

The (former) Evening Post Building
82 Willis Street



Evening Post Building. Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The building is a good representative example of a Chicago style office building, and is probably the best remaining commercial building designed by William Fielding, a well-regarded local Wellington architect.
- The building is a historical and stylistic companion to the Dominion Building, on the corner of Mercer and Victoria Street, which was occupied by the offices of a prominent, rival newspaper.
- The building has a strong association with the *Evening Post*, Wellington's daily evening newspaper that was published from various offices on Willis Street for 137 years. The newspaper has immense social importance as it has provided the most prolific record of the life and culture of the city. The building was synonymous with the name of the newspaper from the time of its construction in 1928 until the newspaper merged with its rival to form the DomPost. The building has important historic value for its inextricable link with the editing and production of the paper and this value is presently enhanced by the production of other papers, including *The Dominion*, on the site.
- Although it has suffered from some unsympathetic modifications, the form, fenestration and much detail on the Willis Street facade remain to indicate a building of quality for its time.

District Plan:	Map 17, Symbol 345/1
Legal Description:	Lot 9 Pt Lot 10 DP 851 & Pt Secs 506-508
Heritage Area:	None WCC - 2012
HPT Listed:	Historic Place - Category II ref 3621
Archaeological Site:	Wellington CBD
Other Names:	Zephyr House, Zephyr @ 82, (access to) Community House, RipCurl
Key physical dates:	1927 - 1928 construction
Architect / Builder:	William Fielding (circa 1875 – 1946)
Former uses:	Newspaper offices
Current uses:	Ground floor retail units. Ground floor access to Community House. Office building at floors above ground occupied by various commercial tenants. The building appears to have been subdivided into 13No. unit titles.
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 161255 Bdg StrengthInv Notice Issued 27/01/2012 Notice Expires 27/01/2027

Extent: Cityview GIS 2012



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

The *Evening Post* was founded by Henry Blundell and his sons in 1865. Henry Blundell was the first editor of the paper and its first premises was a timber building on Willis Street near or adjacent to the current Stewart Dawson's Corner.²

Henry Blundell (c.1815–1878) was born in Dublin and worked at the *Dublin Evening Mail* for 27 years. He became a manager, but “resigned over a disagreement about the treatment of staff”³ before migrating with his children to Melbourne in 1860. He came to New Zealand in 1861 and worked for the *Lyttelton Times* until 1862 and settled his family in New Zealand in 1863. He worked for a year for the *Otago Daily Times*, before moving to Marlborough to establish the *Havelock Mail* in 1864, but the newspaper survived only until November of that year when the Wakamarina goldfields closed.⁴

Blundell then moved to Wellington in 1865 with his business partner David Curle and Blundell's sons John and Henry. Wellington was seen as a good place to establish a business as it had just been declared the capital of the colony and did not have a daily newspaper. The nearest rivals were the “tri-weekly” *Wellington Independent* (1854-1874) and the *New Zealand Advertiser*, and the weekly *New Zealand Spectator and Cook's Strait Guardian* (1844-1865).⁵ The early years were difficult as Wellington had a European population of only 5,000 people, and Blundell bought out Curle when the business nearly failed in July 1865.

The *Evening Post* was thereafter run as a family business with Henry (senior) as manager and writer and sons Henry (junior) and John as “typesetters, canvassers and reporters”, son Louis later joined the family business after completing his schooling in Dunedin.⁶ The paper focussed on local events from a politically neutral editorial stance and Blundell wrote in the first edition that “...a liberal course of policy will be pursued and the bounds of moderation will not be overstepped in giving expression to the views entertained by the proprietors as journalists.”⁷ This political neutrality was unusual for a time when newspapers were established to directly promote particular political opinions, and was a feature of the paper throughout its 137 year history. Ownership of the *Evening Post* passed to Blundell's sons after his retirement in 1874 (Blundell's three daughters were not associated with the *Evening Post*)⁸ and it remained in the control of the family until 1972.

¹ History is based on the WCC Heritage Building Inventory ref Will2

² Images F6941/1, F355131/2, 38111/2, Alexander Turnbull Library Photographic Collection

³ Leslie Verry. 'Blundell, Henry - Biography', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10 URL:

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2b29/1>

⁴ Leslie Verry. 'Blundell, Henry - Biography', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10 URL:

<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2b29/1>

⁵ “Evening Post” Paperspast website accessed July 2012 <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=CL1.EP&essay=1&e=-----10--1----0-->

⁶ “Evening Post” Paperspast website accessed July 2012 <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=CL1.EP&essay=1&e=-----10--1----0-->

⁷ “Evening Post” Paperspast website accessed July 2012 <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=CL1.EP&essay=1&e=-----10--1----0-->

⁸ Leslie Verry. 'Blundell, Henry - Biography', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2b29/1>

The first Evening Post Building on the corner of Lambton Quay and Willis Street was demolished in circa 1900 but Blundell Bros. had moved to a new building on Willis St in 1896. Designed by William Chatfield and built at a cost of £6786⁹ the building stood for 30 years before it was demolished to make way for the present building.

Architect William Fielding, who had offices in an adjacent building, designed the new building and the principal contractor was Fletcher Construction. Fielding had also recently completed the Petone premises for the *Evening Post*.¹⁰ The new Willis Street premises were constructed near the existing printing house, and it was critical that these remained in use during the building contract. The contract and specification make this clear with the statement that "...it is imperative that a thoroughfare shall be maintained between the hours of 2 and 5pm each week day for the transmission of papers from the printing house to the trams in Willis Street."¹¹

The building was completed in 1928, and, in an era when radio broadcasting was in its infancy, was associated with the provision of the most widely disseminated and up to date news available to the general public. Photographs of the 1931 election show the crowds that gathered in Mercer Street to see up-to-the-minute election news posted on a large billboard on the front of the building, and the results were also broadcast by 2ZW radio station that operated from the nearby Nimmo/Hibernian Building at 89 Willis Street.¹²

In 1975 the building had \$300,000 of alterations and additions designed by Tse Group. At some earlier point, possibly after the 1942 earthquake, the parapet was also removed. In addition, in 1938, a printing building - Press House - was built in Boulcott Street. This building was considerably extended and refurbished in 1989 to designs by Structon Group.¹³

The building remained in the ownership of Blundell Bros until 1972 when the company was bought by Wellington Publishing Company, founded in 1906 and publisher of *The Dominion*, the *Evening Post's* great morning rival. In 1973 this company changed its name to Independent Newspapers Ltd. The purchase of the *Evening Post* brought the two newspapers together in the one complex after *The Dominion's* operations were moved from Dominion House. In 2002 the *Evening Post* merged with the *Dominion* to form a morning paper called the *Dominion Post*.¹⁴ The building has since been renamed Zephyr House and is currently filled with a mix of commercial tenants.

The building façade was painted at some time pre 1995¹⁵ and this obscures the original terracotta tile-work, particularly the fine articulation of the middle three bays of the first floor. Underneath the paint is a splendid collection of decorative components, including green glazed half columns.

⁹ Permit OC 1421, .Proposed business premises for Evening Post newspapers for Messrs Blundell Bros., WCC Archives

¹⁰ NEW OFFICES *Evening Post*, 29 August 1927, Page 8

¹¹ Permit B 3513 .Erect office premises (concrete) in Willis Street for Blundell Bros. Ltd., WCC Archives

¹² The Evening Post Photo. TELLING THE WORLD.—The Right Hon. G. W. Forbes, Prime Minister, speaking... [truncated] *Evening Post*, 3 December 1931, Page 10

¹³ Kernohan D. & Kellaway T., 'Wellington's Old Buildings', VUW Press, Wellington 1994 p.97

¹⁴ "Evening Post" Paperspast website accessed July 2012 <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=CL1.EP&essay=1&e=-----10--1----0-->

¹⁵ WCC Heritage Inventory 1995



1880s View of Willis Street, Wellington, taken from the Post Office Tower. Photograph taken by Burton Brothers (Firm) during the 1880s. Image: Burton Brothers (Dunedin, N.Z.) Alexander Turnbull Library Ref: BB-2289-1/1-G



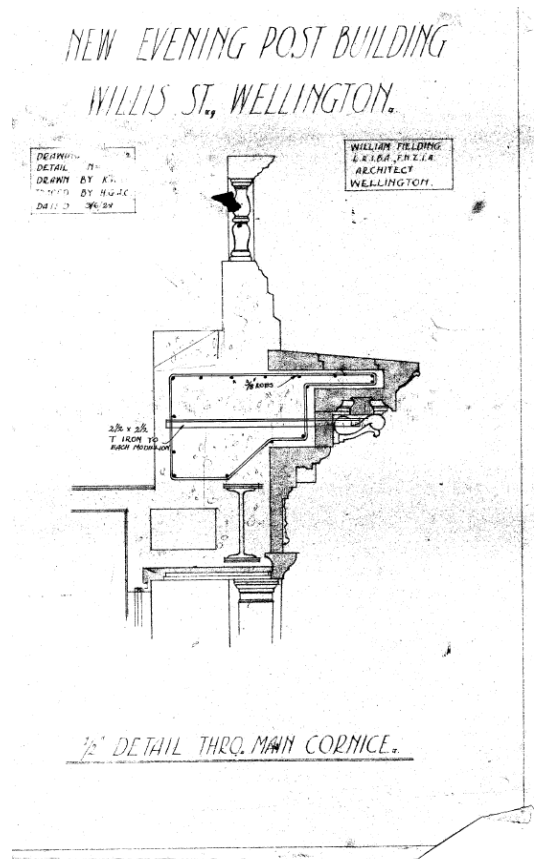
1931, "Crowd in intersection of Willis and Mercer Streets, Wellington, outside the offices of the Evening Post, awaiting the results of the 1931 general election." Image: William Hall Raine Alexander Turnbull Library Ref: 1/1-004500-G



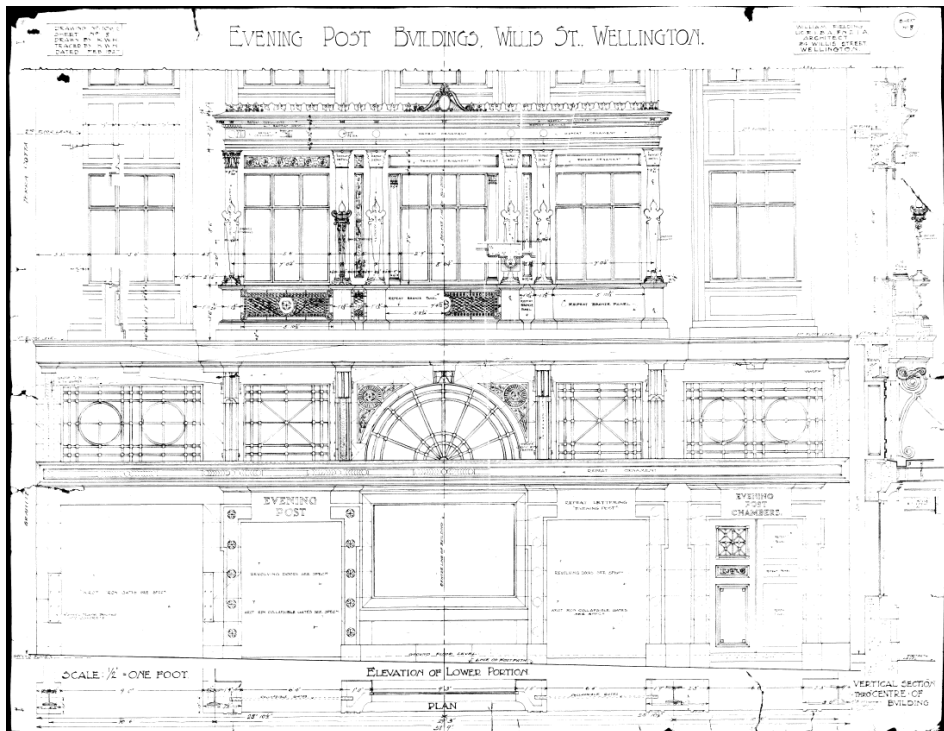
Circa 1940s Willis Street, Wellington, including the Evening Post building, photographed circa 1940s by an Evening Post staff photographer. Image: Alexander Turnbull Library ref: 114/521/01-G



1950 "Two men, a Vauxhall car and a number of shops and businesses in Willis Street, Wellington including the Evening Post, Wardell's, the Allan Shand School of Music, Richard Brown and son and the DeLuxe cafe." Image: *Evening Post* staff photographer, Alexander Turnbull Library Ref: 114/160/13-G



Parapet / cornice detail Image: William Fielding WCC Archives ref 00056_36_B3513



Part front elevation. Image: William Fielding WCC Archives ref 00056_36_B3513

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1865	<i>Evening Post</i> founded by Henry Blundell & Sons
1896	Evening Post offices moved to 82 Willis Street to a new building designed by William Chatfield (requires verification)
1928	Evening Post Building designed by William Fielding and constructed by Fletcher Construction.
Circa 1942	Parapet removed
1972	Control of the <i>Evening Post</i> transferred from Blundell Brothers to the Wellington Publishing Company (later Independent Newspapers Ltd.) which owned the <i>Dominion</i> .
1975	\$300,000 works designed by TSE group architects
2002	<i>The Evening Post</i> and the <i>Dominion</i> were merged to form the <i>DomPost</i> .

1.3 Architect

William Fielding¹⁶ (circa 1875 – 1946) was born in Lancashire, England and worked as an architect in Manchester where he was made a junior partner. He married Lily Midgley in 1900 and the family, with daughter May (born in 1904), emigrated to New Zealand in 1908. The family established themselves in Hataitai and son Robert was born in 1921.¹⁷

William Fielding established an architectural practice in 1911 and his work includes:-

- Congregational Church, Cambridge Terrace (1916)
- Mutual Building; former Plumbers Building (1923 & 1933) 124 Wakefield Street
- Evening Post Building, Willis Street (1927)
- Wellington Trades Hall 124-128 Vivian Street (1927)
- Methodist Church, Hataitai (1928)
- Block of flats at 2 Hawker Street, Mt Victoria (1941) & another at 93 Brougham Street, Mt Victoria (1935)

He was also, for a time, the chair of the Wellington branch of the NZIA.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Despite being sited in the narrow middle section of Willis Street, the Evening Post building faces along the axis of Mercer Street, which makes it highly visible in the streetscape.

The Evening Post building is a good example of the Chicago style. It is divided into three parts: the base consisting of the ground floor, which was originally clad in red Aberdeen granite; the shaft of five storeys, each floor with a regular row of five square-headed windows with continuous shafts running up between them, and a top floor separated by a patterned frieze.

¹⁶ Wellington City Council Heritage Building Inventory 2001 – Appendix III Wellington Architects

¹⁷ Hataitai Local History website accessed July 2012 <http://www.heritagehelp.co.nz/locals.html> note that this website references Evening Post articles of 26th and 29th July 1946 (possibly Mr Fielding's obituary)

A bold bracketed cornice and balustrade that originally finished the building has now been removed. The whole elevation from the first floor level up was faced with glazed terracotta tiles. Although these still exist they have been painted over; according to the specification, they were to be supplied by Burmantoft's, Leeds Fireclay Co., England. The central three bays of the first floor, articulated by columns supporting a cornice, remains fully intact, while the ground floor, inside and out, has been extensively modified.

The structure is a steel frame encased in concrete; the side and rear elevations are rendered concrete.

2.2 Materials¹⁸

- Steel structure encased in concrete; rear and side elevations rendered concrete;
- Aberdeen Red granite cladding at ground floor levels (assumed since removed)
- Vitreous glazed terracotta tile cladding at upper levels (now painted over) supplied by Burmantoft's, Leeds Fireclay Co., England
- Marble floors and stair treads

2.3 Setting

The former Evening Post building is located at the south end of Willis Street, which along with Lambton Quay forms Wellington's "golden mile" of retail and corporate office buildings. The Evening Post Building makes good use of its prominent location at the "T" intersection of Willis and Mercer Street, and is visible from the Civic Square and the nearby *Dominion Building*. The *Dominion Building* was home to the Evening Post's one time rival newspaper the Dominion and the buildings are of a similar age and style.

The west side of Willis Street is dominated at the Boulcott Street intersection by the massive *Majestic Centre*, one of the tallest buildings in the CBD, and the Majestic Centre development includes the timber French Second Empire styled *Dr Henry Pollen house* (1902), and the disembodied Classical façade of the former *Preston's Building* (1902). The podium of the *Majestic Centre* adjoins the Chicago-style *Evening Post Building* (1928). There are two further late 19th / early 20th century Classical buildings to the north of the *Evening Post Building* and the diminutive two storied building is now disfigured by a large advertising hoarding, and the façade of its neighbour to the north has been much modified.

The street blocks to the east of Willis Street include a fine collection of heritage buildings including the eclectic *Jaycee Building* (1920) with its unusual mix of Classical motifs, and these are adjoined on both sides by diminutive two-storied late 19th / early 20th century commercial buildings. The carefully detailed Art Deco style *Hibernian Building* (1930) is sited on the prominent corner between Willis and Bond Streets. The street-block bounded by Willis, Mercer Street, Victoria and Bond Streets includes the very fine Chicago styled Dominion Building that occupies the corner site between Victoria and Mercer Streets.

¹⁸ Original Specification – WCC Archives ref 00056_36_B3513

The quality of the modern commercial buildings on Willis Street varies between the low rise and low quality retail outlets (such as the street block between Mercer and Bond Streets, and the Dukes Arcade) and high rise, higher quality buildings such as the *Majestic Centre*, and the *PoMo Cigna House* on the corner of Mercer and Willis.

3.0 References

- Alexander Turnbull Library Photographic Collection
- Leslie Verry. 'Blundell, Henry - Biography', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2b29/1>
- "Evening Post" Paperspast website accessed July 2012
<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=CL1.EP&essay=1&e=-----10--1----0-->
- WCC Archives
- NEW OFFICES Evening Post, Volume CIV, Issue 51, 29 August 1927, Page 8
- Kernohan D. & Kellaway T. 1994, Wellington's Old Buildings, VUW Press, Wellington
- Wellington City Council Heritage Building Inventory 2001 – Appendix III Wellington Architects
- Hataitai Local History website accessed July 2012
<http://www.heritagehelp.co.nz/locals.html> note that the website references Evening Post articles of 26th and 29th July 1946 (possibly Mr Fielding's obituary)
- WCC Heritage Building Inventory ref Will2

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 building is a good representative example of a Chicago style office building, and is probably the best remaining commercial building designed by William Fielding, a well-regarded local Wellington architect.

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 located on a prominent site at the end of Mercer Street and is to some extent a local landmark.

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 building can be read in conjunction with the fine, similarly styled, *Dominion Building* on the corner of Mercer and Victoria Street that was occupied by the offices a prominent, rival newspaper.

Historic Value:

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

The building has a strong association with the *Evening Post*, Wellington's daily evening newspaper that was published from various offices on Willis Street for 137 years. The newspaper has immense social importance as it has provided the most prolific record of the life and culture of the city. The building was synonymous with the name of the newspaper from the time of its construction in 1928 until the newspaper merged with its rival to form the DomPost. The building has important historic value for its inextricable link with the editing and production of the paper and this value is presently enhanced by the production of other papers, including *The Dominion*, on the site.

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?*

The building has archaeological value. Pre-1900 human activity on the site / located in the Wellington CBD

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 was once held in high public esteem for its association with *Evening Post*, a politically neutral daily newspaper. This esteem has been diminished somewhat by the demise of the *Evening Post*, and the renaming of the building to Zephyr House.

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 occupied this key site on Willis Street for over eighty years and, despite some unsympathetic modern alterations, continues to contribute to the sense of place and continuity of the Willis Street commercial / retail precinct.

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

The *Evening Post* continues to hold a special place in the culture of the capital city although this connection will diminish over time now that the paper is no longer in circulation. Archival copies of the *Evening Post* newspaper, however, continue to be a valuable source of social history for all New Zealanders.

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 good representative example of a 1920s Chicago-style commercial 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?*

Although it has suffered from some unsympathetic modifications, the form, fenestration and much detail on the Willis Street facade remain to indicate a building of quality for its time.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

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