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International working party for  
**documentation and conservation**

of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the  
**modern movement**

**New International Selection  
Full Documentation Fiche 2003**

**for office use only**

**composed by national/regional working party of: New Zealand**

0. Picture of building



Depicted item: Mason & Wales Architects Office Building, Dunedin – north elevation, facing York Place.  
Source: Hamish Muir, Mason & Wales Architects  
Date: October 2023

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## 1. Identity of building

### 1.1 Data for identification

current name: Mason & Wales Architects Office Building

former/original/variant name: N/A

number(s) and name(s) of street(s): 46 York Place

town: Dunedin

province/state: Otago

post code: 9016

block:

lot:

country: New Zealand

national topographical grid reference: 45° 32' 19" S, 170° 30' 06" E, 18.24 m.

current typology: Office building.

former/original/variant typology: Office building.

comments on typology: The building was purpose-built as the premises of Mason & Wales Architects, and continues to serve as their office and studio.

### 1.2 Status of protection

protected by: N/A

grade: N/A

date: N/A

valid for: N/A

remarks: Not currently listed or scheduled

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

name of surrounding area: Dunedin city

visual relations:

The building is located within a mixed-use environment, close to the central business district and central-city Octagon. It can be described as city fringe, with neighbours including professional services firms (accounting and legal), as well as some older houses now with mixed uses including childcare, flats and housing. Across the road is a motel development, designed by Mason & Wales in 2001 to blend into the residential style of the neighbourhood and hill suburbs beyond. Close by is the modernist First Church of Christ Scientist (32 York Place, 1960-61 & 1969), which was designed by Miller, White and Dunn.

functional relations:

N/A.

## 2. History of building(s) etc.

### 2.1 Chronology

commission or competition date: Early 1972

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design period(s): Architectural drawings are dated March-April 1972

start of site work: Dunedin City Council issued a building permit for the office building in June 1972. It is assumed that work began on site shortly thereafter.

completion/inauguration: 1973

## 2.2 Summary of development

commission brief:

The property was privately owned until 1959 when it was transferred to the Otago Pioneer Women's Memorial Association (est. 1939). In 1971 the property was acquired by Cumulus Investment Company, which had been incorporated in 1963 by the practice of Mason & Wales Architects Ltd, in whose name it remains today. The lot appears to have been in residential use by 1901, if not earlier, before its redevelopment by Mason & Wales Architects in the early 1970s, as their own office and studio.

design brief:

The building was designed to serve the office and studio needs of the architecture practice that also designed it. The design was generated through an in-house design competition at Mason & Wales Architects, won by William (Bill) Harris.

building/construction:

Reinforced concrete foundations and walls, with an exposed timber roof structure, concrete tiles, and steel window frames. Original asbestos cement sheets, cladding and sunshades have been removed and replaced with new cement sheet panels.

completed situation:

As noted, the building is located within a mixed-use environment, close to the central business district. Close by is the modernist First Church of Christ Scientist (32 York Place, 1960-61 & 1969), which was designed by Miller, White and Dunn.

original situation or character of site:

As above.

## 2.3 Relevant persons/organisations

original owners/patrons/architects:

Established by William Mason (1810-1897) in 1862, Mason & Wales Architects is New Zealand's oldest (longest continuously running) architectural office. Mason had worked in England, Australia and New Zealand's northern city of Auckland before moving to Dunedin, which was benefitting from the Otago gold rushes of the 1860s. He had two partnerships in the 1860s, and the name change to Mason & Wales came in 1871, when Nathaniel YA Wales (1832-1902), who had joined Mason as a clerk of works in 1862, was made a junior partner. Members of three subsequent generations of the Wales family served as partners in the firm. In 1970, C. Ashley Muir (b. 1946) joined the staff. He became a director of the practice, retiring from that role in 2021, although remaining on as a consultant architect. Current directors are Francis Whitaker, who has been with the practice since 1983, and Hamish M. Muir, a son of Ashley and a third-generation architect, who joined the practice in 2005, upon his return to Dunedin. Mason & Wales Architects has designed the full range of architectural projects over many years, from churches and

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commercial buildings to industrial facilities and private houses, and has garnered numerous architecture awards.

landscape/garden designer(s):

other designer(s):

consulting engineer(s):

building contractor(s): Stevenson & Williams, contractors

The firm of Stevenson & Williams was established in 1947 and continues to operate from Dunedin and remains involved with the building refurbishment and modernisation.

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

name(s):

association:

event(s):

period:

## **2.5 Summary of important changes after completion**

type of change: refurbishment and modernisation.

Partitioned offices and rooms, with dark brown timber finishes, bright red steel fixings, green carpet, hessian-lined walls and the original standing desks for drawings boards, were refurbished as a contemporary open-plan workspace with a fresh coat of white paint to the concrete surfaces as well as the timber structure and steel fixings, and the introduction of new light oak timber finishes and contemporary carpet tiles. Adapting to modern workplace arrangements, the works included opening up of office and administration spaces, and a staff kitchen as well as a new main stair with complying risers and balustrade, to a new entry gallery space at ground level with reconfigured bathrooms and new and enhanced main entry steps and landscaping to York Place. The refurbishment and modernisation also included provision for latest technologies, with new lighting and data cabling throughout, air-conditioning and environmentally sustainable material selections.

date(s): 2005-2006

circumstances/ reasons for change

To ensure a contemporary work environment and a contemporary public image for Mason & Wales Architects.

effects of changes:

The interior partitioning was substantially opened up, but key structural components and materials remained legible.

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persons/organisations involved:

Hamish Muir, a director of Mason & Wales Architects, led the modernisation, redesign and refurbishment of the interior.

Gray Brothers, builders; Stevenson & Williams, joiners.

type of change: maintenance, upgrade and modernisation.

The project comprised the replacement of the roofing, gutters and downpipes to reduce weight and ensure weather-tightness, as well as a full exterior and interior modernisation, refurbishment and repainting.

The external works included asbestos removal, the introduction of low energy features, new insulation where possible, and the installation of opening high-level windows for natural ventilation. Interior works included provision of acoustic treatments, low energy technologies including heatpumps, and new lighting as well as provision for ceiling fans and solar panels.

Landscaping to the east boundary, to the driveway and neighbouring office building, was also cleared and updated, to be more sophisticated and to provide more natural light to the interior spaces and ground-level carpark, while preserving the pre-existing original bluestone wall at the street frontage.

date: 2023

circumstances/ reasons for change

The programme of works followed the retirement of C. Ashley Muir and the return to the office after Covid-19 remote working (2020-22) and marked 50 years in the building for the practice. The works were undertaken to meet expectations for a contemporary work environment, for the enjoyment of the Mason & Wales team as well as clients, collaborators and the wider community.

effects of changes:

The project aimed to respect and preserve the original building and its character. The exterior maintains and reinvigorates its design integrity, while key structural components and materials remain legible throughout.

persons/organisations involved:

Mason & Wales Architects; Gray Brothers, builders; Stevenson & Williams, joiners.

### **3. Description of building(s) etc.**

#### **3.1 Site/building character**

The Mason & Wales Architects Office Building is two-storey, with a rectangular footprint running north-to-south and occupying most of the lot. It has a three-part, south-facing sawtooth roof to ensure natural light, without direct sunlight, to the whole of the upper level. The main entry is set below the level of the footpath and provides access to a ground-floor entrance gallery (2023) from which stairs rise to the first floor, comprising an open-plan reception and waiting area and meeting rooms to the front, with open-plan

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'drawing room', print spaces around a central team table, and staff kitchen at the rear. The first floor extends beyond the ground floor towards the rear of the lot, allowing for car-parking underneath the first floor.

The key features of the building's exterior include heavily textured roughcast concrete walls with expression given to the off-form concrete floor slab at the building's mid-level, triangular roof forms including both gables and half-gables, and solar shading 'fins' on the west elevation. It has an exposed timber roof structure, and steel window frames. The fenestration is varied, with a large expanse of glazing towards the street as well as strip and boxed bay windows. The building has stainless steel guttering and rainwater heads, as well as a contemporary abstracted finial to main gable.



The first floor reception area and office/studio.  
Source: Luke Melhop, Mason & Wales Architects, 2023

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### **3.2 Current use**

of whole building/site:

The building maintains its original use as the office and studio of Mason & Wales Architects.

### **3.3 Present (physical) condition**

of whole building/site: Following a full programme of works in 2023, the building remains well maintained, cared for, and in daily use.

comments:

### **3.4 Note(s) on context, indicating potential developments**

No known future or potential developments that would threaten the future of this building are known.

## **4. Evaluation**

### ***Intrinsic value***

#### **4.1 technical evaluation:**

The Mason & Wales Architects Office Building is typical of Mason & Wales' period use of reinforced concrete in a bold and sculptural manner that is expressive of the methods used in its construction.

#### **4.2. social evaluation:**

The Mason & Wales Architects Office Building illustrates the social importance of the practice of architecture through its visibility in the streetscape and expression of the firm's longstanding relationship with the region's built environment. The building has been owned by multiple generations of the Wales family and the Muir family, thus demonstrating long-standing connections and relationships that continue to this day.

#### **4.3. cultural and aesthetic evaluation:**

The Mason & Wales Architects Office Building has design significance as a late modern office building that was designed by a noted architectural practice for its own use. The building demonstrates the regional modernism of the period, in which architects inflected their designs with a greater awareness of local building traditions, here including the use of steeply pitched roofs in combination with concrete walls, a palette that is in contrast to the flat roofs and transparency of much international modernism.

### ***Comparative significance***

#### **4.4 canonical status (local, national, international)**

Mason & Wales Architects is New Zealand's oldest (longest continuously running) architecture practice and has long been recognised as one of the country's leading practices. The Mason & Wales Architects Office Building was designed by the practice and purpose-built to serve as their own office and studio.

The Mason & Wales Architects Office Building embodies a regional modernist aesthetic, and is aligned with the best of contemporaneous New Zealand architecture. In 1973, it was recognised by the Otago Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects with a design award. It is also featured in an *Architecture New Zealand* guide to the work of Mason & Wales which was published in 2022.

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As a purpose-built architects' office, designed and developed by the practice that would occupy it, the building is comparable to the Warren & Mahoney office in Christchurch (1962) and the Athfield home and office in Wellington (1965+), both of which have been recognised as modern heritage buildings.

#### **4.5 historic and reference values:**

The Mason & Wales Architects Office Building is historically important as the purpose-built premises of New Zealand's oldest architectural practice, and as an expression of the way in which central Dunedin was being transformed by modernist commercial and educational buildings in the decades after World War II.

## **5. Documentation**

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

Architectural drawings are held by Dunedin City Council and by Mason & Wales Architects, Dunedin.

### **5.2 principal publications (in chronological order):**

John Stacpoole, *William Mason: The First New Zealand Architect*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1971.

'Mason & Wales Architects Offices,' *New Zealand Institute of Architects Journal* Vol. 41, No. 3, March 1974, p. 38.

Hardwicke Knight and Niel Wales, *Buildings of Dunedin: An Illustrated Guide to New Zealand's Victorian City*, John McIndoe, Dunedin, 1988.

Andrew Barrie and Julia Gatley, 'Dunedin Guide – Mason and Wales,' *Architecture New Zealand*, March 2022, 99-101. See <https://architecturenow.co.nz/articles/itinerary-dunedin/>

Mason & Wales Architects, "About Us," <https://www.masonandwales.com/about>

### **5.3 visual material (state location/ address)**

original visual records/drawings/photographs/others:

Architectural drawings are held by Dunedin City Council and by Mason & Wales Architects, Dunedin.

recent photographs and survey drawings:

film/video/other sources:

None known.

### **5.4 list documents included in supplementary dossier**

## **6. Fiche report**

name of reporter: Julia Gatley

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**examination by DOCOMOMO national/regional section**

approval by wp co-ordinator/registers correspondent (name): Ann McEwan  
sign and date: 12 December 2023

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**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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