Thousands Attend Wellington City Heritage Week — David Batchelor

Over 4,000 people attended events of all types for the inaugural Wellington City Heritage Week. Tours of the Wrights Hill Fortress and open day at St Gerard’s Monastery each attracted over 1000 people. Smaller scale events such as Katherine Mansfield House and Garden’s Katherine’s Kitchen and Jane Tolerton’s Wellington Women of World War One reached capacity.
Visits on Monday to Antrim House started the week, with Victoria University of Wellington, Museum and Heritage Studies students conducting tours in the afternoon. Over 600 people enjoyed the twenty-minute tours of the 1904 house built by Robert Hannah, the founder of Hannah’s shoes, and his wife Hannah Hannah. While lines were long due to the high demand, the students ran the day safely and smoothly with attendees saying the wait was “absolutely worth it.”

On Tuesday, the Panel Event and Public Discussion at the Adam Auditorium of the City Gallery saw representatives from the Wellington City Council, Heritage New Zealand, the New Zealand Planning Institute, and the New Zealand Institute of Architects discuss pressing heritage issues of conserving modernism, earthquake-prone buildings, non-tangible heritage, and advocacy, chaired by Lindsay Shelton of Wellington Scoop. The biggest audience reaction came when panel member David Kernohan said that “we should stop using the term ‘earthquake-prone building’ as there is no such thing… New Zealand is earthquake-prone, not its buildings.”

Karori Cemetery Tours guided 101 people through the landscape throughout the week. Tour operator Barbara Mulligan provided a fantastic service and the weather was splendid. Nga Taonga Sound & Vision hosted great film showcases from Thursday through to Saturday. Heritage New Zealand’s Central Region General Manager, Claire Craig, gave a special introduction on Thursday screening of the film Hometown Boomtown (1983). Other events such as Mary O’Keeffe’s Archaeological Walking Tour, Government House Guided Tours, and the New Zealand Cricket Museum and Basin Reserve Tours booked out well in advance.

Hosts reported that attendees travelled from Christchurch, Wairarapa, Hawkes Bay, and Auckland to attend Wellington City Heritage Week. The attendees were impressed with the high quality events and said they are looking forward to next year’s week. Wellington City Heritage Week was organised by Historic Places Wellington with support from Heritage New Zealand, the Wellington City Council, and Museums Wellington. Historic Places Wellington will start organising Wellington City Heritage Week 2018 early in the new year.
The Annual General Meetings of Historic Places Aotearoa (HPA) rotate around Member Organisations and it was the turn of South Canterbury Historical Society, an affiliated Member, to host the 7th AGM. Of the seven Member Organisations, neither Central Otago nor Manawatu were able to be present but HPW had four representatives including Nigel Isaacs who is on the Executive and Priscilla Williams, Chairman, who was the delegate. This level of representation and our active participation in the meeting is appropriate given that HPW is the largest member and contributes a quarter of the budget.

A major topic of concern, and one highlighted by Hawkes Bay which also is a large contributor to the budget, is the failure of HPA in its six years of existence to attract many member organisations or attain an adequate national coverage. The current members in order of size are: Wellington, Hawkes Bay, Tairawhiti (Gisborne), Manawatu (a new member), Canterbury, Mid-Canterbury, Central Otago (whose future is uncertain), and South Canterbury, an affiliated member. Under the old system of branch societies of the Historic Places Trust, nation-wide coverage was provided by twenty-one organisations, so HPA is probably representing only one third of the country.

Heritage New Zealand, which is keen to encourage active NGO support for heritage, shares this concern. In an interesting speech to the meeting, the Chief Executive, Andrew Coleman, announced a contribution of $3,000 to HPA on the condition that this money was to be used to attract more member organisations. Hawkes Bay followed up with conditions of numbers and deadlines which will be a challenge for the Executive in the coming year. Mr Coleman’s speech also addressed the restructuring of HNZ which is based on respect, trust and confidence by spreading out more work to the Regional Offices and less monitoring by the Central Office. He envisages also more emphasis on training and development and also more responsibility for heritage operational programmes.

The one motion put to the meeting was from HPW and designed to encourage greater transparency and simplicity to the budgeting process – which might also make it easier to get new members. The Executive countered with an alternative proposal which met most of our objectives so in the interest of cooperation we withdrew our motion in favour of theirs. The governance structure of HPA is a difficult one and highly dependent on the personal capabilities of the Chairman. We admire the vigour and enthusiasm of the current Chairman, James Blackburne from Tairawhiti, and are pleased that he has been re-elected. The current Executive was also re-elected, including Nigel Isaacs from HPW.

Our hosts also organised two fascinating talks on heritage subjects. One was from the Chairman of the Timaru Civic Trust, David McBride, who gave a case study on the Landing Service Building, a heritage building at risk of demolition which the trust acquired and restored at some cost. It is now a landmark in central Timaru and a valuable commercial property which is generating considerable income for the trust. Our meeting was held in this building.
Given its healthy bank balance the Trust is now negotiating to buy another heritage property in the CBD and has also been active in trying to save others from demolition.

The other talk was by Nigel Gilkison, an architect from Historic Places Mid-Canterbury, and was on Blue Heritage Plaques. Those who have visited London and other places in Europe where they are used will be familiar with the scheme whereby these plaques are installed on heritage buildings to help identify, promote and protect them. Nigel’s extensive feasibility study has covered all aspects including the construction techniques and material options. It is an idea which we think should be considered in a national context so you may hear more about heritage name plaques in the near future.

On the day after the meeting David McBride took us on a brisk but intensive walk around the heritage buildings of Timaru’s CBD giving us an informative, amusing commentary. Seventy buildings with their architects were on his hand-out, testifying to the number of such buildings still there and the variety of architecture. For Wellingtonians it was a treat to see the many brick and masonry buildings in good condition. On the downside it was sad to see one particularly important and iconic building, the Hydro Grand Hotel which occupies a commanding situation, has been at the losing end of a heritage case and will almost certainly be pulled down.

Finally the HPW group was treated to a personal tour of the South Island Organ Company’s premises where we saw a huge organ from the Nelson School of Music under current restoration. This is the largest organ restoration company in Australasia and it is responsible for keeping in good condition all these heritage items throughout New Zealand, both large and small, as well as many in Australia. You will probably recall that sadly two of its staff were killed in Christchurch while working in the Durham St Methodist Church during an earthquake and we saw some of the twisted pipes from that disaster. We are fortunate to have in New Zealand the specialist skills of dedicated people who can restore these beautiful instruments.
A busy 2017 for Historic Places Wellington — David Batchelor

The year 2017 has been a busy one for Historic Places Wellington (HPW). We have strengthened the voice for heritage in the Wellington Region, grew our relationships with other community groups, and worked closely with local and national authorities.

In March, HPW Committee Member Dr Ben Schrader spoke to a full room at the City Gallery’s Adam Auditorium on topics in his book The Big Smoke: New Zealand Cities 1840-1920. He was also interviewed on Radio New Zealand. That month, HPW also provided a tour to Waikanae where Kapiti historian Anthony Dreaver and archaeologist Mary O’Keeffe guided attendees.

In May, HPW held a bus trip to Christ Church in Taita, the Blockhouse in Trentham, and Golder’s Cottage and St John’s Church in Upper Hutt.

In June, HPW provided a donation to the Architectural Centre’s efforts to save the Gordon Wilson Flats. This Modernist building located on The Terrace divided public opinion about heritage but brought to light important discussions about the significance of Modernist heritage and social values.

August saw the HPW Annual General Meeting held at St Andrew’s on The Terrace, and as noted elsewhere in this newsletter, October saw Wellington City Heritage Week be a great success with thousands of attendees. The week was primarily organised by HPW to provide the community a platform to celebrate and discover Wellington’s heritage.

Running throughout the year there have also been many ongoing activities by HPW. Heritage Wairarapa was established with the help of Priscilla Williams from the HPW Committee. Heritage Wairarapa serves a similar purpose as HPW as they are a community group who advocate for heritage matters. HPW will look to further build the relationship between the regions. Also, HPW has been coordinating with Save the Basin to protect the 1924 Museum Stand from demolition as part of the Redevelop the Basin Council-led initiative.

Historic Places Wellington is only as strong as our members’ support so we thank you and are looking forward to next year.

Upcoming Events

Wednesday, 15 November, 7:30pm, Thorndon School Hall, 20 Turnbull Street “Residential E and the ‘saving’ of Thorndon,” a talk by Dr Ben Schrader

Join us for Ben’s rescheduled talk that explores pioneering preservation advocacy in Thorndon with the successful in the creation of New Zealand’s first historic district.
Friday, 1 December
“Nothing to be ashamed of in a good nail”: New Zealand architecture in the 1910s

A one-day symposium held under the auspices of the Centre for Building Performance Research, Victoria University, Wellington. This annual symposium will be held at Victoria University – for abstracts, the programme, and registration, see: https://www.victoria.ac.nz/architecture/centres/cbpr/conferences.

Announcements

Note about subscription payments — It would be a great help to our treasurer if you would first check your bank account statement to see whether a payment has been made for the coming subscription year before emailing HPW with that query. Thanks!

Home of Compassion Chapel and Visitor Centre, Island Bay – Vivienne Morrell

Some of you visited the Home of Compassion on our Island Bay visits in November 2015 (see the Past events page of our website for some photos: www.historicplaceswellington.org/past-events/). Even if you didn’t come on the visit, you may be interested to know there have been some new developments there. There is now an extension to the chapel which houses Suzanne Aubert’s resting place – the lovely window in the extension continues the connection with the Drawbridge family. The late artist John Drawbridge designed the windows in the chapel and one of his sons (Tony) and Tanya Ashken (John’s widow) worked with Olaf from Pukerua Glass to interpret in glass a John Drawbridge watercolour painting that also hangs at the Home of Compassion. This is the main window in the extension as seen in the photo below. A small shop and cafe also complement the visitor centre, which tells the history of Mother Aubert and the Sisters.

The visitor hours are Weds-Sat 10am to 3pm and Sunday 12 to 2:30pm. The address is 2 Rhine Street, Island Bay. And for anyone who might be travelling in the North Island this summer, the Home of Compassion and Mother Aubert have a connection with Jerusalem/Hiruharama on the Whanganui River where the church and convent building are both Heritage New Zealand Category 1 listed buildings.

The resting place of Suzanne Aubert (1835-1926); Home of Compassion, Island Bay. www.compassion.org.nz