

## **Kelvin Chambers**

16 The Terrace



Image: *Charles Collins* (2015)

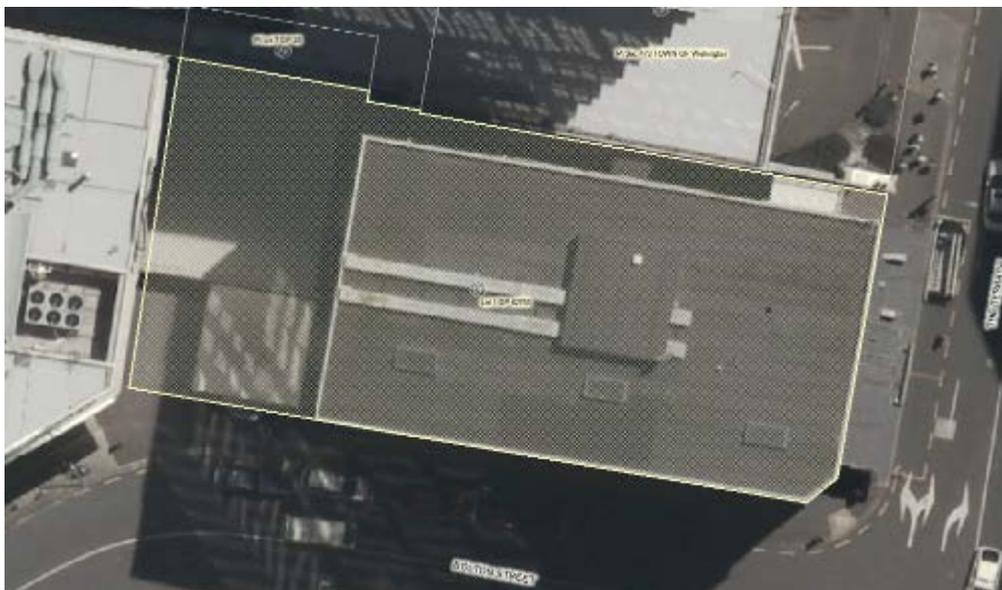
### **Summary of heritage significance**

- Kelvin Chambers is a good representative example of an inter-war commercial building. It is notable for its well-proportioned Stripped Classical façade and for its elegant entrance foyer.
- The building has some group value as one of a diverse cluster of heritage buildings that have survived the redevelopment of The Terrace in 1980s and 1990s.
- The building played a pivotal role in the development of a network of private health provision in the city in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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District Plan:	Map 17, reference 453 (DPC 53)
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 62793
Heritage Area:	None 2013
HPT Listed:	None 2013
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270
Other Names:	Kelvin House Buildings
Key physical dates:	1927-1928
Architect / Builder:	Llewellyn Williams
Former uses:	Medical suites
Current uses:	Mixed use residential and commercial
Earthquake Prone Status:	SR161042 , Bdg StrengthInv, Bldg - Kelvin House, NOT Earthquake Prone

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History

Kelvin House was completed in 1928, built by Fletcher Construction for Medical Chambers Limited, a company of medical practitioners. In keeping with a trend overseas, practitioners of various kinds gathered together in one building to provide a range of services to patients. Prior to the construction of Kelvin Chambers, central city doctors had tended to congregate in Willis Street and environs, to the extent that it was referred to as the 'Harley Street' of Wellington.<sup>1</sup> Kelvin Chambers is credited, to some degree, with dissipating this distinctive cluster.<sup>2</sup>

Architect and engineer Llewellyn Williams, who took a suite on the penthouse floor, designed the building. Perhaps ironically, the site of the building had been a doctor's residence.<sup>3</sup> Before construction, the building was described as "comprising shops and showrooms on the ground floor, offices and showrooms on the first floor and special suites for medical men and dentists above [including] consulting rooms, surgeries, waiting rooms...and also a trading room and library".<sup>4</sup>

The building kept its original purpose for a remarkably long time. It was visited by probably tens of thousands of Wellingtonians with appointments for general practitioners, dentists or specialists. From 1928 it housed a large complement of medical practitioners, with numbers steadily increasing throughout the next four decades.<sup>5</sup> Numbers in fact remained relatively steady well into the 1980s.

In the early 1970s Medical Chambers Ltd. sold the building to the Aurora Group, a property investment company, but the building remained predominantly occupied by medical practitioners. The sale does not appear to have affected the occupants. In the late 1980s, at the height of the share-market boom, Aurora Group considered demolishing the building and constructing a multi storey building in its place<sup>6</sup>, but the 1987 crash ended that idea. Aurora Group was later liquidated. The medical tenants started to move out from this time and, with the future of the building uncertain, few were left by the early 1990s. After substantial refurbishment, the building reopened in 1998 as Kelvin House, part of the flourishing development in inner city apartments. Two additional levels of penthouse apartments were added in 2001. A small number of medical practitioners remain.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 17/11/1928.

<sup>2</sup> F. Bowerbank, *A Doctor's Story* (The Wingfield Press, Wellington, 1958), p.76. Bowerbank practiced from Kelvin Chambers for a number of years.

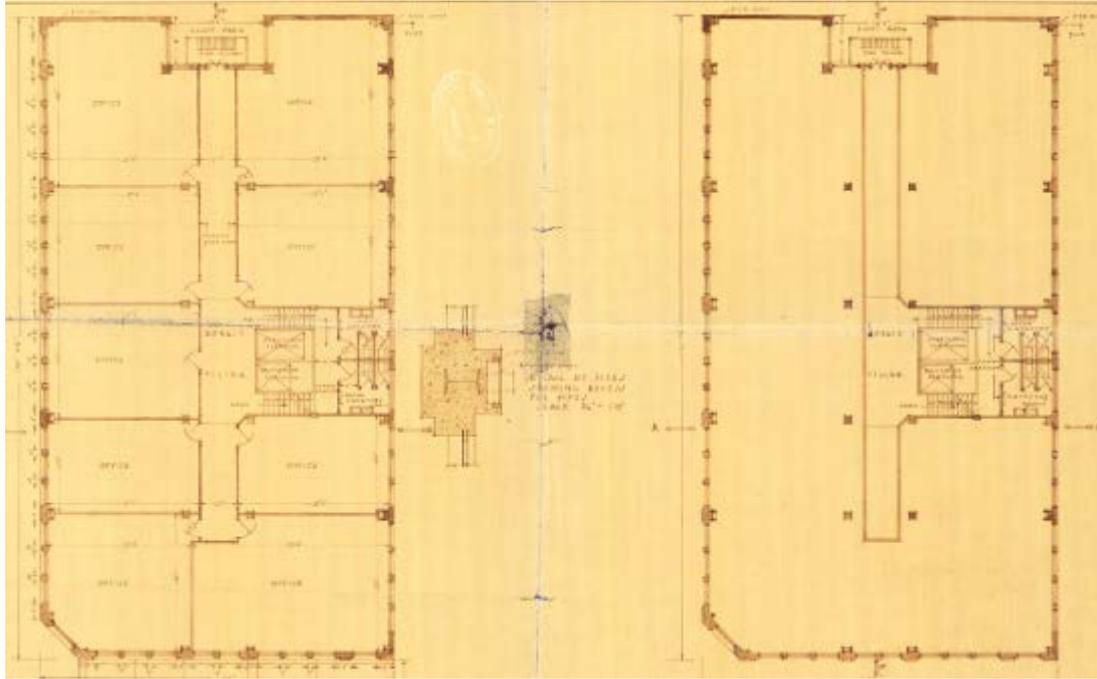
<sup>3</sup> *Evening Post*, 4/2/1927.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

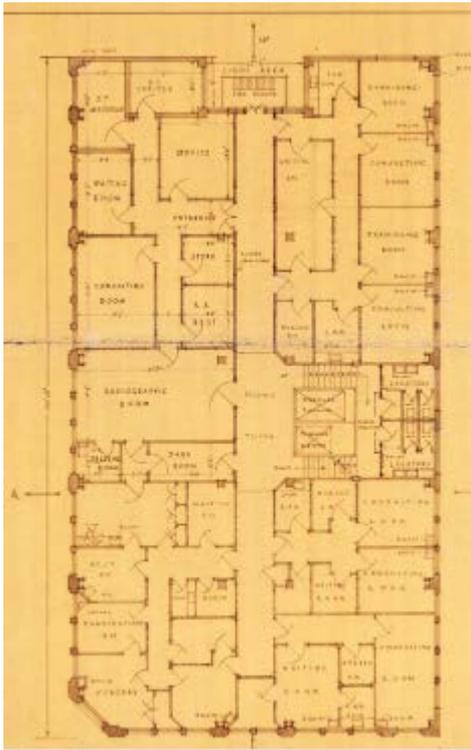
<sup>5</sup> *Stones Wellington, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki Directory, 1928-1945; Wises Post Office Directory, 1947-1968.*

<sup>6</sup> File 00009:260:6/3575. WCA.

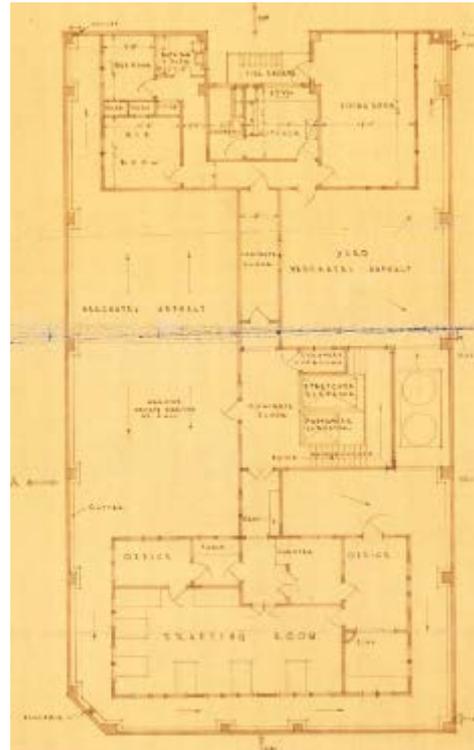
<sup>7</sup> This report is an updated version of Russell Murray, 'Kelvin Chambers' unpublished heritage report prepared for WCC DPC 53



1927 First floor offices and second floor showroom proposed plans<sup>8</sup>



1927 Typical proposed floor plan for levels 3 – 6 (medical consulting rooms)



1927 Proposed plan for the penthouse apartment and offices

<sup>8</sup> WCC Archives ref 00056\_34\_B3373



c.1930 photograph of The Terrace from near St Andrews with a view towards Parliament grounds. Kelvin Chambers, including its roof-top penthouse, is clearly visible. <sup>9</sup>

## 1.2 Timeline of modifications

1927	00056:34:B3373; Wellington Terrace [14-16 The Terrace], building
1942	00056:275:B22251; 14-16 The Terrace, erect air raid shelter
1946	00056:314:B24646; 14-16 The Terrace, parapet
1952	00056:429:B32790; 16 The Terrace, additions
1954	00056:492:B36943; 16 The Terrace, addition of board room
1970	00058:709:C32306; 14-16 The Terrace, reinstate windows
1971	00058:733:C33187; 12 Bolton Street, Kelvin Annex building demolished
1996	00078:181:25459; 16 The Terrace, strengthen and refurbish building, basement, ground floor, levels 1-7
1998	00078:197:45202; 16 The Terrace, conversion to apartments, level 5 and 6
1999	Conversion to apartments (Stage 2) SR45202
2001	Additional two storeys SR 59632

<sup>9</sup> The Terrace, Wellington. Ref: 1/2-092987-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22321980>

### **1.3 Architect**

#### **Llewellyn Edwin Williams (1884-1967)**

Llewellyn Williams was born in 1884 in Newtown, NSW, Australia.<sup>10</sup> His parents, Edwin and Sarah, arrived in Australia in 1882 from Derbyshire, England. Edwin, originally Welsh, was trained as a master stone mason. He did well enough in Australia to become an architect by 1900. Llewellyn followed his father's career path, and studied architecture in France and England.<sup>11</sup>

In 1919 Llewellyn emigrated with his wife from Sydney to Wellington, where he joined Wellington architect Frederick de Jersey Clere in partnership. With Clere he designed a number of fine buildings, among the best of which was St Mary of the Angels Church (1921), as well as St Barnabas Church, Khandallah, and St Andrew's on The Terrace. At this time he taught at the Banks Commercial College, Wellington, with another prominent Wellington architect, C.H. Mitchell.

From 1923, Williams practised on his own designing a number of prominent buildings, including Druids Chambers cnr Woodward Street and Lambton Quay (1923), part of Kirkcaldie and Stains (1924), Todd Motors Building, Courtenay Place (1926), Kelvin Chambers, The Terrace (1927), Civic Chambers, Cuba St (1927), and Chevening House, Salamanca Road Kelburn (1929).

He was also responsible for the design of many new theatres around the country, including the De Luxe (now the Embassy) Theatre in Wellington (1924), The Regent (1926) and Kings (1936) cinemas in Wellington (both demolished), and the Avon cinema in Christchurch (1934).<sup>12</sup>

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture**

Kelvin House was originally a tall-proportioned seven-storey building with an eighth storey penthouse level that included an apartment and offices for the architect of the building, Llewellyn Williams. It is built on and to a prominent corner site, with the site boundaries determining the plan form of the building – a rectilinear plan with a bevelled corner at the street intersection.

The design of the building is Stripped Classical in nature, with a pronounced vertical emphasis. The original design was composed as a column, with base, shaft and capital. The base is a dark-coloured plinth containing shops and the main entrance to the building. Above the base rose four floors, terminating at a heavy cornice, with a further two floors forming the capital. The eighth floor penthouse was off-set from the perimeter of the roof and would not have been visible from the street.

The two principal façades are divided into four uneven bays to The Terrace and six uneven bays to Bolton Street, joined with a single bay on the bevelled corner.

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<sup>10</sup> *New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages*, No 7973/233.

<sup>11</sup> Old Shoreline Heritage Trail

<http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/heritage/pdfs/oldshorelinetrail.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> NZHPT professional biographies

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=239>

Each bay is defined by large plain Tuscan pilasters that rise from the plinth at the first floor to a broad moulded cornice at the fifth floor level; each bay is further subdivided with narrow Tuscan pilasters between the windows. Interestingly, this subdivision also varies around the building, with between one and four windows per bay per floor. Above the cornice, tall arched openings frame the windows of the top two floors with a moulded spandrel panel between the two floor levels. The dominance of these floors suggests that they might have been added later, but the original drawings show them to be part of the design.

Today an extra two floors of apartments surmount the building, glazed with double-storey windows that emphasise the vertical composition. These apartments, although a significant change to the original building, are a reasonably good fit to the building and represent one of the more successful roof-top additions visible in Wellington.

Given its age and style, Kelvin House is remarkably compatible with the modern graph-paper architecture buildings that surround it, perhaps because of its vertical emphasis and narrow proportions of the windows, and it has high townscape value on its prominent corner site.

The building has the appearance of a reinforced concrete building but, according to the original drawings, the structure is a steel frame with the steel members encased in concrete, typical of the designer. This gives the building some technical significance.

Beyond the façade and structure, little original fabric remains; most of this is concentrated in the elegant main entrance foyer, which, beyond the heavy horizontal entrance canopy and modern glass automatic doors has polished pink marble lining and a high vaulted ceiling, reminiscent of Gothic rib-vaulting, that gives the space dignity. Lift, stairs and toilets are set well back on the north side. Other internal facilities are utilitarian.

The original uses were showrooms and offices on the lower floors and consulting rooms from the third to the sixth floors (one of the original lifts was big enough to take a bed), with the seventh floor given over to the penthouse apartment. Today there is retail space on the ground floor and apartments occupy nearly all of the upper floors (a dental practice remains).

## **2.2 Materials**

Reinforced concrete foundations, floors and roof  
Steel columns encased in concrete

## **2.3 Setting**

Surrounded in its setting by high-rise towers, predominantly of the “graph-paper” school of design, Kelvin Chambers is a prominent local landmark on the corner of The Terrace and Bolton Street, partly due to the local topography and partly due to the space around it created by the intersection. It is the northernmost of a group of heritage buildings of quite diverse styles and ages on the west side of The Terrace, the others including the apartment building Braemar, St Andrew’s Church at No. 28 and the New Zealand Medical Association at No. 26 The Terrace. It makes an important contribution to this setting, and is enhanced by the presence of the other older buildings.

The wider setting includes the residential areas of Kelburn to the west, Parliament to the north and the “high city” of The Terrace and Lambton Quay to the south and east.

### **3.0 Sources**

Bowerbank, F. *A Doctor's Story* (The Wingfield Press, Wellington, 1958)

*Evening Post*, 4/2/1927.

*Evening Post*, 17/11/1928.

Murray, Russell. 'Kelvin Chambers' unpublished heritage report prepared for WCC DPC 53

*New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages*, No 7973/233.

NZHPT professional biographies

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=239>

Old Shoreline Heritage Trail, WCC

<http://www.wellington.govt.nz/services/heritage/pdfs/oldshorelinetrail.pdf>

*Stones Wellington, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki Directory, 1928-1945; Wises Post Office Directory, 1947-1968.*

WCA Archives File 00009:260:6/3575.

WCC Archives ref 00056\_34\_B3373

## 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?

Kelvin Chambers is a good representative example of an inter-war commercial building. It is notable for its well-proportioned Stripped Classical façade and for its elegant entrance foyer.

***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 occupies a prominent corner site at the intersection of Bolton Street and the Terrace and is a local landmark.

***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 some group value as one of a diverse cluster of heritage buildings that have survived the redevelopment of The Terrace in the 1980s and 1990s.

#### **Historic Value:**

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

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

The building played a pivotal role in the development of a network of private health provision in the city in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The practice of grouping health practitioners in one place was not new in the late 1920s but the scale of the Kelvin Chambers development was innovative and it lasted, in one form or another, for nearly 60 years.

#### **Scientific Value:**

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

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***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 has technical interest for the structural steel frame, and for original finishes, where they survive, in the main entrance lobby.

#### **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 (with the exception of the relatively sympathetic modern two storey roof extension) and contributes to the sense of place and continuity of The Terrace.

***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?*

Kelvin Chambers is the largest surviving 1920s development that was designed to house various health practitioners in the same building.

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

The building is a good representative example of an inter-war commercial 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 exterior has had few intrusive modern alterations and retains much of its original built fabric.

***Local/Regional/National/International***

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

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## 5.0 Appendix

### Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	none	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	none	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	Y	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	none	
Plan change?	53	
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)	y	
HPT website	y	
HPT files	y	
Conservation Plan	none	
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*