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# **ANOTHER ELDERLY LADY TO BE KNOCKED DOWN:**

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**Heritage discourse and the protest to save  
the Missions to Seamen building, 1986.**

By

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## Abstract

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Through a specific historical case study, *Another Elderly Lady to be Knocked Down* applies discourse theory and the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) to the context of urban built heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand. Previously, only limited work had been done in this area. By examining an underexplored event this dissertation fills two gaps in present literature: the history of the event itself and identification of the heritage discourses in the country at the time. Examination of these discourses in context also allows conclusions about the use of the AHD in similar studies to be critically examined.

In 1986 the Missions to Seamen building in Wellington, New Zealand, was threatened with demolition by its government owners. In a remarkable display of popular sentiment, individuals, organisations, the Wellington City Council (WCC) and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) worked together to oppose this unpopular decision. This protest was a seminal event in the history of heritage in New Zealand.

This study relies upon documentary sources, especially the archival records of the Historic Places Trust and the State Services Commission, who owned the building, to provide the history of this watershed moment in New Zealand's preservation movement. The prevalent attitudes of different groups in Wellington are examined through the letters of protest they wrote at the time. When analysed in context, these discourses reveal the ways in which heritage was articulated and constructed.

The course of this dissertation has revealed the difficulty of identifying an AHD in this context. The level of collaboration between 'official' and 'unofficial' heritage perspectives, and the extent to which they shaped each other's language, creates considerable difficulty in distinguishing between discreet discourses. To better explore the ways that heritage meaning is constructed and articulated, heritage must be recognised as a complex dynamic process.

## Photo Credits

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## List of Abbreviations

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AHD	Authorised Heritage Discourse
BCC	Buildings Classification Committee
GCCA	Government Centre Conservation Area
GOAB	Government Office Accommodation Board
HNZ	Heritage New Zealand
MOWD	Ministry of Works and Development
NZHPT	New Zealand Historic Places Trust
PSA	Public Service Association
SSC	State Services Commission
WCC	Wellington City Council

## Introduction

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For more than a century, people have worked to preserve and share access to historic buildings. This heritage shapes our identities, our cultures and our sense of place in the world, and institutions have been formed at local, national and international levels to categorise and protect it. Clearly, heritage is of immense value. As the idea of actively recognising and preserving heritage places has evolved and grown in popularity, so too have definitions and practices. Academic theorists have sought to better understand the impact of heritage upon the world, especially upon power relations and the needs of contemporary society, to ensure that organisations and formal lists represent and contribute to the communities who access and value them in their daily lives. A common theoretical approach is discourse analysis, by which a careful study of language is used to examine the ways that people construct and articulate the significance of heritage. This theoretical approach has been increasingly used in academic heritage studies since the end of last century. A particularly influential concept has been that of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD), described by Laurajane Smith in 2009, who identified a power imbalance reinforced by a state-sponsored built heritage, which excluded minority voices.

Discourse analysis and the notion of an AHD have been utilised extensively to examine heritage practice in the United Kingdom and Australia. By contrast, very few studies have applied discourse theory to the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. This dissertation is the first to systematically examine the different heritage discourses which existed in New Zealand at a time of extensive public involvement in heritage preservation. The protest to save the Missions to Seamen building in mid-1986 was a seminal moment in the history of New Zealand's heritage movement. The outpouring of public sentiment that occurred was the culmination of a period of widespread destruction of historic buildings in Wellington and elsewhere. It also contributed to the passing of new laws which shifted responsibility for heritage preservation and increased the effectiveness of legal protection. Examination of the discourses of this important event reveals the prevalent attitudes which shaped present legislation and contributes to the wider history of heritage preservation in New Zealand.

The first chapter discusses the key theoretical perspectives that underlie this study, including the emergence and use of discourse analysis to examine heritage practice, some of the implications and limitations of this model, and new ways in which academics have begun to understand heritage. It also looks briefly at heritage theory in New Zealand.

The second chapter describes the research design of this study, including the methods and sources used, as well as their limitations.

Chapter three addresses the historical context of the protest, including the history of the Missions to Seamen building and of the heritage movement in New Zealand. Context is essential to any attempt to grasp the ways in which people thought and acted at the time, and to be able to draw wider conclusions about heritage.

The final chapter addresses the perspectives of the people and organisations involved in the protest through analysis of the language they used in their letters, the primary source material.

Discourse analysis has revealed the rich complexity of ideas involved in the construction and articulation of heritage meaning. In other studies, the AHD has been instrumental in recognising dominant power structures within 'official' heritage organisations. This dissertation began as an attempt to analyse the impact of the AHD and the specific historical context upon the people who shaped this pivotal event. However, used in this context it has proved unhelpful in adequately describing the multitude of 'unofficial' voices and the interconnectedness of heritage ideas. Internationally, this same issue has resulted in an unsustainable proliferation of heritage. This dissertation concludes with a critique of the use of the AHD model.

Heritage contributes to community, to identity, and to memory as well as to formal art-historical narratives. To be able to effectively function within society, heritage institutions need to be able to understand and express these diverse fields of meaning. For this reason, self-reflection and the continued development of theory is essential to the discipline.



## Chapter One: Literature Review

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Discourse theory is a useful analytical perspective and has made important contributions to the study of heritage. This chapter begins by summarising the key ideas and applications of this theory. Examination of discourse is central to the analytical framework and thesis of this dissertation. The chapter then turns to the impact that the use of discourse analysis has had upon heritage practice in the UK and New Zealand, before describing some of the limitations of the model and problems this has caused. Some of these issues have also become evident within the boundaries of this study. Finally, it outlines some new ways to think of heritage that have been proposed by academics more recently, which may suggest new ways forward for the discipline.

### Heritage and discourse theory

For much of the twentieth century, heritage value was seen as an objective quality expressed by a physical object, defined by an expert and assumed to embody some meaning experienced collectively by a group. The increasing impact of post-modern philosophy has caused a shift in this conception. The work of Laurajane Smith, especially her book *Uses of Heritage* (2006), was an influential application of post-modern concepts to heritage studies. Smith argued that heritage does not exist naturally or objectively, but that its relevance depends upon meanings constructed in the present. Without these, the objects of the past had no inherent value and remained simply ‘things’. This contention is borne out by little-remembered historic places: it is not the ‘thing,’ the place itself, that is important, but its associations with identity and collective memory.<sup>1</sup> From this conclusion Smith made the famous pronouncement that “there is, really, no such thing as heritage”.<sup>2</sup> Rather, heritage is a discourse, a set of performances, values and meanings which are simultaneously inherited from the past and constructed in the present. These social practices are concreted within “texts,” a term which in this context includes both written and spoken language. Texts can be studied to reveal the discourses which existed at a given time. Michel Foucault, who popularised the study of discourse in modern humanities, argued that language is essential to the process of understanding the world.<sup>3</sup> Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Neil A Silberman, “Heritage Places: Evolving conceptions and changing forms,” in *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, eds. William Logan, Máiréad Nic Craith and Ullrich Kockel (Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 30.

<sup>2</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences*, first published 1966 (London: Routledge, 2001).

language and texts both shape and are shaped by their context, the social practices of a community.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, heritage is both constructed by and constitutive of the language used to describe it.

The concept of heritage discourse has become increasingly widespread in academic literature, accompanying a wider shift in the field from concern with objects and their interpretation to the interrogation of heritage as a social and cultural phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> Central to this conception is the understanding that attributed heritage value can be neither static nor inherent but must be defined with regard to the cultural context of the time. Discourse analysis has proved valuable to critical examination of the politics of representation, one of the central issues in contemporary heritage studies. If meaning is defined in the present, who has control over these definitions? Smith conceptualised the existence of an AHD, encapsulating a self-referential group of experts, institutionalised in state heritage apparatus, who drew their value judgements from a Western art-historical canon.<sup>6</sup> In response, recent academic discourse has focused on ways to promote inclusion and self-representation within heritage. In practice, change to bureaucratic heritage organisations has been slower and these debates remain relevant.

Rodney Harrison has described this power relationship by distinguishing between the single narrative of ‘official’ government-sanctioned heritage and multiple ‘unofficial’ publicly constructed heritages. ‘Official’ institutions, motivated by some form of charter or written legislation, select places to ‘list’ with the intention of contributing towards their preservation. ‘Unofficial’ heritage is manifested in a variety of different ways and can include buildings, objects and social practices. It is recognised by a group of people but not sanctioned by law.<sup>7</sup> Identification and comparison of the two is important to an analysis of heritage power relations in a society. Given the extent to which heritage definitions are intimately tied to discourse, Wu Zongjie and Song Hou have argued that it is necessary to explore alternative discourses to the AHD in order to challenge its dominance and promote marginalized groups.<sup>8</sup> Looking at

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<sup>4</sup> Wu Zongjie, and Song Hou, “Heritage and Discourse,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, eds. Emma Waterton, and Steve Watson (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 39.

<sup>5</sup> Waterton and Watson, “Heritage as a Focus of Research: Past, present and new directions,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, 1, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 17-21.

<sup>7</sup> Rodney Harrison, “What is Heritage?” in *Understanding the Politics of Heritage*, ed. Rodney Harrison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010): 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Wu and Hou, “Heritage and Discourse,” 45.

unofficial heritage definitions creates alternative platforms from which to challenge established norms.

Very little published material has focused upon heritage discourse in a New Zealand context. The most important discussion of local heritage to date, *Common Ground*, was published in 2000, three years before Smith's *Uses of Heritage* formalised the concept of the AHD. Nonetheless, the authors of the former expressed their awareness of the existence of a form of authorised discourse within local heritage bodies, even without the contemporary terms of description. One author, Jeremy Salmond, was concerned that the specific definitions used within heritage organisations could result in the exclusion of all but specialists. He also noted that heritage charters justified decisions on matters of principle: decisions made and reinforced within the system.<sup>9</sup> Another issue with the discourse of heritage in New Zealand was the longstanding perception that 'heritage' was merely a synonym for 'historic place'. Whilst buildings listed under such criteria undeniably possessed historic value, the authors of *Common Ground* expressed doubt as to whether they were valued by anyone other than relevant historical experts.<sup>10</sup> More recently, the existence of an AHD within New Zealand archaeological practice has been posited by Elizabeth Pishief. Her research suggested that archaeologists operating from a Western, scientific perspective have excluded emotional and experiential understandings of heritage, especially from a Māori cultural perspective.<sup>11</sup> It was in recognition of such cultural exclusion that Smith developed the idea of the AHD. Whether similar exclusion has existed in the context of urban built heritage preservation has not yet been explored.

### **The Authorised Heritage Discourse in practice**

The concept of the AHD was first formulated to contest the central limitations of present heritage practice. A key theme expressed in Smith's *Uses of Heritage* was the dominance of a Euro-American conception of monumental architecture defined by experts. Other heritage writers have acknowledged "the problem of Eurocentrism" and "the problem of inclusion" to

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<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Salmond, "From Dead Ducks to Historic Buildings: Heritage terminology and conservation planning," in *Common Ground?* ed. Alexander Trapeznik (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2000), 52, 56.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Trapeznik and Gavin McLean, "Public History, Heritage and Place," in *Common Ground*, ed. Trapeznik, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Pishief, "Engaging with Māori and Archaeologists: Heritage Theory and Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand," in *Engaging Heritage, Engaging Communities*, eds. Bryony Onciul, Michelle L Stefano and Stephanie Hawke (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2017), 56.

be critical issues affecting the heritage sector.<sup>12</sup> Emma Waterton and Steve Watson express these issues concisely as “‘identity’, ‘community’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘commodification’”.<sup>13</sup> Focus on buildings has excluded other conceptions of heritage, such as those of non-monumental cultures.<sup>14</sup> A well-known example is the Imperial Shrine at Ise in Japan. As it is rebuilt every twenty years it does not qualify as ‘old’ in the Western sense, yet the process and rituals of rebuilding are regarded as important heritage traditions locally.<sup>15</sup> The AHD has succeeded in bringing these issues to greater attention. It has been less successful in proposing solutions for change.

The democratisation of the heritage process has been emphasised by the academic literature in recent years as the primary means to overcome these issues. William Logan, Máiréad Nic Craith and Ullrich Kockel summarised the “overall aim of heritage conservation” as striving “to enable people to better understand, have access to, and enjoy their heritage in ways they choose”.<sup>16</sup> Reliance upon the public at large to define what deserves to be recorded and celebrated as heritage counters the dominance of experts and the specific perspective they may have gained from exposure to the AHD. In the past, focus was given to the conservation of buildings, particularly buildings under ‘threat’ from development, to such an extent that this could be seen as an end in and of itself. Modern practice still fixates on materiality as the primary holder of heritage value.<sup>17</sup> For example, Morgan et al. noted that although the US National Register of Historic Places distinguished between both tangible and intangible heritage, only the former could be registered on the National List.<sup>18</sup> They identified this fixation as a symptom of the AHD.

From the theoretical recognition that value is only assigned to buildings by a human agent acting in the present, stems the conclusion that this defining body needs to become more inclusive. In this way, noting that “stakeholders, intangible resources, and the places of significance in our communities have always been inextricably connected,” Morgan et al. have

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<sup>12</sup> Britta Rudolff, and Kristal Buckley, “World Heritage: Alternative futures,” in *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, eds. Logan et al., 527.

<sup>13</sup> Waterton and Watson, “Heritage as a Focus of Research,” 8.

<sup>14</sup> Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 111.

<sup>15</sup> William Logan, Máiréad Nic Craith and Ullrich Kockel, “The New Heritage Studies: Origins and evolution, problems and prospects,” in *A Companion to Heritage Studies* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Logan, Nic Craith, and Kockel, “The New Heritage Studies,” 21.

<sup>17</sup> Silberman, “Heritage Places,” 36.

<sup>18</sup> Morgan et al., “From National to Local: Intangible values and the centralisation of heritage management in the United States,” in *Heritage Values in Contemporary Society*, ed. George S. Smith et al. (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010), 113.

called for heritage resources to be placed “in the hands of those who value them most through the process of daily life and interaction”.<sup>19</sup> Such democratisation has proved to be successful in the United States, where recognition of locally-driven National Heritage Areas has grown rapidly despite the reluctance of their official overseers.<sup>20</sup> This is an example of the popularity and effectiveness of ‘bottom-up’ heritage process in action.

David Atkinson observed a similar phenomenon at work in the English industrial city of Hull, where the waterfront area underwent a process of redevelopment after industrialisation. Whereas official heritage recognition of the area focused upon one specific celebratory narrative, this was protested by community groups, especially the families of the north sea fishing fleet, who desired greater recognition of their less glamorous but significant role in the city’s history.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, a process of gentrification took place, which was protested in some areas where it was considered “insensitive” to industrial history, yet celebrated in others as an adaptive reuse which succeeded in referencing the history of the area within its redeveloped self.<sup>22</sup> Although there were still dissonant heritage voices, each group celebrated its own conception of heritage value, neither of which was captured by the formal view. The fluidity and vibrancy of these ‘unofficial’ heritage practices persisted despite the lack of ‘official’ recognition.

In contrast to these studies, Carol Ludwig undertook an exploration of traditional ‘top-down’ heritage processes in England. From a detailed analysis of local heritage processes including both policy review and interviews with practitioners, she concluded that the prevalence of discourse theory in academic literature has not had as marked an effect upon the discipline in practice.<sup>23</sup> The *discourse* of heritage practice evolved considerably, and practitioners became keenly aware of the subjectivity and presentism of heritage value. This was evidenced by a move away from the preservation of sites associated with the political and social élite and the inclusion of vernacular architecture and ‘everyday’ history. However, the “operational requirements of the planning system” ensured that heritage lists remained heavily dominated

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<sup>19</sup> Morgan et al., “From National to Local,” 124.

<sup>20</sup> National Heritage Areas are reluctantly managed by the National Parks Service. Morgan et al., “From National to Local,” 120-2.

<sup>21</sup> David Atkinson, “The Heritage of Mundane Places,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, eds. Brian Graham and Peter Howard (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 389.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>23</sup> Carol Ludwig, “From Bricks and Mortar to Social Heritage: Planning Space for Diversities in the AHD,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 22:10 (2016): 812.

by material concerns defined by ‘experts’.<sup>24</sup> ‘Intangible’ justification for heritage such as popular narratives of local identity were excluded. In order to democratise heritage and counter elitism, heritage processes themselves need not to merely recognise diversity, but to formally include alternative perspectives.

Within New Zealand there has been a strong trend to counter the over-representation of élite history through reliance on social history and the preservation of industrial sites, which echoes similar developments noted by Ludwig in the UK.<sup>25</sup> This movement is not without its problems. The turn to social history has not resulted in the end of expert dominance, but to a large extent has simply empowered new experts.<sup>26</sup> Much like in the UK, these experts are interested in public representation, but this does not directly translate to community engagement. However, unlike in the UK this increased representativeness has to some extent been driven by public interest and activism. Public reaction to destruction of heritage during the widespread demolition of the 1980s resulted in a boom in legislation and preservation.<sup>27</sup> It appears that in a New Zealand context at least, the relationship between public and professional is more complex than division between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ would suggest. The extent to which there has been an AHD in New Zealand, and the space it has allowed for public involvement in heritage process has not previously been explored. This dissertation contributes toward study of this unfamiliar area.

### **Too much heritage?**

Conservation has always been one of the central tenets of heritage philosophy. Since the manifesto of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877), widely recognised as the foundation of modern heritage practice, this attitude has been formalised by a series of international charters, most notably those of Athens (1931) and Venice (1964).<sup>28</sup> Despite continuing redefinition of heritage, the preservation of physical objects has remained fundamental to the practice. Only recently has academic literature begun to question whether a constantly-expanding heritage list is the best way to maintain the value of heritage. Despite the best wishes of practitioners and public alike, it is simply impossible to remember or

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<sup>24</sup> Ludwig, “From Bricks and Mortar to Social Heritage,” 823-4.

<sup>25</sup> Trapeznik and McLean, “Public History, Heritage and Place,” 18-19, 22.

<sup>26</sup> See Gavin McLean, *100 Historic Places in New Zealand* (Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett, 2002), 24; Michael Kelly, “Building a Case: Assessing Significance,” in *Common Ground?* ed. Trapeznik, 128.

<sup>27</sup> McClean, “From Shrine to Shop,” 84, 90.

<sup>28</sup> Ascensión Hernández Martínez, “Conservation and Restauration in Built Heritage: A Western European Perspective,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, ed. Graham and Howard, 250-1.

preserve everything. Even widely celebrated World Heritage Sites such as Pompeii suffer from the effects of nature and finite funding, as demonstrated by the notable collapses in 2014.<sup>29</sup> In response, Cornelius Holtorf and Troels Kristensen have advocated for the acknowledgement that changes in meaning resulting from heritage losses can in fact contribute to wider heritage values.<sup>30</sup> The destruction of physical fabric does not necessarily imply the destruction of identity or significance.

Holtorf has explored this idea further through a series of case studies in the loss of heritage worldwide. Drawing attention to the processual nature of heritage, Holtorf convincingly argued that heritage is not the “victim” of change over time, but rather its “manifestation”.<sup>31</sup> In a way, this is merely the natural conclusion of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Building’s ‘anti-scrape’ philosophy:<sup>32</sup> if all additions are constitutive of a building’s value, then surely subtractions are as well? The loss of heritage can be heritage in its own right. For example, the recent destruction of the ancient ruins of Palmyra tells a new story of identity through war.<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, if the loss of one ‘example’ can increase the value of another, perhaps loss of part could enhance the overall meaning of the whole. If such is indeed the case, it frees heritage professionals to focus on the identification and conservation of specific values, rather than the unachievable blanket retention of as much as possible. It could also diminish a long-held concern that adaptive re-use might result in heritage destruction. Rather than a practical necessity, re-use can actively maintain and enhance a building’s value to a community, as well as give it new identities.

The concept of the AHD encouraged critical examination of the politics of representation. A result of this has been that heritage definitions have grown increasingly broad. Whereas organisations in the early twentieth century focused upon determining “the remarkable – the greatest, oldest, biggest and best,” more recent international definitions such as that of the latest revision of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter have expanded to include “all types of places

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<sup>29</sup> Cornelius Holtorf, and Troels Myrup Kristensen, “Heritage Erasure: Rethinking ‘Protection’ and ‘Preservation’,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21:4 (2015): 313.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>31</sup> Cornelius Holtorf, “Averting Loss Aversion in Cultural Heritage,” *International Journal of Museum Studies* 21:4 (2015): 417.

<sup>32</sup> Championed by William Morris among others, the ‘anti-scrape’ movement was a guiding principle of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the burgeoning heritage movement. Opposed to the ahistorical ‘restoration’ of monuments, advocates of ‘anti-scrape’ argued that all modifications to a building represented historical change and were thus essential to its value.

<sup>33</sup> Holtorf, “Averting Loss Aversion in Cultural Heritage,” 416.

of cultural significance” which could include “aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations”.<sup>34</sup> In the context of globalisation, increased international cultural tourism and increased emphasis on the experiential nature of heritage, the dramatic broadening in scope of definition has resulted in what Rodney Harrison calls an “abundance of heritage”.<sup>35</sup> With a broad definition, anything has the potential to be imbued with meaning and celebrated as heritage. This fact was made clear in 2009 when the Norwegian government granted Special Protection to a bus shelter as part of their Everyday Heritage initiative.<sup>36</sup> Their listing criteria was persuasive and procedural, but with the implicit potential that any number of quotidian objects could follow the same route.

Overwhelming focus on the preservation of physical fabric has the potential to become a serious issue. Harrison believes that the present conception of heritage as a continually-growing body of protected ‘things’ threatens the very sustainability and existence of memory itself. In the fear of loss that has driven much heritage conservation throughout the past century, and the drive to conserve a ‘representative sample’ of heritage, Harrison identifies the makings of a crisis that goes some way towards explaining the contemporary exponential growth of heritage lists.<sup>37</sup> Scholars of memory studies have determined that individuals must choose to forget certain memories in order to recall information. Total recall would result in the inability to extract relevant data. Harrison posits the same is true of collective memories. Put simply, if everything is celebrated as heritage, it all becomes equally irrelevant.<sup>38</sup> If heritage is defined by the values associated with it in the present, it is essential that things representing past values which no longer apply are set aside, to avoid losing sight of the meaningful. Not doing so betrays a lack of faith in the value-based significance of heritage, and recourse to past assumptions of universal value prevalent in the AHD. If value is constantly redefined by human agents, so too should listed heritage be redefined.

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<sup>34</sup> Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 18; ICOMOS Australia, *The Burra charter for places of cultural significance* (2013), accessed 9 May 2017, [australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Burra-Charter-2013-Adopted-31.10.2013.pdf](http://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Burra-Charter-2013-Adopted-31.10.2013.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 227.

<sup>36</sup> Halldis Elina Valestrand, “Text and object: the bus shelter that became cultural heritage,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21:1 (2015): 81-98.

<sup>37</sup> Rodney Harrison, “Forgetting to Remember, Remembering to Forget: Late modern heritage practices, sustainability and the crisis of accumulation of the past,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19:6 (2013): 585-6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 580.



Given the existence of similar debates in the museum sector it is perhaps possible to develop similar, collaborative solutions. Heritage professionals must look further than conservation for their *raison d'être*, and explore the relationship between heritage and the community itself. In both museums and in heritage organisations, the problem of power remains a central consideration. Both have attempted to escape paternalism by increased focus on social history and 'ordinary people'.<sup>39</sup> For a truly representative collection, public input is vital. Thinking of heritage in terms of audience and access, already a central consideration for museum collections, has the potential to prioritise human engagement. A similar approach can be taken to deaccessioning or delisting. Both museum and heritage sectors have shown a similar reluctance to deaccession, as both exist to preserve. However, the fact that deaccessioning clauses have recently become commonplace in museum policy, and the legal and moral checks that have been put in place to prevent misuse show that a progressive and positive attitude to recycling of irrelevant material is not just possible but important.

### **New ways of thinking**

Acknowledging the substantial contribution to the discipline made by discourse analysis, Rodney Harrison has advocated a new model for understanding and defining heritage. Although he conceded that heritage is not an inert quality, but rather an active process of assigning contemporary meanings, he argued that the material world does play an active part in our understanding. Even heritage processes regarded as purely intangible, such as cultural performance, involve some form of spatial relationship and interaction between bodies, landscape and objects. Thus, the meanings that we assign to objects and places are in part determined by the material limitations of the physical world itself. In place of discourse, in Harrison's *dialogical* model, heritage emerges "from the *relationship* between people, objects, places and practices".<sup>40</sup> Such a conception breaks down the hitherto dichotomous relationships between tangible and intangible, or cultural and natural heritage. It puts the power to define heritage in the hands of whoever seeks to celebrate it, and has the potential to democratise the process of nomination and even declassification of formally recognised heritage.

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<sup>39</sup> See for example Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 23; Hernández Martínez, "Conservation and Restoration in Built Heritage," 263.

<sup>40</sup> Italics not in original. Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 229.

An alternative way of conceptualising this ‘dialogue’ is of a heritage landscape as ‘brecciation’.<sup>41</sup> Breccia is a sedimentary rock, made up of fragments of stone and literally cemented together by finer particles. In the same way, a cityscape or urban area inevitably contains buildings and infrastructure of distinct origin which form a composite whole in the present. Furthermore, this composition is not static but continually evolving: a process of *brecciation*. Nadia Bartolini has argued that the heritage viewer is confronted equally by past and present, and it is only in their interaction with each other and with people that the value of heritage can be recognised.<sup>42</sup> Neil Silberman agrees that the active, processual nature of heritage is its defining characteristic.<sup>43</sup> This dissertation demonstrates that focus on the AHD does not fully account for this fact. Heritage must be recognised as both active and interactive.

A similar model is explored by Russell Staiff who has focused much more closely on the affective and experiential elements of heritage visitation. In his book *Re-Imagining Heritage Interpretation: Enchanting the Past-Future*, Staiff explored multiple aspects of visitor experience and interpretation, drawing from his own experience and observation at museums and heritage sites across the globe. He strongly asserted that ‘heritage’ is a living concept: its value exists solely in the imagination of human subjects, it provokes strong emotions, such as wonder and awe, and even in its most didactic form it represents values and lessons held and communicated by living people. To Staiff, heritage value was not communicated by the ‘true’ story, but instead by “conversation”: interaction and engagement with the site, with oneself and with others.<sup>44</sup> Emotional attachment to the site is indispensable to interaction on any more than a superficial level. This perspective pays much closer attention to the ways which people actually interact with heritage sites, avoiding the didacticism of a single top-down heritage voice. It suggests that tangible values identified by traditional practice are not so distinct from wider social values, as suggested by Smith. The importance of this fact became apparent in the course of this research. It is vital to consider the interactions between people and with the places themselves.

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<sup>41</sup> Nadia Bartolini, “Critical Urban Heritage: From palimpsest to brecciation,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20:5 (2014): 527.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

<sup>43</sup> Silberman, “Heritage Places,” 30.

<sup>44</sup> Russell Staiff, *Re-Imagining Heritage Interpretation: Enchanting the Past-Future* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 153-4.

## Chapter Two: Research Design

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The literature review introduced the analytical tool of discourse theory. This dissertation relies upon analysis of the discourses and context of a specific case study to provide new insight into heritage practices and attitudes within New Zealand in the 1980s, and the relationship between alternative heritage discourses. This unexplored dimension contributes to our understanding of the history of the preservation of built heritage in urban New Zealand. In a wider theoretical context, this dissertation also draws conclusions about the use of discourse analysis and the concept of the AHD in critical heritage studies.

Previous studies suggested the existence of an AHD in New Zealand, but one tempered by public input through activism. Although the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) had moved from the realms of predominantly architectural values by the 1980s to include other assessment criteria such as historical and social, their listing process and conservation aims did not appear to have been undertaken in accordance with public desire.

The protest to save the Missions to Seamen building was a watershed moment for New Zealand's heritage movement. Examination of the arguments both for and against preservation expressed by the NZHPT, government departments, private organisations and the general public, expressed through letters, articles and internal memoranda, reveals the ways that 'official' and 'unofficial' heritage discourses were influenced by each other, by public opinion, and by the historical context. An historical case study allows these different perspectives to be studied at a time when their different attitudes and perspectives came to the fore. It also enables examination of the effects of context upon heritage discourses, including the way that the ideas of a time influence people's attitudes, and the contributions of heritage loss and survival to concepts of value. When contrasted with the developments that have followed in the intervening three decades, including the resulting changes to legislation and present attitudes to the building, the relative usefulness of the discourse analysis framework is shown.

### Research strategy

In June 1986, nearly 2000 people signed the walls of the Mission to Seamen building in Wellington, in a bid to save it from developers' bulldozers.<sup>45</sup> Completed in 1904, the building served as a social and spiritual centre for visiting sailors for 70 years. In 1975, however, rising

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<sup>45</sup> Helen Robinson, "Years of Turmoil," *Heritage New Zealand* 97 (2005): 43.

costs and falling visitor numbers resulted in the relocation of the mission, and the building was sold to the State Services Commission (SSC). In 1986, the SSC announced that the existing building would be replaced with a government office tower. In the face of the threat of demolition, advocacy for the retention of the building resulted in one of the biggest heritage battles in Wellington's history.<sup>46</sup> Examining the ways in which the people involved talked about heritage and defended their perspectives gives valuable insight into the attitudes towards heritage prevalent at the time, and when shown in their historical context, enable wider conclusions about the ways that heritage is constructed and articulated through discourse to be drawn.

The defined boundaries and holistic view of a case study approach suit this type of analysis. Active protest action to save the Mission to Seamen building occurred between early May 1986, when demolition was announced, to mid-July, when the Wellington City Council (WCC) approved a development scheme which prioritised the retention of the building. This is a prime example of an "extreme instance" occurring within definable boundaries, allowing one meaningful event to be examined in detail.<sup>47</sup> The discrete, completed nature of the protest encourages a qualitative approach, relying on multiple sources to create an overall picture of the discourse of the time.

The most significant limitation of a case study is that it covers only a single instance. In this case, such a seminal event is clearly not representative of every heritage protest. Despite this, the conclusions reached from this case study are still relevant to the wider field of heritage research. In and of themselves, they are valuable as the history of a specific event. In a broader sense the attitudes demonstrated towards heritage buildings can be assumed to be similar to those held by many in Wellington in the 1980s. The ways in which these attitudes shape and are shaped by each other reveals the complex roots of heritage meaning and the way that attitudes are affected by wider social, political and economic trends.

Another important limitation is the focus upon the active advocates of heritage preservation, which is not a representative sample of wider public opinion. This does not detract from the conclusions made, as this study focuses specifically upon the perspectives of heritage 'users,' the people within society who engage with and value heritage. It is notable that out of the nine

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<sup>46</sup> Wellington City Council, "Mission to Seamen Building," accessed 31 July 2017, [wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/buildings/151-300/274-missions-to-seamen-building?q=](http://wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/buildings/151-300/274-missions-to-seamen-building?q=).

<sup>47</sup> Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide* (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press), 58.

letters to the editor published in the Wellington dailies only one supported the demolition, suggesting that such support was relatively rare. A multi-source approach, taking account of pro-demolition perspectives such as those of the SSC, contributes towards the overall significance and comprehensiveness of the project.

This study is also limited by the fact that it depends upon attitudes only to built heritage in its traditional Western sense: an architecturally and historically notable building in an urban setting. Similar examination of the preservation of heritage celebrated by a minority group, or a less traditional style of building, would likely find an AHD framework more useful.

### **Sources**

Documentary research has been the primary means of data collection for this dissertation. Given the historical and completed nature of the case study, written documents are an ideal way to obtain information about what occurred. Documents contain data which reveals events through personal perspective, such as letters; demonstration, such as minutes of meetings; and description, such as in newspapers. They also can be analysed to reveal further information about the people who wrote them, revealing underlying assumptions and contributing events. They are relatively easily accessible, in the National Library of New Zealand, Archives New Zealand and the archives of Heritage New Zealand (HNZ). Whilst official records tend to provide more accurate figures and dates, newspapers and letters are written with a greater degree of conscious subjectivity. Given that my research goal is to learn about the motivations and assumptions of heritage ‘users’, this subjective information is just as valuable.

The primary source material for this case study is the documentary record of the 1986 protest. Because of the way they reveal the personal perspectives of their authors, letters have been of foremost importance. The analysis in Chapter Four relies upon 52 letters by individuals from private addresses, and 16 letters from private organisations, sent in support or opposition to the campaign to save the building (see Appendix). Additionally, the correspondence between the SSC, WCC and NZHPT gives valuable insight into their relationships and differing perspectives. Letters were sourced from Archives New Zealand, the HNZ archive and from newspapers held at the National Library. The use of documentary evidence is appropriate for this study as the letters written at the time have not been affected by the outcome of the protest or the changing perspectives of their writers, as would inevitably be the case with qualitative interviews. Additionally, they take considerably less time to analyse.

Another invaluable source of information is the Submission in Support of Retention of the Missions to Seamen Building (henceforth ‘the Submission’), presented to the SSC by the NZHPT, WCC and Wellington Architectural Centre in June 1986. Preserved in the HNZ archive, it gives well-researched and crafted arguments in support of these institutions’ goals. The HNZ archive is also the source of the internal communications of the NZHPT, providing a picture of the perspective of this “official” heritage institution. NZHPT publications, such as *Historic Places in New Zealand*, also contribute towards this formal perspective whilst providing general contextual information. Similarly, the internal documentary records of the SSC and Ministry of Works and Development (MOWD), now at Archives New Zealand, have also revealed information about the perspectives and actions of these organisations.

Local and national newspapers provide some insight into the extent to which heritage advocacy succeeded in reaching the public sphere. They are also an invaluable source of historical contextual information.

The history of the protest itself in Chapter Three is largely based on the same documentary evidence, especially the files found in Archives New Zealand. Discussion of the wider historical context within which these events occurred and the history of heritage preservation in Wellington and New Zealand relies largely on secondary sources. Although secondary sources have traditionally been considered less objective than the contemporaneous documentary record, more recent theorists have suggested that both rely upon similar assumptions and that a binary distinction cannot be made.<sup>48</sup> Histories written by more recent authors are analysed similarly to other documentary sources. Although this requires a greater degree of faith in the analytical framework used by the author, it is justifiable given the time limits of the project. It was important that the case study was made the primary focus. Contextual data is used to provide points of comparison and a greater depth to the analysis of heritage discourses.

### **Method of analysis**

As discussed within the literature review, Laurajane Smith argued for the existence of an AHD within formal heritage institutions. Similarly, Rodney Harrison described two broadly definable sources of heritage discourse in society, the “official” heritage expressed by

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<sup>48</sup> G. McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences* (London; New York: Routledge), 32-4.

government institutions, and the “unofficial” heritage of other groups, not sanctioned by law.<sup>49</sup> At the outset, this study was intended to make comparisons between the two, thereby revealing whether ‘official’ discourse was dominant, and the extent to which each perspective influenced the other. During the course of primary source research, it quickly became clear that ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ definitions mutually influenced one another to a large extent. Thus, the scope of this study changed to take a broader view of the ways in which heritage meaning is constructed through discourse and to draw wider conclusions about the use of the AHD in critical heritage studies.

A discourse-analysis approach is the ideal means to conceptualise and discuss the different ways in which heritage value is described and understood. Discourse analysis has been an important tool in the humanities since the post-structuralist turn of the 1990s. Popularised by the work of French sociologist Michel Foucault, it proposes that an examination of the language used in a specific context can reveal the key ideas and assumptions behind the actions of a group of people.<sup>50</sup> The central premise of discourse analysis is the idea that data can be deconstructed to reveal deeper meanings than the surface information presents.<sup>51</sup> In this study, discourse analysis is used to examine the heritage meanings described by written documents in the wider context of the social and political trends of the time, to assess the extent to which external factors such as heritage loss contributed to heritage worth. Comparison of the similarities between these arguments when used by different groups also shows the degree to which ideas were shared, allowing conclusions about the collaborative nature of constructing and articulating heritage meaning.

The major limitation of discourse analysis is its reliance upon the interpretive framework of the researcher. This was countered by using a specific methodology focused solely within limited boundaries: comparison of the reasons given to save the Mission to Seamen building. Written sources were analysed using qualitative methods. Data was closely scrutinised using NVivo analysis software. The explicit reasons for the importance of preserving heritage, or the Missions to Seamen building specifically, as stated in each document, were coded individually. Any similar reasons were later joined into nodes, revealing the most common explanations given. These were compared between individuals and groups, creating a comprehensive picture

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<sup>49</sup> Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 15-16.

<sup>50</sup> Wu and Hou, “Heritage and Discourse,” 38.

<sup>51</sup> Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, 288.

of the ways in which people talked about heritage. When analysed in relation to other factors, such as increasing discontent with heritage destruction and the wider culture of protest, the factors that prompted people's opinion and ways that different groups influenced each other could be discussed. Whilst informative in their own right, these conclusions also allowed a degree of self-reflection upon the effectiveness of a discourse analysis method in assessing the ways in which people construct heritage value. The research findings clearly suggest a complex, collaborative process. Whilst the AHD has its strengths, in assessing the importance of heritage to ordinary people the use of alternative models may be needed.



## Chapter Three: Historical Context

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Examination of the historical context in which the protest to save the Missions to Seamen building occurred is vital in order to understand the factors which contributed towards such a palpable display of public sentiment. Any discourse is strongly dependent upon external factors, and the ways it is expressed depend upon the means of expression common at the time. The 1980s in New Zealand were a time of dramatic political and economic change. The fourth Labour government under the prime-ministership of David Lange broke dramatically from past iterations of the party and enacted substantial reforms upon the public sector. These had a direct impact upon the government departments involved in the protest. Publicly, a considerable number of demonstrations and protests occurred about events both local and international which affected the ways in which advocates of the Missions to Seamen building expressed their position. The developing role of the NZHPT and its relationship with public opinion also defined the way they acted.

### Heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand

The origins of the heritage preservation movement developed in New Zealand only a little later than in larger Western countries such as the United Kingdom and United States. The first organisation dedicated to preserving cultural landscapes, the Dunedin Suburban Reserves Conservation Society, was formed in 1888, followed by similar groups in Wellington, Taranaki and Auckland.<sup>52</sup> Romanticism was a key driver of this ‘need’ to retain beautiful areas for recreation and as havens from which to escape the ordeal of industrialised life.<sup>53</sup> As Pākehā society began to construct a distinct national identity around the turn of the century, it adopted Māori history as a national ‘pre-history,’ offering a unique narrative depth.<sup>54</sup> For example, in 1927 Elsdon Best compared the fortifications of Māori pā to “earthwork defences erected by neolithic man in any land,” particularly pre-Christian hillforts in Great Britain.<sup>55</sup> Preservation of pre-European heritage landscapes accompanied both romantic and historicising trends.

Increasing interest in scenic and historical locations led to government involvement in the process. The Cook landing site in Gisborne became the first national historical reserve in 1896.

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<sup>52</sup> Gavin McLean, “Where Sheep May Not Safely Graze: A brief history of New Zealand’s heritage movement 1890-2000,” in *Common Ground?* ed. Trapeznik, 26.

<sup>53</sup> Kynan Gentry, *History, Heritage and Colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 42.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>55</sup> Elsdon Best, *The Pa Māori*, first published 1927 (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2005), 13.

In 1903 the Scenery Preservation Bill was passed. Although focused on places of scenic beauty, the bill included historical sites in its remit and included provision for the purchase of privately-owned land.<sup>56</sup> Another important milestone was the Scenery Preservation Board's 1918 declaration that "in New Zealand, 'historical monuments' would include aboriginal rock-paintings, earthworks of Maori pas, Maori or pre-Maori stone fences, battle-sites of Maori wars, redoubts, blockhouses and perhaps certain buildings erected by the early colonists".<sup>57</sup> In 1928 the Christchurch Provincial Council Chamber became the first building formally protected by law.<sup>58</sup> Already the foundation for modern heritage legislation had been laid.

Increased historical awareness and nationalism around the national centenary in 1940 and legislative independence following the Statute of Westminster in 1947, coupled with the widely publicised demolition of notable buildings such as Partington's Mill in Auckland, culminated in the Historic Places Act in 1954.<sup>59</sup> The central importance that public outrage and activism for notable buildings played in the development of this legislation is notable. The Act resulted in the formation of the National Historic Places Trust, later to become the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) and now known as Heritage New Zealand (HNZ). It was tasked with the organisational commitment to "arouse and maintain a healthy public interest in places and things of national or local historic interest" and to "mark, maintain, and preserve such places and things".<sup>60</sup> With a tiny number of permanent staff the NZHPT relied heavily upon the seventeen regional committees whose volunteer members assisted with identification and advocacy of historic buildings throughout the country.

Constrained by a limited budget and with no legal power to prevent demolition, from the outset the NZHPT had to rely upon public advocacy and compromise to preserve the places deemed worthy of recognition. This is evident in the preservation of Old St Pauls church in Wellington. Although the NZHPT initially accepted a compromise proposal to incorporate part of the old building into a new cathedral, thereby preserving some of its original fabric, public

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<sup>56</sup> McLean, "Where Sheep May Not Safely Graze," 25-7; Gentry, *History, Heritage and Colonialism*, 43-6; Robert McLean, "Heritage versus Planning: Can heritage planners influence the emerging geography of heritage in New Zealand/Aotearoa?" in *Past Matters: Heritage, history and the built environment*, ed. CL Miller and MM Roche (Palmerston North: Massey University Press, 2006), 288.

<sup>57</sup> New Zealand Government, "Report of the Scenery Preservation Board," *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, C-6 (1918): 2.

<sup>58</sup> McLean, "Where Sheep May Not Safely Graze," 29.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Christoffel, "Genesis: The Origins of the Trust," *Heritage New Zealand* 97 (2005): 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Christoffel, "Learning to Walk," *Heritage New Zealand* 97 (2005): 12.

campaigning resulted in its purchase and preservation by the central government.<sup>61</sup> The NZHPT also undertook a vigorous campaign of affixing plaques to notable sites, and assumed the responsibility for the few government-owned heritage properties.

The early 1980s saw dramatic changes in the NZHPT itself and to the heritage environment in which it operated. The Historic Places Act 1980 gave the NZHPT greater legal powers of protection over historic fabric. Buildings could be categorised as ‘A’ to ‘D’ dependant on their “historical significance or architectural quality”.<sup>62</sup> Assessment was undertaken by the three permanent members of the Building Classification Committee (BCC), who visited potential candidates and wrote summaries of their heritage value. Nominated candidates were then approved by the Trust Board. The Act also gave the NZHPT the ability to serve protection or repair notices over buildings in the top two categories. More commonly used was the Heritage Covenant, a contract between the owner and the NZHPT to preserve or maintain a building. With this new legislation, the BCC suddenly had an immense task to undertake. As well as applying the new criteria to previously-assessed buildings, the Trust Board had decided to begin classification of buildings built from 1900-1940s. Assisted by the members of the regional committees, the BCC and NZHPT staff succeeded in classifying an incredible 3227 buildings before 1984.<sup>63</sup>

Between 1981 and 1989, historic buildings were demolished in New Zealand at an unprecedented rate, estimated by the NZHPT to have been 1.4 classified buildings a month, let alone those that were unclassified.<sup>64</sup> Throughout the decade the NZHPT appeared largely powerless to carry out its job, notwithstanding the supreme efforts undertaken by its staff and members. Limited funding continued to hamper the organisation and contributed to a wider lack of faith in the system which prevented protection orders from being used or applied effectively. Public advocacy remained the most effective tool for preserving threatened buildings, as amply demonstrated by the Missions to Seamen building. Public support for heritage continued to increase throughout the 1980s, eventually resulting in the passing of the Resource Management and Historic Places Acts in the early 1990s. These shifted more of the

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<sup>61</sup> Christoffel, “Learning to Walk,” 14.

<sup>62</sup> New Zealand Government, “Historic Places Act 1980,” 92.

<sup>63</sup> Shelley Richardson, “New Directions,” *Heritage New Zealand* 97 (2005): 35.

<sup>64</sup> Helen Robinson, “Years of Turmoil,” *Heritage New Zealand* 97 (2005): 43.

responsibility for protection of heritage sites to local government, changing the role of the NZHPT.

### **The Missions to Seamen building**

The organisation known as the Missions to Seamen was founded in England in 1856. In the preceding two decades a number of Anglican ministries had been set up in ports throughout England, starting with the Reverend John Ashley's Bristol Channel Mission in 1836.<sup>65</sup> The success of these small ministries was such that they were combined into a single organisation. A missionary society of the Anglican Communion, the Missions to Seamen gradually spread across the British Empire, establishing branches in British and Colonial ports. The Wellington branch was established in its Stout Street building as a result of collaboration between the Reverend James Moore and Mary Anne Williams, a private benefactor. After 22 years' experience with the Mission in England, Moore arrived in Wellington in 1898 with little money and no place to hold services. Williams, a wealthy widow with a long association with local shipping through her late husband Captain William Williams, donated land and funds as a memorial to her husband and as a lasting legacy in the city centre.<sup>66</sup> This was the largest private charitable donation ever to have been made in New Zealand at the time, a fact later emphasised by protestors.

The only building to ever occupy the site on the 1876 reclamation, the Wellington mission was designed by the local architectural firm Crichton and McKay and completed in 1904. An elegant building in the Edwardian Free Style, it contained a hall, library, tearooms and a chapel. As a mission it served as a social and spiritual hub for visiting seafarers of all nations, hosting postal and church services, and free events including concerts, dances and lectures. The increased number of visiting sailors in the Second World War meant that the building was used extensively. Post-war, however, visitor numbers rapidly declined, and in 1975 the Mission was relocated to Kelburn. Because of its location, the building was sold to the State Services Commission (SSC).<sup>67</sup> Renamed Mission to Seafarers in 2000 to reflect its role in caring for all seafarers, regardless of gender, the organisation continues to operate in 200 ports across 50

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<sup>65</sup> The Mission to Seafarers, "The Visionary John Ashley," accessed 27 November 2017, [missiontoseafarers.org/ourhistory](http://missiontoseafarers.org/ourhistory).

<sup>66</sup> Wellington City Council, "Mission to Seamen Building," accessed 31 July 2017, [wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/buildings/151-300/274-Mission-to-seamen-building?q=](http://wellingtoncityheritage.org.nz/buildings/151-300/274-Mission-to-seamen-building?q=)

<sup>67</sup> The Crown had priority of purchase over buildings sold within a defined government centre area.

countries. The Wellington branch is now based in Shed 5 on Aotea quay.<sup>68</sup> Mission staff played only a minor role in the protests of 1986, arguing that “the Missions to Seamen continued (and still continues) to minister to seafarers and others” unaffected by the loss of their original building.<sup>69</sup>

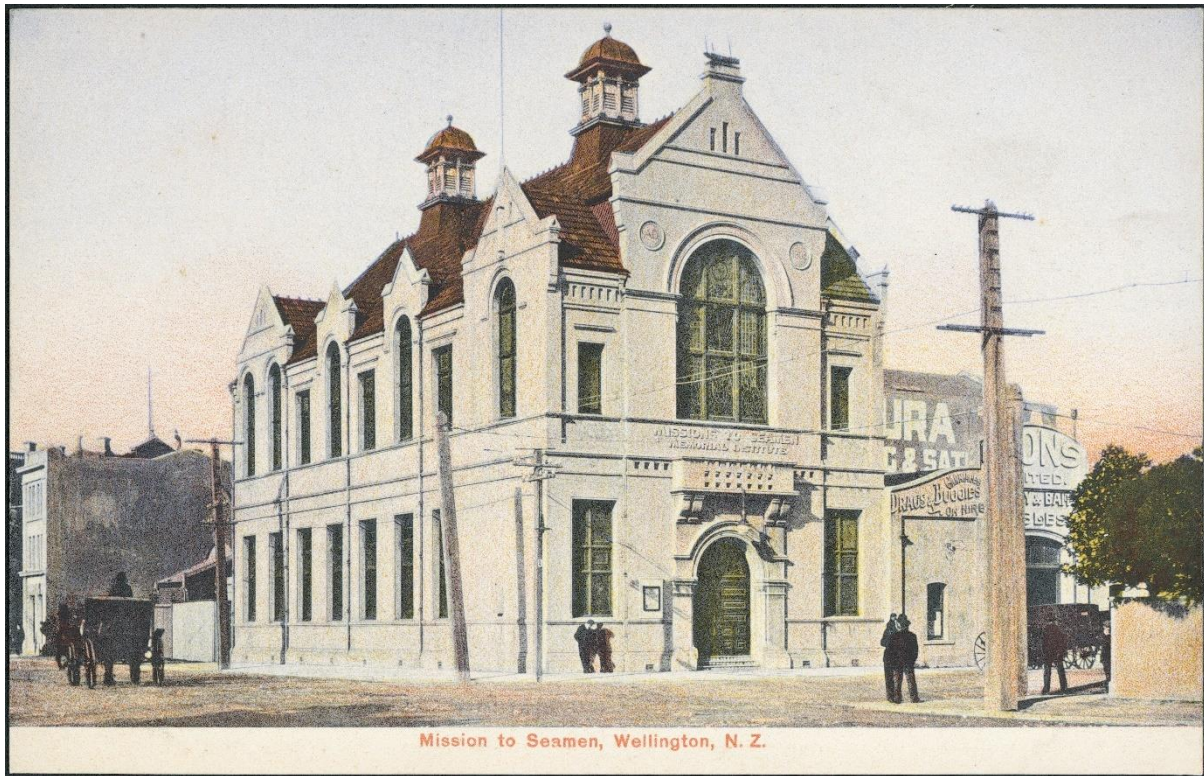


Figure 1: Postcard showing the newly-built Missions to Seamen c.1904.

For the next ten years the Ministry of Defence used the building as a storehouse, and rooms were rented to the Apostolic Church and a judo club.<sup>70</sup> In April 1984 a Government Office Accommodation Board (GOAB) assessment of the building concluded that it was an eyesore, structurally unsound due to decay, and rife with conflict between the tenants. Assessment of the benefits and costs of demolition was recommended.<sup>71</sup> Later reports show that the board assumed demolition would take place that same year. In August, the NZHPT completed the listing process for the building, which they had classified ‘C’. Though it is most likely they had already been informed of the intention to list the building in accordance with NZHPT procedure, official notice was then sent to the SSC along with a recommendation that it be

<sup>68</sup> The Mission to Seafarers, “Wellington Port,” accessed 27 November 2017, [missiontoseafarers.org/wellington](http://missiontoseafarers.org/wellington).

<sup>69</sup> Rev C.J Pether, letter to the editor, *Evening Post*, 16 June 1896.

<sup>70</sup> Different documents from 1985-6 refer to either a police judo club or private karate club. It is unclear whether these are the same organisation or separate groups.

<sup>71</sup> Government Office Accommodation Board, “Use of Mission to Seamen Building,” 17 April 1984, *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 785 Box 199.

“strengthened and restored”.<sup>72</sup> Stan Rodger, the minister for State Services, responded that this information would be taken into account in their assessment, but was unlikely to affect the final decision. Rodger represented Dunedin North electorate in parliament from 1978 until his retirement in 1990. As Minister for State Services his close involvement with the public-sector reforms of the fourth Labour government were so controversial he was stripped of his PSA membership. Rodger himself was keenly aware of the “grave inefficiencies in the state sector” and believed that “the whole system needed an overhaul”.<sup>73</sup> His role in the Missions to Seamen campaign reflects his desire to achieve dramatic change at any cost.

Little appears to have happened during the course of the following year. It was not until September 1985 that the Cabinet Management and State Employment Committee formally approved demolition. In the interim, the GOAB’s priorities had clearly changed. Whereas the first assessment was based upon the building’s condition with little regard to the future use of the site, this later decision to demolish was predicated on the fact that the site “would make available some 30,656 sq. metres of usable office space,” which would contribute to the drive to decentralise government offices that was taking place at the time.<sup>74</sup> Notice was sent to the tenants on 14 October, advising them they must vacate the premises by the end of the year. Word of these plans evidently reached the NZHPT and the very next day the Regional Committee began lobbying the SSC to request “that the building may be adequately maintained and put to some suitable use”.<sup>75</sup> The same month, the NZHPT’s central committee wrote to inform the SSC of their intention to consider raising the classification of the building at the next meeting of the Trust Board in March 1986.<sup>76</sup> Under the Historic Places Act 1980 buildings classified ‘A’ or ‘B’ could be granted statutory protection through a heritage order. Although the SSC later accused the NZHPT of proposing such a classificatory change purely to save the building, it does appear that such a change had been under consideration for some time and the timing was a result of slow processing hampered by internal restructuring.<sup>77</sup> In their magazine

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<sup>72</sup> J.W.F Cattell, letter to State Services Commission, 2 August 1984, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>73</sup> Stan Rodger, quoted in Noel O’Hare, “Stan Rodger,” *PSA People*, accessed 30 January 2018, [psa100.org.nz/stories/people/l-z/stan-rodger](http://psa100.org.nz/stories/people/l-z/stan-rodger).

<sup>74</sup> Cabinet Management and State Employment Committee, “Minutes,” 25 September 1986, *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 785 Box 199.

<sup>75</sup> NZHPT Regional Committee, letter to Stan Rodger, 15 October 1985, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>76</sup> Carol Quirk, letter to State Services Commission, 30 October 1985, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>77</sup> See Geoffrey Whitehead, letter to Robert Tizard, 16 June 1986; Neil Begg, letter to NZHPT Board, 13 June 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

published the same year the NZHPT claimed that the reclassification was a result of better understanding the building's social importance.<sup>78</sup> Requests to save the building resulted in a meeting between Rodger and senior staff of the NZHPT on 7 November 1986. The NZHPT staff requested that the building be retained if at all possible, and the Minister gave an assurance that this would be taken into account, although he privately thought it unlikely that the decision to demolish would change.<sup>79</sup>

In the following months the key points of this meeting, hastily summarised, were presented to the GOAB, but as Rodger had predicted, they had no impact upon their final decision. The Apostolic Church and judo club were given further notice in April, as they had failed to vacate the premises, and the MOWD began to advertise for contractors to demolish the building. From 1 May regular correspondence between the NZHPT and SSC was renewed when the NZHPT formally queried why they had heard nothing since the meeting in November. On 15 May Rodger finally replied, stating that although the "situation was examined in depth," the SSC and Cabinet Committee on Management and State Employment remained unconvinced by their arguments and had decided to go ahead with demolition.<sup>80</sup>

This continued determination to demolish the building sparked a wave of protest from the Wellington City Council (WCC), private organisations and the general public. On 12 May members of the public held the first of several informal meetings of people concerned about the demolition.<sup>81</sup> On 19 May they met within the building itself, as guests of the judo club, which had still not left the building despite government warnings. On 30 May they held an open day to show the building's interior to passers-by. The *Dominion* published a front-page article on the impending demolition on 13 May, and many media outlets, including the *Evening Post*, local television and radio continued to publish updates on the debate throughout the ensuing months. The NZHPT maintained a constant campaign, working closely with the WCC and Wellington Architectural Centre. On 31 May they published a half-page advertisement in the *Evening Post*, which used unmistakably provocative language in its description of the

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<sup>78</sup> Chris Cochran, "A Win in Wellington: The Missions to Seamen Building," *Historic Places in New Zealand* 14 (1986): 4.

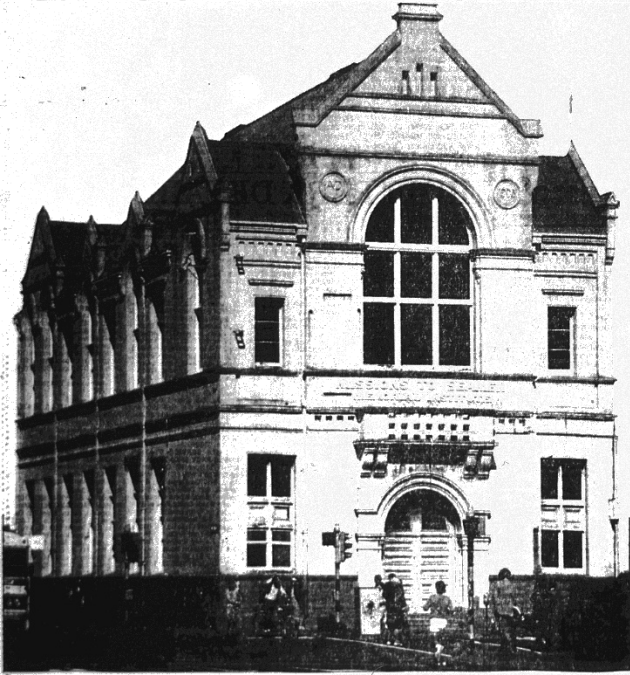
<sup>79</sup> This remark was made to the secretary after the NZHPT members had departed, and recorded in the minutes. N.P Saunders-Francis, "Mission to Seamen Building," 12 November 1985, *Archives New Zealand AALR* W5920 785 Box 199.

<sup>80</sup> Stan Rodger, letter to J.R.S Daniells, 15 May 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>81</sup> Cochran, "A Win in Wellington," 4.



building's heritage merits.<sup>82</sup> Many private organisations also offered their support, most notably the Cromwell Corporation, which offered to buy the building from the SSC and undertake its restoration themselves. The campaign to preserve the building culminated in the “sign it to save it” and later “paint it to save it” initiatives in the first two weeks of June. The building was continually occupied to ensure contractors did not begin demolition, and passers-by were encouraged to show their support by signing the walls of the building. It is estimated that around 2000 people did so.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, around 3500 signatures were added to a petition set up outside the building and on a stall on Lambton Quay. Protest was widespread, cooperative and well-organised.



## Another elderly lady to be knocked down on busy city corner.

She's been accused of getting in the way of progress. Already she's been found guilty without a fair trial or hearing and sentenced for demolition.

The elegant old lady that is the Missions to Seamen Building would be gone forever. Progress is important to our city. But should it take precedence over anything that stands in its way? Demolishing the Missions to Seamen Building would be unjust for a number of reasons.

For seventy years she provided succour and comfort to seamen of all nations. Her history is rich and romantic.

She was the gift of a single benefactor, Mrs Mary Anne Williams. This was stated at the time to be the largest benefaction ever in New Zealand. At the opening ceremony a pledge was made that the building "would ever stand as an institute worthy of the city of Wellington."

If walls could talk the Missions to Seamen Building could tell many a colourful tale. She is part of our city's heritage.

The building is part of the setting of nationally important historic buildings such as the wooden Government Buildings, the High Court, the Cenotaph and a number of buildings in Stout Street. It is part of the Government Centre Conservation Area (as identified under the Historic Places Act 1980). It is at the centre of the greatest concentration of classified buildings in the country and is classified C on the national register of historic buildings.

In October 1985, the State Services Commission were informed of a proposal to re-classify the building B. They replied as late as May this year saying the building is to be demolished.

Their single reason for doing so is — "maximum utilization of site." This argument holds no water. The same floor area could be provided with a taller building on the balance of the site.

There is no arguable reason why this beautiful old building should go. Architecturally she is considered by many as a city treasure. She is the work of important Wellington architects Crichton and McKay, few of whose buildings remain.

The Missions to Seamen Building is a Wellington personality innocent of impeding our city's progress. She could be easily incorporated in a major redevelopment of the site and continue a useful life alongside a new building.

The co-existence of old and new makes our city more exciting both visually and socially. This has already been demonstrated by developments such as the old and new Public Trust Buildings in Lambton Quay.

If the State Services Commission don't wish to make use of the building, others certainly will. She could provide conference, restaurant or social facilities. Perhaps a cultural or arts centre or the home of a theatre company.

**Register your protest against her demolition by writing or sending in the coupon.**

If you would also like to contribute toward the cost of this advertisement please send your donation to:

The Treasurer, Wellington Regional Committee, N.Z. Historic Places Trust, P.O. Box 12165, Wellington

NB: No stamp required.

**Hon. Stan Rodger, Minister for State Services, Parliament Buildings, Wellington.**

Please reverse the decision to demolish the Missions to Seamen Building, so saving and putting to a creative new use a valuable part of the social, architectural and townscape heritage that is uniquely Wellington's.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

**HELP STOP THE SENSELESS DESTRUCTION**

This advertisement underwritten by the Wellington Regional Committee and the National Office of the N.Z. Historic Places Trust, Wellington. An assisted letter, and Judy Evans on behalf of descendants of Mary Ann Williams. Many other organisations including the Wellington Branch of the N.Z. Historic Places Trust and individuals have also supported.

Figure 2: The NZHPT and Architectural centre collaborated on this half-page advertisement in the Evening Post, 31 May 1986. The inflammatory nature of the language used is clear.

On 13 June the NZHPT proposed an emergency reclassification of the Missions building from a ‘C’ to a ‘B’. The proposed reassessment, as notified to the SSC in October 1985, was to have been discussed at the Trust Board meeting in March. However, due to lengthy debate on other matters, no classification proposals had been discussed, but were instead postponed until the

<sup>82</sup> *Evening Post*, “Another Elderly Lady to be Knocked Down on Busy City Corner,” 31 May 1986.

<sup>83</sup> Cochran, “A Win in Wellington,” 4.



July meeting. Given the imminent threat to the building, it was suggested that an emergency decision be made. An emergency reclassification would allow a protection notice to be issued. However, to pass it would require unanimous assent by the board members. Sir Neil Begg, the chairman, also pointed out that the threat to the building should not affect the decision to reclassify, only the urgency with which the decision was made.<sup>84</sup> Notice and a brief description of the heritage significance of the building was sent to all Trust Board members, who were asked to reply within three days. In the event, two Board members dissented, stating that the architectural worth of the building was not “very great” as required by a ‘B’ classification.<sup>85</sup> The dissenting members were both government representatives on the Board: the secretary of Internal Affairs and a representative of the Director-General of Lands. Additionally, the Commissioner of Works abstained, as he believed his position on the Board represented a conflict of interest. The resolution did not pass.

Despite the NZHPT’s failure to prevent the demolition by legal means, the display of public support was enough to persuade the SSC to delay the demolition several times until the NZHPT, WCC and Wellington Architectural Centre were able to put together a submission defending the building’s heritage value (the Submission). The GOAB concluded that despite the protests, the estimated costs and potential profit from the proposed office building dictated that the Mission must be demolished unless the WCC granted significant exemptions. On 30 June the Minister prepared to announce a failure in negotiations and resume demolition.<sup>86</sup> The same day the mayor agreed in principle to the exemptions proposed.<sup>87</sup> By the end of July a deal had been formalised, awarding a number of exemptions to Council planning regulations for the office building to be built on the neighbouring site, in return for the preservation of the Missions to Seamen building. In their 11 July meeting, the NZHPT board finally approved the reclassification of the building as a ‘B’ because “of its very great historical significance and architectural quality”.<sup>88</sup> Continued government restructuring resulted in the dismantling of the

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<sup>84</sup> Neil Begg, “Classification of Missions to Seamen Building,” 13 June 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>85</sup> E.J Babe, letter to Acting Director NZHPT, 16 June 1986; N.D.R McKerchar, letter to Director NZHPT, 16 June 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>86</sup> Stan Rodger, “Press Release,” 30 June 1986, *Archives New Zealand AALR* W5920 Box 200.

<sup>87</sup> Ian Lawrence, letter to Stan Rodger, 30 June 1986, *Archives New Zealand AALR* W5920 Box 200.

<sup>88</sup> Meeting of the NZHPT Trust Board, “Minutes,” 11 July 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

GOAB in November, and the proposed office was never built.<sup>89</sup> The Missions to Seamen building still stands in Stout Street.

### **Reform and opposition in the 1980s**

The 1984 ‘snap election’ which replaced interventionist Prime Minister Robert Muldoon and the National government with a Labour government for the first time since 1975 is considered one of the most significant in New Zealand’s history. Under the leadership of David Lange and finance minister Roger Douglas the fourth Labour government enacted a series of radical economic reforms and changes to foreign and social policy. The decision to demolish the Missions to Seamen was announced at the apogee of these changes, before the divisions which later led to Lange’s resignation and the party’s disintegration a few years later had fully manifested. It was also linked intimately to intensive government restructuring, a process which privatised state assets and introduced corporate practices to state services.<sup>90</sup> The salience of protest against economic arguments demonstrated discomfort with the drive to operate state services as profitable businesses. The new office proposed for the Mission site was to provide office space to meet the additional constraints imposed by changes to staffing and rent in the government centre.<sup>91</sup> The direct involvement of the government in the destruction of the building angered some people, perhaps even more than a private developer may have done. One letter-writer blamed the “all-out restructuring Government” for “betray[ing]” the citizens of Wellington and planning the demolition.<sup>92</sup> Labour supporters protested that this was an administration which ought to “have the right instincts, and ... not thwart responsible citizens who care about their city”.<sup>93</sup> Political opinions were bound up inextricably with a sense of heritage.

Given the social and political turbulence in New Zealand in the 1980s, it is not surprising to note the number of public demonstrations which occurred at the time. The violent clashes over the Springbok tour in 1981 were the largest civil disturbances the country had seen for two decades and they dramatically altered the country’s self-image.<sup>94</sup> The refusal of entry to the

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<sup>89</sup> State Services Commission, letter to Director NZHPT, 5 November 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>90</sup> Steve Watters, “The 1980s,” *New Zealand History*, accessed 17 January 2018, [nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/the-1980s](http://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/the-1980s); Peter Aimer, “Labour Party,” *Te Ara*, accessed 17 January 2018, [teara.govt.nz/en/labour-party](http://teara.govt.nz/en/labour-party).

<sup>91</sup> C.J Hill, “Minutes,” 25 September 1985, *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 785 Box 199.

<sup>92</sup> Alex Riddell, letter to the editor, *Evening Post*, 12 June 1986.

<sup>93</sup> Claire Falla Meo, letter to the editor, *Evening Post*, 28 June 1986.

<sup>94</sup> Steve Watters, “The 1980s,” *New Zealand History*, accessed 17 January 2018, [nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/the-1980s](http://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/the-1980s).

USS *Buchanan* in 1985 reflected the new government's strong nuclear free stance, and the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior* by French Secret Service agents the same year continued to feature prominently in both Wellington dailies throughout the period of the protest to save the Missions to Seamen building. At the same time, in mid-1986, the Homosexual Law Reform Bill, under debate in Parliament, received significant media attention and was frequently referred to in letters to the editor. It is interesting to note that Fran Wilde, the MP who proposed the bill, was also an important figure in the Missions to Seamen protest, writing and speaking to many politicians and spending time at the pickets outside the building itself. If not explicitly a 'culture of protest,' the 1980s was a decade when taking to the streets to demonstrate was a natural and regularly-occurring response to disagreement with government action.

### **Newspapers and media**

From May 1986 the two Wellington daily newspapers *Dominion* and *Evening Post*, as well as the tabloid *Contact*, carried regular articles about the Mission to Seamen building and the campaign to save it. The mere fact that the story was covered with such regularity shows the importance of the debate and widespread awareness. Articles in the *Evening Post* made the front page several times.<sup>95</sup> On the whole the debate was presented in a relatively factual and impartial way. Articles tended to follow descriptions of the latest developments with supporting arguments from both sides. Interestingly the *Evening Post* also contained comment from independent campaigners, most notably Judy Evans, choosing to focus on the human dimension and the importance of the building to individuals.

Throughout the month of June articles in both major papers became increasingly antipathetic to the SSC. Although they continued to quote statements from Stan Rodger and other SSC officials, investigative journalism revealed multiple dissenting voices, including disagreement between the MOWD, which supported retention of the building, and the SSC. Officials in the GOAB were alarmed to see that this information had leaked. The estimations of private businesses such as the Cromwell Corporation, which estimated that the cost of demolition was higher than that of preservation, were also printed. As the "Sign it to Save it" campaign grew, the *Dominion* printed photos of the visually interesting graffiti, and interviews with protestors. There were also editorials printed in both papers which strongly supported the retention of the building, including a notable piece entitled "Bureaucratic Insolence" which a NZHPT

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<sup>95</sup> Articles in *Evening Post*, 5 and 18 June 1986.

representative later said “brilliantly summarised the case”.<sup>96</sup> Throughout the campaign only one letter to the editor was published offering an opposing perspective. Radio commentators, including Paul Holmes, pledged their support for the preservation of the building from as early as May. National Radio highlighted the “Sign it to Save it” campaign by quoting some of the graffiti, a light-hearted news item showing implicit support.<sup>97</sup>

It is clear that the media publicity given to the protest contributed to greater awareness of the campaign. From their letters, it is clear that seventeen people (of a total 46 letter-writers) were aware of or had directly heard of the protest from newspaper articles, and another three learned of it from other media coverage including radio and television.

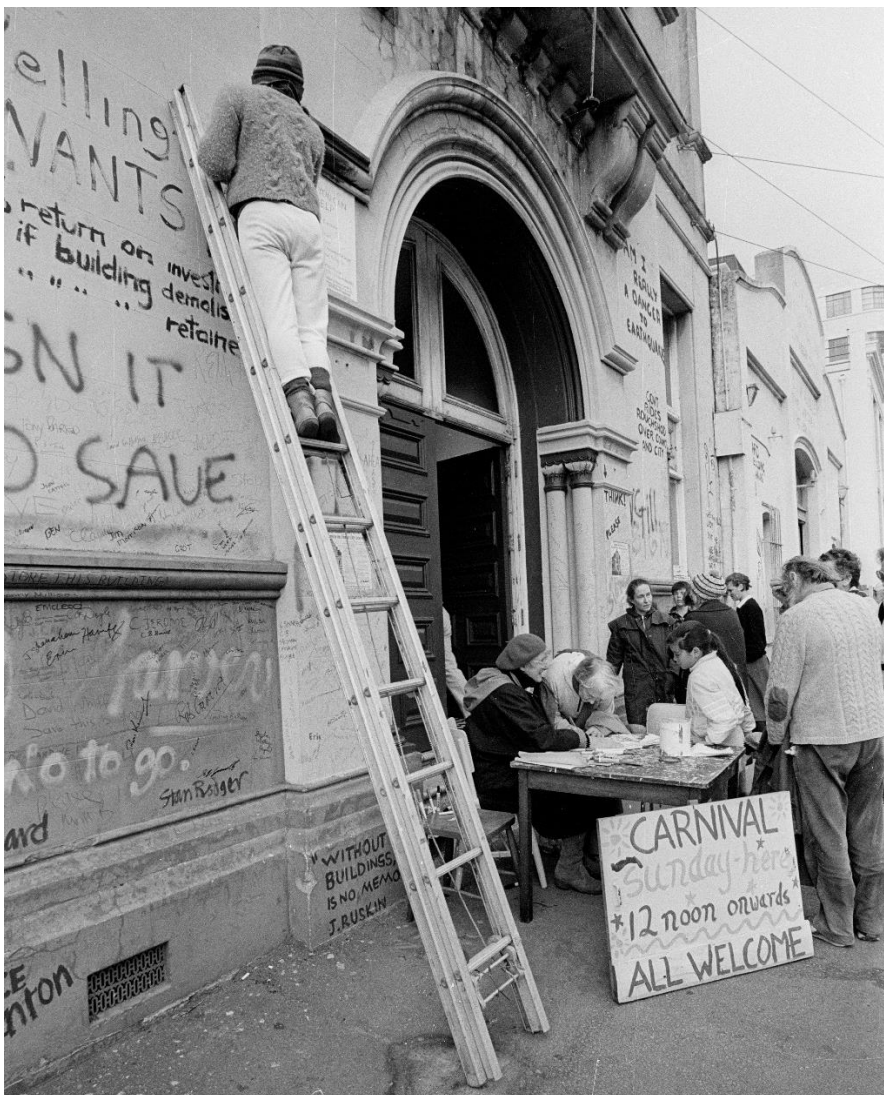


Figure 3: An example of the photos of the campaign printed in the Dominion, 9 June 1986.

<sup>96</sup> Cochran, “A Win in Wellington,” 6.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 4-5.

## **Chapter Four: Heritage Expressed through Protest and Debate**

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This chapter examines the ways in which individuals and organisations consciously defined heritage and its importance in the letters they wrote about the Missions to Seamen building at the time. The first section examines letters written independently by private individuals. They have been collected from three different sources: HNZ's archives, Archives New Zealand and letters to the editor in the Wellington newspapers *Contact*, *Dominion* and *Evening Post* (see Appendix). The intention behind most letters was similar: to protest the demolition of the Missions to Seamen building by arguing its importance as heritage. Those sent directly to the NZHPT expressed support for their campaign, those to the government expressed opposition to demolition and those to the newspapers sought public recognition of the building's importance. The ways in which the building is described and the language used are very similar in all three types. There is one exception to this: a single letter to the editor of the *Evening Post* which supported the building's demolition. These letters are used to give a sample of the public comment on the building at the time, part of what could be considered an 'unofficial' heritage discourse.

The second section examines the letters sent by private organisations, either to the NZHPT or to the government in protest. A variety of organisations and businesses became involved in the protest. Several of these actively cooperated with the NZHPT. Most important of these was the Wellington Architectural Centre which, although a volunteer organisation, contributed to the Submission. This close collaboration complicates the idea of a dominant 'official' discourse.

The third section looks at the 'official' heritage institutions which opposed the demolition of the Missions to Seamen building. Foremost amongst these was the NZHPT, which was legally charged with identifying and advocating for heritage by the Historic Places Act 1980. Given its authority over urban planning and the consideration this had to extend to historic buildings, the WCC also had a degree of authority over heritage within Wellington, which led it into conflict with the SSC. Finally, the MOWD also advocated for the preservation of the building, even though it was tasked with its demolition and with designing its replacement. The MOWD had worked with the NZHPT in the past, and the Commissioner of Works was a permanent member of the Trust Board. This may explain their attitude to some extent.

The final section examines the perspective of the other government departments which were closely involved in the protest, and the impact that it had upon their decision-making processes. The building's owners, the SSC, advocated for its demolition on behalf of the GOAB, which

was in charge of ensuring the government had suitable and adequate accommodation within the city.

### **Letters from individuals**

Private individuals advocating for the Missions to Seamen building drew upon diverse arguments to support its retention. Perhaps unsurprisingly, foremost amongst these was the idea that the building was inextricably bound up with the past. Most letters referred to some sense of history, through its physical fabric or by association with past people or activities, especially Mary Ann Williams, the original benefactor. One prominently expressed concept was that the building carried part of the past into the present. According to one advocate, “the building should be saved to ensure our children can see the living past not through museums or television”.<sup>98</sup> The fact that the building was described as “living,” ahead of the comparatively lifeless objects in museums, shows the emotive value of reusing an historic space. Several writers also described the building’s importance as a memorial, because of both its dedication to Captain William Williams and the shelter it gave to the men of the merchant navy in the Second World War. To many of the people who actively participated in the campaign to save the building, its inherent association with and representation of the past through its age rendered it worthy of preservation.

The other primary reason people gave for the building’s importance was its aesthetic qualities. The Missions to Seamen, and other “majestic, elegant and historically valuable buildings” were valued “as treasures and gems” to be admired as part of the landscape of Wellington.<sup>99</sup> Although the Missions to Seamen building was variously described as “gothic”, “Queen Anne” or “Jacobean,” and there was clearly confusion over exactly what style it represented, its distinctive appearance of age nevertheless attracted attention. This very noticeable quality was an important part of the building’s attraction. One advocate wrote that the Mission “is part of the folklore and landscape of Wellington. Thousands pass it ... on their way to the train”.<sup>100</sup> To that writer, the building was a vital part of the Wellington built landscape simply due to its existence and visibility. She remembered it fondly because it had always been there. Other writers expressed a similar sense of connection through tradition or nostalgia.

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<sup>98</sup> K. Warne, letter to Stan Rodger, 16 May 1986.

<sup>99</sup> Melanie Hutton, letter to Stan Rodger, 4 June 1986.

<sup>100</sup> Hilda McDonnell, letter to Historic Places Trust, 16 June 1986.

Of the nine letters to the editor which refer to the Missions to Seamen building published in Wellington newspapers between 28 May and 5 July, only one supported its demolition. Even taking media bias into account, this disparity in number suggests the existence of a high level of support for heritage preservation in Wellington. Interestingly, that author also used aesthetic and architectural arguments to support his views. In his opinion the “ugly little edifice [was] a hotch-potch of architectural styles” and there was no reason to keep it.<sup>101</sup> This shows a similar desire for an architecturally interesting city.

Although historical and architectural significance were the two most commonly-expressed justifications for the building’s preservation, most writers were not clear about why these were important. Many letters claimed that the building was “historic”, or “part of our history” without elaborating upon that statement. At times it appeared as though the mere fact of the building’s age was in itself a reason to preserve it. Another common phrase used to describe the value of the building was “architectural significance,” usually unaccompanied by any elaboration of exactly what that significance might be. Nearly half the letter-writers used either one or both of these phrases. This demonstrates the difficulty of articulating heritage value, especially for those unfamiliar with ‘official’ terminology. Two letters, written by Oroya Day, a member of the NZHPT regional committee, and Barbara Fill, a private contractor for the committee, present an interesting contrast.<sup>102</sup> The authors were evidently more familiar with professional heritage terminology and gave significantly lengthier explanations of value than any other. Familiarity with formal descriptions gave them greater resources at their disposal to describe the building’s importance. The contrast demonstrates the existence of a linguistic divide between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ discourses, which gave heritage professionals greater ability to construct arguments. However, the widespread use of historic and architectural justifications demonstrates public familiarity with this discourse, which they appear to have used to give a greater sense of professionalism to their own arguments. The lack of explanation given to these values-statements suggests that public sentiment as a whole was not so academic as the letters may suggest at face value.

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<sup>101</sup> Alfred R. Lewis, letter to the editor, *Evening Post*, 16 June 1986.

<sup>102</sup> Barbara Fill, letter to Robert J. Tizard, 19 May 1986; Oroya Day, letter to Stan Rodger, 19 May 1986.



Figure 4: Protestors pose for the Dominion photographer in front of the graffitied Mission building in June 1986.

A defining feature of the letters written by private individuals in opposition to the demolition of the Missions to Seamen building is their deeply personal and individual nature. Connection to the building, whether familial, or through personal memories or experiences, was a key argument for preservation. Eight writers told stories of their own or their family's use of the building, and 20 people used the word "our" to refer to "memories" or "history," emphasising a sense of a collectively-owned past. Judy Evans, a lead campaigner, wrote letters to Stan Rodger, the NZHPT and the *Evening Post*. Her family was intimately connected to the building, through her great-great grandfather, a partner in Crichton and McKay, and her great-great-great aunt, Mary Ann Williams.<sup>103</sup> Having grown up amidst stories and photos of her family's long association with the Mission, the planned demolition felt like an attack on her own personal

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<sup>103</sup> Judy Evans, letter to Historic Places Trust, 13 June 1986.



history. Seeing the “overwhelming support among Wellingtonians for its preservation” led her to believe that it must “house memories for thousands of people” in a similar way.<sup>104</sup> These familial links must have felt intensely personal to Ms Evans, yet the NZHPT could only guess at such a connection, until it was expressed in the public outpouring of feeling when the building became threatened.

For other campaigners, a sense of personal connection with the building came from their own memories of working within it, including both sailors and those who cared for them. For some, simply standing inside the building was enough, as they were awed by the atmosphere of the interior. One such person invited Stan Rodger to see it for himself, sure that he too would be moved by the experience of interacting with the past and the “living energy of its own”.<sup>105</sup> This demonstrates the importance of emotional connection with heritage described by Russell Staiff.<sup>106</sup> Other writers used their connection to the building as qualification to give their opinion, such as one woman who argued that “having lived in Wellington all my life (54 yrs) I do [...] feel some gracious older buildings should remain,” or a building conservator who condemned the government for investing a substantial scholarship towards his education “while demolishing those buildings on which that training should be applied”.<sup>107</sup> The extent to which advocates connected themselves to the building shows important social and experiential dimensions of heritage.

The sense of history derived from the Missions to Seamen building was often accompanied and given greater urgency by a wider recognition of the scarcity of heritage in general.

Demolition [of the Missions to Seamen building] will make a mockery of the legacy from which it was built, and contribute negatively to the paucity of buildings that now remain from the city’s earlier days. Its retention will go some way to reminding us of what Wellington used to be.<sup>108</sup>

In this unusually eloquent example, the importance of the building’s age lay in its ability to operate as a didactic object, which actively demonstrated what the city had once looked like to

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<sup>104</sup> Judy Evans, letter to Historic Places Trust, 13 June 1986.

<sup>105</sup> K. Warne, letter to Stan Rodger, 16 May 1986.

<sup>106</sup> Staiff, *Re-Imagining Heritage Interpretation*, 153-4.

<sup>107</sup> C. James, letter to Stan Rodger, 14 May 1986; Ian Bowman, letter to Minister State Services Commission, 24 April 1986.

<sup>108</sup> Jennifer Leatham, letter to Stan Rodger, 1 June 1986.

passers-by. Such an argument could be used for any historic building. What gave the Missions to Seamen particular urgency was the “paucity” of historic buildings left in the city.

As a result of the intensive development of the 1970s and early 1980s, a sense of dramatic loss of heritage pervaded the public imagination. Coupled with opposition to the “ugly,” “stark” or “unimaginative” high-rise offices built in their place, this lament for the city’s changing face is the second theme most-commonly expressed in people’s letters. Advocates were determined that Wellington had already lost too many historic buildings and that no more ought to be demolished. One letter writer was saddened “that all of the lovely little buildings scattered around Wgton [sic.] which are so picturesque and full of character are being swept away in the name of ‘progress’”.<sup>109</sup> Others worried that “the present wave of destruction of our inner city buildings will in the future leave us without that link to our heritage”.<sup>110</sup> This demonstrates the widespread sense of loss engendered by the demolition of historic buildings. Although these authors valued the Missions to Seamen building for different reasons, the one aesthetic and the other historical, they were both motivated to oppose its demolition by the memory of other buildings which had already been demolished. As recognised by Cornelius Holtorf, heritage loss is as important to the construction of heritage meaning as the buildings which survive.<sup>111</sup> Although the Missions to Seamen was a distinctive historical building, it is unlikely that such levels of support would have manifested themselves without the overwhelming sense that heritage was disappearing everywhere and active work was needed to preserve what was left. This sense of loss was crucial to the public desire to actively campaign in support of the building. It represented a clear stand in support of heritage and opposition to heavy development.

Many letter-writers referred to the development of The Terrace as a key example of what they were fighting against. The transformation of the northern end of The Terrace from a residential to a commercial streetscape began with the construction of Massey House in 1958 and reached its height in the 1970s. The resulting high-rise buildings were often cited as the premier example of the “windy and dehumanised street conditions” that result from intensive modern development.<sup>112</sup> Because of its dramatic clarity as an example, its freshness in the memories of advocates and perhaps also because even Robert (Bob) Tizard, the acting Minister for State

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<sup>109</sup> Shirley Hendry, letter to Stan Rodger, 16 May 1986.

<sup>110</sup> J.P. Hogan and E. Bark, letter to Stan Rodger, 16 May 1986.

<sup>111</sup> Holtorf, “Averting Loss Aversion in Cultural Heritage,” 417.

<sup>112</sup> *Evening Post*, letter to the editor, 6 June 1986.

Services in June 1986, had acknowledged that it was something of a “concrete canyon,” many people referred to The Terrace in their letters. The combination of fond nostalgia for the past, disgruntlement with change and dissatisfaction with modern design was a key driver of action amongst protestors.

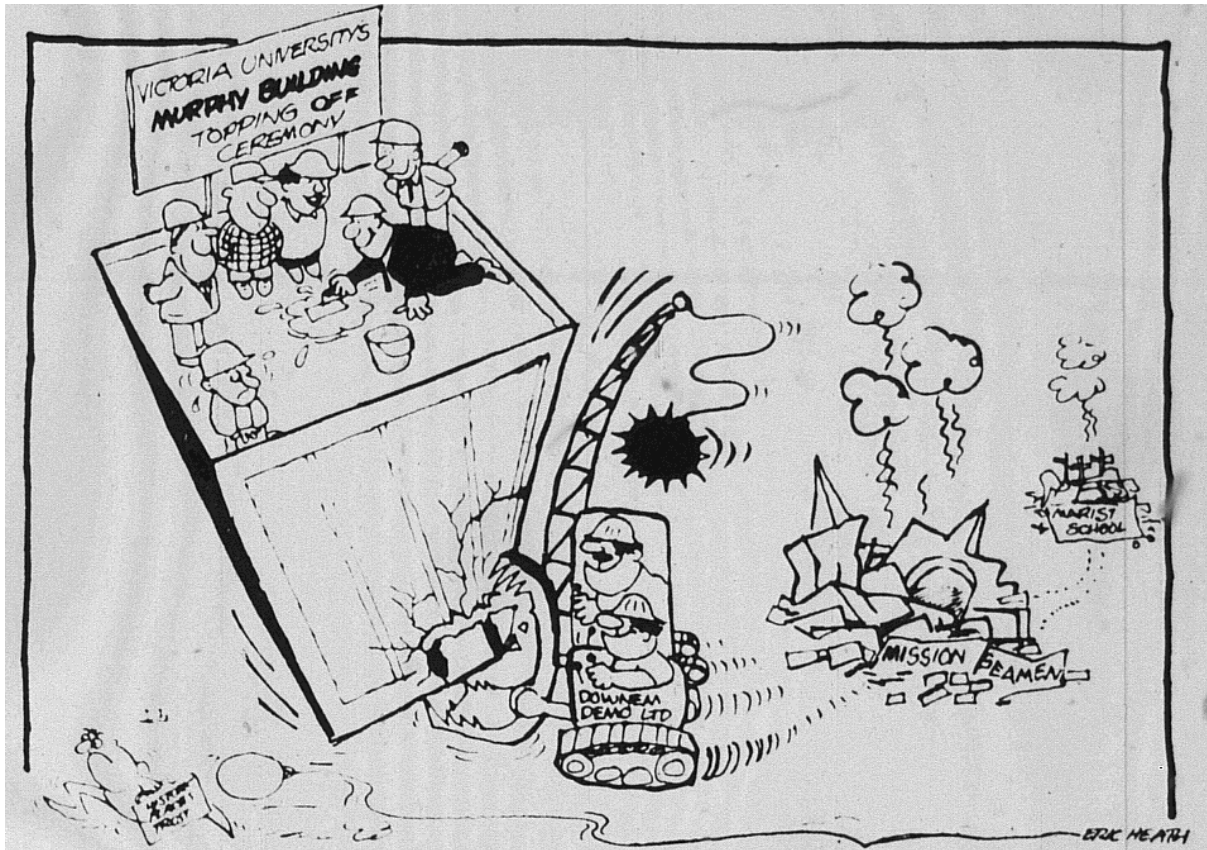


Figure 5: A cartoon in the Dominion eloquently illustrates the atmosphere of destruction in Wellington: Victoria University's newly completed Murphy building is threatened by over-zealous developers, whilst the Missions to Seamen building already lies in ruins. A figure labelled 'Historic Places Trust' flees in the bottom left corner.

To balance the conviction that the Missions to Seamen was special and worthy of preservation, more than 40 percent of advocates also gave assurance that the building, once saved, could be put to practical use. Given that economic motivations to demolish were those most often cited by the SSC, countering these was logical. Suggestions were diverse, ranging from examples of other successfully preserved buildings and the tourism value they added to the city, to offers by interested parties such as the president of the Chamber Music Society to put it to use themselves. Further than this, some people argued that economic motives and “commercial value” alone are not ever a justifiable argument when they compromise “human and

environmental concerns”.<sup>113</sup> The accompaniment of these ethical points with genuinely useful suggestions made for a strong argument and one which SSC spokespeople never convincingly countered. They show the depth of thought and understanding of heritage of which members of the public were capable.

Protest against the manner in which the SSC had handled the entire affair was also common. As one writer protested: “In my opinion the State Services Commission has acted with almost indecent haste and complete disregard to public opinion on the question of the Missions for Seamen building”.<sup>114</sup> The indifference that GOAB planners had shown towards public opinion, the NZHPT, and WCC planning permission restrictions was very clearly resented by all these parties. The short time that elapsed between notice of demolition and the demolition itself was also condemned as an unscrupulous tool used to sweep aside dissent. The fact that the construction date set for the new building was more than seven months later than the demolition date was often cited as ‘evidence’ of this unnecessary haste. Seven separate authors pointed out that the government had a responsibility to lead by example in advocating the preservation of heritage buildings. In this instance, however, they had acted no differently to a private developer. Their disregard of the NZHPT in particular damaged the credibility of the organisation, which was itself a government body.

As a whole, the arguments used by private individuals against the demolition of the Missions to Seamen building were both impassioned and persuasive. Although many attempted to use vague, academic descriptions about exactly what it was that gave the building value, it was still eminently clear that it held some meaning to them. To some authors this meaning was clearly intensely personal. People with clear memories or associations were much more likely to give detailed narratives of its importance to their lives. It appears that many writers were probably initially attracted to the Missions to Seamen by its appearance – either its patina of age or aesthetic qualities. However, it was their heightened awareness of the ‘threat’ to Wellington’s historic buildings and dissatisfaction with the development that had already taken place which motivated them to act. This may well have been fed by a general opposition to change; a sense that ‘their’ familiar city was becoming foreign around them. As a group, public advocates were determined that the building could and should be preserved and reused.

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<sup>113</sup> Ronald Burt, letter to Stan Rodger, 23 May 1986; Stephen Rainbow, letter to the editor, *Dominion Post*, 28 May 1986.

<sup>114</sup> Russell O Armitage, letter to Geoffrey Palmer, 6 June 1986.

### Letters from private organisations

In addition to individual letters of protest, at least twelve organisations wrote to the SSC to express their dissatisfaction with the government's actions and support for the campaign to save the building (see Appendix). Not all these parties were disinterested: several organisations, such as the Apostolic Church, Circa Theatre and Cromwell Corporation expressed a desire to use the building. This notwithstanding it does appear that organisations were mindful of the heritage value of the building and wished to preserve it for various architectural, historical and social reasons.

Founded in 1946, the Wellington Architectural Centre is a volunteer organisation which actively promotes and discusses architecture in Wellington.<sup>115</sup> In 1986 the Centre played a leading role lobbying for the preservation of the Missions to Seamen building. Throughout the campaign they worked in close collaboration with the NZHPT. This is well-demonstrated by their collaborative contribution to write and fund the Submission in June 1986 and the substantial advertisement in the *Evening Post* which advocated for the preservation of the building.<sup>116</sup> Also significant was the fact that the Centre's membership largely consisted of architectural professionals and academics. This gave the organisation some authority as 'experts,' as did their recognition as such by the WCC and the NZHPT, separating them from the 'everyday' of unofficial heritage.

The Architectural Centre communicated with the SSC and NZHPT through letters, from at least as early as May 1986, and their contribution to the Submission was the largest. In their introduction, the Centre discussed the reasons for which the building was considered to be valuable. This was followed by a substantial section dedicated to rebutting the arguments that had been put forward for demolition. This was largely based upon the practicalities and costs of maintaining an historic building on the site. Finally, a detailed appendix was included, containing a wealth of evidence for the preceding arguments from independent sources, including examples of public comment, engineers' reports and a proposal for the future use of the preserved building.<sup>117</sup> Although the Centre's arguments themselves were relatively brief,

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<sup>115</sup> Architectural Centre, "About Us," accessed 8 January 2018, [architecture.org.nz](http://architecture.org.nz).

<sup>116</sup> *Evening Post*, "Another Elderly Lady to be Knocked Down on Busy City Corner," 31 May 1986.

<sup>117</sup> Wellington Architectural Centre, "Submission in Support of Retention of the Missions to Seamen Building: Stout Street, Wellington," June 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

this substantial body of evidence and great attention to public opinion showed their quality to be of the highest standard.

Succinctly summarised, the “significant architectural and historic status,” or heritage values, assigned to the building by the Centre was as follows:

- Arguments were based on “expert specialised knowledge in this area,” and reinforced by the government-mandated NZHPT assessment.
- The building itself represented the Christian mission to sailors.
- It was rich in valued memories of social history and change expressed by a large number of ordinary citizens.

The idea that the present social significance of the building, “the memories it contains and its long involvement in the life of this city” was even more significant than its architectural and historic merits was expressed by the centre even in its earliest letters.<sup>118</sup> Given the widespread public demonstrations of support, it is perhaps unsurprising that this aspect was afforded such precedence.

Other organisations gave only brief accounts of the value they attached to the building. They expressed their support in similar ways to the individual letters. Unsurprisingly the personal and emotional connections expressed by some people were not repeated by institutions. Despite this it can be assumed that members of organisations such as the Seamen’s Union, Wellington Waterside Workers’ Union and Merchant Service Guild would have such associations. The single most common explanation given was that the building was ‘part of our history’. Second only to this explanation was the recognition that Wellington’s heritage was under threat and that a diverse cityscape was important to the wellbeing of a place. Here again the importance of historic buildings is substantially increased by the perceived threat to the heritage as a whole.

### **‘Official’ heritage**

In the context of the protest to save the Missions to Seamen building, the boundary between what Rodney Harrison refers to as ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ heritage is difficult to define. At the time, the NZHPT was New Zealand’s ‘official’ heritage institution, as its classification and support of heritage buildings were undertaken in accordance with the Historic Places Act 1980. However, the NZHPT worked closely with non-governmental institutions, especially the

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<sup>118</sup> Stuart Niven, letter to Stan Rodger, 18 May 1986.

Architectural Centre, and contributed to the public protests. Although the letters sent from private addresses were ‘unofficial,’ some of these were written privately by individuals working for the NZHPT. Other letters were sent by private organisations with an active interest in heritage, but with no official authority to define it, such as The New Zealand Founders’ Society. Although the NZHPT was a government-mandated body, within the government there was both support for and opposition to the demolition. The WCC supported the retention of the building from a town-planning perspective and disputed jurisdiction over the area. Within the central government, the MOWD supported the preservation of the Missions building from the outset. This makes identifying a possible AHD difficult, and speaks of the interconnectedness of people and ideas in the formation of heritage. The comparison of ‘official’ communications with the letters of other heritage proponents reveal both similarities and differences in opinion, as well as cross-overs in which the opinion of either group has been shaped by the other.

The WCC, and especially the mayor, Ian Lawrence, was publicly vocal in its support for the retention of the building and opposition to the central government’s attempts to override its authority in Wellington city town planning. It initially refused planning permission for the new office block, a potentially illegal action. This is especially notable given the widespread destruction of heritage which occurred during the previous mayoralty of Michael Fowler (1974-83). Although Fowler had personally chosen Lawrence to succeed him, their attitudes to heritage clearly differed, perhaps partially as a response to attitudes of the general public. The argument for preservation given by the WCC was largely phrased with respect to the practicalities of town-planning. Also important were questions of authority over the government centre. Although the central government could legally demolish the building, the WCC was not happy with the belligerence with which its advice was treated.

The perspective of the WCC offers an interesting contrast to the arguments of both public advocates and the NZHPT. In the Submission in June 1986, Ian Lawrence did recognise that the building had “historic and architectural merit and [was] worthy of preservation”.<sup>119</sup> However, the majority of the Council’s arguments hinged not on the heritage value of the building itself but on questions of responsibility for oversight and the relationship between central and local government. Lawrence believed that the Crown had “an obligation to save whatever buildings of this nature that it can” as an example to other property owners, to

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<sup>119</sup> Wellington City Council, “Submission in Support of Retention of the Missions to Seamen Building: Stout Street, Wellington,” June 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

reinforce the role of the NZHPT and to support WCC regulations. Unlike the other official heritage bodies, the Council also focused upon “the vital issue of public value”.<sup>120</sup> Their five-page Submission was divided into sections dealing with town planning issues: plot ratio control and the incentive system for the preservation and strengthening of buildings. In the event it was the practical compromise suggested by the incentive system that led to the building’s preservation.

The mayor maintained regular correspondence with Stan Rodger from May 1986. The reason to preserve the building he most frequently stated was that central government ought to lead by example in the preservation of historic buildings.<sup>121</sup> In late June, after the Submission, this correspondence increased as negotiations were underway. The SSC insisted that they would preserve the building only in return for an increased maximum height and plot ratio on the proposed new office building, to which the Council eventually agreed. The Council’s recognition that the building itself was ‘heritage’ was based upon the assessment of the NZHPT, the Architectural Centre and “the Wellington Community”.<sup>122</sup> Although it is clear from the Submission that greater use was made of the detailed definitions provided by the two official institutions, this was largely due to the relative ease of access to detailed, written reports. Widespread public support for the preservation and re-use of the building was clearly important to the Council.

Uniquely amongst the relevant central government departments, the MOWD advocated for the retention of the Missions to Seamen building from the outset. Responsible for the plans and initial cost estimates for the proposed new building, the Ministry considered that the slight increase in projected income gained by the demolition of the building was minimal enough to be balanced by the added benefits of maintaining the building.<sup>123</sup> MOWD representations on behalf of the building in 1985 caused further debate in the SSC. The MOWD had a long relationship with the NZHPT, working as the design and construction arm for the organisation, and the Commissioner of Works had a permanent seat on the NZHPT board. As such they perhaps understood the NZHPT’s motives better than departments less-familiar with their arguments. In a response to the GOAB’s 20 June report the Commissioner of Works argued

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<sup>120</sup> Wellington City Council, “Submission”.

<sup>121</sup> Assorted correspondence in *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 Box 200.

<sup>122</sup> Wellington City Council, “Submission”.

<sup>123</sup> A.M Robertson, “Mission to Seamen Site,” 19 March 1986, *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 25001 Box 102.



that their arguments were flawed and failed to take into account all the relevant factors. Instead he recommended that the building be saved and strengthened.<sup>124</sup> When news of this was reported in the *Dominion* and *Evening Post* in early June it prompted further indignation at Rodger's apparent inflexibility: it appeared the SSC was to demolish the building despite overwhelming advice to the contrary.<sup>125</sup> In fact, the media were so well informed that the MOWD arranged an "investigation on the possible leak of information".<sup>126</sup> It is notable that even arguments in favour of retaining the building used economic justifications, which were clearly uppermost in the minds of officials under pressure from the fourth Labour government's sweeping reforms.

Unsurprisingly, the NZHPT played a leading role in the protest to preserve the Missions to Seamen Building. They first protested the demolition to the SSC in October 1985, long before most other organisations or individuals were involved, and remained at the forefront of public and private debate and negotiation even after a compromise was reached.<sup>127</sup> From analysis of the NZHPT's publications their official perspective of the Missions to Seamen and the ways in which its value was defined can be gleaned. As well as regular written communication with the SSC, the NZHPT also contributed to the Submission in June 1986, collaborated with the media, and conducted face-to-face meetings with Stan Rodger.

In the communications of the NZHPT a clear development of opinion and knowledge throughout the time of the protest is evident, demonstrating the further research and thought undertaken to assist in the defence of a threatened asset. The earliest communications with the SSC were sent by the Wellington Regional Committee, as dictated by their important local advocacy role. Initially, their arguments clearly drew directly from the brief report made on the building's significance when it was first classified in April 1984.<sup>128</sup> This briefly covered its connection with the Williams family, its social importance to sailors and its architectural style (anachronistically labelled "Gothic"). Additionally, the building's location within the

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<sup>124</sup> A.M Robertson, "Missions to Seamen Building," 24 June 1986, *Archives New Zealand* ABKK W4449 Box 17.

<sup>125</sup> Carole van Grondelle, "Demolition Starts Without Permit," *Dominion*, 5 June 1986; *Evening Post*, "MWD: Keep Mission," 10 June 1986.

<sup>126</sup> M.J Fenton, "Mission to Seamen," 9 June 1986, *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 Box 200.

<sup>127</sup> Trust letters in October 1986 show they were still negotiating details of the building's future preservation with the government. See for example J.R.S. Daniels, letter to D.K. Hunn, 13 October 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>128</sup> Chris Cochran, "N.Z. Historic Places Trust Buildings Field Record Form," *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

Government Centre Conservation Area (GCCA) swiftly became a key point in the argument to retain it. A detailed report of the GCCA was also prepared in 1984, so it is understandable that it became a source of information and status.<sup>129</sup> As focus upon the building intensified it is clear that further research was undertaken, as the information given to support these arguments gained further detail. Despite this, the points themselves remained relatively consistent throughout: social value to sailors and especially in association with the Williams family, architectural merit and location in the GCCA.

By the end of 1985 the NZHPT's Central Office had taken a more active role. The director and deputy director met with Stan Rodger on 7 November 1985 to discuss the building's future face-to-face. The reasons they presented to the minister were again similar. However, the practicality of preserving the building, its uniqueness and the widespread public support for its retention were also raised. One NZHPT member also claimed that "buildings in a city should not all be of the same vintage".<sup>130</sup> This idea of a diverse city-scape was used further and by other organisations and people later in the campaign as a key argument for the retention of heritage buildings in general.

The most complete statement of heritage value produced by the NZHPT was that included in the Submission. Seven typed pages contained an introduction and three sections on the historical, architectural and townscape value of the building. Additionally, an appendix contained details of the GCCA and the criteria by which the NZHPT selected buildings for registration.<sup>131</sup> Summarised as briefly as possible, the reasons given to retain the building were:

#### History:

- The building was funded by Mary Anne Williams' donation, at the time the largest single donation in the country, and intended as everlasting memorial to her husband, Captain Williams, and to the sailors who utilised it.

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<sup>129</sup> James McKenzie, "Government Centre Conservation Area, Wellington," (1984): *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 785 Box 75.

<sup>130</sup> N.P Saunders-Francis, "Mission to Seamen Building," 12 November 1985, *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 785 Box 199.

<sup>131</sup> New Zealand Historic Places Trust, "Submission in Support of Retention of the Missions to Seamen Building: Stout Street, Wellington," June 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

- It was the first, and now the only, Mission to Seamen in NZ, and was thus intimately linked to the social history of Wellington and its port. It was also the first combined social centre and chapel in Australasia.

#### Architecture:

- A unique, characteristically Edwardian building, the Mission was designed specifically for the site and purpose. Its kauri ceiling was unique in Wellington.
- It was designed by the architectural firm of Crichton and McKay, who were prominent in Wellington, but few of their buildings had survived.

#### Townscape:

- An important part of the GCCA and a highly-visible corner landmark, the Mission complemented other historic buildings in the area.
- Its architectural and aesthetic qualities made it a unique feature within the largest group of historic buildings in New Zealand.

Although there was a greater amount of detail included in this explanation, the basic points are much the same as in the NZHPT's original summary in 1984. It is notable that the immense value of the building, as demonstrated by the widespread protest, was barely mentioned. Although this was due in part to the fact that this section of the Submission was handled in depth by the Architectural Centre, it is notable that the NZHPT had few tools in place to deal with popular sentiment. Their 'expert' assessment criteria clearly identified the historical and architectural value of the building, yet there were no tools in place to understand its contemporary social value.

The interaction between official and unofficial organisations and individuals is important to understand the way in which heritage value is constructed and articulated. The NZHPT was clearly aware of the popular interest in the building, and actively contributed towards promoting public pressure in lieu of official power. In the November meeting with Stan Rodger, NZHPT members informed the minister that "if the Government says 'no' then the Trust will have to go 'public' and oppose the Government".<sup>132</sup> The vital importance of this public support to the survival of the building was not lost on NZHPT staff, as much as they

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<sup>132</sup> N.P Saunders-Francis, "Mission to Seamen Building," 12 November 1985, *Archives New Zealand AALR* W5920 785 Box 199.

might desire “easier ways of saving our historic buildings”.<sup>133</sup> This perspective was shared by the Architectural Centre, which clearly distinguished between ‘expert opinion’ and the building’s “more important” social and mnemonic importance, based upon popular opinion.



Figure 6: The Missions to Seamen building in September 1986, covered in graffiti by protestors and contractors.

Also significant is the fact that the definitions of heritage used by the general public clearly drew upon expert descriptions to defend its value. The letter-writers who described the importance of the building’s ‘C’ classification or its inclusion in the GCCA were clearly drawing from official articulations to support their conviction that the building merited preservation. It is also likely that where they express specific information, such as the architectural firm who designed the building and the relationship to the Williams family, this was gleaned from similar official sources. A clear example of this is the influence of the advertisement published in the *Evening Post* on 31 May 1986, written collaboratively by the NZHPT and Architectural Centre. Six letter-writers specifically mentioned the advertisement. Many of the points expressed in individuals’ letters were also clearly derived from it. The idea that the building could be reused as a theatre or cultural centre especially, clearly expressed in this ad, was echoed in the letters of those who had read it. Whereas Jeremy Salmond was concerned that the language of heritage experts might result in the exclusion of all others, it appears here that the opposite took place and interested citizens adopted the technical definitions of the NZHPT for their own use.<sup>134</sup> Although most public advocacy for the Missions to Seamen was probably motivated on a personal level by a sense of connection with the

<sup>133</sup> Cochran, “A Win in Wellington,” 6.

<sup>134</sup> Salmond, “From Dead Ducks to Historic Buildings,” 52.

building or its history, many people drew upon the technical linguistic discourse of the NZHPT in order to give voice and authority to their arguments.

In this context the boundary between official and unofficial heritage is very difficult to define, as there is much continuity and interaction between the two. At the most basic level, ideas of historical and architectural merit were expressed by all the parties who argued for the preservation of the Missions to Seamen building. The contribution to the Submission in June put forth by the NZHPT was the most detailed description of these values produced at the time. It was carefully researched and well-written. However, the NZHPT failed to fully grasp the deeply personal, experiential and mnemonic ways in which the general public connected with their heritage. Although they were aware of the wide public support, this wasn't used to define heritage value of itself. The Wellington Architectural Centre was more aware of the social value attached to the building by the citizens of Wellington through memory and involvement in the 'life' of the city and balanced this with its 'expert' assessment of history and architecture. They still did not fully grasp the wide variety of ways in which ordinary people related to the building, such as the experiential aspect of entering or viewing the building, or the widespread fear of loss and antagonism towards 'ugly' new developments. The WCC relied upon these two institutions for its heritage definitions, but concerned itself more with the practicalities of society in the present than the heritage meaning of the building itself. Although in this context these organisations acted as experts, the constant communication between parties and public, especially through the media, caused many ways of defining heritage to be shared. Public protests emphasised formal definitions as much as official sources referred to popular support to bolster their arguments.

### **How effective were these arguments upon the building's owners?**

It appears that the Crown officials tasked with assessing the Missions to Seamen building were unaware of the implications of its heritage value when they first proposed its demolition in 1984. Internal memoranda show that the decision was largely based on practical factors: decay, risk of collapse, dilapidated appearance and unsatisfactory tenants.<sup>135</sup> Coupled with later economic justifications based on the estimated profit generated by a potential new office building, these considerations remained the primary arguments put forward by the SSC throughout the campaign. The internal processes behind the proposed demolition of the

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<sup>135</sup> Government Office Accommodation Board, "Use of Mission to Seamen Building," 17 April 1984, *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 785 Box 199.

building were shared by a number of cooperating bureaucratic departments. The SSC owned the building and were responsible for overall decisions and management. They were represented in correspondence and public comment at times by the Minister for State Services, Stan Rodger, by the Acting Minister, Bob Tizard, whilst Rodger was overseas, and by various secretaries. Assessment of the building and proposals for future development were made by the GOAB and approved by the Cabinet Committee on Management and State Employment, which was itself chaired by Rodger and oversaw the Wellington Government Centre Strategic Plan.

After the departure of NZHPT staff from the 7 November meeting, Stan Rodger remarked that despite the NZHPT's protestations, the Cabinet Committee was "not likely to retain the building, on economic grounds".<sup>136</sup> This indeed proved to be the case. In his May letter to the NZHPT, Rodger explained that the case for retention of the building had been put towards the Committee by the SSC and MOW, in conjunction with a recommendation to demolish the building from the GOAB. "The situation was examined in depth," and "it was considered that the justification for retention was not sufficiently strong to outweigh the arguments in favour of maximum utilisation of the site".<sup>137</sup> The Board argued that although the Mission to Seamen building "provid[ed] social and architectural continuity, [and was] part of early port activity" it wasn't "a significant historical building" in its own right. They also noted that there were other "vestige[s] of a bygone era in the area".<sup>138</sup> This argument shows a clear misunderstanding of the ways in which the NZHPT's classified heritage and the language they used, another example of the specialist discourse of heritage professionals. To the building's proponents, its continuity was what gave it historical significance, and the existence of other historical buildings nearby in no way reduced the value of this one. The SSC either failed to grasp these arguments, or wilfully ignored them. It is possible that a clear description of the building's social value and the benefits of retaining it to the community and culture may have been more effective in swaying their opinion.

The SSC had clearly not expected such widespread public outcry at the proposed demolition. Internal memos show that they were greatly taken-aback by the level of insider knowledge the

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<sup>136</sup> N.P Saunders-Francis, "Mission to Seamen Building," 12 November 1985, *Archives New Zealand AALR* W5920 785 Box 199.

<sup>137</sup> Stan Rodger, letter to J.R.S Daniels, 15 May 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

media, especially newspapers, had managed to obtain.<sup>139</sup> Opposition from the WCC appears to have had the greatest impact upon debate within the SSC. By refusing to accept the planned plot ratio for the new building, they actually encouraged the SSC to demolish in order to increase the new floor space.<sup>140</sup> GOAB assessors had not expected to face arguments in favour of heritage and when balancing them with economic costs always gave precedence to the latter. Heritage advocates in turn largely disregarded economic justifications, giving precedence to the social and cultural importance of maintaining historic buildings.

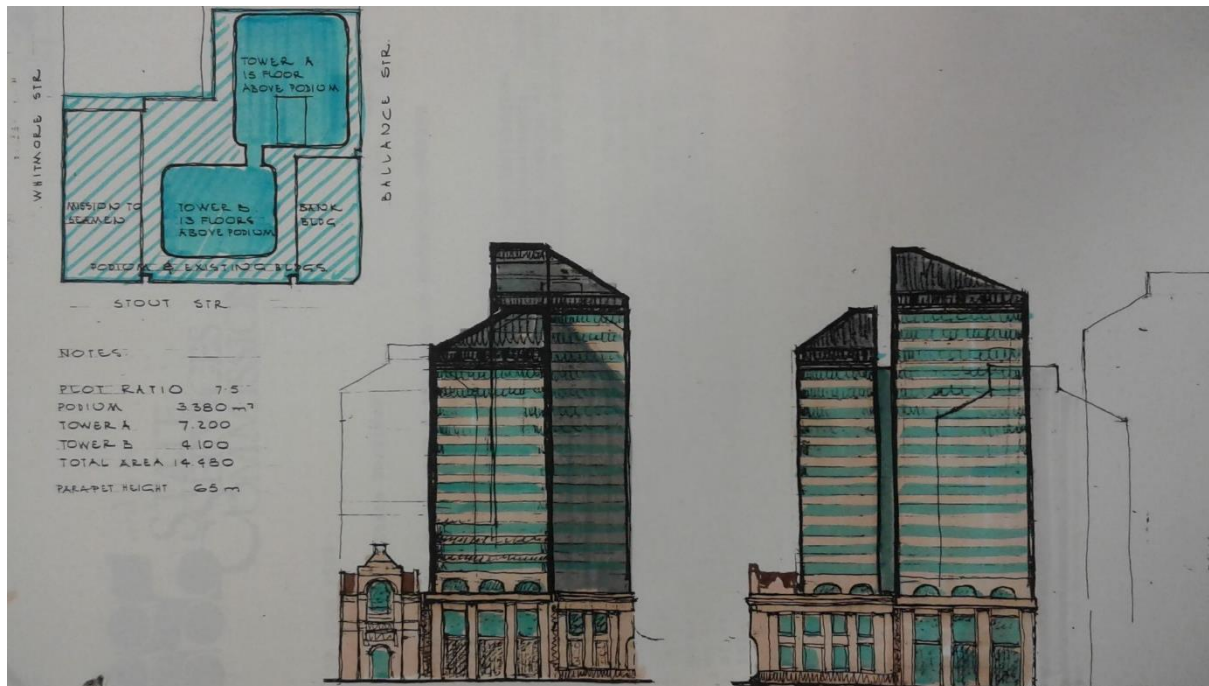


Figure 7: A MOWD proposal for a new office block, preserving the Missions to Seamen Building.

The public response was such that on 5 June the issue was raised in Parliament. Simon Upton, the National MP for Raglan put an urgent question to Bob Tizard, effectively asking what was to be the building's future. Tizard was adamant that all possible options had been considered, and that the original decision to demolish need not be over-turned. He stated that the building was structurally unsound, would cost a million dollars to strengthen, and even if it were strengthened it would be "of little use commercially".<sup>141</sup> The same day the general manager of Burrell Demolition Contractors, hired to demolish the building, stated that he intended to leave

<sup>139</sup> Minutes, "Mission to Seamen Building: Demolition," 6 June 1986, *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 Box 200.

<sup>140</sup> D.K Hunn, "Mission to Seamen Site: Analysis of Retention Options," 20 June 1986, *Archives New Zealand* AALR W5920 Box 200.

<sup>141</sup> "Urgent Question," 5 June 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

demolition for several days until “the protesters’ backs were turned” and then “bowl it”.<sup>142</sup> The GOAB and SSC continually failed to understand the cultural and social arguments put forward for the preservation of heritage and remained unconvinced of its value. It appears that they were truly satisfied that they had considered every option.

In an interview on Radio New Zealand on 21 May, Stan Rodger, arguing that the Mission had no commercial value, implied that if a private company were to put in a bid, the building could be sold and reused. By the end of that week, the Cromwell Corporation, a private developer, had submitted a proposal to the SSC, offering to buy the building and fund its restoration as a community centre.<sup>143</sup> Cromwell held discussions with both the NZHPT and WCC, as well as consulting architects and engineers. They argued that the building could be feasibly and economically saved, and moreover that it ought to be saved for historic and architectural reasons. Using language clearly influenced by the NZHPT, Cromwell cited the importance of visual relief from excessive uniformity in the city, and the Mission’s importance to the GCCA as key conveyers of heritage value.

Although it appeared to commentators that this proposal should effectively end discussion, and the media speculated why it was not taken, the GOAB did in fact consider the option very carefully. In their report to Stan Rodger on 20 June they registered concern that accepting Cromwell’s proposal would not only weaken their bargaining position with the WCC, where they could offer restoration of the Missions to Seamen building to obtain a greater plot ratio for the new office, but would also necessitate offering the building to the highest bidder.<sup>144</sup> Instead, they outlined two basic options. Firstly, that the Mission be demolished, allowing an office building to utilise the whole site. Alternatively, that the Mission building be restored as office space, and its retention used as a bargaining chip to obtain a greater plot ratio and height limit as well as subsidised rent. The loss in value caused by retaining the building was estimated at \$3.7 million. Despite the Submission, letters, and protest, economic value and maximum use of site remained the Commission’s primary concern. The protests of the NZHPT and other heritage proponents were ineffective. Although the GOAB and SSC recognised that heritage was important to people, economic value remained their central concern.

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<sup>142</sup> Carole van Grondelle, “Tizard Says Mission Will Go,” *Dominion*, 6 June 1986.

<sup>143</sup> F.M Shanahan, letter to Stan Rodger, 29 May 1986, *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

<sup>144</sup> D.K Hunn, “Mission to Seamen Site: Analysis of Retention Options,” 20 June 1986, *Archives New Zealand* ABKK W4449 Box 17.



## **Conclusion: Heritage Discourses Past and Present**

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Despite the interest shown in the development of the Missions to Seamen building by groups such as the Cromwell Corporation and Circa Theatre, the building was retained by the SSC and used as a warehouse. In 1994 it was sold to a private developer, seismically strengthened, and converted into ten apartments. During the conversion most of the interior spaces were destroyed, and the roof was replaced with pink pressed-metal tiles which do not match the original design. Although HNZ and the WCC continue to emphasise the historical and architectural values of the building, the 1986 protest is perhaps now its greatest claim to heritage significance. There is no commemoration or interpretation onsite. The story and the building itself are largely unknown and unremarkable to Wellingtonians. Today HNZ, too, looks very different to the NZHPT of 1986. Now an autonomous Crown Entity, it is supported by the Government and funded through the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Under the Resource Management Act 1991, the WCC has assumed legal responsibility for administering protective mechanisms for built heritage through the District Plan. To current practitioners, the idea of these organisations fomenting and cooperating with widespread public activism is inconceivable.<sup>145</sup> The importance of the Missions to Seamen building as a symbol of public defiance of government destruction and support for heritage has largely been forgotten. Without emotional engagement, the site's heritage value has become largely superficial.

In 1986, the number of protestors, petitioners, letter-writers, graffitists, and the limited support for demolition all demonstrated the widespread support for the preservation of the Missions to Seamen building. Although the media maintained a degree of journalistic impartiality, the continual coverage of the story, investigation of new arguments in favour of preservation and protesting columnists probably reflected wider popular sentiment. Opposition to the demolition emerged more-or-less simultaneously and independently amongst individuals and institutions alike after the intention to demolish was publicly announced in May 1986. Protest was well-organised, as evidenced by the careful panic lists and picket regulations preserved in the NZHPT archive.<sup>146</sup> It was also closely cooperative; the NZHPT worked alongside the WCC, the Architectural Centre and protestors, and even private businesses such as the Cromwell Corporation collaborated with the NZHPT and Council. Although public protest emerged at a

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<sup>145</sup> Michael Kelly 2018, *pers comm*.

<sup>146</sup> Unknown, "Panic Lists," and "Picket at Missions to Seamen," *Heritage New Zealand Archives* 12009 064.

grass-roots level it undoubtedly benefitted from NZHPT support. Conversely, the NZHPT clearly benefitted from the additional support of widespread public involvement.



Figure 8: The Missions to Seamen building in September 2017.

Almost every protest in whatever form referred to the historical or architectural value of the Missions to Seamen building. Of these, the NZHPT undoubtedly offered the most detailed and succinct descriptions of the building's social-historical and architectural worth. That they relied upon specific language to describe this value is demonstrated by the comparative lack of explanation found in most letters from unaffiliated parties. It can be speculated that many protestors were not aware, initially at least, of the building's significance within an independent architectural or social-historical canon, but rather were attracted to it by its self-evident patina of age. It is clear, however, that many were able to utilise the language of the NZHPT to lend authority or clarity to their own arguments. The discourse of the NZHPT did not preclude its adoption by others. Yet nor was it always understood. When the Cabinet Committee met to decide the fate of the Missions to Seamen building, Stan Rodger used the arguments given to him by NZHPT staff when they met in November 1985 as examples of its *lack* of value. Clearly there was enough of a discursive difference here to prevent some understanding.

In addition to lip-service to the historic and architectural qualities of the Missions to Seamen building, individual protestors expressed the importance of their personal connection to the building in a variety of different ways. Protestors marshalled their own memories or experience of having worked in the building, associated family stories, the immersive sense of time and

place or ‘living’ history that came from spending time inside the building and even simply the sense of continuity and local identity derived from seeing a familiar landmark. It is evident that the dialogue between heritage viewers, materiality and emotion as described by Rodney Harrison, Neil Silberman, Nadia Bartolini and Russell Staiff did contribute to some people’s sense of heritage.<sup>147</sup> Viewing a building through the lens of historical memory gives a different perspective to that derived from academic history. People may value buildings which are not considered very historically significant. The NZHPT has never attempted to undertake systematic identification or assessment of these personal or emotional responses. In this case study, the social-historical methods they used did accurately assume the existence of these personal connections. However, it should be possible for official heritage institutions to capture this dimension without reliance upon proof from such unusual occurrences.

To some extent the ways in which the NZHPT identified and categorised buildings to be listed was based upon a self-referential and exclusive system. Architectural and historical value was assessed by technical experts and the present social meaning of a building to the wider public was not specifically identified in its own right as a reason to value a building. Although the NZHPT could not effectively account for personal connections to the building, this was balanced by its reliance on other people and organisations for support and activism, without which it was much less effective. In a New Zealand context, the collaboration between official and unofficial heritage processes appears to have long been closer than in the UK, where comparative studies such as those by David Atkinson and Carol Ludwig have identified the impact of the AHD.<sup>148</sup> Morgan et al. have argued that authority over heritage buildings ought to remain “in the hands of those who value them most through the process of daily life and interaction”.<sup>149</sup> It is vital that there is some sort of public input to the identification and preservation of heritage.

It is certainly also true that the historical context had a significant impact upon the ways in which a sense of heritage manifested itself amongst protestors. The sustained demolition and redevelopment of the Wellington central business district over the proceeding decade altered popular attitudes to historic buildings in a profound way. As recognised by Cornelius Holtorf,

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<sup>147</sup> Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, 229; Silberman, “Heritage Places,” 30; Bartolini, “Critical Urban Heritage,” 531; Staiff, *Re-Imagining Heritage Interpretation*, 153-4.

<sup>148</sup> Atkinson, “The Heritage of Mundane Places”; Ludwig, “From Bricks and Mortar to Social Heritage”.

<sup>149</sup> Morgan et al., “From National to Local,” 124.

heritage loss greatly increases the value of what remains.<sup>150</sup> Holtorf also argued that loss of material need not result in the loss of heritage meaning. Public protestors disagreed with this sentiment: their primary aim was the preservation of the building at all costs, as its value was associated with its appearance, both internally and externally. However, the surviving building appears to have become neglected, no longer imbued with the personal meanings it once contained. If it were threatened again, would such attitudes resurface?

The conviction that the Missions to Seamen building, if preserved, could be put to practical use was shared by individuals and organisations alike. That many people were convinced of the importance of preservation by its practicality is unlikely. Rather, the fact was used as a further means of convincing the SSC of the benefits of preserving the building, a direct challenge to their own economic arguments. Frustration with bureaucratic belligerence and the failure of the SSC and GOAB to grasp any other than financial motives was widespread amongst protestors. Both the WCC and NZHPT were concerned that their authority was being overruled and their credibility damaged. Political opposition manifested itself in various ways. Even the MOWD argued that a compromise was possible, with minimal economic impact. All these factors contributed to the prevalence of support for the building. In the months after the protest, the NZHPT predicted that the “wide support for strengthening the Historic Places Act” and the desire “that the Government must be bound by the Town and Country Planning Act” would have important implications for the future. Indeed, the frustrations of the NZHPT, the conflict between WCC and central government over jurisdiction and public activism all contributed to the Resource Management Act in 1991 and Historic Places Act 1993.

Throughout the protest the determination of the SSC and GOAB to demolish the building remained largely unchanged. The substantial delays to demolition in June show that the widespread protests had clearly affected the decision-making process. Despite this, GOAB reports in July show a continued insistence on council sanctions to maximise profit as a condition of preservation. The difficulty of ‘proving’ the value of heritage is at its clearest here. Although arguments about the social and amenity value of the building were expressed during the campaign, they were difficult to verify and usually overshadowed by architectural and historical interest or obscured by focus on the aesthetic benefits of a diverse city-scape. Instead

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<sup>150</sup> Holtorf, “Averting Loss Aversion in Cultural Heritage,” 417.

of architectural and historical perspectives, perhaps the more elusive social benefits of preserving the building would have formed a more persuasive argument.

Discourse analysis seeks to discover the ways that past people constructed and articulated the significance of heritage through examination of the language they used. It has been suggested that the specific technical language used by government heritage institutions, the AHD, has had a significant impact upon the way that heritage professionals think, to the exclusion of ordinary people from the heritage process. In the context covered by this dissertation, that appears not to have been the case. The concept of the Authorised Heritage Discourse has made a significant contribution to critical heritage studies, especially to the recognition of the great diversity the concept of 'heritage' entails, and the risk of exclusion and exploitation that results from the dominance of a single perspective. However, focus upon an authorised, 'official' discourse limits analysis of the multitude of 'unofficial' discourses and the way they emerge. Emphasis on identification of the AHD does not fully account for the active, processual, collaborative nature of heritage for which this case study provides strong evidence. In order to explore the richness of these diverse meanings, primary focus must be given to identifying, understanding and promoting these alternative discourses.

Heritage is important. It continues to shape communities, identities and memories. To effectively contribute towards preserving this value for the future, it is important that we continue to strive to better understand the complex dynamic processes which result in the formation of heritage meaning.

## **Appendix: Letters**

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### **Heritage New Zealand Archives**

#### Individuals

- Armitage, Russell O. Letter to Wellington Regional Committee NZHPT. Undated.
- Evans, Judy. Letter to Fran Wilde. 10 June 1986.
- Evans, Judy. Letter to Wellington Regional Committee NZHPT. 13 June 1986.
- Green, Gordon R. Letter to Wellington Regional Committee, NZHPT. 31 May 1986.
- Jansen, Guy E. Letter to Stan Rodger. 5 June 1986.
- MacDonald, G.R. Letter to Wellington Regional Committee, NZHPT. 1 June 1986.
- McDonnell, Hilda. Letter to Wellington Regional Committee NZHPT. 16 June 1986.
- Murray, John. Telegram to Robert Tizard. 10 June 1986.
- Wayer, Albert. Letter to Stan Rodger. 31 May 1986.

#### Organisations

- Circa Theatre. Letter to Wellington Architectural Centre. 13 June 1986.
- Cooks and Stewards Union. Telegram to Bob Tizard. 16 June 1986.
- Cromwell Corporation. Letter to Stan Rodger. 29 May 1986.
- Merchant Service Guild. Telegram to Robert Tizard. 12 June 1986.
- Wellington Waterside Workers Union. Telegram to Robert Tizard. 12 June 1986.

### **Archives New Zealand**

#### Individuals

- Armitage, Russell O. Letter to Geoffrey Palmer. 6 June 1986.
- Athfield, Ian, and Roger Walker. Letter to David Lange. 20 May 1986.
- Bird, Judith W. Letter to Stan Rodger. 14 May 1986.
- Bowman, Ian. Letter to Minister for the State Services Commission. 24 April 1986.
- Brown, Rachel. Letter to Stan Rodger. 23 May 1986.

Burt, Ronald. Letter to Stan Rodger. 23 May 1986.

Cochran, Chris. Letter to Stan Rodger. Received 14 May 1986.

Cochran, Margaret. Letter to Stan Rodger. Received 14 May 1986.

Daish, John. Letter to David Lange. 17 June 1986.

Day, Oroya. Letter to Stan Rodger. 19 May 1986.

Donald, Rod. Telegram to Geoffrey Palmer. 9 June 1986.

Donn, M.R. Letter to Minister State Services. 9 June 1986.

Evans, Judy. Letter to Stan Rodger. 14 May 1986.

Fill, Barbara. Letter to Robert Tizard. 19 May 1986.

Hendry, Shirley. Letter to Stan Rodger. 16 May 1986.

Hogan, J.P and E. Bark. Letter to Stan Rodger. 16 May 1986.

Hutton, Melanie. Letter to Stan Rodger. 4 June 1986.

James, G. Letter to Stan Rodger. 14 May 1986.

Jeune, Margaret. Letter to Minister of State Services. 16 May 1986.

Leatham, Jennifer. Letter to Robert Tizard. 5 June 1986.

Leatham, Jennifer. Letter to Stan Rodger. 1 June 1986.

Long, Margaret. Letter to Ann Hercus. 10 June 1986.

Long, Margaret. Letter to Geoffrey Palmer. 10 June 1986.

Long, Margaret. Letter to Margaret Shields. 10 June 1986.

Long, Margaret. Letter to Robert Tizard. 10 June 1986.

May, Gladys M. Letter to Director NZHPT. 15 June 1986.

Murphy, Rodney M. Letter to Stan Rodger. 4 June 1986.

Najar, Pamela M. Letter to Stan Rodger. 16 May 1986.

Peolt [illegible], J.A. Letter to SSC. 14 June 1986.

Warne, K. Letter to Stan Rodger. 16 May 1986.

Williams, W.R. Letter to Stan Rodger. 14 May 1986.

Williamson, Sarah. Letter to Minister of State Services. 14 May 1986.

Wotherspoon, Paul. Letter to Stan Rodger. 31 May 1986.

### Organisations

Apostolic Church. Letter to Chairman GOAB. 19 August 1985.

Circa Theatre. Letter to Stan Rodger. 16 June 1986.

Cromwell Corporation. Letter to Robert Tizard. 9 June 1986.

Founders Society Incorporated. Letter to Stan Rodger. 19 May 1986.

Professional Conservators' Group. Letter to Stan Rodger. 22 May 1986.

Seamen's Union. Telegram to Stan Rodger. 16 May 1986.

Wellington Architectural Centre. Letter to Stan Rodger. 18 May 1986.

Wellington Architectural Centre. Telegram to Geoffrey Palmer. 6 June 1986.

Wellington Civic Trust. Letter to Stan Rodger. 7 May 1986.

Wellington Community Arts Council. Letter to Stan Rodger. 28 May 1986.

Wellington Labour Local Body Committee. Letter to Stan Rodger. 26 June 1986.

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