A good news story for Wellington’s heritage was the reopening of St Mary of the Angels in Boulcott Street a few weeks ago. The much loved French Gothic-style church, opened in 1922, was closed following the July 2013 earthquake for strengthening work. Engineers later concluded the structure only met 15 to 20 per cent of the building code.

The project included digging up the church floor to install new ground beam buttresses. While this was going on archaeologist, Kevin Jones, took the opportunity to dig for artefacts. He found several objects associated with the church’s beginning, not least were some wooden piles from the original 1843 church. The building’s ornate columns were also replaced with stronger replicas; anchors were used to tie the foundations to bedrock; and a new copper roof installed. It now meets 100 per cent of the code. Over the four-year timeframe some 500 tradespeople worked on the site.

The $9.5 million restoration was led by tenacious parish priest, Father Barry Scannel, and funded by a wide range of public and private donations. Unlike similar work on other buildings, where bracing work is highly visible, all the strengthening work at St Mary is hidden. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the whole project is that the church looks much the same as it did before.
Paramount Theatre — Priscilla Williams

The Paramount Theatre recently announced it will close in September. Showing its first film in August 1917, it is the only survivor of a number of theatres designed by James Bennie, and is Wellington's oldest-surviving purpose-built cinema. It screened the first “talkie” shown in Australasia in 1929 and has been the home of the Wellington Film Society for many years. The theatre’s façade is authentic above veranda-level and contributes to the Wellington City Council's listed Courtenay Place Heritage Area. It is also a Category 2 historic place entered on the NZ Heritage List.

In 1927 the bold, Neoclassical parapet with 'PARAMOVNT' at centre was added to the façade. The interior originally comprised a two level auditorium with 1511 seats, plus retail tenancies on the ground floor and office space at the front of the first floor. The first major changes were made to the interior in 1926, then the 1960s, and again in 2004. Today the original seating for some 1200 people on two levels is now reduced to 450 in what was the circle and the movie screen is on top of the former orchestra pit. The ground floor space was rented as a night-club, but is now empty.

The current owners, based overseas, are looking to sell the property and in June 2016 obtained a resource consent for a ‘boutique hotel,’ which is valid for five years. An alternative plan being considered is to convert it to office space. Both of these proposals would involve destruction of the impressive, albeit presently rather shabby, auditorium. The current lessees of the theatre have been asked to vacate by September and to remove all the seating and equipment.

Unless there is a change of plan, this would mean the closure of a cinema, which is not only Wellington’s oldest, but also one of the few in New Zealand which predate 1920. On a more practical level, it would mean that the various film groups and many other community groups which use this theatre would be homeless as there is a serious lack of mid-sized theatre space in Wellington with good access. It would be most unfortunate to lose this heritage cinema when its space is needed for so many events.

Photograph courtesy of Vivienne Morrell.
Gordon Wilson Flats — Ben Schrader

The Gordon Wilson Flats at the bottom of The Terrace look forlorn and derelict. In this state it’s perhaps too easy to reach the conclusion the Modernist structure is not worth saving. Yet this is what an Architectural Centre appeal to Environment Court is attempting to do. Victoria University of Wellington bought the building from Housing New Zealand after it was closed in 2012 following an engineer’s report stating that its facade was structurally unsafe.

The university wants the building removed from Wellington’s district plan so that it can be demolished. It then proposes to land bank the site before proceeding with plans to develop a ‘gateway’ to its Kelburn campus – it’s uncertain what this project would comprise. The university claims the building has only moderate heritage significance and is too decrepit to be upgraded and used for another purpose.

The Architectural Centre disagrees. It believes it has high heritage significance; that the structural issues can be solved; and it could be readily adapted to a new use – not least for much-needed student accommodation. It is also concerning that the removal of the building from the district plan could set a precedent for delisting other heritage buildings. HPW supports the appeal and has made a contribution to its cost.

I was asked to research the social history of the building as an expert witness. I believe the building’s historical importance has been over-shadowed by it more famous predecessor: the Category 1 Dixon Street Flats. My findings suggest the Gordon Wilson Flats are on par with the Dixon Street structure. My and the evidence of other experts will be tested in the Environment Court in June.

Whatever the outcome the process has increased our knowledge of the building and its importance in Wellington’s history. The university is contributing to this process by commissioning an historian to interview former tenants and write an oral history. We will keep you informed of the progress of the appeal.

Travelling Codes — Nigel Issacs

In March 1921, American mining engineer Herbert Hoover became US Secretary of Commerce. One of his early actions was to establish a “Building Code Committee” with a goal of improving the productivity of house construction. In July 1922 the Committee reported its “Recommended Minimum Requirements for Small Dwelling Construction,” a widely distributed, compact booklet.

In New Zealand, also in March 1921, a recent graduate of the University of Auckland was appointed as the first Engineer of Forest Products in the new Forestry Department. In 1923, A.R. (known as Pat) Entrican was set to work reviewing the many building by-laws with a goal of supporting the more efficient use of native timber. He soon set up a national conference to develop a standard national building by-law, which was held in Wellington in June 1924. As a model for the NZ conference, Entrican used the US publication, modifying it to suit NZ conditions. The NZ conference recommendations were widely distributed and generally adopted, even before the 1931 Napier earthquake.

Fulbright NZ provided an award, which with support from Victoria University of Wellington, permitted the exploration from November 2016 through mid-February 2017 of the US code archives. This involved travel to West Branch, Iowa (the birthplace of Herbert Hoover and site of his presidential archives); St Paul, Minnesota (the home of an architect on the committee); Madison, Wisconsin (Forest Products Laboratory); Washington D.C. (National Archives and Records Administration, the Library of Congress, and the National Institute of Science and Technology which had hosted the committee); and San Francisco (Herbert Hoover Archives). Papers in these archives revealed the background research and discussions. These supported the creation of the reportedly first code to provide minimum acceptable requirements. The records show the care taken by the committee and its supporting agencies to obtain quality research data to support their work as well as their extensive industry and code official consultation. They also document political lobbying from sectors of the industry unhappy with the code recommendations.

The 1922 code coverage was wide. Topics included not only the obvious fire and structural issues, but also moisture control, thermal and acoustic insulation, snow and wind loads, earthquakes and vermin. Interestingly, the 1924 NZ code did not even mention earthquakes or thermal insulation. Although not widely recognised today, the 1922 code is the direct ancestor of the modern “International Building Code” used throughout the US. Over the coming months, the development of the US code and its links to the NZ code will be further explored.

Hutt Valley Wharves — Hannah Clark

The future of the Hutt Valley wharves at Petone, Days Bay, Rona Bay, or Pt Howard is again in question and it is hard to fathom that these places, which hold so much public meaning and memory, could be lost.

Petone Wharf was first built by the Great Meat Company in 1883 to enable the shipping of meat to Wellington and coal to Petone. The goods shipped between Wellington and Petone expanded for a short time, but the completion of Wellington’s Glasgow Wharf around 1900 greatly reduced the number of shipments coming to Petone Wharf. For more than a century now, the wharf has been mainly used as a place of recreation: hosting picnics, walkers and fishermen/women, along with being a ferry stop on the odd occasion. As resident, Hope August, recalls, echoing comments by several people, “It [the wharf] is part of who we are. As kids we grew up jumping off here, fishing and strolling, sun tanning, it’s the best place to be”.

The Eastbourne wharves have a similar hold on the community. Days Bay wharf, and surrounding area, has been the centre of recreational activities for locals and tourists from the turn of the twentieth century. The legacy of being an excursion destination continues into the modern day, with families and friends venture out on a fine day to enjoy the sun, water and atmosphere. The wharf is the docking point for the East by West ferry, enabling the public to skip commuting traffic and sail across the harbour to work, along with providing direct transport to Matiu/Somes Island. Pt Howard and Rona
Bay have served as anchors for the development of transport and industry in the Hutt Valley, but do not hold the same sentimental place as Days Bay.

Discussion surrounding the fate of these wharves is nothing new – their restoration or demolition appears regularly within the Hutt City Council’s agenda. However, the discussion has become more serious because of damage sustained during the November earthquake. Petone Wharf is currently closed, while the Eastbourne wharves remain open. Local council has released an extensive report outlining the various expensive options for restoring or replacing the wharves in question. Rona and Days Bay wharves are nationally recognised as Category 2 historic places on the NZ Heritage List and this status may influence the council’s ultimate decision about them. Petone Wharf is not entered on the Heritage List; however, it is locally recognised as a heritage site. While their fates are uncertain, there is no question that they hold a special place within the Hutt Valley community.

Hannah Clark is a guest contributor for the newsletter. Hannah completed her Masters in History from Victoria University of Wellington in 2016 and is a resident of Lower Hutt. HPW would like to thank her for the great article. If anyone else would like to contribute to the next newsletter, please get in touch with us via email.

**Wellington Wharves — Vivienne Morrell**

Plans to demolish a historic wharf in Evans Bay have been put on hold for the time being. After a submission from 11-year-old Alex Randall, the council agreed fishing was an important recreational activity and deferred a decision until more information had been received about other wharves in the area.¹

The Evan’s Bay wharf is part of the Patent Slip entry on the NZ Heritage List (Category 2) and it is also listed by the Wellington City Council. The last three bays of the wharf are collapsing into the sea and structural work will need to be done if it is not demolished.

Evans Bay is the site of the first Patent Slip in Wellington and indeed New Zealand. The Patent Slip—consisting of two slipways built in 1873 and 1922, respectively—was designed to accommodate large ships over land for maintenance and repairs and is considered a great engineering feat. The 61-metre wharf was erected in 1912. The Maritime Archaeological Association of New Zealand (MAANZ) was one of the main advocates for zoning it as a heritage area.² There is now interpretation signage in the area.


Photograph courtesy of Vivienne Morrell.
Since the notice about the possible demolition of the Basin Reserve’s Museum Stand (NZ Heritage List, Category 2) in our December 2016 newsletter, there has been considerable media attention with arguments for and against its retention.

Mayor Justin Lester stated in a Dominion Post article dated April 19 that retention of the Museum Stand will be costly and “I’m not sure that can be achieved.” Deputy Mayor Paul Eagle added “In terms of its heritage status, the stand had not been identified as a ‘must-save’ for Wellingtonians.” It was reported that for Cricket Wellington and the Basin Reserve Trust, the Museum Stand is a hindrance to expanding the Basin’s seating capacity to attract international tests. Wellingtonians expressed mixed opinions about the stand’s future in letters responding to the article. Some mirrored Lester’s and Cricket Wellington’s views, yet some notable opinions, including hat of heritage consultant Michael Kelly, called for its full or partial retention.

Historic Places Wellington is concerned about images of the building being fenced off and the under maintained exterior being used to spread uninformed opinions regarding its heritage value. Thankfully, HPW has received images of the Museum Stand’s wonderful interior that show its considerable heritage value without the scaffolding and fencing. HPW is supportive of the Museum Stand’s retention and inclusion in the redevelopment of the Basin. Public consultation on the stand’s future is set to go out in August.
The Members’ Trip to Paraparaumu and Waikanae

Over 40 people went on a bus tour of the Paraparaumu and Waikanae areas on 26 March 2017. Led by local historian Anthony Dreaver and archaeologist Mary O’Keefe, the tour covered early settlement sites, urupa, viewing points, and finished at the Waikanae museum. Anthony prepared a very interesting booklet for participants on the ‘four Waikanaes’ – the different settlement phases and locations of Waikanae. After viewing Kapiti Island and hearing some of its history, we next went to the site of the main Te Ati Awa village from 1824 to the 1840s, Kenakena (or Waikanae) pa, and site of the first church built in 1843.

The next stop was to view the Waikanae estuary, old Ferry Inn, and Arapawaiti cemetery reserve, where the family of the first ferryman are buried. Mary O'Keefe who was the archaeologist for the expressway project also gave interesting information about some of the things she found – and didn’t find – during the building of the new expressway. From Takamore urupa we viewed the site of the second ‘Waikanae’, Tuku Rakau. There was no organised Pakeha settlement until the railway went through in 1886. The trip finished at the former Post Office – now the Kapiti Coast Museum.

Upcoming Events

Hutt Bus Trip. Sunday, 21 May. 10:30am to 3:30pm.  
Meet at the Waterloo Railway Station at 10:30 am.

The bus will be parked on the Cambridge Tce side of the station and will depart at 10:45am. Cost is $20 (or $25 for non-members) payable on the day. Please bring your own lunch.

Please RSVP by Thursday 11th May to wgtm@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz or phone Vivienne Morrell at (04) 383 7660.

We will visit and have someone speak to us at: Christ Church in Taita, The Blockhouse, Trentham, Golder’s Cottage, and St John’s Church in Upper Hutt.

- Christ Church is the oldest church still standing in Wellington. Its first service was held on 1 January 1854. It is a Category 1 listed historic building.

- The Blockhouse was a defensive structure built in 1860 (also Category 1). We are lucky that there will be an exhibition on The Blockhouse at Expressions Gallery in Upper Hutt, which we will be able to see after our visit to the Blockhouse.

- Golder’s House (or Cottage) is a Category 2 listed building. Golder’s House and associated outbuildings provide valuable insight into colonial domestic life. The house was built in 1876-77 by John Golder. The property also contains various outbuildings, a water pump, and a food store (also Category 2). We can have lunch here – please
bring your own. Hot water will be available if you want to have a hot drink, but please bring the other items (coffee, tea, mug, etc).

- We will finish the trip with a visit to St John’s Anglican Church – a Category 2 listed building dating from 1863.

As you can see, our focus is on early Hutt buildings – 1850s to 1870s. The bus will return people to Waterloo Station about 3:30pm.

“Wellington’s Grand Opera House,” a lecture by Julia Thompson Thursday, 13 July. 7pm. Victoria University of Wellington, Schools of Architecture & Design, 139 Vivian St (entrance off Dunlop Terrace), Lecture Theatre 1.

The Wellington Opera House at 109-117 Manners Street (Category 1, List No. 1432) has a colourful history. Designed by an Australian architect, William Pitt, the building's construction was overseen by his brother-in-law, Albert Liddy. The building featured natural ventilation as well as an innovative sliding roof and sliding ceiling system above the main seating area.

Within 15 years of construction this system was no longer in use and the sliding roof was rumoured to have only ever opened once, although the mechanics remain. Structural renovations, including seismic strengthening in 1977-1982, have blocked most of the original natural ventilation inlets but no new system has been added. The presentation will further explore some of the fascinating history of this important building.

Julia Thompson is undertaking her doctorate in building science at the School of Architecture Victoria University of Wellington. Her research is investigating the history of natural ventilation design in auditoria, and the feasibility of reintroducing such systems in present day.

Announcements

An evening class on Wellington’s architectural heritage will be offered over four Tuesdays in June at Wellington High School. This well-illustrated course will give an outline of Wellington’s history since 1840 and in particular will look at some of the important buildings that illustrate different periods of its development. At the end of the course instructor Vivienne Morrell will lead a walk around the CBD to look at some of the buildings discussed during the course.

For more information and enrolment, see: http://www.cecwellington.ac.nz/courses/1142-city-stories-wellingtons-architectural-heritage.

Maritime Archaeological Association of NZ
2017 Speakers Programme

24 May           Sharon Evans: “Three Names, Three Captains: My Great- Great-Great Grandfather’s Ship”
21 June          Rudi Mack: “Tasman’s 375th anniversary”
19 July          John Brown: “Life at sea with USSCo, Cook Strait ferries etc
16 August        Bridget Buxton: “Recent Mediterranean Underwater Discoveries”
20 September     Bob McDougall: “The Night Hitler’s Navy Came to Wellington”
18 October       John Ackrill, 75th Anniversary of the sinking of the Awatea

All talks are held at 7:30pm at the Museum of Wellington. Supper follows

For more information, contact Mary at mary@heritagesolutions.net.nz