

**Circa Theatre (Street facades of the former Westport Coal Company only)**  
1 Taranaki Street



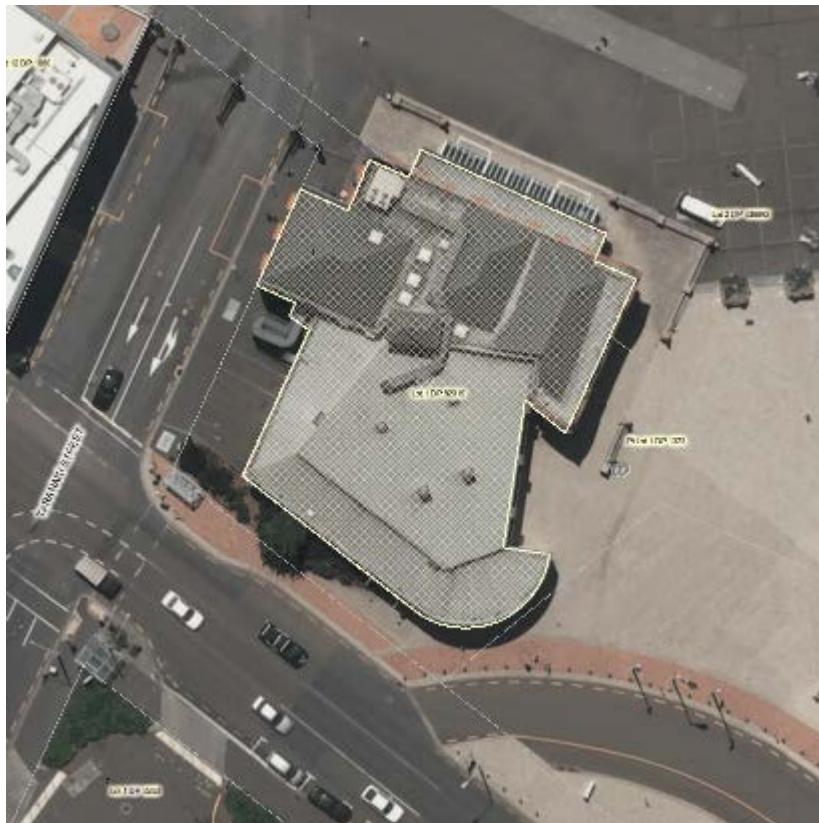
Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

**Summary of heritage significance**

- The remaining fragment of the former Westport Coal Company building has some architectural value for its well proportioned and elaborately detailed brick masonry facades. The aesthetic value has been somewhat diminished its incorporation into the new Circa Theatre building that is considered to have little architectural merit by many in the local architectural community.
- The fragment of the 1916 masonry building has some historic value for its association with the Westport Coal Company that was once the nation's largest coal producer and supplier. This has been somewhat diminished by the demolition of the building and relocation of the facades in 1994.

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 408 ( <i>Street facades of the former Westport Chambers (Circa Theatre)</i> ) VAR22
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP82019
Heritage Area:	None 2013
HPT Listed:	None 2013
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270 – & reclaimed land
Other Names:	Circa Theatre 1 Taranaki Street
Key physical dates:	1916 constructed 1994 demolition (facades retained and relocated).
Architect / Builder:	Façade - 1916 Architect: Penty and Lawrence. Building: W H Bennett. Circa Theatre – 1994 Architect: Ampersand / Grant Tilly (theatre consultant)
Former uses:	Branch office / coal yard
Current uses:	Theatre
Earthquake Prone Status:	'Not yet assessed March 2013'

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History

The Westport Coal Company was founded in 1881 when a group of Dunedin businessmen purchased the mines of the Westport Colliery Company Ltd. The company developed the remote West Coast coalfields at Coalbrookdale (Denniston) and Granity Creek (Millerton) <sup>1</sup> and was once New Zealand's largest coal producer. It had a head office in Dunedin with depots in most cities and large towns throughout New Zealand. The Union Steam Ship Company was a major shareholder and customer, and by strategic asset acquisition, held a virtual monopoly of West Coast coal until the intervention of Richard Seddon's government in 1901 with the establishment of the State Coal Mines.<sup>2</sup>

The Westport Coal Company traded from premises at Queen's Chambers, Post Office Square, with branches on Dixon Street, Tinakori-road and Tasman Streets until 1915 when a site was purchased on the 'Taranaki-street extension'. They commissioned architects Penty and Lawrence to design a two storey brick building with a manager's office at ground floor and a showroom on the first floor levels.<sup>3</sup> The new premises were said to be 'a fine building' located on a site near Te Aro Station that had previously been used by travelling circuses. The elevations were of 'red brick relieved with white stucco facings', the ceilings were of pressed metal with rimu panelling and plastered walls. The rear yard was fitted with a 'self-recording weigh bridge and the total cost of construction was approximately £3000.<sup>4</sup>

The Westport Coal company went into a decline in the 1930s due in part to the displacement of coal by oil fuel and hydroelectric power, as well as reductions in the country's rail service and by a reduction in demand for coal in industry caused by the economic depression.<sup>5</sup> The outbreak of war in 1939 led to a strong demand for coal. Coal mining was declared an essential industry in 1942, and all the mines in the Grey River valley were nationalised in that year. In 1948 the nation's remaining coal deposits were nationalised and the Westport Coal Company was either nationalised or ceased to trade at around this time.<sup>6</sup>

The building was substantially demolished in the early 1990s and the street facades were moved across Cable Street to the north east of the Cable and Taranaki Street intersection. These were incorporated in the new Circa Theatre building, designed by Ampersand architects and theatre consultant Grant Tilly that opened in 1994.<sup>7</sup> The original street façade was rotated 180-degrees to face the plaza in front of the Museum of New Zealand (Te Papa Tongarewa) that was under construction at the time.

<sup>1</sup> 'Coal is discovered - Seddonville', (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 20-Dec-2012 URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/seddonville/coal-discovery>

<sup>2</sup> Alan Sherwood and Jock Phillips, 'Coal and coal mining - The 19th century', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 13-Jul-12

URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/coal-and-coal-mining/page-3>; The Cyclopedia of New Zealand [Otago & Southland Provincial Districts] (Christchurch: The Cyclopedia Company, Limited, 1905)

<sup>3</sup> LOCAL AND GENERAL *Evening Post*, 2 November 1915, Page 6

<sup>4</sup> WESTPORT COAL CO.'S NEW OFFICES *Evening Post*, 9 August 1916, Page 2

<sup>5</sup> BUSINESS DECLINE *Evening Post*, 24 November 1931, Page 12

<sup>6</sup> Alan Sherwood and Jock Phillips 'Coal and coal mining - The 20th century', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 13-Jul-12

URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/coal-and-coal-mining/page-4>

<sup>7</sup> 'History', Circa Theatre website accessed March 2013 <http://www.circa.co.nz/site/About/History>; Rebecca Thomson, 'Centre Stage for 35 years' *Dompost*, 14/04/2011.

The original Taranaki Street façade and a single bay of the north (Cable Street) and south (coal yard) facades now form the main entrance to the theatre. The remaining walls of the new theatre are clad in weatherboards and decorated to resemble the nearby Wellington Rowing Club Building (c.1906). The new Circa Theatre building is an unusual agglomeration of shapes, masses, building styles and materials, and the old Westport Company building is somewhat overwhelmed by the scale and architecture of the new elements. The new Circa Theatre has its critics in among the architectural community and was selected as one of Wellington's top-ten 'worst buildings' in a competition run by Wellington's Architecture Centre in 2007.<sup>8</sup>



c. 1929 photograph of Taranaki Street with a view towards the waterfront.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Architecture Centre website updated 12<sup>th</sup> March 2007

<http://architecture.org.nz/2007/04/12/dominion-post-ten-worst-buildings/>

<sup>9</sup> Wellington city scene including the intersection of Taranaki and Cable Streets. Just, F R: Two albums of photographs and captions relating to the Just family and 119 negatives taken by his father in the 1920s and 1930s of around Wellington and the Bell Bus Company. Ref: 1/2-071478-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23117809>





Enlarged part of previous photograph that shows the former Westport Coal Co. Ltd building in its original location.



1956 aerial photograph<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Enlarged part of previous photograph that shows the former Westport Coal Co. Ltd building in its original location.



Enlarged part of previous photograph that shows the former Westport Coal Co. Ltd building in its original location.

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications

- 1916 Constructed
- 1994 Demolition (facades retained and relocated)

## 1.3 Architect

Penty and Lawrence<sup>11</sup>

Francis Penty (1841-1919)<sup>12</sup> 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 and established a private architectural practice in Wellington. In his first ten years he designed no less than 150 houses. 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. He was in partnership with E.M. Blake in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the partnership of Penty and Blake is best known for the design of the Hunter Building at Victoria University.

<sup>11</sup> Updated from the WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref Appendix III - Sources: NZHPT Glossary; The Hunter Building, Victoria University of Wellington, WRC, NZHPT, February 1979.

<sup>12</sup> DEATHS. *Dominion*, 19 April 1919, Page 1

Blake was succeeded in the partnership by Charles Lawrence (c.1872-1933) who had worked in private practice and the Public Works Department (he once deputised as acting Government Architect). Lawrence amalgamated the practice with that of John Sydney Swan to form Swan, Lawrence and Swan in c.1916.<sup>13</sup>

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture**

The Westport Coal Company building was substantially demolished in 1994 and the only remaining elements include the main (west) façade that once faced Taranaki Street, and a single bay each of the facades that once faced north (Cable Street) and south (to the coal yards).

The building fragment was rotated 180-degrees and relocated to a new site on the north-east corner of the Cable and Taranaki Street intersection. It was incorporated as the main entrance of the new Circa Theatre building in 1994. The design of the new Circa Theatre building is somewhat controversial<sup>14</sup> and the remaining fragment old Westport Coal Company building is somewhat overwhelmed by the scale and architecture of the new elements.

### **2.2 Materials**

Brick masonry with rendered decorative elements

### **2.3 Setting**

The building fragment has been relocated to an adjacent site within the redeveloped Wellington waterfront. The façade has been rotated to address the public plaza by the main entrance of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

---

<sup>13</sup> MR. C. A. LAWRENCE *Evening Post*, 30 January 1933, Page 11

<sup>14</sup> Architecture Centre website updated 12<sup>th</sup> March 2007

<http://architecture.org.nz/2007/04/12/dominion-post-ten-worst-buildings/>

### 3.0 Sources

BUSINESS DECLINE *Evening Post*, 24 November 1931, Page 12

'Coal is discovered - Seddonville'. Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Updated 20-Dec-2012 URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/seddonville/coal-discovery>

DEATHS. *Dominion*, 19 April 1919, Page 1

'History', Circa Theatre website accessed March 2013  
<http://www.circa.co.nz/site/About/History> ;

Just, F R 'Wellington city scene including the intersection of Taranaki and Cable Streets: Two albums of photographs and captions relating to the Just family and 119 negatives taken by his father in the 1920s and 1930s of around Wellington and the Bell Bus Company.' Ref: 1/2-071478-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23117809>

LOCAL AND GENERAL *Evening Post*, 2 November 1915, Page 6

MR. C. A. LAWRENCE *Evening Post*, 30 January 1933, Page 11

Sherwood, Alan and Jock Phillips. 'Coal and coal mining - The 19th century', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 13-Jul-12

URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/coal-and-coal-mining/page-3>;  
<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/coal-and-coal-mining/page-4>

The Cyclopedia of New Zealand [Otago & Southland Provincial Districts]  
(Christchurch: The Cyclopedia Company, Limited, 1905)

Thomson, Rebecca. 'Centre Stage for 35 years' *Dompost*, 14/04/2011.

Wellington Architecture Centre website updated 12<sup>th</sup> March 2007

<http://architecture.org.nz/2007/04/12/dominion-post-ten-worst-buildings/>

WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref Appendix III

WESTPORT COAL CO.'S NEW OFFICES *Evening Post*, 9 August 1916, Page 2



#### **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 remaining fragment of the former Westport Coal Company building has some architectural value for its well proportioned and elaborately detailed brick masonry facades. The aesthetic value has been somewhat diminished its incorporation into the new Circa Theatre building that is considered to have little architectural merit by many in the local architectural community.

**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?*

Circa Theatre has some townscape value for its integration into the public space in front of Te Papa Tongarewa (Museum of New Zealand).

**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 fragment of the 1916 masonry building has some historic value for its association with the Westport Coal Company that was once the nation's largest coal producer and supplier. This has been somewhat diminished by the demolition of the building and relocation of the facades in 1994.

**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?*

Central City NZAA R27/270 – & reclaimed land (disturbed by redevelopment c.1994)

**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?

The building was substantially demolished in 1994 and only a fragment remains.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

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

## 5.0 Appendix

### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	None	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	none	
WCC Records – building file	none	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	none	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	none	
Plan change?	none	
Heritage Area Report	none	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	none	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	y	
HPT website	none	
HPT files	none	
Conservation Plan	none	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	y	

### Background research