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New International Selection
Full Documentation Fiche 2003

International working party for
documentation and conservation

of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the
modern movement

composed by national/regional working party of: New Zealand

0. Picture of building/ group of buildings/ urban scheme/ landscape/ garden



depicted item: Ryder Hall, New Plymouth Boys' High School
source: Julia Gatley
date: 2007

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1. Identity of building/ group of buildings/ group of buildings/ landscape/ garden

1.1 Data for identification

current name: Ryder Hall

former/original/variant name: New Plymouth Boys' High School Assembly Hall

number(s) and name(s) of street(s): 107 Coronation Avenue

town: New Plymouth

province/state: Taranaki Province

post code: 4342

block:

lot:

country: New Zealand

national topographical grid reference: unknown

current typology: EDC, REC (educational, private halls)

former/original/variant typology: EDC, REC (educational, private halls)

comments on typology: Purpose built assembly hall still used as such.

1.2 Status of protection

protected by: Not currently listed or protected

grade:

date:

valid for:

remarks: Although not heritage listed at present this building should be listed on the New Plymouth District Council's District Plan as an example of Modernist Brutalism.

1.3 Visually or functionally related building(s)/site(s)

name(s) of surrounding area/building(s): Alexander Block, also known as CR Block. This is a Science classroom block designed by the same architect, Desmond Ivor White, in 1967. This three-storied classroom block adjoins Ryder Hall

visual relations: Alexander Block is designed and constructed so that it flows visually and is linked to Ryder Hall. The materials used are the same or similar; pre-stressed concrete and the use of external line and pattern.

functional relations: The corridors physically and visually link Alexander Block to Ryder Hall

other relations: nil

2. History of building(s) etc.

2.1 Chronology

commission or competition date: tenders were called for the construction of CR Block and Ryder Hall in 1969.

design period(s): Initial planning commenced in 1965.

Gallery Layout drawings 11/1966. Details of building and amendments 1969

Most drawing and design work completed in 1968 including the Chapel design.

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The then New Plymouth City Council received the architectural plans 18/11/1969

start of site work: 20/06/68

completion/inauguration: Completed in 20 October 1972. Note: the Education Board architect John Fathers completed the stage and gallery rail design in 1972. Regrettably White died prior to the hall's completion.

2.2 Summary of development

commission brief: Upon sighting the original architectural drawings the commission date for Ryder Hall would have been circa 1966.

design brief:

The design brief would have been given to the Taranaki Education Board architects between 1966 and 1967. Desmond White produced the drawings and sketches for the hall layout in November 1967. White was at the time involved in the construction and design of the adjoining Alexander or CR Block in 1969. Tenders were called for the construction of CR Block and Ryder Hall in 1969.

building/construction: CR Block and Ryder Hall were on the same contract. The site was cleared in 1966 and 1968 Construction started in 1970. CR Block or Alexander Block replaced what was left of the original wooden school.

completed situation: The first assembly was held on 20 October 1972. The hall was opened by the Prime Minister JR Marshall.

original situation or character of site: Originally a 2-storied Laboratory Block existed on the north-west corner of the site. There was a bicycle shelter was on part of the site as well. In 1882 the school had begun its initial development on the east side of Eliot Street, on a 6-acre site. This is almost adjacent to the present Alexander Block and Ryder Hall. Ryder Hall occupies the site that was formerly Taranaki Harbour Board lease land. This land was used in early years, circa 1920s, as a horticultural plot and was acquired by the school in a piecemeal fashion. It was announced in 1965 that Alexander Block and a new assembly hall would be built. However 'limitations of the site and area forced this accommodation into three storeys and considerably affected the design of the assembly hall.' The design 'was best accepted as the best combination of appearance and maximum utilisation of the site' [Alexander *The First 100 Years*].

2.3 Relevant persons/organisations

original owner(s)/patron(s): Taranaki Education Board, New Plymouth Boys' High School Board of Governors and the NP Old Boys Association.

architect(s): Desmond Ivor White (Chief Architect for the Taranaki Education Board)

John Fathers (Architect for the Taranaki Education Board) who completed the project management and design for the stage and gallery railing design after White died in 1972.

landscape/garden designer(s): Unknown

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other designer(s): Nil or none known of.

consulting engineer(s): Unknown

building contractor(s): Roebuck Construction New Plymouth

2.4 Other persons or events associated with the building(s)/site

name(s):

association: Cowie, Rochell and Chong (Architects)

event(s): alterations to office and administration block (between Alexander Block and Ryder Hall)

period: 1990

2.5 Summary of important changes after completion

type of change: Museum added to house Old Boys and school memorabilia.

Slight unobtrusive changes made to foyer and Headmaster's office. This is now the uniform shop and fitting room.

date(s): 1992 and 2008 respectively.

circumstances/ reasons for change The Museum was built to house archival material and memorabilia. The Headmaster's office was moved to a new office block in 2007.

effects of changes: The headmaster's office was moved into the new tower block which was constructed in 2006/2007 some of the original fabric including fittings, fixtures and some joinery has been removed or altered. The body of the Ryder Hall remains extant.

persons/organisations involved: Chapman Oulsen and Spiers Architects (presently architects for New Plymouth Boys' High and holders of the original architectural plans for Ryder Hall). Jeff Salisbury is a partner in this firm and was the architect involved in the upgrade and design of the new tower block 2007.

3. Description of building(s) etc.

3.1 Site/building character

A sculptural, Brutalist building that occupies a prominent corner site. It is sited on a main arterial route into the CBD. It has a significant and imposing form. As a civic building it is a radical diversion from what was accepted as a standard secondary school hall during this era.

The Hall occupies a prominent north-west corner site at the school. The street elevation wraps seamlessly around one corner and is decorated with a 3-dimensional cloud-like concrete motif. The concrete massing that forms the 10 metre plus vertical wall panels was poured in-situ using 6x1 inch timber slats. Once these were removed, the spiralled texture was achieved by pneumatic chipping. This adds to the verticality, height, raw and honest elegance of the building.

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The side and rear elevations are dominated by two soaring garrets, which mesh with a simple but effective roof geometry. Functional oversized guttering adds emphasis to the rugged aesthetic. The site has been used cleverly with each elevation giving the viewer a distinctly different vista of the building.

The interior walls are fair-faced concrete contrasted with honeysuckle (rewarewa) parquet flooring. At the rear to one side is the Memorial Chapel (part of the original architectural design -1968) with its central feature being the 'List' Memorial stained glass window.

The curved and tiered upper Gallery contrasts with the major rectilinear forms of the interior. Here the simple use of negative detailing on the gallery walls along with vertical beams provides a contrast to the generous use of concrete. The upper floor is designed to seat 300 and is uniquely engineered as a separate entity so as to withstand the movement and impact of an earthquake.

The Hall had a small addition made with the internal formation of a museum. This was constructed in 1992 and is not too obtrusive and does not significantly detract from the fabric and architectural intent of the Hall.

3.2 Current use

of whole building/site: School assembly hall, house meetings, student study, examinations, parent/ teacher evenings and prize giving ceremonies. It is used for public meetings including concerts, meetings for community based groups and parent/ student events where a public speaker is giving an address.

of principal components (*if applicable*): n/a

comments: Educational based activities and events

3.3 Present (physical) condition

of whole building/site: A well maintained site and building. The Hall is still in its original state with few if any alterations internally and externally.

of principal components (*if applicable*): As above

of other elements (*if applicable*): As above

of surrounding area (*if applicable*): The Hall is bounded by Coronation Ave (formerly Avenue Road) and Wakefield Street. Unique vistas of the north-west elevation can be seen from New Plymouth Racecourse, which is directly across the road. This relationship is also historical in that the school experienced fires to its early wooden buildings in 1915, 1916 and 1926 respectively. On all three occasions classes affected were moved to the racecourse buildings. The Racecourse also provides playing fields for rugby and cricket alike. This is a significant part of New Plymouth Boys' High School's sporting curriculum.

comments: nil

3.4 Note(s) on context, indicating potential developments

See above; there are no known threats to the building at this time.

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4. Evaluation

Intrinsic value

4.1 technical evaluation: This building demonstrates the enthusiasm for off-form concrete apparent among New Zealand architects of the 1960s and 1970s. The concrete massing of the exterior was formed by using 6x1inch boards. The bush hammered textured surface was achieved later, by pneumatic chipping. Desmond White also used this rendering technique on a wall of the Infant Department at the Central Primary School in 1968. This wall is still extant and the achieved texture and technique is described in the building specifications (along with photographs to inform the builder's practice).

4.2. social evaluation:

The Hall's social value is reasonably important, not only as a core component of an educational institution but also as a local amenity. It is used for assemblies, meetings, ceremonies, including the annual senior ball, and locally for events and shows. It was stated that it was initially built as a community hall but this has never been substantiated. The school was faced with meeting excess costs associated with the construction of the Hall and it is believed that the school farm was sold to defray some of these costs.

4.3. cultural and aesthetic evaluation:

Ryder Hall's design was inspired by Hugh Casson's Whipsnade Elephant House at London Zoo (1964). It was a radical departure from secondary school halls of that time, particularly within this relatively conservative community. Public opinion on its design was –and continues to be - divided. Inclusion of this building in a book on New Zealand modern architecture *Long Live the Modern* in 2008 made the front pages in the local newspaper; the *Taranaki Daily News*.

Comparative significance

4.4 canonical status (local, national, international)

At a local level there are no other school assembly halls that are equal or similar in both design and execution of materials. Saint Joseph's Catholic Church (NP) is similar in construction and architectural context.

Bill Alington used fairfaced and off-form concrete for the design of Wellington High School in the 1960s and 1970s, although Alington's work is orthogonal and strictly ordered, whereas Ryder Hall is characterised by its massive, curving wall that wraps around the two street facades on this corner site.

Internationally the influence of Hugh Casson and the English Modern Brutalist movement has been used and adapted here in the antipodes. Ryder Hall is a prominent local landmark and a significant piece of New Plymouth's streetscape and civic architecture, sited a corner site on the edge of the central business district. It is located within a secondary school campus that has a flat site and contains buildings from a range of different decades and architectural styles.

4.5 historic and reference values:

Desmond Ivor White was born in London in 1924. He is thought to have trained at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, from which he received a Diploma of Architecture in 1948. It is

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possible that he knew of High Casson whilst residing in London. White arrived in New Zealand in 1951 and initially worked in Christchurch for the Ministry of Works designing state houses. He was the Chief Architect for the Taranaki Education Board from 1955 until 1970, when he resigned.

Of White's other work for the Taranaki Education Board, Hawera Intermediate is also noteworthy. The Intermediate is a two-storied building built in the modernist idiom. Other school designs by White include Devon Intermediate, New Plymouth Girls' High School, Merrilands Primary School, and Raroa Intermediate in Johnsonville, Wellington.

White was employed by UNESCO to design schools in Grenada, St Vincent, St Kitts and elsewhere in the Caribbean in c.1967-1968. He also designed houses in New Plymouth and Christchurch. He often used split stone in these buildings. He designed Maori schools and the dormitory blocks for Auckland Teachers' College.

5. Documentation

5.1 archives/written records/correspondence etc. (state location/ address):

New Plymouth District Council Building Archives, Council Buildings Liardet Street, New Plymouth. Copies of all original drawings and specifications are contained on microfiche.

Chapman, Oulsen and Spiers, Architects, 42 Egmont Street, New Plymouth: contact architect is Jeff Salisbury. The firm holds original site plans, elevations, plans, architectural detail drawings and concept sketches for gallery, stage and handrails.

Email correspondence with Desmond White's daughter, Deborah White. Author's possession.

Telephone conversations with; Mr Lyn Bublitz, former Deputy Principal of New Plymouth Boys' High School. Also with Mr Tom Ryder, former Headmaster of New Plymouth Boys' High School.

5.2 principal publications (in chronological order):

Alexander W.E *The First 100 Years 1882-1982* New Plymouth Boys High School Centennial Committee, 1982

Insull, H.A. H. *Taranaki Education Board: Beginnings, Struggles, Progress; A Retrospect of the Administration of Education in Taranaki 1841-1971* Taranaki Education Board, New Plymouth, ca. 1978

Young, Robert, 'Ryder Hall (also known as Assembly Hall), New Plymouth Boys' High School', in Julia Gatley (ed.) *Long Live the Modern: New Zealand's New Architecture, 1904-1984* Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2008, p. 184.

5.3 visual material (state location/ address)

original visual records/drawings/photographs/others:

recent photographs and survey drawings:

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Photo by Robert Young

film/video/other sources:

5.4 list documents included in supplementary dossier Nil

6. Fiche report

name of reporter: Robert Young

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date of report: 11 December 2008 / 8 July 2010; revised December 2011 following peer review by Dr Julia Gatley

examination by DOCOMOMO national/regional section

approval by wp co-ordinator/registers correspondent (name): Dr Ann McEwan

sign and date: 4 April 2012

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examination by DOCOMOMO ISC/R

name of ISC member in charge of the evaluation:

comment(s):

sign and date:

ISC/R approval:

wp/ref. no.:

NAI ref. no.:

date:

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