

Missions to Seamen Building

7 Stout Street



Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

Summary of heritage significance

- The Missions to Seamen building is a fine example of an Edwardian civic building. It was designed in an eclectic Revivalist style that reflects the unusual mix of social and spiritual services that the building once offered.
- This building is associated with a number of prominent people from the early history of Wellington. Of particular note are its benefactor, Mary Williams, who donated land for this building as a memorial to Captain William 'Bully' Williams, and the Rev. James Moore – the institution's first missionary. The building is also associated with the significant architectural firm of Crichton and McKay who designed it.
- This building was constructed as the first permanent Mission to Seamen in Wellington and provided an important social service for sailors. The building was extremely well patronised, especially in the years before the First World War. It was credited with reducing the rate of crime by visiting sailors and, during the Second World War, it hosted social activities for American servicemen stationed near Wellington.
- It is a local landmark as an elegant Edwardian building set on a prominent corner site, and contributes to the Stout Street Heritage Area

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 274
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 79269 (Part of Thorndon Reclamation)
Heritage Area:	Stout Street Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Category 1, reference 3411
Archaeological Site:	Thorndon Reclamation/ NZAA R27/270 Central City Area
Other Names:	Missions to Seafarers Hall
Key physical dates:	Constructed: 1903
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Crichton and McKay
Former uses:	Civic facilities and recreation – Hall, Religion - Chapel
Current uses:	Residential buildings - Apartments
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone – SR 190152

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

The Missions to Seamen was founded in Bristol in 1865 and had its origins in the work of Anglican Minister Rev. John Ashley, who would visit ships in Port Bristol and offer religious services to them. The Mission developed in other ports and the various ministries that offered them were united under one non-denominational organisation in 1856. Two years later the name 'Mission to Seamen' was adopted. The Mission spread from England, and in 1898 the Rev. James Moore came to Wellington after 22 years at the Mission in England. He arrived in New Zealand with little money and no place to hold services, so he started his work in the Wellington Botanic Gardens, then in a variety of places until a benefactor arrived.

This benefactor was Mary Anne Williams, the widow of Captain William 'Bully' Williams (1832-1890), who established the Black Diamond shipping line. He was brought out by the Union Steam Ship Co., in 1885 and went on to run the ferries on Wellington harbour. When Williams passed away in 1890, his widow Mary donated the land for the building to the Rev. Moore as a memorial to her husband and to house a hall, library, tearooms, and a chapel. The Missions to Seamen building was the first building to be constructed on this site - on the 1876 Thorndon reclamation. This building was also the first purpose built Mission to Seamen in New Zealand.²

The design for the Missions to Seamen (or Seafarers) Building was drawn up by architectural firm Crichton and McKay and the cost of the building was £5247. The foundation stone was laid on the 16th December 1903 by Mary Williams and the building was officially opened by Governor General Lord Plunket on 25th August 1904. The facilities were available to sailors of nations, classes, creeds and constitutions and the large hall hosted a number of free events such as concerts, dances, and lectures. Also available was a large library and a postal service, as well as services held in the upstairs chapel. Moore provided counselling and encouraged the sailors to sign a pledge against the consumption of alcohol. The Mission was extremely successful and, according to Moore, played a substantial role in the reduction of arrests of drunken sailors from 554 in 1902 to 290 in 1909.

The history of the Missions to Seamen building has not always been smooth sailing. Although Rev. Moore was credited with reforming the image of sailors visiting Wellington, he lost control of the institution when he was forced to return to England due to a period of ill-health. Moore's application to return to New Zealand to continue his work in Wellington was declined and he subsequently disassociated himself from the Missions to Seamen movement. With the help of Mary Williams he established a new trust outside of the Mission's jurisdiction. This allowed Moore - as a private citizen - to run a social and spiritual centre in this building until his death in the 1930s.

Following Moore's death the Missions to Seamen movement regained control of the building. During World War Two (particularly during the war in the Pacific) an increased number of overseas ships visited Wellington, and the building was used extensively.

¹ History adapted from Wellington City Council, "7 Stout Street" *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 2001), STOU 1.

² Rebecca O'Brien. *Former Mission to Seamen Building: 7 Stout Street*. Historic Places Trust unpublished registration report, 5 December 2002, accessed 12 June 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=3611>

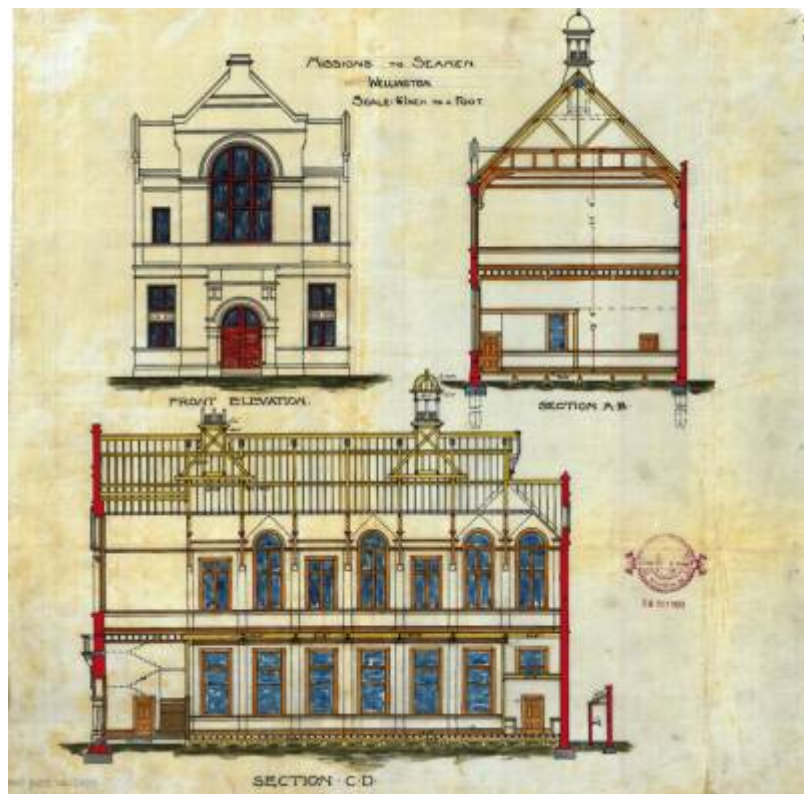
Following the war, attendance slowly declined, and by 1975 falling visitor numbers and the rising cost of maintenance prompted the relocation of the Mission to Kelburn.

The building was then sold to the Government and used as a storehouse and community centre until 1985 when a proposal was made to demolish the building. This led to one of the biggest heritage battles in the city's history and the Government was forced to reconsider its plans.

The building remained in use as warehouse until 1994 when it was sold, and then converted into ten private apartments. During the conversion the fine interior spaces were, for the most part, altered or destroyed. The exterior remains reasonably authentic although the replacement of the original Marseilles roofing tiles with a pink pressed metal roof detracts from the architectural finesse of the building. The building received seismic strengthening during the 1994 conversion.

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1903	Original Construction – Applicant: WL Thompson. Owner: Mission to Seamen. Architect: Crichton and McKay (00053: 101: 5728)
1994	Building modifications – partitioning, refit for apartments (00060: 129: 4720; 00060: 144: 5290)
1995	Building reinstatement (00060: 164: 15255)



1.3 Occupation history

1903-1975	Mission to Seamen
1975-1994	Crown
1994-present	Whitmore Apartments

1.4 Architect

Crichton, William

- 1900-1901: Toomaths, 43-47 Ghuznee Street, 16 / 128
- 119-121 Cuba Street (JJ Murphy's)
- 123-125 Cuba Street (Barber's Building)

Crichton, McKay & Haughton (see also McKay & Macgregor)

William Crichton (1862 – 1928) was born in Cornwall and was trained as an architect in the office of James Hicks of Redruth. He arrived in New Zealand in 1879 and joined the Colonial Architects Office where he “designed several of the largest public buildings in the Colony.”³ Crichton established a private practice in 1891 when he was “retrenched” due to a reduction in size of the public service. He went into partnership with James Hector McKay in 1901 to form Crichton and McKay.

James Hector McKay (d. 1944) was probably originally from Scotland and arrived in New Zealand from Australia in 1890.⁴ He established an architectural partnership with Robert Roy MacGregor which lasted from 1898-1901, before he formed Crichton and McKay with William Crichton. McKay returned to Britain on his retirement in 1926.⁵

Crichton, McKay and Haughton were a prominent Wellington architectural practice and designed a number of fine buildings including the Missions to Seamen Building (1903-4), the Alexandra Road Fever Hospital (1918-1920), Braemar (1924), the Huddart Parker Building (1924), and the Dominion Building (1926-28).

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The Mission to Seamen Building is a blend of architectural styles, reflecting the unusual mix of social and spiritual services that it offered to the seamen. It is an eclectic mix of Gothic, Romanesque and Classical motifs, brought together in a convincing and original interpretation of the Edwardian 'Free' style.

This building is one of the last examples of the Crichton – McKay partnership. It has a strong presence in the townscape because of its corner site and the prominence of its gable roof forms; the main west facing gable to Stout Street, originally surmounted by a model sailing ship, has a large round headed window, while the side elevation to Whitmore Street has a row of smaller gables which give the building an interesting silhouette. The two principal facades, each symmetrically composed, are characterised by tall pediments, each containing a round headed window, which relate to the steeply pitched and complex roof form behind.

³ Cyclopedia Co. Ltd, “Crichton, William,” in *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand: Wellington Provincial District* (Wellington: The Cyclopedia Company Limited, 1897), accessed January 10, 2012, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc01Cycl-t1-body-d4-d33-d3.html>

⁴ May 2012 email from Nancy Swarbrick at the Ministry of Culture and Heritage to MS, that included the unpublished DNZB biographical database records for James Hector McKay.

⁵ Dictionary of Scottish Architects Biography Report for James Hector McKay, Dictionary of Scottish Architecture website accessed May 2013 http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_list.php?asme=mckay&asstr=&astwn=&asct=&asctr= ; Bulleymont Fortune website accessed July 2012 http://www.bulleymontfortune.co.nz/BFA_history.html

The building is only lightly decorated with details worked into the plasterwork, including a variety of Romanesque and maritime motifs.

The interior of the building was originally two large spaces, a social hall on the ground floor and a chapel on the first floor, each capable of holding about 400 people. The chapel had Kauri linings and heavy timber trusses exhibiting some grandeur. With the subdivision of the building into apartments, the spatial qualities of the interior have mostly vanished, although some original fabric remains. A small round-headed stained glass window in the fanlight above the front door is one significant item that displays the former use of the building showing a small ship and headland. A large stained glass window which formed the west end of the chapel on the second floor was removed some time prior to the conversion to apartments. The building was strengthened as part of the 1994 conversion, and in its exterior form it has retained a reasonable level of authenticity.

2.2 Materials

- Masonry
- Concrete
- Pressed Metal roof
- Kauri
- Stained Glass

2.3 Setting

The former Missions to Seamen building has high heritage value and makes an important contribution to the Stout Street Heritage Area. This building is opposite the Supreme Court and near to the Old Government Buildings and the Government precinct. It is prominent in views from around the Cenotaph and the Beehive.

3.0 Sources

Bulleyment Fortune website. 'Architect Biographies'. accessed July 2012
http://www.bulleymentfortune.co.nz/BFA_history.html

Cyclopedia Co. Ltd, "Crichton, William," in The Cyclopedia of New Zealand: Wellington Provincial District (Wellington: The Cyclopedia Company Limited, 1897), accessed January 10, 2012, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc01Cycl-t1-body-d4-d33-d3.html>

Dictionary of Scottish Architects Biography Report for James Hector McKay, Dictionary of Scottish Architecture website accessed May 2013
http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_list.php?asnme=mckay&asstr=&astwn=&ascnt=&asctr

O'Brien, Rebecca. *Former Mission to Seamen Building: 7 Stout Street*. Historic Places Trust unpublished registration report. 5 December 2002. Accessed 12 June 2013,
<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=3611>

Wellington City Council. *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non-Residential Buildings*. Wellington City Council, 2001.

Wellington City Archive

00053: 101: 5728
00060: 129: 4720
00060: 144: 5290
00060: 164: 15255

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 Missions to Seamen building is a fine example of an Edwardian civic building. It was designed in an eclectic Revivalist style that reflects the unusual mix of social and spiritual services that the building once offered.

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 building is a local landmark as an elegant Edwardian building set on a prominent corner site.

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 former Mission to Seamen makes a strong contribution to the Stout Street Heritage Area.

Historic Value:

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

This building is associated with a number of prominent people from the early history of Wellington. Of particular note are its benefactor, Mary Williams, who donated land for this building as a memorial to Captain William 'Bully' Williams, and the Rev. James Moore – the institution's first missionary. The building is also associated with the significant architectural firm of Crichton and McKay who designed it.

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

This building was constructed as the first permanent Mission to Seamen in Wellington and provided an important social service for sailors. The building was extremely well patronised, especially in the years before the First World War. It was credited with reducing the rate of crime by visiting sailors and, during the Second World War, it hosted social activities for American servicemen stationed near Wellington.

Scientific Value:

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

Pre 1900 reclamation

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?*

This building is held in high public esteem. This was demonstrated by the public outcry when it was scheduled for demolition in 1985.

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?*

This building was the centre for the social and spiritual life of many men associated with the sea and shipping for seventy years. The building was also the focus of community and social events for the Wellington community – although this association is likely to diminish over time

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 contributes to the sense of place and continuity of the Stout Street Heritage Area.

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

Level of cultural heritage significance

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

The former Mission to Seamen building is an important building in the history of Wellington and New Zealand. It was the first building constructed on the Thorndon reclamation in 1903. It was also the first purpose-built Mission to Seamen constructed in New Zealand. It was also the focus of one of Wellington's largest heritage conservation battles.

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

This building is an excellent example of an Edwardian civic building designed in an eclectic mix of Revivalist styles.

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?*

Despite the 1995 alterations the building exterior retains much of its original built fabric – with the notable exception of the replacement of the original Marseille tile roof. The interiors have been somewhat altered.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

The former Mission to Seamen building is a nationally important building for a number of reasons. It has a long history associated with prominent Wellingtonians; it played an important role in the social, cultural, and religious life of seamen for seventy years and an important role for soldiers stationed in Wellington during World War Two. It was saved from demolition in the mid-1990s after one of Wellington's largest heritage conservation battles.

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
WCC Records – building file		
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)		

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*