

## **Former Herd Street Post & Telegraph Building**

22 Herd Street



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

### **Summary of heritage significance**

- Designed by Edmund Anscombe, a prominent architect of the time, this building has architectural value as one of Wellington's most significant Inter-War Streamlined Art Deco/Art Moderne style office buildings.
- The building has historic significance for its association with the Post Office and the development of that organisation.
- The style, scale, and isolation of the building give it significant townscape value and outstanding landmark presence.

District Plan:	Map 12, 16, reference 456
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 360932
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Category II, reference 7419
Archaeological Site:	Reclaimed land
Other Names:	Chaffers Dock Apartments
Key physical dates:	1938-1939
Architect / Builder:	Edmund Anscombe & Associates / Builder unknown
Former uses:	Offices
Current uses:	Residential, retail, offices
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not EQP (SR 269069)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History<sup>1</sup>

This imposing building, located on Wellington's waterfront, was constructed between 1938 and 1939 for the Post and Telegraph Department.<sup>2</sup> This department was established in 1881 to handle postal matters, but as communications technology developed its services quickly expanded.<sup>3</sup> By the 1930s the Head Office in Wellington had become over-crowded and extra space was required.

Cabinet approved the erection of a five-storey line and office building in Herd Street at an estimated cost of £88,000 in December 1936.<sup>4</sup> Soon after, noted architectural firm Edward Anscombe & Associates was engaged to design the building. However, nothing happened for approximately ten months, by which time the pressure on existing accommodation had become more acute. This was exacerbated by the fact a P & T Department building on Stout Street had been taken for the construction of the new Defence Headquarters. The final go-ahead was given in late 1937.

The land on which the building was constructed, was owned by the Wellington Harbour Board. It was leased to the Crown for a period of 21 years from 21 July 1927.<sup>5</sup> Once constructed, the building housed the telegraph 'line depot' and 'faults' section on the ground floor, with the Chief Engineer's section on the top floor. The accounts branch occupied the remaining spaces.<sup>6</sup> A tennis court was built on the roof.

According to an account in *Home and Building*:

The new building – one of the most outstanding of its type in the Dominion – has been planned with a view to the utilization of maximum working facilities and providing the staff with the latest developments in well-ventilated and well-lit accommodation. Altogether it is an excellent example of modern design applied to present-day construction....<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This report is based on the following document: Russell Murray. *Former Herd Street Post & Telegraph Building, 22 Herd Street, vVIII*. (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 53, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Building Permit 00044:14:187, 1938. Wellington City Archives (WCA).

<sup>3</sup> V. Jamieson, 'The Herd Street Post Office (Determining Significance)', (ARCH 489, Victoria University of Wellington, 1996), un-paginated.

<sup>4</sup> ABWN 889 w5021/85 20/1118 pt.1. Archives New Zealand (ANZ).

<sup>5</sup> CT WN383/19.

<sup>6</sup> Jamieson.

<sup>7</sup> *Home and Building*, vol. IV No. 2 March 1940, p.21.



Herd Street Post Office building, 1939 (Alexander Turnbull Library, Ref: 1/1-039298-G).

Various alterations were made over the years. The tennis court was sacrificed for a sixth floor in 1942.<sup>8</sup> It appears that this addition was required for secret war-time communication activities. Correspondence was marked 'secret'. Various internal changes were made to accommodate changing technology and staffing requirements, but many of the original features remained.

The building was used by the P & T Department, later re-named New Zealand Post Office, until 1987, and it is assumed that many minor changes were carried out over the intervening years to suit the various changes of purpose and departmental reshuffles that characterised that organisation.<sup>9</sup> That year the Post Office was split into three divisions<sup>10</sup> as part of wider, far-reaching changes to government departments associated with the Fourth Labour Government. Telecom was created to manage the telecommunications business, and was the leaseholder until approximately the late 1990s, using the building mainly for accounting purposes.<sup>11</sup>

In the mid 2000s the building underwent a radical redevelopment. The alteration work changed the building from commercial use to a mixture of private and public uses, and definitively ended its life-long association with the Post Office and Telecom.

---

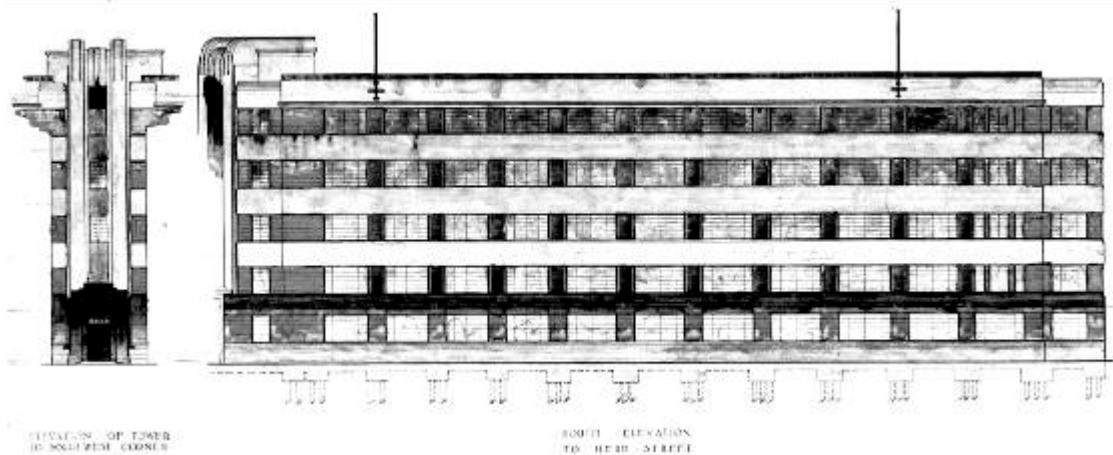
<sup>8</sup> ABWN 889 w5021/85 20/1118 pt.1. ANZ.

<sup>9</sup> Jamieson.

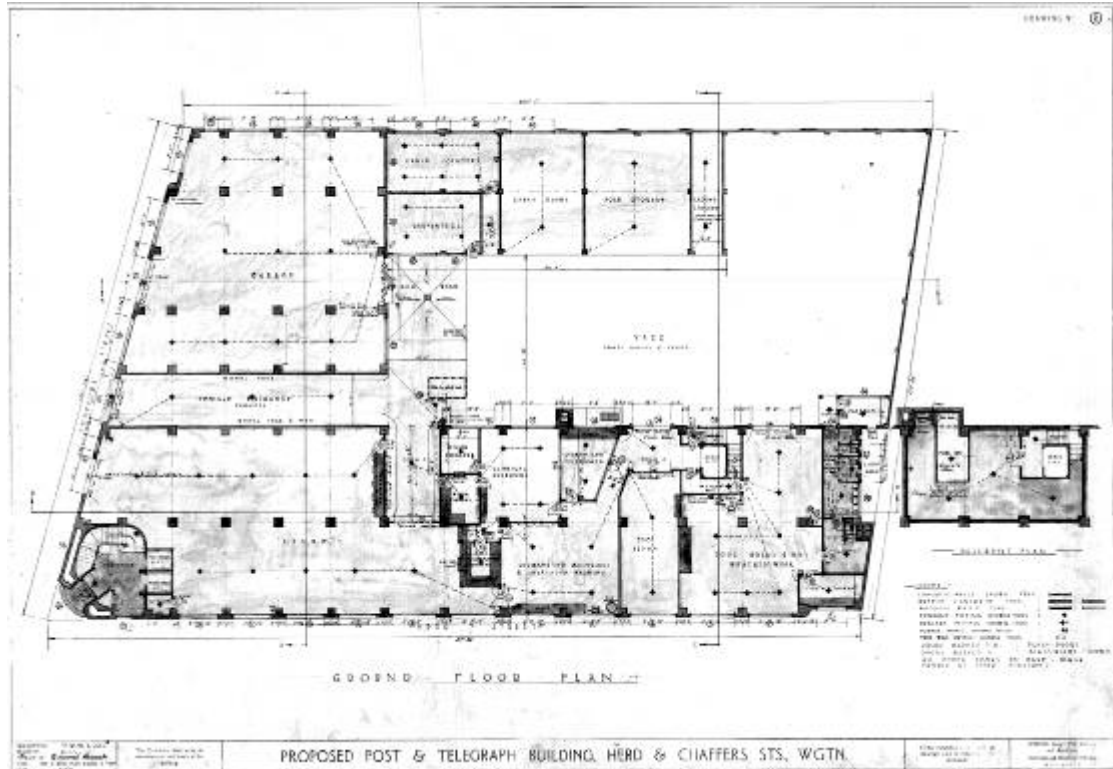
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> CT WN14B/71. Telecom New Zealand is recorded as the leaseholder in 1997. Neither this title, nor the current title (CT WN5A/823) record when this lease was relinquished.

Alterations included stripping out the entire interior (save for the main stairwell), replacement of all the original steel windows with aluminium (of much greater visual bulk), enlargement in height of all the windows on the seaward side to provide for apartment balconies (and the addition of balconies), the addition of a further top storey on the roof and construction of a new, slightly separate, glassy three-storey block on the seaward side for still more residential accommodation. As part of the redevelopment, the building was strengthened to the then current code.



South elevation, detail from the 1937 plans (WC Archives 00044:14:187)



Ground floor, detail from the 1937 plans (WC Archives 00044:14:187)

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications

1938-39	Building constructed (00044:14:187)
1942	Sixth floor added, various internal changes
1999	Removal of concrete panels for new roller doors (00078:290:58006)
c2005-2007	Building strengthened, two floors added, and redeveloped to house apartments, retail, and offices.

## 1.3 Occupation history

1939-1987	Post & Telegraph Department (later re-named New Zealand Post Office)
1987-late 1990s	Telecom
Unknown	
Unit titled	

## 1.4 Architect

### Anscombe, Edmund

Edmund Anscombe (1874-1948) was a prominent architect in inter-war New Zealand. His embrace of new styles was remarkable in a man approaching retirement and his greatest work, of which his own apartment building is an example, took place later in his life. 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 well as Otago Girls' High School and several of Dunedin's finest commercial buildings including the Lindo Ferguson Building (1927) and the Haynes building.

Anscombe moved to Wellington about 1928 and was known for his work as the designer of the Centennial Exhibition (1939-1940). Anscombe had travelled extensively and had visited major exhibitions in Australia, Germany and America. The practice of Edmund Anscombe and Associates, Architects, had offices in the Dunedin, Wellington and Hawkes Bay districts, and Anscombe's buildings include the Vocational Centre for Disabled Servicemen, Wellington (1943), Sargent Art Gallery, Wanganui, and several blocks of flats including Anscombe Flats, 212 Oriental Parade (1937) and Franconia, 136 The Terrace (1938), both in Wellington. As well as being interested in the housing problem, Anscombe held strong views concerning the industrial advancement of New Zealand.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust Professional Biographies, 'Edmund Anscombe,' accessed 4 September 2012  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Anscombe,+Edmund>.

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture**

The original building was a sleek Anscombe design executed in a high Moderne aesthetic. A distinctive L-shaped structure of five floors; this form was a direct result of the application of advanced ideas for contemporary office design of the day and gave a shallow plan ideally suited for good ventilation and daylighting as well as a direct means of separating activities within the plan. It was given a predominant and appropriately Moderne horizontal emphasis with a long low proportion and windows set in horizontal bands, further marked with horizontal lines scribed in the plaster render. Despite being compatibly detailed with the building, the later sixth floor still reads as an added structure. Less architectural emphasis was given to the seaward side of the building than the landward, perhaps commensurate with its siting next to the working harbour.

A distinctive Anscombe touch is the monumental entry. This is a dramatic vertical architectural element set in contrast to the predominant horizontal lines of the building and arranged at 45° in plan. The curved head of the tower would have originally projected above the roofline - but its striking architectural effect was substantially reduced by the addition of the sixth floor in 1942.

The entrance also houses the front door and, beyond, the main staircase and lift. The base of the entry is clad in dark grey granite, surrounding the entrance door and extending into the foyer. The base is surmounted by a bronze-clad triangular oriel window, a favourite Anscombe detail, rising a further four floors (although with only three windows, one at each of the stair landings); the oriel, capped with a Deco crest, is set against the background of the striking Deco-ish roll-topped tower element which rises nearly two stories above the top of the oriel. The entire entry element is given further emphasis by the adjoining walls being set back from the line of the main building walls for a few metres; the change in plane is effected with an elegant curved corner to each of the main façades.

The staircase and entry foyer within is recorded as being of high interest with an intriguing mix of terrazzo flooring and dadoes, and chrome trims and handrails. The present condition of this material is unknown as the interior was not inspected (in c.2006).

### **2.2 Materials**

The building is constructed of reinforced concrete arranged in a post and beam structural form.

### **2.3 Setting**

The building has a distinctive location on the waterfront. Established on the working harbour adjacent to the busy Clyde Quay wharf, it has always been somewhat isolated from other substantial buildings on this relatively remote site; its nearest neighbours for many years were sheds on Clyde Quay and the WCC tram and (later) bus depot, all rather lower in scale, and which permitted its distinctive architectural form to be seen in the round. This prominence in its immediate setting means the building has always had some landmark status in the area.

In its present setting the building can be seen against the developed (and developing) waterfront, including the broad open expanse of Waitangi Park and the newly

redeveloped Overseas Passenger Terminal. This setting helps to maintain the historical isolation and prominence of the building and continues its landmark status; this isolation will continue, at least until proposals for development of the surrounding area place substantial new buildings very close to it and radically change the setting.

### **3.0 Sources**

Historic Places Trust, *Post and Telegraph Building* (Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report), October 1, 1997. Available online: <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=7419>

New Zealand Historic Places Trust Professional Biographies, 'Edmund Anscombe,' accessed 4 September 2012  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Anscombe,+Edmund>.

Ian Bowman, *Herd Street Post Office: Report on Heritage Values* (Unpublished report, prepared for Wellington City Council, no date).



#### **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 Herd Street Post & Telegraph Office has architectural value as one of Wellington's most significant Inter-War streamlined Art Deco/Art Moderne style office buildings.

**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 somewhat isolated with Te Papa as the only other large building in the vicinity. As such, the style, scale, and isolation of the building give it significant townscape value and outstanding landmark presence. Its magnificent setting at the northern boundary of Waitangi Park adds to its aesthetic and architectural significance.

**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 historic significance for its association with the Post Office and the development of that organisation, and as a work of the well-known architect Edmund Anscombe.

**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 on reclaimed land – post 1900.

**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?*

This building is held in high public esteem, which is evidenced by the contentious debate surrounding its possible demolition in the 1990s.

**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?*

Although the building has had some intrusive modern additions and alterations over the past 70+ years, it contributes to the sense of place and continuity of the Wellington Waterfront and Waitangi 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?*

The Herd Street Post & Telegraph Office has architectural value as one of Wellington's most significant Inter-War Streamlined Art Deco/Art Moderne style office buildings designed by one of the most prominent architects of the period.

**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?*

Since the redevelopment of the building and conversion to apartments, little original fabric remains beyond the corner entrance and the two main landward-facing façades.

**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 and regional significance for its history of use by the NZ Post Office, and for its aesthetic and townscape values.

---

## 5.0 Appendix

### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	N	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	N	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	N	
Plan change?	53	
Heritage Area Report	N	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	N	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	Y	
HPT files	N	
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

### Background research

2007 STRENGTHENING

[http://www.spencerholmes.co.nz/projects/herd\\_street.html](http://www.spencerholmes.co.nz/projects/herd_street.html)