

## **Bats Theatre**

1 Kent Terrace, Wellington City



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

### **Summary of heritage significance**

- 1 Kent Terrace is a good representative example of an inter-war Stripped Classical Commercial Building. It was designed by the high-profile architectural practice of Clere & Clere, and is a good example of how a small commercial structure can be given architectural interest with careful attention to form and detail.
- The building is historically significant for its association with the Manchester Unity Oddfellows Society and the now defunct Wellington Savage Club. It is currently home to the influential local BATS theatre company.
- BATS Theatre has great social value. It has hosted theatrical performances since the building's construction, and has been a formal theatre space since 1969. Hundreds of productions have been staged, and the theatre has provided an important independent venue for theatrical talent.

District Plan:	Map 12, 16, reference 436
Legal Description:	Lot 1 Plan A 1346
Heritage Area:	Courtenay Place heritage area
HPT Listed:	No
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Oddfellows' Building Savage Club Hall
Key physical dates:	Built: 1923-24
Architect / Builder:	Clere and Clere
Former uses:	Masonic Lodge
Current uses:	Live Performance Art
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone (SR 188840)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 History

Although best known more recently as the home of Bats Theatre, this building was originally built for the Manchester Unity Oddfellows Society. The society was a 'benevolent fraternal organisation' that spread from its origins in the UK and became a world-wide institution – particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The organisation now claims to be the "largest united international fraternal order in the world under one head."<sup>2</sup>

The Manchester Unity Oddfellows Society was founded in Wellington in 1843<sup>3</sup> and met in the Oddfellows Hall, which was built on the corner of Lambton Quay and Grey Street in 1859. In 1922 it was sold to the T&G Mutual Life Society, the hall was demolished and the site is now occupied by the T&G Building.<sup>4</sup> The proceeds of this sale were divided between two branches of the Oddfellows Society, the Britannia Lodge and the Antipodean Lodge. The latter group purchased a building at 56 Cuba Street opposite James Smith Corner.

The Britannia Lodge purchased part section 366 on Kent Terrace in 1923.<sup>5</sup> The same year architect Frederick de Jersey Clere and his son Herbert were commissioned to design a two-storey building with a purpose built lodge meeting room on the first-floor, and two shops and a dance hall / theatre venue on the ground floor.<sup>6</sup>

Work was probably completed by the following year. The Lodge held its meetings upstairs and initially reserved the hall for its exclusive use. However, the Wellington District Branch Committee of the Oddfellows Society also used the hall for meetings on various occasions.<sup>7</sup> By the 1930s the Lodge began to hire the hall out for events such as concerts and dances. The building was used in this fashion for the next four decades.

In 1944 the building was sold to the Wellington Savage Club (WSC), and became known as the Savage Club Hall. The WSC was established in 1905 with the object of providing "...rational entertainment, promote good fellowship, develop the artistic talents of its members and generally to encourage art of all kinds."<sup>8</sup> Savage Clubs, which were essentially men's social and artistic clubs with benevolent leanings, sprung up around New Zealand from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and took their name from the original Savage Club, which began in London in 1857.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This report is mostly sourced from Russell Murray, 'Bats Theatre, 1 Kent Terrace, Wellington City IX', (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 53, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> 'Independent Order of Odd Fellows', Wikipedia accessed 04 March 2014

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent\\_Order\\_of\\_Odd\\_Fellows](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_Order_of_Odd_Fellows)

<sup>3</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand: Vol. 1, Wellington Provincial District* (Cyclopedia Co. Ltd., Wellington 1897), p.413.

<sup>4</sup> Manchester Unity Friendly Society (MUFS), *History of the Loyal Britannia Lodge no. 3833, 1843-1943* (Loyal Britannia Lodge, Wellington, 1993), p.13.

<sup>5</sup> J Henderson, 'Buffaloes and Bats - Manchester Unity Oddfellows Building, Heritage Inventory and Conservation Plan' (ITDN 373, School of Architecture, Victoria University of Wellington).

<sup>6</sup> MUFS, p.16.

<sup>7</sup> Minute Book 1923-1931. MSY-4728: Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows, Wellington District Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL).

<sup>8</sup> *Rules of the Wellington Savage Club* (Wellington Savage Club, Wellington, c.1925).

<sup>9</sup> Allan Thomas, 'The Savage Clubs: a Spirit of 'Bohemian Comradeship'', *Turnbull Library Record*, 31 (1998), p.43.

In New Zealand Savage Clubs took on a local flavour, and in particular adopted superficial elements of Maori culture, the most obvious being the bi-weekly entertainment evenings referred to as the 'Korero'.<sup>10</sup> In the late 1950s the WSC set up a fund to assist the study of arts practitioners, which ran until the early 1970s.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps in connection to this, the first full-time use of the hall was in 1969 when the Unity Theatre Company took exclusive use of the space. They made considerable changes to the hall including the removal of the original stage, redesigning the backstage, and building tiered seating and a box office.

By the early 1970s the WSC was struggling with falling membership and dwindling finances. In 1973 the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, which had purchased 2 adjacent sites, wanted to purchase the hall for demolition so a multi-storey building, ironically named 'Preservation House', could be constructed.<sup>12</sup> This suggestion lapsed, but it did, by planting the seed, pave the way for the sale of the building to current owners, the Royal Antediluvian Order of the Buffaloes, in 1976.<sup>13</sup>

Unity Theatre, which had leased the theatre space from WSC, continued this arrangement after the sale. However, it too was experiencing financial difficulties and was wound up in late 1978. In 1979 BATS (Bane and Austen Touring Society) took over the theatre and it has remained there ever since despite various management changes. In 1988 Nomis Productions (Simon Bennett and Simon Elson) took over BATS and in 1990 the theatre was damaged by fire. Over the next decade the lodge quietly continued its activities upstairs, while the theatre became the centre of independent theatre production in Wellington, drawing a loyal and dedicated audience.

In 2011 the Royal Antediluvian Order of the Buffaloes sold the building to Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh.<sup>14</sup> Jackson and Walsh issued a long-term lease to Bats. The new arrangement allowed Bats to occupy the majority of the building, and in particular to use the first-story hall that had once been the sole preserve of the RAOB.

In 2012 the Bats Theatre company relocated, temporarily, from 1 Kent Terrace while the building undertook strengthening and refurbishment. The process was expected to take eighteen months and Bats Theatre is expected to reopen at Kent Terrace in 2014.<sup>15</sup>

The building is important to Wellington's heritage. While the theatre has architectural and townscape value, the building's real importance lies in its standing as a cultural resource and the contribution it has made to Wellington society. The building has been a venue for theatrical productions since its construction. Its association with the BATS theatre company is particularly important. BAT plays an important role in Wellington's theatre scene; with its philosophy on the development of young talent, and of a youthful theatre audience.

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<sup>10</sup> Harison Cook, 'Notes on Wellington Savage Club' 1936. MS-0605: Wellington Savage Club Papers, ATL.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas, p.47.

<sup>12</sup> 'Report on club premises and accommodation at 1 Kent Terrace' c. 1974. 85-027-4/15: Wellington Savage Club Papers, ATL.

<sup>13</sup> CT WN305/199.

<sup>14</sup> 'Bats – History', last accessed May 2013, at <http://bats.co.nz/shows/history/>; Brendan Manning, 'A place where a few Buffaloes still roam', Dominion Post, 7 February 2012, last accessed May 2013, at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/capital-life/6370806/A-place-where-a-few-Buffaloes-still-roam>.

<sup>15</sup> 'Bats – Out of Site', last accessed May 2013, at <http://bats.co.nz/bats-201/>

Many established members of the local theatre-fraternity owe their early career success to this development model and Wellington's lively theatre-scene benefits from this experimental, supportive and altruistic approach.

Bats Theatre has played a crucial role in Wellington theatre, and fortunately, with the building's strengthening and refurbishment, it looks likely to do so for many years to come.

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications



Architect plans, Independent Order of Manchester Unity of Oddfellows Wellington (Bats Theatre), 1 Kent Terrace, as proposed. WCC Archive File 00055:18:A1754.

## 1.3 Occupation history

1923-1944	Britannia Lodge (and the hall could be hired out for events)
1944- 1976	Wellington Savage Club
1969- 1978	Unity Theatre (theatre space)
1976-2011	Royal Antediluvian Order of the Buffaloes (upstairs)
1979-2012	Bats Theatre (theatre space)
2013-2014	Building vacated for strengthening and refurbishment



## 1.4 Architect

### Clere and Clere

The Historic Places Trust entry for Frederick de Jersey Clere reads<sup>16</sup>:

Clere (1856-1952) was born in Lancashire, the son of an Anglican clergyman, and was articled to Edmund Scott, an ecclesiastical architect of Brighton. He then became chief assistant to R J Withers, a London architect. Clere came to New Zealand in 1877, practising first in Feilding and then in Wanganui. He later came to Wellington and practised there for 58 years. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1886 and held office for 50 years as one of four honorary secretaries in the Empire. In 1883 he was appointed Diocesan Architect of the Anglican Church; he designed more than 100 churches while he held this position. Clere was a pioneer in reinforced concrete construction; the outstanding example of his work with this material is the Church of St Mary of the Angels (1922), Wellington. As well as being pre-eminent in church design, Clere was responsible for many domestic and commercial buildings including Wellington's Harbour Board Offices and Bond Store (1891) and Overton in Marton. Clere was also involved in the design of large woolsheds in Hawkes Bay and Wairarapa. He was active in the formation of the New Zealand Institute of Architects and served on their council for many years. He was a member of the Wellington City Council until 1895, and from 1900 a member of the Wellington Diocesan Synod and the General Synod. He was also a member of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts.

1 Kent Terrace was designed by Clere and Clere, the architectural practice Frederick ran with his son, Herbert. The practice was responsible for the design of many notable Wellington buildings, including:

- 1928-29: All Saints Church, Abbott Street, corner Kenya Street Ngāio, 21 / 378
- Amp Society Building, 86-89 Customhouse Quay, (NZHPT Category I), (WCC 17 / 96)
- CBA Building, 328-330 Lambton Quay, Wellington (NZHPT Category II) (WCC 19 / 190/2)
- All Saints Church (Anglican and Methodist), 94 Hamilton Road, Hataitai, (Category II) (WCC 6 / 220)
- Old St Paul's Cathedral, (Additions to) 34 Mulgrave Street, Thorndon, (NZHPT Category I) (WCC 18 / 221)
- Our Lady Star of the Sea Convent Chapel (Catholic), 16 Fettes Crescent, Seatoun (NZHPT Category II) (WCC 7 / 120)
- St Andrew's on the Terrace. 28-30 The Terrace (NZHPT Category I) (WCC 17 / 288/1)
- St Gerard's Monastery, (additions to) 73-75 Hawker Street, Mt Victoria (NZHPT Category I) (WCC 12 / 143 and 144 )
- St Mary of the Angels Church (Catholic), 17-27 Boulcott Street (NZHPT Category I) (WCC 17 / 35)

<sup>16</sup> Historic Places Trust, "Fredrick de Jersey Clere", *Professional Biographies*, accessed January 29, 2013,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Cler e,+Frederick+De+Jersey>. See also Susan Maclean, 'Clere, Frederick de Jersey - Clere, Frederick de Jersey', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30 October 2012, last accessed May 2013, at <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2c22/clere-frederick-de-jersey>

- Wellington Harbour Board Head Office and Bond Store, 2-3 Jervois Quay (NZHPT Category I) (WCC 17 / 160)
- Wellington Harbour Board Wharf Office Building (Shed 7), Jervois Quay (NZHPT Category I) (WCC 17 / 161)
- Wellington Rowing Club Building Taranaki Street Wharf (NZHPT Category I) (WCC 17 / 284)
- Brandon House, 20 Brandon Street (WCC 17 / 38)
- St John's Church, corner of Bassett and Ironside Roads, Johnsonville (WCC 23 / 364)
- Chinese Mission Hall, 40-46 Frederick Street (WCC 16 / 124)
- St Mary's College Main Building, 15 Guildford Terrace (WCC 18 / 138) (NZHPT Category II)
- St Mary's Anglican Church, 168-170 Karori Road (NZHPT Category II), (WCC 11 / 170)
- Bats Theatre, 1 Kent Terrace (WCC 12, 16 / 436)
- Kelburn Chambers, 280 – 284 Lambton Quay (NZHPT Category II), (WCC 17 / 188)
- St Matthias Church, Makara (NZHPT Category II), (WCC 9 / 196)
- Fire Station Apartments, 12-14 Murphy Street (NZHPT Category II) (WCC 18 / 225)

Frederick de Jersey Clere died in Wellington in 1952, at the age of 96. He had only retired from architecture four years earlier, at 92. He is highly regarded for marrying European styles to New Zealand conditions.<sup>17</sup>

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture**

The Bats Theatre building is a small commercial building of the mid-1920s, three-storeys high, built entirely in rendered reinforced concrete and finished with timber-framed shop-fronts at the street level, a simple horizontal verandah and steel windows to the rest of the building. The front elevation to Kent Terrace is dominated by four square pilasters rising through the first and second floors; the outer two are Doric, the inner Corinthian. These support a heavy cornice with a running dentil moulding below, and a plain parapet. Greek key-patterned panels between the windows add further Classical overtones.

At ground level, two shops still have their original doors and shop-front windows with red tiles below while, in the centre, the original Takaka marble steps and oak doors (nicely patched) open into a modest hall.

Inside the hall, there are stairs on the left to the upper floors and, straight ahead, is the foyer, bar and the space used by BATS Theatre itself. On the left side, the original shop houses a small bar, on the right side the other shop houses the BATS office. Adjoining the office is a large walk-in safe with its original door and fittings intact. Opposite this, a generous open staircase ascends to the other levels of the building.

The shell of the theatre space is raw concrete, now overlaid with seating, lighting, props and other paraphernalia of a modern theatre company.

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<sup>17</sup> Susan Maclean, 'Clere, Frederick de Jersey - Clere, Frederick de Jersey', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30 October 2012, last accessed May 2013, at <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2c22/clere-frederick-de-jersey>

While the technical value of the building is fairly typical or representative of many interwar commercial buildings, it has a high level of authenticity in its front elevation, the only apparent change being the removal of an iron gate from the front entrance porch. A significant architectural feature, a glazed dome in the Grand Hall on the top floor, is still in existence.<sup>18</sup>

The building has high townscape value, as it is well scaled and discreetly enhanced by Classical detailing. It has group value in conjunction with several other significant heritage buildings in the same area, particularly the Central Fire Station next door (to the north), the Taj Mahal opposite, and the Embassy Theatre on the Majoribanks Street corner. These groups of buildings fittingly terminate the east end of the Courtenay Place precinct.

## **2.2 Materials**

Reinforced concrete

## **2.3 Setting**

The building fills the entirety of its small inner-city site. Its setting, the area of Kent and Cambridge Terraces at the eastern end of Courtenay Place is of high overall heritage value and the building both makes an important contribution to that setting and is enhanced by it. The setting has a large number of interesting old buildings and is characterised by their general low scale (two to three storeys), and masonry construction.

To the north, the immediate neighbour is the Wellington Central Fire Station (1937); on the island across the road is the remarkable 'Taj Mahal' (1928) and the view across Cambridge Terrace is closed by a number of Edwardian commercial buildings and the Hannah Playhouse (1973). The glaring anomalies in the neighbourhood are the incongruous and over-scaled apartment block to the south and the unfortunate characterless New World supermarket that blocks the view of Waitangi Park and the waterfront from the two Terraces, both of which strongly detract from the setting. Further south, the Clemenger BBDO building and the Embassy Theatre (1924) round out one of Wellington's important collections of heritage buildings; aside from the apartment building, the streetscape in this area remains much as it was in the 1940s and is of high importance and significance for that.

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<sup>18</sup> Access was not possible above the ground floor.



## Sources

Bats website. Last accessed May 2013, at <http://bats.co.nz/>

Cook, Harison. 'Notes on Wellington Savage Club'. 1936. MS-0605: Wellington Savage Club Papers, ATL.

CT WN305/199.

*Cyclopedia of New Zealand: Vol. 1, Wellington Provincial District*. Cyclopedia Co. Ltd., Wellington 1897.

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Minute Book 1923-1931. MSY-4728: Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows. Wellington District Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL).

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'Report on club premises and accommodation at 1 Kent Terrace'. C. 1974. 85-027-4/15: Wellington Savage Club Papers, ATL.

*Rules of the Wellington Savage Club*. Wellington Savage Club, Wellington, c.1925.

Thomas, Allan. 'The Savage Clubs: a Spirit of 'Bohemian Comradeship''. *Turnbull Library Record*, 31 (1998).

## 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?*

1 Kent Terrace is a good representative example of an inter-war Stripped Classical Commercial Building. It was designed by the high-profile architectural practice of Clere & Clere, and is a good example of how a small commercial structure can be given architectural interest with careful attention to form and detail.

**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 a well-known local performance venue that gains local landmark-status from its use and association with the BATS theatre company.

**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?*

It has high group value in its association with the other heritage buildings and structures, in particular, the Central Fire Station next door and the 'Taj Mahal' across the road.

The building can be seen as part of a group of nearby performance spaces that include the Michael Fowler Centre and Wellington Town Hall at the nearby Civic Square, the State Opera House on Manners Street, the Paramount and Downstage on Courtenay Place, and the Embassy Theatre on Kent Terrace.

#### **Historic Value:**

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

The building is historically significant for its association with the Manchester Unity Oddfellows Society and the now defunct Wellington Savage Club. It is currently home to the influential local BATS theatre company.

**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 is located in the Central City archaeological site reference NZAA 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?*

BATS theatre is likely to be held in high public esteem as a well-known local performing art venue.

**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?*

Bats Theatre has high cultural value for the theatre community that it supports.

**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 Wellington arts-scene is an important part of the local city 'brand' and venues such as BATS contribute to the city's sense of identity.

The building also contributes to the sense of place and identity of the Courtenay Place Heritage Area.

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

Bats Theatre is likely to be a focus of community sentiment and connection for Wellington's theatre community and the people that support that.

**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 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?*

The building retains authenticity in its exterior form and detail.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

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

Bats Theatre is important at a local level.

### 3.0 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

*Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:*

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*