

# NEWSLETTER

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## EVENTS

**22 January 2024: Art Deco CBD walk with Vivienne Morrell**

**17 February: Oriental Bay historic buildings walk with Felicity Wong**

## Wellington loses another heritage listed building through neglect



Historic Places Wellington was deeply saddened and frustrated to learn that yet another heritage building in Wellington has been badly damaged by fire. The heritage listed building, known as the Toomath's Buildings, and located at 43-45 Ghuznee Street, was well past the deadline for its earthquake strengthening. The owners had been taken to Court by Wellington City Council in an effort to enforce the rules.

Images: 1. From Post newspaper. 2. Charles Fearnley, 1977. [Wellington City Library](https://www.wellingtoncitylibrary.govt.nz/) (detail)

The Council had also put resources and goodwill into providing consented solutions to the owners for appropriate redevelopment. Despite being given every opportunity to develop the building was years overdue for sympathetic re-purposing and redevelopment into a new multi storey use.

Our chairperson, Felicity Wong, said in a press release: *“It’s my understanding that a local developer interested in heritage buildings offered to buy the building from the current owners with a view to its renovation and redevelopment. However, the current owners refused to engage and instead chose to litigate the Council and leave the building empty and decaying. It was completely avoidable and preventable. We don’t yet know the cause of the fire but if the building was being properly cared for, it would be a different story<sup>1</sup>. It is demolition by neglect – plain and simple.”*

A number of heritage-listed buildings have fallen victim to fires in recent years. 128 Abel Smith Street, owned by the Lebanese Society, abandoned and empty burnt down in August 2020, and earlier this year the sawtooth building in Shelly Bay burnt down.

HPW also made a brief submission to the Independent Commissioners considering the council’s Draft District Plan. We argued for retention of the heritage listing for the façade (which has not – yet? – been demolished). *“That facade has heritage (and streetscape) value and is part of the Cuba St heritage precinct. Continued recognition of its heritage value is consistent with the independent Commissioners’ decision of April 2022 in relation to the Former Adelaide Hotel (114 Adelaide Rd).*

*In that case Commissioners decided that retaining the two street facing facades was a “sustainable use” of the site “in a manner that acknowledges the historic heritage values attaching to the site”. Commissioners decided that “façadism” was better than total demolition of the building “if a viable economic alternative is not available to the owner” ... The Adelaide Hotel decision recognised that a new (higher) building could be constructed above and behind the heritage building’s facade thus providing an economic use. In the case of the Toomath Building that is precisely what’s been envisaged for its redevelopment prior to the fire. WCC has been working with the owners to consent such a scheme.*

*HPW is also of the view that rapid removal from the heritage schedule of buildings subject to arson sends the wrong signal about the potential advantage of such dangerous and unlawful activity. There should be no fast tracking of de-listing for heritage buildings burnt down by suspected arson.”*

## Wellington Heritage Festival 2023

We hope many of you enjoyed some of the 100+ events on offer in this year’s Wellington heritage festival. This year, the festival not only had a change of name (from Heritage Week) but also a different way of managing it. A member of our committee, Richard Norman, was also involved with organising this year’s festival, as he explains below. Between us, HPW Committee members went to many of the events and below is a small selection:

### **Richard Norman – Festival opening event**

The greenest building is that which is already standing. This comment from the Chief Engineer at MBIE (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment) Dr Ken Elwood, summarised agreement across a diverse panel of speakers at the opening of Wellington’s heritage festival on October 18. Speakers focused on *The Challenges for Heritage in a Changing Economic and Social World in Greater Wellington*. The launch, at the Old Public Trust building on Lambton Quay, had a capacity audience of 200 at a restored building, which symbolises the challenges of heritage in an earthquake risk city.

First term Wellington City Councillor, representing the new Māori Ward, Nīkau Wi Neera challenged heritage advocates to understand the perspective of students and migrants seeking housing in Wellington. “Many low-income people’s experience of heritage is cheap, cold, damp, poorly-maintained housing in our so-called “character suburbs.” But New Zealand is also “sorely in need of

<sup>1</sup> Four young teens have since been referred to youth services ([news source](#)).

some nation-building ... and heritage and landscape architecture has an important role to play...We occupy a unique intersection of Europe and Polynesia like nowhere else in the world.”

Grace Ridley-Smith, who described herself as “an enthusiastic, passionate, local, concerned about the future of our city” provided research about the contribution of building restoration to tackling carbon emissions. A report by the US National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2016 found “it takes between 10 and 80 years for a new building that is 30 percent more efficient than an average building to overcome the negative climate change impacts related to the construction process”. According to Ministry for the Environment, “up to half of all waste in Aotearoa is made up of construction and demolition waste.”

Grace sought “heritage rules that are genuinely protective without being overly pedantic or punitive. We hear a lot from developers that renovating is more expensive than demolition and new build, but I’d like to see the environmental cost quantified as part of this equation.”

Maurice Clark, owner and managing director of McKee Fehl Constructors Ltd, who restored the Public Trust building, described the process of strengthening, maintaining and finding new uses for buildings as ‘hard yakka’. Jamie Jacobs, central region director for Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga summarised the green building argument. “An existing building, no matter how much work is needed to adapt is always better for the environment as it contains embodied energy from past materials.” New Zealand could learn from United States experience with tax credits for restoration, which have assisted restoration and boosted revenues for local authorities through reuse.

The opening session was a new feature of the Heritage Festival, one initiated by Roger Blakeley, who since February has chaired the festival planning group, which I’m part of. Other core members are David Watt from Heritage New Zealand and Alex Hockley, director of the festival in 2022 and designer of the website. Roger will be president of the Rotary Club of Wellington next year and persuaded eight Rotary clubs in Wellington city to back this year’s festival, with aims to grow further in 2024.

At a time of news about cost overruns with Wellington’s Town Hall and arson and demolition by neglect of Toomath’s Building, the Heritage Festival opening and more than 100 varied events have provided many reasons for celebrating the distinctiveness of Wellington’s urban heritage. You can read a transcription of the speeches from the opening event [here](#).

### **Felicity Wong: *Pākehā at Pukerua.***

I attended this illustrated talk given by He Ara Pukerua, the Pukerua Heritage Group. Ashley and Margaret Blair talked about its first European settler George Stubbs and his local wife and prominent sons, and Jerningham Wakefield (that “unstable wastrel”) who recorded his 1840 visit to primeval bush and beautiful sweep of bay below large areas of the potato grounds of locals. Extracts of writings by early visitors were read by members of the group to great dramatic effect. Stories included the brick works set up to make a million bricks to line the six railway tunnels, which were mostly unusable requiring replacements to be brought to Pukerua by ship from Wellington and

Auckland. Later reports were about the farms of controversial resident Charles Gray and the Hall family who farmed nearby, and later subdivision of the place, and the holiday baches.



(Photo shows numbers 7 and 8 Ocean Parade, Pukerua Bay, built in the 1920s by Walter Morrell, after the beachfront sections were subdivided.)

### ***Botanic Gardens***

Built in 1920 the imposing main gates of the Botanical Gardens welcome visitors to 66 acres of spectacular heritage trees and features. Three talks were given during Wellington Heritage Festival about its history, its notable trees and its pictorial postcard past. A third of the gardens remains in native bush, set aside by early Wellington botanists who realised the risks of local extinction from settlement.

The gazebo (photo below) was built by the Carpenters Guild in 1914 and first displayed on a float in a parade, and is now popular with wedding parties. The gardens have some splendid trees planted from 1870 onwards. The original picturesque stables are still used as gardeners' sheds.



**Pukeahu Park:** I did a tour of the monuments of Pukeahu, the War Memorial Park. The most striking monument is the Australian gift of 15 red stone pillars, inset with glass etched aboriginal patterns.

Another sculpture is a rusty looking metal wreath from the Belgian Government. It's one of 15 similar wreaths around the world and is big enough to walk inside and look out through the lattice of cut out leaves. A fabulous new addition to the park is a huge conch shell decorated with Pasifika patterns - a gift of friendship from the Pacific Peoples. It's at the eastern end near the Suzanne Aubert Crèche (otherwise known as the Queen Elizabeth II Education Centre), a remarkable heritage building built in 1914.

### **Ben Schrader: *Visible or Invisible Heritage***

In a well-attended Rotary and Heritage Festival event at the Wellington Club, historian Jock Phillips gave a stimulating talk about New Zealand's memorials. He asked if our memorials were representative of the population and whether they were an accurate depiction of history. On the first question he found they were not. In his extensive travels through the country over 40 years he had found most memorials fell into one of three groups: 1) soldiers; 2) male politicians; and 3) disasters. While there are seven memorials to Queen Victoria, there were few memorials to New Zealand women. Until relatively recently, the only exception was the memorial to the Waimate doctor, Margaret Cruickshank.

Māori were better represented. Of the colonial era memorials, 17 depicted Māori figures and 13 depicted Pākehā. He put this down to the public representation of important tupuna, in pou and other carving, being an established Māori practice. The government also built memorials to commemorate Māori who had aided colonial settlement – including one of Honiana Te Puni at Petone. Several sportsmen were memorialised, such as Peter Snell and Colin Meads, but there was a lack of figures from the Arts (an exception was the Scottish poet Robbie Burns). He called for more memorials of ordinary New Zealanders and significant events like the 1981 Springbok Tour.

Considering the second question, Jock used the example of the Wakefield Memorial in the Basin Reserve. It commemorates William Wakefield, the (New Zealand Company) founder of colonial Wellington. Despite recent calls to dismantle or remove the monument – due to his disreputable character and dubious dealings with Māori – Jock argued that he remained an important historical figure and the monument should stand. As he put it: 'We need to remember history in its richness and ugliness.' He called for further interpretations of the memorial that acknowledged Wakefield's flaws. These could be provided by a website that visitors could access via a QR code at the site.

Jock concluded that we needed a greater range of memorials and richer interpretations of them. With history becoming a compulsory part of the school curriculum, memorials offered a way for students to learn more about their local past, he said. A fascinating Q + A session followed.

**Vivienne Morrell: *ANZ Archives visit.*** With various earlier banks making up the 'lineage' of the ANZ Bank, the archives began in 1840 when two representatives of the Union Bank arrived in Wellington on the ship Glenbervie, with their two-ton safe. Joanna Newman, the archivist, gave us a very interesting tour, starting with a customer signature book showing signatures from Wellington settlers from 1840 on and a cheque signed by [Arthur Wakefield](#) (he was killed at Wairau in 1843). Objects relating to the goldmining era featured, with scales and record books. There were bank note printing plates, as banks printed their own notes prior to the Reserve Bank taking over that function.



**Modernist Architecture walking tour.** Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga have been running these walks for five years, showcasing different Modernist buildings in Wellington. These tours are always booked out and interesting. This year we started with the 1940s Dixon Street Flats and finished at the 1973-built Hannah Playhouse (both are Category 1 listed buildings).

(Photo: detail of Dixon St Flats)

**HPW contributed financially** towards this year's festival, and also ran two events. We projected large photos of about 30 historic buildings onto a blank wall of an apartment building in Oriental Bay from 8 to 10pm on two weekends of the festival (the example below shows the Lower Hutt Town Hall). We also ran two guided walks of some Island Bay houses that feature in the recently re-published children's book "[Annie and Moon](#)" (photo of the group on the first walk).



## HPW submission on Golders Cottage and Upper Hutt Blockhouse

Upper Hutt City Council recently sought feedback on a report it had commissioned looking at future possibilities (e.g. funding opportunities, improving visitor numbers, and interpretation) for Golders Cottage and the Blockhouse, both in Upper Hutt. You can find more information (including a copy of the [report here](#)). HPW made a submission on the report – supporting some aspects of it, but not others. If you would like to read our submission, a copy is on our website, [here](#).

## Upcoming Events



### Art Deco Buildings in the CBD - Monday 22 January 2024

**(Wellington Anniversary Day) at 10:30am:**

Committee member Vivienne Morrell will lead a walk looking at Art Deco (and other late 1920s to early 1940s) buildings from the Railway Station to Cuba Street. This will take about 1.5 hours – there is a cafe option at the end!

If postponed due to weather, the alternative day will be Saturday 27 January.

**Oriental Bay historic buildings walk: Saturday 17 February 2024 at 10:30am.** Our Chairperson and Oriental Bay resident, Felicity Wong, will lead this walk looking at the various historic buildings of Oriental Bay. If this is postponed due to weather the alternative date will be Saturday 24 February.

Please RSVP for either or both of these walks to: [wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz](mailto:wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz)

**Mid-March:** We are currently arranging a trip with a Lower Hutt focus. Details will be in our February 2024 newsletter.

**Other events - Architecture Symposium: Friday 1 December 2023: “redolent of the soil”:** *New Zealand interior and landscape architectures of the 1890s.* This is a one-day symposium held under the auspices of the Centre for Building Performance Research, Victoria University of Wellington. You can read more [here](#) and scroll to the bottom to find the registration form. The programme and abstracts are also available on this page. **Venue:** Wellington School of Architecture, Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington, Vivian St. There is a charge.

## Past Events

### 1. Saturday 12 August: Two Churches visit



As a fine example of 19th century timber architecture, Wellington’s **Wesley Methodist Church** is a Category 1 listed heritage building. Blending Gothic and Classical features, the church was designed by Wellington architect Thomas Turnbull and completed in 1880. (You can read more about the church on the [WCC heritage site](#).)

The latest remediation and restoration project implemented extensive seismic upgrades to the church, through a carefully-managed process, where discreet interventions belie the complexity of the works. Paul Cummack told us about the process involved at the church. This project won an NZIA 2023 Wellington Architecture Award for Heritage. (Wesley Church visit photo by Neil Price [www.neilprice.photo](http://www.neilprice.photo))

The second church visit was to the **former Congregational Church at 45 Cambridge Terrace**. This impressive building was built in 1916, designed by architect William Fielding. The former church was recently earthquake strengthened and is now known as [The Chapel on Cambridge](#) and has concerts several times a year. Wayne Coffey hosted our visit.

### 2. Sunday 27 August. HPW AGM, and speaker Laura Dunham

Thirty members attended our AGM at the St Peter’s Church, Willis St, Garden Room. Following the business part of the meeting, Laura Dunham enlightened us with the following talk: **Building Dialogues in the Limelight: Architectural Narratives in Wellington Magic Lantern Lectures.**

Part of the attraction in going to public lectures, meetings, and entertainments during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the chance to view images of fascinating architectural sights from around the world while also listening to explanations about them, a process made easier with the magic lantern, the predecessor of today’s digital data projector. This instrument not only enabled people to learn about the very latest ideas concerning buildings, but it also provided the opportunity to discuss issues about them and make decisions about their surroundings that continue to affect how we view and experience Wellington today.

Laura Dunham is currently a PhD student in the Wellington School of Architecture at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington. Her research investigates the role of the magic lantern in effecting change in New Zealand’s built environment from the 1880s to the 1940s.

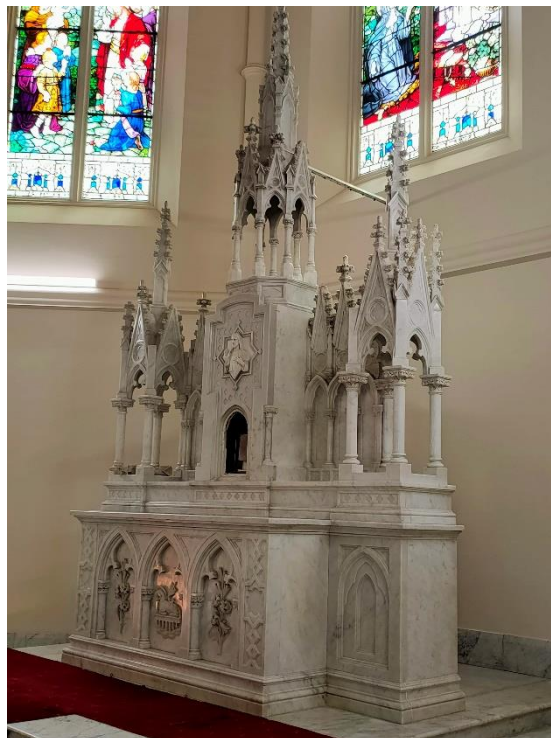
### 3. September 23 – Eva Forster-Garbutt on New Zealand’s domestic interiors: 1840 to 1900.



Eva Forster-Garbutt, a PhD candidate at the School of Architecture and Design and Victoria University Wellington, gave a very interesting presentation about the changes in the interior layout and design of our early homes, between 1840 and 1900. Her research draws on existing knowledge, early photographs, the work of heritage professionals, and her research on interior decorative linings. Case studies focused on interiors from the Wellington region, and particularly wallpapers, which were imported or brought out with the settlers, and were plentiful and relatively cheap.

### Erskine Chapel reopened after renovation and strengthening

HPW (and others) had argued for retention of the 1906-built Main Block at the former Erskine College in Island Bay. We had hoped to see it converted into apartments. However, that fight was lost and the building was demolished. You can read more background on our website's Advocacy page [here](#). We also covered it in at least two newsletters (Nov 2018 and Feb 2018 – you can find all our newsletters on our website [here](#)). We are pleased to see the restoration of the 1930 Chapel is complete and the building was reopened at an official function on 26 October. It was a real pleasure to hear the women's choir of Alliance Francaise perform in the beautiful space. There was an open day and craft market on the following Sunday, giving many more people the opportunity to see the building.



(Erskine Chapel, 30 October 2023, Vivienne Morrell)

As it was **World Day for Audiovisual Heritage** on 27 October, we thought you might enjoy this short 1925 clip: 'Wellington capital city of New Zealand' from Nga Taonga Sound and Vision: <https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/search-use-collection/search/F855/>