



NEW LIFE FOR A LANDMARK

Sustainably refurbishing Auckland's Chief Post Office Building

CHIEF
POST
OFFICE





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Cover The refurbished grand staircase of the Chief Post Office Building. Previous pages Auckland’s historic Chief Post Office Building opened in 1912 and was refurbished in 2025. Left A detail of the heritage entrance lobby tiling.





A LETTER FROM PETER COOPER



I remember, as a little boy, coming down from Kaitaia in my father's work truck to visit my Auntie Nell, who worked at the Chief Post Office. I would catch the tram into town and go to the CPO to meet her, and she'd take me out for dinner. Even when I was at high school, I remember going down to the CPO in my college blazer, which was my best coat, to go out to dinner with her.

Tens – perhaps hundreds – of thousands of other New Zealanders will also have memories of this special building, which has held an important place in the community for over a century. To have the opportunity to restore a place that has been so significant to Auckland's history is a real privilege for Cooper and Company.

When I toured the refurbished building, I was struck by the refinement and grace of the work achieved by the team. There have been an unusually large number of women working on this project and there is a femininity to the final result that comes through to me. Architecturally, the way the atrium has been handled as a gathering space for people makes it very special.

The Chief Post Office is a much grander building than the heritage warehouses at Britomart, the nine-block district that Cooper and Company has been regenerating for over 20 years. While it has seen a number of different uses over the years, the CPO has always been a key part of downtown Auckland's infrastructure, from communications to commuting.

In some ways, its story can be read as a reflection of the history of the city and its changes over the passage of time. For me, it is important for the city to have buildings that hold this kind of history, and we are proud to have restored and modernised the Chief Post Office Building in a way that sets it up for the next century of history to come.

Kua hua te marama / A cycle or project is completed.

PETER COOPER
Executive Chairman, Cooper and Company

Previous pages The building's original lightwell has been transformed into a tree-filled atrium space for socialising
Left Delicate stained glass domes are a feature of the atrium space, letting light into the lobby of the Waitematā Station below.

A LETTER FROM
MATTHEW COCKRAM



As the Chief Executive of Cooper and Company NZ, I am delighted to share the story of the Chief Post Office Building. In our 20-year history of remaking Britomart, it is one of the foremost embodiments of our commitment to creating places that will inspire and attract people to come to work every day.

We believe the spaces we create should be more than just places to work; they should be destinations that people look forward to being in. We applied this philosophy in our approach to the refurbishment of the CPO, as we have in the shaping of the broader Britomart area.

With its rich history and architectural elegance, the CPO has an inherent appeal as a place to work. In addition, our team of collaborators have transformed it into a vibrant and sustainable workspace that honours its heritage while meeting the needs of modern occupiers.

One of the standout features of the CPO is the new atrium, a central gathering space that fosters social interaction and collaboration. This atrium, along with the outstanding amenities and experiences offered by the Britomart area, creates a unique and inviting atmosphere for our newest lease partner and their team members.

From the sunny green space of Takutai Square and the evening lights over Te Ara Tāhuhu to public artworks and weekly events, the Britomart district offers a blend of history, culture, and modern convenience that makes it a place where people want to be, workers and visitors alike.

We are proud to support our lease partners by providing spaces that are not only beautiful and functional but also contribute to the well-being and productivity of their teams. Attracting and retaining the best talent is, in our view, bolstered by outstanding physical facilities and amenities.

Our commitment to sustainability, heritage conservation, and creating people-centric environments is at the heart of everything we do. This book tells the story of how we have brought those values to life at the Chief Post Office Building.

MATTHEW COCKRAM
Chief Executive, Cooper and Company New Zealand

Right Symmetry and linearity play off against curves and organic shapes in the CPO's grand stairwell, while the solidity of the building is lightened with a creamy colour scheme.





The Chief Post Office, pictured soon after its completion in 1912. Photo by Henry Winkelmann, Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, 1-W1532

A SHORT HISTORY

Standing on the eastern edge of the public square now known as Te Komititanga, Auckland’s Chief Post Office has been one of the city’s most beautiful and important buildings for more than 110 years.

Four storeys tall, with ornate turrets at each corner of the façade and graceful stained-glass domes in the ceiling of the ground floor, the Chief Post Office – or CPO as it is colloquially known – first opened in 1912, nearly a year after its expected completion date.

It was designed in a grand Imperial Baroque style, with an elegant façade of white Oamaru stone sitting above a

grey Coromandel granite base, and was constructed at the same time as the first Wellington Chief Post Office, in a very similar style.

The Chief Post Office is listed as a Category 1 historic place by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, meaning it is a place of “special or outstanding historical or cultural significance”.

Following its 2025 refurbishment, the building is targeted to become New Zealand’s first 6 Green Star heritage building, as rated by the New Zealand Green Building Council, and to earn a WELL Core Gold rating from the International WELL Building Institute.



Left A 1909 view of preliminary construction work for the new Chief Post Office on the site of the former Queen Street Railway Station, looking east. Photo from the Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 323161

Right The Chief Post Office Building sits at the westward edge of Britomart, between Te Komititanga and Waitematā Station Plaza.



A Civic Hub for a New City

The Chief Post Office was built when Auckland was a rapidly growing port city. In September 1840, the city had been founded by Governor William Hobson, thanks to a gift of 3000 acres of land by the Ngāti Whātua chief Āpihai Te Kawau. Within a year, the city was declared New Zealand’s new capital, and boatloads of settlers from Australia and Britain began arriving.

From 1870 through to the early 1880s, land reclamation of Onepanea Bay extended Auckland’s shoreline from Shortland Street to Quay Street, creating a deeper harbour for ships and boosting the port’s activity.

As business confidence picked up in the early years of the 20th century and traders raised warehouses on the new waterfront land, the need grew for a general post office to handle deliveries for the city’s 40,000 residents.

The scale of the building that was designed by government architect John Campbell and Claude Paton reflected its importance, not just as a handler of mail but also as a civic gathering-place and office space for government officials. The interiors were lavish, with fittings

imported from Britain and extensive marble and mosaics in the ground floor public spaces. The opening ceremony, attended by Prime Minister William Massey, drew a crowd of 8000-10,000 people.

The Chief Post Office originally faced onto the lower end of Queen Street, with street-level stairs leading up to the main public floor. This original main floor was almost completely removed during the building’s transformation into the Britomart Transport Centre (now known as Waitematā Station), with the ground-level basement becoming the new station concourse.

Two years after the Chief Post Office opened, World War I brought a big uplift in demand for its services. As men headed to war, women increasingly filled roles in the postal service, as they would again during World War II.

Between the wars, the role of the Post Office expanded, managing a variety of activities from tax collection, pensions and car registrations to electoral enrolments and radio (and eventually television) licences, as well as operating as a savings bank.

Right With the removal of dropped ceilings installed during the 20th century, the original heritage column heads have been revealed.





Thousands gathered for the opening of the Chief Post Office on 20 November 1912. Photo by Henry Winkelmann, Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 1-W0927.



A Mid-Century Workhorse

After the removal of the original train station that ran alongside the Chief Post Office, the Post Office department bought the land the building stood on in the late 1930s from the Auckland Harbour Board when the original lease expired, as well as land to the east, on which they added a four-storey extension in an Art Deco style. With train services removed to a new station on Beach Road, the area behind the post office was transformed into a central bus depot and a large car park.

By the 1960s, it became clear that the Chief Post Office was in need of serious repairs. The façade was crumbling in many places, and an extensive exterior renovation took place from 1969 – 1972, though it did not remedy all the problems.

Inside, many years of handling enormous mail loads had also taken their toll, resulting in sagging floors. Neglect of the roof meant some interior ceiling cornices had to be removed as they were a fall risk.

Left The concrete stairwell floors of the second and third level have been replaced with a creamy terrazzo with stone flecks that draw their tones from the heritage mosaic tiles in the lobby.

Below The radio cabin on the roof of the Auckland Chief Post Office, c1912. Photo possibly by WA Price, Alexander Turnbull Library Collections.



The face of the harbourfront was also changing, as the area had become run-down and in need of revitalisation. The Auckland Harbour Board, which administered the area, came up with the Downtown Scheme, developed in association with a Sydney architecture practice.

Starting in 1968, a number of historic buildings to the west of the Chief Post Office were demolished, and replaced with office towers – including the original Air New Zealand building – and a large retail mall, the Downtown Shopping Centre.

In 1980, the lower portion of Queen Street was closed and transformed into a public space – Queen Elizabeth II Square – complete with seating, trees, fountains and sculptural artworks.

Plans were also in the works to completely redevelop the Chief Post Office, with only the façade retained and a new building behind it, when the government’s economic reforms changed the game.



CLOCKING OFF... AND BACK IN AGAIN

The Chief Post Office’s clock has been a notable feature of the building since it was installed in July 1938, although due to its tendency to display the wrong time or stop working completely, it has at times been regarded with as much exasperation as affection.

The clock is a dual-faced Magneta London clock, made in England at an original cost of £321, 10 shillings. It was a particular type of railway clock that worked on a linked system with clocks throughout the building – or at least, it was meant to.

Instead, it sometimes seized up “owing to the hands being out of balance and to the failure of the mechanism to synchronise with that of numerous other small clocks on the same electrically controlled system”, according to National Library records.

In 2019, it was removed, given some TLC by a specialist clock restorer and then stored until its reinstatement in 2022 when the City Rail Link works on the building were completed. Since then – touch wood – it has kept perfect time.

THE ORIGINAL HOME OF AUCKLAND RADIO

Even before the official opening of the Chief Post Office on 20 November 1912, the building was already enabling better communication for New Zealanders. On 24 October, Auckland Radio NZK, one of the country’s first radiotelegraph stations, began operating out of a small building on the southern part of the Chief Post Office roof.

The original radio masts were installed on the top of the two Baroque turrets of the building, a striking contrast between old and new. While the station received “excellent results” in its early days, it was closed down only three years later when the new, more powerful station set up at Awanui, near Kaitia, proved to have superior capacity.

After being used for many years as a storage room, today the radio building has been cleaned out with a new floor to enable its continued use.

Changing Tides: Abandonment and a New Life

Following the 1987 transformation of the Post Office into three State-Owned Enterprises – New Zealand Post, Post Bank and Telecom New Zealand – hundreds of post offices throughout the country were closed. These were mostly in small rural towns, but in 1992, the rationalisation process reached the Chief Post Office. Given the building’s need for investment in refurbishment, it was decided to relocate the central city’s postal services.

The building sat empty for the next nine years, becoming gradually more run-down, with a fire damaging the third floor in 1994. Vandalism and water damage further decayed the interiors. A lot of work would be needed to bring it up to the Building Code requirements.

In 1986, the building had been listed as a Category 1 historic place, and with interest in preserving Auckland’s heritage growing, Auckland City Council was keen to see it refurbished.

A conservation plan (from which much of this history has been drawn)

was created by heritage architects Salmond Reed in 1990 (and later updated in 2003). A number of developers had presented ambitious proposals to revive the neglected Britomart area, and in 1994, the council announced plans to bring rail back into the central city, with the Chief Post Office serving as the lobby of the transport terminal. In 1995, the council purchased the Chief Post Office Building.

After protracted wrangling over the form the new transit centre would take, an architectural competition for its design was held, and won by Californian architect Mario Madaayag, who worked with local firm Jasmax.

The Art Deco extension at the rear was demolished to make way for the new station, with a new glass extension housing the transitional space between the underground railway and the ground floor of the Chief Post Office, which had been reimaged and refurbished as a grand lobby. Work began in 2001 and the new station opened in July 2003.

Meanwhile, Cooper and Company were awarded the development rights for the wider Britomart district, which included responsibility for refurbishing 18 heritage buildings in the area, among which were the upper storeys of the Chief Post Office Building.

By the early 2000s, these floors had sat empty for over a decade. Ian Grant, who was Auckland Council’s senior heritage advisor at the time, remembers the state of the building. “It had been derelict and empty for some considerable time, and the pigeons and rough sleepers had got in and there had been a fire that affected both Level Two and Three from memory,” he says. “The place was a real pit, quite a mess internally.”

The transformation of the ground floor into the train station lobby involved structural shell and seismic reinforcing, improved fire protection and asbestos removal throughout the building. However, Cooper and Company’s development director at the time, Mike Geale, says the building still had issues.

“We had to provide access between the floors; fixing the stairs, the handrails, and things like that. We had to make sure the building was effectively waterproofed, because the roof leaked.”

Ian Grant says major work was also needed on the original Crittal steel windows. “They had rusted out and a lot of them were broken so the pigeons would get in, and they leaked badly.”

Working with architect Pip Cheshire, who had left Jasmax to set up his own practice, as well as heritage architects Salmond Reed, Cooper and Company got the building’s upper floors into a tenable state and leased them to shipping giant Maersk. Over the next decade, other tenants included law firm Duncan Cotterill (now based in the Australis Nathan Building at Britomart) and Kotahi, the logistics arm of Fonterra.

In 2017, the building was once again closed as work began on the underground City Rail Link (CRL). The project involved relocating the foundations of the 14,000-tonne CPO so that tunnels to transform the station into a two-way underground rail link connected to the western line could be dug beneath it, while lifting the entire building by just 2mm.

Preserving such an important heritage building through such extensive underground works was a delicate task with complex engineering demands, but in 2021, the building reopened again, with even more seismic strengthening in the lower level. Work to refresh and restore the facade continued over the next few months, and for the next three years, the upper levels were home to the now-defunct Auckland Light Rail Project and Link Alliance, a group of companies working on the CRL project.

The building’s latest temporary closure came in 2024, when the upper floors were emptied out for a major interior refurbishment in anticipation of the new long-term lease partner, the Guardians of New Zealand Superannuation, in 2026.



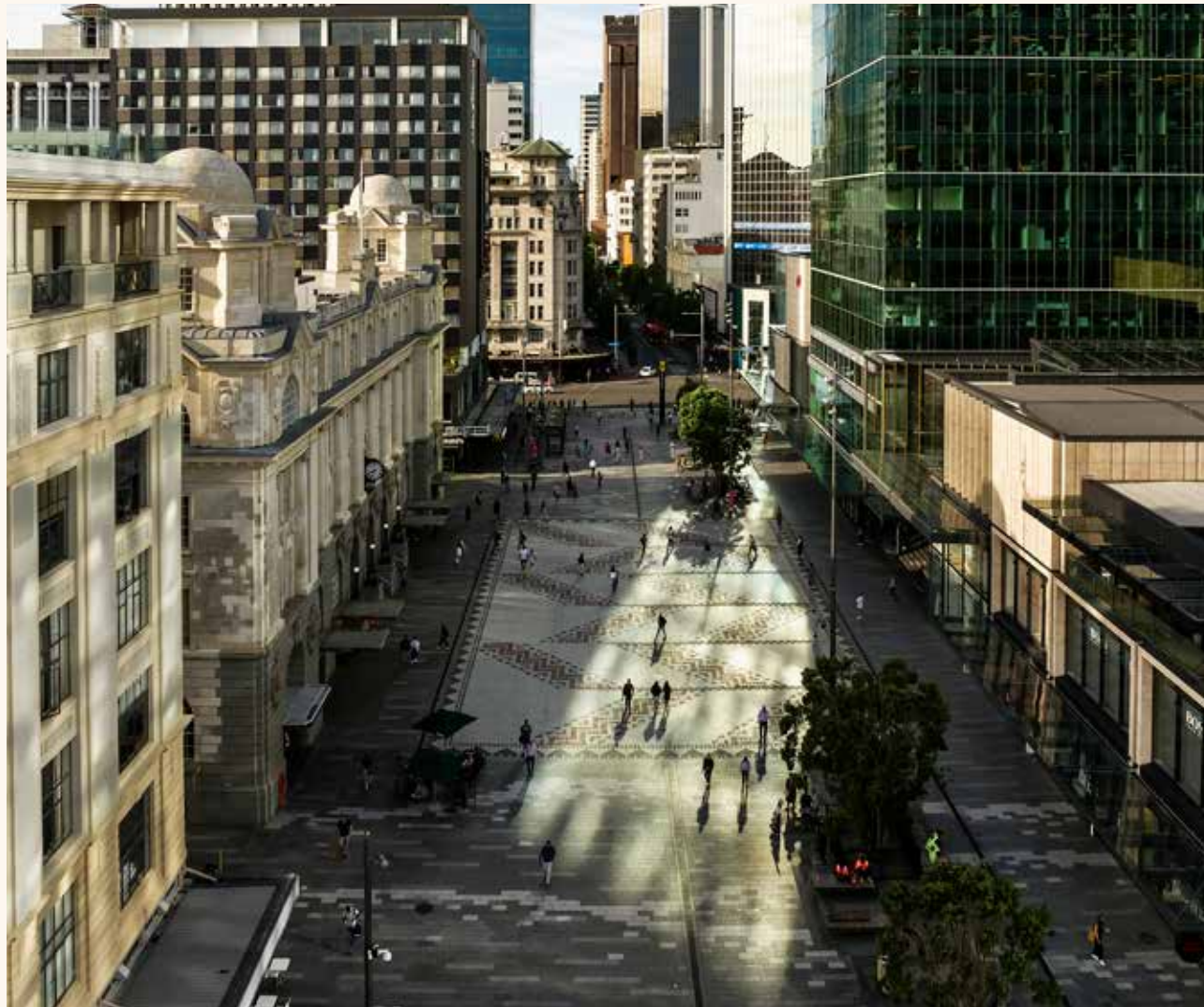
Left Vehicles parked outside the Chief Post Office in QE2 Square in the 1980s. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 1760-07 Far left QE2 Square and the Chief Post Office in the 1990s, looking south from the Ferry Building. Molly Macalister’s bronze statue of a Māori warrior, which now stands at the front of Te Komititanga, can be seen in the middle of the pedestrian area. Michio Ihara’s *Wind Tree* sculpture, now located in Wynyard Quarter, can be seen at right. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 1613-17-02

“One day, during the first refurbishment of the Chief Post Office, someone at the company received a phone call from an old lady, who asked if she could walk around the building. No problem. I met her, and she wanted to see the first floor. Well, we took her up to the first floor and she started tearing up. She and her husband had both worked for the Post Office, and her husband had recently died. He’d proposed to her in that space on the first floor, so it was really important to her to visit it again. To me, that moment is as important as anything else about that building. Buildings are buildings. They don’t have any feelings. But they create opportunities for people’s experiences. It’s about the people. That moment in the CPO with that lady was one I’ll never forget. Wonderful.”

— MIKE GEALE, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR AT BRITOMART, 2005 -2012







OUTSIDE THE DOORS

The Chief Post Office Building sits between two of Auckland’s newest public squares – Te Komititanga to the west and Waitematā Station Plaza to the east.

From the western windows or rooftop of the Chief Post Office Building, you have a perfect view of the intricate brickwork patterns of Te Komititanga. The design was created by mana whenua weavers to represent a whariki (woven harakeke welcome mat) lying over the waters of Te Waihorotiu Stream, which once flowed down Queen Street and met the Waitematā Harbour where the square now lies.

The name Te Komititanga, meaning ‘to mix or merge’, makes reference to this meeting of waters, as well as to the mingling of people who cross or visit the

square every day. It was gifted by Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei and City Rail Link’s Mana Whenua Forum before it was adopted by Auckland Council’s Waitematā Local Board.

On the eastern side, the design elements for the new Waitematā Station Plaza were developed by mana whenua alongside Te Komititanga, including the variable pavement pattern that represents the look of the Waitematā foreshore as it would have been seen by people gathering seafood before the area was reclaimed.

The design of the lid of the central seating area, by Ngāti Whātua artist Graham Tipene, refers to the abundance of the area and the meeting of people. Work on the project was completed in late 2025.



Top Te Komititanga connects Quay Street with Customs Street and the bottom end of Queen Street.

Above Waitematā Station Plaza opened in 2025.

The Exterior Details

Although the exterior of the Chief Post Office Building doesn’t fall under Cooper and Company’s responsibility, it’s an integral aspect of the building’s character and appeal, and the ornamental detailing has an interesting history.

The western entry facade and side returns are constructed from Coromandel granite for the foundation layer and Oamaru stone for the upper storeys. From there eastwards, the building is made from cement-rendered brick masonry incised with faux ashlar linework that gives the impression of the stone of the facade continuing for the entire exterior.

Oamaru stone is a soft limestone that proved to hold up quite poorly under Auckland’s temperamental maritime climate. As early as the 1940s, the exterior detailing was showing signs of disrepair. Some of it was given reinforcing treatment, while other sections of heavily weathered ornamentation were cut away completely. Some detailing may also have been removed as a seismic risk.

By the time of the CPO’s adaptation into the entrance to the Waitematā

Station in 2003, the exterior was in need of substantial work. Peter Reed of Salmond Reed Architects says the detailing was able to be restored very well, thanks to there being of lots of good photographs and drawings of the original work. “There were also scars or traces of where that work had been on the building, so we knew precisely where it should go. As close as humanly possible, I would say that original work was copied.”

The style of the stonework is very classical, says Reed, consisting of traditional motifs like swags, cartouches, egg-and-dart decorations, bunches of grapes and carved faces. The work was done by a pair of English stonemasons who were working in New Zealand at the time. If you’re trying to work out who the carved faces might depict, you’re out of luck; they’re generic, although Reed notes that ornamental stonemasons are often fond of adding some individual flair. “You do find that these stonemasons get quite colourful in what they do, and there are places where they use license and personalise the work a little bit.”



Right Swags and scrolls are two of the traditional motifs used in the exterior detailing of the Chief Post Office Building.

A SYMPATHETIC RESTORATION

The latest refurbishment of the Chief Post Office Building has been the most substantial to date, as well as being Cooper and Company's most ambitious sustainable building project.

"Due to the CPO's Category 1 heritage listing, which is the highest threshold for heritage conservation, our plan was to transform the space into a vibrant sustainable workspace while celebrating the building's unique character – stripping away a lot of materials that have been added along the way and revealing original features such as the timber flooring, high ceilings and cornices," says Deidre Gourlay, Cooper and Company's development lead on the project. "Along with further structural upgrading, it ensures the office space will remain fit for purpose for the next 20 or 30 years."

Campbell Williamson, Cooper and Company's development director, says the company was given an opportunity that seldom comes along: a second round of heritage restoration of an iconic building. "The first round was around 2005. Some things were done well and with the benefit of hindsight some things could have been done better," he says. "We brought together a talented and determined group of people to make the absolute best of that second round, and we achieved an extraordinary outcome that will be enjoyed and admired long into the future."

The design was led by Cheshire Architects, one of Cooper and Company's closest architectural collaborators, who have previously worked on the full refurbishments of the Kiwi Building, the Maritime Building, the Buckland Masonic Building, the Excelsior Stanbeth Building, and the heritage-sympathetic design of The Hotel Britomart.

Cheshire Architect directors Nat Cheshire and Daijiang Tai, principals Pam Sando as project lead, Lucy Hayes-Stevenson as heritage lead and Ellie Green were the chief collaborators on the project, bringing visionary skills, technical understanding and deep heritage knowledge to the project.

The refurbishment begins at the central entrance archways that lead into the tile-and-mosaic-lined lift and stair lobby. This is the interface between the public world and the private world of the tenancy upstairs, welcoming the people working in and visiting the building, while also being formal enough to signify that it's not a public space like the train station lobby.

A fully refurbished stairwell, complete with a striking new 14m chandelier, leads to the three upper storeys, while the lifts on the right of the lobby have been modernised with bronze doors and fluted American oak panelling on the exterior.

The main entrance to the tenant

Right The brightly tiled entranceway and vestibule have been restored to their former glory. The earlier chrome-framed doors have been replaced with steel-framed cathedral glass.







spaces is a reception lobby on the northern side of Level One. Grand open-plan workspaces with restored kauri floors lie to the north and south of each floor, with the western side of Level One also giving access to a new atrium space at the bottom of the three-storey lightwell in the heart of the building.

On the top level, a new roof deck is an open-air space for socialising and functions, while the two iconic domed turrets, accessible via refurbished spiral staircases on Level Three, are for meeting and breakout spaces.

Pre-refurbishment, the building was quite “bitsy” and easy to get lost in, says project leader Pam Sando. “There were lots of little spaces that had been broken up into lots of other little spaces. Most of the heritage elements were covered and a lot of what you could see looked old and dirty. It didn’t reveal its value at that time. Some areas were really tired, with stained carpets and half falling-down ceiling grids. The internal experience of it was so different to what you got from the external experience – its civic nature, sitting in that square.”

Dajiang Tai says the scheme for the refurbishment of the building was created during the unique period when Auckland had just re-emerged from the Covid lockdowns and the commercial world was wondering what the future of the office would be.

“I vividly remember when I was doing that first drawing, I was watching the Tokyo Olympic opening ceremony, one year after the lockdowns,” he recalls. “It was the period where we were debating on a daily basis what a

new way of working feels like. People were working from home 80 percent of the time and only coming to work very occasionally. So, the thought of the first sketch and the central topic of the Chief Post Office was, ‘What does a new working typology look like in a heritage building?’ There was an interesting tension in it as an old building bringing a new working typology.”

For Dajiang, an obvious way to help people reconnect after a long period of distancing was to transform the central glass lightwell into a usable atrium made for socialising. This also turned people’s focus away from the outer windows, back into the heart of the building, where the beautiful heritage ceilings and floors that were concealed for decades have been revealed and restored.

Heritage architect Lucy Hayes-Stevenson has worked on several refurbishments at Britomart, mostly on early trading warehouses like the Maritime Building and the Kiwi Building. The Chief Post Office stood out as a very different project.

“With the other buildings, their industrial heritage is really celebrated in their refurbishments, but the CPO is very refined and classical,” she says. “The main thing for me on this project was respecting the heritage in the building above all else. We were not trying to compete with it or make our mark on it. We were just being very sensitive, to enhance what it was. I think that’s a really lovely tie-in to the sustainability side of things: to do less and remove less as well, and that’s been really refreshing for my own outlook.”

Left Balustrades that match those in the stairwell protect both the heritage domes and users of the space from accidents, while potted trees and plants give the atrium a true indoor-outdoor feeling.

Below As Level One was also originally a public space, the heritage tiling on the floor extends up to this level, albeit with a more restrained set of motifs.



Above This arched doorway, which leads to the lift lobby, may look like it has been there since the CPO was built, but it was actually created in a heritage-sympathetic style by the architects.

Right The wrought iron lamp standards that sit on plinths at the entrance to the Chief Post Office weren't part of the original design, but were replacements for four statues, one male and three female, abandoned due to cost overruns before the building opened in 1912.

The Entrance and Heritage Core

For the first 89 years, the archways on the front of the Chief Post Office Building were open to the street. During the 2005 renovation, glass and chrome doors were introduced to add a layer of security. In the new refurbishment, these have been replaced with dark bronze and cathedral glass that better reflect the joinery of the windows above. Organically shaped bronze door handles created by Chant Hardware introduce one of the design motifs that recurs throughout the building.

Beyond these doors lies the area known as the 'heritage core' of the building – the original public vestibule, with a staircase that rises through all three levels of the building. It's a bright and visually striking introduction to a building that is otherwise quite restrained in its palette, with the floor decorated in bright Majolica tiles featuring designs of flowers and leaves, as well as the intertwined letters 'GR' (standing for George Rex, in reference to the then-newly crowned King George V). Rich green and gold tiles line the walls, extending up towards the first floor, which was originally also open to the public.

Heritage architect Peter Reed, who worked on the 2005 renovation of the CPO, says when he first encountered the tiling, it was in a poor state. "When the Post Office was operating from the building, they drilled holes into the tiling and screwed signs against it and cut holes to put in letterboxes. It was quite a mess. There's no way we could get replacements that would match the tile colours perfectly, so we needed a very high-quality clay to fill the holes."

Help with their restoration came from an unexpected source: Reed's dentist, who told him about a clay for denture moulds that was so refined it didn't shrink when dried. "I thought, that's the perfect stuff. He gave me a little bit, we experimented with filling the holes and it was perfect. And then a friend airbrushed on the colour with a very fine spray for delicate work."

If you look closely at the tiling today, you should be able to tell which ones have been repaired, as showing a difference between original material and refurbished material is a tenet of heritage work, says built heritage specialist Ian Grant. "If you know what you're looking at, you should be able to see a difference. It'll be subtle, but you should be able to read the story."

For the 2025 renovation, the tiles were largely in good shape, with only a few small areas needing replacement, and the Cheshire team drew inspiration from their colours for the new terrazzo flooring that was introduced on the stairs and upstairs lobbies. "We used recycled offcuts of other stones in the terrazzo mix to create a bespoke creamy tone, which ties in with some of the cream tones of the original mosaics and also references the border of the mosaic," says Lucy Hayes-Stevenson.

In the lobby, a new pendant light with soft, organic bulbs hints at one of the most spectacular new pieces of design in the refurbishment. As you ascend the staircase, with its oak handrail, to the first level, you catch the first glimpse of a spectacular three-storey, 14-metre chandelier that is suspended through the centre of the stairwell.

The chandelier was a collaboration between Cheshire Architects and Auckland's Monmouth Glass studio. Almost 50 organic 'petal' bulbs spiral up a trio of rails, adding softness and a little playfulness to the space. The design is repeated in smaller pendant lights in several places through the building.

"All the curves we've used in the project have come from the arches, the formal classical curves in the building," says Lucy. "Our new curves are more organic but still give you a bit of softness when you're walking through that new archway to the lift or looking at the new door handle at the entry."

That introduced softness also provides a contrast against the formal, linear symmetry of the original building, says Dajiang Tai. "People look at the building and think, 'This building is all about weighty, straight-angle things,' and the little soft elements help you to appreciate those qualities."

In part, he attributes the softer, highly refined finish of the building to the approach to the unusually high number of women working on the project. "There is a level of gentle refinement for the Chief Post Office Building that's slightly unusual; the timber, the lightness of the paint colours, the layering of softness, the chandelier. That level of refinement is always the intent, but somehow it's really profound in this project, which is such a masculine building. I think a lot of it goes to the female-orientated team from the client body, from the architectural body and from a lot of the consultant body."





Left Statement door handles are something of a signature for Cheshire Architects (take a look at their work at The Hotel Britomart if you're passing). These bronze shapes were made by Chant Hardware.

Right The organic shapes of the chandelier bulbs reflect the same soft curves of the entrance handles. Both were inspired by the original curves and arches found in the building's design.





The Workspaces

For the three office floors, the Cheshire Architects team’s primary objective was to strip back the spaces as much as possible and allow the heritage features to shine. “Most of the heritage features were hidden or changed or concealed by dropped ceilings and the office partitions were very overpowering in their spacing, rather than being soft and sensitive and secondary to the heritage,” explains Lucy Hayes-Stevenson.

“We just wanted to peel it all back, give space to the columns, to the cornices, give back a sense of scale, reveal the floors and consolidate services as much as possible so that the heritage elements are the features of the building as they once were. We made all the walls neutral to pull out the character of the cornices and the mouldings and the archways.”

One of the bigger challenges was minimising the visual impact of the heating, ventilation and lighting systems needed in a modern workspace, all of which were previously concealed under secondary ceilings that also hid the beautiful column heads of the original space. Cheshire’s solution was to consolidate most of the services into a single block running around the inside

of the space, painted white like the ceilings to recede it as much as possible.

“Buildings have a need for a lot more services than we ever used to think we needed, so it’s really wonderful that they found a solution that doesn’t visually impact the heritage features and gives enough space around the columns and the cornices that you can have visual access to them,” says Robin Byron from Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga. “It really celebrates the features of the building that have craft and detail and are original to the space. And you get back the spatial integrity of the place as well. It’s about being able to appreciate the space of it, the grandeur.”

Another heritage feature that was refurbished was the northern spiral staircase on Level Three, which leads up to one of the roof turrets (see photo on following page). Heritage specialist Ian Grant says he believes the staircase is unique in Auckland. “From memory, there is no other spiral staircase like that one.” Many spiral staircases were removed from commercial buildings in New Zealand when the building standards around them were made more stringent, but the heritage nature of this one was its saving grace.



Left A view of the Auckland Chief Post Office press room at night as journalists file reports on the day’s results from the 1950 British Empire Games. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections NZMS-641-S2-A5-59



AN ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVE WITHIN THE WALLS

During many heritage refurbishments, some architectural elements – like bricks, windows and doors, flooring, fittings and hardware, room partitions and even bathroom fixtures – will be removed and not reused immediately.

Under Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga conservation rules, these elements must be retained in case a future owner or tenant of the building wants to reinstate them as part of their fit-out. Robin Byron, senior heritage architect at Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, says the original fabric of the building has intrinsic value, and preserving it gives flexibility for the future.

“One of the principles of heritage is reversibility,” Robin explains. “If you’re taking out some bricks, even if they’re not going to be reinstated later, they might have a purpose somewhere else in the precinct when you’re repairing other buildings. In some ways it’s a sustainable approach, and having those materials as a resource to help with the conservation of other buildings in

the area is quite valuable. You do want to make sure they’re well protected so they’re not damaged. And it’s always good to try to keep them on-site because so often if things go off-site, people lose track of them or you don’t know which building they’ve come from.”

In the Chief Post Office, a collection of heritage glass and timber room partitions, windows, floorboards and doors have been stored within empty wall spaces on each level, marked with signage to give occupants an insight into what’s hidden inside.

“The heritage items [that have been stored] were still in use, but not all in their original locations,” says Cheshire’s heritage architect Lucy Hayes-Stevenson. “The windows came from the Atrium, where we now have our new, enlarged openings. The timber and glass partitions had previously been repurposed and installed around the egress cores, likely in the 2005 works. Similarly, the doors were removed as part of works to relocate the bathrooms.”



Top The wood and glass room dividers in this image, taken c. 1955, have been stored inside the walls of the building, above. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections.





Left The entrance to the atrium space on Level One is lined with sustainably sourced American oak that complements the tones of the restored kauri floorboards.

The Lightwell

The (literal) centrepiece of the Chief Post Office Building’s refurbishment is the transformation of the lightwell into a graceful social atrium, with trees, seating and a new glass roof. This was not originally designed as a usable space, but functioned only as an atrium to bring light down into the centre of the three upper storeys, as well as through the ceiling of the ground floor via stained glass domes.

For many decades it was an open-air space, says heritage architect Peter Reed, as when it was built, Auckland’s pigeon population wasn’t as well-established as it is today – and nor was the habit of littering. “Back then, the Post Office just managed the rainwater that landed in there and people didn’t chuck confectionary wrappers and cigarette butts out the window. Another contemporary problem is that plastic bags get blown around and end up down in these old light wells and block up the rainwater outlets, which produces flooding.” During the 2001 transformation of the building, the space was covered over with a glass and aluminium super-structure to protect against rain, rubbish and birds entering the space.

The idea to make the lightwell usable came when the Cheshire team were reconsidering what office work meant in the wake of the COVID pandemic. While the Britomart district had many ways of encouraging people to socialise outside the office – like Takutai Square, with its lunchtime tables and beanbags, the restaurants and shops – their challenge was to make the office itself a place where people had the opportunity and incentive to reconnect.

“The CPO had this magnificent core, which is in some ways one of the most beautiful spaces, so it was a no-brainer for the atrium to become the space

where people interact every day,” says Dajiang Tai. “It didn’t seem like you needed much to give it a lot of life. New paint, new floors, some plants, and you have all the elements to make it the central heart of the building.”

Although the concept may have been intuitive, the execution was more complicated. The original floor of the atrium was designed as a roof only and wasn’t strong enough to be used as a floor. A raised floor had to be created, which was tiled with soft limestone. Even more importantly, the heritage stained-glass domes dotted through the space had to be protected.

“The domes are absolutely stunning, but you have to both protect people from falling and protect the domes from a heritage standpoint,” explains Lucy Hayes-Stevenson. “That has led to the soft balustrades around them, which have a similar language to our heritage core.”

More vibrancy was added through the introduction of potted plants. “The landscaping was aimed at just softening the institutional or civic solidity of the building,” says architect Pam Sando. “You’ve got these finer elements of the domes and the balustrades and then the softness of the trees and the plants that make it into a kind of garden.”

Even more complicated was the renewal of the interior paint. Originally, the plan was to strip it away to reveal the original brick – as has been done with many buildings at Britomart – but this quickly turned out to be problematic, says Pam. “The lightwell was originally an external space, so the paint system was for weatherproofing. It had been painted over for years and years and years and there was lead in the paint. So the complexities of that thick layer on the brick through time were huge.”

After exhausting the possibilities for removing the paint, the team decided to follow in the footsteps of history and enclose the original paint under a new layer to give a plastered effect, in a warm ochre colour that reduces glare, with a paler shade to delineate the window frames.

Erecting the scaffold for the painters was another design feat, as the scaffolding was too heavy for the floor and had to be suspended across joists. The heritage domes had plywood boxes constructed over them to protect them. Painters working on the project had to be constantly mindful of not dropping anything, while also facing the challenge of creating a plaster effect across a space without being able to see more than a small area at a time.

“The painters were real artisans,” says Lucy Hayes-Stevenson. “Up on the scaffold, they were painting in the dark, basically, which is quite incredible. We were a bit nervous about how it was all going to look, because we couldn’t see much throughout the process, but when the scaffolding all came down, we were like, ‘Okay, beautiful.’”

The final step in converting the lightwell into an atrium was the replacement of the glass roof that was installed during the 2005 works. The original glass was thin and installed solely to protect against rain. This meant that on sunny days, heat would pour into the space, making the space as hot as 48 degrees C in summer, according to development manager Deidre Gourlay, while in winter the temperatures plunged.

The new glass is laminated with a performance film that mediates heat coming into and going out, making the atrium’s temperature similar to the outside temperature and giving it the feeling of a true outdoor space.

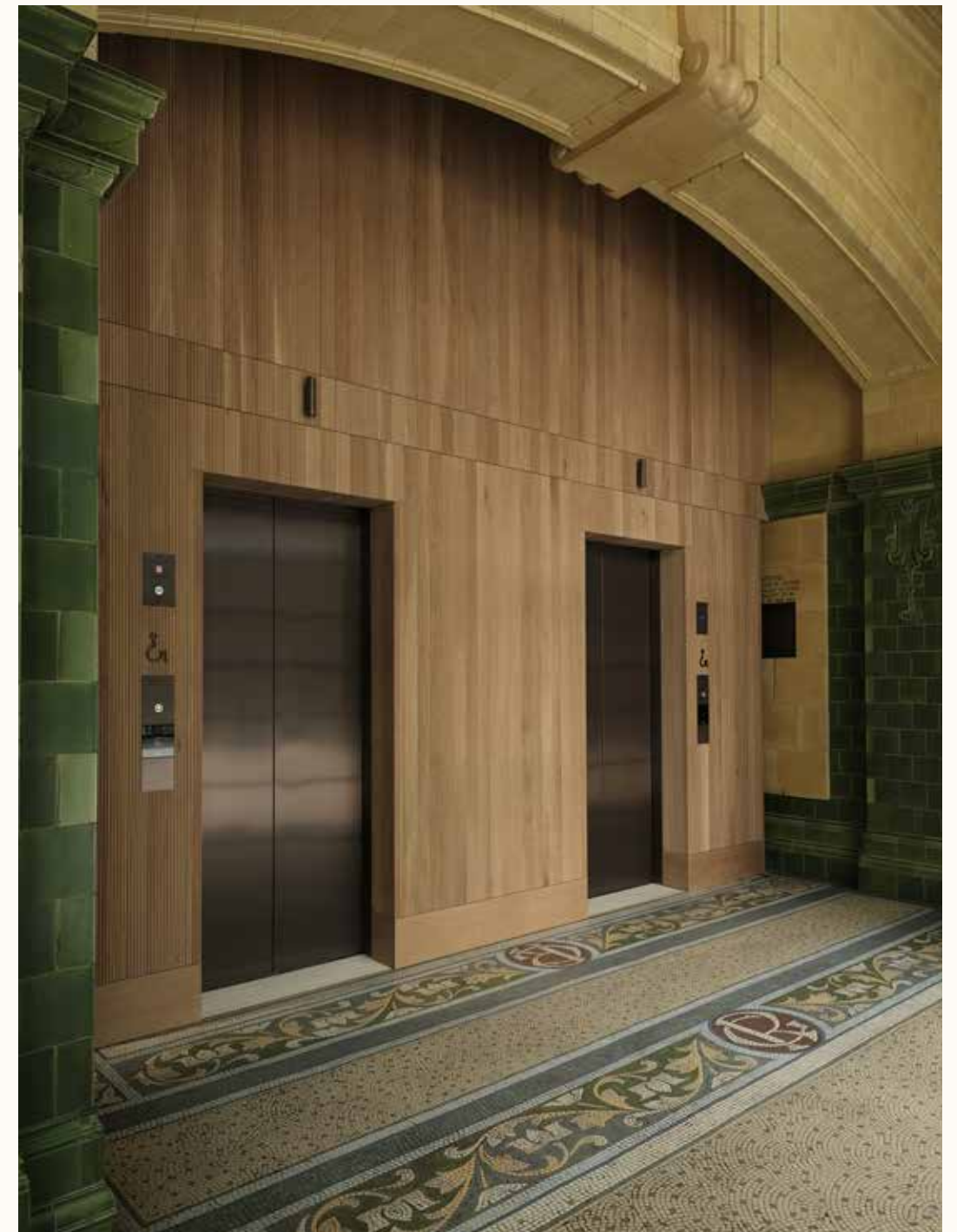






Above The interlinked letters GR in the decorative borders of the lobby tiles stand for George Rex, in reference to King George VI, who reigned at the time of the building's construction.

Below Lifts were not part of the original design of the building, so the architects were able to replace the ones installed in the early 2000s with a modern, but soft palette of American oak panelling and bronze doors.





Left Extensive seismic reinforcing work was undertaken around the edges of the building and the structural columns.

SEISMIC WORK

As part of the most recent refurbishment of the Chief Post Office, substantial seismic upgrading was done. The works were completed in partnership with Auckland Transport, which holds ownership of the exterior of the building.

Some seismic work was done during the construction of the train station and the 2005 refurbishment, but after the 2011 Christchurch earthquake, the building industry reconsidered its approach to earthquake-proofing. “After the earthquake, we learned a lot more about how buildings move in different ways, and how to improve them to be more resilient,” says Britomart’s development director Campbell Williamson. “For this upgrade, that involved welding a lot of additional steel collars to connect the beams and floor bracing to the columns and then putting in beams around the perimeter of the building and the internal lightwell that were bolted to walls and tied the walls to the floors.

“We had to do the same thing for the concrete roof slab, which had leaked over time and water had rusted the reinforcing steel. Fortunately, it was in isolated areas, so we were able to expose what we call the spalled concrete, where the rusting pushes the concrete away. Where the reinforcing steel was not significantly rusted,

we cleaned and treated it and were able to grout back up high-strength concrete. And there were some places where the reinforcing steel needed to be replaced, which we did.”

The work of reinforcing the columns meant the construction team had to cut quite significantly into the heritage kauri floor – but they came up with a way to do so that Robin Byron from Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga describes as working very well.

“Everything we do, especially structural work, has a thought to what visual impact it has on the building and whether we either celebrate that work and bring it to the fore or conceal it without a trace,” says Campbell. “With this building, our strategy was to conceal the work. We put some effort into saw-toothing the boards, so they fit together like a zipper and you don’t see any floorboards that have been cut straight across.”

Even if those with an eagle eye can spot the difference, that’s okay, says Robin Byron. “The fact is, the building doesn’t have to look perfect. It’s a building of a certain age and having evidence of use and changes over time recognises that. You can treat it with dignity, but it’s inevitably going to have signs of change and wear, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing.”



Above ‘Sawtoothing’ floorboards around the columns where reinforcing was needed helped conceal the interventions.

SUSTAINABILITY AT THE CPO

Right The refurbishment work was a delicate balance between retaining and celebrating beautiful heritage features like the spiral staircase pictured here, and updating the building for modern environmental and wellbeing standards.

A Heritage Building at the Forefront of Modern Workplace Design

Since 2007, Cooper and Company has worked with the New Zealand Green Building Council to refurbish and construct buildings with low environmental impact, a connection to nature and that provide a healthy environment for their occupants.

The Chief Post Office Building will be Britomart’s sixth Green Star-rated building and its first project targeting a 6 Green Star rating. If the rating is signed off in May 2026, the CPO will become New Zealand’s first 6 Green Star rated heritage building.

In addition, the project is targeting a WELL Core Gold rating from the International WELL Building Institute. Development lead on the project Deidre Gourlay says the two systems cover different spectrums of performance across environmental and human wellbeing factors, but are complementary and have some crossovers.

“What the Green Star rating

system does is put sustainability in the forefront of our minds for all decisions that we make, like adding energy-efficient systems and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing indoor air quality, efficient water management, the use of sustainable low-emission materials that can be recycled or recyclable, and preferencing low-toxicity finishes,” says Deidre. “We also implemented a construction and operational waste management plan, including diverting demolition waste from landfill by more than 80 percent.”

For WELL certification, it’s all about how buildings can improve the health and wellbeing of their occupants, she explains.

“It’s similar to the Green Star framework, in that there’s a focus on air, water and light quality, acoustic and thermal comfort, with the addition of mind, nourishment and movement.”

CERTIFICATION TIMELINE

**6 GREEN STAR DESIGN
AND AS BUILT**
Submission January 2026

**6 GREEN STAR DESIGN
AND AS BUILT**
Certification May 2026

WELL CORE GOLD
Submission January 2026

WELL CORE GOLD
Certification July 2026

TOITŪ CARBONREDUCE
Certification August 2027

NABERSNZ ENERGY
Certification September 2027



Making a Building Well

The WELL Building Standard is a certification programme that focuses on human health and wellbeing. Developed by the International WELL Building Institute, based in California, it's recognised in 130 countries and assesses 11 areas: air, water, nourishment, light, movement, thermal comfort, sound, material, mind, community and innovation, awarding points as each element is optimised.

Within the WELL system, some elements are compulsory for all projects, while others are optional, and earn points towards higher degrees of WELL certification. Many of the standards require companies to have strong policies and procedures and to offer benefits designed around wellbeing, such as smoking cessation support, mental health support, no-cost vaccination and volunteering leave.

The Chief Post Office project is the first time Britomart has targeted a WELL Gold standard for the base building. This sets any tenants of the building up to be able to pursue their own WELL rating if they wish. As well as benefitting the future occupants of the Chief Post Office Building, WELL certification also benefits the team working at Cooper and Company, as any team members who work within the Chief Post Office Building on an ongoing basis must also be covered by the WELL Gold certification standards.

For the Chief Post Office, this standard covers only one person – the facilities manager. However, Cooper and Company decided to put a range of benefits inspired by WELL in place for all members of the company, including workers in the Britomart head office, the facilities management office and the Britomart Carpark.

As WELL is a global standard and is recognised in some countries that have less robust employment laws than New Zealand does, some of the policies and benefits that fit into the standards were already provided for under New Zealand employment law, such as holidays and breaks.

Others were already offered by Cooper and Company, such as the Employee Assistance Programme, mental health first aid training, participation in the GROOV workplace wellbeing platform and paid volunteering days.

Areas where Cooper and Company wrote new policies or added benefits to reach the WELL standard included the implementation of a leadership programme, the addition of a Modern Slavery policy, a stress management plan and the provision of a mental health self-assessment tool.

Being a heritage building, the CPO presented several challenges for the development team to overcome. The large spaces and abundance of hard surfaces meant that points for acoustic control were hard to achieve. “The natural timbers and masonry finishes were challenging from an acoustics perspective,” explains Shelly Thompson, New Zealand sustainability lead at Norman Disney & Young, a global engineering consultancy that Cooper and Company has worked with for more than a decade. “The acoustics team worked alongside the architects to offer a tasteful solution to reverberation and sound management.” By the time the base building was completed, the acoustic testing passed the WELL standards.

Right The original paint finish on the atrium space created too much glare for WELL standards. Instead, the space was repainted in a soft, matte render with a brushed effect, which was both complementary to the interiors and softer on the eye.





Three Ways the CPO Went Further on WELL

AIR QUALITY

Better air quality is directly linked to improved cognitive function and increased productivity in workplaces. In the Chief Post Office, an air quality monitor was installed, says Shelly Thompson of Norman Disney Young. “They’re quite impactful because users and can engage with the air quality in the space. Without sensors or monitors, we don’t know what the ambient air conditions and quality are like. Their data feeds into a few different aspects of the WELL framework, including air quality and thermal comfort.”

One advantage of the Chief Post Office being a heritage building is that unlike in a modern glass curtain-wall building, many of the windows can be opened to allow for greater natural airflow. Combined with high-quality air filtering, this gives the building better-quality fresh air for occupants.

Left Accessibility and inclusivity were central in the beautiful bathrooms in the building, which offer self-contained toilets with full-height doors, meaning the facilities can be used as gender-neutral spaces.

MOVEMENT

WELL standards encourage building occupants to move around during their day. At the CPO, this starts in the entrance lobby, where the beautiful stairwell is located before the lift access. A bike park and end-of-trip facilities encourage people to cycle as a form of transportation, and the building’s location, bordered by two public squares and two pedestrianised streets, has high walkability, while its position atop the Waitemata train station gives excellent public transport access.

COMMUNITY

Alongside requirements to seek community input and feedback on the building and spaces, the Community standard rewards the provision of non-work, multipurpose spaces that are available for occupants to use. At the CPO, these take two forms: restorative spaces that can be used by tenants in a variety of ways (breakout spaces, multi-faith rooms, wellness rooms – even nap spaces), and lactation rooms that have been specifically designed to support breastfeeding mothers. “These are spaces that we’re starting to see in premium commercial assets, and they’re certainly powerful,” says Shelly Thompson. “Offering restorative spaces as part of the base building provides a lot of broader community value to tenancy.”

SUPPORTING CONSTRUCTION WORKER WELLBEING

Under Green Star requirements, the key construction partner on the project must have a comprehensive wellbeing programme in place to support its workers.

The construction industry is well known to have high rates of depression and suicide risk. In New Zealand, the industry loses nearly one person a week to suicide, 98 percent of whom are men.

Cooper and Company’s main building partner of the last 15 years has been Bracewell Construction, a third-generation family-owned company that has worked on major projects at Britomart, including the Hayman Kronfeld Building, The Hotel Britomart and the Excelsior Stanbeth Building.

Throughout the construction period, weekly toolbox meetings were held where wellbeing and health and safety matters, including reminders of harassment policies, were discussed. Posters around the work site and in bathrooms advised workers on organisations that could help them if they were struggling (such as Mates in Construction, which sent a speaker to talk at one of the toolbox meetings,) and on staying healthy (such as the Heart Foundation’s heart health advice posters).

Bracewell also gives employees access to the Employee Assistance Programme at no charge, and supports a range of charities, including White Ribbon (suicide awareness) and Movember (prostate cancer).



New Zealand's First 6 Green Star Heritage Building

One of the most ambitious aspects of the Chief Post Office Building refurbishment was the decision to target a 6 Green Star Rating, which indicates a world-leading level of environmental performance. Only a handful of buildings in New Zealand have achieved this level of sustainability, with the first 6 Green Star rating only being awarded as recently as 2024.

The Green Star rating system has been administered in New Zealand by the New Zealand Green Building Council since 2007, and is a holistic assessment of a building's environmental performance, covering areas such as energy efficiency, waste management, water reduction, indoor air quality and sustainable materials.

Key elements of the building's sustainability include that it's an existing building adaptively reused, its outstanding access to every form of public transport from trains and buses to ferries and cycling, high-quality air management and lighting,

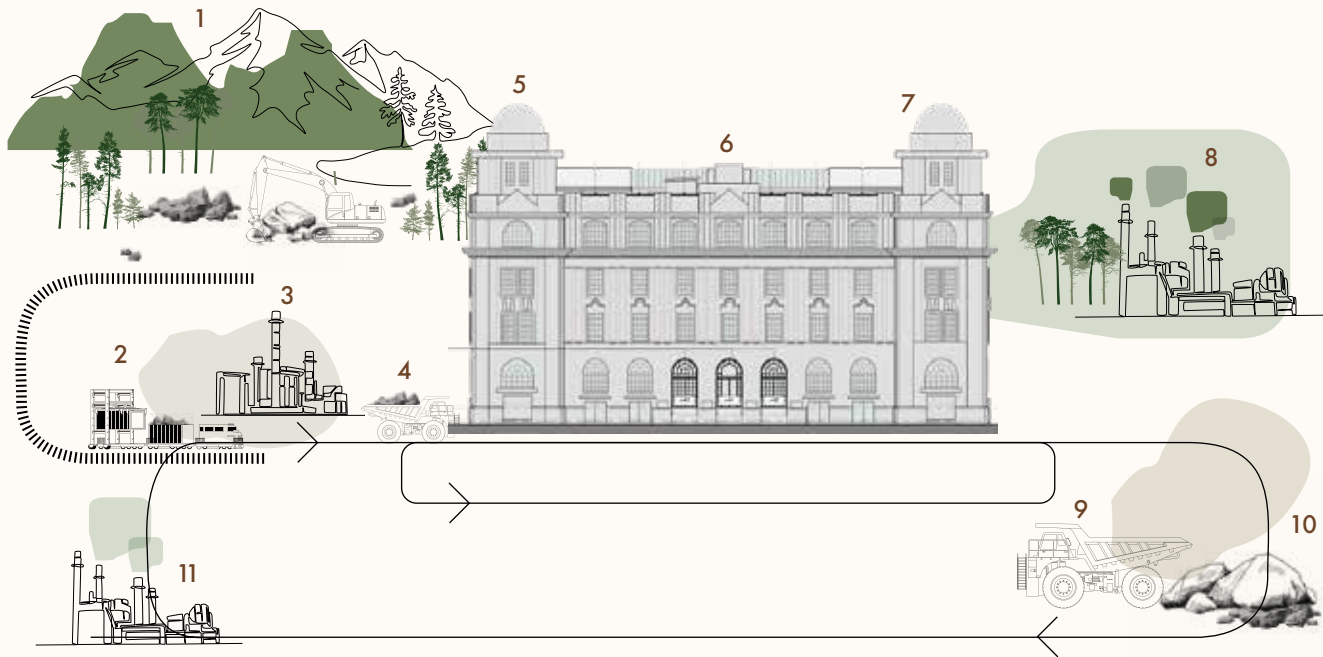
use of sustainable and low-emission products throughout, excellent waste management and diversion from landfill (over 80 percent) during the construction phase and the development team's completion of a Life Cycle Analysis for the building.

"The Life Cycle Analysis measures the whole-of-life carbon for the project, including embodied carbon," explains development director Campbell Williamson. "Carbon is built into and is released by buildings throughout their existence. In the beginning when we're constructing the building, that's the embodied carbon, which covers the materials, the labour, the freight of getting materials and then the energy expended in building it.

"Next, you have operational carbon, which is the carbon associated with the energy and resources used in the building's operation as well as any maintenance refurbishment. And then at the end of a building's life, we have the demolition carbon."

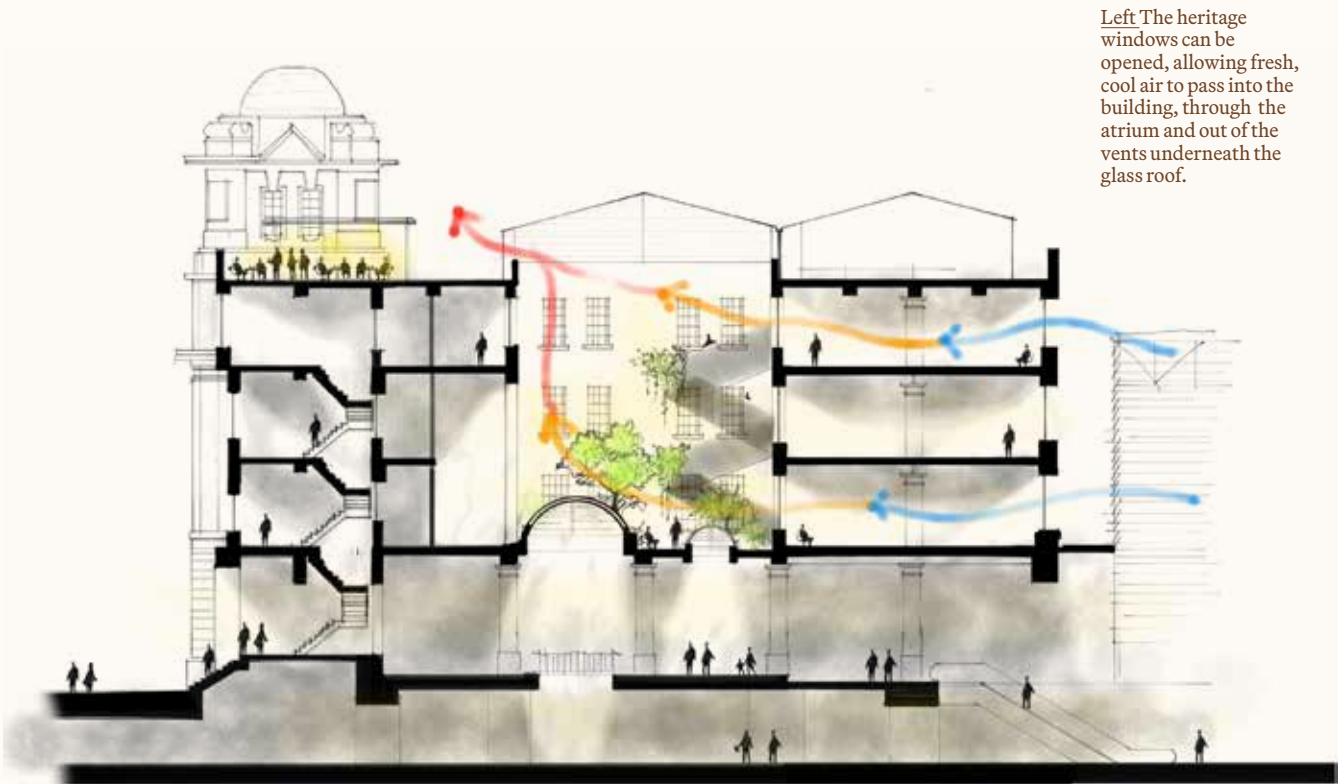
Within Green Star, the Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) is compared against an LCA for an identically sized 'typical' modern building, built to Building Code compliance with the minimum levels of insulation, HVAC provision and services. The level of difference in performance between this imaginary reference building and the building under consideration then translates into a certain number of points in Green Star.

"Almost by virtue of having a heritage-listed building, we are retaining a lot of the structure and the facade, so we're saving a lot of embodied carbon as opposed to building a new building," says Campbell. "Our assessment for the Chief Post Office Building calculated a 97 percent reduction in upfront carbon compared to a new build with standard contemporary construction. The upfront carbon associated with the retained structural materials – specifically stone, brick, concrete and steel – was significant, which resulted in some great savings."



CARBON LIFE CYCLE

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Raw material extraction | 5. Construction | 8. Deconstruction and demolition |
| 2. Transport to manufacturing site | 6. Use, maintenance, repair, replacement and refurbishment | 9. Transport |
| 3. Manufacturing | 7. Operational energy and water use | 10. Waste processing and disposal |
| 4. Transport to construction site | | 11. Reuse, recovery and/or recycling |



Left The heritage windows can be opened, allowing fresh, cool air to pass into the building, through the atrium and out of the vents underneath the glass roof.

KEEPING THE CPO'S WASTE OUT OF LANDFILL

On a big construction project in a tight central city location, a considered approach to waste management is needed. For the Chief Post Office Building, Cooper and Company worked with Bracewell Construction, who brought on board Green Way and Green Gorilla to optimise the waste management process. "Both companies focus on collecting, separating and recycling waste product to reduce the amount of construction waste going to landfill," says development manager Deidre Gourlay.

"They're doing some great things. On site, they compartmentalised the types of waste, which was then sorted at Green Gorilla's depot. They have their own waste processing facility where the building material is separated: so steel goes off to a specialised steel recycling plant, as does the glass, and so on. They also do their own processing of gib board, where the gypsum is extracted and made into fertiliser, and untreated timber

converted to woodchip to go into gardens."

To remove waste from the site, contractors carefully (and temporarily) removed heritage windows from each floor level and installed a rubbish chute to drop waste out of the windows into the skip on ground level. "Where there's a will, there's a way of getting building materials in and out of the building," says Deidre. "As we're located in a busy CBD metro area, the rubbish chute was acoustically padded, to reduce the noise factor that goes with the work."

The result? Over 81 percent of construction waste was recycled throughout the project, contributing to the project's 6 Green Star target. Of the waste recycled, 65 percent was general construction and demolition waste, including steel, wood and cardboard, and another 16 percent was hardfill, which includes clean concrete, brick, stone and ceramic tiles, which can be crushed and used as a bedding base in a wide range of construction activities.



A Public-Private Partnership for a Bicycle Park

A significant contributor to the Chief Post Office Building’s Green Star and WELL ratings, and part of Cooper and Company’s agreement with the long-term future occupant of the Chief Post Office, was to provide 50 secure bicycle parks and end-of-trip facilities for workers in the building.

The end-of-trip facilities (showers) were built into the bathroom blocks on each level, but finding space for secure bike parking in a heritage building where the ground floor was already in use as a train station lobby proved difficult.

The solution was a partnership with Auckland Transport (AT) to build a bike park facility next to the rear entrance of the train station, which would provide both 50 parks for the building tenant, and 50 parks for public use.

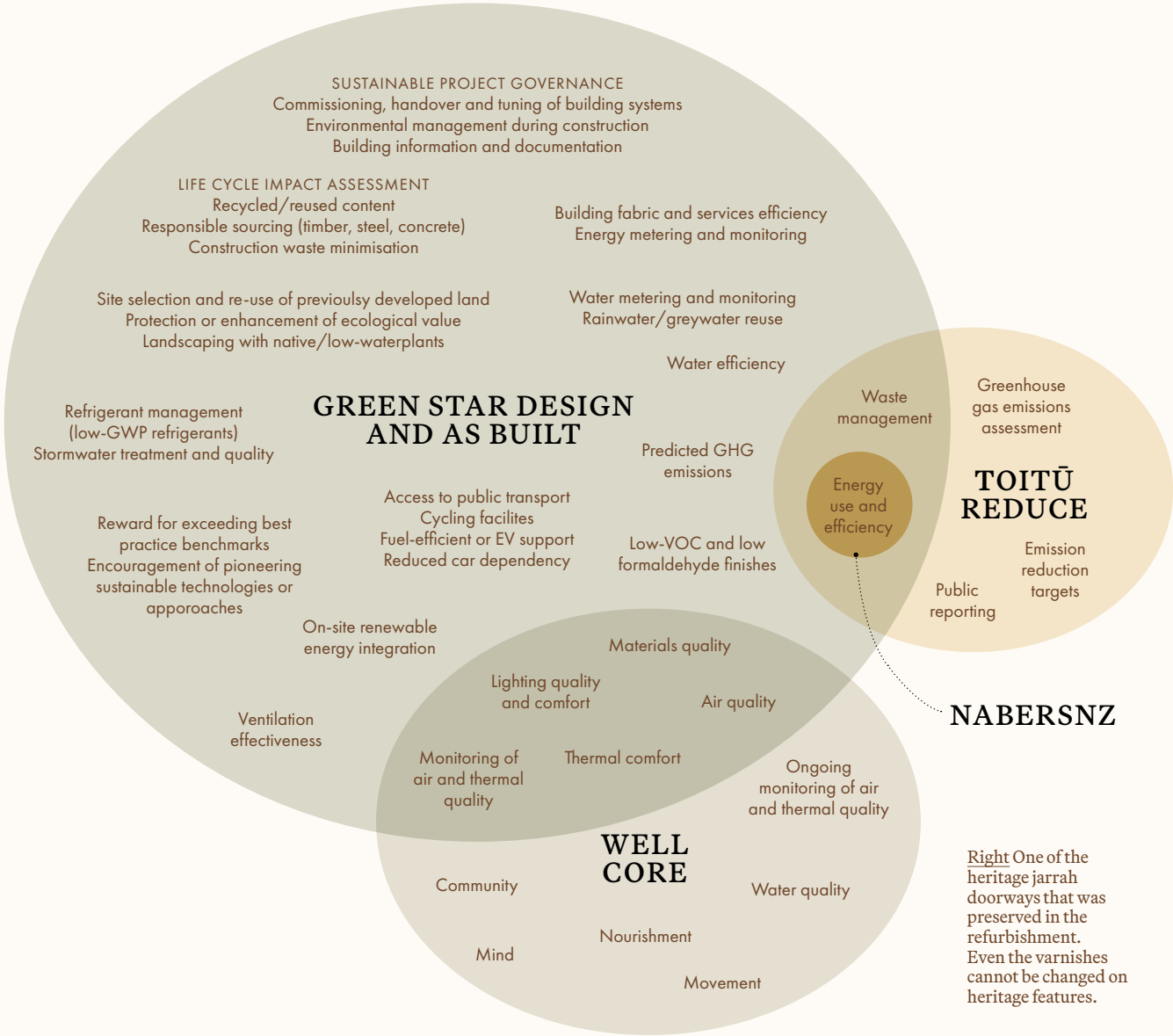
The facility was designed by Cheshire Architects, working around existing trees on the site and allowing secure access for work to be done on the adjacent train station extension if needed.

The provision of 50 parks more than meets the certification requirements of one bike park for every 10 people working in the building and contributed a point to the building’s Green Star total.

“We also took advantage of AT’s Waitemata Station Plaza development works to provision for services so that if we wanted to in the future, we could potentially build a mirror-image bike park on the other side of the building,” says Cooper and Company development manager Tom Davison.

Green Light: Taking the Crosswalk

Pursuing both Green Star and WELL ratings at the same time makes sense, due to the existence of ‘crosswalks’ between them. “A crosswalk is where one framework or one certification body recognises either an equivalency or an alignment of the features or the credits in another tool,” explains Shelly Thompson, sustainability lead at Norman Disney Young. “If you’re targeting a credit in, say, Green Star, and WELL sees that as an aligned feature, you can essentially recognise the points in both frameworks in an efficient manner.”



Right One of the heritage jarrah doorways that was preserved in the refurbishment. Even the varnishes cannot be changed on heritage features.





Future Certifications

TOITŪ CARBONREDUCE

In 2019, Britomart started working with emissions accreditation agency Toitū to develop a base-case emissions profile for Britomart's group of businesses. Every year since then, Britomart has reported on its annual greenhouse gas emissions generated by 19 buildings within the precinct, as well as from outdoor usage like fairy lights, exterior uplighting and Takutai Square's lights, and electricity supply for activations in Takutai Square.

From April next year, when Britomart's annual reporting cycle begins, the Chief Post Office Building will also be included in the buildings covered by Britomart's emissions profile.

NABERSNZ ENERGY RATING

The NABERSNZ rating system is a way of measuring the energy-efficiency of commercial office buildings. At Britomart, we've been bringing buildings under this system since 2017, and now have 10 buildings rated, with the Chief Post Office to come in 2027 once 12 months of energy use data (with the reporting year starting in June 2026) becomes available.

Buildings can be rated in one of three ways: Whole Building, which measures the energy used in the entire building; Base Building, which measures the energy used in common areas and other spaces that are under the control of the landlord as well as the office HVAC (or air conditioning and ventilation); and Tenancy, which measures energy used by individual tenants.

In older buildings, there's often insufficient metering to be able to differentiate between tenancy use and landlord use, so a Whole Building Rating is necessary. Due to the comprehensive metering introduced during the Chief Post Office Building's refurbishment, it will be able to pursue a Base Building rating.

Left Sometimes the old ways are best; the ability to open windows to allow natural air flow contributed to the building's environmental and wellbeing ratings.

Bringing Mauri to the Whare

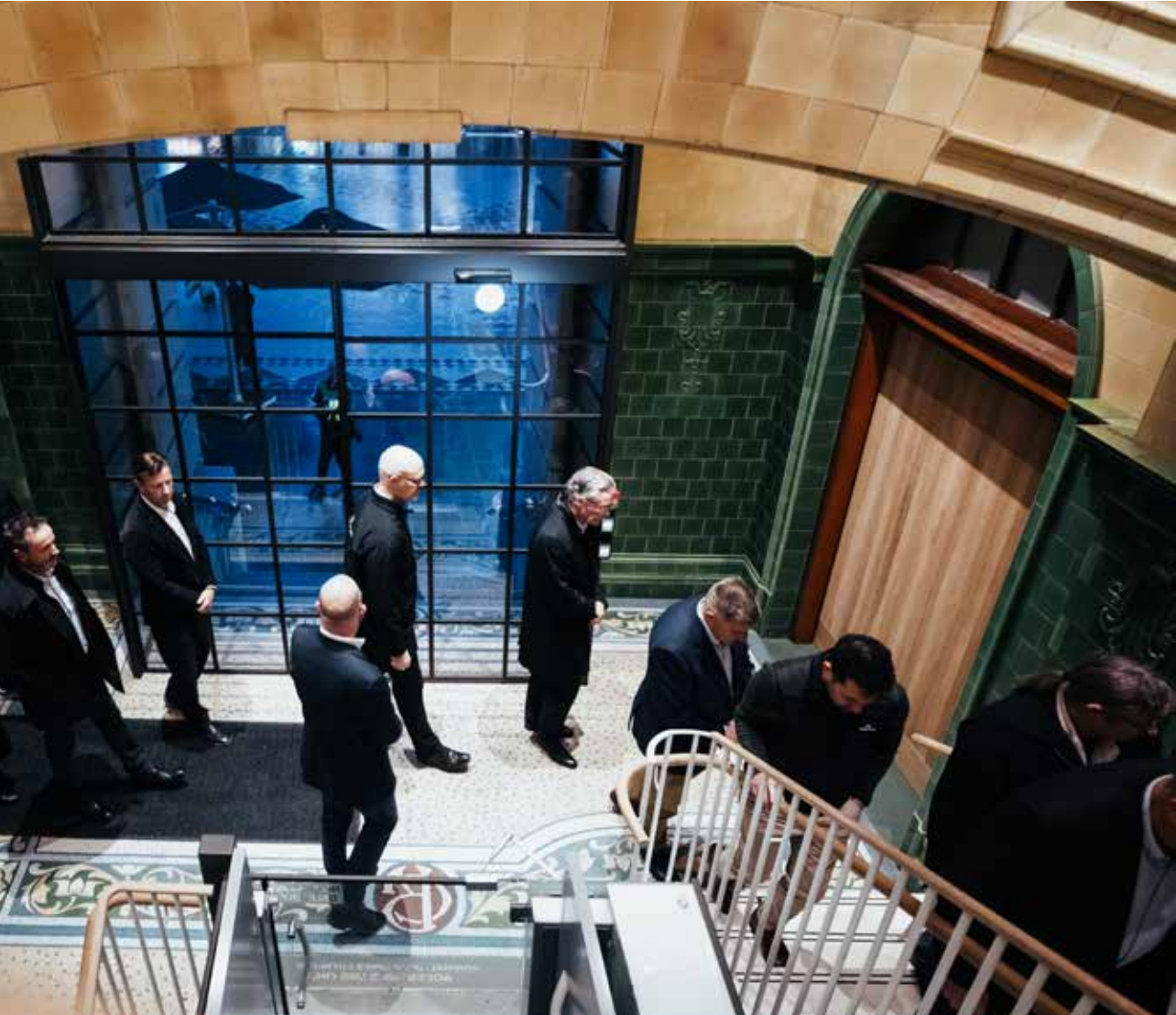
In the early dawn light on Wednesday 10 September 2025, around 100 people gathered outside the Chief Post Office Building to take part in a traditional Māori blessing of the space. This is a ceremony that Cooper and Company have asked the local iwi, Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, to lead for the opening or reopening of buildings or spaces since the earliest years of Britomart’s development.

The morning saw members of the Cooper and Company team join with representatives from the iwi, Cheshire Architects, Auckland Council, AT, Bracewell Construction, Norman Disney Young, Holmes

Group, The Guardians of New Zealand Superannuation and other significant contributors to the project for a ceremony that included the sounding of conches and a full walk-through of the building while blessings were spoken over the space.

After speeches and waiata from Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei’s Tom Irvine and Robbie Paora, Cooper and Company CEO Matthew Cockram and John Williamson, chairman of the board of The Guardians of New Zealand Superannuation, the guests gathered for breakfast, coffee and a chance to take in the details of the refurbishment at a slower pace.

Below Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei’s Tom Irvine stands on the steps of the Chief Post Office as he welcomes guests as he welcomes guests to the blessing and explains the protocol.



Right Iwi elders and members of the Cooper and Company team walk through the building during the ceremony.





Above A Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei elder touches the walls as part of the Chief Post Office Building blessing.

Below After the ceremony and speeches, members of the Cooper and Company team — including founder Peter Cooper, pictured — and the Guardians of New Zealand Superannuation exchanged hongi with Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei representatives.





Around 100 people took part in the ceremony. All blessing photos by David St George.



Above The original lightwell was designed to let light into the core of a substantial building, and although it now has a new role as a social space, it continues to fulfill its old one too.



Below Looking from the Level One reception area through a doorway to the atrium. The main atrium entrance is on the opposite side of the building.



The Changing Face of Construction

In New Zealand, women are vastly underrepresented in almost all areas of the industries dedicated to making buildings. In engineering and construction, they make up only 14 percent of workers. In architecture, women graduate from degrees at the same rate as men but only 29 percent of female graduates go on to be registered, and as few as 10 percent of senior leadership positions in architecture firms are held by women.

One of the most noticeable aspects of the Chief Post Office Building's refurbishment has been the unusually high number of women involved at all levels of the project, particularly in leadership. As heritage architect Lucy Hayes-Stevenson notes, "Across the last 10 or 11 years, this might be one of the first projects where I'm not the only woman at the table. And it's so empowering, because we've been talking about it since day one – that we

had a balance of women and men at the table from the start."

"It's been quite a joy, actually," agrees lead architect Pamela Sando. "Sitting around a meeting table, where for once the majority has shifted in a world that is very male-dominated, has made it quite a lovely project."

On the development side, Deidre Gourlay and Sarah Hull led the project's management and sustainability respectively. At Cheshire Architects, Pamela and Lucy took the lead on design and project management, while Pamela Dziwulska at Salmond Reed gave heritage architecture support. Engineering, design and sustainability was provided by Shelly Thompson, Renee Young, Taja Canalas, Yun Zhou and Athira Rajeevan at Norman Disney Young, while fire engineering and structural expertise was provided by Kimberly Dennis and Natalie Morrison at Holmes.



Opposite An overall feeling of softness is one of the defining characteristics of the refurbishment. Photo by Sam Harnett.
Left Women members of the development and construction team on site. Photo by Jinki Cambroner.

Women team members



DEIDRE GOURLAY
Cooper and Company Development Lead
Deidre joined Cooper and Company as a development manager in 2023, following almost two decades working in management positions in the property division for Restaurant Brands, along with stints at Air New Zealand and Warner Cinemas in London. She has strong skills in relationship-building, encouraging collaborators to push the boundaries of projects and go beyond the status quo, along with the ability to manage all parts of a project from conceptualisation and strategy to high-level execution.



SARAH HULL
Cooper and Company Sustainability Oversight
Sarah has worked in a range of leadership roles at Cooper and Company for over 20 years, before being appointed director of brand and sustainability in 2022. She has a deep commitment to people-centred spaces and wellbeing and oversees the maintenance and advancement of sustainability progress and all ongoing environmental certifications across Cooper and Company’s property portfolio.



ROBIN BYRON
Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, Senior Conservation Architect
During her 20-year tenure at Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, Robin Byron worked with the Cooper and Company team on nearly every heritage refurbishment at Britomart. A registered architect in her home country of Canada, she taught at the University of Auckland’s School of Architecture before joining Heritage New Zealand. The Chief Post Office Building was one of the last projects she worked on before her retirement in 2025.



PAM SANDO
Cheshire Architects, Project Lead
Described as being a “supremely calm, confident and focused maker of architecture”, Pam designs comprehensive and carefully thought-out projects of integrity and efficiency. As project lead on the Chief Post Office Building project, she oversaw the translation of a complex design brief into a beautifully resolved result that balanced heritage conservation and modern workplace requirements.



LUCY HAYES-STEVENSON
Cheshire Architects, Heritage Lead
Lucy was the heritage lead for the Chief Post Office project, bringing knowledge gained during her four-year post-graduate heritage studies in Rome as well as her beautiful and materially intelligent architectural sensibility. Lucy’s work covers a broad spectrum, from commercial space planning and heritage-based refurbishment to sourcing hand-made pieces for projects.



PAMELA DZIWULSKA
Salmond Reed Architects, Heritage Architecture Consultant
With a deep passion for heritage buildings and expertise in traditional materials, repair techniques, and sensitive heritage design, Pamela has provided invaluable advice based on Salmond Reed’s long experience with the Chief Post Office building.



SHELLY THOMPSON
Norman Disney & Young, New Zealand Sustainability Lead
An experienced sustainability leader, Shelly Thompson oversees a team of sustainability consultants across New Zealand. As sustainability project lead for the Chief Post Office redevelopment, she spearheaded the sustainability strategy, carefully navigating the nuances of heritage building while integrating Green Star and WELL frameworks. By celebrating building reuse and reducing embodied carbon, Shelly emphasises the social sustainability benefits created in the newly designed spaces.



RENÉE YOUNG
Norman Disney Young Mechanical Lead
Renée Young is a skilled mechanical engineer with 17 years of experience in leading project teams through various commercial and retail developments. As the Mechanical Lead for the Chief Post Office project, she played a pivotal role in coordinating a multidisciplinary delivery. Her strong project management capabilities alongside her commitment to advancing women’s roles in the construction industry remains a driving force throughout her career.



TAJA CANLAS
Norman Disney & Young Mechanical Project Engineer
Taja Canlas is a committed mechanical project engineer who has rapidly advanced her career since joining NDY as an intern in 2021. As the Mechanical Delivery Lead for the Chief Post Office project, she effectively managed the mechanical delivery from early-stage design through to on-site execution and commissioning. Taja’s strong coordination skills ensured seamless collaboration among various disciplines, allowing for the successful integration of mechanical systems within the heritage building. Her ability to communicate complex designs clearly makes her invaluable in delivering efficient and effective solutions.



YUN ZHOU
Norman Disney & Young Structural Project Engineer
Yun Zhou is a detail-oriented structural engineer with a strong foundation in project management and technical design. In her role as Structural Support Engineer for this project, she provided essential structural solutions that complemented the building services while respecting the heritage elements of the site. Yun’s experience in coordinating multi-disciplinary teams and her expertise in seismic restraint design ensured effective integration of critical structural components throughout the project.



JANE JOO
Norman Disney Young Sustainability Consultant
As a Green Star Accredited Professional (GSAP) and WELL Accredited Professional (WELL AP), Jane played a vital role in the sustainability delivery for the Chief Post Office refurbishment, supporting the Green Star and WELL certification processes under the guidance of Shelly Thompson. With a focus on climate change adaptation and life cycle assessments, Jane brought a thorough understanding of the Green Star framework and its alignment with the social sustainability objectives of WELL.



ATHIRA RAJEEVAN
Norman Disney Young Fire Protection Engineer
Athira Rajeevan is a fire protection engineer who began her career with Norman Disney and Young in 2023. Athira delivered the fire protection engineering alongside the wider NDY fire team. The design was unique for this heritage building, requiring tailored solutions to address the intricacies of the structure. With her proficiency in CAD and expertise in using Revit for modelling, Athira ensured that the fire protection systems were effectively integrated while complying with relevant standards, demonstrating her commitment to delivering high-quality fire protection solutions.



KIMBERLEY DENNIS
Holmes Group Senior Passive Fire Engineer
As a Senior Passive Fire Engineer at Holmes, Kimberley has extensive and practical knowledge of the complex requirements of passive fire protection in New Zealand. Her focus on identifying issues early and solving them with compliant and buildable solutions, makes for an effortless design and construction process. She is a practical problem-solver who gained invaluable on-site experience in the commercial construction industry before joining Holmes. Her expertise adds value through the construction phase, reducing costs and reworks, to keep the project moving.



NATALIE MORRISON
Holmes Group Structural Engineer
Natalie provided the structural engineering support throughout construction of the Chief Post Office project, building on her experience across a diverse range of structural projects. Known as a collaborative problem solver with meticulous attention to detail, Natalie relishes the opportunities and challenges in helping preserve and adapt heritage buildings for modern use.



ADRIANA TALIVA
Surface Project Manager
With more than six years in the decorating industry, Adrianna brings both hands-on craftsmanship and project leadership to Surface. She began her career as a painter, mastering artisan plaster techniques and specialist paint finishes before moving into project management. Her background on the tools gives her a unique appreciation for detail and process, and she thrives on guiding projects from concept through to completion. Adriana loves contributing to Surface’s award-winning work, and takes pride in helping every project reach its full potential.



ANGE RANDLE,
Surface Interior Decorator
Ange has been with Surface for over a year, bringing creativity and care to both specialist finishes and traditional painting. She completed the lime wash effect single-handedly on the CPO project, transforming a façade spanning six levels of scaffolding into a finish of lightness and character. Beyond work, Ange explores oil-based painting and graphic design, blending artistry and technical skill; qualities that make her a valued part of the Surface team and the CPO project.

PHOTOGRAPHY
Architectural photography Sam Harnett. Blessing photos by David St George. Other photos by Jinki Cambronero, Deidre Gourlay, Melinda Williams, Alexander Turnbull Library and Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections.

The typeface used in this document and on signage throughout the Chief Post Office Building is Martina Plantijn. The source font, Plantin, was designed in 1912, the same year that the Chief Post Office opened. In 2023, it was redesigned and updated by New Zealand designer Kris Sowersby.



