

**Wellington Central Fire Station**  
2-38 Oriental Parade



Wellington Central Fire Station.<sup>1</sup>



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

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<sup>1</sup> Geoff Goddard, Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/geoffgoddardphotography/3680937110/>, accessed 9 August 2012.

### **Summary of heritage significance**

- The Wellington Central Fire Station is a good representative example of inter-war public building architecture. The building is notable for its size and scale, for its symmetrical main façade, and for its prominent clock tower.
- The building has historic value for its 70 year association with the Wellington Fire Service. The building is also associated with the Wellington Town hall, as the clock in the tower was originally donated to the town hall in 1922 before being transferred to the fire station in 1932.
- The fire station is a local landmark, and the building's size and scale, the prominent clock tower and symmetrical main façade make a strong contribution to the streetscape of Kent Terrace.

District Plan:	Map 16 reference 234
Legal Description:	All DP 10776 (2001 Inventory) LOT 1 DP 88105 (City View)
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Category II reference 3654
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Wellington Fire Station
Key physical dates:	1937
Architect / Builder:	Architect: C.H. Mitchell
Former uses:	Fire Station Residential
Current uses:	Fire Station
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR 204767 (124 Served) – expires 21/06/2020 SR 192625 (124 Served) – expires 21/06/2020

Extent: Cityview 2012



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History

There were many fires in Wellington's early history, the result of the combination of timber building construction, a total reliance on fires for cooking and heating, the absence of a reliable water supply and no organised fire-fighting service. Wellington's first fire engines were run by insurance companies but they were generally directed to fires in buildings insured to individual companies. The first organised brigade, the Wellington Volunteer Fire Brigade,<sup>2</sup> was established in 1865. A second, rival brigade, the Central Volunteer Fire Brigade, appeared in 1867.<sup>3</sup>

A relatively poor success rate and inter-brigade rivalry led to the municipalisation of the volunteer brigades in 1880. The two brigades worked from separate stations in Manners and Brandon Streets, with the latter the first combined headquarters. From 1885 the Manners St station became the brigade headquarters until the first central fire station was built in Mercer St in 1901, on a site now occupied by the Michael Fowler Centre. Under Superintendent C.A. Woolley, appointed in 1932, the service planned new, much larger headquarters. Architect C.H. Mitchell, of the firm Mitchell and Mitchell, was engaged to prepare designs for a site on Oriental Parade then occupied by Clyde Quay School.

There was considerable opposition to the proposal but the service had its way and the school built anew on land in Elizabeth Street, Mt Victoria. Mitchell planned a building on two levels with the main station on Oriental Parade and the married men's flats behind. The building was designed to hold nine fire appliances and to provide accommodation for 21 married men and 33 single men. It was constructed by W.R. Bodell and Co. at a cost of £49,877<sup>4</sup> and was officially opened by the Governor General, Lord Galway, on 1 December 1937.

The Mercer Street station became a traffic office before being demolished in 1957. The building's clock was that donated by John Blundell, of the newspaper publishing family, and previously placed in the tower of the Wellington Town Hall in 1922. After 10 years the clock had to be removed to make way for the demolition of the tower. A new home was found for it in the fire station and it remains a public landmark and facility to this day.

The building itself remains the home of Wellington's fire service, and in 2012 it was announced that the New Zealand Fire Service would spend at least \$1 million to seismically strengthen the central Wellington station.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> L.E. Ward, *Early Wellington*, (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1928).

<sup>3</sup> A. Bristow, 'Firefighting in the Old Days Was Quite Something,' *Evening Post*, 28 October 1926.

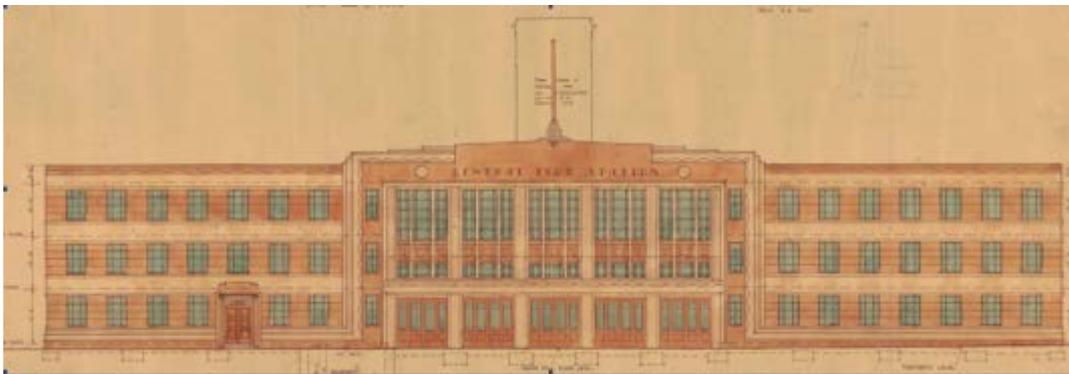
<sup>4</sup> '2-32 Oriental Parade Wellington Central Fire Station,' 26 March 1936, 00056:170:B15032 Wellington City Archives.

<sup>5</sup> History repeats: Wellington City Council, "2-38 Oriental Parade," *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 2001), ORIE1.; Rebecca Thomson 'S1m rescue for fire station: Earthquake strengthening work to save station' *The Wellingtonian*, 29/03/2012



Atkins & Mitchell (Firm). Opening of the Central Fire Station building, Oriental Parade, Wellington, 1937. Godber, Albert Percy, 1875-1949: Collection of albums, prints and negatives. Ref: PAColl-3039-1-011. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications



Plans for the front elevation of the fire station, 00056: 170: B15032, Wellington City Archives.

- 1936 Wellington Central Fire Station (00056:170:B15032)
- 1968 Additions and alterations (00058:545:C26169)
- 1972 Additions and alterations (00058:796:C35809)
- 1984 Additions and alterations (00058:0:C64887)
- 1988 Business alterations (00059:201:D9551)
- 1990 Business additions and alterations – glazed entrance (00059:404:E20785)
- 2004 Refurbishment of fire station (00078:2412:112266)
- 2008 Interior fit out, air conditioning and ventilation additions (00078:2702:182242)
- 2012 SR256204 , RC - a Res.Con, 1. Land Use: Strengthening of fire station (heritage building)

2013 SR281051 , aBLDG CONSENT, 3.2 - Commercial - Heritage Building - Wellington Central Fire Station including separate archive building at rear - New Seismic strengthening concrete shear walls, Fire safety upgrade work, minor internal alterations,

### **1.3 Occupation history**

1937 Wellington Fire Board

### **1.4 Architect**

C.H. Mitchell. The firm of Mitchell & Mitchell was established by the Mitchell brothers, Cyril Hawthorn Mitchell (d. 1949) and Alan Hawthorn Mitchell (d.1973). The brothers were two of a handful of prominent Wellington architects of the early twentieth century. C. H. Mitchell had qualified as an architect in 1913, forming the partnership with his younger brother when A. H. Mitchell returned from training in the United Kingdom in 1932. The Mitchell brothers designed many buildings throughout New Zealand, and both became fellows of the New Zealand Institute of Architects.<sup>6</sup>

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture**

The main block of the Central Fire Station fronts onto Oriental Parade with a symmetrical facade and a central tower set well back. Behind this main block there are two wings of two-storey flats overlooking the rear car park. The style of the building is a functional version of Moderne, with some minor Art Deco touches. The main building has a prominent central entrance, conceived as a shallow bay with five appliance access doors. The piers of the ground floor are continued through the first and second-floor levels as plain pilasters. Deeply recessed windows and spandrels fill the rest of this central component which is capped by a stepped parapet, acroterion, and flagpole. The tall vertical window bands light up the vehicle court behind and demonstrate the functionalism of the design.

The two wings on either side of the centre are a model of plain design, with metal window joinery and a regular pattern of window spacing. String courses above and below the windows tie the composition together somewhat. The line of the parapet is decorated by a zigzag line. The square clock tower carries the profiles and ornament of Art Deco.

The interior of the Central Fire Station, plain and utilitarian, is largely intact, with some simplified Art Deco detailing. Modifications have been made to some of upstairs accommodation.

This is a functional and rational building in reinforced concrete. In style, it is almost perfectly poised between the historicism of earlier decades, and styleless simplicity of the Modern Movement. Architectural precedents have been followed in the design of this building, and simplified, but no real departures have been made.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust Professional Biographies, "Mitchell & Mitchell," accessed 13 August 2012, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=147>.

<sup>7</sup> Architecture taken from: Wellington City Council, "2-38 Oriental Parade," *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings* (Wellington City Council, 2001), ORIE1.

## 2.2 Materials

- Reinforced concrete structure

## 2.3 Setting

The Wellington Central Fire Station is situated on Kent Terrace at the end of Wakefield Street. Its broad façade dominates the beginning of Kent Terrace and its clock tower is quite prominent. These features allow it to be viewed from quite a considerable distance along Wakefield Street. On the building's southern side, along Kent Terrace, stands the Bats Theatre (1923). To the north the building is separated from the multi-storey Bay Plaza Hotel by an access way.

## 3.0 Sources

Historic Places Trust. "Mitchell & Mitchell." Professional Biographies. Accessed 13 August 2012.  
<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=147>.

Ward, L.E. *Early Wellington*. Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs. 1928.

Wellington City Council. "2-38 Oriental Parade." *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: n-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001. ORIE1.

## Newspapers

Bristow, A. 'Firefighting in the Old Days Was Quite Something.' *Evening Post*. 28 October 1926

## Wellington City Archives

'2-32 Oriental Parade Wellington Central Fire Station.' 26 March 1936.  
00056:170:B15032.

## 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 Wellington Central Fire Station is a good representative example of inter-war public building architecture. The building is notable for its size and scale, for its symmetrical main façade, and for its prominent clock tower.

***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?

The fire station is a local landmark, and the building's size and scale, the prominent clock tower and symmetrical main façade make a strong contribution to the streetscape of Kent Terrace.

***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?

#### **Historic Value:**

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

The building has historic value for its 70 year association with the Wellington Fire Service. The building is also associated with the Wellington Town hall, as the clock in the tower was originally donated to the town hall in 1922 before being transferred to the fire station in 1932.

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

The building is associated with the efforts undertaken by Wellington's fire service, since over the past 60 years the combat against some of the city's largest fires has been directed from this station.

#### **Scientific Value:**

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

The building is located in the Central City archaeological site reference NZAA R27/270.

***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?*

**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 and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of the Oriental Parade/Kent Terrace streetscape.

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

The building will have sentimental value to both current and former members of Wellington's fire service.

**Level of cultural heritage significance**

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

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

**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 has retained a significant amount of its original fabric, therefore it has authenticity.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

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

The building is important on a local level due to the architectural value that it adds to the Wellington townscape and because of significant role that it has played in the history of the city's fire service.

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## 4.0 Appendix

### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website		
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

### Background research