

Former Franconia House
136 The Terrace



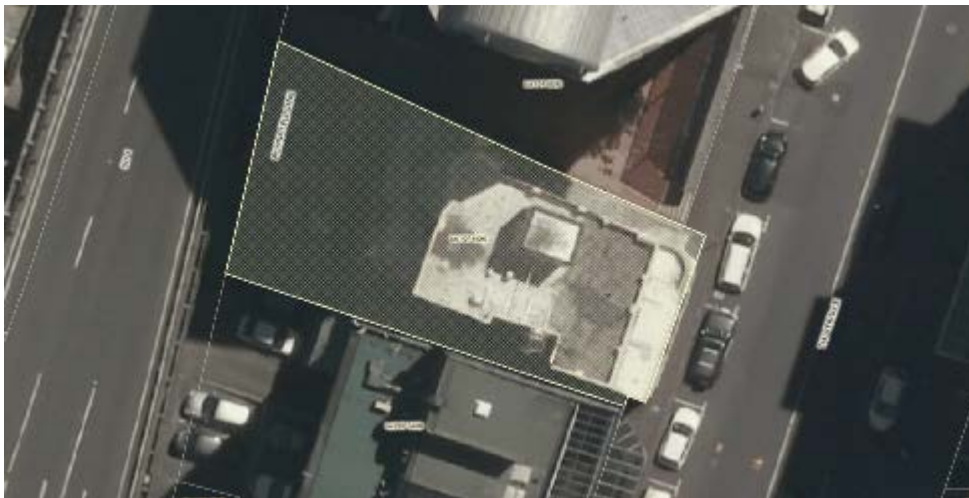
Images: Charles Collins (2015)

Summary of heritage significance

- The former Franconia House is an elegant six-storey high office building designed in a sweeping and original High Moderne style. The building is notable for its asymmetrical facades that utilise a combination of curved and plane faces and are decorated with a restrained palette of Art Deco-inspired motifs and ornamentation.
- The building with its striking Moderne north, east and west facades is a local landmark on The Terrace. It has group value with other surviving early apartment buildings on The Terrace, including Braemar at the north end.
- The building has historic significance as an early example of high-density inner city living and as a good surviving example of the work of its designer, the well known architect Edmund Anscombe.

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 452 (DPC 53)
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 64269
Heritage Area:	None 2013
HPT Listed:	Category II ref 1364
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Lintas House Invincible House Challenger House Franconia House
Key physical dates:	1938
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Edmund Anscombe Builder: L. Daniels
Former uses:	apartments
Current uses:	Commercial offices
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR191206 , Bdg StrengthInv, Bldg -, NOT Earthquake Prone

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

Franconia, designed by noted architectural firm Edmund Anscombe & Associates, was built as a set of residential flats for Topic Limited in 1938.¹ High-density residential buildings of this nature began to appear in the main centres of New Zealand in the early 1920s.² Braemar, at 32 The Terrace is a prime example in the area. The economic depression during the early 1930s slowed the construction of such buildings, but numbers picked up at the latter part of the decade as financial conditions improved.

Topic Ltd purchased part of Town Acre 461 in December 1937³ and commenced construction the next year, for a cost of £15,000. The building contained six floors. The first and second floors were divided into two flats, while the remaining floors (including the ground) were devoted to one flat only. Four garages were provided in front of the ground floor flat, two of them in tandem. All the flats were rental properties.

The tenants tended to be middle-class professionals who probably worked close by. Early tenants included a drapery buyer, a barrister, a dentist and company directors.⁴ This variety of tenant continued until the building was sold by Topic Ltd to The Tourist Hotel Corporation of New Zealand (THCNZ) in 1962.⁵ Some residential tenants remained after this, but by the late 1960s - early 1970s the entire building was devoted to commercial purposes. THCNZ was the primary tenant until 1976, when the building was sold to F.S Havill Properties Limited.⁶ Havill undertook a number of internal alterations on all floors, though the original doors were re-used and some decorative plasterwork retained.⁷ The primary occupant at this time was advertising firm SSC & B Lintas New Zealand⁸, and the building was re-named Lintas House.

In 1987 it was sold to Unity Developments Limited (UDL), who proposed to demolish the building and erect a 15 floor commercial building in its place.⁹ Fortunately, UDL went into receivership before this could happen, and the building was instead sold to Invincible Life Assurance Limited and renamed Invincible House.¹⁰ Since this time, the building has been leased to a wide variety of commercial tenants. One of Wellington's most notorious murders occurred in a second floor office in February 1994, the killings of businessmen Gene and Eugene Thomas. Shortly thereafter, the original name, Franconia, was reinstated to the building.

Aside from internal alterations in 1976, other recorded changes to the building include the conversion of the garages to office space in 1973, the construction of a verandah above the foot-path in 2001, and the installation of an oral surgery on the 3rd floor the same year.¹¹

¹ Building Permit 00056:210:B18178, 1938. Wellington City Archives (WCA).

² J. Gatley, 'Going Up Rather than Out: State Rental Flats in New Zealand 1935-1949', in B. Brookes (ed), *At Home in New Zealand: History, Houses, People* (Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2002), pp.142-143.

³ CT WN339/164.

⁴ *Stones Street Directory* 1939, 1940, 1945.

⁵ CT WN339/164.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Building Permit 00058:1067:C46303. WCA.

⁸ *Wises Street Directory*, 1978.

⁹ File 00277:1049:1. WCA.

¹⁰ CT WN33C/690.

¹¹ Building Permits 00058:886:C39391, 00078:796:74918 and 00078:880:73835. WCA.

The fifth floor balcony has been enclosed with glazing in recent history. Aside from the loss of the garages and new verandah, the external appearance has not significantly changed.¹²

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1915	00053:184:10122; 136 The Terrace, dwelling
1938	00056:210:B18175; 136 The Terrace, flats constructed
1962	00058:247:C10960; 136 The Terrace, PABX room
1967	00058:537:C25915; 134-138 Lambton Quay [126-136 Lambton Quay, 47-57 The Terrace], additions and alterations
1968	00058:591:C27935; 134-138 Lambton Quay [126-136 Lambton Quay, 47-57 The Terrace], partitions, levels 1-6
1973	00058:886:C39391; 136 The Terrace, demolition of three garage fronts
1976	00058:1067:C46303; 136 The Terrace, alterations, level 1-5
2001	00078:1063:79552; 136 The Terrace, non-emergency lighting, type 4 fire protection, new toilets to ground floor
2002	SR74918 , Bldg Cons<500K, New verandah above footpath.

1.3 Architect

ANSCOMBE, Edmund, 1874-1948

Anscombe was born in Sussex and came to New Zealand as a child. He began work as a builder's apprentice in Dunedin and in 1901 went to America to study architecture. He returned to Dunedin in 1907 and designed the School of Mines building for the University of Otago. The success of this design gained him the position of architect to the University. Five of the main University buildings were designed by Anscombe, as was Otago Girls' High School and several of Dunedin's finest commercial buildings including the Lindo Ferguson Building (1927) and the Haynes building.

He came to Wellington about 1928, and he is best known here for his work as the designer of the Centennial Exhibition (1939-1940). Anscombe had travelled extensively and visited major exhibitions in Australia, Germany and America. The practice of Edmund Anscombe and Associates, Architects, had offices in Dunedin, Wellington and Hawkes Bay. Buildings designed by the firm include the Vocational Centre for Disabled Servicemen, Wellington (1943); Sargeant Art Gallery, Wanganui; and several blocks of flats including Anscombe Flats, 212 Oriental Parade (1937) and Franconia, 136 The Terrace (1938) in Wellington. As well as being interested in the housing problem Anscombe held strong views concerning the industrial advancement of New Zealand.¹³

¹² This report is an updated version of Russell Murray, 'Lintas House' unpublished heritage report for DPC 53 (2006)

¹³ WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref Appendix III; NZHPT Glossary

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Originally and best known as Franconia, this building has had several names over the years including 'Lintas House', 'Invincible House' and 'Challenger House'. It is six storeys high, the ground floor plinth surmounted by four principal floors and a top level, with the lift machine room projecting above the main roof. It is solidly constructed in reinforced concrete with a rendered finish and is trimmed out with steel windows and doors, balcony rails and the like. Although the interior has been progressively modified over the years, its outward appearance has changed little since its construction in 1938.

Designed in high Moderne style by well-known local architect Edmund Anscombe, Franconia is neatly fitted to its small site, characteristically asymmetric in plan and elevation and is replete with signature Anscombe features including the elegant combination and contrast of curved and plane faces, the use of Art Deco-inspired motifs and the dramatic triangular oriel window to the stair- and lift-well on the north elevation.

Against its narrow site, which gives the building an innately vertical proportion, Franconia has a predominant Moderne horizontal emphasis with the window head and sill lines set at consistent heights around the building to provide datum lines for each floor and by the almost strip window arrangement of The Terrace elevation; the top floor walls are further marked with incised horizontal lines. This is contrasted with strong vertical elements on each principal elevation. The three principal elevations are each asymmetric and differ markedly in composition but are unified with some clever architectural touches.

The ground floor is formed as a plinth to the building; the wall faces are set proud of the main wall lines above and are finished in a heavy brocaded render distinct from the much lighter texture applied to the remainder of the building.

The Terrace façade plinth contains the three original garage door openings, now neatly converted to fully glazed shop-fronts with large plate-glass display windows. The ground and first floor are composed symmetrically about the centre of this elevation and finish with a square corner at either side of the façade. Centred on the façade above the plinth, and engaged with it, are three large decorative pilasters running to above the top of the fourth floor windows, finished with a hint of Ionic volute. Above, at the balcony line of the top floor, run stylised triglyphs. While these elements have been read as ironic comments to the decline of the classical in the contemporary architecture of the day¹⁴ and may be so, they are a typical Anscombe gesture and are rather more likely just decoration employed to enliven the façade.

2.2 Materials

Rendered reinforced concrete
Steel windows

¹⁴ WCC Heritage Inventory record sheet 1995

2.3 Setting

The former Franconia House is an elegant New Zealand Moderne building located near the top of The Terrace. The site is quite compact as a result of the local topography, bounded to the east by the slope of The Terrace, to the west by a small cliff descending to the Clifton Terrace car-park and to the south by the adjacent building. Fortuitously, the adjoining building to the north is set some distance away and the north elevation of the former Franconia House can still be appreciated from the street as intended; it has high streetscape value for its interesting design and elegant proportion and makes an important contribution to the character of the local area.

The local area has changed significantly over the years as The Terrace has evolved as a business district from its once predominantly residential character. An intermediate stage in this transformation was the construction of high-density residential accommodation during the 1920s and 1930s, of which the former Franconia House and Braemar, further to the north, are rare surviving examples. Intensive development from the 1950s onward has removed most of the original buildings from the main part of The Terrace. The Wellington motorway, completed in the late 1970s, further changed the nature of the area. Originally overlooking a deep bush-clad gully and on to the lower reaches of Kelburn, the view to the west of The Terrace is now mainly of the elevated motorway and the Clifton Terrace car-park beneath it.

3.0 Sources

CT WN339/164; CT WN33C/690.

Gatley, J. 'Going Up Rather than Out: State Rental Flats in New Zealand 1935-1949', in B. Brookes (Ed.), *At Home in New Zealand: History, Houses, People* (Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2002)

Murray, Russell. 'Lintas House' unpublished heritage report for DPC 53 (2006)

NZHPT Glossary

Stones Street Directory 1939, 1940, 1945.

WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref Appendix III

WCC Heritage Inventory record sheet 1995

Wellington City Archives (WCA). Building Permit 00056:210:B18178, 1938 ; Building Permit 00058:1067:C46303; File 00277:1049:1. 00058:886:C39391, 00078:796:74918 and 00078:880:73835.

Wises Street Directory, 1978.

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 former Franconia House is an elegant six-storey high office building designed in a sweeping and original High Moderne style. The building is notable for its asymmetrical facades that utilise a combination of curved and plane faces and are decorated with a restrained palette of Art Deco-inspired motifs and 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?*

The building with its striking Moderne north, east and west facades is a local landmark on The Terrace.

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 group value with other surviving early apartment buildings on The Terrace, including Braemar at the north end.

Historic Value:

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

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

The building has historic significance as an early example of high-density inner city living and as a good surviving example of the work of its designer, the well known architect Edmund Anscombe.

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

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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 has had few intrusive modern alterations or additions (with the notable exception of the conversion of the ground floor garages to retail units) over the past 75+ years and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of The Terrace.

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 an Inter-war apartment block.

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 has a reasonable level of authenticity in its external form and internal service core.

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 of local significance.

5.0Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	Y	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	none	
Plan change?	53	
Heritage Area Report	none	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	none	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	Y	
HPT files	Y	
Conservation Plan	none	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	y	

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*