

**HERITAGE STATEMENT – 4 AND 6 NEW REGENT STREET
NEW REGENT STREET SHOPS**



PHOTO: 4 - 6 NEW REGENT STREET – 2008



PHOTO: NEW REGENT STREET SHOPS – c2003

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The *New Regent Street shops* are listed as a Group 2 protected heritage place in the Christchurch City Plan, and is registered at a Category I historic place by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.

New Regent Street has social and historical significance as it was the forerunner of the present day shopping mall. At the time of its construction the concept of an entire street made up of small speciality shops was novel for New Zealand. The building work took place between 1930-32 and was one of the few large scale building projects undertaken in the South Island during the Depression. *New Regent Street* occupies the site of the old Colosseum, a building designed by Thomas Cane in the 1880s and demolished in 1930. This huge wooden building was at various times a skating rink, boot factory, silent picture theatre, venue for shows and sporting events and, from c.1926-30, a taxi company and Dominion Motors. On 1 April 1932 *New Regent Street* was opened by the Mayor of Christchurch, Mr D.G. Sullivan. Of the 40 shops offered for lease, only three were let owing to the economic depression of the time. To encourage occupancy, New Regent Street Ltd. decided to lease the remainder free of charge until businesses became established, and then at a nominal rent of five shillings a week.

New Regent Street has architectural and aesthetic significance because of the architect Henry Francis Willis (1892-1972) and the actual design of the Street. The 40 shops on individual titles were designed in the Spanish Mission Revival style by Henry Francis Willis in 1930. Willis also designed the State Picture Theatre (1934-5), Santa Barbara on Victoria Street and the Repertory Theatre (formerly Radiant Hall, 1929); the latter being similar in style to *New Regent Street's* terraces. The contractors were P. Graham and Sons Ltd, who had previously built Christchurch Boys' High School and the Majestic theatre; Messrs Boyle Brothers were the drainage contractors for the street.

The windows and ornamentation of the first floor establishes the Spanish Mission character and unique appearance of *New Regent Street*, and there are three upper storey variations. The first contains three round headed/arched windows with profiles recalling classical Palladian style, supported by small columns with spiral motif, above which sits an oval medallion. These facades have an awning extending above the windows and supported by decorative wrought iron brackets. Originally these awnings were covered with Spanish style Cordova roof tiles; they were later removed leaving just the concrete slabs.

Alternating on either side of these properties are two similar styled facades, both with Spanish Mission style parapets of similar elevation and the shaped gables commonly found on Spanish Mission style buildings. The first of these has centrally placed double casement windows with a window box beneath, the Palladian window motif as before, and circular medallions set within the gable. In the second the central window is replaced by French doors leading onto a small balcony and the gable is decorated with a pair of heraldic shields. The central windows of both are surmounted by projecting arched mouldings over semi-circular fan light windows with panes arranged in a sunburst form. Additional ornamentation separates each facade with decorative art deco chevrons and Spanish Mission style barley twist columns. In terms of numbers 4 and 6 *New Regent Street*; number 6 features the ornate parapet, while number 4 sits at roof level.

Originally the large display windows facing the street were surrounded by decorative coloured floral tiles, many of which still remain. Wide plate glass windows beneath the verandah light each shop, and entry is through a glazed door set back from the street beside the entrance to the adjoining shop. This continuous suspended verandah runs the length of the terraces and extends around into Gloucester Street. In 1968 the buildings were repainted in Adam Gold, Etruscan Red and Slate Blue; the existing colour scheme dates from 1994.

The *New Regent Street* shops have technological and craftsmanship significance due to their design and method of construction. The shops are structurally based on an exposed concrete frame with infill panels of cavity brick, the facades of which have been plastered and painted; extensive steel reinforcing is also used along the entire length of the Street. Weep holes at the base of the cavity were designed to allow water soaking down from the parapets to drain. All underground services were through the rights-of-ways behind the shops. Ventilation, interior lighting and floodlighting were an acclaimed feature of the street at the time of its opening. Craftsmanship is evident in the shop windows and entrance doors at numbers 4 and 6 *New Regent Street* which still have the original stained timber finish.

New Regent Street is contextually significant because of its streetscape value including the uniformity of design, form, colour and scale of all 40 shops. *New Regent Street* continued to evolve; after World War Two it became a public road, and in 1986 it was made a one-way street. In 1994 the street became a pedestrian mall and the tram line was installed. At this time the cobblestone paving, wrought iron railings, planter beds and period lighting we see in the streetscape of today were introduced.

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New Regent Street as a post-1900 site has a degree of archaeological significance because of the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past building construction methods and materials, and human activity on this site. It is also known that it was the location of the old Colosseum prior to 1900.

REFERENCES:

CCC Heritage Files

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