Historic Places Wellington Reconstituted

The last step in making HPW a fully independent society took place in December with a committee decision that the new Rules should come into effect on 1 January 2015. This process was explained in our previous newsletter though a mistake in the second line of the lead article referring to HPA rather than HPW may have left members somewhat confused about what is a complex process. We are relieved to be at the end of this at last. We are now responsible for our own membership and have contacted all those whose subscriptions are due in the first half of the year under the transitional arrangements explained also in the last newsletter.

Seconded to the committee since the AGM is Vivienne Morrell who has an MA in Art History and a background in heritage work including at HPT. In a later newsletter, we shall have details of a course she is offering on Wellington’s architectural heritage.

Finally and importantly we now have our own website which is www.historicplaceswellington.org. It is still bedding in, but should assist members and others to find information about HPW more easily.

Harcourts Building

Our last Newsletter reported the good news that the Environment Court had once again declined consent to demolish this Category One listed building. This decision followed a second hearing by the Court.

The owner Mark Dunajtschik has since announced that he will retain ownership of the building and will carry out the strengthening work required. This decision is welcome, although it has to be pointed out that the combined expenses of the parties to the various Court proceedings would have gone some way to meeting the strengthening costs, which are likely to be substantial.

Former GHQ Defence Building

During 2015 when New Zealand marks the centenary of Gallipoli, we hope the spotlight will be on this greatly overlooked heritage building at the corner of Taranaki and Buckle Streets. In response to the letters we have written to the Minister of Defence and to the Minister for the Arts, Culture and Heritage, both Ministers have assured us that the building has a temporary reprieve and will be spruced up in time for the opening of
Pukeahu National Memorial Park on 25 April. As we go to print, the rusty roof and spouting have been painted and the wooden hoarding taken off the great coat of arms, although more needs to be done to make it fully presentable and worthy of the place it occupies as the earliest remaining Defence building left on the Mt Cook site.

Ministers have been careful however not to commit themselves to preserving this building beyond the ANZAC commemorations and thus the threat of demolition still hovers over it. There is a certain irony that in this year of commemoration, one of the WW1 built heritage symbols may be destroyed. Built as a General Stores Building in 1911-12, it was part of New Zealand’s preparation for an expected war and complemented other military buildings then clustered on the Mt Cook site and which no longer exist. The building features in the background of dramatic photographs taken in November 1913 when the waterfront strikers confronted the Special Constables.

Historic Places Wellington will be working on this issue over the next two months with the other two agencies who are similarly anxious to save the building; they are Wellington Civic Trust and Mt Cook Mobilised.

**Titahi Bay Marines Building**

The Porirua City Council has voted to demolish the hall, which is an important surviving building from the presence of the US Marines in World War 2. The Council had commissioned surveys of public views on the building. Although the findings have not been released, we understand that they showed majority public support for keeping the hall.

If the Council proceeds with its demolition plans, it will need to seek a resource consent. As the Council owns the hall, any application will need to be heard by independent commissioners. Historic Places Wellington will make submissions opposing demolition.

**Heritage New Zealand**

The recent death of renowned architect Ian Athfield is a great loss to Wellington and to heritage work throughout New Zealand. In recognition of his knowledge of the place heritage buildings held in society he was one of the eight Ministerial appointees to the Heritage New Zealand Board and was similarly appointed to the Maori Heritage Board following the passage of the Heritage New Zealand Act in May 2014. His architectural projects in Wellington will be an enduring legacy of his vision.

The new General Manager for HNZ’s Central Region has taken up her position. She is Claire Craig who comes from Napier and was at one stage the legal advisor for HPT. For the past 12 years she has been working with the National Trust and English Heritage in the UK. We look forward to working with her and her team at the Regional Office.

Heritage New Zealand has decided to add to its Heritage List the Freyberg Pool on Oriental Parade, Wellington, giving it Category 1 status. HPW supported the recommendation for this status.
Waterfront walk with Michael Kelly

On 1 February twenty-four members joined heritage historian Michael Kelly for a walk along the Wellington waterfront, beginning at Shed 21 (now apartments) and ending near Clyde Quay wharf (more apartments). Michael explained the three main things to remember about the waterfront were reclamations, harbour board and wool. While this was the main theme, small pieces of history were particularly fascinating.

At Shed 21 (built 1910 by the Wellington Harbour Board [WHB] to store wool) Michael pointed out where the so-called ‘accumulator’ was located. This was a hydraulic lift – accumulated water pressure drove lifts that moved goods between floors. Hydraulic power used to be the main source of power on the waterfront. Next to the former WHB Queen's Wharf offices (now housing the Academy of Fine Arts) is the memorial fountain to the dog ‘Paddy the Wanderer’ – perhaps unknown to some members is its use of stone from London’s Waterloo Bridge. Most of the historic buildings around the waterfront now have alternative uses – many housing apartments or cafes/restaurants, including the wooden building moved some years ago from Greta Point. Exceptionally the wooden Star Boating Club and Wellington Rowing Club buildings, although moved from their original sites, retain their original uses – although they also double as reception venues. The walk ended in a rare burst of rain at the sundial in the small park near Clyde Quay wharf; this sundial is also built of stone from Waterloo Bridge.

This walk is a useful reminder of the amount and quality of built heritage along the city’s waterfront, preserved because of the passionate advocacy from Wellingtonians. During our walk Michael stressed the wealth of the Harbour Board, demonstrated by the opulence of their main buildings. All the major buildings and sheds, as well as the iron gates and railings on the waterfront, are covered by individual heritage listings. A proposal has been under consideration for some time to register the whole harbour board area from Aotea Quay to Clyde Quay Wharf as a Historic Area. Given the extent of this proposal and the number of buildings covered, negotiations between Heritage New Zealand and stakeholders are somewhat complex but we hope they will be concluded in the near future.
Erskine College, Island Bay

One of the most difficult and long-standing heritage issues in Wellington is the future of Erskine College, owned by property developer Ian Cassels of the Wellington Company. This Category 1 listed building is red-stickered and remains empty, vulnerable to claims of “demolition by neglect”. Negotiations over the future of Erskine are made more complex by the fact it is subject to a protection order by SECT (Save Erskine College Trust). SECT is unusual in being a non-governmental heritage protection authority.

Mr Cassels has agreed to a site visit by the HPW Committee as we wish to be better informed about the current state of these important heritage buildings. There has been a rumour in the media that an Open Day for the public may be held in March. If so, we urge all members who can do so take the opportunity to visit the college and see for themselves both the size and quality of the buildings under discussion and their current state of repair. Another recent and possibly related development is the allocation of $10,000 from Wellington City Council’s Built Heritage Fund to enable an earthquake strengthening design to be developed.

Notable alumni of Erskine College include the Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, Hon Maggie Barry and Wellington City Councillor Nicola Young. Both support resolution of this difficult issue.

Members’ Trips and Events

Walk around Seddon’s State Houses - Patrick Street Petone 11.00am, Sunday 8 March.

Historic Places Wellington, with support from Patrick Street Heritage Group and Petone Historical Society, will host a walk in Petone to see the first state houses built in New Zealand. Prime Minister Richard Seddon’s Workers’ Dwellings Act in 1905 was followed by a competition for designs of high quality and artistic but low cost houses. Seven different designs were chosen from leading architects, and 33 houses were built in 1906 on the sand hills near Petone Beach. All except one are still standing and lived in. The Patrick Street Workers’ Dwellings Precinct, Petone, is protected as a Heritage Area registered by the Historic Places Trust.

Our guide will be Sylvia Allan, a town and environmental planner with a long involvement in heritage protection. She has been closely involved in the identification and protection of the Patrick Street houses and the development of the precinct provision in the Hutt City District Plan. She will be accompanied by Tui Lewis, Hutt City Councillor. Sylvia and Tui and their families have been residents of Patrick Street for over 30 years. The group will meet at Alfred Memelink’s Artspace Gallery, 223 Petone Esplanade, corner of Patrick Street, any time from 10.00 am, for an opportunity to look around the gallery at artwork by local artists, featuring a John Rundle Memorial exhibition. A limited number of booklets by Barbara Fill about the houses will be available to purchase. We will set off at 11.00 on the guided walk for about an hour. Walkers will then be free to explore Petone cafes for lunch.

For any enquiries, please phone Ruth Mansell, 589 1707.

Possible Kapiti Coast Trip

Plans are being made for a members’ visit to the Kapiti region. This will be led by well-known Kapiti historian Anthony Dreaver. Further information, and the date, will be advised by email.