

## Former Francis Holmes Building

208 Taranaki Street



M. Kelly 2007

### Summary of heritage significance

- The Francis Holmes Ltd building is a good representative example of a light-industrial building built in the Inter-War period. It is notable for its well-proportioned and symmetrical facade, and for its restrained decorative scheme of rendered friezes and brick on edge bands.
- The building has historical value due to its connection with Francis Holmes Limited, a Wellington based company which was involved in construction and the production of cement. The building is associated with the early years of Fletcher Construction Ltd, a building construction company and building products manufacturer, and with the Fletcher Trust and Investment Company Ltd.
- The building has had few intrusive modern alterations and additions in the past 80 years and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of Taranaki Street, and to the nearby, newly formed Memorial Park.

District Plan:	Map 16 Reference 417
Legal Description:	Lot 1, DP 9560
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Not registered
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Unknown
Key physical dates:	1929
Architect / Builder:	E.R. Wells
Former uses:	Warehouse
Current uses:	Office
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 179932 (124 notice Served) – expires 01/06/2027

CityView 2012



## 1.0 Outline History

*Note: this report is based on the 2007 heritage report prepared for District Plan Change 58<sup>1</sup>*

### 1.1 History

Francis Holmes Limited was a cement and general builders' merchant, and this building was constructed in 1929 by the Fletcher Trust and Investment Company and leased to Francis Holmes Limited for some 16 years. It was then sold to Frances Holmes Ltd in 1946.

The involvement of the Fletcher Trust company in providing a building for Francis Holmes Limited was undoubtedly bound up in the considerable changes underway in the brick and concrete industries at the end of the 1920s. For the origins of this it is necessary to go back further, to when Fletcher Construction's founder and managing director James Fletcher began to realise that, to ensure the ready supply of building materials of sufficient quality, the company would have to make its own.

Fletchers took an early interest in brick making and bought a plant in Silverstream in the late 1910s. They also bought a plant in Glenburn, Auckland. During the following decade brick became a common construction material, but nevertheless, by the middle of the decade there was an oversupply. Other brick manufacturers considered that if Fletchers' Glenburn works in Auckland, although profitable, could be prevented from producing bricks it would alleviate the difficulties faced by other brick companies. Fletchers agreed, for a substantial sum, not to make bricks for five years, with the proviso that they could make hollow tiles and small facing bricks, of a type James Fletcher had seen in the United States in 1925.

James Fletcher returned to the United States in 1927 and bought two plants to make the new brick products. The plants were shipped from Dayton, Ohio to New Zealand and were in production in Glenburn and Silverstream by 1928. The new products were an instant success and very quickly Fletchers found themselves, in a sense, being paid for the privilege of making a hugely successful product.

This situation could not have been allowed to last and, in an agreement that mirrored an earlier merger of New Zealand's three major cement companies, the Auckland brick manufacturers, including Fletchers, agreed to form a conglomerate. The Amalgamated Brick and Pipe Co., as it became known, was established. Similar arrangements were made in Wellington. The A.B. & P. Co.'s office in Wellington was in Hamilton Chambers.<sup>2</sup>

Francis Holmes, as a supplier of cement products, was part of the wider Fletchers 'operation' in Wellington and may even have been a subsidiary of the company. The building constructed for them was made of the narrow-faced Silverstream brick, the 'Silverstream Mastertile', made by Fletchers. The building was erected by Fletcher Construction,<sup>3</sup> so it can be reasonably concluded that their involvement was part of the general deal made with Francis Holmes. The design of the building's front façade, although not extravagantly decorated, appears to have been used to promote Fletcher's new brick products, just as it was in the case of the Amalgamated Brick and Pipe Company's Hamilton Chambers (another Fletcher design and build, also completed in 1929). The architect was E.R. Wells, who worked for Fletchers during the early part of his career but was working on his own account by 1929. The estimated cost was £4,500.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Kelly & Ann McEwan, '208 Taranaki Street (former Francis Holmes Building)' unpublished heritage report for WCC DPC 58 (2007)

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kelly, 'Hamilton Chambers: Cultural Heritage Assessment,' New Zealand Historic Places Trust (Wellington, 1998), pp.7-8.

<sup>3</sup> '208-212 Taranaki Street, warehouse,' 22 May 1929, 00056:76:B7365, Wellington City Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

When the land was acquired by the Fletcher Trust and Investment Company it was subject to the Wellington City Council's plan to widen Taranaki Street.<sup>5</sup> The property was set back from the existing street boundary approximately 15 metres.

The building was originally one open warehouse space, with offices on the first floor of a narrow brick adjunct to the main space. Francis Holmes remained in the building until at least the early 1970s. At some point the building was divided in half, probably about the time they were first recorded as sharing the building with another occupier. The first instance of this was in 1971 when O'Brien and Co., footwear manufacturers, was listed as an occupier.<sup>6</sup> No permit record has been located indicating when this happened and who was responsible. Francis Holmes remained the owner of the building until the property was compulsorily purchased in 1974 under the Public Works Act for the proposed extension of the Ngauranga-Basin Reserve motorway.<sup>7</sup> The land was gazetted by the Government and has remained in the hands of the National Roads Board and its successor Transit New Zealand ever since.

In the meantime, the building was occupied by a range of different businesses. In 1978, C & F Distributors and Safety Tread were the occupiers. By 1983, Odlin Agencies and Electrical Ltd briefly had possession alongside C & F Distributors. The Bike Clinic was an occupant during the 1980s, while Autobodies occupied the building for much of the 1990s,<sup>8</sup> along with Seddon Motors (a sign on the rear of the building for the latter is still in place). It is presently used by Williams and Adams, car dealers, for storage and car maintenance.<sup>9</sup>

Current works (2013) to create Memorial Park along Buckle Street between the Basin Reserve and Taranaki Streets should substantially enhance the setting of the Francis Holmes Building in the near future.

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<sup>5</sup> Land Title Service, CT WN 417/97.

<sup>6</sup> *Wises New Zealand Post Office Directory*, 1971-1972.

<sup>7</sup> Land Title Service, CT WN 417/97.

<sup>8</sup> *Wises New Zealand Post Office Directory*, 1975-1995.

<sup>9</sup> History is an updated version of: Michael Kelly and Ann McEwan, '208 Taranaki Street (former Francis Holmes building),' unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council DPC 58 (2007), p.3.



Francis Holmes Building, seen here set back from Taranaki Street, 1947. Whites Aviation Ltd:Photographs. Ref: WA-11340-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

## **1.2 Timeline of modifications**

- 1929 Warehouse construction (00056:76:B7365)
- 2013 Building Consent Application SR239712 , aBLDG CONSENT, 2.2 Commercial - Francis Holmes Building - Seismic strengthening to building. (Unclear if carried out)

## **1.3 Ownership history**

- 1930 Fletcher Trust and Investment Company Limited
- 1946 Francis Holmes Limited
- 1974 Land taken for the Ngauranga-Basin Reserve Motorway

## **1.4 Occupation history**

- 1936 Francis Holmes Limited
- 2007 Protecta Insurance

## 1.5 Architect

Edwin Royden Wells (1887-1950) was born and raised in Canterbury. His parents were Alban Douglas (an ironmonger) & Agnes Wells (nee Spensley).<sup>10</sup>

In 1911 Wells moved to Gisborne after practicing for ten years throughout New Zealand, including in Christchurch, Wellington and Timaru. The *Poverty Bay Herald* reported that he had just “completed extensive plans for the Parliamentary Buildings at Wellington, having entered for the competition instituted by the Government.”<sup>11</sup> In 1912 he became a registered architect<sup>12</sup>, and in Gisborne he was working in partnership with F.H. Forge from 1912-1913.<sup>13</sup>

The partnership dissolved by 1914<sup>14</sup>, and Wells joined the Mounted Rifles division of the 6<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements where he served as a lieutenant in WWI.<sup>15</sup> During his service he received a Military Cross<sup>16</sup> ‘...for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in leading his party through heavy shell-fire in an attempt to gain information. Finding it impossible to take his men further owing to machine-gun fire, he went forward alone, gaining valuable and definite information, and by his fine leadership and good judgement finally withdrawing his troops with very few casualties.’<sup>17</sup>

After the war Wells returned to Wellington, where he married Lynette Katharine MacKenzie.<sup>18</sup> In 1919 he joined the Fletcher Construction Company,<sup>19</sup> and it was during this period that he designed the former Hallensteins building (WCC ref 16/81.1) at 132 Cuba Street.

By 1921 Wells had established a private practice.<sup>20</sup> From the tenders advertised in the *Evening Post* during the 1920s and 1930s, it can be seen that Wells was involved in many residential builds, but was also responsible for a few shops and commercial buildings such as Francis Holmes (1929) and the “Regal” picture theatre in Karori (1928-9).<sup>21</sup> He continued in practice through the 1940s,<sup>22</sup> and died aged 63 in 1950.

## 2.0 Physical description

### 2.1 Architecture

The Francis Holmes Building is a two-storey office building built in structural brick masonry. The façade is symmetrical, has exposed brickwork and is emblazoned with the name of the building. The end bays project forward slightly, and are inset with the smaller paired windows, for greater prominence. They are also capped by a decorative frieze with an X-pattern beneath the solid parapet.<sup>23</sup>

The exterior is clad in 'Silverstream Mastertile,' and the roof is supported by timber trusses that carry the corrugated iron roof over the former store-room. This room is lit by 10 skylights

<sup>10</sup> Beverly Evans, “Christchurch City Library - Church register cards - Surname – WELLS,” December 8, 2004, <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~ashleigh/Library.BMDs/WELLS.BMDs.Christchurch.Library.html>

<sup>11</sup> *Poverty Bay Herald*, 2 September 1911, Page 4.

<sup>12</sup> “Unregistered Architect,” *Auckland Star*, 8 September 1928, Page 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Poverty Bay Herald*, 29 July 1912, Page 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Poverty Bay Herald*, 11 June 1914, Page 3.

<sup>15</sup> “Sixth Reinforcements,” *Poverty Bay Herald*, 14 August 1915, Page 8.

<sup>16</sup> “Architects and War,” *Evening Post*, 29 November 1917, Page 8.

<sup>17</sup> “For Gallantry,” *Evening Post*, 21 December 1917, Page 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Evening Post*, 26 February 1920, Page 9.

<sup>19</sup> “Unregistered Architect,” *Auckland Star*, 8 September 1928, Page 20.

<sup>20</sup> *Evening Post*, 17 December 1921, Page 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Evening Post*, 1 December 1928, Page 5; “A New Theatre,” *Evening Post*, 5 August 1929, Page 4

<sup>22</sup> *Evening Post*, 11 March 1944, Page 6.

<sup>23</sup> Architecture is an updated version of: Michael Kelly and Ann McEwan, ‘208 Taranaki Street (former Francis Holmes building),’ p.5.

alternating along the length of the roof, whilst the office has paired or tripartite casement windows at front and rear.

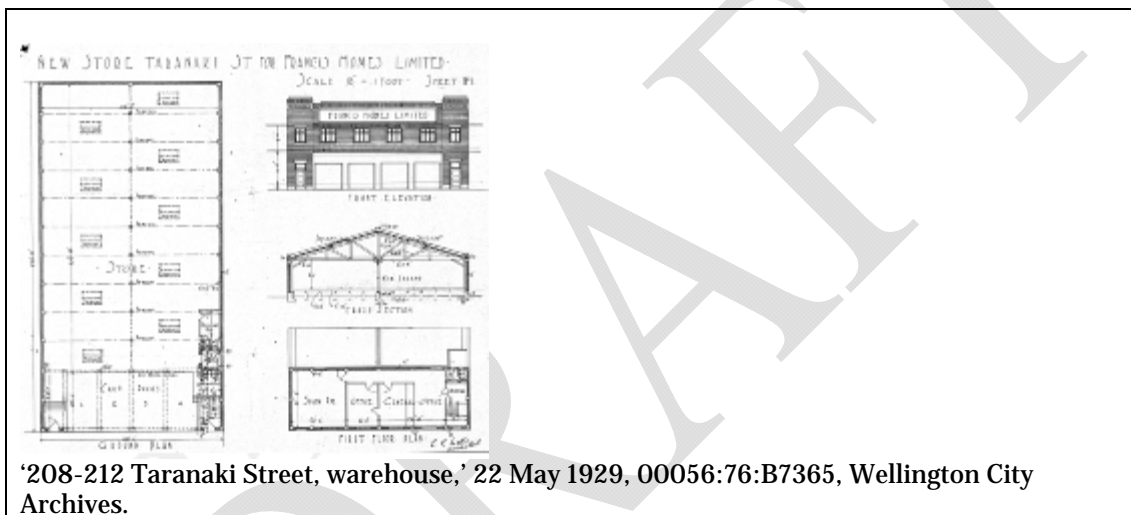
## 2.2 Materials

Not assessed

## 2.3 Setting

The Francis Holmes Limited building is situated on the western side of Taranaki Street adjacent to the corner of Taranaki Street and Arthur/Buckle Street. The building is surrounded by empty lots, with an open-air car yard to the north and an expanse of open ground laid in gravel to the south.

Current works (2013) to create Memorial Park along Buckle Street between the Basin Reserve and Taranaki Streets should substantially enhance the setting of the Francis Holmes Building in the near future.



## **4.0 References**

Kelly, Michael. 'Hamilton Chambers: Cultural Heritage Assessment.' New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Wellington, 1998.

Kelly, Michael and Ann McEwan. '208 Taranaki Street (former Francis Holmes building).' Unpublished report prepared for Wellington City Council, 2007.

New Zealand Electronic Text Centre. [http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/VUW1948\\_Spik-fig-VUW1948\\_Spik077c.html](http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/VUW1948_Spik-fig-VUW1948_Spik077c.html). Accessed 13 August 2012.

*Wises New Zealand Post Office Directory, 1971-1972.*

### **Wellington City Archives**

'208-212 Taranaki Street, warehouse.' 22 May 1929. 00056:76:B7365. Wellington City Archives.

### **Wellington City Council Records**

CT WN 417/97. Land Information New Zealand.

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### 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?*

The Francis Holmes Ltd building is a good representative example of a light-industrial building built in the Inter-War period. It is notable for its well-proportioned and symmetrical street facade, and for its restrained decorative scheme of rendered friezes and brick-on-edge bands.

**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 some value as a local landmark due to its size, scale, architectural-style, and building materials, all of which are in contrast to the empty lots and modern commercial buildings that are its nearest neighbours.

**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 has historical value due to its connection with Francis Holmes Limited, a Wellington based company which was involved in construction and the production of cement. The building is associated with the early years of Fletcher Construction Ltd, a building construction company and building products manufacturer, and with the Fletcher Trust and Investment Company Ltd.

**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?*

It is known that there has been pre-1900 human activity on the site; hence this site has potential archaeological value.

**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:**

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*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 and additions in the past 80 years and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of Taranaki Street, and to the nearby, newly formed, Memorial Park.

***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 good representative example of a light industrial building designed and constructed in the inter-war years.

***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's façade has authenticity as it has retained a significant amount of its original fabric.

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

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

The building is important on a local level because it acts as a landmark on the corner of Taranaki and Karo Drive, and for its historical association with Fletcher Construction and the Fletcher Trust.