

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

First Church of Christ, Scientist

Address

81 Courtenay Street, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

This building has considerable heritage significance for its 95-year association with the Christian Science Church in New Plymouth. The original building was designed by capable local architect Thomas Herbert Bates in 1923, with rear extensions designed by prominent local firm Messenger & Taylor in 1932. Despite modifications to the frontage, the original building still retains a high degree of external integrity and incorporates an interesting array of architectural features. The building is the oldest surviving on Courtenay Street between the Liardet and Gover Street intersections and adds interest to an area now dominated by modern commercial premises.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description	PT Section 935 Town of New Plymouth
District Plan Item/ Map No.	
Heritage New Zealand List	Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction	1923/1932
Principal Materials	Reinforced concrete, corrugated steel
Construction Professionals	Thomas Herbert Bates; Messenger and Taylor (architects), Fred Archer Coleman; Boon Bros (builders)

History

The original portion of this building was constructed in 1923 as the first permanent New Plymouth home of the First Church of Christ, Scientist. The First Church of Christ, Scientist was established in New Plymouth during the early 1920s, with services initially held in 'the old Repatriation Room' in Brougham Street.¹

A permit was granted by the New Plymouth Borough Council on 27 August 1923 for the construction of a church on Courtenay Street; the builder was Fred Archer Coleman, and the building had an estimated construction cost of £1000.² Whilst no plans are held by NPDC for the original building, it is known to have been designed by noted New Plymouth architect Thomas Herbert Bates, who called for tenders for its construction in June 1923.³ Thomas Bates (1873-1954) was one of New Plymouth's foremost architects during the first half of the twentieth century, and was associated with a significant number of substantial commercial and residential buildings between 1916 and 1953.

Construction of the building was commenced in August 1923 and the 'Corner Stone' was laid 2 November 1923. The first service in the new building was held on 6th January 1924.⁴ A dedication service was held on the 21st February 1932; this was not held until this date as members wished the building to be debt free before doing so.

By 1932, the church had grown to a point where enlargement of the building was required, and in July of that year, noted local architects Messenger and Taylor prepared designs for a rear extension to the building.⁵ This extension included a schoolroom, library and reading room, and two lavatories.⁶ A permit for this work was granted by the New Plymouth Borough Council on 5 August 1932; local firm Boon Bros were the builders, and the estimated construction cost was £1000.⁷ In the 1980s, a new reception area and reading room was constructed at the front of the building.

¹ *Taranaki Herald*, 15 December 1923, page 12

² NPBC Building Register Book 1922-27, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

³ *Taranaki Daily News*, 15 June 1923, page 1

⁴ *Taranaki Herald*, 5 January 1924, page 14

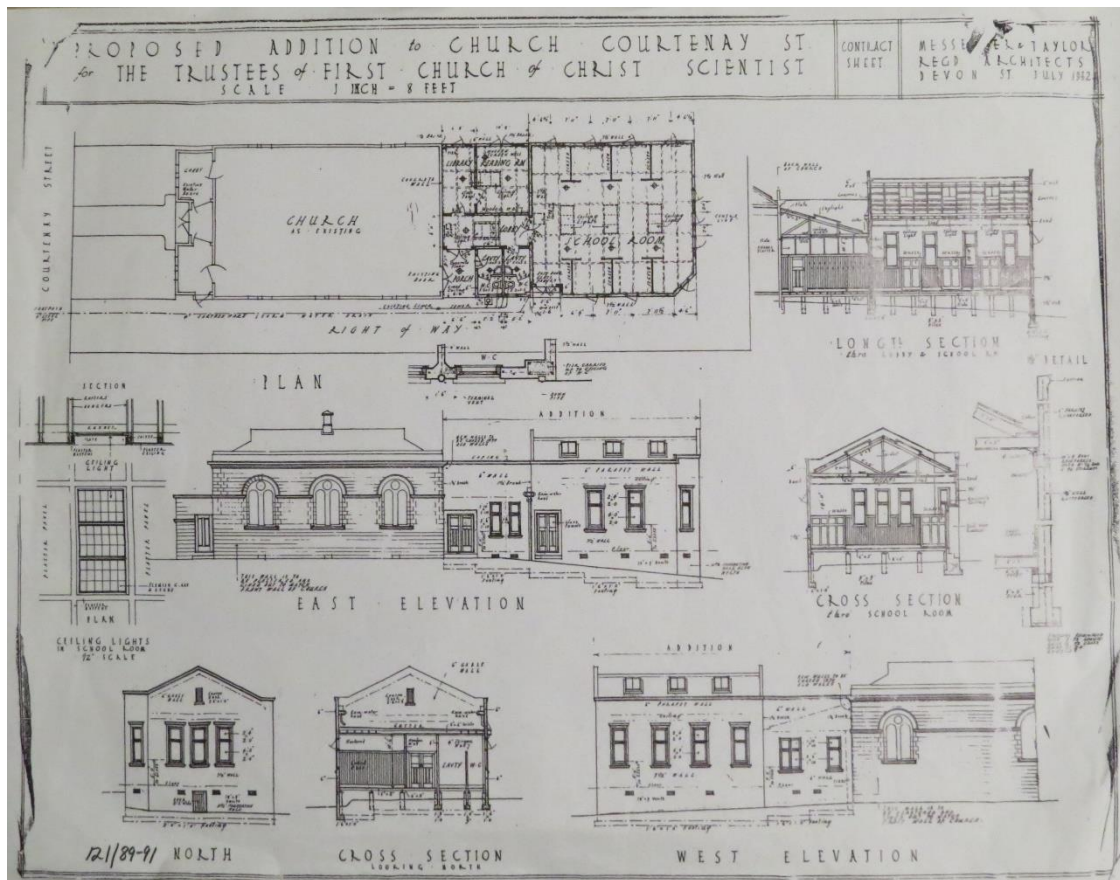
⁵ NPDC Archives

⁶ NPDC Archives

⁷ NPBC Building Register Book 1927-33, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)



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Copy of plan showing 1932 extensions by Messenger & Taylor, NPDC Property File

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

Description

This building is located at the western end of Courtenay Street, a busy one-way system in New Plymouth's Central Business District. The building is the oldest surviving on Courtenay Street between the Liardet and Gover Street intersections. The building is rectilinear in form and constructed on a roughly NW-SW orientation. It is an atypical church design which borrows from several different ecclesiastical styles.

The exterior walls of the original 1923 building are constructed of reinforced concrete, plastered, and finished to resemble stonework. The building is finished with a Dutch Gable roof clad in mild corrugated steel. Whilst the original frontage is now largely concealed by the 1980s addition, three symmetrical oeil-de-boeuf windows can be glimpsed through a modern glazed roof. 'First Church of Christ, Scientist' (deliberate omission of 'The') is incised onto the frieze, with a strong cornice then leading to a small parapet.

The western elevation of the 1923 building incorporates two tracery windows, each with two tall lancets, oeil-de-boeuf, and lead-light glazing. The windows are capped with arched labels, and the lower portion finished with moulded quoins designed to resemble stone. A moulded string course at centre height runs the length of the wall; being intersected at window openings. Above the windows is a plain frieze, strong cornice, and small parapet which hides the guttering. The eastern elevation of the 1923 building is stylistically identical to the western elevation, except it incorporates a regular row of three tracery windows, instead of two.



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The 1932 addition is simpler in form and largely unadorned and references the Art-Deco/Moderne style popular at the time. It is composed of a simple NW-SW gable, with a lean-to linking to the old building; the parapet is of a consistent height to give the illusion of a continuous structure. The western elevation incorporates two smaller wooden casement windows to light what were designed as the library and reading room, and four larger, symmetrically positioned casements to light the schoolroom. The schoolroom casements, along with almost the entire western wall of the schoolroom, is now hidden behind a large concrete wall forming part of The Warehouse/public underground carpark.

The eastern elevation of the 1932 addition is an irregular arrangement that includes two door openings with small porches; two small casement windows with fanlights in each of the toilets; and two large casements lighting the schoolroom. The eastern wall gives way to a chamfered corner with single casement, whilst the rear elevation includes three symmetrically positioned casements, and a small sub-floor door.

Assessment:

Historical	This building has considerable heritage significance for its 95-year association with the Christian Science Church in New Plymouth.	✓
Importance to Community	As place of worship for almost 100 years, this building is of considerable importance to its members.	✓
Architecture & Construction	A non-conformist example of ecclesiastical architecture incorporating an interesting array of architectural features.	✓
Setting and Context	As the oldest surviving building on the NW side of Courtenay Street between Liardet and Gover Streets, this building stands-out amongst otherwise modern commercial buildings.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	This building is representative of the smaller Christian Science churches constructed in regional centres during the 1920s-30s period. Aside from the modern front addition, the building retains a high degree of external integrity.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓