



A Voice for Heritage

No. 43. February 2023

HISTORIC PLACES WELLINGTON INC
PO BOX 12426 THORNDON WELLINGTON 6144

NEWSLETTER

In this issue:

- We've Been Here Before
- Shelly Bay demolitions: sequence of events
- WCC District Plan update
- Proposed listings by HNZPT
- Blue Plaque champion?
- Past Events
- Upcoming Events
- US Marines in NZ (WW2)

Editor: Ben Schrader

JOIN US

To join Historic Places Wellington or learn more about HPW, go to www.historicplaceswellington.org.

CONTACT US

Our email address is
wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz

VISIT our Facebook page

www.facebook.com/historicplaceswellington

EVENTS

Summer walking tours at Pukeahu Memorial Park

Nairn St Cottage tours to the end of February

Our AGM will be on 20 August this year.

We've Been Here Before



Shelly Bay showing the now condemned Shed 8, Sawtooth Building and wharfage (Image: One News)

We should not be surprised by last December's decision by the Wellington City Council to allow the demolition of the wharfage, Shed 8, and Sawtooth Building at Shelly Bay because engineering reports had found they 'were too far gone' to preserve. Many HPW members will remember the same argument was made about the Main Block at Erskine College. It came down after the Environment Court agreed with the developer that the building was derelict and a seismic risk and would be too expensive to preserve – see [here](#) .

The developer in both cases is Ian Cassels' The Wellington Company. The company [promotes](#) itself 'as a major player in the redevelopment of Wellington city's urban environments and historic places.' This strap line suggests that it's a supporter of the city's built heritage, but a playbook seems to be developing where it pledges to support the retention of built heritage to get public buy-in for its developments, but then back tracks on these commitments once they're officially approved. This happened at Erskine and now it's happened at Shelly Bay.

We recognise that preserving built heritage can be expensive and complex, but The Wellington Company and its partner the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust would have known this and should have made sufficient financial provision to keep its pledge to retain these important historic places. If they had commissioned the engineering reports earlier on in the piece then they would have better known what they were dealing with and planned accordingly.

We suspect the developers always saw the wharfage and buildings as a hindrance to their scheme. This was seemingly confirmed by The Wellington Company's development manager, Earl Hope Pearson, who following confirmation of the demolition permit [said](#): 'It's taken a bit to digest, but we're upbeat, seeing this an opportunity.' He went on to say that the 'restoration of the historic military base would have limited the development's options in terms of raising the buildings above sea level' and without that constraint it would be easier to future-proof it. He was clearly delighted by the turn of events and lamely suggesting some demolition material might be incorporated within the new 'village'.

It's sobering to compare the Shelly Bay development with that at another former Airforce base: Auckland's [Catalina Bay](#). There a different developer has successfully incorporated heritage buildings – including a large hanger – into a vibrant commercial and residential precinct. It shows what is possible when built heritage is considered an asset rather than a liability. Perhaps it's time for The Wellington Company to admit it doesn't really value built heritage. It could then stop pretending that it did.

Shelly Bay: Sequence of Events – Vivienne Morrell



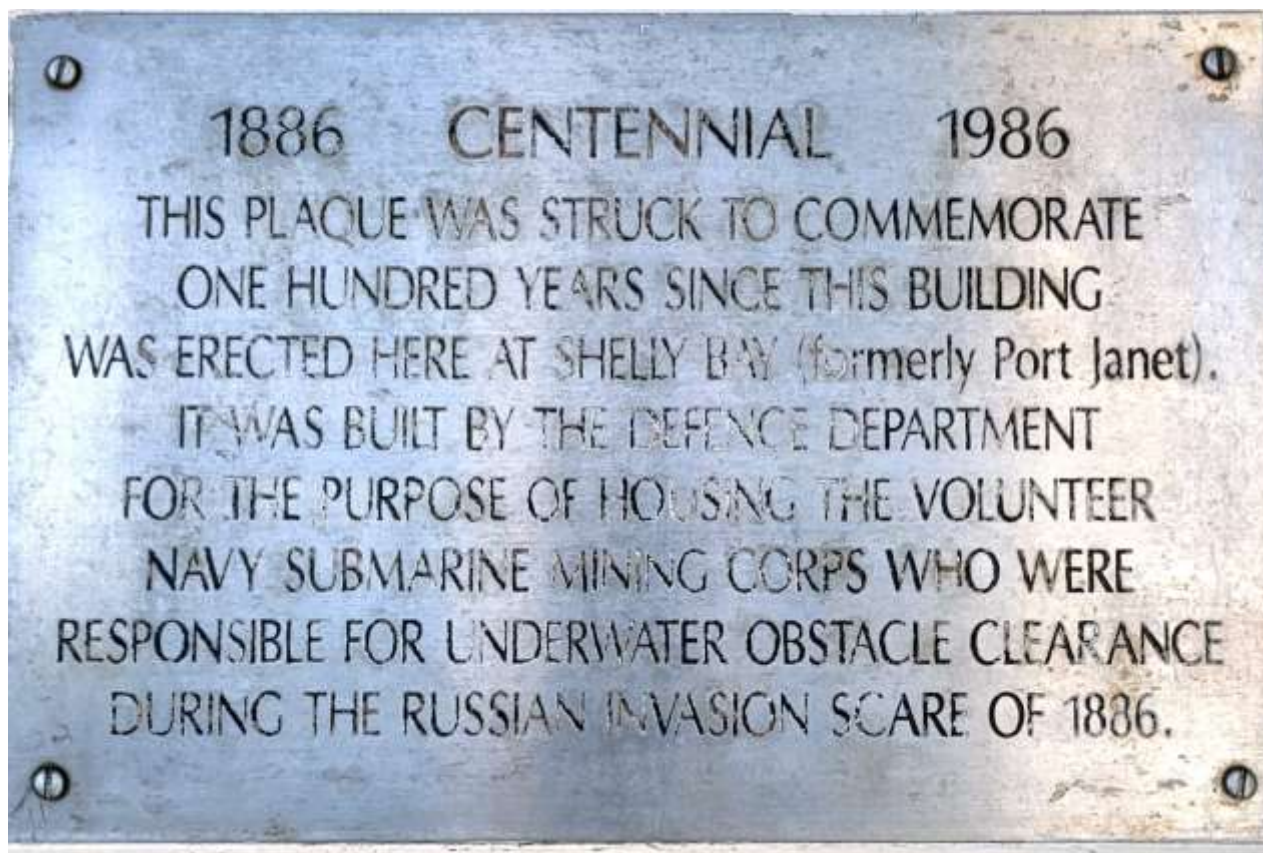
In late January the public became aware of the Wellington City Council's agreement to the "[deconstruction](#)" of two buildings at Shelly Bay on the Miramar Peninsula. These were supposed to be restored in the development at Shelly Bay, but it has now been decided they are too dangerous and "due to the level of asbestos in the buildings they will be deconstructed for a slower more managed demolition."

A local group, Shelly Baywatch, [opposes the demolitions](#) of the 'sawtooth' and shipwrights buildings. They say the public has been shown no evidence the buildings cannot be saved, and the demolitions would

be a clear breach of the agreement the Wellington City Council struck with the developer, Ian Cassels' Wellington Company, when it agreed to the sale and lease of its land at Shelly Bay in November 2020. Spokesperson Mary Varnham said an important part of the deal was that the company would restore and refurbish the two buildings.

The design guide for Shelly Bay in the council's district plan calls the two buildings 'the main focal point of the wharf area'. 'Both buildings are strongly related to the military history of Shelly Bay. The foreground position of the Workshop and Stores [Sawtooth] building, its relative height and characteristic roof form, make it a recognisable landmark feature of Shelly Bay,' the guide states.

The 'sawtooth' roof design was a way of getting more light and ventilation (through windows) onto the floor of a building. Mary Varnham says that in some places overseas "like Bloomington, Berkeley and Madrid, ... restored sawtooth buildings have become tourist attractions and places of immense civic pride. And, in an added twist, sawtooth buildings are enjoying an architectural renaissance, as climate change forces the world to look at ways to conserve energy."



(Images: Vivienne Morrell, 2021)

The photo below appeared in a Stuff article "[Shovel finally hits dirt at controversial Shelly Bay development](#)" showing the WCC's chief planning officer with a shovel, alongside Taranaki Whānui leader and the private developer. We expect a council official to be politically neutral, so did anyone else find it inappropriate (as some of your committee do) that the head of council planning is so involved in such a controversial private development? Surely, it would have been more appropriate for a politician (councillor or local MP – and isn't that Paul Eagle to the right?) to be handling the shovel.



BRUCE MACKAY/STUFF

Wellington City Council chief planning officer Liam Hodgetts, Taranaki Whānui leader Kara Puketapu-Dentice, and Wellington developer Ian Cassels turn the sod of the development.

WCC District Plan update – Felicity Wong

This week the independent planning commissioners start their hearings on the Wellington District Plan. HPW has been a consistent submitter: drawing attention to Wellington's built heritage as a precious resource; its globally unique form and history; and its role adding essential value and memory to the city. We've hosted talks about its sustainability ([this link](#) is to a highlights video of the "Old or Green?" talk we hosted in heritage week 2021); written about it; and been active advocates for the recognition and protection of the city's built heritage - much of which is sustainable native timber buildings that are emissions free (having made more than a century of useful contribution to people).

The planning commissioners will hold many different "streams" of hearings throughout the year each based on chapters of the 1000 plus page new district plan.

The first "stream 1" hearing will take place this fortnight and HPW will participate in its initial legal discussions about whether the provisions of the plan relating to heritage can be appealed to the Environment Court (in the normal way). Many provisions of the new plan relate to the Government mandated medium density rules for housing intensification, for which there are no appeal rights. HPW does not agree with WCC that that rushed legislation fully eliminated redress to the Environment Court for district plan heritage matters.

The main issue, about the extent to which the older character heritage houses are protected by rules around demolition, will be considered in "stream 2" hearings. That begins on 28 March and will focus on new residential zoning, heights and rules. Almost the entire city will have 12m heights (replacing 8m) and the new 4m and 60 degrees height planes from neighbouring properties ("MDRS rules").

The provisions of the district plan for heritage (where specific buildings or areas have been "listed") will go before the Commissioners in "stream 3" from 9 May.

In that hearing the Commissioners will consider VUW's application to de-list the Gordon Wilson Flats on The Terrace and the Robert Stout Building on Kelburn Parade. HPW does not support that. Several other applications have asked to de-list buildings; for example, the very beautiful house at 1 Ranfurly Tce, Mt Cook. In general, HPW supports the present listings; the WCC's recommended new additional listings (which cover a number of Modernist buildings); and made a few additional listing proposals ourselves (you can read our proposals in our December 2021 [submission here](#).)

HPW generally supports the very good proposals and input made by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga and by a group of "Heritage Professionals" who have expert experience in planning matters and with Wellington city.

Following the "stream 3" heritage chapter will be many other hearings on topics like earthworks, wind rules (which developers have asked to relax), coastal matters and hazards etc - all very important to maintain for a liveable city.

A very topical issue of course will be about buildings in flood prone areas. Although not specifically a heritage matter, HPW's very concerned about the recent devastations for many fellow New Zealanders.

Proposed listings by Heritage New Zealand

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga maintains the national heritage List, which gives recognition to important places or buildings – this can be Category 1 (outstanding significance) or Category 2.



Hannah Playhouse is proposed for Category 1 recognition. The report says: “*The building was designed by notable New Zealand architect James Beard (1924-2017) and completed in 1973... [Its] prominent central Wellington location contributes to its landmark status, as does its striking Brutalist design, featuring two boldly articulated façades and a prominent asymmetrical wedge-shaped roof volume. Hannah Playhouse is seen as a key New Zealand modernist building and has received several regional and national architecture awards. It is also historically significant for its lengthy association with the renowned Downstage Theatre Company.*”

The site’s association with theatre commenced on 20 November 1964 when the newly formed Downstage Theatre Company opened in its first home in the abandoned Walkabout Coffee Bar and Restaurant building on the site. That same year, Mrs Sheila Winn made a substantial donation for a ‘small and intimate’ theatre to be built in Wellington. This donation later initiated a project to create a new purpose-built theatre, designed to be the permanent home of the Downstage Theatre Company, New Zealand’s first professional theatre company. The theatre was built on the site of the former Walkabout Coffee Bar and Restaurant building, and was named after Mrs Winn’s grandfather, successful 19th century businessman Robert Hannah who started R Hannah Co. Ltd, now a national chain of footwear stores. Hannah Playhouse opened its doors on 15 October 1973 with a production of As You Like It.”



The Chinese Mission (former) is proposed for Category 2 listing. The report includes the following: “*The Chinese Mission Hall (Former), located on the northern side of Frederick Street in Te Whanganui-a-Tara / Wellington’s central suburb of Te Aro, was designed by nationally significant architect Frederick de Jersey Clere (1856-1952) and completed in 1906... In the 1880s many Chinese goldminers left the depleted goldfields of the South Island. Some settled in Wellington’s Haining Street and Frederick Street, the heart of an area which became known as ‘Tong Yan Gaai’. The Anglican Chinese Mission Hall opened in 1906 to cater for the needs of this community. It was designed to function as both a church and community hall, a place where members of the Chinese community could attend services, learn the gospel, improve their English literacy through the study of Christian religious texts and celebrate Anglican spiritual traditions. The modest brick building was designed in a relatively plain Gothic Revival architectural style.*”

Images by Vivienne Morrell. The Chinese Mission Hall photo was taken on a Chinese history walking

tour with Lynette Shum (pictured). Her tours are recommended whenever they are offered – our chair Felicity Wong wrote about one she did earlier this year in a Scoop article (click [this link to read](#)).

National Historical Landmarks are another level of recognition that was introduced in the 2014 Act. The purpose of the National Historic Landmarks list is to: promote the long-term protection of key heritage places; assist in prioritising the government’s heritage conservation efforts; further appreciation of these places by New Zealanders. In Wellington the National War Memorial (the

carillon, hall of memories and tomb of the unknown warrior) is proposed for listing as a National Historical Landmark.

Historic Places Wellington committee supported all these proposals.



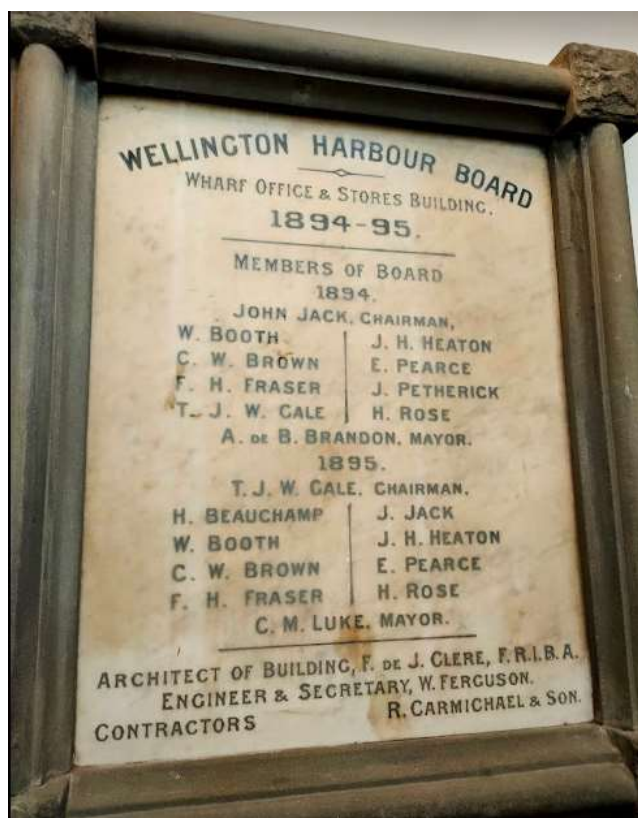
Blue Plaque champion needed for Wellington region?

Blue plaques are an initiative of our national body Historic Places Aotearoa. A blue plaque is a permanent sign serving as a historical marker and installed in a public place to commemorate a link between that location and a famous person, event, building or former building on the site. Currently we only have one in the Wellington region – in front of Randell Cottage, in Thorndon.

Whanganui, in contrast, has several; as you can see on a walk around their streets – and there is also one on the former BNZ bank building in Raetihi. There are also many in parts of the South Island. You can read more here: <https://www.blueplaques.nz/>

The committee is hoping one of our members might like the interesting task of trying to encourage owners of historic buildings – and perhaps working with the council – to see more of them in our region. The committee could make a small contribution to the costs for at least ten. Please get in touch with us if you would like to be involved: wqtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz (Currently, Paekakariki people are working to get one for the house that early conservationist [Val Sanderson](#) (1866-1945) lived in.)

Past Events



Sunday 12 February 2023, 2pm: CBD historic walk (part 2): Committee member Vivienne Morrell led several members on a walk in Wellington's CBD looking at historic buildings and signs. We began outside the Supreme Court on Whitmore Street, went along Featherston St and Customhouse Quay and finished in Willis St. Unlike part 1 walk last October, which was on pre-1840 land, this walk was mostly on land reclaimed from the harbour (until Willis St). Thanks to one of our members who lives in an apartment in the former Harbour Board [Wharf offices](#), we had an unexpected bonus of seeing inside the foyer (image of harbour board sign in the foyer) and first floor.

Upcoming Events

We are still working on upcoming members events, but in the meantime, here are a few things that could be of interest:

The Ministry of Culture and Heritage is offering Summer Walking Tours at Pukeahu Park (National War memorial park). Please scroll down on their 'events' page to find more details and you will need to book: <https://mch.govt.nz/pukeahu/news-events/events>

Nairn Street Cottage has daily tours until the end of February. Bookings required
<https://bit.ly/3PGb8Rd>

And on **Saturday 25 February** – PhD candidate Eva Forster-Garbutt will give a talk at Nairn St cottage on historic domestic interiors, followed by a tour of the cottage. Bookings required. More details here: <https://facebook.com/events/s/talk-tour-nzs-domestic-interio/1189728354977616/>

But if you miss out, Eva will be giving members a presentation following **our AGM on Sunday 20 August**. We would welcome another couple of members to join our committee at the AGM or earlier – especially if you are interested in organising members events or the Blue Plaque role mentioned above.

Please get in touch if you are interested or would like to know more.

US Marines in NZ (WW2)

The 80th anniversary of the arrival of the United States Marines was noted recently with the launch of Mark Pacey's new book "Our New Zealand Home". Mark Pacey is the Masterton archivist and the book was launched at the Masterton Public Library. Felicity Wong went to the launch and wrote about it [here](#). Masterton's Solway Park retains a former US Marines Hall, in contrast to the one that used to be at Titahi Bay which was demolished a couple of years ago. Together with the new interpretation boards (see image below) - and earlier signage - at QEII Park at Paekakariki, it's a tangible reminder of the important role of US forces in New Zealand during World War 2. You can order a copy of Mark's book online [here](#).



(Image, Vivienne Morrell – the Site of Camp Paekakariki & signage installed last year)