

TIMARU DISTRICT COUNCIL
HISTORIC HERITAGE ITEM RECORD FORM

HERITAGE ITEM NAME Oxford Buildings
ADDRESS 148 Stafford Street, Timaru

PHOTOGRAPH



(A McEwan, 9 July 2018)

FORMER DISTRICT PLAN ITEM NO. No. 47 **HNZ LIST No. & CATEGORY** 2058 / 2
(at time of assessment)

LEGAL DESCRIPTION Lot 2 DP 51949

VALUATION NUMBER 2500050501EE

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION 1924-25

**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER/
BUILDER** Messrs Turnbull & Rule, architects; A Kennedy, builder

STYLE Inter-war classical

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Four storey-building with rectangular footprint and hipped roof. Principal elevations overlooking George and Stafford Streets have symmetrical, centre-and-ends compositions with longer elevation on Stafford Street (east elevation). Chamfered corner, suspended veranda with clerestory windows above. Rusticated end bays topped by arch motif with oversize voussoirs and keystone. Parapet and fanlights have inset Union Jack motifs. External fire escape stairs and balconies on Stafford Street elevation; balcony at third floor of George Street (north) elevation.

MATERIALS/STRUCTURE

Reinforced concrete.

ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS

Unknown, if any.

SETTING

The building stands on the south-west corner at the intersection of Stafford and George Streets. Cains Terrace is directly to the north. There are a number of other heritage buildings in the vicinity, including the former Landing Service building (heritage item # 44), Meehan's building (heritage item # 20), the Theatre Royal (heritage item # 46), the Excelsior Hotel, and the former National Bank (heritage item # 45). The extent of scheduling is the land parcel on which the building is located.

HISTORY

The Oxford Buildings were erected for DC Turnbull & Co. in 1924-25. Initially it was intended to erect a three-storey building at 'Gabites' corner' but the decision was made in late 1924 to build to four storeys. The commercial building was the tallest in Timaru at the time of its construction and it replaced an earlier structure built by Richard Turnbull that was occupied by Arthur Gabites, a drapery and clothing company established as Gabites and Plante in 1872. Arthur Gabites took possession of the corner shop in the new building, with three other retailers in the smaller shops along Stafford Street. The local branch of the *Press* and the *Weekly Press* moved into an office on the first floor in April 1927. Government Life Insurance purchased the building in the early 1950s, having earlier had rooms in Hay's Buildings further north along Stafford Street. The building has changed hands but remains in commercial use today.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Buildings have historical and social significance for their association with DC Turnbull & Co. and the inter-war commercial development of the Timaru town centre. David Clarkson and Richard Turnbull were early Timaru merchants and two generations of the Turnbull family were responsible for erecting three buildings in all at the corner of Stafford and George Streets, the third being Oxford Buildings.

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Buildings have cultural value as a demonstration of the way of life of the building's tenants and their customers, especially those associated with the drapery business Arthur Gabites, after whom the street corner was known for many years.

ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Buildings have architectural significance as the work of Timaru architectural practice, Turnbull and Rule. Timaru-born James Turnbull (1864-1947) trained in Melbourne and then established a practice in Timaru in c.1895. The son of Richard Turnbull (1826-90), a prominent Timaru businessman and politician, and the brother of David Clarkson Turnbull (1868-1951), who founded the merchant company DC Turnbull & Co. in 1894, Turnbull also designed Job Brown's Beehive Stores (heritage item #117, 1901-2) in Temuka, Chalmers Church (heritage item #38, 1903-4) and a large number of Timaru houses. Turnbull went into partnership with Percy Watts Rule in c.1920, after which time Rule was the principal designer in the firm. The firm designed the Timaru Boys' High School War Memorial Library (1924, heritage item # 16), Temuka Library (heritage item #118, 1926-27), St James' Anglican Church at Franz Josef (1928-31) and the 1930 additions to the Bank Street Methodist Church (heritage item # 51). Rule was awarded a Gold Medal from the NZ Institute of Architects for his design of the Surgical Wing at Timaru Hospital (1936-40) in 1939.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Buildings have technological and craftsmanship value for their reinforced concrete construction and classical facade detailing.

CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Buildings have 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 principal CBD thoroughfare its distinctive identity and sense of place.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

Although the building post-dates 1900 its site may have potential archaeological significance relating to its earlier development and use. The first building on the site pre-dated the 1868 fire that destroyed a large number of buildings in central Timaru.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Buildings have overall heritage significance to Timaru and Timaru district as a whole. The buildings have historical and social significance for their association with DC Turnbull & Co., Arthur Gabites and the interwar development of the town centre, and cultural value as a demonstration of the way of life of their former tenants and their customers. The Oxford Buildings have architectural significance as the work of successful Timaru architects Turnbull & Rule and technological and craftsmanship value for their reinforced concrete construction and ornamental classical detailing. The Oxford Buildings have contextual significance for the contribution they make to the Timaru town centre streetscape and the building's site may have potential archaeological significance in view of the colonial use of the property.

HERITAGE CATEGORY

B

REFERENCES

- *Temuka Leader* 15 March 1927, p. 4.
- *Press* 8 May 1924, p. 4; 24 December 1924, p. 2; 12 March 1926, p. 7; 11 April 1927, p. 4.
- *Timaru Herald* 11 May 1866, p. 6; 11 June 1914, p. 3; 31 October 2014 (available online).
- <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/2058>
- <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/2055>
- <https://www.kpirothschild.co.nz/properties/ref/148/>
- <http://www.timarucivictrust.co.nz/activities/the-oxford-building>
- <https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/1898>



Extent of setting, 148 Stafford Street, Timaru.