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**New International Selection
Full Documentation Fiche 2003**

International working party for
documentation and conservation
of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the
modern movement

composed by national/regional working party of: New Zealand

0. Picture of building



depicted item: Massey House, Lambton Quay, Wellington
source: Photograph by Julia Gatley
date: 2007

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

1.1 Data for identification

current name: 126 LQ

former/original/variant name: Massey House

number(s) and name(s) of street(s): 126-132 Lambton Quay and 47-57 The Terrace

town: Wellington

province/state: Wellington

post code: 6011

block: n/a lot: Lot 1 DP 16589

country: New Zealand

national topographical grid reference: unknown

current typology: commercial

former/original/variant typology: commercial

comments on typology: Purpose-built office building with ground floor retail.

1.2 Status of protection

protected by: Wellington City Council District Plan Heritage Listing

grade: n/a

date: 27/07/1994

valid for: building exterior

remarks: statutory protection

listed by: Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga

grade: Category I historic place [register # 7661]

date: 30/06/2006

valid for: building exterior and interior

remarks: no statutory protection, but a recognition of significance and value

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

name(s) of surrounding area/building(s): Manchester Unity building, 124 Lambton Quay

visual relations: a building of similar scale, form, proportion, and age built adjacent on the north side

functional relations: n/a

other relations: generic relationship to other commercial high-rise buildings in Lambton Quay

2. History of building(s) etc.

2.1 Chronology

commission or competition date: Commissioned 1948; south addition commissioned 1967

design period(s): unknown

start of site work: construction commenced 1955

completion/inauguration: Completed 4 October 1957

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2.2 Summary of development

commission brief: built to house the producer boards of the New Zealand dairy and the New Zealand meat industry.

design brief: an office building with retail at ground-floor levels to Lambton Quay and the Terrace.

building/construction: reinforced concrete columns and floor plates with glass curtain walling and aluminium glazing

completed situation: Massey House was erected on Wellington's most prestigious commercial retail street, Lambton Quay, in the post-war period when eight- and nine-storey buildings were replacing their two- and three-storey predecessors.

original situation or character of site: as above.

2.3 Relevant persons/organisations

original owner(s)/patron(s): New Zealand Meat Producers' Board, New Zealand Dairy Export Producers' Control Board (Dairy Board)

architect(s): Plishke & Firth (the partnership of Ernst Plischke and Cedric Firth) 1957 building, Cedric Firth, 1967 addition

landscape/garden designer(s): Plishke & Firth, level 8 roof terrace

other designer(s): n/a

consulting engineer(s): Edwards and Clendon, Consulting Engineers

building contractor(s): AG Wells, Cubitt Wells

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

name(s): William Ferguson Massey, New Zealand Prime Minister (1856-1925)

association: founder of meat & dairy industry producer boards (1922-23)

event(s): n/a

period: Massey was well known as New Zealand's Prime Minister from 1912 to 1924.

2.5 Summary of important changes after completion

type of change: major addition to the south designed by Cedric Firth

date(s): 1967

circumstances/ reasons for change: additional floor space for producer boards.

effects of changes: the addition utilises similar materials and detailing to the original portion of the building and reaches the same height. The addition is offset at an angle from the original building.

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persons/organisations involved: Cedric Firth, Architect

type of change: construction of a kitchen addition to the rooftop

date(s): late 2006

circumstances/ reasons for change: tenant requiring additional facilities

effects of changes: the kitchen addition encloses an area of the rooftop and negatively impacts the architectural aesthetic of this section of the building

persons/organisations involved: Stephenson & Turner New Zealand Ltd, Architects and Engineers

type of change: enclosure of terrace to bar on first floor (see lower left of cover photo)

date(s): unknown

circumstances/ reasons for change: tenant requirement

effects of changes: reduction in external authenticity of 1967 addition

persons/organisations involved: unknown

type of change: external and internal alterations

date(s): 2020-2024

circumstances/ reasons for change: earthquake strengthening, internal refurbishment, external repairs and reconstruction

effects of changes: enhancement of external authenticity including reapplication of original blue and pink colour scheme, reduction of internal authenticity with removal of original toilets and some original interior linings

persons/organisations involved: Egmont Dixon (project managers), Architecture+ Ltd (architects), Sylvester Clark (consulting engineers), Ian Bowman (conservation architect)

3. Description of building(s) etc.

3.1 Site/building character

Main features

Massey House was the first curtain-walled high-rise office building in New Zealand. It influenced New Zealand architecture from its completion on 4 October 1957 and is the work of two important architects: Ernst Plischke and Cedric Firth. Its architectural and aesthetic qualities are admired nationally. Massey House was built to house the

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producer boards of both the dairy industry and the meat industry. It name commemorates William Massey, Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1912-1924, and acknowledges the role he played in establishing national producer boards, thereby permitting cooperative international marketing of New Zealand primary produce. The early bookshop and coffee gallery tenancies in Massey House were instrumental in establishing the cultural milieu in Wellington in the 1960s.

The building features glass cladding along the east and west facades that is independent of the building's ferro-cement structure. The use of modern materials and construction techniques allowed the architects to achieve a radical, yet well received, departure from New Zealand's architectural norms of the 1950s. On its opening in 1957 Prime Minister Keith Holyoake announced that: "This building has added something worthwhile and spectacular to Wellington's skyline and is a symbol of the economic importance and vast proportions of our primary industry".

Massey House was widely emulated in subsequent years, with Wellington's Shell House, Wool House and Manchester House following the example set by Massey House. Together these buildings served to establish the architectural context of the north end of the Wellington CBD, which is still evident today. The extensive, published architectural critique of Massey House, both within New Zealand and internationally, has ensured that the building has had a wide influence on architectural history. The building fronts to Lambton Quay and, at a higher level, The Terrace. Eight floors and a rooftop terrace rise above Lambton Quay, in a roughly "C" shaped plan around a light well on the north side of the building. This original plan form can no longer be read from the street, as the light-well has been enclosed by a 1967 addition on the south side and the neighbouring Manchester Unity Building. The 1967 addition gently angles to follow the curve of Lambton Quay and was designed by Cedric Firth. With the exception of the mock Victorian pub on the ground and first floors, the addition follows the style and architectural language of the original building.

The key features of the primary, street façades are:

- the curtain glass wall, with its subtly modulated, articulated aluminium alloy frames; the structure of the columns which are expressed independently of the curtain wall and interior walling (note the use of verandas to celebrate the independence of the façade from the columns), and link the building with a simple, classical platonic tradition;
- the rooftop terrace with its sculpted concrete forms;
- the shopfronts designed originally to house a car show room, but redesigned by Plischke and Firth to house a jewellers, Parson's Bookshop and Harry Seresin's Coffee Gallery; and
- a cantilevered veranda sheltering the shopfronts on the Lambton Quay side. The underside of the veranda is studded with recessed light fittings, and an ovoid sculpted ceiling panel straddles the glazed façade, hosting a further array of recessed lights. This feature was celebrated in the *Evening Post* at the official opening of the building, with the Prime Minister and the chairman of the Meat Producers' Board admiring the "Polka Dot Foyer".

Architect Ernst Plischke reported that offices and meeting rooms were designed to respond to the brief of specific occupants. This meant, for example, the installation of a flower window/greenhouse in executive offices of Massey House. The boardrooms (the interiors are no longer extant) were widely noted for their careful detailing and expressive use of materials such as native timber veneer joinery.

Construction and Materials

The building is clad with aluminium framed glazing panels to the east and west, and ferro-cement reinforced concrete to the north and south. Reinforced concrete columns support the reinforced concrete floor plates. Wall linings include plaster board and rimu ply. The building features suspended ceilings (fibrous plaster and an "egg crate" material), with recessed lights. Joinery is rimu and totara, or aluminium in the stairwells and foyer areas. Rose marble is a feature in the foyer areas.

The windows include a row of opening windows on each floor, permitting fresh air access for occupants. The original

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interior fit-out featured plasterboard and rimu ply linings, aluminium and timber joinery (rimu and totara), with glazed doors to lobbies and shops. Massey House made early use of suspended ceilings, a number of which feature distinctive lighting mounts (these are still intact in a number of lift foyers).

3.2 Current use

of whole building/site: Massey House is currently undergoing strengthening, external reconstruction and repairs and internal refurbishment. It is intended that commercial uses, including ground floor retail, will be reinstated.

of principal components (*if applicable*): n/a

comments: none.

3.3 Present (physical) condition

The original interior fit-out has been widely recognised for its lavish and considered detailing, although little of the original design remains. What does remain is essentially limited to the stairwells, the main lightwell and parts of the former bookshop. Key features include the open stair in the bookshop, with its elegantly proportioned diagonal string balustrading running between the carefully detailed treads and handrail (though the strings were relocated after a baby fell through the balustrading); the distinctive recessed circular light-fittings located above the Lambton Quay entrance; the strip lighting, linings, stairs, aluminium pipe handrails, and door hardware in the stairwells.

Original features still evident include:

- glazed facades
- free standing columns
- balconies and foyer areas, including the tapering cantilevered veranda with recessed lights, and floor to ceiling glazing
- bookshop stairway, mezzanine, remnant rose marble, shop-front windows
- remnant rimu ply linings
- rose marble (though this has now been generally discoloured through sandblasting)
- diagonal patterned terrazzo at the Terrace foyer entrance
- organically shaped door handles
- organically shaped lighting mounts, and reveals, particularly in the main entry foyers
- front and rear stairwell features including the "luminous walls", aluminium tube handrails with glass balustrading, concrete stairs covered with resilient flooring and foyer doors
- black and white tiled balcony on 7th floor
- cream and pink tiles to the roof terrace on level 8
- lift house room with cantilevered stair

Chattels include:

- N/a

of principal components (*if applicable*):

of other elements (*if applicable*):

of surrounding area (*if applicable*):

comments:

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3.4 Note(s) on context, indicating potential developments

In 2006 a proposal was submitted to Wellington City Council for permission to add two enclosed spaces to the roof top of Massey House. The council approved the addition of one space, a kitchen that is positioned to the northern edge of the building behind the curved lift house room. A second lounge space proposed for the Lambton Quay edge of the rooftop and enclosing the original glazed stair termination space was declined.

4. Evaluation

Intrinsic value

4.1 technical evaluation:

Massey House is known as the first curtain-walled building in New Zealand. It made use of new technology and advances in structural engineering that allowed the cladding of the building to be liberated from the structure, thus allowing both elements to take on new expressive qualities.

Curtain wall construction frees the cladding system from having to carry any structural load, permitting the extensive use of non-loadbearing materials such as glass. Lateral loads must be resisted by alternative structural components, and in Massey House this function is met by the aluminium window joinery.

The new technologies also permitted the building to reach its full eight-storey height (on the Lambton Quay side). The north and south facades of Massey House make use of more conventional load-bearing, reinforced concrete walls, anticipating the construction of tall neighbours. The structural design of these walls was carefully considered to manage earthquake risk.

The technological qualities of the building were generators of architectural and aesthetic qualities, in keeping with the principles of international modernism.

4.2. social evaluation:

The bookshop and coffee gallery tenancies in Massey House were instrumental in fostering a new cultural milieu in Wellington in the 1960s. The building came to be associated with the birth of café culture in Wellington, particularly through the involvement of Harry Seresin, who managed the Coffee Gallery. Seresin went on to establish the well-known Settlement restaurant and played a significant role in establishing Downstage Theatre. The design of Massey House, and its relationship to the street, facilitate and emphasise the cultural function of the building by creating a sheltered place for pedestrians to stop and look at the shop displays, and through the use of floor-to-ceiling shop windows, which permit a visual link between pedestrians and the retailers and their wares.

4.3. cultural and aesthetic evaluation:

Massey House is architecturally important as a modern presence on Lambton Quay and for its luxurious and occupant-oriented planning and interior design. The building was an early and influential study in what came to be known as international modernism. It reflects key concepts of international modernism including function driven planning; the elimination of redundancy and adornment; the use of technologically advanced construction materials and details; and a strong emphasis on sculptural forms and surfaces.

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Comparative significance

4.4 canonical status (local, national, international)

Massey House has outstanding national technological significance as the first high-rise building to make use of the curtain wall in New Zealand.

It has national aesthetic and historic value as an early and highly influential study by two important architects, Ernst Plischke and Cedric Firth, in what came to be known as international modernism. It is recognised as an important example of modernist architecture in New Zealand. It has local aesthetic significance for the elegant contribution it makes to the Lambton Quay streetscape.

The building has national historic value, connecting it with important twentieth-century economic and political developments, because it was constructed for the producer boards of two of New Zealand's most significant industries: the meat industry and the dairy industry. The building's name commemorates Prime Minister William Fergusson Massey, who was instrumental in establishing these boards.

The building has local social and cultural importance because it is associated with the birth of café culture in Wellington through the inclusion of a European style café and an independent bookshop. It continues to serve as an informal meeting place for workers.

4.5 historic and reference values:

Massey House is associated with the producer boards of two of New Zealand's most significant industries: the meat industry and the dairy industry. The producer boards coordinated marketing and exporting of New Zealand primary produce, allowing the industry to cooperate on a national level to expand and diversify the international market, thereby generating a high proportion of New Zealand's export earnings. Massey House was constructed during a period of affluence and expansion in these industries and the high design qualities reflect this.

The building commemorates William Massey, Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1912-1924, acknowledging the role he played in establishing national producer boards and thereby permitting cooperative international marketing of New Zealand primary produce.

5. Documentation

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

Wellington City Archives, 28 Barker Street, Wellington – multiple holdings dated 1954-1994

5.2 principal publications (in chronological order):

H Philpott, *A History of The New Zealand Dairy Industry 1840-1935* (Government Printer, Wellington, 1937).

John Stacpoole and Peter Beaven, *New Zealand Art; Architecture 1820-1970* (AH and AW Reed; Wellington; 1972).

Golden Jubilee: The story of the First Fifty Years of the New Zealand Meat Producers Board, 1922-1972, ed. D Hayward (Universal Printers, Wellington, 1972).

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Martin Hill, *New Zealand Architecture* (Department of Education, Wellington, 1976)

David Mitchell and Gillian Chaplin *The Elegant Shed: New Zealand Architecture since 1945* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1984)

Terence Hodgson, *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* (Grantham House, Auckland, 1990)

Peter Shaw, *New Zealand Architecture from Polynesian Beginnings to 1990* (Hodder and Stoughton, Auckland, 1991)

Tommy Honey, 'Stranger in Paradise. Massey House 1957 by EA Plischke and Cedric Firth', *Glory*, *Glory* no.1, Wellington, May 1993

Zeal and Crusade, The Modern Movement in Wellington, ed John Wilson (Te Waihora Press, Springston, 1996)

The Modern Movement in Architecture: Selections from the DOCOMOMO Registers, eds Dennis Sharp & Catherine Cooke (010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2000)

Xanthe Howes 'Massey House' Registration Report, NZ Historic Places Trust, Wellington, 17 March 2006 URL: <https://www.heritage.org.nz/list-details/7661/Massey%20House>

Greg Bowron 'Firth, Cedric Harold 1908 - 1994' & Barry Gustafson 'Massey, William Ferguson 1856 - 1925' *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* updated 22 June 2007; URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

Chris Cochran, *Massey House Lambton Quay, Wellington, Conservation Plan for GMT Property Holdings Ltd*, 2010

Ian Bowman, project files 2020-2024

5.3 visual material (state location/ address)

original visual records/drawings/photographs/others:

recent photographs and survey drawings:

film/video/other sources: unknown

5.4 list documents included in supplementary dossier nil

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6. Fiche report

name of reporter: Alexandra Teague address: unknown

telephone: 64 4 801 3541 e-mail: alexandra.teague@gmail.com date of report: 29 November 2009; revised January 2012 following peer review by Dr Christine McCarthy; revised January 2024 with updated descriptions of work currently underway provided by Ian Bowman

examination by DOCOMOMO national/regional section

approval by wp co-ordinator/registers correspondent (name): Dr Ann McEwan

sign and date: Dr AE McEwan 9 January 2024

examination by DOCOMOMO ISC/R

name of ISC member in charge of the evaluation:

comment(s):

sign and date:

ISC/R approval:

wp/ref. no.:

NAI ref. no.:

date:

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