Chevening gifted to Heritage New Zealand

Last year was a dismal year for built heritage in Wellington with the loss of the Erskine College Main Building and impending loss of much of the former Karori Teachers’ College, both Category 1 places. So it’s wonderful to begin 2019 with some very good news.

On 15 February Heritage New Zealand announced that Susan Price had gifted the organisation the elegant 1929 Kelburn apartment building Chevening. She also included a generous endowment to

Susan Price stands outside Chevening after gifting the building to Heritage New Zealand (Image: Monique Ford/Stuff)
maintain the Category 2 heritage place. The structure had been the vision of Emma Rainforth, a teacher at Wellington Girls’ College, who built it to accommodate herself and provide a retirement income. Each of the four floors contains one flat. The stripped classical building was designed by Llewellyn Williams, who also designed the De-Luxe (later Embassy) Theatre in Courtenay Place.

Susan fell for the building as an 18-year old and encouraged her parents, Hugh and Beverley Price, to buy it when it came up for sale in 1979. At this time it was very rundown and shabby but Susan dreamed of restoring it to its former glory. In 2011 the flats were strengthened to 100 percent of the building code under the direction of conservation architect Lianne Cox and engineer Matthew Lander. The building was also restored to a 1920s and 30s period style. Much of the furniture in the building Susan and her parents found in Wellington’s second-hand shops. ‘Cuba Street was full of riches’, recalled Susan.

HNZ central region manager, Jamie Jacobs, warmly welcomed Susan’s gift. “She’s the first person that has given us a building that has been restored entirely and includes an endowment.” Susan was equally pleased because “it was the best way to ensure the family’s legacy of love for Chevening was carried on.” Jacobs said a study was under way to see how to best use the building, but it’s likely it will be rented out as medium-stay accommodation, possibly to visiting scholars at nearby Victoria University. Some members will remember visiting Chevening some years ago.

**Additional Wellington Town Hall funding approved**

On 27 February the Wellington City Council agreed to an additional $20 million of ratepayer funding to seismically strengthen and restore the Wellington Town Hall. This takes the total sum to $112 million, plus an undisclosed contingency fund – widely believed to be $20 million. In announcing the decision Mayor Justin Lester conceded the “Town Hall has been racked with indecision. We now have some certainty we can proceed with this project.” He said the building was a “taonga that required protection. We can't demolish the building, it’s a category 1 building.” Councillor Nicola Young agreed Wellingtonians had been frustrated by the “lack of action” on the building, but “it was a complicated project due to issues surrounding heritage, land reclamation, base isolation and working below the water table.” The Council meeting also agreed to formalise the construction contract with builder Naylor Love. The project is due to be completed in 2023, a decade after the Town Hall was closed as an earthquake risk. It will form part of a music hub in partnership with Victoria University and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.
HPW strongly welcomes the decision. We have been concerned for some time about the constant delays in starting work on the building and feared it might not proceed. Despite the substantial sums involved, we believe the investment will be well worth it. The project will not only restore a much loved building to Wellington, but do much to reinvigorate the city’s social and cultural life, which has recently suffered from a lack of suitable venues.

On this point, Ben Schrader visited the reopened Christchurch Town Hall during an open day on 24 February. The place was seriously damaged in the 2011 Canterbury earthquake and it was only through the efforts of heritage advocates that the Brutalist building was saved from demolition and restored. It will once again become a vital hub for the performing arts in the city. Ben was amazed by the high quality of the $165 million restoration, as were hundreds of other people who had flocked to see the building. People were positively beaming as they walked around marvelling at the repaired spaces and recalling to their companions their previous experiences in the building. A local amateur orchestra played in the auditorium and the acoustics were superb. It reminded Ben of the fabulous acoustics in our own Town Hall and he can’t wait to reacquaint himself with them in 2023 – or soon after.
There are almost 700 earthquake-prone buildings in Wellington, and a fair few of them are heritage buildings. The previous National led government passed legislation requiring earthquake strengthening of building facades or their demolition. Wellington buildings in “priority areas” have seven years in which to do so, while regional centres of lesser earthquake risk have either 12 or 15 years. Given the lower economic returns for such buildings, older town centres in New Zealand risk “demolition by legislation” at the expiry of the relevant time limit.

Last year, HPW raised the problem with the Ministry of Culture and Heritage. We expressed concern about the potential to radically change town centres of Wellington and other smaller towns. We called for tax relief or other funding options to assist with the strengthening costs and avoid demolition.

In September 2018 Rangitīkei, Manawatu and Wanganui Council representatives also called on Building Minister Jenny Salesa to explain the problem caused for their heritage town centres. These regional mayors offered rates and consent assistance but called on central government to “come to the party” as well. The September Interim Report of the government’s Tax Working Group suggested tax relief by treating earthquake strengthening as a deductible expense rather than a capital investment. HPW is pleased the Tax Working Group referred to the issue and made a recommendation about the treatment of depreciation in its Final Report issued last week. We support tax relief through deductibility of strengthening costs.

In addition, Associate Minister for Arts and Heritage, Grant Robertson announced an increase to the EQUIP fund for earthquake strengthening in recent days. That will now fund up to 50% of the cost of professional advice for listed heritage building owners in regional areas. Many building owners in regional areas are also able to apply for up to 67% of works costs. HPW welcomes the extension to this fund for regional folk.

Currently earthquake prone buildings must be brought up to code if more than 25% of the value of the earthquake prone building is spent on alterations or renovation. This results in many heritage and older buildings sitting dilapidated. The owner can’t afford to spruce them up, or strengthen the facade as required, without strengthening the whole building at an uneconomic cost.

The regional mayors also asked that the “demolition by legislation” law be amended to alter this “trigger” threshold for strengthening. They asked for it to be calculated as either 25% of the capital value of the building, or $200,000, whichever is the greater. In many cases the work to strengthen the facade will cost less than $200,000 and therefore won’t trigger the need to bring the whole building up to code. We also want this change.

In December HPW made a written submission and followed up with oral comments to Wellington City Council about the issues, but the Councils are limited by the legislation. If the tax changes are implemented by government, the EQUIP funding provided, and the trigger adjusted, demolition by legislation could be avoided. Here’s a photo I took in Foxton Main Street on 10 January 2019.
Naenae Community Hall update

The last newsletter included a piece about the heritage importance of the Naenae Community Hall and the Hutt City’s proposal to demolish it for a new community hub. Naenae residents have since launched a petition to save it from this fate. We would encourage members to sign the petition because the hall is a vital part of Naenae’s heritage landscape and its demolition would be a significant loss.

Karori Campus Update

Ryman Healthcare is on the cusp of applying for Resource Consent for its new retirement village on the Karori Campus site. They held a public open day this week at the site and displayed plans for its redevelopment. HPW committee member and architect Deb Cranko went along. She revealed that the plans showed the retention of some existing buildings and gardens, but it’s still uncertain as to what extent this will be realised. We have been given to understand that Heritage New Zealand is still negotiating with Ryman over these plans.

Past Events

Wednesday January 30th and Thursday February 21st 2019: “Secret Art Walk” – about 15 members enjoyed exploring some of the art in foyers of central Wellington commercial buildings with Vivienne Morrell on a two-hour walking tour. There was also a heritage focus – beginning at the site of the former Wellington Hotel of Baron von Alzdorf who was killed in the 1855 earthquake (now the location of Bowen House, Lambton Quay).

Saturday 17 November 2018, 2pm – about 22 members and friends visited four historic buildings in the Wellington CBD beginning at the Christian Science Building, 285 Willis Street. We visited:
- 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 (architect unknown, 1918).
Upcoming Event

Carillon visit: We have arranged two dates for visits to the carillon – Sundays 17 and 24 March at 1:30pm (prior to a carillon recital at 2:30).

These visits are strictly limited to 9 people per visit and require a reasonable level of fitness as there are 55 stairs to climb before a small lift is available. To register, you can reply to this email or phone Vivienne.

The carillon is part of the National War Memorial (a Category 1 complex). “Designed as a sister carillon to the Peace Tower Carillon at Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, Canada, the National War Memorial of New Zealand, consisting of a Carillon constructed in 1932, and a Hall of Memories completed 32 years later, is a solemn tribute to, and a commemoration of, the contribution of all those New Zealanders who have served and died in war.” (Heritage NZ List entry http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/1410).

Recently, the carillon tower and Hall of Memories were earthquake strengthened and cleaned as part of the construction of Pukeahu National War Memorial Park.

A carillon is a musical instrument – the largest musical instruments in the world. They consist of at least 23 bells, typically housed in a campanile (bell tower), which are tuned so they produce a melody when played. The New Zealand carillon is the third largest in the world, both by number of bells (74) and their combined weight. You can read more on the Ministry for Culture and Heritage website.

Odds and Ends

Heritage Night Class

City Stories: Wellington’s Architectural Heritage – evening class starting on Tues 4 June (four weeks on Tuesdays, 5:30 to 7:30pm). For the last few years, Vivienne Morrell has taken an evening class at Wellington High School Community Education. After the course, Vivienne leads a walk around the CBD to look at some of the buildings discussed. Click here for more information.

Fundraising for Old St Paul’s

Fundraising for a multi-million-dollar project to strengthen historic Old St Paul’s Church in central Wellington is underway ahead of its temporary closure this year to allow work to be carried out. Completed in 1866, the building will be closed from May to October 2019 to undertake necessary works. If you would like to make a donation to Heritage New Zealand for this purpose please go to this website or telephone 0800 802 010.

Fun Fact

Both Old St Paul’s Church and the National War Memorial are listed with Heritage New Zealand as Category 1 historic places. You may be interested to know that there are 105 Category 1 places in the Wellington City Council area; 13 in Hutt City; 7 in Kapiti Coast District; 4 in Porirua City; and 4 in Upper Hutt City.

The New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero (‘the List’) identifies New Zealand’s significant and valued historical and cultural heritage places. Historic Places - such as archaeological sites, buildings, memorials – can be either:

- Category 1 historic places, which are of special or outstanding historical or cultural significance or value.
- Category 2 historic places, which are of historical or cultural significance or value.