Identifying Wellington’s future built heritage

HPW has been invited by Cr Iona Pannett to suggest heritage buildings that could be added to the WCC District Plan. Possible candidates include this Karori Modernist House designed by Anthony Treadwell and Allan Wild in 1958. An article on the house can be found here. (Image: Stuff)

It’s one of the peculiarities of New Zealand’s legislative framework that the only legal protection given to historic buildings is through territorial district plans. Having a building listed on the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT) list gives a place a certain moral protection but provides no guarantee against demolition – as the miserable fate of the Category 1 Karori Teachers’ College...
proved. In seeking to save a historic building from demolition preservationists are often frustrated by it not being scheduled on a district plan. This makes it harder to convince property owners to preserve a building because they have often bought the place for the sole purpose of redeveloping its site. Because their building is not listed on the local District Plan as a heritage place, they can feel unfairly targeted when preservationists seek to stop their plans. This state of affairs benefits neither side and built heritage advocates have long argued that territorial authorities need to put more resources into identifying and protecting built heritage within their areas to prevent these situations from perennially occurring.

We now have such an opportunity. At a meeting with the HPW Committee last week Cr Iona Pannett asked us for a list of unscheduled heritage buildings that we think should be on Wellington’s District Plan. One such building is considered in this newsletter: the Kelburn Scout Hall near the top of the Cable Car. But there are many others. These include colonial-era buildings that might have previously been missed, or have become more significant due to new research, right up to 1960s and 70s houses that are beginning to get a ‘heritage patina’. This includes suburbs like Kingston and Karori (see above image) that have some superb Modernist houses that will one day be as valued as the Victorian cottages of Thorndon and Mt Cook. We’re sure our members will know of historic buildings that have previously fallen under the radar but could now be prime candidates for scheduling. We’re therefore asking members to nominate such a place and send it to us via our email: wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz. If you know anything about its history please include this information. Please also say why you think it should be scheduled. If possible, attach a photo or image of the building too. HPW would like to devote a section of the newsletter to these places and seek feedback about whether you agree they should get District Plan protection.

Scout halls (Vivienne Morrell)

I’m sure many of you appreciated the chance to walk about your neighbourhoods during lockdown. Committee member Deb Cranko photographed the Karori Scout Hall on one of her walks. This was designed by Bill Alington (then of the architecture firm Gabites, Alington & Edmondson) in 1976 (the National Library has plans for it). This is the hall for the First Karori Scout group at 156 Campbell St, Karori.

Karori Scout Hall in 2020 (Image: Deb Cranko)

This led us to thinking about which scout halls might be heritage listed. The Wellington City Council has included the First Seatoun Scout Hall in its heritage schedule. This was built in 1932 and the heritage inventory says: “Seatoun Scout Hall is likely to be Wellington’s oldest purpose-built scout hall”. The relevant words here are “purpose-built” because as some of you may know, the Kelburn

Scout Hall, which is located in the Wellington Botanic Gardens below the Dominion Observatory, has been occupied by the scouts since 1913.

The front and back [needing repairs] of the Kelburn Scout Hall in 2020. (Image: Vivienne Morrell)

According to information from the Friends of the Botanic Gardens, it was built in 1896 as a house for Wellington’s naval volunteers who manned the Garden Battery (which was built in response to the Russian scare of the mid 1880s).² The article notes: “The garden battery was commenced in 1896. (Some reports say 1892 or 1894, but contemporary newspaper reports appear to confirm the later date.) The fortifications were constructed, but the gun was never installed or fired although it was stored in the magazine. It was feared firing would blow out all the windows within a half mile radius given the close proximity of dwellings. The drawings show the underground structures of the battery … The gunners’ cottage erected by the battery became the Lawson Scout Hall, and is the oldest continually occupied scout hall in New Zealand.”

A plaque on the building commemorates its historical significance. It reads: ‘This historic building has been the home of the 1st Kelburn Scout Group since 31st May 1913. Originally the quarters for Volunteers for the gun emplacement located on the site of the Dominion Observatory, the Hall is named in memory of the Scoutmaster Eric “Pa” Lawson who formed the original Kelburn Troop in September 1909 and guided its early years until 1921. Today it is the longest standing Scout Hall in New Zealand and is warmly remembered by many past and present Kelburn Scouts and residents. 21 November 1993.’ (Image: Vivienne Morrell)

In 1898, the Wellington Naval Volunteers had 95 members, the Petone group had 83. There was also a Kelburne (original spelling) Rifles group of 67 members and a cycling volunteer corps of 18 members!\(^3\) It seems to have been a detachment of the Petone naval volunteers who manned the Garden Battery. In October 1898, 87 Petone volunteers were present at their monthly inspection and had detachments for the Ngauranga, “Kaiwarra” and Garden Batteries.\(^4\)

The Kelburne Scouts have used the building since 31 May 1913 and it is now called the Lawson Scout Hall after their first scout leader. And according to the sign on the building, it is the oldest standing scout hall in continuous use in New Zealand. It is included in Heritage New Zealand’s listing for the Dominion Observatory Historic Area.\(^5\) However, it isn’t included in WCC’s District Plan heritage schedule – we will advocate that it should be.

**Demolition of US Marines Hall (Felicity Wong)**

The proposed demolition of the US Marines Hall at Whitehouse Rd, Titahi Bay came a step closer with the Porirua City Council applying for a demolition consent during Level 4 lockdown. HPW made a submission in support of local Save Our Hall group, emphasising the heritage character of the building listed under the District Plan, and arguing for a reprieve. The hall is not listed by HNZPT.

This is the last remaining music hall built for US Marines camped in New Zealand during WWII. When nearly 2000 marines decamped from Titahi Bay the hall was left to the community. For many decades the Titahi Bay Little Theatre used its well-suited high stud for staging props and lighting. When the City declined to maintain the hall, and raised the adjoining land causing flood damage, the hall was declared unsafe and left empty some years ago.

The City also declined the request to contribute an equivalent amount of money to be used for demolition to community fundraising efforts for retention and restoration. It seems determined to spend $200,000 on demolition and grassing the site. The City estimates a $2.2 million cost to strengthen, restore and improve the hall while building a new one would cost $2 million. HPW believes there’s an affordable middle option of fixing the hall under a cost effective plan put together by an architect. Saving the hall is a great “shovel ready” project.

---

\(^3\) NZ *Mail*, 16 June 1898.
\(^4\) Evening Post, 26 October 1898
\(^5\) [https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7033](https://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7033)
The Hall is a uniquely important memorial to our war efforts assisted by 27,000 Marines stationed in New Zealand ensuring victory in a bloody war remembered by ANZAC day annually. The First World War left us with memorials while World War Two left community halls and other facilities, many of which are now being demolished. The genesis of this one was a dynamic programme of American jazz and comedy. That's a reminder of the power of music in grim times, and worthy of study with New Zealand history to be part of the school curriculum soon. You can read HPW's submission opposing demolition on our website here.

Obituary. Knowing who you are: Cynthia (Cindy) Beavis 1934-2020

In the early 1970s Cindy Beavis saw the potential others couldn’t, and restored a derelict pioneer cottage in Greytown, Wairarapa. Alarmed by the weekend buzz of chainsaws, she and local Betty Thompson took clipboards down every street and got the trees protected under the town plan. Half a century later, magnificent trees and restored villas and cottages are central to Greytown’s prosperous character.

After a dynamic career in radio broadcasting and a period at Government House as Sir Paul Reeves’ press secretary, Cindy joined the Historic Places Trust in 1991 as curator at Fyffe House, Kaikoura. With beloved dog “Jenny” she lived in its earliest part built in the 1840s of pit sawn totara and hand forged nails on whale vertebrae foundations. The warm and sunny house was a classic shore-based whaling site with sheltered beach, fresh water stream and high ground lookout for passing whales.

Cindy oversaw the renovation of the dilapidated two-storied (1860s era) section of the house, setting new standards for expert interior conservation and restoration. She delighted in showing visitors the whalebone fence remnants, huge King George IV door locks, paint made from whale oil and red lead, and lathe and plasterwork.

In 1994 Cindy moved to Kerikeri as curator of Kemp House, to enlarge the profile of New Zealand’s oldest surviving building. Tourism and heritage strategies were being debated for the Kerikeri Basin and conservation planning was underway for the Stone Store. Cindy revamped the communications and signage, drawing out the mission station character and its relationship with nearby Māori settlement. She understood its value as a tourist draw for the local economy and said “the tourism agenda is different to conserving history but both need one another - it’s symbiotic.” A devastating flood in 2007 led her to move near family in Wellington and sadly leave Kerikeri friends.

Cindy drove vintage cars and enjoyed antiques and beautiful objects. Reading widely, being curious, kind and witty, Cindy had a lifelong passion for both Maori and European history. She said “there’s something terribly deeply important in belonging somewhere, knowing who you are, how you became what you are, and why you are here”. Her life well lived ended peacefully in Wellington on 21 March 2020. By Felicity Wong (daughter).
Updates

Heritage NZ Listings
Since our last newsletter we were advised of the listing of the Featherston District War Memorial, Featherston, as a Category 1 historic place. And in April the Naenae Post Office (Former) was included on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero, also as a Category 1 place. We wrote about the Naenae Post Office in our February newsletter. Here is a link to the newsletters page on our website.

Wellington Central Library
Wellington Central Library building was a joy for its many visitors to the heart of the city, before it closed in 2019. WCC Councillors have been discussing its fate. Options include demolition and borrowing $250 million to build a new one over 10 years. A very much more modest and speedy option, put forward by the public (not Council staff), is to strengthen the underside of the hollow core floor, the building’s weak point. Base isolating it is another option taking 2-3 years. Let’s hope good sense prevails and we get the building open again ASAP. Members may not be aware that Civic Square, including the library building, is included in the WCC heritage schedule. You can read about it here.

Catholic Basilica
The re-focussed interim plans to strengthen the Catholic Basilica in Hill St demonstrates good sense. WCC is contributing $120,000 to the project. An application for funding to support further strengthening to secure its long term future has also been made to central government.

Old St Paul’s (by Tamara Patten, HNZPT)
Old St Paul’s was due to reopen in mid-May, but unfortunately lockdown and the resulting site shutdown meant that couldn’t happen. Works got back up and running under Level 3, and is in the finishing stages. We expect to reopen in early July – exact date still TBC. Most exterior work is complete. Steel bracing is currently being installed in the bell tower, and this is the last significant piece of the strengthening work. The contractors and subcontractors will be wrapping up and leaving site in the next week or so, and we’re now moving on to reinstatement of the interior spaces. Additionally, the closure provided us a rare opportunity to send significant items like the illuminated panels, flags and brass lectern off for conservation work and we’re starting to receive these back. I’m looking forward to showing off the results to our visitors – all looking so beautiful!

Upcoming Events
The Covid-19 lockdown has severely disrupted our events programme. We are in the process of re-scheduling those that we had to postpone and will let you know as soon as possible when arrangements are settled.

Book Advert:

Raupo to Deco: Wellington Styles and Architects 1840–1940 by Geoff Mew and Adrian Humphris (2014) – “Celebrating a century of architectural achievement in Wellington, this book links the progression of style characteristics — from raupo thatching to art deco ornament — with the development of the city. It contains biographical information about more than 300 architects associated with Wellington at various times — plus photos, elevations and reproductions of rare plans.”

Adrian Humphris has copies available at the discount price of $40. If you would like one, please email Adrian directly at: adrianhumphris@gmail.com