

TIMARU DISTRICT COUNCIL
HISTORIC HERITAGE ITEM RECORD FORM

HERITAGE ITEM NAME former Atlas Chambers
ADDRESS 17 Beswick Street, Timaru
PHOTOGRAPH



(A McEwan, 9 July 2018)

FORMER DISTRICT PLAN ITEM NO. No. 26 **HNZ LIST NO. & CATEGORY** 2077 / 2
(at time of assessment)

LEGAL DESCRIPTION Lot 1 DP 2612

VALUATION NUMBER 2500072000A

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION 1909-10

**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER/
BUILDER** Dunning & Black, architects; P Foster, builder

STYLE Edwardian Free Style

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Two storey-building with rectangular footprint and gabled roof forms. Symmetrical façade with side entry, metal balustrading shielding basement area at street front, cornices between ground and first floors and above paired first floor windows. Upper cornice has dentil moulding. Pedimented parapet features crowning niche with engaged columns. First floor windows are casement and fanlight type with shallow arched heads and curving mullions. Decorative shield and swag carved panels beneath both windows. Shaped moulding over first floor windows with ornamental shield motif atop pier separating them. Building is three storeys at rear.

MATERIALS/STRUCTURE

Brick, ferro-concrete, Oamaru stone, metal roofing.

ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS

Façade painted and ground floor fenestration altered (date unknown).

SETTING

The building stands on the north side of Beswick Street, near its intersection with Stafford Street to the west. It occupies the full width of its narrow lot. The Royal Hotel (heritage item # 25) and the Grosvenor Hotel (heritage item # 23) are to the east along Beswick Street. The extent of scheduling is the land parcel on which the building is located.

HISTORY

William Evans set himself up in Timaru as a merchant in 1875, developing a disused foundry as premises for his coal, grain and timber business. Low grain prices in the late 1880s meant that Evans incurred losses on shipments of wheat, so he decided to start milling flour himself. Evans established the Atlas Roller Flour and Oatmeal Milling Company in 1888; he also had an interest in the Crown Roller Mills in Dunedin. Messrs Black & Dunning called tenders for a 'modern office building' for the Atlas Company in September 1909. Atlas Chambers was nearing completion by mid-April of the following year, with offices being advertised to let by late May. The building was designed to accommodate a restaurant or café in the basement, with offices above. Production of flour at the Atlas mill ceased in 1970. The office building continues to provide space for multiple tenancies and the Timaru Comedy Club opened in the basement in early 2018.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The former Atlas Chambers has historical and social significance as an Edwardian office building that is associated with the development of the local milling industry. The building is related historically to the former Evans Atlas Mill on Turnbull Street (heritage item # 42).

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The former Atlas Chambers has cultural value as a demonstration of the way of life of its former occupants and their clients or patrons.

ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

The former Atlas Chambers has architectural significance as the work of Messrs Black & Dunning, architects and civil engineers. The firm had their offices in Stafford Chambers (heritage item # 24) at the corner of Stafford and Beswick Streets. William Henry Dunning (1872-1933) was a Tasmanian-born architect who worked in South Africa before emigrating to New Zealand in 1908. In that year he joined William Black in practice before relocating to Dunedin in 1910 and becoming partners with C Fleming McDonald. McDonald and Dunning were awarded 9th place in the design competition for Parliament Buildings in 1911 and the National Bank in Princes Street, Dunedin is considered to be Dunning's most significant design. William Black's son Robert, a licensed surveyor and civil engineer, took up an office in Atlas Chambers in August 1910. The Edwardian Free Style of the façade, which is unusual on the context of contemporary Timaru commercial buildings, combines classical symmetry with Arts and Crafts decorative detailing.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

The former Atlas Chambers has technological and craftsmanship significance for its brick and reinforced concrete construction and Oamaru stone ornamental detailing. Philip Foster (1856-1938) was a local builder and contractor from 1896 until 1920, when he left for Wellington. Timaru engineering company Wallace & Cooper undertook the reinforced concrete work for the building.

CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The former Atlas Chambers has contextual significance as a notable historic feature within the Timaru town centre. The concentration of scheduled heritage items and historic character buildings lining Stafford Street, and in the vicinity of the port and railway station, gives Timaru's CBD streetscape its distinctive identity and sense of place. The building is featured in the Central Timaru Historic Walk, although its date in the walk brochure is incorrect.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

Although the building post-dates 1900 its site has potential archaeological significance arising out of the earlier development of the property. A building is shown on the site in the 1875 plan of Timaru (South Canterbury Museum).

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The former Atlas Chambers has overall heritage significance to Timaru and Timaru district as a whole. The building has historical and social significance for its association with the Atlas Flour Milling Company and the early 20th century commercial development of the town centre and cultural value as a demonstration of the way of life of its early occupants and their clients. The former Atlas Chambers has architectural significance for its distinctive Edwardian Free Style design by Messrs Dunning & Black and technological and craftsmanship significance for its brick construction and stone detailing. The former Atlas Chambers has contextual significance for the contribution it makes to the Timaru town centre streetscape and potential archaeological significance in view of the pre-1900 development of the site.

HERITAGE CATEGORY

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REFERENCES

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- *Lyttelton Times* 23 February 1891, p. 6.
- *Press* 15 February 1892, p. 6.
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- *Evening Star* 20 December 1927, p. 2; 7 March 1933, p. 6.
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- <http://sites.rootsweb.com/~nzlscant/Foster.htm>
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Extent of setting, 17 Beswick Street, Timaru.

