

**Karamu Chambers, 124-126 Karamu Road North, Hastings**

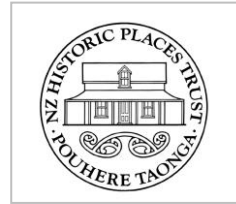
Inventory Number 60

Property ID: 21316; TRIM Reference 21316#002#0005

Draft: 20 June 2007, amended 28 October 2009; Michael Kelly / Chris Cochran; Final Audit 4 November 2009, updated July 2012 (Cochran & Murray); Final Report: November 2012, Updated 2015 by the HDC Environmental Policy Team

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## Hastings CBD Heritage Inventory Project



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### KARAMU CHAMBERS

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**OTHER NAMES:** Forsyth Barr Esam & Cushing Building



Photo: P. Huddleston, 2015

**LOCATION:**

*Street and Number:* 124-126 Karamu Road North

*Location Information:* Corner Karamu Road North and Queen Street East

*City / Town:* Hastings

*Region:* Hawke's Bay

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:**

*Legal Description:* Lots 17, 18 and 19 DP 2795

*Certificates of Title (includes Registry):* HBB4/122, Hawke's Bay Registry

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### **SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

#### *Architectural Value:*

Karamu Chambers has architectural value as an excellent late example of the Stripped Classical style; it is almost completely free of ornament (abstracted column capitals are an exception), but there is no lack of visual interest because of the strong, bold form of the building and the inter-play of horizontal and vertical elements that also shows a strong Moderne influence. It is a confident design, the work of a locally important architectural practice that designed significant buildings in the city after the Hawke's Bay earthquake.

The strong form and the sweeping curve of the corner of the building, give it a presence on a busy intersection in the Central Business District (CBD). It is pivotal in this streetscape, linking groups of interesting period buildings, of similar age, scale and style, in Karamu Road and Queen Street.

#### *Social Value:*

The association of the building with Esam Cushing and Co. and Sir Selwyn Cushing gives it a profile in Hastings, particularly as it occupies a prominent corner. The firm's staff and clients will also have a connection to the building.

#### *Historic Value:*

Karamu Chambers has had just two owners over its life and both are historically significant. The building was constructed for a group of local investors in the wake of the Hawke's Bay earthquake. Karamu Chambers Ltd. was comprised of seven directors, three of whom were members of the Chambers family, an important farming family from Havelock North. During their ownership the building was occupied by a number of mainly commercial lessees. Included among them was the Te Mata Park Trust Board, established after the Chambers family donated land for a park at Havelock North. The building has been owned since 1969 by Devon Agencies and occupied from that time by Esam Cushing (now Forsyth Barr Esam & Cushing). Both of these companies are partly owned by Sir Selwyn Cushing, a prominent New Zealand business leader. Esam Cushing has been a significant provider of financial services and investment advice in the Hawke's Bay, and nationally, for a number of decades.

#### *Aesthetic Value:*

The aesthetic value of Karamu Chambers derives from both its architectural qualities and from its very important contribution to the townscape qualities of the area. Its strong form, and the sweeping curve of the corner of the building, gives it a distinctive presence on a busy intersection in the CBD. It is pivotal in this streetscape, linking groups of interesting historic buildings, of similar age, scale and style, in Karamu Road and Queen Street. It is also visually linked with period buildings on other corners of the intersection, so that Karamu Chambers is at the heart of an important heritage area.

#### *Technological Value:*

Karamu Chambers is a high quality commercial building of the mid-1930s, well designed and well built. It is therefore valuable as an example of the building technology of the time. The survival of the original drawings and engineering calculations enhance its technical interest.

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### HISTORY:

The present building on the prominent Karamu Road-Queen Street East corner site has had two distinct histories. Prior to its construction the site was occupied by the National Bank's first purpose-built Hastings branch<sup>1</sup>. The Bank bought the land in 1914<sup>2</sup> and the branch opened two years later.<sup>3</sup>

The corner premises were used by the bank for the next decade and a half until the Hawke's Bay earthquake struck on 2 February 1931. The ensuing fire burned the building's interior out and that coupled with the water damage caused by fire fighting left the building unable to be reused.<sup>4</sup> The National Bank soon joined its counterparts in a temporary building erected for the resident banks behind the Bank of New South Wales at the corner of Market and Queen Streets and never returned to its original site, eventually moving to new premises in Market Street in 1934.<sup>5</sup>

In 1934 Karamu Chambers Ltd was established in Hastings with the primary object of buying the property on the corner of Karamu Road and Queen Street East for development.<sup>6</sup> The first directors were Harry Abbott, a well-known builder, Frank Candy, company manager, and Hugh Chambers, a farmer at Mokopeka, and a member of the well-known and influential Chambers family of Havelock North.<sup>7</sup> Two other members of the Chambers family held shares, and there were seven shareholders in all. The three largest shareholders were the Chambers. The company bought the property from the National Bank on 28 November 1934.

Karamu Chambers Ltd. contracted architects Davies and Phillips to design a building on the site. Work seems to have been completed in 1935.<sup>8</sup> Davies and Phillips were successful architects in their own right before teaming up in the wake of the Hawke's Bay earthquake to work on Hastings' reconstruction, sometimes in collaboration with Alfred Garnett, another important early 20<sup>th</sup> century Hastings architect. Davies and Phillips continued their partnership long after the Depression and many buildings designed by them still stand in Hastings.

Karamu Chambers was an investment property – apparently the only one the company built or owned – and for the 40 years that occupants were recorded by street directories, they remained fairly constant. Early tenants included Hallett and O'Dowd, solicitors, who occupied the ground floor, under various permutations, for the entire period, while the second floor housed Albert Palmer, an accountant, Kelsey and Rogers, share-brokers, and Henry Davies, a surveyor.<sup>9</sup> After World War II the Te Mata Trust Board, established to administer Te Mata Park as a public park and public recreation ground, became a long-standing tenant on the first floor. The land for the park was donated by the Chambers family (in 1927)<sup>10</sup> so the Board's presence in the building was no coincidence. In the 1950s, the Yorkshire Insurance Co. and Nicol and Stevenson, seed brokers, also took offices on the first floor.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The National Bank was founded in London in 1872 and opened its first branches - in Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch in 1873.

<sup>2</sup> CT HB 48/261, Land Information New Zealand, Hawke's Bay Land District.

<sup>3</sup> Michael, *From Disaster to Recovery: The Hastings CBD 1931-35*, Havelock North: Michael Fowler Publishing, 2007, pp.40-41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Karamu Chambers Ltd. 1934-1971, ACCC Series 7605 W5010 Item 14, 1934/38, Archives New Zealand.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> As the property was bought in Nov. 1934, it can be assumed that construction began some time after that.

<sup>9</sup> *Wise's New Zealand post office directory*, H Wises & Co, Dunedin, 1946.

<sup>10</sup> [www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/hastings/hastingshistory.pdf](http://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/hastings/hastingshistory.pdf) [viewed 21/11/2007]

<sup>11</sup> *Wise's New Zealand post office directory*, H Wises & Co, Dunedin, 1959/60.

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In 1969, Karamu Chambers Ltd. sold the building to Devon Agencies,<sup>12</sup> and two years later the original company was dissolved.<sup>13</sup> Devon Agencies was part owned by Selwyn (now Sir Selwyn) Cushing and bought the building to house the offices of Esam Cushing, which later also took over the building next door at 125 Queen Street East.<sup>14</sup>

Cushing's involvement with Esam Cushing began in 1960 when he became a principal in the firm, along with his business partner Stan Esam.<sup>15</sup> Sir Selwyn Cushing is a successful Hawke's Bay businessman with many commercial interests. In addition, he has held major positions in public organisations and companies, include chairing the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Brierley Investments and Air New Zealand. Forsyth Barr Esam & Cushing remains the occupier of the building.

### **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:**

*Architect:* Davies & Phillips

*Builder:* Totterdell Ltd

*Date of construction:* 1935

*Construction details:* Karamu Chambers is a reinforced concrete building, two storeys above ground and with a basement space. The main structural elements are in reinforced concrete, including foundations, floors and walls; most of the roof, and internal partitions, are timber-framed.

*Description:* Karamu Chambers occupies the south-west corner of the Queen Street/Karamu Road intersection. Although relatively compact in plan, the building has a very strong presence in the streetscape, enhanced by its prominent corner site.

The building is a blend of Stripped Classical and Moderne in style, the façade divided into three main parts: the middle section is a smooth curve around the corner, while on either side is a recessed section with tall columns rising through two floors; there are six of these in the Karamu Road elevation, and four in the Queen Street elevation. A spandrel panel forms a strong horizontal band linking the sections; the whole of the framework of the composition, major columns and parapet, is devoid of any decoration, the parapet itself forming one long horizontal from end to end.

There is a door at the end of each elevation, that on Queen Street giving access to the stairs to the first floor. While today there are general office spaces on both floors, the original drawings show a waiting room and surgeries on the first floor.

As was common practice following the Hawke's bay earthquake, Karamu Chambers is built in reinforced concrete. The street elevations are finished in smooth cement plaster; this was originally lined out as stonework and coloured with pigments. It is now painted. Exterior joinery was specified as redwood timber (although the windows today are largely steel and, showing no sign of being replacement windows, are very likely to be the originals), while interior joinery was heart rimu. Window-mounted air conditioners are discordant modern protrusions on the façade.

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<sup>12</sup> CT HB B4/122, Land Information New Zealand, Hawke's Bay Land District.

<sup>13</sup> Karamu Chambers Ltd. 1934-1971, ACCC Series 7605 W5010 Item 14, 1934/38, Archives New Zealand.

<sup>14</sup> Due to the absence of relevant information at Hastings District Council, the nature of any changes made to the building by either owner is not known at this stage.

<sup>15</sup> 'Good Corporate Citizen' in [www.hbrc.govt.nz/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=fJrZv%2FeXXQg%3D&tabid=337&mid=1813](http://www.hbrc.govt.nz/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=fJrZv%2FeXXQg%3D&tabid=337&mid=1813) [viewed 21/11/2007].

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The interior of a number of the offices on the ground have been modernised, and the upper floor fittings date from approximately 1970s/80s. Surviving features of interest on the interior are the strong rooms, two on each floor<sup>16</sup>.

Karamu Chambers is a high quality commercial building of the mid-1930s, well designed and well built. The survival of the original drawings and engineering calculations enhance the technical interest of the building.

**ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:**

Element	Significance
Two street facades	Aesthetic, townscape, technical, historic

**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:**

Certificates of Title HB 48/261 & HB B4/122, Land Information New Zealand, Hawke's Bay Land District.

Fowler, Michael, *From Disaster to Recovery: The Hastings CBD 1931-35*, Havelock North: Michael Fowler Publishing, 2007.

'Good Corporate Citizen' in [www.hbrc.govt.nz/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=fJrZv%2FeXXQg%3D&tabid=337&mid=1813](http://www.hbrc.govt.nz/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=fJrZv%2FeXXQg%3D&tabid=337&mid=1813).

Karamu Chambers Ltd. 1934-1971, ACCC Series 7605 W5010 Item 14, 1934/38, Archives New Zealand.

*Wise's New Zealand post office directory*, H Wises & Co, Dunedin, vols 1940 - 1959-60.

[www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/hastings/hastingshistory.pdf](http://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/hastings/hastingshistory.pdf) [viewed 21/11/2007].

*HDC Permit records:*  
"Office building Queen Street for Bank Chambers Ltd.", not dated, Davies and Phillips Registered Architects

**OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION:**

*NZHPT Register:* Karamu Chambers is a Category II historic place (Register No. 1081).

*District Plan Listing:* Listed as a Category II historic place in the Operative Hastings District Plan and located within the Central Character Precinct (Plan declared operative 10<sup>th</sup> June 2003)

*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.

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<sup>16</sup> Based on site visit Imelda Bargas, March 2008

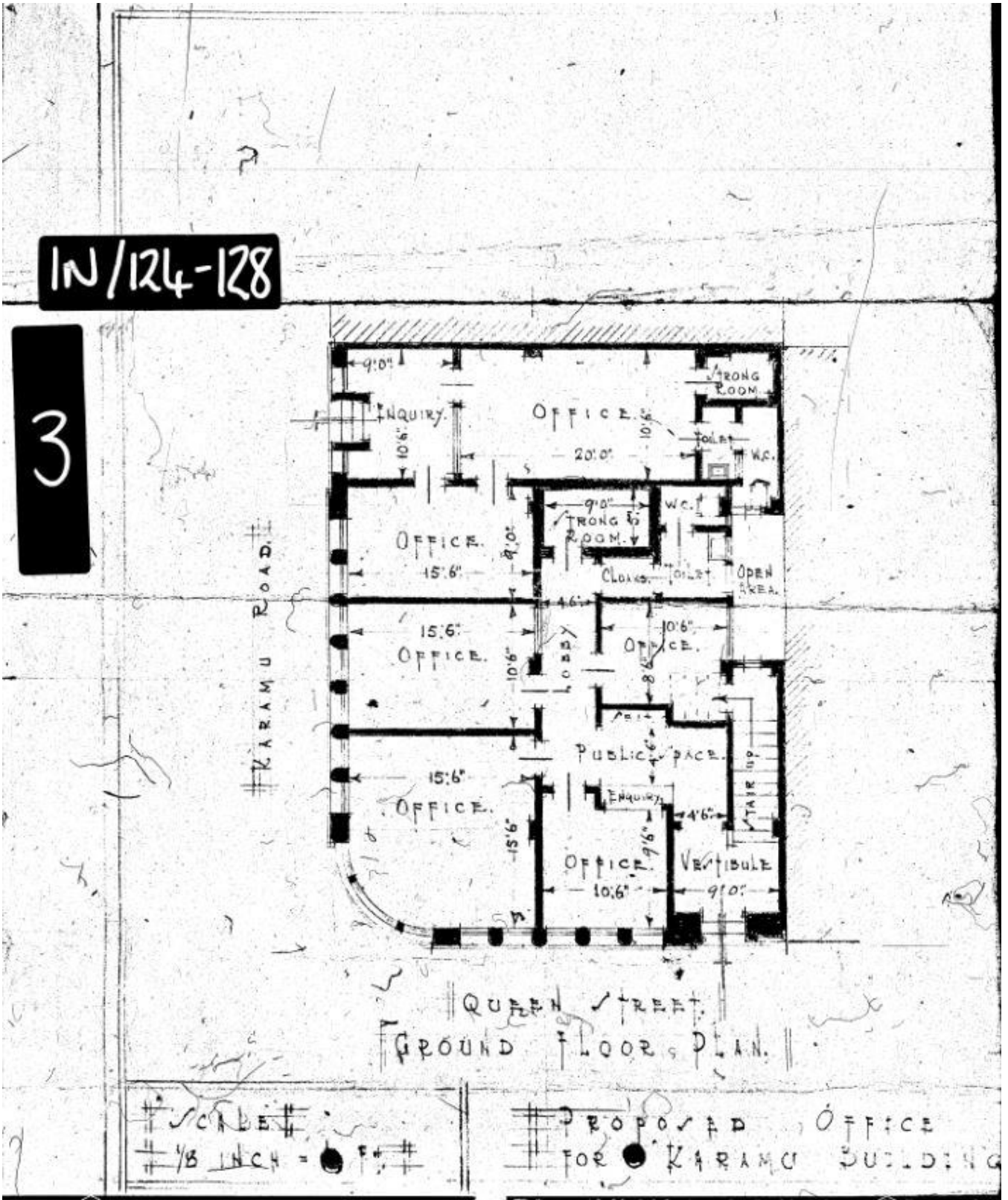
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**ARCHIVE PLAN(S):**



Ground Floor Plans, 1935

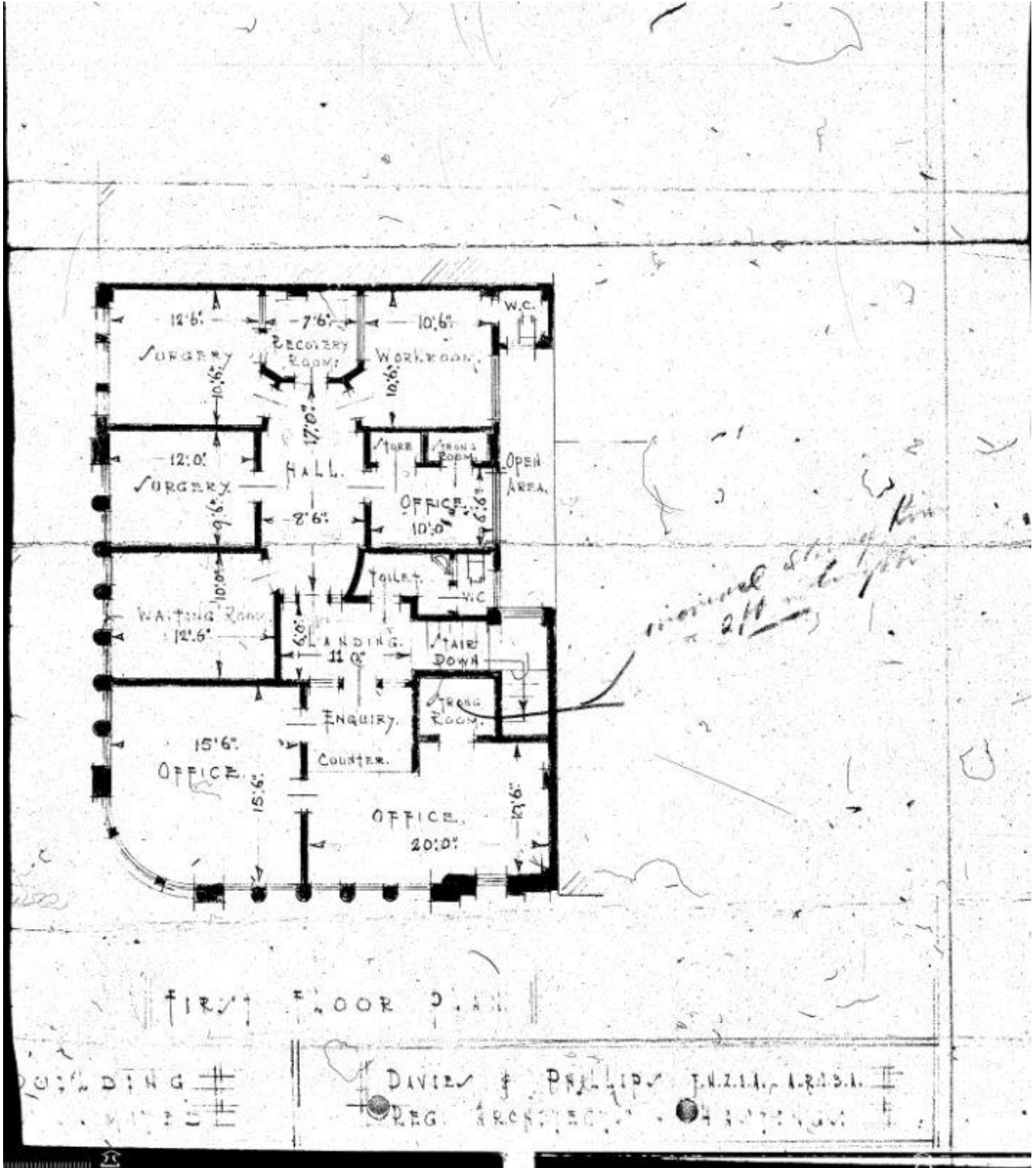


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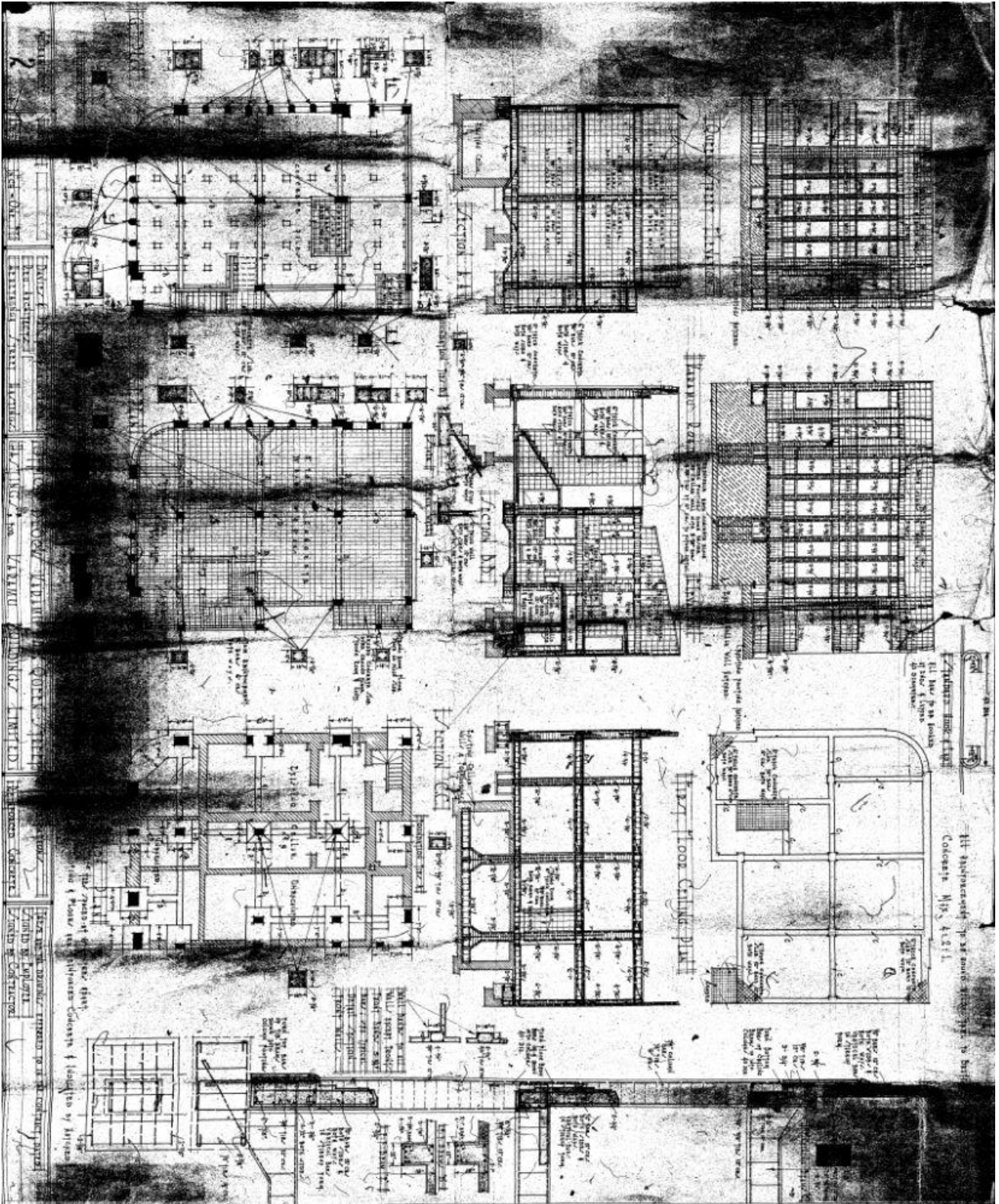
First Floor Plans, 1935

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Original Plans, 1935