

HASTINGS HERITAGE INVENTORY PROJECT: INTRODUCTION



OVERVIEW

Background

When the Hastings District Plan was notified in 1997, becoming operative in 2003, it included a schedule of heritage buildings that were to be subject to certain controls. These were broadly designed to encourage retention of the built heritage of Hastings, control change and, as far as possible, prevent demolition, thus maintaining and enhancing the heritage values of the city. The schedule remains in the District Plan today.

The Hastings Heritage Inventory Project was then begun in 2004. It was initiated jointly by the Hastings District Council and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, and was financially supported by the Council, the Trust, the Hastings City Business Association (formerly Hastings City Marketing) and the Landmarks Trust.

The aim of the project was to provide information on the history and heritage values of the buildings in the Hastings CBD, '...in order to assist in the assessment of resource consent and building consent applications, assist property owners in preparing building consent applications, provide up to date information as part of Land Information Memorandums and ... be useful to members of the community in researching the history of a particular building.' (Project Brief, 2004.)

It is the intention of the Council that the Inventory will be a standalone resource, separate from the District Plan, that it will be used as above, and it will be a useful non-regulatory resource for the preservation and conservation of the heritage resource of the city.

Method

Broadly, the method involved:

- Researching the history of each building. The main sources drawn on were published histories, and records held by Land Information New Zealand, the Hawke's Bay Museum, the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, and of particular importance, the building permit records of the Hastings District Council where available.
- Inspecting the exterior of the building, also the interior where accessible.

- Making a photographic record of the form and detail of the building, and its place in the townscape.
- Writing up an inventory entry for the building, each entry containing a photo, land information, ownership details, history, description and an assessment of significance according to District Plan criteria. The level of authenticity, and changes through time were recorded.

Stages

The work has been carried out in two stages.

Stage 1, 2004 - 2007

Stage 1 was carried out jointly for the Hastings District Council and the Historic Places Trust, and included those buildings registered under the Historic Places Act (Group 1 buildings in the Inventory). Two inventory entries were written for each building - one was to the Council's format, and the other followed a standard layout of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, using the criteria that are contained in the Historic Places Act.

Stage 2, 2011 - 2012

Stage 2 included Group 2 and 3 buildings. These followed the Council's format and criteria.

The completed Inventory contains entries under three groups: Group 1 buildings are those registered under the Historic Places Act, and are acknowledged to be of national or regional importance; Group 2 and 3 buildings are generally of local importance and/or have high townscape or group value.

There are 27 entries in Group 1, 36 in Group 2 and 26 in Group 3. Some Group 2 and 3 entries are for groups of buildings, so that the total number of buildings included is 115.

Re-Assessment

The work has led to the re-assessment of buildings listed in the District Plan. It is proposed that several buildings that were previously in Group 3 should now be in Group 2, and one should be removed from the Inventory altogether. It is also proposed that Queen Street East be investigated further for possible designation as an historic area.

The Council is currently undertaking a full review of the District Plan and is considering putting these changes into effect as part of the review.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement is made to all those who helped in the preparation of the Inventory in various ways including New Zealand Historic Places Trust Staff, and

Hastings District Council Policy staff members (current and former), Anna Sanders, Sara Field, Sarah Akers, and Kate Pascall.

Research and scanning of the building permit files for both stages was carried out by various members of Council staff including Council Archivist Chris Johnson.

Assessment of the architectural features of the buildings was undertaken by Chris Cochran, Michael Kelly, and Russell Murray.

Acknowledgement is also made to the financial supporters of this project:
Hastings City Business Association
Landmarks Trust
New Zealand Historic Places Trust
Hastings District Council

BUILDINGS OF THE HASTINGS CBD

Heritage Significance

Taken as a whole, the buildings of the Hastings CBD are of very great heritage significance, not just to the city and region but nationally. This is reflected in the high number of buildings registered under the Historic Places Act – seven buildings are registered Category I, being ‘places of special or outstanding historical or cultural heritage significance or value’, and sixteen are registered Category II, being ‘places of historical or cultural heritage significance or value’.

The principal reason for this is the high concentration of buildings of a particular era, the early 1930s, which give a remarkable consistency and visual interest to the streetscapes of the city.

Nationally, the only other city that can compare with Hastings is Napier, similarly rebuilt in the 1930s. Otherwise, one would have to look to Oamaru for any other place in New Zealand of such consistent townscape and architecture. That is of course a place of very different age, style and materials.

Main Themes

The heritage buildings of the city are deeply enmeshed in its history and development, and are illustrative of almost all aspects of its foundation, growth and development. Particular aspects of the life of the city that the buildings stand for (along with just one example) are:

Its religious life: St Matthew’s Church

Its commemorative life: the Cenotaph

Its cultural life: Opera House

Its administrative life: former Municipal Buildings

Its social life: Albert Hotel

Its agricultural origins: former Hawke's Bay Farmers Building

Its retailing and commercial life: Westerman's, and any number of CBD buildings

Its legal and financial life: Queen Street East

Its infrastructure: Hawke's Bay Electric Power Board Building

Its destruction by earthquake in 1931: the Clock Tower.

With the founding of Hastings dating from the mid-1870s, and several extant buildings dating from the 1880s (the Albert Hotel, 1882 and St Matthew's Church, 1886), the heritage buildings of the city reach back to all but the first decade of European settlement.

Architectural Styles

Hastings shares with Napier the distinctiveness of having been largely rebuilt in a short period of time in the early 1930s. A very pervasive influence on the new buildings of the city, indeed of the form of the city to this day, was that of the highly destructive Hawke's Bay earthquake of 3 February 1931.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, safety was a paramount consideration, so that one and two storeyed buildings, built in in-situ reinforced concrete, became the common building type. It was also this type of building that had best survived the earthquake. The city thus developed a distinctive low-rise character, still (despite a number of higher modern buildings) the defining feature of the city today.

Fashionable architectural styles of the time were Stripped Classical, Spanish Mission, Art Deco and Moderne and these lent themselves admirably to the low-rise form and the materials – reinforced concrete with plaster finish - that became prevalent after the earthquake.

While each of these styles are quite distinctive, they share some features in common, and some buildings exhibit elements of several of the styles. Visual unity of the streetscapes arises from the relative uniformity of scale of the buildings, of materials and finishes, and from the intricate and creative decorative effects that embellish many of the buildings.

While it is the collection of buildings of the CBD as a whole that provides the special character of the place, there are nevertheless some special examples of each of the principal styles. The Opera House and Westerman's for example, are nationally important examples of the Spanish Mission style; the Clock Tower of the Art Deco style, and the Hawke's Bay Farmers Building of the stripped Classical style.

Pre-Earthquake Buildings

In any discussion of the architecture of the Hastings CBD, the 1930s must be the focus because of the pervasiveness of the buildings of that decade. But those earlier buildings that survived the earthquake hold a special place in the history of the city.

They are important in providing an 'anchor' to the city, also variety and an extension to the range of architectural styles. They stretch back in some cases to the Colonial architecture of the 19th Century (the Albert Hotel, 1882 and St Matthew's Church, 1886). The Rainbow and Hobbs Building, 1914, in Queen Street East, has a late Edwardian Baroque, even Art Nouveau character, that is not to be found in any later buildings. The later styles, stripped Classical in particular, spans the time of the earthquake and is well represented by both pre- and post-earthquake buildings.

The pre-earthquake buildings tend not to have the particular group values of the later buildings, although Queen Street East is one place where there is a concentration of such buildings and the character of the area is partly dependent on them.

Together these pre-earthquake buildings form a resource not just of historic and aesthetic importance, but also of great technical interest for the simple fact that they survived what was New Zealand's largest-ever earthquake in an urban area (until Christchurch 2011).

Post-earthquake Reconstruction

The building permit (now known as building consent) records of the Hastings District Council are a remarkable resource, since they are very complete for the post-1931 period. They document the original form and detail of many of the 1930s buildings, often to a high degree. While they typically include (as one would expect), plans elevations and sections, they often also include architectural details, structural details and comprehensive specifications.

For those buildings that survived the earthquake but which required repair, the documents offer information on the earlier form of the buildings, and of the type of damage sustained. They also contain valuable information about the earthquake resistance of different building types, and of the building technologies of the time.

One matter of historic importance (and of particular interest in this post-Christchurch earthquake era), is the speed of the rebuild of the city. Within months of 3 February 1931, building permits were being issued for repairs to damaged buildings and for new buildings in permanent materials. Edmund Anscombe applied for a permit to repair the Murray Roberts building (formerly the Taheke Building) in Queen Street East on 24 March 1931, less than eight weeks after the quake, and there were many new buildings under construction in 1932.

Where available, these important building records have now been scanned by the Council and are available for inspection.

Architectural Practices

Hastings today can boast examples of work by highly skilled architects, some with a national reputation. Among these are Benjamin Mountfort and Frederick de Jersey Clere (St Matthew's Church); Edmund Anscombe (Hawke's Bay Farmer's Building); Henry Eli White (the Opera House); Stanley Fearn (former Public Trust Building), and J T Mair, Government Architect (former Post Office). Apart from Anscombe, who worked in Hastings after the earthquake, none of these architects had a particular association with Hastings, but they left their mark on the city with just a single important building.

The most prolific practice in the reconstruction of the city was the local firm of Davies, Garnett and Phillips whose work is spread throughout the CBD, and the city owes its character today to these architects more than to any others. They designed competent buildings, fit for purpose, economical, some of high architectural interest, and above all safe – admirable in the post-earthquake life of the city, and during a time of severe economic depression in the country.

For a full discussion of the architects and architecture of the city, see *Spanish Mission Hastings, Styles of Five Decades*, by Peter Shaw and Peter Hallett (Cosmos Publications, 1990).

Uses

Today the collection of the heritage buildings of the CBD is appreciated for its historic and aesthetic values, and significant work has been done in the last two decades not only to the buildings themselves by public and private owners, but to streetscape improvement to enhance the setting of the buildings.

Some uses have changed, and most buildings have been altered over time to meet changing circumstances. Such change is inevitable, and indeed desirable (so long as sympathetically done), so that as buildings age they remain functionally useful. This is the single most important factor in ensuring their survival.

It is hoped that this inventory, in defining the heritage values of the buildings, will help in the process of the careful conservation and nurturing of the nationally important heritage resource of the heart of the city of Hastings.

Chris Cochran & Russell Murray
Conservation Architects
2012