

Hastings CBD Heritage Inventory Project



THE MUNICIPAL POWER HOUSE

OTHER NAMES: Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board Building



Photo: K Pascall, July 2012

LOCATION:

Street and Number: 301 Heretaunga Street East (Council) or 317 Heretaunga Street East (business). Frontage is on Eastbourne Street East.

City / Town: Hastings

Region: Hawke's Bay

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Legal Description: Lot 2 DP 304502

Certificate of Title (includes Registry): HB 18115, Hawke's Bay Registry

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Architectural Value:

The Power House building on Eastbourne Street was designed and built in 1912. The building is in a forthright Edwardian neo-Classical style appropriate to its original use and era and it has architectural values for this.

Historical Value:

The building is the source of the first public electric power supply in Hastings. It is a distinctive element of infrastructure that is a significant part of the history of both the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board and the development of Hastings and the wider area. It is also a significant remnant of Hastings from the period prior to the 1931 earthquake.

Aesthetic Value:

The building has a strong presence in the streetscape of Eastbourne Street East, and is part of an important wider complex of buildings on the same site associated with the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board.

Social Value:

The Power House played an important role in Hastings enabling many households to receive electricity for the first time.

HISTORY:

The first public power supply in Hastings was established in 1912 by the Borough Council. Diesel generators, presumably housed in the present building in Eastbourne Street, supplied the electricity. As demand for electricity grew throughout the Hawke's Bay area, in 1923 the Hawke's Bay County Council investigated the possibility of setting up an organisation to purchase power from the nascent national grid and supply it to the region's local authorities. The Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board was formed in 1924, under the Electric Power Boards Act of 1918, with Mr H H Wylie as the chief executive. The Board's role was initially to supply power to the rural areas of the county as each of the urban areas had their own supplies¹. The Board began to supply electricity in 1925;² by 1927 Hastings had begun to purchase power from the Board, and by 1929 Hastings had an electric street lighting network;³ on 1 October 1934, the Board took over reticulation in Hastings. However, following four years of discussion, the County Council sold the power board in 1936.⁴

¹ Outline history of the board found at Unison (lines company) <http://www.unison.co.nz/default.asp?t=7>

² Fowler, M 2007 *From Disaster to Recovery: the Hastings CBD 1931-1935*, Michael Fowler Publishing Limited, Havelock North pp. 185-187

³ Ibid.

⁴ Boyd, pp. 289-290, 294, 347.

Reticulation and infrastructure throughout Hawke's Bay remained the province of the Power Board until the early 1990s, and it is thought that the Power House remained an important part of the Board's infrastructure over much of that period. In 1993 the ownership of the generation and distribution infrastructure changed to Hawke's Bay Power Limited, owned by the Hawke's Bay Power Consumers' Trust (HBPCT), which provided for continued "consumer ownership" of the company. Under the Electricity Industry Reform Act 1998 the retail business of HBPL was sold to Contact Energy in 1998 and HBPL was subsequently renamed Hawke's Bay Network Ltd. After a series of acquisitions and mergers, on 17 April 2003, the company changed its name to Unison Networks Limited (trading as Unison), but still remained wholly owned by HBPCT.

The Power House appears to have been built in 1912, the date inscribed in the Eastbourne Street parapet. To date, neither the designer nor the builder has been identified. A substantial reinforced concrete and brick structure, the building apparently withstood the 1931 earthquake, although it sustained some damage⁵. However it remained operational and provided an alternative source of power for the Hawke's Bay - much needed as other power stations had been badly damaged and were out of service⁶. The Board had retained the old diesel generators in the power house as an emergency supply⁷. The emergency supply also allowed water to be pumped into the mains⁸ after the earthquake, possibly from the reservoir under the building.

The history of change of the building is not currently well known. The switch-gear part of the building reads quite distinctly as an addition to the Power House, but no confirming records have been located. Surviving drawings by architects Davies & Phillips, probably ca. early 1930s, show the installation of an overhead crane system and modest changes to the interior of the Power House, with the switch-gear section clearly present at the time; other drawings show a store addition on the east side that backed on to the Municipal Theatre and adjacent Municipal buildings (although no trace of this can be seen today).

It is not known exactly when the Power House building stopped being used for generation or standby supply. The building is presently available for lease, described as warehouse space.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Architect: Unknown

Builder: Unknown

Date of construction: 1912 (Power House)

Construction details: Reinforced concrete structure, brick, steel truss roof, corrugated roofing, timber windows

Description: The Power House building is located at the rear of the substantial lot once occupied by the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board. The site contains a number of buildings and structures that illustrate the long history of the Power Board, including the Power House, the former Head Office building (an Art Deco structure ca. 1938, currently

⁵ Wright, M 2001, Town and Country: The History of Hastings and District, Hastings District Council

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Fowler, pp186.

⁸ Ibid

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known as the “Miracle Centre”), and a large 1952 modernist addition, as well as the sizeable Brutalist-inspired 1970s Power Board building and its 1980s mirror-glass additions. Much of the lot is currently car-park, and the Power House, which faces Eastbourne Street East, can be seen largely in the round.

The Power House building is a substantial structure of a forthright Edwardian neo-Classical style. It consists of two joined but distinct sections, each with its own roof, but sharing a common internal gutter; the Power House proper, a tall two storeys, and an adjoining tall single-storey block formerly housing switch gear, workshops and support spaces to the south. The latter appears to be an addition to the Power House, although it is in a compatible style of much the same vintage. The building is constructed in reinforced concrete, with brick infills, and steel-truss roof frames supporting the gabled roofs.

The main elevation of the Power House is symmetrically composed about the centreline with a tall gabled parapet, stepped up at the centre with a circular window in the upper façade. A prominent horizontal cornice divides the parapet from the lower façade; below this three groups of three low multi-light timber windows are set in moulded plaster surrounds with heavy sills and large panels below the sills. At the ground floor level, there are two semi-circular headed windows (with aluminium joinery) – the “keystone” of these arches blends into the panels above – while a large roller door occupies the left-hand side of the façade in place of the third window. The windows sit on a large dado and the building is trimmed to the ground with a tall base mould. The north-west corner of the building has moulded quoins, which appear to have been plastered over on the south-west. The switch-gear part of the building is also symmetrical within itself; it has a flat parapet, a distinctive central semi-circular arched window with an elaborate moulded keystone, a glazed timber door on the left and a small timber window on the right. Exposed brick is visible at the south-west corner of the building.

The north elevation of the building is almost devoid of detail, with only regularly spaced plain steel windows to add visual interest. The south elevation shows an expressed concrete post-and-beam structure with infill panels and groups of three multi-light timber windows, and a gabled timber-framed clerestory above the switch-gear spaces, with timber windows.

Archive plans show the Power House has a large water reservoir underneath about half of the building. It is presumed, but not known, that this still exists. These drawings also suggest the main space originally contained support spaces, including a partial mezzanine floor, that were removed in later alterations.

ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

Element	Significance
Form and detail of main elevation	Townscape, architectural, aesthetic
Form and detail of side elevations, including clerestory to south	Architectural, aesthetic

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:

Boyd, M.B., *City of the Plains*, Wellington: Victoria University Press for Hastings City Council, 1984

Fowler, M 2007 *From Disaster to Recovery: the Hastings CBD 1931-1935*, Michael Fowler Publishing Limited, Havelock North pp. 185-187

Orr, Russell, *Fifty Years On: a history of the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board*, Hawke's Bay: Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board, 1974, n.p.

Wises Street Directories, 1916 to 1959-60.

Wright, M. 2001, *Town and Country: The History of Hastings and District*, Hastings District Council.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION:

NZHPT Register: Not registered

District Plan: The Municipal Power House building is not specifically listed in the Hastings District Plan, and is not included within the Central Character Precinct.

New Zealand Historic Places Act 1993: This site has not been identified as a potential archaeological site under Section 2 of the New Zealand Historic Places Act 1993.

OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS:



Municipal Power House, East Elevation, K Pascall July 2012

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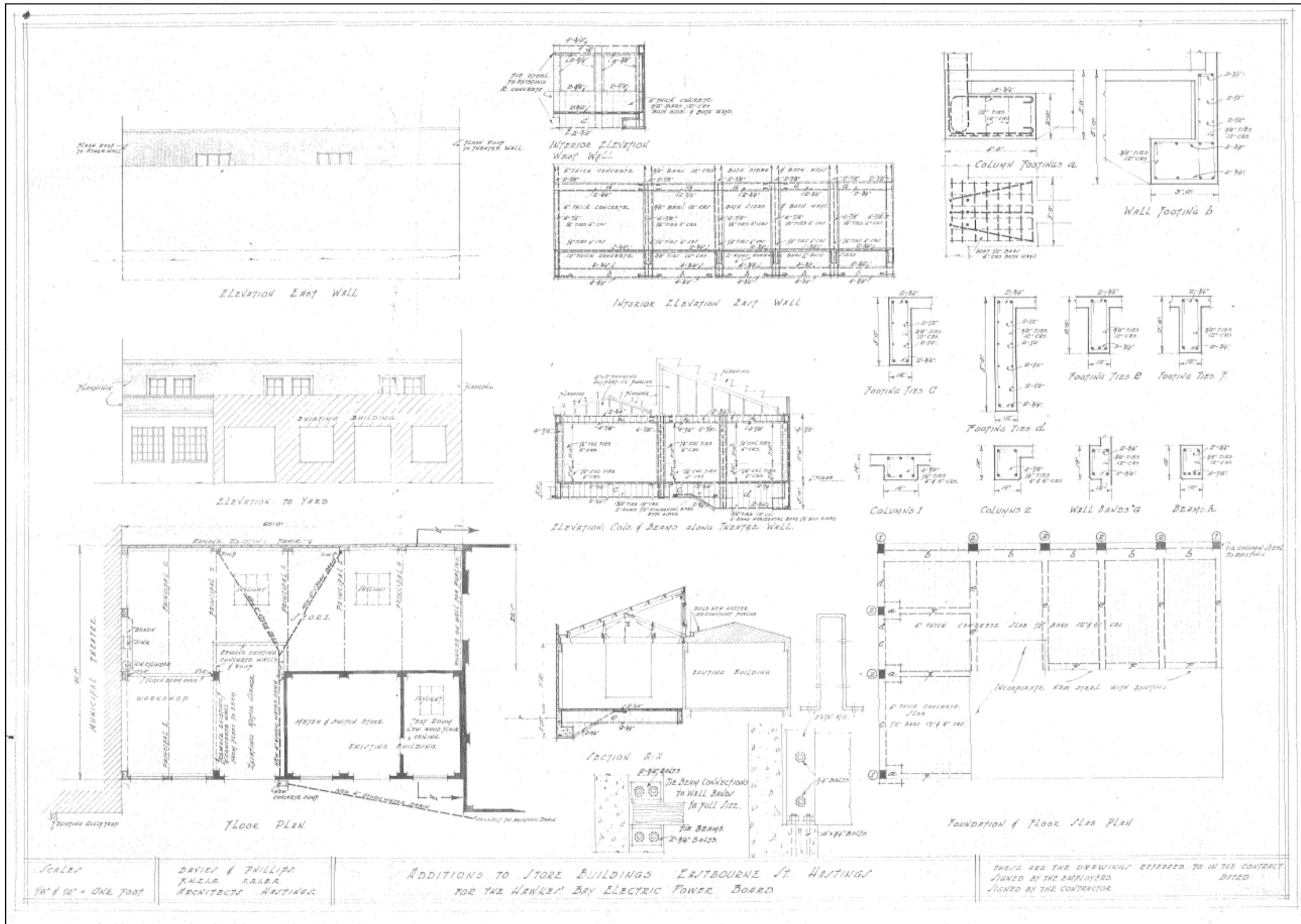
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ARCHIVE PLAN(S):

Alterations to Power Station at Hastings for the Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board, (No date) (TRIM Ref: 21436#040)



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