

NEWSLETTER

No. 41. August 2022

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EVENTS

14 August 2022 – HPW AGM

23 August 2022 – George Troup talk

16 October 2022 – CBD guided walk

Where now for the Gordon Wilson Flats? – Ben Schrader

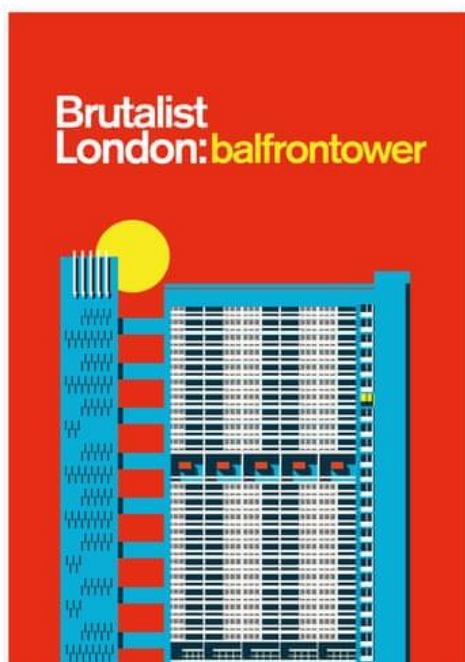


At a recent Wellington Club event the esteemed developer, Maurice Clark, provided a fascinating overview of his involvement in the adaptive reuse and restoration of heritage buildings in the city – discussed further in this issue. There was insufficient time for a Q+A session at his talk's end, but the chair of the session, Cr Nicola Young, asked Maurice what he thought of the (Victoria University-owned) Gordon Wilson Flats (GWF). After some reflection he bluntly stated: 'Knock it down', leading to spontaneous applause.

The audience reaction wasn't surprising. When heritage activists successfully appealed the WCC's 2016 decision to delist the heritage building (to enable its demolition) in the Environment Court in

2017 the public response was incredulous. A [Stuff poll](#) found that 90 percent of respondents thought the building an eyesore and should come down. A similar reaction happened after Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga recommended it be listed as a Category 1 building due to its outstanding heritage values. For most Wellingtonians it was simply too ugly to be heritage. Since then, the Brutalist building has been in limbo. It continues to deteriorate and may reach the point where it becomes unsalvageable.

With the GWF close to becoming yet another case of demolition by neglect, it's encouraging to hear that a keynote speaker at this year's New Zealand Institute of Architects' conference is the French architect, [Anne Lacaton](#). She and her partner Jean-Phillipe Vassal's guiding principle of 'Never demolish, never remove or replace, always add, transform, and reuse!' has made them world leaders in the adaptive re-use of buildings. This includes the upgrade of a [modernist social housing block](#) – similar to GWF – in Bordeaux, which alongside their other work saw them awarded the [2021 Pritzker prize](#) (widely considered the Nobel Prize for architecture). Meanwhile, in London, another Brutalist social housing block once dubbed Britain's 'ugliest building', [Balforn Tower](#), has recently been renovated and is now being sold off as individual 'trophy flats' to urbane and eager buyers.



Balforn Tower Art Print by Mathaki Kodavsal (Guardian)

There is scope for a similar outcome for GWF. From a heritage perspective the ideal would be for the flats to return to social housing, but both Kāinga Ora and other social housing providers have ruled this out, on the grounds that high-rise flats are difficult to manage. Victoria University has previously said GWF is unsuitable for student accommodation, although it continues to lease former [high-rise office blocks](#) for this purpose. If this really is the case, perhaps the time has come for the university to look for a developer who would be prepared to buy the flats and renovate them for private residential use? The sale price could then be used to fund faculty development elsewhere.

The welcome reopening of the stunningly restored Category 1 St James Theatre in June reminds us that all Category 1 places have national heritage significance. We should therefore treat all with equal respect rather

than casually determine that one is intrinsically more important than another because we presently think it more beautiful. If Wellington's/Pōneke's future rests on shaping a more sustainable city to mitigate the climate crisis, then we need to get past the knock-it-down-and-start-again mentality that has driven the city's development since 1840. We need to make Lacaton and Vassal's catch cry our own.

For the love of built heritage: Maurice Clark talk – Felicity Wong

Innovative Wellington engineer and heritage building maestro, Maurice Clark, recently talked about his and wife Kaye's heritage projects. Host, Cr Nicola Young, congratulated him on behalf of all Wellingtonians for his superb commitment to the city's heritage.

Maurice recalled his early absorption of and love for the variety of historical building styles from his early years in Oxford, UK. He was unusual in combining structural engineering expertise with investing and developing. 'It's important to recognise the difference between conservation [highest level of preservation], and adaptive re-use [pragmatic approach],' he said.

The 1987 restoration of the **Old Government Buildings** was his first conservation and strengthening project. The rotten totara piles, going two meters deep into the poor ground of the old beach, needed to be replaced with concrete ones to enable the rest of the building to be restored.

The building's timber frame was built by farmer labourers during the 1870s recession using Australian hardwood that had been dumped on the beach. The strongest part was the old Treasury mint area made of brick. While the building was 'very wobbly', the interior doors and window joinery was of 'brilliant quality'. Over \$2 million worth of demolition Kauri and other wood was used in the building's restoration. A lot of the existing plaster had cracked and fallen and was replaced with new plaster using modern fibres instead of horse hair. The building's 22 chimneys had previously been removed but were restored using polystyrene replicas.



Among those Maurice has brought back from the brink are the Old Defence Force Building <https://www.mckeeffel.co.nz/our-projects/15-stout-street/> (behind his shoulders and now MBIE) and the former Public Trust Building (to his right and now Culture and Heritage ministry). (Image: Stuff)

His next heritage project was the **Hunter Building** at Victoria University. It also had a 'magnificent staircase', but except for the main library, the rest had been 'pushed around a bit'. Made of unreinforced brick with a cavity structure, the building was heavily sprayed with concrete, and big ties used to transfer loads. Maurice said he 'couldn't believe there'd been such a strong move to knock it down'. He was, he said, 'thankful to the protagonists who opposed that.'

The old **Government Life Building** at 50 Customhouse Quay followed. The original building had been knocked down and replaced in the 1930s with one constructed of steel encased in concrete. The Government couldn't find the necessary steel so steel plates were riveted together to make bigger plates, attached to beams. The rivets were heated by coal braziers on the floor below and thrown up to a guy above who caught them with a leather glove. He put them into a hole and with another man on the other side, they hammered the hot rivet in place. As it cooled, it contracted pulling the plates and beams together. The building's earthquake rating was 25%, but research at the Ministry of Works' lab showed the joints to be very strong. Heritage New Zealand supported Maurice's desire to remove the footpath canopy to reveal the Doric columns, but he had to go to the Environment Court to get consent because of a city ordinance about canopies over certain Wellington footpaths.

The old **Defence Force Building** at 15 Stout St had been empty for eight years, and had a 'dubious' earthquake rating, and an 'unattractive courtyard.' It was also built by the Ministry of Works but using proper steel which was welded. There was doubt about the quality of the numerous overhead welds involved and the building had only a 40% earthquake rating. The 3000-plus welded joints were however found to have been done by a British shipbuilder to a high standard. Research conducted by the University of Canterbury involved cutting holes and using big jacks to drag the beams apart. Among 50 tested, only one joint failed, and now the building has a 180% rating. The 22,000sqm building was snapped up for MBIE.

Maurice's next heritage project was the **Wellington Museum**, the old headquarters of the Harbour Board. The 1892 brick building rested on timber piles. Replacing the piles without destroying the heritage building, Maurice said, 'was like putting on new shoes without taking the old ones off and

not sitting down.’ The walls were of unreinforced masonry and he had to construct new beams and fix them to the building’s columns and jack up the entire building in order to take its weight off the old piles. Since then, the building’s walls require further strengthening.

The **Public Trust Building** was Maurice’s next heritage ‘headache’. Plaster had fallen on the heads of Creative New Zealand staff who left it three-quarters empty. The Hon Stephen Kos and ground floor tenant, Penny’s Trelise Cooper store remained, despite preparations for strengthening. The tall and slender building was made of huge granite blocks and was ‘very wobbly.’ Maurice strengthened the building by putting big foundations in the bottom; a huge beam with anchors, and ‘two very thick sheer walls’ with steel inside them to absorb any earthquake energy. The building has a lovely performance hall which welcomes being utilised.

Maurice’s current project is the **Oriental Bay Band Rotunda** which was empty for 10 years. The building has concrete cancer and needs extensive work. His original plan was to drop the restaurant floor to street level, but WCC insisted (‘rightly’ he added) that the lower windows and basement be kept for architectural integrity and community use. The weakness with the building is caused by the windows on the seaward side having no lateral strength. The building’s heavy top could screw off its bottom in an earthquake ‘like opening a jam jar.’ It turns out the basement slab can be fixed and diagonally braced, and seawater entry stopped. The priority is to identify a restaurant tenant to complete work to specification.

Maurice ‘inherited’ the **Anglican Chinese Mission Hall** in Frederick St, with the site for his and Kaye’s “Housing First” philanthropic project. They are building 75 units for housing vulnerable folks. The Mission Hall, designed by Frederick de Jersey Clere, was to be knocked down by its previous owners. Only the facade had been listed by WCC for “streetscape” value (and that had been opposed by the previous owners). This unreinforced masonry building ‘on poor ground’ has since been heritage listed. Its internal walls are being replaced by plaster ones and the building needs strengthening.

Finally, some remarks were made about the Gordon Wilson Flats and Maurice applauded for his and Kaye’s tremendous contributions to Wellington’s built heritage, a truly wonderful legacy.

“Hometown Boomtown” – Felicity Wong

Sir Michael Fowler died recently. The [DomPost](#) noted that during his mayoral tenure (1974-1983) ‘many of the city’s finest old hotels came down but it was on Lambton Quay that the [earthquake] policy had its biggest impact. Half of the 187 at-risk buildings along the city’s Golden Mile were bowled.’ Some say Sir Michael had a modernising vision, but it was at odds with many, like Rex Nichols and reporter David McGill, who valued Wellington’s heritage. To see Fowler in action, take a look at the 1983 film [“Hometown Boomtown”](#).



Left. The sites (in red) of central Wellington buildings that were demolished under Mayor Fowler's tenure. Right. Michael Fowler being interviewed in the Hometown-Boomtown documentary. (Images: stills from “Hometown Boomtown”)

The film's narrator says that 'in the name of public safety we flagged in the biggest demolition derby of them all.' David McGill talks about the demolition of the old Victorian city of Wellington. 'It started', he said, 'with Lambton Quay and we saw the Terrace going, but in the last year we've also seen Jervois Quay go and very little left.' Sir Michael is filmed saying: 'that's just nonsense. The preservationists, in italics, would prefer it falls down around the ears of its citizens when the earthquake comes and I won't have that.' McGill said 'you walk down Willis St or Lambton Quay and Jervois Quay and suddenly another one of your roots has been pulled out as if it was a rotten tooth and you feel sad about this and I think people want to see it stopped.' The narrator says 'story after story bowled and everything lost in the felling.' Let's also remember the sad legacy when we enjoy concerts in the lovely MFC!

HPW AGM - NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING
SUNDAY 14 AUGUST, AT 2:00 PM
St Peter's Church Garden Room, 211 Willis St, Wellington

Following the business part of the meeting, we will hear from Councillor Iona Pannett, who will be reflecting on her life as an advocate for Wellington's heritage. We will also have refreshments. We look forward to seeing many of you there.

AGENDA FOR THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF HISTORIC PLACES WELLINGTON INC, FOR THE YEAR ENDING 30 JUNE 2022

1. **Apologies**
2. **Minutes of Tenth Annual General Meeting 2021***
3. **Committee's Annual Report – Statement of Service Performance****
4. **Treasurer's Annual Financial Statement***
5. **Election of Committee**
6. **Appointment of representative to Historic Places Aotearoa AGM**
7. **General business**

** The minutes and the financial statement are attached. Copies will also be available at the meeting.*

*** See below.*

Please bring to the meeting this newsletter and any other papers that will assist you for full participation in the meeting.

Note for Item 5.

Current Committee members who have indicated willingness to stand for re-election are:

Deborah Cranko; Sally Hasell; Nigel Isaacs; Christina Mackay; Vivienne Morrell; Richard Norman; Ben Schrader, and Felicity Wong. Under our Rules the AGM has to elect a minimum of six and maximum of twelve committee members. Office holders are subsequently elected by the Committee. We welcome hearing from other potential committee members who are interested in heritage issues and like working collaboratively. We would especially welcome anyone who wants to help organise members' events.

Note for Item 6.

The following draft resolution is proposed: Moved that Richard Norman represent HPW at the HPA meeting but if he is unable to attend, that the committee be authorised to appoint another appropriate representative.

Annual Committee Report 1 July 2021 - 30 June 2022

Under our rules the Committee is obligated to report to its membership annually about activities over the past financial year. We are also obligated to report annually to the Charities Services on “service performance” so this report is designed to meet both requirements.

The **Committee** continues to meet approximately every five to six weeks during the year. Eight members were elected to the committee at the AGM held in August 2021. Office bearers appointed by the committee were: Chairman – Felicity Wong; Vice Chairman – Ben Schrader; Minutes Secretary – Sally Hasell; Treasurer and Membership Secretary – Deb Cranko.

One committee member was on the executive of **Historic Places Aotearoa (HPA)** and reported on the HPA deliberations throughout the year (Nigel Isaacs).

We reached 85 individual and 33 family **members**, in addition to our ten life members. We provide a discounted membership rate for youth (25 and under).

Our **accounts** remain in a healthy state (with approximately \$23,000 in funds). The largest items of expenditure were: Summer student for the Newtown project (Red Design) – \$3,000; Michael Kelly (heritage listing research) - \$2,300, and Paekakariki Station Trust for a Heritage Week event - \$1,214. We're grateful to the speakers to whom we provide modest koha for their insightful presentations.

Advocacy issues have continued to be an important focus for the committee. We made seven submissions (on the WCC's Draft District Plan; Let's Get Wellington Moving; and some to Parliament on Bills). You can read our submissions on our website's [advocacy page](#).

We have also commented on (and sometimes participated in hearings on) buildings at risk, such as the former Adelaide Hotel (also known as Tramways Hotel), where we argued that more of the building's volume should be kept and retaining the street-facing façades only was a poor heritage outcome. Our arguments did not persuade the panel considering the site's redevelopment and it will proceed with only the facades retained.

We held six **events** during the year: including a guided walk around Mt Victoria; a well-attended talk during Heritage Week; and visits to Trades Hall and a former Ministerial Residence.

Four **newsletters** were issued at quarterly intervals, sent either digitally or by post to all members. These contain news stories and commentaries about HPW's activities and about historic places in the Wellington region, illustrating these, when possible, by photographs.

The figures for our **website and Facebook** page show a considerable interest in heritage issues. From 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022 we had 2,541 'visitors' to the website, an average of 212 per month. This is a drop from the previous year, but is similar to earlier years since we set up the website in August 2015, as the table shows.

Financial year	Website visitor numbers	Average per month
2015-16 (from August)	1,627	148 (11 months)
2016-17	2,259	188
2017-18	2,820	235
2018-19	2,377	198
2019-20	2,056	171
2020-21	3,709	309
2021-22	2,541	212

As at July 2022 we had 983 followers on Facebook (compared with 891 last year, 704 in 2020; 621 in 2019; 526 in 2018 and 176 in 2017). The most popular posts tend to be about specific buildings.

Chairperson's report – Felicity Wong

Much gratitude to members of HPW who ensure we are heard in the hurly burly of city planning and in support of heritage buildings at risk of demolition, and in our companionable visits to interesting

places.

The planning process has been something of a contest between interests. It's disappointing HPW's proposals for new listed buildings were not accepted, although the recently notified district plan does propose a number of other new welcome listings.

The notified plan falls far short of adequate protection of the character of our old inner city heritage suburbs. Essentially, nothing has changed to the paltry 30% protected by the pre-1930s demolition rule proposed in the draft spatial plan of 2020. Please make a further submission to support the rules wider coverage (closes 12 Sept), and vote wisely for pro-heritage councillors in this year's elections.

It's sad to see modernist and post-modernist buildings now being demolished (e.g. Athfield's Christian Science Church in Willis St, and likely, the old Cricketers Arms on the corner of Tory and Vivian St).

We need to get out in front of city debates and further increase our use of social and other media to build more awareness about our living urban environment. My thanks to Committee members for their ongoing valuable contributions.

Heritage News

St James Theatre Reopens



The magnificent St James Theatre auditorium. (Image: WCC)

In late June the St James Theatre in Courtenay Place re-opened after three years of strengthening, upgrading, and restoration work that has given the building a new lease of life for decades to come. Designed and built in 1912 by Henry Eli White, the Category 1 heritage building is home of the Royal New Zealand Ballet. Mayor Andy Foster said the following at the June opening:

The St James Theatre has played an integral part in our history over the past century. It accents old-world glamour with modern technology, and will once again bring dance, drama, opera, comedy, and music to Wellingtonians – and reclaim its status as an historic heritage treasure. Its reopening also marks the first of a number of critically important Council buildings to open or reopen and will be followed by Tākina [Convention Centre], the Wellington Town Hall, and then Te Matapihi, the central library.

HPW very much welcomes the building's return to life and is equally looking forward to the completion of the Town Hall and Te Matapihi in due course.

Christian Science Church to be demolished

The fear expressed in our last newsletter that the Ian Athfield-designed Christian Science Church in Willis Street faced imminent demolition has been confirmed. We understand that its new owner, Craig Stewart, intends to build an apartment block on the site. While the building is not scheduled in the District Plan as a heritage building, it has many attributes that would qualify it as one. These include it being:

- designed by one of Wellington's foremost late-20th century architects, Ian Athfield
- an excellent and relatively rare example of post-modern architecture in the city, and
- an important and whimsical contribution to the Upper Willis Street townscape.

Our chairperson, Felicity Wong, has therefore written to Stewart asking him to incorporate all, or as much as possible, of the building in his new development. The New Zealand Institute of Architects is also approaching Stewart with a similar aim.



A protest banner outside the Christian Science Church in Willis Street. (Image: Felicity Wong)

Newly archived photos and films of WW2 Wellington / Camp Paekakariki

A large collection of photographs and film taken during World War Two by American serviceman Norm Hatch has recently been acquired and catalogued by Nga Taonga / Film Archive.

The films and photos reveal a view of Wellington and Kapiti that most of us have never seen. The arrival of the Marines abruptly changed the whole look of the area – it was hard for anyone to miss them. Large camps were constructed on the Kapiti Coast, namely Camp Paekakariki, Camp Russell and Camp McKay. Smaller camps went up at Pāuatahanui, Judgeford Valley and Titahi Bay. Businesses sprang up in the city, some run by the military, to provide the new arrivals with services like dry cleaning and American-style foods, which locals also learned to enjoy. Marines trained for combat on beaches and in the bush, and recovered from injuries received in the Pacific at hospitals staffed by local and American nurses. You can read more [here](#).

Some of the photos were used in new signage marking the location of Camp Paekakariki. The Camp Paekakariki signage is now complete apart from landscaping. Kapiti US Marines Trust will hold a formal dedication in November, when the weather will be better and landscaping will be complete. It is already a popular feature for walkers and cyclists at the southern (Paekakariki village) entrance to Queen Elizabeth Park. The photo shows the designer, Anne Johnston, and writer, Anthony Dreaver. The steel work was by Riverbank Engineering, Otaki, the foundations by Greater Wellington Parks staff and Base Consulting, Levin, and panel printing and installation by DAC, Plimmerton. Funding from the US Embassy, Paekakariki Services Club and Lotteries is gratefully acknowledged.



Anne Johnston and Anthony Dreaver in front of new signage at Camp Paekakariki. (Image provided by Anthony Dreaver)

Crooked columns – Vivienne Morrell

In the last newsletter we featured the Ian Athfield-designed crooked column on the Christian Science Church in Willis Street. One of our astute readers pointed out that there is a crooked column in Arezzo, Italy and the tradition is that at the time of its construction this apse was so good that it touched perfection. Since perfection belongs only to God, it was decided to introduce an imperfection.¹ Did Athfield know of this example, or are there others?

¹ See this blog post, for example: <https://www.traxplorio.com/curiosities-about-arezzo/>



Images: Christian Science column (Vivienne Morrell). Chiesa Santa Maria Delle Pieve, Arezzo from this website: <https://bagnidilucca.blog/2020/11/20/lunch-and-art-in-arezzo/>

In Julia Gatley's book, *Athfield Architects*, pp147-148, she discusses the columns: 'Bent Gaudi-esque columns with ceramic pink petals as capitals add to the unconventional environment'. 'Gaudi-esque columns' refers of course to Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926), the Spanish architect - many of you will be familiar with his work in Barcelona. Here is an example of Gaudí columns.



(Image: Casa Batlló, Barcelona, 2007, Vivienne Morrell)

Gatley also notes Athfield's broad range of influences (page 41). Deb Cranko (architect and HPW committee member) notes: 'And as with the Nikau palms on the City Library, there seemed to be a strong wish to be a little cheeky, and a bit of showmanship. Whilst eclectic, I sense that a lot of Athfield Architects work was deliberately referential, with a twist. It's important to note the role of Clare Athfield and other team members in their projects too.'

Past Events

Sunday 3 July 2pm – 4pm. Visit to the Wellesley Boutique Hotel. 2- 8 Maginnity Street

Over 40 members attended a visit to the Wellesley Hotel, with talks and a walk through, followed by afternoon tea. The Wellesley Hotel is a 1920s neo-Georgian style heritage Category 1 building, designed by architect William Gray Young (1885-1962), with historical connections to Wellington's founding. It was built between 1925-27 for the Wellesley Club, established in 1891 as a 'junior club' offshoot of the Wellington Club, founded in the 1840s. Wellesley was the family name for the Duke of Wellington, and both the Wellington and Wellesley clubs were established to be the equivalents of London gentlemen's clubs – places to 'socialise, drink, dine, relax and occasionally reside.'

In the 1990s a majority shareholding was sold by the Club and the building became a heritage hotel / function centre. Since 2009 it has been owned by a group of private investors associated with the Westminster Lodge of Freemasons. The remaining part of the second-floor billiard room is now the Freemason's meeting room. Further significant renovations are planned during the next 18 months.

Stuart Brooker and architect Warwick Bell discussed their long-standing commitment to preserving and renewing this significant building and provided an opportunity to visit parts of the building not normally open to the public.



Warwick and Stuart talking at the Wellesley (image: Felicity Wong)

Upcoming Events

Sunday 14 August, at 2pm, HPW AGM, St Peter Church Garden Room, 211 Willis Street

23 August, 5.30 p.m. Richard Norman (HPW Committee member) Talk – 'Wellington's roaring 1920s: Topical issues from a hundred years ago – Wellington's Infrastructure Mayor, George Troup'

Wellington Club, 88 The Terrace, 5.30 for 6 – 7 p.m. talk with bookings for dinner at 7 p.m. possible. There will be a charge of \$20 for the talk, with refreshments available, and dinner bookings can be made separately. Please email richardnorman.nz@outlook.com if you would like to take part.



Sunday 16 October, 2pm: Committee member Vivienne Morrell will lead a walk in Wellington's CBD to look at historic buildings. For a number of years (2015 to 2019) Vivienne taught an evening class on Wellington's architectural heritage at Wellington High School. At the end of each course, she would lead the group on this walk. This may be of particular interest to some of our newer members who perhaps aren't sure which city buildings are heritage listed.

It will take about two hours and is roughly a loop beginning and ending near the railway station. Limit of

16 people. She will consider doing another in January 2023 if there's enough interest.

Please RSVP to Vivienne at wgtm@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz

Image: Lambton Quay and surrounding area, Wellington. C. 1890. Burton Bros. Ref: BB-0198-10x12-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. [/records/22896162](https://records/22896162)

24 October – 6 November: Wellington Heritage Week. This year's Heritage Week will be spread over two weeks. The event list is not available yet, but keep an eye on their website:

<https://wellingtonheritageweek.co.nz>

Thursday 27 October, 5:30 for a 6pm start: During Heritage Week, the Wellington Club is hosting a panel discussion on Wellington city's heritage issues: \$20 for discussion and a drink; \$75 includes dinner. RSVP to Richard Norman richardnorman.nz@outlook.com if you would like to take part.

Miscellaneous

HPA funding Co-ordinator

Historic Places Aotearoa are seeking a part-time funding co-ordinator (about three hours per week) to help grow the organisation. If this sounds like you or you know of someone who might be interested, please contact HPW and we will forward you further information.

Correction



In the last newsletter in the item on the restored former Congregational Church on Cambridge Terrace, Wellington, we said the Chapel was now the home of the Salvation Army band. This is incorrect and we apologise for the misunderstanding. The Chapel band is not the same as the Salvation Army band.

If you would like to see what concerts or events are coming up you can check out their [Facebook page](#).