

NEWSLETTER

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EVENTS

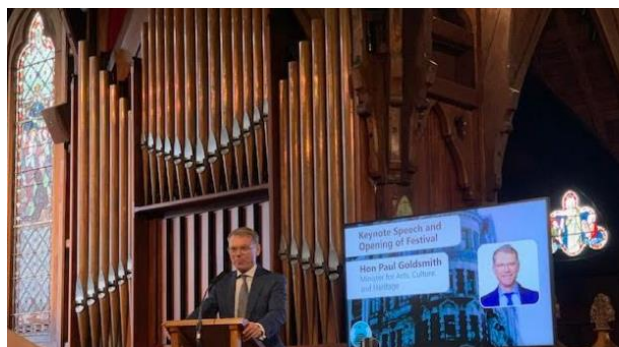
**Sunday 8 December – visit to Massey House,
Lambton Quay**

**Sunday 26 Jan 2025 – 1913 Strike ('Sites of
Struggle') history walk**

Wellington Heritage Festival 2024

This year the Wellington (including Kapiti, Hutt and Wairarapa) Heritage Festival extended over three weeks and included over 150 events. We hope many of you enjoyed getting to some of them. As we have done previously, we give brief reports on some of the events committee members attended. HPW was also a sponsor of the event, contributing \$1000.

Festival Opening & Ministers' remarks – Felicity Wong



The Heritage Festival was opened by Arts, Culture and Heritage Minister Hon Paul Goldsmith speaking at Old St Paul's. The Minister talked about the RMA reforms and the Government's support for simplifying the regulatory context. He emphasised the priority of the earthquake regulatory review, and wished for "New Zealand to be better known for its cultural contribution". He said there was an opportunity for New Zealanders to "connect with history", starting with school education. His talk was followed by a panel discussion.

At another Festival event, Hon Chris Penk, Minister for Building and Construction, gave more detail about the government's review of earthquake resilience standards, noting that they needed to be based on better cost/benefit and risk assessment. The audience raised with the Minister the very high cost of earthquake insurance for Wellington multi-unit buildings; the cost of building materials and the onerous nature of the earthquake resilience

standards required for both heritage and non-heritage buildings. I asked him to take into account in the risk assessment the limited time some important heritage buildings were actually occupied such as churches and some small buildings like Onslow Historical Society's museum, open for just 3 hours per week. The real risk of injury in those buildings was much less than for residential buildings and period of use should be a factor in assessing risk. He agreed that was the sort of "pragmatic" approach the Government was aiming for.

He said there were 7000 earthquake prone buildings nationwide and 20% of them had heritage status, including 159 category 1 buildings. The Minister outlined the seven key principles for finding the "right balance" in the review:

- "Goldilocks" regulations, not too much, nor too little
- pragmatic approach whereby "the village isn't destroyed to save it"
- the costs of preserving a building's character vs public good of increased housing are considered
- recognition of public benefit of heritage preservation for tourism etc
- certainty vs flexibility is considered
- recognising the environmental benefits of older buildings re carbon emissions
- considering diversity of heritage buildings vs modern sterile environments.

Sacred Heart Cathedral, Hill Street – Felicity Wong



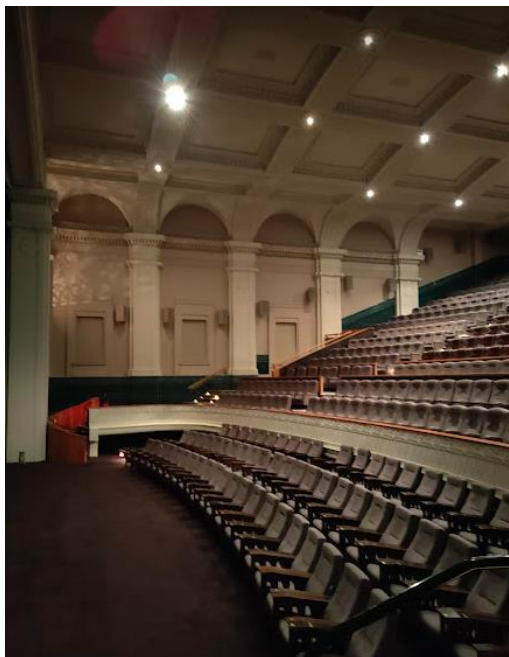
During the Festival there were several tours of the newly strengthened and renovated Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Hill St. Its luminous Oamaru stonework interior has been cleaned and other portions painted "Thorndon Cream". The original pressed tin ceiling was repaired by the Sydney factory still in operation. Magnificent floor mosaics have been revealed and the beautiful marble altar transferred from St Gerard's monastery church. While it's tragic it was removed from that church, the altar is a beautiful and appropriate addition to the Cathedral. The simplicity of the architecture has been enhanced and interventions minimised. It's fully returned to the original splendour envisaged by Francis William Petre who designed it in 1901.

St Lukes, Wadestown – Felicity Wong

During the Festival several buildings and spaces not widely known about are open. The arts and crafts style St Luke's Anglican Church in Wadestown is particularly beautiful and has recently been earthquake strengthened and renovated. It's one of more than 100 churches designed by Frederick de Jersey Clere. This one in 1908. St Luke's has the original Old St Paul's organ, which was transferred to it in 1946 after being in a couple of other churches. Next to the church is a comfortable modern community space "the Atrium".

Embassy Theatre tour and WCC Archives tour – Vivienne Morrell

The Embassy Theatre (then called the de Luxe) opened 100 years ago, almost to the day of the tours. Committee members of the Mt Victoria Historic Society presented these popular tours over the first weekend of the festival. Llewellyn Williams was the architect – he designed other theatres and a number of commercial and apartment buildings. If you missed a tour, this article in [Scoop](#) summarises the building's history.



(Image showing interior of Embassy, with the now closed windows and a raised floor in the front, where the stalls used to be).

The WCC Archives tours are usually also booked out. Starting with a talk from Adrian Humphris about the scope of the archives (it is mainly for city council archives; 29 years since opening; 10km of shelves; 9,000 customers annually; 20million pages digitised). Tour members were then able to look at some of the items put on display and walk through the 'back of

house' where the records – and currently also some of the council's art collection – are stored.

Robert Orr House, Lower Hutt – Felicity Wong

[image left]



Robert Orr House in Lower Hutt is a real historical gem; the continuous home of six generations of the Orr family. The house retains its original features and furniture and is an absolute delight to visit. HPW aims to arrange a visit for members and we hope to have details in our February newsletter.

Historic Places Aotearoa conference in Napier, 8-10 November – Felicity Wong

The conference had more than 100 attendees and was well organised with ex-Mayor Barbara Arnott keeping all to time and smoothly running.

The conference started with the Hawkes Bay Heritage Awards on Friday night with eight (slightly overlapping) categories. The Napier War Memorial

Conference Centre is a stylish venue and the awards featured a range of local recipients.

Saturday had a real diversity of speakers, including a panel I participated in, reporting on Wellington "good news" (Chapman Taylor Bar, Sacred Heart Basilica and Massey House); "anxious" (Dixon St Flats and Gordon Wilson Flats); and "bad news" (District Plan outcome losing 70% of Wellington's "character" area protection).

Talks were largely short (7 mins) and community based. There were some interesting "creatives" reaching out to wider audiences, and some "paranormal investigators" assuring us of their "scientific" approaches (also potentially reaching a wider/ younger/ weirder "heritage audience"). There were really interesting talks from "The Knowledge Bank"

community archives; Clendon papers gift to NZ Archives; SS Ventnor (sunken Chinese bones ship); history of NZ Cookbooks; and “Forgotten Women” stories;

There were some great tours on the Sunday, including an extraordinary old house “restored” to its 1850s condition. The tour is called “before the earthquake” run by Art Deco Trust (\$20).

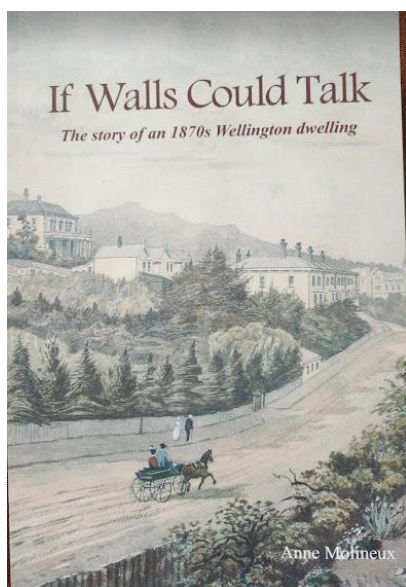
WCC Archives on the move – slowly! - WCC archives staff

In an exciting new development for Wellington City Council Archives, we will be moving the bulk of the City Archives collection to Council’s new premises at 68 Jervois Quay in 2025 and enabling access to the rest at Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui [city library] when it re-opens in early 2026. The Jervois Quay premises will be just across from Te Ngākau Civic Square and Te Matapihi. City Archives will have a place in the redeveloped library alongside Nōku te Ao Capital E, the Council’s Service Centre and of course our library services!

Currently located near the Basin Reserve, this new more central location for archives will serve as a gateway to a wealth of resources and experiences. By bringing together knowledge, creativity, and heritage, it will foster a sense of connectedness within the community - a place where people can not only access information but also engage with their history and culture in meaningful ways.

As well as our digital resources, a small part of our physical resources will be more accessible in Te Matapihi, and City Archives staff/kaimahi will be on hand to help.

New and upcoming books



A house in Mt Victoria...

Anne Molineux, a resident of an 1870s house in Mt Victoria, has spent several years researching the history of her house and has recently produced a book about it: *If Walls Could Talk: The story of an 1870s Wellington dwelling*. She has covered the previous owners, changes to the house (from small single storey box, to double-gable single storey to two storey in the 1890s, and various renovations), changes to the street and suburb. Although about one house, it is also representative of many trends over Wellington’s development in the last 140 years. If you want to find out more, you can email Anne at annemolineux@gmail.com.

(Disclaimer: I did some paid research for Anne a few years ago for the book – VM)

From Making Space to Ward Maps...

Elizabeth Cox whose previous book [*Making Space: A history of New Zealand women in architecture*](#) was published in 2022, is currently working on a new project. The Thomas Ward maps, completed in 1892, are well known to those interested in Wellington’s history. They stretched from Thorndon in the north to Berhampore in the south, and took in the teeming inner-city areas of Te Aro and Newtown, the remnants of Māori kainga, the town belt, the Basin Reserve, the prison, ‘lunatic asylum’ and hospital, reclamations and every street in between.

The exact footprint of every building in Wellington was recorded – every commercial building and factory and every house, garden shed and outdoor toilet. Data was recorded for each residential and commercial building, including how many rooms it contained, and what the roof and walls were made of. The city's streams and even the street lights and fire plugs are shown. They are available on the Wellington City Archives website, and as an overlay on the WCC's GIS map system.

Elizabeth Cox is currently writing a book which will use these maps as a medium to tell a detailed social and urban history of Wellington in the 1890s, in all its noisy, smelly, crowded, complicated glory.

The maps, drawn by Wellington engineer and surveyor Thomas Ward, were drawn on 88 A1 sheets. The book will provide a full-page reproduction of each of the 88 map sheets, as double page spreads, alongside a social history story which emerges from each one, illustrated with historic photos.

The Thomas Ward maps are a touchstone for the history of our city. It is used every day by Wellington's architects, archaeologists and historians. The research for the book will draw on Elizabeth's own detailed social history research, plus the work of these other professionals, and the rich photographic archive.

The book will be published around this time next year, in 2025. It will be published by Massey University Press. Historic Places Wellington has offered some funding support for the book, and Wellington City Archives is providing lots of assistance.

The maps are available in a number of forms. One way to interact with them is to go to the WCC's GIS maps page: <https://gis.wcc.govt.nz/LocalMapsGallery/> and then choose the "Property" map option. On that map, go to Layers tab and turn ON the Thomas Ward layer.

Newtown history...

During the Heritage Festival, Claire Nolan, a Newtown resident – and HPW member – ran tours of Newtown. There was a full-page article about it in the Post newspaper: <https://www.thepost.co.nz/culture/360463409/fascinating-history-wellingtons-coolest-suburb>

Also, on the Newtown Residents' Association website, a draft history of Newtown is available. This was researched and written in the 1980s and 1990s by local resident Laura Rosier, who died before she could complete it. They would welcome any comments. See: <https://newtown.org.nz/local-history/the-laura-rosier-history-of-newtown/>

Upcoming Events

Sunday 8 December (afternoon): Visit to Massey House, 126 Lambton Quay
RSVPs essential

The tour will have a maximum of 20 people. RSVP to Vivienne at wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz

The first (partially) curtain-walled building in New Zealand, Massey House was an early and influential example of International Modernism here. Completed in 1957, it reflects key concepts of that architectural approach; including functional design, a lack of adornment, and the use of technologically advanced construction materials and techniques.



Although now a common feature, at the time of its construction the large expanses of glass were striking against the heavy masonry of its neighbours. Unlike them, Massey House's structural system meant the front facade did not need to help carry the building's load, so a glass curtain wall was possible.

Massey House quickly influenced other Wellington buildings, such as Shell House, Wool House and Manchester House. Massey House was built for the Meat and Dairy Boards, who were deliberately looking to create a modern statement. Plischke and Firth were hired to create a modern building of high-quality concrete construction.

Ernst Plischke (1903 - 1992) was an Austrian emigrant who arrived in Wellington in May 1939

with his wife and son seeking refuge from the Nazis. He began by working as an architectural draughtsman at the Department of Housing Construction. He went into partnership with Firth in 1947. Plischke had an established international reputation when he arrived in New Zealand.

Cedric Firth (1908 -1993) was born in Auckland and trained as a builder and architect before travelling to Europe, where he visited housing schemes built during the Depression. He had a strong interest in social housing and wrote extensively. He joined the Department of Housing Construction in 1939 before moving into private partnership with Plischke in 1947. By 1958, Firth had his own practice, through which he completed the Massey House addition, on the Southern end.

A 1967 extension to the building angles to follow the curve of Lambton Quay. The building is actually shaped as a 'C' around an internal light-well on the North side of the building, although this is now hidden from view by the neighbouring building.¹ (Image above from National Library², 1957 nearing completion. The internal lightwell can be seen).

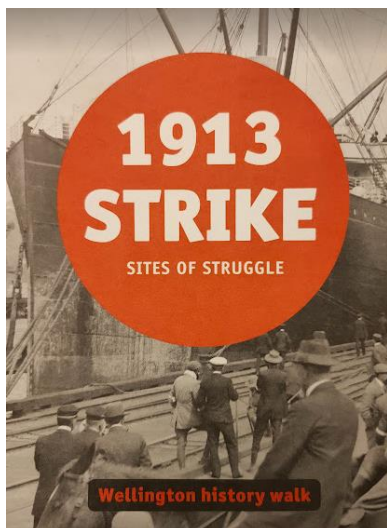
The tour will not be of the whole building. It will focus on the common areas and floors occupied by the legal firm of JB Morrison, which celebrated its 100th year in Wellington by moving into the top three floors of Massey House in June 2024 (including the original rooftop terrace).

The Category 1 Heritage building, first opened in October 1957, has been strengthened and restored by The Wellington Company in association with Stuart Gardyne of Architecture+. JB Morrison's premises were sympathetically designed to enhance the heritage features by Athfield Architects while providing modern efficient offices and meeting spaces for a growing legal practice.

The building has been repainted in its original heritage colours (including the cobalt blue free-form lift house). Our chair Felicity Wong wrote an [article](#) about it for Scoop (click the link to read).

¹ Laura Jamieson, 2018: <https://discover.stqry.app/en/story/16206>

² <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22726015>



Sunday 26 January 2025 (afternoon) – “Sites of Struggle” – the 1913 strike, a history walk

RSVP to Vivienne at wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz (maximum 16 people). Rain day (if particularly wet) will be Sunday 2 February.

The “Great Strike” of 1913 was the largest and most disruptive in New Zealand’s history, involving around 14,000 workers, massive demonstrations and a wave of violence. The real issue at stake was an industrial power struggle, and even more broadly: socialism vs capitalism. Wellington was the scene of the most violent events. Although the strikers were defeated, many went on to political action and founded the Labour Party in 1916.

Committee member Vivienne Morrell will lead this walk. The walk is based on a brochure written in 2013 by the Labour History Project. But I will adapt it, as well as supplementing it with my own research. We will start at Pukeahu War Memorial Park (former Buckle St) and end at Queen’s Wharf. It should take about 1.5 hours.

One-day Architecture Symposium

Friday **6 December**: A one-day symposium held under the auspices of the Centre for Building Performance Research, Victoria University of Wellington. Venue: Wellington School of Architecture, Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington. Each year the theme is a decade – this year: 1940s landscape and interior architecture. You can find the programme and abstracts and register at this link: [“the need for beauty”—New Zealand interior and landscape architecture in the 1940s](#)

Past Events

AGM & speaker Redmer Yska 8 August 2024, Sunday 2pm:

Despite heavy rain, we got a good attendance for our AGM in the St Peter’s Garden Room – and our speaker Redmer Yska, who gave a very interesting and entertaining presentation on “Voyages with KM; Picking up the Traces of a Writer’s Europe”. (Image below)

Redmer Yska is a Wellington writer and historian. In the 1990s, he produced books about NZ post-war youth culture: *NZ Green*, *the Story of Marijuana in New Zealand* and *All Shook Up, the Flash Bodge and the Rise of the NZ Teenager in the 1950s*.

In 2004, he was commissioned to write a history of Wellington City: *Wellington: Biography of a City*. In 2008, he won the National Library Research Fellowship to write *NZ Truth: the Rise and Fall of the Peoples’ Paper* (2010), an institutional history of his old paper.

A substantial NZ History Trust Fund Award in 2014, allowed him to write *A Strange Beautiful Excitement: Katherine Mansfield’s Wellington 1888-1903*. The book was longlisted for the 2018 Ockham Book Awards.



In 2019, a generous grant from Creative NZ allowed him to write *Katherine Mansfield's Europe: Station to Station*, published in 2023 by Otago University Press.

See: <https://newzealandbooks.com/book/katherine-mansfields-europe-station-to-station/>

Pohutukawa trees at Pukeahu Memorial Park

As this is our last newsletter before Christmas, we will finish with some information about the pohutukawa trees (NZ symbol of Christmas) at Pukeahu war memorial park. (This is from a brochure: *Living Memorials: Pohutukawa at the National War Memorial*, 2014.)

The hill was barren when the National War Memorial Carillon tower was dedicated on Anzac Day 1932. After 1935 groups such as the Wellington Horticultural Society and the Wellington Beautifying Society sought to beautify the city with trees.

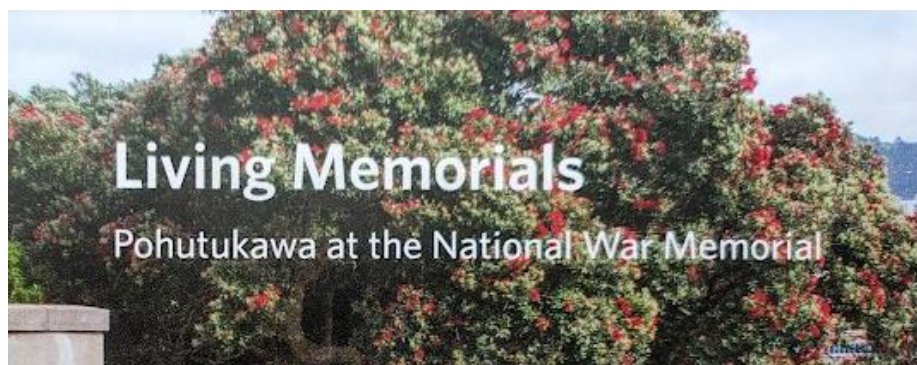
The pohutukawa was a popular choice because of its hardiness in harsh coastal conditions. The Governor-General Lord Galway and Lady Galway planted two Pohutukawa trees on Arbor Day, 7 August 1935. Sixteen were planted the following year to commemorate 16 men who died on NZ's first warship, HMS Philomel, during World War 1.

The National Museum opened behind the Carillon in 1936. At least 500 were planted in 1938, the City Council's Director of Parks and Reserves, Mr McKenzie becoming known as "Pohutukawa Mac".

However, a later Director of Parks and Reserves, Edward Hutt, in 1964 was eager to avoid past mistakes when he said "native plants, including forest trees, were put in almost as thick as one would plant cabbages, with the inevitable result."

In a symbolic gesture, with support from Te Atiawa, in 1995 a mature pohutukawa was moved (over 11 days) to the waterfront grounds of Te Papa, which opened in 1998.

We hope you have a good and relaxing Christmas!



*

Postscript: If you would like to read about some of the unusual requests HPW sometimes gets via email, I wrote a blog post on my personal website about one such request [here: mystery photo](#).