

Macarthy Building

50 – 52 Willis Street



Photo: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Statement of significance

- The Macarthy Building has historic significance for its association with the Macarthy family trust and with Tisdall's, a long-standing and successful sports store that has occupied the ground floor of the building for some 50 years.
- This commercial building has architectural value for the integrity of its façade and the quality of detailing in the entrance foyer. These are the only remnants of the original building to survive the c.2011 works to construct the Telecom Central development on this and the adjacent sites.

District Plan:	Map 17 ref 343
Legal Description:	Lot 2, DP 55488
Heritage Area:	None 2012
HPT Listed:	None 2012
Archaeological Site:	Investigated by NZHPT in 2008 Pre 1900 human activity on site
Other Names:	Tisdall's Building Telecom Central
Key physical dates:	1913 construction 2011 Telecom Central development
Architect / Builder:	J. M. Dawson
Former uses:	Commercial premises. Sporting good shop, photographers
Current uses:	Commercial office building with ground floor retail
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 161254 Section 124 Notice Issued 15/10/2009, Notice Exp 4/10/2024

Extent:



Note: This document is an updated version of the report prepared by Michael Kelly and Ann McEwan for WCC titled “50-52 Willis Street (Tisdall's Building)” (2007)

1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

The former Tisdall's Building, as its name implies, has long been associated with the sports retailer of that name. However, the building, constructed in 1913, owes its existence to the fortune made by brewer Thomas George Macarthy (c.1833-1912).

Macarthy was born in London, England, probably in 1833 or 1834. He went to the goldfields of Victoria in the 1850s before moving to Otago and then the West Coast. He acquired enough assets to buy a brewery at Charleston and invest in the Reefton area. In 1877 Macarthy moved to Wellington, where he purchased two more breweries and then some hotels closely aligned to those breweries. He invested in other urban property and gradually became one of the city's wealthiest men. He was a member of the Wellington and Manawatu Railway Company, and a board member of the Bank of New Zealand from 1894 to 1898. He was also a member of the Wellington Racing Club.²

On 28 April 1897, Macarthy married Mary Fitzsimons. He was 63 and she was 40 years his junior. There were no children. He remained in business for the rest of his life and died on 19 August 1912. Macarthy, who had been a benefactor to charities during his lifetime, albeit discreetly, left a will that gave half his substantial estate³ to his wife, and half for a Wellington-based charitable and educational trust to be established in his name. It was run by the Public Trust, as it still is. His will stipulated that his wife's inheritance would go to the trust if she had no children. Interestingly, Mary Macarthy did marry again, to Walter Reid, a merchant, on 21 January 1914, but the marriage was childless. She died in 1934.⁴

Both the Macarthy Trust and Mary Macarthy invested in buildings. Tisdall's Building was planned by Mary Macarthy soon after her husband's death.

¹ Michael Kelly and Ann McEwan, “50-52 Willis Street (Tisdall's Building)” , unpublished WCC document, 2007

² For the source of this mini-biography of Thomas and Mary Macarthy see Hawke, G. R. 'Macarthy, Thomas George 1833/1834? - 1912'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 April 2006 www.dnzb.govt.nz

³ At £369,689, it was very large sum for those days – in the top 0.1% of all estates. (See Hawke op. cit.).

⁴ Ibid.

The permit was approved in 1913 and the applicant was W.L. Thompson (who may have been the builder).⁵ The value was £5,500. The architect was Joseph Dawson (1877-1956), who had been in practice on his own account since 1906. He later (1929) formed King and Dawson with Jack King. By that time Dawson had established a successful practice specialising in designing buildings for the motor trade. The best known Dawson buildings include the Columbia Private Hotel (1908), Hope Gibbons Building (1927), Manthel Motors (1913), the Apostolic Nunciature, Lyall Bay (1928) and the James Smith Building facade (1932), the Ford Motors plant, Seaview (1936). The firm he founded continues under the same name.

The building has had very few owners. After Mary Reid's death in 1934, the building was managed by the Public Trustee. Prior to and during that period it was known as the Macarthy Buildings or Chambers. The Public Trust continued to rent the building out until, in 1953, they sold it to W.H. Tisdall Ltd.,⁶ the firm that the building became synonymous with.

Over its life the building has been occupied by a great many individuals and institutions, chief among them Tisdall's. However, the longest standing tenant was Jauncey Studios on the first floor, which was begun by photographer Philip Jauncey in the late 1920s (he took out a lease in 1929)⁷ and was still going in the early 1990s. Dawson designed a photographic studio for the building and Jauncey's probably occupied that space. Early tenants included a branch of McKenzie's chain of department stores (on the ground floor) and Campbell and Burke, one of Wellington's most successful building contractors in the first half of the 20th century (on the first floor). There were long-standing tenants, such as merchants Turner and Wilson in the main ground floor retail space, and N.I. Gooder, an optician.⁸ At any one year the building contained anywhere between 10 and 16 occupants, depending on the building's rate of occupation.

Use of the building was dramatically interrupted by the commandeering of the building by American forces during World War II. It served as stores or offices, along with notable buildings such as the Hannahs Building, Bank of New Zealand and Odlins.⁹

⁵ 00053:176:9740, 50-52 Willis Street, permit - building, Wellington City Archives

⁶ CT WN 438/43, LINZ

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Wises Post Office Directories*, 1913-1995

⁹ www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/second-world-war/us-forces-in-new-zealand/the-camps

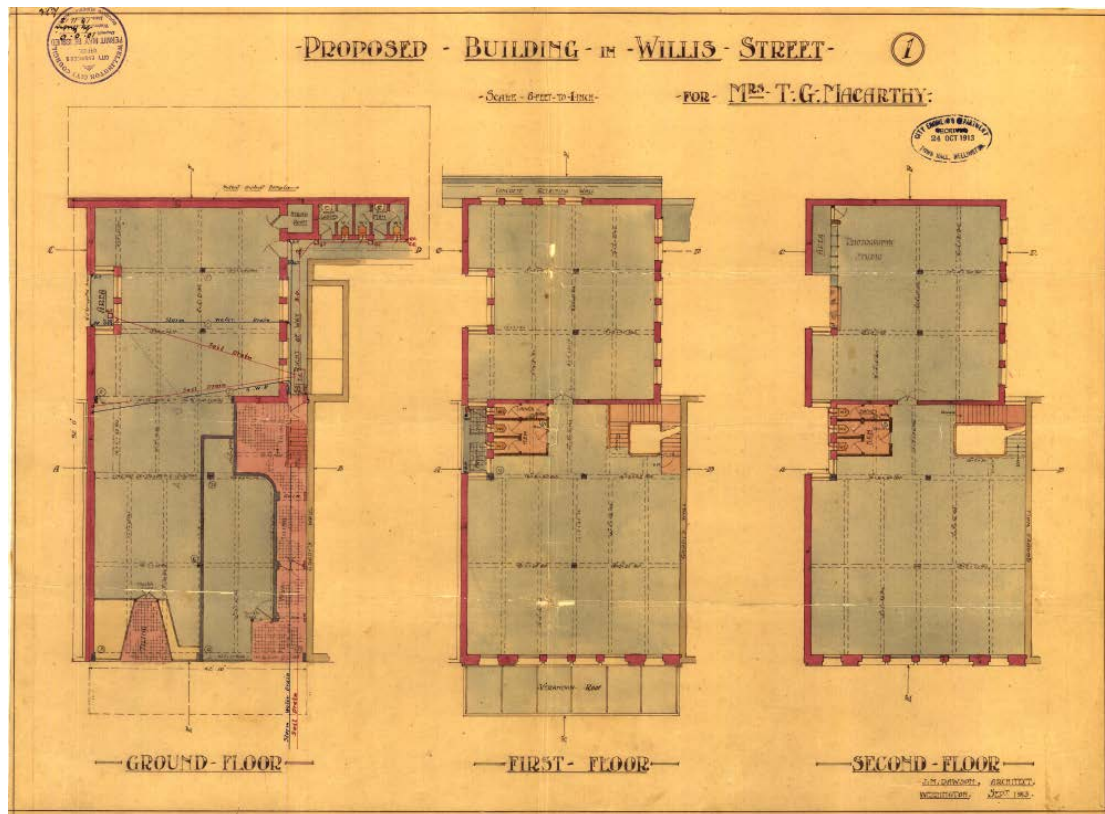
In the second half of the 20th century, the building continued to host an eclectic and ever-changing collection of tenants. There were registered offices of commercial firms, professional groups and societies, music and dance teachers, photographers, accountants, stationers and a host of others.¹⁰ By 2007 the first floor offices had been converted into retail space, with a number of spaces amalgamated and there were many alterations to the building on all floor levels.

The former Tisdall's Building now forms part of the "Telecom Central" commercial office development of 42-52 Willis Street designed by Architecture + and completed in 2011. This development constructed 35,000m² of commercial office space on a 3660m² site that runs from Willis to Boulcott Street, and retained parts of the former Tisdall's Building and the 1980s former Airways Building. The surviving building fabric from the former Tisdall's Building is limited to the Willis Street façade, a short portion of the return walls, and the internal stair.

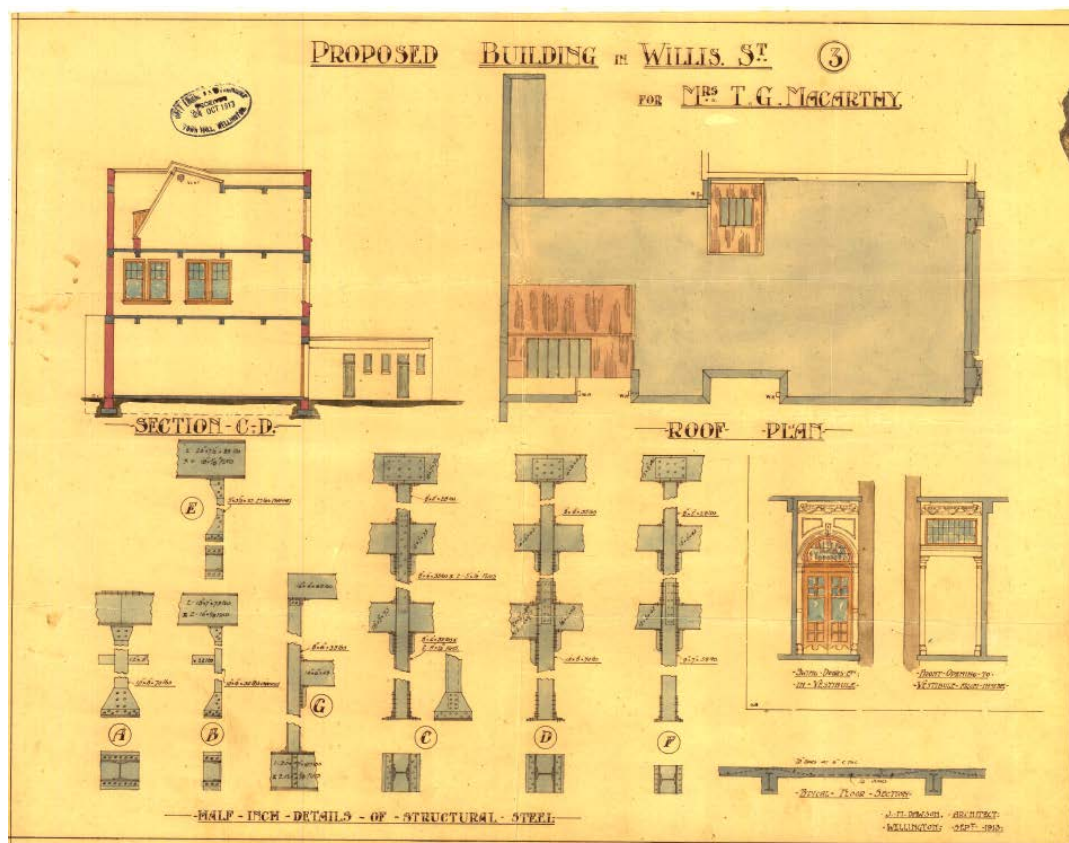
In 2011 works to install a new sewer pipe under the road revealed the remains of a hangi pit, and remnants of 1900 tramlines directly in front of nearby 35 Willis Street.¹¹ This gives an indication of the various ages of human occupation of Willis Street.

¹⁰ *Wises Post Office Directories*, 1913-1995

¹¹ WCC files – see appendix for details

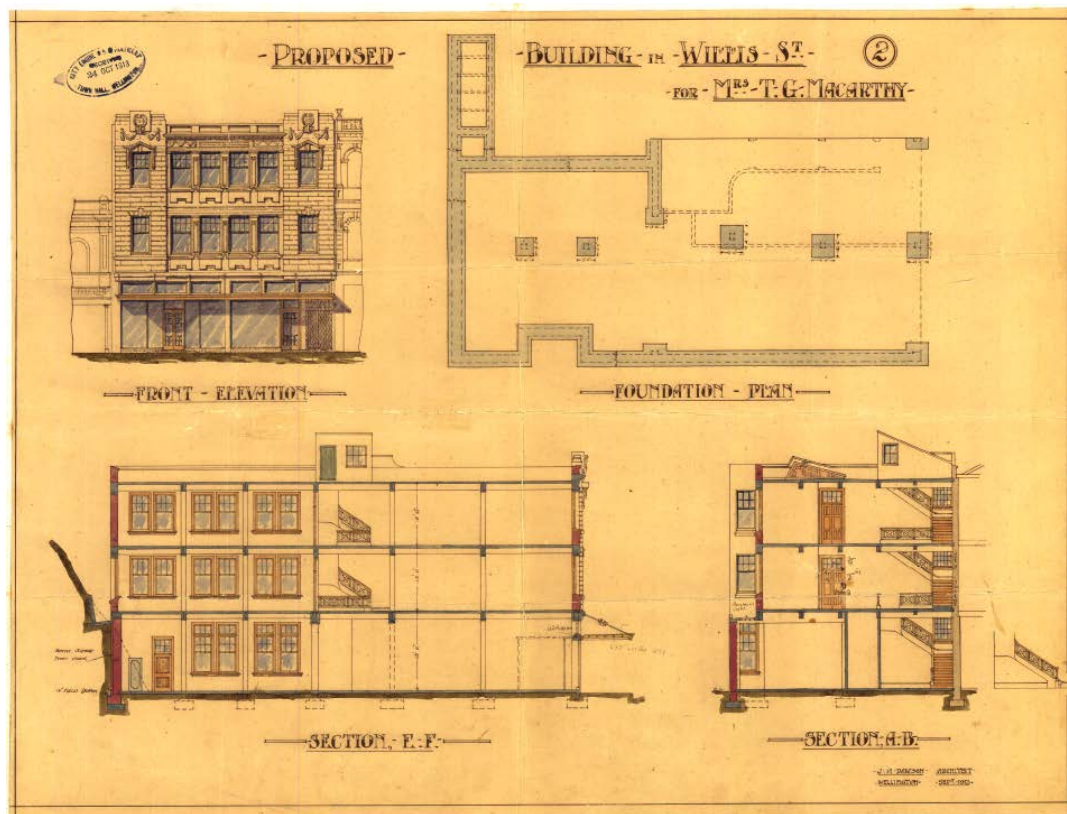


1913 – plans as proposed. Note the photographer's studio on the first floor with the south facing windows for indirect natural light.¹²



¹² WCC Archives 00053_176_9740-sepcifications and plans

1913 – section, roof plan and details of steel columns and beams.



1913 – foundation plan, sections and elevations.

1.2 Architect¹³

DAWSON, Joseph McClatchie, 1877-1956

J. M. Dawson was born in the Wairarapa. His father was a contractor in this district and Dawson's education included a background in construction work. In 1900 he left New Zealand and travelled to South Africa, England and Australia, returning in 1906 to establish his own architectural practice in Wellington.

His buildings include the T. G. McCarthy Building, Willis Street (1913); Hatricks Motor Garage (now Manthel Motors), corner Taranaki and Wakefield Streets (1913); and the Hope Gibbons Building, Dixon Street (1925).

Dawson was an inaugural member of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, formed in 1905, and became a Fellow of the Institute in 1913. He was its president from 1938-1940. He appointed Jack Ian King (1900-1972) as a partner in 1929, and retired in 1948. The firm he founded continues as King and Dawson.

¹³ WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref Appendix III

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The former Tisdall's Building was a three storeyed masonry building of Edwardian Classical design with an internal steel frame. The surviving east-facing façade is divided into six bays above a ground floor shop frontage of large plate glass windows. A suspended verandah with pressed metal ceiling, as per the original plans, shelters shoppers, and access is provided to two shops on the ground floor and an entrance foyer on the north side, which in turn leads to a staircase extending the full height of the building.

Given its location, only the elevation facing Willis Street has been given an architectural treatment. Above the ground floor windows, and the clerestory over the verandah, the first and second floors have a sculptural ornamental appearance typical of the Edwardian style. The wall surface is rusticated, in imitation of masonry construction, and there are decorative aprons beneath the central windows at both levels.

To enhance the Classical symmetry of the façade, the end bays project forward and are also given greater prominence with the decorative use of keystones at the first floor level and flared pediments carried on consoles over the second floor windows. The entablature above the four central bays carries the name of the building framed by floral swags, which are repeated beneath medallions crowning the end bay parapets. The façade, which retains its original fenestration, is entirely as it was designed with the exception of the modern signage along the verandah fascia and above the shop entrances.

The building interior was substantially intact in 2007 before the Telecom Central development commenced, but of this only the internal stair now survives. This was described in 2007 as comprising of a tiled vestibule on the ground floor running along the northern boundary wall to extend half way back into the building and leading to a generously proportioned flight of stairs. These terminate at roof level and are lit by windows on the landings and a skylight set into the roof. There is lavish plasterwork in the vestibule, and an Art Nouveau leaded fanlight over a pair of internal doors and highly sculptural plastered ceiling set with linen swags.

Classical pilasters divide the vestibule into sections and frame the view from the street, across the original floor tiling, towards the staircase. It was also noted that the stair hand rails had been removed on both the second and third floors in some time pre-2007.

2.2 Setting

The façade of the former Tisdall's Building stands in the heart of the central business district, on the west side of Willis Street, roughly halfway between Manners Street and Lambton Quay. This part of Willis Street is much changed and former Tisdall's Building is today surrounded by newer and generally taller buildings including the large and enveloping "Telecom Central" development that surrounds it. With the exception of some older structures (to the north-east) on the other side of the road, the surviving façade of the former Tisdall's Building is the only heritage building for some distance; the nearest is probably the former Evening Post Building to the south.

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?*

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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?*

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?*

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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?*

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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?

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?*

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?*

Local/Regional/National/International

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

3.0 References

CT WN 438/43, LINZ

Kelly, Michael and Ann McEwan, "50-52 Willis Street (Tisdall's Building)", unpublished WCC document, 2007

Hawke, G. R. 'Macarthy, Thomas George 1833/1834? - 1912'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 April 2006 www.dnzb.govt.nz

NZ History.net website accessed in 2006 www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/second-world-war/us-forces-in-new-zealand/the-camps

WCC Archives ref 00053:176:9740, 50-52 Willis Street, permit - building, Wellington City Archives

WCC Archives 00053_176_9740-sepcifications and plans

WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref Appendix III

Wises Post Office Directories, 1913-1995

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
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)		

Background research

Street trench outside 35 Willis Street, Friday (10/06/11).
North to the right. Depth from road surface to base of trench, 1.55m

