

Former Brooklyn Library
22 Harrison Street



Former Brooklyn Library / Brooklyn Playcentre (2011). Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The former Brooklyn Library is the oldest purpose-built branch library in Wellington and is a particularly fine example of a small municipal building. It is notable for the elaborate decorative scheme of Classical ornamentation that is unusual for such a diminutive building.
- The building has group value for its contribution to the group of community buildings that occupy this large, WCC owned, site.
- The building was designed by the WCC City Engineer, WH Morton, and served as the first branch library for the suburb from 1905-1960. It has been occupied by the Brooklyn Playcentre for the past 50+ years.

District Plan:	Map 6, reference 402
Legal Description:	Pt Lot 132 DP 681 (<i>As or for a site for a Public Hall or for the purposes provided by Section 406 of The Municipal Corporations Act 1886</i>)
Heritage Area:	None 2013
HPT Listed:	None 2013
Archaeological Site:	Risk unknown
Other Names:	Brooklyn Playcentre
Key physical dates:	1905 built 1962 converted to Playcentre
Architect / Builder:	William Hubbard Morton – WCC City Engineer Contractor: Messrs Atkinson and Helliwell
Former uses:	Library
Current uses:	Playcentre / early childhood education
Earthquake Prone Status:	Community Centre, Scout Hall and Playcentre on this site. SR 226232, SR 226233, & SR 226234, Bdg Strength Inv, WCC Bldg. All are NOT Earthquake Prone

Extent: Cityview GIS



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The first library in Wellington was the Mechanics' Institute and Athenæum which opened in Barrett's Hotel on Lambton Quay in 1842. The first Wellington Public Library opened in 1893, with the aid of some public benefaction by several major donors, and the donation of much of the Athenæum's book collection.¹

The Melrose Borough Council was wound up in 1903 and the area under its jurisdiction, which included Brooklyn, was incorporated within the Wellington City Corporation's boundaries. To mark the occasion, the WCC decided to present the suburb with a library, partly to alleviate an apparent delinquency problem in the suburb.² It was to be Wellington's second branch library and it was constructed on land that had been set aside by the Melrose Borough Council for the construction of a public hall.³ The building was designed by the City Engineer, William Hubbard Morton, as was frequently the case with smaller civic buildings, and opened on 16 February 1905.⁴ Unusually, living quarters were provided for the librarian, Mrs Hastings, although they were regarded as being fairly cramped; there being only a living room, scullery and bedroom. The library was open just nine hours each week and, initially, just 350 volumes were available for issue. The number of registered borrowers grew, along with the number of books available for issue.

The 1905 library was soon found to be too small to serve the needs of a growing community and by 1928 there were proposals to build a new library building at the corner of Harrison and Cleveland Street. In 1936 the WCC purchased land for use by the Transport Department as a bus turning bay, and in 1960 a new library was built to the south of this site.

Brooklyn Playcentre negotiated to lease the former library from the WCC and moved from their former home in the nearby Methodist Hall in 1962. The Playcentre movement began in New Zealand in 1941 as a parent cooperative that was designed 'to provide leisure for mothers and opportunities for the social development of the pre-school child.'⁵ It soon spread throughout the country and the NZ Playcentre Federation was established in 1948 to bring together associations in Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury. There are now 489 affiliated Playcentres throughout New Zealand and 33 regional associations. In general, each centre is run as a parent cooperative, training is offered to allow parents, whanau/family and caregivers to assume the role of pre-school teachers, and there are few, if any, paid staff.

There have been many modifications to the buildings over the past 50 years. The building was adapted to suit the Playcentre in 1962 and several large openings were made in the internal walls to create an open-plan play area. A brick chimney was demolished in 1979 and the building was re-piled and re-lined in 1980-81 when a new north-porch and door were added. A verandah and deck were added in 1997/98 and the current arrangement of sleeping room and WC facilities date from about this

¹ This report is an updated version of the WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref HARR1

² Vickers, J and Fitchett, AJ, *Early Brooklyn Revisited* (Wellington: Northland Print, 1998), 43

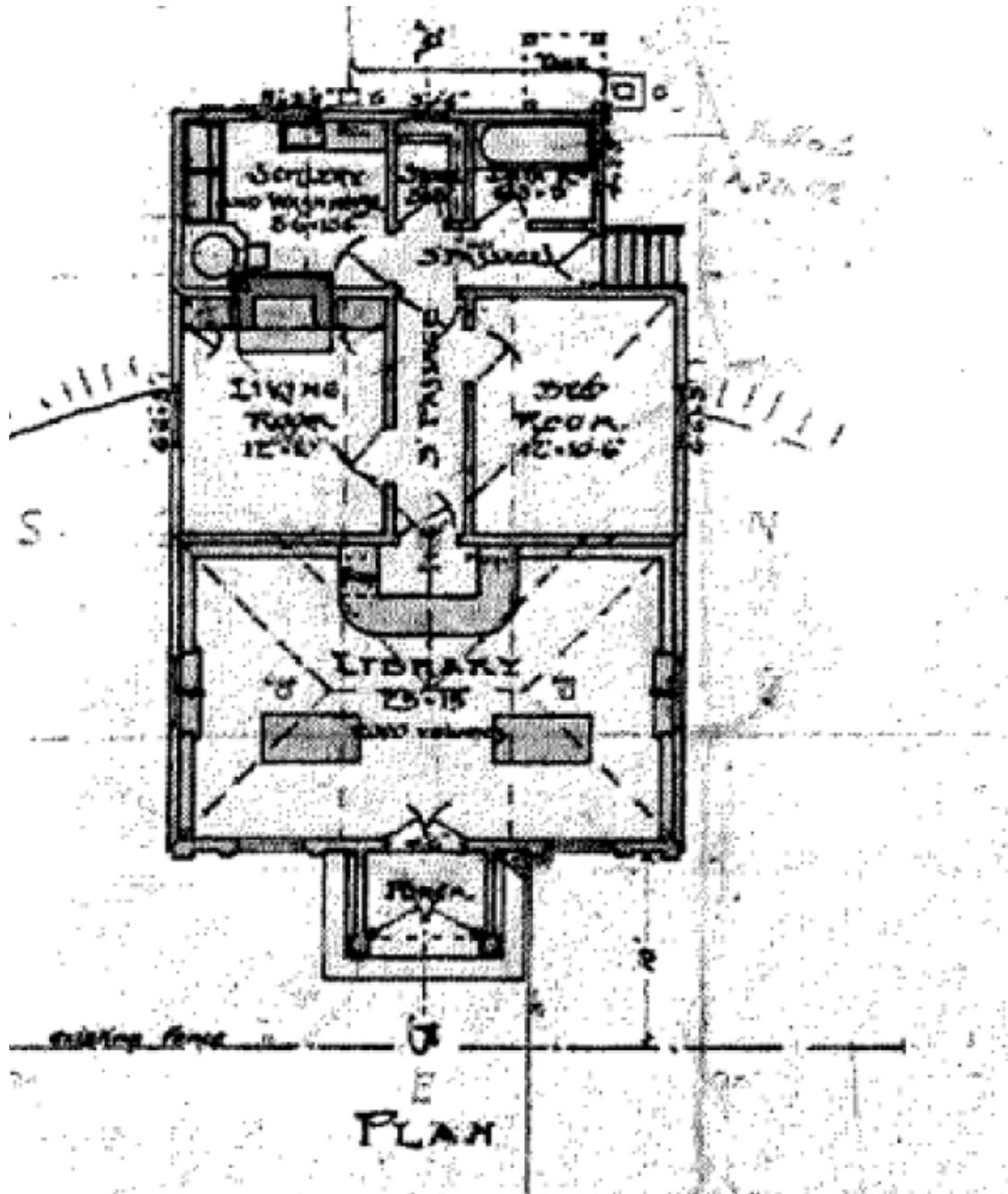
³ Georgina Fell, '22 Harrison, former Brooklyn Library (Brooklyn Playcentre) Conservation Plan', unpublished conservation plan prepared by VUW MMHS student (2011)

⁴ 'Brooklyn Public Library: The Opening Ceremony', *Evening Post*, 17 February 1905, 2, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19050217.2.8&srpos=1&e=17-02-1905-17-02-1905--10-EP-1---0Brooklyn+Library-->

⁵ 'Playcentre – History', Playcentre website accessed July 2013, <http://www.playcentre.org.nz/history.php>

time, as does the northern play area including sandpit, shed and landscaping. The northern verandah/decks were adapted and enlarged in c.2005.⁶

Brooklyn Playcentre continues to occupy the building and run various half-day pre-school education sessions to suit the needs of the current member-families.



1904 plan as proposed⁷

⁶ Russell Murray, email to Barbara Fill dated 30 March 2005. WCC Heritage files.

⁷ Fell (2011)



1904 proposed elevation

1.2 Timeline of modifications

c.1894	Land gifted to the Melrose Borough Council for a public hall or similar.
1905	Library constructed
1960	New library constructed at the corner of Harrison and Cleveland streets
1962	Old library adapted to suit Playcentre
c.1979	Chimney removed
1980/81	Re-piled, re-lined, new north door & porch
1997/98	New verandah, deck, sleeping room, WCs and kitchen (note: it is likely that the small addition to the north-west corner of the building was added at this date).
1999 - 2001	External works and landscaping SR 56180, SR 80414, SR 29516, SR 29517
c.2005	Extension to north verandah / deck

1.3 Occupation history

1905	Brooklyn Library
1962	Brooklyn Playcentre

1.4 Architect

William Hobbard Morton (1866-1923) – WCC City Engineer (1904 – 1923)

William Hobbard Morton was born in Melbourne and worked for the Melbourne City Engineer's office from 1888. He moved to Wellington in 1904 to take up a position of City Engineer and Surveyor with responsibilities that included waterworks, tramways, sewerage systems, roads, abattoirs, parks and public reserves. Morton was best known for the design of the Morton Dam in Wainuiomata, a 164m long buttressed dam that was built in 1911 and decommissioned from Wellington's water supply in 1988.⁸ He retired due to ill-health in 1923 and died in June of the same year.⁹

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The Brooklyn Playcentre, formerly the Brooklyn Library, is a single storey timber building, well endowed with decorative features considering its size. It has a hipped roof, and two prominent windows with pediments that break into the roof line as small gables. The windows flank the central porch and front door, the porch supported by two Doric columns and surmounted by a heavy timber balustrade with turned balusters. All this detail is reminiscent of stonework, the masonry-like character enhanced by the cladding of wide rusticated weatherboards with quoin blocks at the corners. The windows in the original library room are unusual with a fixed bottom pane and a hopper (bottom hung opening light) over, other windows to the old residential areas are standard sashes. Although the original picket fence has been replaced, the building retains a high level of authenticity for its form and for the retention of much of the exterior detail and built fabric. The interior has been much altered, but functions well in its new use as a Playcentre.

Harrison Street is a small blind street with a number of cottages of similar age to that of the Playcentre. The streetscape value of the building is small, but it is one of a compatible group of modest timber buildings on the west side of the street. It is in good condition, with recent repairs and painting of the exterior.

⁸ IPENZ Engineering Heritage, 'Morton Buttress Dam' IPENZ website, accessed July 2013
<http://www.ipenz.org.nz/heritage/itemdetail.cfm?itemid=189>

⁹ 'Morton, William H' NZHPT Professional Biography, NZHPT website accessed July 2013
<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Morton%2C+William+H>; Fell (2011)

2.2 Materials

Timber framing
Rusticated timber weatherboards
Corrugated mild steel roof

2.3 Setting

Brooklyn Playcentre occupies part of a large sloping site that was set aside for the construction of a community hall in c.1894. Other buildings on the site include the community centre hall to the west, a playground, a scout hall to the south of the Playcentre/former library building, and community gardens that runs along the extent of the far southern boundary.

The former library's main facades are viewed from Harrison Street, a street that is characterised by a mix of Victorian/Edwardian single storey cottages and villas. The former library's nearest neighbour to the south is the fine single storey c.1910 scout hall and to the north there is a low-level car-park and then a single storey cottage. Harrison Street is a quiet no-exit street and along the cottages and villas are a WCC housing block to the south of the short street, school playing fields to the south-east, and shops/commercial buildings/low rise apartment buildings and the mixed use library/WCC housing block to the north.

3.0 Sources

CT WN25B/403

'Brooklyn Public Library: The Opening Ceremony', *Evening Post*, 17 February 1905, 2,
<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19050217.2.8&srpos=1&e=17-02-1905-17-02-1905--10-EP-1----0Brooklyn+Library-->

Fell, Georgina. '22 Harrison Street, former Brooklyn Library (Brooklyn Playcentre) Conservation Plan', unpublished conservation plan prepared by VUW MMHS student (2011)

IPENZ Engineering Heritage, 'Morton Buttress Dam' IPENZ website, accessed July 2013 <http://www.ipenz.org.nz/heritage/itemdetail.cfm?itemid=189>

'Morton, William H' NZHPT Professional Biography, NZHPT website accessed July 2013
<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.a.spx?CPName=Morton%2C+William+H> ; Fell (2011)

Murray, Russell. Email to Barbara Fill dated 30 March 2005. WCC Heritage files.

'Playcentre – History', Playcentre website accessed July 2013,
<http://www.playcentre.org.nz/history.php>

Vickers, J and Fitchett, AJ. *Early Brooklyn Revisited*. Wellington: Northland Print, 1998.

WCC Heritage Inventory 2001 ref HARR1

4.0 Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

The former Brooklyn Library is the oldest purpose-built branch library in Wellington and is a particularly fine example of a small municipal building. It is notable for the elaborate decorative scheme of Classical ornamentation that is unusual for such a diminutive building.

Townscape: *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

Group: *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

The building has group value for its contribution to the group of community buildings that occupy this large, WCC owned, site.

Historic Value:

Association: *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

The building was designed by the City Engineer, WH Morton, and served as the first branch library for the suburb from 1905-1960. It has been occupied by the Brooklyn Playcentre for the past 50+ years.

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

Unknown risk

Educational: *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

The building is likely to be held in high public esteem for its contribution to the Brooklyn Community Centre 'precinct' and as a distinctive and attractive heritage building.

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?

Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?

The building has had few intrusive modern alterations or additions (with the notable exception of the eastern fence, and the northern verandah & play area) over the past 100+ years and contributes to the sense of place and continuity for suburban Brooklyn.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

The building is a focus of community sentiment and connection for its association with the many families that have attended the Brooklyn Playcentre over the past 50+ years.

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

The building is the oldest remaining purpose built branch library in Wellington City and its suburbs.

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The building is a particularly good representative example of a WCC designed Edwardian municipal building.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The building's exterior has had few intrusive modern alterations (with the notable exception of the eastern fence, and the northern verandah & play area) and much of the original built fabric survives.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

The building has local significance.

5.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	none	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	none	
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report	None	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	None	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	Y	
HPT website	none	
HPT files	none	
Conservation Plan	Y	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

Background research

Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*