



# CONSERVATION REPORT

## The WHANGANUI REPERTORY THEATRE

ADDRESS: 4 Ridgway Street, Whanganui Old Town  
DATE PREPARED: 3 December 2021  
REVISED: /  
PREPARED FOR: The Committee, Whanganui Repertory Theatre  
Incorporated  
PREPARED BY: Drawingroom Architecture & Interiors in association with  
BPL Group & Fire Engineering Services Ltd.  
LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Pt Section 548, Town of Wanganui

COVER IMAGE: Repertory Theatre Building, 2021



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Note re Spelling	
<b>2. HISTORICAL OUTLINE</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 Early Development of Whanganui	2
2.2 The Site: Development of Pukenuamu	3
2.4 History of current Repertory Theatre building as a Public Library	5
2.5 History of the building as the Repertory Theatre	14
<b>3. ARCHITECTURAL, HERITAGE AND CONDITION ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING BUILDING BY ELEMENT / SPACE</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1 Exterior	14
3.2 Interior	25
3.3 Summary of condition\	31
3.4 Summary of heritage values	31
<b>6. LEGAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES / FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>33</b>
6.1 Ownership	
6.2 Site and boundaries	33
6.3 Archaeological and Resource Consent process	33
6.4 National and Local Legislative Influences	33
<b>7.0 ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>8. CONSULTANT REPORTS</b>	<b>35</b>
8.1 BPL Group Ltd Structural Engineering Report	
8.2 Fire Engineering Services Ltd Fire Engineering & Accessibility Report	
<b>9. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>10. APPENDICES</b>	
10.1: ICOMOS New Zealand Charter 2010	
10.2 Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga Criteria for Assessing Historic Heritage Values in the (Whanganui) District	
10.3 Excerpt from Maxwell Smart Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library	
10.4: Architectural drawings of Existing Library and Repertory Theatre by Drawingroom	
10.5: Whanganui District Council Heritage Inventory entry (Item 348)	
10.6: List of Sources	
10.7 Brief document by Drawingroom.	
10.7: Proposed Drawings by Drawingroom.	

## 1.00 INTRODUCTION

Sited at the base of prominent Pukenamu, or 'Sandfly Hill', Whanganui's Repertory Theatre began life as the town library, built in 1882. Additional wings were added to the East and West around the turn of the century, and when the library relocated in 1932, the building was put into use as a theatre. Major renovations undertaken in 1957 removed almost all character features. The Repertory Theatre Incorporated still lease the building and use it to stage theatre for public audiences.

We have sought relevant historical materials relating to this building, its site, design, architectural significance, changes, and the significant roles it has played. These are detailed in Appendix 10.5. Note many of the documents we sourced included quotations, dates and information which were themselves not adequately sourced.

Section 3 contains a detailed appraisal of the current state of the building using the methods outlined by ICOMOS (Refer Appendices for the NZ Charter), including images of areas needing repair or upgrade (also refer Consultants' reports). We subsequently define spaces and elements within this, that are particularly significant or parts of the building that may be less important.

Additionally the final sections (7-9) set out conclusions and recommendations relating to condition.

The process above aims to identify any significant building components, factors, relative values, constraints and threats, any significant fittings, and guiding themes or narratives. This prioritisation can be used to guide the design and decision making process around incorporation of required changes to preserve the building and ensure its functionality and relevance in decades to come. Care has been taken in design of the proposed plans to incorporate this process along with other necessary strands.

This Report includes a redrawn plan of the original library layout, and subsequent iterations now lost, thus describing well the various expansions the building has undergone, largely due to change of use, since it was first constructed. These are included as figures in the report. The appended current existing drawings were provided to the consultant team to aid their assessment process.

As a complement to the heritage and condition assessments, we also set out information on the governing legal, archaeological and planning structures framing any new work.

Section 7 of this document (Refer appended drawings) looks forward, to introduce architectural solutions which would incorporate much needed conservation, maintenance, modernisation and compliance to ensure the on-going use of the building, in a manner that remains sensitive to the building's core heritage values and which would allow continued use as a modern theatrical venue.

### 1.1 A NOTE RE SPELLING

Although the city was called Wanganui from 1854, in February 2009, the New Zealand Geographic Board recommended the spelling be changed to "Whanganui", thus conveying the meaning of the place name. In December 2009, the NZ Government decided that, while either spelling was acceptable, Crown agencies would use the Whanganui spelling. In keeping with this, we have decided to use the 2009 version except where shown as part of a historical or other quotation.

### 1.2 A NOTE RE DRAWINGROOM

Where 'Drawingroom' is used in this Report to denote the author's architectural practice, this is a shortening of 'Drawingroom Architecture & Interiors', the Trading name of Inside Outside Architecture Limited, a registered company in New Zealand, of which Elinor Harvey McDouall is Director.



Figure 1: A view of Petre or Wanganui (Whanganui), looking upriver, in September 1841, just after its establishment.

## 2.0 HISTORICAL OUTLINE

### 2.1 Early Development of Whanganui

Whanganui, (refer Introduction for note on spelling), meaning 'big bay', or 'big harbour', is an area rich in Māori history and occupation dating from the 1400s when Kupe, voyaging from Hawaii, is said to have found landfall at Castlecliff ('Kaihau o Kupe'). Four centuries later, it also became one of New Zealand's first colonial settlements and one of New Zealand's oldest cities.

Based around the mouth of the Whanganui River, the local Tupoho iwi are part of Te Ātihaunui-a-Papārangī (Wanganui river Iwi), a group occupying the length of the awa from coast to the source in the mountains of the Central Plateau. Tupoho are traditionally based at Putiki Pa, in the current Marae location in modern day Putiki, and their rohe included the coastline and lower reaches of the Whanganui River.

In the early 1800's Europeans began to arrive.

The New Zealand Company began negotiation to purchase land in Whanganui in 1840 after their first purchase, Wellington, began to crowd its natural boundaries. From 1841, settlers from across the UK began to arrive. Initially settler access to Whanganui could only be gained, often by foot, from Wellington.

An agreement to purchase 80,000 acres was officially signed in 1848 by Putiki Māori, although some prominent chiefs later described this document as 'of no significance'. The land purchased was on the Northern bank of the river, opposite Putiki Pa, where the township had already been established, and at its centre was Pukenui, a prominent elevated hill site offering commanding views. The Company named their new town Petre, and settlement continued apace.

Tensions between Māori and settlers grew. The British military arrived on 13 December 1846 to defend the Wanganui township's 2 - 300 colonial



residents against some 3-4,000 local Māori. Two stockades, the Rutland and York, were built to defend the settlers, the Rutland on Pukenu, renamed Queens Park.

The Crown repurchased the land in the district including the Reserve in May 1848. In 1852 the town became part of the Province of Wellington which took over control of all reserves not under direct control of the central government.

1848 to 1860 were years of consolidation for the town. New businesses were established, roads were formed and trade through the port increased. One of the country's oldest schools, Wanganui Collegiate, was founded in 1854, and the *Wanganui Chronicle* newspaper in 1856. Catholics and Presbyterians established a presence. Between 1848 and 1858 the town's European population rose from 170 to 1,324.

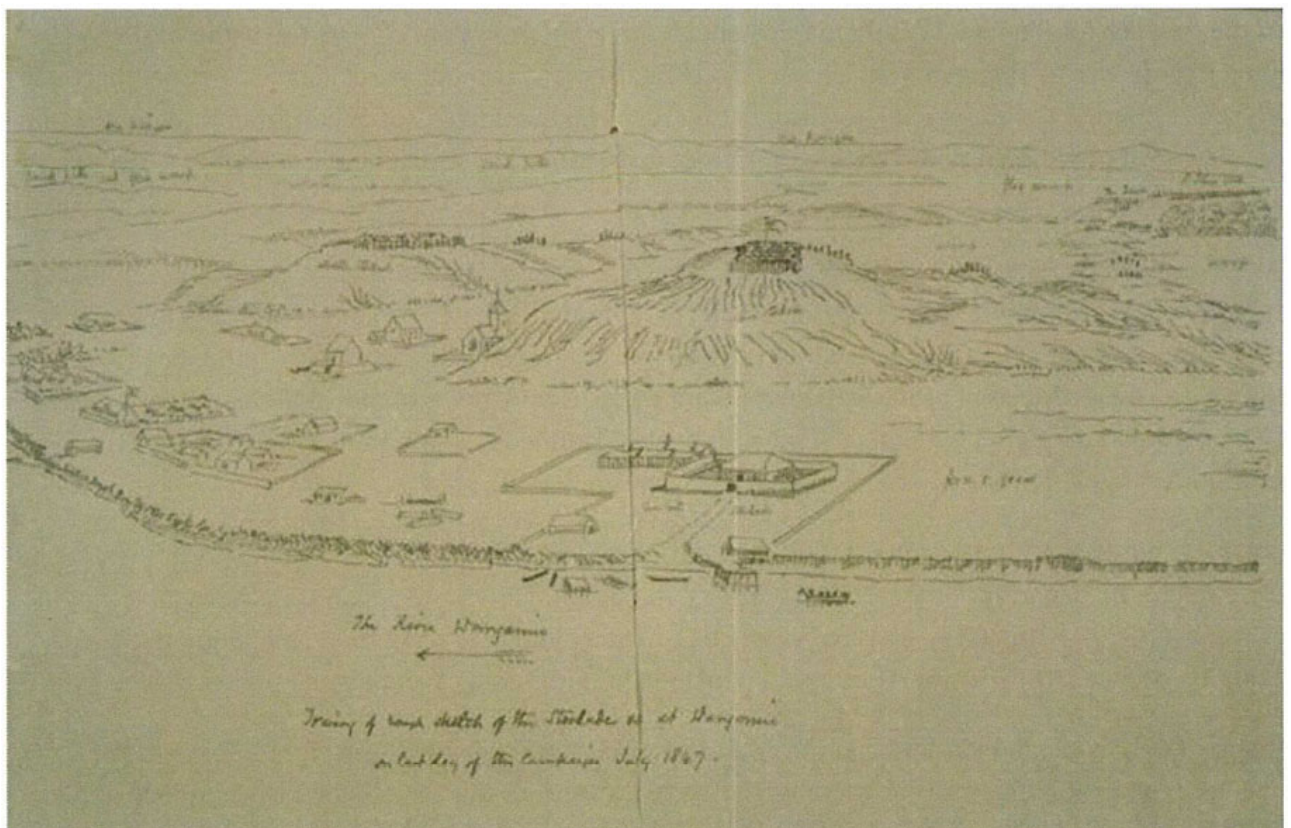
Wanganui expanded in the 1870s with the European settlement clearing pastures of its hinterland along the coast to the north-west, increasing from the 1880s to 1910s as settlement spread to the inland hill country and the Waimarino plain. In 1871 a town bridge was

built, followed six years later by a railway bridge at Aramoho. Wanganui was linked by rail to both New Plymouth and Wellington by 1886. The town was incorporated as a Borough on 1 February 1872, with William Hogg Watt as the first Mayor. Wanganui became a fully fledged regional centre - freezing works, woolen mills, phosphate works and wool stores were established in the town.

The Pakeha settlers who arrived in Wanganui brought with them their Victorian cultural practices, including a love for the arts. Groups such as the Art society, Brass band, choral, operatic, and Repertory theatre group formed at this time and are still functioning today. Our building, initially a library, constructed in 1882, was part of this consolidation.

## 2.2 The Site: Development of Pukenu

Pukenu, a ridge formed of a sand dune stretching from the bank behind the current theatre across to the base of St. John's Hill, has often been assumed to be a historic pa site, although archaeological diggings have found little evidence of this, including site investigations in 2019 years for the extended Sarjeant Gallery



**Figure 2:** Thomas Bernard Collinson. 1822-1902. The River Wanganui. Tracing of rough sketch of the stockades at Wanganui on last day of the campaign July 1847. Source / Alexander Turnbull Library

(Source: Archaeology North, Michael Taylor & Annetta Sutton). The archaeologists note that during the early Māori occupation of the area it may have comprised of shifting sand and very little vegetation, perhaps making it unsuitable for occupation other than spasmodically. Middens have shown there was occupation around the base facing the river, including in the area where the Repertory Theatre is now sited. Occupation here may have included a pa site, hence there is scope for confusion over whether residential occupation as a Pa, may have been 'on' or 'at' Pukenamu.

Queens' Park was at the centre of the Petre area and an excellent strategic location because of its expansive views, hence it was the chosen site for the Rutland stockade which was built under the management of Thomas Bernard Collinson, Royal Engineer, later Major General. It was occupied by the British military from 1846 until 1870.

Pukenamu has engendered longstanding and intimate cultural association for Māori. Although no residential evidence has been located, its defensive value would have been undisputable and it still contains at least one, possibly two, urupa (burial grounds). Its central elevated location overlooks the Whanganui River and region as far as the coast and the Central Plateau, obvious attributes as a strategic and defensible site through the centuries.

Pukenamu Queen's Park was first mapped as a public reserve by the New Zealand Company in 1842. The significance of the reserve, its location, and its vistas were commented on by Samuel King in the Wellington newspapers in May 1843, with the proposal "But suppose, Mr. Editor, you accompany me to the Queen's Park - our Acropolis – from its position in the very center of the town and its command of ocean, earth, and sky, must be a place of frequent resort."



Figure 3: Map of Queens Park from the Whanganui District Council's Reserve Management Plan 2018: Repertory site not included.



Figure 3: Further map from the same document: Repertory site and others at Eastern corner to the right of the curved road in Queens Park, are omitted.



The first military garrison included several amateur artists such as Commissariat Officer W. Tyrone Power, who wrote and illustrated a book in 1849 entitled “Sketches in New Zealand with Pen and Ink”, (Refer figure 2). The right hand mound is Pukenamu showing the Stockade on top. The Repertory Theatre building now sits at the base of this hill facing the river, in a relatively direct line down from where the stockade is drawn. Around the Stockade, cottages were built for married servicemen.

A gallows was constructed here for the hanging of four Māori suspects of the Gilfillan Massacre of 1847. In the 1930's skeletons thought to be these, were exhumed during road construction at the top of Pukenamu. They were then crushed and deposited in an unmarked hole (Refer Appendices). It is presumed that there will be other small urupa (cemeteries) on Pukenamu also, dating from earlier times. It is possible this hole is now on the upper part of the Repertory site.

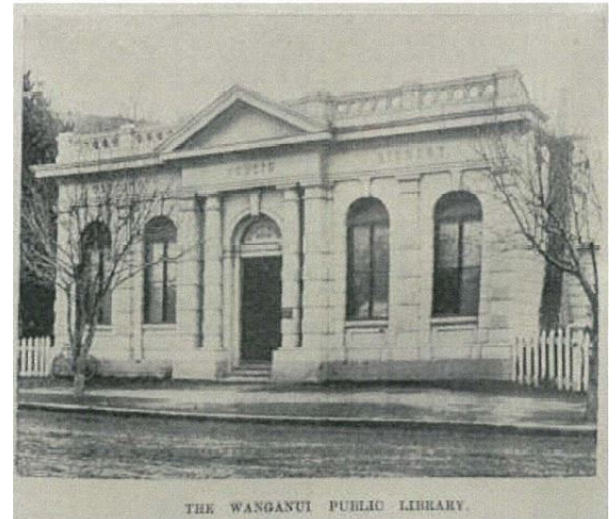
From the 1870s the reserve was increasingly used as a place for educational, cultural and military purposes. Schools occupied the North East section from 1880 until 1977, and a Volunteer Drill Hall opened in 1879.

In 1880 the purpose of the Reserve was deemed to be municipal purposes only, but later that same year, they were changed again to recreation. A parcel of land fronting Bell Street was also taken from the Reserve for government purposes; including a new Police Station and a gift of land for a Masonic Hall (Whanganui Chronicle, 1880). Government then gifted a section of the Reserve fronting Ridgway Street for a public library which opened in 1882. This building was the first iteration of what is now known as the Repertory Theatre. Archaeology North suggest that part of the base of Pukenamu was a quarry site - it is wondered if perhaps this was the site gifted, due to it already being flat. This will be apparent when site investigations are undertaken.

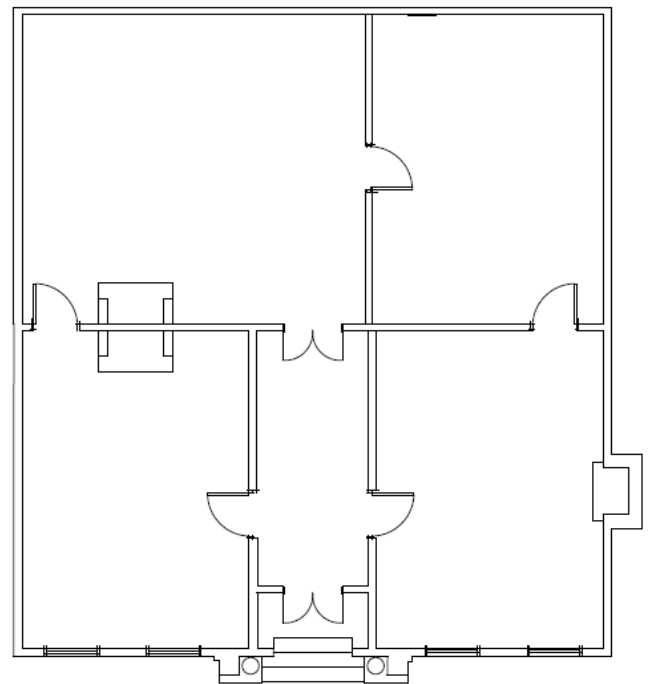
The Māori name Pukenamu was added to the official moniker, and Pukenamu Queens Park is still a public park, classified as a ‘local purpose reserve (site for municipal buildings)’. The 1882 library, now the Repertory Theatre, which sits at the base of the mound, is no longer part of the gazette reserve and is owned by the Whanganui District Council and leased by Whanganui Repertory Theatre Incorporated.

## 2.4 HISTORY OF THE REPERTORY THEATRE AS A PUBLIC LIBRARY

Newspapers from England were in great demand even though they could be several months old on arrival. A public meeting was held to form a committee to discuss ways and means of raising



*Figure 3:* Original library building, built 1882.



*Figure 4:* Original Plan of Library, Redrawn by Drawingroom for clarity. Not to scale.

funds to build a standalone, purpose built, free public reading room. Initially access to these papers were obtained on a paid basis from retailer Mr T. Davis, and they could be read from his shop. Only private residential libraries existed at the time, fulfilling the requirements of a small number



*Figure 5:* Front (Ridgway Street) Elevation of original library building

of wealthy families. It was thought that people, especially young men new to the town, would need mental stimulation, and something to keep them from temptation and out of the many grog shops and hotel bars whose reputation was questionable.

A major development came in 1871 when the local friendly society The Odd Fellows formed a Whanganui chapter, erecting their first lodge building on the corner of Bell & Ridgway Streets in 1874. They agreed to allow the ground floor of the building to be occupied rent free by the library. The space consisted of 3 rooms: a free reading room, a circulating library and a reference room. Lodge member Mr. Joseph W. Robinsons donated his valuable personal book collection to form the foundation and various local retail proprietors furnished newspapers free of charge.

Great jollification marked the opening night of



**Figure 6,7:** Interior of original library building

what was known as the Odd Fellows Library in 1874. Brother John Ballance delivered the inaugural address and said quite poetically: "Wanganui being without anything which could be called in any sense a public library, it was

determined that the lower part of the building should be devoted to the purpose without fee or reward for space. In this sense it is public. The reading room will be open without charge and the profits of the lending department will be appropriated to the purchase of books ..... though the beginning may be small, the rapidity of growth is certain and in a little time the inestimable treasures of a well stocked library will be accessible to all".

Ballance headed the Library and incorporated it into the Wanganui Public Library. He also became the first director and first paid subscriber. The first defacto librarian, a Mr Watkins, also the town Sherriff, was employed in 1877.

As the library expanded, the committee established a building fund, started with a government donation of \$40 which allowed fundraising through the sale of debentures. The Borough Council then pledged an annual grant of \$50 per year which they increased over the years until in 1914 when it was \$350.

In 1879 the Government approached the library directors with a proposed gift of a quarter acre of land at the base of the Queens Park Reserve. Tenders were called in 1880. Finally a new building, designed by John Robinson Wright, was erected by James Tawse, Builder, on the corner of Ridgway Street and opened on December 12 1882.

The new building was built in timber, in the Neoclassical style, the prevalent style across most of the Western world from the mid 18th into the 19th centuries for civic architecture. The style was strongly adhered to in the US and Latin America for the same reasons it was here - to imbue a 'gravitas' to the colonial milieu that may have been felt to be lacking.

Neoclassicism was a reaction to the extravagance and ornamentation of earlier styles Baroque and Rococo. It celebrated the ideals of classical architecture, favouring the 'authenticity' and simplicity of pared back geometric form, symmetry and the limited ornamentation seen in Greek and Roman architecture. This classical architectural vocabulary strongly featured columns, pediments and friezes, with typically flat facades free of the projecting ornamentation typical of those previous styles. Neoclassicists also sought grandeur of scale and to recreate the grand spatial volumes of that classical era.





*Figure 8:* Old Government House, Auckland, 1856. Note the rather flamboyant decorative mock stone ‘lintels’ over the windows as also seen on our building’s façade, as well as at the corners.



*Figure 9:* Old Government House, Wellington, 1876: Façade detail showing mock stonework ashlar corner detail in timber.



*Figure 10:* Close up picture of the existing central portal of the Repertory (once library) building showing the preserved mouldings and dentils. Note the lack of decoration within the triangle of the pediment that was typical of neoclassical detailing.

The library building is an example of the 'Block' style of neoclassical architecture, having a simple rectangular plan, a flat roof behind the street facing parapet which features horizontal bands of façade decoration and a central feature, in this case the entry doorway portal flanked by doric columns and featuring simple mouldings and dentil decoration. Refer photo of the central portal, fig.



**Figure 11:** Existing Repertory Theatre façade showing the central 'keystone' detail over the front windows and the timber tongue & groove façade cladding cut to resemble stonework detailing. To the left is one of the reconstructed timber columns apparently installed during renovations in the late 1950's replacing the original curved ones.

10.

The new building was tall enough to be a two storeyed structure, but only supported a single floor - aligning with the neoclassical favour of the unity of an enlarged single storey, reflecting ancient structures such as Greece's Parthenon which stands enormously tall but is presented as a single storeyed temple. One unified storey was considered more imposing than multiple stories. The library's oversized arched windows and its imposing double coffered front door were also part of creating a stately and grand impression.

Although in Europe, civic buildings of this nature would have been constructed of stone, here in

New Zealand timber was by far the most available and cost effective material. The vast majority of buildings were and still are constructed of timber, along with façade decoration, but in a manner so as to emulate stone. Projecting wooden blocks were installed to emulate the look of ashlar cornerstones, and above window and other openings, projecting blocks resemble the decorative keystones and lintel pieces in stonework archway construction. Although in a stone building, these were required features made decorative, they were of course not required in timber construction, so were purely façade decorations serving to give the impression of stonework. Both the Auckland Government House (1853) (Fig. 8), and the subsequent, much larger Wellington example, built in 1876 (Fig. 9), just a few years prior to our subject, are well preserved examples of this.

The Whanganui library building façade is an example of this approach. The lintel, or 'keystone' decorations seen over the windows at Old Government House in Wellington are evident here atop the arched windows, and it is still possible to see the chiseled diagonal lines added into the timber tongue & groove horizontal cladding to mimic the lines of cut stone standing out in relief (fig.11). The building was painted in a pale white/grey colour to mimic stone.

Exterior ornamentation on the façade was kept to a minimum in accordance with neoclassical principles - even interior of the 'pointed' Greek style portal above the main entrance was devoid of any sculpture in relief. There was also a simple frieze defined with horizontal mouldings, which appears to have contained the words 'Wanganui Public Library'. Attractive carved balustrading that ran across the top of the front parapet of the building was a strong visual feature, as were the coffered panels on the double entrance doors. Today one of these coffered doorsets, which we assume was the internal doorset, due to its slightly smaller size, sits in one of the arched window openings to the right of the current entry. The original front door leaves are reputed to still be onsite at the Repertory Theatre.

The library's original front façade (refer fig. 3) shows two inset pilasters flanking the entranceway with very basic doric style capitals. Round columns, presumably turned timber, stand on either side of the entranceway, while elsewhere on the façade the columns are square fronted. All feature simple capitals and horizontal



banding of relief resembling stonework detail.

The rear elevation of that portion of the building still stands, although the window openings have been built over to suit the theatre use. The side walls were removed to accommodate the later extensions. We assume they were also built of timber. The main entranceway with the pilasters

It is clear from the photo in figure 13 that in the late 18th century the roof of the library was a single gable format running East to West.

The AGM minutes of 1895 detail a ladies' lavatory added in that year and a chimney in 1889 to the librarian's room. The intention was that the new



**Figure 12:** Photo from the South bank of the river, 1884 - 1886, by William James Harding (taken from a glass negative in the Alexander Turnbull Library at this link <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22820347> )



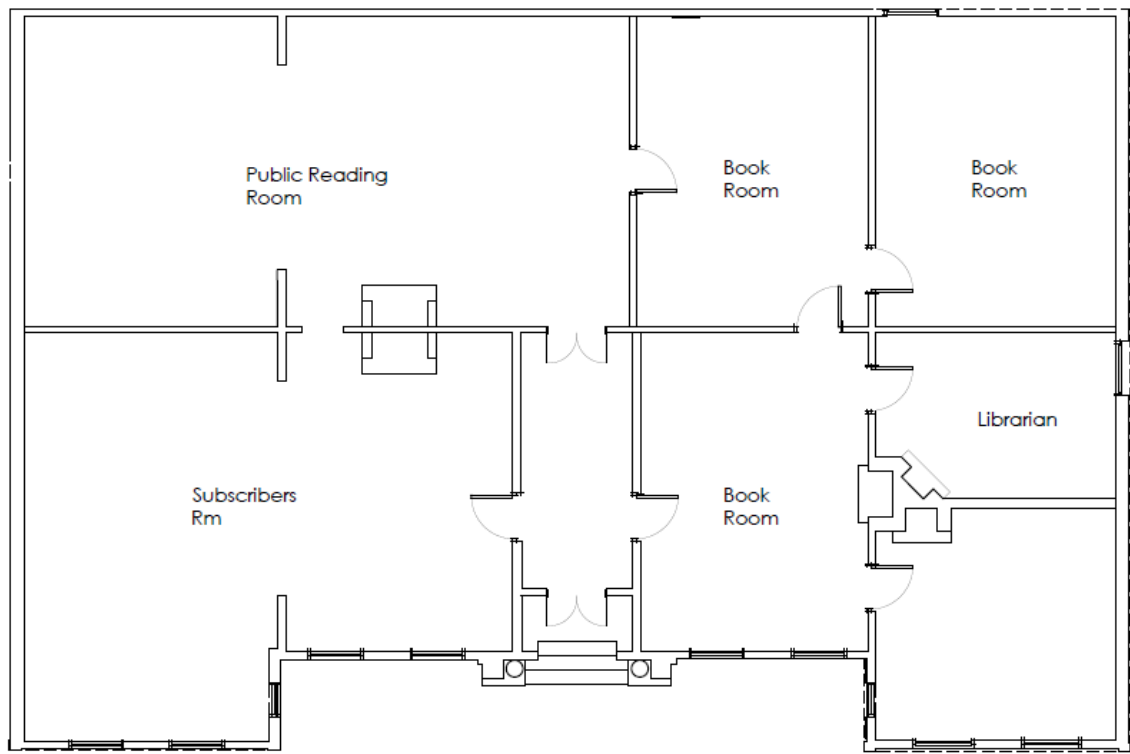
**Figure 13:** Close up of the above photo showing the Library in the centre. The horizontal banding is evident.

and spherical columns was lost along with the balustrade, during renovations in 1957.

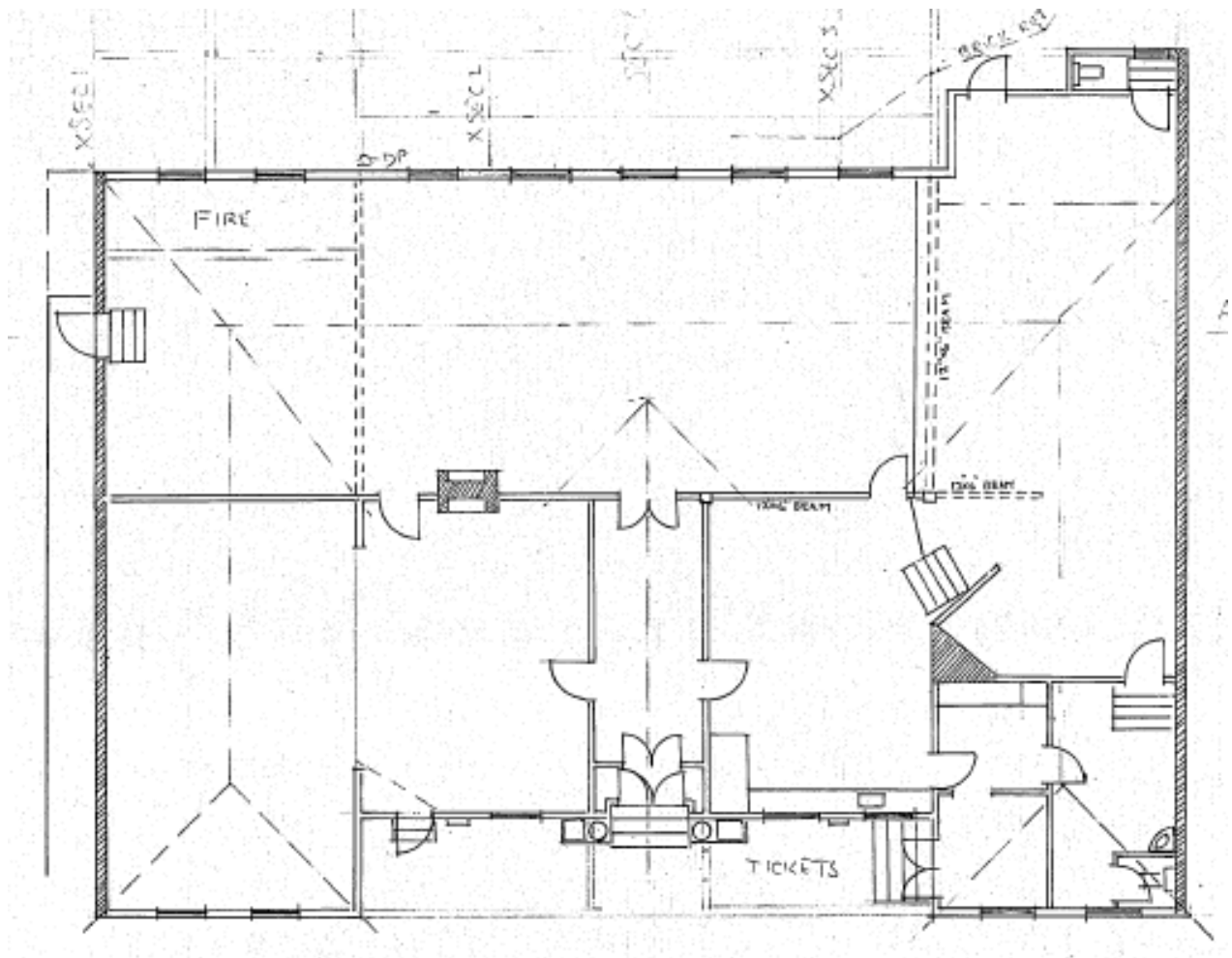
public library could eventually become a site for both a public museum and an art gallery with the addition of two wings and possibly a second storey to the rear, at a later date. To this end many fundraising efforts occurred, buoyed by large bequests.

In 1894 (*disputably 1898, refer Pettigrew & Southcome, 'The End of the Wooden Shop', AHA: Architectural History Aotearoa, 2007, and also suggested to be in 1902, 'The Libraries of Whanganui', by Athol Kirk*) the West wing was added with a £500 bequest from the eminent Alexander family. The new wing was designed by local architect Alfred Atkins, originally of Birmingham, who designed a large number of buildings in Whanganui, famously several local churches and Whanganui Girls College in 1905.

The facade of the new wing projected forward about a metre towards the street and was in no way a continuation of the neoclassical style of the earlier façade. The new wing was built in a much plainer, domestic style, with rusticated weatherboard cladding and without a parapet, instead with a hipped roof and spouting along the street frontage in the domestic style. Although no



*Figure 14:* Plan of Library with East and West wings, Redrawn by Drawingroom for clarity



*Figure 15:* Plan of original layout of Theatre with central entrance, circa 1933.

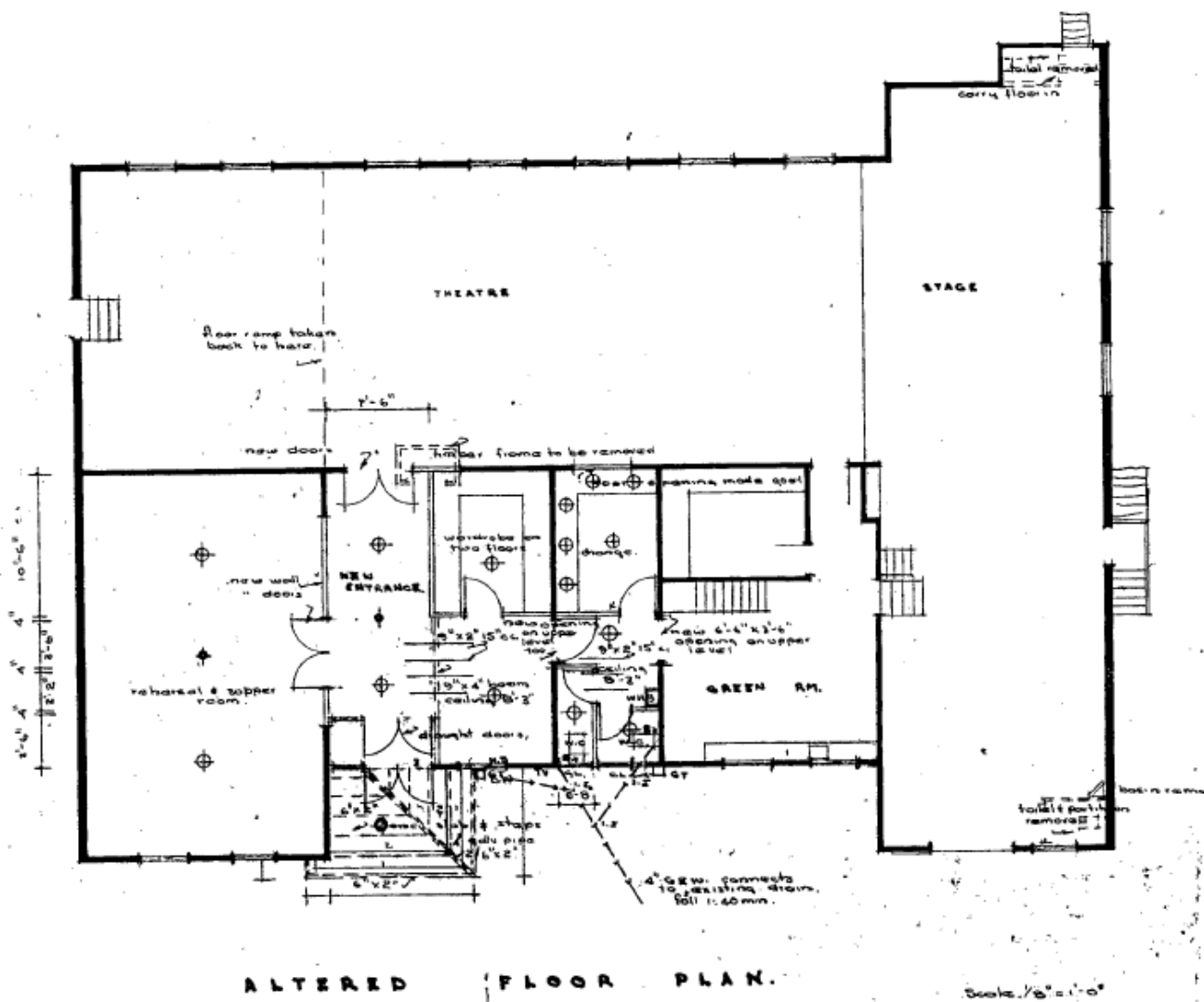


Figure 16: Floor plan of Theatre showing layout of the 1957 alternations.





**Figure 17:** Aerial photo by White's Aviation, 1933 showing the Repertory Theatre at bottom right with 3 gabled roofs.

information is forthcoming about why this was done, we suspect it will have been due to a waning of the influence of neoclassicism, coupled with budgetary reasons.

In 1904 a second planned wing to the East was able to be built after a bequest from Thomas Reid and family. This was also designed by Alfred Atkins, and was carried out in the same style to its' predecessor, both projecting further onto the footpath. See figure 10 for the layout of the library with the additional wings.

Both these additional wings featured solid double skin clay brick side boundary walls and parapets, following a change in building regulations in 1896 to stem damage to building stock from all too frequent fires (*Pettigrew & Southcombe, 2007*).

Probably at the time of the extensions, the original roof was changed to run in the opposite direction, parallel with the new roofs on the adjoining wings.

Another gabled roof form ran across the rear of the building, resulting in internal gutters. Refer fig.

The building spent next 50 years as a public library, Atkins having convinced the Museum committee that this building would be better housed in a new standalone building than as a second storey of the Library (*Pettigrew & Southcombe, 2007*).

The library continued to grow and was brought under the auspices of the local Council in 1918. A large bequest of £24,000 was received from Miss Alexander for a new museum and library, and it was deemed that a new combined building be constructed, however it was evident that a museum would require a different type of building than a library, and for 13 years discussions continued regarding site and typology. Eventually separate buildings were erected, and a new library on the top of Queens' Park was erected in 1932, now known as the Alexander Library.

## **2.5 THE BUILDING AS A REPERTORY THEATRE**

‘Repertory’ : “1; A company that presents several different plays, operas, or pieces usually alternately in the course of a season at one theater, or 2; a theater housing such a company”, Merriam Webster Dictionary

When the library relocated, the building was gifted to the Wanganui Repertory Theatre Society (*Historical Record of Wanganui. Vol 19 Nov 1988*), to be run as a working theatre. The society “set about turning the old storage area into a stage. The bulk room became an auditorium that seated 200...Horsehair filled tip up seats with iron frames were taken from the old Princess Theatre further down Ridgway Street. The current space only allowed for one dressing room. A curtain split the male and female sides. The ...inaugural production was on November 7<sup>th</sup> 1933 and it was London Wall. It was depression time and the public flocked (*Historical record, refer previous*) The plan in figure 12 (unspecified date, presumed circa 1933) shows these changes.

Although specialising in ‘serious drama’, the theatre also hosted musical performances and dance, all on a regular basis, attended by members of the public, and contributing strongly to the cultural life of Whanganui. Auditions and rehearsals were carried out at the theatre.

The Whanganui Museum archives and the Alexander Library each have a lively collection of playbills and memorabilia dating back through the catalogue of the Repertory’s offerings. The myriad props stored currently in the Mezzanine attest to the many and varied menu of dramatic offerings over the years.

By 1955 the building was 75 years old and in 1957 it was altered. The alterations were reputedly designed by notable architect Don Wilson, also a Repertory member, although we could not locate named plans. The amendments most notably involved shifting the entry from the centre of the original façade to the West, adding more extensive dressing and ‘greenroom’ areas for actors, and the addition of a mezzanine floor, which sat at the transom height of the front windows, and served as a storage space.

The proscenium arch was widened, supper room and projection box added, and the backstage area extended. The second phase would add a ticketing box office in the foyer downstairs and a mezzanine floor allowed for onsite prop and wardrobe storage. This building work was undertaken by Saunders & Griffin.

Don Wilson is highly regarded for his provincial modernist work through the 1950s and ’60’s, including Whanganui Museum and his own home in St. Johns’ Hill. He left for Chicago, USA in 1957, to pursue further study.

In 1980 the exits were upgraded and walls of the auditorium were fireproofed. Aside from minor amendments, this is the plan of the current building.

### 3.00 ARCHITECTURAL, HERITAGE AND CONDITION ASSESSMENT

Due to the extensions and alterations as discussed in previous sections, an assessment of what is original, what has been varied or altered during early or more recent extensions and renovations, is somewhat blurred. This Assessment has taken the view that the basic structure, plan and form of the building we see today dates from around 1904 following the completion of the 1904 east wing extension. It and the changes from the 1957 works constitute the Repertory Theatre building.

This section of the Report describes the heritage features of the Repertory Theatre building both internal and external and provides an assessment of the significance of these features, along with comments on their condition. The highest assessment is given to original features, especially those that cannot easily be replicated today should they be lost or altered, and areas of particular historic interest. Where alterations have been made or new features added, it has been noted whether these are complementary or intrusive.

The following codes are given with the heritage assessments:

Capital letters are used for structures, elevations and interior spaces as a whole with lower case letters used to assess individual elements that form part of each elevation and interior space.

A - exceptional heritage significance with original features intact.

B - considerable heritage significance; mainly original features with some alterations.

C - some heritage significance; a few original features.

D - little or no heritage significance.

X - intrusive elements; not original features.

### 3.1 BUILDING EXTERIOR HERITAGE & CONDITION ASSESSMENT

#### 3.1.1 ROOF

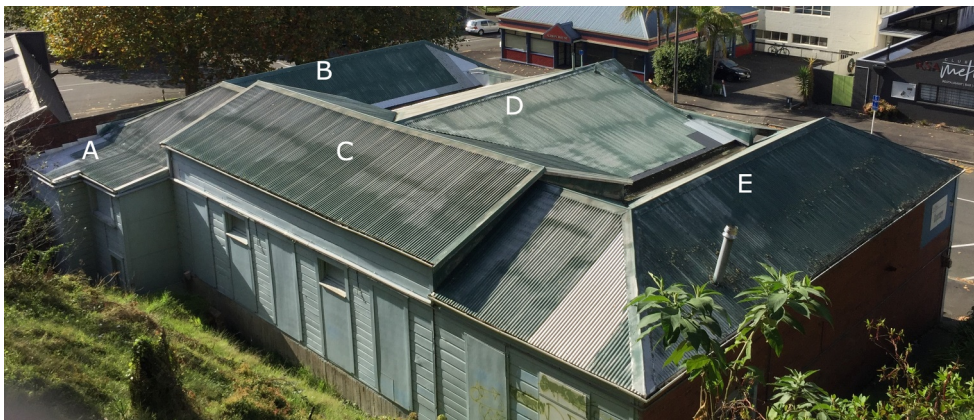
The roof of this building has been completely altered since it was first built. Originally it was a lightweight timber gable clad in corrugated iron, running parallel with the front façade along Ridgway Street (refer fig. 11). Subsequent to the side wings being added, we see a new gabled roof over the original portion running North to South, parallel with new roofs for the side wings, all hipped to connect with a fourth gable structure running West/East along the rear of the building. All of these structures are built of native timber rafters, purlins and corrugated iron.

Currently the rear part of this roof is raised some 300mm higher than the others, with a slightly lower pitch; perhaps this portion has been built again over the original in an attempt to try and reduce leaking, or perhaps since the Repertory took over there was a need for a raised ceiling in the auditorium, possibly to allow for focal length requirements for stage lighting.. There is a small additional lean-to roof extending to the North at the stage end which corresponds to the small extension added when the building was taken over by the Repertory Society. Although the timber structure remains as built around the turn of the century, the roof has evidently been replaced in the last 20 years as it is in reasonable condition and has been installed over self supporting bituminous membrane which is installed over plastic webbing as is the current practice.

The roof design is complicated but with regular maintenance could be functional.

The roof amendments and parapet removal have resulted in the stormwater drainage now being run via a series of downpipes down the front façade, which is a detractor from aesthetic merit.

SPACE REF	ITEM	ASSESSED VALUE
--------------	------	-------------------



ROOF	Hipped and gabled corrugated iron clad roof forms.	C
A	Lean-to roof over Eastern Fire Exit extension: Corrugated iron added as part of recent extension, lined with building paper	D
B	Gable roof over North Eastern extension: Relatively recently replaced corrugated iron roofing, lined with building paper	C
C	Gable roof over Atrium and Stage: Recently recently replaced corrugated iron roofing, lined with building paper	C
D	Gable roof over Entry Foyer, Green room, Box Office, Dressing Rooms, Toilets: & Mezzanine Floor: Recently replaced corrugated iron roofing, lined with building paper	C
E	Gable roof over Western extension: Recently replaced corrugated iron roofing, lined with building paper	C

### 3.1.2 FACADES

The existing façades of the Repertory Theatre consist of an eclectic mix of original features which have been embellished by a series of extensions and alterations over the life of the building.

The most significant of these alterations, remains the addition of the East and West wings of the building which date back to 1904 and 1894 respectively, during which time the building still served as a library. It is evident, given their lack of adornments and ornamentation, that these wings were designed and constructed for a low budget out of the necessity of space. Rather than the elaborate rusticated wooden paneling of the original library building with a classically designed entablature and balustrade (which were removed at the time of the construction of these extensions), the hipped roof extensions with exposed gutters, reflect less the gravitas typically associated with late 19<sup>th</sup> C civic buildings and are more in keeping with early 20<sup>th</sup> C residential construction.

Given the date of these extensions, however, the front façade of these wings (facing Ridgway Street) can be understood as relatively historically significant, particularly in the case of the 4 arch topped windows which mimic the openings of the Original Library facade. As for the brick South West and North East Facades of these extensions, as these walls are not original and secondary, their historical significance is negligible.

Beyond this, the more recent alterations to the façades are intrusive and detract from what remains of the original. Whilst some of these are only minor embellishments and can be easily restored, such as the electrical conduits visible in sections of the façade. This is not the case in the major alterations that occurred around 1957 which sought to support the pressing needs of Wanganui's theatrical community. These alterations featured the addition of a mezzanine floor and the restructuring of the internal layout within the original library footprint which subsequently led to the repositioning of the main entrance. Externally, these changes are most clearly evident along the front façade of the theatre, on which a significant section of the original façade has been entirely demolished and replaced with little reverence for the buildings' original architecture. These alterations interrupted the strict symmetry of the façade and led to the demolition of a significant section of the wooden ornamentation of the Original Library building. Due to this, the theatre's ar-

chitectural presentation along Ridgway Street has been significantly damaged.

The effect of these alterations can also be seen at the rear of the building, with many of the alterations being easily redeemable. Given that this façade will scarcely be seen by the public, however, it would be unwarranted to demand a major restoration of this façade. Whereas changes made to the existing NW façade (back), which would serve the pragmatics needs of the theatre going forward, could be entirely justified.

Beyond the architectural challenges facing these façades, it is also necessary to note that the NW & SW sides of the building are currently at risk from further damage caused by the bank behind the building falling down. Conservation of this building will therefore require retaining this bank in order to ensure that no further erosion will put pressure on the exterior of the building (refer section 6)

Front  
(South  
East)



SPACE REF

ITEM



Front Façade on North Eastern extension:

B

**Window:** Timber Double Hung Sash Window, Timber Sill, Jambes & facing with single pane of frosted glass and paint finished arch top panel. Requiring fresh paint but otherwise in good condition. **b**

**Door:** replaced window in order to provide prop access point for offsite fabricated props for the theatre in the early 20<sup>th</sup> C. Requiring fresh paint but otherwise in good condition. **b**

**Weather boards & Corner boards:** 255mm cover paint finished weatherboards. Evidence of isolated rot which will require further inspection and in instances to be replaced **b**

**Gutter:** Periodically replaced and of little architectural merit **d**

**External Electrical conduit:** Ø 20 mm pipe running along top and right side of the wall detracting from the original features. Preferably these would be hidden within the walls of the building **x**

**Foundation wall:** In good condition. Paint finished. **c**



**Front Façade on North Eastern side of original façade:** **B**



**Windows/Moldings/Facings:** Original fixed timber Windows, Timber Sills, Jambs & facings with glazed arch top window. Single pane frosted glazing. The view into these windows is currently obstructed by the 1956 addition of the mezzanine floor in the middle of the glazing which detracts from the external quality of these windows. Joinery requires fresh paint but otherwise in good condition. **a**

**Air Vent in window:** On the lower left pane of the right window an air vent detracts from the existing façade and should be removed and replaced by a better concealed ventilation alternative. **x**

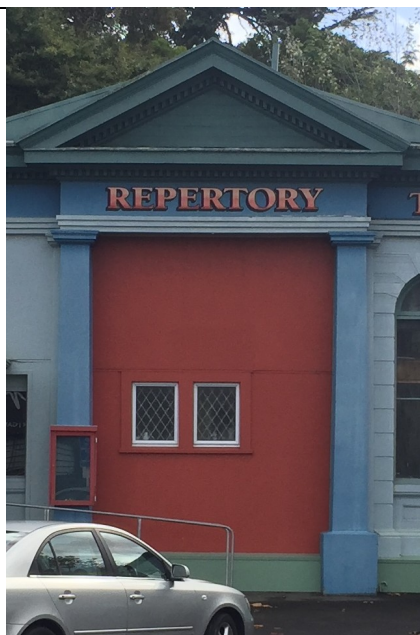
**Rusticated Weatherboards & Pilaster:** Original details which should be maintained and restored to ensure their longevity. Original photos indicate planted timber panels were positioned along the column to imitate masonry construction, evidence of which can still be seen on close inspection. The mock stonework appearance worked into, and onto, the horizontal tongue & groove timber cladding, is significant. **a**

**Weatherboards on Eastern Side:** Weatherboards matching those of the 1904 extension have replaced the original boards behind the downpipe. These are in relatively good condition but detract from the aesthetic of the original façade. **c**

**Downpipe:** running down the right corner a PVC downpipe currently detracts from the existing façade. An effort should be made to better conceal through repositioning or more delicately finishing the downpipe. **x**

**Entablature and Ashlar details:** Original details which should be maintained and if necessary restored to ensure its longevity. Currently requiring fresh paint but otherwise in good condition. **a**

**Central Front Façade:** **C**



**Plaster cladding:** The 1957 alterations led to the replacement of the original entrance and portico with a plain paint finished stucco wall. These alterations were financed by a small interest free loan which was unfortunately stretched too thin to adopt a more sensitive approach and resulted in much of the architectural merit of the main façade to be lost. As a result of this an effort should be made to replicate the original features and reinstate a central entrance to mirror the original Library façade. **x**

**Aluminum Windows:** Added as a part of the same alteration two small aluminum windows currently provide light to the existing bathroom. **x**

**Entablature:** Original details which should be maintained and if necessary restored to ensure its longevity. Currently requiring fresh paint but otherwise in good condition. **a**

**Pediment:** Original details which should be maintained and if necessary restored to ensure its longevity. Currently requiring fresh paint but otherwise in good condition. **a**

**Display Cabinet:** A Small Glass fronted casing on the left column used to advertise shows. **c**



## Front Entrance:

C

**Plaster Wall, Windows, Portico, Steps and Ramp:** The 1957 Alterations resulted in the central entrance of the theatre being moved to the left side of the original façade. In Place of the timber wall which mirrored the other side of the original façade a plaster wall was erected featuring new double doors, fixed windows, a portico, steps and a ramp

x

None of these elements are of any architectural significance and only detract from the original features of the theatre. An effort should be made to demolish the evidence of this alteration by mirroring the opposite side of the original façade and reinstating the central entrance in place of the existing entry.

**Entry, Columns and Entablature:** While the original columns and pilasters have been removed, the pediment and dentil decoration remains, and should be maintained and if necessary restored to ensure its longevity. Currently requiring fresh paint but otherwise in good condition.

a



## Front Façade on South Western extension:

B

**Windows:** Timber Double Hung Sash Windows, Timber Sills, Jambs & facings with a single panes of frosted glass and painted out glass to arched top panels. Vent in toplight should be removed. Currently requiring fresh paint but otherwise in good working condition.

b

**Air Vent in window:** On the toplight pane of the right window an air vent detracts from the existing façade and should be removed and replaced by a better concealed ventilation alternative.

x

**Weather boards & Corner boards:** 255mm cover paint finished. Evidence of rot which will require further inspection and in instances to be replaced

b

**Gutter:** Periodically replaced and of little architectural merit

c

**Down Pipe:** running down the right side of this section of the façade, a PVC downpipe currently detracts from the existing façade. An effort should be made to better conceal through repositioning or more delicately finishing the downpipe.

x

**Foundation wall and sub Floor Air Vents:** Masonry, in good condition. Paint finished. Metal vents still in reasonable condition.

b

South  
West



South West Facade

B

**Brick Wall:** Constructed as a part of the 1894 Library extension, the decision to construct the brick facade on the west façade of the building reflects the early 20th century regulations which sought to limit the spread of fire. While this façade is therefore architecturally more contemporary than the original building, it is in keeping with many other predominately wooden historic buildings with brick party walls around Whanganui. In good condition aesthetically, refer to structural engineers report for structural assessment of the party wall.

b

**Gutter:** Periodically replaced and of little architectural merit

c

**Painted Sign**

c

**Gas Meter & Pipes:** Gas pipes spread over the western façade and the meter which can be seen on the right side of the wall. It would be worth considering canceling these elements.

c

**Fire Door:** The wooden Fire door which exits out of the rear of the auditorium appears to have been designed and constructed subsequent to the 1894 extension. As a minor element within this façade the opening and the door panel in particular pertains no heritage significance.

c

North  
West



Rear (North) Façade of West Extension

C

**Weatherboards:** Constructed as a part of the 1894 Library extension, the weatherboards on the rear façade of the west extension were selected to match the adjacent original weatherboards. As non-original and grossly unseen elements the architectural merit of these weatherboards lies largely in the fact that they match the original weatherboards. Currently requiring fresh paint but otherwise in good condition.

c

**Gutter:** Periodically replaced and of little architectural merit

c

**Covered openings:** Constructed as a part of the 1894 Library extension and boarded up presumably when the auditorium was constructed. The incorporation of these in the west wing can be considered as having some merit as they can be read as an effort by the designer to compliment the original openings that they neighbor.

c

**Concrete retaining:** Constructed as a part of the 1894 Library extension the retaining wall on the back corner of the west extension is no longer very visible as a result of the erosion of the bank. As a consequence of this, the condition of the retaining is questionable and poses a risk to the conservation of the building.

c





## Rear (North) Façade of Original building

B

**Weatherboards:** Currently requiring fresh paint but otherwise in reasonable condition.

b

**Gutter:** Periodically replaced and of little architectural merit

c

**Down Pipe:** Spanning across the length of the original back façade and stretching to the Eastern brick wall, the existing downpipe undermines the integrity of this façade and was evidently retrofitted as the easiest drainage solution on a façade that is not typically viewed by the public.

x

**Covered openings:** Remnants of the building's past as a Library, when these openings would have been needed to light the reading rooms. They have subsequently been covered over in order to keep the auditorium sufficiently dark for theatre performances. Far less ornately adorned than the original windows on the front façade, these openings will be scarcely seen from the outside and are no longer fit for the purpose of the theatre due to their low light, sound and thermal insulation value.

b

**Concrete retaining:** Original retaining the condition of which is questionable as a consequence of the eroding bank which it has come to retain. The choice of concrete retaining here reflects the original intention that this façade would not be frequently accessed or viewed by the public

b



## Rear Façade of North Eastern Extension

C

**Weatherboards, High Level Covered opening, Ground Level sealed door:** Thought to have been added as an extension to the eastern wing of the theatre as a part of the 1957 alterations. The building elements which make up this section of the back façade are of no considerable architectural merit but can equally be acknowledged as in keeping with the original section of façade that they neighbour. Currently requiring fresh paint but otherwise in good condition.

c



## Back Fire Exit off Stage

C

**Portico, Steps & Landing:** In Poor condition, the existing fire exit, which provides egress from backstage, is no longer fit for purpose and needs to be replaced. Refer to Fire Engineer's Report

c



## Rear corner of North Eastern Façade

B

**Brick Wall, Openings & Parapet:** Constructed as part of the 1904 Library extension, the decision to construct the brick facade on the East façade of the building reflects the early 20th century regulations which sought to limit the spread of fire. While this façade is therefore architecturally more contemporary than the original building, it is in keeping with many other predominately wooden historic buildings around Whanganui with brick party walls. A number of historical openings would need to be bricked up in order to retain the integrity of this wall as a fire wall. In good condition aesthetically, refer to structural engineers report for structural assessment of the party wall.

b

**Fire Door, Wooden Steps & Landing:** In poor condition, the existing fire exit, which provides egress from backstage and workshop, is non compliant and no longer fit for purpose and needs to be replaced/ removed. Refer to Fire Engineer's Report

c



**Gutter & Down pipes:** Periodically replaced and of little architectural merit

c

**Fence:** Periodically replaced and of little architectural merit

c





## 3.2 BUILDING INTERIOR HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

It is difficult within the existing interior of the Repertory Theatre, to find much trace of the original library or any apparent details that remain thereof, save for being able to see where the original fireplaces and exterior windows were sited. This is largely due to the conversion of the building into a theatre in the 1930's and the subsequent alterations that took place to serve this shift in programme. Of these alterations, the 1956 alteration which featured the introduction of the mezzanine floor, the repositioning of the entrance, foyer, dressing rooms and bathrooms was particularly detrimental to the original internal features of the building.

As a result of this, the only noteworthy historically significant features of the interior that remain, can be found in the trims of the windows along the main façade and in some of the ceilings.

The only original instances of these window trims remain in the existing green room and can be seen extending into the mezzanine above. Similar details can also be found in the workshop space and the supper room which date back to the 1894 and 1904 extension respectively.

### 3.2.1 FLOORS: OVERALL COMMENT

The building has a raised timber subfloor structure resting on piles and supported at the perimeter on a clay brick foundation wall, all resting some 600mm above ground level. The level of the original library floor was continued into the additional wings, however when the Theatre took over, a raised stage was installed over the original floor, along with a raised, tilted structure supporting the seating.

The floor has been subject to differential settlement in the sandy substrate and there are some fairly significant level changes across the floorplate. The floor is currently not insulated nor damp proofed as would be expected in the present day. Refer to BPL Group's structural report for detailed information on condition and level.

Internally floors are carpeted, probably dates from the 1960's. The stage is painted and in poor condition.

The height of the stage, too, presents issues for present day theatrical productions, as the distance

from it to the ceiling lighting rig is not long enough to supply the required focal length for present day LED type stage lighting, so the theatre is not able to upgrade to current technology without lowering the stage. The theatre wish to lower the stage to 400mm above the floor to remove this problem.

The Mezzanine floor has presumably been added in the 1957 works, and shows behind the existing window openings (fig. 16). The ceiling height of 2m is too low to comply with current legal minimums.

### 3.2.2 CEILINGS: OVERALL COMMENT



*Figure 18:* Front façade showing mezzanine floor built across window openings.

The original building had timber ceilings fixed to timber structure, and this was then extended into the new wings. The ceiling may have been raised over the auditorium area (Refer Roof section), but the reason for this is not clear.





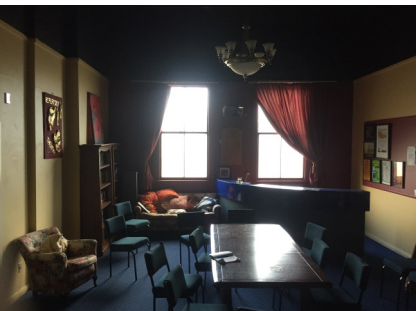
Of the remaining older ceilings and cornices, in the areas where these are thought to be original the overall condition is poor. In the case of the ceiling above the auditorium this is a result of damage from the installation and management of lighting and sound rigs which suspend through the ceiling.

This installation remains necessary to the functionality of the stage productions, a factor that will need to be considered during renovation designs.

The condition of the ceiling above the backstage and workshop area, which date back to the 1894 extension, has been damaged and altered due to many small building amendments and the wear and tear of the stage and prop making use. The remainder of the original ceiling is currently hidden from public view due to the mezzanine floor. The condition of this ceiling is difficult to fully access as much of it remains covered but what can be seen appears to be in poor condition.

The only instance in which any significant ceilings remain in good condition is in timber ceiling and cornices in the supper room, which date back to the 1904 west wing extension. These are typical of the era, with wide timber or plywood boarding connected with turned mouldings at intervals on the underside. These are painted. A central decorative ceiling rose supports a pendant light fitting (non original).

### 3.2.3 INTERIOR SPACES

Entry Foyer		D
1		<p>Ceiling , Walls &amp; Floor Linings d</p> <p>Doors &amp; Windows d</p> <p>Lighting d</p>
2		
3		
Supper Room		C
1		<p><b>Ceiling &amp; Cornice (Image 3):</b> Dating back to the 1894 construction of the west wing. Good condition requires minimal attention b</p> <p><b>Walls &amp; Floor Linings</b> d</p> <p><b>Window Trims (Image 4):</b> Dating back to the 1894 construction of the west wing. Good condition requires minimal attention b</p> <p><b>Bar</b> d</p>
2		<p><b>Lighting</b> d</p>




---

Box Office	D
------------	---

---



Ceiling , Walls & Floor Linings	d
Doors & Windows	d
Lighting	d
Fire Escape Ladder & Hatch	d

---

Bathrooms	D
-----------	---

---



Ceiling , Walls & Floor Linings	d
Plumbing Fixtures	d
Window Trims	d
Lighting	d

---




Green Room	C
------------	---





---








Ceiling , Walls & Floor Linings	d
Window Trims (Image 2): Outside of the recent paint the window trims are original and still in good condition	a
Lighting	d






2			
<b>Dressing Rooms</b>			<b>D</b>
1		<p>Ceiling , Walls &amp; Floor Linings</p> <p>Dressing room tables and furnishings</p> <p>Lighting</p>	<p>d</p> <p>d</p> <p>d</p>
<b>Workshop</b>			<b>C</b>
1		<p><b>Ceiling &amp; Cornice (Image 2):</b> Dating back to the 1904 construction of the East wing. Average condition due to the fitting of lighting and curtains through ceiling .</p> <p><b>Wall &amp; Floor Linings</b></p> <p><b>External Prop Door and Linings (Image 3):</b> Opening onto Ridgway street the French doors on the south eastern side of the workshop were retrofitted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> C in order to provide prop access for the Theatre. The linings date back to the 1904 of the East wing</p>	<p>c</p> <p>d</p> <p>b</p>
2		<p><b>Work Shop Storage Space</b></p> <p><b>Lighting</b></p>	<p>d</p> <p>d</p>
3			


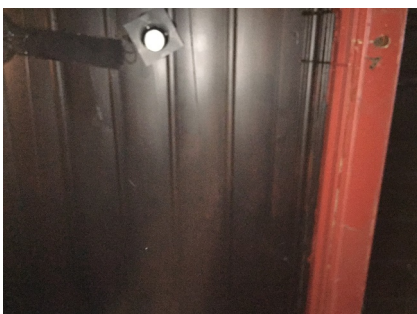

Workshop Bathroom		C
1		<p>Ceiling , Walls &amp; Floor Linings d</p> <p>Plumbing Fixtures d</p> <p><b>Window Trims (Image 2):</b> The workshop bathroom faces onto the Arch topped window of the main façade dating back to the 1904 construction of the East Wing. The ceiling of the bathroom currently divides the window. Good condition requires minimal attention b</p> <p>Lighting d</p>
2		
Back Stage & Stage Managers room		C
1		<p><b>Ceiling &amp; Cornice (Image 2):</b> Dating back to the 1904 construction of the East wing. Average condition due to the fitting of lighting and curtains through ceiling. b</p> <p>Wall &amp; Floor Linings d</p> <p>Fire Doors d</p> <p>Curtains &amp; Partition Walls d</p> <p><b>Stage:</b> Elevated 800mm above the East Wing floor the existing stage was constructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> C when the Library was converted into a Theatre. The condition of the stage and sub floor and requires attention and is in some instances dilapidated and unfit for purpose. c</p> <p>Lighting d</p>
2		

Mezzanine		C
1		<p><b>Ceiling &amp; Cornice (Ceiling rose image 3):</b> The Original timber ceiling and cornices still form the ceiling in the mezzanine although in instances these have been covered with a cardboard lining. The ceiling construction is as described in 3.2.2 with a central timber framed round rose. The condition of the ceiling is very poor and would require extensive restoration in order to maintain</p> <p><b>Wall &amp; Floor Linings.</b> Appear to be Matai or similar native tongue &amp; groove planks over a timber structure. This floor was probably added in the 1930's.</p>
2		<p><b>Window Trims (Image 4):</b> The top of the arch top windows on of the main façade can be seen in the first space entered in the mezzanine. These windows and window trims are original and still in good condition</p> <p><b>Prop Storage</b></p> <p><b>Lighting</b></p>
3		
4		

Auditorium & Stage (Within Original Library Footprint)		B
1		<p><b>Ceiling &amp; Cornice (Image 2):</b> Original Features. Average condition due to the fitting of lighting and curtains through ceiling which are essential features to the function of the theatre</p> <p><b>Floor (Image 3):</b> Reconstructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> C when the Library was converted into a theatre. Still in reasonable condition requiring only minor restoration</p> <p><b>Wall Linings</b></p> <p><b>Proscenium Arch:</b> Widened in the 1950's</p>



2		<b>Covered openings (Image 4):</b> Along the external wall of the auditorium original windows were positioned to light the interior of the original library. They have subsequently been covered over in order to keep the auditorium sufficiently dark for theatre performances. The condition of these is subject to further investigation and would require the removal of the wall linings currently covering them. It is worth noting that these opening are no longer fit for the purpose of the theatre due to their low light, sound and thermal insulation value.	b
3		<b>Seating:</b> Modern comfortable auditorium style banked collapsible upholstered seating mounted on a raked floor. Fairly tight rows but workable.	d
4			

Auditorium & Projection room (Within West Extension Footprint)			C
1		<b>Ceiling &amp; Cornice: (image 2)</b> Dating back to the 1894 construction of the West wing. Good condition requires minimal attention  <b>Wall Linings</b>  <b>Floor Linings (image 3)</b> Reconstructed in the early 20 <sup>th</sup> C when the Library was converted into a theatre. Still in reasonable condition requiring only minor restoration  <b>Fire Door</b>	b  d  b  d
2		<b>Seating</b>  <b>Projection room</b>	d  d
3			



### 3.3 SUMMARY OF CONDITION

The Repertory Theatre building is aged, with the original component nearing 200 years old, and has suffered deferred maintenance. Hence unsurprisingly it is in poor repair.

As there are very few items or areas that can be noted as being worth saving, it has been decided not to assess the condition of each element individually but to carry out a combined assessment, including Condition as part of the previous section in parallel with assessment of architectural and heritage merit.

The photographic survey and assessment in section 3 of this Report is to be taken as complementary with the detailed analysis of the state of exterior walls and framing, cladding, floors, foundations and existing structural performance that has been provided by the Structural Engineers in their report.

For its age, the roof is in reasonable condition but due to the complexity of its design, will need regular maintenance to avoid buildup of detritus causing leaks and damage. Removal of the original parapet and redesign of this roof around the turn of the century now means that unsightly plastic downpipes mar the appearance of the front façade. The existing timber structure is in good repair (and was replaced in total when the side wings were added around the turn of the century), but as is usual, would not comply with the current Building Code .

As is common with piled timber floors of this age, borer and damp have taken their toll on the floorboards as has differential settlement, in what is sandy soil at the base of the Pukenamu dune, resulting in some rather significant changes in level. No assessment has been undertaken of the subfloor structure itself due to the difficulties of access. The brick perimeter wall appears to be in good condition although being unreinforced it now poses an earthquake risk under the current building code.

Again, although colonial era timber framed buildings such as this have generally stood the test of time, requirements for earthquake performance and structural bracing have heightened dramatically in recent years, and this building as discussed in further detail by BPL in their report, will have no chance of complying with the current requirements. Rot is evident in the weatherboard cladding and facings in a number of instances, and given the risk of existing weatherboards splitting during removal, and the likely possible gain during reinstallation of the chance to install insulation and building wrap, it is likely a

decision will be made to fully replace them. Replacement weatherboards of the same profile could easily be sourced. The existing windows and remaining doorset on the Ridgway Street elevation are in good condition.

It is difficult to assess clearly what the original interior detailing comprised, as so little remains, but what has been found was typical of its era, and plain and practical in style, of a common type often found elsewhere. What has replaced it in the extensive 1950's renovations is of poor quality, ad-hoc and itself papered over with further renovations and roughly installed electrical items, DIY building work and suchlike.

As such, and given that what remains is in such poor condition, it would be difficult to argue based on condition alone, for any particular effort to be made in order to save any interior component or material.

What remains, although valiantly supported by the Repertory Incorporated, is a tired and dated facility that struggles to be fit for purpose, and when assessed against current standards, falls short of meeting modern heating, hygiene, safety and comfort standards.

### 3.4 SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

Section 3 includes a detailed photographic analysis of components of the Repertory building from a heritage and architectural perspective.

Aside from the remaining original components on the front façade, which are of architectural and heritage interest and should be retained, there is very little that is of particular interest architecturally in the Repertory Theatre building.

As both library and theatre, it has been built to tight budgets and with a minimum of detail. This in itself is not without interest, however any legibility or cohesiveness in the programme or detailing has been damaged or removed by the comprehensive and insensitive mid century renovations, themselves of little merit.

In terms of the building's operational history, both as a library and subsequently as a theatre, it could be assumed that there could be furniture, workings or perhaps particular architectural features that defined or illustrated this work, and may be worthy of retention. That is not the case. All furniture and operational items of interest have been removed or updated over the years.

Architecturally, the original building represented an attractive example of a timber neoclassical building, indeed the typical style of the time, but with a fairly finely wrought façade inclusive of columns, balustrading and pediment, all in timber.

The addition of less interesting side wings in what was essentially a domestic style that did not complement or reference the original made the whole less cohesive and therefore of less value from a heritage perspective. It was unfortunate that a proportion of that original façade was removed to incorporate the wings.

Don Wilson's modernisation work in the 1950's did nothing to improve the façade, quite the contrary, and added no further points of interest to the building.

We would advocate that the 'timber stonework' and generous joinery on the Ridgway Street façade preserved. Internally, save for perhaps salvaging the ceiling roses in the Supper Room and



LINZ Data Service Created on 18 Apr 2021 Created By: Henry Dickson Source URL: <https://data.linz.govt.nz>

**Figure 19:** Printout from the Land Information NZ Web-site showing the Repertory building (blue) projecting beyond the site boundaries onto Ridgway Street.

elsewhere for possible re-use, there is nothing particular of note.

In any consideration of heritage of course we must consider not only the fabric of the building but its social history. This building has existed in a publicly accessible form for nearly two hundred years, most recently as a theatre, providing memorable experiences to a large number of

people, many of whom are still resident in Whanganui. Indeed it still provides working theatre, with an almost constant lineup of plays, pantomimes and the like.

## 6.00 LEGAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES / FRAMEWORK

The operational arrangement for the Repertory Theatre is much the same today as when it was handed over to the Borough Council as New Zealand staggered out of World War One. Ownership rests with the Whanganui District Council, who undertake some maintenance, and the day to day operations rest with the Repertory Theatre who are an Incorporated Society.

As the building has become increasingly unfit for its purpose as a space for community theatre, the Repertory Theatre Society have approached us to complete this Report as a first step towards what is hoped may be major restoration and refurbishment project. The intention is to transform the building into an *'attractive, modern, safe, functional, multi-purpose 'theatre' venue'*

Drawingroom have compiled a 'Brief' document summarising what will be required from the point of view of the Society, to achieve a modern functioning theatrical venue. The points addressed range from space for cleaning, administration, bar sales and the like to assumptions for safety, comfort and requirements for operations and stagecraft and guests in a modern multi purpose venue. (*Brief, Refer Appendices*)

Additionally it is abundantly clear to the Repertory Incorporated that a modern venue will have associated running costs. These may be able to be funded via grants to cover paid staff, but also income will be needed for the venue to break even in future. Income will need to be derived from hireage of the venue for such activities as classes, travelling shows, conference and private function hosting. Therefore the theatre needs to both be suitable and equipped for such events, but also be physically attractive enough to be considered appealing and desirable, particularly in the case of private function hireage.

It is believed that continuation of staging drama events as has been done in the past, is feasible into the future, and that a venue of this size and nature would complement the existing 'stable of venues' in the town, while offering some unique elements.

Bearing in mind the historic, cultural and contextual significance of the theatre, which is recognised by the WDC heritage inventory as a class B building, the objective of this Conservation Report is to inform the owners, operators, the engineer and the architect, of the conditions that need to be considered in conducting this work.

## 6.1 OWNERSHIP

The site remains as originally gifted in 1879, a quarter acre of land (roughly 965m<sup>2</sup>), largely unchanged since it was gifted to the Borough in 1918, today the Whanganui District Council owns the Repertory Theatre and it is leased to the Repertory Theatre Incorporated.

Our clients wish to undertake fundraising efforts in order to finance and carry out a restoration, and question whether this is possible as a leaseholder, so wish to obtain correct documentation outlining proposed support from the Whanganui District Council before starting this process, or alternatively discuss taking on ownership outright.

## 6.2 SITE AND BOUNDARIES

Three matters arise relating to the site and Boundaries.

The first is the site's movement, evident in the photographs of the rear of the building in Section 3. The sand dune substrate and approximate 33 degree gradient up the hill to Queens Park mean that over the years much sand has fallen to rest against our building, displacing old brick external retaining walls adjacent to the building, some 20% off the vertical. The Society strongly supports efforts by the Council as owner of this and the adjoining sites to undertake stabilisation work on the bank, thereby reducing what is now a considerable risk of damage, particularly during earthquake or extreme weather events.

Boundary encroachment is another concern. Currently the side wings of the building extend beyond the current site boundaries onto Ridgway Street. This has historically been overlooked and the usual Right to Occupy arrangements foregone, however at this time it would seem correct to obtain a more certain undertaking regarding this, and this has been promised but needs to be enshrined in a suitable document.

Thirdly, it has come to our attention that in order to put in place a compliant fire egress route from the rear of the building, escape is going to be necessitated to the street via an external route around the building's Western elevation. This would not be able to occur within the building's site as currently the building extends all the way to that boundary. A 'gentlemen's agreement' has been in place for many years allowing this to happen, however in order to gain the required Consents, this will need to be documented and the appropriate Easements registered, on both the Repertory's and the adjoining titles. Payment for Right to Occupy may also need to be addressed. Perhaps it would fall to the District Council to clean and maintain these areas.

## 6.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND RESOURCE CONSENT PROCESS

Pukenamu generally, as well as the Repertory Theatre and its site, are archaeologically important to Whanganui and the theatre will very likely need to be subject to an archaeological investigation if significant changes are proposed.

Archaeological sites in New Zealand are governed by the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014, and more generally the Resource Management Act 1991, which controls the consenting process generally, through in this case the Whanganui District Council's District Plan. Under the RMA the Whanganui District Council has compiled a Heritage Inventory of Built heritage items, and the Repertory Theatre is classified as Class B, defined as *'At a regional or local level it has several high heritage values and/or has good integrity'*, thus an additional layer of protection exists for this building.

Under the HNZPT Act, any person who intends to carry out work that may modify or destroy an archaeological site must first obtain an Authority from Heritage New Zealand. The process applies to all archaeological sites (defined as those under human occupation prior to 1900), on land of all tenures. The HNZPT Act 2014 contains penalties for unauthorised site damage or destruction. As we would be proposing to break the ground under the Theatre, an archaeological investigation process must be instigated and the appropriate processes followed.

Additionally as the building is in Whanganui's Old Town area and is part of the Heritage Inventory (Refer Appendices), a Resource Consent process



and Consent would be required before Building Consent for the new works could be sought.

It would be apparent from such investigations whether or not this is the old quarry site, and if so, chances of items of interest being found would be much reduced due to the top layers of sand having been removed already.

## 6.4 NATIONAL AND LOCAL STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS GENERALLY

### **Pouhere Taonga Act 2014**

Replacing the Historic Places Act 1993, the Pouhere Taonga Act came into force in 2014. The Repertory Theatre is not currently listed under this Act. It is, of course, desirable to consult Heritage New Zealand about restoration work and other proposals which might affect the building; such consultation would also be triggered by any resource consent application made to the District Council, which would in turn trigger the Archaeological Authority process, if the work proposed was to disturb ground.

### **Resource Management Act 1991**

The Resource Management Act confers responsibility for the development of policies and rules regarding heritage buildings to the local territorial authority, in this case the Whanganui District Council. Resource consent will be required for certain activities as set out in the District Plan Rules (see below).

### **Whanganui District Plan**

The Repertory Theatre is a Class B item on the Whanganui District Council Heritage Inventory. Special conditions and rules surrounding this status can be found in the District Plan.

## 7.0 ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT

The way the building might be handled has been broken down to address key components in the following sections. Section 7.5 addresses additional elements that must be added to the facility.

### 7.1 FLOORS

We and the consultant team have assumed that the existing floors have little life left. Coupled with this, they are currently some 600mm above the ground level, which would mean some 15m of accessible ramping would need to be provided to the main entrance for wheelchair access, if compliance is to be achieved with the current building code. This would in turn mean further breaching of the current boundary, as these ramps

would need to be sited on Ridgway Street, causing further encroachment. The resulting ramping would be unsightly and difficult to design around the new entry. Hence we are proposing to remove the existing floor and replace it with a new concrete floor which would be some 150mm above the current ground level, thereby reducing the floor level throughout the building by around 350mm.

### 7.2 INTERIORS

Given that the existing interior is not of any real note, and also that to achieve compliance with toilets, stairs and modern compliance and functionality, major reorganization of the interior spaces will be required, we assume that very little of the current interior will remain.

### 7.3 ENTRY

In faithfulness to one of the main tenets of the original neoclassical design, we would like to return to a central entry point, as per the original library layout, however at a lower height (refer Floors).

### 7.4 FRONT FACADE

We see greater value in the older, central part of the façade than in that of the newer wings to either side. We feel that the two styles do not combine well. It is hard to clearly ascertain the rationale at the time: Were the new wings simpler and cheaper for budgetary reasons, or simply because the neoclassical style was waning in popularity by the turn of the century?

We advocate for restoration of the older, central portion to its original condition as far as possible, inclusive of balustrading which is no longer existing. We also wish to restore the facades of the side wings but for reasons of achieving an agreeable overall façade, advocate that they be restored to match the older component. In our view, which inevitably has been formed in the here and now, this approach would result in a vastly more attractive building, and one that will radiate the gravitas, given of the neoclassical style, that befits a public building such as a theatre.

A second consideration here is that we believe this 'gravitas' and beauty, will aid the theatre in becoming a sought after and popular venue, both for theatre and particularly one that is considered suitable and sought after for hosting private functions, an income strand that we suspect may be essential to support the theatre's financial position.

In short we believe that the neoclassicism still radiates a beauty and formalism recognised today, whereas the side wings were never possessed of architectural merit or character, and they would be improved if presented as part of a harmonious whole. We see nothing to be learnt historically or architecturally in the rather ungainly clash of styles and wish to retroactively improve the whole through favouring of one style over another from the lens of today's favour and what will best serve today's uses and aspirations for the theatre.

## 7.5 PROPOSED ADDITIONAL FACILITIES

**7.5.1 Bathrooms:** The existing wc provision fails to meet the accessibility standards required by the building code, and there are two few to comply, while also bearing in mind the accentuated need for such facilities at such times as theatre intermissions. We propose to provide 4 toilets, one of which is Accessible.

### 7.5.2 New Mezzanine Layout:

The existing Mezzanine floor, which is needed for prop storage, currently has a non-compliant floor to ceiling height and clashes with the windows along the main façade. As a consequence of the proposed lowered floor, it will be possible to ensure that the floor to floor height if the new Mezzanine will be no lower than the minimum 2100mm requirement. In addition to this the Mezzanine floor will be repositioned in order to avoid clashing with the windows of the main façade and in order to provide a more welcoming double height space above the foyer and in the lobby (Multi function space)., while equipped with specialized racking to make storage more efficient.

### 7.5.3 Modernised Bar & Foyer:

The existing supper room does not have a liquor license, is not well positioned and is ill equipped to support functions. We have proposed that by repositioning this volume around the foyer, and installing improvements to facilitate a liquor license, we will improve visitor experience, facilitate profit making liquor sales and enable the economy of box office and bar services to be combined during quiet times.

It is hoped that designing this area to a high

standard, with some old style theatre panache, will aid the theatre's transformation into a more desirable venue for use by the theatrical community and the community at large for multiple functions. We envisage weddings, small conferences, classes and the like could be centred around this space. It would also function as an excellent 'breakout space' for a proportion of the cast to work separately from the main troupe during rehearsals which mainly happen on-stage.

### 7.5.4 Modernised Stage and Auditorium:

The existing auditorium functions well and has adequate seating capacity. For this reason we have not increased the quantity of seating above the existing levels, beyond reinstalling the seating at the back of the auditorium. All will be reinstated at a steeper gradient, allowing better visibility. This will be particularly useful for younger audience members who might visit the theatre with school groups.

The existing stage has been confirmed to be adequately deep from front to back, however, actors can currently only enter the front of the stage from one side and the height of the stage is such that the focal lengths modern LED stage lighting cannot be achieved. Thus we have proposed a lowered stage 400mm high, and that the back stage area is extended to envelop the North western side of the stage. These renovations are the occasion to install a much wished-for stage turntable also, as well as 'legs', refer proposed drawings.

### 7.5.5 Office & storage:

The new layout includes office space and cleaners' sink, essential spaces for general administration and the running of the theatre that currently do not exist within the building.

### 7.5.6 Actor's Facilities:

The proposed design shows improved dressing and greenroom facilities, incorporating large casts, and a lobby between these and the stage for acoustic reasons.

### 7.5.7 Acoustics:

This report does not cover acoustics.

## 8.00 CONSULTANT REPORTS

### 8.1 BPL Group Structural Engineering Report

### 8.2 Fire Engineering Services Ltd - Fire Design and Accessibility Report



## 9.00 CONCLUSION

The Repertory Theatre is a long standing and valuable heritage and cultural asset to Whanganui, containing some areas of architectural heritage interest. We believe a restoration and revitalisation programme should be undertaken.

Although the interior retains very little physically of interest from a social history or architectural heritage perspective, the front façade has elements worth retaining. Currently, after multiple alterations and additions, little cohesiveness is left.

Alongside broader issues of site and legalities (refer s6), extensive interior reorganisation and modernisation will need to occur for the building to be comfortable, safe and useful into the future. Our proposal for these is appended to this document. Additionally we propose uniting the façade in the neoclassical style, conforming with that of its first iteration, to achieve an attractive and unified result that is fit for purpose.

This approach conforms with and helps to facilitate the extensive programme of improvement required from both a structural and fire engineering perspectives - refer section 8.



## 10. APPENDICES

- 10.1: ICOMOS New Zealand Charter 2010
- 10.2 Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga Criteria for Assessing Historic Heritage Values in the (Whanganui) District
- 10.3 Excerpt from Maxwell Smart Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library
- 10.4: Architectural drawings of Existing Library and Repertory Theatre by Drawingroom
- 10.5: Whanganui District Council Heritage Inventory entry (Item 348)
- 10.6: List of Sources
- 10.7 Repertory Theatre Future Brief document by Drawingroom
- 10.8: Proposed Drawings by Drawingroom

## 10.1 ICOMOS NZ CHARTER FOR CONSERVATION OF PLACES OF HERITAGE VALUE

The most appropriate conservation standards for use in New Zealand are those set out in the ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value. (ICOMOS stands for the International Committee on Monuments and Sites.) The charter has been formally adopted by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga and a number of territorial authorities. Important conservation principles contained in the charter are explained below.

### 5.2.1 Carry out regular maintenance

Regular maintenance is essential to the long life of heritage buildings. If maintenance is not carried out on a planned basis, repairs become progressively more difficult and expensive, and fabric of heritage value can be lost, thus diminishing the significance of the building. In addition, a well-maintained building will survive the effects of earthquakes, storms and other natural disasters better than one that is poorly maintained.

### 5.2.2 Repair rather than replace

When repairs are necessary, cut out and replace only decayed material. It is better to have fabric that is worn and carefully patched than modern replica material, however faithfully copied.

### 5.2.3 Repair in compatible materials

In carrying out repairs, materials matching the original should generally be used if they are available. Work to a higher technical standard is good practice in some circumstances and may be required by the Building Code.

### 5.2.3 Restore with care

Restoration of lost features should be carried out only if there is clear evidence of the original form and detail. Such evidence could come from original drawings, early photographs or elements relocated to other parts of the building. Detailed examination of the fabric of the building can often reveal information that is not available from other sources.

### 5.2.4 Keep change to the minimum

Where additions and alterations are carried out to fit a building for a new use, change should be the minimum necessary to suit the new functional requirements. There should be the least possible loss of building fabric of heritage value.

### 5.2.5 Make new work reversible

Where possible, new work should be reversible, so that change back to the present form remains a possibility should this be required in the future. This can sometimes be difficult, particularly with major work such as earthquake strengthening. Recycle or store early fabric that has to be removed and make new junctions with the old fabric as lightly as possible.

### 5.2.6 Respect alterations

Additions and alterations to heritage buildings can have historic or aesthetic significance in their own right. Returning a building to its original form is recommended only when the significance of the original structure is outstanding and later alterations have compromised its integrity.

### 5.2.7 Distinguish new from old

Growth and change are natural parts of the life of any building. Major changes, especially additions, should be able to be seen as such so as not to confuse the new with the old. Compatible design, where the new does not dominate or conflict with the old, should be the aim.

### 5.2.8 Document changes

Changes should be fully documented in drawings and photographs, with the latter taken before, during and after conservation work. New materials should be identified by date stamping.

## 10.2 HERITAGE NZ POUHERE TAONGA CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING HISTORIC HERITAGE VALUES IN THE (WHANGANUI) DISTRICT



### 10.3 EXCERPT FROM MAXWELL SMART PAPERS, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

## 10.4 ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS OF ORIGINAL LIBRARY, ALTERED AND CURRENT REPERTORY THEATRE BY DRAWINGROOM

## 10.5 WHANGANUI DISTRICT COUNCIL HERITAGE INVENTORY ENTRY, ITEM 348

## 10.6 LIST OF SOURCES CONSULTED

The below are the sources consulted for this work. The list is by no means exhaustive but we feel is enough to give a good overview for the purposes of this Report.

Where no source is identified in the text, this is largely because there is no noted source. The Athol Kirk document in particular is rich in information but lacking in notation of sources.

*Whanganui District Council Archives & Property Files including Heritage Inventory entry (Refer Appendices).*

*Whanganui Museum, Archives*

*Archaeology North (anecdotal conversation)*

*Journal of the Historical Society Incorporated (1976, Vol7, no. 2) "The Libraries of Wanganui", Athol Kirk*

*ICOMOS NZ Charter for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage Value (Refer Appendices)*

*Heritage NZ Criteria for Assessing Heritage Values in the District*

*Repertory Theatre Archives Harrison & McGowan Report on the Repertory Theatre, 2009*

*AHA: Architectural History Aotearoa (2007) vol 4:76-87 "The End of the Wooden Shop: Whanganui architecture in the 1890s", Mark Southcombe and Wendy Pettigrew.*

*Pukenamu Queen's Park Reserve Historic Area Registration Report, Kyle Dalton.*

*Pukenamu Queens Park Management Plan (2018), Whanganui District Council*

*Archaeology North Ltd: Archaeological Assessment of the Extension to the Sarjeant Art Gallery, Pukenamu/Queen's Park, Site R22/440, Whanganui (2019)*

*Historical Record of Wanganui (1988), Vol 19*

*Alexander Turnbull Library. Text excerpt re gallows site, re 1931 reburial*

*Whanganui Regional Heritage Trust, Archives*

*National Library of New Zealand, Photo archives*

*Land Information New Zealand, survey database*

*Archives New Zealand, online database*

*BPL Group Ltd, Repertory Theatre Assessment, 2021*

*Fire Engineering Ltd, Fire Design & Accessibility Report, 2021*



## 10.7 REPERTORY THEATRE FUTURE BRIEF DOCUMENT BY DRAWINGROOM

## 10.8 PROPOSED ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS BY DRAWINGROOM