

# Newsletter

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## EVENTS

17 November, The Heritage of Willis Street +  
Environs Walk, 2pm  
30 January 2019 + 21 February 2019, Vivienne  
Morrell, 'Secret Art Walks', 10am

## One Category 1 Building Gone; Others Soon to Follow



The demolition of Erskine's Main Building began in October (Image: Vivienne Morrell)

Demolition of the Category 1 Erskine College's Main Building began last month and it will be all but dust by the end of this one. It's a tragic outcome for built heritage in Wellington and highlights again the weakness of legislation purportedly designed to protect it. As local

resident and heritage practitioner, Elizabeth Cox, pointed out in [her blog](#) on the matter, the building's destruction

is a salutary lesson in the heritage protection our heritage buildings really have in New Zealand. This building had the trifecta – it was listed on the city council's district plan as a heritage item, it was listed by Heritage New Zealand as a Category 1 historic place, and it was the subject of a Heritage Order. And yet it still comes down.

The Main Building's loss is made more poignant by the imminent demolition of half the buildings in another Category 1 historic place: the Karori Campus. A Category 1 listing demands a very high threshold from Heritage New Zealand and most communities see it as an honour to have such places within them. Wellington appears to be an exception. The deliberate destruction of two of the city's Category 1 historic places has made 2018 an *annus horribilus* for Wellington's built heritage and we hope we never have another year like it.

If there is any silver lining in their loss, it is that there is increasing awareness within Wellington City Council that Special Housing Areas (the planning measure used to fast-track Erskine's demise) should not be used in areas of high heritage value. There is also growing appreciation within Council of Wellington's Modernist heritage. In 2019, HPW will continue to advocate for the protection of built heritage in Special Housing Areas and raise the public profile of important Modernist buildings in the region. We will also continue to argue for a change in historic places legislation so that Category 1 historic places are given much stronger protection than presently is the case.

## **News from the Hutt**

For a long time Hutt City Council have had a dismissive view of their city's Modernist heritage, tending to see their built heritage as confined to Jackson Street and other areas of Petone. Protests in the early 2010s concerning the proposed demolition of their Town and Horticultural Halls raised public awareness of the city's Modernist buildings. This led to the demolition plans being modified: the Horticultural Hall was lost but the Town Hall was saved.



Naenae Community Hall and (former) Post Office. (Images: Stuff)

Concern over the loss of another hall in the city has raised the profile of the heritage values of suburbs like Naenae. Earlier this year Hutt City said it would demolish the Naenae Community Hall and replace it with a new [community hub](#). This alarmed those Naenae residents who saw the hall as part of their heritage. Local residents had paid half its building cost through a community rating; the other half had been paid by the government. Many residents had happy memories of dances and other social events that had been held in the hall since its opening in 1954. Sadly, the Council did not think of incorporating the existing hall into its community hub plan and it will be demolished before Christmas.

Still, the local protest over the hall's fate seems to have raised awareness within the Council of the heritage values of places like nearby Hillary Court – built between 1953 and 1959. This was New Zealand's first pedestrian mall and was originally designed by the famous architect Ernst Plischke. The most important building in the mall is the former post office, whose clock tower is a landmark feature. The post office closed in 2015 and its new owners proposed demolishing the tower because it was an earthquake risk. The Council wanted to avoid this and has facilitated its listing as a historic place. This would make the building eligible for built heritage funds to strengthen the tower. HPW members can support its listing by making a [submission](#) before 16 November.

HPW is very pleased by this development, not least because it shows the Council is now looking beyond Petone and seeing that it has important built heritage elsewhere in the city.

## **Rugby Street Terrace Houses**



(Image: Felicity Wong)

Despite their “high rarity value” these two houses overlooking the Basin Reserve are set for demolition by their owner: the Chinese Embassy. The houses are Wellington's only example of Australian style Edwardian terrace housing. The houses have little changed in outward appearance from the time of their construction, circa 1912. Heritage New Zealand notes their ‘very high representational value’ and that they have an important setting on Mount Cook, an historic area of high significance. An application to Heritage New Zealand to list the houses is pending. The houses are not however protected under the WCC District Plan so the Chinese Embassy has gained consent to demolish them.

HPW has asked Ambassador Wu Xi to reconsider the embassy's plans and to explore whether the facades, at least, could be incorporated into the new Embassy development. While noting the good relationship between China and New Zealand, HPW is advised China likely intends to demolish the historic houses in accordance with its consent. The Embassy will however retain the protected facade of the old Boys and Girls Institute. The Chinese Embassy and staff were a welcome feature of Thorndon and the Botanical Gardens. A similar warm welcome to the Mount Cook community would be great.

Please join us in making further appeals to Ambassador Wu Xi to save the historic houses (Chinese Embassy, P.O. Box 17-257, Karori, Wellington).

## **Facebook Update**

We would like to remind members that we regularly post items of interest on our [website](#) and on our [Facebook page](#) – you do not need a Facebook account to view our page!

A few of our recent Facebook posts include:

### **31 October**

Earlier this year, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage undertook some consultation around New Zealand's system for protecting heritage buildings. In all, close to 300 stakeholders, representing a range of interests and backgrounds from all across New Zealand, participated. Members of our committee participated in a workshop. MCH reports that four clear and consistent issues with the existing system were raised by respondents during the consultation process:

- the existing heritage protection system does not identify and protect New Zealand's heritage buildings effectively;
- the existing system is too complex, which makes participation difficult for many people;
- stakeholders lack the information and resources they need to achieve positive heritage outcomes;
- the government needs to be more proactive in the identification and protection of heritage buildings that it owns.

The Ministry for Culture and Heritage will now consider how best to address these issues, and identify any changes it may need to be made to the existing system to improve its effectiveness. Once complete, findings and recommendations from the survey will be submitted to the Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, and will provide her with a basis for making decisions on how the heritage system can be enhanced.

### **October 17**

Four Wellington buildings got funding for [seismic strengthening](#) in the latest Government Heritage Equip funding round. 'Ashleigh Court Newtown, a Heritage NZ Category 1 building is receiving \$184,000 for comprehensive strengthening work, the upgrade is also supported by Wellington City Council; 255 Cuba Street is allocated \$31,000; the landmark Erskine Chapel, also a Category 1 building, receives \$250,000; and the Farmers Building in Cuba Street receives \$250,000.' We also commented:

While we support restoration of Erskine chapel, the MCH grant of \$250,000 to Ian Cassel's Wellington Company to help restore the Erskine College Chapel is a case of rewarding bad behaviour. Cassels fought tooth and nail to avoid having any heritage protection over the Erskine College site. He successfully persuaded the Wellington City Council to make it a Special Housing Area, allowing him to bypass normal regulatory hurdles and paving the way for the demolition of the Category 1 Main (College) Building. An appeal to the Environment Court to stop this happening was unsuccessful, but the Court determined that the Wellington Company restore the College Chapel as compensation for the loss. We assume the Company will do very well from the 96-townhouse Erskine development. It does not need taxpayers' money for a building that it's been ordered to restore.

### **October 3**

Ryman Healthcare who now own the Modernist Karori Campus (former Victoria University Teachers College) will begin demolition of some of the buildings in early November. The plan below shows which buildings they intend retaining & which demolishing. One change from earlier plans is they now intend reusing the octagonal music room. From Save Karori Campus Group:

Ryman assess demolition will start in early November and are planning to start closing down the site from next Monday 8 October. We understand there have been extensive discussions between Ryman, the WCC and Heritage NZ, from which we gather that Ryman are still in the early stages of planning the retirement complex and that there is no new information on their approach to the development.

## **Past Events**

HPW Committee members Vivienne Morrell and Ben Schrader gave two public talks this spring, both of which were warmly received by those who went along to them.

### **‘Exploring the Terawhiti Goldfields’**

This talk was given by Vivienne Morrell at the VUW School of Architecture, Te Aro, on 25 September at 7pm.

Terawhiti is the mostly rural area to the west of Wellington that most Wellingtonians would only know by flying over it or seeing it from the Cook Strait ferry. Vivienne researched the history of this area for Heritage New Zealand and wrote the report for the historic listing of the Albion Goldmining Company remains. At various times from the 1850s to the 1910s the area was a site for gold prospecting – it is the lower North Island’s only example of a large area that includes a range of gold-related sites. Vivienne gave a presentation on the history of the area and, in particular, the goldmining and the remains that are visible today. Michael Grace, Terawhiti Station shareholder, was also present and spoke briefly about the Wellington Goldfields Heritage Trust that he is establishing.



Albion Battery remains and Ben Schrader at Futuna Chapel (Images: Vivienne Morrell + Felicity Wong)

### **‘Can Heritage Be Ugly?’**

This talk was given by Ben Schrader at the Futuna Chapel, Karori, on 28 October at 2:45pm.

The 2017 Environment Court decision that the Gordon Wilson Flats in Wellington had very high heritage values was greeted with incredulity by Wellingtonians. Most believed it was too ugly to be considered heritage and should be demolished. Ben explored why a building’s aesthetics or architecture had become the main public criterion for determining the heritage worth of a historic building. He argued that this had meant that other factors like a building’s history are often ignored. He then examined ways in which the public might look beyond a building’s perceived ugliness and see its beauty.

The talk was hosted by the Friends of Futuna Charitable Trust and Wellington Heritage Week. It was recorded by the Friends and will be made publicly available in due course. We will let you know when.

## Upcoming Events

We have two walking tours that we're sure will interest HPW members.

### 1) The Heritage of Willis Street + Environs

**Saturday 17 November 2018**, 2pm (to approx 4pm) – a walking tour visiting some historic buildings in the Wellington CBD. Meet at the Christian Science Building, 281 Willis Street at 2pm. Wet or fine. The buildings to be visited are:

- Christian Science Building, architect Ian Athfield, 1983;
- 'The Manor' (former Red Cross building) architect William Turnbull, 1908;
- St Peter's Anglican Church, architect Thomas Turnbull, 1879; and
- Theosophical Society Hall, 1918.

For anyone interested, following the walk some of us will go to Nga Taonga (Film Archive) for a coffee. While the Christian Science Building is not heritage listed, it is architecturally interesting. 'The Manor' received funding in a recent round of Heritage Equip for seismic strengthening. The Manor is a Category 1 historic place completed in 1908 as a residence and surgery for surgeon Sir Donald McGavin.

### 2) Secret Art Walk

Come explore some of the hidden art in foyers of central Wellington buildings with Vivienne Morrell. While not strictly 'heritage', we thought some members might enjoy finding something new in Wellington! Vivienne led five of these walks for U3A groups in 2017 and early 2018 and they proved to be a popular event.

The walks will be on **Wednesday January 30<sup>th</sup> 2019** and **Thursday February 21<sup>st</sup> 2019** from **10am to 12pm**; starting at Bowen House, 70/84 Lambton Quay (at the north end of Lambton Quay) and ending in Manners Street. Registration is essential as each tour is limited to 16 people (some of the foyers are narrow.) Buildings are usually only open in working hours – hence the need for the tours to be in working hours.

To register interest, email: [wqtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz](mailto:wqtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz) or phone Vivienne.

These will be the same or very similar to the walks Vivienne did for U3A so if you did one of those, and would like to do it again, please let me know in your email as I would like to give first preference to those who haven't done one.

As well as many years interest in heritage, Vivienne has an MA in art history and is a part-time tour guide at Te Papa.

## HPW Brochure

HPW has printed a promotional brochure to make the public more aware of its work and to recruit new members. A copy of it is on our [website here](#). You may have seen some at public libraries and at a few historic buildings during Heritage Week. If members know of places where some of these might be displayed, could they please contact Vivienne Morrell through the website or email: [wqtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz](mailto:wqtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz)