



HISTORIC PLACES WELLINGTON INC  
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# NEWSLETTER

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## EVENTS (See page 5 for details)

**Monday 13 March**      **City Talks: The Big Smoke**

**Sunday 26 March**      **Waikanae History Tour**

## Erskine College Buildings in Island Bay

In our last newsletter we reported about this long-running saga and our position about the proposal by the developer to demolish the main college block which is part of the Category One heritage designation. Historic Places Wellington wrote to the Wellington City Council on this issue at the beginning of November. Since then, two of our committee members, Ben Schrader and Christina MacKay, have written an article about the problems around the land designation of the Erskine property. This was published in the Dominion Post on 21 December last year but due to the importance of the issues raised we are reprinting it below, slightly edited for space reasons.

“The aim of Special Housing Areas (SHA) is to speed up housing provision. A developer can apply to the Minister for Building and Construction for a SHA and, if approved, avoid the usual checks and appeals of the Resource Management Act. This includes consulting affected communities. Historic Places Wellington is very concerned about the present and future impact of SHAs on the region’s historic places.

A case in point is Island Bay’s Erskine College. It includes an imposing four-storey Main (teaching) Block (opened in 1907) and a magnificent chapel (1930). Both were designed in the Neo-Gothic style by the gifted Wellington architect John Sydney Swan. Both are Category One listed buildings, the highest rating, and reserved for exceptional structures.

In 2015 the owner of the complex, The Wellington Company, sought and received a SHA over the site. The Wellington City Council supports the designation. The developer proposes to build 96 dwellings and retain and strengthen the chapel. It plans to demolish the Main Block, arguing it is not feasible to keep it. However, in adaptively reusing the chapel it believes the most significant heritage values of the site and ‘spirit’ of Erskine College will be retained.



We doubt this claim. The Main Block is essential to retaining Erskine's spirit and we are concerned that the developer does not fully appreciate its heritage significance and explored all options for converting it into apartments or other purposes.

Historic buildings can certainly make inspirational living spaces. A successful example is the former St James Church in Newtown, which was recently converted into several apartments. Its freshly-painted tower now glimmers on the skyline. The Main Block is of similar grandeur and construction to Victoria University's Hunter Building, now fully earthquake strengthened and increasingly treasured by Wellingtonians. We believe the Main Block would be equally valued if restored and reused.

If the building does indeed fall due to the SHA designation, it raises chilling questions about the protection of other heritage buildings in Wellington. What will then stop developers from buying other places of heritage value and seeking an SHA to bypass measures that have enabled

Wellingtonians to have a say in how their communities develop?

The question then becomes whether SHAs should be allowed to be applied to heritage sites. We think this is a public conversation that needs to be had. We support the fact that the region needs more housing, but this should not mean losing the very best of our built heritage."

*Ben Schrader is an urban historian.*

*Christina MacKay is an architect and senior lecturer at Victoria University.*

### **Capital's heritage now at your fingertips**









On Tuesday 29 November Mayor Justin Lester launched Wellington City Council's new online heritage inventory to a full room of attendees at the Wellington Museum. The heritage inventory is an online resource for information on heritage items scheduled in the District Plan. It is regarded as the finest in New Zealand for accessibility and content.

It documents over 450 heritage buildings scheduled in the District Plan, including each building's address, current and historic photographs, construction data, architect, heritage and social significance, subsequent consents/modifications, and general history. The inventory also includes information about heritage areas.

At the event, attendees were shown the new website and given a tour of its user friendly interface. The website functions through a keyword search for either Architects, Areas, or Buildings and allows for comparisons between buildings. Comprehensive reports are tidily managed through drop down and collapsible folders to ensure easy navigation. The value of the inventory was already shown as it was stated that the photographs in the inventory were used in the aftermath of the November earthquake to identify any new damage to heritage buildings.

The inventory was created in response to no online heritage information being available for the buildings in the District Plan. Previously, information was only available on request. This hindered the public's engagement with heritage places. In 2014 the Council decided to move the information online to improve the public's access to the information and to deliver up-to-date, relevant heritage evaluations in accordance with their Disaster Response Strategy.

The improved accessibility reflects the wider change to more public engagement with heritage issues throughout the planning industry. This is a response to the debate of whether heritage places are restricting positive growth or should be retained and celebrated as a part of an identity. By providing the information in a publically accessible format it democratizes the process by empowering the public to understand the heritage values and then make informed judgements.

			
<p><b>Embassy Theatre</b> 9-11 Kent Terrace Mt Victoria Wellington Constructed 1924 - 1924 <a href="#">Llewellyn Edwin Williams</a></p>	<p><b>St James Theatre</b> 77 - 81 Courtenay Place Te Aro Wellington Constructed 1912 - 1912 <a href="#">Henry Eli White</a></p>	<p><b>A &amp; T Burt Ltd Building (Former) / St James Theatre Foyer</b> 87 Courtenay Place Te Aro Wellington Constructed 1900 <a href="#">Dawson &amp; King</a></p>	<p><b>Commercial Building</b> 179 Riddiford Street Newtown Wellington Constructed 1902 - 1902 <a href="#">Unknown</a></p>
			
<p><b>Paramount Theatre</b> 25-29 Courtenay Place Te Aro Wellington Constructed 1917 - 1927 <a href="#">James Bennie</a></p>	<p><b>Circa Theatre</b> 1 Taranaki Street Te Aro Wellington Constructed 1916 - 1916 <a href="#">Penty and Lawrence</a></p>		<p><b>Wharanui / former Stagecraft Theatre</b> 15 Kensington Street (relocated from 13 Tonks Avenue) Te Aro Wellington Constructed 1906 <a href="#">Unknown</a></p>

WCC On-line Heritage Inventory – Page example

The inventory is currently live, access is linked below, and will be continuously updated with new information and new user tools over the coming months. The team at Wellington City Council have done an outstanding job at providing the information in an accessible format.

Wellington City Council Heritage Inventory: <http://www.wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/>

## **Turnbull House Continuing Closure**

Turnbull House has been closed and “yellow-stickered” since December 2012, although it suffered only minimal damage in the November 2016 earthquake. This well-loved brick building occupies a prominent site adjacent to the Parliamentary Precinct Heritage Area and is considered to be the finest piece of architecture on Bowen Street. Wealthy bibliophile Alexander Turnbull commissioned architect William Turnbull (no relation) to design it as a private residence and to accommodate his extensive library. Built in 1915 in a plain Queen Anne revivalist style, it is a strong example of a large, early 20th century, domestic residence. It has a Category 1 heritage rating, having exceptional historic and cultural value as the home of Alexander Turnbull who bequeathed to the country his extensive collection of books and manuscripts. The building is held in high public esteem which was demonstrated in the campaign to prevent its demolition in the 1970s.

Somewhat unusually for an urban heritage building, Turnbull House is within the portfolio of the Department of Conservation, as is the Old Government Buildings nearby. DoC has been undertaking a series of earthquake strengthening options but after more than four years there seems to be little resolution as to a possible way forward. Of more immediate concern is that there is now a new notice attached to the building which notes the building is classified as “earthquake prone in terms of section 124 of the Building Act 2004” and further states

“You are accordingly required by 31 January 2018 to either:

- a. Strengthen the building to a sufficient degree so that it is not earthquake prone; or
- b. Demolish the building.”

The Friends of Turnbull Library, who are understandably very concerned about the on-going closure and seeming lack of action, have made at least two representations to the Minister who is the Hon Maggie Barry, seeking assurance that the work to strengthen and preserve the building will receive urgent attention. Our committee has written recently to the Minister in support of these representations, noting our surprise that further delays and more assessments are now being planned by her department. Our letter states also that “It must be of concern to you and other Government Ministers that such a prominent building within the Crown portfolio now displays a ‘demolish’ notice and thus sets a poor example to other private owners of heritage portfolios.”

### **New Committee Member**

We welcome onto the committee Jamie Jacobs who is a heritage professional from Washington DC, who has recently come to Wellington. He has been working in the historic preservation section of the National Park Service.

Other members of the committee are: *David Batchelor; Deborah Cranko; John Daniels; Peter Dowell; Nigel Isaacs; Christina Mackay; Vivienne Morrell; Ben Schrader; Priscilla Williams; Felicity Wong.*

### **“Tough but necessary call” to demolish Shed 35**

Sadly the elegant brick Shed 35 on Waterloo Quay is set to be demolished. It is scheduled as a Heritage Building in the Wellington City District Plan. It is also included within the Wellington Harbour Board Historic Area which was proposed by The Historic Places Trust in 2012 to be formally



*Shed 35 Cordoned off*

reregistered. The report on the historic area lists 8 “sheds” of which this is the most northern. The other sheds listed – running from north to south - are #s 21,13,11,7,5, 3 and 22.

Built in 1915, the former Wellington Harbour Board warehouse is a rare intact example of an early 20th century waterfront building. It is a well-considered and elegant symmetrical composition of

basic architectural elements that creates a simple but striking building. The brick warehouse is associated with the development of Wellington and the society and economy which grew out of the port. This history includes New Zealand’s longest and bitterest 1951 waterfront dispute when 22,000 workers across the country downed tools for five months over pay.

After sitting vacant for many years, the building was earmarked in 2012 to be renovated to a permanent market place similar to Melbourne's bustling Victoria Market. The idea was celebrated by the Council and other Wellington market organisers as a positive contribution to the waterfront. However the November Kaikoura 7.8 earthquake damaged its structure beyond repair after the 2013 Seddon earthquake initially weakened the building.

In a statement Wellington City Council's city planning manager, Warren Ulusele, said it had been a "tough but necessary call" to use the emergency provisions in the Resource Management Act 1991 to demolish the building but earthquake damage had made it a risk to the public and port workers. The Chairman of Greater Wellington Regional Council, which jointly owns the building with CentrePort, stated that the earthquakes "totally compromised" its structure and it has "reached a point where it's almost too dangerous (to keep standing)". The CentrePort Chief Executive said that "Shed 35 is susceptible to further damage and/or collapse". Given these circumstances, Heritage New Zealand have given their approval for the demolition.

Structural demolition of the building is yet to start as asbestos is firstly being cleared from the roof of the building.

## **Forthcoming Events**

### **CITY TALKS - The Big Smoke:** New Zealand Cities 1840-1920 — Ben Schrader

*Streets are filled with larrikins, orators, hawkers, hang men and prostitutes in the first scholarly study of our urban history*

City Gallery Wellington, Civic Square. **Monday 13 March**, 6pm. Free entry

The pursuit of city life is one of the most important untold stories of New Zealand. Historian Ben Schrader's *The Big Smoke* is the first comprehensive history to tell this story, presenting a dynamic and highly illustrated account of city life from 1840 to 1920. At a time of national debate over housing and the growth of our cities, he reveals how our urban origins have shaped the people we are today and invites us to consider such questions as: what did cities look like and how did they change; why were women especially drawn to live in cities; in what ways did Māori experience and shape cities; how far was the street a living room and stage for city life; and why did New Zealand so quickly become a nation of townspeople?

City Talks is an ongoing series initiated by the New Zealand Institute of Architects Wellington Branch and presented in partnership with City Gallery Wellington. Its purpose is to foster discussion about architecture for a broader audience in a city that cares to openly discuss ideas relevant to our future. The talk will be followed by refreshments.

### **Waikanae History Tour - Sunday 26 March**

This tour will follow the same pattern as our successful tour of the Paekakariki area a couple of years ago. Our guides will be Kapiti historian **Anthony Dreaver** and archaeologist **Mary O'Keeffe**. Mary has been the project archaeologist for the Freeway project. Both have an excellent knowledge of the area and we will be assured of a fascinating tour.

This tour will be by coach, so there will be a charge and you will need to book (details below). The coach will leave from **Paraparaumu rail station at 1.00 pm**, and will return to the station at around 4.30 pm. We will first visit sites on the south side of the Waikanae River and then go on to Waikanae proper on the north side.

To book, please email [wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz](mailto:wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz), or phone John Daniels on 938 7971.

The charge will be \$10 per head, payable on the day.