

ARCHITECT - or Painter, Politician, Forger, Farmer: Multiple careers a necessity in 1840s New Zealand

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ABSTRACT: Emigrants arriving in New Zealand in the 1840s who had some architectural training were rarely able to find full-time employment in that profession. Some sought to make a living in related fields where their drafting skills could be used (as artists or surveyors); others changed completely to become farmers or real estate agents. A few sought civil service positions or moved into politics. The most persistent bided their time in other employment but moved back to architecture when conditions became more favourable.

Here we describe a number of examples of these categories. Edward Ashworth arrived in Auckland in 1842. Unable to find architectural work, he taught drawing to the Governor's children and also produced several paintings of early Auckland. Henry St Hill arrived in Wellington as the New Zealand Company's Architect - but followed a career as magistrate and sheriff. W Robertson practised as an architect in Auckland from 1847 - but also advertised as a real estate agent. S Kempthorne arrived in 1842 as a church architect but did not adapt well to New Zealand conditions and fell out of favour with Bishop Selwyn. By 1864 he was Secretary of a Public Buildings Commission. Reader Gillson Wood, famous or infamous for New Zealand's first parliament building, the "Shedifice" in Auckland, became a well-known politician - but returned to practising as an architect several times during a long career. William Mason thought he was coming to New Zealand as Colonial Architect in 1840. Downgraded to Superintendent of Public Works, he resigned after two years. Mason then moved into auctioneering and farming for the next ten years before returning to architecture and, later, a highly successful career in Dunedin. T O'Meara of Wellington claimed to be an architect but was probably a builder. Either way his drafting ability was found to be wanting when he forged a series of government debentures and tried to pass them for payment. (This resulted in a ten-year jail sentence, with transportation to Tasmania).

We also explore some of the social reasons for the apparent lack of work for early skilled architects, including the slow-growing economy, immediate needs for basic shelter/food production and major differences in building material resources compared with settlers' countries of origin.

Introduction

The numbers of architects, trained or otherwise, arriving in New Zealand at the start of the decade from 1840 were very small, even in relation to the relatively limited numbers of European settlers. The chief settlements at that time were Auckland, New Plymouth, Wellington, Whanganui and Nelson. Dunedin and Christchurch were founded right at the end of the period. The majority of new arrivals were at first too busy worrying about the necessities of life to bother about the refinements of architecture.

The embryonic government began in Russell and moved to Auckland as the capital on 14 March 1841. It might have been expected to start erecting substantial public buildings, but was chronically short of money, and to begin with had no control over other centres settled by the New Zealand Company. In the earliest days the lack of population precluded a need to establish municipal authorities and, when numbers were sufficient, some people argued against them, fearing huge rates bills. The church, particularly the Anglican Church, was the one body that showed some inclination to

provide architecturally-designed buildings for its adherents; followed eventually, in halting fashion, by the government and some of the more wealthy settlers.

Two other factors are of importance when considering the uncertainties of an architectural career in the early days of European settlement: the youth of most of the emigrants, and the time needed to set up a successful export-based economy.

The first architects in Auckland have been

identified in Stacpoole's classic book on William Mason.¹ Mane followed this with a 1990 article on the first European architects in New Zealand.² We have built on and added to this information, considering also the social and economic trends influencing the success or otherwise of aspiring architects during the 1840s.

Youth of "Architects" and other emigrants

Of the 15 emigrants who we have identified who attempted architectural careers (this appears to be the total number for the 1840s) we have "age at arrival" data for 13, which gives an average age of 26. However, if we remove the three over 30, the average reduces to age 24. These figures are generally comparable with averages for early emigrants as a whole, as Table 1 shows.

Around half our 15 arrived as survey assistants, but, as was the fashion of the times, this frequently meant that they also had some architectural, as well as possibly engineering, training. Seven men were initially employed in a survey capacity; four in Wellington, two in Auckland and one in Nelson. Another

Age range	All males (%)	All females (%)	All immigrants (%)
0-14	28.7	37.4	32.3
15-24	28.2	21.0	25.3
25-34	27.4	24.7	26.3
35-44	12.2	13.4	12.7
45+	3.5	3.5	3.5
Average	22.1	20.9	21.6

Table 1: Age of Immigrants 1840-1952. Source: www.nzhistory.net.nz/files/documents/peopling2.pdf

seven arrived specifically with the intention of practising as architects. Of these, Walter Robertson of Auckland was the oldest at 44, but did not arrive until 1847. Henry St Hill of Wellington was 33 when he landed in 1840, the same year that William Mason (30), potentially the best qualified architect, arrived at Kororāreka from Australia. Sampson Kempthorne, also aged 33, came by ship to Auckland in 1842 and Timothy O'Meara (age unknown), who professed to being an architect, was in Wellington by 1843. Nor do we know the age of Edward Roberts when he came to Wellington about 1847 in a mixed official and private capacity as engineer and architect attached to the Royal Engineers. Edward Ashworth was another early arrival at Auckland in 1842 (see below). Frederick Thatcher was the odd man out; although a trained architect, he actually came to New Plymouth in 1843, aged 29, with the intention of farming - but his church interests soon led

to architectural work there, which continued when he moved to Auckland in 1845.

The youth and backgrounds of the large numbers of settlers who came to New Zealand either to farm, to trade as shopkeepers or merchants, or to become manufacturers was generally associated with a lack of investment capital except in very limited instances. In the period when land had to be cleared of forest, and exploration was still being carried out to determine the extent of mineral and other resources, there was little surplus money available for any but the most basic buildings - hence the difficulties potential architects had in finding work.

Youth and Adaptability

Of the seven men with some architectural training, who began their New Zealand careers doing survey work, only one, James Baber of Auckland, was considered to be an

¹ Stacpoole *William Mason*.

² Mane "The First New Zealand Architects" pp 37-41.

architect at the end of his life, and that was after several periods in alternative jobs such as Deputy Waste Lands Commissioner (1858) and Inspector of Buildings (1861).³ Reader Wood, who later in the 1860s would entrust Baber with his architectural practice while overseas,⁴ became a prominent politician, as did Thomas Fitzgerald, who moved from Wellington to Hawke's Bay and then to Queensland.

Thomas Brunner did not start advertising as an architect in Nelson until 1849 and then only had limited work, gaining a much greater reputation as an explorer and surveyor. Albert Allom, initially based in Wellington, is only mentioned briefly in the literature in connection with a possible design for Judge Chapman's house in the suburb of Karori. Although he spent much of his later life in New Zealand, he was mainly concerned with mining ventures around Auckland and on the Coromandel Peninsula.

Henry Cridland worked in Wellington as an architect from about 1845 and was moderately successful as he also ran a saw mill and a

Name	Arrival in NZ	Age	Located
Allom	1842	17	Wellington
Baber	1842	21	Auckland
Brunner	1841	20	Nelson
Cridland	1843	22	Wellington
Fitzgerald	1842	18	Wellington
Stokes	1840	30	Wellington
Wood	1844	23	Auckland
Architect			
Ashworth*	1842	28	Auckland

Table 2: "Surveyors" age on arrival in New Zealand and place of settlement. Note Ashworth has been included; despite his formal architectural training and qualifications, he best fits in with this group.

brick works. He moved to the then-new settlement of Christchurch in 1849 as Superintendent of Public Works, carrying out both survey and engineering tasks so enthusiastically that he died of overwork in 1867. Robert Stokes, aged 30 on arrival in Wellington in 1840, only lasted two years doing survey work. He then advertised as an architect, land surveyor and agent, getting limited architectural commissions in the single year he practised. From 1843 he ran the local newspaper, the *New Zealand Spectator and Cook's Strait Guardian*, also entering politics and becoming a landowner. He made no further attempts at an architectural career.

Of the first seven, discounting Robert Stokes, the average age was 20 (age range=17-23) at

time of arrival. It is clear that most of these young men, having relatively soon finished with survey work, also realised that their architectural backgrounds were not going to provide viable alternative careers, at least in the short term. Henry Cridland was the only exception, perhaps because he also had a hand in supplying the required building materials to go with his designs. The others recognised alternative opportunities and were sufficiently adaptable to take full advantage of them.

An eighth relatively young man, Edward Ashworth (28) came ashore in Auckland in 1842 from the same ship as James Baber. Ashworth was a qualified architect, having trained in Exeter and London, but was singularly unsuccessful in finding suitable

³ Platts *Nineteenth Century New Zealand Artists* p 28.

⁴ Platts *Nineteenth Century New Zealand Artists* p 28.

work in Auckland. His skill as a talented artist gained him employment as a tutor to the Governor's children and he also left a valuable record of the appearance of early Auckland in his paintings and sketches. However, in 1844, he moved briefly to Sydney, then to Hong Kong where he did find some work designing commercial buildings over a two-year period. Returning to Exeter in 1846, he made a name for himself restoring old churches in the west of England.

Age and Persistence

A group of six architects who were somewhat older on arrival also had varying fortunes in the courses of their subsequent careers. Their ages varied from 29 to 44 and the most ultimately successful was William Mason (30 when he came from Sydney), although the Auckland part of his life was beset with difficulties as he alternated between architecture and farming before removing to Dunedin and full-time architectural work in 1862.

Sampson Kempthorne was perhaps the least successful, although he arrived aged 33 in 1842 with excellent credentials as one of the first members of the then Institute of British Architects. Kempthorne preceded Frederick

Name	Arrival in NZ	Age	Located
Kempthorne	1842	33	Auckland
Mason	1840	30	Auckland
Roberts	1847	35?	Wellington
Robertson	1847	44	Auckland
St Hill	1840	33	Wellington
Farmer / Architect			
Thatcher	1843	29	New Plymouth

Table 3: "Architects" age on arrival in New Zealand and place of settlement.

Thatcher in working for Bishop Selwyn in Auckland, designing the Parnell St Stephen's Chapel, St Thomas' at West Tamaki and some of the St John's College building. For various reasons such as subsidence and unsuitable use of materials, all were found to be faulty and the bishop dispensed with Kempthorne's services. By early 1864 he was Secretary of a Public Buildings Commission and proposed an idea for a planned group of government and other buildings systematically laid out like the Whitehall area in London. This was seen as too ambitious for the times and was rejected. Kempthorne died in 1873. As already noted, Kempthorne's replacement, Frederick Thatcher, did not intend to practise architecture on arrival, but was drawn into it in New Plymouth, Auckland, and finally Wellington, leaving a legacy of fine colonial churches before his retirement to England and death there in 1890.

Walter Robertson arrived in Auckland from a roller coaster career as a builder/architect across the Tasman somewhat later than the others in 1847. He was also older at 44 and probably more experienced at finding work under colonial conditions. To begin with, he advertised as an architect, surveyor and land agent but he was soon publishing so many tenders for architectural work that the other advertisements ceased. It may be that he simply took on too much work, as he died in 1851 aged only 48. We do not know how old Edward Roberts was when he arrived in Wellington in 1847 but he was probably in his thirties judging from a *carte de visite* photograph taken a year or so after his 1856 departure. Although his official position appears to have been that of a military engineer and surveyor, he also practised privately and successfully as an architect in Wellington, clearly having access to the

developing upper echelons of society from Governor Grey down. His case differs from most others in that he was a salaried official throughout his term in New Zealand and therefore not necessarily affected by economic fluctuations. Despite this he seems to have been singularly energetic (and experienced) in seeking out extra work across a wide variety of disciplines.

By contrast, Henry St Hill, aged 33 on arrival in Wellington in 1840, despite being described as "the architect of the [New Zealand] Company," received hardly any commissions for architectural work, although he does not seem to have tried very hard to pursue such a career. Instead he became a magistrate and administrator, but returned to England and died there in June 1866.

Black Sheep and a Gentlemen Architect

None of the previous studies of early architects in New Zealand has mentioned the strange and somewhat embarrassing case of Timothy O'Meara, described as an architect on the 1843 *Burgess Roll for Wellington* and hence a land owner at that time. No tenders for architectural work by him have been found and on an early 1845 list of persons qualifying as jurors he had altered his profession to

"builder." His next appearance was in court in June of the same year accused of forging several debentures on which he had sought payment. Found guilty, he was given a 10-year sentence to be served in Tasmania.

Another unexpected find was the architect Henry William Appleyard - only discovered through his death notice⁵ and subsequent advertisements for the sale of his considerable Auckland estate.⁶ No tender notices were placed by him, although he was stated to be an associate member of the Institute of British Architects. We can only conclude that having inherited what was presumably a considerable fortune on the death of his father in 1843, he had no need to practise and had invested the money in land and buildings hoping to profit as a speculator.

Social and Economic Factors

Auckland and Wellington shared several characteristics regarding incoming architects and development. They were significant entry ports for settlers and needed strong teams of land surveyors to lay out towns and also to establish boundaries of country sections.

⁵ "[untitled]" p 107.

⁶ "Full Particulars of the intended Sale ... [Sales by Auction]" p 1.

Many of the surveyors among the first immigrants were trained in both surveying and architecture (and also engineering in some instances) because that was common practice in the British Isles at the time. Even some of the military personnel who were part of the Royal Engineers sent to New Zealand had some architectural training, as they were expected to design barracks and fortifications. Once the initial flurry of surveying was over in the first three to five years, a number of these surveyors attempted to turn their hand to architectural design.

The problem with finding work as an architect was not so much lack of skill but lack of opportunity to practise, at least in the earliest few years, compounded with the need to adapt to using timber for most building purposes. Many architects would have been much more familiar with the use of stone, brick, tiles and slate.

Another problem seems to have been the disproportionate distribution of potential clients for architectural services in what was a largely rural economy. Despite Wakefield's utopian ideas of importing ready-made segments of society, from rich landowners and merchants to lowly tillers of the soil, with

everyone in between, the reality of immigration was the dominance of not very affluent potential settlers determined to improve their lot in a new country. Few of these were going to be able to afford an architect for a long time to come. Thus, some of the potential clients for architectural work were church groups, societies and a government in need of schools, court houses, prisons, hospitals, post offices, customs houses etc. All of which took a long time to develop.

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