



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND  
POUHERE TAONGA

## New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero – Report for a Historic Place **Hannah Playhouse, WELLINGTON (List No. 9983, Category 1)**

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Hannah Playhouse, Wellington (Tom Ackroyd, 31 May 2020, CC BY-SA 4.0)

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### *Disclaimer*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Purpose of this report*

The purpose of this report is to provide evidence to support the inclusion of Hannah Playhouse in the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero as a Category 1 historic place.

### *Summary*

The iconic Hannah Playhouse on the corner of Courtenay Place and Cambridge Terrace in Wellington was designed by notable New Zealand architect James Beard (1924-2017) and completed in 1973. This part of Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington) was the focus of significant Māori settlement prior to Pākehā arrival with Te Aro Pā and extensive surrounding cultivations, and retains strong cultural values. The building's prominent central Wellington location contributes to its landmark status, as does its striking Brutalist design, featuring two boldly articulated façades and a prominent asymmetrical wedge-shaped roof volume. Hannah Playhouse is seen as a key New Zealand modernist building and has received several regional and national architecture awards. It is also historically significant for its lengthy association with the renowned Downstage Theatre company.

Subsequent Pākehā colonisation irrevocably changed traditional Māori settlement in Te Whanganui-a-Tara and by the 1890s the hapū of Te Aro Pā had been forced off their whenua. The Courtenay Place area was slow to develop but by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it had transformed into a bustling commercial area with numerous substantial two-storey masonry buildings including picture theatres, restaurants, coffee lounges and shops. One such building was located on the prominent site at the corner of Courtenay Place and Cambridge Terrace which later became the home of Hannah Playhouse.

The site's association with theatre commenced on 20 November 1964 when the newly formed Downstage Theatre company opened in its first home in the abandoned Walkabout Coffee Bar and Restaurant building on the site. That same year, Sheilah Winn made a substantial donation for a 'small and intimate' theatre to be built in Wellington. This donation later initiated a project to create a new purpose-built theatre, designed to be the permanent home of the Downstage Theatre company. The theatre was built on the site of the former Walkabout Coffee Bar and Restaurant building, and was named after Mrs Winn's grandfather, successful 19<sup>th</sup> century businessman Robert Hannah who started R Hannah Co. Ltd, now a national chain of footwear stores. Hannah Playhouse opened its doors on 15 October 1973 with a production of *As You Like It*.

The design brief called for a combined theatre and restaurant in an arena theatre style. When built, the theatre was one of few venues to combine performance, dining, and drinking within one space.

The theatre is one of the most significant works of important New Zealand architect James Beard who played the leading role in its design. In particular, the building is an excellent example of Brutalist architecture, characterised by the honest exposure of fabric, strong geometric forms, and the influence of interior spatial design on the exterior appearance of a building.

The Downstage Theatre company's long association with Hannah Playhouse continued until late 2013 when the company wound up due to a lack of stable funding. The theatre was subsequently used by Capital E, the National Theatre for Children from 2014 to 2020, and is currently available as a theatre for hire. Through its close connection with Downstage Theatre and its on-going role as a theatre venue used by the likes of leading Māori theatre company Taki Rua, Hannah Playhouse has a critically important place in the history of New Zealand theatre, as a place where the careers of local actors, directors and playwrights were launched and sustained.

## **1. IDENTIFICATION<sup>1</sup>**

### **1.1. Name of Place**

#### *Name*

Hannah Playhouse

#### *Other Names*

Downstage Theatre (Former)

### **1.2. Location Information**

#### *Address*

12 Cambridge Terrace and 2 Courtenay Place

Te Aro

WELLINGTON

#### *Additional Location Information*

The building is towards the northern end of Cambridge Terrace and it defines the east end of Courtenay Place. NZTM E 1749340 N 5427104 (approximate centre of land parcel).

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<sup>1</sup> This section is supplemented by visual aids in Appendix 1 of the report.

*Local Authority*

Wellington City Council

### **1.3. Legal Description**

Lot 1 DP 30440 (RT WN7B/313) and Legal Road, Wellington Land District

### **1.4. Extent of List Entry**

Extent includes the land described as Lot 1 DP 30440 (RT WN7B/313) and part of the land described as Legal Road, Wellington Land District and the building known as the Hannah Playhouse thereon. Extent includes the roof canopies on the Cambridge Terrace and Courtenay Place façades. (Refer to map in Appendix 1 of the List entry report for further information).

### **1.5. Eligibility**

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

### **1.6. Existing Heritage Recognition**

*Local Authority and Regional Authority Plan Scheduling*

Scheduled in Wellington City District Plan Operative 27 July 2000 [as amended], Chapter 21: Heritage List - Areas, Ref. 26, Courtenay Place Heritage Area. Demolition or relocation of any building or structure within a heritage area (other than a specifically identified non-heritage building or structure) is a discretionary activity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, Wellington City Council has also added Hannah Playhouse to the list of heritage places and objects proposed for addition to the heritage schedule in the Wellington City Council District Plan. See: Wellington City Council, 'Heritage Places and Objects', *Our City Tomorrow Planning for Growth*, <https://planningforgrowth.wellington.govt.nz/about/related-projects/heritage-places-and-objects>, accessed 15 May 2021.



## 2. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 2.1. Historical Information

#### *Māori Settlement of Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington) and the Establishment of Te Aro Pā*

The Māori history and settlement of Te Whanganui-a-Tara reflects many changes and waves of migration over hundreds of years.<sup>3</sup> Before the arrival of Māori from Taranaki in the 1820s and 1830s<sup>4</sup>, Te Whanganui-a-Tara was populated primarily by people of Kurahaupō waka descent, including Ngāi Tara, Rangitāne, Muaūpoko, Ngāti Apa and Ngāti Ira.<sup>5</sup> These people have been referred to as ‘Whatonga-descent peoples’ since all claimed descent from Whatonga, an early Māori explorer who named the harbour Te Whanganui-a-Tara, for his son Tara.<sup>6</sup>

Hannah Playhouse is located very near to the site of one of the largest pā in Te Whanganui-a-Tara – Te Aro Pā. Te Aro Pā was established in 1824 by Ngāti Mutunga near the former shoreline in what is now part of the Wellington central business district, in the vicinity of lower Taranaki, Manners and Cuba Streets.<sup>7</sup> When Ngāti Mutunga migrated to Rēkohu/Wharekauri/the Chatham Islands in 1835, they left their lands ‘from Waitangi Stream to Ngauranga’ in the possession of Taranaki iwi and Te Aro Pā was subsequently inhabited by whānau and hapū of Ngāti Ruanui, Taranaki iwi and Te Āti Awa.<sup>8</sup> Te Aro Pā was surrounded by extensive cultivations totalling approximately 60-80 acres, including on Puke Ahu/Mount Cook and extending in pockets to the south coast at Paekawakawa/Island Bay.<sup>9</sup> The nearby bush, Waitangi Lagoon and harbour itself were also rich in resources, as were the numerous

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<sup>3</sup> Raukura Consultants, ‘Orua-Poua-Nui Baring Head Cultural Values Report’, 2011, pp.6-7, <http://www.gwrc.govt.nz/assets/council-publications/Orua-Poua-Nui%20Baring%20Head%20Cultural%20Values%20Report%20Feb%202011.pdf>, accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Morris Love, ‘Te Āti Awa of Wellington’, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 1 March 2017, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/te-ati-awa-of-wellington>, accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, *Te Whanganui A Tara Me Ona Takiwa: Report on the Wellington District*, Waitangi Tribunal Report 2003, WAI 145, p.18, [https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/Documents/WT/wt\\_DOC\\_68452530/Wai145.pdf](https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/Documents/WT/wt_DOC_68452530/Wai145.pdf), accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Wellington City Council, *Te Ara o Nga Tupuna Heritage Trail*, 2006 (2nd. ed.), <https://wellington.govt.nz/-/media/recreation/enjoy-the-outdoors/walks-and-walkways/files/heritage-trails/teara.pdf?la=en&hash=B152AFFB5CD68142D22E8051638A1CBFC36ED67E>, accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen Anderson, ‘Toenga o Te Aro (remains of Te Aro Pā)’, *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga*, 2008, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7771>, accessed 16 May 2021. The remains of Te Aro Pā were listed as a Category 1 historic place in 2008.

<sup>9</sup> *New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator*, Volume IV, 4 October 1843, p.3; Raukura Consultants, ‘Cultural Impact Report, Massey University Wellington, Puke Ahu’, n.d., p.17, <https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/sustainability/documents/Massey%20Wellington%20-%20cultural%20impact%20report.pdf?2C05BBD3E782006293AC51B5443DD2FD>, accessed 15 May 2021; personal communication Richard Te One, Wellington Tenth Trust, 1 December 2022.

waterways that are largely unseen today, such as the nearby Waimapihi Stream (also known as Te Aro Stream) and the Waitangi Stream, bounding the Te Aro flats to the west and east respectively.<sup>10</sup> Present-day Cambridge Terrace follows Waitangi Stream, which flowed from Newtown along Adelaide Road to the Basin Reserve (originally a significant wetland known as Hauwai), and then along what is now Kent Terrace, feeding into the expansive Waitangi Lagoon which provided Māori with eels, fish and shellfish, flax, fresh water and was also used for launching waka.<sup>11</sup>

The New Zealand Company bought land in the Wellington Harbour (Port Nicholson) area in 1839 in preparation for emigration from England. The area was soon colonised with the Pākehā settlement growing steadily and attracting many immigrants. Te Aro Pā was reserved for Māori in the 1844 deeds of release along with other traditional pā such as Pipitea, but the pressures of Pākehā colonisation, including the loss of cultivations or their transfer by government to less desirable and more remote land, and the effects of the Taranaki wars caused the population of Te Aro Pā to rapidly decline.<sup>12</sup> The 1855 earthquake also resulted in dramatic change to the Wellington landscape and the availability of natural resources – a new shoreline was created and the Te Aro flats were raised by around 1.5 to 2 metres.<sup>13</sup> The inhabitants of Te Aro Pā dwindled from 186 in 1850 to 28 in 1881, and by the 1890s the pā was unoccupied.<sup>14</sup> Remains of the pā were uncovered in 2005 during construction of a multi-storey apartment building, and are now preserved for display at Te Aro Pā Visitor Centre.<sup>15</sup> The Waitangi Stream was culverted as part of the underground storm-water system (original plans to turn it into a canal were abandoned after the earthquake) and it was once again exposed to daylight again as a key element of the Waitangi Park development which opened in 2006.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Raukura Consultants, 'Technical Report 15 Assessment of Effects – Cultural, Basin Bridge Project, Hauwai', 2013, p.16, <https://www.epa.govt.nz/assets/FileAPI/proposal/NSP000026/Applicants-proposal-documents/13a40c1787/TR15-Assessment-of-Cultural-Effects-FINAL-31-MAY-2013.pdf>, accessed 15 May 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Raukura Consultants, 2013, pp. 4, 16, 17, 24, 39; Lesley Adkin, *The Great Harbour of Tara*, Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, Wellington, 1959, p.97; 'Waitangi Day in the capital', *Wellington City Council*, <https://wellington.govt.nz/wellington-city/about-wellington-city/history/throwbackthursday/waitangi-day-in-the-capital>, accessed 18 October 2021; Anderson, 2008. See also Map 11, Te Aro Cultivation Clearing in Wellington Tenth Trust, GIS Map Book 2004, Wellington Tenth Trust, 2004, p.13.

<sup>12</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, 2003, p.337; Wellington City Council, 2006; Love, 2017, Anderson, 2008

<sup>13</sup> Wellington City Council, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, 2003, p.339; Love, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Wellington City Council, *Te Aro Pā Visitor Centre, 39 Taranaki Street*, n.d., <https://wellington.govt.nz/-/media/community-support-and-resources/our-communities/maori-community/files/te-aro-pa-booklet.pdf?la=en&hash=8C6EE261C3E00E7971CFB9B3E8EDA446C2D89AE1>, accessed 16 May 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Raukura Consultants, 2011, p.24; Kerryn Pollock, 'Landscape architecture - Modern landscape architecture, 1960s to

### *Development of Courtenay Place and 'Cording's Corner'*

The Courtenay Place area was slow to develop following Pākehā settlement – its early development exemplifying ‘the gulf between the New Zealand Company’s vision of a utopian settlement and the grim Victorian reality that eventuated in parts of Wellington’.<sup>17</sup> It was initially an industrial area surrounded by ‘slum’ housing but by the mid-1920s it was shaping into the ‘civilised concourse’ originally envisaged with a number of imposing two-storey masonry buildings including picture theatres, restaurants, coffee lounges and shops.<sup>18</sup> One such masonry building was located on the prominent site at the corner of Courtenay Place and Cambridge Terrace, known locally as ‘Cording’s Corner’ (after Cording’s bookshop which operated out of the downstairs corner shop in the early twentieth century).

‘Cording’s Corner’ was originally part of Town Section 225, one of the one-acre town sections created as part of the Port Nicholson settlement. Town Section 225 was one of several sections purchased by Pākehā settler Harry Hughlings who arrived in Wellington on the *Bombay* in 1842.<sup>19</sup> It was later subdivided in 1876, with the land parcel at the corner of Courtenay Place and Cambridge Terrace becoming Lot 4 Deed 52.<sup>20</sup> Deed Plan 52 shows a building on this land parcel – this would have been an earlier timber building subsequently replaced by the two-storey masonry (brick) building which dates to the late 1880s.<sup>21</sup> A number of businesses occupied the masonry building throughout its history. In addition to

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2000s’, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/42923/waitangi-park>, accessed 18 October 2021; ‘Waitangi Park – an urban wetland recreated’, *Envirohistory NZ*, <https://envirohistorynz.com/2010/12/12/waitangi-park-an-urban-wetland-recreated/#more-5898>, accessed 18 October 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Wellington City Council, ‘Courtenay Place Heritage Area’, <https://wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/areas/26-courtenay-place-heritage-area>, accessed 16 May 2021.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Louis E. Ward, *Early Wellington*, Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, Auckland, 1928, p.191, <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WarEarl-t1-body-d16-d4.html>, accessed 14 September 2021; *New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator*, Vol III, Issue 208, 4 January 1843, p.2. Hughlings also purchased a number of other town sections.

<sup>20</sup> See Deed Plan 52 (1876) and also Deposited Plan 30440 (1969), Land Information New Zealand. This end of Cambridge Terrace was also known as Clyde Quay until 1925. See the description for ‘Procession of Clydesdale horses on Cambridge Terrace, Wellington’. New Zealand Free Lance: Photographic prints and negatives. Ref: 1/2-099996-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23167141>, accessed 14 September 2021.

<sup>21</sup> A newspaper advertisement dating to 4 July 1889 refers to the opening of the ‘Bon Marche’ store in the ‘new brick premises’ at the corner of Clyde Quay and Courtenay Place – see *Evening Post* (‘EP’), 4 July 1889, p.1. The building is shown in a photo dated to 1896-1897 – see ‘Business premises of Elson chemist and Dutton bookshop, Courtenay Place, Wellington, with the Coal and Wood Yard of F Holm visible around the corner in Cambridge Terrace’. Halse, Frederick James, 1863-1936: Collection of negatives. Ref: 1/2-004081-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23135121>, accessed 14 September 2021.



the bookshop there was a tobacconist shop, chemist, florist, and beauty salon, and it later housed the Walkabout Coffee Bar and Restaurant (upstairs).<sup>22</sup>

#### *A New Theatre for Wellington – the Sheilah Winn Donation*

In 1964 Sheilah Winn (1917-2001) donated \$300,000 to build a small and intimate theatre in Wellington after the style of those she had experienced in London.<sup>23</sup> Her generous donation stemmed from her passion for her hometown and from her interest in theatre.<sup>24</sup> Sheilah Winn was the granddaughter of Irish immigrant Robert Hannah (1845-1930) who moved to Wellington in 1874 where he opened a boot shop and a factory five years later. R. Hannah and Co. Ltd. grew rapidly, becoming a major manufacturing and retail enterprise.<sup>25</sup> With stores nationwide Hannahs remains a household name in New Zealand to this day, while Winn went on to sponsor the high-profile Sheilah Winn Shakespeare Festival (1992-present).<sup>26</sup>

The Winn Theatre Group committee was subsequently formed by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and it convened over a four-year period with little progress.<sup>27</sup> The frustrations Winn experienced in the years of deliberation over location, design, and performance type for the theatre meant that she vowed never again to give money for a building project.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Founding of the Downstage Theatre company (1964)*

In 1968 Wellington City Council pushed for Winn's donation to be channelled into a civic theatre for wide-ranging performing arts. The Arts Council resisted this, arguing that it deviated from the donor's intention. It was at this point that the Downstage Theatre Society became involved.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *New Zealand Times*, 22 January 1910, p.10, 22 June 1922, p.3; *EP* 14 March 1931, p.4. See also 'Looking down Courtenay Place from Cambridge Terrace'. *Evening Post* (Newspaper. 1865-2002): Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: EP-1736-1/2-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23236758>, accessed 14 September 2021.

<sup>23</sup> 'Hannah Playhouse', *Designscape*, Nov 1973, pp. 1-8. See page 2.

<sup>24</sup> 'Giving Money Away can be Very Tricky,' *EP*, 10 Feb 1968, p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> Helen McCracken, 'Antrim House', *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga*, 2002, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/208>, accessed 16 May 2021.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.sgcnz.org.nz/programmes/sgcnz-university-of-otago-sheilah-winn-shakespeare-festival> (accessed 18 April 2023).

<sup>27</sup> *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Karen Brown, 'Arts Patron Shies from Future Building Projects,' *EP*, 27 Mar 1991, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 2.

In 1964, the same year that Winn made her donation, the Downstage Theatre Society had been founded at a public meeting instigated by a dissatisfaction with the New Zealand theatre scene. The objective was to create an exciting small, local, and professional theatre.<sup>30</sup> On 20 November 1964 Downstage opened in its first home in the former home of the Walkabout Coffee Bar and Restaurant on the upper floor of the building at the corner of Cambridge Terrace and Courtenay Place, where the Hannah Playhouse was later to be built. The society aimed to provide permanent employment for actors with performances throughout the week.<sup>31</sup> Graeme Kerr, the well-known television chef, cooked dinner for patrons on opening night.<sup>32</sup>

The provision for meals and coffee before shows was popular with theatre patrons. A precedent was set during this period for informal seating arrangements and flexibility in stage location. Later, when the Hannah Playhouse was being built, the society relocated to the Star Boating Club in Jervois Quay where dining remained integral to performances. This tradition of use was to become a defining feature in the design of the Hannah Playhouse.<sup>33</sup> The idea of combining a theatre with a restaurant remained controversial though, with some purist actors opposed to the distraction from the art form caused by dining. In contrast, supporters appreciated the resultant breaking down of barriers and increased accessibility of theatre to the public, along with the sense of social occasion afforded by a relaxed and informal atmosphere.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Hannah Playhouse Design Brief and Construction*

In 1968 the Hannah Playhouse Trust was formed to build a new theatre on the site occupied by the Walkabout Coffee Bar and Restaurant building, to be named after Sheilah Winn's maternal grandfather Robert Hannah. From this point the Trust Board became responsible for the Hannah Playhouse project. Raymond Boyce, set designer and chairman of the newly-formed Downstage Theatre Company, and other members of Downstage developed a design brief and sketch plans for the Hannah Playhouse with Auckland architect Ron Parker, who

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<sup>30</sup> 'Hannah Playhouse', *Home and Building*, 1 Apr 1975, pp.40-45, see p.43; Raymond Boyce, 'Downstage: a History', *NZIA Journal*, No. 8, Aug 1974, p. 146.

<sup>31</sup> *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Morris, Adam, 'Downstage Notches up First 25 Years,' *EP*, 30 Sep 1989, p. 35; 'Downstage Celebrates 45 Years on 20 Nov,' *Theatreview*, <http://www.theatreview.org.nz/news/news.php?id=471>, accessed 16 May 2021.

<sup>33</sup> *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

was experienced in the small theatre movement. An additional \$192,000 necessary for construction, equipment, and furnishings was raised.<sup>35</sup>

Practicalities dictated the commissioning of a Wellington-based architect to realise the project and James Beard, of Gabites and Beard Registered Architects and Town Planning Consultants, was chosen. Boyce remained as theatre consultant. Basic development plans were already completed, and it was Beard's task to comply with them as closely as possible.<sup>36</sup> Beard is now recognised as a significant Wellington architect, town planner, and landscape architect. The Hannah Playhouse was to become one of his most notable architectural projects. Its realisation demonstrated a range of his design ideas including an appreciation of context and a reverence for natural materials, structural integrity, and function.

The theatre was opened on 15 October 1973 with a production of *As You Like It*.<sup>37</sup> It was considered by most people to be a very positive addition to the city's 'sparse cultural amenities'.<sup>38</sup> For a minority though, the makeshift and casual premises that Downstage had occupied before the purpose-built new building better represented the informal, supportive, and pioneering team spirit of the group. They criticised the newly imposed delineation between diners and non-diners as anti-egalitarian. While these people were less accepting of the new premises the majority agreed that the building was a successful outcome.<sup>39</sup>

By 1974 Downstage had been in continuous operation for ten years and was presenting performances six nights a week at Hannah Playhouse, along with occasional lunchtime, late evening, and children's theatre. The company maintained its policy of showcasing New Zealand writers, though the proportion of New Zealand plays varied from year to year.<sup>40</sup> In 1974, under the artistic directorship of Sunny Amey, seven of the ten mainbill productions at Downstage were New Zealand plays, including Robert Lord's *Well Hung*, which went on to become a 'kiwi retro classic'.<sup>41</sup> Regional touring was added in the mid-1970s under artistic

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<sup>35</sup> *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> See Figure 1 and Figure 2; 'The Hannah's History', *Hannah Playhouse*, <http://www.hannahplayhouse.org.nz/history-of-the-hannah>, accessed 16 May 2021.

<sup>38</sup> *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 6, 7-8.

<sup>40</sup> Boyce, 1974, p. 146.

<sup>41</sup> John Smythe, 'Downstage closure a tragedy', *Dominion Post* ('DP'), 19 September 2013, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/columnists/9183209/Downstage-closure-a-tragedy>, accessed 30 May 2021; John Smythe, *Downstage Upfront – the First 40 Years of New Zealand's Longest-Running Professional Theatre*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2004, pp.148-149; 'Well Hung by Robert Lord', *Creative New Zealand*, 12 January 2011, <https://www.creativenz.govt.nz/news/well-hung-by-robert-lord>, accessed 30 May 2021.

director Mervyn Thompson – this helped support the ‘permanent company’ model which continued under subsequent artistic directors.<sup>42</sup> Other New Zealand plays performed during the 1970s included Joseph Musaphia’s *Mother and Fathers*, *Bully* by Frank Edwards, Craig Harrison’s *Perfect Strangers* and John Banas’ *The Robbie Horror Show*, a late-night revue which savagely portrayed the prime minister and covered ‘topical issues like nuclear warships, abortion, the Olympic boycott and the All Black’s tour of South Africa’.<sup>43</sup>

### *Downstage and Taki Rua*

Leading Māori theatre company Taki Rua evolved from Downstage’s side venue The Depot, which was used following a rehearsal room fire in 1981.<sup>44</sup> The Depot focused on New Zealand plays and was where noted playwright Hone Kouka got his start in the late 1980s.<sup>45</sup> Renamed and with a strong focus on Māori and Pasifika theatre, Taki Rua emerged as a fully-fledged company independent of Downstage, but nevertheless maintained close ties.<sup>46</sup> When it transitioned to a production company and closed the bricks and mortar theatre in late 1997, Downstage’s Hannah Playhouse was a regular venue for the company’s plays, including Briar Grace-Smith’s *Purapurawhetu* and *Ngā Pou Wahine* (both 1997), Victor Roger’s *Sons* (1998), Hone Kouka’s *The Prophet* (2004).<sup>47</sup> Beyond Taki Rua, other notable productions of the era at Hannah Playhouse included The Naked Samoans’ *Naked Samoans Talk About Their Knives* (1998), Jacob Rajan’s *Krishnan’s Dairy* (1998), Toa Fraser’s *No. 2* (2001), and Oscar Kightley and David Armstrong’s *Nui Sila* (2004).<sup>48</sup>

### *Challenges and Closure*

The early 1990s also saw Downstage face severe funding cuts and the collapse of the company model. Around this time, it was proposed that Downstage wind up and Taki Rua

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<sup>42</sup> Smythe, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Smythe, 2004, pp. 169-170, 173-175, 179, 189-190.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Taki Rua: Brave New Frontier’, *DP*, 18 March 2013 <https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/culture/8436785/Taki-Rua-Brave-new-frontiers>, accessed 11 July 2023; Paul Maunder, *Rebellious Mirrors: Community-based Theatre in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2013, p.143

<sup>45</sup> Hone Kouka, ‘Re-colonising the Natives: the State of Contemporary Māori Theatre’, in Marc Maufort and David O’Donnell (eds), *Performing Aotearoa: New Zealand Theatre and Drama in an Age of Transition*, P.I.E. Peter Lang, Bruxelles; New York, 2007, p.143.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid; Lisa Warrington and David O’Donnell, *Floating Islanders: Pasifika Theatre in Aotearoa*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2017, pp.35-37.

<sup>47</sup> Smythe, 2004, pp.488-493

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

take over Hannah Playhouse.<sup>49</sup> Taki Rua was not interested in acquiring the building and Downstage in any case survived.<sup>50</sup> Hannah Playhouse was a presenting venue for external theatre productions by 2008.<sup>51</sup>

A mix of presenting and in-house productions followed the solely presenter model, though funding remained an ongoing concern.<sup>52</sup> Creative New Zealand chose not to fund Downstage in 1995, though funding was reinstated in 1997.<sup>53</sup> In 2009, Downstage once again received no funding from Creative New Zealand, leading to the resignation of artistic director Cathy Downes.<sup>54</sup> Downstage continued to operate until 2011 when financial constraints meant that they had to cancel the remainder of the 2011 season and lay off staff.<sup>55</sup> Ticket sales were down and there had also been a decrease in fundraising revenue.<sup>56</sup>

Downstage relaunched in 2012 following an additional \$90 000 funding from Wellington City Council and continued occupy the Hannah Playhouse until late 2013, when the company made the difficult decision to cease trading after nearly 50 years of operation.<sup>57</sup> Creative New Zealand had declined Downstage's funding application for 2014 after they struggled to meet audience and financial targets.<sup>58</sup> Creative New Zealand had been the company's single biggest funder in previous years, contributing an annual amount of \$325, 000.<sup>59</sup>

Until its closure, Downstage held the distinction of being New Zealand's longest running regional professional theatre company. It played a significant role in enriching theatre and the cultural life of the nation in the purpose-built Hannah Playhouse, and the news that the company was winding up left Wellington's theatre community reeling.<sup>60</sup> Dame Kate

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<sup>49</sup> Smythe, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Smythe, 2013; feedback from Murray Lynch, Hannah Playhouse Trust Chair, 24 January 2023.

<sup>52</sup> Smythe, 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Thomson, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*; Smythe, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> 'Downstage Theatre company to close', *Stuff*, 17 September 2013, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/9175545/Downstage-theatre-company-to-close>; accessed 14 May 2021.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*; 'Curtain to fall on Downstage Theatre', *RNZ*, 17 September 2013, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/221913/curtain-to-fall-on-downstage-theatre>, accessed 14 May 2021.

<sup>58</sup> 'Creative New Zealand statement on the closure of Downstage Theatre', *Manatū Taonga, Ministry for Culture and Heritage*, 17 September 2013, accessed 14 May 2021.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*; *Stuff*, 17 September 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Chris Hutching, 'Downstage closure – 'absolutely wicked'', *NBR.co.nz*, 17 September 2013, <https://www.nbr.co.nz/article/downstage-closure-absolutely-wicked-ch-p-145987>, accessed 15 May 2021.

Harcourt, who had been associated with the company since the 1970s, noted that it had ‘fostered the talent of many successful theatre practitioners and the opportunities it created would be missed’.<sup>61</sup> Over the course of its almost 50-year history Downstage had 18 artistic directors and countless careers were ‘launched or enhanced’ by the company – many of those involved with Downstage went on to become household names in the New Zealand, from actors to playwrights and directors.<sup>62</sup> In addition to Dame Kate Harcourt and Miranda Harcourt, other notable New Zealanders who ‘made their names’ acting or directing at Downstage include Jim Moriarty, Grant Tilly, Roger Hall, Rawiri Paratene, Theresa Healey and Ginette McDonald.<sup>63</sup> Downstage also paved the way for other professional theatre companies to follow.<sup>64</sup>

#### *Capital E and a Venue for Hire*

After the Downstage Theatre company wound up, Experience Wellington leased Hannah Playhouse to provide a theatre venue for Capital E, the National Theatre for Children, until 2020.<sup>65</sup> The Hannah Playhouse Trust have also made the venue available for hire over recent years, with a diverse range of productions from theatre to dance, music and comedy, including a number of Māori theatre productions such as *The Māori Side Steps*, *Cellfish* by Rob Mokaraka, Miriama McDowell and Jason Te Kare, Hone Kouka’s *Waiora* and Bianca Hyslop and Rowan Pierce’s multi-disciplinary dance piece *Pōhutu*.<sup>66</sup>

#### *Associated List Entries*

N/A

## **2.2. Physical Information**

### *Context*

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<sup>61</sup> ‘Harcourts grieve over Downstage closure’, *DP*, 19 September 2013, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/wellington/9183468/Harcourts-grieve-over-Downstage-closure>, accessed 30 May 2021.

<sup>62</sup> John Smythe, 2004 – see pp.6-7 for all the company’s artistic directors excluding Cathy Downes and Hilary Beaton who post-date the book’s publication; ‘Downstage closure a tragedy’, *DP*, 19 September 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Thomson, 2010.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Editorial: The sad demise of Downstage’, *DP*, 20 September 2013, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/9181432/Editorial-The-sad-demise-of-Downstage>, accessed 30 May 2021.

<sup>65</sup> ‘The Hannah’s History’, *Hannah Playhouse*.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*; ‘2018 Productions’, *Hannah Playhouse*, <https://www.hannahplayhouse.org.nz/2018-productions> and <http://www.hannahplayhouse.org.nz/2018-productions> and ‘2019 Productions’, *Hannah Playhouse*, <http://www.hannahplayhouse.org.nz/2019-productions>, both accessed 14 May 2021.



The Hannah Playhouse is a unique and bold form in the streetscape of Wellington city. The orientation of the site in relation to the very broad streetscapes of Courtenay Place and Cambridge Terrace allows the building to be appreciated from wide-ranging and distant viewpoints. This position has contributed to it becoming a landmark building in the city. Because adjoining buildings on both streets are no more than three storeys high and of contrastingly different styles, the Hannah Playhouse provides a dramatic corner statement that is appropriate in scale.<sup>67</sup> Uniquely individual in style, it contributes positively to the variety and vitality that embodies the area. The building sits upon a small, irregular, and challenging corner site and the footprint of the building is rhomboid in plan to maximise site coverage.<sup>68</sup> The constraints have been identified as a strong influence on the successful realisation of the building's interior and exterior design.<sup>69</sup>

### *New Brutalism*

The Hannah Playhouse is an excellent example of Brutalist architecture. The New Brutalism movement was an international architectural approach of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and the term was coined in England in 1954.<sup>70</sup> It exhibited a reverence for materials and was characterised by the honest exposure of construction fabric such as exposed raw textured concrete. Brutalism is noted for strong geometric forms and the way interior spatial design was an influence on the exterior appearance of a building.<sup>71</sup> The exterior in this way revealed the function within. One of New Zealand's best-known exponents of the style was Christchurch architect Sir Miles Warren, with work such as the Dorset Street Flats (1956-57), College House (1965-1970), and the Christchurch Town Hall (1968-72), all Category 1 historic places.<sup>72</sup> Another well-known example of Brutalist architecture is the Ministry of Works' National Library in Wellington (1974-1986).

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<sup>67</sup> See report cover image, Figure 7 and Figure 8.

<sup>68</sup> See Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5; *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> NZIA Resene Local Awards for Architecture 2003 – Wellington Awards', *Architecture New Zealand*, Mar-Apr 2004, pp. 90-91. See page 90.

<sup>70</sup> John Fleming, Hugh Honour, and Nikolaus Pevsner (eds.), *Penguin Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, Penguin Books Ltd, London, 1999, p.75.

<sup>71</sup> Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?*, The Architectural Press, London, 1966, pp. 45, 89.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, Hachette, Auckland, 2003, pp.173-76; Jessica Halliday and Christine Whybrew, 'Dorset Street Flats', Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, 2010, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7804>; C. Whybrew with Jessica Halliday and Robyn Burgess, 'College House', Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7812>; Ian Lochhead, 'Christchurch Town Hall', Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, 2020, <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/9817>; all accessed 16 May 2021.

The Hannah Playhouse adheres to Brutalist characteristics in its use of materials and in the way its interior function impacts on its exterior form. The expansive asymmetrical roof volume that dominates the exterior grew from the functional requirement to house lighting and scenery in the auditorium. The strong diagonal line in concrete that crosses the building's eastern façade reveals the form and structure of the main interior stairway leading from ground level to the auditorium.

Although usually understood by its formal architectural aesthetic features of exposed materials and raw untreated surfaces, New Brutalism also has an ethical component that is frequently overlooked. It was an architectural ideal as much as an approach, with social objectives including the reform of urbanism and the total environment.<sup>73</sup> Hannah Playhouse arguably conforms to the ethics of this approach given its recognised unique urban and streetscape qualities and the social and environmental philosophies of its architect James Beard.

#### *Exterior*

Hannah Playhouse presents to the street two boldly articulated façades and a prominent roof form comprising an expansive steel-framed asymmetrical wedge-shaped volume.<sup>74</sup> Unusual and dominating, it has been a topic of controversy, with some disliking its appearance and others admiring its boldness.<sup>75</sup>

The exterior fabric and finish of the Hannah Playhouse remains largely intact and unaltered apart from two intrusions. The first is the addition of unsympathetic rustic-style stone cladding on the street level restaurant façade on Courtenay Place. The second is a protruding box enclosure for the lift installation evident on the second level of the Cambridge Terrace façade. This cantilevered rectilinear box is acceptable in scale, but its form, materials, and detailing do not correlate with the original, existing cantilevered features of the building. However, despite these changes the original design of the building is clearly legible allowing a strong appreciation of its architectural and streetscape qualities.

The walls are constructed of reinforced concrete, concrete block, and unpainted off form (exposed shuttered) concrete. They have been constructed independently of the floors and columns to minimise earthquake impact. The steel framed roof with timber purlins and

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<sup>73</sup> Banham, 1966, pp. 45-47, 89.

<sup>74</sup> See Figure 1, Figure 7 and Figure 8.

<sup>75</sup> *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 4.

sarking is clad in 'Alstrip' horizontal aluminium strip cladding with vertical jointing bands. Concrete gutters are lined in butyl sheet and the downpipes are aluminium. Window joinery is timber on the main frontage and aluminium on the theatre floor.<sup>76</sup>

### *Interior*

There have been limited changes to the interior layout over the years; the most significant change was the reconfiguration of the first floor during the lift installation in 2003, but otherwise much of the interior fabric of the Hannah Playhouse in the spaces used by Downstage Theatre remains unaltered. The original raw concrete surfaces and rugged finishes are enduring characteristics that create a strong sense of the original design intent.<sup>77</sup>

The building comprises three main levels of ground, intermediate, and the theatre floor covering a gross area of 1360 square metres.<sup>78</sup> When built, the ground floor comprised the theatre workshop, two leased shops, lobbies, and the ticket and box manager's offices. A coffee bar with a small mezzanine level was suspended over the retail area.<sup>79</sup> The main entrance lobby has undergone alterations with the ticket box office having been relocated into the space originally occupied by the coffee bar and small mezzanine area. The original brass pendant light fittings still adorn the main stair well and adjoining public spaces. The foyer floor is finished in large multi-coloured pavers painted with 'Tuscan-style' imagery.<sup>80</sup>

The original plan provided for two separate ground floor retail spaces fronting Courtenay Place and these have since been combined to create one restaurant tenancy. In addition to unsympathetic exterior cladding, there has been an extensive interior fit-out resulting in little original fabric remaining visible apart from structural columns and glimpses of the underside of the floor slab above.

The first floor houses the patrons' bar, actor's green room, dressing rooms, offices, storage, and public and staff toilets. The rehearsal area originally on this level was converted into a patrons' bar in the early 1980s. The original kitchen to service both the theatre level restaurant above and the coffee bar below is now the green room, with the original green

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<sup>76</sup> *Home and Building*, 1 Apr 1975, pp. 40, 41, 43, 45; James Beard and Co., 1974, pp. 147-151.

<sup>77</sup> See Figure 9.

<sup>78</sup> See Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5 and Figure 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Home and Building*, 1 Apr 1975, pp. 40, 41, 43, 45; and *Designscape*, Nov 1973, pp. 5, 7.

<sup>80</sup> Email from Murray Lynch, Hannah Playhouse Trust to Joanna Barnes-Wylie, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Central Region Office, 6 May 2021, filed on Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Central Region file 12008-052.

room now used as an office.<sup>81</sup> The dressing rooms and the offices are essentially original with respect to layout, fabric, and finishes.

Accessibility requirements resulted in the addition of a lift to the building in 2003. The lift has been accommodated in the space of a storeroom located inside the entrance doors by removing the set of internal lobby doors. The lift is relatively unobtrusive internally, with its major impact occurring on the Cambridge Terrace façade.

The second level accommodates the theatre and a mezzanine balcony within an expansive wedge-shaped ceiling space.<sup>82</sup> This level covers almost the full footprint of the site. Within this volume is a substantial gridded working floor that forms the theatre's immediate ceiling at a height of 5.5 metres. The steel framed grid has 1.2 metres by 1.2 metres openings with 0.6 metre access ways between them. Heating and ventilating ducts are incorporated below the access ways and adjustable lighting fixture rods are installed in openings.<sup>83</sup> Further above is the lighting control, lift machinery, and ventilation fan floor.<sup>84</sup>

The auditorium level mezzanine balcony was extended in the late 1980s. The original square and triangular movable seating platforms have been replaced by a demountable tiered seating system. This tiered system continues to enable flexibility in the seating configuration but is notably different from the original design and has been found to be cumbersome.<sup>85</sup> The extensive gridded working floor that defines the auditorium ceiling is essentially unchanged. The removable trap floor in the centre of the theatre remains in place, although the creation of the bar on the level directly below and subsequent changes to the bar's layout and lighting have made its removal impractical. The stained diagonal timber doors, balcony fronts, walls, and large partition screens remain in place and look appropriate despite signs of wear and tear.

The ground floor is concrete laid on solid ground and the first and second floors are reinforced concrete flat slabs approximately 30 centimetres deep, suspended on concrete columns. The mezzanine floors are timber framed and the stairs are reinforced concrete.

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<sup>81</sup> *Home and Building*, 1 Apr 1975, p. 42.

<sup>82</sup> See Figure 10.

<sup>83</sup> *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> James Beard and Co., 1974, p.147.

<sup>85</sup> Email from Lynch to Barnes-Wylie, 6 May 2021, filed on Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Central Region file 12008-052.

Some of the interior fair-faced concrete was originally painted white and unfortunately now some of the interior off-form concrete is painted.<sup>86</sup>

### *Flexibility*

The Hannah Playhouse is designed so that productions can be staged in any part of the auditorium floor area, with the audience seating arranged to suit. The innovative and creative use of platforms and seating in the auditorium produced a theatre environment with a multitude of arrangement possibilities. Performances might be in a central location, to one side, in an arena and proscenium setting, on a thrust stage, or wrapping around the audience. The original movable carpeted platforms in the form of squares and triangles enabled diners to be arranged at various levels and in various configurations.<sup>87</sup>

To accommodate this flexible in-the-round theatre the steel-framed ceiling grid for hanging scenery and lighting extends above the entire floor area. The grid was unique in New Zealand theatre design.

Further flexibility was gained with a large 'trap' or removable floor area approximately 5 metres by 7 metres in the centre of the theatre to create a partial or fully sunken stage or for actors to enter from the area below as required.

### *Finishes*

Beard's aim was to create a neutral canvas as a background to the activities within. He achieved this in the auditorium through the use of grey concrete, stained timber, blue-grey carpet, deep blue curtains, and dark blue paint to the grid.<sup>88</sup> Generally concrete has been left raw but paint was applied to the walls of the theatre floor.<sup>89</sup> Diagonal-stained timber features on the doors, balcony fronts in the auditorium, walls behind and below the mezzanine floor (rimu), and large partition screens (rimu). The original brass tube pendant lights with uncovered bulbs feature in the stair well and public areas.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Home and Building*, 1 Apr 1975, pp. 40, 41, 43, 45; and *NZIA Journal*, No. 8, Aug 1974, pp. 147-151.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid*, pp. 42, 45.

<sup>88</sup> *Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> James Beard and Co., 1974, p.151..

<sup>90</sup> *ibid*, pp. 6, 8.

### *Architecture Awards for Hannah Playhouse*

The Hannah Playhouse has received a string of awards over the years that highlight the building's architectural, cultural, and social significance.

- 1974: *New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) Merit Award (Regional)* <sup>91</sup>
- 1977: *Tourism Design Award* <sup>92</sup>
- 1978: *NZIA National Award* <sup>93</sup>
- 2003 and 2006: *NZIA Enduring Architecture Awards, Local (2003) and National (2006)* <sup>94</sup>

### *Construction Professionals*

*Architects:* James Beard & Company, Wellington. Designed by James Beard with initial design by Ronald M Parker, Auckland. <sup>95</sup>

James Beard (1924-2017) was a significant Wellington architect, town planner, and landscape architect. He took an active role and made a positive contribution to shaping the urban environment and in conservation, environmental, and ecological issues in New Zealand. <sup>96</sup>

*Theatre Consultant:* Raymond Boyce

*Structural Engineers:* Beca, Carter, Hollings & Ferner

*Main Contractor:* Lemmon & Slack Construction Co. Ltd., Miramar, Wellington.

*Joinery Manufacturers:* Timber windows and interior doors C. E. Daniell Ltd., Masterton. <sup>97</sup>

*Mechanical Consultants (Heating and Ventilation):* Davies and Newson

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<sup>91</sup> *Home and Building*, 1 Apr 1975, p. 41.

<sup>92</sup> 'Award – Hannah Playhouse, Wellington', *New Zealand Architect*, No. 6 Dec 1977, p. 14.

<sup>93</sup> 'National Awards', *New Zealand Architect*, No. 3 Jun 1978, pp. 32-34.

<sup>94</sup> *Architecture New Zealand*, Mar-Apr 2004, p. 90; 'NZIA Resene NZ Awards for Architecture 2006 – Enduring Awards', *Architecture New Zealand*, May-Jun 2006, pp. 58-59.

<sup>95</sup> Christine McCarthy, 'Hannah Playhouse (also known as Downstage)', in Julia Gatley (ed), *Long Live the Modern; New Zealand's New Architecture 1904-1984*, Auckland University Press, Auckland 2008, p.189.

<sup>96</sup> Ina Holst, 'James Beard on a Life Well-lived,' *The GB Weekly*, 17 March 2011.

<sup>97</sup> *Home and Building*, 1 Apr 1975, pp. 40-45.



*Electrical Consultants:* Falkner, Butler and Associates<sup>98</sup>

#### *Construction Materials*

Reinforced concrete, concrete block, off-form (exposed shuttered) concrete, timber, steel framing, aluminium roof cladding, timber and aluminium joinery.

#### *Key Physical Dates*

1971-1973 Original Construction

1980 Modification - rehearsal area modifications and extension of mezzanine balcony in auditorium

1990s Modification - alterations to bar and box office

2003 Modification - addition of lift and toilets for accessibility and upgrade of level 1 toilets

#### *Uses*

Civic Facilities - Theatre

Trade - Restaurant

### **2.3. Chattels**

There are no chattels included in this List entry.

### **2.4. Sources**

#### *Sources Available and Accessed*

The Hannah Playhouse is well documented in New Zealand architectural and design journals. The building was featured in several publications after its completion, and it has been covered since that time on numerous occasions in relation to the design awards that it has received. Some of this material also provides background information about the Downstage Theatre. The Hannah Playhouse and Downstage Theatre have featured in Wellington newspaper articles and in books, and these provide supporting information.

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<sup>98</sup> James Beard and Co., 1974, p.147.

Archival material is available at Wellington City Council's City Archives and at the National Library's Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL). The City Archives holds files on the building relating to consent processes.

The history and significance of the Downstage Theatre company is documented in detail in John Smythe's 2004 publication *Downstage Upfront: The First 40 years of New Zealand's Longest-running Professional Theatre*. This was supplemented by newspaper articles, particularly from late 2013 following the announcement that the company was winding up.

#### *Further Reading*

Christine McCarthy, 'Hannah Playhouse (also known as Downstage)', in Julia Gatley (ed), *Long Live the Modern; New Zealand's New Architecture 1904-1984*, Auckland University Press, Auckland 2008, pp. 188-189.

Peter Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, Hachette, Auckland, 2003.

John Smythe, *Downstage Upfront: The First 40 years of New Zealand's Longest-running Professional Theatre*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2004.

'Hannah Playhouse', *Designscape*, Nov 1973, pp. 1-8.

'Hannah Playhouse', *Home and Building*, 1 Apr 1975, pp 40-45.

James Beard and Co., 'Hannah Playhouse', *NZIA Journal*, No. 8, Aug 1974, pp. 147-151.

### **3. SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT<sup>99</sup>**

#### **3.1. Section 66 (1) Assessment**

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

#### **Aesthetic Significance or Value**

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<sup>99</sup> For the relevant sections of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 see Appendix 4: Significance Assessment Information.

The Hannah Playhouse is a prominent and striking visual landmark in central Wellington. It makes a positive and noteworthy contribution to the quality and diversity of the streetscape. The building has considerable townscape value for its contribution to the Courtenay Place precinct achieved through its unique and remarkable appearance and through the appropriate application of scale, form, massing, and texture. The building is important for the high standard it has set for urban design in Wellington city.

#### Architectural Significance or Value

The Hannah Playhouse is an excellent example of the Brutalist approach to architecture. It exhibits a reverence for materials and is characterised by the honest exposure of construction fabric including exposed raw textured concrete. The building has strong geometric forms, and the interior spatial design has been an influence on the exterior appearance of a building, both features of Brutalism. It is an example of a revolutionary theatre design that combined performance with dining, and a fine and rare New Zealand demonstration of the small theatre movement principles of its time. The building has a high level of authenticity to its exterior and interior having undergone little change since its completion date and thereby retaining a large amount of original fabric. The high level of authenticity contributes to the architectural significance of the building.

#### Cultural Significance or Value

The creation of the Hannah Playhouse is testimony to the important position that theatre holds in the cultural life of Wellington. It represents the endeavours of a small group of people who held a strong belief in the importance of theatre to New Zealand cultural life.

#### Historical Significance or Value

Hannah Playhouse has historical significance for its lengthy association with Downstage Theatre, a company important for its cultural contribution to Wellington and the nation. Downstage occupied the theatre continuously from its completion until late 2013, a period of 40 years. At the time of the company's closure, it was the longest-running professional theatre company in New Zealand. Many notable New Zealand actors and directors are associated with Downstage, such as Kate and Miranda Harcourt, Jim Moriarty, Rawini Paratene and Ginette McDonald, who made their mark in the theatre world within the walls of Hannah Playhouse. The production of New Zealand plays were a hallmark of the company since the 1970s, highlighting Downstage and Hannah Playhouse's critical roles in supporting local playwrights, including Robert Lord and Hone Kouka, and other significant theatre companies such as Taki Rua. Further historical significance is derived from its association with

notable New Zealand architect James Beard and its connection with the Hannah family and its legacy. The building itself was the first purpose-built theatre restaurant in the country.

#### Social Significance or Value

The Hannah Playhouse is an integral part of Wellington's arts community. The building has provided a place to practice and to experience professional theatre in Wellington for 48 years. The Hannah Playhouse holds special meaning and associations for many theatre professionals and patrons in New Zealand. They have a continuing sense of attachment to the building from their regular and ongoing use of it throughout the years.

### **3.2. Section 66 (3) Assessment**

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

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

Through its association with Downstage Theatre, the Hannah Playhouse strongly represents the development of local theatre in this country and a dedicated focus on New Zealand plays.

The building represents an important moment in the history of professional theatre design and construction in New Zealand as a high profile and high quality purpose-built theatre. It was the first purpose-built theatre restaurant in New Zealand and when completed, was one of the few theatre restaurants in the world. It reflects the continuing important position that theatre holds in the cultural history of New Zealand.

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

Hannah Playhouse is a place where local theatre practitioners and companies honed their craft to become leaders in their field, such as Kate and Miranda Harcourt, Jim Moriarty, Rawini Paratene, Ginette McDonald. It is closely associated with leading Māori theatre company Taki Rua, which has its origins in Downstage Theatre's side project The Depot.

It is also associated with significant New Zealand architect, town planner, and landscape architect James Beard who played a prominent role in its design. Beard took an active role and made a positive contribution to shaping the urban environment and to conservation, environmental, and ecological issues in New Zealand. The building is considered a signature architectural project for Beard and represents one of the most important works in his oeuvre. The unique urban and streetscape qualities of the Hannah Playhouse are the realisation of the design, social, and environmental philosophies of its architect. The Hannah Playhouse is also associated with philanthropist Sheilah Winn, a significant theatre patron.

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

The Hannah Playhouse is held in high public esteem by many theatre professionals and patrons in Wellington and nationwide, who have a strong connection with it from regular and ongoing use over many years. In a broader context, there is a strong community association with the building as it provides a prominent and striking visual landmark in the Wellington city streetscape.

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

The Hannah Playhouse is an exceptional representative example of Brutalist architecture as it manifested in New Zealand in the 1970s. As such the building represents an important milestone in the progression and development of Modern Movement architecture in New Zealand.

The building possesses value for its enduring design qualities that continue to satisfy aesthetic and functional requirements. The Hannah Playhouse's design value is increased by the high degree of integrity of its exterior and interior fabric that has undergone minimal change. The numerous architectural awards received after its completion and in recent years substantiate the building's exceptional design values and its enduring qualities.

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

The Hannah Playhouse is a rare example of a prominent purpose-built theatre from the 1970s that encapsulates an important moment in the development of professional theatre design in New Zealand. It was the first purpose-built theatre restaurant in New Zealand.

*Summary of Significance or Values*

The Hannah Playhouse is a landmark building with outstanding aesthetic, architectural and historic value. It is historically significant for its long association with Wellington's Downstage

Theatre company and as an enduring venue for New Zealand actors, directors, playwrights, and other theatre companies such as Taki Rua. It is a high-quality purpose-built professional theatre and the first purpose-built theatre restaurant in New Zealand. The winner of multiple architecture awards, it is a signature project for the significant New Zealand architect James Beard. The building's unique, distinctive, and imposing Brutalist architecture, its careful articulation of form, scale, massing, and materials, and its high level of authenticity make a special contribution to the Wellington streetscape and continue to set a high standard for urban design in the city.



## 4. APPENDICES

### 4.1. Appendix 1: Visual Identification Aids

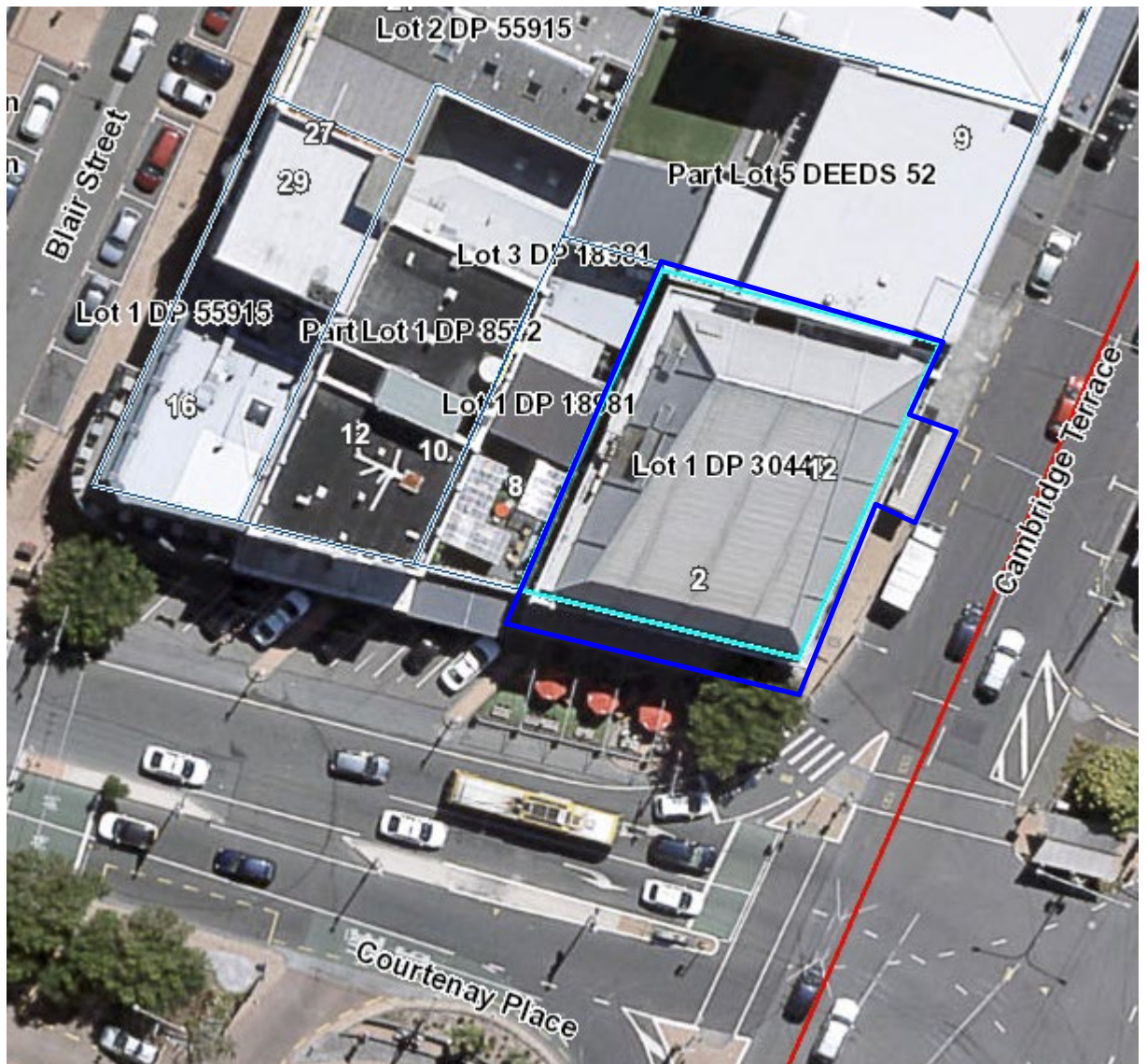
#### *Location Map*










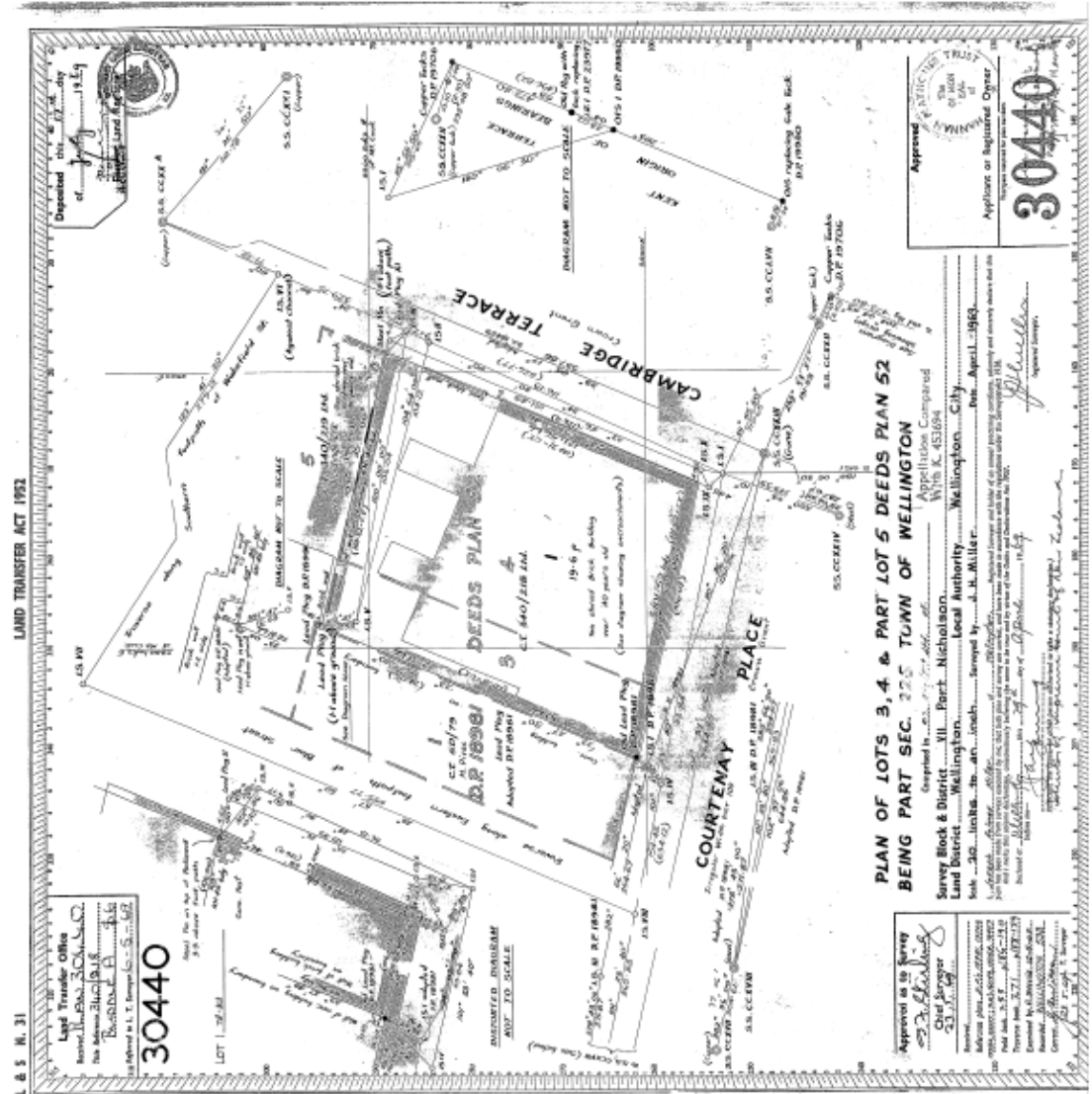
### Map of Extent



Extent includes the land described as Lot 1 DP 30440 (RT WN7B/313) and part of the land described as Legal Road, Wellington Land District and the building known as the Hannah Playhouse thereon. Extent includes the roof canopies on the Cambridge Terrace and Courtenay Place façades. (Source: Wellington City Council Property Maps, aerial imagery from 2017).

	<b>RECORD OF TITLE UNDER LAND TRANSFER ACT 2017 FREEHOLD Search Copy</b>	  R.W. Muir Registrar-General of Land
<b>Identifier</b>	<b>WN7B/313</b>	
<b>Land Registration District</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	
<b>Date Issued</b>	17 July 1969	
<b>Prior References</b>	WN340/218	
<b>Estate</b>	Fee Simple	
<b>Area</b>	496 square metres more or less	
<b>Legal Description</b>	Lot 1 Deposited Plan 30440	
<b>Registered Owners</b>	Hannah Playhouse Trust as to a 56/100 share Wellington City Council as to a 44/100 share	
<b>Interests</b>	876779 Certificate of Consent by the Wellington City Council to the construction of a cellar on the within land - 25.6.1971 at 11.29 am	
<small>Transaction ID 61741266 Client Reference jnyllie001</small>		<small>Search Copy Dated 21/09/20 9:04 am, Page 1 of 2 Register Only</small>

<sup>100</sup> In 1996 a one-third share of the Hannah Playhouse property was transferred to Wellington City Council. In 2003 Wellington City Council's share of the ownership increased by 11 percent (to 44%) in return for their investment in installation of a lift and associated renovations – see 'Hannah Playhouse Trust, Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2008,' p.11, [https://wellington.govt.nz/~media/your-council/meetings/subcommittees/council-controlled-organisation-subcommittee/2009/06/19/files/8\\_hannah\\_07\\_08\\_ar.pdf](https://wellington.govt.nz/~media/your-council/meetings/subcommittees/council-controlled-organisation-subcommittee/2009/06/19/files/8_hannah_07_08_ar.pdf), accessed 30 May 2021.



## 4.2. Appendix 2: Visual Aids to Historical Information

### *Historical Plans*

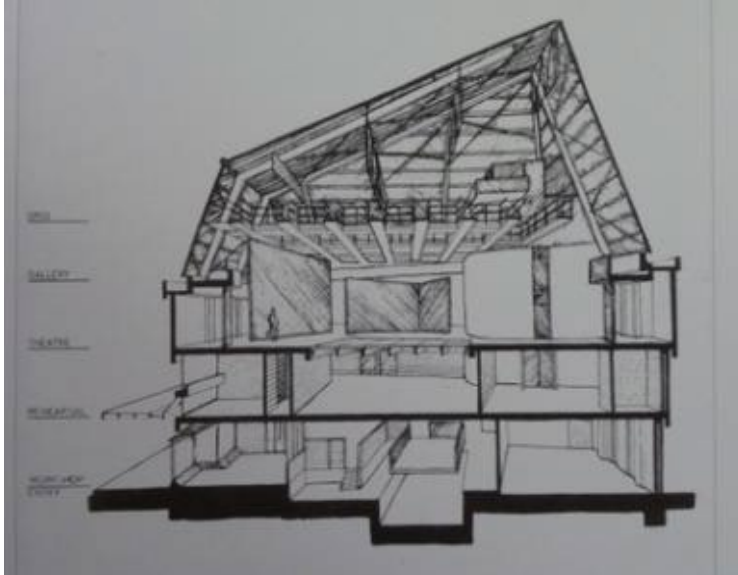


Figure 1: Sectional perspective of the Hannah Playhouse showing the main ground, first, and auditorium levels along with the gallery and working floors of the theatre. (*NZIA Journal*, No. 8, Aug 1974, p. 148)

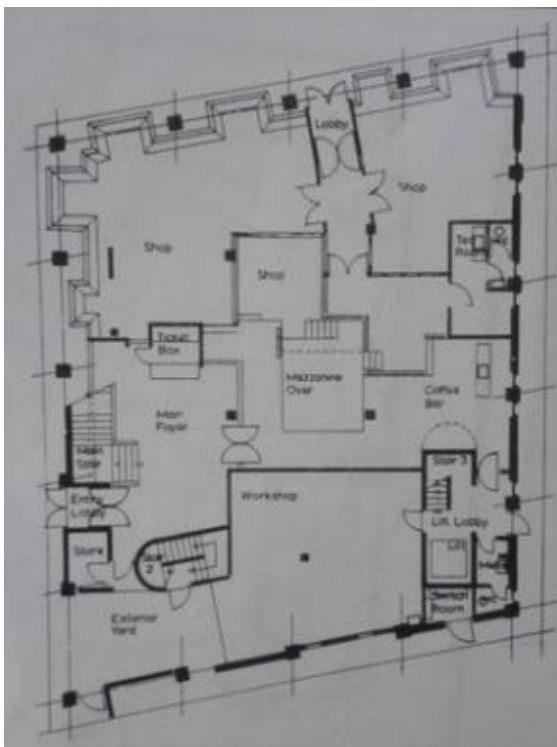


Figure 2: Ground floor plan of the Hannah Playhouse. (*Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 4)





Figure 3: First floor plan of the Hannah Playhouse (*Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 4)

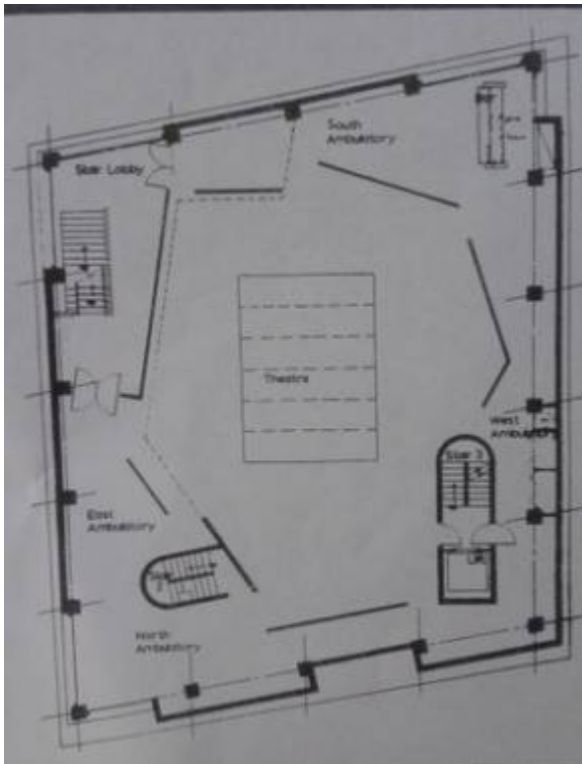


Figure 4: Auditorium floor plan of the Hannah Playhouse (*Designscape*, Nov 1973, p. 6)



Figure 5: Downstage Theatre under construction, 20 June 1972, *Dominion Post* (Newspaper): Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post and Dominion newspapers, Ref: EP/1972/3017/14. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23160722>.



Figure 6: View of the interior of the new Hannah Playhouse, Wellington, 6 October 1973, *Dominion Post* (Newspaper): Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post and Dominion newspapers, Ref: EP/1973/4372/12-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22673310>.

#### 4.3. Appendix 3: Visual Aids to Physical Information

##### *Current Plans*

N/A

##### *Current Photographs of Place*



Figure 7: Courtenay Place façade of the Hannah Playhouse, Joanna Barnes-Wylie, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, 28 May 2021



Figure 8: Cambridge Terrace façade of the Hannah Playhouse. Joanna Barnes-Wylie, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, 28 May 2021



Figure 9: Main foyer and stairway of the Hannah Playhouse, Alexandra Teague, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, 10 August 2011



Figure 10: Auditorium level of the Hannah Playhouse, Alexandra Teague, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, 10 August 2011



#### 4.4. Appendix 4: Significance Assessment Information

Part 4 of the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014

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

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

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

##### *Significance or value (Section 66(1))*

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

##### *Category of historic place (Section 66(3))*

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

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

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

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

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

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