

**CHRISTCHURCH DISTRICT PLAN – SCHEDULED HERITAGE PLACE  
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE  
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 404**

***NEW REGENT STREET SHOPS AND SETTING, 3-8, 10-14,  
16-17, 19, 21, 23 - 26, 28 -35, 38 NEW REGENT STREET;  
153 GLOUCESTER STREET; 157A GLOUCESTER STREET  
166 ARMAGH STREET; 180 ARMAGH STREET,  
CHRISTCHURCH***



**PHOTOGRAPH: M. VAIR-PIOVA 5.12.2014**

**HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*Historical and social values that demonstrate or are associated with: a particular person, group, organisation, institution, event, phase or activity; the continuity and/or change of a phase or activity; social, historical, traditional, economic, political or other patterns.*

New Regent Street has high historical and social significance as a notable Depression-era building project and precursor to the present day shopping mall in New Zealand. At the time of its construction the concept of an entire street made up of small speciality shops was a novel one. Francis Willis designed the 40 shops on individual titles in the Spanish Mission

Revival style in 1930. The building work took place between 1930-32 and was one of the few large-scale building projects undertaken in the South Island during the Depression. New Regent Street was built on the site of the Colosseum, a building erected in 1888 and demolished in 1930. This large building housed at various times a skating rink, boot factory, silent picture theatre, a taxi company and Dominion Motors. It was also the venue for shows and sporting events and stood on a parcel of land known as 'the circus paddock' since the early 1870s.

On 1 April 1932 New Regent Street was opened by the Mayor of Christchurch, Dan Sullivan (1882-1947). Of the 40 shops offered for lease, only three were let on opening day. To encourage occupancy, New Regent Street Ltd offered the remainder free of charge until businesses became established, thereafter charging a nominal rent of 5 shillings per week. Over time some properties were amalgamated to form larger shops; all eventually passed into individual private ownership as Arthur Stacey, the developer's agent, progressively sold the shops on behalf of the company's shareholders.

New Regent Street, which was named after London's Regent Street, became a public road after World War Two. In 1986 it was made a one-way street and in 1994 the street became a pedestrian mall and the tramline was installed. At this time cobblestone paving, wrought iron railings, planter beds and period lighting were introduced. The shops were damaged in the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 however the street reopened, following strengthening and repair work, in April 2013.

## **CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*Cultural and spiritual values that demonstrate or are associated with the distinctive characteristics of a way of life, philosophy, tradition, religion, or other belief, including: the symbolic or commemorative value of the place; significance to Tangata Whenua; and/or associations with an identifiable group and esteemed by this group for its cultural values.*

New Regent Street has cultural significance as a tangible early example of a change in the culture of inner-city retail practice with the introduction of a series of small retail business in a single architectural style parallel to each other forming an outdoor mall.

## **ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE**

*Architectural and aesthetic values that demonstrate or are associated with: a particular style, period or designer, design values, form, scale, colour, texture and material of the place.*

New Regent Street has high architectural and aesthetic significance for its design and association with the architect Henry Francis Willis (1892-1972). Willis selected the Spanish Mission Revival style for the street and also designed the State Picture Theatre (1934-5, demolished), Santa Barbara on Victoria Street (1930) and the Repertory Theatre (formerly Radiant Hall, 1929, demolished); the latter being similar in style to New Regent Street's terraced shops. The contractors were P. Graham and Sons, who had previously built Christchurch Boys' High School and the Majestic Theatre; Boyle Brothers were the drainage contractors.

The windows and ornamentation of the first floor on each terrace establishes the Spanish Mission character and unique appearance of New Regent Street. There are three upper storey variations. The first contains three, round-headed windows with profiles recalling the Palladian style, supported by small columns with spiral motif, above which sits an oval medallion. These facades have an awning extending above the windows supported by

decorative wrought iron brackets. Originally these awnings were covered with Spanish style Cordova roof tiles; they were later removed leaving just the concrete slabs.

Alternating on either side of these properties are two similar styled facades, both with Spanish Mission style parapets of similar elevation and the shaped gables commonly found on Spanish Mission style buildings. The first of these has centrally placed double casement windows with a window box beneath, the Palladian window motif as before, and circular medallions set within the gable. In the second the central window is replaced by French doors leading onto a small balcony and the gable is decorated with a pair of heraldic shields. The central windows of both are surmounted by projecting arched mouldings over semi-circular fanlight windows with panes arranged in a sunburst form. Additional ornamentation separates each facade with decorative Art Deco chevrons and Spanish Mission style barley twist columns.

The large display windows facing the street are framed by decorative coloured floral tiles, some of which are original, while others have been replicated. Wide plate glass windows light each shop, and entry is through a glazed door set back from the street beside the entrance to the adjoining shop. A continuous suspended veranda runs the length of each terrace and extends around into Gloucester Street. The original colour scheme was lemon, terracotta, green and white. In 1968 the buildings were repainted in Adam Gold, Etruscan Red and Slate Blue; the existing colour scheme dates from 1994.

All but five of the units have had extensive earthquake strengthening and repair works completed. This included: new concrete floors to replace the original suspended timber (Rimu) ones with the reuse of as much of the T & G floor timbers as possible; new steel work frame across shopfront façade; ground floor brickwork to rear walls removed up to concrete frame and replaced with reinforced concrete block wall with brick veneer; new rear windows and new rear door to each unit; first floor brick walls, structural concrete frame and steel windows retained throughout; walls strengthened with Helifix system of steel screw in replacement wall cavity ties; new GIB linings throughout ground floor and as required on first floor; new stairs in three units made in Rimu to match damaged originals; ceilings removed and strengthened with Gib Braceline structural diaphragm; shopfront glazing repaired as required with new timber framing to match the original in form and finish; new terrazzo entrances, new and reused tiles to shop fronts; plastered facades repainted with latest colour scheme; verandah soffits re lined and/or repaired; New plumbing, electrical systems and fire alarms, emergency lighting throughout.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE**

*Technological and craftsmanship values that demonstrate or are associated with: the nature and use of materials, finishes and/or technological or constructional methods which were innovative, or of notable quality for the period.*

The New Regent Street shops have technological and craftsmanship significance due to their use of materials, methods and quality of their construction. The shops were originally structurally based on an exposed concrete frame with infill panels of cavity brick, the facades of which have been plastered and painted; extensive steel reinforcing is now used along the entire length of the street. Drainage holes at the base of the cavity were designed to allow water soaking down from the parapets to drain. All underground services were through the rights-of-ways behind the shops. Ventilation, interior lighting and floodlighting were an acclaimed feature of the street at the time of its opening. The detailing of the facades demonstrates the skill of the contractors in executing the design features typical of the

Spanish Mission style. Many of the original decorative floral tiles made by Minton, England on the ground floor shop fronts remain in situ.

## **CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*Contextual values that demonstrate or are associated with: a relationship to the environment (constructed and natural), a landscape, setting, group, precinct or streetscape; a degree of consistency in terms of type, scale, form, materials, texture, colour, style and/or detail; recognised landmarks and landscape which are recognised and contribute to the unique identity of the environment.*

New Regent Street and its setting has high contextual significance arising from the uniformity of design, form, colour and scale of its terraced shops. The street's architectural style and continuous facades give it high public recognition and landmark significance. New Regent Street is unique within the inner-city streetscape of Christchurch and was proclaimed as 'the most beautiful street in New Zealand' by Mayor Sullivan at the time of its opening.

The street has further contextual significance as the only commercial street in New Zealand to have been designed as a coherent whole and as one of the best examples of Spanish Mission style architecture in New Zealand. The street comprises of two rows of 38 shops (formerly 40) running north to south between Gloucester and Armagh Streets with the tramline running through the centre. The two storey buildings have decorative facades featuring shaped gables, medallions, tiled window hoods and barley-twist columns. The rear is utilitarian brick.

The shops are the only remaining intact heritage streetscape to have survived the demolitions that occurred in the aftermath of the Canterbury earthquakes and are a rare and important reminder of the pre-earthquake city for the local and regional community.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE**

*Archaeological or scientific values that demonstrate or are associated with: the potential to provide information through physical or scientific evidence an understanding about social historical, cultural, spiritual, technological or other values of past events, activities, structures or people.*

New Regent Street has archaeological significance because it has the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past building construction methods and materials, and human activity on the site, including that which occurred prior to 1900. Circus activity took place on the site from at least 1873 and the Colosseum was erected in 1888. A roller-skate was found during archaeological investigations in the area in 2013.

## **ASSESSMENT STATEMENT**

New Regent Street and setting has high overall significance to Christchurch, including Banks Peninsula, and New Zealand as one of the few large scale building projects undertaken in the South Island during the Depression. New Regent Street has high social and historical significance as a development of 40 shops on individual titles undertaken in the Spanish Mission Revival style in 1930. It is socially significant as an early precursor to the modern day shopping mall. New Regent Street has cultural significance as a tangible early example of a change in the culture of inner-city retail practice with the introduction of a series of small

retail business in a single architectural style parallel to each other forming an outdoor mall. New Regent Street has high architectural significance as a unique and highly intact group of buildings in the Spanish Mission style and as the major extant work of local architect H. Francis Willis. The New Regent Street shops have technological and craftsmanship significance due to their use of materials, methods and quality of their construction. New Regent Street and its setting has high contextual significance arising from the uniformity of design, form, colour and scale of its terraced shops. The street's architectural style and continuous facades give it high public recognition and landmark significance. The shops are the only remaining intact heritage streetscape to have survived the demolitions that occurred in the aftermath of the Canterbury earthquakes, and are a rare and important reminder of the pre-earthquake city for the local and regional community. New Regent Street has archaeological significance because it has the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past building construction methods and materials, and human activity on the site, including that which occurred prior to 1900

#### REFERENCES:

Christchurch City Council heritage files – New Regent Street

Historic place # 4385 – Heritage New Zealand List

<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/4385>

Historic area # 7057 – Heritage New Zealand List

<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7057>

'Arthur Stacey & New Regent Street' *Kete Christchurch*

<http://ketechristchurch.peoplesnetworknz.info/site/topics/show/382-arthur-stacey-and-new-regent-street#.VKxPYFq9fXk>

Amanda Ross 'H. Francis Willis A Christchurch architect in the 1930s' BA Hons research paper, University of Canterbury, 1998.

**REPORT DATED: 7 JANUARY 2015**

PLEASE NOTE THIS ASSESSMENT IS BASED ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT THE TIME OF WRITING. DUE TO THE ONGOING NATURE OF HERITAGE RESEARCH, FUTURE REASSESSMENT OF THIS HERITAGE ITEM MAY BE NECESSARY TO REFLECT ANY CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF ITS HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE.

PLEASE USE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL HERITAGE FILES.