

In this issue:

- Upcoming events
- Update on our activities
- Past events
- Obituaries
- The archaeology of Parliament

Editor: Vivienne Morrell

JOIN US

To join Historic Places Wellington or learn more about HPW, go to www.historicplaceswellington.org.

CONTACT US

Our email address is
wgtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz

VISIT our Facebook page

www.facebook.com/historicplaceswellington

EVENTS

3 May, 2pm: Talk; History of Taranaki Whanui

24 May, 10.30am: Archaeology Walk with Mary O'Keeffe

Upcoming Events



Saturday 3 May 2pm: “History of Taranaki Whanui, the Mana Whenua of Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington)” by Te Karanga o Te Tūi Marino (“TK”).

TK gave this fascinating history talk at the Heritage Festival closing event held in Masterton last year. He has agreed to share his talk with us to explain how Taranaki Whanui came to Wellington, and its relationship with other iwi and with colonial settlers.

TK is the Kaitarataki (Kaupapa Taiao) Environmental Liaison Officer with the Wellington Tenth Trust. The Trust has a long history, arising from the earliest days of colonisation and the establishment of Wellington city, and is actively involved in contemporary affairs. We will also hear from Rangimoana Taylor with his reflections on growing up in Simla Crescent, Khandallah.

We are co-hosting this event with Onslow Historic Society. The talks will be followed by afternoon tea. At 86 Khandallah Road (the former Khandallah telephone exchange building aka K.A.T.E.) We'll be charging \$10 entry to cover costs (please have cash).

RSVP to Vivienne at wqtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz

(Image: Pa, Te Aro, Wellington looking towards the Hutt River [1842 or 1843?]. Ref: A-049-001. Alexander Turnbull Library. [/records/23026225](https://records/23026225))

Saturday 24 May, 10:30am: Central city archaeology walk, with archaeologist Mary O'Keeffe. Approx 90 minutes. (Rain day 25th May). Max 16 people. RSVP to Vivienne at wqtn@historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz

Mary is a professional archaeologist who has been digging around Wellington for 30 years. Starting near Te Papa and ending near Old Government Buildings, this walk and talk will go via various of Mary's projects where she'll discuss what was found, what it means, and what it can tell us about life in our city in the past.

Update on HPW committee activities - Felicity Wong

The past few months have seen HPW appear at the select committee on the Fast Track Bill amendment to the Resource Management Act. We had met with Minister Chris Bishop last year to discuss options for streamlining heritage decisions in the wake of WCC Mayor Tory Whanau and Councillor Ben McNulty's letter to him asking for the power to de-list heritage buildings so they could more easily be demolished. HPW did not oppose the Government's new draft legislation that creates a fast-track approach to de-listing, but asked for the power to also be given for fast-track listing. That would even up the process for both pro- and anti-heritage moves. Fast track could have some advantages for us as well as disadvantages.

HPW also attended a meeting Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga had recently to consider its Statement of General Policy. We endorsed the draft and especially its continued provisions supporting strong heritage advocacy. Such advocacy, and technical expertise, was appreciated during the Wellington District Plan process.



Last week the High Court rejected the case brought by advocacy group Live Wellington, which challenged the Council's process for reducing the character areas covering the old suburbs of Thorndon, Mt Victoria, Mt Cook, Aro St and Newtown. Live Wellington had hoped to see the Council re-visit its unwelcome decisions to reduce areas with demolition protections from 307.2ha to just 85ha. HPW did everything we could to oppose such a massive reduction during the District Plan hearings so the legal failure is disappointing and likely to bring on more demolitions in due course. Right now, however, the flat lining population of Wellington, with high building and finance costs, means there is at least a practical pause in destruction of our oldest inner-city suburbs.

In more welcome news the Council has proposed a "minimal maintenance" option in its 10 year budget for the Begonia House. While the option involves the Friends of the Botanic Gardens fund-raising the difference, at least it's unlikely to be demolished.

In our [previous newsletter](#) (accessible by clicking the link) we had covered other demolitions the Council has done or proposed. The Civic Trust has taken a court case about the flawed consultation process on the City to Sea bridge, which will be heard 28/29 April. We certainly wish them well with that costly, but important, endeavour.

In alarming news, the 10 year Draft Long Term Plan also contains \$2.4million for "the potential demolition of the Michael Fowler Centre". The public are simply unaware of the nature of any specific problems with the building.

HPW met recently with VUW/Te Herenga Waka Chief Operating Officer, Tina Wakefield, under the auspices of local MP, Tamatha Paul, to discuss the Gordon Wilson Flats (GWF). At the meeting we welcomed VUW's advice it had pivoted toward using the GWF site for high density student housing. We advocated for restoration of the existing building, while Ms Wakefield explained they had in mind demolition and replacement with a new facility. We followed up with a letter, which you can read on our [Advocacy page](#) and by clicking [this link](#).

Upcoming conference

9 - 12 October 2025: Combined Historic Places Aotearoa / ICOMOS NZ AGM & Conference in Napier. The theme is *"Tell me a story": interpreting our heritage*. As usual there will be field trips and conference papers. There is currently a call for conference papers, until 30 May. See [this flyer](#) on our website for more details.

Past Events



1. Saturday 5 April: Oriental Bay architecture and history walk with Felicity Wong.

On a lovely sunny day our chairperson and Oriental Bay resident, Felicity Wong, led 16 of us on a walking tour of Oriental Bay's eclectic and representative samples of interesting New Zealand architecture. Among its many heritage-listed buildings are fine villas, modernist apartment blocks, early transport hubs, and outstanding buildings (used for swimming,

boating, and spiritual renewal). The tour included the two heritage precincts of the Clyde Quay boat sheds and the “seven sisters” villas.

2. Sunday 23 February 2pm visit to Robert Orr House, Lower Hutt – with afternoon tea

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.

This two-storey Italianate styled villa was designed by Charles Petrie for Robert Orr. The house was built by Stephen Strand in 1885-1887. Orr established extensive market gardens on his 17-acre [6.9 hectares] property, sometimes employing up to 40 people at one time. Most of the Orr estate was subdivided in the 1960s.



You can also read more and see a few more photos on our Past events web page [here](#).

3. Sunday 26 January 2025 – “Sites of Struggle” – the 1913 strike, a history walk

Committee member Vivienne Morrell led this walk looking at sites of the “Great Strike” of 1913. The walk was based on a brochure written in 2013 by the [Labour History Project](#). You can also read more in a blog post on Vivienne’s [website here](#).

Obituary: Diana Beaglehole (January 2025)

Diana Beaglehole was a prominent writer and historian. She was a long-time member of the Wellington Branch Committee of the former New Zealand Historic Places Trust, notably authoring

the branch’s newsletter, and until a few years ago, a member of Historic Places Wellington. She also served for many years on the executive of the Friends of Old St Paul’s. You can read more [here](#).



Obituary: Sheila Williams (March 2025)

Sheila will have been known to many of you. She was a familiar face at many Historic Places Wellington events and her sister Priscilla, who died last year, was our former chairperson. Sheila was a librarian by profession and a long-time member of the Friends of Turnbull Library committee – among active membership of many other groups. You can read a tribute [here](#).

Obituary: David Kernohan (April 2025) by Nigel Isaacs¹

In 1977 David was employed as a Senior Lecturer at the VUW School of Architecture, and New Zealand gained a great educator, communicator, teacher and researcher. He wrote guides to heritage buildings - in 1989 “Wellington’s New Buildings”; in 1994 “Wellington’s

¹ This is an excerpt from Nigel’s eulogy given at David’s funeral in Featherston.

Old Buildings,” and in ‘retirement’, in 2004, “Wairarapa Buildings.” He also played a critical role in saving Futuna Chapel.

In 2001 he began his involvement with the “Wellington Waterfront Framework,” remaining on the board of the Wellington City Council’s “Wellington Waterfront Limited” until the end of 2009. Perhaps the most important from a national perspective, in 2002 he was appointed to a three-person, independent panel to investigate the “Leaky Building Syndrome.” Their report (known as the ‘Hunn Report’) set the scene for a revised Building Act 2004 and improvements to the NZ Building Code. Its impact continues to be visible today’s new buildings. In 2007 he was appointed a Deputy Environment Commissioner (a non-lawyer member of the Environment Court), ultimately serving 3 five-year terms.

Digging around the Corridors of Power – the archaeology of Parliament - Mary O’Keeffe, Heritage Solutions²

Parliamentary Services are currently undertaking construction works at the rear of the Parliament complex to construct new buildings for MPs and staff, and support infrastructure structures. Archaeologist Mary O’Keeffe is monitoring the construction works.

Site history

The history of the Parliament site will be familiar to HPW members: the area was set aside in the 1840 plan of Wellington; Colonel Wakefield’s house was built on site (Wakefield was the New Zealand Company’s principal agent - his house was later used as the first Government House); construction of the wooden Provincial Council building, built in 1857-8 and extended in the 1880s; Government House built 1871; the Parliamentary Library fire of 1907; construction of architect John Campbell’s Parliament House, completed in 1922; and construction of the Beehive, completed in 1979.

Behind the Parliament buildings was also a complex of fascinating historic buildings, most notably the Colonial Museum and a house for the Museum Director, James Hector, built in about 1865.



Image: Dominion Museum [Colonial Museum] and James Hector's house and garden, off Museum Street, Wellington, circa 1880. Alexander Turnbull Library 1/2-005154-G

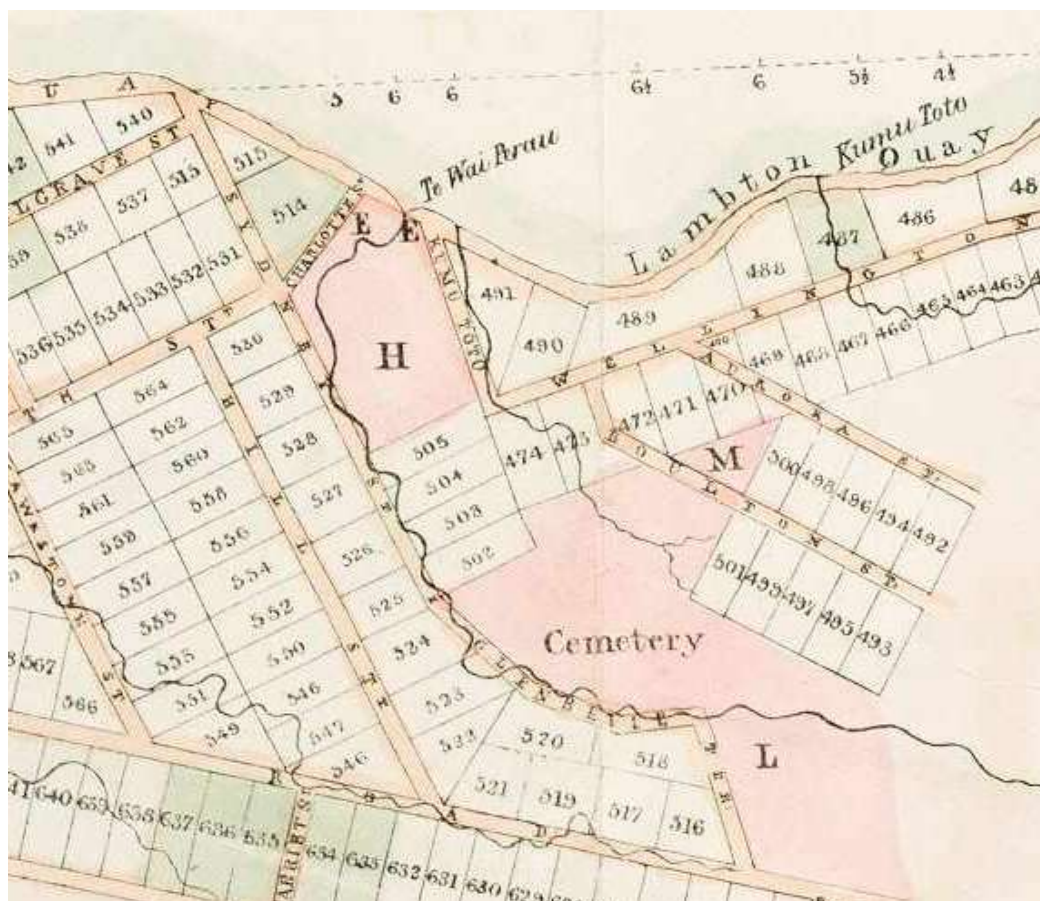
The museum also managed laboratories and workshops. The laboratories were later to become the DSIR.

Another notable building on the site behind Parliament was Broadcasting House, opened in 1963 and demolished in 1997.

The buildings were located on a high ridge, with a stream and gully running through it, known as the Sydney St gully. Sydney Street originally ran through the parliament site.

² www.heritagesolutions.net.nz

The stream is noted on a plan by Government Surveyor Felton Mathew, drawn in **1841**.



Detail from Plan of Wellington by Government Surveyor Felton Mathew, 1841. Alexander Turnbull library.

Archaeological monitoring

I have been periodically monitoring on the site since late 2022. Sadly, nothing of the Colonial Museum or Dr Hector's House or laboratories has survived – site pre-enabling works revealed a spaghetti tangle of mid to late 20th C services that has obliterated any evidence of these structures. However, two features have been recorded that are of interest.

Brick culvert - I recorded a brick barrel drain in a trench beside Ballantrae Place, behind Parliament Buildings. It was made of orange bricks, with thin mortar between the bricks. No makers marks or identifying features were seen on the bricks. More sections of the drain have been revealed in subsequent work across the site.

A CCTV camera sent down the drain revealed it was live (it had water running through it) and it was in good condition. I have georeferenced the location of the barrel drain in relation to the stream shown in Felton Mathew's plan; the drain overlies the stream, so almost certainly contains this stream.

I have not established a firm date for this barrel drain, but I note that brick lined culverts for water and sewerage were being constructed in Wellington from the 1850s: advertisements or reports of work in the newspapers date from this time. Civic works were being undertaken by the 1860s: the "town board" called for tenders for an eleven-chain long brick culvert in Lambton Quay in March 1866³.

Sewer and stormwater drains were in place in many locations throughout the city by 1892⁴, due to typhoid and diphtheria outbreaks⁵.

³ *Wellington Independent*, 24 March 1866

⁴ Plan of Wellington's stormwater and sewer. Wellington City Archives Ref: 00233:34:1892/740 typhoid map

⁵ Humphris and Mew, 2009: 23-25



Brick barrel drain Nick Morris, LT McGuinness



Wooden culvert

Another water management feature I've recorded on site is a small section of an open wooden culvert. This feature had a flat wooden bottom and angled wooden sides. Each side was made of two planks, one placed on top of the other, with no visible fasteners; the sides were held in place by the surrounding earth.



Wooden Culvert. O'Keeffe

This culvert was about 3m below the existing ground surface. Due to its depth I'm considering that it presumably predated the filling in of the gully through Sydney St. The culvert was constructed of rimu, which would have been locally available. It may also have been associated with the stream noted by Felton Mathew, but I have not established this.

Archaeological evidence shows that many streams in the Wellington area either stopped flowing or had significantly reduced flow after the 1855 earthquake, due to uplift. It may be that the stream shown on Felton Mathew's plan had reduced flow, so was small enough after the earthquake to be contained by this wooden culvert. The stream may have been later enclosed by the brick barrel drain due to the mentioned health issues.

Equally, it may be that the culvert contained the stream prior to the filling in of the Sydney St gully. This project reflects two aspects of archaeology in New Zealand: firstly, that you don't always find the stuff you expect, and secondly, unexpected but no less interesting features can be revealed.