

Former Municipal Buildings, 101 Hastings Street East

Inventory Number: 17; Property ID 21437; TRIM Reference 100467#002#0008

NZHPT Registration Number: 177

Report by Michael Kelly / Chris Cochran, August 2007; Final Audit 19 November 2009; Updated August 2012

Hastings CBD Heritage Inventory Project



FORMER MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS



LOCATION:

Street and Number: 101 Hastings Street East

City / Town: Hastings

Location Information: Corner of Hastings Street East and Heretaunga Street East

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Legal Description: Lot 3 DP 6499, Pt Lot 152, Lot 153 DP 83 and Lot 154 DP 83

Certificates of Title (includes registry): HB96/284, HB 52/53 and HB 52/54

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Architectural Value:

The former Municipal Buildings stand out as an original and eclectic piece of architecture. In the manner of the time, it draws on a mix of Classical elements and combines them in a novel and interesting manner, lending suitable grandeur to the most important civic building of the town. Interior spaces match the quality of the exterior, making it a building of considerable architectural value, of regional and national interest. It is the work of an important local architect, Albert Garnett, perhaps his most ambitious and creative work, and it is noteworthy too for its being commissioned through a competition judged by Joshua Charlesworth, architect of the Wellington Town Hall.

The building has a strong presence in the townscape, both for the impressive facades to Hastings and Heretaunga Streets, and for the contribution it makes to the nearby group of heritage buildings that includes the Hawke's Bay Opera House and Wesley Church. It is a landmark in this context, both from nearby and in more distant views.

Cultural Value:

The building has strong cultural significance, being not only the former home of the Hastings District Council, but also a retail outlet of considerable age and a place where many social functions have taken place over the years. Together with the former Municipal Theatre, the building represents the past aspirations of a coming region of New Zealand. The building's role in the rejuvenated theatre complex and the care and attention lavished on its exterior and interior have only increased public esteem for the building.

Historic Value:

The Municipal Building is historically significant for the 60 years it spent as the home of the Hastings Borough (later District) Council. This was the third building the Council had used following its inauguration in 1886, and its second purpose-built facility. Together with the Municipal Theatre, the construction of this building demonstrates a remarkable boldness on the part of the council and its ratepayers of what was then still a town.

The building has had a range of uses over its history. Its ground floor on Heretaunga Street has seen a variety of retail outlets of long-standing, parts of the first storey have been used as a social and functions venue and, after the Council left the building, it was home to numerous organisations, including government departments. Since the refurbishment of the theatre and municipal buildings into a multi-purpose function and entertainment centre in the early 2000s, the building has been subsumed into the Hawke's Bay Opera House complex, opening a new era in its history.

Technological Value:

The building has technological value for its structure. It survived the Hawke's Bay earthquake with limited damage, and was repaired, so that it provides an insight into structural design of the time of construction (1915) and of the post-earthquake period. The steel trusses that span the council chamber and assembly hall are unusual with their configuration of members to give curved ceilings to these spaces.

HISTORY:

The Municipal Buildings were built in 1916 to provide new premises for the Hastings Borough Council. In addition to Council chambers and offices, the building included an assembly hall and several retail shops. The Municipal Buildings and the adjacent Municipal Theatre, which was built in 1915, demonstrate the growing confidence in the prosperity of the district during the early twentieth century.

Town government was established in Hastings during the mid-1880s. In 1884, with a population exceeding 500, Hastings met the statutory requirement for a town district and in August 1886 was proclaimed a borough.¹ The Hastings Borough Council met for the first time in October 1886.² One of the Council's first concerns was to provide accommodation for itself. It arranged for the construction of a purpose-built timber structure, which opened in 1888. This building housed the Council chambers, offices for the town clerk and the engineer, a private room for the mayor, and a large brick strong room. It was described as 'one of the best buildings in Hastings' at the time.³

By 1908, it was widely recognised that the old municipal chambers would have to be replaced. The Hastings Standard commented that:

It is very evident that the question of rebuilding the Municipal Chambers will have to be faced before many years. As a matter of fact the present building is insufficient for a town of the size and importance of Hastings yet, as the money available is required for other purposes, Councillors are perforce compelled to put up with the inconvenience of the time being.⁴

As well as new accommodation for the Borough Council, there was also a need for a new town hall and a new theatre. The old timber Princes Theatre, which served as Hastings' town hall and principal theatre, was thought to be a fire risk and was too small for large travelling companies.⁵

In November 1911, the Mayor, James Garnett, concluded negotiations on behalf of the Council for the purchase of two vacant quarter-acre sections that were adjacent to the old council building.⁶ The acquisition of this land gave the Council a total of 0.3 of a hectare (three-quarters of an acre), with 60 metres of frontage on Heretaunga Street and 20 metres on Eastbourne (now Hastings) Street. The Council proposed to erect a municipal building that would include offices, shops, and a public hall. Revenue from the rental of the shops and hall would be directed towards repaying the loan that would be required to cover construction costs. The erection of a theatre was also considered, but the whole project was then temporarily suspended.

In January 1914, the Council addressed the matter of funding.⁷ It authorised the raising of a £29,300 loan for a municipal building and for a theatre, which would be additional to a works extension loan of almost £70,000. In a decision that reflected great confidence in the future growth and prosperity of their town, Hastings' ratepayers approved the loan, which amounted to almost £100,000 for a population of just 7,000. Discussing the proposed new buildings, the Hawke's Bay Tribune expressed approval of the Council's leadership and commented that: 'The Municipal Buildings...are badly needed, and more especially is the

¹ M.B. Boyd, *City of the Plains: A History of Hastings*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1984, pp 62-69.

² Ibid. p 72.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Hastings Standard*, 8 December 1908, cited in Di Stewart and Associates & Salmond Architects, 'Hastings Municipal Buildings: A Conservation Plan Prepared for the Hastings District Council', June 1998, p 2.

⁵ Boyd, pp 183-184.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. p 184.

provision of a theatre suitable to the wants and status of the town a matter of urgent demand.⁸

The Municipal Theatre, designed by H.E. White, was constructed before the Municipal Buildings, opening in October 1915.⁹ The Council decided that a competition would be held for the design of the Municipal Buildings, with architects living within three miles of the Hastings post office invited to submit plans.¹⁰ The judge, architect Joshua Charlesworth of Wellington, selected Albert Garnett's design to be the best of the eight entries. Albert Garnett was the eldest son of James Garnett, who had been elected mayor in 1911 and who had died in 1913 while still in office.¹¹ After working independently for many years, Garnett went on to form a partnership with Harold Davies and Eric Phillips in the wake of the Hawke's Bay earthquake.

A tender of £12,042 by Stanley Brothers was accepted for the construction of the Municipal Buildings.¹² The foundation stone was laid on 10 February 1916. Building work lasted throughout 1916, with the Council expressing dissatisfaction at the rate of progress.¹³ The shops were ready for occupation by January 1917 and the Council held its first meeting in the new building on 13 April 1917. There were eight shops on the ground floor, with stairways leading to the Council Chambers, offices, Assembly Hall, and supper rooms on the first floor. A tower room above the Heretaunga Street entrance was used for card games when dances were held in the Assembly Hall. The latter was in frequent use until 1950.¹⁴

A number of improvements and alterations were made to the Municipal Buildings prior to 1930. The most significant work was probably the construction of the Supper Room in the space between the Municipal Buildings and the Municipal Theatre.¹⁵ This took place about 1924.

Council minutes from May 1930 show, for the first time, the Municipal Buildings returning a profit.¹⁶ The deficits of previous years were largely the result of costs incurred in carrying out alterations and additions.

The Municipal Buildings and the Municipal Theatre were damaged but not destroyed by the 1931 Hawke's Bay earthquake.¹⁷ As part of the reconstruction efforts, local architects and architects from the main centres combined to evaluate damage and design new buildings. Davies, Garnett, and Phillips were responsible for the repair of both the Municipal Buildings and the Municipal Theatre. In May 1931, the Council accepted a tender by Trevor Brother for reconditioning work, which included installation of a new service lift. The Council called for further tenders for reconstruction work in August 1931.

There appear to have been few alterations made to the Municipal Buildings between the mid 1930s and the late 1960s.¹⁸ Council records mostly concern the letting of the shops and bookings for the Assembly Hall, which continued to be a popular venue for dances, music recitals, and large meetings. Among the special events held in the Assembly Hall,

⁸ Hawke's Bay Tribune, 20 November 1911, cited in Di Stewart and Associates & Salmond Architects, 'Hastings Municipal Buildings: A Conservation Plan Prepared for the Hastings District Council', June 1998, p 3.

⁹ Boyd, p 184.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Di Stewart and Associates & Salmond Architects, 'Hastings Municipal Buildings: A Conservation Plan Prepared for the Hastings District Council', June 1998, pp 12-13.

¹² Boyd, p 185.

¹³ Boyd, p 185; Di Stewart et al, p 5.

¹⁴ Peter Shaw and Peter Hallett, *Spanish Mission Hastings: Styles of Five Decades*, Napier, 1991, p 25.

¹⁵ Boyd, p 273; Di Stewart et al p.6

¹⁶ Di Stewart et al p.6

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, p 8.

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the records include a ball to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 and a ball held in September 1956 to mark Hastings becoming a city.

By the late 1960s, consideration was given to altering the Municipal Buildings to provide more office space.¹⁹ This idea was not pursued as it was realised that a new council chamber and administration would have to be built. However, it was widely thought that the Municipal Buildings should be retained as a community facility. In 1977 and 1978, after the Hastings City Council had left the building for new premises, offices were leased to the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Works and Development.²⁰

It was at this time that major, recorded changes began to occur. Alterations were made to the entry foyer in 1977. In November 1983, a fire caused major smoke damage to the supper room, Assembly Hall and one of the retail stores and these spaces had to be reinstated.²¹ In January of the following year, the Council decided to upgrade the building for safety purposes. In June 1986, the Assembly Hall was leased to Te Waka Tapu O Takitimu Trust.²² In April 1988, approval was given for certain building works, apparently following requests for alterations by Te Waka Tapu O Takitimu Trust.

In 1994 a first floor 'bridge' was built to link with the adjacent Municipal Theatre, providing theatre patrons access to the bar and supper rooms, enabling the two buildings to be used as one facility. In May 1997, the Hastings District Council commissioned a conservation plan for the Municipal Buildings. The resulting report, dated June 1998, was prepared by Di Stewart and Associates and Salmond Architects.²³

In 2002 resource consents were sought for major changes to the building as part of a plan to establish the Hawke's Bay Opera House, a multi-purpose venue based on the Municipal Theatre and incorporating the Municipal Buildings and the vacant site to the west of the theatre.²⁴

Work on the \$4 million project began in 2002 with preliminary work on the theatre. Major work began in 2004 with the restoration and refurbishment of the theatre, and the incorporation of the Municipal Building into the development. The Assembly Hall (now known as The Assembly), Hawke's Bay's largest ballroom, was refurbished and its sprung dance floor restored. The latter was also intended to offer a place for visiting ballet and dance performers to warm up. The Shakespeare Room, formerly the Municipal Chambers, was converted into a function space, while the Supper Room was also renovated for use as a function room. Work to restore the Municipal Buildings and the Municipal Theatre was completed in 2007.²⁵

¹⁹ Ibid.; Boyd, p 406

²⁰ Di Stewart et al, p.8

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. p.37

²⁴ Promotional booklet, *The Hastings Municipal Theatre and Assembly Function Centre*.

²⁵ <http://www.hawkesbayoperahouse.co.nz/index.php?Cid=100009&PCid=100025>;

<http://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/opening+hawkes+bay+opera+house>

accessed 11 April 2008; Interpretation board 'The Hawke's Bay Opera House Story' situated outside the revamped complex.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:*Architect:* Albert Garnett*Date of construction:* 1916

Construction details: Reinforced concrete and structural steel, including concrete ground and first floors; both concrete and steel were also used in the repairs carried out after the Hawke's Bay earthquake. Trusses over the Council Chamber and Assembly Hall are in riveted steel, with curved bottom chords.

Description: The former Municipal Buildings is a structure of two storeys, originally with commercial tenancies on the ground floor and civic spaces on the first. These were in two parts: that at the Hastings and Heretaunga Street corner end, and with a formal entrance from Hastings Street, contained the council chamber with associated mayoral suite and council offices, while the part accessible from Heretaunga Street was the 'assembly hall'. While there is no special treatment for the corner of the building (compared especially with Westermans at the far end of Heretaunga Street), each of the entrances is proclaimed in bold letters as 'Council Chambers' and 'Municipal Buildings', neatly separating the two functions. Commercial uses remain today on the ground floor, and spaces on the first floor have recently been renovated for use in conjunction with the Hawke's Bay Opera House next door.

The architecture of the building is an original blend of features that means it does not fit neatly into any single descriptive style; perhaps Edwardian Baroque describes it best. Classical detail abounds, in the giant order Ionic columns that frame prominent balconies over the two entrances; in a bracketed cornice that runs the full length of both facades, and in heavy rustication of the ground floor. Circular windows in the tower, oval ('oculus') windows decorated with wreaths, and the over-sized and dramatic corbels that support the first floor balcony above the verandah, are all features of the exuberant Baroque style of the period. The balcony is a most unusual feature of the building, a ceremonial walkway along the street elevations of the building, above the verandah roof. It is a handsome building, well articulated by the architecture of the two street entrances, and by the hipped and tiled roofed tower above the Heretaunga Street entrance.

During the Hawke's Bay earthquake, major damage was sustained to the Heretaunga Street façade of the building, the portion alongside the assembly room; here the parapet and two of the three pediments on this elevation collapsed, and were rebuilt to match. Modifications have been carried out inside the building (see history) but important spaces and the exterior retains a high degree of authenticity.

ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

Element	Significance
Street facades	Architectural, aesthetic, technical
Council chamber, assembly hall	Architectural, aesthetic, technical
Structure	Technical

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Hastings Standard, 8 December 1908

Hawke's Bay Tribune, 20 November 1911

Di Stewart and Associates & Salmond Architects, 'Hastings Municipal Buildings: A Conservation Plan Prepared for the Hastings District Council', June 1998

Shaw P. and Hallett P. 1991, *Spanish Mission Hastings: Styles of Five Decades*, Napier, 1991

Promotional booklet, *The Hastings Municipal Theatre and Assembly Function Centre*.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION:

NZHPT Register: Listed as a Category I heritage item (Register No. 177)

District Plan: Listed as a Category I heritage item in the Operative Hastings District Plan (Plan declared operative 10th June 2003), Reference No. H2. The former Council Chambers are also located within the Central Character Precinct.

New Zealand Historic Places Act 1993: This site has been identified as a potential archaeological site under Section 2 of the New Zealand Historic Places Act 1993.

OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS:



Former Municipal Buildings, Hastings Street East facade (S. Akers, 2010)

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Former Municipal Buildings, corner Hastings Street East and Heretaunga Street East (S. Akers, 2010)



Former Municipal Buildings, Heretaunga Street East facade (Western side) (S. Akers, 2010)

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Former Municipal
Buildings,
Heretaunga Street
East facade
(Western side) (S.
Akers, 2010)



Former Municipal
Buildings,
Heretaunga Street
East facade
(Eastern side) (S.
Akers, 2010)

ARCHIVE PLAN(S):

There are no plans available for this building