

""Good Architecture should not be a plaything":
New Zealand architecture in the 1920s" a one day symposium
Friday 2nd December 2011

ABSTRACTS

Don Bassett "The Beaux-Arts method in New Zealand"

This paper will begin by looking at a selection of student drawings produced during the 1920s at the School of Architecture, Auckland University College, following its establishment under Professor Cyril Knight. Beaux-Arts influence is clear. While Knight's commitment to the Beaux-Arts methods of teaching and drafting is well-known, a growing interest in this approach was evident in the 1910s, before his arrival. This paper will outline that development and (using comparisons with the situation in Great Britain and the United States) will discuss the techniques and goals of this approach to architectural drawing, as well as its significance for the ongoing development of architecture in this country.

Lianne Cox "Llewellyn Williams' *Chevening*"

"Chevening" is a four level apartment building designed by Llewellyn E. Williams, and built in 1929 in Kelburn. This paper looks at the influences and context of the original design and the qualities of the building. "Chevening" was refurbished and strengthened this year with the aim of preserving it into the future. The key aspects were integration of strengthening, services and modern appliances into the heritage structure and design. This paper will look at how this was done, and ask if "Chevening" remains a significant example of 1920s architecture.

Michael Findlay "The lure of London: New Zealand architects abroad 1918-1930"

New Zealand architecture experienced great change in the decade between the Armistice and the Great Depression. These two events bracket a period in which attitudes within the profession turned from reliance on the RIBA, education in the London and Liverpool schools of architecture, and OE in the major London practices towards greater independence. A steady outward flow of New Zealanders seeking academic qualifications and registration were lured by the opportunities on offer in England. The ex-servicemen who were taken into the architectural and planning courses after the War came back to lead the local profession. A significant group stayed on to compete for scholarships such as the Rome Prize.

This paper looks specifically at the ways in which New Zealand architects engaged with the scholarship system in England and what effect success in this field had on their careers both there and at home.

Phillip Hartley "Auckland Railway Station"

The New Zealand Historic Places Trust's registration describes the former Auckland Railway Station as "one of the most self-consciously monumental public buildings erected in early twentieth-century New Zealand." Gummer and Ford designed the building in an American influenced Beaux-Arts classicism, appropriately grand externally, with restrained-ornate interiors for the public spaces. The Chief Engineer for New Zealand Railways, F C Widdop, is named on Gummer and Ford's original drawings dated 1927, and the building – a feat of modern engineering at the time – was constructed by the Public Works Department in 1928-30.

The building operated as Auckland's point of arrival by rail until it was sold as part of the privatisation of NZ Railways in the 1990s, following which its ill-conceived

redevelopment in 1999 as student accommodation marked a ten-year period of decline. Promised repairs to the heritage fabric never eventuated, and the substantial and unsympathetic additions to the building failed the (short) test of time. Such a monumental mistake required a project in 2009-2010 of equal value to the redevelopment of ten years previously. The completed scheme of conservation repair was the most significant in its eighty year history, with each material type requiring investigation for conservation concept, and remodeling of the additions, which returned some dignity to this nationally important building.

Nigel Isaacs "Hot Water for the Masses"

Lloyd Mando's 1915 "all-electric house" was followed by his 1923 patent for an electric storage hot water system. The paper will explore the development of the electric hot water system and its impact on the house over the following years. This 1920s invention is remarkably similar to the cylinder found in the modern New Zealand house, but provides a level of service that was unexpected in the decade of its invention.

Ian Lohead "“From the uttermost ends of the Earth”: The World War One Battlefield Memorials of Samuel Hurst Seager"

Drawing on the unique photographic records of the Hurst Seager Lantern Slide Collection at the University of Canterbury, and Seager's report on the design of battlefield memorials, this paper examines his contribution to the design of New Zealand's World War One battlefield memorials and compares them with the design of British memorials at Gallipoli and on the Western Front.

Christine McCarthy "Concrete passions: Anscombe's material politics"

Edmund Anscombe (1874-1948) was an advocate of concrete as a building material, especially in relation to housing. This paper examines Anscombe's promotion of concrete, with specific reference to his patenting, selling, specifying of, and writing about, OK blocks and concrete in the 1920s, a time when he is better known for his work on the University of Otago campus, the 1925 New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition, and his move from Dunedin to Wellington in 1928.

Chris McDonald "Military Ephemera and Early Observance of Anzac Day: A Wellington Case Study"

In the aftermath of World War I, martial themes featured prominently in discourse on national identity in British dominions. New Zealand's emerging sense of nationhood relied upon claims about military prowess and the country's readiness to sacrifice its young men in Imperial wars. At the same time, dedicated military spaces and explicit military imagery were almost entirely missing from New Zealand's capital. This absence had several causes: the garrisoning of Imperial forces in Auckland; the colony's early policy of self-reliance in matters of defence; a largely volunteer army; and a Military District headquartered in Palmerston North rather than Wellington. By 1920, the lack of military sites in the nation's capital appeared anomalous and problematic. War memorials for the city and the State would correct this omission, but these monuments were still more than a decade away from realisation. Consequently, during the 1920s Wellington witnessed a series of lavish military ceremonies which used co-opted sites and temporary installations. The conference paper examines this phenomenon through early ANZAC Day observances. The paper concludes that the relative absence of permanent military iconography in the capital encouraged experimentation during a period when ANZAC Day rituals were still evolving.

Bill McKay & Fiona Jack "A "Useful" End to the War to End all Wars: The 1920s Utilitarian War Memorial in New Zealand"

This paper traces the development of the utilitarian war memorial in 1920s New Zealand focusing on memorial halls. The Peace Day celebrations in 1919 saw all manner of experimentation with commemorative structures across the British Empire, Europe and the USA. Most memorials were seen as having an educational value and were of a sombre nature, expressive of sacrifice rather than victory. Lutyen's invention of the cenotaph became highly influential as did his designs for obelisks, war crosses and so on. However there was a great deal of public debate about the notion of "useful" memorials versus "aesthetic" ones: utilitarian buildings as opposed to symbolic memorials. The Town Planning Conference of 1919, organised by Samuel Hurst Seager in Wellington, extensively discussed the issue.

In New Zealand, due probably to the disillusionment with war of those who had actually been there, many veterans seemed to prefer utilitarian memorials rather than ones expressing lofty ideals. However despite a number of proposals from towns and communities for "useful" memorials such as libraries, halls, clubrooms, hospitals, sports parks and other facilities, the Government came down firmly against them, supported by numerous newspaper editorials and the Returned Services Association. Nevertheless of the approximately 450 Great War memorials erected in the 1920s, there are more than 20 halls, several libraries, several bridges as well as a hospital, a museum and other public facilities.

This paper backgrounds the debate and surveys the "useful" war memorials erected throughout the country in the 1920s with a focus on halls. These are particularly significant in that they foreshadow the First Labour Government's approach to commemoration of the Second World War, when all memorials took the form of community centres in a significant programme of public construction often neglected by historians.

Geoff Mew & Adrian Humphris "The 102-foot Australian Invasion of Central Wellington in the 1920s"

A significant change to the building bylaws by the Wellington City Council in the early 1920s allowed for the design and erection of much taller buildings in the central city than had previously been permitted. Coupled with the use of steel frames and concrete floors, buildings started to reach eight or nine storeys; not tall by American standards, but regarded as skyscrapers in a city where three- and four-storey buildings were still the norm.

The fact that several of the most prominent of these new buildings were designed mainly by Australian architects, both in the 1920s and the early 1930s, does not seem to be widely known, or has been partially concealed by quoting the local supervising architects as the prime movers in the planning. Some of the buildings were erected to house branches or Wellington head offices of Australian firms but others were solely for New Zealand clients. The firm of A & K Henderson of Melbourne led the way with their 1926 design of the T & G Building (now Harcourts) on Lambton Quay, in association with Atkins and Mitchell. Australian born and trained Llewellyn Williams had already designed the tall, but narrow, Druids Chambers further to the north and went on to oversee more tall structures in the next few years. Hennessy & Hennessy, also Australian, pioneered Wellington Art Deco designs in the early 1930s.

Both the building techniques and the architectural styles employed showed strong American influences, particularly the tripartite form developed in Chicago. At first the massing of Inter-War Stripped Classical was employed, later followed by the more flowing lines of Art Deco.

Local architects were not slow to accept the new challenges required in the construction of taller, more massive buildings. The firm of Atkins and Mitchell was responsible for the DIC Building (now Harbour City Centre) in 1928 whereas JM Dawson had planned the Hope Gibbons Building, a rather more traditional structure, in Dixon Street in 1925. He was also responsible for Wakefield Chambers on the corner of Wakefield Street and Taranaki Street in 1928.

The huge new commercial buildings of the 1920s took advantage of the increasing availability and affordability of electric power for lighting, heating, lifts and the pumping of water. Telephones could be fitted in every office; central heating started to be installed, and there was better fire-fighting equipment. Steel-framed buildings were less susceptible to earthquake shocks.

Many of the buildings we describe here are still standing, although often modified for other uses. They have become iconic structures reflecting the marked advances of the 1920s era.

Roy Montgomery "The Invisible Architect: Edward England (1874-1949) and building style in Canterbury in the 1920s"

The firm of England Brothers is known by an informed few in the history of building design and construction in Canterbury. The name comes up in countless references to domestic house, church, school and commercial business commissions from the late nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century. Greater attention is likely to fall on this name as the dust eventually settles on the Canterbury earthquakes and people realise that quite apart from the loss of iconic structures that were designed by the star architects of particular generations there was a substantial body of more modestly detailed but highly functional work in the architectural fabric of the city now gone forever that belongs to this firm. For example, the Knox Presbyterian Church (1902) on Bealey Ave and the A.J. White Building (1904) on High Street, both severely damaged in the aftershock of February 22, 2011 to the point of partial or total collapse, were England Brothers' commissions. What may remain unexamined, however, is the fact that from 1908, when Richard West England junior died, it was Edward Herbert (1874-1949) who headed the firm for another three decades. Without fanfare, "Eddie" as he was known to his friends, appears to have produced an extensive array of domestic, institutional and commercial architecture. I will argue in this paper that the principal reason his work is not more well-known is that Eddie's style blended a modernist architectural outlook with a fondness for the Arts and Crafts influence. In other words his work was just too subtle to stand out. To illustrate this claim I will use the 1928 commission for the Laboratories Building at Canterbury Agricultural College.

Natasha Naus "The "Taranaki Type": C.H. Moore and fresh-air classroom design"

Charles Howard Moore was the Taranaki Education Board Architect from 1920-1943. During his tenure Moore developed an open air classroom design that he called the "Taranaki type"; a design that he claimed was an improvement on the "Fendalton type" of Christchurch. The first Taranaki "fresh air classroom" was opened in New Plymouth in 1928. The "Taranaki type" embraced the principles of natural light and fresh air in an innovative and thoughtful way that took into consideration climatic conditions and the needs of the users. Moore's distinctive design dominated classroom construction throughout the Taranaki region and many of them continue to be used for educational purposes.

The New Zealand Historic Places Trust has registered examples of the Taranaki fresh-air classroom and many have been identified by local councils for their

architectural and technological values. However, little has been written about C.H. Moore - his life, training, experiences, and influences. Was he a lone practitioner of the open-air design? Was his design 'revolutionary'? Were his classrooms successful?

Utilising a variety of archival sources, genealogical research, and comparative analysis, this paper will reveal a more detailed picture of C.H. Moore and examine his contribution to the design of educational buildings in New Zealand.

Wendy Pettigrew "Truth and Consequences"

During the 1920s, two stories appeared in *NZ Truth* that featured Wanganui men and court cases they were involved with. Both had consequences for the gentlemen concerned. The first resulted in the end of the career and family life of the Mayor, Charles Mackay, whose name was subsequently erased from Wanganui's history until his story re-emerged some 70 years later and began to generate a life of its own. Mackay was a strong supporter of the arts and the development of the Sarjeant Gallery but was made to confront his own demons by a returned soldier and sometime poet, Walter D'Arcy Cresswell. The magistrate's hearing into Mackay's attempted murder of Cresswell in May 1920 was quick as Mackay pleaded guilty and was sent to goal. The event horrified conservative Wanganui residents and severely affected the arts community. Today Mackay's story has a cult status, featuring in plays, books and journal articles with at least two biographical studies under way.

The second story involved the Wanganui architect, Clifford Newton Hood, who, by a strange quirk of fate, had a connection with Mackay and his wavering fortunes in 1920. Hood was no stranger to controversy but was an honest man, as evidenced by papers in his extensive work archives and information provided by his daughter, Audrey. He stood up for himself when challenged by others and made sure he got the credit, and payment, he was due for his architectural work. In 1927, this resulted in Hood's challenge to Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana when he sued the prophet for architectural fees due to him for the preparation of plans for the Temple at Ratana. Hood won his Supreme Court case in part and his standing in the Wanganui community did not appear to suffer at all in consequence of his action. Indeed, his relationship with his lawyers later resulted in one of his most important commissions, the Alexander Library, and he went on to design two other churches including the chapel at Nga Tawa school in Marton. Hood's story also sheds more light on the practicalities of working as an architect in Wanganui in the 1920s, a time of changing fortunes for many in what was, by then, the fifth largest urban area in New Zealand.

Tyson Schmidt "...the menace posed to public health by "insanitary pahs": Sir Maui Pomare's clean up of Maori architecture"

Apirana Ngata, Te Puea Herangi and Wiremu Ratana each left behind what Deidre Brown calls "a major architectural movement" – Ngata staged an architectural renaissance based on traditional practices, Te Puea looked to develop a blending of building practices, and Ratana pointed to a new direction altogether. Sir Maui Pomare, however, left no distinctive architecture that embodied his views of his people's future, and has largely been overlooked in New Zealand's architectural history as a result.

Pomare's crusade to improve the health of Maori communities, however, did have a pervasive and direct impact on Maori architecture. His beliefs and actions provide an important counterpoint to those of his contemporaries, helping us understand the full spectrum of architectural actions taken by Maori in the early twentieth-century. This paper examines Sir Maui Pomare's work and its architectural impact, placing it in the context of other influential Maori architectural movements of the time.

Eloise Taylor "The Lost *Upoko Poito*"

No building exemplified Napier's 1920s catch cry of "sunshine and sea breezes" better than *Upoko Poito*. An expansive and expensive private hospital on Marine Parade, it embraced the bay from which it took its name and was the modern alternative to the cramped and insanitary conditions at the aging hospital on the hill. *Upoko Poito's* story takes us back to a decade in which Napier looked enviously toward neighbouring Hastings, a town profiting by war time agricultural prices and with acres of land on which to grow. The harsh reality for Napier was that its aspirations - both to keep up with Hastings, and develop a reputation as a health resort were stymied by a tidal swamp that hemmed in the CBD.

Along with Napier's other significant building of 1920 – the Public Trust Office, *Upoko Poito* recalls a brief period of post-war economic optimism, a time when Napier had the money, and inclination to build big. Its design also represents the town's first significant foray into a Spanish style, echoing that which had been enthusiastically adopted by Hastings a full ten years earlier.

Built as 1920 dawned, *Upoko Poito* was gone in the opening of the next – a casualty not just of Hawkes Bay's devastating earthquake of 1931, but of its timing. Significantly damaged by the quake, but not irretrievably so, it would likely still be with us had the restoration of such a building not been too expensive to consider at the height of the Depression.

Linda Tyler ""The hours and times of your desire": Sholto Smith's romantic vision for *Colwyn* (1925)"

Early in 1920, French-born architect Sholto Smith (1881-1936) decided to abandon his Moose Jaw practice, and his Canadian wife and family, and emigrate to New Zealand. His decision seems to have been precipitated by a memorable encounter with a woman who would later become a celebrated pianist for the Auckland radio station 1YA, Phyllis Mary Hams (1895-1974). Sholto Smith had met Hams during World War One while he was on leave from the Canadian Expeditionary Force and visiting Colwyn Bay, North Wales. Sholto Smith's major contribution to Arts and Crafts Auckland, the house he designed as a gift for Phyllis Hams on the occasion of their marriage on 3 March 1925, was named *Colwyn* to memorialise their Welsh meeting place.

Despite only living in New Zealand for his last 16 years, Sholto Smith left a legacy of over 100 buildings. *Colwyn* was a well-placed advertisement for his domestic architecture, and his Arts and Crafts and Tudor house designs were soon in great demand throughout the building boom of the 1920s. Smith had arrived in Auckland on 17 March 1920 and immediately joined the practice of Thomas Coulthard Mullions (1878-1957) and C. Fleming McDonald. The latter had been the architect of the original Masonic Hotel in Napier (1897), and the firm originally specialised in hotels and commercial architecture using modern materials including reinforced concrete, but dressing the modernist structure with historicist references. Several of their inner city Auckland buildings such as the Waitemata and Manukau Council building on the corner of Shortland and Princes Street, Chancery Chambers in O'Connell Street and the Lister building on the corner of Victoria and Lorne Streets, still survive. After McDonald's death, Sholto Smith became a partner in the firm and encouraged Thomas Mullions to move into residential property development in central Auckland: Shortland Flats (1922) was a commercial venture where the architects formed a company owning shares in the building which comprised 24 flats designed to generate rental income.

But detached suburban domestic architecture was Sholto Smith's real passion. Before leaving Canada for fresh beginnings in New Zealand, he drew an architectural perspective for his ideal home. He titled this drawing *Dreamworld*, and his vision for this ideal house was to be realised in Auckland at 187 St Heliers Bay Road. For this house design, Sholto Smith drew inspiration from Canadian colleagues such as British Columbian architect Samuel Maclure (1860-1929) and from the British masters of the Arts and Crafts Movement including C.F.A. Voysey (1857-1951) and M.H. Baillie Scott (1865-1945). *Colwyn* is reminiscent of the latter's *Corrie Wood* (1908) in Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire in its adventurous open planning.

A little bit of Olde Englande recreated in the South Pacific for his homesick new wife, *Colwyn* was Sholto Smith's perfect *Dreamworld*, right down to the text on the wooden mantelpiece over the fireplace. The quote inscribed there is taken from the beginning of Shakespeare's sonnet 57, and seems addressed by Smith to his thirty-year-old bride: "Being your slave, what should I do but tend upon the hours and times of your desire?" Epitomising the romantic archetype, *Colwyn* remains a fine example of the type of Arts and Crafts dwelling that well-to-do Aucklanders aspired to inhabit in the 1920s.

Peter Wood "C. Reginald Ford: an account of his practice and influence, 1919-1931"

Throughout the 1920s the best known architect in New Zealand was William Henry Gummer. Handsome, charismatic and precociously talented it isn't surprising that he cast such a shadow over other architects of the period. Unfortunately none was more hidden than his own business partner in the dominant firm of Gummer & Ford. Charles Reginald Ford would be the first to praise his colleague's great talent - in Gummer's obituary Ford described him as a master of neo-classical forms, and, oddly enough, loosely compared him to Mies van der Rohe - but he also wrote that the success of their firm was grounded in "a true partnership." It is troubling then that Ford has been so easily neglected. It isn't as though his was an unremarkably career, nor life, and in many ways he, more than Gummer, dominated architectural practice in the 1920s. From his appointment as President of the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1921, to reporting on the Napier earthquake in 1931, Ford spent the decade of the 1920s in full and complete command of New Zealand's architectural scene but what he did not do was leave in his wake a legacy of buildings designed by his hand. In Gummer & Ford that was Gummer's job, and even Ford seemed happily resigned to his place as the administrative support. Yet this model of quiet compliance is at odds with both Ford's past, and his influence (about which I will provide some detail). However the principle theme of this paper concerns one area of activity where Ford more than out performed Gummer: writing. From his first article on architectural competition in 1919, to his observations on small houses in 1931, Ford was quite possibly the most frequent and pointed commentator of the period. His was a voice of reasoned authority and his writing establishes a useful baseline to appreciate architectural practice of the day. In this work I offer a critical review of Ford's contribution to architectural discourse through the 1920s in which I tease out a version of C. Reginald Ford that is more personally complex, politically astute and architectural influential than his typecasting as a "backroom bureaucrat" suggests. In conclusion I observe an odd paradox that the celebrated buildings of Gummer have become neo-classical anachronisms while the strategic work of Ford, with its subtle influences, remains an active if unrecognised influence in architectural practice in New Zealand.