

**The last royal epoch:
New Zealand Interior and Landscape Architecture in the 1900s**
a one day symposium held under the auspices of the
Centre for Building Performance Research,

Friday 5th December 2025
VUW School of Architecture

ABSTRACTS

Victoria Adams and Linda Tyler "The Empire Look: the installation of the British Art Exhibit at the New Zealand International Exhibition 1906-07 at Christchurch"

Organised under the aegis of New Zealand Premier Richard Seddon (1845-1906), the 1906-1907 New Zealand International Exhibition was designed to show the colony's progress to the world and frame Aotearoa as a Better Britain. The British Art Section comprising 2,000 works was organised by the British government but paid for by the New Zealand government. It was housed in its own bespoke gallery in Hagley Park designed by a local architect. This installation remains the largest exhibition of British art in Aotearoa's history, and purchases made by local government authorities formed the basis of metropolitan public art collections throughout Australasia. A principal motivation of the exhibit was to inculcate what was then considered good taste in colonial viewers, as well as to provide a version of the Royal Academy product to sell to middle-class art buyers nostalgic for reminders of Home. The British Government Representative for Fine and Applied Art, Alfred Longden (1875-1954), stated shortly after his arrival in Christchurch that the artworks were selected,

with the idea of having [them] represented in the homes of the people there [New Zealand]. That is the motive that has actuated the artists. They have sent work which they feel would be suitable and acceptable for your houses and museums.

Longden was also responsible for decorating the Art Gallery, fitting out the interior in an Arts and Crafts aesthetic style which was well-received by exhibition visitors. Sir Isidore Spielmann (1854-1925) who chose the works for exhibition but remained in Britain, noted in his 1907 report that "the general opinion was expressed that the rooms of the British Section were excellent in taste." The decorative scheme was also adopted for the rooms containing the Colonial Art Section, and this paper will address the ways in which the interior design framed the whole enterprise in terms of Empire.

Adrian Humphris "Place promotion and civic-boosterism; the need to regulate architects"

On the 19th of October 1905, a group of New Zealand architects met in Wellington with the aim of forming a New Zealand Institute of Architects, so the profession as a whole could be represented at the Conference of Builders and Architects being held in Timaru on the 25th.

The desire architects had to regulate their profession had been in place for some time. Throughout the nineteenth century anyone could use the title and set themselves up in practice, regardless of training and ability. William Beatson wrote in 1865 of "a colony where every carpenter calls himself an architect;" as late as 1907 Frederick de Jersey Clere complained that "[t]he profession of architect in NZ is an absolutely open one - any man who chooses, with or without the most ordinary education, can dub himself an architect and can practice as such."

The role of the architect had developed to become an essential factor in the building process, even taking on smaller jobs that previously were done by builders. In the absence of landscape architecture as a profession the aggregation and location of architects directly impacted cityscapes. There was also increased perception of architects and the need for good architecture in streetscapes in towns and cities. Aesthetic standards were rising, and even quite modest buildings were expected to be an ornament to the town and the surrounding landscape. As Ben Schrader notes in *The Big Smoke*, good architecture was seen as essential for "place promotion and civic-boosterism."

This paper explores the debates and steps taken to regulate the architectural profession leading up to the October 1905 meeting, and how regulation was seen as essential for cityscapes in New Zealand.

Adrian Humphris & Geoff Mew "The dunny comes in from the cold"

By the late nineteenth century, action was taken by local authorities in several major New Zealand cities and towns to instigate measures to improve sanitation to reduce or eliminate the spread of noxious diseases. Wellington led the way in 1898 by completing a citywide drainage system, to collect human waste from households and carry it to the sea at Moa Point on the south coast. The water closet was a necessary integral part of this system, with the attendant piping for odour dissemination.

It was soon realised that the isolated external toilet or dunny situated well away from the main house, and a feature of the garden, was no longer necessary; instead, homeowners could have a special small room indoors to accommodate the toilet with its plumbing; hence the origin of "the smallest room in the house." An interim stage of house planning was to locate the toilet beneath a verandah overhang, possibly with an adjacent wash house or coal store. Or there might be a small add-on wing to the house with the same functions. Some toilets were in the same internal room as the bath, but this was generally uncommon.

In this paper we look briefly at key features of the Wellington sanitation scheme, then analyse the number and locations of internal toilets using building permit plans for new houses. The changeover to internal toilets took many years, even decades in some areas, as they were difficult and costly to retrofit in older villas and some bungalows which had only recently got used to having piped water. Thus, the night cart system for collection and disposal of human waste from earth closets also had to continue - in some instances until the 1960s. Although the dunny was eventually replaced in towns and cities, it still lives on near huts in parks and reserves - but progress has generally led to better overall sanitation, and garden landscape design benefited accordingly.

Nigel Isaacs "*Handwork for Schools: Woodwork* (1902): New Zealand's first local building training?"

The first New Zealand book relating to carpentry held by any library is the Department of Education's 1902 *Handwork for Schools: Woodwork*, authored by E.C. Isaac. It provided basic training in the use of tools and instruction to make simple items, such as a folding chair, a bath-mat, a set of bookshelves or even a step-ladder. As well as "helping teachers who are taking up woodwork in school classes" it also set out the expectations for a two year woodwork course under the Manual and Technical Instruction Act 1900. As for the students, its goal was to support them to achieve "full and symmetrical development of the powers of hand and eye as servants of the brain." This included the skills of drawing to scale as "without drawing, exact and intelligent handwork is scarcely possible."

It was not until 1944 that the Army Education Welfare Service (AEWS) published a set of five carpentry booklets for adult learners and 1958 until the Technical Correspondence Schools' *Carpentry in New Zealand*. The paper explores the history of this 1902 publication, its author and the links to the more recent New Zealand publications.

Jamie Jacobs "The Department of Tourist and Health Resorts and the Creation of the "Finest Walk in the World.""

The Milford Track stands among New Zealand's earliest, most significant, and best-known leisure and tourism destinations. This designation is not made solely because of the varied and exhilarating natural beauty encountered along the way as the ability to experience such an overwhelming landscape was fully dependent on its sustained development for tourism purposes alone.

The Milford Track was one of a relatively small group of destinations for the nascent tourism industry in New Zealand. The government provided funds for the development of the track and construction of the earliest huts in the 1890s. However, it was only after the establishment of the Department of Tourist and Health Resorts in 1901 that its character as a premiere tourist experience was firmly established. The development of the track and facilities was greatly expanded under the Department and in 1908 it reworked the stages that people walked and overnighted on the track, and these segments remain more-or-less in place today. The shared experience of the loose confederation of

hundreds of thousands of trampers for whom the track was constructed and for whom it has been maintained over the years also establishes its exceptional level of significance as an experienced cultural landscape.

When the Department was beginning to strategise how to oversee the Milford Track in 1903, it confidently stated: the "Te Anau and Milford Sound Tour ... is destined to be one of the most popular in the colony." Their increased marketing popularised the remote track. And as early as 1908, Blanche E. Baughan, a poet and reformer recently immigrated from England, promoted it as the "Finest Walk in the World."

This paper will explore the establishment of the Milford Track as a central part of early-twentieth-century tourism in New Zealand. It will have a particular focus on the development of the track and its facilities, and how they contributed to the creation of a codified visitor experience of this stupendous natural landscape that has remained remarkably consistent for well over a century.

Christine McCarthy "Charles Lillywhite and New Zealand's 1900s gaol regulations"

In November 1900, American painter and decorator Charles Lillywhite was arrested at the corner of Willis and Manners Sts in Wellington after being identified as murderer Arthur Blatch while painting a postal pillar box. He was accused of murdering Alfred Welch in Colchester, England seven years earlier in December 1893. The arrest was sensational news. Multiple witnesses testified to Lillywhite being Blatch, including an Invercargill man who had known Blatch in England. In his defence Lillywhite produced a certificate of membership of the Painters' and Decorators' Brotherhood of North America to demonstrate he had been in America when the murder occurred, and the Chief of Police at Tacoma, Washington provided "statements from reputable citizens" identifying Lillywhite as being a resident painter and decorator in Tacoma from 1883 until 1894 when he moved to New Zealand.

After four months remanded in The Terrace Gaol, Lillywhite was extradited to England, where 30 witnesses were unable to positively identify Lillywhite as Blatch and he was released in late June 1901. Even before Lillywhite's name was cleared, the Justice Department decided to revise the gaol regulations "[i]n consequence of the agitation which has arisen through the treatment of Lillywhite" to "provide for different treatment of persons awaiting trial from those under sentence." This paper examines this proposal and other 1900s gaol regulations and their consequences and implications for the interiors of New Zealand gaols as well as providing insight into the career of one early twentieth-century interior decorator.

Natalie Marshall "Picnic Parties, Photography, and Primates: Heginbotham's Tea Gardens, Kilbirnie"

Heginbotham's Tea Gardens was the last of Wellington's five pleasure gardens to open and it was at its peak in the early 1900s. Opened in Kilbirnie in 1891, the gardens advertised its summerhouse, ocean views, and "endless amusement in the antics of ... monkeys in a cage," as well refreshments in a curated outdoor recreational space. These were fairly typical attractions for New Zealand's pleasure gardens, but Heginbotham set his venue apart by having a photographic studio onsite. From 1842, when the city's first tea garden had opened, pleasure gardens had been a popular form of entertainment, making "a major contribution to the social life of Wellington" through the nineteenth century. These were public places that women could visit unaccompanied by men and socialise outside the home. By the early twentieth century, however, interest was waning in this form of entertainment and the expansion of Wellington's suburbs was encouraging subdivision. Alongside sweeping urban and social change was a growing appreciation for New Zealand's natural environment. Wellington's pleasure gardens had largely disappeared by the mid-1920s. This paper explores the role of these gardens and considers their legacy.

Justine Olsen "Furnishing a Christchurch house in 1907"

In January 1906, ten months before British arts & crafts were shown at the New Zealand International Exhibition in Christchurch, architect Edward Herbert England (1875-1949), bought a section at 82 Springfield Road, St Albans. The house which England designed and built about 1907, featured a full expression of the British Arts & Crafts Movement. While its furnished rooms emphasised simplicity,

functionality and beauty conveyed through the 1880 address of William Morris, it featured recent examples of design including wallpaper by C.F.A Voysey and ceramics by Ruskin Pottery. This paper examines England's interiors through Steffano Webb's photographs dated about 1907. They demonstrate links to the N.Z.I.E. exhibition and the influence of trade and local dealers.

Tyson Schmidt ""... it is an absolute matter of impossibility that these townships will ever progress ..." The growth (or not) of towns between 1900 and 1910 under the Native Townships Act 1895"

The majority of the 18 towns created under the Native Townships Act 1895 were formed in the first decade of the twentieth century. A continuation of the Crown's support for settlers, the townships were also part of the modernisation push of the Liberal Government under Premier Richard Seddon.

Neither city nor rural expanse, and certainly not the untamed bush, the townships were the servants of the farm and the stopovers for the tourist. The growth of the townships quickly slowed through a lack of access to financing and the taihoa policies of leading Māori MPs. The number of new townships being created reduced considerably by the end of the 1910s, and many that had been established struggled to reach their intended and expected potential.

The story of native townships has only really been told through Waitangi Tribunal research, framed through a narrative of claim and a focus on two or three townships in a region at a time. This paper is an exploration of native townships and the stories they may hold from a landscape and architectural point of view.

Peter Wood "Interior Examination: The Invercargill Tragedy, 1908"

For New Zealanders, the first decade of the twentieth century was a reckoning with late nineteenth-century national mythologies of a "farmer backbone" society where social health was promised by an abundant agricultural economy. But, despite claims that a shift to cities would produce an inferior breed of New Zealander, in 1911 we officially became an urban society (of which Ben Schrader drolly observed that fears of catastrophic national decline failed to materialise). The corollary of urbanisation was the consolidation, through the 1900s, of the New Zealand suburb. Colloquially, this eventually becomes the cultural foundation of the "dream" of Pākehā culture, where Kiwis live in their own homes, insulated from the world in what would become a folk tale paradise of quarter acres, half-gallons, and Pavlova pie.

But in Invercargill, in 1908, the fallacy of suburban paradise was confronted even as it was being forged. In the early hours of April 8th, in an action of inexplicable and horrifying violence, James Reid Baxter killed his wife, his five children, and then himself in an act of familicide. This heartbreak has been largely forgotten, and the human cost of the Invercargill Tragedy might have been best kept respectfully distanced from academic research were it not for the unusually explicit domestic descriptions of the suburban crime scene that were published at the time. Preceding the mores of modern journalism, and taking place prior to the widespread availability of photographic reproduction in newspapers, these accounts provide a unique, if uncomfortable, account of domesticity at this time. This features full descriptions of the domestic interior, but in a context where the perpetrator's motives remained elusive the accounts go further and offer insight into the social norms and patterns of the 1900s home. In this paper I unpick the architectural story of the domestic functioning of the Baxter family, as described at the time. In this procedure I am not seeking to sensationalise the violence, nor "solve" the crime. What I will do is explore the representational narratives of 1900s domesticity this case provides. In my argument the vivid descriptions of the Invercargill Tragedy spoke to a genuine desire at the time to understand the unthinkable, and it may be that the reason such domestic violence slipped so quickly from public consciousness was a realisation that actions cannot be simply blamed on houses, however suburban.