

WORDS: ANNA DUNLOP / IMAGERY: MIKE HEYDON



Work of art

Once integral to the development of secondary education in New Zealand, Dunedin's former King Edward Technical College is now a community hub for the arts

Dunedin isn't short of magnificent architecture and grand buildings, but one of the most imposing is the former King Edward Technical College (KETC) – now known as King Edward Court – which sits on a corner of Stuart Street, just 500 metres from the Octagon in the central city.

Designed by prominent architect Harry Mandeno and built in 1914, KETC, a Category 1 historic place, was the largest secondary school in New Zealand for more than 20 years, and one of the country's first technical schools. The listing

information states: "KETC represents the development of technical education in New Zealand, from concerned citizens adopting international trends to state-run mainstream technical education."

The school represents the growing importance placed on continuing education for all, not just the wealthy, and is a prime example of a citizen-led programme that brought about nationwide change.

In 1888 the Dunedin Technical Classes Association (DTCA) was formed by some of the city's most prominent citizens, who wanted to

provide continuing education and technical classes for young people.

The first evening classes were held on 1 May 1889 in rooms on Moray Place; 204 students enrolled, with arithmetic being the most popular subject. Classes gradually expanded to include literary (English, French, German and shorthand), scientific (mathematics, chemistry and physics) and manual (freehand, mechanical drawing, carpentry, and wood and metal-turning) subjects.

According to Sarah Gallagher, Area Manager Otago Southland for New Zealand Heritage Pouhere Taonga, the DTCA aimed to direct the attention of youth to "higher aims and objectives" and was inspired by the City and Guilds of London Institute.

"It served to upskill and uplift individuals and therefore had positive flow-on effects for the community," she says.

"It became so successful,

that it was no longer feasible for it to be citizen led, so it became a state-run technical education service. It was a complete game changer for education in New Zealand."

In fact, the venture proved so popular that finding suitable accommodation for students became an ongoing problem.

KETC was eventually purpose built for the task, and the foundation stone was laid on 20 March 1913. Mandeno designed a grand building, constructed in red brick with Oamaru stone pediments, pilasters, quoins and other detailing, and featuring Neo-Baroque and Georgian Revival motifs. Inside, past the grand entrance vestibule featuring wood panelling, a tiled floor and a decorative plaster ceiling, is an extensive maze of corridors that is said to be inhabited by the ghost of a 13-year-old girl.

While the three-storey brick edifice on Stuart Street

is the most recognisable part of KETC, the complex actually comprises a cluster of buildings: the main structure, which includes the Kempthorne Wing and workshops; Burt Hall (added in 1918 and named after Alexander Burt, chair of the DTCA); and the Thomson Wing (named for the association's founder and first superintendent of the school, George Thomson, and added in 1924).

The former Dunedin School of Art building, located on the corner of Tennyson Street and York Place and not physically connected to the main block, is also part of the KETC listing on the New Zealand Heritage List Rārangī Kōrero. It was designed by government architect John Mair and opened in 1937.

The art school cultivated some of New Zealand's most influential artists – Colin McCahon (one of the first pupils to enrol), Anne Hamblett, Doris Lusk and Patrick Hayman were all students taught by internationally renowned teachers such as WH Allen and RN Field – and it is believed to be the birthplace of New Zealand modernism.

By 1955 KETC had 2500 pupils, making it the largest secondary school in the country. In the 1960s the school was divided into Otago Polytechnic and

King Edward High School and pupils were later relocated to other premises.

The building was then sold to private owners and renamed King Edward Court (KEC). Classrooms were turned into offices, dance and art studios, ensemble practice rooms and storage units. Over the years, many of the 75 rooms have been rented out to various tenants, including musicians, artists and photographers. Black Seeds guitarist Mike Fabulous (Michael August) even used a storage room as a recording studio in the late 2000s.

Long-term tenants, past and present, include: musician Adrian Mann, who moved his business, Alexander Pianos, into the building in 2016; Rasa School of Dance owner Lisa Wilkinson, who has taught dance pupils in a KEC studio for 20 years; and Matthew Robertson and Fiona Shaw-Robertson, whose business, Ma-Fi Arts, runs art classes for adults and children.

Matthew first taught in the building in 1999 and later returned with his wife Fiona to run the art classes from three rooms on the first floor. He says he's seen tenants come and go.

"Sometimes it's been a full house, other times it's been emptier as people have moved on," he says. "I've always loved the building, and it's a fantastic location

in which to teach our pupils. We've looked after it over the years, and it's looked after us."

KEC was sold again in 2022 to a developer who has plans to renovate part of the main building to provide short- and long-term rental accommodation. However, it is hoped it will continue to be a community hub for artists.

As for the art school building, it has recently been given a new lease of life as a suite of art, music and drama rooms for Trinity Catholic College.

Architect Matt Mitchell of McCoy Wixon Architects says the building needed to be upgraded to current standards, adding that the compliance-related work was carefully woven into the fabric of the original building.

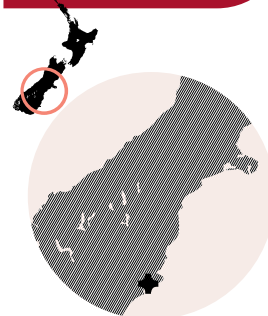
"We added internal layers – floating floors, insulation and acoustic material – to bring the building up to scratch acoustically and provide fire safety," he says.

"We realised that the original concrete basement had a lot of potential, so we removed the old boiler and created a sound-proof recording studio."

The exterior was also carefully restored where possible, with work extending to the roofing, cladding and windows.

"Some of the timber casement windows had been replaced with white aluminium," says Matt.

Listing
4712



◆ LOCATION

Dunedin lies on the central-eastern coast of Otago, surrounding the head of Otago Harbour.

"It was important to us that we replaced these and reinstated the timber."

Sarah says that it's wonderful to see the building adapted and given a contemporary fit-out to meet the needs of the new students and staff.

"It's particularly special knowing that fine arts are again being taught in this building, just as when it was first built as the Dunedin School of Art. It carries the legacy of some of New Zealand's finest artists and art teachers to a new generation." **11**

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