

**HERITAGE ASSESSMENT FOR SCHEDULED HERITAGE BUILDING:
FORMER ACETYLENE BUILDINGS**



Google Streetview, accessed 24 February 2023

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Current 2GP CCB Reference No:	CC070
Temporary 2GP Scheduled Heritage Building Reference No:	BX065
Address:	126 Stuart Street. This address includes both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commercial building at 126,130 and 132 Stuart Street • factory/workshop at 29 Bath Street
Located within a Heritage Precinct:	Stuart Street Commercial Heritage Precinct
HNZPT List Reference & Description:	Not listed
Heritage Covenant:	No
Building Use at Time of Record:	Commercial
Condition of Property:	Included on Earthquake Prone Building Register No. 1801

HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

Historic/Social	Meets criteria
Spiritual/Cultural	Does not meet criteria
Design	Meets criteria
Technological/Scientific	Does not meet criteria

RECOMMENDATION:

The building meets one or more of the significance criteria from Policy 2.4.2.1.b and is recommended for inclusion in Appendix A1.1 of the 2GP.

RECOMMENDED PROTECTION

[Tick]	Features	Details
✓	Building envelope	Entire external building envelope (of both commercial building and former workshop building).
	External/ancillary elements	
	Internal elements and/or rooms	Not considered as part of this desktop assessment. Owner may nominate interior elements for protection
✓	Excluded elements	Lower part of the east elevation obscured by the neighbouring building.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The former Acetylene Buildings have historic significance, recalling the history and development of acetylene lighting in New Zealand in the early twentieth century. Developed as an alternative to coal gas, it was a short-lived technology overtaken by electric lighting. The building has design significance as a Queen Anne style Edwardian commercial building designed by prominent Dunedin architect John Arthur Burnside.

It is comparable to scheduled heritage buildings within Dunedin of a similar type and period. When compared with other scheduled buildings, the former Acetylene Building meets the threshold to be included on the district plan heritage schedule.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

Architectural Period	Edwardian (1902-1914)
Style	Queen Anne Edwardian
Era/Date of Construction	1910
Architect/Designer/Builder	John Arthur Burnside (architect) George France (contractor)
Historic Use & Cultural Associations	Commercial building
Primary Construction Materials	Masonry
Architectural Features	Typical Queen Anne architectural detailing

Previous site development

Photographs indicate small scale buildings and/or yards were on this site prior to 1910.

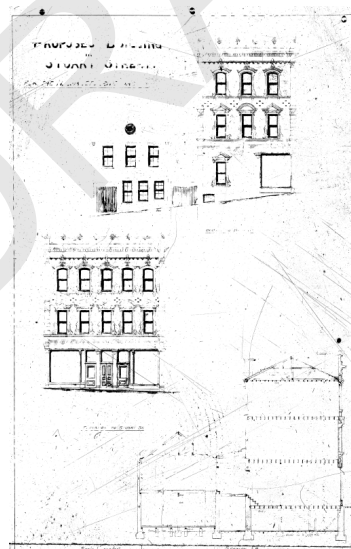


Site prior to construction of Acetylene Building (Stuart Street, Dunedin from Railway Station Tower, circa 1905, Dunedin, by Muir & Moodie. Te Papa (C.012290)

Design and construction

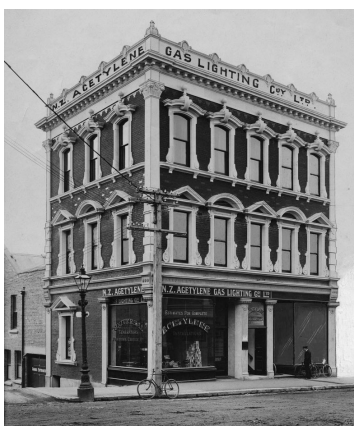
The Acetylene Buildings were erected during the boom in construction that came to Stuart Street after the re-siting of the Dunedin railway station. The buildings were built for the New Zealand Acetylene Company – and were lit by acetylene.

John Arthur Burnside was architect. Burnside called for tenders for construction in September 1909. George France was the contractor and the buildings, which cost £2400, were finished by April 1910. There were three storeys to Stuart Street, with two shops on the ground floor and generously proportioned offices above. An adjoining workshop building faced Bath Street. Acetylene lighting was used throughout.



DCC Records

The exuberant Queen Anne styling included prominent window pediments and volutes that echoed those on the nearby Roberts Building, which Burnside had designed six years earlier. Most of the architectural features remain today, but the parapet detail and cornice have been removed and as a result the composition has lost its overall balance. The brickwork on the street facades has been painted and a hanging verandah and fire escape added.



Toitū / Otago Settlers Museum 63-45-1.

Later history and development

The Acetylene Gas Lighting Company, relocating from their Octagon offices, took the corner shop and workshop. The business was renamed New Zealand Acetylene and Hardware Ltd in 1919, and after downsizing it was reorganised as Electric and Plumbing Supplies Ltd in 1929 and closed in 1956. The corner shop was afterwards taken by the Otago Missionary Association, which ran a book room, and then by the Lullaby Fashion House (children's wear), between 1961 and 1979. Later tenants included Fiesta Fashions and Toy Traders.

Thomas Long, a manufacturing jeweller, ran his Zealandia Jewellery Manufacturing Company in upstairs rooms from 1913. Within five years he dropped the company name, but he continued to work in the building to 1929. In more recent years the connection with jewellery manufacture has continued with Lure, and John Z. Robinson (from 1999).

Other tenants in the upstairs rooms have included August De Beer (indenting agent, 1913-1932), Chrissie Hall (dressmaker, 1913-1925), Robert Bennet (tailor, 1925-1953), and Bertrand Quelch (barrister and solicitor, 1954-1967). The Otago Chess Club (established in 1884) had its club rooms on the top floor from 1941 to 1955.

The old workshop fronting Bath Street became a restaurant around 1987. Smorgy's and Just Desserts were there for a few years before Geoff and Lois Simpson opened Tull in 1993. Named after the rock band Jethro Tull, it was particularly known for its desserts, and had an almost cult following. Diners were awarded a certificate ('The Blodwyn') if they were able to finish the Chocolate Massacre, and other dishes paid homage to the band with names such as Aqualung (a seafood salad) and Bungle in the Jungle (a green salad). The Simpsons were folk musicians and the New Edinburgh Folk Club (established c.1977) met at the restaurant on Sunday nights from 1999 onwards. Tull closed following Geoff's death in 2006, and since 2007 the space has been a Japanese restaurant, Yuki Izakaya.¹

Notable people/Themes

John Arthur Burnside

Dunedin born John Arthur Burnside (1856-1920) was the architect responsible for the design of many notable Dunedin buildings. He was indentured to Mason and Wales, remaining an assistant in the practice for two or three years. He went into practice on his own account. His significant buildings include

¹ See Built in Dunedin blog post, 29 July 2013: <https://builtindunedin.com/2013/07/29/acetylene-building/> for further information and references.

the Terminus Hotel, a number of churches and manses, Ashburn Hall, and residences for Scobie Mackenzie at Waverley, George Mondy's residence on Royal Terrace, Dr Colquhoun's residence on High Street, Robert Gilles' Transit House on Park Street, and Dr McKellar's residence on Pitt Street.

New Zealand Acetylene Company

Discovered in the late 1830s, acetylene gas technology developed in the late nineteenth century. Acetylene gas lighting developed in Europe in the mid-1890s. There were discussions in Dunedin from c.1896 about the potential for gas lighting in the city.

Acetylene lighting became popular in the Edwardian era, particularly for towns or particular properties that were not easily connected to an electricity network. Calcium carbide pellets combined with dripping water to produce the acetylene gas, which was then burned to produce the light. A New Zealand Acetylene Gas Company was formed in Nelson in 1897, with Mercer's Bicycle Works illuminated with gas lighting shortly afterwards.² The New Zealand Acetylene Gas Lighting Company was established in Dunedin in 1902, and within a short time branches were operating in Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland. In 1906 the company was responsible for setting up the street lighting in Picton, the first town in New Zealand to use the system. Kaiapoi and Geraldine followed in 1908, and Opunake in 1909. The company also supplied lighting for private houses such as 'Aorangi' at St Leonards, institutions such as Waitaki Boys' High School, various dredges, and Shackleton's expedition to Antarctica in 1909. Acetylene cooking stoves and heaters were also sold. A problem with the gas was that it was prone to causing explosions. Eight people were killed in an explosion at a general store at Upper Hutt in 1914. Following a long inquest and vigorous argument, the coroner eventually concluded that gelignite on the premises was to blame rather than acetylene, but the bad press may have hastened the decline of the acetylene lighting in New Zealand, while at the same time electrification was becoming more widely available.

ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

HISTORIC/SOCIAL

The building demonstrates heritage values within this criterion. The former Acetylene Building has historic significance for its association with the New Zealand Acetylene Gas Company, recalling a short lived but significant technology.

SPIRITUAL/CULTURAL

The building does not demonstrate heritage values within this criterion.

DESIGN

The building demonstrates heritage values within this criterion.

The former Acetylene Buildings have design significance. The Edwardian Queen Anne style commercial building is the design of prominent Dunedin architect John Arthur Burnside. It is prominent corner building that contributes to the streetscape of lower Stuart Street that developed following the relocation of the railway station to its current site in 1906.

² *Dunstan Times*, 30 Apr 1897, p. 4.

TECHNOLOGICAL/SCIENTIFIC

The building itself does not demonstrate heritage values within this criterion.

REFERENCES

See Built in Dunedin blog post, 29 July 2013: <https://builtindunedin.com/2013/07/29/acetylene-building/> for further information and references.

Otago Daily Times, 1 September 1909 p.1 (call for tenders), 16 September 1909 p.12 (Shackleton expedition), 1 April 1910 p.1 (rooms to let), 5 December 1995 p.17 (Lure), 2 September 2006 p.34 (Geoff Simpson obituary)

Date Assessment Completed	13 April 2023	Author	HB
Date Peer Reviewed	12 July 2024	Reviewer	MM
Date Confirmed Complete	19 July 2024		