

## **And "... the dazzle continued inside ... ": New Zealand interior and landscape architectures of the 1930s**

a one day symposium held under the auspices of the Centre for Building Performance Research, Victoria University  
Friday 3rd December 2021

### **ABSTRACTS**

#### **Paul Addison "St James and the Good Shepherd: windows on the landscape"**

Two New Zealand churches completed in the 1930s, St James' Church at Franz Josef / Waiiau (James Stuart Turnbull and Percy Watts Rule, 1931) and the Church of the Good Shepherd on the shores of Lake Tekapo (Richard Strachan De Renzy Harman, 1935), feature large plate glass windows behind the altar, affording expansive views of the natural landscape beyond. This represented a significant departure from prevailing ecclesiastical design ideas of the time, with the interior of the churches being intimately connected to the landscape outside, rather than the usual largely internalized atmosphere with any sense of the surroundings limited to light coming through strategically placed decorative or stained-glass windows. It is, however, a design aesthetic that has seldom been utilized in New Zealand since. This paper will traverse the history and design of the two churches and their relationships with the landscapes in which they are situated.

#### **Eva Garbett "The Ideal and the Real: interior linings in 1930s New Zealand homes"**

The choices made by New Zealanders in terms of how they line the floors, walls and ceilings of their homes, both today and in the past, is driven by various influencing factors. These include economic factors such as supply and demand, changes in technology, societal norms, as well as the agency of people themselves, ranging from the manufacturer and supplier to the designer and homeowner. In 1930s New Zealand, architectural and building publications aimed to influence consumer behavior in terms of the products and methods used to design, construct and decorate buildings. These magazines also played a pivotal role in both reflecting and shaping current societal ideals and the associated ideal homes, which are almost always the homes of the middle and upper classes.

This paper takes a case study approach by looking at the first 12 issues of the *Home & Building* magazine between December 1936 and November 1939, extracting from these the construct of the ideal home interior and the types of interior linings that were advertised and used for this purpose in the homes that are presented. To investigate the extent to which these trends are adopted in the homes of "real New Zealanders," a sample of a sample of Wellington building consents and historical interior photographs available through DigitalNZ are used.

#### **Adrian Humphris & Geoff Mew "Frederick Tschopp, Landscape Architect, O.E. in New Zealand 1929-1932"**

Frederick Tschopp was a naturalised American of Swiss birth who had trained as a horticulturalist specialising in landscape architecture. He and his wife arrived in Auckland in September 1929 and he soon found work with some of the local bodies there. Works and Development in Wellington later employed him in designing gardens for several important government properties. This was not a permanent position however and about July 1931 he moved to Rotorua with a major contract to beautify the city, including extensive street plantings and an upgrade of the lake shore. Most of this work was well-received but there were some dissenting voices. The contract was terminated in November 1932, but with several goodwill gestures. While in Rotorua, Frederick had visited both Hamilton and Tauranga, commenting

on landscape design aspects. The family (now with the addition of a son) left New Zealand for home in Los Angeles in late November 1932. Frederick had a subsequent career with the Department of Water in California and died at Laguna Hills, Orange, California in February 1980.

The reasons for Frederick's visit to New Zealand can be interpreted in two ways. Clearly the newspapers regarded him as an Overseas Expert with a talent for landscape design, still a fairly new concept in the country in the late 1920s. He undoubtedly stood out as an American with drive and initiative. But he was only 24 when he first arrived and his motives may well have been to gain overseas experience (OE) to help his chances of obtaining a lucrative job on his return to America. One paper described him as being in the course of a world tour but there is no conclusive evidence for him having spent long in other countries at this time.

### **Nigel Isaacs "Standing Tall – The Evolution of Habitable Room Height Limits in NZ Building Controls"**

Although it is often thought that the 3 February 1931 Napier earthquake led to the first New Zealand use of building codes, they have a far longer history. Often developed by the local town, city or borough engineer, these building codes or by-laws covered a wide range of topics, not just structural safety. As a result of two surveys of local government building by-laws undertaken to support the development of national building controls, digests of details from a number of these codes are available. The 1924 survey of 37 municipalities was used to support the development of the first national code for timber buildings, while the 1938 survey of 84 municipalities was used in the development of NZSS 95 Model Building By-law during the 1930s and early 1940s. The digests provide an opportunity to explore the 1930s development of building by-laws by geographical and topic coverage, as well as the impact on building controls since that time.

These local building by-laws often included requirements that affected the interior architecture of buildings, such as the requirement for minimum dwelling or bedroom room heights. In 1924 these minima ranged from 8 ft to 10 ft (2.4 m to 3.0 m) for either a dwelling or an attic room. However, by 1938 while the height range for dwelling rooms was unchanged for attic rooms the range was reduced by 1 foot (0.3 m) to 7 ft to 9 ft (2.1 to 2.9 m). Although the 1992 New Zealand Building Code (NZBC) does not specify minimum habitable room heights, the "House Improvement Regulations 1947" are still in force. These initially set the height requirement for a habitable room to 2.1 m, increasing in 1975 to the current requirement of 2.4 m.

The paper explores the development of minimum dwelling height requirements in New Zealand through these two surveys and longer-term building by-law analysis for both Wellington and Dunedin City Councils from the 1870s to the 1930s. These requirements will be compared to UK and USA codes, exploring both the international evolution of room height requirements and the relationship to New Zealand.

### **Christine McCarthy "Clandestine Correspondences: ideas about prisons in New Zealand in the 1930s"**

It is often considered that the 1930s was a mundane period in the history of New Zealand prison architecture, but this conclusion frequently ignores New Zealand's reception of international ideas about prison architecture. Films were one medium of this reception, with movies such as "The Criminal Code" (1931), "Twenty Thousand Years in Sing Sing" (1932), "Prison Farm" (1938) and "Prison without bars" (1939), presenting images of the interior of prisons, as well as illustrating the landscape as having penitential value. At the same time, the Vatican replaced its

"medieval dungeons," New York State introduced the idea of the "medium security" prison, and Britain proposed a new "cottage system" for women's prisons. This paper examines the ideas of prisons available to the public during this decade when the boundary between the inside and outside of NZ prisons was variously challenged, with, Mt Eden prisoner, John Charles Carter, being found guilty of using invisible ink (sodium bicarbonate), and clandestine correspondences, in letters to his wife, Isabella McIntosh petitioning parliament to investigate her son contracting tuberculosis following time in Hautu Prison, and John William Graves, being refused admission to Auckland Prison, as he tried to surrender after escaping Waikune Prison Camp. It will consider how these international images compare with new thinking and commentary about the interiors of New Zealand prisons.

### **Christine McCarthy "if other arrangements can reasonably be made": the interior architecture of Children's Courts in New Zealand in the 1930s.**

In 1925, the Child Welfare Act was passed. The Act introduced the idea of the Children's Court as a space "separate from the premises in which another Court usually exercises jurisdiction" (s28). In 1927, an amendment to the Act provided further elaboration, clarifying that:

persons attending any sittings of a Children's Court shall not be brought into contact with persons in attendance at any other Court; and for this purpose the sittings of the Children's Court shall not, except in cases where no other suitable room is available, be held in any room in which any other Court ordinarily exercises jurisdiction; nor shall a sitting of the Children's Court, if held in the same premises as any other Court, be held at a time when such other Court is sitting, if other arrangements can reasonably be made (s18(1)).

This paper investigates the locations and interior architecture of Children's Courts in New Zealand in operation in the 1930s. It aims to establish whether or not the interior architecture of Children's Courts, with their legislated requirement to be physically distinct from the rest of the court system, was also distinct and in what ways children were specifically accommodated for in this interior architecture.

### **Linda Tyler "Walter Reginald Brook Oliver and the internal design of the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum"**

This paper will evaluate how the progressive elements of the interior design of the National Art Gallery and Dominion Museum – the low ceilings and soft lighting which made the building "essentially modern" according to commentators – were influenced by museum director Dr W.R.B Oliver's input as the client's representative as much as by prevailing architectural fashions.

Following the example set by the Auckland War Memorial Museum which had been designed by returned servicemen Hugh Grierson, Kenneth Aimer and Keith Draffin and completed in 1929, the new national art gallery and museum in Wellington was built as a two-storeyed classical building with a double-height daylight-lit Māori Hall at its centre. In contrast to Auckland, in Wellington the role of commemorating loss of life in World War One was consigned to an adjacent carillon.

The Director of Auckland Museum, botanist Thomas Cheeseman (1845-1923) did not live to see his museum completed but had built up its collections since he became curator in 1874. By contrast, in Wellington, W.R.B. Oliver (1883-1957) was of a younger generation. He had only become Director of the Dominion Museum at the age of 45 in 1928 on the death of Dr J. Allan Thomson, but Oliver was quick to upskill. He successfully applied for a Carnegie grant which enabled him to travel extensively in the United States, gathering ideas for the display of exhibits and the management of collections. While Samuel Hurst Seager's (1855-1933) techniques for illuminating the exhibition halls were adopted, as a scientific museologist, Oliver

had his own ideas about interior design which prioritised preservation and storage of collections.

**Peter Wood "The Cottage that Kids Built: Jack's Mill School and the Significance of Architecture for Progressive Education in New Zealand in the Late 1930s."**

Even today, the tiny West Coast community of Kotuku is difficult to find. In 1935, when Edward Darracott arrived to the position of sole teacher at Jack's Mill School, it must have felt very far removed indeed from the rest of New Zealand. Yet here, in what might be described as a Department of Education backwater, Darracott implemented an audaciously progressive educational experiment. Central to his teaching, Darracott embarked on two major projects with his students. The first (and in keeping with an interschool competition at that time) was the design and establishment of a garden. The second project would prove more ambitious. With responsibility for the planning and building passed to the students, Darracott initiated the construction on the school grounds of a three-quarter scale bungalow, complete with furnishings, running water and electricity. The 'miniature bungalow' received national attention at the time, and survives today under the care of the Department of Conservation, but outside the interests of back-road tourists, Darracott's educational experiment remains largely neglected. This paper will provide an overview of Darracott's achievements in Kotuku before focusing attention on the specific architectural interests he activated. This begins with the self-conscious civility on display in the garden, before moving on to the opportunities and consequences of domesticity at work with the cottage itself. Viewed in this way, it is hoped that the isolation of Darracott's achievement (geographically and educationally) will begin to be replaced by a well-informed alignment with international practices of the time. Moreover, it will be shown how these "radical pedagogies" saw architecture as a necessary - perhaps inevitable - tool of implementation.

**Peter Wood and Michael Dudding ""Interior view of a hut ...": Stereography and the depiction of an interior architecture in 1930."**

This paper is an exploration of a stereographic photograph taken inside a New Zealand backcountry hut. Matter-of-factly entitled, "Interior view of a hut, with mugs, a bottle, plate and cutlery on a table, looking through door to another hut, location unidentified," the photograph is attributed by the Alexander Turnbull Library to keen amateur photographer Edgar Richard Williams.

The image gives little detail away in its depiction of the hut interior, except for a utilitarian table tableau that begins to suggest a nascent New Zealand interior defined by no-nonsense pragmatism and Lea & Perrins. But, far from being a scene of Depression-era poverty and deprivation, close examination of the photographed situation and its broader context provides a glimpse into a monied amateurism that heralded an emergent leisure class.

As a stereoscopic image, the photograph does more than depict a scene. By placing us *within* a spatial view, we become immersed in questions concerning interiority and exteriority. We are presented with two spatial contrasts: one in the subject of the image, the other in the object of the image. By taking a close reading of both contrasts, this paper is an attempt to make some architectural sense of these dualities.