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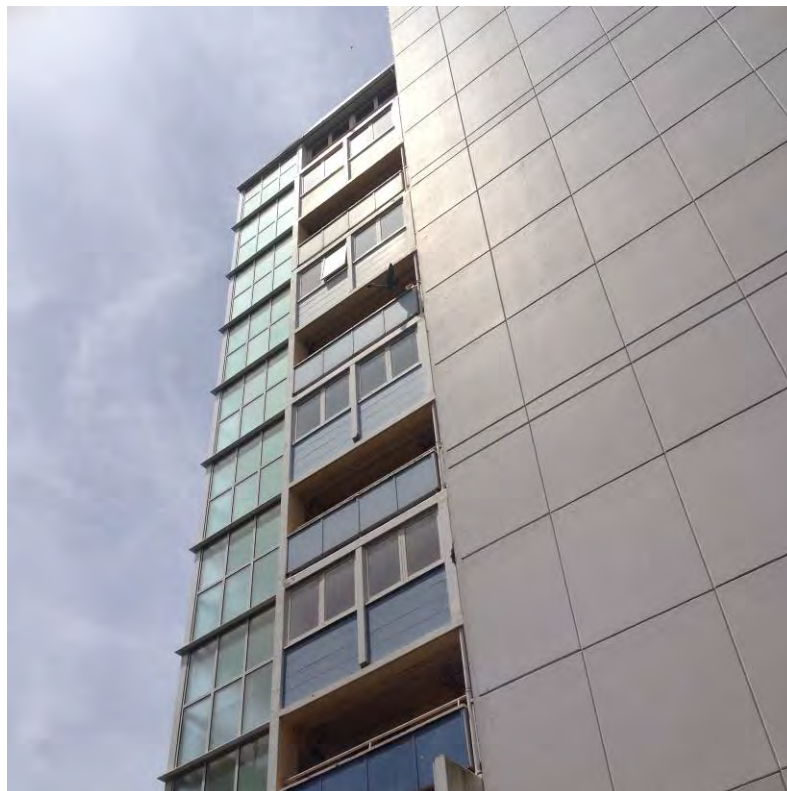


figure 1 gordon wilson flats, archifact architecture & conservation ltd., 2014)

gordon wilson flats
314 the terrace
wellington

heritage assessment

on behalf of

wareham cameron + co

may 2015

prepared for:

victoria university of wellington
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auckland, may 2015

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1.0 executive summary

This report is an objective and independent assessment of heritage values of the Gordon Wilson Flats development and has proved to be a finely balanced exercise in determining the level of significance for the place. The Gordon Wilson Flats are considered overall to be of **moderate** significance.

The place has architectural value for its Modernist influences as a building type that is relatively rare in the Wellington region and in the wider national context. It has **considerable** historical value for a design that is a surviving example of the work of Gordon Wilson and his team within the Ministry of Works Architectural Section, recognised as one of the most important design offices of cost effective, high density social housing during the mid-twentieth century. The Gordon Wilson Flats hold **considerable** historic and social significance in signifying the forward thinking aspirations of the State during the 1950s, and the building continued to function as a key centre of local social housing through to its closure in 2012. **Moderate** significance is recognised for its aesthetic, architectural and townscape values, with **no** functional significance and only **minor** significance attributable to scientific and technological values (archaeological significance was not assessed as part of this assessment).

The development was originally envisaged to provide economic State rental accommodation, however, the architects were challenged to provide a building at basic cost, on what was determined a difficult site. Building design was undertaken by the head office of the Ministry of Works under the leadership of Gordon F Wilson, and was of a similar design to the earlier development of the Grey's Avenue Flats, Auckland. The foundation stone for the Gordon Wilson building was laid on the 6 August 1957 with completion in 1959. Few alterations have been carried out to the building ensuring the scale, mass and layout of the original Modernist building form and integrity has not been compromised over the design conceived in the post-war years. However, engineering assessments undertaken in 2011 identified an urgent need for remedial works to the façade to such a degree that a decision was made to evacuate the residents in May 2012.

The building is formed as an 11-storeyed residential block with an externally expressed superstructure of wall and floor slabs creating a rhythm of cellular units. The Ground Floor is generally laid out with 12 bed-sitting room flats and ancillary spaces and on the floor above are a total of 75 maisonette-style flats; 70 of which cover a floor area of 64m² with two double bedrooms, whilst the remainder have one double bedroom and a single room. The foundation system devised for the project had not previously been used on any structures in New Zealand at that time and consequently the building was the subject of a structural monitoring programme by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research to measure earthquake movement.

Following the success of earlier high density developments including the Dixon Street Flats (Wellington) and Auckland's Symonds Street and Lower Greys Avenue flats (first stage), post war accommodation pressures challenged designers to develop cost effective social housing. Based on a potential template design model during the period when Modernist influences were integral to social housing design and development, the first of type was envisaged with the construction of the Upper Greys Avenue Flats (second stage) in Auckland and the subject place followed quickly thereafter. However, ongoing political and public pressures ensured that the second building to be constructed, in the form of the Gordon Wilson Flats, was also the last; so forming a premature end to the brief foray by government in the provision of high density social housing in the post-war years.

2.0 description of the place

2.1 ownership

The property is owned by the Victoria University of Wellington.

2.2 address

Gordon Wilson Flats
314 The Terrace
Wellington

2.3 legal description

Lot 1 DP 3630505

NZTM reference:

Easting: / Northing: 1748250/5427637

2.4 local authority designation

- The property is recognised on the Wellington City Council District Plan – Heritage list as: Building item 299. Refer Wellington City Council District Plan Map: 16 in *Chapter 21- Heritage Rules – Heritage List: Areas*.
- The property has not been attributed Earthquake Prone Status by Wellington City Council, however, the building has been vacant since May 2012 following evacuation due to safety concerns over falling masonry from unstable and decayed façade elements.

2.5 registration

The Gordon Wilson Flats are not registered under provisions of the Heritage New Zealand Act 2014, however, it is understood that the site was occupied prior to 1900. Therefore, the site may be defined as an archaeological site in accordance with Section 6 (a) (i) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, which recognises that places associated with human occupation prior to 1900 are by definition archaeological sites.

3.0 brief

3.1 requirements

The brief required the preparation of an objective and independent Heritage Assessment for the Gordon Wilson Flats as found and to inform ongoing investigations into options for developing the building and its site.

3.2 authors

This Conservation Plan has been prepared by Archifact - Architecture & Conservation Limited. The authors have been Adam Wild and Andy O'Neil.

3.3 methodology

This assessment of heritage values pays regard to the terms adopted and taken from a selection of criteria included in Section 66 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. This section of the Act lists criteria used in qualifying the inclusion of a place on the New Zealand Heritage List administered by Heritage New Zealand. Criteria from this list used in this report include the following values and a short description of these follows below:

A – Aesthetic:

Considering the formal qualities of the fabric and setting: the form, scale, materials, space etc. Assessment of the space or its parts demonstrating aesthetic significance or contribution to the overall integrity of the design of the place.

B – Archaeological:

The degree to which the space can be said to have an archaeological potential.

C – Architectural:

Addressing the design and architectural aspects of the place. Assessment of the space demonstrating those particular characteristics of a school of design.

D – Functional

The contribution of the function of the place that can be assessed as having cultural heritage significance.

E – Historical:

The ability to demonstrate an association with persons, ideas or events. Included in this section are the histories of all the other criteria considered.

F – Scientific:

Concerned with the importance of the place as evidence and with the physical survival of that evidence in the building fabric. Scientific value is the potential to provide information about past human activity. This may encompass technology, archaeology, philosophy, custom, taste and usage as well as technique or material.

G – Social:

The notion of a spiritual, traditional, political, national, or any other cultural sentiment expressed by a group.

H – Technological:

Assessment of the demonstration of particular characteristics of a building technique or craft.

I – Townscape:

An assessment of the 'Townscape Value' or the contribution of the space to its greater context.

3.4 constraints

This heritage assessment has been based on information available at the time. A site visit was conducted on Thursday 18 December 2014. Free and open access to the majority of the place and its site surrounds has been made available. However, due to safety concerns a defined secure perimeter had been placed around the base of the building which prevented close inspection of any external element at ground floor level. It was not possible to access any of the ground floor flats, the southern glazed stairwell or the section of roof containing the boiler house facilities.

4.0 development history

4.1 early settlement

The formation of The Terrace dates back to the beginning of formal colonial settlement of the Wellington region in 1840. The Terrace is located towards the western boundary of the Te Aro Valley through which once ran the Te Aro Stream (Wai Mapihi) and is situated on a hillside at the edge of the Te Ara Flat on land leading to the sea. The hillside was described as being filled with “*detritus of slips and deposits from small streams,*”¹ whilst the lower levels of the Flat were “*covered with fern and flax: and being bog from Courtenay Place to Basin Reserve.*”²

The topography of the hill-enclosed harbour city resulted in early housing development being grouped along the beach. Plans for sub-division were quickly developed, however, these early schemes were relatively short-lived. Early settlers experienced regular minor earthquakes until two significant events in 1848 and 1855. The 1848 quake is recorded as causing widespread damage to brick masonry structures in the area and as a result later buildings were initially mostly constructed from wood, however, the second earthquake in 1855 caused significant deformation and uplift of the land around the shore.³ Manners Street and Lambton Quay were no longer waterfront roads and additional land had been created between Lambton Quay and the sea. Consequently, early subdivision surveys of the area were subject to extensive remodelling to accommodate additional available land⁴ and as the port grew, residential development began to spread up the valley sides; graduating from small shops on the landward side of Lambton Quay to larger houses....

4.2 site and building development

In the early subdivision of land in the Wellington settlement much of the area behind the foreshore was divided into one-acre lots which were granted to settlers who had already bought farms of over 100 acres in the outlying districts.⁵ This size of lot was sufficient for the landowner to build a townhouse with associated horse paddocks to which they could reside when away from the country and the ‘*town-acre*’ arrangement was particularly prevalent along the Terrace, where grand four or five level timber dwellings lined the hillside.⁶

With the particularly restrictive topography of Wellington came pressures to provide sufficient land for housing and this need became particularly prevalent following the transfer of Governance from Auckland to Wellington in 1865.⁷ These pressures continued into the early part of the twentieth century but became more acute following the end of the Second World War with returning servicemen seeking a new start to life.

As of 3 February 1943, the subject site was one of the few remaining large blocks in the residential part of the city and at this time was purchased by the Government for housing purposes for approximately £14,000. The site comprised a little over two acres and was considered for many years one of the beauty spots of the city. At the time of purchase by the Government, it contained two houses; with the smaller of the two recognised as being one of the oldest dwellings in the city. This property was constructed by Mr R. R. Strang in the early 1840s and it was his daughter who married Sir Donald McLean; with Sir R. D. D. McLean being born in the house and enforcing the family link with the site. The larger of the houses on the site was used as the city residence by Sir R. D. D. McLean⁸ and remained so until the death of Lady McLean.

¹ The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, Vol, 28, No. 1, February 1961, J, Serial No.222

² Ward, L., E., 1991, Early Wellington.

³ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/4433/eyewitness-account-of-the-1855-earthquake>

⁴ Chao, S., 2005, Where Fashion Sold for Less

⁵ McLeod, N.L. and Farland, G.H, 1970., Wellington Prospect, p169

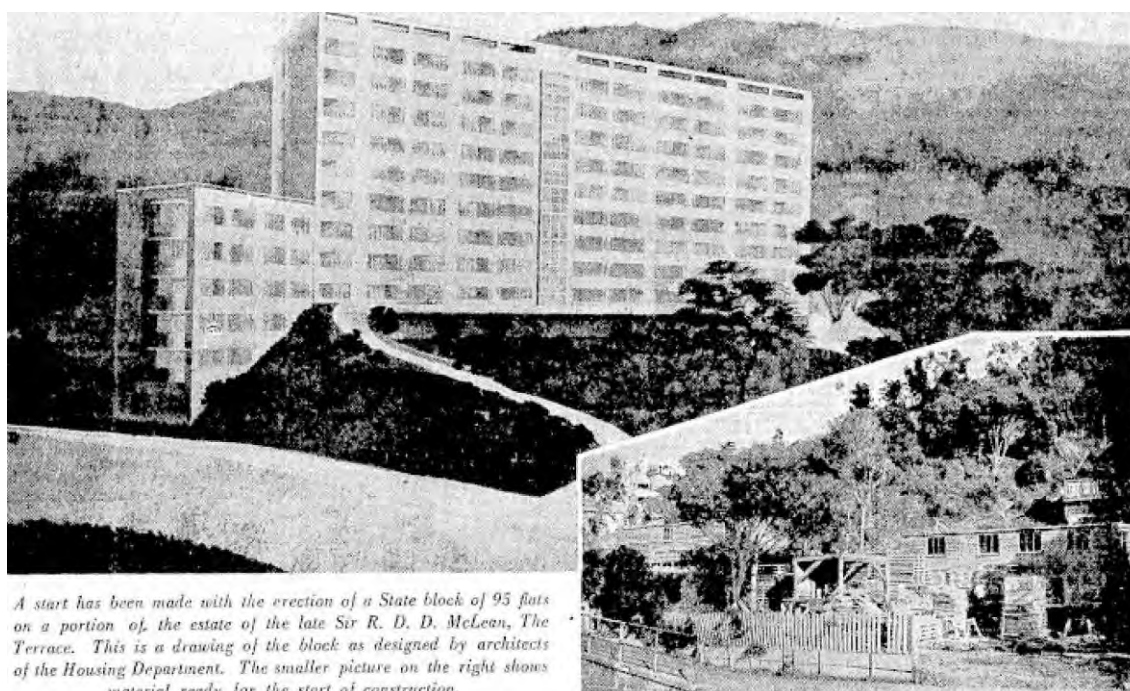
⁶ Fowler, M., 1981, Wellington, Wellington., A History, P12

⁷ Ibid, p14

⁸ Papers Past, Evening Post, Volume CXXXV, Issue 28, 3 February 1943, P3

The first stage of development on the former Sir R. D. D. McLean estate was secured by a New Plymouth development firm and was to be undertaken in stages with construction beginning in 1943 with a five-storey block of 14 flats. This first block was to serve as a hostel for women of the armed forces (Women's Auxiliary Army Corps and Women's Auxiliary Air Force) stationed in Wellington and then a second stage was proposed for a later date in the form of a nine storey block.⁹

The first stage was nearing completion in May 1944 and was expected to be occupied by June of that year. The women at that time had been stationed on the site in old wooden buildings on the area of land that was to form the second stage of development. Those buildings were renovated and turned into two large flats for large families and were also scheduled for occupation in June, although these buildings were scheduled for demolition once the second stage large block was built.¹⁰ It was unknown at that stage however, when the next stage would be implemented although early designs had been developed in conjunction with the McLean State Flats.



A start has been made with the erection of a State block of 95 flats on a portion of the estate of the late Sir R. D. D. McLean, The Terrace. This is a drawing of the block as designed by architects of the Housing Department. The smaller picture on the right shows material ready for the start of construction.

Figure 2. Image taken from the Evening post dating to 5 May 1943. This image shows a perspective sketch of the proposed erection of a State block of 95 flats and is attributed to Ernst Plischke. The proposal was formed from two individual elements, with the smaller block representing the McLean State Flats that constituted the first phase of the development and was built between 1943 and 1944. Note the design of the larger scale principal block encompasses design cues similar to those incorporated in the Dixon Street flats (constructed 1943). (Source: Papers Past: Evening Post, Volume CXXXV, Issue 105, 5 May 1943).

The original design for the second stage of multi-unit flats on the McLean site featured similar design cues to the Dixon Street Flats, which were situated a short distance to the east and developed in line with well-established Modernist concepts from the United States and Europe. A perspective sketch of the proposed scheme for the McLean and Terrace Flats dating to 1942 has been attributed to Ernst Plischke who worked under Gordon Wilson as Chief Architect. The sketch reveals that the original design for the Gordon Wilson Flats was reflective of the Dixon Street Flats, which were under construction at the time this sketch was produced. However, his involvement in the McLean site scheme from that point is unclear, as professional conflict between Gordon Wilson and Plischke became intolerable.¹¹ Consequently Plischke left the Architectural Section in 1942 and transferred to another department as head of

⁹ Papers Past, Auckland Star, Volume LXXIV, Issue 94, 21 April 1943, P2

¹⁰ Evening post, Volume CXXXVII, Issue 117, 19 May 1944, P4.

¹¹ Wellington City Council, Heritage Report, May 2012, Gordon Wilson Flats, 320 The Terrace.

Community Planning.¹² Therefore, this relocation is likely to have removed Plischke's involvement in the development of the building from that point.

What is clear is that the length of time between the implementation of the staged construction resulted in a change of design emphasis that reflected the evolving Modernist Style of architecture and government budget limitations. With the new design, gone was the monolithic form and central vertical glazed stairwell, and in was a lighter building both in terms of construction techniques and living environment, with the building alignment orientated further towards the north-south axis to maximise the daily exposure of each unit to the sun and to views of the surrounding city and harbour. Much emphasis was also placed on ensuring high quality building services that together with the light and airy environment provided characteristics the designers hoped would not repeat issues inherently recognised within the slum conditions of multi-level developments in Europe.

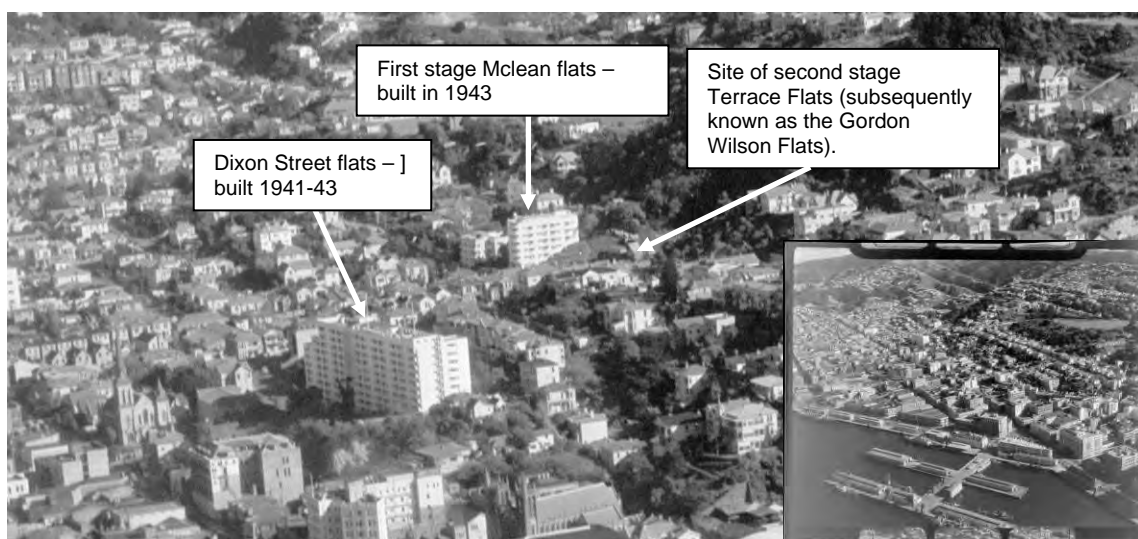


Figure 3. Extract image (see full aerial inset) showing the site in 1947 with the Stage 1 Mclean State flats completed, the context with the Stage 2 site and the Dixon Street flats. (Source: Wellington City central business district with Queens Wharf in foreground, looking to The Terrace and the suburbs of Kelburn and Brooklyn beyond. Whites Aviation Ltd:Photographs. Ref: WA-07187- F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/30662143>).

The Gordon Wilson Flats was envisaged to provide economic State rental accommodation, however, the designers were challenged to provide a building at basic cost, on what was determined a difficult site. With regard to the building layout, the Architects and engineers devised a solution to reduce costs that included accommodation in the form of bed-sitting rooms at Ground level with the remainder of the building featuring two-bedroom maisonettes.¹³

It is also noted that the Department of Housing Construction and the Ministry of Works and Development actively sought out new ideas for new materials and systems of construction that would potentially speed up the supply of houses or reduce costs. In particular, experiments were undertaken in various methods of construction in poured concrete, concrete blocks and brickwork.¹⁴ Whether such materials or practices were applied to the construction of the subject building is not known at this stage, however, it has been identified that the foundation design chosen for the works was in a format not previously employed in New Zealand.¹⁵

¹² Sarnitz, A., Ottillinger, E., B., 2004, Ernst Plischke: Modern Architecture for the New World: The Complete Works.

¹³ The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, Vol, 28, No. 1, February 1961, J, Serial No.222

¹⁴ Firth, C., Wilson, G., F., 1949, State Housing in New Zealand, Ministry of Works Wellington, New Zealand

¹⁵ The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, Vol, 28, No. 1, February 1961, J, Serial No.222

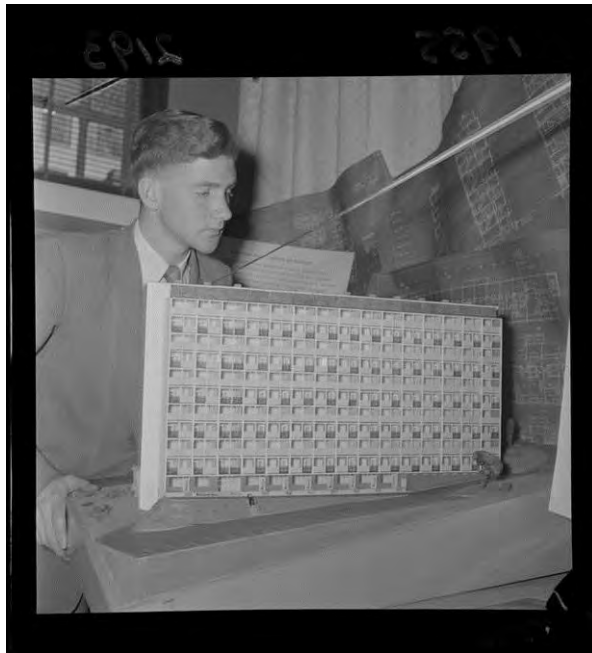


Figure 4. Image dating to 1955 showing a model of the proposed Terrace Flats multi-storey flat development in Wellington. (Source Ref: Unidentified man with architectural model of Gordon Wilson Flats, a State Advances Corporation housing block, at housing exhibition, Drapery and General Importing Company of New Zealand Ltd gallery. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: EP/1955/2193-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23023267>



Figure 5. Looking at the foundation stone for the Gordon Wilson Flats laid on the 6 August 1957. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

The Gordon Wilson building itself was designed by the head office of the Ministry of Works under the leadership of Gordon F Wilson, and was of a similar design to the recently completed block in Grey's Avenue, Auckland. The construction supervision was carried out by the Wellington District Office¹⁶ and the project builders were Downer and Company Ltd and McKenzie Thomson Hoskins Ltd.¹⁷ The foundation stone for the building was laid on the 6 August 1957 by the Hon. Dean J. Eyre, minister of Housing.

Unfortunately, Gordon Wilson passed away during the later stages of the construction period and in recognition of his work, the building was subsequently renamed The Gordon Wilson Flats in his honour and completed in 1959.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Foundation stone text



Figure 6. Gordon Wilson Flats under construction, The Terrace, Wellington. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: EP/1957/0397-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23171607>



Figure 7. Terrace flats under construction, The Terrace, Wellington. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: EP/1957/4364-1-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23246983>



Figure 7. Aerial image dating to 4 February 1958 showing the Gordon Wilson Flats under construction on The Terrace. (Source: Gordon Wilson Flats (Wellington). Gordon Wilson Flats under construction on The Terrace, Wellington. Dominion post (Newspaper) :Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post and Dominion newspapers. Ref: EP Industry- Housing-State-02. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22299856>).

The building served its original purpose as State Housing through to 2012 with only a few modifications undertaken up to 2011, at which time a programme of repair works and modifications were initiated to upgrade the accommodation. The proposed works were to be undertaken in two phases, with the first phase involving the replacement of the stairwell glazing systems, repair of the membrane roof, the replacement of the service stairs and general repair and maintenance work.¹⁸

The initial phase was budgeted at a cost of \$1.3 million but due to additional works this rose to a final cost of \$1.5 million. The second phase was initiated, however, significant decay of the structural façade was identified at that stage and works were halted. Engineering assessment of the building identified urgent need for remedial works to the façade and that there was a significant risk of sections of the façade becoming detached in the event of an earthquake or strong winds.¹⁹

Consequently, a decision was made to evacuate the residents, and in May 2012 they were given just one week's notice given to find alternative accommodation. Housing New Zealand considered a number of options regarding the future of the building but eventually sold the site to Victoria University in September 2014.²⁰

4.3 multi-unit state housing in new zealand

Efforts to address housing shortages and poor living conditions were undertaken by various New Zealand authorities from the time of the earliest days of Colonial settlement, with the initial efforts of both New Zealand Company officials and provincial governments focussing on providing barrack accommodation for new arrivals. However, it was not until the early 1900s when Central Government first recognised concern over the standard of housing in the main cities, areas of which were rapidly descending into slum-like conditions.

Various schemes were conceived to address the issues; with a mixture of state erected dwellings and offers of low-interest loans for land-owning workers, although successive governments had conflicting viewpoints on the appropriateness of such schemes. However, by the end of the 1920s the state was financing half of all new homes built in New Zealand.

In 1935 the then Labour Government introduced the Housing Survey Act which provided information on the existing living conditions within the main towns and cities. The survey revealed that the condition of housing for poor income families was acute with poor sanitation and lack of cooking facilities. Consequently the government developed plans in 1936 to build 5,000 State House rental properties that would offer a standard of accommodation that was *“at least up to the standard of, and preferably better than, the houses inhabited by ordinary typical citizens.....and in no circumstances were the same designs to be used to such an extent that they would be labelled as “Government mass-produced houses.”*²¹ In light of the extensive nature of the programme, a new department of Housing Construction was formed to oversee the works.²² *The programme was aimed at low - to - middle income families – partly to encourage breeding,*²³ and the first State House under the new scheme was constructed in 1937 at 12 Fife Lane, Miramar, Wellington.²⁴ By 1939 the houses were being erected across the country at the rate of 57 each week.²⁵

¹⁸ Wellington City Council, Heritage Report, May 2012, Gordon Wilson Flats, 320 The Terrace.

¹⁹ Stuff.co.nz, Dominion post. 03 April 2014, *More Than \$1m To Upgrade Now-Empty Flats.*

²⁰ Stuff.co.nz, Dominion post. 12 September 2014, *Quake – Prone flats sold to University.*

²¹ Firth, C and Wilson, G. F., 1949, *State Housing in New Zealand*, Ministry of Works Wellington, New Zealand.

²² <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/housing-and-government/page-2>

²³ Ibid

²⁴ <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/we-call-it-home/first-state-house>

²⁵ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/housing-and-government/page-2>

The ideal housing standard for New Zealanders was considered at that time to constitute building in detached formation, however, it was already being recognised by planners that suburbs were spreading uncontrollably and some considered that the open plan layout required for detached housing was “*unsatisfactory aesthetically*.”²⁶ Much discussion over the previous years had centred on the merits of houses over multi-unit accommodation and New Zealanders studied with interest the experiences encountered of both types in Europe and the United States. In particular, concerns over serious overcrowding in the Wellington context led to suggestions that flats could be seen as the ideal solution to the pressing issues.

The argument in favour of flats primarily centred on their supposed ability to do away with overcrowding of the inner areas of cities where land is expensive.²⁷ However, many considered that previous examples of multi-unit social housing lacked planning, were little more than rooms rather than dwellings,²⁸ had poor standards of light and air and external space, and were often associated with tall barrack-like structures offering poor appearance.²⁹

The newly formed Department of Housing Construction under the leadership of Gordon F Wilson, sought to address the negative connotations by planning centrally situated multi-unit accommodation that were close to the centre of town and places of employment. The first of the new multi-unit developments was erected in Wellington, although this development was situated a few kilometres from the centre of the City and became known as the Berhampore Flats (originally called the Centennial Flats). This medium density development was designed by Gordon Wilson and constituted one of the first examples of Modernism in New Zealand³⁰ with monolithic form, sharp angles and clean lines of bold horizontal elements formed by windows and balconies, broken by strong vertical forms such as stairwells.

The Second World War placed further pressure on the development of social housing provision within New Zealand, both through delays on construction projects due to priorities placed on defence work and then the subsequent need to house returning servicemen. Towards the end of 1944 a total of 2276 State rental houses and flats had been allotted to returned servicemen, widows of servicemen and to wives of prisoners of war throughout New Zealand. In Wellington alone, 742 houses and flats had been allotted to returned men by that date³¹

Multi-unit development in the cities was considered to be important to the economy of the country, although the then Labour Government continued to prove reluctant in building city flats as opposed to urban housing³². This type of development retained the stigma of overcrowded slum from experiences overseas so the need for well-designed flats was required to counter those views and to offer accommodation that provided good light, air, amenities and spaciousness. Following in the success of the Berhampore Flats, plans were put into place to construct high-density multi-storey accommodation in both Wellington and Auckland and by 1941 the Government’s first high-density multi-unit development was underway in the form of the Dixon Flats, Wellington.

Completed in 1944, this ten storey structure provided 115 one-bedroom flats that were intended for couples and single people and was New Zealand’s first multi-unit slab apartment block. It was designed by staff from the Department of Housing

²⁶ Firth, C and Wilson, G. F., 1949, *State Housing in New Zealand*, Ministry of Works Wellington, New Zealand, p14

²⁷ *PapersPast-Evening Post*, Volume CXXI, Issue 75, 28 March 1936, P14

²⁸ *PapersPast-New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXV, Issue 23202, 23 November 1938, P15

²⁹ Firth, C and Wilson, G. F., 1949, *State Housing in New Zealand*, Ministry of Works Wellington, New Zealand.

³⁰ Schrader, B, 2005, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing*.

³¹ *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXVIII, Issue 125, 23 November 1944, p8

³² Schrader, B, 2005, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing*.

Construction (the Department merged into the Ministry of Works and Development in 1943³³), with the work overseen by Gordon Wilson. Of note, the plans for the Dixon Street block indicate that up to sixteen staff were involved in the design process to some degree including notable architects such as Ernst Plischke, however, the extent of his involvement with the building design is questionable³⁴

The scheme paid regard to both American and European Modernist precedents and its prominent location with its significant scale, soon proved to be a major element in the Wellington landscape. Similar development was planned a short distance from the Dixon Street Flats with the acquisition of the McLean site in 1943 and construction of the first stage of a two-stage development was completed in 1944. The next multi-storey housing development was proposed for the Auckland region with two sites selected in close proximity; Symonds Street and Grey's Avenue. The design for these projects continued in with Modernist influences and the design of the Symonds Street Flats was attributed to Friedrich Newman, although his work was conducted through the Department of Housing Construction which was essentially overseen by Gordon Wilson.

The Greys Avenue development was part of a planned programme of slum clearance; a condition which had blighted that part of Auckland for many years and the Auckland City Council contributed finance to purchase the land. The scheme design was attributed to Gordon Wilson and the Ministry of Works and Development with initial proposals submitted to erect a total of 486 units throughout Greys Avenue although initial construction was delayed due to the Second World War. Ultimately, when the decision to proceed with the project was taken the scale of the development proved too ambitious in light of the post-war financial restrictions and only the Symonds Street Flats and four blocks of the Greys Avenue Flat development was completed. Both sites were opened on the same day in 1947.

Further development of both the Grey's Avenue site in Auckland and the McLean site in Wellington was delayed due to post-war construction costs being prohibitively high³⁵ and it was not until the advent of economic recovery of the early 1950s that a decision was made to proceed with the second stages of both projects. By the time of that decision, the original design of the Greys Avenue Flats was considered to be outdated and proposals were put in place to redesign the second (southern) stage. Research was undertaken into producing a building that was cost effective yet provided a good standard of accommodation and amenities. The resultant multi-level unit featured a design encompassing evolved Modernist influences and included 70 two-bedroom maisonettes and sixteen bed-sits. The building was opened on 9 August 1957 by the Minister of Housing, Dean Eyre.³⁶ Once completed, the designers had produced a building that was both lighter in structural mass and featured improved daylight transmission through the use of extensive glazed elements.

The new model of high density housing was potentially envisaged to form a template for future development; saving costs both in planning and construction. However, the view remained in Government that blocks of flats represented a European model of urbanism that was at odds with the suburban nature of the general New Zealand condition. Reinforcing this perception, applications from prospective tenants for suburban State houses were noted as continuously outnumbering those for city flats and all subsequent State flats were designed to be small-scale and low-rise.³⁷

³³ Sarnitz, A., Ottilinger, E., B., 2004, Ernst Plischke: Modern Architecture for the New World: The Complete Works.

³⁴ Gately, J, 2008, Long Live the Modern, New Zealand's Architecture 1904-1984.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Auckland City Council Listed Buildings/places/ Objects History Checklist, 12 December 1995.

³⁷ Schrader, B, 2005, We Call It Home: A History of State Housing.

5.0 description and physical condition

5.1 location map

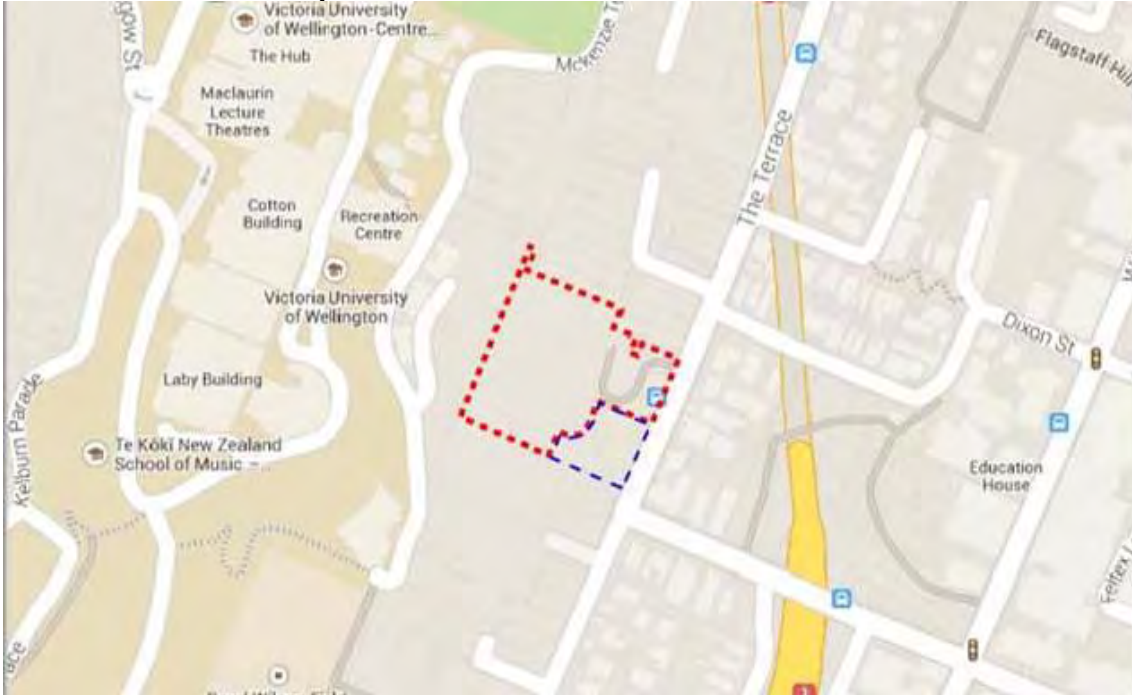


Figure 8. Aerial photo from 2014 showing the location of, and boundary of the subject property. The boundary for the Gordon Wilson flats is delineated with a dashed line in red. The dashed line in blue indicates the site boundary of the Mclean State flats. (Google Maps, 2014).

5.2 site

The Terrace is one of the main thoroughfares in the city of Wellington, running in a generally north-south direction. It begins at the crossroad junction with Bowen St and Museum St to the north and terminates at the corner of Abel Smith St to the south.

The subject site encompassing 314 The Terrace is located on the north-western site of the street, close to the T-junctions with Macdonald Crescent and Ghuznee Street. This section of The Terrace slopes downwards in a north/ south direction and contains predominantly residential buildings. The site encompasses an area of approximately 0.7 hectares and is identified as Lot 1 DP 363050, whilst the topography of the site is generally formed by the steep hillside that rises away from the flat land of the Te Aro valley. The subject building is located in the approximate centre of a terrace of land carved into the side of the hill and set back from the street side by approximately 40m.

The site is accessed from The Terrace via a winding driveway which leads to a hardstand carpark that was originally for use of residents only. Mature trees and metal fencing of approximately 2m in height are situated along the site boundary, partially screening the subject building from view of the street. Due to the significant height of the subject building, it is clearly visible from the surround area. To the rear of the site, the land is populated by mature vegetation and rises steeply away to the west and the McLean State Flats are located in close proximity to the subject building on land lying directly towards the south-east aspect.



Figure 9. Image showing 1892 survey map extract of Wellington with the subject site highlighted in red and the shadow footprint of the Gordon Wilson State Flats overlays that of the 1892 building outlines. (Wellington City Council, GIS Viewer, 2014).



Figure 10. Looking along the entrance driveway leading to the eastern aspect of the Gordon Wilson building. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014).



Figure 11. Looking north towards the Mclean State Flats from the junction of Ghuznee Street and The Terrace. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014).



Figure 12. Looking east towards the Gordon Wilson building from the junction of Macdonald Crescent and The Terrace. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014).



Figure 13. Looking north-west towards the Gordon Wilson building from the junction of Ghuznee Street with Willis Street. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014).



Figure 14. Looking north-west towards the Gordon Wilson building from Willis Street. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014).



Figure 15. Looking north-west towards the Gordon Wilson building from the junction of Victoria Street with Ghuznee Street. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014).



Figure 16. Looking west towards the Gordon Wilson building with the harbour in the distance (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 17. Looking west towards the Gordon Wilson building with the city context in the background. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

5.3 structure

The subject property identified as 314 The Terrace sits on a hillside site overlooking Te Aro. The hillside is noted as originally being filled with “*detritus slips and deposits from small streams combined into a heterogeneous mixture of clays and silts....to a depth of some 40ft.*” The hillside was therefore recognised as a difficult site on which to erect a multi-storey building and it was determined that the foundations for such a building would require piles bored to a sufficient depth in order to meet firm bedrock.

The system of piling devised for the project had not previously been used on any structures in New Zealand at that time. The process involved boring the pile holes, then placing reinforcement before adding a dry-mix of concrete aggregate. The final process involved injecting a fluid grout mixture, and once poured, the piles were left to set for a few months. The centre piles were bored to a depth of 48ft, reducing to 20ft at the ends of the block, which were located on two rock outcrops extending back to the main ridgeline, whilst a proportion the piles were raked to improve structural stability. Further structural support was provided along the western side of the building through a set of short buttresses that acted as stiffening members. These buttresses anchored the structure to the pile heads and rose vertically to the third floor level of the building.

As a result of the inherent time delay required to allow the piles to set before loading commenced, the building process required a novel construction method to be adopted, and instead of the building being erected floor by floor, a plan was developed to erect the building in a diagonal sequence to suit the varying setting times of the varying pile lengths.

The 11 storey structure is configured in a cellular format and considerable building weight was saved through a two storey arrangement of the units, with the dividing floors formed from 5 inch thick concrete and the intermediate floors being constructed of timber. Due to the slender nature of the structure, the building was stiffened longitudinally with a central spine wall 9 inches thick and diagonally reinforced. Openings through this wall were staggered and 8 inch thick transverse walls divided each unit.

As the construction methods were unusual in the context of New Zealand at that time, the building was also the subject of a structural monitoring programme by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research³⁸ to measure earthquake movement.

³⁸ Shepherd, R. and Wood, J., H., April 1963, The Dynamic Design of Earthquake-Resistant Structures

This type of system was considered common practice overseas at that time and enabled monitoring and measurement of earthquake movements and the resulting strain in the building materials. Strain gauges and motion accelerators were installed within the building with the aim to determine “*the natural period of vibration and to get the modal shapes,*” and the resultant data collected provided interesting data sets. Of note, the data contributed to an understanding that “*with relatively symmetrical structures there could be a considerable amount of torsional effect.*”³⁹

Recent searches of the building have, however, failed to locate any surviving monitoring equipment and the whereabouts of any data obtained by that equipment through the monitoring process is also unknown at this time. However, modern analyses by structural engineers of the appropriateness of the methods used to establish the foundations have suggested that the method employed is questionable for reliability in a seismic context.

Other measures to counter seismic activity included strengthening the detached lift tower with alternate access links, and by stabilising the surrounding hillside with crib walling. The crib walling required to stabilise the excavated face of the hillside rose approximately 60 feet behind the structure and each level was set back 4 feet horizontally and 8 feet vertically.⁴⁰

5.4 exterior

The subject building is an 11-storeyed residential block with an externally expressed superstructure of wall and floor slabs creating a rhythm of cellular units. Main access to the flats is via an open area to the northeast corner of the building; currently with use of a steel shipping container to protect visitors from any falling debris that is the result of advanced decay of reinforced concrete façade elements. A secure perimeter has been set up around the base of the building to prevent access within 5.0m of the façade.

The in-fill panels forming the façade consist of pre-cast slabs divided by, and supported by, precast concrete posts. Above each panel on the eastern elevation, a line of rectilinear timber framed windows combine with the panels below to form defined horizontal bands, but these are also subtly divided vertically with finer lines of the superstructure. This façade is punctuated at each unit by a single width balcony; the fronts of which are formed from vitreous enamelled metal panels framed with tubular steel members.

On the western elevation, the horizontal emphasis appears more defined due to a negative detail formed by the alternating layers of open balconies that provide pedestrian access to each unit. In a similar manner to the eastern side, this elevation also features a subtle vertical subdivision formed by the expressed superstructure, however, the vertical sub-division over the first three levels is emphasised by buttressing that ties the structure to the foundations.

Apartments at ground floor level are boarded up to prevent access to the interior, but it is noted that these are detailed in a different manner than the levels above with brick panelled fronts supporting timber framed window and door sets. Small flights of steps with cantilevered cover provide secondary access routes into the ground floor apartments at the rear, western side of the building. Some planting features to the front of the ground floor apartments, although this is now largely unkempt and overgrown.

Glazed stairwells define the north and south ends of the building and these are positioned at the north-western and south-eastern corners. These provide a link to

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, Vol, 28, No. 1, February 1961, J, Serial No.222

each level of the building as does the detached lift tower that is located at the northern end of the western elevation. The lift shaft is connected to the main structure by alternating levels of access lobbies that intersect with the open balconies. The stairwells and lift also provide access to the roof area that provided laundry facilities along the length of the roof. The roof area is bounded by painted fence formed from timber and steel although it is difficult to observe this feature from the street level.

Originally, the building was presented with a carefully considered colour scheme of grey, green and red elements that was designed to express the individual structural and non-structural façade elements. The original colour scheme included light grey for the end walls, the in-situ structural walls floor slabs; whilst dark grey was utilised for the precast posts, slabs and soffits over balconies and a pale green coated the horizontal wall slabs. The single balcony fronts were finished in alternate colours of blue and light red and the double balcony fronts were very dark brown. On the roof, the trellis fence which bounded the perimeter was light grey, and all window trim was in white.⁴¹

The building now features a slightly reduced colour palette, of graded panels ranging from dark blue at the lower apartments to pale blue at the top of the building. The exposed structure remains expressed with painted white so that it further enhances the building's cellular appearance. However, there is evidence of extensive decay of both structural and secondary components and consequently the general condition of the external elevations is considered to be poor.



Figure 18. Looking at the north end of the building with the glazed access stairwell set on the north-east corner of the building. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

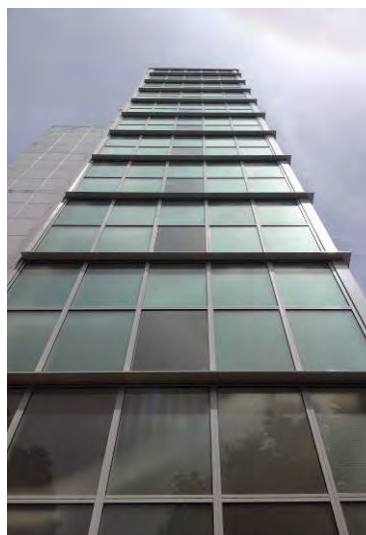


Figure 19. Looking up at the glazed elevation of the northern stairwell. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 20. Looking south towards the lift tower and its junction with the west elevation. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

⁴¹ The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, Vol, 28, No. 1, February 1961, J, Serial No.222
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Figure 21. Looking north at the lift tower and its junction with the west elevation.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 22. Looking south along the western elevation. Note the slender buttresses that act as stiffening members anchoring the structure to the pile heads.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 23. Looking north along the western elevation. Note the slender buttresses on the right of the image that act as stiffening members anchoring the structure to the pile heads.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 24. Looking at the upper levels of the southern end of the building with the glazed access stairwell set onto the south-west corner of the building.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

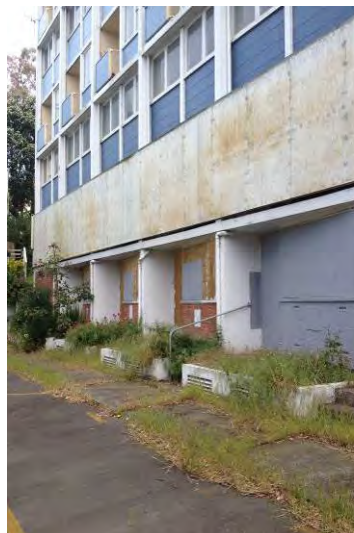


Figure 25. Looking at the southern end of the building's eastern elevation.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 26. Looking at the lower levels of the eastern elevation. Note the Ground Floor level apartments are boarded over preventing access into the interior.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 27. Looking at the northern end of the eastern elevation. Note the steel shipping container slotted into the main entrance to protect visitors from falling debris. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 28. Looking at the main entrance wall entrance signage. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 29. Looking south along the open roof deck. Note the laundry and storage rooms to the left of the image. Also note the flue serving the buildings boiler house. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

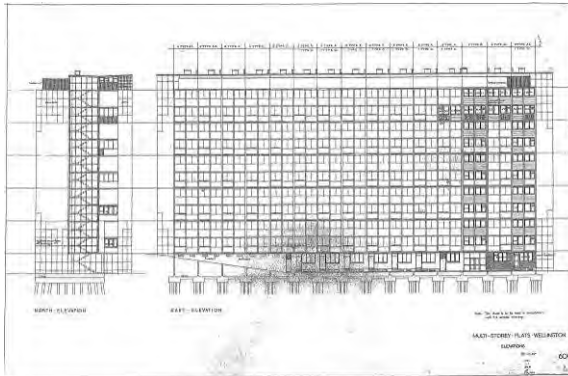


Figure 30. North and East elevations for the proposed State Flats dating to July 1954. Note these plans are considered to include approval initials of Gordon Wilson. (Source: Wareham Cameron Co, 2014).

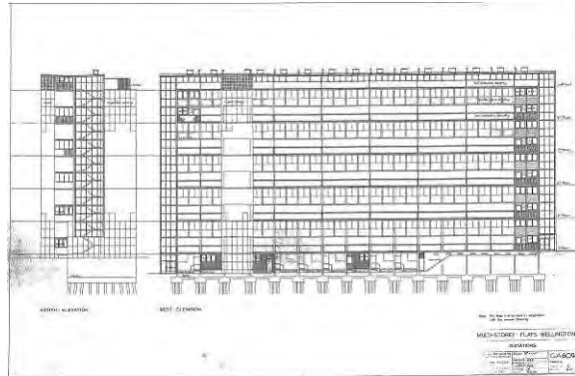


Figure 31. South and West elevations for the proposed State Flats dating to July 1954. Note these plans are considered to include approval initials of Gordon Wilson. (Source: Wareham Cameron Co, 2014).

5.5 interior

The Ground Floor of the building is generally laid out with 12 bed-sitting room flats but also incorporates the main entrance and lift lobby, a caretaker's office, waste disposal and storage areas. Above this level there are a total of 75 maisonette style flats; 70 of which cover a floor area of 64m² with two double bedrooms, whilst the remainder have one double bedroom and a single in each. On entering each flat a short hallway leads to a kitchen immediately to the right and onwards to a living area. This space features large windows with views spreading out across the city and a further doorway leading out to a small balcony area. A set of stairs leads from this space to the first floor area that contains the two bedrooms and a bathroom.

Glazed stairwells set at each end of the building provide access to each of five balconies and then on to individual flat entrances. There are two lifts that also link the main ground floor entrance to the balconies and these as well as the stairwells continue to roof level where laundry and storage facilities are provided. The stairwells also contain access hatches for building services with metering and electrical panels for each flat.

It is noted that a number of the interior spaces are displaying a degree of fabric decay and this is particularly apparent throughout the lower levels of the building where water ingress is causing areas of mould growth and efflorescence. Overall, the interior spaces are however, considered to be in a fair condition.

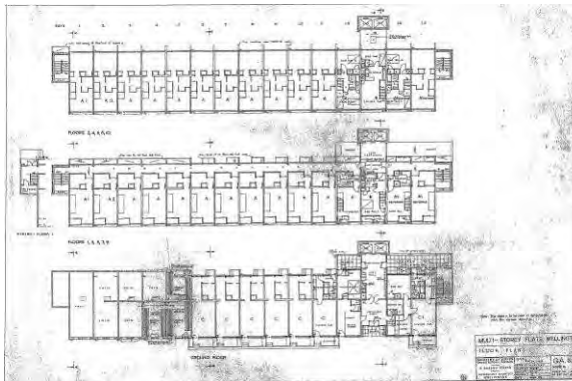


Figure 32. Floor plans for the proposed State Flats dating to August 1954. Note these plans are considered to include approval initials of Gordon Wilson. (Source: Wareham Cameron Co, 2014).

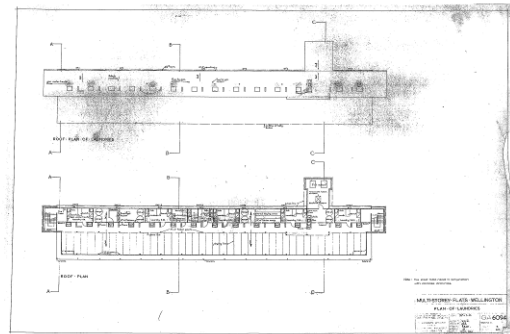


Figure 33. Roof and Laundry plans for the proposed State Flats dating to July 1954. Note these plans are considered to include approval initials of Gordon Wilson. (Source: Wareham Cameron Co, 2014).

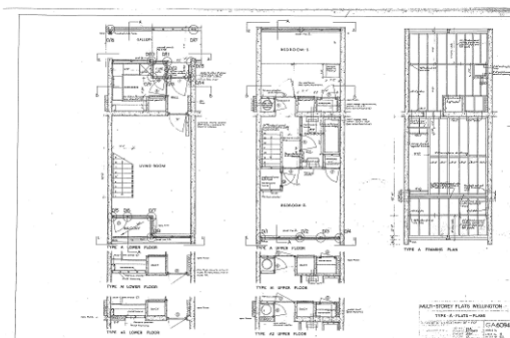


Figure 34. Type A floor plans for the proposed State Flats dating to July 1954. Note these plans are considered to include approval initials of Gordon Wilson. (Source: Wareham Cameron Co, 2014).

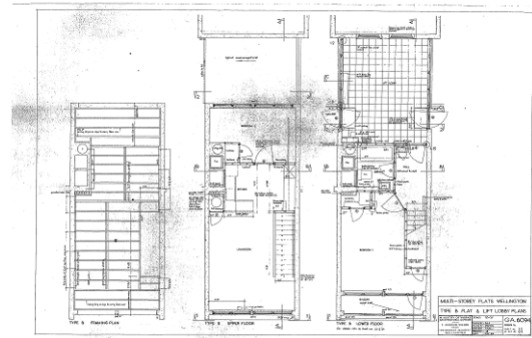


Figure 35. Type B floor plans (smaller second bedroom and reorganised living area) for the proposed State Flats dating to July 1954. Note these plans are considered to include approval initials of Gordon Wilson. (Source: Wareham Cameron Co, 2014).

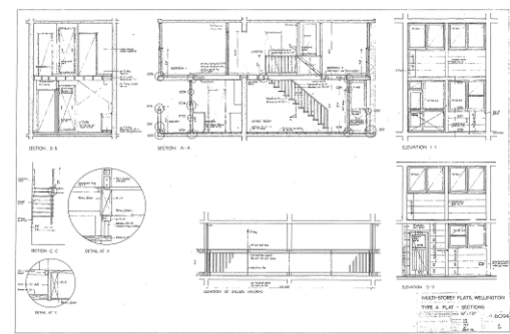


Figure 36. Type A sections for the proposed State Flats dating to August 1954. Note these plans are considered to include approval initials of Gordon Wilson. (Source: Wareham Cameron Co, 2014).

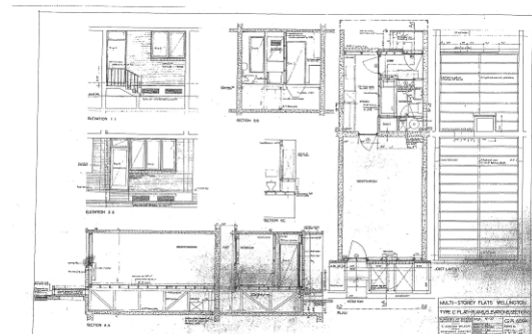


Figure 37. Type C floor plans (Ground Level bed-sits) for the proposed State Flats dating to July 1954. Note these plans are considered to include approval initials of Gordon Wilson. (Source: Wareham Cameron Co, 2014).



Figure 38. Looking at the main entrance lobby at Ground Floor level.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 39. Looking at the stainless steel letterbox array within the main entrance lobby.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 40. Looking at the main passenger lift entrance lobby at Ground Floor level.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 41. Looking at a typical stairwell positioned at the north and south ends of the building.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

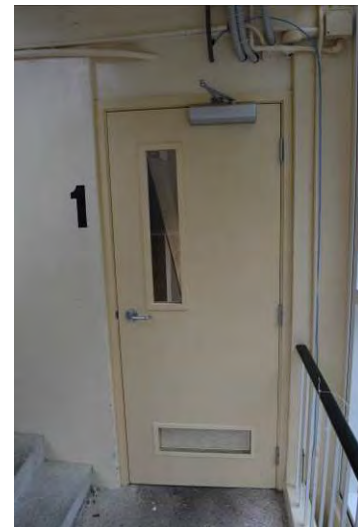


Figure 42. Looking at a typical entrance doorway leading to the balcony walkways.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 43. Looking north along a typical balcony walkway providing access to flats.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 44. Looking south along a typical walkway.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 45. Looking into a typical junction along the walkway that leads into lift lobby for that level.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 46. Looking at a typical lift lobby.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 47. Looking at a typical set of lift doors.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 48. Looking at a typical entrance doorway for the flats.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

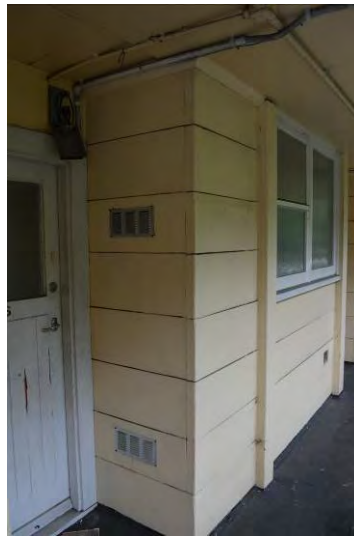


Figure 49. Looking at the western elevation of a typical flat.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 50. Looking at a typical entrance hallway leading in to a flat.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 51. Looking at a typical kitchen.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 52. Looking at a typical living room.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

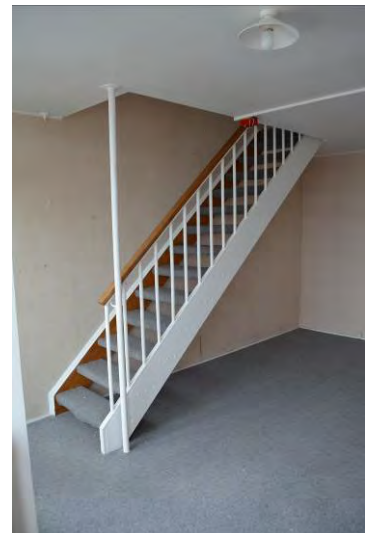


Figure 53. Looking at a typical set of stairs within the living room rising to the first floor level.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 54. Looking at a typical balcony enclosure. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 55. Looking out towards a typical balcony that serves each of the flats. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 56. Looking at a typical east side bedroom. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 57. Looking at a typical east side bedroom. Note damp patch with mould growth on the external wall. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

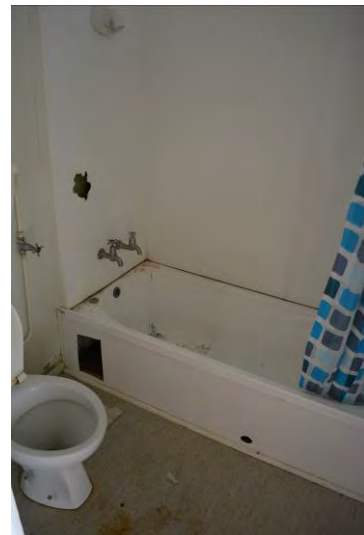


Figure 58. Looking at a typical bathroom. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 59. Looking at a typical west side bedroom. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 60. Looking at a typical west side bedroom. (Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 61. A typical view from an apartment looking towards the east.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 62. A typical view from an apartment looking towards the McLean Flats which are situated at the southern end of the site.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 63. A typical view from an apartment looking towards the west. Note the Victoria University of Wellington buildings lining the ridge.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 64. A typical view from an apartment looking towards the south-west.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 65. Looking at the laundry and storage facilities located at roof level.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

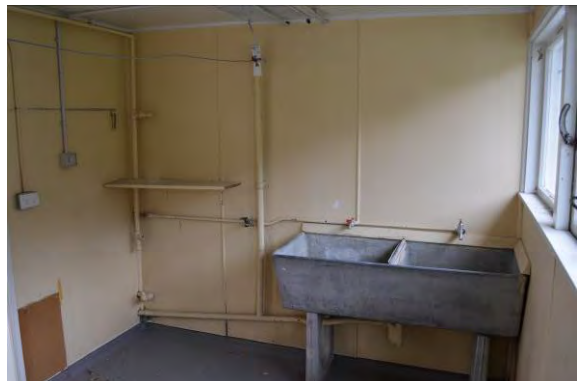


Figure 66. Looking at a typical laundry room.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

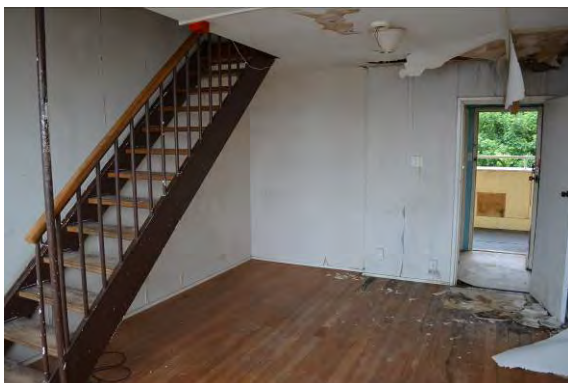


Figure 67. Looking at the living area of Flat 15 on level 3. Note the extent of water damage which has resulted in a collapsed ceiling.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 69. Looking at broken glazing within the southern stairwell.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

Figure 68. Looking at typical spalling of concrete elements.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 70. Looking at the extent of decay apparent in the balcony balustrading.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

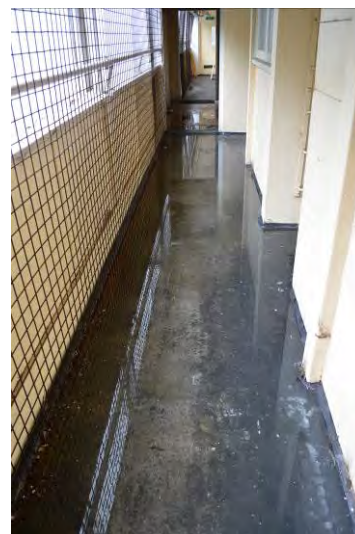


Figure 71. Looking at the extent of flooding on the First Floor level.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

6.0 extent of surviving original fabric

6.1 chronology of change

The site has experienced a degree of alteration and loss of historical fabric since the building was constructed. The principal periods during which alterations have been undertaken and their extent is recorded below, although this list is not exhaustive:

- 1957-59 – Construction of building
- 2011 –
 - Replacement of stairwell windows,
 - repair and replace membrane roof
 - Replacement of service stair
 - Safety railing
 - General fire upgrade
 - Installation of 10 abseil anchor points on roof
 - General repair and maintenance work⁴²

⁴² Wellington City Council Archive – SR 22613, SR227008
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7.0 the individuals or institutions connected with the place

7.1 francis gordon wilson (1900-1959)



Figure 72. Francis Gordon Wilson, F.N.Z.I.A., A.R.I.B.A. (1900-1959). (Source: The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects., Vol. , No. 1, February 1959, Serial No. 202).

Francis Gordon Wilson was born on 27 November 1900 in Perth, Western Australia. His father, Francis John Wilson was originally from New Zealand and also an architect and his mother, Mary Catherine O'Hagen, was from Ireland.

Francis attended Terrace School Primary, Wellington and Wellington Technical College after which he attended the Auckland University School of Architecture where he completed the Professional Examinations of the New Zealand Institute of Architects. In 1928 he was elected an associate of the Institute in that same year; advancing to fellowship in 1951 and then elected an Associate of the R.I.B.A in 1954.

His career first saw him articled to architect William M. Page in Wellington between 1916 and 1920, after which he transferred to the office of Hoggard, Prouse and Gummer that evolved into Gummer and Ford in 1922.

During his time with this practice, he advanced from draughtsman to Chief Assistant and by 1928 he was offered a partnership role. During his time with Gummer Ford he was associated in the design of numerous notable projects including:

- Remuera Library, Auckland (1926)
- Dilworth Trust Building, Auckland (1927)
- The Auckland Railway Station (1930)
- New Zealand National War Memorial (1932)
- New Zealand Dominion Museum Building, Wellington (1936)

In 1936 the Government introduced a major state housing scheme and consequently formed the Department of Housing Construction⁴³. Wilson applied for, and succeeded in securing the position of Architect to the newly formed Department, where he was responsible for overseeing the construction of state rental houses.

He eventually gained the status of Chief Architect in 1945 with the newly titled Housing Division of the Ministry of Works and Development and this period of his career saw his skills instrumental in improving the standard of both State house design and construction; improvements that also filtered through to the wider public realm. The housing programme was not limited to suburban schemes for individual properties, but also focussed on multi-unit development with designs produced for apartments and flats; often over multiple stories.

His department was able to attract architects of significant talent including Ernst Plischke, Fred Newman, Helmut Einhorn, Ian Reynolds and George Porter; architects who would continue to excel in their own right. Wilson's approach to overseeing the design work produced through the department is recorded as being particular thorough with him retaining close control and overseeing all work prior to issue. He is recorded

⁴³ <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/we-call-it-home/timeline>

as being 'a dominant person who had strong influence on all the work of the architectural office.'⁴⁴

Further recognition of his work came in 1948 when he was appointed Assistant Government Architect; finally succeeding to the position of Government Architect in 1952 and during this period he was responsible for a greater total amount of building than any of his predecessors in his office.

Notable project designs produced by the Department of Housing under the direction of Wilson include, amongst others:

- The Berhampore Flats (1939-40)
- The Dixon Street Flats, Wellington (1941-44) (Received the Gold Medal by the NZIA in 1947)
- McLean State Flats, Wellington (1945-47)
- Greys Avenue Flats (first stage), Wellington (1945-47)
- Symonds Street Flats, Auckland (1945-47)
- Greys Avenue Flats (second stage), Auckland (1957)
- The Terrace Flats (Gordon Wilson Flats), Wellington (1957-59)
- Bledisloe State Building, Auckland (1959)
- The School of Engineering, University of Canterbury (1957-61)
- Bowen State Building (1962)

Wilson was also particularly active in other organisations including Chairman of the Wellington branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, the Council of the National Historic Places Trust, and the Association of the New Zealand Art Societies. He also sought to gain extensive knowledge of housing development throughout the world with numerous study trips abroad. In 1928-29 he visited the United States to study and visited again in 1945 as part of a Ministry of Housing delegation to form an understanding of housing and building techniques. Further trips to the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe occurred in 1954 and then again in 1957 where he acted as consultant on the design of New Zealand House in London.

As part of his extensive studies and considerable research in the housing division, Wilson wrote several articles

Wilson died suddenly on 23 February 1959 and was survived by his wife, three sons and two daughters. It is considered that the legacy of Wilson's work has resulted in many fine buildings throughout the country.

8.0 similar places

A brief study of similar places has been undertaken with a view to establishing a comparative assessment between characteristics inherent in the Gordon Wilson Flats and other similar social housing projects that were developed by the Ministry of Works Housing Division during the 1950s both within the local and wider national context. This study is not exhaustive and focuses on high density development from that period whilst excluding low-to-medium scale developments such as the Berhampore Flats.

8.1 dixon street flats

Although the design of the Dixon Street Flats is widely attributed to Gordon Wilson, it is purported that another member of the Ministry of Works Housing Division in the guise of Ernst Plischke, was most involved with the development of the building⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5w36/wilson-francis-gordon>

⁴⁵ According to <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/2646/dixon-street-state-flats-wellington>, although the extent of Plischke's input has been disputed by other sources.

Constructed between 1940 and 1944, the flats represent the Labour government's first initiative in high-density state rental housing and New Zealand's first slab housing block. The ten-storey reinforced concrete building of 116 private rooms followed European precedents such as Walter Gropius' unrealised Berlin apartments (1931) and van Tijen, Brinckman & van der Vlugt's Bergpolder block in Rotterdam (1933-34), although the monolithic design is compromised to a degree by the stepped appearance of the south end due to Wellington's height controls.⁴⁶

In a similar manner to the Gordon Wilson Flats, the Dixon Street Flats feature a regimented appearance characterised by external balconies and rectangular window arrays with feature planter boxes coloured to provide relief and depth to the façade. Access corridors for the apartments are to the rear of the building with a semi-glazed stairwell located at the northeast corner and a fully glazed stairwell positioned mid-way along the eastern elevation. The roof area provides the laundry and storage facilities for the residents.

The building is recorded in the Wellington City Council Operative District Plan Heritage List: Buildings, and is classified as a Category 1 Historic Place by Heritage New Zealand. The building was awarded the NZIA Gold Medal in 1947; being recognised as having considerable contribution to the modernist movement in New Zealand.



Figure 73. Dixon Flats nearing completion in 1944. (Source: Gatley, J, 2008, page 42)



Figure 74. Front façade of flats, showing colour scheme. (<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/dixon-street-flats-wellington>)



Figure 75. Rear façade of flats, with access balconies feeding the apartments creating a cruise liner appearance. (Gatley, Julia, 2008, page 42)



Figure 76. Rooftop laundry rooms, similar to those found on the Gordon Wilson Flats. (Source: Part of the roof of the Dixon Street Flats, Wellington. Pascoe, John Dobree, 1908-1972 :Photographic albums, prints and negatives. Ref: 1/4-000820-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23066090>)

⁴⁶ Gatley, J, 2008, Long Live the Modern, New Zealand's Architecture 1904-1984.

8.2 symonds street flats

Following influences from Wellington's Dixon Flats, the Symonds Street Flats were constructed in order to house childless couples and single people in Auckland City Centre. The building was to the design of Austrian Fred Newman of the Ministry of Works between 1945-47 and a T-shaped plan consisting of 45 apartments was established with a subtle curve in the street façade following the curve of the road.

The building was designed with modernist influences of regimented white-painted façades, balconies and rectangular window arrays that in many respects are similar to the Grey's Avenue Flats, Auckland (first stage) and the Dixon Street Flats in Wellington. The development was opened on the same day as the Grey's Avenue Flats in

The Symonds Street Flats are included within the Auckland Council Unitary Plan as a Category A item inclusive of interiors.



Figure 77. Street view of flats, showing colour scheme.
(Source: <http://www.architecture.archive.auckland.ac.nz/docs/block-digital/2007-07BlockDigital-CityApartmentGuide.pdf>)



Figure 78. Historical street view of flats, 1947.
(Source: Sparrow Industrial Pictures Ltd, 1947 - http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/LibraryCatalogue/P5285.detail?Ordinal=1&c_keyword_search=symonds+street+flats)



Figure 79. Curved front façade of flats.
(Source: Sparrow Industrial Pictures Ltd, 1947 - http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/LibraryCatalogue/504.detail?Ordinal=6&c_keyword_search=symonds+street+flats-)



Figure 80. Living room of flats showing tenants furnishings and ornamentation.
(Sparrow Industrial Pictures Ltd, 1947 - http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/LibraryCatalogue/503.detail?Ordinal=8&c_keyword_search=symonds+street+flats)

8.3 lower greys avenue flats

With financial support from Auckland City, a 'slum clearance' programme was developed to transform Greys Avenue into an area of State housing and the project began with the construction of the lower Greys Avenue Flats between 1945-47 to a design attributed to Ernst Plischke working under the Housing Division, Ministry of Works. The design inherited similarities with Wellington's Dixon Flats although window planting boxes were kept to a minimum along the frontages visible from the public realm.

The selected building contractor for the project was Fletcher Construction Ltd. However, initial construction of the building was delayed due to the outbreak of the Second World War and disproportionately high post-war costs resulted in the decision to reduce the design from the proposed 468 units to just 50 units. Those were arranged in four blocks with the southern end of the development postponed indefinitely.

Built on a sloping site, the building is arranged so that there are three distinctive rectilinear street side blocks with two blocks extending to the rear. The front façade has a regimented appearance with square windows and natural ventilation in the reinforced concrete structure. Communal glazed stairwells are entered at ground floor level via a small entrance porch. Balconies are located to the rear of the building, overlooking a planted area and hardstand carpark for residents. The lower Greys Avenue Flats are scheduled under the Auckland Council Unitary Plan as a Category A Item and are listed as an Historic Place, Category 2 by Heritage New Zealand.



Figure 81. Model of original proposal for Greys Avenue development. (Gatley, J, 2008, page 42)



Figure 82. Front façade of Flats, 1960-79. (Source: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, ID 435-B4-188)



Figure 83. Rear view of Lower Greys Avenue Flats, 26 November 1981. (Source: Heritage New Zealand List report Number 583).



Figure 84 Approach to flats from north end of Greys Avenue, 1947. (Source: Sparrow Industrial Pictures Ltd, 1947 http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/LibraryCatalogue/597.detail?Ordinal=9&c_keyword_search=greys+avenue+flats)

8.4 upper greys avenue flats

Built between 1957-58 and designed by F. Gordon Wilson within the Ministry of Works, the upper Greys Avenue flats was the second phase of the Council's 'slum clearance' development scheme, replacing what was originally intended to be part of the lower set of flats which were interrupted due to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Engineered by F. M. Hanson and built by Fletcher Construction Ltd, the upper Greys Avenue flats was designed to reflect the technological developments of the 1950s with notable features such as taller and slimmer form that tended to reduce mass and extensive glazing.



Figure 85. Approach to flats from south end of Greys Avenue.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 86. View of flats from neighbouring YMCA hostel.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 87. Street view of flats, partially obscured by mature trees at the street side.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 88. Approach to flats from north end of Greys Avenue.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 89. Front façade of flats.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 90. Rear façade of flats.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

The design of the Greys Avenue Flats is considered to have potentially formed a template for future inner-city social housing development and is similar in style, scale, and form to the subject Gordon Wilson Flats building in Wellington; the construction of which began immediately following the completion of the Greys Avenue Flats in August 1957.



Figure 91. Stairwell to north side of flats.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 92. Stairwell to south side of flats.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 93. Upper Greys Avenue Flats, 1986.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 94. Main entrance area.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)



Figure 95. Ground floor apartments.
(Archifact-Architecture & Conservation Ltd., 2014)

The accommodation consists of 70, two-bedroom maisonettes in addition to 16 bed-sits at Ground Floor level and the cellular appearance is formed by the expressed superstructure with rows of external balconies dividing regimented horizontal banks of windows. Lift towers and glazed stairwells are located at the southwest and northeast corners of the building with the main entrance located at the northeast corner in a similar arrangement to that of the Gordon Wilson Flats.

A series of buttresses rise between ground and first level although these are less pronounced than those featured on the Gordon Wilson Flats, which rise as far as the third storey. The Greys Avenue flats are still in operation as a residential dwelling and in a significantly better condition than those in Wellington.

Historic images show that the original colour scheme was off-white, but the flats are currently coloured a pale yellow with pale brown lift towers and the limited palette tends to soften the expression of the structural system. Similar to the Gordon Wilson Flats, small sets of stairs with cantilevered canopies are formed at ground floor level to provide access into apartments. There is a grass area to the front of the building and a hardstand carpark for residential use only to the rear.

The upper Greys Avenue flats are not currently listed under the provisions of either the Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan or Heritage New Zealand as a place of historical value.

9.0 assessment

9.1 general criteria for significance

This section establishes the criteria adopted in the assessment of cultural heritage value. The criteria adopted are taken from a selection included in with Section 66 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. This section of the Act lists criteria used in qualifying the inclusion of a place on the New Zealand Heritage List administered by Heritage New Zealand.

9.2 degree of significance

A conservative approach has been adopted for the assessment. Where the origin of an item is inconclusive and has the potential of having cultural heritage value (such as the archaeological significance of a site), it has been assigned the highest value possible in order to avoid loss of potential cultural heritage value through lack of information at this time. Should, at a later time, more information become available these items should be reassessed.

A six-level scale of value has been adopted in tabulating the cultural heritage value of the spaces or elements within this place. This is based on the New Zealand Historic Places Trust' 1994 *Guidelines for Preparing a Conservation Plan*. These values are:

A Exceptional Significance

The element or space is of exceptional importance to the overall significance of the place.

B Considerable Significance

The element or space is of considerable importance to the overall heritage significance of the place.

C Moderate Significance

The element or space is of moderate importance to the overall heritage significance of the place.

D Minor Significance

The element or space is of minor importance to the overall heritage significance of the place.

0 No Significance

The element or space is of little or no importance to the significance of the place and is not intrusive or negative.

X Intrusive

The element or space obscures or passively detracts from the heritage significance of the place.

9.2.1 aesthetic significance moderate C

The aesthetic significance considers the formal qualities of the fabric and setting: the form, scale, materials, space, etc. Assessment of the space or its parts demonstrating aesthetic significance or contribution to the overall integrity of the design of the place is made.

The Gordon Wilson Flats sit on an elevated position highly visible from the public realm; both from within the immediate setting where the building is set in stark contrast to the surrounding low-rise traditional villa and bungalow forms, and visible from vantage points across much of the Te Aro valley. Accordingly, due to its significant scale and form in relation to the modestly scaled buildings within the immediate setting there is potential for the perception of the place to be considered incongruous when viewed in relation to its immediate contextual setting.

However, the property has undergone few alterations over the years ensuring the scale, mass and layout of the original Modernist building form has not been unduly compromised over the design conceived in the post-war years; so retaining aesthetic significance of the building itself to a large extent.

In light of the values identified above, the Gordon Wilson Flats is considered overall to hold **moderate** aesthetic significance.

9.2.2 archaeological significance not assessed

The archaeological significance shows the degree to which the place can be said to have an archaeological potential.

No formal archaeological assessment has been undertaken of the site to date. The site may be classified as an archaeological site in accordance with Section 6 (a) (i) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, which recognises that places associated with human occupation prior to 1900 are, by definition, archaeological sites.

It is the site, not the building that by definition in the Act may be found to be an archaeological site since it has been associated with human activity prior to 1900. However, post 1900 development of the site particularly with the construction of the Gordon Wilson Building has been very significant and may well have compromised any archaeological values.

9.2.3 architectural significance moderate C

The architectural significance addresses the design and architectural aspects of the place and includes assessment of the place demonstrating particular characteristics of a school of design or style.

This place is inextricably linked to one of the most influential New Zealand architects of the mid-twentieth century in the guise of Gordon F Wilson, who was associated with a number of highly significant civic projects throughout his career.

The place has architectural value for the Modernist influences in a building type that is relatively rare in the Wellington region and wider national context. The design represents a surviving example of the work of Gordon Wilson and the team within the Ministry of Works Architectural Section, who are recognised as being one of the most important designers of cost effective, high density social housing during the mid-twentieth century. His designs also paid close regard to the living environment with much emphasis placed on the provision of good views, sunlight, air and good amenities. This focus was to ensure that the slum perception of multi-level flats within Europe was not repeated in New Zealand.

It is noted that the original design for the development of the McLean site was intended to reflect an earlier International Style of Modernism; the first stage of which was formed by the McLean State Flats. Consequently, the original conception of the two individual buildings would have formed a closer, more intimate design relationship than is currently perceived and the alteration in style and design for the later development tends to disrupt those original intentions presented in Plischkes' perspective drawing dating to 1942 for the site as a whole.

The place is therefore considered to lose a degree of architectural significance through the loss of continuity of design with the associated with the McLean State Flats which together were originally conceived to be an integral and intimate part of the McLean site development.

Any intimate association of Plischke with the design of the Gordon Wilson Flats is also debateable as his involvement in the design of high density social housing was potentially restricted to the earlier schemes such as the Dixon Street Flats and Greys Avenue Flats in particular. Through his departure from the Architectural Section in 1942, further design influence over projects including the Greys Avenue and Gordon Wilson Flats would therefore have been limited.

In light of the values identified above, the Gordon Wilson Flats is considered overall to hold **moderate** architectural significance.

9.2.4 functional significance **no significance 0**

The functional significance addresses the contribution of the function of the place that can be assessed as having cultural heritage significance.

Throughout its lifespan, The Gordon Wilson Flats have proved adaptable particularly through the building's ability to provide social housing to residents with a wide range of accommodation needs.

However, due to the redundancy of the place as an operational social housing facility following its identification as a health and safety risk, the Gordon Wilson Flats as found are, at this point in time, considered to hold **no** functional significance.

9.2.5 historical significance **considerable B**

The historic significance describes the extent to which the place reflects important or representative aspects of New Zealand history, the association with events, persons or ideas of importance and the potential to provide knowledge of New Zealand history.

The historical importance of the Gordon Wilson Flats relates not only to the association with the development of social housing provision during the mid-twentieth century, but also to the association of the place with Gordon Wilson and the Architectural Section of the Ministry of Works who produced some of the finest examples of 1950s Modernist social housing architecture within New Zealand. However, the Gordon Wilson Flats were not the first of type and are likely to have been originally envisaged as just one of many such developments in the future under a common template.

Following the success of earlier high density developments including the Dixon Street Flats, Symonds Street flats and Greys Avenue flats, post war accommodation pressures challenged designers to develop cost effective social housing. Based on a potential template design, the first of type was envisaged with the construction of the Greys Avenue Flats in Auckland, however, ongoing political and public pressures ensured that the second building to be constructed, in the form of the Gordon Wilson

Flats, was also the last; so forming a premature end to the brief foray by government in the provision of high density social housing in the post-war years.

The history of the Gordon Wilson Flats has **considerable** significance in signifying the forward thinking aspirations of the nation during the 1950s, and the building continued to function as a key centre of local social housing through to its closure in 2012.

In light of the values identified above, the place is therefore considered to be of **considerable** historic significance.

9.2.6 scientific significance minor D

The scientific significance is concerned with the importance of a place as evidence of scientific knowledge and development and with the physical survival of that evidence in the building fabric and its potential to provide information about past human activity.

As the construction methods for the foundation support of the structure were unusual in the context of New Zealand at that time, the building became the subject of a structural monitoring programme operated by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research to measure earthquake movement.

It is understood that data obtained by that equipment was used to contribute to at least one scientific paper although recent searches of the building have failed to locate any physical evidence of the monitoring equipment, or any of the original data obtained through the process. This lack of physical evidence therefore restricts any potential to provide information of any analytical value.

Therefore, in light of the lack of surviving physical evidence of the monitoring programme it is considered that the property holds only **minor** scientific significance.

9.2.7 social significance considerable B

The social significance is concerned with the importance of the place to tangata whenua, the community association with, or public esteem for, the place and the potential of the place for public education.

There is social significance attributable to the place through its contribution to the development of social housing through the mid-twentieth century. Although the Gordon Wilson Flats were destined to be the last multi-level, multi-unit project of this scale the development was pre-empted by a number of fine examples of similar social housing projects built during the period when Modernist influences were integral to social housing design and development.

The social significance of the place is principally born from its original function as one of only a few multi-storey, multi-unit social housing blocks conceived in the post war period to provide inner-city State housing for many vulnerable members of society. It could be considered that the social significance of the place has been compromised to a degree by its closure to State tenants and subsequent sale to a new owner, however, the place remains a prominent feature in the community and consequently retains **considerable** social significance.

9.2.8 technological significance minor D

The technological significance includes the technical accomplishment or value, or design of the place. It also includes the ability to demonstrate particular characteristics of a building technique or craft.

The survival of the original building fabric provides an insight to past human activities, customs and lifestyles. The arrangement and use of the internal floor space and the techniques utilised in their construction provide a permanent record of the materials and skills available during that period and the ability to integrate them into the building. The techniques utilised for the construction of the expressed structural framework were borne from those techniques practised and refined for many similarly framed structures both in New Zealand and throughout the world.

It is also noted that the Department of Housing Construction and Ministry of Works actively sought out new ideas for new materials and systems of construction that would potentially speed up the supply of houses or reduce costs. In particular, experiments were undertaken in various methods of construction in poured concrete, concrete blocks and brickwork.⁴⁷ Whether such materials or practices were applied to the construction of the subject building is not known at this stage, however, it has been identified that the foundation design chosen for the works was in a format not previously employed in New Zealand.

The inclusion of the unusual method of foundation design does lend a degree of technological significance to the place, however, due to the very nature of its sub-surface location, it would prove challenging to physically demonstrate the particular characteristics of that building technique. Modern analyses by structural engineers of the appropriateness of the methods used to establish the foundations have suggested that the method employed is questionable for its reliability in a seismic context.

Therefore, in light of the potential for the techniques utilised in forming the foundation to be poorly conceived and the naturally inaccessible nature of the foundation structure constraining an ability to demonstrate, it is suggested that the technological characteristics contribute only **minor** technological value to the place.

9.2.9 townscape significance moderate C

The townscape significance describes the extent to which the place forms part of a wider historical or cultural complex or historical or cultural landscape.

The construction of the Gordon Wilson Flats has produced a distinct landmark within the Wellington City region and together with the McLean Flats and Dixon Street Flats contributes strongly to the group value of similar buildings providing social housing.

Its significant scale and mass, set amongst the largely residential small-scale single storey buildings that line the valley and surrounding area forms a prominent, readily identifiable element within the cultural landscape, although potentially incongruous set within the context of the surrounding low-scale villas and bungalows.

In light of the values identified above, the Gordon Wilson Flat development is overall considered to hold **moderate** townscape significance.

⁴⁷ Firth, C., Wilson, G., F., 1949, State Housing in New Zealand, Ministry of Works Wellington, New Zealand
2015-05-06__2141007- heritage assessment-final
314 the terrace, wellington

10.0 conclusion

The Gordon Wilson Flats are inextricably linked to one of the most influential New Zealand architects during the mid-twentieth century in the guise of Gordon F Wilson, who was associated with a collaborative team of architects within the Ministry of Works that created a number of highly significant government projects. This place is considered to hold **considerable** historical and social value for the role the building played in providing a cost-effective approach to State social housing provision, whilst ensuring that the tenants were provided with accommodation that was light, airy and had high quality amenities to counter the public and professional perception that this type of development could potentially degenerate into slum conditions.

Gordon F Wilson ensured that all of his work was contemporary in style and presided over the design of significant buildings such as the Bledisloe civic building in Auckland and high density Modernist social housing in the form of the Dixon Street (Wellington), and the Auckland Symonds Street and Lower Greys Avenue flats. His designs sought a cost-effective approach to the provision of social housing, whilst ensuring that the tenants were provided with accommodation that was of high contemporary design. The Gordon Wilson Flats were designed within these parameters and mindful of Wellington's seismic condition. Under Wilson the Ministry of Works strived to be at the forefront of new design direction and produced a design for the place that was at the cutting edge of available technology. The design highlights the department's commitment to innovative technologies such as the system of piling utilised for the foundation design, however, it is considered that the system employed is unreliable under current engineering science.

The commissioning date of the Gordon Wilson Flats came at a time when the template of building type is also likely to have been finalised and established for the construction of a second stage of State housing in Greys Avenue, Auckland, which presented the first example of the evolved Modernist design for future Government high-density State social housing. It is likely, but unsubstantiated, that Gordon Wilson's involvement in the overall design of the Gordon Wilson Flats was at a reduced level as the project may have then been handled by the collaborative team within the Ministry of Works following resolution of the design of the Greys Avenue development. It remains likely however, that his managerial style would have overseen everything leaving the office. In addition, any perceived association with the design (particularly the façade design) being attributed to Plischke is unlikely as he had left the Architecture Section of the Ministry in 1942, some time prior to the commencement of the next building stages during the mid-1950s.

The place contributes to the historical, cultural, planning, architectural, and social consciousness of Wellington during the post-war period and has **considerable** historical and social value for the part it plays in defining the approach to social housing provision in New Zealand. The building forms part of a number of vistas into and out of the central city area and can be regarded as a distinct landmark building particularly within its local context. Further to the redundancy of the place, functional significance has been lost and only **minor** significance is attributable to scientific and technological values (archaeological significance was not assessed as part of this assessment). Of some note however, the similar development of the Upper Greys Avenue Flats in Auckland has not been formally recognised by either the local planning authority or Heritage New Zealand.

It is concluded, in light of the above values, that the Gordon Wilson Flats is of **moderate** significance overall.

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12.0 appendices

appendix 1 – wellington city council 314 the terrace heritage report



Gordon Wilson Flats
320 The Terrace



View of Gordon Wilson Flats from The Terrace *(Charles Collins, 2015)*

Summary of heritage significance

- The Gordon Wilson Flats have architectural value as a good representative example of 1950s Modernist high density social housing, that though common internationally, is relatively rare in New Zealand.
- The flats are associated with the social policy of the government of the day and were an endeavour to solve a chronic housing shortage. They were the last of the high-rise tower-block social housing developments designed by the Ministry of Works & Development. The flats are also associated with economic recovery in the 1950s which led to a boom in the building industry.
- The flats were designed by Government Architect Gordon Wilson, who died while the flats were nearing completion. It is for this reason they were named in his honour.

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| District Plan: | Map 16, Symbol 299 |
| Legal Description: | Lot 1, DP 363050 |
| Heritage Area: | None 2012 |
| HPT Listed: | None 2012 |
| Archaeological Site: | Central City NZAA R27/270 |
| Other Names: | The Terrace Flats |
| Key physical dates: | Built: 1957-1959 |
| Architect / Builder: | Architect: Architectural Division of the Ministry of Works, under chief architect Gordon Wilson. |
| Former uses: | Low cost State Housing rental accommodation |
| Current uses: | Vacant as at May 2012 (evacuated - safety concerns) |
| Earthquake Prone Status: | Not EQP (IEP 27/11/2006, SR 210925) |

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The Department of Housing Construction was set up in 1936 by New Zealand's first Labour government to construct state rental houses.¹ Gordon Wilson was appointed chief architect of the Department in 1938, he became chief architect of the Housing Division of the Ministry of Works from 1943 – 1952, assistant Government Architect from 1948 – 1952 and Government Architect from 1952-59.² The Gordon Wilson Flats (originally known as The Terrace Flats), were renamed to honour Wilson when he died shortly before their completion in 1959.³

The flats were built on the site of the first residence of Mr George Hunter, the first mayor of Wellington.⁴ They were sited next to the existing McLean State Flats (built 1943-44), an earlier social housing scheme of which Gordon Wilson was involved in the design and construction. The original plans are signed by 'Gordon Wilson, Government Architect' and dated August 1954, at a time when Wilson was Government Architect at the head office of the Ministry of Works. The detailed design was completed by the Wellington District Office of the Ministry of Works.⁵

New Zealand's state social housing (multi-unit) designs of the 1930s – 1950s were influenced by the 'International Style' of Modernism promoted by Swiss/French architect Le Corbusier, German architects Mies van de Rohe, Walter Gropius and others. The manifesto of Modernism spread from continental Europe in the 1930s, partly due to the Diaspora that fled from the oppressive regime in Nazi Germany at a time when Modernism was at odds with the prevailing political ideology. Two outstanding examples of New Zealand's state housing designed in the 'International Style' are the Berhampore (Centennial) Flats (1939-40), and the Dixon Street State Flats (1941-44). The Berhampore Flats were the Labour Government's first multi-unit scheme of social housing, and one of the first, largest and most complete schemes of buildings designed in the 'International Style' in New Zealand⁶ and the similarly styled Dixon Street State Flats won the NZIA Gold Medal in 1947.

In New Zealand the best known Modernist architect 'refugee' was Austrian Ernst Plischke who worked for the Department of Housing Construction (c1939-1947)⁷. For some of this time he worked under Gordon Wilson as Chief Architect on designs for multiple-unit housing blocks. However, due to a personality clash, in 1942 Plischke became a community planner under Reg Hammond in the same department.

¹ See also: Ben Schrader, "Housing and government - State loans and state houses", *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 13-Jul-12, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/housing-and-government/page-2>

² Julia Gatley, "Wilson, Francis Gordon – Biography", from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 1 September 2010, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5w36/1>

³ "The Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington: The Work of the Architectural Division, Ministry of Works," *The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects*, Vol 28, No 1 (February 1961):1

⁴ Wellington City Council, "Gordon Wilson Flats," *Heritage Inventory - 1995* (Wellington City Council, 1995)

⁵ "The Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington: The Work of the Architectural Division, Ministry of Works," *The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects*, Vol 28, No 1 (February 1961):1

⁶ Julia Gatley, "For Modern Living: Government Blocks of Flats" in *Zeal and Crusade*, (Christchurch: Waihora Press, 1996), 53; also Julia Gatley, *Long Live the Modern: Zealand's New Architecture 1904-1984*, (Auckland; Auckland University Press, 2008), 34.

⁷ Linda Tyler, "Plischke, Ernst Anton - Biography", from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 30 October 2012, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5p31/plischke-ernst-anton>

The level to which Plischke may have been involved in the design of the building when he still worked under Wilson is unknown, but a 1942 drawing by Plischke shows a design for the McLean and Terrace Flats.⁸ This drawing is slightly different from the final plans, the most notable differences being the siting of the building; that the staircase is located in the middle of the block, rather than at one end; and the monolithic finish of the building that is closer to the streamlined 'International Style' than the later 1950s Modernism of the Gordon Wilson Flats.

The final design of the Gordon Wilson Flats is somewhat similar to the Grays Avenue Flats in Auckland. The basic plan was designed to maximise views and sunlight on a difficult and steeply sloping site, and to manage costs, structure and amenities.⁹ "After basic research by architects and associated specialist engineers, the solution finally adopted was to provide bed-sitting rooms in the basement and above that to make the remainder of the accommodation in two-bedroom flats on the maisonette principle."¹⁰ The building was the last large, high-rise block of flats designed by the Ministry of Works, before a change in ideology led the provision of social housing solely by low density houses and low rise units.



An architectural model of Gordon Wilson Flats at a housing exhibition in 1955 (ATL, EP/1955/2193-F)

High-rise, high-density social housing schemes designed on Modernist principles have been identified as problematic in many European countries. In many instances social problems have been exacerbated by housing high-density, at-risk populations in building that were poorly maintained and with insecure communal spaces (particularly staircases & lifts). In New Zealand these problems have been exacerbated by structural problems with the innovative designs of the Modernist era, and in 2011 the nearby McLean State Flats were evacuated when they were deemed to be earthquake prone.¹¹

The Gordon Wilson Flats were evacuated in May 2012 following an engineer's report commissioned by Housing New Zealand that identified the need for urgent remedial work to large concrete panels on the building's exterior facade. The media reported that "they could fall and crush people during an earthquake or strong wind..."¹² and the buildings population of over 130 residents were given seven days to vacate the building. Although some residents spoke to media about their sentimental attachment to the building including one who said that "This is my castle, I love it here,"¹³ others were more equivocal noting problems with other marginalised, often anti-social tenants, and a lack of building maintenance.

⁸ August Sarnitz, and Eva B Ottillinger, *Ernst Plischke: Modern Architecture for the New World* (Prestel Publishing, 2004)

⁹ "The Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington: The Work of the Architectural Division, Ministry of Works," *The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects*, Vol 28, No 1 (February 1961):1

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Lane Nichols, 'Unsafe flats: Tenants told to leave within week', *Dominion Post*, May 10 2012, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/6897604/Unsafe-flats-Tenants-told-to-leave-within-week>

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Lane Nichols, 'Unsafe flats: 'This is my castle.' *Dominion Post*, May 11 012 <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/6900410/Unsafe-flats-This-is-my-castle>



Aerial view of the Gordon Wilson Flats under construction c1958-9. The McLean State Flats are to the left (Ref: EP-Industry-Housing-State-02, ATL)

1.2 Timeline of modifications



DETAIL OF PLAN
Layout of a typical two double-bedroom maisonette flat. The distance between the cross walls is 12 ft.

Image reproduced from The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, p3

1957-9 Building constructed

2011 Replacement of stairwell windows, repair and replace membrane roof, replacement of service stair and safety railing, general fire upgrade, install 10 abseil anchor points on the roof, general repair and maintenance work (SR 226613, SR227008).

1.3 Architect

(Francis) Gordon Wilson – Government Architect (1952 – 1959)

Gordon Wilson's¹⁴ began his public service career as chief architect for the Department of Housing in 1938. He had worked previously as an associate partner at Gummer and Ford and is known to have been involved in the design of the Remuera Public Library, Auckland Railway Station, Wellington Public Library, the National War Memorial and Carillon, and the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum building in Wellington. The design of both the Wellington Public Library (now the City Gallery) and the Dominion Museum building have also been attributed to him. He continued with the Department of Housing until 1943 when he was appointed chief architect of the Housing Division of the Ministry of Works from 1943 – 1952, and progressed to assistant Government Architect from 1948 – 1952. He was Government Architect until his death in 1959.

The various civil service government architectural offices led by Wilson produced many buildings that were at the leading edge of architectural design style throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s. The result was that he was able to attract many gifted young architects to the civil service, particularly the 'refugee architects who had fled Europe in the 1930s'.¹⁵ Many of his protégées became noted architects in their own right including Ernst Plischke, Fred Newman, Helmut Einhorn, Ian Reynolds and George Porter.

The key buildings during Wilson's years in the NZ civil service include:

- Bledisloe State Building
- Flats in Grey's Avenue, Auckland
- Bowen State Building
- Gordon Wilson Flats
- School of Engineering building at the University of Canterbury
- University of Otago Dental School building

¹⁴ Julia Gatley, "Wilson, Francis Gordon – Biography", from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 1 September 2010, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5w36/1>

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The Gordon Wilson Flats are a multi-storey block of social housing that varies in height from 7 – 10 storeys depending on topography. The building was designed with bedsitting rooms on the ground floor level(s) along with a caretaker's office, and storage for baggage and prams. There were 75 maisonette flats above ground floor and laundry washing and drying facilities on the roof. Each 64m² maisonette consisted of a lounge and kitchen at entry level, with a stair to two bedrooms and a bathroom on the upper level.¹⁶

Exterior of the building is dominated by the expressed structural grid pattern. A primary grid denotes the individual two-storey, two bay maisonette tenancies, and this is further divided by a secondary grid that divides the elevation of the maisonettes at bedroom floor level, and vertically through the bedroom and living room windows. Most of the visible structural elements are concrete, particularly the wall and floor slabs, the precast spandrel panels and window (mullion) posts. The balcony fronts were vitreous enamelled metal and were once decorated in an alternating pattern of red & blue, although this appears to have been over-painted at a later date. The concrete structure was designed as a fair-faced finish, although the internal walls of the apartments were generally papered or painted. The internal floors within the maisonettes were constructed in timber.

The building was partly built into a site that sloped steeply and the hillside was stabilised with a series of crib walls that step back into the hillside and retain up to 20m vertically. The building's piling system was a new technology for its time and consisted of pre-drilling the holes, filling them with reinforcement and aggregate, and pumping them full of a wet mix of sand and cement.

2.2 Materials

Reinforced concrete piles, foundations, walls, floor-slabs, roofs, and stairs

2.3 Setting

The Gordon Wilson Flats are located on a large, prominent, steeply sloping site on the Terrace and are a landmark that is visible from various points around the city, including Mt Victoria and Roseneath. The site includes the much smaller McLean State Flats (1943-44) designed in an earlier 'International Style'.

¹⁶ "The Gordon Wilson Flats, Wellington: The Work of the Architectural Division, Ministry of Works," *The Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects*, Vol 28, No 1 (February 1961): 6

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Wellington City Council, "Gordon Wilson Flats," *Heritage Inventory - 1995* (Wellington City Council, 1995)

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 Gordon Wilson Flats have architectural value as a good representative example of 1950s Modernist high-density social housing, that though common internationally, is relatively rare in New Zealand.

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 monolithic high-rise block of flats is a significant visual element in the cityscape and has townscape value for that reason.

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 Gordon Wilson Flats have a relationship to the neighbouring McLean State Flats, and the nearby Dixon Street Flats, forming a collection of buildings of similar design and purpose in the same part of central Wellington.

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 flats are associated with the social policy of the government of the day and were an endeavour to solve a chronic housing shortage. They were the last of the high-rise tower-block social housing developments designed by the Ministry of Works & Development (although there were several later high-rise social housing developments constructed by the Wellington City Council). The flats are also associated with economic recovery in the 1950s which led to a boom in the building industry.

Scientific Value:

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

Central City 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 has technological value for the inclusion of equipment to measure earthquake movements, a practice that was not widely used in New Zealand at the time. The building also has technological value for being one of, if not the first, building in New Zealand to use the particular system of piling employed.

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?

This building fulfils an ongoing function as social housing, although this is in temporary respite while the earthquake prone status of the building is resolved.

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 Gordon Wilson Flats have architectural value as a good representative example of 1950s Modernist high-density social housing, that though common internationally, is relatively rare in New Zealand.

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 had relatively few intrusive modern alterations or additions 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?

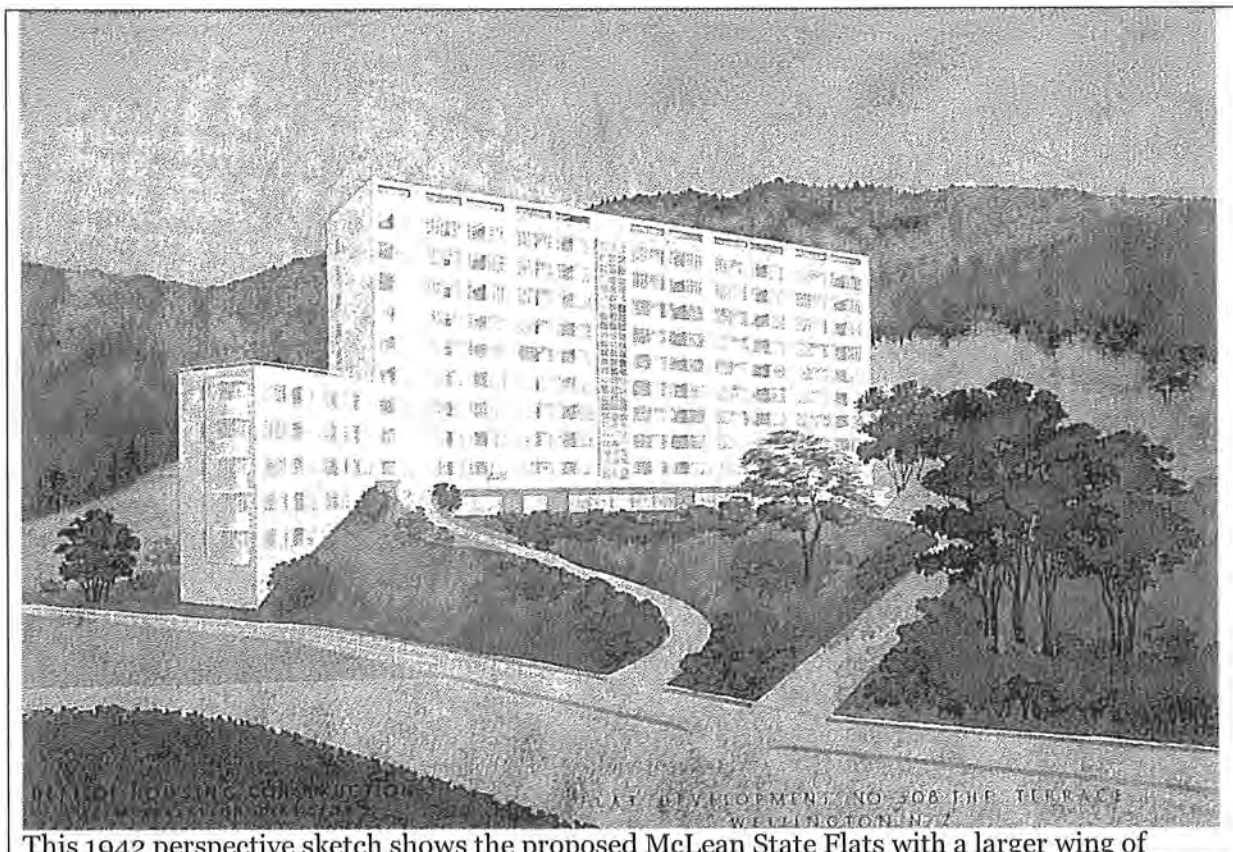
The building is of local significance as an example of Modernist high-density social housing. It is of some significance nationally as the last high-rise tower block designed as social housing by the Ministry of Works.

5.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

| Source | Y/N | Comments |
|--|-----|--------------|
| 1995 Heritage Inventory | Y | |
| 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory | N | Not included |
| 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) | Y | |
| HPT website | N | Not listed |
| HPT files | | |
| Conservation Plan | | |
| Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2) | Y | |

Background research



This 1942 perspective sketch shows the proposed McLean State Flats with a larger wing of

multi-storey flats behind that later became the Gordon Wilson Flats.¹⁷



Gordon Wilson Flats under construction circa 11 February 1957. The McLean State Flats are behind the Downer crane. *Evening Post*. (Timeframes EP/1957/0397-F)

¹⁷ Image: Ernst Plischke: *Modern Architecture for the New World*, p 148

appendix 2 – wellington city council district plan map 16



appendix 3 – historic plans



SCHEDULE OF DRAWINGS

ARCHITECTURAL LAYOUT

- 1 SITE LAYOUT
- 2 FLOOR PLANS
- 3 ROOF & LAUNDRY PLANS
- 4 SECTIONS
- 5 ELEVATIONS 1
- 6 ELEVATIONS 2

STRUCTURAL CARCASE

- 7 FOUNDATIONS
- 8 SITE EXCAVATION WORKS
- 9 SITE WORKS
- 10 BASE & FLOOR SLABS
- 11 FLOORS 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 & ROOF
- 12 SPINEWALL / FLOORS 3, 5, 7, 9
- 13 ENDWALL 'A' / CROSSWALLS B, D, F
- 14 CROSSWALL N / LIFT TOWER
- 15 STAIRWAYS
- 16 DUCTS
- 17 TERRACES & SITWORKS 17A TEST BORE DETAILS

ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

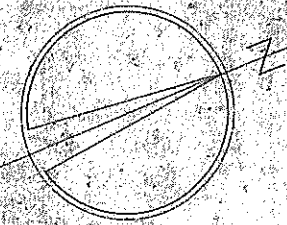
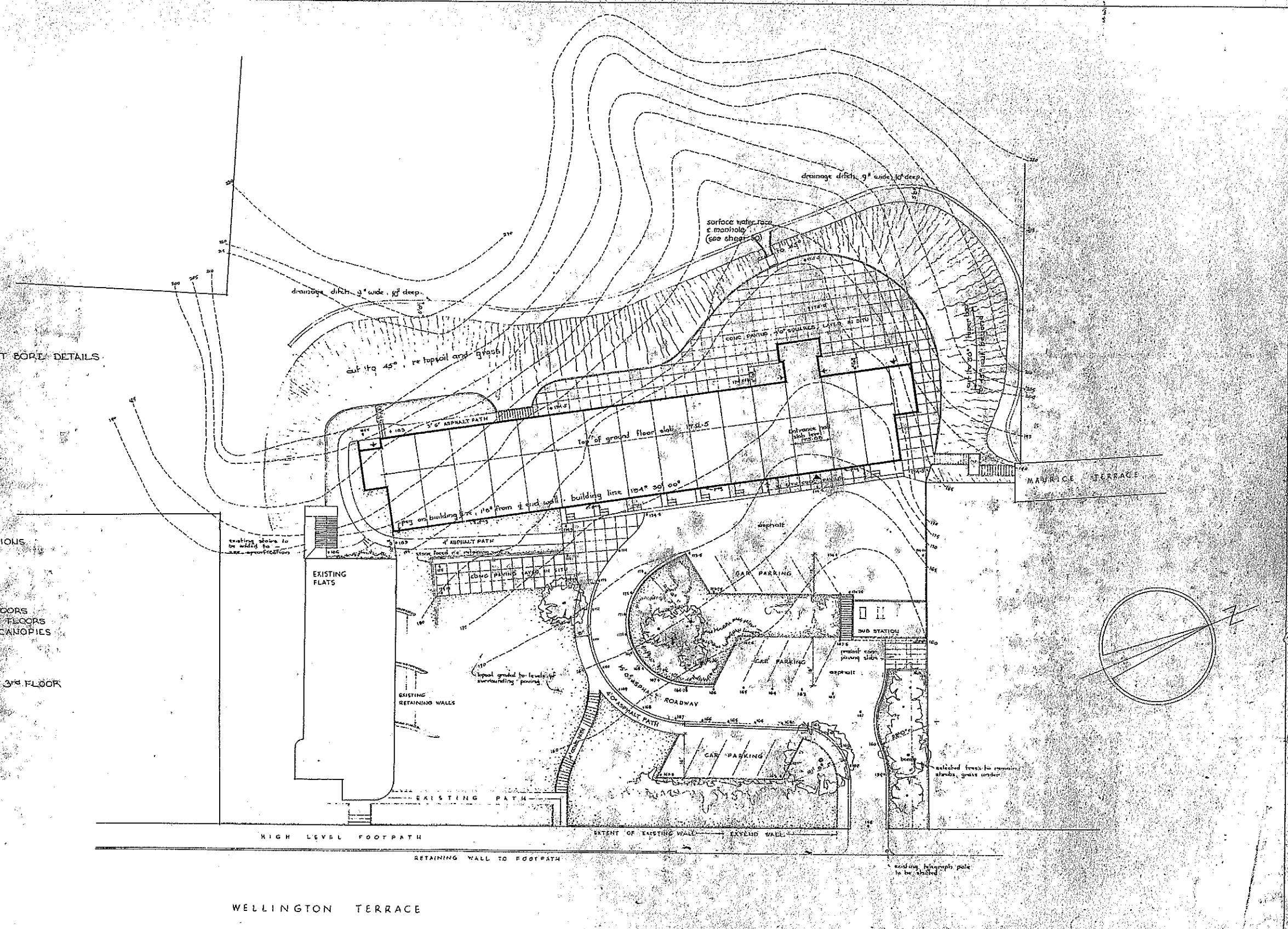
- 18 TYPE 'A' FLAT PLANS
- 19 TYPE 'A' FLAT SECTIONS ETC
- 20 PRECAST PANELS - CONSTRUCTION
- 21 PRECAST PANELS - COMPONENTS
- 22 TYPE 'B' FLAT PLANS
- 23 TYPE 'B' FLAT SECTIONS ETC
- 24 LIFT LOBBY DETAILS ETC
- 25 TYPE 'C' FLAT PLANS, SECTIONS ETC
- 26 TYPE 'C' FLAT DETAILS, WINDOWS ETC
- 27 KITCHEN DETAILS
- 28 ENTRANCE HALL PLANS, DETAILS
- 29 ENTRANCE HALL SECTIONS
- 30 STAIRS / PLANS SECTIONS
- 31 STAIRS / ELEVATIONS DETAILS
- 32 STAIRS / DETAILS
- 33 LAUNDRIES / PLAN, ELEVATIONS, SECTIONS
- 34 LIFT MACHINE ROOM
- 35 ROOF LEVEL DETAILS

STRUCTURAL REINFORCEMENT

- 36 FOUNDATION DETAILS
- 37 FOUNDATION WALLS
- 38 CROSSWALLS, DETAILS GD TO 3RD FLOORS
- 38A CROSSWALLS F, N, O, P GROUND TO 1ST FLOORS
- 39 ENTRANCE HALL, PRAM RM, SLAB, CANOPIES
- 40 FLOOR SLABS 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 & ROOF
- 41 FLOOR SLABS 2, 4, 6, 8, 10
- 42 SPINE WALL TO FLOOR 7
- 43 SPINE WALL 7 TO ROOF
- 44 ENDWALLS 44A ENDWALLS ABOVE 3RD FLOOR
- 45 CROSSWALLS ABOVE 3RD FLOOR
- 46 LIFTSHAFT & ACCESS SLAB
- 47 STAIRS
- 48 EXTERNAL WALLS TO STAIRS
- 49 DUCTS

BUILDING SERVICES

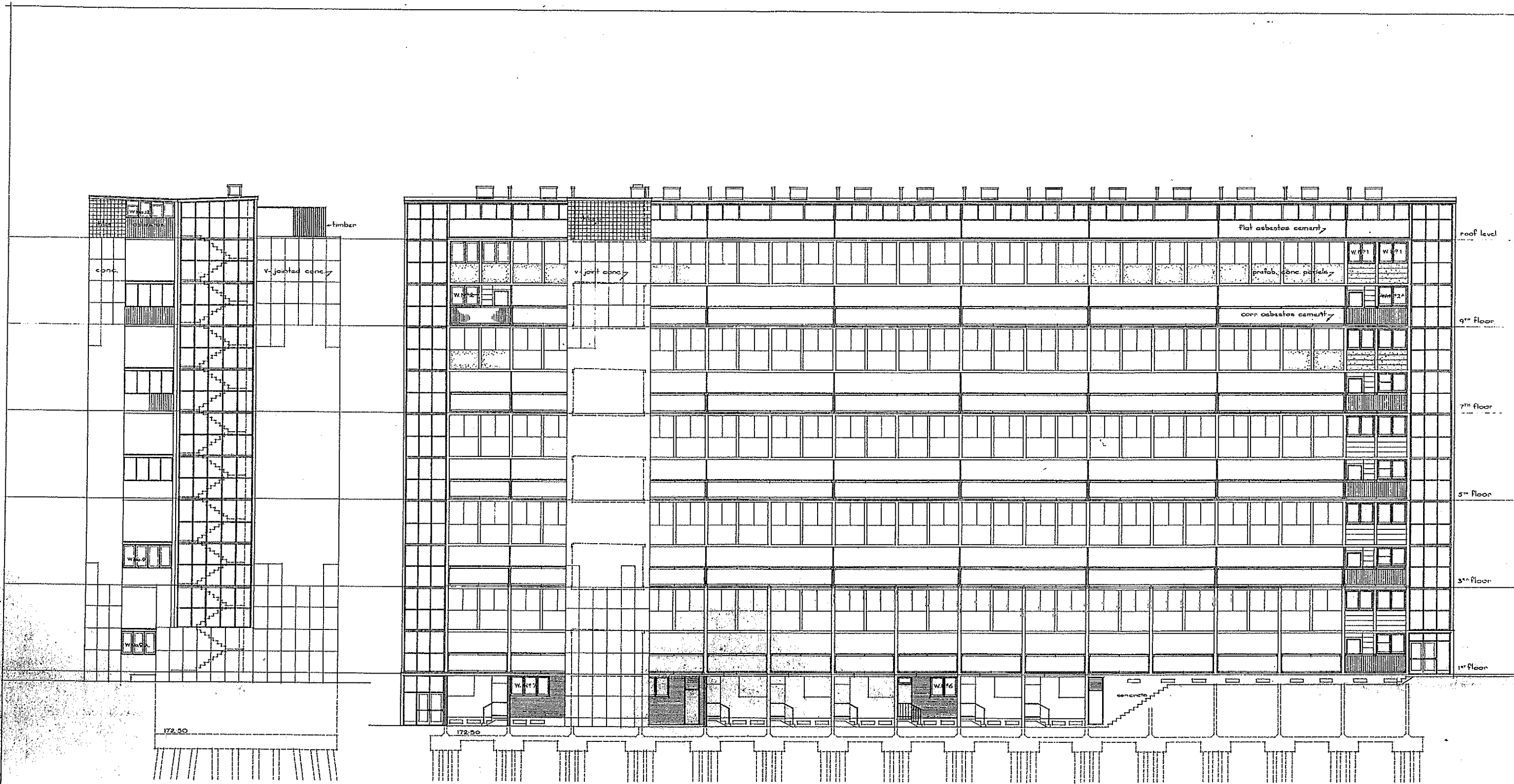
- 50 SITE LAYOUT
- 51 PLUMBING / FLAT DETAILS
- 52 PLUMBING SECTION
- 53 WATER
- 54 GAS 1
- 55 GAS 2
- 56 ELECTRICAL / FLOORS GD TO 10
- 57 ELECTRICAL / LAUNDRIES
- 58 MAIN SWITCH GEAR & RISING MAIN
- 59 RADIO CONDUITS
- 60 INCINERATOR 1
- 61 INCINERATOR 2
- 62 INCINERATOR 3



MULTI-STOREY FLATS WELLINGTON

SITE PLAN

| | | |
|---|---------------------------|--------|
| MINISTRY OF WORKS ARCHITECTURAL DIVISION | SCALE: 1/6" = 1'-0" | G 6094 |
| T. GORDON WILSON PLANNING | DRAWN BY: E.M.P. & D.M.W. | |
| GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT WELLINGTON | CHECKED BY: J.A.S. | |
| | APPROVED BY: [Signature] | |
| | DATE: AUGUST '54 | 62 |



SOUTH · ELEVATION

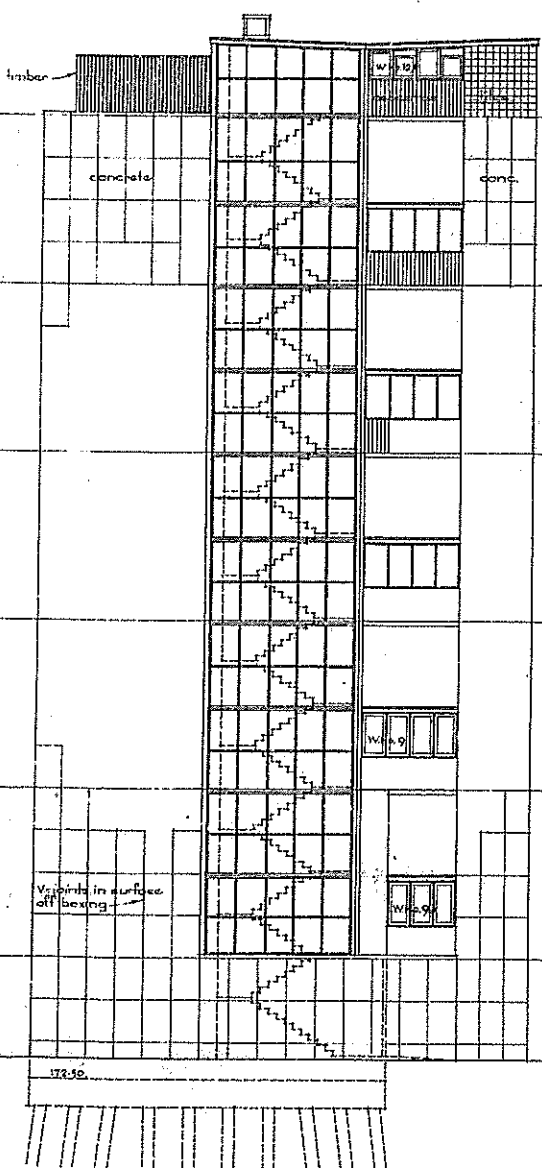
WEST · ELEVATION

Note: This sheet is to be read in conjunction with the carcass drawings

MULTI-STOREY · FLATS · WELLINGTON

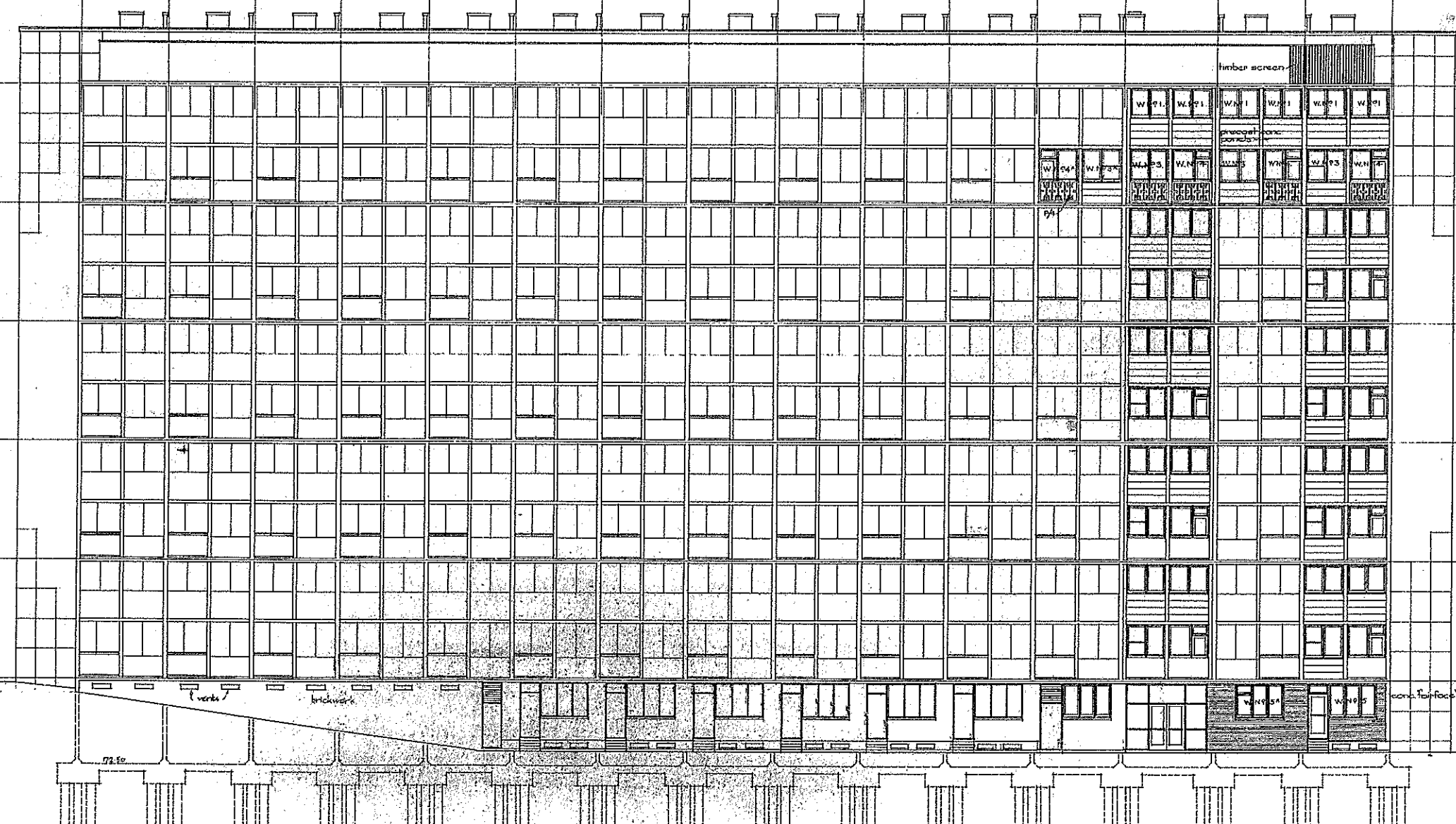
ELEVATIONS

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| DEPT. OF WORKS CIVIL DIVISION | SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0" | GA6094 |
| DESIGNED BY: WILSON | DRAWN BY: H.B.E. | |
| CHECKED BY: H.B.E. | DATE: July 1954 | WORKS NO. 6 |
| | | IN SET NO. 62 |



NORTH · ELEVATION

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------|
| 5 TYPE A1 | 5 TYPE A2 | 5 TYPE A | 5 TYPE A | 5 TYPE A | 5 TYPE A 1 TYPE C | 5 TYPE A 1 TYPE C | 5 TYPE A 1 TYPE C | 5 TYPE A 1 TYPE C | 5 TYPE A 1 TYPE C | 5 TYPE A 1 TYPE C | 5 TYPE A 1 TYPE C | 5 TYPE B | 5 TYPE A1 | 5 TYPE A1 1 TYPE C1 |
|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------|



EAST · ELEVATION

Note. This sheet is to be read in conjunction with the cornice drawings.

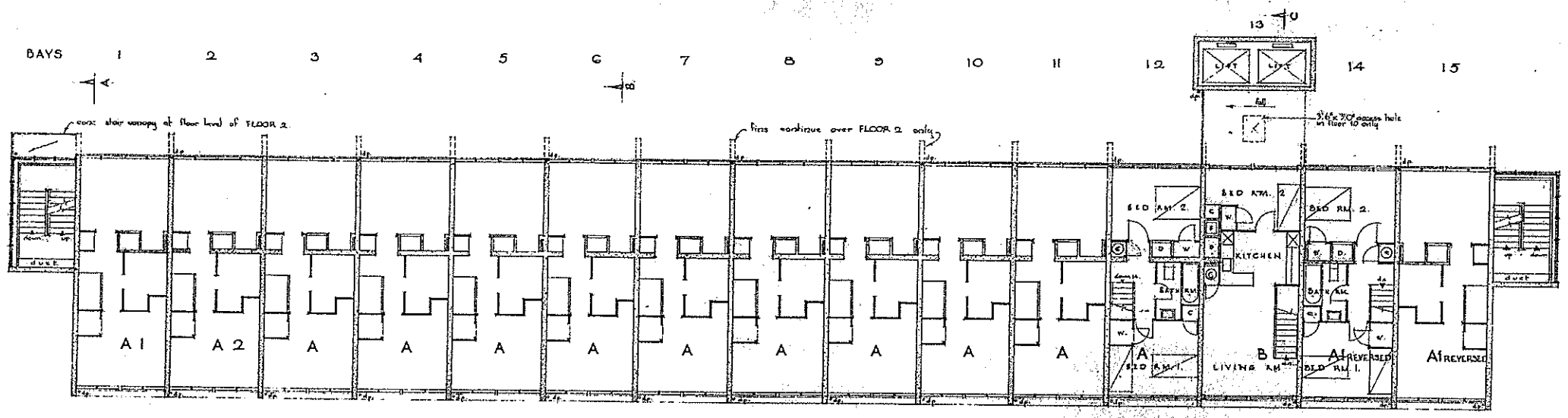
MULTI-STORY · FLATS · WELLINGTON

ELEVATIONS

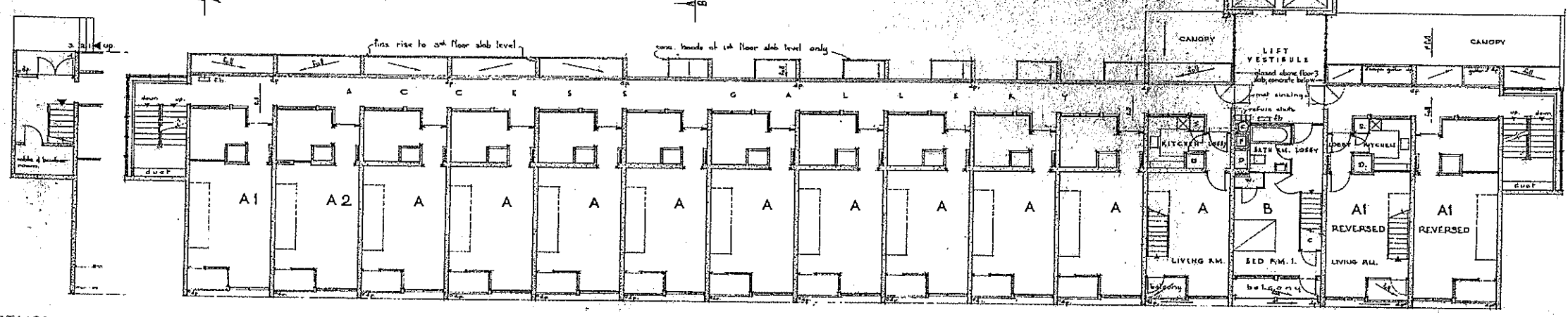
1/8" = 1'-0"

6094

HSE
PEN
5
62

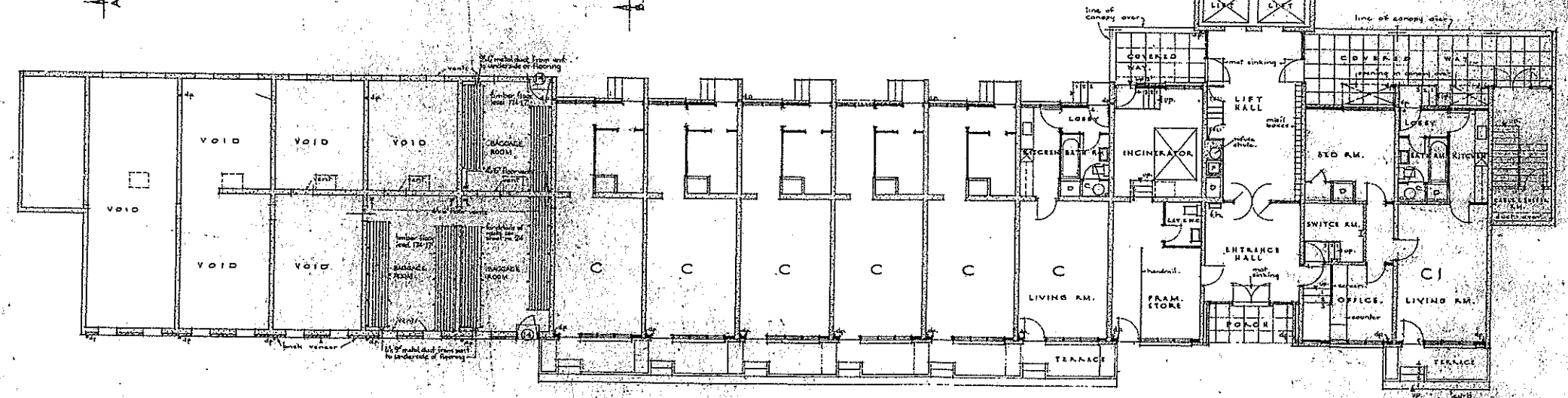


FLOORS 2, 4, 6, 8, 10.



STAIRS - FLOOR 1

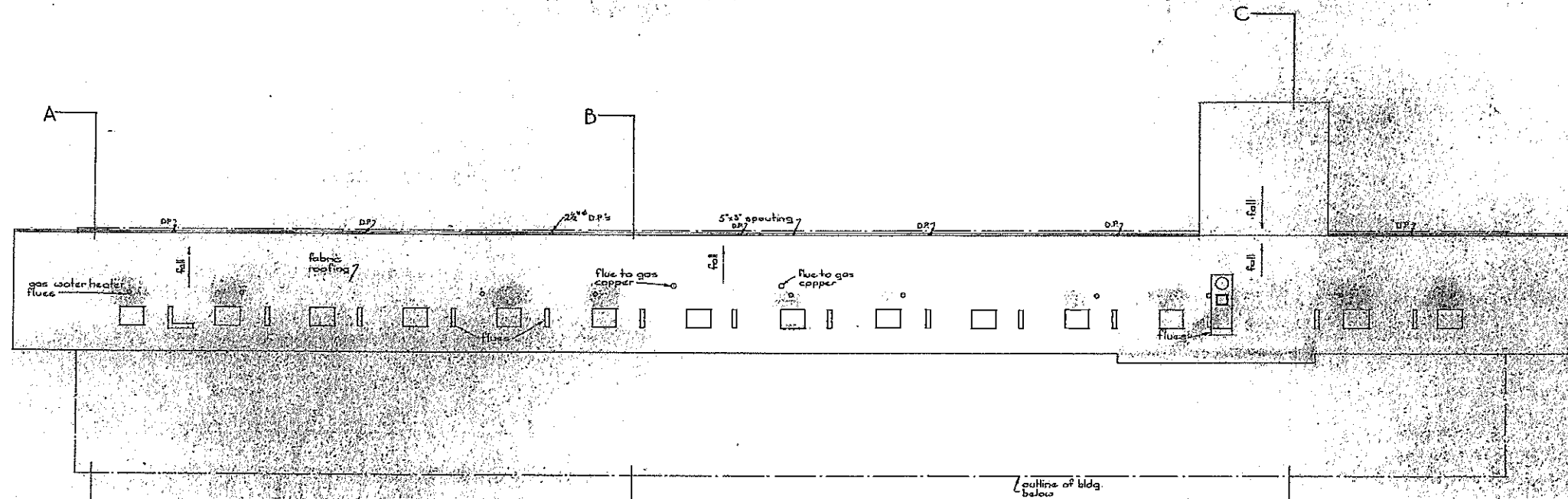
FLOORS 1, 3, 5, 7, 9.



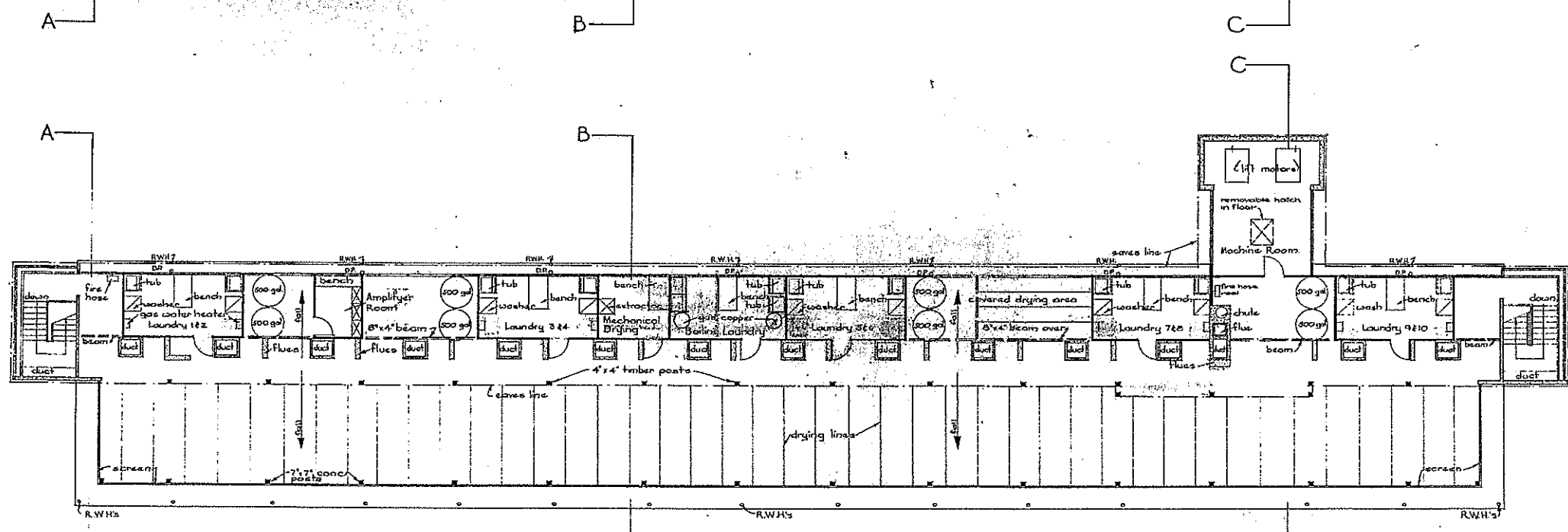
GROUND FLOOR

Note: This sheet is to be read in conjunction with the general drawings.

| | |
|---|---|
| MULTI-STOREY FLATS, WELLINGTON | |
| FLOOR PLANS | |
| MINISTRY OF WORKS ARCHITECTURAL DIVISION | SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0" |
| F. GORDON WILSON P.R.A. | DRAWN BY: M.L.W. C.P.T. |
| GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT WELLINGTON | CHECKED BY: R.S.W. APPROVED BY: [Signature] DATE: 2 AUGUST 1952 |
| | GA. 6034 |
| | WORKS No. SHEET No. 2 IN SET OF 22 |



ROOF PLAN OF LAUNDRIES



ROOF PLAN

Note: This sheet to be read in conjunction with carcass drawings.

MULTI-STOREY FLATS - WELLINGTON

PLAN OF LAUNDRIES

| | | |
|---|--|------------------------|
| DESIGNED BY GORDON WILSON ARCHITECT | DRAWN BY W.S.W. S.J.A. J.E.W. | NO. 101-1-0 GA 6094 |
| WELLINGTON | JULY 1954 | WORKS 3 62 |