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International working party for
documentation and conservation

New International Selection
Full Documentation Fiche 2003

of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the
modern movement

composed by national/regional working party of: **NEW ZEALAND**

0. Picture of building/ group of buildings/ urban scheme/ landscape/ garden



depicted item: The New Zealand Parliamentary Buildings. The Beehive appears centre left midground.
source: Paul Hillier, School of Architecture, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
date: 2006

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1. Identity of building/ group of buildings/ group of buildings/ landscape/ garden

1.1 Data for identification

current name: Executive Wing, Parliament Buildings (The Beehive)

former/original/variant name: The Beehive

number(s) and name(s) of street(s): 40 Bowen Street, Pipitea

town: Wellington

province/state: Wellington

post code: 6011

block:

lot:

country: New Zealand

national topographical grid reference: BQ 31

current typology: ADM (Parliamentary)

former/original/variant typology: ADM (Parliamentary)

comments on typology:

1.2 Status of protection

protected by: NZ Historic Places Trust [recognition as opposed to protection]

grade: Registered Historic Area

date: 27 October 1994

valid for: whole area

remarks: Registration type: Historic Area. Register Number: 7035. Registered under the Historic Places Act 1980 on 28 June 1984 (HP 63/84). Reassessed under the Historic Places Act 1993 and registration confirmed as an historic area on 27 October 1994 (BD1994/10/36)

1.3 Visually or functionally related building(s)/site(s)

name(s) of surrounding area/building(s): Parliamentary Precinct including the General Assembly Library (1907), the present Parliament Buildings (designed 1911-12, opened 1922) and the Executive Wing in landscaped grounds.

visual relations: The Beehive was designed to operate as a symbolic hub for the wider government precinct, which includes the other parliamentary buildings, government departments and legislative buildings including the High Court and the Supreme Court. Many of these buildings have been designed subsequent to the Beehive completion.

functional relations: The Executive wing is occupied by the Prime Minister's office, Cabinet Committee room, Cabinet Ministers' offices, the Cabinet Room, press gallery, offices, banquet hall, restaurants, reception rooms, and staff facilities including swimming pool and gymnasium. It is connected to the earlier Parliament Buildings (1922), which houses some politicians' offices including those of the Leader of the Opposition and the Speaker of the House, civil servants and the legislative chamber. The Beehive is also connected by underground walkway to Bowen House, which houses other parliamentary rooms.

other relations: n/a

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2. History of building(s) etc.

2.1 Chronology

commission or competition date: The sketch design dates from March 1964 when Sir Basil Spence visited New Zealand on a lecture tour. The earlier adjacent Parliament Building (1911-12) remained partially finished and there was uncertainty whether to complete the earlier design, or to design a modern addition. When Spence was invited to give an opinion how to proceed, he produced a sketch design in which he offered as 'a germ of an idea'. It was adopted by the New Zealand government and was developed further by Spence in consultation with the Government Architect, Fergus Sheppard. In June 1965 it was announced that Spence would not be involved with the subsequent stages of the project, with the Government Architect becoming the architect responsible for the subsequent project stages.

design period(s): March 1964 - 1977

start of site work: 1970

completion/inauguration: Executive Wing Stage One contract completed by William Angus, August 1972; Executive Wing Stage Two contract completed by Gibson and O'Connor, March 1981.

official opening by the Queen: 28 Feb 1977

2.2 Summary of development

commission brief: schedules assembled May 1963

design brief: the design brief was initially developed between May 1963-March 1964. Following acceptance of the Sketch design in April 1964, detailed design work was undertaken by Spence in consultation with the Government Architect. The Design Report was presented in May 1965. Design continued through to 1977.

building/construction: 1970-1982

completed situation: 1982

original situation or character of site: Site was earlier occupied by government buildings including Colonel Wakefield's House (1840) which later served as Government House from 1865-69 and William Clayton's Government House which became Bellamy's (erected 1871, demolished 1970).

2.3 Relevant persons/organisations

original owner(s)/patron(s): New Zealand Government

architect(s): Sir Basil Spence (1907-1976) and the New Zealand Government Architect. Government Architects between 1964 and 1982 included Fergus Sheppard (1908-1997), John Blake-Kelly, Frank Anderson, and Graydon Miskimmin.

landscape/garden designer(s): New Zealand Ministry of Works, Warren and Mahoney Architects, Boffa Miskell Limited.

other designer(s): J.W. Laburn was the job architect 1965. Syd Bates was the principal architect working on the working drawings.

consulting engineer(s): New Zealand Ministry of Works

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building contractor(s): Stage One contract completed by William Angus, August 1972; Stage Two contract completed by Gibson and O'Connor, March 1981.

2.4 Other persons or events associated with the building(s)/site

name(s): Keith Holyoake (1904-1987)

association: Prime Minister (1957, 1960 –1972)

event(s): in office through period of initial design

period: 1964-1972

name(s): John Drawbridge (1930 – 2005),

association: artist

event(s): creator of the Beehive Mural (enamel on aluminium, 4.8 x 42 metres)

period: 1973-76

2.5 Summary of important changes after completion

Building was refurbished by Warren and Mahoney between 2001 and 2006. This refurbishment was undertaken to improve wayfinding, increase usable floor area, incorporate new technology and update the building's interior design. The entrance and mail handling facility was redesigned in order to improve building security.

effects of changes: Little of the original interior design remains intact.

persons/organisations involved: Warren and Mahoney Architects, Project architect: Roy Wilson.

3. Description of building(s) etc.

3.1 Site/building character

The innovative eleven-storey radial design is housed within an unconventional somewhat conical shape. The lower three floors of constant diameter form a regular drum, while the upper levels of decreasing diameter give the building its distinctive diminishing beehive shape.

The building was designed to emulate the rhythms, shadow variation and materials of the adjacent earlier parliamentary building (des 1911-12). The basement podium is clad in granite while the upper concrete elements are partially clad in marble. The crown of the building, which houses the Cabinet Room, is clad in copper.

Ground-breaking model testing helped resolve the seismic design of the novel structure. A concrete core provides space for services, elevators and central circulation, while at the fourth level a ring beam running around the building's exterior ties the structure coherently together.

The building was termed 'the Beehive' by Sir Basil Spence when he officially presented the design in April 1964.

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3.2 Current use

The building and site continues to fulfil its original function.

3.3 Present (physical) condition

The building is well maintained and continues to fulfil its initial functions

3.4 Note(s) on context, indicating potential developments

The building is a landmark element within New Zealand's Parliamentary Precinct and the wider Wellington urban environment. Past plans to erect a Ministerial Building behind the Beehive, on the site of the demolished Broadcasting House, and to significantly redevelop the Bowen State and Charles Ferguson buildings within the precinct have, as yet, not been realised.

4. Evaluation

Intrinsic value

4.1 technical evaluation:

The building represents a very successful and innovative design that was developed by Ministry of Works architects and engineers, from a concept by noted British architect Sir Basil Spence. The circular design, with rising floor levels with diminishing floor area and arcs of increasing curvature required meticulous design to ensure wayfaring, spatial efficiency and structural integrity. The design of the concrete circular raft foundation, central core and fourth floor ring beam mark significant developments in reinforced concrete seismic design.

4.2. social evaluation:

While the building provides high security accommodation for the nation's leaders, the public areas on the lower floors are very accessible. Many public functions and tours are hosted in the building, which welcomes several tens of thousands of visitors every year. The grounds are open to the public and are the site of public rest and recreation, as well as national celebration and political protest.

4.3. cultural and aesthetic evaluation:

The aesthetic value of the building has been controversial since the first designs were presented. In the 1960s some people had wanted to see the adjacent 1911-12 parliament building completed. Despite strong political support for the Spence design (notably from the Prime Minister, Keith Holyoake), some felt that the building would appear incongruous amongst the complex of the neo-gothic parliamentary library and the Edwardian baroque 1911-12 design. These concerns continue to be voiced; however, as the wider government precinct now includes many modernist buildings a coherent context for the Spence addition has developed over time.

Comparative significance

4.4 canonical status (local, national, international)

The building is one of Sir Basil Spence's most significant projects outside the United Kingdom. Built at a time when economic links between the United Kingdom and the commonwealth nations were still very strong, the building was the last significant national building in New Zealand to be designed by a British architect.

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4.5 historic and reference values:

At the time of its initial design, Spence argued that the building would provide a notable distinctive symbol for government in New Zealand. Early references to the political and government hub, a dynamo and hive of activity were quickly accepted and have become enduring references, which are universally understood. In New Zealand, images of the Beehive appearing on banknotes and stamps, in news reports and in political cartoons are immediately read symbols of government.

5. Documentation

5.1 archives/written records/correspondence etc. (state location/ address):

Archives New Zealand [Parliament Buildings Extension files AAQB W3950 Box 216 File 24/26/16 parts 1-12], 10 Mulgrave Street, Thorndon, Wellington 6011

Alexander Turnbull Library [Marshall, John Ross, Papers, Parliament buildings - 1963-1965 MS-Papers-1403-399/6; MS-Papers-1403-399/7; MS-Papers-1403-400/1 AND Cook, Roderick, Papers relating to refurbishment of Parliament and Government Building MS 99-215], 77 Thorndon Quay, PO Box 1467, Wellington 6140

5.2 principal publications (in chronological order):

1965 *Additions to Parliament Buildings: design report: prepared by the office of the Government Architect*, Wellington: Ministry of Works, 1965.

1977 *Designscape*, n. 89, March 1977.

1989 KERNOHAN, D., *Wellington's New Buildings*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1989, p. 24.

2005 HALLIDAY, J., *Function follows form: Sir Basil Spence and the design and construction of 'the Beehive,' the Executive Wing of the New Zealand Parliament*: a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History in the University of Canterbury, 2005.

SKINNER, R., 'Hanky-panky at Parliament' [The Beehive sketches of Sir Basil Spence], *Architecture New Zealand*, Mar/Apr 2005: 86–88.

2006 SKINNER, R., 'Retooled dynamo', *Architecture New Zealand*, Jul/Aug 2006: 42–48.

2007 *Basil Spence: architect*, edited by Philip Long and Jane Thomas, Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland in association with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 2007.

SKINNER, R., 'The Beehive: a difficult collaboration' in *The Politics of Making: theory, practice, product*. Edited by Mark Swenarton, Igea Troiani & Helena Webster, London: Routledge, 2007: 137–47.

2008 HALLIDAY, J., 'The Beehive (Executive Wing, Parliament Buildings)', in *Long Live the Modern: New Zealand's New Architecture 1904-1984*. Edited by Julia Gately, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008, 217.

5.3 visual material (state location/ address)

original visual records/drawings/photographs/others:

Ink sketches and a pastel drawing by Spence are held by the Parliamentary Collection, Wellington

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A further felt pen sketch on Spence letterhead is held in the Marshall papers/Pictures collection at Alexander Turnbull Library
Other drawings are held at Archives New Zealand, Ministry of Works records, W2795 Folder 1.
recent photographs and survey drawings:

Recent photographs are held at the School of Architecture, Victoria University of Wellington, PO Box 600, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.

film/video/other sources:

Beehive: 1st Stage Progress Ministry of Works, 1971, 2003.2332; Also *Beehive: Construction & Beehive: Design & Construction* (awaiting cataloguing), The New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington.

5.4 list documents included in supplementary dossier n/a

6. Fiche report

name of reporter: Robin Skinner

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date of report: August 2009

examination by DOCOMOMO national/regional section

approval by wp co-ordinator/registers correspondent (name): Dr Ann McEwan
sign and date: 4 April 2012

examination by DOCOMOMO ISC/R

name of ISC member in charge of the evaluation:

comment(s):

sign and date:
ISC/R approval:

date:

wp/ref. no.:

NAI ref. no.:

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