

2.10 Clyde Road, no. 4: Napier Girls' High School Main Block

Schedule number:

NCC Heritage Group:

Heritage New Zealand List number and category (if applicable):

Type of site (archaeological site/historic place/historic area): Historic place

Address: 4 Clyde Road

Legal Description: PT SS 90 NAPIER (CT 53/266)

Construction date: 1930-1932



Figure 79 The central bay of the Main Block, notable for its restrained Classical design. The steps rise straight from the street, with no footpath. Source: Chris Cochran May 2019



Figure 80 Front elevation (north) of the Main Block, from Clyde Road. Source: Chris Cochran May 2019



Figure 81 Front elevation from East. Source: Chris Cochran May 2019



Figure 82 Napier Girls' High School campus, with the Main Block circled in centre. Source: Napier City Council property on-line

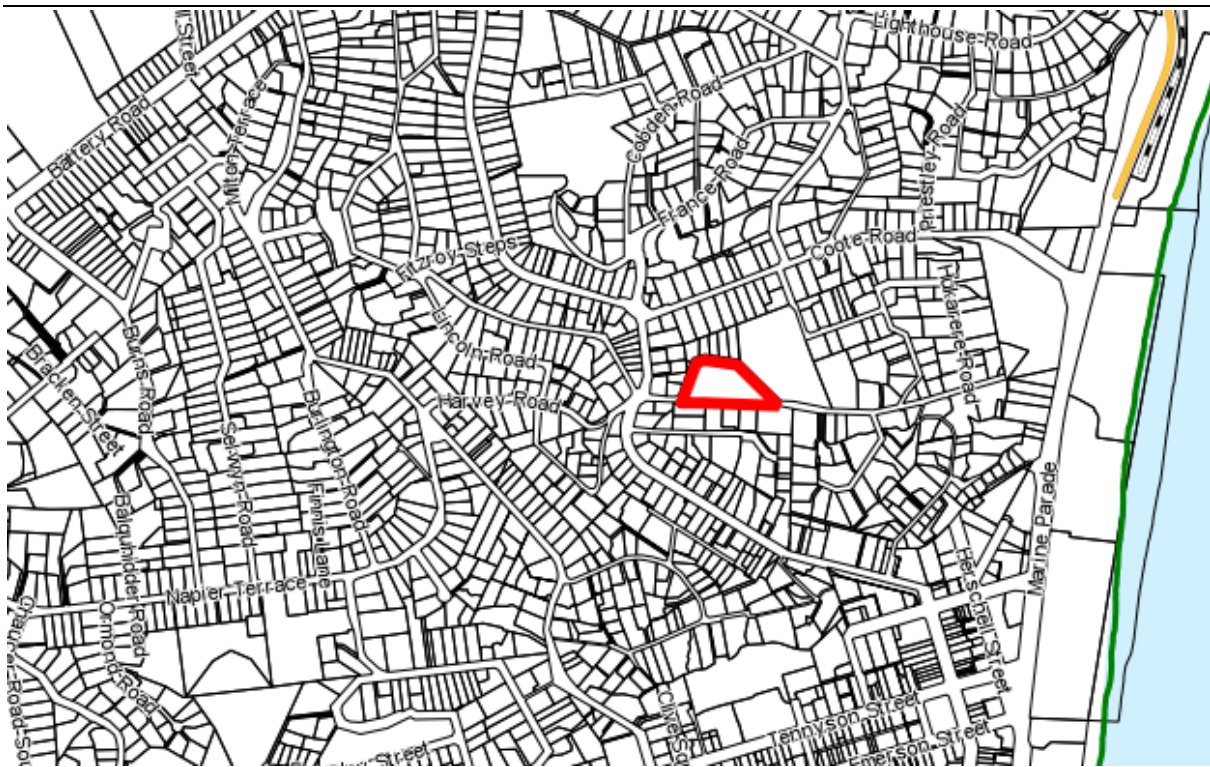


Figure 83 Location of Napier Girls' High School main block, Source: <https://www.gis.napier.govt.nz>

Architect: John Thomas Mair

Builder: W.M. Angus

Original function/use: Offices and classrooms

Original owner:

Current use: Offices and classrooms

Current owner:

Significance: Aesthetic, architectural, historical, cultural, social, technological.

Summary:

Napier Girls' High School has strong historical and social value for generations of girls who have been educated here; it has been a fundamental part of the educational life of the region since 1884. The Spencer Block is a beautiful and restrained piece of Classical design by an important architect, J T Mair, still in very authentic condition despite a number of alterations, which have maintained the integrity of the original building while increasing its usefulness as the main building of the school. It has high townscape value for its form and design, and commanding site.

School History:

Napier Hill has the distinction of being the site of four of New Zealand's oldest secondary schools:

- 1867 Sacred Heart College opened on its current site in Convent Road.
- 1874 Napier Boys' High School was established with the main building at the foot of Gladstone Road.
- 1875 Hukarere Girls' College opened on Hukarere Road.
- 1884 Napier Girl's High School opened on Clyde Road slightly above the current hostel and facing more south-westerly than its replacements.

The plans for a girls' school in Napier were submitted to the Board of Governors in July 1883 and Napier Girls' High School opened on January 29, 1884 with thirty-nine pupils and one boarder. The first principal was Miss M.E Hewett. The original school course included English, French, Latin, German, Drawing, Singing and Callisthenics.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napier_Girls%27_High_School



Figure 84 Earlier building on Clyde Road on site of current boarding hostel. Source: Napier Girls' High school web site.

The original school building had classrooms on the ground floor, and rooms for the boarders upstairs.

In 1885 the school inspectors reported that: “the programme appears to be skilfully adapted to the wants of the pupils— there is a very good tone as to manners and diligence and good understanding between teachers and pupils.”²⁰⁹ By 1893 Miss Spencer had introduced Practical Sketching and Political Economy for the older girls and cooking, dancing, sewing and First Aid. The examination curriculum now included: Euclid, Algebra, Trigonometry, English, Latin, History, Geography, Botany, Scripture on Sundays and sometimes Physiology and mechanics. Debating Drill, charades and singing were also enjoyed.²¹⁰

The first school magazine was published in 1889. The same year the first debate was held with the topic “The side saddle should be abolished,” being won by the negative team. Tennis was a popular sport and when basketball was introduced in 1902 it was thought NGHS was the first school to play it.²¹¹

By the 1890s endowed single sex schools such as NGHS were being challenged by District High School that were getting good results in the Matriculation Examination required for university entrance. These Technical Schools had been established to prepare students for the trades but were getting good results in this important examination. This encouraged the single-sex schools to offer government subsidised free places and soon most of the pupils held these, but they had to be earned by attaining a certain standard. By 1917 only 37% of primary leavers were going on to secondary school; twenty years later it was 65%.

²⁰⁹Blair, Mary-Jane, *Celebrating 125 Years of Napier Girls' High School: 1884-2009*, p. 15

²¹⁰Blair, p. 15

²¹¹Blair, p. 15



Figure 85 The original school building (on the site of the present hostel) sometime between 1911 and 1931. Source: MTG Hawke's Bay Object nos. m59/23, 2352, 91903

The years during the War between 1914 and 1918 were difficult for the school, but in 1919 the school magazine editorial noted that the “great world crisis is over, and a new life lies ahead of us, full of bright hopes and promises for the future.” The times were proud and patriotic, and *Rule Britannia* and *Land of Hope and Glory* were sung at school assemblies.²¹²

There was a Junior School for little girls who had to pass their proficiency examination to move to the senior school. Those who were not boarders walked home and back to school at lunchtime and led active lives: they caught the tram from the top of Shakespeare Road and went to Nelson Park for games, or walked to the Marine Parade baths for swimming as well as having regular Drill on the bottom Green. They gave singing and dancing performances at the annual Garden Fête and at the School Prize-giving at the Municipal Theatre. They had their own Dux but wore the same uniform as the senior girls.

Junior schools were discontinued in the late 1930s because space was restricted, and as these schools were private schools, they charged fees, their teachers had poorer pay, and less opportunities for career advancement than their state school counterparts.²¹³

There was no high school in Hastings until 1926 so the girls and boys travelled on the train from there, Clive and Eskdale to the three schools in Napier: Girls' High, Boys' High and the Technical College, developing strong bonds among themselves.²¹⁴

²¹² Blair, p. 17

²¹³ Blair p. 17

²¹⁴ Blair, p. 18.

In 1926 NGHS became one of the earliest non-Technical schools to introduce a commercial course into the curriculum with the principal Miss Greig insisting that Miss Anderson taught her shorthand so could understand the difficulties the girls were facing. The same year Napier Boys' high School moved to the Awa and the Board gave NGHS over three acres of land and several buildings. Scinde House was largely demolished, apart from a wing previously used by the headmaster and his family, which was to be used as the junior girls' school.

The first Christmas gift service was held in 1927 when every girl took a present for someone less fortunate than herself. The Shand Cup acknowledging scholarship, character, conduct, accomplishment and sport was presented by D.B Shand in 1928. The award of this cup remains the highest honour bestowed by the school alongside the Dux. In 1929 the school magazine was renamed the *Torchbearer*. The Club room opened in 1929 where ex-pupils or members of the Parents' league could meet without encroaching on classrooms or where small reading or dramatic groups could work. This year the Green was formed by filling in the NBHS gully.²¹⁵ It was becoming obvious that the school desperately needed more space and a new Main building was designed and almost completed when the earthquake occurred on 3 February 1931.

The main building of the present school, named Spencer Building after Miss A.E.J. Spencer, the school's third principal, stands in what was the original playing area of the first school.²¹⁶ It was, however, designed prior to the earthquake with the foundation stone being laid on 13 November 1930 by the Hon. H. Atmore, M.P., the Minister of Education.²¹⁷ The new brick building was almost complete when it was so badly damaged by the earthquake that it had to be demolished.

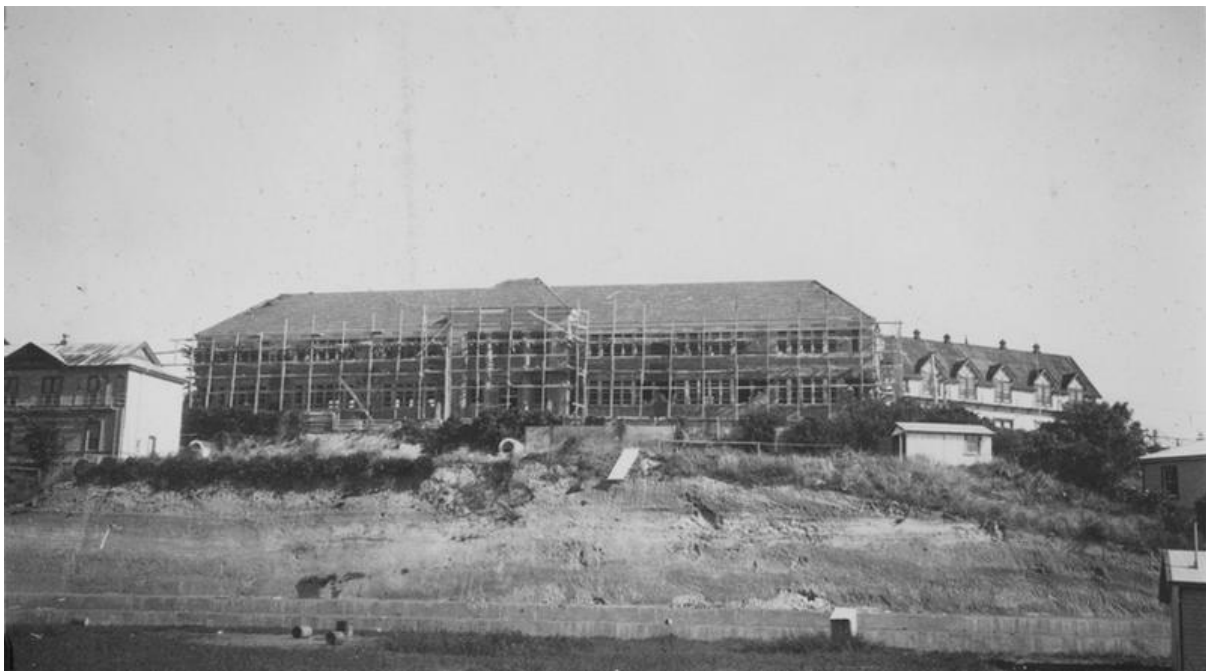


Figure 86 The damaged main block, propped up with scaffolding after the 1931 Earthquake. Photographer Ernest Sinclair. Source: MTG Hawke's Bay Acc. No. 2015/31/24

Miss Arthur, the Principal at the time, wrote that when she first saw the building she wondered if there would ever be a school on the hilltop again. She commented that the girls'

²¹⁵ Blair, p. 20

²¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napier_Girls%27_High_School

²¹⁷ Foundation stone.

response to adversity, their courage, self-control, obedience and unselfishness were unsurpassed.²¹⁸ By 9 March the school reopened with two teachers and 12 girls who used the Hall at first, then the Clubroom and other intact buildings so that Napier Central School could use the Hall.²¹⁹

A new Technical College on the site of the current Napier Intermediate School was almost complete but, although it did not collapse, it was demolished after the earthquake because brick buildings were no longer considered suitable in Napier.²²⁰ It was decided to disestablish the Technical School and amalgamate it with the NGHS which opened in May 1931. Old Girls remember what efforts were made to welcome and include the new girls who had lost their school. A later Principal, Miss Naumann, especially requested Rita Angus that their uniform and crest be included in the Hall mural.²²¹

Dorothy Watty, a pupil from 1932 to 1936 and Principal's secretary from 1941 to 1985 provides a description of the school uniform in the 1930s.

Throughout the year the uniform was a navy woollen serge tunic, white long-sleeved blouse, tie, black stockings, navy felt hat with band and badge in winter, and white panama in summer. Boarders had a navy-blue underside to the panama brim to distinguish them. Footwear was shoes, with a pair for changing into indoors, and white lace up sandshoes (often called tennis shoes) which were kept in a named bag in the cloakroom nearest to your form room.²²²

²¹⁸ Miss Arthur in editorial to the Torchbearer 1931 cited in "*Celebrating 125 Years of Napier Girls' High School 1884-2009*", p. 23

²¹⁹ Blair, p. 25

²²⁰ Irene Earnshaw nee Tonkin pupil from 1931-1935, in 125 years, p.25.

²²¹ Blair, p. 25

²²² Blair, p. 29

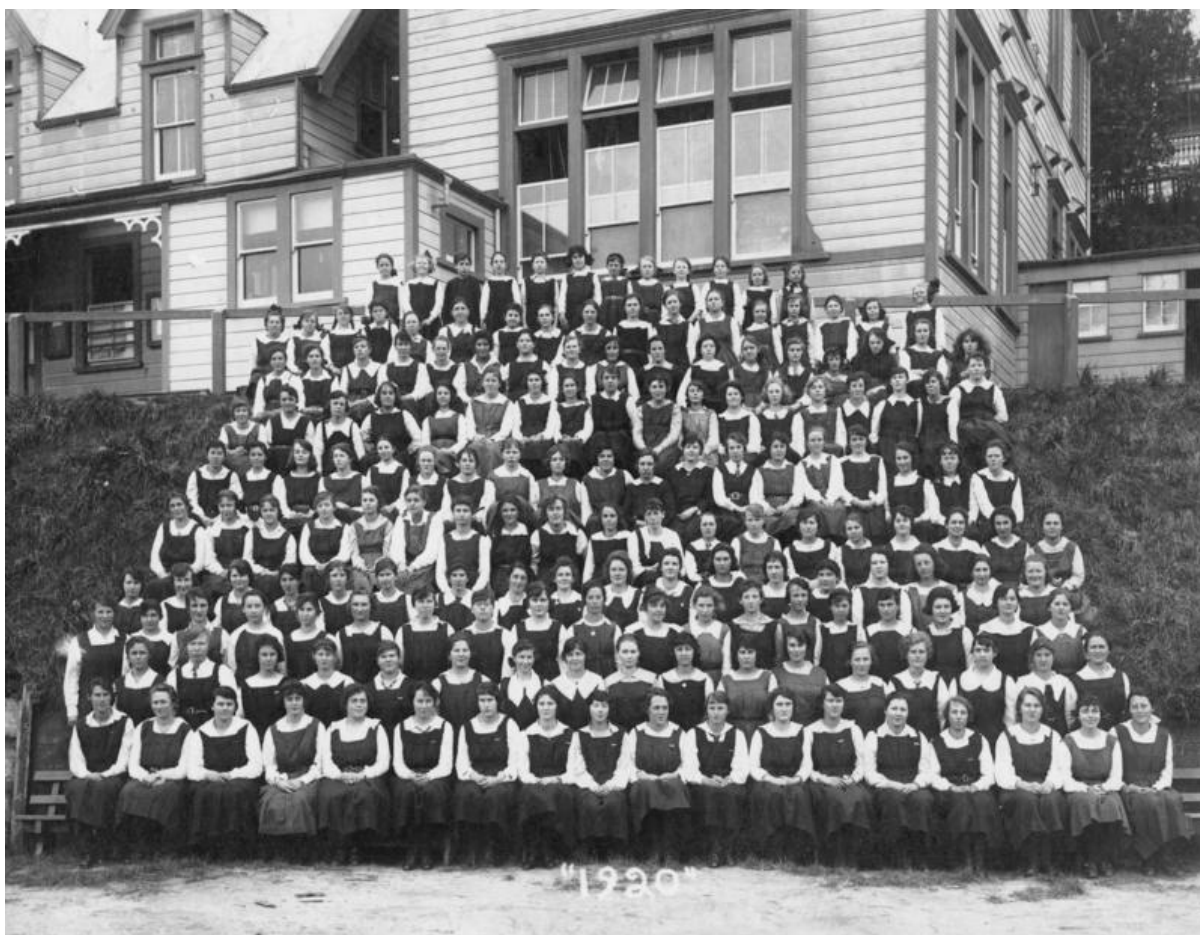


Figure 87 Group portrait of pupils at Napier Girls High School taken in 1920, donor Miss Bowman. Source: MTG Hawke's Bay Object Nos. m82/13, 15993, 80629

In 1939 with the outbreak of World War II compulsory air raid practices were taken seriously and the school took pride in being able to get everyone under its five shelters within two minutes. English evacuees joined the school and the girls undertook a huge amount of work supporting war projects: Finnish Relief, Poppy Day, the Red Cross, the Spitfire Fund and the Patriotic Fund were all given donations. The girls knitted over 500 garments and continued knitting peggy squares for blankets after the war.²²³

There were staff shortages during the 1950s exacerbated by the retirement of several long-term teachers. The 75th Jubilee was held at Easter 1958. A debutante ball was held (the first school ball) and the treat for the 500 pupils was a train trip to Eskdale Park for a picnic. The swimming pool was built at the end of the decade and work began on the Hall, which opened in 1960.²²⁴ The Hall wall mural by one of New Zealand's most important artists, Rita Angus, commemorates the merging in 1931 of Napier Girls' High School and Napier Technical College. The mural is not in the Main Building, but in a foyer that opens into it, although it was originally on the back wall of the Hall. In an interesting coincidence, the Angus name is on the foundation stone – Spencer Block was constructed in 1931 by W. M. Angus, the founder of an important construction company and Rita's father.

²²³ Blair p.30.

²²⁴ Blair, p. 34; 40



Figure 88 The Rita Angus mural commemorating the merging of Napier Girls' High School and Napier Technical College in 1931. Its symbolism is explained in a wall plaque nearby. Source: Chris Cochran May 2019

In 1970 Hukarere School became a boarding hostel only and the fifty girls began attending NGHS. Te Reo Māori was introduced as a subject throughout the school and over 100 girls joined the Māori Club. The principal Miss James learnt Māori and reached at least School Certificate level.

The 1970s was a decade of building:

- Arthur House was bought for a 6th Form Common Room
- The Club Room was demolished
- The Theatre Building was opened in 1976
- The Tunnel was built in 1978
- McCarthy Block with its Science Room and Common Room opened in 1979
- A hockey field was constructed on Coote road.²²⁵

²²⁵ Blair, p. 46

The abolition of compulsory hats, berets and gloves was one of the first successful requests of the newly formed School Council. The next uniform change occurred in 1973 when two options: the tartan winter kilt or plain tailored navy-blue slacks, were introduced.²²⁶

Further building took place in the 1980s when Arthur House was opened for music and drama, the two old houses at the hostel were replaced by Matthews House and the library was extended to triple its former size. The School Centennial was celebrated at the end of March 1984.²²⁷

In 1991 the New Zealand Qualifications Authority framework was introduced with a new curriculum. The 4-term school year began in 1996. New senior subjects of Physical Education, Photography, Classical Studies and Drama were added to the school curriculum. More building took place:

- The Spencer Block reopened in 1996
- 1999 the Walker Block was begun
- The Games Cupboard, the last relic of Napier Boys' High was re-located to the Green
- Spencer Quadrangle was transformed by landscaping.²²⁸

Kirsten Franklin won first equal in the National Bank Senior Science competition in 1990 and in 1993 Jody Foster represented New Zealand at an International Youth Science Forum in London.²²⁹

In the 1990s Hukarere girls left to go back to their own school. There was growing concern about the impact of co-educational schools on single sex schools and talk of the latter closing in Hastings, but towards the end of the 1990s the NGHS roll began to grow until it was necessary to introduce an enrolment scheme in 1997.²³⁰

The hostel was an important part of the school from its opening. In 1884 they had small rooms upstairs above the classrooms until the first hostel was built on the same site as the current one. The Principal lived there until 1961.²³¹

The 1931 earthquake destroyed most of the hostel buildings so tents were set up on the top tennis court to accommodate people. There were not enough tents, so the staff used stacked chairs from the Hall covered with curtains as temporary shelter. The Wairoa girls left by boat and after 48 hours there were only 5 people remaining in "Ad Lucem Camp." The boarders stayed in various temporary arrangements for the next few years until the new hostel opened on 30 October 1940. Another wing was added in 1961 and the hostel was renamed Hewett House in 1962.

Principals

²²⁶ Blair, p. 47

²²⁷ Blair, p. 50

²²⁸ Blair, p. 58

²²⁹ Blair, p. 58

²³⁰ Blair, p. 57

²³¹ Blair, p.74

1. **Mary E.G. Hewett 1884-1892** Associate of Queen's College London – a highly valued qualification because women were not able to get University Degrees at the time.
2. **1893-1901 Minnie E.G. Matthews LLA** St Andrew's Scotland. She taught Botany, Mathematics, Geography, French, English, Scripture and Drill
3. **1901-1910 A.E. Jerome Spencer BA, OBE.** First year pupil, studied extra-murally for her BA. First woman on school's Board of Governors from 1931-1945. Founded the Old Girls' Association 1908 and the Country Women's Institutes of New Zealand.
4. **1910-1926 Violet M. Greig MA BSc.** Inspired high ideals and proud record of academic success. Taught all forms. Later Principal of Wellington Girls' College. School song written by Miss Duncan (Head of Junior School) with music by Mrs Collet (Music) for her farewell.
5. **1926-1939 Doris M. Arthur MA Edinburgh.** Wrote words to school hymn *Ad Lucem* set to hymn tune no. 430 from Scottish Hymnary and introduction of Gift Service. Oversaw destruction caused by 1931 Earthquake and rebuilding
6. **1939-1953 Elva M. McCarthy MSc (Hons)** Brilliant scientist with Honours in Botany and valued the Arts - gifted the school art works including the Rita Angus Mural. Founded Parent Teacher Association and revived Old Girls' Association. Taught science during staff shortages throughout difficult war years.
7. **1953-1961 Audrey Naumann MA (Hons)** in English and French from Victoria University of Wellington. ATCL in Piano performance. Oversaw numerous changes including first summer uniform. Staff shortages led to the first men on the staff. Chose Rita Angus to paint commemorative mural unveiled by Miss McCarthy November 1960.
8. **1961-1968 E. Jean Wilson MA.** Abolished the dreaded Disorder Mark system, made changes to winter uniform and introduced new sports uniforms.
9. **1969-1989 Rosemary E. James MA OBE** mathematician and musician. Longest serving principal. Introduced Te Reo Maori and system of Deans Vertical Forms and School Council.
10. **1989-1998 Yvonne Walker BA** began Founders' Day celebrations. Wonderful refurbishment of Spencer Building and planning of Walker building underway when she died.
11. **1998-2005 BA Claire E. Hague (Hons) LRSM LTCL, ONZM** Deputy Principal during Miss Walker's illness, previously Head of English. Managed disruption caused by construction of Walker and Hague buildings.

Spencer Building (Main Block)

The architect of the Spencer building was J.T. Mair, who had been born in Invercargill on 12 October 1876 the son of a carpenter who later became a building contractor and the Mayor of

Invercargill.²³² After travelling to the United States and Britain for additional training Mair returned to New Zealand via Europe and designed the Presbyterian First Church in Invercargill in 1910, an outstanding Romanesque design with Byzantine elements that was the cornerstone of his reputation as an architect.²³³ In 1910 he set up his practice in Wellington and concentrated on domestic work.²³⁴ He became the Department of Education architect from 1920 and succeeded John Campbell as Government Architect in 1923 holding the position for the next 18 years.

As Government Architect Mair was responsible for most of the government buildings erected in New Zealand, many of them involving significant departures from tradition and precedent in style and construction methods. During this period modernist architectural precepts displaced the revivalist styles favoured for public buildings in the past; construction methods began to utilise concrete and structural steel instead of brick and timber.



Figure 89 View of Napier Girls' High School showing rear of Main block on skyline. Source: By Kiwichris - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=42866431>

Rotorua's Blue Baths, designed in 1929 in the Spanish mission style, are notable among the buildings built by the Public Works Department while he was government architect. Among his many other buildings were courthouses completed in Hamilton (1931), Ashburton (1938) and Blenheim (1939); and post offices in Napier (1930), High Street, Christchurch, and Cambridge Terrace, Wellington (1932), Tauranga (1938) and Lower Hutt (1943).²³⁵

In 1940 Mair was elected a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects; after retiring in 1941 he received honorary life membership of the New Zealand Institute of Architects. He

²³² <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m31/mair-john-thomas>

²³³ Mew & Humphries, 2014, p. 197; <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m31/mair-john-thomas>

²³⁴ <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m31/mair-john-thomas>

²³⁵ <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m31/mair-john-thomas>

was for many years a member of the Town-Planning Institute of New Zealand. He died tragically on 26 November 1959, survived by his son, a Wellington architect.²³⁶

Alterations: In the 1950s Spencer Block received the first of many additions with the new staffroom upstairs and a further Science laboratory downstairs.²³⁷

Spencer Block reopened in 1996 winning a Supreme Award for its renovations – the first of three major projects by architect, Paris Magdalinos.

A significant addition has been made to the central section on the rear elevation, opening the building to a courtyard space. Alterations have also been made at the eastern end, connecting the Main Building to a newer building.

Notable people: J T Mair, Government Architect; W M Angus, building contractor, principals: Misses Hewett, Matthews, Spencer, Greig, Arthur, McCarthy, Naumann, Wilson, James, Walker, Hague.

Architectural style/description: The Main Block of the Napier Girls' High School is a remarkable and impressive structure, a timber building of considerable size and height, its presence emphasised by its prominent location on Clyde Road as it runs along the crest of Bluff Hill.

A concrete wall with iron railings runs the full length of the building on the road boundary, with the building set back enough to allow a path and narrow strip of garden in front of it; symmetrical flights of steps rise to a landing and front door in the middle of the building. This central section is a beautiful and restrained piece of Classical design, with four plain fluted pilasters²³⁸ rising through two storeys to support a fascia which is decorated with just a dog-tooth moulding and the name of the school. The weatherboarding here is wide flush boards in imitation of stonework, while the long classroom wings that stretch out symmetrically on either side are clad in narrow lapped weatherboards boards. The windows in the central section have glazing bars in interesting geometric patterns, while the windows of the two wings are divided into small panes in three sashes each. They are large and tall, in banks of six, providing ample natural light to the high-ceilinged classrooms. The roof is hipped, the central section with its own hipped roof, these shapes giving the building a contained and finished form; the roof is clad in corrugated iron.

The interior is notable for beautiful joinery – doors, panelling and finishing timbers – executed in rimu; it survives in remarkably authentic form.

The building is Stripped Classical in style, most obviously in the form and detailing of the central bay, and in the strict symmetry and plainness of the two wings. It employs quite conventional materials and construction details for the time but disposed in an original and inventive way to make an educational building of some distinction.

Theme: Education

²³⁶ <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m31/mair-john-thomas>

²³⁷ Blair, p. 34.

²³⁸ Pilasters are columns but attached to the wall, not freestanding; two of them here are just half pilasters.

Hapu/Iwi:

References:

Blair, Mary-Jane, (ed). 2009. *Celebrating 125 Years of Napier Girls' High School: 1884-2009*. GEON Hawke's Bay. Limited print run 1000.

Foundation Stone of Spencer Building.

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m31/mair-john-thomas>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napier_Girls%27_High_School

MTG Hawke's Bay collections on-line

Recommendations: Schedule as **Outstanding** including Interior