

Massey University Refectory Building

Massey University Campus, Tennent Drive, Palmerston North

NZHPT Registration Number: 1187
NZHPT Registration Type: Historic Place – Category II
NZHPT Registration Date: 02/07/82
City/District Council: Palmerston North City Council
District Plan Status: Category 2



Brief History

Auckland-based architect, Roy Alstan Lippincott (1885-1969), was commissioned for the design of three essential founding buildings for the new Massey Agricultural College; a dairy factory, refectory, and main science building. (see Old Dairy Factory and Massey Main Building). The Refectory and the Main Building were designed concurrently as a pair and were erected by Fletcher Construction. The Refectory plans are dated 22 April 1929, and those of the Main Building, 10 June 1929. The Refectory was completed in early 1930 providing temporary lecture space until the Main Building was opened in April 1931.

The Refectory is of the Spanish Mission style that is characterised by tile roofs, smooth plastered wall surfaces and semi-circular window heads. This represents a break with such revivalist styles as Neo-Georgian and stripped classical that were common in New Zealand at the time. The precedent for this style was RA Abbot's design for the Auckland Grammar School (1916). In comparison Lippincott's design is notable for its simple, dramatic forms and absence of decoration, relying for its interest on the pattern of the windows. A high central wing runs east west with a tall semi-circular-headed window, the centrepiece of the building, at the west end. Built prior to the Napier earthquake of 1931 and before the first structural building code of 1935, the Refectory building has technological value for the design of the reinforced concrete frames with brick and terracotta infill panels. The original contract drawings still exist.

In 1932 the Refectory common room was converted into study bedrooms and was not used for its intended purpose until dormitories were constructed on campus. The building became an Army staff college from 1942 to 1944 during the Second World War. The two-storey addition to the kitchen wing was constructed during this time to extend the food preparation area and create a matron's flat on the first floor. In 1963/64 a mezzanine floor was constructed within the former dining hall providing space for a new common room. When the Student Union Building was opened in 1968 the Refectory was modified to accommodate the new Student Health Service and now also housed the drama studio, staff offices and lecture rooms. Substantial renovations were made to the building in 1980/81 to update teaching facilities and to accommodate the new Business Studies Computer Research Unit.

Principal Sources:

Cochran, Chris. *The Refectory, Massey University, Palmerston North, Conservation Plan*, for Property Management Section, Massey University, 1999.
Heritage Trails Working Party, *Massey History Walk*, 1994.