

**"the need for beauty":  
New Zealand Interior and Landscape Architecture in the 1940s**  
a one day symposium held under the auspices of the  
Centre for Building Performance Research,  
Victoria University, Wellington  
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**ABSTRACTS**

**John P Adam and Laura Kellaway "A garden, a post office and a fairy: Hamilton's quest for city status"**

The sugar bag years of the 1930s depression was an important part of the history that effected the growth of provisional towns like Hamilton. Known for its golden mile, Hamilton was caught by the world-wide depression. Eager to gain city status locals and government focused on how to transform the town as the established centre of the Waikato. Essential to "making progress" was the new Hamilton Central Post Office, with its old 1901 post office past its use in size and facilities. The new building, designed by the Waikato architects Edgecumbe and White was built halfway up the old golden mile, north of the old town in 1939. And a garden opposite the new post office site - Garden Place - was to become the focus for the new city.

The timing meant that the new Central Post Office opened during World War II, with special approval for the works. Its impressive dome was a significant construction feat with war restrictions and shortage of labour. However, the new planned landscape of the city was halted as Garden Place became a focal point for the activities of the War, becoming Hamilton' town square much later than planned. But Hamilton's Garden Place didn't start as a planned town square and the stories about the Garden remain somewhat hidden along with its name Te Koopuu Mania o Kirikiriroa. This paper looks to the landscape heritage of Garden Place and the challenges of a war time build of a new city post office and its paradox of a "piazza."

**Michael Dudding "Making New Zealand: celebration and anti-myth"**

The *Making New Zealand* publications were a New Zealand government produced series of magazines to celebrate the centenary of the 1840 signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Each issue of the series (covering topics from infrastructure and defence, to fashion and sport) was to present an objective overview of the history of its subject – within the confines of a publication commemorating New Zealand's history. Joe Heenan, Undersecretary of Internal Affairs, was keen for the centenary celebrations and ephemera to "celebrate 100 years of colonisation," bringing "the bright side of our national progress" before the eyes of the world. While some authors were happy to articulate their topics in support of Heenan's vision, others became interested in producing what they believed to be a more realistic narrative grounded in the social realities of this country, including its negative aspects. Rather than making a case for the maintenance of cultural continuity, these writers sought a national identity arising from cultural adaptation to the specific conditions of New Zealand as a new world.

This paper looks at a range of *Making New Zealand* issues to explore the narratives put forward as retrospective accounts of and normative directives for the design of New Zealand's interior and landscape environments.

**Cara Francesco "From Field to Table: The Pukekohe Dehydration Factory in the 1940s"**

In August 1943, the New Zealand Government's Internal Marketing Division, announced plans to construct a vegetable dehydration factory in Pukekohe, on the outskirts of Auckland. The factory was constructed with urgency, to dehydrate, quick-freeze, can and cool store, large quantities of vegetables to assist with providing food for the United States of America troops, stationed in the Pacific. The factory comprised a large, long main factory building; a boiler house and machine shop; a cafeteria; a chemical building; a vinery building, a laboratory, and an administration block. The factory incorporated the most modern plant and processing methods of the time, with much of the equipment from the United States.

To supply the large quantities of vegetables required under direction from the Department of Agriculture, produce was grown through a combination of "state gardens" and commercial market gardeners. To

meet the demand, the factory operated long hours, becoming a significant local employer, particularly for women. Workers were deployed from further afield to achieve the processing outputs.

This paper will examine the development and operation of the Pukekohe Dehydration Factory in the 1940s, and its role in assisting with the war effort during the Second World War, and thereafter.

### **Matt Grant ""The sort of design sophistication we were all in need of," Ernst Plischke's Interior Design for Paul's Book Arcade (1947), Hamilton"**

In 1947 a remarkable interior design for a Hamilton bookshop by Ernst Plischke was, according to the client, "the sort of design sophistication we were all in need of." Paul's Book Arcade played a pivotal role in Hamilton social circles in the 1940s, with the owner David Blackwood Paul (a.k.a. Blackwood) and his wife Janet Wilkinson, forming their own "centre of human enlightenment." The Blackwood group of friends included painter Margot Phillips, who like Plischke, was a European refugee, painter, critic, and writer for *The Listener*, Geoff Fairburn and his wife Jean (also an artist), as well as writer Alexander Gaskell Pickard.

Paul's Book Arcade was established in Hamilton in 1901 by Blackwood's father William Henry Paul. In 1933, Blackwood took over the management of the bookshop, reportedly as the result of a disagreement with his father, who by then was a powerful community leader. Paul's local services were a more pressing concern, and so Blackwood inherited what was a "modest emporium" with the atmosphere of a general store. Blackwood would later transform Paul's Book Arcade to such an extent that in 1949 the visiting English publisher Sir Stanley Unwin numbered the bookshop among the fourteen best in the world, and one of the two best in New Zealand. So successful was the bookshop that in 1955 a further two stores were opened, each in Auckland. The first was located on Shortland Street, and the second on High Street, also designed by Plischke.

The Blackwood social circle would have a lasting and far-reaching influence on the mid-century architecture of Hamilton. Connections with local artists and groups such as The Waikato Society of Arts, allowed a seamless flow of European-inspired modernist ideals to inform Hamilton's new architecture, interior design, and cultural landscape. The first built manifestation of this movement was the 1947 interior design for Paul's Book Arcade by Austrian architect Ernst Plischke.

This presentation will look at the relation between Blackwood and Plischke, the architect's design for the Book Arcade, and how the Blackwood's informed design sensibilities would influence Hamilton's modernist landscape for years afterwards.

### **Marguerite Hill "Centennial city – the city of Auckland model"**

Auckland Council is lucky to care for the surviving portion of a city model made for the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in 1940. The model represents a section of Auckland central, covering the area from Albert Park to Nelson Street, and Waitematā Harbour to what is now Aotea Square.

The model was displayed in Dominion Court, one of a dozen models which represented New Zealand's main cities and towns. Fletchers' architects Ronald Muston and Lewis Walker were responsible for the design of Dominion Court and the interpretive models and dioramas within. Muston had a special interest in the models and even travelled to Hollywood to learn about current trends in movie model design and advertising techniques.

The ingenuity of the model makers included ships that 'sailed' on the harbours, faux glow worms in the papier mâché Waitomo Caves, and a model of Aoraki/Mount Cook which was over 7.5m high. Thousands of wooden model buildings were made and hand-painted by artists and technical college students and were based on aerial and street-level photographs and specific colour palettes for each city.

The model came to Auckland City Council after the exhibition closed and has been displayed inside and outside of council. It was recently conserved and is once again on public display.

### **Nigel Isaacs "E.163 1945 Emergency Standard Specification for Dwellinghouse Construction – the forgotten ancestor of NZS3604"**

The outbreak of World War II led to a focus on the most efficient use of materials within New Zealand. In 1944 the New Zealand Standards Council was requested to develop an *Emergency Standard Specification for Dwellinghouse Construction*. Unlike NZSS 95 *New Zealand Standard Model Building By-Law*, which was limited to structural stability, public health and other council-controlled issues, this new specification (NZSS E.163) could deal with materials and construction methods. Published in January 1945, only two copies appear extant – a partial copy in Wellington City Archives and a full copy in Auckland City Archives, although the Committee minutes are held in Archives New Zealand.

As well as dealing with house construction (foundations, concrete work, carpentry, etc) it deals with internal finishing (solid- and fibrous-plaster, terrazzo, painting and paperhanging, etc) and services (plumbing, drainage and electrical). E.163 was promoted as being of real benefit to occupants (owners or tenants) as they could be assured as to “essential considerations relating to materials, workmanship, and design” – placing quality, not speed at the heart of the then Government’s actions.

The paper compares the requirements of E.163 with the relevant parts of NZSS95, as well as looking forward to the development of NZS 3604 *Code of Practice for Light Timber Frame Buildings Not Requiring Specific Design*.

### **Cherie Jacobson "'Ruffled by the number of windows": The 1948 Halberstam House by Henry Kulka"**

In March 1940 architect Henry Kulka arrived in New Zealand as a refugee of the Second World War. He had enjoyed a successful career in Vienna, including collaborations with his former teacher Adolf Loos. Kulka's wife Hilda followed with the couple's children a few weeks later and during her journey she met another refugee family, the Halberstams - Hugo, Martha and their daughter Lucie. Eight years later Henry Kulka designed a house for a section the Halberstams had bought in Karori. In an oral history interview with Lucie, she recalled that once the house was completed, her parents invited people they had met while renting in Kelburn to visit their new home. The feedback received about the number of windows and the wood-panelled living and dining room gave the distinct impression that their former neighbours felt they had built a house "above [their] social level."

This paper looks at the reaction to the Halberstam House and similar houses built by émigré architects when they were completed. It concludes with the perspective of a current inhabitant - how well does it suit contemporary living?

### **Kate Jordon "Surprises and sighs from researching garden retailers in 1940s New Zealand"**

In the 1960s, plant retailing in Aotearoa New Zealand changed dramatically. Drive-in, self-serve, garden centres changed how plants were bought, sold and grown. But in order to study a massive change, we must know what came before. This paper presents some of the initial findings from researching the businesses that grew and sold plants for the home market in Aotearoa in the 1940s. All the findings relate to the landscape of our towns and cities, both how the landscapes shaped the business of home gardening and how, in turn, these businesses shaped urban landscapes.

### **Laura Kellaway "Camouflaged: Hamilton’s wartime heritage"**

During the Second World War Hamilton’s location away from the coast and main cities was seen as the place to camouflage the military services and the supply chain of ammunition factories for essential war supplies. On the eastern side of the town American soldiers were housed (in secret), there were air force and army bases nearby, including American fuel stores at Cambridge and two ammunition factory complexes in Hamilton.

The Colonial Ammunition Company factories were quickly built along with temporary social and housing facilities for the factories workers and conscripted New Zealanders were built. Declared "temporary" some of the places and the stories still remain part of the folklore of Hamilton. This paper focuses on Hamilton’s wartime activities of the Colonial Ammunition Companies and their factories in Hamilton during the war and gives a glimpse of what it may have been like inside the complexes.

### **Christine McCarthy "Modernist representations and an art deco landmark"**

Since seeing a photograph of the New Zealand University Senate Building (Wellington, Prouse and Wilson, 1940, dem. 1987) reflected a construction site pond of the deferred Broadcasting House, I've always been curious about it. This paper will discuss the building as a response to its urban environment - particularly the geometries of Bowen Street, investigate its interior, and discuss a series of photographs of the building's siting by Duncan Winder and Ans Westra, and painting by Bill Toomath.

### **Mary O'Keeffe "'Brick by Brick" – the role of brickworks in building Wellington."**

Despite a dramatic change in building material from brick to wood following the 1848 and 1855 earthquakes, Wellington's construction industry still continued to have a need for brick. Official sources document the annual output of Wellington's brickworks, plus newspapers regularly bewailed the annual "brick famine" experienced by the city each year in the first decades of the twentieth century. This paper looks at the key brickyards and their years of operation. It discusses the output of bricks from the city's brickyards from the 1870s to the 1940s, and the changing use of the brick. Archaeological investigations by the author illustrate some of these uses.

### **Peter Wood "The Crazy House' - Was it really that crazy?: Architectural entertainment at the 1940 New Zealand Centennial Exhibition"**

Writing on public buildings for the war time publication series *Making New Zealand*, Paul Pascoe described the Centennial Exhibition at Rongotai, Wellington, as displaying the degree of modernity that was then generally accepted and approved of by New Zealander's. An accompanying photograph (in all probability selected for inclusion by Pascoe's brother, John) shows Edmund Anscombe's Moderne tower building, and it is noted in the caption that the exhibition drew favourable comment from overseas visitors. At a moment in New Zealand's history when the heat of World War was once more accelerating, Anscombe's restrained stream-lined modernism was meet with approval. But not excitement. That reaction was reserved for Playland, the collection of amusement park attractions operating on the periphery of the exhibition grounds, and which, for many, offered the most compelling argument for attending. Of the varied offerings in Playland, the most popular attraction was The Crazy House where visitors were promised to encounter - without warning! – innumerable diversions and never-ending sources of mirth-making. The Crazy House, like all elements of the Centennial Exhibition, was temporary, but unlike the latter, very little documentary of it remains. The few photographs of it present a modest façade with little hint of mirth, and of the interior of we have no descriptions at all. With reference to historic developments in entertainment attractions, this paper assembles what little information we have of The Crazy House to make a case for its significance as a defining development in New Zealand architecture. Just as the academic assurances of the Exhibition buildings would become a swansong to architectural stylism, The Crazy House would signal the appearance of demands on architecture that it now compete in an emergent field of international architecture called "popular entertainment."