



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND
POUHERE TAONGA

New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero – Report for a Historic Place **McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats, WELLINGTON** **(List No. 9783, Category 1)**



[Blyss Wagstaff, 6 July 2020, Heritage New Zealand]

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Please note that entry on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero identifies only the heritage values of the property concerned, and should not be construed as advice on the state of the property, or as a comment of its soundness or safety, including in regard to earthquake risk, safety in the event of fire, or insanitary conditions.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to provide evidence to support the inclusion of the McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats in the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero as a Category 1 historic place.

Summary

The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats, on The Terrace in Wellington, were built in 1943-44 and 1957-59 respectively to provide state rental housing in central Wellington. This pair of buildings has outstanding historical significance because of their association with the state housing programme that was initiated by the first Labour government in 1935 and then continued under subsequent administrations. They are an expression of the culture of central government provision of social welfare as it evolved through the twentieth century. The Gordon Wilson Flats is the country's sole remaining example of 1950s high-rise state housing and is therefore uniquely placed to demonstrate that chapter of New Zealand's response to the need for housing. The buildings have special architectural significance because they are representative of the embedding of Modernist architecture as a characteristic approach in New Zealand's mid-twentieth century public architecture, and together reflect the evolution in style before and after World War Two. They are highly esteemed by members of the architectural heritage community. Gordon Wilson Flats has technological significance for the early use of the building as a seismic monitoring site, and its novel piling system. The buildings are also local landmarks in relation to their streetscape on the edge of the central city and for their relationship to the nearby Dixon Street Flats.

Designed by the Department of Housing Construction (later known as the Housing Division of the Ministry of Works), the flats were expected to appeal to central city workers, whether they were unmarried middle-aged women or the heads of small families. Having acquired the McLean estate in early 1943, the government undertook the construction of the McLean Flats under war-time provisions. The second stage of development, which was always intended for the site, was delayed for over a decade, by which time the scale and design of what became known as the Gordon Wilson Flats had been reduced and updated.

Named in honour of the highly influential former Government Architect who oversaw the design of both apartment buildings as well as New Zealand's state housing programme from the 1930s, the Gordon Wilson Flats are typical of the rectilinear character of post-war 'International Style' Modernism; by contrast the McLean Flats are more sculptural in appearance reflecting the influence of

European Modernism of the interwar period. The buildings stand at right angles to one another. The McLean Flats is close to the roadway, six storeys high and accommodates 18 apartments; the Gordon Wilson Flats is set back against the rear of the site, is 11 storeys high and accommodates 12 bed-sitting rooms on the ground floor with 75 maisonettes above.

The flats were vacated, due to resident safety and building durability concerns, in the early 2010s; they were subsequently purchased by Victoria University of Wellington. The university sought to have the Gordon Wilson Flats removed from the heritage schedule of the Wellington District Plan in 2015 but this application was subsequently declined by the Environment Court; this pivotal 2017 decision confirmed the building's significant heritage values due to a strong show of support from the architectural and social heritage community. In July 2020 the university announced plans to redevelop the site; concept plans show the retention of the McLean Flats for use as post-graduate student office space and new buildings on the site of the Gordon Wilson Flats.

1. IDENTIFICATION¹

1.1. Name of Place

Name

McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats

Other Names

McLean State Flats; The Terrace State Flats; Gordon Wilson Memorial Flats

1.2. Location Information

Address

320A and 320 The Terrace

Te Aro

WELLINGTON

Wellington

Additional Location Information

E1748250; N5427637 (NZTM)

¹ This section is supplemented by visual aids in Appendix 1 of the report.

Local Authority

Wellington City Council

1.3. Legal Description

Lot 2 DP 363050 (RT 256860) and Lot 1 DP 363050 (RT 256859), Wellington Land District.

1.4. Extent of List Entry

Extent includes the land described as Lot 2 DP 363050 (RT 256860) and Lot 1 DP 363050 (RT 256859), Wellington Land District, and the buildings known as the McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats thereon. (Refer to map in Appendix 1 of the List entry report for further information).

1.5. Eligibility

There is sufficient information included in this report to identify this place. This place is physically eligible for consideration as a historic place. It consists of buildings that are fixed to land which lies within the territorial limits of New Zealand.

1.6. Existing Heritage Recognition

Local Authority and Regional Authority Plan Scheduling

Gordon Wilson Flats: Scheduled in Operative Wellington District Plan, 17 October 2019, Heritage List: Buildings, map ref. 16, symbol ref. 299.²

Demolition is a restricted discretionary activity.

New Zealand Archaeological Association Site Recording Scheme

This site has been recorded by the New Zealand Archaeological Association. The reference is NZAA R27/270.

Other Heritage Recognition

Gordon Wilson Flats: DOCOMOMO New International Selection (2017).³

² 'Gordon Wilson Flats', Wellington City Council, <http://www.wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/buildings/151-300/299-gordon-wilson-flats-320-the-terrace?q=>; accessed 2 August 2020

³ 'Gordon Wilson Flats', DOCOMOMO, <http://www.docomomo.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/Gordon-Wilson-Flats-DOCOMOMO-full->

2. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

2.1. Historical Information

Legendary voyager Kupe is said to have explored the length of the west coast of the North Island and named geographical features in Wellington harbour.⁴ Following permanent settlement, the rangatira Tara, son of Whātonga and the eponymous ancestor of Ngāi Tara, settled at the harbour, which came to be known as Te Whanganui-a-Tara (the great harbour of Tara).⁵ In the seventeenth century Ngāti Ira of Hawke's Bay joined Ngāi Tara; Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne, Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Māmoe also settled in the region. Later, in the 1820s and early 1830s, Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Mutunga and Ngāti Tama moved to Wellington from Taranaki. When the colonial settlement of Wellington commenced in 1839 land acquisition by the New Zealand Company, and then the Crown, alienated land from its Māori owners. Place names, such as Te Aro, convey the cultural landscape on which the modern city has developed.⁶

Town Sections 440 and 441 in Woolcombe Street, the future site of McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats, were granted to Robert Strang (section 440) and R. and J.M. Stokes (section 441) in 1853 and 1856 respectively, although both properties had been settled by 1842.⁷ Robert Stokes built a house called 'St Ruadhan' and the Strang family named theirs 'Dalmuir Hill'.⁸

Donald McLean (1820-77) married Robert Strang's daughter Susan at 'Dalmuir Hill' in 1851, subsequently becoming the property's owner. McLean acquired 'St Ruadhan' in 1895.⁹ McLean's son Douglas (aka Douglas Maclean, 1852-1929) inherited both properties from his father and 'St Ruadhan' became his town house when he was not in residence on his farm 'Maraekakaho' in Hawke's Bay.¹⁰ Douglas McLean, knighted in 1927, was a Member of

[fiche-2017_Low_res.pdf](#); accessed 2 August 2020

⁴ Rāwiri Taonui, 'Ngā waewae tapu – Māori exploration - Wairarapa and Wellington', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/nga-waewae-tapu-maori-exploration/page-8>, accessed 31 July 2020

⁵ Matene Love, *Te Ara o Ngā Tuna: the Path of our Ancestors*, <http://www.wcl.govt.nz/maori/wellington/TeAra1.html>; accessed 21 February 2020

⁶ Chris Maclean, 'Wellington region - Early Māori history', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/wellington-region/page-5>, accessed 31 July 2020; Morris Love, 'Te Āti Awa of Wellington', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/te-ati-awa-of-wellington>, accessed 31 July 2020

⁷ Woolcombe Street was also known as Wellington Terrace by the late 1870s, although the name Woolcombe persisted until it was officially changed to The Terrace in 1937. *Evening Post*, 23 May 1927, p. 8; 6 October 1928, p. 17 and 6 August 1937, p. 3

⁸ *Evening Post*, 6 October 1928, p. 17 and 6 September 1938, p. 7. See also *New Zealand Times*, 26 September 1874, p. 7

⁹ *Wellington Independent*, 30 August 1851, p. 1

¹⁰ *Nelson Evening Mail*, 9 February 1929, p. 6; *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 25 February 1908, p. 2

Parliament and noted animal breeder.¹¹ The contents of McLean's two Wellington houses were put up for auction in August 1941, following the death of his wife Lady Florence in 1940. Eventually both dwellings were demolished to make way for the site's redevelopment by the government.¹²

State housing flats

The first Labour government initiated a programme of state housing construction after it was elected in 1935. There had been previous government housing schemes, such as under the Workers' Dwelling Act of 1905 and by the Railways Department for staff. However, the first Labour government's programme represented state housing's 'first boom period'.¹³ Houses and, to a lesser extent, flats were built throughout New Zealand to increase both the nation's housing stock and the quality. Although the English cottage style was the dominant mode for the design of early state houses, the impact of Modernism was also felt in some single-family and duplex dwellings and it was to provide the basis for the government's apartment buildings, beginning with the Berhampore (Centennial) Flats in 1939-40.¹⁴

After a brief initial period when private architects provided designs, the Department of Housing Construction (DHC) undertook the planning of state houses and flats and oversaw their construction. Architects within the DHC, led by chief architect Francis Gordon Wilson (1900-59) between 1936 and 1948, were interested in the aesthetic and societal potential of European Modernist architecture to create high quality living environments that made a positive contribution to urban form.¹⁵ Modernism was also attractive to architects and builders because its emphasis on planar form over applied ornament was an economical response to contemporary material and labour shortages.¹⁶

Although it was thought that 'in a country such as New Zealand ... the detached house is the ideal', apartment buildings and blocks of flats were erected by the government because they could achieve higher residential densities than single-family state houses, accommodate the shortages brought about by the Second World War, and also, in some settings, facilitate

¹¹ It was reported by city historian Louis Ward that the McLeans' holdings were the 'only remaining town acres existent in Wellington in 1929'. Ward, Louis E., *Early Wellington*, Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, Auckland, 1928, p. 322

¹² *Evening Post*, 31 July 1941, p. 16

¹³ 'The state steps in and out', NZHistory, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/we-call-it-home/the-state-steps-in-and-out>, updated 21-Jul-2014

¹⁴ Julia Gatley, 'Labour Takes Command: A History and Analysis of State Rental Flats in New Zealand, 1935-49', MArch thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1997

¹⁵ Julia Gatley, 'Wilson, Francis Gordon', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 2000, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5w36/wilson-francis-gordon>, accessed 19 May 2020

¹⁶ Julia Gatley, 'For Modern Living – Government Blocks of Flats', John Wilson, ed., *Zeal and Crusade – The Modern Movement in Wellington*, Te Waihora Press, Christchurch, 1996, p. 55

urban renewal through slum clearance.¹⁷ Notwithstanding these advantages, the early multi-storey blocks of state flats were more expensive to build per unit than single-family state houses; as a result tenants of the flats were charged a higher rental.¹⁸ Through newspaper advertisements and opinion pieces, the Labour government worked to counter the prevailing negative public opinion that equated the term 'flats' with 'a tall barracks-like structure with poor accommodation and poor appearance'.¹⁹

Tenancy of state housing accommodation was achieved by applying to the State Advances Corporation. Typically only a small number of applicants specified a preference for a flat over a house.²⁰ It was generally assumed that the flats would house childless couples and single people, but the provision of two-bedroom units clearly signalled they were intended for family occupancy.²¹ Priority access to state housing, including flats, was given to ex-servicemen and women even before the war had ended.²²

The DHC, which had been established in 1936, was renamed the Housing Division of the Ministry of Works (MOW) in 1943. By 1949, when it lost power, the Labour government had built a total of 13 blocks of flats in Auckland and Wellington; five of these were multi-storey buildings.²³ This accounted for around 1.5 per cent of the total number of state residences constructed.²⁴ Medium-density blocks of flats were also built in a number of urban centres around the country in the late 1950s; an example of this typology was the Rolleston Street Flats of 1955 in Mount Cook, Wellington.²⁵

¹⁷ C. Firth, with illustrations selected by Gordon F Wilson, *State Housing in New Zealand*, Ministry of Works, Wellington, 1949, p. 33. By early 1949, 480 state rental flats had been built in contrast to 28,399 state houses; Julia Gatley, 'Going Up Rather Than Out – State Rental Flats in New Zealand 1935-1949', Brookes, Barbara, ed., *At Home in New Zealand – History, Houses, People*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2000, pp. 144-146, fn 2-3. See also, Ben Schrader, 'A prominent marker of an alternative vision: the Gordon Wilson Flats', August 2017, <https://bayheritage.co.nz/2017/08/17/a-prominent-marker-of-an-alternative-vision-the-gordon-wilson-flats/>, accessed 31 July 2020; Schrader, Ben, *We Call it Home – A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, Reed Publishing Limited, Wellington, 2005, pp. 102-107

¹⁸ Gatley 'Going Up', p. 152

¹⁹ Gatley 'Going Up', p. 147; quotation is from Firth, 1949, p. 34

²⁰ It was reported in early March 1943 that the government had received around 600 applications for flats in Wellington and the Hutt Valley out of a total of 7396 applications that were then described by Prime Minister Fraser as being currently unsatisfied. *Evening Post*, 2 March 1943, p. 4. See also *New Zealand Herald*, 3 March 1943, p. 4

²¹ Gatley 'Going Up', p. 147

²² *ibid.*, p. 150; 'State Advances Corporation of New Zealand report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31st March 1944, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1944, Session I, B-13, pp. 5-6

²³ Multi-storey flats built were the Dixon Street Flats, McLean Flats, Hanson Street Flats, all in Wellington, and the Symonds Street and Lower Greys Avenue Flats in Auckland. Gatley, 'Going Up', pp. 141-42. The Gordon Wilson Flats and Auckland's Upper Greys Avenue Flats were high-rise apartment buildings built under the first National government. 'Greys Avenue Flats', *Home & Building*, 1 June 1959, pp. 62-64, 66-67, 93 & 95; Gatley, 'Going Up', p. 153

²⁴ Gatley, 'Going Up', p. 140

²⁵ Kenneth John Davis, "'A liberal turn of mind": the architectural work of F. Gordon Wilson, 1936-1959, A cultural analysis', B. Arch. research report, Victoria University of Wellington, 1987, pp. 69, 76. The flats at 21 Rolleston Street, Mt Cook, were demolished in 2020. Kainga Ora, 'What's planned and timelines', updated 29 September 2020, URL: <https://kaingaora.govt.nz/developments-and-programmes/what-were-building/mount-cook-wellington/whats-planned-and-timelines/>, accessed 3 November 2020

Meanwhile a National Housing Conference held in 1953 reframed government housing policy to some extent, placing a greater emphasis upon private provision of affordable houses for purchase by families. The Group Housing Scheme was the primary vehicle developed by the first National government to increase single-family home numbers, but ‘encouragement [was] also being given to the building of blocks of residential flats’.²⁶ High-density housing was seen by the government at this time as a step ‘to arrest the urban sprawl’ and ‘stop abnormal use of first-class land close to built-up areas.’²⁷ To that end it was reported in 1955 that ‘[t]he Government is proceeding with the building of large blocks of multi-story flats in Wellington and Auckland, each to contain 80 two-level two-bedroom maisonette flats, and smaller blocks in other cities both for rental and sale’.²⁸ After the completion of the Gordon Wilson Flats and Auckland’s Upper Greys Avenue Flats in the late 1950s, central government abandoned such high-density housing models, favouring instead single-family and medium-density, low-rise residential forms. Nevertheless high-density social housing developments were still being built in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, by local, rather than central, government.²⁹

McLean Flats

The concentration of state rental flat construction in Wellington is an expression of the growth of the capital city in the mid-twentieth century within an environment in which building sites were limited by both the topography and historic development of the inner suburbs.

Named in honour of the previous landowners, the McLean (State) Flats were erected in 1943-44 by the first Labour government. Minister of Housing Robert Semple announced in February 1943 that the McLean estate on The Terrace had been purchased by the government for housing purposes; construction of the first block of what was to be a staged work programme was under way by late April 1943.³⁰ The government had been criticised for

²⁶ *The New Zealand Official Year-Book 1955*; https://www3.stats.govt.nz/New_Zealand_Official_Yearbooks/1955/NZOYB_1955.html, accessed 31 July 2020. See also, Ferguson, Gael, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1994, p. 193

²⁷ The first quote in this sentence is from Housing Minister Dean Eyre, ‘State awake to need for flats’, *Auckland Star*, 10 August 1957, p.3; and the second quote is from Commissioner of Works F.M. Hanson, ‘Urgent need for more flats to counter sprawl problems’, *Auckland Star*, 9 August 1957, p.5. References provided in Pers comm. Ben Schrader (Vice-chair, Historic Places Wellington) to Heritage New Zealand, ‘Re: proposed listing of McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats’, 12 October 2020

²⁸ *The New Zealand Official Year-Book 1955*. See also, Ferguson, Gael, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1994, p. 193

²⁹ See for example the Arlington Housing complex in Te Aro, Wellington (1964-76). Julia Gatley (ed.), *Long Live the Modern – New Zealand’s New Architecture, 1904-1984*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2008, pp. 202-3

³⁰ *Evening Post* 3 February 1943, p. 3; 28 April 1943, p. 3; 5 May 1943, p. 3. See also *Press* 4 February 1943, p. 4; *Gisborne Herald*, 4 February 1943, p. 4; *Manawatu Standard*, 29 April 1943, p. 5 and *Otaki Mail*, 30 April 1943, p. 1

the exclusive provision of one-bedroom units in the Dixon Street Flats (1940-44), so of the McLean Flats' 18 flats five were two-bedroom units.³¹

The lead architect for the project was Frederick Newman (1900-1964), although Ernst Anton Plischke was involved in preparing the original design concept for the site.³² Born in Vienna as Frederick Neumann, Newman came to New Zealand as a refugee in 1939 and gained work in various government departments, starting with the DHC. McLean Flats may have been the first major project he completed, in a career which later saw him appointed the Ministry of Work's Housing Architect, and a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Architects.³³ Like other émigré architects, Newman imported European experience and the Modernist approach and principles to architecture.³⁴ Newman brought strong socialist ideals to his design work, contributing through government housing projects to the realisation of 'New Zealand as a field for ideological experimentation'.³⁵ As Housing Architect from 1956 a particular focus of Newman's was to 'provide socially responsive proposals for medium- and high-density rental accommodation'; designs for the Star Flats and various duplex and multi-unit flats, and also a change in appearance of state houses, date from his tenure.³⁶

The McLean Flats were built under war-time provisions for essential works. In 1943 it was expected that the building would provide temporary dormitory accommodation for Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) and Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) members before becoming state rental accommodation.³⁷ In the event the WAAF's and WAAC's were housed elsewhere, although one of the two historic houses on the site was briefly used as a mess before being converted into two temporary flats for use by large families; this building was later demolished to make way for the Gordon Wilson Flats.³⁸

³¹ 'Housing – Erection of flats - The Terrace (McLean Flats', SAC1-242, National Archives, Wellington; Gatley 'Going Up', p. 151

³² Andrew Leach identifies Fred Newman as being responsible for the bulk of the McLean Flats drawings. Andrew Leach, 'Public Service: Social Factors in the Architecture of F.H. Newman', *The Journal of New Zealand Studies*, No. 1 (2002), p. 114, <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/jnzs/article/view/83>, accessed 2 August 2020. Ernst Plischke prepared drawings such as that published by the *Evening Post* in 1943, that show Newman made revisions to the McLean block such as widening the curved rooms that project out towards The Terrace on the building's eastern side. Plischke is not recorded as having claimed The Terrace project as his own. 'A start has been made on 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...', *Evening Post*, 5 May 1943; Pers comm. Dr Robin Skinner to Heritage New Zealand, 'Submission on the Heritage List proposal for the McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga List No 9783, Category 1)', n.d. (received 13 October 2020), p.2

³³ Newman was designing the Symonds Street Flats from 1942, but this was not completed until 1947. Leach, 'Public Service: Social factors in the architecture of F.H. Newman', p.114, pp.123-124; Lewis E. Martin, *Built for Us: the work of Government and Colonial Architects 1860s to 1960s*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2004, p. 161

³⁴ *ibid*, pp. 110, 113-114; Gatley, *Long Live the Modern*, p. 4

³⁵ In 1938, John A. Lee, Under-Secretary to the Minister of Finance and responsible for Housing between 1936-1939, published *Socialism in New Zealand*, which indicated the 'international perception of New Zealand as a socialist country operating under a democratic government model.' Newman owned a first edition of this book and 'took seriously his own responsibility to uphold values of social morality and equity within New Zealand society.' Leach, 'Public Service: Social factors in the architecture of F.H. Newman', pp. 114-116

³⁶ *ibid*, p. 124

³⁷ Gatley 'For Modern Living', p. 56

³⁸ *Evening Post* 19 May 1944, p. 4

The McLean Flats were built by W. Angus Limited from reinforced concrete with 'special attention to earthquake resistance'.³⁹ Two earthquakes centred near Masterton that occurred on 24 June and 2 August of 1942 caused extensive damage in Wellington and were a reminder of the need for earthquake-resistant construction in the city.⁴⁰ The 1929 Murchison and 1931 Hawkes' Bay earthquakes had already led to changes to the law in regard to earthquake-resistant construction, which was embodied in the 1935 building code.⁴¹

By September 1944 the flats were almost ready for occupation. Among the early residents of the McLean Flats was Helen Heketa, the mother of Private John Heketa of the 28th Māori Battalion who died in Italy on 23 September 1944.⁴² Mrs Heketa also appears to have been the widow of an ex-serviceman and, therefore, was likely to have been on the priority list for state housing.⁴³

McLean Flats featured in the 1946 film *Housing in New Zealand* as representing 'the forms of future cities – tall, white buildings rising out of the past'.⁴⁴ The film documents the desperate need for housing at the time, complicated by difficulties obtaining construction materials due to post-war shortages. McLean Flats was used as an example of state housing which catered to those who wanted, or needed, to be in the hustle and bustle of the city; but it was also acknowledged that this was not everyone's ideal. The flats were also illustrated in Cedric Firth's 1949 booklet *State Housing in New Zealand*, for which Gordon Wilson chose the illustrations, although the text makes no mention of the building.

Gordon Wilson Flats

The second, somewhat delayed, stage of development undertaken on the former McLean estate involved the erection of the Gordon Wilson Flats.⁴⁵ Although a high-rise scheme of similar scale for the site had been published in the *Evening Post* in 1943, the design was

³⁹ *Evening Post*, 28 April 1943, p. 3. W Angus Ltd (est. 1924) undertook reconstruction work after the 1931 Hawkes' Bay earthquake and later gained a number of government contracts, including the Chief Post Office in Whanganui (1939-40) and the lower level works for the Beehive in Wellington (1969-72). See Figure 5.

⁴⁰ Eileen McSaveney, 'Historic earthquakes - The 1942 Wairarapa earthquakes', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/historic-earthquakes/page-9>, accessed 19 May 2020

⁴¹ Eileen McSaveney, 'Earthquakes - Building for earthquake resistance'. See also, Belton-Brown, Greg, 'Revolution or Evolution? The Response of the Law to Earthquakes in New Zealand 1848-1948', *Canterbury Law Review*, Vol. 18, 2012, pp. 213-231

⁴² <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C25707?n=john%20heketa&ordinal=0&from=%2Fwar-memorial%2Fonline-cenotaph%2Fsearch>

⁴³ Helen Heketa's husband was Tarakitai (Tai) Heketa, who was a member of the 6th Māori Battalion in the First World War. He died in London in 1921. 'Tarakitai Heketa', Cenotaph, <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C74527?n=heketa&w=World%20War%20I%2C%201914-1918&ordinal=0&from=%2Fwar-memorial%2Fonline-cenotaph%2Fsearch>, accessed 5 August 2020; 'Deaths', *Evening Post*, 20 September 1921, p. 1

⁴⁴ *Housing in New Zealand*, part 2 (1946), Archives New Zealand, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mbgu8fluKug>, accessed 3 August 2020

⁴⁵ See Figure 1

finalised during the term of the first National government (1949-57), by which time wartime building restrictions had been lifted but concern about the negative impacts of suburban sprawl was increasing.⁴⁶

The Gordon Wilson Flats are a redesign of the block originally planned to extend the McLean Flats.⁴⁷ Plans dated May 1947 show the intention at that time was to build a curved link containing six flats between the rear of the McLean Flats and a new L-shaped block containing 52 flats in total. This did not eventuate and by 1954 the design had been reduced to a single narrow building, with major similarities to the block being designed in tandem for the Upper Grey's Avenue site in Auckland.⁴⁸

The project had resumed in 1953, and working drawings for stage two of the Terrace Flats were signed off by Gordon Wilson, now the Government Architect, in August 1954; the local district office then undertook the detailed design work for the building.⁴⁹ MOW architect Jack Wight appears to have been responsible for the technical design.⁵⁰ Wellington District Architect for the MOW with oversight of the project was John Blake-Kelly, who later served as the Government Architect; MOW Clerk of Works was R. Patterson. Private contractors Downer & Company Limited (est. 1933), and McKenzie Thomson Hoskins Limited were awarded the contract; foreman of works was W. Christensen.⁵¹

The piling system used in the Gordon Wilson Flats was reportedly a New Zealand first; the challenging hillside site and the presence of fill necessitated piling to rock, with the longest

⁴⁶ Although Ernst Plischke has been credited with input into the design of the Gordon Wilson Flats, Gordon Wilson was ultimately responsible for the design of both of the buildings erected on the McLean estate. Plischke resigned from the public service in 1947, many years before the design of the Gordon Wilson Flats was finalised and construction commenced. His influence was in earlier concept sketches, such as that published in the *Evening Post* on 5 May 1943. Gatley 'Going Up' p. 153; 'A start has been made on 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...', *Evening Post*, 5 May 1943; Linda Tyler, 'Plischke, Ernst Anton', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, first published in 2000, updated November, 2007, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5p31/plischke-ernst-anton>, accessed 2 August 2020

⁴⁷ Gatley 'For Modern Living', p. 59

⁴⁸ The leg of the new block was to have extended on an oblique angle towards the rear of the site with an entrance hall and lift hall at the meeting of the three sections of the Terrace Flats as a whole. In March 1954 Wellington City Council (WCC) had notified the MOW that it intended to build a new highway through the back of the government's housing site. By this date what was to become the Gordon Wilson Flats had been reduced to a single narrow building that was independent of the McLean Flats, although close to its north-west corner. W.C.C. City Engineer's Department files, 6/1149, 1948-1981, Wellington City Council Archives, 00009-6/1149. The building's similarities with the Upper Greys Avenue Flats are discussed in Julia Gatley and Gina Hochstein, 'Like Gordon Wilson, Minus the Heritage Protection: Auckland's Upper Grey's Avenue Flats, 1954-1959', *Historiographies of Technology & Architecture: Proceedings of the 35th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand*, Wellington, 4-7 July 2018, URL https://www.sahanz.net/wp-content/uploads/SAHANZ_18_Gatley_Corrected2020.pdf, accessed 22 October 2020

⁴⁹ 'Gordon Wilson Flats', Wellington City Council; Dr Robin Skinner, 'Submission on the Heritage List proposal for the McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga List No 9783, Category 1)', p.2

⁵⁰ Dr Robin Skinner, 'Submission on the Heritage List proposal for the McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga List No 9783, Category 1)', p.3; 'Multi Unit Flats - the Terrace,' file note, 19 July 1957. 'Housing - flats: official opening general' AEFM 19224 W1552 HD1W1552, 19, file 1/19/0 pt 2, Archives New Zealand, Wellington

⁵¹ 'Gordon Wilson Flats' Heritage Assessment, Archifact Limited, 2015, p. 10, https://wellington.govt.nz/~media/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/district-plan/changes/active-changes-variations/files/plan_change_81/a3_2.pdf?la=en, accessed 5 August 2020

piles being 14.6 metres in length.⁵² Pre-drilled holes were filled with reinforcement and aggregate and then filled with wet mixed sand and cement, left to set for a few months.⁵³ The maisonette design was adopted because of advantages such as the timber flooring between the two levels of the maisonettes reducing the overall load of the building on its foundations.⁵⁴

Construction delays meant that the foundation stone was not laid by Dean Eyre, Minister of Housing, until 6 August 1957. The Labour government returned to power in December of the same year. Gordon Wilson died suddenly in February 1959, and before the flats were finally opened in mid-1959 a decision was made to name them in his honour.⁵⁵ The total cost of the build was given as £372,000 in July 1959.⁵⁶

Open days held in the first week of April 1959 were poorly attended and those who inspected the units complained that there was inadequate storage, no room for a refrigerator or a washing machine in the kitchen, and that the open staircase in the living room would make the maisonettes draughty and hard to heat.⁵⁷ In the same month screening was undertaken of the 644 applications received for the 86 units available in the building (a flat for the caretaker was in addition to this number).⁵⁸ While it had been determined by mid-May who was to be offered each of the twelve bedsits, there were initially only 30 approvals for the two-bedroom maisonettes. With a relaxation of both the maximum income threshold and requirements around sufficiency of income to cover the rent, a total of 45 approvals had been reached by the end of the month. Although a ballot was signalled as a possibility to select tenants if the building was heavily oversubscribed it does not appear that one was ever held, although by the end of 1959 there was a waiting list.⁵⁹

⁵² 'Test Pile of Novel Type', *Evening Post*, 4 March 1955, cited in 'Gordon Wilson Flats: 320 The Terrace, Te Aro, Wellington – Heritage Assessment for Victoria University of Wellington, July 2020', Archifact Limited, 2020, p. 41

⁵³ 'Gordon Wilson Flats', Wellington City Council

⁵⁴ Descriptive report titled 'Gordon Wilson Flats The Terrace, Wellington', submitted to NZ Institute of Architects by FM Hanson, Commissioner of Works, letter dated 13 January 1960, 'Accommodation: McLean Estate Multi-Storey Flats, The Terrace, Wellington', AAQB-W3950-889-Box520, Archives New Zealand, Wellington; 'Annual Report of the Director Housing Construction: Report for the Year Ending 31 March 1954', *Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives*, 1954, DI, pp.49-50

⁵⁵ Government press release by Mr Fox, Minister of Housing, dated 8 April 1959, SAC1-Box 245, Archives New Zealand, Wellington; 'National Loss – death of Mr F Gordon Wilson, Government Architect', *Home & Building*, 1 April 1959, p. 21

⁵⁶ Letter from LCE Malt, District Commissioner of Works, to the Commissioner of Works, dated 22 July 1959, 'Government Buildings: Residential Accommodation: F Gordon Wilson Flats, The Terrace', AATE-W3388-Box 29, Archives New Zealand, Wellington

⁵⁷ See SAC1-Box 245, Archives New Zealand, Wellington. See Figure 4.

⁵⁸ Fill, Barbara and Murray, Russell, 'Heritage Assessment – Gordon Wilson Flats, 320 The Terrace, Wellington' for Housing New Zealand Corporation, May 2010, p. 9. Before the building had been completed the proposed caretaker's flat on the ground floor, next to the office supplied for him, was converted into two bedsits.

⁵⁹ State Advances Corporation memos dated 13 May 1959, 22 May 1959 and 26 May 1959, SAC1-Box 245, Archives New Zealand, Wellington; Schrader, 'A prominent marker of an alternative vision: the Gordon Wilson Flats'

After some delays finishing the building to the government's satisfaction, the flats were released to the State Advances Corporation for occupancy by tenants from 5 June 1959; the caretaker Gerald Higson had earlier uplifted keys for Flat 103 on 9 May.⁶⁰ Contrary to the prevailing notion that social housing was built for low-income individuals and families, rents were higher than usual for these state housing units on the basis of the cost of construction and future maintenance requirements, and the accommodation was aimed at workers and middle-income earners.⁶¹ The government felt that the location of the flats would be attractive to prospective tenants and facilitate savings for them in travel time and expenditure.⁶²

Foundation tenants photographed by the *Evening Post* as they were moving into the flats in mid-June 1959 included Mrs C. Glennie, a widow with two teenage daughters who originally hailed from Scotland, and Mr and Mrs W. Shaw and their two young sons. The bedsits were originally allocated to single working women over 45 years of age and two-bedroom maisonettes were assigned to families, some led by single mothers.⁶³ Urban historian Ben Schrader notes that 'numerous single men had applied for the bedsitter flats even though they were ineligible and many couples had applied for the maisonettes in the view of marrying after finding suitable accommodation...the occupational profile of tenants was diverse and included: milkmen, bakers, [a] plumber, clerks and civil servants.'⁶⁴ Schrader considers that this offers 'a rare and fascinating perspective on how a socially diverse mix of tenants lived alongside each other and negotiated social relations in a high-density environment'.⁶⁵ In later years some tenants complained about the noise from neighbours' children, but there were few demands for transfers. Many tenants were particularly appreciative of having their own bathrooms, after years of shared facilities in rooming-houses.⁶⁶

Gas water heating was initially installed to demonstrate supply advantages at a time when security of supply for electricity was under increasing pressure.⁶⁷ The system resulted in higher construction costs and was replaced in two stages (1962 and 1968) by electricity when

⁶⁰ R Patterson, Building Inspector, memo 94/3/10/3, 'Government Buildings: Residential Accommodation: F Gordon Wilson Flats, The Terrace', AATE-W3388-Box 29, Archives New Zealand, Wellington

⁶¹ Julia Gatley and Gina Hochstein, 'Like Gordon Wilson, Minus the Heritage Protection: Auckland's Upper Grey's Avenue Flats, 1954-1959', np (pdf document p.9)

⁶² *Evening Post*, 18 March 1959

⁶³ See SAC1-Box 245, ArchivesNew Zealand, Wellington.

⁶⁴ Schrader, 'A prominent marker of an alternative vision: the Gordon Wilson Flats'

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

the gas heaters' ignition mechanism and flues did not meet the required performance standards and were causing health concerns.⁶⁸

The Gordon Wilson Flats was the first building in New Zealand to be comprehensively instrumented for seismic engineering research.⁶⁹ Seismic monitoring equipment—strain gauges and strong-motion accelerographs—was installed by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) at the time of the building's construction; the strain gauges likely still remain in the foundations.⁷⁰ The equipment was a precursor to the accelerographs installed in a range of building types by the DSIR from 1963 onwards. These instruments provided useful information and field experience for DSIR scientists, as well as being of interest to the leader of Japan's institutes of seismic research in high-rise construction, Toshihiko Hisada.⁷¹ Scientific papers were published with reference to the data collected in the building and the development for commercial sale, both nationally and internationally, of the M.O.2 Accelerograph by DSIR staff in the mid-1960s could be considered an outcome of the programme of scientific seismic measurement.⁷² The strong motion accelerograph provided information pertaining to building performance in the event of an earthquake and thus created a New Zealand-specific data set for engineers wanting to assess 'earthquake resistance in large structures' during earthquakes.⁷³ As the DSIR director of the research stated:

⁶⁸ A petition signed by twelve tenants requesting replacement of the gas water heaters was presented to the Director of the State Advances Corporation in July 1964 but the matter took some years to resolve. Gas heaters in the living room of each flat were disconnected in October 1959, following two explosions caused by failure of the safety valve, and then modified before being replaced. The Sapphire gas heater in Flat 414 on the 7th floor exploded on 17 August 1959. The tenant, Mrs NFM Lowe, received facial injuries as a result. Letter from JV Jebson, Director of Housing, to the General Manager of the State Advances Corporation, date 10 May 1962, 'Accommodation: McLean Estate Multi-Storey Flats, The Terrace, Wellington', AAQB-W3950-889-Box520, Archives New Zealand, Wellington; 'Housing Management – Pensioner flats, Gordon Wilson, The Terrace', SAC1W11956-48, Archives New Zealand, Wellington; AH Peat, Mechanical Inspector, letter dated 21 August 1959 to Mr Hamlyn and Memo from PM Hanson, Commissioner of Works to the District Commissioner of Works, dated 19 October 1959, 'Government Buildings: Residential Accommodation: F Gordon Wilson Flats, The Terrace', AATE-W3388-Box 29, Archives New Zealand, Wellington

⁶⁹ Christine McCarthy, 'Shaking Gordon Wilson Flats: early seismic engineering research in New Zealand', *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers – Engineering History and Heritage*, 172(4), p.157. McCarthy (p. 154) notes one earlier building, the Otahuhu Substation (1950-51), as being the first to have had strain gauges embedded in its concrete.

⁷⁰ R.I. Skinner, W.R. Stephenson and R.T. Hefford, 'Strong Motion Earthquake Recording in New Zealand', *Bulletin of the N.Z. Society of Earthquake Engineers*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1971, pp. 31-42. See various letters and memos held in SAC1-Box 245, Archives New Zealand, Wellington. A request to provide a flat for the staff member who would undertake monitoring of the equipment was declined. The accelerographs were removed sometime between 1971 and 1979. Christine McCarthy, 'Shaking Gordon Wilson Flats: early seismic engineering research in New Zealand', p. 155, 158

⁷¹ Skinner, R.I., Stephenson, W.R. and Hefford, R.T., 'Strong Motion Earthquake Recording in New Zealand', p. 32. Letter from CF Candy, Designing Engineer, to Dr Hisada, Head of the structural division of the Building Research Institute in the Ministry of Construction, Tokyo, Japan, dated 13 September 1965, 'Accommodation: McLean Estate Multi-Storey Flats, The Terrace, Wellington', AAQB-W3950-889-Box520, Archives New Zealand, Wellington. Toshihiko Hisada was the director of the Japanese Ministry of Construction's Building Research Institute, the chairman of the High-Rise Building Structure Examination Board, and the chairman of the Japan National Committee of Earthquake Engineering. Christine McCarthy, 'Shaking Gordon Wilson Flats: early seismic engineering research in New Zealand', pp.156-57

⁷² Bunce, G.K., 'Field experience section – Earthquake Recording Instrument: The Type M.O.2 Strong Motion Accelerograph', *Bulletin of the N.Z. Society of Earthquake Engineers*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1969, pp. 308-328

⁷³ Bunce, 'Field experience section – Earthquake Recording Instrument: The Type M.O.2 Strong Motion Accelerograph', pp. 308, 325, 327-28. See also, R. Shepherd and J.H. Wood, 'The Dynamic Design of Earthquake Resistant Structures', *New Zealand Engineering*, Vol. 18, No. 4, April 1963, pp. 111-71; with follow up discussion in the Vol. 19, No. 5, May 1964 journal, pp. 183-87. As at 1 July 1969 accelerographs were installed, or proposed for installation, at 13 locations around New Zealand; the Gordon Wilson Flats was not one of those sites

‘There is no question of the value of the results that can accrue from this very long-term undertaking. The loss to New Zealand from a large earthquake is gigantic. We are using the Terrace Flats not to find how the Terrace Flats would behave for their own sake but to find how to make all future buildings in New Zealand safe against earthquakes.’⁷⁴

Engineering research continued in 1964 when the Gordon Wilson Flats was subjected to forced-vibration testing. This is thought to have been the first building in New Zealand in which this physical testing – vital as a comparison with laboratory tests – occurred.⁷⁵

Described by architectural historian Nikolas Pevsner as ‘particularly interesting’, the Gordon Wilson Flats featured in the *Architectural Review* in October 1959 as part of Pevsner’s review of commonwealth architecture. Pevsner had visited New Zealand in 1958 and was hosted by the Architectural Centre during his stay in Wellington.⁷⁶ In February 1961 the Wellington District Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Architects featured the Gordon Wilson Flats in their journal.⁷⁷ A photograph of the building in the 1975 history of the MOW was used to illustrate high density housing provision by the state.⁷⁸

Nonetheless, by the late 1950s the government’s focus had already shifted away from vertical flats towards low-rise medium-density housing (blocks no higher than three storeys), with these accounting for 54 percent of all units built in 1960.⁷⁹ A decade later the design focus had swung further towards single units, with only 11.9 percent being multi-units.⁸⁰ After the Gordon Wilson Flats and Upper Greys Avenue Flats, the construction of high-rise blocks of state flats stalled for 60 years, although with more New Zealanders now considering medium and high-density inner city living as a desirable option, and increased concerns

because it was installed with an earlier type of accelerograph.

⁷⁴ Christine McCarthy, ‘Shaking Gordon Wilson Flats: early seismic engineering research in New Zealand’, p.157

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.153-161

⁷⁶ Cited by K Davis in his B. Arch. research report, 1987, p. 69. See also, Gately, Julia and Walker, Paul, *Vertical Living: The Architectural Centre and the Remaking of Wellington*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2014. The *Dominion* reported in its obituary for Gordon Wilson published on 24 February 1959 that Pevsner ‘described Mr Wilson as “a very enlightened man who has carried out work on quite a big scale and helped many younger architects to progress in their chosen sphere.”’ The Architectural Centre is a Wellington-based group of architects and those interested in the city’s architecture and urban environment. It was founded in 1946 and has historically been involved in heritage advocacy.

⁷⁷ ‘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, pp. 1-8. This unattributed article used the descriptive text supplied by the government; AAQB-W3950-889-Box520, Archives New Zealand. The branch had previously provided an article about the Hazelcourt Flats in the November 1960 issue of the journal.

⁷⁸ Noonan, Rosslyn J., *By Design: A brief history of the Public Works Department Ministry of Works 1870-1970*, Wellington, 1975, p. 220

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220

⁸⁰ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, p. 194

about urban sprawl, in 2020 Kāinga Ora (Housing New Zealand Corporation) is again employing this urban design solution on the Upper Greys Avenue site.⁸¹

Recent history of the flats

After decades of residential use, the McLean and Gordon Wilson Flats were vacated in 2011 and 2012 respectively after the buildings were identified as being potentially earthquake-prone and in need of remedial work; the façade of Gordon Wilson Flats was deemed particularly unsafe.⁸² Residents were given a week to move out; some expressed their distress and sentimental attachment to the place ('This is my castle, I love it here'), while others noted issues with anti-social tenants and a lack of building maintenance.⁸³ The Gordon Wilson Flats were purchased by Victoria University of Wellington from Kāinga Ora in 2014; purchase of the McLean Flats by the university took place in 2019.⁸⁴ In June 2018 building consent for redevelopment of the McLean Flats, including seismic strengthening, refurbishment of the existing units and a three-storey extension, was lodged with Wellington City Council (WCC) but not yet actioned.⁸⁵

Since late 2015 the heritage status of the Gordon Wilson Flats and the university's desire to redevelop the site as a whole to create a pedestrian link between the city centre and its Kelburn campus has been under discussion, and subject to a planning hearing in 2015 and Environment Court proceedings in 2016-2017. The latter was led by the Architectural Centre, who successfully argued that Gordon Wilson Flats' significant heritage values merited its inclusion in the Wellington City District plan heritage schedule.⁸⁶ Expert advocates described the building as being 'a prominent marker of an alternative vision'; 'a remarkable example of a heroic period of modern architecture in New Zealand'; and 'the most developed form of its type...thus an architectural milestone in New Zealand.'⁸⁷

⁸¹ Kāinga Ora, 'Icon to deliver groundbreaking Kāinga Ora complex in central Auckland', 10 August 2020, <https://kaingaora.govt.nz/news/icon-to-deliver-groundbreaking-kainga-ora-complex-in-central-auckland/>, accessed 24 August 2020

⁸² 'Gordon Wilson Flats', Wellington City Council

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ 'Wellington social housing redevelopment scrapped and sold to Victoria University', Stuff, 14 Jun 2014, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/113478644/wellington-social-housing-redevelopment-scrapped-and-sold-to-victoria-university>, accessed 5 August 2020

⁸⁵ Wellington City Council Archives, 00078-394139

⁸⁶ 'Gordon Wilson Flats', Architectural Centre, <https://architecture.org.nz/gordon-wilson-flats/>, accessed 5 August 2020; Decision No: [2017] NZEnvC 116, 9 August 2017, URL: <https://environmentcourt.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Publications/2017-NZEnvC-116-The-Architectural-Centre-v-Wellington-City-Council.pdf>, accessed 23 October 2020

⁸⁷ Schrader, 'A prominent marker of an alternative vision: the Gordon Wilson Flats'; 'Statement of Evidence by Linda Tyler, in the matter of Plan Change 81: Re-zoning 320 The Terrace and de-listing the Gordon Wilson Flats', 7 December 2015, https://wellington.govt.nz/~media/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/district-plan/changes/active-changes-variations/files/plan_change_81/linda-tyler-expert-evidence-gordon-wilson-flats-7-dec-2015.pdf?la=en; 'Statement of Evidence of Jeremy Salmond, Architect, in the matter of Plan Change 81: Re-zoning 320 The Terrace and de-listing the Gordon Wilson Flats', https://wellington.govt.nz/~media/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/district-plan/changes/active-changes-variations/files/plan_change_81/jeremy-salmond-evidence.pdf?la=en

Despite this endorsement of the building's significance by the Environment Court, arguments for and against the building's architectural quality and heritage values have continued to be put forward in the public domain, highlighting in part conflicting views about the merits of Modernist architecture in terms of its aesthetic and functional qualities.⁸⁸ In July 2020 Victoria University announced plans to refurbish the McLean Flats and demolish the Gordon Wilson Flats to make way for new teaching and research facilities and create an entrance plaza for the campus that overlooks the site.⁸⁹

Associated List Entries

Dixon Street Flats, Wellington (List No. 7395)

2.2. Physical Information

*Setting*⁹⁰

The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats are located on a large property, comprising two contiguous land parcels, on the west side of The Terrace, just north of its intersection with Ghuznee Street. Beyond the town belt hillside that forms the western boundary of the site is the main/Kelburn campus of Victoria University of Wellington. The commercial centre of Wellington is to the north and north-east of the site; to the south is the residential suburb of Aro Valley. The streetscape in the vicinity of the flats is primarily residential in nature; the landmark Dixon Street Flats (List No. 7395, Category 1 historic place) are located about 300 metres away to the north-east.

The contextual values of the McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats arise from their height and location set against the town belt on the western fringe of the central city. The topography of Wellington lends itself to extended views across the city, to and from Wellington Harbour. The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats offer views of the city from their primary rooms and have a contextual relationship with the nearby Dixon Street Flats.

⁸⁸ For example, 'Ugly or not, Modernist architecture reflected the desire for a better society', *Dominion Post*, 27 August 2020, URL: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/122547343/ugly-or-not-modernist-architecture-reflected-the-desire-for-a-better-society>, accessed 27 August 2020; 'Strong community opposition expected over plan to demolish heritage-listed Gordon Wilson Flats', *Stuff*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/122267683/strong-community-opposition-expected-over-plans-to-demolish-heritagelisted-gordon-wilson-flats>, accessed 3 August 2020. See also Daube, Reuben, Jacobson, Cherie and Martin, Olivia, 'Gordon Wilson Flats, The Terrace', *Museum and Heritage Studies*, Victoria University of Wellington, 2018, <https://discover.stqry.com/v/modernism-in-wellington/s/a9058e4f-4dd8-4e62-b100-75439e6d158a>, accessed 3 August 2020; and the Architectural Centre's series of 41 submissions on the topic 'My favourite modernist building', <https://architecture.org.nz/2017/03/02/my-favourite-modernist-building-...-index/>.

⁸⁹ *Stuff*, 27 July 2020, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/122257632/victoria-university-plans-to-demolish-heritagelisted-gordon-wilson-flats-to-create-new-front-door>, accessed 2 August 2020

⁹⁰ All thumbnail images in this section were taken by Blyss Wagstaff, Heritage New Zealand, 6-7 July 2020



The buildings are prominent within the streetscape at the southern end of The Terrace, and visible from various points around the city such as Mt Victoria and Roseneath. The scale of Gordon Wilson Flats in the wider cityscape is somewhat mitigated by its siting back against the hillside.

McLean Flats - Exterior



The McLean Flats stand close to the road boundary of the property; it is a six-storey building with a rectangular footprint and flat roof. The principal, north and east-facing, elevations meet at a rounded corner; a rank of five oriel windows with cantilevered hoods overhang the principal entry to the building, which is sheltered by

the corner bay and a slab roofed porch.⁹¹ Timber-framed casement windows are arranged in groups; on the north elevation what were once in-line balconies with window boxes are now bays of slightly rounded oriel windows. Galleries providing access to the upper level flats are at the rear (south elevation) of the building. The principal stairwell for the building is located at its south-east corner. There is a flat-roofed laundry shed on the roof, which is also fitted with clotheslines.

McLean Flats – Interiors

The building accommodates eighteen flats, which are dispersed across six levels in accordance with the sloping terrain of the site. There is one flat on the ground floor, two on the first floor, three on the second, and four on each of the third, fourth and fifth floors.

⁹¹ See Figure 10

Only the ground floor flat is a bedsit, with the remainder having one or two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen, living room and sunroom. The mid-block and western flats have one-bedroom, while the flats at the east end of the building have two bedrooms and a separate combined kitchen-dining room set within the curved space created by the corner oriel window. All bathrooms provide enough space to accommodate a laundry tub and washing machine; the kitchens are U-shaped in plan with wall-mounted and under-counter cupboards. The enclosed balconies on the north elevation now have the appearance of a sunroom adjacent to the living room. Casement windows in the bedroom directly behind the sunroom bring light into that space from the latter. There are rubbish chute access hatches on each floor beside the concrete steps in the stair tower. Additional egress from the building is provided by an external timber stair at the west end of the building. Except for preparations for renovations in some flats, the majority remain intact.



Gordon Wilson Flats - Exterior



The Gordon Wilson Flats stand against the hill at the rear of the site; it is an eleven-storey building with a rectangular footprint and flat roof.⁹² The principal, east-facing, elevation has a uniform, grid pattern design that articulates the maisonette configuration of bedrooms above balconied living rooms; this treatment was considered to be expressive of the 'cellular character of the building'.⁹³ The east elevation is not perfectly symmetrical as the bay over the main entry to the building has balconies that extend the full width of the flat within. This subtle difference in façade

⁹² See Figures 2-3

⁹³ '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, p. 2. See Figure 12

modulation corresponds with the position of the lift tower towards the northern end of the building and reflects an alternate layout for the flats within this bay, wherein the kitchen is accessed from the living room, rather than the entrance hall, which is the arrangement in all the other flats above the ground floor, bedsit level. The perimeter is fenced off to protect from the hazards of the site, including the risk from falling chunks of the concrete façade, evident on the ground surrounding the building.

The thin slab form of the Gordon Wilson Flats means that the width of the building accommodates a single flat, allowing daylight to enter all of the principal spaces within each unit. The north-south axis of the building provides for afternoon sun entering the access galleries and second bedroom above, whilst morning sun and expansive views of the city centre and Wellington harbour are available from the principal bedroom and living room on the east elevation.



At the rear of the building (west elevation) access galleries run the length of the building, alternating levels with the external wall of the second bedroom within. Short slab buttresses extend from the ground up to third floor level to provide additional stiffening; on the ground floor these elements partially shelter

the steps providing rear entry to the bedsits. Glazed external stairwells are located at both ends of the building (north and south elevations).⁹⁴ There is a flat-roofed laundry shed on the roof, which is also fitted with clotheslines. Two elevators located within a lift tower at the rear of the building (west elevation, near the northern end) provide access to the galleries and the roof deck.

Gordon Wilson Flats – Interior

Twelve bedsitting rooms on the ground floor and 75 two-storey, two-bedroom 64 square-metre maisonette flats on the remaining floors provided 87 units in total.⁹⁵ The main entry to

⁹⁴ See Figure 11

⁹⁵ See Gordon Wilson Flats VR Experience, School of Architecture, Victoria University of Wellington: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=111&v=sfVw8TFc5nU&feature=emb_title, accessed 3 August 2020; Jacobsen, Cherie, 'Building Legacies? Review of *Immersive Legacies: 320 The Terrace*, Wellington Museum, 19 October until 3 November 2019, posted by

the building provides access to the lift tower and accommodates mailboxes, two telephone cabinets and access to a custodian's office. The foundation stone of the building is located within the tiled entrance porch.



Five of the maisonettes, adjacent to the lift tower, are of the double-bedroom and single-bedroom type, with the remainder accommodating two double-bedrooms. An internal 'spine' wall provides longitudinal stiffening of the structure; this can be seen in the 'riser' services duct between

the bedrooms on the upper level of the maisonettes.

Beside the entrance to each of the maisonettes is a fire ladder positioned to provide safe egress from the second bedroom in each unit via a hatch set into the floor. With the exception of the flats adjacent to the lift tower, the entrance door provides access to a short hall off which open the west-facing kitchen and east-facing living room. Stairs to the second floor rise directly from the living room, which has a door in the east wall providing access to the balcony. The bathroom on the upper level is positioned between the two bedrooms, both of which have built-in storage. The bedsits on the ground floor have front and rear entries, with a galley kitchen and bathroom positioned beside the back (west) door.



The building has suffered considerably from vandalism since its closure. Much of the interior metal work (riser pipes, hot water cylinders and general plumbing, kitchen benches) has been stripped out, although kitchen cabinetry and bathroom fixtures remain in place, albeit damaged in some flats.

Broken windows have allowed weather and pigeons to enter some units. Others remain dry, tidy and intact, with occasional reminders of the people who used to live there.

Comparative analysis

The primary heritage values of the McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats relate to their place in the history of social housing provision since 1935 and their Modernist architectural pedigree as multi-storey apartment buildings.

Gordon Wilson was chief architect of the government housing department during what historian Roslyn Noonan calls 'its most successful period', as nearly 35,000 state dwellings were built.⁹⁶ Wilson is described as having had 'a strong influence on all the work of the architectural office... Gordon would do the rounds each morning, leaving behind him black pencil marks over drawings and many irate architects.'⁹⁷ Noonan states that during his subsequent tenure as Government Architect, a period described as when 'office buildings, schools, hospitals, post offices, flats and hotels flowed from the Ministry of Works, free of inhibitions and expressing the best thoughts of contemporary design'... '[Wilson] was more concerned with public buildings than housing with the exception of high-density flats which were his special interest.'⁹⁸ Wilson, who was made a fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1951 and an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1954, saw his role as including the education of public opinion on good design.

After World War Two the government's architectural department was strongly committed to International Style Modernism. The monolithic tower block form of the Gordon Wilson Flats, with its ancestry in the Dixon Street Flats, corresponded with contemporaneous design of public buildings from the Government Architect's office, as well as private commercial high-rise developments. Bledisloe House, in Auckland (completed 1959), and the School of Dentistry at Otago University (1959, List No. 7618) were both designed by the Ministry of Works around the same time as the Gordon Wilson and Upper Greys Avenue Flats, and share the narrow, multi-storey form, gridded façade and semi-detached lift tower. Gordon Wilson Flats shows the increasing emphasis on fully glazed elevations as New Zealand Modernism

⁹⁶ Noonan, *By Design: A brief history of the Public Works Department Ministry of Works 1870-1970*, p. 223; statistics calculated from Firth, 1949, pp. 67-71, which gives the number of state rental houses erected between 1937-1949 as being 33,766 and the number of multi-unit dwellings erected between 1936-1948 as being 10 multi-unit blocks totalling 376 dwellings, with five more blocks totalling 574 dwellings under construction.

⁹⁷ Gatley, 'Wilson, Francis Gordon'

⁹⁸ Noonan, 1975, p.223

progressed towards the full glass curtain-wall, first realised in commercial developments such as Plischke and Firth's 1952 Massey House (List No. 7661).

Although Le Corbusier's Unite d'Habitation in Marseille, France (1947-52) and the London County Council's Loughborough Estate (Sir Leslie Martin, 1954-57) in Brixton, England have been mentioned by others as specifically inspiring the design of the Gordon Wilson Flats, it is probably more accurate to characterise both the McLean Flats and the Gordon Wilson Flats as New Zealand examples of mid-century high-density social housing designed using a Modernist approach.⁹⁹

There are currently three state housing blocks of flats entered on the New Zealand Heritage List/ Rārangī Kōrero (the List): the Berhampore Flats (List No. 7432, Category 1 historic place) and the Dixon Street Flats (List No. 7395, Category 1 historic place) in Wellington and the (Lower) Greys Avenue Flats (List No. 583, Category 2 historic place) in Auckland. The Berhampore Flats are considered to have outstanding heritage value as the 'inaugural multi-unit scheme in a vast State housing scheme that was dominated by detached and semi-detached houses and flats'¹⁰⁰; the Dixon Street Flats are equally highly regarded as they are 'considered to be the archetype of Modernist apartment blocks in New Zealand'.¹⁰¹ Auckland's Symonds Street Flats (1942-47) and Wellington's Hanson Street Flats (1943-44) date from the same time period as the McLean Flats.

The McLean and Gordon Wilson Flats can be said to represent a continuation of the policies and practices set in train by the Berhampore and Dixon Street Flats. The most relevant high-density state-housing comparators are the Lower and Upper Greys Avenue Flats, which were also part of a larger high-density government scheme interrupted by the war.¹⁰² The Upper Greys Avenue Flats (1957-58) can be considered a 'sibling' building to the Gordon Wilson Flats; the two were designed in tandem and comprise a narrow slab block of eleven storeys of mostly two-storey maisonettes.¹⁰³ With their taller, slimmer design, reduced mass and more extensive glazing and facades that revealed the maisonette configuration, both show the evolution in government design from the pre-war high-rise blocks of flats. With the demolition of the Upper Greys Avenue Flats in January 2020, the Gordon Wilson Flats are

⁹⁹ Davis, 1987, p. 69

¹⁰⁰ 'Berhampore Flats', Heritage New Zealand, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7432>, accessed 5 August 2020

¹⁰¹ 'Dixon Street Flats', Heritage New Zealand, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7395>, accessed 5 August 2020

¹⁰² 'Upper Greys Avenue flats', Heritage et AL, <http://heritageetal.blogspot.com/2014/03/upper-greys-avenue-flats.html>, accessed 5 August 2020

¹⁰³ Julia Gatley and Gina Hochstein, 'Like Gordon Wilson, Minus the Heritage Protection: Auckland's Upper Grey's Avenue Flats, 1954-1959'

now the sole remaining example of the state's 1950s investment in high-density high-rise state housing. Kāinga Ora is currently redeveloping the site of the Upper Greys Avenue Flats to provide 276 apartments in a multi-level high-rise building, indicating the continued usefulness of the typology in certain locations within the department's housing portfolio.¹⁰⁴

The Gordon Wilson Flats also represent a turning point in the New Zealand government's experiment with high density housing. For reasons of policy (National governments promoted private home ownership), finances (high-rise flats were not that cost effective to build), a change in the perception of 'problems' like urban sprawl, and the rise of car ownership and commuter culture, the central government pursuit of this form of housing ceased for 60 years after Gordon Wilson Flats and the Upper Greys Avenue Flats were built. This type of housing was still viewed by town planners as an alternative to inner city housing shortages, but the lead on this was taken up by local authorities and private developers. For example, the Freeman's Bay development undertaken by Auckland City Council in 1960-67 and over a dozen large-scale developments carried out by the WCC between 1955 and 1985 took over the provision of high-density rental flats from central government. WCC's Hanson Court Flats (1963-68), Central Park Flats (1964-70), Newtown Park Flats (1965-78), Arlington Apartments (1971-84), and Berkeley Dallard Apartments (1971/5-80) all include high-rise tower blocks.¹⁰⁵

A number of purpose-built flats recognised for their outstanding heritage significance were built as private residential developments. Courtville in Auckland (List Nos. 2624 and 4487, Category 1 historic places) is recognised for its very early date (1914-15 & 1919), architectural styling and townscape impact, whilst the Dorset Street Flats in Christchurch (1956-57, List No. 7804) are acclaimed as one of the 'most important domestic buildings built in New Zealand in the second half of the twentieth century'.¹⁰⁶ The Anscombe Flats (List No. 1333) and former Braemar Flats (List No. 1341) in Wellington, the Devonport Flats in New Plymouth (List No. 890), and the Berrisville Flats (List No. 554) and Cintra Flats (List No. 564) in Auckland, all Category 2 historic places, are architecturally designed examples of a residential typology that historically only ever found minority support within the overall housing supply in New Zealand, but which is growing in popularity as a solution to present

¹⁰⁴ Kainga Ora Homes and Communities, 'Working Together', <https://kaingaora.govt.nz/developments-and-programmes/what-were-building/greys-ave/working-together/>, accessed 1 July 2020

¹⁰⁵ Heritage Consultancy Services, 'Wellington City Council Housing Upgrade Project – Historic Heritage Assessment Project', Hamilton 30 June 2010. The George Porter Tower, the high-rise component of the Arlington development, was demolished in mid-2020.

¹⁰⁶ 'Dorset Street Flats', Heritage New Zealand, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7804>, accessed 5 August 2020.

housing needs.¹⁰⁷ The scale and form of the Gordon Wilson Flats was a forerunner to two privately constructed high-rise flats built further along The Terrace in the 1960s: the 13-storey Herbert Gardens, completed in 1965, and the 18-storey Jellicoe Towers, completed in 1968.

The two-level, maisonette plan form, which is a distinctive feature of the Gordon Wilson Flats (and the Upper Grey's Avenue Flats before they were demolished), is not common in New Zealand apartment buildings but can be found in Christchurch's Maisonettes in Bealey Avenue (1939-41), the Hazel Court Flats in Mt Victoria, Wellington (1954-56), and at Freeman's Bay.¹⁰⁸ Early criticism of the open stair leading to the upper floor of the maisonettes in the Gordon Wilson Flats offers one reason why the plan form was not more widely used for central and local government rental flats, although it was noted to be more economical.¹⁰⁹ Maisonette configuration is being considered anew in present housing developments, suggesting that its relatively rare employment in the Gordon Wilson Flats was somewhat progressive rather than being a dead-end design scheme.

The McLean Flats have a commemorative aspect in that the name references the previous landowners and a family with notable historic associations with the city and the nation. The Gordon Wilson (Memorial) Flats was named in Gordon Wilson's honour but not built as a memorial per se. The flats are similar to the Berhampore Centennial Flats in that respect. More comparable are the Anscombe Flats (List No. 1333) in Oriental Parade, which were designed and named by architect Edmund Anscombe in 1937.¹¹⁰ The Michael Fowler Centre and George Porter Tower (now demolished) are other Wellington buildings that reference notable local architects in their names. However the dedication of the Gordon Wilson Flats to the architect, who had a major influence on New Zealand's state housing scheme and a particular interest in Modernist multi-storey high-density apartment blocks of this type, is a particularly fitting commemoration.

¹⁰⁷ In the private housing market, over 80% of New Zealanders were resident in stand-alone houses in 2001, with another 10% living in a flat or townhouse joined to one other. Only 6% were resident in accommodation comprising three or more flats, townhouses or apartments joined together; a reduction from almost 8% in 1991. In 2001 1.2% of households were in privately-owned dwellings occupied buildings of three or more storeys: http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz/wbos/Index.aspx?_ga=2.229886680.55410007.1596402388-211300780.1596170261, accessed 3 August 2020

¹⁰⁸ 'Heritage item number 620', Heritage Assessment, Christchurch City Council, <https://districtplan.ccc.govt.nz/Images/DistrictPlanImages/Statement%20of%20Significance/Central%20City/HID%20620.pdf>; accessed 5 August 2020; 'Hazel Court Apartment Building and Garages', Wellington City Council, <http://wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/buildings/301-450/426-hazel-court-apartment-building>, accessed 5 August 2020; 'History and Photos', Freemans Park, <https://freemanspark.co.nz/the-history-of-freemans-park/>, accessed 5 August 2020

¹⁰⁹ The timber framing within each maisonette design meant that only every second floor needed to be of reinforced concrete, and reduced the number of elevator stops and galleries by half. Julia Gatley and Gina Hochstein, 'Like Gordon Wilson, Minus the Heritage Protection: Auckland's Upper Grey's Avenue Flats, 1954-1959', p.194

¹¹⁰ 'Anscombe Flats', Wellington City Council, <http://wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/buildings/151-300/241-anscombe-flats>, accessed 5 August 2020

Conclusion

The McLean Flats and the Gordon Wilson Flats are part of the lineage of mid-century government Modernist architecture, and government-provided rental housing in New Zealand, particularly in regard to the provision of high- and medium-density typologies in Auckland and Wellington. The McLean Flats represents a further stage in the development of a higher-density housing model that was initiated with the Berhampore Flats and continued with the Dixon Street Flats. The Gordon Wilson Flats, like the Upper Grey's Avenue Flats in Auckland, represent the post-war development of two existing state housing apartment sites with modified designs consistent with changing tastes in Modernist architecture brought about by construction delays. It made use of technological advances in building techniques to economise with construction costs, and its large scale and rectilinear facade, communicating the maisonette configuration, made a bold statement in presence. With the demolition of the Upper Greys Avenue Flats in January 2020 the Gordon Wilson Flats are now the only surviving example of a late 1950s high-rise in New Zealand's history of state housing provision.

Construction Professionals

Gordon Wilson (Architect)

Francis Gordon Wilson (1900-59) was born in Perth, Australia, and emigrated to New Zealand with his family in 1903. His father Frank was also an architect.¹¹¹ Wilson the younger, who was known as Gordon, served articles with Wellington architect William Page and then studied at the School of Architecture in Auckland. Wilson spent fourteen years in the office of leading inter-war architectural practice Gummer and Ford, in which stripped classicism moderated the emerging influence of European Modernism and seismic-resistant construction methods were devised using reinforced concrete.¹¹² In 1936 Wilson left the firm to take up the role of chief architect within the DHC, where he had ultimate responsibility for the design of the Berhampore, Dixon Street, and McLean Flats. Wilson was a founding member of the Architectural Centre in 1946 and contributed to the development of New Zealand architectural and town planning discourse through his publications and talks. Wilson became assistant government architect in 1948 and then held the position of government architect from 1952, in which role he had oversight of major projects including the Gordon Wilson Flats and Upper Greys Avenue Flats; departmental buildings the Bledisloe State

¹¹¹ Gatley, 'Wilson, Francis Gordon'. See also, Martin, Lewis E., *Built for Us – The Work of Government and Colonial Architects, 1860s to 1960s*, pp.178-179.

¹¹² Gatley, 'Going Up', p. 146

Building, and Bowen State Building; and the Otago University School of Dentistry and the School of Engineering Building at the University of Canterbury, until his untimely death on 23 February 1959.¹¹³

Fred Newman (Architect)

Frederick Newman (Friedrich Neumann, 1900-64) was one of a number of émigré architects employed by Wilson in the DHC.¹¹⁴ Born in Vienna, Austria and trained in Vienna and Paris, France Newman worked in Russia in the 1930s before emigrating to New Zealand in early 1939. He worked in a number of government ministries, including the DHC from 1939 until 1947, until his death. Newman was lead architect under Gordon Wilson when the McLean Flats were designed and built; he is also credited with the design of the Symonds Street Flats (1945-47) and was appointed Housing Architect to the Ministry of Works in 1956, during which he redesigned the appearance of state housing and produced designs for multi-unit flats such as Star Flats.¹¹⁵

Jack Wight (Architect)

Jack Fraser Wight (1920 - 1993) BArch, ANZIA was a sectional architect in the Architectural Division of the Ministry of Works, Head Office, in the 1950s with his first employment dating back to 1939. Wight appears to have been responsible for leading the technical design of the Gordon Wilson Memorial Flats.¹¹⁶

W Angus Limited (McLean Flats builder)

Downers and Company Limited (Gordon Wilson Flats builder)

McKenzie Thomson Hoskins Limited (Gordon Wilson Flats builder)

Construction Materials

McLean Flats: Reinforced concrete, timber, glass.

Gordon Wilson Flats: Reinforced fairface concrete shear walls, structural steel, vitreous enamelled metal balcony panels, brick, glass, timber joinery and flooring (tawa and rimu).¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Greenish, F.E., 'Obituary – Francis Gordon Wilson (F.), A.R.I.B.A.', *Journal of the NZIA*, Vol. 26, No. 2, March 1959, pp. 55-59

¹¹⁴ Peter Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, Auckland, 1997, p. 143

¹¹⁵ Leach, 'Public Service: Social Factors in the Architecture of F.H. Newman', pp. 109-130

¹¹⁶ Multi Unit Flats - the Terrace,' file note, 19 July 1957, 'Housing - flats: official opening general' AEFM 19224 W1552 HD1W1552, 19, file 1/19/0 pt 2, Archives New Zealand, Wellington. Sectional architects were below the Assistant Government Architect and District Architect level, but were usually above 'Senior Architect' depending on their location and their placement on pay scales.

¹¹⁷ Letter from J. Blake-Kelly to Messrs Downer & Co. Limited re flooring timber, 29 July 1957, 'Accommodation: McLean Estate Multi-Storey Flats, The Terrace, Wellington', AAQB-W3950-889-Box520, Archives New Zealand, Wellington

Key Physical Dates

1943-44	Construction of McLean Flats (MF)
1948, 1954, 1964	Asphalt roof repairs (MF)
1957-59	Construction of Gordon Wilson Flats (GWF)
Early 1960s?	Modernisation of rooftop laundry; bathrooms upgraded; crib (retaining) wall at rear of site filled with concrete (GWF)
1966	Hot water heating system replaced (GWF)
1967	Television aerial affixed to roof (GWF)
(Post-1964)	Accelerograph equipment removed (GWF)
1978	Incinerator chimney replaced (GWF)
1994	Fire safety improvements undertaken (GWF)
(Pre-1995)	Balconies enclosed and flower boxes removed (MF)
2011	Repairs and maintenance; including replacement of stairwell windows, roof membrane and railings (GWF) ¹¹⁸

Uses

Accommodation [Complex of flats] (Former)

Vacant [Vacant]

2.3. Chattels

There are no chattels included in this List entry.

2.4. Sources

Sources Available and Accessed

A range of primary and secondary sources document the design and construction of the Gordon Wilson Flats, whereas material relating specifically to the McLean Flats is scarce. There is a substantial body of source material relating to the development and implementation of the government's state housing scheme initiated in the mid-1930s, particularly Julia Gatley's body of work, and a number of heritage assessments of the Gordon Wilson Flats have been produced over the last five years as the future of the building has been the subject of planning and court hearings. A history of apartment buildings in New Zealand has yet to be written.

¹¹⁸ Wellington City Council Archives, 00078-22708

Further Reading

Davis, Kenneth John, "A liberal turn of mind": the architectural work of F. Gordon Wilson, 1936-1959, A cultural analysis', B. Arch. research report, Victoria University of Wellington, 1987.

Gatley, Julia, 'For Modern Living – Government Blocks of Flats', John Wilson, ed., *Zeal and Crusade – The Modern Movement in Wellington*, Te Waihora Press, Christchurch, 1996, pp. 53-60.

Gatley, Julia, 'Going Up Rather Than Out – State Rental Flats in New Zealand 1935-1949', Brookes, Barbara, ed., *At Home in New Zealand – History, Houses, People*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2000, pp. 140-154.

Julia Gatley, 'Labour Takes Command: A History and Analysis of State Rental Flats in New Zealand, 1935-49', MArch thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1997

Gatley, Julia, 'The heritage identification of modern public housing: the New Zealand example', *The Journal of Architecture*, Vol. 15, No. 5, pp. 683-96; Routledge, London, 2010.

Schrader, Ben, *We Call it Home – A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, Reed Publishing Limited, Wellington, 2005.

3. SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT¹¹⁹

3.1. Section 66 (1) Assessment

This place has been assessed for, and found to possess, architectural, historical, and technological significance or value. It is considered that this place qualifies as part of New Zealand's historic and cultural heritage.

Architectural Significance or Value

The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats are significant examples of New Zealand Modernist architecture, which is evident in the external treatment, plan form and functionalism of both buildings. The buildings retain high levels of authenticity and integrity, with only minor alterations to the exterior and interior of each building; most notably the enclosure of the open porches on the north elevation of the McLean Flats. While McLean Flats follows the 1930s European Modernist approach evident in the Berhampore Flats and the Dixon Street Flats, Gordon Wilson Flats, as would be expected given its 1950s pedigree, adopts the rectilinear simplicity of International Style Modernism of the post-war era, its maisonette configuration plainly readable in its facade. Both buildings clearly embody the progressive idealism of the government's housing department as well as the government's official architectural style at mid-century, and together demonstrate that they were informed by the latest thinking in European Modernism. They are held in esteem by members of New Zealand's architectural heritage community because they exemplify the progressive policies and design practices of central government in supplying social housing in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Historical Significance or Value

The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats have historical significance for their association with the programme of state housing provision which became a mainstay of mid-twentieth century government policy, initiated by the first Labour government in 1935. Although not prevalent in the context of the state housing building programme, these types of high-density residential buildings demonstrate the Department of Housing Construction's interest in a range of residential options to meet differing housing needs in various locations around the country, and in this instance as a response to Wellington's population growth. The Gordon Wilson Flats is now the only remaining example of a state block of high-rise flats

¹¹⁹ For the relevant sections of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 see Appendix 4: Significance Assessment Information.

from the 1950s, and represents a turning point in the government's experimentation with this typology of housing. This type of building paved the way for subsequent local government housing developments in New Zealand's larger cities, altering ideas and expectations about what constituted inner-city living.

The McLean Flats have a commemorative aspect in that the name references the previous landowners and a family with notable historic associations with the city and the nation. Likewise, the Gordon Wilson Flats was named in honour of the long-standing and important Government Architect.

Technological Significance or Value

Gordon Wilson Flats have technological significance as the site of innovative and important seismic data collection equipment and testing, which provided information on building performance in the quest for developing better ways of construction in earthquake-prone New Zealand. The Gordon Wilson Flats' piling system has technological significance because it was reportedly the first use in New Zealand of the technique of fixing piles to bedrock, by pre-drilling holes to varying lengths to fill with reinforcement, aggregate and then with wet mixed sand and cement, to deal with the challenges of a hillside site in a seismic location.

3.2. Section 66 (3) Assessment

This place was assessed against the Section 66(3) criteria and found to qualify under the following criteria a, b, e, g, h, j and k. The assessment concludes that this place should be listed as a Category 1 historic place.

- (a) The extent to which the place reflects important or representative aspects of New Zealand history

The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats reflect the important history of social housing provision in New Zealand, an aspect that has influenced our culture and identity. The two buildings authentically represent central government's experimental approach to housing design throughout the twentieth century, both in terms of style, plan form and building technology, and schemes of increased density. The Gordon Wilson Flats, in particular, is the only remaining example in New Zealand of late 1950s high-rise state housing, and as such is of outstanding significance for its ability to reflect that chapter in New Zealand's history. It is also thought to have been New Zealand's first comprehensively instrumented building, an

innovation championed at the time of being of national importance for its potential to inform the country's seismic engineering industry.

(b) The association of the place with events, persons, or ideas of importance in New Zealand history

The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats are directly associated with the principles and philosophy of the social welfare state as it was developed by the first Labour government and continued post-war by the first National government as they responded to housing and materials shortages. They directly represent the Department of Housing Construction's adoption of mid-century Modernist architectural principles, under the direction of influential architect Gordon Wilson, who became the Government Architect and was later commemorated in the naming of one of the buildings. Wilson and Fred Newman (architect of the McLean Flats) both served as heads of the Housing department, and both had a particular appreciation for the relationship between Modern architecture and progressive political and social ideals. McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats have special significance as representatives of the important culture of state housing in New Zealand and as physical expressions from different decades of the longstanding and competing ideas about what good quality housing looks like.

(e) The community association with, or public esteem for the place

The Gordon Wilson Flats are highly esteemed by members of the architectural heritage community, represented by the Architectural Centre, DOCOMOMO NZ and others, as repeatedly demonstrated through submission and hearing processes, articles, presentations and other advocacy for the building's retention. The 2017 Environment Court decision, which confirmed the Gordon Wilson Flats' heritage significance as successfully presented by many experts from this community, was pivotal in raising public awareness of the building's heritage values and promoting wider appreciation of Modernist architecture.

(g) The technical accomplishment, value, or design of the place

The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats demonstrate contemporary earthquake-resistant construction methods and materials. The Gordon Wilson Flats are particularly notable for the piling system used to mitigate the challenges of the site (fixing piles to bedrock was reportedly a New Zealand first, subsequently widely adopted), and the installation of strain gauges and accelerographs in the building to provide information about regional earthquakes and their impact on building performance.

The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats are both exemplars of the influence of distinct veins of Modernism on twentieth-century New Zealand architecture. With the McLean Flats, the solidity of the smooth, planar wall surfaces contrasting with voids created by the window openings, and originally the open porches, coupled with the distinctive façade curve further emphasised by cantilevered brise-soleils are characteristics of the elegant Modernist architectural ideals first explored in New Zealand in the 1930s. In contrast, the scale and architectural articulation of the Gordon Wilson Flats situates it as a benchmark Modern work in New Zealand as it evolved following World War Two. Its prominent, rational, gridded front elevation facing out over the city, against the backdrop of lush bush, was as important a monument of mid-century International Style Modernism in the Wellington cityscape as the new commercial edifices rising in the CBD, such as Massey House. The contrast of the transparency of the glazed stairwell on the south end and the striking form of the nearly independent lift shaft on the north demonstrate not just a capable handling of Modernism, but a sophisticated and creative expression of the design mode.

(h) The symbolic or commemorative value of the place

Both buildings have some commemorative value that is embodied in their names. The McLean Flats commemorate the site's previous landowners and acknowledge the McLean family's contribution to New Zealand history. The Gordon Wilson Flats has special commemorative significance as a relatively rare memorial to an architect, being named in honour of the Government Architect who oversaw the design of both buildings and served a key role in public service for over twenty years, shaping New Zealand's state housing design since the 1930s. As high-density housing was a special interest of Gordon Wilson's, the Gordon Wilson Flats are a particularly apt building to be named in his honour.

(j) The importance of identifying rare types of historic places

The majority of social housing residences built by the New Zealand government since the first boom period of the 1930s have been in the form of single-unit detached houses, with forays into duplex or medium-density complexes. High-density tower blocks of flats account for a very small percentage of the overall number of state houses constructed, and were only ever built in our major cities. The Gordon Wilson Flats has special heritage values as the only remaining example of late-1950s high-rise state housing design in New Zealand. It is a rare physical-historical link to an uncommon aspect of the government's response to the policies, economics, design philosophies and social concerns of the 1950s.

(k) The extent to which the place forms part of a wider historical and cultural area
In tandem with the nearby Dixon Street Flats, the McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats are part of a historical and cultural area in inner-city Wellington that demonstrates the philosophy and implementation of mid-twentieth century state housing development in the capital city. The relationship of the buildings with examples of high- and medium-density social housing built by Wellington City Council in the near vicinity is also important as this context allows analysis of the ways that local government extended the exploration of housing models begun by central government.

Summary of Significance or Values

The McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats have special architectural and outstanding historical significance as two distinct examples of multi-storey state housing rental flats within a complex built by central government in the middle of the twentieth century. The situation of the two buildings from different decades on one site clearly represents the evolution of the European Modernist architectural approach adopted by the Department of Housing Construction in the 1940s and 1950s, united in their design by Gordon Wilson's oversight of government architectural design between 1936 and 1959. The buildings both have associations with architects who had a major impact on the design of social housing: Frederick Newman, who led the housing department in the 1960s, and Gordon Wilson, who is considered one of the country's most prominent, talented and influential architects. The Gordon Wilson Flats is a fitting memorial to Wilson and his outstanding contribution to New Zealand architecture, reflecting his particular interest in high-density housing and inner-city living as a way to address urban sprawl and ensure economical use of high-value land. The Gordon Wilson Flats has been the focus of considerable public debate about the heritage values of Modernist buildings over the last decade. It has galvanised the architectural community to publicly promote the values of Modernist architecture and demonstrate their esteem for the Gordon Wilson Flats as New Zealand's only remaining example of the government's particular 1950s response to housing issues, and the technological and architectural values of that period that it embodies.

4. APPENDICES

4.1. Appendix 1: Visual Identification Aids

Location Maps

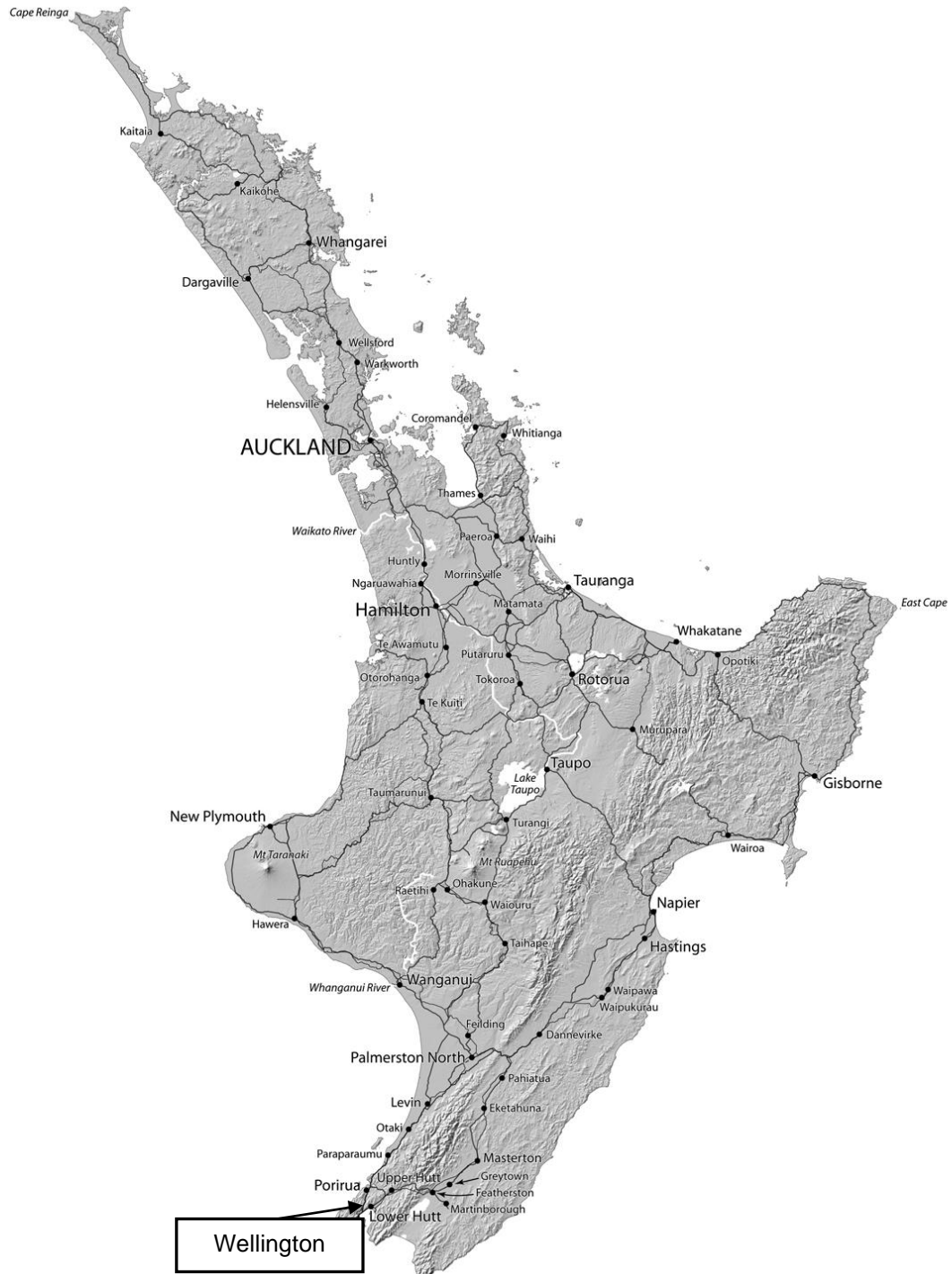




Image courtesy of Google Earth, accessed 5 August 2020. The location of McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats is indicated with the red arrow.

Map of Extent



Extent includes the land described as Lot 1 DP 363050 (RT 256859) and Lot 2 DP 363050 (RT 256860), Wellington Land District, and the buildings known as the McLean Flats and the Gordon Wilson Flats thereon.

Map courtesy of Wellington City Council. Extent indicated by yellow line.

Current Identifiers



RECORD OF TITLE
UNDER LAND TRANSFER ACT 2017
FREEHOLD
Search Copy



R. W. Muir
Registrar-General
of Land

Identifier **256859**
Land Registration District **Wellington**
Date Issued 16 October 2006

Prior References
WN217/295 WN329/168

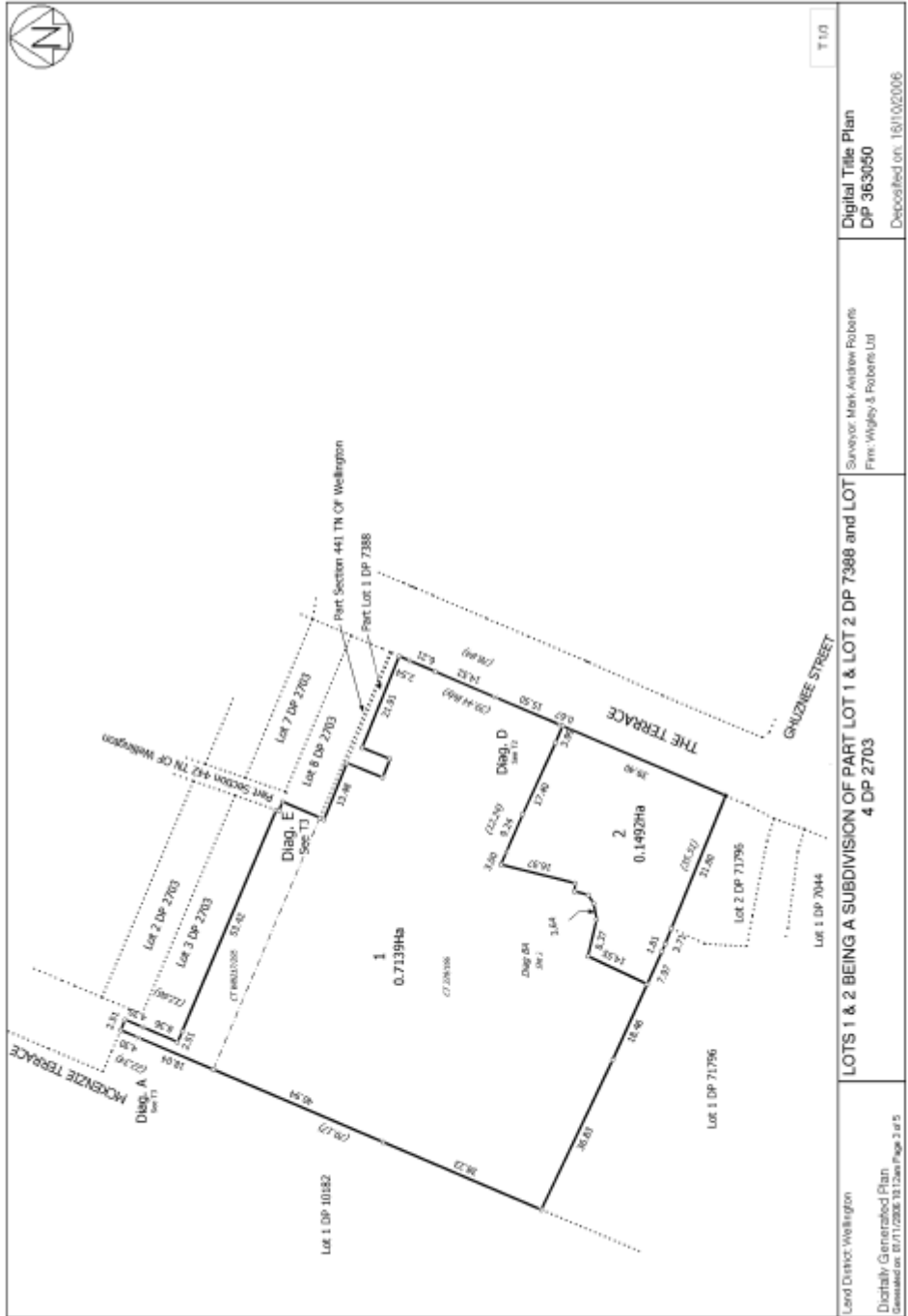
Estate Fee Simple
Area 7139 square metres more or less
Legal Description Lot 1 Deposited Plan 363050
Registered Owners
Victoria University of Wellington

Interests

Appurtenant hereto is a right of way (Affects part formerly in CT WN217/295)
Subject as to the said Right of way to conditions imposed by the Wellington City Council and set forth in an instrument deposited as Z201
Subject to a right (in gross) to lay and maintain an underground cable over part marked F on DP 363050 in favour of Capital Power Limited created by Transfer 216570 - 3.9.1932 at 11.08 am
541182 Partial Surrender of right of way - 17.10.1962 at 9.23 am
Subject to the Housing Act 1955
Subject to Part IVA Conservation Act 1987
Subject to Section 11 Crown Minerals Act 1991
Subject to a right of way and a right to drain water over part marked A, a pedestrian right of way over part marked B and a right to drain sewage and water over part marked C on DP 363050 created by Easement Instrument 7072198.2 - 16.10.2006 at 9:00 am
Appurtenant hereto is a right to drain water and convey gas created by Easement Instrument 7072198.2 - 16.10.2006 at 9:00 am
8327190.1 Certificate pursuant to section 115(2) of the Port Nicholson Block (Taranaki Whamui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika) Claims Settlement Act 2009 that the within land is RFR land as defined in section 92 and is subject to subpart 2 of Part 3 of the Act (which restricts disposal, including leasing of the land) - 29.10.2009 at 9:00 am
9860464.2 Encumbrance to Housing New Zealand Limited - 16.10.2014 at 10:09 am

Transaction ID 60960979
Client Reference bwagstaff001

Search Copy Dated 09/07/20 1:23 pm, Page 1 of 4
Register Only



Land District: Wellington Digitally Generated Plan Generated on: 18/11/2006 10:12am Page 3 of 5	LOTS 1 & 2 BEING A SUBDIVISION OF PART LOT 1 & LOT 2 DP 7398 and LOT 4 DP 2703	Surveyor: Mark Andrew Robins Firm: Higley & Robins Ltd	Digital Title Plan DP 363050 Deposited on: 18/10/2006
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**RECORD OF TITLE
UNDER LAND TRANSFER ACT 2017
FREEHOLD
Search Copy**




R.W. Muir
Registrar-General
of Land

Identifier 256860
Land Registration District Wellington
Date Issued 16 October 2006

Prior References
WN329/168

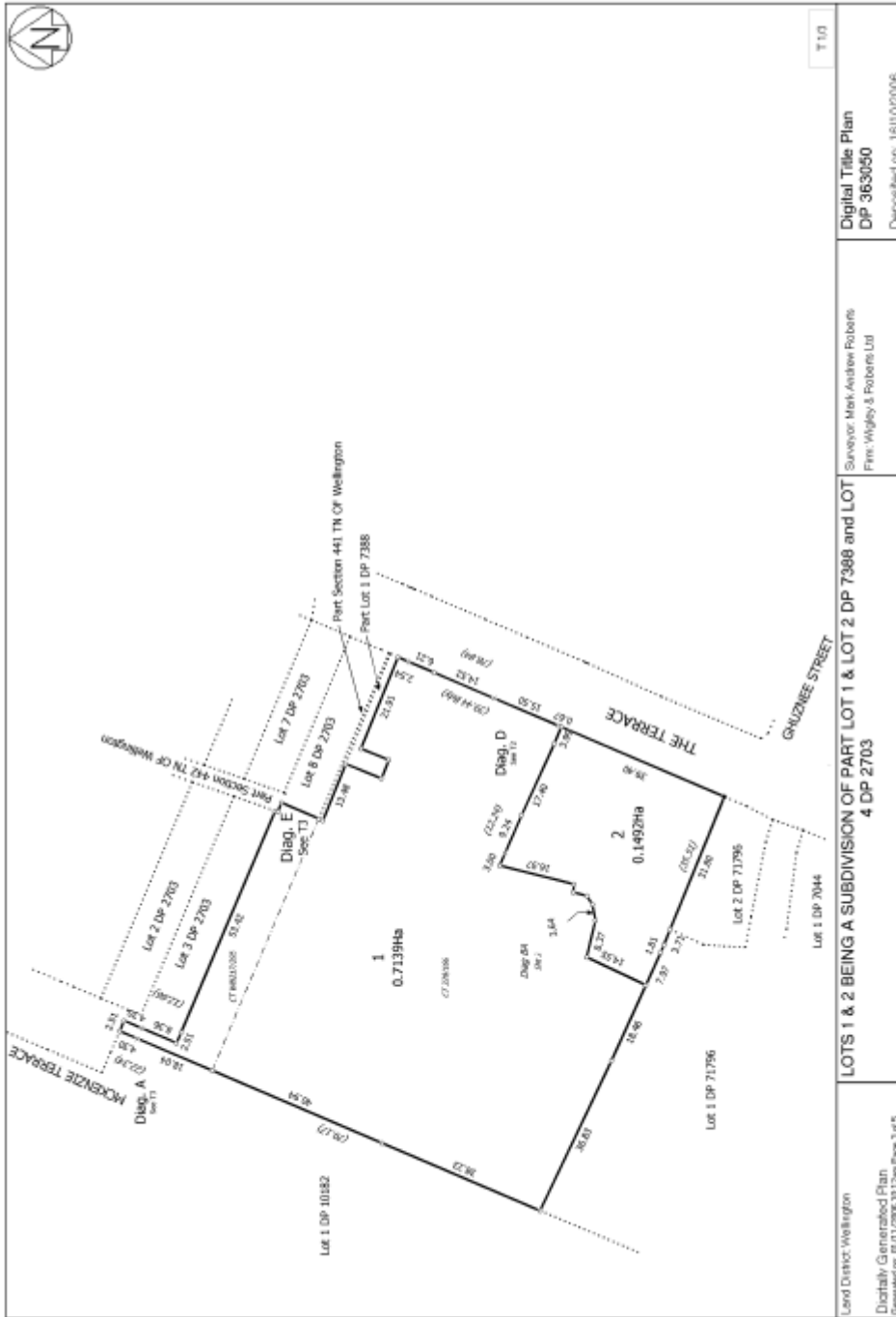
Estate Fee Simple
Area 1492 square metres more or less
Legal Description Lot 2 Deposited Plan 363050
Registered Owners
Victoria University of Wellington

Interests

216 Order in Council imposing Building Line Restriction
1880 Order in Council imposing a Building Line Restriction - 29.1.1941 at 3:00 pm
Subject to the Housing Act 1955
Subject to Part IVA Conservation Act 1987
Subject to Section 11 Crown Minerals Act 1991
Subject to a right to drain water and convey gas over parts marked D and E on DP 363050 created by Easement Instrument 7072198.2 - 16.10.2006 at 9:00 am
Appurtenant hereto is a right of way, a right to drain water and sewage and a pedestrian right of way created by Easement Instrument 7072198.2 - 16.10.2006 at 9:00 am
8327190.1 Certificate pursuant to section 115(2) of the Port Nicholson Block (Taranaki Whamui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika) Claims Settlement Act 2009 that the within land is RFR land as defined in section 92 and is subject to subpart 2 of Part 3 of the Act (which restricts disposal, including leasing of the land) - 29.10.2009 at 9:00 am

Transaction ID 60961043
Client Reference Inwgstiff001

Search Copy Dated 09/07/20 1:26 pm, Page 1 of 4
Register Only



T 1/0

Digital Title Plan
DP 363050
Deposited on: 16/10/2006

Surveyor: Mark Andrew Robens
Firm: Wigley & Robens Ltd

LOTS 1 & 2 BEING A SUBDIVISION OF PART LOT 1 & LOT 2 DP 7388 and LOT 4 DP 2703

Land District: Wellington
Digitally Generated Plan
Generated on: 20/11/2006 10:12am Page 2 of 5

4.2. Appendix 2: Visual Aids to Historical Information

Historical Plans

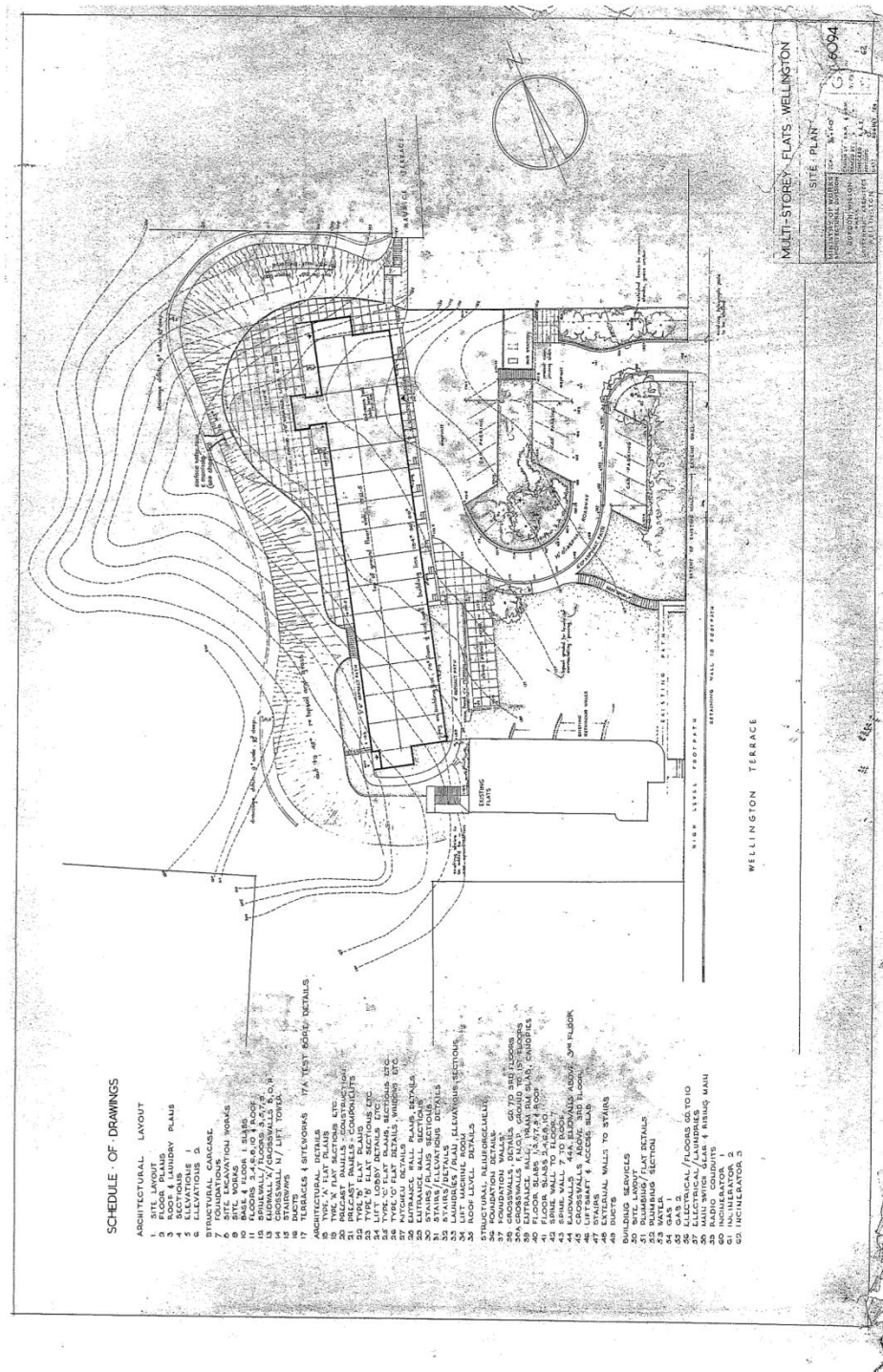


Figure 1: Site Plan and Schedule of Drawings, Gordon Wilson Flats; sourced from Archifact report, Appendix 3

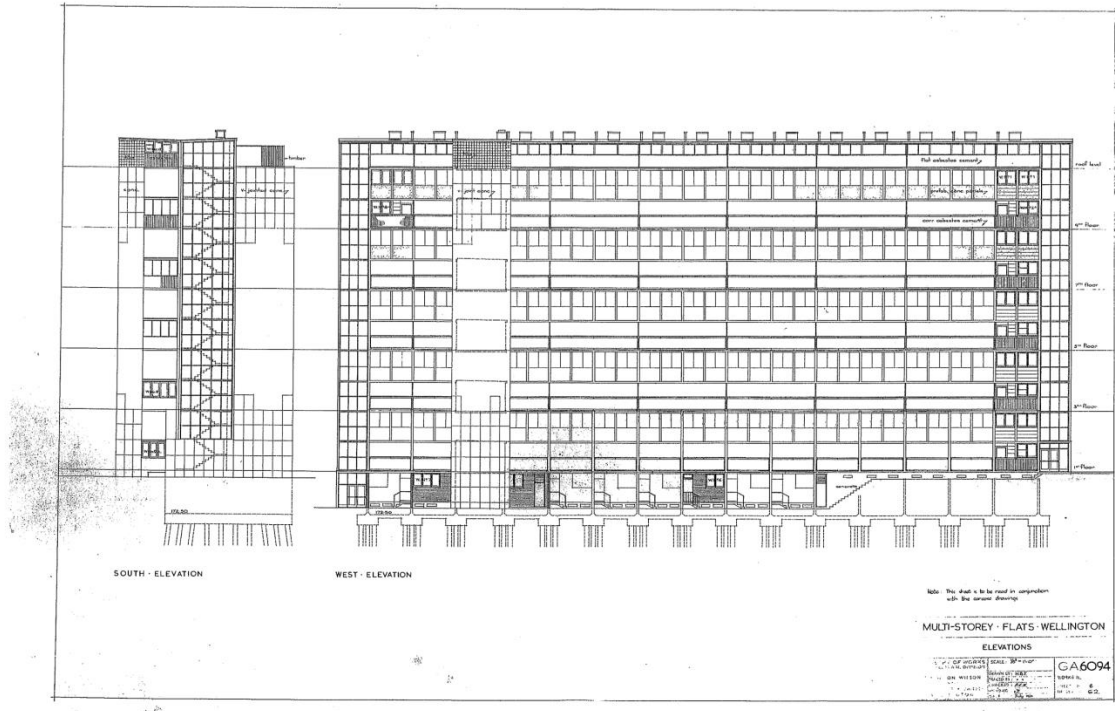


Figure 2: South and west elevations, Gordon Wilson Flats; sourced from Archifact report, Appendix 3.

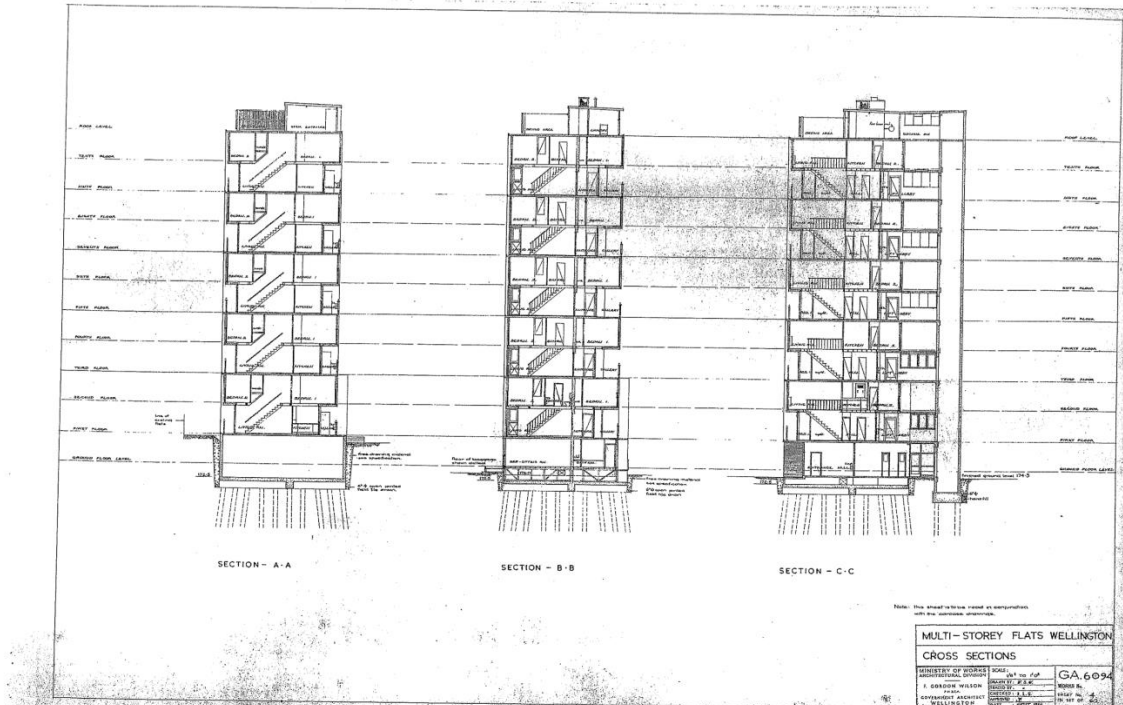


Figure 3: Sections, Gordon Wilson Flats; sourced from Archifact report, Appendix 3.

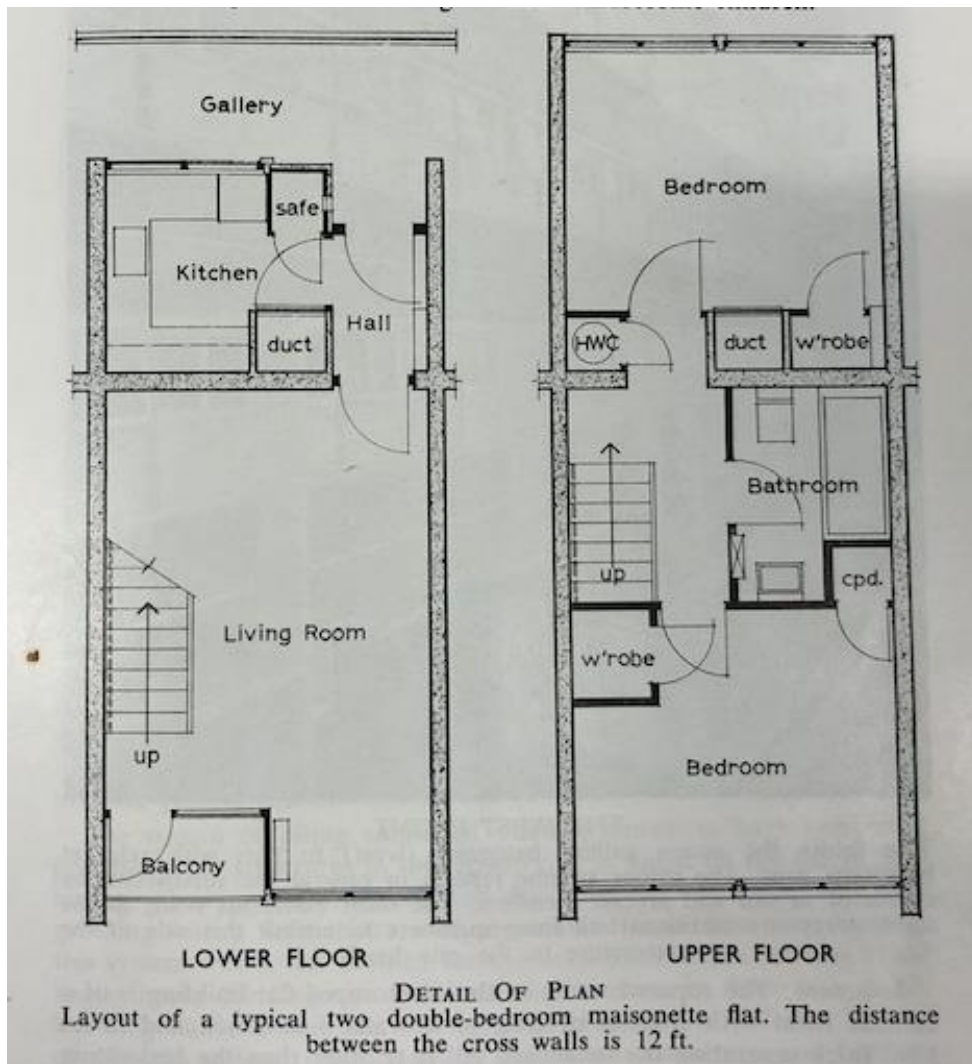


Figure 4: Floor plan of Gordon Wilson Flats maisonettes. Published in *Journal of the NZIA*, Vol. 28, February 1961, p. 3.

Historical Photographs



Figure 5: McLean Flats with earthworks for Gordon Wilson Flats, 1955. EP/1955/2247-F, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Note that the image shows the McLean Flats prior to the enclosure of their north-facing balconies.



Figure 6: [Gordon Wilson Flats], Construction of lift tower, 1958. EP/1958/1539-F, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.



Figure 7: Gordon Wilson Flats under construction, 4 February 1958. EP-Industry-Housing-State-02, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.



Figure 8: Gordon Wilson Flats, and the Mclean Flats, had a multi-coloured paint scheme in the late 1970s, inspired by a Dulux paint chart (pers comm. Chris Cochran, a colleague in the MOW office at the time, to Heritage New Zealand 3 September 2020). The image is reproduced from *New Zealand Architect*, issue no 5 1978, p. 29

4.3. Appendix 3: Visual Aids to Physical Information

Current Plans

N/A

Current Photographs of Place

Photographs: Blyss Wagstaff, Heritage New Zealand, 6 July 2020



Figure 9: McLean Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats from driveway.



Figure 10: Detail of east elevation of McLean Flats.



Figure 11: Rear (west) elevation showing stairwell and lift tower at northern end.



Figure 12: East elevation of Gordon Wilson Flats from roof deck of McLean Flats.



Figure 13: Gordon Wilson Flats' rooftop laundry facilities.



Figure 14: The view from a bedroom in Gordon Wilson Flats; the Dixon Street Flats are visible in the distance.



Figure 15: The upstairs of one of the maisonettes.

4.4. Appendix 4: Significance Assessment Information

Part 4 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014

Chattels or object or class of chattels or objects (Section 65(6))

Under Section 65(6) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, an entry on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero relating to a historic place may include any chattel or object or class of chattels or objects –

- a) Situated in or on that place; and
- b) Considered by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga to contribute to the significance of that place; and
- c) Proposed by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga for inclusion on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero.

Significance or value (Section 66(1))

Under Section 66(1) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga may enter any historic place or historic area on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero if the place possesses aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, technological, or traditional significance or value.

Category of historic place (Section 66(3))

Under Section 66(3) of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga may assign Category 1 status or Category 2 status to any historic place, having regard to any of the following criteria:

- a) The extent to which the place reflects important or representative aspects of New Zealand history
- b) The association of the place with events, persons, or ideas of importance in New Zealand history
- c) The potential of the place to provide knowledge of New Zealand history
- d) The importance of the place to tangata whenua
- e) The community association with, or public esteem for, the place
- f) The potential of the place for public education
- g) The technical accomplishment, value, or design of the place
- h) The symbolic or commemorative value of the place

- i) The importance of identifying historic places known to date from an early period of New Zealand settlement
- j) The importance of identifying rare types of historic places
- k) The extent to which the place forms part of a wider historical and cultural area

Additional criteria may be prescribed in regulations made under this Act for the purpose of assigning Category 1 or Category 2 status to a historic place, provided they are not inconsistent with the criteria set out in subsection (3)

Additional criteria may be prescribed in regulations made under this Act for entering historic places or historic areas of interest to Māori, wāhi tūpuna, wāhi tapu, or wāhi tapu areas on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero, provided they are not inconsistent with the criteria set out in subsection (3) or (5) or in regulations made under subsection (4).

NOTE: Category 1 historic places are 'places of special or outstanding historical or cultural heritage significance or value.' Category 2 historic places are 'places of historical or cultural heritage significance or value.'