"Pleasing homogeneity," "Dull times," and "animated cocktails": New Zealand Architecture in the 1930s

Abstracts

In the Provinces

Ann McEwan "Hamilton: Where it sometimes happens"

As much as the citizens of Hamilton leap to its defence whenever the city's status as a main centre is disputed, or even ignored, there is no denying the invisibility of the Waikato's largest centre in the nation's architectural history.

Peter Shaw's survey of New Zealand architecture illustrates just three Hamilton buildings, two houses and a performing arts centre at the University of Waikato. There are no historic places in Hamilton, judging from the indefatigable Gavin McLean's 2002 book *Landmarks*. Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins may well have visited but his 2004 survey of domestic architecture seems to suggest that 'New Zealand design' happens only rarely beyond the boundaries of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, and not at all in Hamilton.

So, as pedestrian as it may be, it seems that a corrective should be offered to introduce Hamilton architecture from the 1930s [other decades will have to wait their turn]. In a decade in which the architectural profession faced challenge and opportunity, Hamilton acquired an interesting collection of buildings. None perhaps that shook the world, or ultimately made it into the history books, but buildings that made a distinctive contribution to the streetscape of a provincial town that was soon to become a city.

Kerry Francis "Temperate Modernity: The Whangarei architecture of Alfred Morgan in the 1930s"

Alfred Morgan was born in Brixton, London in 1893. The family emigrated to New Zealand and settled in Avondale, Auckland. Alfred moved to Christchurch, attended Christ's College and later returned to Auckland where he studied at the Auckland Architectural Students Association. During World War I he was overseas in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He stayed on in London after the end of the war to further his architectural studies and was admitted as a member of the RIBA. Here he met Horace Massey and the two collaborated on projects including several entries in the Daily Mail Ideal Homes Competition of 1919. Morgan returned to New Zealand and settled in Whangarei in 1923.

Whangarei in the 1930s was a small rural service town with a population of 8,000 far from the epicenters of international architectural change.
Morgan had originally studied at the AASA with Noel Bamford and Roy K. Binney, two protégés of Sir Edwin Lutyens, and the Neo Georgian was his preferred style.
During this decade we observe a gradual shift in his design sensibilities as he moves towards the modern. Whilst initially retaining the red brick of the Neo Georgian style he assimilated new formal strategies to produce an architecture of temperate modernity.

This paper will examine several projects by Morgan during this decade including the 1938 NZIA Gold Medal award winning Whangarei Public Library, which was designed in collaboration with Horace Massey, and discuss how international influence and provincial location shaped his architecture.

Mark Southcombe and Wendy Pettigrew "The End of the Golden Weather"

Whanganui is located in a sheltered river valley with a favorable microclimate. Its river gave direct access to an otherwise inaccessible hinterland and its port gave early traders direct access to international markets. After the problems in the early 1840s over the disputed New Zealand Company purchase of Whanganui, colonial settlement was assisted by readily accessible land and local Maori "friendly" and supportive of European settlement. Whanganui's early years were characterised by extraordinary growth and building especially in the period from 1870 to the First World War. In 1924 the settlement became a city and was at the time New Zealand's fifth largest urban area. Whanganui was a burgeoning regional centre of national significance.

The depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s hit Whanganui hard. The city never fully recovered its former growth rate and status. The decline in coastal shipping coupled with problems maintaining the two ports in town and at Castlecliff resulted in a reduction of exports from Whanganui. At the same time there was a marked growth in railway freight with goods transferring to the Main Trunk Line and the newly-established rail link to New Plymouth. The relative isolation and difficulty farming the regional hinterland settled by the returned servicemen after the war, coupled with low wool prices, contributed to a reversal then stagnation of the city's growth after this time.

This paper examines the architectural evidence of this transitional economic period of Whanganui's architectural history and traces some key architectural moments and their significance. The effects of the Murchison and Napier earthquakes are considered, the last flowering of the city's early prosperity is

documented and the initial transition to a regional government service centre is marked at the point of recovery at the beginning of the Second World War. The scene is set for the reality of the economic stagnation and architectural hiatus that followed.

Ian Lochhead "Resisting Modernism or the Last Gasp of the Arts and Crafts?: Church Building in Canterbury and North Otago in the Thirties"
The dominant historical narratives of twentieth-century architecture present the 1930s as the period during which Modernism's claim to be the architectural style of the century was consolidated and when the new architecture began to spread across the globe. In New Zealand, as in the rest of the world, this master narrative has tended to obscure the significance of buildings constructed in more traditional styles. The five New Zealand buildings included in the RIBA's Centennial Exhibition, *International architecture 1924-1934*, were not, however, the latest examples of Modernism in this country, but relatively conservative designs, including Cecil Wood's Arts and Crafts inspired St Barnabas's Church at Woodend (1932). Wood's building forms part of an extensive group of small country churches built throughout Canterbury and North Otago during the 'thirties. These include Wood's St Paul's, Tai Tapu (1930-31) and Herbert Hall's St David's Memorial Church at Cave (1930 although by far the best know is R.S.D. Harman's Church of the Good Shepherd at Lake Tekapo (1935).

These small, unpretentious churches, many built with assistance from a government fund initiated to stimulate the construction industry, made use of modern materials, especially reinforced concrete, but their mode of expression remained conservative. They were often embellished with furnishings executed in the traditions of the Arts and Crafts movement. In most cases these churches were important statements of local identity while at the same time expressing the diverse cultural origins of those who built them. In style they were invariably Gothic yet within that dominant idiom considerable stylistic diversity was achieved. For both architects and their clients Modernism, with its emphasis on internationalism and the machine, was unable to express the rich veins of meaning which such buildings were required to embody. Yet as expressions of the uncertainties of the time, their conservative aesthetic values, their reassertion of pioneering roots and of an enduring local identity were as significant as Modernism's confident assertion of a better, essentially urban, future. At a time when the approaching Centennial events of 1940 was stimulating a reassessment of the country's past, these buildings also acted as powerful statements of consolidated achievements.

Foreign Influences
Albert L Refiti "Pacific Oddity"
This proposed paper attempts to scope out a history of a little Pacific oddity that was made in Samoa in the late 1930's and transplanted to Wellington in 1939 and now located on Puketutu Island in Auckland. It will be an attempt at theorising a peripheral history of New Zealand architecture and of the faletele or Samoan guesthouse's place in New Zealand architecture.

Julie Willis "A dip in the Tasman: Stephenson & Turner's Early NZ projects"
In the mid-1930s, the newly-elected NZ Labour Government introduced a series of social reforms, including the state housing programme, that would play a significant role in shaping the future of architectural effort in ensuing years, with a focus on housing and education. There was also interest in building for health and in 1936, the thoroughly modern firm and hospital-specialists Stephenson & Turner (S&T) undertook their first exploration across the Tasman of the potential of New Zealand as a market for its services. Within 12 months of their first visit, Stephenson & Turner were commissioned to completely redesign two of New Zealand's key hospitals.

The firm described New Zealand as having "unexplored… architectural potential" with "domestic and commercial work steadied by a colonial tradition, but had been by-passed by fresh streams of thought from Europe and America; and in hospital development the climate of through had not significantly progressed since the days of Florence Nightingale."[1] Thus the Australians saw New Zealand as a natural opportunity for expansion, and ripe to embrace their brand of technical and aesthetic modernism through their flagship designs: hospitals.

Not surprisingly, S&T's overtures in New Zealand were greeted with some suspicion and, later, significant obstacles. Their modernist hospital designs for both the Auckland and Wellington hospitals would have been large and prominent examples of the new architecture, if they had not been halted by the declaration of World War II. Although a thwarted attempt by Australians to invade the New Zealand profession and spread the fervour of modernism more widely, S&T's engagement with New Zealand in the 1930s foretold of a radically changed architectural future, where modern technology, communications, travel, business practices and aesthetics, as well as the threat of international competition, would combine to radically shift New Zealand architecture post-WWII.

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[1] Marguck [Stephenson & Turner's in-house journal], December 1962, p4.

Linda Tyler "A Certain Stirring Thrills the Air: the Design of IYA Radio Station, 1935, in context"
Radio broadcasting started in New Zealand on 17 November 1921 with a broadcast by Professor Robert Jack, Professor of Physics at Otago University, Dunedin. By 1925 a private company, The Radio Broadcasting Company of New Zealand Ltd. (RBC) had been contracted by the Government to provide a national broadcasting service from the main centres of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Transmission was not to begin at 1YA Auckland until 1926 and then with a broadcasting power of only 500 watts, but a well-primed public that had bought their own radios paid an annual licensing fee of £1 10s from (coincidentally) April Fool's Day 1925 in anticipation. The RBC received £54,166 from licensees and it was this money that assisted in the financing of the main centre stations and gave a tremendous impetus to broadcasting growth.
A bill to make broadcasting a state enterprise was passed on 11 November 1931, but recording capability was not available until 1935 by which time radio was very firmly established as a source of entertainment and information. The large body of listeners was assured of a daily programme service, with the exception of one silent night each week. An amendment to the Act in 1934-35 enlarged the New Zealand Broadcasting Board and gave it powers of supervision over all private broadcasting stations and their programmes and the authority to "prohibit, either absolutely or subject to such conditions as it thinks fit to impose, the transmission from any broadcasting station of any programme or part which in its opinion is unsuitable for broadcasting."

Commissioned at the height of the Depression by the conservative NZBB, the IYA Auckland studios were designed by Norman Wade and Alva Bartley, architects of De Bretts (also in Shortland Street) and built to become Auckland's first radio station in 1935. Described as neo-Romanesque in appearance, the building shows that Wade and Bartley looked to American and British prototypes for their design, but included some clever adaptations to the site. Deceptively large, the IYA station's structure presents a single storey façade to Shortland Street, but extends for another three levels down the hill to Fort Street at the back. Requirements of early radio broadcasting technology dictated that the building be solid and soundproof. Thick double brick walls blocked out noise, and copper framed arched "windows" revealed a second layer of brick rather than a view of the interior. Studios below street level at the front could be used for music practice and recording as they were built into the hillside to block sound. A central dome above the foyer was surmounted by an enormous broadcasting aerial, which was described in newspapers of the time as Auckland's equivalent of the Eiffel Tower.

In 1936, newly elected Michael Joseph Savage dismantled the NZBB and placed responsibility for the control of the National Broadcasting Service – as it was first termed – in the hands of a Minister of the Crown who was charged with the administration of the Act. Because of its early function as essentially another means of communication, broadcasting in New Zealand, as in most countries, had been associated with the responsibilities of the Postmaster-General. But, with the coming of the Labour Government, the concept of broadcasting as a social force was fully established. Its importance in this respect may be gauged from the fact that Savage himself assumed the portfolio of Broadcasting. The Act also provided for the appointment of a Director of the National Broadcasting Service and Canterbury University's charismatic Professor James Shelley was appointed to that position on 1 December 1936, ushering in a glittering era of state funded production of homegrown music and drama.

Bill Toomath "Hidden Persuaders, Forbidden Fruit"
I want to look into the growth of 'styling' on everyday objects, the deliberate cultivation of appearances to indivdualise machine products as a competitive marketing tool. Styling's influence on popular design fields including architecture during the 1930s can be set against the challenge of Modern architecture's principled functionalism.

Impetus to styling was given by General Motors in 1927, when an Art & Colour section was set up to increase the sales appeal of its passenger cars by yearly changes to their styling, thus sowing seeds of our ultimate 'consumerist' society.

After the Depression in the early 30s the client base for Art Deco had changed, from luxury for the wealthy to mass production for middle class Americans. Industrial design specialists soon emerged and became a phenomemon of the 30s, producing exciting smoothed enclosures for domestic electrical equipment and for all forms of transport, with their rounded shapes and horizontal 'speedlines' of Streamline Deco – the popular visual idiom of the 1930s. Direct links can be made to NZ architecture of the time with its rounded corners, curved glass, emphasised horizontal glazing bars and ornamental spaced bands, all as motifs in local Deco versions known as Spanish Modern, modernistic and Jazz Modern.

By 1940 however, Modern Architecture was winnng the battle, while industrial design was legitimising its own place for the future, and consumerism was getting a grip. Being a child of the times was an adventure, I can tell you.

Ideas of New Zealand

Bill McKay "Maori and Architecture in the 1930s"

This paper examines buildings by Maori and the use of Maori motifs by Pakeha architects in the 1930s.

The 1930s saw the decline of the Young Maori Party, the increasing influence of Te Puea Herangi and the Kingitanga Movement, and the political rise of the Ratana movement. This paper surveys meeting house and marae construction during the period, Kingitanga buildings such as Mahinarangi and Turongo, and Ratana buildings such as the Temepara, Manuao and Omeka Marae.

The impending 1940 centenary of the Treaty of Waitangi, as well as the influence of Te Puea and Apirana Ngata, prompted a Government interest in supporting construction of meeting houses such as that at Waitangi. These can be contrasted with Ratana's buildings which eschew the use of customary forms and motifs even though that movement sought the restoration of Maori lands, rights and mana.

This survey also examines the use of Maori motifs by Pakeha architects, such as in the Napier Bank of New Zealand, and traces the influence of the Arts and Crafts and Art Deco styles, New Zealand nationalism and the 1940 Centennial.

Peter Wood "... from teat-jerk to quidnunc": A.R.D. Fairburn and the Formation of a National Architectural Ideology in New Zealand.

In 1934 A. R. D. Fairburn published the essay "Some Aspects of N.Z. Art and Letters" in the Journal *Art in New Zealand*. In it he criticized Alan Mulgan's book *Home: A Colonial's Adventure*, which had been first published in 1927, and was reprinted in 1934. It was, in Fairburn's view, an account unacceptably steeped in romantic melancholy for a distant motherland that was no longer as germane as it had once been. Instead he proposed looking to the American Transcendentalists Twain and Thoreau for direction.

Also published in 1934 was a small book from the New Zealand Institute of Architects called *Building in New Zealand*. In it the NZIA made a case for the professional and social responsibilities of the architect in New Zealand and it is best described as conservative. However it is pertinent that this book was edited by Alan Mulgan. Here the role of the architect in cast in practical terms that bear direct comparison to the code of practice issue for the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Mulgan's contribution to discussion on New Zealand Architecture is limited to this publication, and it is likely his editorship of *Building in New Zealand* was motivated more by depression economics than architectural interest. However this book is still an important summary of the profession at that time, and it links architecture to Mulgan's romantic writings though the reiteration of a colonial fountainhead. By contrast Fairburn would go on to champion a national voice for New Zealand's writers, artists, and architects. Moreover he established a close relationship with Vernon Brown, and was to associate with Bill Wilson and the Architectural Group. Indeed, the limited writings available from these architectural associates often echo Fairburn's 1934 call for an antipodean 'honesty' in 'our' buildings.

It is in the immediate post war period that the emergence of a national architectural expression in New Zealand is most celebrated, being lead in Auckland by Brown, Wilson, and the Architectural Group. However an examination of the writings by Fairburn and Mulgan shows that the elements of the debate were already in place well before then. I conclude that the antecedent for the emergence of debate on a national architectural character appears, however unintentionally, in the 1934 writings of Fairburn and Mulgan. Critical to this is discussion on we mean by 'honest' architectural work.

Robin Skinner "Christopher Perkins, Architecture and New Zealand"

In the early 1930s, the forthright painter and art educator, Christopher Perkins wrote an article calling for the development of an indigenous architecture befitting the New Zealand condition that did not slavishly follow work of the old country. In this remarkable piece of writing, his argument predates the post-war rhetoric of the Bill Wilson, the Group, the Architectural Centre and other architectural nationalists. In these terms, this little-known text remains a significant event in the development of New Zealand art and architecture.

In this paper I consider this writing with respect to Perkins' other writings, Wellington debate of the early 1930s and the wider literary and architectural nationalist discourse of the 1920s-40s. I attempt to access what impact his writing had on the subsequent architectural discussion of the 1930s. In addition, Perkins' artistic production of his New Zealand years between 1929-33 is assessed in terms of the article of 1931. His writing, I argue, casts new light on his well-known works: the iconic images 'Taranaki' and 'Frozen Flame' of 1931.

At Home in the Thirties

Don Bassett "J.L. Hanna & Modernistic Homes"

J L Hanna described himself as Director of Home and Garden Services and Specialist in Home Design, Landscape Gardening and Interior Decoration on the title-page of a small book he published in 1 936

called *Modernistic Homes.* His earlier book had been called *Modern New Zealand Homes* published 1931 and contained houses of 'conventional design'; but as Hanna writes in his Foreword, 'times have changed and a new era demands a different type'. This paper will look at the activity of J L Hanna during the 1930s in Auckland and especially at the small 1936 publication. It will also consider the use of the terms 'modern' and 'modernistic' in the wider context of that time.

Christine McCarthy "Anscombe's plans for Highrise Living "
Edmund Anscombe, well-known as the art-deco architect of the 1939-40 Centennial Exhibition, moved to Wellington c1929. Following successful practices in Dunedin and Invercargill, he soon established offices in Wellington and the Hawke's Bay. While Anscombe's shift north can be characterised by a stylistic change to Art Deco and (in Hastings) Spanish Mission, his oeuvre also began to include the design of multi-storey apartments. This paper examines Anscombe's apartment designs including buildings such as Anscombe Flats, Albert Flats, Belvedere, Franconia and Olympus Flats in the context of his articles on housing, in particular his published scheme for superblocks on Adelaide Road, as a civic betterment in preparation for the 1939-1940 Centennial Exhibition.

Julia Gatley "Modernism and the Quadrangular Courtyard"
Auckland's Robin Simpson House (1938-1939), Timaru's Humphrey Hall House (1938-1939) and Wellington's Berhampore Flats (1938-1940) have all been recognised to date for being among the first full expressions of high modernist architecture in New Zealand. This paper teases out and complicates the accepted interpretation of the Berhampore Flats as being, by New Zealand standards, stylistically advanced by focusing on the ways in which it remained conventional, namely, its retention of a quadrangular courtyard layout and the resulting floor planning, which was effectively that of the row or terrace house.

The paper outlines the British medieval, educational and garden city/suburb associations of the quadrangular courtyard layout and examines Berhampore's use of this typology in combination with the flat roofs and lack of applied ornament of modernism. It finds a precedent for this particular layering of references within German modernism, most notably in the work of Ernst May, who had worked for British garden suburb ideologue Raymond Unwin prior to designing medium density settlements in the Nidda Valley, Frankfurt, in the latter 1910s and the 1920s.

The aim of this paper is not to challenge the accepted interpretation of the Berhampore Flats as being stylistically advanced by New Zealand standards, but rather to expand upon and enrich this interpretation by acknowledging the multiple threads and influences that can be read into the design.

Michael Findlay "So high you can't get over it: Neo-classicism, modernism and colonial practice in the forming of a twentieth century architectural landmark"
Amyas Connell (1901-1980) was a New Zealand architect regarded as a leading figure in British modernism. His first commission, 'High and Over' (1929-31) for the archeologist and classical scholar Bernard Ashmole was described as the first fully worked out modernist house built in England. The project drew attention from a wide range of architectural critics including Howard Robertson and the Country Life writer Christopher Hussey. A short film entitled 'The House of a Dream' was made by British Pathé, ensuring the house was seen by the large cinema audience in 1931. 'High and Over' became more contentious over time when Connell's intention to combine classical and modern design tendencies was criticised by more doctrinaire modernists. 'High and Over' occupies a place where the traditions of classicism and the emergent features of modernism intersect.
Connell's path, if taken, may have produced a distinctively British form of classical modernism.

This paper seeks to establish the context for 'High and Over' from a New Zealand perspective and though comparison with other projects by 'colonial' architects in Britain. Connell's critical profile has been shaped by the notion that British modernism was in the hands of 'Wild Colonial Boys', a soubriquet used to frame Connell's work in the 1930s by the British writer Dennis Sharp. In this interpretation, the depth of Connell's experience prior to 'High and Over' is overlooked.

Connell was an articled pupil of the British-born Wellington architect Stanley Fearn. His further training at the Bartlett School, London under the French Beaux Arts classicist Hector Corfiato, and period of study at the British School at Rome, combined with his formative experience of early reinforced concrete construction in his home town of Eltham, combined to produce a powerful entry to the British architectural scene. Connell's partnership with the Australian-born Stewart Lloyd Thomson (1902-1990) has not been covered in any previous study of the Connell, Ward and Lucas practice. The 'High and Over' project included a number of related structures set in a landscape plan not usually included in analysis of the complex whole. The relationship between the garden plan and the designs of the Armenian architect Gabriel Guévrékian seen at the Paris Exposition and the Villa Heim at Neuilly (1927) has also not been traversed.