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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

for office use only

composed by national/regional working party of: New Zealand

0. Picture of building / group of buildings



King, Cook and Dawson, Town Hall and Administration Building, Lower Hutt, 1951-57.
Photo by Julia Gatley, 2021.

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Left: Structon Group, War Memorial Library and Little Theatre, 1951-56. Photo by Julia Gatley, 2021.
 Right: Structon Group, St James' (Anglican) Church, 1951-54. Photo by Ian Bowman, 2007.

depicted item: Lower Hutt Civic Centre

1. King, Cook and Dawson, Town Hall and Administration Building, Lower Hutt, 1951-57.
2. Structon Group, War Memorial Library and Little Theatre, 1951-56.
3. Structon Group, St James' (Anglican) Church, 1951-54.

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

1.1 Data for identification

current name: Lower Hutt Civic Centre Historic Area

former/original/variant name: Lower Hutt Town Hall and Administration Building; Lower Hutt War Memorial Library and Little Theatre; Riddiford Park; St James' (Anglican) Church

number(s) and name(s) of street(s): 30 Laings Road and 71 Woburn Road

town: Lower Hutt

province/state: Greater Wellington Area

post code: 5010

Administration Building: Pt Lots 4-9 and 16-22 DP 89, Lot DP 12766.

Town Hall: Pt Lots 1-3 DP 89, Lots 23 - 25 DP 89, Pt Sec 25 Hutt Dist. & Pt 4 DP 664

Library and Little Theatre: Pt Lots 32 - 38 DP 89, Pt Lot 4 DP 15844, Pt 1 DP 17883, Pt Sec 25 Hutt Dist, Pt Stream

Recreation Reserve (Riddiford Park): CT 770/64.

country: New Zealand

national topographical grid reference:

current typology: Local government administration building, town hall, public hall, war memorial library, theatre, Anglican church

former/original/variant typology: Local government administration building, town hall, public hall, war memorial library, theatre, Anglican church

comments on typology: The precinct was purpose-built as a civic centre and continues to serve this function.

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1.2 Status of protection

protected by: The local authority – Hutt City Council.

grade: Listed by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) as Lower Hutt Civic Centre Historic Area; and scheduled on the Hutt City Council's District Plan as Lower Hutt Civic Centre Historic Area

date: Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga listed on 13/06/2003

valid for: The HNZPT historic area "has road boundaries to the south, west and north. These are, clockwise, Woburn Road, Queens Drive and Laings Road. To the east, Myrtle Street forms the boundary as far as the drive into the Hutt Bowling Club; the boundary then continues around the Club grounds, and from there on, separates private property from Council-owned and church-owned land back to Woburn Road."¹ The Council scheduling has the same boundaries.

remarks: The historic area listing and scheduling recognise the collective value of these various post-war civic buildings. In New Zealand, listing is a recognition of heritage value but does not provide protection; only local authority scheduling provides protection.

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

name(s) of surrounding area/building(s): All related buildings are included in the listed and scheduled historic areas.

visual relations: The various buildings in the historic area were designed by two architectural practices – King, Cook and Dawson, and Structon Group – and present as a visually cohesive cluster.

functional relations: The various buildings in the historic area form a civic centre collectively. They are owned and occupied by the Hutt City Council, except for St James' Church, which is owned and occupied by the Anglican Church.

other relations: The Dowse Art Gallery was also designed by Structon Group and is located nearby. The cluster of buildings benefit from proximity to the public gardens of Riddiford Park, which was established by Mayor W T Strand and planned by Edward Hutt.

2. History of building(s) etc.

2.1 Chronology

Note if the dates are exactly known (e) or approximately estimated = circa (c) or (±)

Town Hall and Administration Building:

1951	Building designed by King Cook and Dawson (project architect, Keith Cook)
24 July 1953	Building completed
1967	Additions to the west
1994	New cafeteria and other alterations on the ground floor
1998	Office alterations, first floor alterations

¹ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT), "Lower Hutt Civic Centre Historic Area," <https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/7520/Lower%20Hutt%20Civic%20Centre%20Historic%20Area> (accessed 28 July 2023).

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2001	Alterations to supper room and café
2002	Ramps and handrails installed at entrances
2004-05	Second floor alterations including kitchenette and fit-out of first and second floors
2014-17	Major building upgrade designed by Architecture+. The project included seismic strengthening and new additions, and transformed both buildings. It also included the demolition of the neighbouring Horticultural Hall and replacement with a new Events Centre.

War Memorial Library, including Little Theatre:

1920s	Hutt Borough council purchased the site for recreation purposes
1951	Demolition of the original Plunket Rooms.
1951	Library building designed by Structon Group (project architect, Ron Muston)
1952	Construction started
1956	Library opened by Governor-General, Lieutenant-General Sir Willoughby Norrie
1976	Reroofing of flat sections of the roof
1980s	Meeting rooms converted to Library offices
1990	Staff room built on part of flat roof
2002	Office walls removed Completion of alterations to the Little Theatre Installation of Lower Hutt Cenotaph

St James' (Anglican) Church:

1946	An earlier timber church (the third on the site) was destroyed by fire.
By March 1951	Building designed by Structon Group (project architect, Ron Muston)
21 December 1953	Church dedicated and opened. Cost £80,000.
20 December 1958	Church consecrated.
1960	Floor under choir pews raised.
10 December 1961	New parish hall opened.
1967	East end extended to a design by Ron Muston of Structon Group.
1976	Remedial work undertaken on building.

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2.2 Summary of development

commission brief: It was in the time of Mayor J. W. Andrews, who served from 1933 to 1947, that it was recognised that Lower Hutt needed more and better planning. Andrews appointed R. D. H. Hill as first City Planner, “one of the first such officers in New Zealand [who] laid the groundwork for the great changes to come”.² The urgent need for a civic centre was appreciated by these two men, who had to lobby a reluctant central government for financial support. Unlike the new suburbs of Naenae, Eponi, Waiwhetu and Moera nearby, Lower Hutt City was not planned in cohesive fashion and had grown haphazardly. The location and condition of Council amenities reflected this pattern of growth: “Council offices were in temporary housing in the old post office, the library was rated a disgrace, there was no theatre, no central amenities, no flowers, no joy”.³

The first necessary part of development of the civic centre was the reorganisation of streets in the centre of Lower Hutt to reduce traffic congestion and aid easy cross and through traffic. Queens Drive, on the boundary of Riddiford Park, was the result. It allowed for the amenities to proceed much as had been envisaged by Andrews and Hill. An added advantage of the location of the civic buildings was the pride in, and concern to maintain, the public gardens of Lower Hutt. It was entirely appropriate that the new centre would be built alongside one of the finest public gardens in the Greater Wellington area.

St James’ Church was designed as a critical part of the Lower Hutt city centre development. It was the first of the buildings in the centre and the City Council asked the architect for the church, Ron Muston of Structon Group, to design the Memorial Library and Little Theatre to match it.⁴ As well as the library and theatre, this building included the Memorial Entrance Hall, which commemorates Lower Hutt’s dead from the two World Wars, and a Plunket rooms (i.e. rest rooms for women, including provision for mothers with babies and young children). The Library and its facilities were opened in 1956 by Governor-General Sir Willoughby Norrie.

design brief: The brief was for a comprehensive civic centre, including an Anglican church. The church was built first, and the City Council asked the architect who had designed it, Ron Muston, to design the next building, the Memorial Library and Little Theatre, to match it.⁵

building/construction: The chronology is as outlined above.

completed situation: The historic area is on a flat site between Lower Hutt’s commercial centre and its public park and gardens, Riddiford Park.

original situation or character of site: In the 1950s, Lower Hutt was New Zealand’s fifth largest city. At the opening ceremony for the Administration Building, it was remarked that, “we are now in the proud position of a city with a focal centre in which a group of magnificent buildings symbolises a highly developed sense of civic pride”.⁶ A period publication observed of that the Library building “is set in very pleasant surroundings and with the new Free Ambulance Station and the St James’ Church will, when the old Vicarage and the old Library has been removed, form an important group of dignified buildings worthy of the main approach into the City”.⁷ Journalist and commentator David McGill later wrote that, “The fine clean lines of these new structures set amidst lawn and gardens was an instant fillip to civic pride. It helped no end that, unlike the Duke of Edinburgh of last century, the Queen detoured from her schedule

² David McGill, *Lower Hutt: The First Garden City* (Lower Hutt: Lower Hutt City Council, 1991), 156.

³ McGill, *Lower Hutt*, 157.

⁴ McGill, *Lower Hutt*, 165.

⁵ McGill, *Lower Hutt*, 165.

⁶ *Building Progress*, July 1957, 78.

⁷ *Building Progress*, August 1957, 72.

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to pay a visit to the new church in 1954. She praised its lighting saying she had seen but one other like it, in Edinburgh. Citizens chests puffed out like well-fed pigeons. In May 1955 the 'Hutt News' declared the days of the Lower Hutt shanty town were passing".⁸

By 1960, the civic centre included the Riddiford Baths (now demolished), the Library, two halls, a theatre, the administration building, Plunket rooms, and St James' Church and new hall. To this grouping were later added the Dowse Art Museum, law courts and the civil defence headquarters, all while still retaining the garden setting for each.

2.3 Relevant persons/organisations

original owner(s)/patron(s): Administration Building and Library Building originally owned by Lower Hutt City Council; St James' Church originally owned by the Anglican Church.

architect(s): Library Building and St James' Church designed by Structon Group (project architect, Ron Muston); and Town Hall and Administration Building designed by King, Cook and Dawson (project architect, Keith Cook)

landscape/garden designer(s): -

other designer(s): -

consulting engineer(s): Structon Group

building contractor(s): Angus Construction (all buildings)

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

name(s): Percy Dowse (all the Council-owned buildings)

association: Mayor from 1950 to 1970⁹

event(s): period: Between 1935 and 1938, Dowse was a councillor on the Lower Hutt Borough Council and in 1947 he was a City Councillor. He became the first Labour Mayor of Hutt City in 1950. Dowse had been the leading member of the Hutt Council Civic Centre Committee, which had recommended that a new Library be built within Riddiford Park. As Mayor he pushed the development of the new Civic Centre with the initial building being that of the Library.

name(s): Captain Daniell (War Memorial Library and Little Theatre)

association: The Memorial Library and Little Theatre occupies a site that was settled early in Lower Hutt's history, in 1848, by Captain Daniell.

event(s): period: nineteenth century

⁸ McGill, *Lower Hutt*, 165.

⁹ Miller, *Once Upon a Village*, 174-75.

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name(s): Canon J.C. Davis and Sir Walter Nash (St James' Church)

association: Davis was Resident Vicar. In addition to serving as New Zealand Prime Minister, Sir Walter Nash was the local MP, a member of the St James' parish and a lay reader.

event(s): period: 1953

2.5 Summary of important changes after completion

type of change: See above.

date(s):

circumstances/ reasons for change

effects of changes:

persons/organisations involved:

3. Description of building(s) etc.

3.1 Site/building character

Town Hall and Administration Building:

The Town Hall and Administration Building complex, built of reinforced concrete, gives architectural expression to its various component parts, which are organised in linear formation, facing towards the north-east. The Town Hall has always been the centrepiece of the complex, with the Administration Building to its west, and originally a Horticultural Building to its east. The initial Horticultural Building was lost to fire in 1957 and replaced with a concrete one that was in keeping with the design language of the Town Hall and Administration Building but was demolished as part of the 2014-17 upgrade and replaced with a new Events Centre. The front wall plane of the Town Hall sits forward of that of the Administration Building, and includes a large porte-cochere, both of which enhance the Town Hall's sense of importance. This building has much solid walling, not having the need for large windows, whereas the three-storeyed Administration Building has large windows between the columns and beams of its structural frame, contrasted by balconies that signal the main entry.

A landmark town clock provides the hinge between the Town Hall and the Administration Building. It is approximately twice the height of each of the buildings, resulting in a massing that can be described as Dudok-esque. Its overall severity is relieved by small cut-out windows in the northern corner and geometric detailing near the top.

The new Events Centre at the east end is reasonably sympathetic in terms of scale and bulk. It is legibly new, although makes reference to the old in some of its design moves and details.

War Memorial Library and Little Theatre:

The War Memorial Library and Little Theatre are located to the south-west of the Town Hall and Administration Building. They are again in linear formation, but with a north-west rather than north-east aspect. The library and theatre demonstrate a stronger commitment to the elimination of ornament than the neighbouring Administration Building and particularly the town clock component of it, with clean lines and projecting boxes for each of the entries. The words "Lower Hutt War Memorial Library" and "Little

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Theatre” are inscribed on the building, which also includes the city’s coat of arms at the library entrance. Immediately inside this entrance are the war memorial murals and Roll of Honour, commemorating the dead from two World Wars.

The interior design of the building follows the tradition of a large, well lit, open hall serving as the main reading room. The mezzanine provides further reading space, much like the gallery spaces of historic European libraries with an opportunity to view the whole of the ground floor from above. The inclusion of works of art also maintains the strong tradition of libraries being places of learning, with the murals reflecting the period in which they were painted.

St James’ Church:

St James’ Church takes the form of a rectilinear concrete box with a very shallow gabled roof and a detached bell tower. The exterior in particular was spartan by New Zealand architecture standards of the early-mid 1950s. The interior is articulated by exposed concrete portal frames, and also features blue and yellow ceiling decoration, timber furniture including the pews, and cork flooring. A local newspaper recorded that the English architect Sir Alfred Bossom considered it essential for inclusion in his work, “Trends in Modern Church Design”.¹⁰

3.2 Current use

of whole building/site: as original

of principal components (*if applicable*):

comments:

3.3 Present (physical) condition

of whole building/site: The Town Hall and Administration Building are well maintained and structurally sound following a major upgrade in 2014-17.

of principal components (*if applicable*):

of other elements (*if applicable*):

of surrounding area (*if applicable*): It is the historic area that is heritage listed and scheduled. The area maintains integrity even though there have been major additions to the Town Hall and Administration Building.

comments:

3.4 Note(s) on context, indicating potential developments

Following the upgrade of the Town Hall and Administration Building in 2014-17, a hotel was proposed for the immediate area, to ensure that people could stay within close proximity of the new Events Centre. This was opened in 2023.

¹⁰ *The Hutt News*, 23 March 1955.

4. Evaluation

Intrinsic value

4.1 technical evaluation:

The Town Hall and Administration Building uses typical technologies of the time including a reinforced concrete structure, cement render, interior and exterior wall tiles, and steel window joinery.

The War Memorial Library Building and Little Theatre building uses typical technologies of the time including a reinforced concrete structure, concrete roofing tiles, steel window joinery, and decorative cement plaster bas relief decorative panels.

St James' Church uses typical technologies of the time including a reinforced concrete structure. The use of formica laminate for such things as the pulpit, the areas behind the cross and around the font, the ends of pews, and the cupboards at the back was highly controversial at the time and remains so. The use of cork tiles for the interior is also not common.

4.2. social evaluation:

The Lower Hutt Civic Centre is of high social value, bringing together the key civic facilities for a local authority area with a population of a little over 100,000 people. It comprises a town hall, civic administration building, library, theatre, war memorial, Plunket rooms, Anglican church and church hall, all constructed within five years of each other in the 1950s. The setting and design of the Civic Centre gave the city a considerable sense of pride and achievement when the buildings were first opened.

The complex is associated with the local authority politicians and staff who conceptualised, supported and commissioned the buildings, especially Mayors J. W. Andrews and Percy Dowse and City Planner R. D. Hill as well as the public whose generous donations helped to fund construction.

The Town Hall has been the site of many functions and events of the years, while the Administration Building is of particularly high social and community value locally. It houses the mayor's office, where dignitaries are formally greeted and other visitors and citizens are met, along with the Council Chamber, the symbol of local government democracy, where issues are debated by Councillors, local citizens can voice their opinions on issues, and events such as council inaugurations and citizenship ceremonies are held. The building also houses the departments of Council and the front desk area where ratepayers interact with Council staff.

The War Memorial Library was designed as a 'living memorial' to the Lower Hutt citizens lost in war and is a focus for the commemoration of their sacrifice. The murals and Roll of Honour in the entry hall remind all visitors to the building of its memorial function immediately upon entrance. The war memorial theme is reinforced with the cenotaph positioned immediately in front of the library building. The concerns of the public of Lower Hutt for social facilities housed in the building are reflected in the considerable funds donated by local citizens equalling the combined totals of local and central government. This concern has been rekindled over discussions for the future of the building as both a memorial and library.

The church replaced an earlier building (the third on the site) destroyed by fire and is imbued with the history of the spiritual endeavour of the Lower Hutt Anglican community. It carries considerable social values for past and present clergy, parish members, and members of the community.

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4.3. cultural and aesthetic evaluation:

In the late 1990s, Lower Hutt became recognised for its Modern Movement architecture.¹¹ The Civic Centre precinct was, and remains, an important component of this. The Civic Centre is of high aesthetic value, comprising a cluster of post-war modern buildings designed and built within a short period of time by two architecture practices – Structon Group and King, Cook and Dawson – who worked closely together in the preliminary designs of all the Council buildings and then became responsible for the more detailed design and construction of specific buildings within the precinct. The scale, bulk, design language and material palette of the various buildings are reasonably consistent, giving the Civic Centre visual cohesion. Furthermore, the concept of a park setting for the Civic Centre was a fundamental requirement of its planning. The park setting enhances the buildings' sense of civic presence and importance, which other local authorities aspired to in the 1950s, but few were able to achieve.

When constructed the Administration Building was noted for its enlightened approach to office design with simplicity and flexibility in the use of spaces. They had multi-use capability, as well as plenty of natural daylighting, wide stairs and cork-tiled floors to reduce noise. The interior design of the Council Chamber and Mayoral Chambers, including the Mayoral dais, employed various New Zealand timbers.

While New Zealand built cenotaphs and obelisks to commemorate the dead after World War I, after World War II "utilitarian" or useful memorials were preferred, and the Lower Hutt War Memorial Library is one such memorial. It is culturally significant to the local community in commemorating the 407 dead from both World Wars. It is believed to be one of only two such libraries in New Zealand which serve as war memorials, the other being in Hastings. The inclusion of works of art also maintain the strong tradition of libraries being places of learning, with the murals reflecting the period in which they were painted.

St James' Church was much admired at the time of construction, including by other architects, Queen Elizabeth II when she visited in 1954, and also the clergy as a modern, pragmatic and practical solution to church architecture. In the precinct, this building was designed first and influenced the design of the other buildings that followed.

Comparative significance

4.4 canonical status (local, national, international)

National

In New Zealand, many local authority civic centres were developed incrementally, over long periods of time, and are eclectic in their architectural design. The Lower Hutt Civic Centre is one of only a small number to have been planned and built as a collective, with two architecture practices working together in the initial stages to develop a cohesive whole. Another that was designed as a cohesive whole is the Upper Hutt Civic Centre (1965-76), located some 20 kilometres away. Its buildings have fair-faced concrete columns and beams and flat-topped hipped roofs and as a result, the precinct has different aesthetic values.

4.5 historic and reference values:

The Lower Hutt Civic Centre is a unique and nationally significant modern civic centre, designed and built from 1951 to 1957. It comprises a town hall, civic administration building, library, theatre, war memorial,

¹¹ Ian Bowman, *1950s Buildings: Lower Hutt City's Post-war Modern Movement Buildings* (Lower Hutt: Hutt City Council, 2002).

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Plunket rooms, church and church hall. The various buildings were designed by two architecture practices working together initially and then independently on specific buildings, ensuring a degree of consistency across the building types and cohesiveness for the civic centre as a whole. There have been additions and alterations over time. These have helped to keep the civic centre useful and of value to the community, while retaining an acceptable degree of design integrity.

5. Documentation

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

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
Hutt City Council Archives, Lower Hutt.
Local Studies Collection, Lower Hutt Administration Building.

5.2 principal publications (in chronological order):

Home and Building, September 1954, 44-45, 71-79.
Journal of the NZIA, April 1955, 58-60.
Building Progress, July 1957, 71.
Building Progress, August 1957, 71.
"Early Church History in the Valley" in *St James' Parish News*, 29, no.4 (July 1958).
David P. Millar, *Once Upon A Village: A History of Lower Hutt, 1819-1965* (Wellington: New Zealand University Press for Lower Hutt City Corporation, 1972).
NZIA Journal, February 1975, 2-7.
David McGill, *Lower Hutt: The First Garden City* (Lower Hutt: Lower Hutt City Council, 1991).
St James' 50th Anniversary of the Fire 1946-1996 (Lower Hutt: St James Church, Lower Hutt, ca 1996).
Ian Bowman, *1950s Buildings: Lower Hutt City's Post-war Modern Movement Buildings* (Lower Hutt: Hutt City Council, 2002).
Warwick Johnston, *Woburn = Te Umumamaku* (Lower Hutt: Hutt City Libraries, Hutt City Council, 2002).
S. R. K. Sawrey, "Lower Hutt Library Building Earthquake Assessment for Hutt City Council," November 2002.
"Registration Proposal – Historic Place – Lower Hutt War Memorial Library," Lower Hutt Historical Society, February 2003.
Julia Gatley, "Lower Hutt Civic Precinct," *Architecture New Zealand*, January-February 2019, pp. 62-70.

5.3 visual material (state location/ address)

original visual records/drawings/photographs/others: see above
recent photographs and survey drawings: -

film/video/other sources: -

5.4 list documents included in supplementary dossier

6. Fiche report

name of reporter: Ian Bowman
address: 68 Britannia Heights, Nelson, New Zealand

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date of report: September 2023

examination by DOCOMOMO national/regional section

approval by wp co-ordinator/registers correspondent (name): Gina Hochstein

sign and date: 13 October 2023

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.:

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