

**Architectural style spreads its wings: New Zealand architecture in the 1880s:**  
a one day symposium held under the auspices of the  
Centre for Building Performance Research, Victoria University

Friday 6th December 2013

**ABSTRACTS**

**Dean Divehall & Nigel Isaacs "Best Bricks: a study of advertised brick pricing in Victorian New Zealand"**

While timber was suitable for construction, more than permanent materials were needed for real buildings. Stone was available but transport limited its distribution. Bricks could be made almost anywhere. This paper examines New Zealand brick pricing based on advertised data from published newspapers across the Wellington, Nelson, Canterbury, Otago and Auckland regions. It provides an overview of brick pricing during this critical period of the birth of colonial New Zealand. The price of bricks will be compared with other essential supplies, to help understand changes in the cost of buildings.

**Adrian Humphris & Geoff Mew "Sailing too close to the wind in 1880s Wellington."**

The 1880s and early 1890s have been widely recognised as a time of depression in New Zealand. While well-known architects with substantial clienteles were generally able to survive the downturn in business, others struggled to make ends meet, showed signs of extreme stress, or occasionally resorted to sharp practices.

Few in-depth studies have been able to show the broad spectrum of architects working in Wellington at a particular time as, until recently, it has been extremely difficult to accumulate the necessary data. The introduction of *Papers Past* has considerably simplified this task. We can now find and assess almost all the architects who made the news in different ways.

Although more than 30 men claimed to be Wellington architects in the 1880s, not all of them were working. Some, such as Frank Mitchell, produced relatively large numbers of plans throughout the decade; many others appear to have been less successful, and to have turned their hands to other activities, for better or worse.

In this paper we select a few of the more colourful "architects" residing in Wellington in the 1880s. Our candidates range from the aforementioned Frank Mitchell, through to Christopher Walter Worger, who being bankrupted in Christchurch, moved to Wellington in 1889. Leaving no record of any building designs, he had gone to Dunedin by 1906.

Another enigmatic character was James Henry Schwabe, who escaped Dunedin and a rather public humiliation for Wellington in the late 1870s. Similarly, we discuss the erratic behaviour of W.J.W. Robinson, also escaping scandal in Dunedin to practise in the capital. Charles Zahl we find making a fleeting visit in early 1887, before absconding with a large sum of investors' money en route to Rio de Janeiro or Britain. We finish with the case of Ernest Wagner, released into the community after a year's hard labour in 1880. He never practised as an architect again - preferring, or being forced, to live as a farmer in the country south of Auckland.

The examples we discuss are the exception rather than the rule. Of the bankruptcies recorded at the time, few came from the upper echelons of society. Some architects who were later prominent in Wellington moved offshore to better conditions in Australia (such as Joshua Charlesworth), whereas others such as William Turnbull were protected to some extent in successful partnerships in which they had a junior role.

### **Nigel Isaacs "'Balloon to Platform Framing' a change of the 1880s?"**

*Brett's Colonists' Guide and Cyclopaedia of Useful Knowledge: Being a Compendium of Information by Practical Colonists*, edited by Thomas W. Leys, was first published in 1883. Rated, in 1993 in a National Library Exhibition, as one of the 21 "Working Titles" that had shaped New Zealand, it provided "all information of possible use" to new arrivals. This included how to build your own cottage – providing floor plans, a material list and an estimate of labour for four cottages (increasing to five cottages complete with a set of written specifications in the 1897 edition). These designs and quantities provide a unique opportunity to explore changes in the technology of New Zealand house construction.

It has been hypothesised that in the 1890s timber construction shifted from balloon to platform framing – the basic style still used for timber framed houses. The paper will report research that examined import statistics, business records and quinquennial national censuses to explore indirect measures of changes in construction technology. It is concluded that this change occurred in the previous decade, the 1880s.

### **Ian Lochhead "'distinctly in a nineteenth century style": Samuel Hurst Seager's Christchurch Municipal Offices"**

In 1887 Samuel Hurst Seager described his recently completed Christchurch Municipal Buildings, as being "distinctly in a nineteenth century style." The building was the result of an architectural competition and was the architect's first commission following his return to New Zealand after a period of study in Britain. From a twenty-first-century perspective we recognise the Municipal Buildings as a precocious New Zealand example of the Queen Anne style that had come into vogue in Britain in the 1870s. Seager, however, clearly aimed to present his building not as belonging to a particular style from the past but as a representative design of the age in which it was built. Where we see an eclectic amalgam of sources drawn from British and European architecture from the late 17th century onwards, Seager saw a synthesis of motifs that produced a picturesque effect appropriate to the building's site. For Seager, it seems, eclecticism was indeed the style of the nineteenth century. Drawing on contemporary sources, including the architect's description of the building that accompanied his competition entry, this paper examines Seager's design in the context of late nineteenth-century discussions of architectural style but also within the specific context of Seager's personal search for a resolution of the nineteenth-century "dilemma of style."

### **Christine McCarthy "Homelessness in the 1880s"**

Given the degree of economic trauma recorded in New Zealand in the 1880s, it seems no surprise that this was accompanied by the experience of homelessness, but the newspaper reporting appears to under-emphasise chronic homelessness in New Zealand. Newspaper serials tinged homelessness with the ache of romantic love. The love of Mary, for example, in Charles Read's "Love and Money," published in the *Otago Witness* in 1884, made William Hope rich in his "poverty, and happy in my homelessness." The dreary chambers of the *Bruce Herald's* "Model Bachelor" illustrated "the utter homelessness of the place ... and he would willingly give up all his past enjoyments for one kind voice to cheer him, for one person whom he loved

to be hear him ..." The reporting of homelessness was equally dominated by international disasters: the 3,000 people homeless because of the 1882 fire in Badzinilow, the 1,000 homeless in Illinois devastated by the 1888 cyclone, "the homeless and starving people" resulting from the 1885 revolution in Panama, and those affected by the 1886 eruption of Mount Etna.

Among these reports, homelessness in New Zealand appears to be more intimate and less melodramatic. House fires, such as that of William Beals' eight-roomed house in Epsom, the destruction by fire of Mr. Keogh's seven-roomed dwelling on the north-west side of Mount Pukekaroro, and the 1884 fire which broke out "on the grounds of St. Mary's Orphanage, Ponsonby" are examples. These were stories where neighbours such as Mr Hill "gave the homeless family shelter for the night," or the loss was minor and "will be shortly repaired." In contrast, the January 1886 bush fires in the Stratford district, which rendered "a great number of people ... homeless and destitute," and the June 1886 eruption of Mount Tarawera in which "many people have met with a terrible death, while others have been rendered homeless and penniless," caused widespread and unusual devastation.

Chronic homelessness, when it appears, occurs via the reporting of institutional and architectural support structures. The establishment of institutions such as "a home ... for the reform of fallen and the accommodation of destitute women," or the Albert Street soup kitchen which provided "accommodation from night to night of homeless females" or the Women's Temperance Union's building purchased to hold "meetings for the instruction of boys and girls, for giving temporary shelter to the homeless, and for a refuge for persons just out of prison until they get employment" indicate this. The paper will examine the reporting of homelessness throughout the 1880s, through architectural, representational and sociological lenses.

#### **Guy Marriage, Robin Marriage, & Ian Bowman "Stead Ellis, Architect"**

In December 1879, Stead Ellis landed in New Zealand, with family, seeking work as an architect in the South Island, along with his pupil, budding architect Joshua Charlesworth. Finding work in Nelson as the Architect for the Nelson Education Board in early 1880, Ellis was a key architect, along with Beatson, in the appearance of early Nelson's public buildings. Ellis was responsible for designing many school buildings in the Nelson region, and also other commissions such as the church at Motupiko. Very little remains of Ellis's lifetime of work, with most schools having replaced their buildings several times over, but some few scraps of Ellis' work remain - namely two buildings: the Bishops School, near the Nelson Cathedral, and the Anglican church at Motupiko. This paper will examine and trace remaining work of Stead Ellis.

#### **Michael Milojevic "Fripp in the 1880s"**

The entry for the British Columbia architect, Robert Mackay Fripp in Robert Hill's *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950* lists some eighty projects of which two are listed in New Zealand and yet from the Auckland perspective Fripp, in his mid-20s when he was first there, was a notable intern who grew into a respected practitioner in 1880s and even more so when he returned briefly in the 1890s. Recorded by the Auckland Society of Arts as a design tutor Robert Mackay, Fripp appears to have been New Zealand's first instructor in architecture and through his contributions to *The Canadian Architect and Builder* we learn of his Auckland activities between 1882 and 1888 in a partnership as Paul and Fripp, and then as a sole practitioner after the mid-decade economic downturn. From his 1893 RIBA Nomination papers we see Fripp recording scores of executed works for the 1880s many quite modest though exceptionally among these he recorded a [contentious] claim for the joint-authorship, with the prominent Melbourne architect Alfred Louis

Smith, of the quite substantial Victoria Arcade on Queen Street. In this paper I propose to present Fripp's early years as an architect from his arrival in the Antipodes with his brother Charles Edwin at the start of the decade and his six productive years here before his marriage to another English-born Aucklander, Christina Nicol, and setting off to participate in the booming post fire rebuild of Vancouver in 1888 where he set up practice with his brother.

### **Mary O'Keeffe, David Rudd and Kathryn Hurren "Wellington City Archaeological Mapping Project"**

In light of the earthquake in Christchurch as well as the recent ones in Wellington the need to know the location and types of archaeological sites/themes in Wellington is important. NZHPT, combined with the Wellington Archaeological Group, Wellington Tenth's Trust/Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust, are working on a Wellington City archaeological mapping project that will have two purposes:

The first being a tool that can be used in an emergency event to guide heritage experts, council, NZHPT and the equivalent of CERA, with a systematic and practical map showing the areas of high, medium, low or no archaeological risk.

The second tool that will come out of this project is a mapping tool that can be used by consultants, Wellington City Council, Tāngata Whenua, developers and other groups, on a daily basis to help identify the archaeological potential of an area in respect to proposed development or research.

The project will pull together local archaeological consultants' knowledge, Tāngata Whenua knowledge, Wellington City Council and archival information as well as information on previous archaeological authorities and registrations held at NZHPT. We are seeking information and knowledge from people within the heritage community who can help in developing the project.

### **Tyson Schmidt ""that headquarters of fanaticism and disaffection": Protest and the construction of space at Parihaka in the 1880s"**

At the 2009 version of this symposium I presented a paper that outlined how protests at Waitangi during the 1980s were played out architecturally through the media. Despite the heavy focus on biculturalism during the 1980s, reporting of proceedings at Waitangi on February 6th each year clearly showed a trifurcation of space. Television networks and the national newspapers showed that the "landscape of nationhood" was in fact inhabited by three actors in the symbolically important rituals - the State, tame Māori, and wild Māori.

This trifurcation of space also played out a hundred years earlier at Parihaka. Sue Abel's examinations of media constructions of nationhood and cultural interaction can be identified in reports on happenings at Parihaka pā through the 1880s. From the passive resistance to the Crown's persistent surveying of the land and building of roads, the frequent large hui held at Parihaka that drew Māori from around the country, through to the invasion of the pā by a Government force of more than 1500 troops – there was rich material for spatial representation by the media of the time. While the channels were different (dominated by newspapers and Parliamentary reports, with no television networks), this paper shows that the message of trifurcation was as strong in the 1880s as it would be in the 1980s.

### **Peter Wood "Parihaka-tecture"**

At 5.00am of November the 5th, 1881, Government sanction troops entered the native Taranaki Pā of Parihaka, arresting key leaders, expelling occupants and destroying the buildings. The impetus for the assault was highly political. On the one

hand Parihaka represented a focus for a broad fear of Māori political independence. At the same time the demand for fertile farm land by colonial settlers was not being met. Scattering the people of Parihaka was a central strategy for alleviating the former and satisfying the latter. Similarly, the destruction of the material fabric of the village – its architecture – was a purposeful action designed to erase any legitimate presence over the land. Not until the publication of Dick Scott's *The Parihaka Story*, in 1954, were the events of Parihaka brought to a wider Pākehā audience. Today it is largely, and correctly, understood as a particularly ugly moment in our history. However, while we may have developed a certain social self-consciousness toward the racial and political ramifications of Parihaka, not enough has been made of the extraordinary architecture that framed it. In this paper I wish to add to what we do know by reviewing period photographs of Parihaka Pā at the time of the invasion. In particular I will be giving consideration to Miti-mai-te-arera (the house of Te Whiti), Rangi Kapuia (the house of Tohu), Nuku-tewhatewha (the communal bank) and Te Niho-o-Te-Atiawa (the dining hall). It is my view that the colonial government were right to interpret these prominent buildings as symbolically threatening and in this paper I hope to show why they were so, but also how their presence nonetheless continued well into the twentieth century.