WAIMAKARIRI DISTRICT COUNCIL

HISTORIC HERITAGE ITEM RECORD FORM

2021 District Plan Item No.   **HH103**

HERITAGE ITEM NAME   Oxford Town Hall

ADDRESS   30 Main Street, Oxford

PHOTOGRAPH

(Dr A McEwan, 10 July 2019)

DISTRICT PLAN ITEM NO.   n / a   **HNZ LIST NO. & CATEGORY**   n / a
(at time of assessment)

LEGAL DESCRIPTION   Lot 2 DP 46386

VALUATION NUMBER   2153257801

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION   1930-31

**ARCHITECT/DESIGNER/
BUILDER**   HSA Murray, architect; Keir & Thompson, contractors

STYLE   Neoclassical

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Two-storey building with L-shaped footprint and half-hipped and gable roof; additions to the side and rear have hipped roof forms. Principal, south-facing elevation is symmetrical about a projecting entrance porch with entablature. Pilasters and single, multi-pane windows flank entry. Classical block motifs beneath eaves on façade; flat roofed dormer and gable end above entry. Casement and fanlight type windows; external staircase to first floor on west elevation. Modern additions to rear (north) and side (east).

MATERIALS/STRUCTURE

Reinforced concrete, cement plaster, corrugated metal roofing.

ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS

Earthquake strengthening, demolition of A&P room and kitchen/storeroom at north-east corner, north and east additions (2014-15).

SETTING

The building stands at the north-east corner of the intersection of Main and Burnett Streets. The Oxford Fire Station is immediately to the north of the hall along Burnett Street; the Oxford Library and WDC Service Centre and Pearson Park are to the west. The former Oxford Post Office and Oxford Centennial Memorial building are on the opposite side of Main Street. The extent of scheduling is limited to the immediate setting of the hall, rather than the land parcel as a whole.

HISTORY

Oxford East and Oxford West had their own public halls from the 1870s, the latter serving other purposes from 1880 until it was demolished in 1932. In East Oxford a hall erected in 1878 by the Oxford Town Hall Company was taken over by the Oxford Benevolent and Improvement League in 1924. The League held a gala to raise money for a new hall in March 1926 but determined that the responsibility for erecting a public hall should rest with the Oxford County Council. Consequently the Benevolent League handed over its assets to the County Council, which subsequently erected the present Oxford Town Hall on a site that was partly held by the council and partly in possession of the Agricultural and Pastoral Association. The site was criticised by some parties as lacking centrality and also for the obligation undertaken by the council to provide a supper room for the A&P Association, which it was felt would restrict public access to the building. Regardless of such concerns, the new Oxford Town Hall opened on 3 June 1931, the foundation having been laid by A Meyers, Chairman of the Oxford County Council, on 20 November of the preceding year. The town hall reopened after redevelopment and refurbishment on 19 February 2015. It continues to function as a cinema, public hall and function venue.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Town Hall has historical and social significance for its association with the civic and social life of the people of Oxford and district since 1931. It also has a commemorative function, housing the Honour Rolls for the district within its auditorium. The entrance porch was described as being a memorial to the local men who fought in World War I when tenders for its construction were being called.

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Town Hall has cultural significance because it is held in esteem as an important local facility. The building's strengthening and refurbishment in 2014-15 demonstrated its cultural value to the community.

ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Town Hall has architectural significance as the work of Christchurch architect Henry St Aubyn Murray. Murray (1886-1943) was born and educated in Christchurch and served his articles with Fred Barlow, the designer of the Rangiora Borough Council Chambers (H077). In 1908 Murray was one of four New Zealanders who represented Australasia at the Olympic Games held in London that year. Murray also designed a number of Catholic churches in Canterbury, including the Church of the Holy Name in Ashburton (1930), as well as the Akaroa (1922-23) and Leeston (1924) war memorials.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Town Hall has technological and craftsmanship value for its reinforced concrete construction and classical detailing. Keir and Thompson were Rangiora builders and the interwar successors to the firm of Boyd & Keir that dated to the early settlement of North Canterbury. William Keir and J Thompson appear to have commenced their partnership in the early 1920s; they registered their company in August 1925. The firm was also responsible for additions to Rangiora Hospital in 1940 and a number of churches and large country houses across the province.

CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Town Hall has contextual significance as a historic landmark on Main Street and within the town centre streetscape. The building defines the street corner on which it is located and forms a civic cluster with the Oxford Library and WDC Service Centre, the Oxford Centennial Memorial Building and the former Oxford Post Office.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE

As the building post-dates 1900 and the property has been redeveloped, its site may have limited potential archaeological value.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The Oxford Town Hall has overall heritage significance to Oxford and the district of Waimakariri as a whole. The building has historical and social significance for its association with the civic and social life of the people of Oxford since 1931 and cultural significance as a place of community esteem and local identity. The Oxford Town Hall has architectural significance as a Neoclassical design by Christchurch architect Henry Murray and technological and craftsmanship value for its reinforced construction and classical detailing by Messrs Keir and Thompson. The Oxford Town Hall has contextual significance as a historic landmark within the village centre; its site may have limited potential archaeological value.
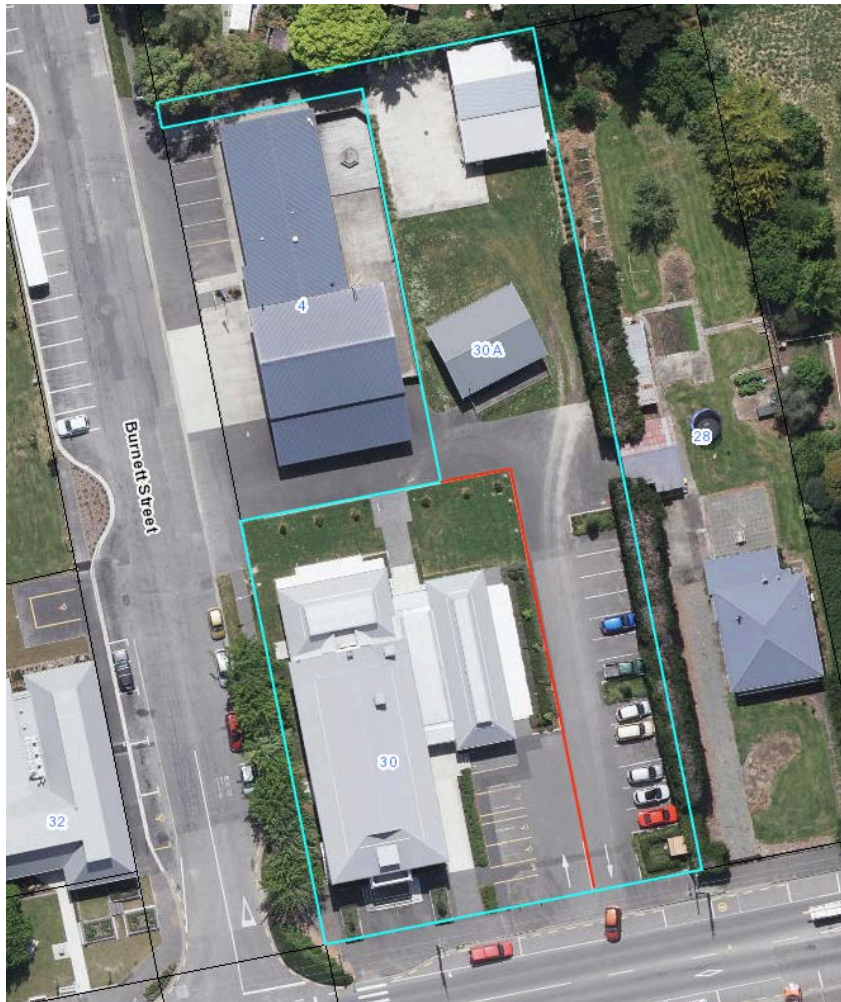
HERITAGE CATEGORY

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REFERENCES

- *Press* 19 August 1924, p. 3; 29 August 1925, p. 12; 10 March 1926, p. 3; 25 September 1928, p. 4; 13 December 1928, p. 15; 28 December 1928, p. 3; 23 September 1930, p. 3; 21 November 1930, pp. 9 & 13; 3 June 1931, pp. 3 & 11; 9 September 1932, p. 18; 18 April 1939, p. 11; 21 December 1939, p. 4.
- *North Canterbury Gazette* 20 August 1937, p. 4; 10 November 1938, p. 3.
- https://bookings.waimakariri.govt.nz/facilities/facility/oxford-town-hall
- https://libraries.waimakariri.govt.nz/heritage/local-history/places-of-the-waimakariri/oxford-and-districts/history-of-the-oxford-town-hall
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_St_Aubyn_Murray
- *Cyclopedia of New Zealand – Canterbury Provincial District* Christchurch, 1903; available online.

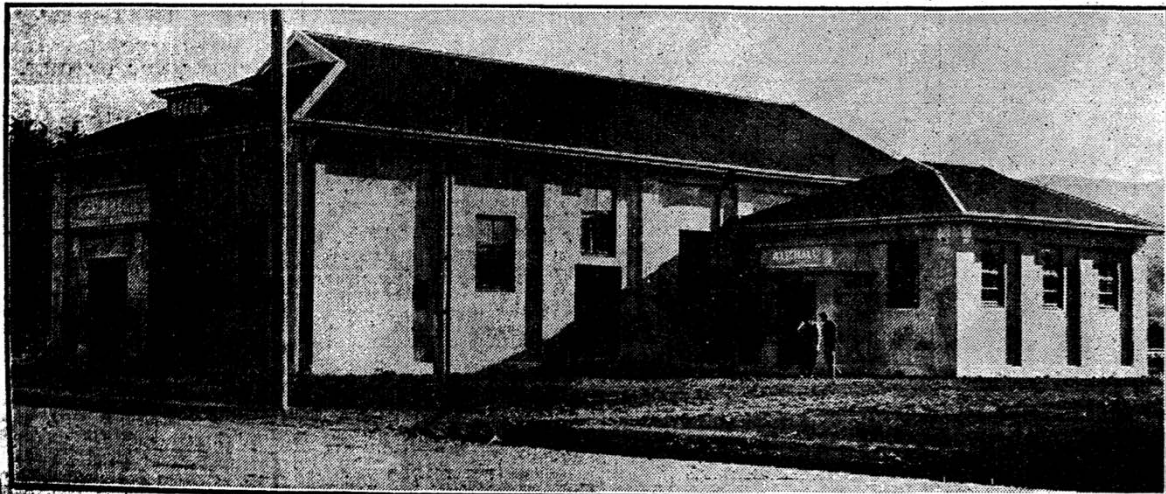**REPORT COMPLETED**   22 July 2019

AUTHOR   Dr Ann McEwan / Heritage Consultancy Services

Extent of setting, limited to the immediate setting of the building, Oxford Town Hall, 30 Main Street, Oxford.

THE OXFORD TOWN HALL.
The opening ceremony took place on June 3rd, 1931. The occasion was a red-letter day in the history of the district.

Press 9 September 1932, p. 18. PapersPast.