

## Building Conservation



### Introduction

When most of us think about New Zealand's historic buildings we tend to picture the painted weatherboards, raised verandahs, ornate fretted bracketwork and bull-nosed corrugated metal roofs of our traditional villas. But there are a host of other vernacular styles that became popular here with Early Settlers from overseas. These styles were not only dependent upon familiar designs from their countries of origin, but also upon

the raw materials that were available in the immediate vicinity. Timber, stone, brick, clay and earth were all utilised in what can be viewed as a disconnected and random mix of architectural compositions that sometimes appear at odds with one another.

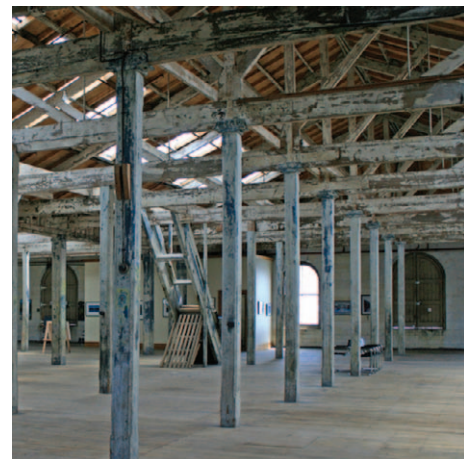
These are the traditional buildings of New Zealand.

### The management of change

Unfortunately most people tend to believe that a country's historic buildings are restricted to the big important ones; palaces, castles, government buildings or the homes of the great and good from the nation's past. This is not so. Many of the finest examples of a nation's built heritage lie tucked away from view in the back streets or down alleyways – the homes and workplaces of everyday folk.

So what does Building Conservation mean? Does it mean wrapping a building in cotton wool so that it remains in the same condition as 100 years ago? Or does it mean turning it into a museum? Well, to us it is neither of these. Conservation, in terms of buildings, is all about the 'management of change'.

All buildings are vulnerable to change. When they outlive their intended purpose they effectively become obsolete and that usually means a significant, and sometimes



badly conceived alteration, or at the very worst - demolition. Conservation is all about understanding what makes a building special and endeavouring to ensure that particular feature or element is retained in any change of use.

And what does make a building special? Well, it may be that it features in some

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## The management of change ... Continued

important historic act such as Treaty House at Waitangi. It could be that it was designed by an influential Architect or constructed by well-known Builder. It may simply be that it is a very complete representation of an architectural style from a given period.

Sometimes whole buildings can be reused without significant external alteration. With

the right conservation philosophy and a sympathetic eye, the change from industrial to residential can be achieved with great success. In the UK during the 1990s, Victorian wharf-side warehouses were elevated from decaying relics of a bygone age into smart desirable apartments for aspiring city-dwellers. Proof that conservation works.

## Tomorrows history

New Zealand does not have a particularly good record when it comes to recognising the importance of its built heritage. Great emphasis is placed upon its natural history but little regard has been afforded to its buildings. Up until the late 1970s, it was common practice to pull down unwanted buildings, regardless of their history. Fortunately there has been a gradual recognition that these structures, however modest, collectively tell the storey of a young and still developing country - the story of its indigenous people as well as those of the newly arrived settlers, and how they 'borrowed' from each other's heritage to create new and evolving styles.

That style is still evolving. History doesn't stand still and that is why we need to focus not only upon conserving those grand buildings from the 19th Century but also to those constructed during the early 20th Century. These are the buildings that will form tomorrow's history.

Fortunately there is now a relatively robust statutory framework in place that provides a degree of protection to historic buildings. Under the Resource Management Act 1991, Territorial Authorities (TAs) or Councils have a responsibility to provide for the protection of the historic environment, including buildings.

There are other statutory instruments that offer safeguards such as the Local Government Act 2002 and Building Act 2004. Additionally the New Zealand Historic Places trust plays an essential role in safeguarding selected places and structures by placing them upon a register and ensuring that any proposed changes are dealt with through a process of consultation.

If you own, live or work in an historic building then the chances are that you already have some understanding of what it represents, and also of your responsibility to ensure that its fabric is properly maintained. Once it is lost, it is gone for good.



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## Tomorrows history... Continued

None the less, by following a few very simple rules the average property owner can ensure that they don't cause irreversible damage to their aged property.

1. Be proactive about building maintenance. Clearing out spouting twice a year could save hundreds of dollars of expensive timber replacement.
2. Always endeavour to repair rather than replace where economically possible. There must always be a presumption to retain fabric.
3. If replacement materials are required, try to replicate those that exist in the property. If you have a large country property there may be piles of stone or roof tiles around the grounds that match those that were used to build the house.
4. Above all, respect the building and work with it rather than against it.



Owning, living or working in an old property with a long and varied history is a privilege. Part of the pleasure of any old building is to 'read' the changes and repairs that have occurred over the years, building a 'picture' of how the property and the needs of its various owners evolved. Endeavour to ensure that any changes you make are equally readable so that future owners can do the same.

## What would Maynard Marks do for us?

At Maynard Marks Ltd, our building conservation surveying team have unique skill and experience in working with historic buildings in a sympathetic yet pragmatic manner. Therefore, if you own a traditional or historic building and want to undertake an alteration or carry out repairs, or maybe you are considering purchasing such a property, Maynard Marks Ltd can provide you with all the specialist advice you need.

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