

Preston's Building (façade)
92-96 Willis Street



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The building façade at 92-96 Willis Street is a remnant of an Edwardian commercial building that has been incorporated into the 1991 Majestic Centre complex. The remnant is a good representative example of an Edwardian Classical façade. It is notable for its exuberant scheme of Classical ornamentation.
- This building is associated with well known Wellington architect Francis Penty. It is also associated with the Preston's butchery business which remained in the building until the 1980s.
- It is a well-scaled, well-proportioned, elaborate Classical façade that stands in dramatic contrast to its modern neighbours; it contributes visual interest on Willis Street and contributes to the character of Wellington.

1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The building façade at 92-96 Willis Street is a remnant of an Edwardian commercial building that has been incorporated into the 1991 Majestic Centre complex. It is a pleasant, well scaled façade, with inventive detailing that lends it a textural richness. Its retention on Willis Street contributes greatly to the streetscape and is a physical reminder of the type of building that once typified the commercial and business district of Wellington City.

Willis Street has a long history, with much of it being settled by the early 1900s. This building was built in two parts for auctioneer Alfred Abram Barnett (c.1832 – 1908). Barnett settled in Australia in 1854 and followed the gold-rush to Dunedin in the early 1860s. He later moved to Wellington where he worked as an auctioneer, and served on the Licensing Bench and as a Justice of the Peace.¹ The first half of the building was built in c.1902 and a matching extension was added in c.1912. Both are based on a design by prominent local architect, Francis Penty.

The original (c.1902) permit application shows a three-storey commercial building with a shop on the ground floor and offices on the floors above.² In November of 1902 Barnett placed an advertisement in the *Evening Post* to lease out this building.³ It appears that Mr Barnett occupied one part of the building and the other was occupied by Alfred Banks, a Pork butcher. In 1909 the building was leased by A. E. Preston Butchery and a three-storey extension with a matching façade was added in c.1912. Preston's butchery has a long association with the building, and the company remains in business today, albeit in different premises.

As the city developed into the 1990s, the Preston's building came under new ownership and the interior spaces were demolished to make way for what is now known as the Majestic Centre. The facades of the Preston's building were retained and continue to contribute to the townscape value of Willis Street.

¹ DEATH OF MR. A. A. BARNETT. *Evening Post*, 16 July 1908, Page 8

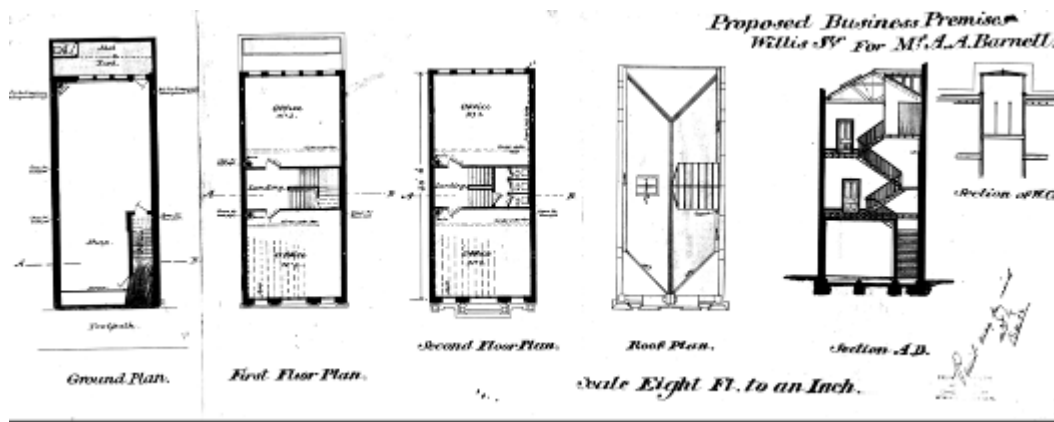
² WCC Archives ref 00053_83_4775

³ *Evening Post*, 20 November 1902, Page 1.

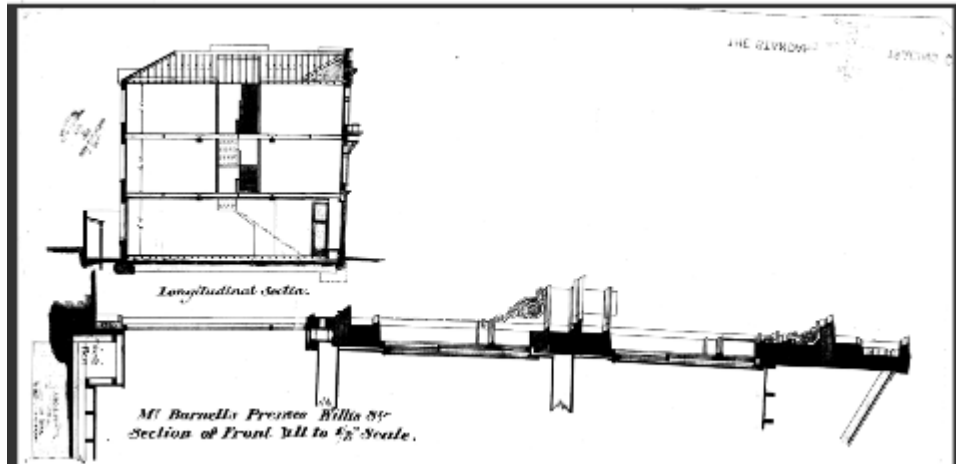


Union picket outside A E Preston and Co Ltd, Willis Street, Wellington 1980 - Photograph taken by Phil Reid. Dominion post (Newspaper) :Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post and Dominion newspapers. Ref: EP/1980/3660/28A-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23158659>

1.2 Timeline of modifications



1902 – Plans and section as proposed.



1902 – Sections and details as proposed.

1902	Building – Shop and offices (00053:83:4775)
c.1912	The building was doubled in size (Old City Permit 9281)
1928	Alterations to shop (00056:57:B5506)
1930	Addition – erect sign (00056:114:B10362)
	Addition – erect shop-front (00056:114:B10364)
1937	Addition – erect signs (00056:197:B17197)
1949	Alteration – reinstate verandah (00056:368:B28281)
1955	Alterations to shop front (00056:504:B37760)
1958	Building additions (00058:82:C4015)
1961	Shop alterations (00058:214:C9737)
1988	Demolition of shops (00059:228:D10570) – I think this refers to the interiors of the building, heritage facades have been retained.

1.3 Occupation history

Not assessed

1.4 Architect

Francis Penty (1841-?) was born in Yorkshire. He was educated in York where he studied architecture, prior to becoming a pupil of J E Oates. On completing his articles he worked in Liverpool and Manchester before joining the Royal Engineers where he was engaged in the construction of new barracks. He later worked for the architectural branch of the London and North West Railway.

In 1887 Penty came to New Zealand, establishing a practice in Wellington. In his first ten years he designed no less than 150 private homes. Amongst his early works were the Convalescent Home, Oriental Bay; a warehouse for Townsend and Paul, Victoria Street; and the Wellington Woollen Company Warehouse in Jervois Quay. Penty also spent times as a Wellington City Councillor from 1892 - 95, where he was known for his belief in practicality before politics.⁴

He formed the practice of Penty and Blake in c.1904 with E.M. Blake and the practice is best known for the design of the 1904 Hunter Building (WCC 17/171) on the Victoria University campus.

⁴ WCC Heritage Buildings Inventory 2001 ref Appendix III

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The building façade at 92-96 Willis Street is a remnant of an Edwardian commercial building that has been incorporated into the 1991 Majestic Centre complex.

The façade was designed in the Edwardian Classical style, with some Italianate influences such as the projecting cornices, elaborate consoles, and in the partially balustraded parapet. There are two main window groups on both the first and second floors. On the first floor, the large stilted segmental arched windows are framed by the heavy consoles of the projecting balcony above. The main windows are segmentally arched and flanked by a pair of narrow arched windows.

Both main window groups are emphasised by the two elaborate segment pediments which rise above the parapets. The pediments are elaborately detailed with a frieze in the tympanum, and a small fluted pilaster which rises through terminating volutes and is capped by a small triangular pediment. The first floor is lightly rusticated; the shallow piers which support the heavy consoles framing the windows give way on the second floor to seven fluted pilasters with plain capitals.⁵

The building was built in two halves with the first section designed in c.1902 and the second complete by c.1912. The two halves form a satisfying and seamless whole, and the repetition and symmetry contribute to the sense of scale, harmony and grandeur of the façade.

The façade has been integrated into the Majestic Centre complex which includes a multi-storey podium topped with a 28+ storey tower that is one of the tallest in the city. The nearby former Dr Henry Pollen's House (1902) WCC ref 17/31 is also located on the Majestic Centre site.

2.2 Materials

Unreinforced brick masonry façade with timber windows above verandah level.

2.3 Setting

This building is an important contributor to Willis Street. As a heritage façade, this building is a dramatic counterpoint to the modern buildings that are its neighbours, in particular the Majestic Building. This building is a reminder of the types of buildings that would have once lined the commercial district of Wellington.

Other nearby heritage buildings include the Evening Post Building (1928) WCC ref 17/345.1, Dr Henry Pollen's House (1902) WCC ref 17/31, the Hotel St George (1929-30) WCC ref 17/354 on the west side of Willis Street, and the Hibernian Building (1930) WCC ref 17/346 and the Jaycee Building (1920) WCC ref 17/347 on the east.

⁵ WCC Heritage Building Inventory 1995 'Preston's Building Façade'

3.0 Sources

Francis Penty'. *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand [Wellington Provincial District]* 1897. <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc01Cycl-t1-body-d4-d13-d63.html>

'Heritage Building – 92 Willis Street'. 2004. 1041-06-WIL92, Wellington City Council Records.

Alexander Turnbull Library

Ref: EP/1991/0267/6-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
<http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23244479>

Ref: EP/1980/3660/28A-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
<http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23158659>

Ref: 114/404/06-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
<http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23049948>

Papers Past

Evening Post, Volume LXIV, Issue 123, 20 November 1902, Page 1.

Wellington City Archive

WCA 00053-70-4249-Plans.

WCA 00053-83-4775-Specifications

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 building façade at 92-96 Willis Street is a remnant of an Edwardian commercial building that has been incorporated into the 1991 Majestic Centre complex. The remnant is a good representative example of an Edwardian Classical façade. It is notable for its exuberant scheme of Classical 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?

It is a well-scaled, well-proportioned, elaborate Classical façade that stands in dramatic contrast to its modern neighbours; it contributes visual interest on Willis Street and contributes to the character 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?

This building is associated with well known Wellington architect Francis Penty. It is also associated with the Preston's butchery business that remained in the building until the 1980s.

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?

This building is on the site of a previous structure, it is also part of the NZAA Central City Archaeological area, 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 façade at 92-96 Willis Street is a remnant of an Edwardian commercial building. Although most of the original building has since been demolished, and a new building has been constructed behind, the façade has had few intrusive modern alterations or additions and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of the Willis Street 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?*

This building is a good example of the Edwardian commercial Classical style. It is one of few buildings that remain (relatively) unmodified left on Willis Street and provides a visual reminder of the types of buildings that once were common.

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 is only the façade that remains, the exterior has been restored and is in good condition, making this façade an important contributor to the Wills Streetscape.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

This building is important at a local level due to the contribution that it makes to the Wills Streetscape despite the demolition of the interiors of the building.

5.0 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

BEST SITE IN WILLIS-STREET.

TWO LET, Barnett's New Building, 61,
Willis-street, near the Evening Post,
and next door to Hume and Son. The
position is central, prominent, and well
adapted for business purposes. The pre-
mises will be ready for occupation on or
about the 1st December.

The rental of the Shop and the whole
of the commodious ground floor is £5 per
week.

The Offices on the first floor, with pri-
vate entrance from Willis-street, are suit-
able for professional men or for mercan-
tile agencies, and can be rented altogether,
or will be subdivided and fitted up to suit
the convenience of incoming tenants.

The Second Floor can be utilised for
industrial and commercial pursuits, and
rooms on this upper flat will be parti-
tioned as may be required.

A. A. BARNETT,
134, Wellington-terrace.



Preston's building facade and Majestic Centre, Willis Street, Wellington, 1991. Dominion post (Newspaper) :Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post and Dominion newspapers. Ref: EP/1991/0267/6-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23244479>



Safe which was blown open. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper, 1951. Ref: 114/404/06-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
<http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23049948>