

Dominion Building

78-84 Victoria Street



The Dominion Building, 78-84 Victoria Street, Wellington
(Photo: Google Maps, 2013)

Summary of heritage significance

- The Dominion Building is an excellent example of a Stripped Classical commercial building designed in a Chicago-inspired architectural style. It is notable for the quality of its design, materials and workmanship, particularly the Caen Stone external cladding (now Over-painted), marble clad interiors, pressed metal spandrel panels, and steel windows.
- Situated on the curved corner of Victoria and Mercer streets, the Dominion Building is a prominent and dignified structure in Wellington's townscape.
- The Dominion Building is historically significant because it housed *The Dominion* newspaper and printery for almost fifty years.

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 317
Legal Description:	LOT 1 DP 82668
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Historic Place Category 2, register # 1358
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	1926-1928: construction 1994-1996: major interior renovations
Architect / Builder:	Crichton, McKay and Haughton
Former uses:	Offices and printery for <i>The Dominion</i> newspaper
Current uses:	Residential apartments Retail and commercial properties
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone: SR number 164070

Extent:



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The Dominion building was purpose built as a printery and offices for *The Dominion* newspaper in 1926-28. *The Dominion* was first published on 26 September 1907. The paper was named in recognition of New Zealand's new status as a Dominion, which had been granted that year.¹

For the first 20 years of its existence the newspaper was based in offices adjoining Plimmer's Steps. Dominion Avenue, off Boulcott Street, also offered access to the building and it remains as testimony to the newspaper's former home.² The Dominion building was sited on land that was reclaimed partly in 1852 but mostly in the 1882-86 reclamation by the Wellington City Council. The land had formerly been occupied by a wharf, slaughter-yard and a foundry.³

The building was designed by the prominent local firm of Crichton, McKay and Haughton and constructed by Mitchell and King. The new building was one of the biggest in the city and reveals the pre-eminence of newspapers as a means of communication at the time. In common with its great rival the *Evening Post*, whose building was erected about the same time, that building had provision for a large billboard to display election results.

The building served *The Dominion* until 1976. That year the paper's owners, Independent Newspapers Ltd, moved operations to Press House, which had been built for the *Evening Post*, by then also part of the INL empire. The building was sold to Renouf Properties in 1984 and later sold to an Asian investor in 1994, as part of an ANZ mortgagee sale.

Planning to convert part of the building into apartments began that year. Designs were prepared by Athfield Architects and work was completed in 1996. Considerable changes were made to the building in the conversion, including a wholly glazed addition to the roof. The top three floors were set aside as apartments, thirty-one in all, and the remaining floors were stripped for use as offices.

The building, closely linked with the publishing of the paper, has important historic and symbolic value to the city. Newspapers, even in the electronic age, hold a special place in the life of any community because of the role they play in communicating and promoting the culture of the place. *The Dominion* was an important daily paper, for the rural as well as the urban community, and it was published from the Dominion Building for almost 50 years.

In addition to this, the connection between Wellington, the newspaper, and the Dominion Building is underlined by the very name of the paper and building - 'The Dominion'. The paper and the building are a link to New Zealand's burgeoning independence; the building is not only a symbol of a developing city, but also of a maturing country. The heritage value of the Dominion Building is reinforced by its name and its link to an incredibly significant time in New Zealand's history.

¹ W. David McIntyre, 'Self-government and independence - Political independence', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 13-Jul-12

URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/self-government-and-independence/page-5>

² F. Irvine-Smith, *The Streets of My City* (Wellington: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1948), p 181

³ D. Kernohan and T. Kellaway, *Wellington's Old Buildings* (Wellington: VUW Press, 1994), p 98



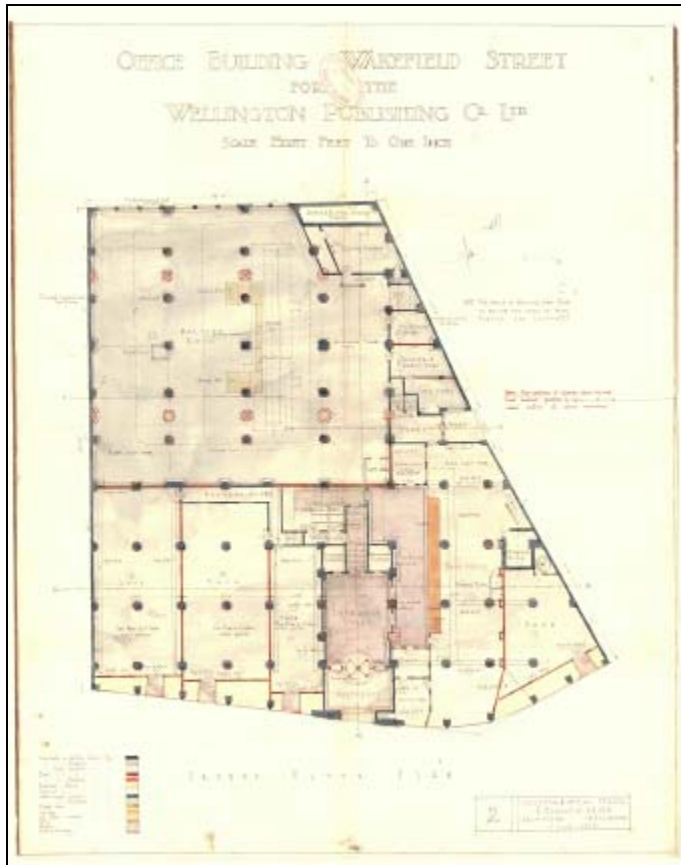
The Dominion Building and Mercer Street, c.1930 (Photo: Wikimedia Commons, photographer unknown)

1.2 Timeline of modifications

WCC Archive file 00056:14:B1371

1926-1928: construction

1994-1996: major interior renovations



1926 – Plan as Proposed⁴

1.3 Ownership history

Not fully assessed

1926-1976 *The Dominion* newspaper

1984-1994 Renouf Properties

1.4 Occupation history

1928-1976 *The Dominion* newspaper

1996-present Mixture of commercial and residential

1.5 Architect

Crichton, McKay & Haughton

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.”⁵ 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.

⁴ WCC Archives ref 00056_14_B13171

⁵ Cyclopaedia Co. Ltd, “Crichton, William,” in *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand: Wellington Provincial District* (Wellington: The Cyclopaedia Company Limited, 1897), accessed January 10, 2012, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc01Cycl-t1-body-d4-d33-d3.html>

James Hector McKay (d. 1944) was probably originally from Scotland and arrived in New Zealand from Australia in 1890.⁶ 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 1926.⁷

Vivian Haughton (1891 – 1956) joined the practice of Crichton and McKay in 1909 as a pupil, served at Gallipoli in WWI and received a “severe head wound” at the Somme.⁸ He became a partner in 1926 and sole principal in 1928, as by then Crichton had died and McKay had retired. In 1935 Haughton went into partnership with William McKeon (1896-1973) and in 1952 Haughton established Haughton and Sons⁹ with his son R.B (Bob) Haughton, who later became president of the NZIA, as did William McKeon in 1945-1946.

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).¹⁰

After Vivian Haughton's death in 1956 the firm became Haughton and Mair. Lindsay Mair was the son of Government Architect John Mair, and in the 1980s the practice became Bulleymont Fortune Architects (BFA).

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

This distinctive building was erected between 1926 and 1928 as a printery and office complex for *The Dominion* newspaper. Originally seven storeys with a cupola, the building has a floor space of two acres and was apparently modelled on contemporary British and American newspaper offices. The style of the building is transitional, containing stripped-Classical elements, but leaning more to the Chicago style.

The facade is symmetrical, with a prominent central 'shaft' that contains the main entry and is capped with a copper-roofed turret. This central shaft sets a strong note of verticality for the building that is echoed in uninterrupted flanking piers and in the mullions and dimensions of the windows. The dark, pressed-metal spandrels of the windows further diminish any horizontality on the shaft. Decoration has been achieved more in the outward display of structure than in applied detail.

High quality building materials were used in the reinforced-concrete construction, including an imported Caen stone frontage, and extensive interior work in Queensland marble. The platform above the main entrance was designed to be used

⁶ 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.

⁷ Swarbrick email; Bulleymont Fortune Architects 'Antecedents', Bulleymont Fortune website accessed May 2013, http://www.bulleymontfortune.co.nz/BFA_history.html

⁸ Bulleymont Fortune Architects 'Antecedents', Bulleymont Fortune website accessed May 2013, http://www.bulleymontfortune.co.nz/BFA_history.html

⁹ NZHPT Professional Biographies accessed May 2012

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=47>

¹⁰ NZHPT, 'Crichton, McKay & Haughton - Architectural Partnership', NZHPT Professional Biographies, accessed April 2013

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Crichton,+McKay+amp+Haughton>

for public addresses and electioneering. The brass discs above the platform were removable so that brackets could be laid to carry a large election-night hoarding.

The building is largely authentic in its external form and detail up to the top floor level. There are several fully-glazed ultra-modern additions at roof level that date from the period when the building was converted to mixed use residential/commercial office and shops in c.1994 – 1996. The interior was altered extensively at this date.

The aesthetic value of the Dominion building is significant. It is an excellent example of design in the Chicago style. Largely authentic in its form and detail up to the top floor level, several fully glazed ultra-modern additions at roof level are a signal to the present day use of the building as apartments and offices. This has required extensive alteration of interior spaces.

2.2 Materials

- Reinforced concrete structure
- Frontage: imported Caen stone
- (Part) interior: imported Queensland marble
- Copper-roofed turret
- Pressed metal spandrel panels

2.3 Setting

The Dominion Building is situated on a very prominent inner-city corner and is an important element in the surrounding townscape, being seen in views south along Victoria Street, in particular. It is sited on a curve of the street (and the facade of the building follows the curve), is visible from several directions, and is close to the Civic Square. The Italian alder trees and gardens at the front of the building contribute to the stately nature of the building.

Sources

Bulleyment Fortune Architects. 'Antecedents'. Bulleyment Fortune website accessed April 2013,
http://www.bulleymentfortune.co.nz/BFA_history.html

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New Zealand Historic Places Trust. 'Crichton, McKay & Haughton - Architectural Partnership'. NZHPT Professional Biographies, accessed May 2013
<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=47>
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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 Dominion Building is an excellent example of a Stripped Classical commercial building designed in a Chicago-inspired architectural style. It is notable for the quality of its design, materials and workmanship, particularly the Caen Stone external cladding (now Over-painted), marble clad interiors, pressed metal spandrel panels, and steel windows.

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 Dominion Building has significant townscape value, making considerable contribution to the character of the downtown area. It is a landmark on Victoria Street, and its form and position on the curved corner makes it visible from several directions.

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 is a historical and stylistic companion to the former Evening Post Building on Willis Street, which was occupied by the offices of a prominent, rival newspaper.

Historic Value:

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

The building housed *The Dominion* newspaper and its printery for almost fifty years. *The Dominion* was an important newspaper for the city and region of Wellington and this building was synonymous with the name of this newspaper from the time of its construction in 1928 until offices and production moved to nearby Press House in 1976.

The building was designed by Crichton, McKay and Haughton, a prominent Wellington architectural firm that designed several notable Wellington buildings.

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?

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?*

The building is of some technical interest given the degree of remaining original materials and building fabric.

Social Value:

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

The building was once held in high public esteem for its association with the *Dominion*, an important daily newspaper for the rural and urban community in the Greater Wellington Region. This esteem has been diminished somewhat by the relocation of the office and printery of the *Dominion* newspaper and its subsequent merger with *The Evening Post*.

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 Dominion Building has occupied this key site at the corner of Victoria and Mercer streets for over 70 years and, despite some modern additions and alterations, contributes to the sense of place and continuity of the streetscape.

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?*

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

The building is an excellent example of 'Chicago style' architecture, especially in Wellington.

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?*

Though the building has undergone considerable interior renovations, the building's exterior has retained a reasonable degree of 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 locally and regionally important for its link to the once very important *Dominion* newspaper.

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3.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

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



The Dominion building, Mercer Street, Wellington, ca 1940
By National Library NZ on The Commons

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