



The Voice of Heritage

HISTORIC PLACES WELLINGTON INC
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Newsletter

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CONTACT US

Our email address is wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz

TOURS AND EVENTS

Basin Reserve Heritage Talk Monday 4th March
Basin Reserve Tour Sunday 10th March
Heritage Office Buildings Tour Sunday

Harcourts Building Decision – A win for heritage

We are happy to be able to report that the application for consent to demolish Harcourts Building has been declined. This is a very important decision, not just for this building, but for future cases where owners wish to get rid of heritage buildings which may require work to bring them up to an acceptable seismic standard.

As recorded in Newsletter 2 this Category I landmark building on the Lambton Quay/Grey Street corner was the subject of a resource consent application by the owner to demolish the building and replace it with a tower block. Although built to the highest standards of its day, Harcourts has been declared an earthquake-prone building, and remedial works will be required if it is to be preserved.

The resource consent application was heard by Commissioners in a four day hearing in late December. Evidence for Historic Places Wellington opposing the application was presented by committee members **John Daniels, Deborah Cranko** and **Peter Dowell** (by phone link from Sydney). The evidence dealt with the building's significance, seismic resistance and other technical issues relating to Harcourts, and the market for strengthened heritage properties in Wellington. Our evidence complemented that of New Zealand Historic Places Trust, and was supported by a range of other organisations and individuals opposed to demolition.

The Commissioners found that a compelling case had not been made for demolition, and therefore declined the application. Their decision is long and complex, including analysis of the case against the provisions of the Resource Management Act and the Wellington City district plan. The Commissioners pointed to doubts about a number of crucial points in the case made for demolition, including

- 🕒 the structural strength of the building. The applicant's own engineering witness stated that the building could be 42% of current code, which would put it well above the recommended 33%.
- 🕒 the need to strengthen the building to 100% of current code, as advocated by the applicant.
- 🕒 estimated costs of structural strengthening. Costs put forward by the applicant differed from other strengthening projects of similar buildings in the city.
- 🕒 the state of the market for space in older buildings in the city.

The Commissioners stated:

"Based on the evidence before us, we have concluded that not every 'reasonable alternative solution' for retaining the building has been considered. This includes strengthening to a standard of less than 100%NBS"

They concluded that "the demolition of the Harcourt's Building would not constitute sustainable management of an important physical resource, namely a heritage building of considerable significance".

While this decision is very encouraging, there is every possibility of an appeal by the owner to the Environment Court, so the case may not be over yet.

Heritage New Zealand Bill

This Bill, at present before the Local Government and Environment Select Committee of Parliament, replaces the present Historic Places Act 1993. The Bill changes the name of the **Historic Places Trust** to **Heritage New Zealand**, and reinforces the status of **Heritage New Zealand** as a Crown Entity. The composition of the Board is altered to reflect this status, and changes are made to some of the present powers of the Trust. The Trust's Branch Committees are disestablished, although the Trust intends to retain its paying membership.

Historic Places Wellington (HPW), along with **Historic Places Aotearoa (HPA)**, has made two sets of submissions to the Select Committee. The first submission questioned the intention for Heritage New Zealand to retain its membership. This is seen as inconsistent with its Crown Entity status, and as prejudicing the role of HPA and HPW as membership-based heritage bodies.

The second submission was in response to changes made to the Bill by way of Supplementary Order Paper. These were introduced by the Government after the original Bill's first reading. The changes alter the title of the Register of Historic Places to a Record, and reduce the status of the Record in Resource Management Act processes. The SOP also introduces a proposed National Landmarks List. This List, to be limited to 50 historic places, is intended to recognise the country's most significant places. In reality, the List would be a largely toothless exercise, conferring no additional protection or assistance to listed places and depending on owners' agreement to listing. HPW and HPA opposed these changes, arguing that the present Register not be downgraded, and recommending that the National Landmarks List provisions be dropped.

Earthquake resilience

In the wake of the Canterbury earthquakes, awareness of risks – and insurance premiums – have risen dramatically. Wellington has always been better prepared than most cities to deal with an earthquake, but even here the imperative to address 'earthquake-prone' buildings has become more urgent. There is debate about issues such as the percentage to which buildings should be strengthened and timeframes but the Government and Wellington City Council are adopting a measured approach to the whole issue, including widespread consultation.

Following the report of the Royal Commission on the Christchurch earthquakes, the Government has issued a public consultation paper. This proposes that the standard for strengthening earthquake-prone buildings be set at 33% of the National Building Standard (NBS). Buildings not meeting this standard would be required to be assessed within a five year period, and then strengthened or demolished within ten years.

Public information meetings have been held around the country. The Wellington meeting was well attended and many questions and concerns were raised. The consultation period runs until 8 March. Historic Places Wellington is discussing with Historic Places Aotearoa about the form of a possible submission focussing on heritage aspects.

Check out www.dbh.govt.nz/review-of-earthquake-prone-building-policy if you would like to know more. For individual home owners there is a useful publication put out by Wellington City Council in conjunction with BRANZ titled "Earthquake Strengthen Your House", also available on their website www.wellington.govt.nz/news/displayitem.

Petone Plan Change threat to heritage precinct

HPW made a submission in August 2012 on **Hutt City Council Plan Change 29**, which proposes to open up adjacent areas to the west of the Jackson Street Historic Area in a way that could have a serious effect on the viability of that heritage precinct. There has been very strong public interest in this proposed Plan Change, attracting 250 submissions. To provide assistance to the Independent Commissioners in understanding the key issues and a range of potential solutions, Hutt City Council arranged a series of four independently facilitated pre-hearing meetings, held between 18th and 25th February. Pre-hearing meetings of this kind are unusual for Hutt City Council.

Because of the complexity of the issues, each meeting focussed on one of the major issues, Natural Hazards, Retail, Built Form and Design, and Traffic. Submitters, who were all invited to participate, generally found it difficult to separate these issues as they interact with each other. One of the overarching issues for HPW as well as for most of the submitters is the threat to the historic precinct and the small scale village feel of Petone as a whole. John Daniels represented HPW while Committee member and Petone resident Ruth Mansell spoke at the meeting on Retail.

Within two days of each meeting **Sue Piper** sent to each of the submitters present her notes of the meeting. Notes for the Retail meeting state that the meeting agreed that the Plan Change ignored the Petone Vision Statement which was the result of a series of community seminars in 2009 and had been intended as the basis for further review of the District Plan. In particular, the Retail meeting agreed that any "Plan Changes should reflect in particular the *Statement's element 1: A distinguishing feature of Petone is it being a unique heritage place.*" The notes also state that the meeting agreed that current "Plan Change provisions did not protect the heritage precinct of Petone ... and would have the cumulative effect of *destroying* the vitality and amenity values of the heritage precinct ... threaten the

heritage precinct given that larger buildings would be out of scale." Formal hearings for the submissions are expected to take place during March.

Cuba Street Walk

An enthusiastic group of **30 members** toured Cuba Street on the evening of Tuesday 29 January 2013. The tour was conducted by a group of staff from the School of Architecture: **Andrew Charleson, David Kernohan** and **Nigel Isaacs**.

The tour started with an overview of the street and a discussion of a possible future through a model developed by fourth-year students from the **School of Architecture** at the end of 2012 showing how the street's buildings could be strengthened. The students developed plans for 70 buildings as part of the project, which was supervised by practising structural engineers and architects, and supported by New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) and Wellington City Council. For more information on the student project (shown in the photograph on this page) see: www.victoria.ac.nz/architecture/about/news/2012-news#a131343. The model is likely to again be on show later in the year in another location, so if you would like to see it, keep your eyes on the paper.



Andrew Charleson talks about the Cuba Street model



The tour then explored Cuba Street, from Karo Drive to Manners Street. Highlights included the original group of cottages in Footscray Ave (developed by Thomas Bloomfield Jobson in 1886 and named after the Melbourne suburb of his youth); the newly resettled Tonks Ave; the interesting reuse of a range of buildings; and an animated discussion of an out-of-character and proportion modern office. At the end of the tour a number of the participants went for dinner at Olive Cafe. Our thanks to the tour guides for their support.

Photo: David Kernohan talks about Footscray Ave

Basin Reserve Flyover

This proposed solution to traffic problems in this area is proving to be controversial, and as a contribution to our understanding of the issues we have arranged for a tour of the area which will concentrate on heritage aspects. Joanna Newman will also be talking on this subject on 4 March and HPW members are welcome to attend. See details of both events on the next page. If you are unable to attend the talk or tour and would like to know more about the history of the Basin Reserve, you will find a guide on Mt Victoria Historical Society's website at <http://mvhs.wellington.net.nz/Publications/BasinReserveWalkingGuide.pdf>

In our previous newsletter we commented on the **Aubert crèche**, a Category 1-registered building which is to be moved. Within the Basin Reserve complex is another heritage building - the **old cricket pavilion** (now known as the

Museum Stand). This is at risk because it is earthquake prone. It is a Category 2-registered building but unfortunately has received little maintenance for many years.

Register Proposals: five more in the Wellington City Council area

HPT has consulted us on five more Wellington properties for inclusion on their Register. The properties are: Holy Trinity Church in the Ohariu Valley, Franconia (Invincible House) on the Terrace, the Albion Gold Mining Remains, Crofton in Ngaio and the Tram Shelter in Oriental Bay. All proposals but the Mining Remains are “deficient” ones in that they were noted previously but the formal process had not been completed. Of particular interest is Crofton which was built by William Fox in 1857 making it one of the earliest houses still extant in Wellington. In view of Fox’s importance as a national figure, including his time as Premier, we have recommended that Crofton’s Register category be raised from 2 to 1.

Basin Reserve Heritage Talk **Monday 4th March 7.45 pm**

Joanna Newman will present an illustrated talk on this NZHPT registered historic area. The first sports ground in New Zealand to be registered in this way. It is unique in that all buildings, stands, gates, scoreboard, the bank etc are included within the area.

Joanna is a former Wellington City Archivist and current Convenor of the Mount Victoria Historical Society and a committee member of HPW.

Members of **Historic Places Wellington** are invited to join the **Onslow Historical Society Inc.** for this talk to be held at **K.A.T.E. 86 Khandallah Road.**

Basin Reserve Tour **Sunday 10th March 11 am**

Join **Joanna Newman** for a guided tour of the Basin Reserve - hear about its unique and precious heritage.

You are welcome to bring friends along.

Meet at the Wakefield Memorial inside the Basin Reserve at 11 am.

This is an outdoor event, so come dressed for the weather!

(The walk will be postponed in the event of seriously adverse conditions, so please register your interest in joining us).

To register and so we can contact you if necessary: email jnewman@xtra.co.nz or phone 385 2254.

Heritage Office Buildings Tour **Sunday 5th May 2 pm**

(This tour was previously advertised for March)

Place: Meet outside **Departmental Building, 15-21 Stout Street** (near Ballance Street) for a tour of two heritage office buildings.

The tour will proceed wet or fine. It is likely that some stairs will need to be navigated as one of the buildings is under renovation. The tour will be mainly inside, but some walking will be required between the buildings.

The **1939 Department Building** was designed by **John T. Mair**, Government Architect (NZHPT Category 2, Register Number 1356). Built by Fletcher Construction, the hot-rivet, steel frame building has exterior stone clad, reinforced concrete walls. Refurbished in 1989, it was occupied by the Defence Department until about 5 years ago. Once refurbishment is completed it will be occupied by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (see: www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/business/commercial-property/8098075/Argosy-buys-city-landmarks)

The **Tower Building** (formerly Government Life) (NZHPT Category 2, Register Number 3618) occupies most of the block bounded by Brandon St, Customhouse Quay and Panama St. The 1931 steel framed building was also designed by **John T. Mair**. It was described as “a solid earthquake-resisting lump that was more a tribute to Napier than to Rome”, but after a renovation a range of businesses occupy high quality, light, airy and heritage spaces.

Communicating with members

Our quarterly newsletter goes to all members, by email to most and by post to those who do not use email. Communications at intervals between newsletters (such as reminders of tours or urgent heritage news) are sent by email only. We regret that time and finance limit our ability to post more often than quarterly to those with postal addresses only.

Please feel free to share items in this newsletter with friends or contact groups, though in most instances our tours are limited to members only. To suggest items or for feedback on our material, contact us on wgtm@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz