The Old High Court – Restoration

In 1993 the Wellington High Court moved out of the Stout Street building. Although it is a category 1 historic building its future hung in the balance. Empty for 14 years the building deteriorated due to a lack of maintenance, water damage, and vandalism.

When a permanent home for the new Supreme Court was planned, on the Lambton Quay end of the block, restoration of the Old High Court was undertaken. It now forms part of the Supreme Court complex.

The old masonry structure was protected from seismic activity by cutting it off its old foundations and installing 130 base isolators.

Removing the old foundations

Base isolator

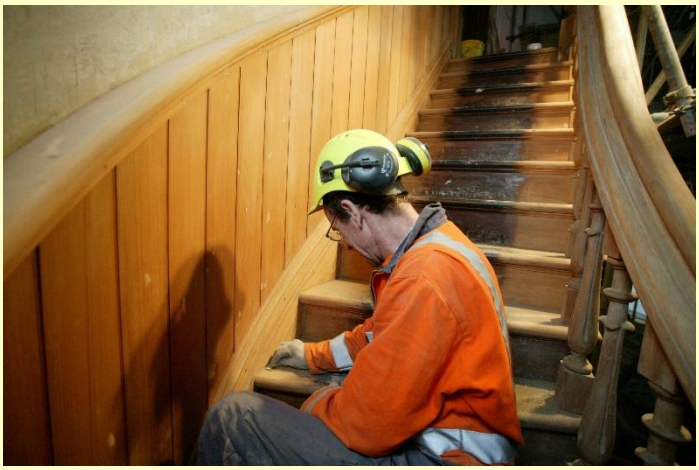
Care was taken to protect the kauri and rimu timber staircase and wall panelling while the structural work was completed.

Public foyer – during the restoration and after

Courtroom No 1. during the restoration

Courtroom No. 1 after

As a Category 1 historic building the Old High Court had to be restored as close as possible to how it was when it was built but be fit for modern use. The staircases and wall panelling are kauri and rimu but when the building was built the timber was stained with a dark stain so it would resemble English timber. The restoration had to respect that, and the timber was stained dark again.



Preparing the timber in the foyer to be stained again

The finished result

The Old High Court reopened in 2010. The office space in the building is now used for staff working for the Office of the Chief Justice. They are responsible for judicial development across all courts, support the senior judiciary and the Courtsofnz website. The courtroom is used as a ceremonial courtroom for Wellington.

There is no public access to the building other than on a guided tour. Email tours@justice.govt.nz to find out when the next guided tour is planned.

Before the restoration

After the restoration