
QUEEN STREET EAST HISTORIC AREA, HASTINGS



Queen Street East, north side buildings from the west.

LOCATION:

Street and Number: Queen Street East, block between Russell Street North and Karamu Road North.

City / Town: Hastings

Region: Hawke's Bay

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Architectural Value:

Queen Street East between Russell Street North and Karamu Road North boasts a number of distinguished buildings – of the 19 buildings in this historic area, there are six buildings that are included in the District Plan Heritage Items register, and a further ten buildings that are included in the Hastings Heritage Inventory for their local or townscape value; there are only three buildings within the area not included in the Inventory. All of these buildings are included in the Central Character Precinct. Standing alone, many of them would command attention for their dignity, their assured architectural compositions (many in the stripped Classical tradition), and the visual interest of their details. Taken as a group, these attributes are enhanced, so that the architectural value of the ensemble is very high indeed.

Some of the buildings are the work of nationally and regionally important architects, including Stanley Fearn; Government Architect J T Mair; Rush and James; the well-known local practice of Davies Garnett and Phillips, and also buildings by Alfred Garnett on his own.

Historic Value:

Queen Street East encapsulates the story of growth and change in Hastings, from the earliest years of the 20th century through to the late 1930s and (as evidenced by small scale change) on to the present day.

The street has played an important role in the commercial life of the city, with a predominance of uses relating to law, finance and commerce rather than retailing. Many Hastings people will be familiar with the street for having worked or enacted business there.

The street is unusual in the city in having a balance of buildings that pre-date the 1931 earthquake; that were repaired and modified directly after the earthquake, and that were demolished and rebuilt during the 1930s, so that the consequences of the earthquake are well illustrated by understanding the story of this street.

Aesthetic Value:

The buildings of Queen Street East constitute one of the finest streetscapes in the Hastings CBD. The consistent scale of the buildings (no more than 2 storeys high); the compatibility of style between the buildings, many of which are in a stripped Classical tradition, and the visual interest of their decorative features all lead to an unusually unified and coherent townscape.

The original (and generally present-day) uses of the buildings in the realms of finance, banking, insurance, legal and professional offices, and the consequent absence of retail frontages and verandahs, marks the street out in the CBD as one of special purpose, standing visually distinct from neighbouring streets but in harmony with them.

HISTORY:

The land on which Queen Street East, Hastings would be created was leased and then later sold in 1870 to Thomas Tanner, by local Maori. When Tanner experienced financial difficulties, he on-sold some of this land. One of the purchasers, Francis Hicks, gave the government 1.5 acres (0.6 hectares) for a railway station in 1873, and then employed surveyors W Ellison & Son to divide the other 100 acres (40 hectares) into sections for sale in July that year (Hastings had been named just a month earlier). Queen Street was created in this subdivision – this was a common street name used in the Victorian era around New Zealand.

While the Havelock–Omahu Road (now Heretaunga Street) evolved as Hastings' main retail area, the land around Queen Street East was initially used mostly for cattle and horse sale yards. W A Beecroft purchased approximately half of the block bordered by Station Street (now Russell Street) Queen Street East, Karamu Road and Heretaunga Street East. The land facing most of Queen Street and extending to Karamu Road on his block was used for a livery (horse stables) and sale yards. The Hastings Borough also had its pound in this location, until it was moved in 1888 to William Stock's yards at Stortford Lodge.

Stock and Station agents Williams & Kettle opened their own horse sale yards in the 1880s, on the corner of Queen Street and Karamu Road, diagonally across the road from Beecroft's yards (now the old Public Trust Office corner) where horses captured from the Rangitaiki Plains were auctioned.

By 1897 several buildings had been constructed on the side of Queen Street East opposite Beecroft's land. The newly formed *Hastings Standard* (1896) newspaper had an office on the corner of Queen Street East and Station Street across from the Post Office. Moving eastwards, next was Mr T W Lewis, solicitor and Maori interpreter; then Symonds' Steam Coach factory, which moved there in 1893 and used an eight-horsepower steam-powered lift to raise the coaches during painting. The last two buildings were F C Tipping's general store and a small house on the corner of Queen Street and Karamu Road.

As Hastings grew in size in the early 1900s, and after the Stortford Lodge livestock sale yards opened in 1903, the Queen Street East area slowly began its transformation from sales yards and industrial buildings to a commercial area. Increased business activity in Hastings meant professionals such as lawyers and accountants could now be supported. Lawyer T W Lewis had taken up residence in Queen Street East in the 1890s and he was joined by accountant John Fraser around 1902.

A major development towards Queen Street East becoming a commercial area was the construction of the substantial Dominion Building in 1907 on the site of Symonds' Steam Coach factory. The building is noteworthy in that it was the first ferro-concrete building to be built in Hastings and provided two stories of office space. A fledgling accountant called William McCulloch, who previously worked for Tomoana Freezing Works, was an early tenant, along with John Fraser. William McCulloch would eventually be joined by partners John Butler and Morris Spence, occupying most of the building for their accounting practice. The building was also the offices of William Richmond,

who developed a significant stock buying and meat processing business which lasted almost 100 years.

When the new Post Office was built in 1909, the old wooden one was moved around the corner to Queen Street East, where it was used for office accommodation.

Beecroft's land was subdivided in 1912 and 23 "business allotments", mostly fronting Queen Street East were offered for sale. These sections would form an important part of the commercial development of Queen Street East. In 1914, another two-storey office building went up near the Dominion Building. The period from 1914 until the mid 1920s saw many other office buildings constructed, and the transformation of Queen Street East into a truly commercial district.

When new shareholders took over the *Hastings Standard* and launched the *Hawke's Bay Herald*, they moved into a new two-storey building in 1911, on the corner of Queen Street and Karamu Road. Two printing firms were also located in Queen Street East: E S Cliff Limited, who built large premises in 1915 directly opposite the Dominion Buildings, and Hart Print, which started in premises next to the Dominion Building in the 1910s. Hart Print would later be owned by Ron Wattie, brother of well-known industrialist Sir James Wattie. The Wattie Print logo can still be seen on the building façade.

The National Bank opened its imposing building in 1916 on the corner of Queen Street East and Karamu Road, further emphasising Queen Street's rise as Hastings' commercial centre. In the 1920s the last of the buildings which completed Queen Street East were built, including the Public Trust Office opposite the Herald-Tribune building.

On 3 February 1931, a massive 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Hawke's Bay. The only Queen Street buildings to come through it totally unscathed were the Dominion Building, the old wooden post office building and the Public Trust Office. The Herald-Tribune building's second storey had to be removed as it was so badly damaged, as was a law firm's diagonally across the road. Several buildings had to be demolished: the Queen's Chambers building, which was opposite the old wooden post office; Frank Kelly's law offices; 101 Queen Street, which housed insurance and legal firms; Cliff Press; Wattie Print; and the fire-damaged National Bank building. All other buildings required significant repairs.

In the place of the National Bank building, Karamu Chambers was built in 1935. Wattie Print rebuilt, and Frank Kelly, who was one of only a few businesses to have earthquake insurance, was one of the first to rebuild in Hastings.

The owner of the Queen's Chambers buildings was forced to subdivide his property to finance the rebuild; the CBA Bank was built on this site. While the 1931 Hawke's Bay Earthquake affected many of the buildings, Queen Street East remained the commercial centre of Hastings. Many locals called the street "Sharks Alley" in reference to the accountancy and legal practices in the area.

In the 1990s and 2000s, many professional firms which occupied Queen Street either outgrew their premises, or found them unsuitable for a number

of reasons to operate modern practices. Most accounting and legal practices are now located in purpose built or specially modified buildings, in other areas of Hastings. Many other professional service businesses have since taken their place, so Queen Street East still retains its commercial look and feel.



Queen Street East, south side buildings from the Karamu Road North intersection, with the Post Office tower in the distance; late 1920s. (Photo courtesy Michael Fowler)



Queen Street East, south side buildings from Russell Street North, immediately post-earthquake. (Photo courtesy Michael Fowler)



Queen Street East, south side buildings from Karamu Road North, immediately post-earthquake. (Photo courtesy Michael Fowler)



Queen Street East, north side buildings, early 1930s. (Photo courtesy Michael Fowler)



Queen Street East, north side buildings, mid-1930s. (Photo courtesy Michael Fowler)

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The physical description of individual buildings can be found in the Hastings Heritage Inventory entries written for the following buildings:

- *Commercial Bank of Australia Building (No. 5)*
- *Dominion Buildings (No.6)*
- *Ebbett's Building (No.7)*
- *Hastings Health Centre (formerly the Hastings Post Office) (No.15)*
- *Public Trust Office (No.20)*
- *Rainbow & Hobbs Building (No.22)*
- *Scannell Building (No.51)*
- *Karamu Chambers (No.60)*
- *Clifton Buildings (No.62)*
- *Herald Tribune Building (No.72)*
- *Queen's Chambers (No.77)*
- *Peacock Building (No.81)*
- *Garnett Building (No.85)*
- *Murray Robert's Building (No.86)*
- *134 Queen St East (No.87)*
- *Kelly McNeil Building (No.88)*

Architects: various architects including Stanley Fearn; Government Architect J T Mair; Rush and James, and Davies Garnett and Phillips, also Alfred Garnett practicing on his own.

Builder: various builders, see separate Inventory entries

Dates of construction: the earliest structure is the Dominion Buildings, 1908, ranging through to Ebbett's Building and Karamu Chambers, both 1935. Changes have been made to various buildings since this time.

Construction details: Generally the buildings of Queen Street East are reinforced concrete structures, the majority two-storeyed, with concrete ground and first floors, and plastered finishes. Timber truss roofs are common, clad in corrugated iron, as is steel window joinery. See separate inventory entries for details for each of the listed buildings.

Description: Queen Street East is one of the principal east – west streets in the Hastings CBD. The historic area is that part of the street linking Russell Street North with Karamu Street North. Russell Street is an important retail street, oriented north – south and containing a number of Hastings' finest heritage buildings; Karamu Road North is one of the principle linking roads into the CBD from the north and Napier.

This block of Queen Street East has a remarkably consistent **townscape**, on both the north and south sides. The north side of the street (a continuous line of ten buildings) is dominated by the Dominion Buildings, the oldest building in the street from 1908, and situated more or less in the middle of the block. Two prominent Stripped Classical buildings from the 1930s anchor the row, the Commercial Bank of Australia at the western end, on the Russell Street North corner, and the former Public Trust Building at the eastern end, on the Karamu Road North corner.

The south side of the street (with 9 buildings) has no single building that stands out from its neighbours, but it has more architectural variety than the north side. It is again strongly anchored at either end, by the stripped Classical Hastings Health Centre (formerly the Hastings Post Office) at the western end, and the Herald Tribune Building at the eastern end. This side is weakened by one large gap in the line of buildings (to the east of The Health Centre), now a carpark.

The predominant **height** of the buildings is two storeys (there are 13 two storey and six single storey buildings in the area), and most have horizontal parapets hiding pitched roofs behind. These vary in height but within a narrow band, so that the silhouette on both sides of the street is of simple shapes with an easy uniformity. All the buildings are built up to the street boundary, and they thus closely define the street edges. (The only place where this does not hold good is the open car park between The Health Centre and Tremain's Buildings on the south side, mentioned above.)

The human **scale** set by the height of the buildings is strengthened by the manner in which each building is articulated and decorated – each one has strong visual interest in the architectural features, and in details worked in solid plaster, that adorn the facades.

The predominant **styles** of the buildings in the street are Edwardian (several of the pre-earthquake buildings) and stripped Classical (the post-earthquake buildings). This provides something of a contrast with other parts of the city (including the adjacent Russell Street North), where the prevailing architectural styles are Spanish Mission and Art Deco. In fact, it is notable that these latter styles are scarcely represented in Queen Street East.

There is a strong link between the original uses of these buildings and their architectural styles. Classical, neo-Classical and Stripped Classical architecture held strong connotations of tradition, security, dignity and prosperity, deriving from a long tradition of the use of the style for important public, institutional and private buildings in Europe and America. Variations on the style were also commonly employed by banks and other commercial institutions seeking to convey a sense of respectability with their buildings.

Typical features of the buildings include symmetrical facades; Classical compositions of capital, shaft and base; fluted pilasters and Ionic columns, some running through the full two-storey height of the building, also roundels, all abstracted and worked in original ways.

Such Classical design does not readily accommodate the interruption of verandahs, and the area is noticeable for its absence of verandahs, there being just one (which is hung from a modern curtain wall façade). The lack of verandahs also illustrates the original uses of the buildings – predominantly professional offices rather than retail. This gives a greater clarity and unity to the facades, which are treated as a whole rather than the above-and-below verandah treatment that is a feature of the retail streets of the city.

Building **materials** provide another unifying influence, since almost all the buildings are finished in solid plaster. While this material might be applied to solid masonry or to in-situ concrete, the finished appearance is mostly that of painted plaster, sometimes textured stucco but generally smoothly finished, with ornamentation and finishing details built up in mouldings or worked into

the plaster. The architectural detail and colours vary between buildings of course, providing considerable visual variety within an ordered framework.

There is one building that is predominantly brick (the Herald Tribune Building, 1911) and only one building where the main material could be judged to be particularly 'out of character'. This is the modern curtain-wall on the north side of the street¹, but because of its modest size, scale, and location within the area, its visual impact is not great.

The **age** of the buildings is important in that they span the pre- and post-earthquake history of the city in a way that no other group of buildings in the city does. Significant pre-earthquake buildings include:

- Dominion Buildings, 1908
- Garnett Building, 1913 (remodelled 1932)
- Rainbow and Hobbs Building, 1914
- The former Public Trust Building, 1926, and
- 134 Queen St East (Former Dominion Post Building), mid-1920s (remodelled 1932)

while post-earthquake buildings include:

- The Hastings Health Centre (formerly the Hastings Post Office), 1932
- Queen's Chambers, 1932
- Commercial Bank of Australia, 1933
- Ebbett's Building, 1935
- Karamu Chambers, 1935.

Several buildings were damaged in the earthquake and were subsequently modified, strengthened and added to. The most interesting in this respect is the Garnett Building; the ground floor, 1913, is Edwardian in character, while the first floor, built as part of the repair and refurbishment of the building in 1932, is distinctly plain in comparison and has features of the Art Deco style.

Given the age of the buildings (many are 80 years old and several are around 100 years), the level of **authenticity** of the area is high. Early architectural drawings, and early photos, show buildings that are still easily recognisable today; change to the building exteriors since the 1930s appears to be relatively superficial.

One reason for this is the nature of the facades of the buildings, which were designed as a whole rather than the above- and below-verandah compositions found in the city's retail and mixed-use commercial buildings; they were thus more difficult to change without significant visual impact on the whole building. And in any event, there was not the commercial pressure to do so. Retail shops throughout the CBD have been modernised below their verandahs to attract the passing shopper, whereas Queen Street East, being professional and legal offices, did not have the same advertising or promotional need.

¹ Able Personnel building, no. 130.

ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

Element	Significance
Whole of the front elevations of all buildings included in the Inventory, form and detail	Architectural, historic, aesthetic, streetscape

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:

Fowler, M 2007 *From Disaster to Recovery: the Hastings CBD 1931-35*, Michael Fowler Publishing Limited, Havelock North p. 139.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION:

NZHPT Register: Historic area not registered.

Six individual buildings are registered:

Commercial Bank of Australia

Dominion Buildings

Ebbett's Building

The Hastings Health Centre (formerly the Hastings Post Office)

Former Public Trust Building

Rainbow and Hobbs Building.

District Plan: Queen Street East Historic Area is not specifically listed as a Heritage item in the Hastings District Plan, but is 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.



Queen Street East, north side buildings from the west.



North side buildings from the east.



South side buildings from the west.



South side buildings from the east.



South side buildings from the Karamu Road North intersection.



Four south side buildings, Karamu Road North intersection on the left.

Map of the historic area to be added.

Kate,

The brief for this job called for advice on several matters that don't fit in the Inventory entry above, so here are some additional words.

What threats exist to the character of Queen Street East?

1 Loss of Individual Buildings

If any of the 16 buildings in the street that are in the Inventory were to be demolished, this would be a loss of integrity and a reduction in architectural and townscape quality. The loss of a scheduled building would of course be more significant than the loss of a building that is not scheduled, whereas the loss of a building that makes no particular contribution to streetscape or historic values, such as no. 130, would have little effect on the area's heritage values.

Threats to individual buildings could arise from several sources - loss of functional usefulness and earthquake-proneness would be the main ones

With many of the buildings 80 years old, functional needs have meant that many of the buildings have been altered, and there is no reason to think that the process of change cannot go on to keep these buildings useful. While the form and design of the buildings does limit their potential uses, the general office use of many of them should be able to be accommodated into the future.

Perhaps the main threat is that arising from the earthquake-proneness of the buildings. As the buildings are all either survivors of the 1931 earthquake or built afterwards to new seismic standards, it is expected that some will have an adequate level of seismic resistance. However, one cannot speculate on the level of threat that the issue poses without having assessments made of individual buildings. Does the Council have any information on this?

Given the reinforced concrete structure of many of the buildings, structural strengthening should be feasible where necessary, although possibly not commercially justified given current rental levels. This needs further study.

2 Loss of Scale

A significant threat arises from out of scale new building, should any of the existing buildings be lost. This might be particularly relevant for the empty site adjacent to the former Post Office, which is presumably available for development although presently in use as carparking.

A simple control of the maximum height for new buildings - to be no higher than the former Post Office or the Dominion building - would be sufficient to address the main effects that could arise from this threat.

3 Loss of Architectural Character

Modernisation of existing buildings could result in the alteration of the main facades of buildings of architectural distinction, with potential flow-on effects to the quality of the streetscape of the area as a whole.

This is an important design matter that is best addressed by public education to promote the heritage values of Hastings, and controlled by design guide and District Plan requirements. Where possible, such control should be supported by incentives such as free professional advice. As alterations to the registered buildings (registered by the Historic Places Trust) will be required to be carried out in accordance with best-practice heritage and conservation principles, this standard should also be applied to the other buildings in the area.

The contribution that the addition of the following 3 buildings to the Heritage Schedule would make to the overall streetscape – Queen's Chambers, Stepping Out Restaurant and Kelly McNeil Building.

My recommendation was simply that these three buildings should go from Group 3 to Group 2, which would not imply protection under the District Plan.

In the context of the proposed Queen Street East Historic Area, this opens up the question of whether any more of the buildings in the street should be included in Group 1 and the Heritage Schedule. There are six there already – Commercial Bank of Australia, Dominion Buildings, Ebbett's Building, former Hastings Post Office, former Public Trust Office, and Rainbow and Hobbs building.

We have been through all the others, and think that one could make a case for the three mentioned above – Queen's Chambers, Garnett Building and Tremain's Building, also possibly the Herald Tribune Building – being included in Group 1 of the Inventory and the heritage Schedule. That would make 10 protected buildings out of a total of 19, and would go a very long way to ensuring the character of the street is preserved.

I also think it would give a more even quality to the scheduled buildings, since Queen's Chambers and Tremain's Building are the equals (architecturally) of others already scheduled. In the case of the Garnett Building and the Herald Tribune, their inclusion would be more for historic reasons (although their architectural values would of course count too).

