

Hill House

185 Melbourne Road



Hill House Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- This house, a distinctive local landmark at the top of Melbourne Road has some historic significance for its association with local milliner Charles Hill and his family.¹
- It is of some architectural interest for its typology, mid-way between villa and bungalow and of some technical interest for its early use of casement window joinery.
- Located in a residential neighbourhood with many old houses, it retains a moderate degree of authenticity in the setting.

¹ Russell Murray, *Hill House, 185 Melbourne Road*, VIII, (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 53, 2005).

District Plan:	Map 4, reference 438
Legal Description:	Pt Lot 2 DP 9371 <i>Note: WCC encumbrance</i>
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	No
Archaeological Site:	Risk unknown
Other Names:	“Te Hiwi”
Key physical dates:	1907
Architect / Builder:	Architect: unknown, possibly builders Builder: Murdoch and Wallis
Former uses:	Residential
Current uses:	Residential
Earthquake Prone Status:	<i>Not EQP, 20/02/2013 (SR 269375)</i>

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History²

History of Charles Hill and his family

Hill House³ was built in 1907 for Charles Edwin James Hill (1832-1918), a hatmaker, who established a well-known millinery business in Wellington (now Hills Hats Ltd) that survives to this day. He was also the patriarch of a remarkably talented family.

The Hills were longstanding hatmakers. Charles Hill was the grandson of Isaac Hill b. 1784, who made straw bonnets at a time when every woman wore one. He established the business of James Hill⁴ and Sons Ltd., Millinery and Fancy Warehousemen. His son Isaac took over the business and his eldest son was Charles. When only 21, in 1853, Charles married Eliza Ann Hulbert (c1831-1905), who was a year older than him. He immediately left for Australia, but without his bride.

Once in Australia Charles Hill found work, not as a hatmaker, but as a musician in a travelling group. Music was his great love and this was the only time in his life he made a living from it. Once he resumed hatmaking, in Melbourne, his wife joined him. Their first son, Charles John, was born in 1855. John William was born in 1857 and then the family suddenly immigrated to Kansas, America. The move was a disaster and they returned to Australia, but with no capital left. On the return Edwin John was born. Back in Melbourne Charles returned to hatmaking. He established his own business in Richmond and in 1870 his son Alfred, a musician and composer and the most famous of his offspring, was born.

Eliza Hill never liked Australia – she lost two infant children, Ada and George, during their time in Melbourne – and encouraged by glowing stories about New Zealand, she persuaded Charles to move to Auckland in 1872. Two of Eliza's uncles, also hat makers, were already in business in Auckland. Charles Hill opened a business of his own and in 1872 Mabel was born. Charles bought land for farming, but never took it up. Eventually it was sold for a profit. In 1875 the family moved to Wellington, the last major move Charles and Eliza made. The previous 20 years had been characterised by a marked restlessness.

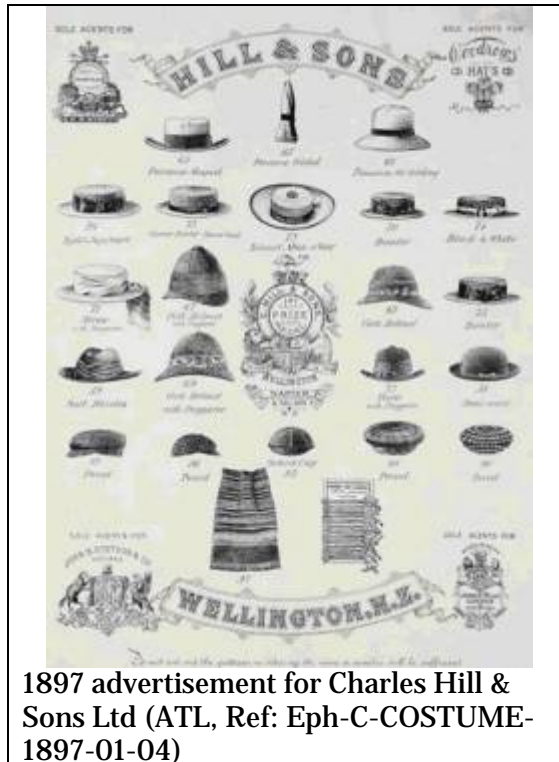
Once in Wellington Charles, now 43 and with adult sons of his own, opened Charles Hill and Sons on Lambton Quay. They rented premises and lived above the shop and workshop but soon found larger premises nearby, but still on Lambton Quay. The family later moved to a large house in Willis Street, then to Oriental Bay about 1885. The hat shop was later located in its own purpose-built premises (date built unknown) and it was still standing in 1980 (the site is now occupied by Capital on the Quay). The building's pediment contained the moniker "C. Hill and Sons, Hat and Cap Manufacturers".

² The text for this report is taken directly from: Michael Kelly and Chris Cochran, Hill House, 185 Melbourne Road – an assessment of heritage values. Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, 2003.

³ For the purposes of this report, this house has been called Hill House in honour of its first and most important owner.

⁴ The reason Isaac used the first name James for his business is not known.

The business was a profitable and longstanding success. In November 1885 the firm styled itself as “Hatters, hosiers and glovers” and had branches in Napier, Nelson and Wanganui.⁵ It was Wellington’s pre-eminent women’s millinery. Through its association with the shop the building was a considerable landmark in its own right and, during the late 19th and half of the 20th century, few Wellington women did not own a hat from Hills. The company sold its finished products in its own stores but it also sold to small drapery stores, local sports clubs and clothing manufacturers. Most of its raw materials were purchased from overseas companies.⁶ By the 1920s the firm was styled as “Hat manufacturers and hosiers”.⁷ The company was sold about 1955. It relocated to Porirua and traded as Hill’s Hats Ltd. It was sold to Singaporean interests in 1997.



1897 advertisement for Charles Hill & Sons Ltd (ATL, Ref: Eph-C-COSTUME-1897-01-04)

It is not known when Charles Hill senior retired but he was succeeded by his son Charles, who, in between his long involvement in the family business, was a noted flautist and singer. He had a house in Maarama Crescent for a considerable period. Other family members, such as William Robert, possibly a grandson, were involved in the firm by the 1920s.

Music was central to the life of the Hill family and every member of the family could play or sing. Charles (Snr) formed a family band and everyone played in it. Most juggled their music with other careers but Charles had the means to send Alfred and his brother John to study music in Leipzig, Germany.

The family’s closeness was exemplified by their housing arrangements. After Charles Hill bought his land in Island Bay, several members of the family acquired property from him and built houses there. The earliest of these was William, who bought land in 1903 (see below). He was soon followed by John, who worked for the Government and was not involved in the business, and Alfred, by then described as a professor of music. All three lived side by side in Melrose Street at one end of the block of land Charles (Snr) purchased. The three houses remained in the family’s hands for a lengthy period. Alfred Hill’s estranged wife Sadie, for instance, stayed on in their house after he moved to Sydney in 1910.

Alfred, on the back of his musical education, went on to become one of Australasia’s greatest early composers, musicians and conductors. He spent the greater part of his working life in Sydney but is recognised on both sides of the Tasman for his contribution to the development of musical life in both countries. Other members of the family became prominent citizens. Older brother Edwin (1860-1960) worked in the family business but he also made a career out of music, primarily as a singer in

⁵ Historical and biographical information on the Hill family, Charles Hill and Sons and individual members from <http://tapuhi.natlib.govt.nz/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Stone’s Directory, Wellington, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki, 1923*

Nelson and Wellington. He later took up bowls with great enthusiasm and some success. Mabel McIndoe (nee Hill) (1872-1956) was a well-known artist and a contemporary of Frances Hodgkins. She married Dunedin printer John McIndoe and one of her children was Archibald McIndoe, the famous pioneering plastic surgeon.⁸ She died in England in 1956.

Another characteristic of the Hill family worthy of note is that, once they survived infancy, they lived long lives. Charles Hill was 87 when he died, Edwin was 100, Alfred 90 and Mabel 84.

History of the house

Charles Hill was already an elderly man when he built his house in Melbourne Road. The family had occupied at least four houses previously in Wellington and at the time of his move, Charles was living in Ingestre Street (later Vivian Street). On the back of the success of his business, Charles Hill bought a large parcel of land in Island Bay, although exactly when is not yet known. It was certainly in his hands by 1903. Rectangular in shape, and bounded by Melbourne Road to the west, Melrose Street to the north, Albert Street to the east and Liffey Crescent to the south, it was comprised of 14 one acre sections. The land was shown as subdivided on early certificates of title and, later, DP 6574, but it remained mostly owned by Charles Hill until his death in 1919. The only other substantial house was on a section fronting Melrose Street, sold to John Hill in 1903. There were subsequent sales to family members but other than that there was little development of the land before his death; even by 1924 there were only four houses on the land.⁹

Charles Hill built his new house on the corner of Liffey Crescent and Melbourne Road – not then a formed road – in 1907.¹⁰ Although the suburb was developing quickly, and the electric tramway had opened two years earlier, it was still something of an outlying ‘country’ or ‘seaside’ suburb. There were houses a block away on Melrose Street – all owned by the family – and some on surrounding land to the south and east but Charles Hills’ house was comparatively isolated. No architect’s name is on the drawings so the house may have been designed and constructed by the builder, Murdoch and Wallis. The house’s ‘Australian’ appearance may have been influenced by the considerable period - 17 years - the Hills lived across the Tasman.

The extent of Charles Hill’s occupation of his house is in some doubt. One street directory (Stone’s) suggests he occupied the house continuously for 12 years. Wises New Zealand Post Office Directory suggests a series of tenants from 1909 to 1914. This is part caused by the house’s address, which did not become Melbourne Road until at least (in the case of Stone’s) 1913. Prior to that Charles Hill was listed either at Liffey Street or Adelaide Road (at a time when it continued on to Island Bay). He was certainly living in the house when he died in 1919, by which time Eliza Hill had also died. Sole possession of the house was taken by their eldest daughter Minnie Eliza Hill (1867-1928), described as a spinster.¹¹

Following Charles Hill’s death his estate was divided up, presumably as a result of the terms of his will, although the first transaction did not take place until his property formally passed to his executors – Edwin Hill and James Tripe, solicitor – in 1923.¹²

⁸ Historical and biographical information on the Hill family, Charles Hill and Sons and individual members <http://tapuhi.natlib.govt.nz/>

⁹ DP 6574, LINZ, Wellington

¹⁰ WCC Building Permit Index Card, plans and elevations, ?, WCA

¹¹ CT312/44, Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), Wellington

¹² CT210/251, LINZ, Wellington

Various family members benefited, but lots were also sold to private individuals, the last in 1943. It was as one of these transactions that Minnie Hill acquired the family house and the land surrounding it, which was later subdivided.

Minnie Hill died in 1928. Street directories suggest she may have already left the house by then¹³ but the property was placed in the hands of the Public Trustee. At the time of her death the land, Lot 8 DP 6574, encompassed what is today 183, 185 Melbourne Road and 1 Liffey Street. Tenants occupied the house for some period thereafter. In 1935 the Public Trust subdivided that land into three parts and portions were sold off.¹⁴ The Hill house and immediate surrounds became Lot 2 of DP 9371, which it remains today. In 1942 the property was sold three times in a flurry of activity, firstly to John Faine, a company secretary, and then to Mabel Milner, and finally to Frederick Warner, a shipwright, and his wife Clara. Four years later it was sold to Ivan Richardson, a carpenter.¹⁵

In 1952 the house was purchased by the WCC milk department, which was urgently searching for accommodation for its employees. The house was converted into three flats by extending the house into the extensive verandahs and converting the main reception areas into smaller spaces.¹⁶ These appear to be the only major changes to the house. Although the Milk Department ceased operating, WCC employees and then casual tenants continued to rent the property until 2001.

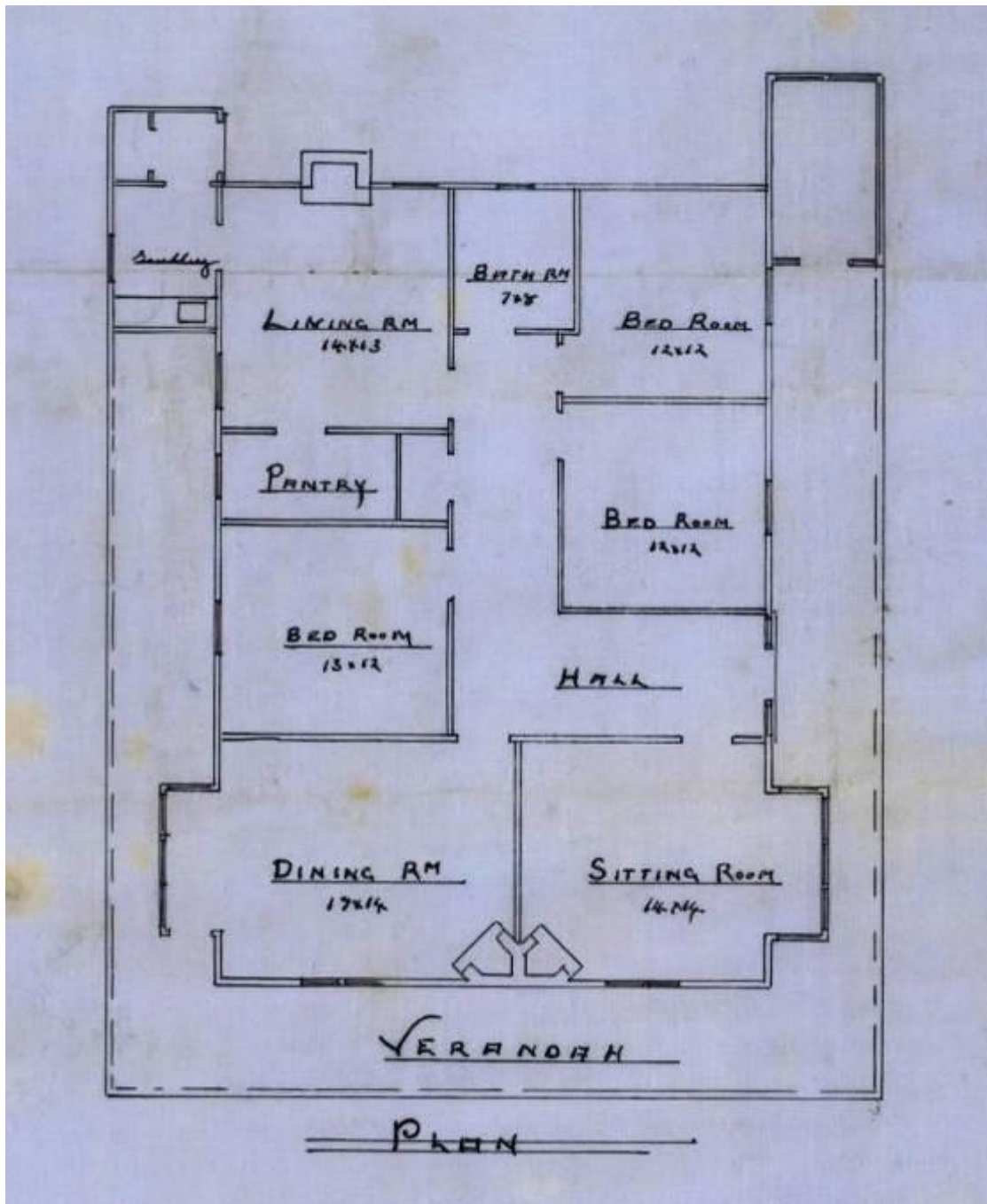
¹³ *Stone's Directory, Wellington, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki, 1924-28*

¹⁴ CT312/44, LINZ, Wellington

¹⁵ CT493/10, LINZ, Wellington

¹⁶ WCC Building Permit Index Card, plans and elevations, ?, WCA

1.2 Timeline of modifications



Detail from the 1907 plans (WC Archives, 00043:22:1318)

- 1907 Building constructed (00043:22:1318)
- 1952 House converted to three flats (00056:433:B33059)
- 2003 Proposal to demolish house (SR 91858)

1.3 Architect

Unknown - No architect's name is on the drawings so the house may have been designed and constructed by the builder, Murdoch and Wallis.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Hill House in its original form had a large hall, a sitting room, dining room, living room and three bedrooms, along with service rooms of pantry, scullery and bathroom; these spaces were surrounded on three sides by a generous verandah which had ample views and sun. The house was oriented north-south, with the main entrance on the west elevation from Melbourne Road. The ground drops away to the north, and there is a basement area under this end of the house.

Today the clarity and logic of the original plan is partly lost (although recoverable) as the subdivision of the house into three flats in 1952 took in some of the verandah area, additions were made to the west and south elevations, door openings were closed over and spaces subdivided; there are now three kitchens and three bathrooms. Some spaces do however, remain unchanged, and give a strong hint of the architectural quality of the original building. The high stud, generously sized windows including two large bay windows, and the verandah made an apparently liveable, large and comfortable house. The verandah is the single most distinguishing feature of the house, unusual in its design for encircling the east, north and west elevations, and for its roof being continuous with the low-pitched hipped roof that covers the house. Despite the additions, many of the verandah posts (with collars and brackets), are still in place, along with a plain handrail and balustrade; the underside of the verandah roof is lined in tongue and groove boarding.

The structure is conventional timber framing, clad in rusticated weatherboards with a corrugated iron roof. Windows are casement style, unusual for their detailing, large size and early date. Inside, there are significant remnants of the original finishes – panelled doors, ceiling light, tongue and groove boarding, and skirtings and architraves for instance, while the balance of the fabric dates from the 1952 conversion to flats. Some modern linings may obscure original features. In a stylistic sense, the rusticated weatherboards, wide window facings and the finishes mentioned above place the house firmly in the villa tradition of the 19th century, while the low-pitched, all-embracing roof and the casement windows look forward to the bungalow style of the 1920s. There is therefore, some stylistic innovation in the design of the house. In addition, its low-pitched hipped roof enclosing a three-sided verandah is a form that is not uncommon in Australian domestic design, and this may be an acknowledgement of the family connection with Australia.

2.2 Materials

The structure is conventional timber framing, clad in rusticated weatherboards with a corrugated iron roof.

2.3 Setting

The house occupies a highly visible site, on an intersection of four streets and on a gentle rise that gives it generous views out to the north. The setting had a significant influence over the orientation and design of the house, which maximises sun and views; as opposed to the vast majority of houses built at this time, which were aligned to the street frontage regardless of their style and setting.

3.0 Sources

Kelly, Michael, and Chris Cochran, *Hill House, 185 Melbourne Road – an assessment of heritage values*. Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, 2003.

Russell Murray. *Hill House, 185 Melbourne Road*, VIII. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 53, 2005).

Thomson, J.M. 1980, *A distant music: the life and times of Alfred Hill 1870-1960*, Oxford University Press, Auckland.

Archives

CT312/44, Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), Wellington

CT210/251, LINZ, Wellington

CT493/10, LINZ, Wellington

DP 6574, LINZ, Wellington

“Liffey Street and Adelaide [185 Melbourne] Road, dwelling”, 1907, 00043:22:1318, Wellington City Archives.

“185 Melbourne Road, convert dwelling to three flats”, 1952, 00056:433:B33059, Wellington City Archives.

WCC Building Permit Index Card, plans and elevations. WCA

Stone's Directory, Wellington, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki, 1923

Stone's Directory, Wellington, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki, 1924-28

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?

Hill House is of some architectural interest for its typology, mid-way between villa and bungalow. The crudely designed alterations of 1952 have degraded all elevations of the house, but the building has the capacity to be restored in a way that would give it high aesthetic value.

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?

This house, a distinctive local landmark at the top of Melbourne Road, occupies a highly visible site, on an intersection of four streets and on a gentle rise that gives it generous views out to the north.

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?

Hill House is historically significant for its association with the Hill family, and most particularly Charles Hill, founder of Wellington's most famous hat shop, and whose name is still associated with the company he began.

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?

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?

There is some technical interest in the house, as a well-built timber-framed building of the first decade of the 20th century. The casement window joinery is unusual for the time, while quality materials and a high standard of workmanship add to the technical value.

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?*

Located in a residential neighbourhood with many old houses, it retains a moderate degree of authenticity in the setting.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

This house is of local significance for its association to Charles Hill and his family.

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

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*