

AUCKLAND MASONIC TEMPLE (Former)

24 St Benedicts Street, Newton 1010



Figure 1: Auckland Mason Temple (former). Blair Hastings, February 2022.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This evaluation assesses the historic heritage values of the Auckland Masonic Temple (former). The purpose of this document is to evaluate the place against the Auckland Unitary Plan (Operative in Part) (**AUP**) and recommend, based on its known heritage values, whether the place meets the thresholds for inclusion in Schedule 14.1 Schedule of Historic Heritage of the AUP.

The Regional Policy Statement section of the AUP identifies the criteria and thresholds for historic heritage places and areas. The evaluation criteria are historical, social, Mana Whenua, knowledge, technology, physical attributes, aesthetic, and context¹. The thresholds are included in Policy B5.2.2(3), which states that places or areas may be included in the schedule if:

- (a) *the place has considerable or outstanding value in relation to one or more of the evaluation criteria in Policy B5.2.2(1); and*
- (b) *the place has considerable or outstanding overall significance to the locality or greater geographic area.*

Background & Constraints

Information on the history of the place and a physical description are sourced from Auckland Council Heritage Unit's property files and any other sources as noted. The information in the files is not exhaustive and additional research may yield new information about the place.

The evaluation does not include an assessment of any archaeological values of the place and nor does it include an evaluation of the importance of the place to Mana Whenua.

The evaluation does not include a structural assessment or a condition report of the building; and any comments on the structural integrity or the condition of the building are based on the visual inspection only.

This evaluation does not include an assessment of the interior of the Building.

The evaluation only refers to Freemasonry through referenced documentation. Assumptions are carefully made, and based on opinion only, noting that the organisation did, and still does, guard much of its workings from the public.

A site visit was conducted on 26 February 2022 from the public realm.

IDENTIFICATION

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|---|---|
| Site address(es) and/or location | 24 St Benedicts Street, Newton |
| Legal description(s) | Sect 168 SO 470828 |
| AUP zone | Business - Town Centre Zone |
| AUP overlays | Special Character Areas Overlay Residential and Business – Business Upper Symonds Street; Regionally Significant Volcanic Viewshafts and Height Sensitive Areas Overlay – E10 and E16, Mount Eden |
| New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero details | List Number 7367 - Upper Symonds Street Historic Area |

¹ Unitary Plan B5.2.2(1).

| | |
|--|----|
| Archaeological site (Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act [HNZPTA] 2014, Section 6) | NA |
| Cultural Heritage Inventory (CHI) reference(s) | NA |
| New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) site record number(s) | NA |

Location

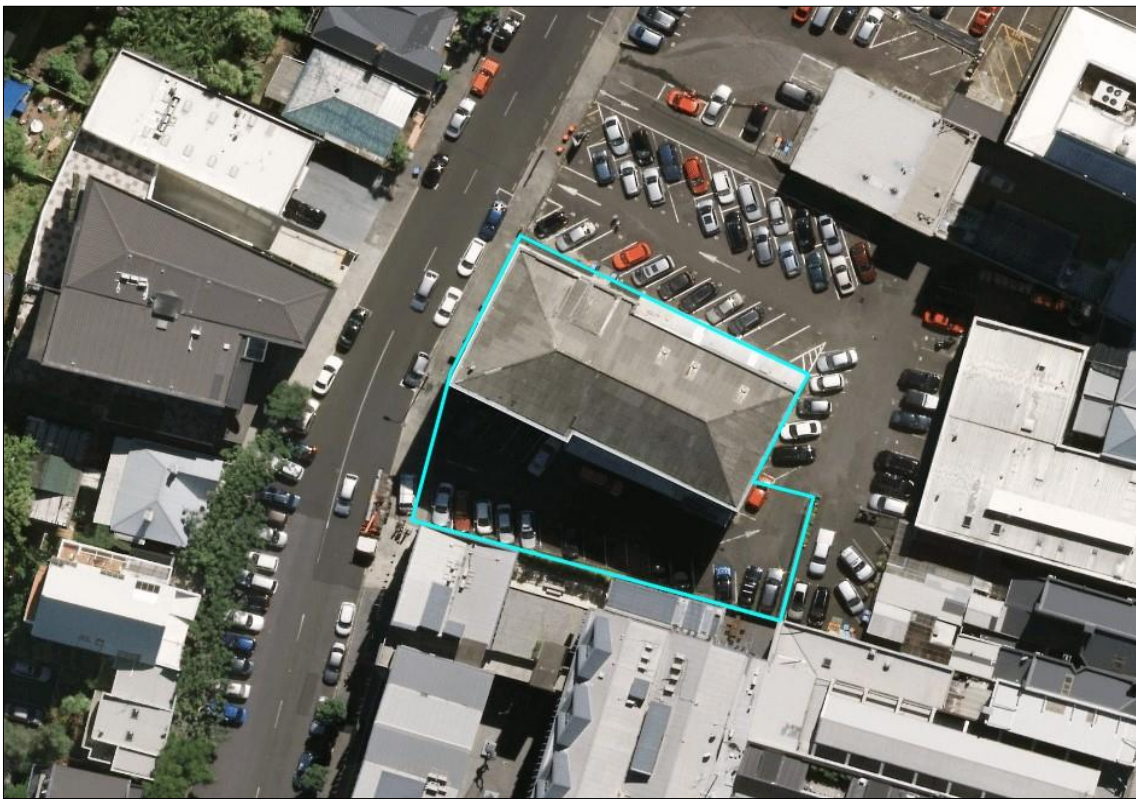


Figure 2: Location map for 24 St Benedicts Street, Newton 1010. The site is outlined in blue. Auckland Council GeoMaps, March 2022.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The Area

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former, *'the temple'*) is located on St Benedicts Street, Newton, just south of Auckland's Central Business District. St Benedicts Street is situated within the Special Character Areas Overlay - Business: Upper Symonds Street (the SCA), in the AUP. This SCA is centred on the southern portion of Symonds Street and encompasses part of Khyber Pass Road to the east, St Benedicts Street, and parts of Newton Road and Dundonald Street to the west. It is also located on parts of Mount Eden and New North Roads to the south.

The area is one of Auckland's earliest and, for a time, most prosperous suburban centres. Established between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, its progressive development into a vibrant commercial and community centre is evidenced in its strong collection of buildings of varying types that served both local residents and commuters along the city's early transport routes. Included within the area are a number of historic heritage places that are identified in the AUP, including the St Benedict's Catholic Church and Presbytery (ID 01596), the Stables (ID 01847) and the Orange Ballroom (ID 01767), all within 150m of the Auckland Masonic Temple Building.²

Freemasonry

Freemasonry or Masonry refers to fraternal organisations that trace their origins to the local guilds of stonemasons which, from the end of the 13th century, regulated the qualifications of stonemasons and their interaction with authorities and clients.³ By the 17th century, when the building of castles and cathedrals diminished, Masonry began to lose its 'operative' aspects, and worthy men who were not craftsmen were also accepted into its membership. It was from this time that Masons were known as 'free and accepted' Masons, as they continue to be known to this day.⁴

With a belief in a supreme being, which in the parlance of Masonry is known as the 'Grand Architect of the Universe'⁵, Freemasonry uses building analogies to teach members how to lead productive lives that benefit the communities that they live in. In the medieval era, stonemasons wore aprons and gloves to protect themselves while working on shaping rough pieces of stone. They wear them today too, but only ceremonially, and they build friendships and communities, rather than cathedrals and castles.⁶

Freemasons meet as a lodge, not *in* a lodge. In this context, the word 'lodge' refers to a local chapter of Freemasons, meeting as a body. However, the term is often misused to refer to the buildings or rooms that Masons meet in. Masonic premises are referred to as, interchangeably and without any hierarchy significance, Lodges, Halls and also Temples ('of Philosophy and the Arts').⁷ Interestingly, given the religious connotation, many countries have ceased using the word 'Temple', in order to avoid arousing undue prejudice and suspicion.⁸

² 'Summary of Area Findings. Special Character Areas: Business', *Draft* internal report, p. 8. Auckland Council Files.

³ Freemasonry. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freemasonry>

⁴ Freemasons New Zealand: History. <https://freemasons.nz.org/history>

⁵ Freemasons: History, facts and myths. <https://www.livescience.com/freemasons.html>

⁶ What is Freemasonry? <https://www.ugle.org.uk/discover-freemasonry/what-is-freemasonry>

⁷ Masonic lodge. Masonic premises.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masonic_lodge#:~:text=In%20this%20context%2C%20the%20word,Philosophy%20and%20the%20Arts%22

⁸ *Ibid.*

Freemasonry in New Zealand

Freemasonry has been in New Zealand since the early 1800s under the banners of, among others, the English, Irish and Scottish Constitutions. The first Masonic meeting was in 1837 at Port Levy, Banks Peninsula, with a gathering of French masons on board the whaling ship *Le Comte de Paris*. The first Lodge, 'The New Zealand Pacific', was founded under the English Constitution, and met for the first time in the Freemasons' Hall in Wellington⁹ (now Waititi Landing, 50m east of the Beehive), in November 1842.¹⁰ In the decades that followed, lodges were established under the various constitutions then in existence. In 1890, The Grand Lodge of Antient, Free and Accepted Masons of New Zealand (Freemasons New Zealand) was constituted, through which many existing (and future) lodges dedicated their allegiance to this new national organisation. Some lodges, however, remain to this day in operation under their original constitution.

The first Masonic lodge in Auckland (considered to be the first official lodge in New Zealand) was the Ara Lodge, No. 348 in the Irish Constitution. The lodge still meets on Airedale Street, in the Bro. Malcolm Draffin designed 'Ara Lodge', which is identified as a historic heritage place in the AUP.¹¹ The first Auckland (and National) lodge inaugurated under the New Zealand Constitution, was also called the Ara Lodge, receiving the number 1. This new lodge, still very active today, with a great history of support for the craft,¹² met for many years in the Freemasons' Hall on Princes Street, the façade of which is also identified in the AUP.¹³

There are thought to be approximately six million Freemasons globally¹⁴. At the height of its 'modern-day' popularity in America, in 1959, approximately 4.5% of the male population were members. Mr Selwyn Cooper, the then Grand Master of New Zealand Freemasons, said in 2011 on an edition of 'The Beat Goes On',¹⁵ that New Zealand's membership was at a high point in the 1940s and 50s, at about 10,000. The reach as it were, was, in effect far larger than this, if you count among this number the families of each of these men. During this period in particular, rates of lodge attendance were high, as Freemasonry offered stability, uniformity and comradeship, all of which men sought after the instability of the war years. If the organisation was secretive, it was also mainstream.

Despite a considerable decline in membership,¹⁶ the organisation in New Zealand still prospers. Across the country there are currently 5,472 members, formed into 193 lodges.¹⁷ In the Auckland Masonic District – being the geographic area from the Tamaki river in the south to Orewa in the north, and coast to coast in between¹⁸ – there are 29 lodges under the New Zealand Constitution, and a further 13 lodges assigned to the three remaining other constitutions.

The organisation is today a little more 'open' in an unashamed drive to attract new, and mainly younger members. The ideals and beliefs of the organisation have not changed; however, out-reach and charity have become a more publicised aspect of their operations. They list on their website recent donations, among

⁹ Te Ara. The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Story: Men's clubs. Freemasons' hall, Wellington.

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/31273/freemasons-hall-wellington>

¹⁰ Te Ara. The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Story: Men's clubs. Page 4. Masons. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/mens-clubs/page-4#:~:text=The%20first%20New%20Zealand%20Masonic,in%20Wellington%20in%20November%201842>

¹¹ Schedule 14.1, ID 01922.

¹² Freemasons New Zealand. Northern Division. District Profile – Auckland.

<https://themasons.org.nz/ndiv/2profile.html>

¹³ Schedule 14.1, ID 02001.

¹⁴ Freemasons: History, facts and myths. <https://www.livescience.com/freemasons.html>

¹⁵ Selwyn Cooper Grand Master NZ Freemasons.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDYHNCVe5qI&ab_channel=TheBeatGoesOn

¹⁶ Selwyn Cooper Grand Master NZ Freemasons.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDYHNCVe5qI&ab_channel=TheBeatGoesOn

¹⁷ Freemasons New Zealand: History. <https://freemasonsnz.org/history>

¹⁸ Freemasons New Zealand. Northern Division. District Profile – Auckland.

<https://themasons.org.nz/ndiv/2profile.html>

many others, of \$600,000 to a medical research program, \$55,000 for a new Kapiti Coastguard vessel and \$55,000 to 'Camp Quality', for children with cancer.

Ironically, while it was far larger as an organisation when it was more secretive, it is today perhaps better understood by more of the population despite its smaller size. Despite having its detractors, including among other things, for being a strictly male only organisation, its ideals, beliefs, and actions are ostensibly positive.

The organisation in New Zealand has included members such as Sir George Grey, former Prime Minister William Ferguson Massey, Sir Peter Buck and Sir Mason Durie.¹⁹

Provincial Premises

In September 1909, the Ara Lodge No. 1, the St Andrew's Lodge No. 8, and the Auckland Provincial Royal Chapter No. 9 (all Auckland-based lodges formed under the New Zealand Constitution) agreed to fund and build their own Masonic home. Sometime prior to the end of 1927 the subject site on St Benedicts Street was purchased. Collectively, however, the aforementioned lodges could not fund the construction of this new 'home' – *'a temple devoted solely to Masonry'*.²⁰

Noting the opportunity both to assist the three lodges, and to expand the vision of the project by establishing a temple suitable for the use of all of the lodges of the New Zealand Constitution in Auckland, Provincial Grand Master, M. W.²¹ Bro. Oliver Nicholson convened a meeting of Masonic leaders in August 1927, seeking to secure resources for this purpose.²²

Successful in securing sufficient funding, architect Mr W. S. R. Bloomfield was duly commissioned, and the tenders for the Masonic Temple were advertised in June 1929. Auckland Masonic Temple Limited was registered in July 1929, to *'acquire land for the erection of Masonic Temple Offices'*,²³ and, noting subject land was already within the ownership of the broader Masonic community, that land was officially transferred to the newly established company in August of the same year.²⁴ Mr H. C. Curlett won the tender, as lead contractor, and the foundation stone was laid on 28 September 1929, at a ceremony attended by over 300 members.²⁵

Reported as *'another milestone in the history of development of the City of Auckland'*, the Auckland Masonic Temple was officially opened on 8 August 1930 by Mr Nicholson, who was accompanied by *'a retinue of officers of Grand Lodge, and in the presence of the largest gathering of Freemasons ever held in Auckland.'* *'Thus Freemasonry under the New Zealand Constitution in the City of Auckland forged another 'link' in the ever-extending chain.'*²⁶

The building included three main large-span interior spaces, being the Banqueting Hall on the ground floor, the Ionic Lodge Room on the first floor, and the Doric Lodge Room on the second floor. Various ancillary rooms and spaces were included on each of the three floors, generally located towards the front of the

¹⁹ Heritage et AL: Unique collections and resources from Auckland Libraries research centres and heritage collections. http://heritageetal.blogspot.com/2014/12/an-inside-view-of-freemasonry-from_3.html

²⁰ *Auckland Star*, 9 August 1930, p. 13. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19300809.2.150>

²¹ Masonic lodge officer: Offices common to all Masonic jurisdictions. 'Most Worshipful.' https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masonic_lodge_officer#:~:text=The%20Grand%20Master%20may%20preside,Pennsylvania%2C%2022Right%20Worshipful%22

²² *Auckland Star*, 9 August 1930, p. 13. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19300809.2.150>

²³ *Auckland Star*, 25 August 1929, p. 4. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19290724.2.19.2>

²⁴ Record of Title, NA30_223, LINZ.

²⁵ *Sun (Auckland)*, 28 September 1929, p. 13. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/SUNAK19290928.2.139>

²⁶ Masonic Temple. *Auckland Star*, 9 August 1930, p. 13. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19300809.2.149>

building – to support the activities within the aforementioned main, large spaces. The floors were served by a single main stairwell, located within the north-west edge of the building.²⁷

Throughout its long Masonic tenure the building was used extensively as a local and regional facility, for any and all of Auckland's 'provincial' lodges, and also nationally, at least as frequently as every two or three years, for the annual Communication of the Masonic Grand Lodge of New Zealand.

In 2008 the Masons vacated the premises and transferred ownership of the property to Persepolis Limited. It was then transferred to Parley Acquisitions Limited in 2011,²⁸ who remain the current owners at the time of writing. The building is variously tenanted.

The Building

The former Auckland Masonic Temple is a three-storied concrete and steel structure with infill brick wall-panelling, rendered across every façade. It measures approximately 35m 'deep', west to east, by 18m 'wide', across the front or street-facing elevation, and approximately 16m 'wide' across the rear or east elevation. The gross floor area of the building is approximately 590m². Designed with a flat concrete roof, a pitched (and hipped) timber-framed and fibrolite clad roof was added circa 1952. The fibrolite was removed and replaced with a stock long-run profile, sometime after 2017.

The two 'side' elevations are relatively good 'mirrors' of one another, being mainly unadorned decoratively, punctuated only by small rectangular (both landscape and portrait oriented) steel windows. The street or west-end of each elevation includes rendered or plastered 'decorative' cornice returns from across the main or street-facing façade, sufficient in scale and depth to provide a three-dimensional character and strength to the St Benedicts Street elevation. The only other decorative relief across each of two side elevations is in the plain but pronounced cills to all the windows. The south elevation includes the steel egress stairs and the north elevation has a new canopy to the secondary entrance/egress (both added circa 1986). The north elevation also includes the foundation stone, located low in the north-east corner of the building. The east or rear elevation is simpler again, including only four very small windows, a considerable number of ceiling or void vents, and an otherwise flat and unpainted rendered face. A reasonably significant amount of original copper pipework remains, as does a copper flashing that runs the entire perimeter of the roof parapet.

The main or street-facing façade is restrained yet rich. The sub-structure is simple, but the rendered and plastered presentation is relatively complex, although the composition is highly readable. Symmetrical about its y-axis, the elevation exhibits classical geometries, with 'stripped-back' but robust detailing. Not quite neo-classical, more 'stripped-classicism', the design embraces a 'simplified but recognisable' classicism in its overall massing and scale, while eliminating a little of the 'finer' or more decorative detailing we might otherwise associate with the style. Indeed, the completed building included considerably less of this 'finer' detailing than had been publicised through the media prior to the commencement of construction. The Doric columns, the cornice work and the elaborately decorative entrance-way, which includes above it, an understated but elegant masonic 'badge',²⁹ however, are all, in and of themselves, key aesthetic features.

Noting the detailed list of modifications below, only the removal of the balusters that once sat between the pedestals to the columns and the removal of the ionic capitals (in place until at least the late 1950s), have altered an otherwise intact original façade. Beyond this, more holistically in terms of the building's form, only the alteration to the roof (in existence for approximately 70 years at the time of writing), impacts on the

²⁷ Handsome Building. *Auckland Star*, 9 August 1930, p. 13.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19300809.2.149>

²⁸ Record of Title, NA838/10, LINZ

²⁹ Acknowledging that with reference to fig. 11, this does not appear to have been an original building feature.

intactness of the building, which presents to both St Benedicts Street directly, and the broader area more contextually, largely as it did when it was completed in 1930.

Modifications

Recorded modifications (dated approximately):

- 1952: The 'flat' concrete roof was replaced with a pitched (and hipped) timber-framed structure, clad with corrugated fibrolite.
- 1965: A 'Covered Way' (used as a Storeroom) was added to the north elevation of the ground floor. Also, some internal partitioning was removed.
- 1986: Major internal alterations were made to the ground floor – which included the 'Banqueting Hall' – to accommodate a new (and unknown) tenant, referred to as some form of 'club'.
- 1986: The steel egress stairwell was added to the rear portion of the south elevation. The 'Covered Way' (along the north elevation) was shortened, and the secondary entrance canopy was added.

Observed modifications (dated approximately):

- Most likely aligned with the change of original ownership, in 2008, the sides of the building (previously unpainted render) were painted a white, and the 'detail' on the front façade (previously painted light blue), including the four Doric columns, was painted a dark grey.³⁰
- The decorative balusters between the column bases were removed sometime prior to 2008.
- The column capitals, built in the Ionic order, were changed to the Doric order, sometime after 1957.
- The fibrolite roofing was replaced with a grey (likely 'ironsand') long-run colour-steel type profile, sometime after 2017.³¹
- The remainder of the 'Covered Way' was removed sometime after January 2020 – in effect reinstating the original north-facing elevation to its original form.
- An 'open' lean-to canopy, located in a similar location to the aforementioned 'Covered Way' – but along the south-facing elevation of the building, was built (referring to historic aerial photographs) sometime after 1985. It was then removed sometime after January 2020.
- The street-facing façade of the building was again painted – to its current paint scheme, at the time of writing – sometime after January 2020.

The Architect

William Swanson Read Bloomfield (1885–1969) is thought to be the first known qualified architect practising in New Zealand of Māori descent. He was the grandson of William Swanson and Ani Rangitunoa. Born in Gisborne, he studied in England and on the European Continent, and also at the University of Pennsylvania, USA. During World War I he served as Captain in the Royal Flying Corps, 57 Squadron, and was shot down behind enemy lines in 1917, serving time as a prisoner of war in Germany until the end of hostilities.³² In November 1929, he married Rhoda Gribbin at Holy Trinity Church in Devonport. During the 1920s he became a foundation member of the Auckland Aero Club.³³

³⁰ Historic photos suggest very little colour (if any) was used on the building throughout its ownership by the Auckland Masonic Temple Limited.

³¹ Auckland Council: GEOMAPS. <https://geomapspublic.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/viewer/index.html>

³² Timespanner: A journey through Avondale, Auckland and New Zealand History. <https://timespanner.blogspot.com/2010/06/timespanner-visits-titirangi-village.html>

³³ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga: Station Hotel (Former). Oldham, Denys, 'William Swanson Read Bloomfield (1885 – 1968); Was he the First Architect with Māori Ancestry?', New Zealand Legacy, 2014, Vol. 26, No.3, pp. 5-8. <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/657>

He practised architecture in Auckland from the mid-1920s until his retirement in 1959, either in sole practice or in a number of partnerships. His major commercial works include Queens Arcade,³⁴ and Yorkshire House on Shortland Street³⁵ (both in 1928), the Masonic Temple³⁶ (1930),³⁷ Lopdell House, Titirangi (1928–1930),³⁸ the Station Hotel, Beach Road (1930), and St Augustine’s Church, Stanley Bay (1932).³⁹ He was also well-known for his residential work, designing a number of houses in the early phase of his career, before it was disrupted by the Great Depression and World War II.⁴⁰ His design at 11 Awatea Road, Parnell was a fine example in the Arts and Crafts style. He returned to domestic architecture in the 1950s and designed a considerable number of houses influenced by the modernist ideology. Many of his house designs and drawings appearing in ‘Home & Building’ magazine throughout the 1940s and 50s.⁴¹

The Contractor

Hugh Clawson Curlett (1898–1934) established the H. C. Curlett Construction Company Limited in July of 1929.⁴² His major works included the Seddon Memorial Technical College (1926),⁴³ the nurses’ home at Tokunui Mental Hospital (1929),⁴⁴ the Tennyson Chambers in Napier, (1932)⁴⁵ and the Masonic Temple (1930). His work on the Masonic Temple was rewarded with significant positive publicity, including this from the *Auckland Star* in August 1930: *‘The new Masonic Temple in St. Benedict’s Street bids fair to rank high among Auckland’s architectural gems. The stately simplicity of its design renders it highly distinctive from the more ornate structures that have been built in Auckland during recent years. Most of the credit for its appearance and worth as an architectural achievement must go to the builders, H. C. Curlett Construction Company, of Ellerslie, who was the principal contractor for the entire building.’*

Mr Curlett died in an accident while piloting a small plane in Napier, in December 1934.⁴⁶

³⁴ As Bloomfield and Hunt. *Sun (Auckland)*, 7 March 1928, p. 8.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/SUNAK19280307.2.78>

³⁵ As Bloomfield and Hunt. *The New Zealand Herald*, 17 November 1926, p. 8.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19261117.2.7.6>

³⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 17 November 1926, p. 5. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19290619.2.183.3>

³⁷ Noting that he had partnered with Owen and Morgan by the time of its completion. *Auckland Star*, 12 July 1929, p. 20. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19290712.2.216.6>

³⁸ *Otago Daily Times*, 15 December 1928, p. 9. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19281215.2.31.2>

³⁹ *Auckland Star*, 28 June 1930, p. 12. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19300628.2.100.6>

⁴⁰ ‘Statement of Evidence of Robin Byron on behalf of Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Topic 032: Historic Heritage: Schedules 28 August 2015’ - PDF file. <https://hearings.aupihp.govt.nz>

⁴¹ Lost Property. <https://www.lostproperty.org.nz/architects/bloomfield-w-s/>

⁴² *Sun (Auckland)*, 16 July 1929, p. 12. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/SUNAK19290716.2.143>

⁴³ *Auckland Star*, 5 June 1926, p. 10. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19260605.2.83>

⁴⁴ *Sun (Auckland)*, 7 December 1929, p. 21. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19291207.2.194>

⁴⁵ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga: Tennyson Chambers. <https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/4817>

⁴⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 2 January 1934, p. 6. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19340102.2.42>

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Historical

The place reflects important or representative aspects of national, regional or local history, or is associated with an important event, person, group of people, or with an idea or early period of settlement within New Zealand, the region or locality.

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) is historically important for its direct association with Freemasonry in New Zealand – considered to be a wide-reaching, perhaps powerful, and charitable organisation. The building was constructed as a local and regional Freemasonry facility, to be used by any of the lodges within the large geographic covering of the Auckland Masonic District – as determined by the New Zealand Constitution. It was also used nationally, as and when conventions were based in Auckland or when event numbers required a building of this size and scale.

While it has now passed into private hands, the building is, as is noted elsewhere within this evaluation, most likely highly recognisable as a Masonic building, to locals and non-locals alike, because of its visual character, presence, and general physical attributes. This important historic association continues in perpetuity, despite the Freemasons having moved to new premises.

This association – between the building and its [erstwhile] ownership and use – is tangible. Less tangible, but likely important, are any direct associations with any number of ‘important’ people who have otherwise been members of any of the lodges affiliated to the temple on St Benedicts Street. Unfortunately, as a direct reflection of the inherent secrecy of the organisation, these potentially important ‘connections’ are largely unknown. A separate investigation in this respect may prove warranted in the future. The place is, however, known to have historical value for its association with Mr. Oliver Nicholson, referred to above, as being integral in the purchase and construction of the land and building. With the exception of a few short years, he served as the Auckland Provincial Grand Master (including Waikato within this jurisdiction until 1934), from 1904 to his retirement in 1945. He was believed to hold a record in the Masonic world, having, during his 51 years as a member of the fraternity, installed over 1,100 masters, and opened 50 new lodges. He was also a former Mayor of Mount Eden.⁴⁷

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) has **considerable local** and **regional historical** value.

Social

The place has a strong or special association with, or is held in high esteem by, a particular community or cultural group for its symbolic, spiritual, commemorative, traditional or other cultural value.

Although the lodges associated with the Auckland Masonic Temple (former) in St Benedicts Street have now moved to new premises, their rituals and ceremonies having moved with them, it is likely the case that the building – the built-form, so important to the organisation in quite literally crafting the walls around them – remains held in considerable esteem by current and past members of the fraternity. The building is likely to represent important aspects of collective memory and identity for the Freemasonry organisation across the broad Auckland region.

It is probable that the building developed a social value to members of the local community. People would have been aware of the organisation that met within the building. The general ‘cloak of secrecy’ with which the organisation is frequently viewed, when coupled with the imposing scale and appearance of the building, may have imbued the place with an intrigue, even mystery, that likely lives on. The building will still play an

⁴⁷ *Auckland Star*, 14 November 1945, p. 6. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19451114.2.73>

important role in defining the cultural identity of ‘masonic life’ – irrespective of how much of this is actually known – through the community’s associations with the proud, distinctive and iconic building.

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) has **considerable local** and **regional social** value.

Mana Whenua

The place has a strong or special association with, or is held in high esteem by, Mana Whenua for its symbolic, spiritual, commemorative, traditional or other cultural value.

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) is not identified in the AUP Schedule 12 Sites or Places of Significance to Mana Whenua (**Schedule 12**). This place has been evaluated primarily for its built heritage values.

Council has a process for assessing sites and places of significance to Mana Whenua. The first step in this process is for iwi to nominate sites. If a site or place is evaluated as significant to Mana Whenua against the factors set in the AUP, it will be considered for inclusion in Schedule 12 and/or, if it has additional values, Schedule 14. No nomination has been received by iwi for this place for its inclusion in Schedule 12.

From what we currently understand about this place, it is located within the extent of a large cultural landscape of value to Mana Whenua, although a formal nomination for this landscape has not been received at this time. The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) specifically is unlikely to have value to Mana Whenua in accordance with the factors or criteria set out in the AUP. However, this is not to say that the place does not have value to Mana Whenua or that the site or landscape may not be nominated by iwi at a future time.

Mana Whenua are required to be consulted during the preparation of any future plan change to consider the addition of this place to the AUP. If/when Mana Whenua values are identified this evaluation will be amended.

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) has **no known Mana Whenua** value.

Knowledge

The place has potential to provide knowledge through scientific or scholarly study or to contribute to an understanding of the cultural or natural history of the nation, region or locality.

The building was touted as being ‘worthy of the craft [of Freemasonry]. Some of the ideals of freemasonry were realised in the architecture of the building’.⁴⁸ Although a broad statement, and despite the general secrecy that *still* exists around exactly what these ideals are, it is likely that through extensive assessment and study the building could provide knowledge of these ideals – and about this important fraternal organisation.

While it is probably not unreasonable to broadly associate the strong symmetry and robust geometries seen on the exterior of the building with some of the known ideals of strength, truthfulness and purity, it is likely that the interior spaces within the building, insofar as they have not been modified, would give us a more tangible insight into the operational and ceremonial aspects of freemasonry – at local, regional and national levels – as they relate to lodge and grand lodge proceedings.

In this case, however, the interior of the building has not been assessed as part of this evaluation and therefore it is considered that the knowledge to be gained from further study of the building's exterior alone, is perhaps limited to what can otherwise be derived from the existing documentation on record. The exterior

⁴⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 20 June 1929, p. 15.

https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19290620.2.114?items_per_page=10&page=9&phrase=2&query=w+s+r+bloomfield&snippet=true&sort_by=byDA

also, while largely intact, has little from a knowledge perspective to contribute to an understanding of the cultural history of the locality.

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) has **little knowledge** value.

Technology

The place demonstrates technical accomplishment, innovation or achievement in its structure, construction, components or use of materials.

The completed building was lauded in the media for, among other things, the exquisite craftsmanship displayed in the finished plaster work, and the plumbing and ornamental iron work used within the various internal spaces.⁴⁹ While the many published articles are noteworthy, and interesting, in respect of both the quality of the work, and the high esteem with which the Masonic organisation held the craft of building, they (the works) do not, in and of themselves, reflect any innovation or advancement in the construction techniques of a commercial building of this scale and form. Both the structural and decorative materials used (despite being of the highest quality), and the construction methods employed in building the temple, are typical of commercial fabric and technique in the late 1920s and are unlikely to reveal any technical innovation.

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) has **little technology** value.

Physical Attributes

The place is a notable or representative example of:

(i) a type, design or style;

(ii) a method of construction, craftsmanship or use of materials; or

(iii) the work of a notable architect, designer, engineer or builder.

The temple has considerable physical attributes value as the work of notable Auckland-based architect William Swanson Read Bloomfield. He was also a noted airman with longstanding links to the New Zealand Defence Force. Bloomfield, of Ngati Kahungunu, is believed to be the first qualified and practising Māori architect in New Zealand. He has a significant list of buildings to his name including Lopdell House in Titirangi, the Station Hotel on Beach Road and Yorkshire House on Shortland Street. All of these, as has been noted above, are highly regarded works, scheduled and listed respectively, with Auckland Council and Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga.

Interestingly, all three of these buildings are typologically different from one another. The temple is no exception, adding a fourth architectural typology to Bloomfield's portfolio. What is a noteworthy similarity though, seen very clearly in the temple, and within these other three commissions, is a stripped back approach to ornamentation, pronouncing in each façade, an adherence to strong yet simple geometry, bold yet restrained detailing, and a high level of visual readability.

Although his work, and that of many contemporary architects of that time, was considerably disrupted by the Great Depression in the 1930s and then World War II, Bloomfield would go on to design many notable houses, and even feature among the country's leading lights of modernist architects, exhibiting many experimental designs through media publications in the 1950s. He retired from practice in 1959.

For the reason alone of Bloomfield's significance as an important architect regionally, especially during this inter-war period, his association with the temple gives the building considerable heritage value. It is also possible, through its physical attributes, to see in its grand façade, direct evidence of Bloomfield's own style.

The building itself also has considerable inherent value as a notable representation of its type. Regarded as a type of architectural 'stripped-classicism', the main façade of the building strongly represents the classical order and geometry associated with this architectural style, while purposefully excluding some of the ornate

⁴⁹ *Auckland Star*, 9 August 1930, p. 13. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19300809.2.152>

detailing seen in other contemporary [classical-styled] buildings of this scale (and age) in Auckland. The four columns, albeit capped with Doric and not the Ionic capitals with which they were built, provide the strong and 'uncluttered' principal aesthetic. Decorative but restrained plaster work supports the symmetry of the composition and supplies a level of three-dimensional relief to the form of the façade. The entranceway is understated in terms of its scale but highly decorative in its appearance, 'topped' with the only Masonic signage to adorn the building. Face-fixed lamps either side of the doorway provide, arguably, the only other 'give-in' to any form of decorative 'fancy'.

The building is also noteworthy as a recognisable representation of generic Masonic architecture. Although significantly larger in scale, its general form and appearance are notably similar to the Masonic Hall in Invercargill (1925) and the Masonic Temple in Nelson (1928). This recognisability, as part of a broader grouping [of Masonic-type buildings], supports both an aspect of its historic value, referred to above, and its importance architecturally as a sub-part of the typology of classical architecture – defined in this case by its function and use.

Although he died very young, Hugh Clawson Curlett had gained an acclaimed reputation as an accomplished builder and craftsman. Much was made of his contribution to the building through the media in advertising the construction of the temple, both prior to its completion and after its ceremonial opening. The Freemasons have a history that is highly associated with craft and craftsmanship. Perhaps for this reason, but perhaps equally of course, to celebrate the success of the project, they lauded Mr Curlett's achievements for his part in the construction of the temple. It is important then to recognise the reverence with which the Masons held Mr Curlett's work, as it supports his involvement and association with the building as having heritage value too.

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) has **considerable local and regional physical attributes** value.

Aesthetic

The place is notable or distinctive for its aesthetic, visual, or landmark qualities.

When completed in 1930 the temple was considerably larger than almost all of the buildings within the local area. Its use too was incongruous with the retail offering immediately east, and with the residential buildings up and down St Benedicts Street. Whether or not the site was chosen specifically in order to highlight its landmark presence is unknown, but there is no denying that its scale alone would have imbued the building with a notable and distinctive presence within the neighbourhood. High on the ridge of Symonds Street it would have been seen from far and wide. Its scale then, combined with its striking aesthetic, would have only cemented its renown as a significant landmark within the broader suburban area.

Despite the intensification of the area today, the building remains a significant and physically imposing presence within the Upper Symonds Street and Newton Gully area. The building is an undeniably impressive structure with considerable streetscape value. The symmetrical, ordered, and geometric design of the façade, with its robust columns and finely detailed plasterwork and entrance way, provides an attractive composition sought and admired by the pedestrian and motorist alike. The beauty and visual distinctiveness of the front façade are perhaps only amplified by the highly contrasting plainness of both return elevations. Its physical presence is only further pronounced by currently having empty lots either side.

The temple has been a local landmark since 1930 and it remains a highly conspicuous feature along St Benedicts Street, and within the local area more broadly. Its scale, architectural qualities, and its visual connections to Freemasonry mean it will be well-known to locals, and many others across Auckland, members, and non-members of the Freemasonry fraternity alike.

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) has **considerable local aesthetic** value.

Context

The place contributes to or is associated with a wider historical or cultural context, streetscape, townscape, landscape or setting.

For its connection with the many Masonic buildings across New Zealand, many of which are either scheduled or listed with councils and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga, respectively, the Auckland Masonic Temple (former) has moderate contextual importance. Although now only formerly associated with Freemasonry in Auckland, and New Zealand, its longevity, scale, striking appearance, and 'classical' architectural styling, common to many of the early Masonic buildings are likely sufficient factors to associate this building with the important grouping of remaining Masonic buildings built in New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s. It is likely highly recognisable, to members and non-members of the organisation alike, as part of this grouping, or that of another significant national body.

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) has **moderate local, regional and national context** value.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former), located at 24 St Benedicts Street Newton, has considerable historical significance locally and regionally, through its long-standing association with the New Zealand Freemasons. For 78 years it hosted regular local, provincial (or regional), and national gatherings, meetings, and ceremonies for the members of the organisation. Its membership in New Zealand expanded rapidly through and after the difficult Depression and inter-war years, and the members, and the organisation alike, likely had influence in the post-war rebuilding of the nation. Although in decline today, the Masonic organisation is still highly active across the country, as a generally well-known, and far-reaching, charitable fraternity.

The building has considerable social value, as the physical meeting place of a well-patronised organisation, dedicated to, among other things, developing friendships and communities. Although the lodges associated with the building have now moved to new premises, their rituals and ceremonies moving with them, it is likely the case that the built form remains held in considerable esteem by current and past members of the fraternity. Representative of both the physical qualities of 'craft', so important to the origins of Freemasonry, and, with its architectural order and grandeur - representative of many of the social values associated with the organisation – the building is determined to have considerable social heritage value to Freemasonry in Auckland, and perhaps also to the local community alike.

The building has considerable value as the work of notable Auckland-based architect William Swanson Read Bloomfield. Bloomfield, of Ngati Kahungunu, is believed to be the first qualified and practising Māori architect in New Zealand. He has a significant list of buildings to his name including a number scheduled and listed, with Auckland Council and Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga respectively. The building itself also has considerable inherent heritage value for its physical attributes, as a notable representation of its type. Regarded as a form of architectural 'stripped-classicism', the main façade of the building strongly represents the classical order and geometry of its type, with little given over to any form of decorative 'fancy'. The building is also noteworthy as a recognisable representation of generic Masonic architectural form.

The building has considerable significance for its aesthetic value, as it remains a conspicuous, intact, and generally legible, landmark feature along St Benedicts Street. It is an undeniably impressive structure with considerable streetscape value. The symmetrical, ordered, and geometric design of the façade, with its robust columns and fine plasterwork provides an attractive composition sought and admired by the pedestrian and motorist alike. Decoration is at a minimum. Order and geometry dominate, reflecting in their

permanence, stability, and strength, some of the foundation values of Freemasonry. Its landmark aesthetic attributes are both high and ever-present.

The building has moderate significance for its context value, as it is readily associated with the broad Masonic building stock across New Zealand, much of which is either scheduled or listed with councils and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga, respectively.

TABLE OF HERITAGE VALUES

| Significance Criteria (A-H) | Value | Geographic Context |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| A- Historical | Considerable | Local, Regional |
| B- Social | Considerable | Local, Regional |
| C- Mana Whenua | No known | NA |
| D- Knowledge | Little | NA |
| E- Technology | Little | NA |
| F- Physical Attributes | Considerable | Local, Regional |
| G- Aesthetic | Considerable | Local |
| H- Context | Moderate | Local, Regional and National |

CATEGORY RECOMMENDATION

The Auckland Masonic Temple (former) meets the thresholds in the AUP for scheduling as a Historic Heritage Place. It is recommended that the place is included in Schedule 14.1 as a category B place.

RECOMMENDATION BASED ON HERITAGE VALUE

Schedule 14.1

| ID | Place name and/or description | Verified location | Verified legal description | Category | Primary features | Heritage values | Extent of place | Exclusions | Additional rules for archaeological sites or features | Place of Māori interest or significance |
|------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|---------------|---|---|
| XXXX | Auckland Masonic Temple (former) | 24 St Benedicts Street, Newton 1010 | SECT 168 SO 470828 | B | Building | A, B, F, G | Refer to planning maps | ⁵⁰ | | |

⁵⁰ No recommendation has been made in relation to the interior of the building as an assessment of it has not formed part of this evaluation.

Planning maps

- The proposed Extent of Place covers part of the existing site – being the original footprint of the building, including ground floor access-way areas, along the rear of both side elevations. The area also includes the access-way forward of this on the northern side of the building, to include the area where the original secondary entrance steps and canopy were located, and the area of the footpath immediately in front of the building.
- This area is considered to contain the historic heritage values of the place - to contribute to the function, meaning and significance of the place.



Figure 3: The proposed Extent of the Place shown outlined in red.

Evaluator

Blair Hastings
Heritage Consultant
May 2022

Peer Reviewer

Carolyn O'Neil
Heritage Consultant
March 2022

Managerial Sign-Off

Megan Patrick
Team Leader Heritage Policy
10 May 2022

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Drawings

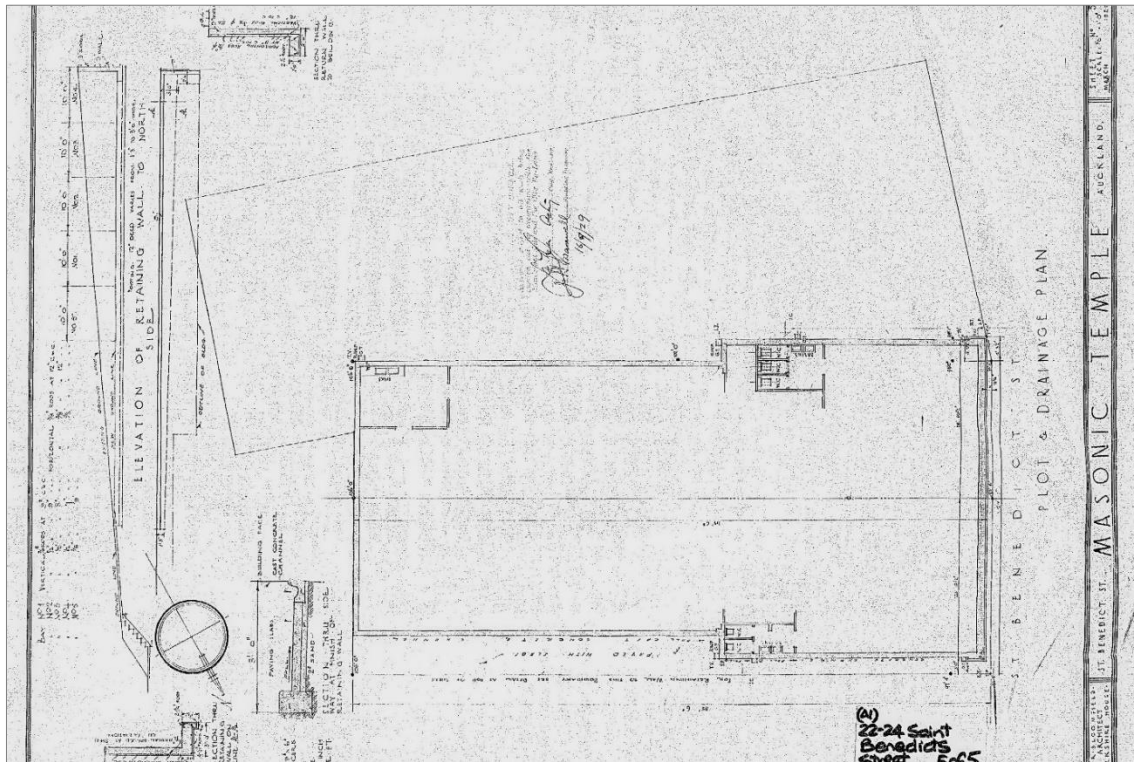


Figure 4: 1929 Drawings for 'MASONIC TEMPLE' - by W. S. R. Bloomfield, Architect: Plot and Drainage Plans. Council Property File. Accessed March 2022

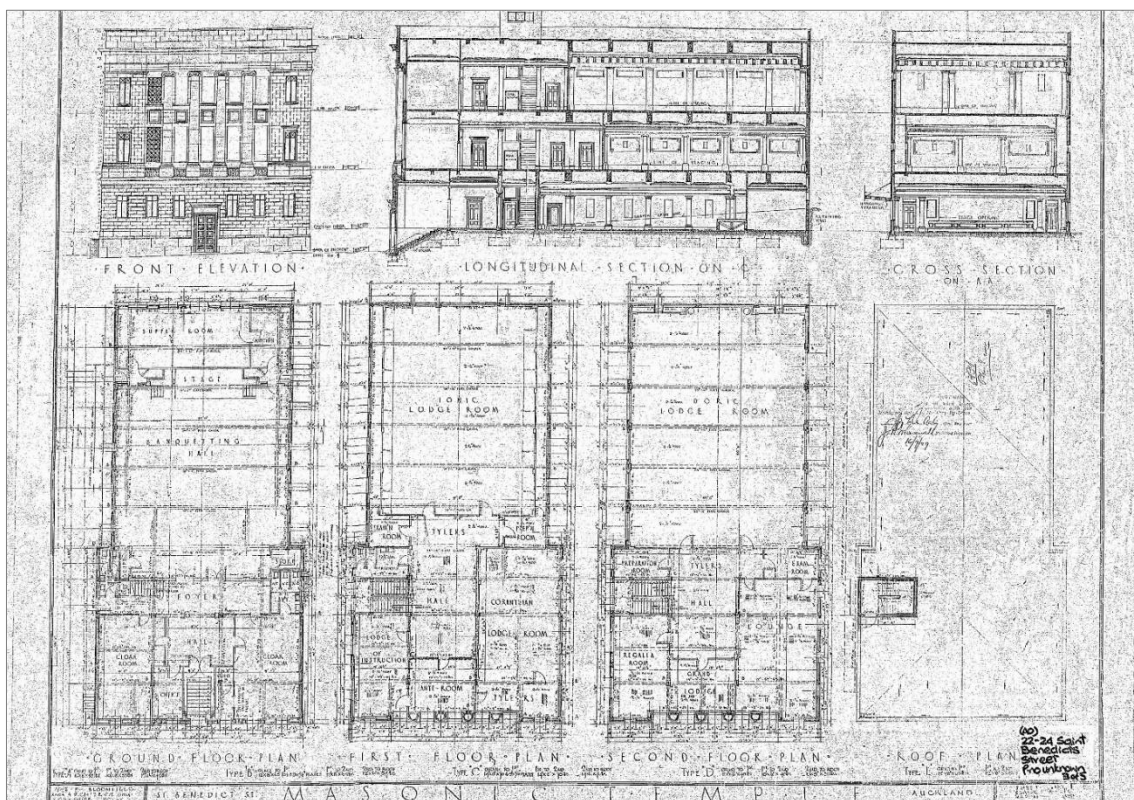


Figure 5: 1929 Drawings for 'MASONIC TEMPLE' - by W. S. R. Bloomfield, Architect: Floor and Roof Plans, Front Elevation and Cross Sections. Auckland Council Property File. Accessed March 2022

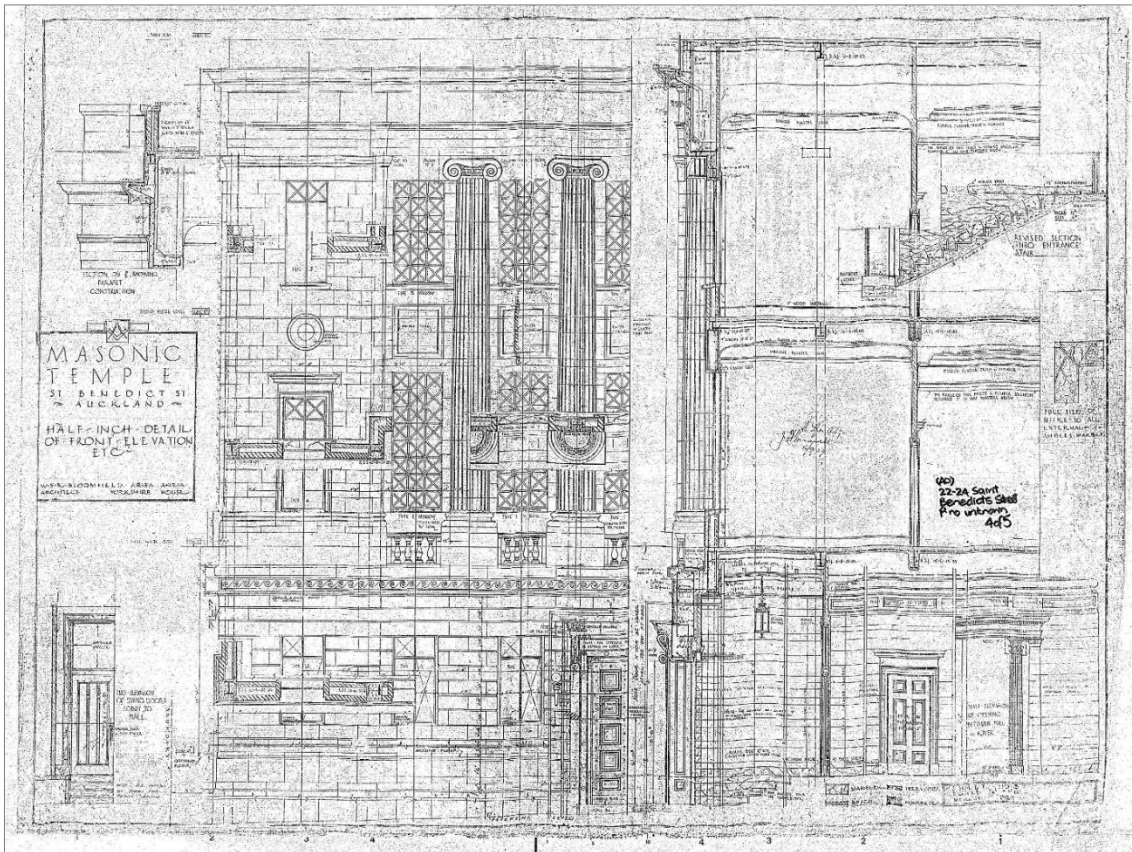


Figure 6: 1929 Drawings for 'MASONIC TEMPLE' - by W. S. R. Bloomfield, Architect: Half Inch Detail of Front Elevation. Auckland Council Property File. Accessed March 2022

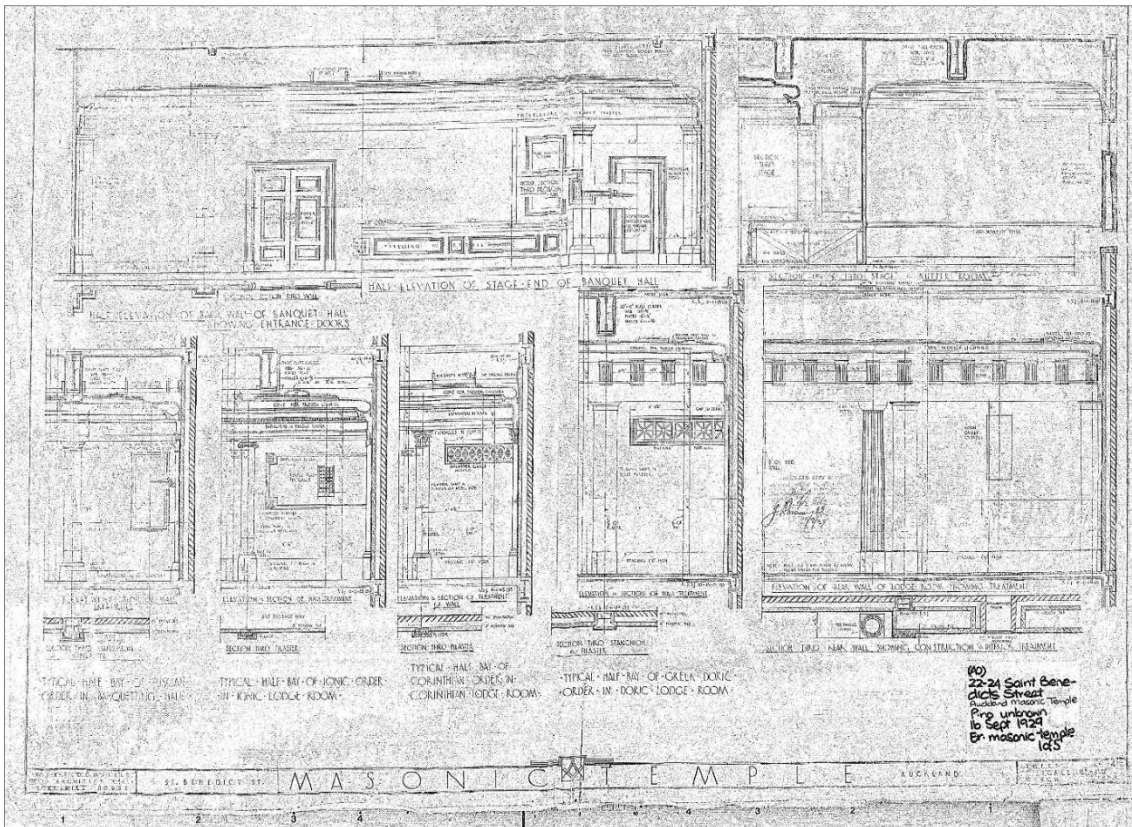


Figure 7: 1929 Drawings for 'MASONIC TEMPLE' - by W. S. R. Bloomfield, Architect: Interior Elevations and Detail. Auckland Council Property File. Accessed March 2022

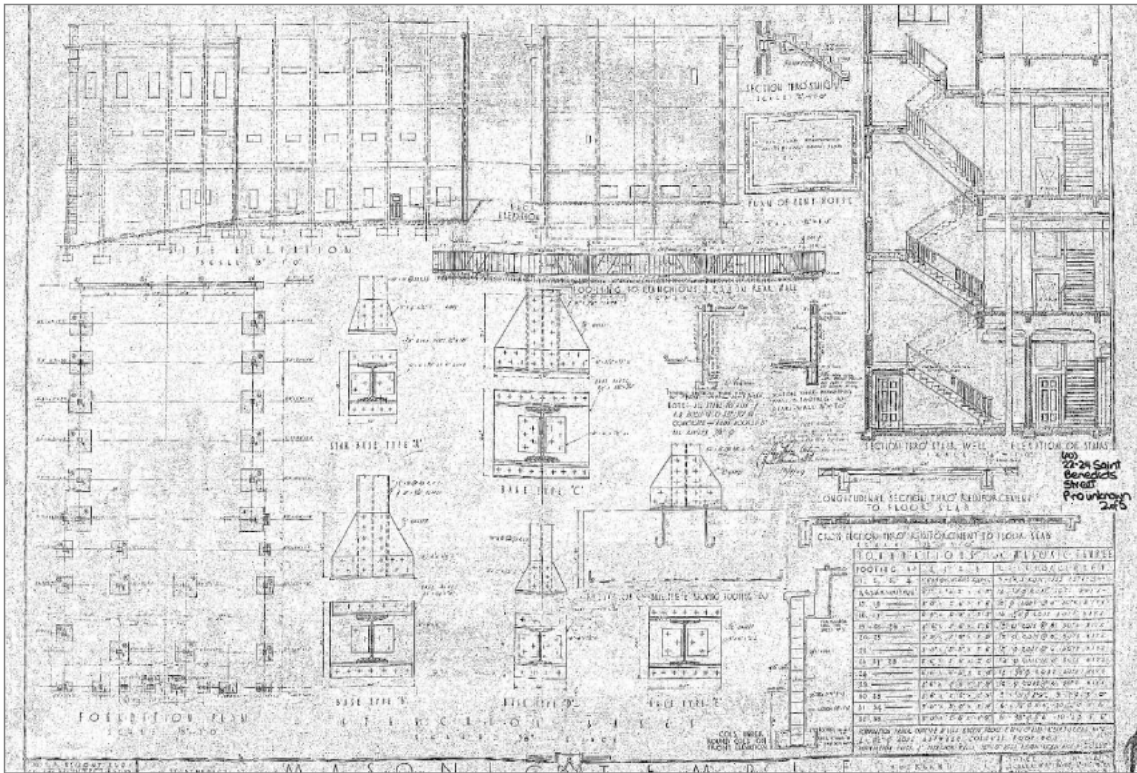


Figure 8: 1929 Drawings for 'MASONIC TEMPLE' - by W. S. R. Bloomfield, Architect: Foundation Plans, Cross Sections, and other Structural Detail. Auckland Council Property File. Accessed March 2022

Appendix 2: Historic photographs



Figure 9: Extract of aerial photograph 1930 - taken from north-east of the site. Shows both the flat roof with which the building was originally built, and also how physically dominant it was, in context with the neighbouring buildings. Whites Aviation Ltd Photographs. Ref: WA-62561-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23036926>.



Figure 10: **Top:** Extract of aerial photograph 1957 - taken from south-west of the site. Whites Aviation Ltd Photographs. Ref: WA-44305-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23213988>. **Bottom:** Extract from Google Maps 3D – accessed March 2022 – from a similar location. Shows both a number of original residential buildings still in-situ along the western side of St Benedicts Street, and also just how physically dominant the building still remains.



Figure 11: **Left:** Photograph of the site – Blair Hastings, February 2022. **Right:** Photograph from June 1930: ‘IMPOSING STRUCTURE IN ST. BENEDICT’S STREET. The new Masonic temple in St. Benedict’s Street is almost complete and in a fortnight’s time should be ready for occupation.’ *Sun*, 25th June 1930, p.1. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/SUNAK19300625.2.8.1>

Appendix 3: Site photographs



Figure 12: West elevation of the building. Blair Hastings, February 2022.



Figure 13: South elevation of the building. Blair Hastings, February 2022.



Figure 14: The building – as seen from the south, on St Benedicts Street. Shows the physical dominance the building retains within its local context. Blair Hastings, February 2022.



Figure 15: The building – as seen from the north, on St Benedicts Street. Shows the physical dominance the building retains within its local context. Blair Hastings, February 2022.