

32 Cathedral Square (The Press Building)
Hearing: Monday 30 January 2012 at 10am

Summary

The Press Building that was situated at 32 Cathedral Square was a 4 storey ornate heritage building constructed in 1906. The building consisted of 4 suspended concrete floors within a concrete basement car park and a concrete roof. Typical floor beams were a combination of steel angles and concrete, numerous iron and steel beams and cast iron columns. Thick brickwork walls wrapped the perimeter of the building to the north, east and across the centre in a combination of reinforced concrete brickwork and stonework frames to the south and west walls. A large brick and stonework turret was located to the south west corner extending above roof level.

The original brick and stonework parapet extending above roof level was reduced in height in the 1970's, along with the installation of structural steel securing works to the south and west wall parapets. It is thought that this was the only strengthening work undertaken to the building since it was built.

In the September 2010 earthquake the building appears to have only suffered minor damage and after Level 1 and Level 2 Rapid Assessments was green placarded.

The owners obtained a structural damage report from Lewis & Bradford, structural engineers. They noted structural damage in three main areas; north-west brick wall at level 3, north-east brick wall at level 3 and the stone work to the south and west perimeter frames. Lewis and Bradford recommended the construction of a new in-situ sheer wall in the north west corner in the next 2/3 weeks.

The tenants, the Press Newspaper, obtained an independent inspection by Harrison Grierson, structural engineers. Various items of damage were noted, the only one which required further assessment was diagonal cracking and loose bricks in the north-east corner of the eastern exterior. It was recommended that the interior pin board lining be removed for inspection of the interior face of this wall. As well the north-west corner of the northern top storey was noted to have large cracks in the wall.

In an earthquake response report, completed by the owners, areas of damage were noted;

- Payroll office north west corner of Level 3 – suspected diagonal shear failure
- Turret railing
- Stone parapet above main entrance required repair

A Level 1 Rapid Assessment on 26 December 2010 following the Boxing Day aftershock noted “general brick cracking including risk that neighbour’s parapet on east side could fall on the Press building”. The building was red placarded and a Building Act notice served on the owners.

Repairs were effected and a certificate was completed by Holmes Consulting Group and forwarded to the Council resulting in the Building Act notice being removed and the building able to be reoccupied.

The Press Newspaper reoccupied the building at that point and remained in occupation until the 22 February 2011 earthquake.

However various proposals for strengthening work were provided by Holmes Consulting Group as, although a formal assessment had not been completed, it was clear that the building’s residual strength following the September and Boxing Day earthquakes was less than 33% full code load. None of the proposed structural work was commenced prior to the 22 February earthquake.

In the 22 February earthquake the building suffered severe structural damage, including the collapse of the upper level entirely onto the 4th floor, most of the parapets dropping and on the corner of tower roof toppling back onto the 4th floor and cracking to the south and west facades.

At the time of the February earthquake, Adrienne Lindsay was working on the top floor with 7 or 8 other staff members from the Press. She was killed as she sheltered under her desk on the top floor when the roof collapsed. Survivors were rescued by USAR making a hole into the collapsed roof.

Proposed Witnesses:

1. Naomi Magee
2. Andrew Boyle, manager, The Press
3. Michael Doig of Ganellen Pty Ltd, were managers for owners of building -
32 Cathedral Sq Ltd
4. Ashley Wilson, Lewis Bradford, structural engineer
5. Andrew Thompson, Harrison Grierson, structural engineer
6. John Hare, Holmes Consulting Group, structural engineer
7. Ben Dare, structural engineer
8. Christchurch City Council
9. Peter Smith, Spencer Holmes Ltd, structural engineer
10. Nigel Brook, Fire Service (written only)
11. Julie Rogers (written only)
12. Conrad Fitz-Gerald (written only)

Likely Issues:

1. Application of the Council's earthquake prone policy to the building.
2. Assessment of the building after September 2010, and after the Boxing Day aftershock.