penthouse above and basement parking / storage. The building is Moderne in style. Art Deco and Moderne styles had their origins in the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes.<sup>8</sup> Moderne is essentially a style of clean, geometric lines with minimal ornamentation usually in the form of abstract motifs derived from plant forms, sharply defined zigzags, chevrons and sunbursts set against plane surfaces and Anscombe Apartments epitomise this style in both form and detail.

The building's form is essentially simple but its rounded corners, generous window area with window hoods, horizontal fluting and use of sculptural effect speak of Anscombe's mastery of shape and form in the genre. The custom made curved glass corner windows were technically difficult to achieve and were (and still are) expensive to produce. This shows that Anscombe Flats is a very high quality building. There are few decorative elements, the horizontal layered banding of the surfaces provides the principal articulation to the facades. This streamlined, horizontal emphasis also reflects the influence of the "International Style" of Modernism that in turn was influenced by ocean liners of the time.

The effect is more Moderne than Art Deco. The semi-circular sun-room at the front of the penthouse is a flamboyant gesture on the roof but wholly in keeping with the building's style and a fitting cap to the whole.<sup>9</sup>

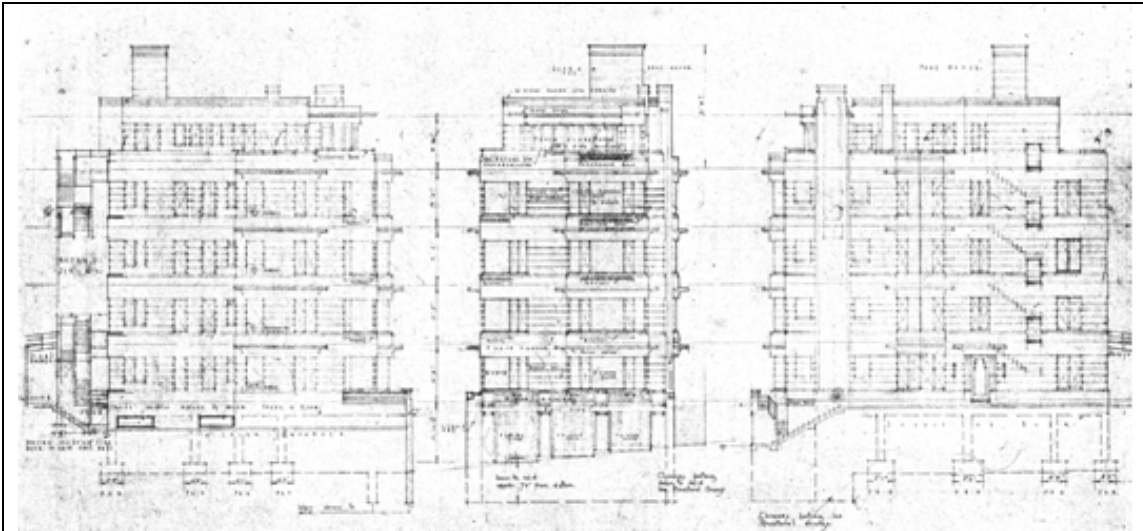
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<sup>7</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust Professional Biographies, 'Edmund Anscombe,' accessed 4 September 2012

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

<sup>8</sup> 'Characteristic House Types – Seven Basic Styles', from An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, edited by A. H. McIntock, originally published in 1966. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 22-Apr-09, accessed 1 October 2012, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/architecture/5>.

<sup>9</sup> Architecture taken from: Michael Kelly, '212 Oriental Parade: Anscombe Flats,' unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council, 2001.



'212 Oriental Parade, residential apartments,' 09 March 1937, 00056:186:B16294, Wellington City Archives.

## 2.2 Materials

Reinforced concrete: Foundations, walls, floors, lift shaft, stairs & chimney. External works including retaining walls and stair

Brick: chimney

Breeze block: partitions

## 2.3 Setting

Anscombe Flats is located on Oriental Terrace, a road which branches off from Oriental Parade in a south-westerly direction. The building has views over Oriental Bay and the wider Wellington harbour. The building is situated between two modern apartment complexes, with the complex on its north eastern side being of a greater height. Although there are a series of apartment complexes along the length of Oriental Parade, the elevation of Oriental Terrace means that Anscombe Flats is still visible when viewed from the far western end and mid northern section of Oriental Parade.

### 3.0 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?

Built in 1937 this building is a fine example of a Moderne style apartment building. It contains features such as the curved glass windows which were considered a technical achievement for their time.

***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 has townscape value for its distinctive architecture which sets it apart from the surrounding modern apartments. It is also visible from some parts of Oriental Parade.

***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 is associated with Edmund Anscombe, an innovative and successful architect who embraced Moderne architecture and designed some of his best buildings in the idiom.

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

The rise of the apartment building in Wellington began in the 1920s and the Oriental Bay area became a favoured location for such developments. Anscombe Flats was one of number built in the area during the first flush of development and its transformation continues to this day.

##### **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?

***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 has had few intrusive modern alterations or additions and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of the Oriental Parade streetscape.

***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 a very good example of the Moderne style.

***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 has retained a significant amount of its original external fabric, therefore it has authenticity.

***Local/Regional/National/International***

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



#### **4.0 References**

'Characteristic House Types – Seven Basic Styles.' From An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Edited by A. H. McLintock. Originally published in 1966. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Updated 22-Apr-09. Accessed 1 October 2012. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/architecture/5>.

Kelly, Michael. '212 Oriental Parade: Anscombe Flats.' Unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council. 2001.

New Zealand Historic Places Trust Professional Biographies. 'Edmund Anscombe.' Accessed 4 September 2012. <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Anscombe,+Edmund>.

#### **Wellington City Archives**

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#### **Wellington City Council Records**

CT 312/19. Land Information New Zealand.

### 3.0 Appendix

#### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
WCC Records – building file	Y	
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	Y	
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

#### Background research



Oriental Bay, 1938. Evening post (Newspaper. 1865-2002): Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: PAColl-5482-014. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.