

Stead Ellis, Architect

Guy Marriage, School of Architecture, Victoria University, Wellington, Robin Marriage & Ian Bowman, Architect and Conservator

ABSTRACT: In December 1879, Stead Ellis landed in New Zealand, with family, seeking work as an architect in the South Island, along with his pupil, budding architect Joshua Charlesworth. Finding work in Nelson as the Architect for the Nelson Education Board in early 1880, Ellis was a key architect, along with Beatson, in the appearance of early Nelson's public buildings. Ellis was responsible for designing many school buildings in the Nelson region, and also other commissions such as the church at Motupiko. Very little remains of Ellis' lifetime of work, with most schools having replaced their buildings several times over, but some few scraps of Ellis' work remain - namely two buildings: the Bishops School, near the Nelson Cathedral, and the Anglican church at Motupiko. This paper will examine and trace remaining work of Stead Ellis.

Stead Ellis, an architect from Yorkshire, stepped foot in New Zealand on Christmas Day 1879 to start a new life in the colonies. Born in Leeds in 1839, Ellis was articled at 16 to E Milnes, architect in Bradford, and later to G Smith in Leeds. Ellis lived at Market Place in Dewsbury, married his wife Elizabeth in 1864 and had an architectural practice in Batley (near Leeds), possibly with his older brother William.¹ On completion of his training, Ellis worked for over a decade in West Yorkshire, taking on articled students, including one young apprentice: Joshua Charlesworth.

Records show that Ellis':

works comprise residence for Philip Ellis, esq. Ossett; St Mark's Parsonage and Sunday Schools, Dewsbury;

¹ Brodie *Directory of British Architects 1834-1914 Vol 1 (A-K)*. Ellis' entry notes that he "flourished" in 1868, which indicates a date for these buildings.

Church Schools (St James's), Heckmondwike; and several warehouses and business premises in Dewsbury and district.²

These warehouses include the four-storey high sandstone:

Machell's Warehouse, [128] Bradford Road [Dewsbury]. Built in 1863 as a rag and wool warehouse by R & W Machell, rag & wool merchants, to designs by William & Stead Ellis of Leeds and Heckmondwike,³

which is still in existence today, although no longer processing the shoddy and mungo it was designed for.⁴ The Batley Corn Mills, "built in late 1820s and early 1830s as a steam-powered woollen mill by the Ellis

² *The Architect's, Engineer's and Building Trades Directory*, p 110.

³ Giles & Goodall *Yorkshire Textile Mills 1770-1830* p 204.

⁴ The terms "shoddy" and "mungo" refer to cloth that is recycled from wool, ground down into a fibrous mass, and respun into new yarn. Batley and the surrounding district were the centre of the shoddy industry.

family"⁵ indicates that Stead Ellis' forebears were probably millers. Ellis was also the designer of the Market Hall in Batley, a gothic-styled building with a heavy-looking central clock-tower, but this market building - although Ellis' largest and most elaborate building - deemed a "white elephant" - was demolished around 1905 and the clock transferred to the library building.⁶

Pevsner notes, somewhat dismissively, that "Dewsbury, Batley, Birstall, Heckmondwike, Cleckheaton are all one - large textile mills huddling close together, workers' housing and little else,"⁷ and that there are "absolutely no houses at Dewsbury worthy of mention,"⁸ so Ellis' work there was certainly not of any

⁵ Giles & Goodall *Yorkshire Textile Mills 1770-1830* p 204.

⁶ Clark, Pers. Comm.

⁷ Pevsner & Radcliffe *The Buildings of England* pp 178-179.

⁸ Pevsner & Radcliffe *The Buildings of England* p 180.

outstanding architectural quality, but nevertheless, the experience in designing church schools would be highly useful in the antipodean portion of his career. Ellis was strongly Anglican in faith, was a Mason, and also an officer of the West Yorkshire Rifles. A single, original water-colour drawing of his exists from this time spent in Yorkshire: a brick, castellated building for the Wakefield Volunteer Armoury in Yorkshire, although it is unclear whether this particular design was ever built.⁹ Ellis did however design the Volunteer Barracks in nearby Dewsbury in 1869,¹⁰ and this is still extant, albeit now a private school.¹¹

Ellis' military link had advantages - as Captain of the 43rd West York Rifles, he evidently became a crack shot: in 1869 and 1870 he was the champion shot of Yorkshire, and "he was twice in the Queen's Sixty,"¹² a

⁹ "Wakefield - West Riding" np. A drill hall does exist in Wakefield, but it is unclear if it is the same building.

¹⁰ "Dewsbury - West Riding" np.

¹¹ Clark, Pers. Comm.

¹² "Obituary. Mr. Stead Ellis" p 2. Note: the Queen's Sixty refers to a National Rifle Association (UK) annual shooting competition, started by Queen Victoria in 1860, with 250 pounds worth of prizes, for the sixty best shots in the land. Lieutenant S Ellis 43rd West Yorkshire Rifle Volunteers placed 29th in 1871 and placed 14th in 1878.

championship shooting competition set up by Queen Victoria.¹³ By 1877 his prowess at shooting saw him win a total of £44 in the Yorkshire Rifle Association annual shooting championships.¹⁴ This amount, not inconsiderable for those days, along with other winnings, gave Ellis the chance to change his life forever by emigrating to New Zealand.¹⁵ Leaving his office in Batley may not have been such a wrench: as Pevsner records disdainfully, "Batley has nothing of municipal architecture to boast of."¹⁶ The failure of the crops in 1879 in England, described as showing "such a state of affairs as has not

Ellis' inclusion in the Queen's Sixty, twice, confirms he was an excellent shot - mainly with the Martini-Henry and Snider breech-loading, single-shot Rifles in use by the British military for over 30 years from 1871 onward, and also used as a competition rifle at the National Rifle Association in Bisley, Surrey. This rifle - still in use by some Afghan Taliban rebels in the 1977 Soviet invasion - was very accurate and obviously a highly reliable weapon. "Martini-Henry" np.

¹³ Molyneux, Pers. Comm.

¹⁴ Prize Certificate, Yorkshire Rifle Association, Robin Marriage collection.

¹⁵ Molyneux confirmed Ellis' prizes included a hand sewing machine in 1871, and a pair of binoculars and the West Riding of Yorkshire Medal with his win in 1877, and monetary prizes also in 1872 (£2.6.8), 1873 (£7), and 1878 (£15). Molyneux, Pers. Comm.

¹⁶ Pevsner & Radcliffe *The Buildings of England* p 96.

been experienced for more than sixty years," with a grim winter, a wet spring and a dismal summer, may have also played a part in his emigration to a place renowned for a sunnier climate.¹⁷ With Stead Ellis was his family: wife Elizabeth and six male children, the smallest only six months old, the oldest aged 14 years; as well as the young apprentice Charlesworth, then aged 18.

They embarked aboard the Shaw Saville sailing ship *Euterpe*, a three-masted, barkentine-rigged, 85m long iron-hulled "clipper" ship, leaving London on 2nd August 1879.¹⁸ The trip, while expected to take only 12 weeks, took far longer due to a series of mishaps before even leaving England (getting rammed by the steamship *Telford* on the crowded Thames, necessitating substantial structural rework), spending 18 days just trying to get past the English channel (infuriatingly getting repeatedly blown back to shore and then almost being rammed by another New Zealand immigrant sailing ship, the *Hurunui*) and getting stuck in the doldrums on the Equator with no wind for weeks on end.

¹⁷ "The Timaru Herald, Wednesday, December 24, 1879" p 2.

¹⁸ MacMullen *Star of India: the Log of an iron ship* p 127.

Seven of the Ellis family lived in a single cabin eight feet wide, nine feet long and seven in height, with four boys in the upper bunk, and the parents in the lower bunk with the baby (Roland) tucked into the bunk across his father's feet. His oldest son Harold (14), and Joshua Charlesworth shared a cabin in the next room, with four other men. The voyage was cramped, exhausting, and severely under-nourished - the ship did not have enough supplies for the extended time of the voyage - and continued rations of stale ships biscuit almost produced mutinous passengers, extremely unimpressed with the Shaw Saville Line:

Our provisions are rather scarce now, and they only give us a day's rations out at a time. So some of the passengers are at work making snares to catch rats. There are thousands of rats and a few of the passengers makes Rat Pies. They skin them and then puts the shoulders and legs into a dish and puts a piece of paste on it for a Pie.¹⁹

Ellis understandably found the cabin life cramped and stuffy, taking to the upper deck where he promptly took charge of the passengers' intellectual needs, organising games for the children, and writing a weekly

¹⁹ "Euterpe" - *Diaries, Letters & Logs of the "Star of India" as a British Emigrant Ship* p 122.

newsletter *The Euterpe Times* in which stories and diary entries entertained the adults. Charlesworth and Harold Ellis had the task of copying the original paper into copies for the other cabin classes. The last issue, no. 14, leaves off from the narrative as they round Stewart Island, sail up the Otago coast, and head towards Lyttleton harbour. The *Euterpe*, incidentally, was retired from this passenger role two decades later, but remains afloat as the world's oldest remaining passenger ship still sailing - renamed as the *Star of India* - and celebrated her 150th year afloat mid-November 2013 at the San Diego Maritime Museum.²⁰ Ellis records only three books that he took with him on the voyage to the colonies: the Sir Julius Vogel *Official Handbook to New Zealand*, Lady Barker's book of letters *Station Life in New Zealand*, and Burn's *Classical Architecture in relation to Farm Buildings*.²¹ Clearly, a more rural life was being planned.

After 134 days at sea, the Ellis family and apprentice Joshua landed in Lyttleton on 25 December 1879, and made New Zealand their new home. Although Stead was comfortable roaming the decks and his diary comments on

²⁰ "Star of India" np.

²¹ "The Stead Ellis Diary" (24 August 1879) p 39.

the nautical sights along the way, such as dolphins, whales, flying fish, numerous seabirds, and a "grampus." Elizabeth suffered from sea-sickness and acute nausea for nearly the entire trip. It is therefore probably no surprise that Stead and Elizabeth Ellis never returned to Britain.

Stead Ellis, unemployed architect from Yorkshire, with eight hungry mouths to feed, therefore started his new life in the first days of the 1880s in a very foreign land. Regretfully, he does not appear to have kept up his diary skills so evident on the *Euterpe* and although he describes keeping a sketchbook on board, this too is missing. A fellow passenger describes their first reactions to the sight of Lyttleton:

At last, on the 24th of December, 1879, I think it was a Wednesday, we crawled into Port Lyttleton. They had given us up. I shall never forget the first sight of the little wooden houses on the hills. We had not seen wooden houses before. What a strange, empty place it looked to us Londoners, used to rows and rows of ugly brick houses. Lyttleton at last.²²

At first residing in Sydenham, Ellis may have been discouraged from looking for architectural work in the Canterbury region

²² Owen "The Voyage of 1879" p 130.

by political events in Christchurch and Timaru at the time: religious sectarian rioting. The day after they landed, a Boxing Day Orangeman parade turned ugly and got out of control. "Arriving at Christchurch station, we were rather taken aback to learn that we must avoid certain streets as the Orangemen and the Hibernians were rioting. I don't know what about."²³ Savage fighting broke out, with four people badly injured in Christchurch, two barely hanging onto life, and with 20 special constables proceeding by train to Timaru to quell matters there.²⁴

It is possible that Ellis had wanted to leave the sectarian violence of the North behind him in England: the Irish famine and English depression were also heavily in the news at that time. It may be that architectural competition in Christchurch was already quite strong, with several well-established practices advertising daily in the *Press*. It appears that Ellis went north to Nelson to compete in the New Zealand Rifle Association's National Championships in March 1880, as the records show that a Captain Ellis, from Christchurch, did compete – but although doing passably

²³ Owen "The Voyage of 1879" p 130.

²⁴ "Serious Riots in Christchurch" p 2.

well, did not win the grand prize.²⁵ Lady Barker's book, Ellis' meager reading material on the trip, certainly sells the image of Nelson as a place to be:

It is a lovely little town, as I saw it on that spring morning, with hills running down almost to the water's edge, and small wooden houses with gables and verandahs, half buried in creepers, built up the sides of the steep slopes. It was a true New Zealand day, still and bright, a delicious invigorating freshness in the air.²⁶

It reinforced the viewpoint that Nelson was, as per the ideas of its New Zealand Company founder, Edward Gibbon Wakefield: the promised land, the land of milk and honey, "imbued with the Romantic Philosophy of a return to a "Golden Age" based on a closer link with nature."²⁷

Having been 37 years since the unsettling and horrifying "Wairau Incident"²⁸ as it is so delicately called, Nelson was, by 1880, more welcoming to British settlers - a rapidly growing region with a warm, sunny climate, and a strong Christian movement. Named after England's finest maritime commander,

²⁵ "Champion Aggregates" p 2.

²⁶ Barker *Station Life in New Zealand*, 14th October 1865.

²⁷ Bowman *William Beatson* p 6.

²⁸ "The Wairau Massacre" p 3.

Nelson had a mixture of Māori place-names such as Motupiko, Waimea; and those English names of a more poetic nature such as Brightwater, Hope, Merryjigs, as well as Promised Land. There was even a Wakefield, the same name as the town Ellis had been raised in the old country. Nelson was a place where an architect in mid-career could make his mark on a town, and start his life anew. At any rate, in March, Ellis applied to a Nelson advertisement, not for an architectural position, but instead (perhaps somewhat bizarrely) as the Secretary of the Nelson Education Board. The Board had first advertised in late January with a salary of £350 per annum and received an astonishing 95 applications for the job (some late), presumably interested by the substantial salary:

It is stated that some eighty applications have already been received for the office of Secretary to the Nelson Education Board, the salary for which is £350. The appointment will probably be made to-morrow.²⁹

The Board swiftly awarded the position to a Mr G Hodgson (curiously, the brother of the chief Inspector of Schools for the Nelson Education Board, Mr WC Hodgson, who

²⁹ "Latest Telegrams" p 2.

himself was the brother-in-law to the Board Chairman). Understandably, some evident outrage followed in which the Nelson Education Board was accused (perhaps well-deservedly) of shoddy behaviour, cronyism and nepotism in the Correspondence columns in the local and regional newspapers.³⁰ After less than a month, G Hodgson resigned, in what appears to have been a tactical withdrawal: no cronyism was acknowledged:

It is understood that Mr. G. Hodgson, recently appointed Secretary of the Nelson Education Board at a salary of £350, has resigned. There has been some correspondence in papers from which it appears the action of the Board creating so expensive an office was disapproved, it being alleged that a smaller salary would be sufficient.³¹

The position of Secretary was advertised again at a reduced salary of £250 p/a. Only 34 people applied this second time (all men, but Mr G Hodgson not amongst them), where there was now a strong impetus to give the job to someone clearly not related to the incumbent staff.

WANTED, a SECRETARY to the Nelson Education Board. Salary £250 per annum. Applications endorsed "Application for Secretaryship," will be received by the

³⁰ "Correspondence" p 2.

³¹ "Too Expensive For Nelson" p 2.

under-signed until TUESDAY Noon, March 30, W.C. HODGSON, Secretary Nelson Education Board.³²

Ellis' original application letter for the job is missing – although all the other applicants' letters are still extant in the Archives New Zealand. Evidently, his application impressed, as other applicants were, arguably, better qualified: one was "a trained and certificated Teacher in England for ten years" (Thomas Scott, of Nelson), another had been "engaged for upwards of ten years as Managing Director of a Sugar Refining Co at Bristol" (H Marten, of Christchurch), and one was even a former schoolmaster in Nelson and Diocesan Secretary to the Bishop of Nelson (George Jennings, of Nelson).³³ Several others evidently had close personal connections with members of the Education Board, reasoning that that point alone may get them the job, even with complete lack of *curriculum vitae* or references. No doubt the arrival of a complete outsider: an experienced business man, a qualified architect with experience of designing and getting built school buildings for local churches, was just what was required. Ellis was offered the position on 1st

³² "Wanted, a Secretary" p 2.

³³ Nelson Education Board - Applications for Office of Secretary.

April 1880, as Secretary, on £250 per annum, and implored to start work straight away: "Please let me know by telegram how soon you can come – the sooner the better."³⁴

Ellis' letter of acceptance to the post of Secretary was published in the local papers, presumably to placate the unsuccessful applicants.

"Gentlemen, – I shall be happy to accept the appointment even at the reduced salary, if the Board can permit me to follow my profession to such an extent as I may be able, without interfering with or neglecting the duties of Secretary to the Education Board. I thought it very possible that there might be some little work of an architectural character that the Board itself would have to do, and which might be done by me in the manner suggested, and the commission on which and on similar private work would render the income of the Board's Secretary more commensurate with his position than it would be with only the moderate salary offered. I am, &c, Stead Ellis, Architect."³⁵

The Board wrote back quickly, confirming that: "The Board appoints you subject to the stipulations embodied in your offer of March 18th with regard to you following your profession as an architect, so long as that does not interfere with your duties as Secretary to

³⁴ Hodgson, letter to Ellis (1 April 1880).

³⁵ "Education Board" (2 April 1880) p 2.

the Board."³⁶

The Ellis family moved to Nelson *en masse*, Elizabeth bearing three more children (all female) and Ellis remained in the position as Secretary and *de facto* Architect, until his death 28 years later. Joshua Charlesworth however, apparently did not accompany Ellis: it seems that he moved first to Timaru, then later established a practice in Wellington, before moving to Auckland, then Sydney, and returning later to become one of Wellington's more famed architects.³⁷ They met again on at least two occasions many years later, with Ellis doing some supervisory work for Charlesworth on Nelson projects. It did not end well: but that is another paper.

Ellis was true to his word, seeking out small architectural projects both within the Nelson Education Board and in the wider community. Starting work in early April 1880, his secretarial work may indeed have been largely spent in controlling a growing educational domain, but he kept up a small architectural practice as well, working from home, taking out advertisements in the local

press, proclaiming: "MR. STEAD ELLIS, ARCHITECT, Mill Stream Cottage, Off Nile-St. East, NELSON. Designs Prepared, Quantities Taken Out, and Builders' Accounts Adjusted."³⁸

Ellis' work is therefore a mixture of private and quasi-public: his records show that he completed some private homes, some church buildings, some cottages for teachers, but mostly, a lot of schools. His interest in military matters was evidently continued in Nelson, as he "took an interest in the Volunteer movement, and for some time was captain of the Stoke Rifles."³⁹ This interest paid off soon enough, given Ellis' design for the Volunteer Armoury back in Wakefield, Yorkshire, as one of Ellis' first freelance projects was for an Armoury in central Nelson:

TENDERS are required for the ERECTION of a READING ROOM and ARMOURY behind the Volunteer Drill Shed, Nelson Plans and specifications can be seen at my Office, at Mill-stream Cottage, Alton-street, up to THURSDAY, the 29th instant, on which day scaled and endorsed tenders are to be delivered. No allowance for estimates, and the lowest or any will not necessarily be accepted. STEAD ELLIS, Architect.⁴⁰

³⁸ "Mr. Stead Ellis, Architect [Advertisement]" p 1.

³⁹ "Obituary. Mr. Stead Ellis" p 2.

⁴⁰ "To Builders [Reading Room and Armoury behind

Ellis' early work for the Nelson Education Board was predominantly administrative, running the day-to-day business of a rapidly growing school region, and reporting to the Department of Education in Wellington. Ellis wrote the minutes, paid the bills, hired and fired school teachers (salaries of whom were around £50-120 per annum at the time), and it is evident that he was a very efficient and speedy executor of business affairs. The Inspector of Schools, Mr WC Hodgson, continued on in his inspecting role at a very comfortable £500 salary. Travel around the large district would have been by horse and buggy. Both men appear very busy with the daily running of the Nelson Education Board, and this got only more so as the Nelson District continued to grow. The Nelson Education Board also had a distasteful administrative task for the new Secretary: in 1881 salaries had to be cut by 10% to all teachers and teachers' aides, because the government decreed that this should happen, and this caused considerable strife to all the teaching staff. In 1882, recognizing that they had caused unnecessary hardship and could afford the larger salaries after all, the Nelson Education Board had to put the salaries up

Volunteer Drill Shed, Nelson]" p 2.

³⁶ Hodgson, letter to Ellis (3 April 1880).

³⁷ "Charlesworth, Joshua - Architect" np.

again: it seems they had acted in haste, and no other Education Boards had cut salaries.

Early Nelson Education Board architectural work by Stead Ellis was at the very minor end of the scale – his first tasks were writing to John Scott, builder, to ask for a set of drawings and specifications of a school that Scott had just built in Haven Road, and writing to a school mistress in Upper Dovedale to ask them for the spare stove to heat the room in Lower Dovedale. Presumably the Haven Road School was a basis for other school designs, but it would also have given Ellis a grasp of how things were done in the Colony. All his buildings back in Yorkshire had been in brick or stone, and certainly nearly all the building work in New Zealand was in timber (with some builders being asked by Ellis to tender alternative prices for schools in brick, stone, or timber – in all but one case, the schools were constructed of timber). Bowman writes on the similar issue encountered by another, earlier Nelson émigré architect, William Beatson, and notes that:

[w]hen William Beatson arrived in Nelson he brought with him a knowledge of traditional timber construction. Timber had been used for building since primitive times in England and construction techniques had been

developed to a high degree of perfection until the 17th and 18th centuries.⁴¹

Bowman goes on to note that:

the once-large oak forests were plundered for shipbuilding and for fueling the iron furnaces of the Industrial Revolution. There was an abundance of timber in New Zealand and America, both of which developed parallel traditions of timber construction.⁴²

There was evidently a strong need for architectural services and for new, more spacious classrooms, judging by this report from the *Westport Times*:

The Denniston schoolroom with its 34 occupants, not including the mistress, would give an average of 42 cubic to each, not more than the cubic contents of two adult coffins! Let each individual member of the Nelson Education Board take an ordinary bedroom, put a ceiling about half way up the walls then cram, ram, and jam 34 children into the space that is left, keep them company for two hours, and they will have some idea of the horrors of the Denniston schoolroom. Is it any wonder that the Inspector shrank from facing this crowd of suffocating humanity? Can there be such a thing as teaching or learning in a place of this description? To add to the discomfort, the surroundings are anything but salubrious as the visitor's nostrils will testify. There is not the slightest apology for a playground or the necessary outbuildings. Surely these facts only require to

be brought before the Education Board to be remedied at once. If this state of affairs is allowed to continue then pestilence and disease will be sure to follow.⁴³

Ellis may have initially simply adapted previous Nelson Education Board school plans, but over the years he developed his own style. The Architecture Library Archive at the University of Auckland has a copy of Edward Robson's 1874 book *School Architecture* (which notes on the inside cover that it had been the property of the Nelson Diocesan Library and therefore highly likely to have been used, read, or even purchased by Ellis), but on the whole the European schools that Robson alludes to are a fair size larger than the small country schools Ellis was asked to design. Interestingly, Robson notes that it was only in 1870 that the provision of schools in London was legislated for:

The vast and increasing amount of ignorance prevalent among the lowest class of population in the largest towns of England which no ordinary efforts seemed able to reach, induced the legislature to pass, on the 9th August, 1870, "An Act to provide for public Elementary Education in England and Wales."⁴⁴

⁴³ "The Hon. E. Richardson on the Northern Railway Extension" p 4.

⁴⁴ Robson *School Architecture* pp 291-292.

⁴¹ Bowman *William Beatson* p 41.

⁴² Bowman *William Beatson* p 41.

Nelson's policy of public schooling for all was ahead of its time, both in New Zealand and elsewhere.

Ellis kept good records of his work for the Nelson Education Board and was, by modern standards, ruthlessly efficient: one advertisement for Tenders for the School in Richmond announced that the tenders would close on the 20th:

TENDERS are required for the ERECTION of a SCHOOL at Richmond; Plans and specifications may be seen at the Education Office Nelson, until FRIDAY, the 20th instant, before 6 p.m. ... By order, STEAD ELLIS, Architect.⁴⁵

A notice of accepted tender was in the same paper the very next day: "ACCEPTED TENDER for the erection of the Richmond Boys' School:— Messrs. Fieldes and Coombes, £284. STEAD ELLIS, Architect."⁴⁶

The records retained are primarily recorded in large leather-bound portfolios of written copies at Archives New Zealand, while the drawings, being more difficult to store, have ended up mainly at the Nelson Provincial Museum, while some of them are still in

⁴⁵ "To Builders [School at Richmond]" p 2.

⁴⁶ "To Builders [Richmond Boys' School]" p 2.

private collections belonging to his descendants. The school designs are for the most part, pretty simple and unsophisticated: one-room schools were the norm at the time, and there was little opportunity for architectural flair. Later schools, in the 1890s and the new century, were much larger and more elaborate, with several classrooms incorporated in the Central School for Boys – not far from the Ellis family's first home in Nile St. Ellis' drawing style is brief and to the point: he had little time to waste on elaborate drawings, so most consist just of a plan, elevations and a section, with few, if any, details or notes. The successful tenderer in each case signed the drawing set as contractor, and that appears to be the entire extent of the known contract documentation. If there was a separate specification for each job, this does not seem to have survived.

There is one sole remaining school in almost original condition - no mean feat for a building over 120 years old - and it sits near the base of the Cathedral steps in Nelson, in Nile Street, not far from the Ellis home. Some of the Ellis boys, or their subsequent three girls, may likely have gone to school here. It was and still is known as the Bishop's School, and has been retained by Nelsonians as a

historic demonstration of the school system in days gone by.

Bishop's School had its beginnings with Bishop Augustus Selwyn. As the Anglican Bishop of New Zealand, he planned to establish church schools in every town. Christ Church School opened on this site in 1844 and closed in 1854. It reopened as the Bishop's School in 1860 under Bishop Edmund Hobhouse.⁴⁷

That the Bishop should have had a Bishop's School is perhaps surprising to us today, but the Bishop attended all Board meetings as the Nelson Education Board was a largely Christian enterprise. Nelson was, and largely still is, a liberal home for free-thinking individuals and the 1880s was no exception, having grown from a "broad-church" way of looking at religion:

According to the 1848 census, although about 1500 settlers were described as Anglicans and nearly 200 as Roman Catholics, almost as many belonged to various Dissenting groups, including Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Baptists, Independents, Lutherans and members of the Society of Friends. Many of these drew together, calling themselves United Christians, to provide some religious education for their children. Their efforts led to the formation of the Nelson School Society.⁴⁸

Bishop Suter

⁴⁷ *Vine Nelson Observed* p 58.

⁴⁸ Tunnicliff "Bishops' Nelson" p 24.

decided in 1881 that the old brick schoolhouse was "positively unsafe" and, largely at his own expense, had it completely rebuilt. The new building, designed by Stead Ellis, secretary to the Education Board, was a much larger, airier schoolroom. It was built of wood except for the porch and western wall, rebuilt with bricks from the old school.⁴⁹

Transforming the school from a completely brick building, to a timber-framed school with bricks only remaining in the entry doorway and the west wall, the school is listed by New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) as a Grade 1 category building for a number of reasons - heritage fabric, historic connection, sole remaining brickwork from 1844, etc.⁵⁰ The question that remains disputed, is: who was the architect of the rebuilt school? Several books of note, including the *Historic Buildings of the South Island*, as well as the San Diego Maritime Museum and notes at the Bishop's School itself, all record that the School's 1881 architect was Stead Ellis. The official HPT report however, states that the architect for the rebuild was William Bethwaite.⁵¹ The *Nelson Evening Mail* noted that:

The plans and working drawings were executed by Mr Bethwaite from a sketch supplied by the Bishop and the

⁴⁹ Tunnicliff "Bishops' Nelson" p 25.

⁵⁰ McCracken & Dangerfield "Bishop's School" np.

⁵¹ McCracken & Dangerfield "Bishop's School" np.

building was erected by Mr Good under the supervision of Mr Stead Ellis.⁵²

Certainly, however the style of the windows have strong similarities to Ellis' work on the St Mark's church school back in Dewsbury, and the architectural fretwork on the bargeboards have links to other Ellis designed schools in the region, so this indicates that the final design was indeed most probably Ellis.

Even the architect of the first iteration of the school is in dispute. Bowman records that "J.W. Barnicoat, a New Zealand Company surveyor, prepared the plans for what is now known as the Bishop's School, in Nile Street."⁵³ The NZHPT, on the other hand, attributes the 1844 design to "Rev. C.L. Reay (architect)."⁵⁴ John Wallis Barnicoat was not just a New Zealand Company surveyor and engineer, but was also one of the few survivors of the Wairau Incident (sensibly, running away to save his life),⁵⁵ and the long-serving Chairman of the Nelson Education Board. Barnicoat was

⁵² "[Untitled]" p 2.

⁵³ Bowman *William Beatson* p 41.

⁵⁴ "Construction Professionals: [were] 1844 Rev. C.L. Reay (architect) [?], 1881 [?] Bethwaite (architect), Messrs Good of Nelson (Builders)." McCracken & Dangerfield "Bishop's School" np.

⁵⁵ "John Wallis Barnicoat 1814-1905" np

on the Board when the 1881 rebuild was proposed, but it is unlikely that he was the "architect" for the original 1844 design. It is also unlikely that William Bethwaite would have been taken on for the project in 1881, as Bethwaite appears to be more of a builder than an architect, although the trade definitions were not as clear before the twentieth century. Most likely, Ellis and Barnicoat would have been responsible for the design and commissioning of the rebuilt school. Scaife's role is unknown.

Reopening ... The schoolroom was effectively rebuilt in 1881, with a wing across its street frontage. The new building was of timber, although original bricks were used in the porch and west wall. The interior features elegant arched roof beams.⁵⁶

It is steeply gabled, as were Ellis' other schools, with decorative scrollwork to the gable eave, and built of timber – the species not documented, but probably rimu or tōtara. Externally it is painted (currently dark red), while internally the effect is dark, from the well-aged timber. Desks and slates and posters on the walls are all as they were in Ellis' time - this building is a fully preserved slice of time and history, used now just as a

⁵⁶ Vine *Nelson Observed* p 58.

museum piece to demonstrate to modern school children just how far we have come. Small wooden desks, each with chalk and slate (uncannily almost exactly the size and shape of an iPad) fill the room, along with maps of the world; the British Empire resplendent in bold pink.

The school consists of a single-roomed building, divided into five bays by four semi-circular elegant arched timber arches. It is rectangular with semi-gothic rounded windows to sides. The British "battle of the styles" had been largely resolved by then, in a mutual truce still apparent in the architecture of both Yorkshire and also Nelson. Barrington Kaye notes that:

By 1900 the pattern of English architecture seemed fixed in a medley of revivalist styles. The great battle between the gothicists and the classicists had resulted in a compromise whereby ecclesiastical and collegiate buildings were designed in Neo-Gothic, and municipal buildings in Neo-Classic.⁵⁷

Certainly, the almost Gothic styling of the building seems quite appropriate to its dual role as both school and ecclesiastical benevolence.

⁵⁷ Kaye *The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain* p 144.

The entry porch (recycled bricks from the former school) is at one end. The walls are tall timber stud-work, clad in thick 8" wide rusticated weatherboards, the wall uninsulated but lined with reeded, diagonal sarking, painted white. The roof is corrugated iron, with a small ornate belfry complete with weathervane.

A timber belfry is mounted at the south end of the roof and comprises an octagonal steeple, with weathervane and obelisque cap, over a square belfry (or mini broach spire) sheet metal roved with corner cappings. Open timber louvres to the belfry have scroll-cut heads over a rectangular frame. The belfry sits on a moulded plinth with roofing astride the main gable.⁵⁸

This belfry was a recurring feature in Ellis' work, but is a common feature in many other school buildings of the time as well. Timber barge boards are highly decorative, with curved scroll fretwork, and these appear to be far more decorative than other schools that Ellis designed. There is a similarity in scale, and perhaps in some detail, to the small stone church schools that Ellis designed in Dewsbury and Heckmondwike.

The NZHPT report describes the windows and walls in some detail:

⁵⁸ McCracken & Dangerfield "Bishop's School" np.

The north wall facing away from the street has a trefoil window high in the gable, a large north facing eight-sash window of many round or square headed panes. A mitred head architrave is set back from the window. A wide brick doorstep leads through a centrally placed single outward-opening door - a 10 paned sash over-mounted on a panelled frame. A porch roof with solid decorative brackets, reeded/quirked board soffit and flat roof, is mounted above the door. The opposing south wall is similar with trefoil window and larger paned and decorated window of five six-paned rounded headed sashes over five 10-paned similar sashes. The sill is heavy. The decorations, corner cappings and weatherboards are similar to the north side. The west wall is brickwork of long-short-long courses. High windows of eight-sash, 10-pane windows are featured north and south of the central gabled porch. Sections of weatherboards with scallop trim fill between the windows, brickwork and porch.⁵⁹

The school closed in 1895. "Restored by the NZ HPT in 1975/76, it operates now as an educational museum."⁶⁰

The status of Ellis' role as Secretary to the Board meant that he could not formally also occupy the role as Architect. For instance, at the same time in 1881 as Ellis being asked to submit sketches of buildings (schools) at Stoke, Lower Wakefield, and 88 Valley, the Board was also questioning the appointment

⁵⁹ McCracken & Dangerfield "Bishop's School" np.

⁶⁰ Vine *Nelson Observed* p 58.

of an architect to the Board - i.e. possibly someone other than Ellis:

"Resolved, That a sufficient addition be made to the Lower Wakefield boys school.

Resolved, that a class room 16ft. x. 20ft. be added to the Westport girl's school, but in the opinion of the Board the accommodation at the Westport boys school is sufficient for the number at present attending.

Resolved, That Mr Ellis be instructed to visit and report on the proposed additions and repairs to buildings at Stoke, Lower Wakefield, and 88 Valley, and that he submit to the next meeting of the Board sketches of the proposed additions.

Resolved, That the question of appointing an architect to the Board be referred to the Finance Committee."⁶¹

Indeed, other architects were not reticent at offering their services. William Bethwaite, the disputed other possible architect to the Bishop's School, took out this advertisement in the *Nelson Evening Mail* in 1884:

W. Bethwaite, ARCHITECT, &c VANGUARD-STREET, Next to All Saints' Church. W. B. having had seven years Practical and theoretical training in England. and twenty-five years experience as a Practical Builder and Architect in the Colonies, and having made construction and arrangement a special study, feels confident of giving continued satisfaction. Charges for Plans and Specifications only 1 1/4 per cent.⁶²

⁶¹ "Education Board" (7 January 1881) p 2.

⁶² "W. Bethwaite, Architect, &c. [advertisement]" p 3.

It is not known what fees other architects in the district would charge, but Bethwaite's one and a quarter per cent would seem to be at the extreme lower end of any scale of charges by any contemporary standard, and may have been extremely tempting to the Board. Bethwaite was however a much older man than Ellis (having moved to the Tasman district in 1858) and by 1884 had largely moved into local body politics; so, although there was no formal appointment of Ellis as Architect to the Board, it appears that he nonetheless continued to design all the public schools in the district.

Although Ellis remained a Mason till his death, given the famous Masonic secrecy there is little to indicate if any commissions were forthcoming from the Mason fraternity. Ellis was a "prominent Freemason, being a P.M. of Lodge Victory, No. 40, N.Z.C.,"⁶³ and officiated at the installation of his eldest son to the masons in 1902,⁶⁴ but his work does not seem to have spread wider into the community, and there are no shops, warehouses or offices recorded by Ellis. Perhaps the Masons have regimented roles for

⁶³ "Obituary. Mr. Stead Ellis" p 2.

⁶⁴ "Forest Lodge, No. 116, N.Z.C., Wakefield" p 3.

their members, and some other Mason had the lead position in commercial work: after all, Ellis certainly seemed to have the Education portfolio.

Records show that Stead Ellis had a part in over 45 schools, and the original drawings in his hand still exist for some of these schools, including extensive plans for the Central School for Boys in 1893. While the majority of his work was in the 1890s, he designed the following schools and alterations in the 1880s:

1880: Karamea School⁶⁵

1881: Bishop's School,⁶⁶ Lower Wakefield School additions⁶⁷

1882: Richmond Boys School, ⁶⁸ Upper Wakefield School enlargement⁶⁹

1884: Appleby School,⁷⁰ Little Grey School⁷¹

1885: Motupiko School,⁷² Pigeon Valley School,⁷³ Waimea West School alterations,⁷⁴ Wakefield

⁶⁵ "School House Karamea" PL452, PL453, PL454, PL455.

⁶⁶ "[Untitled]" p 2.

⁶⁷ "Education Board" (7 January 1881) p 2.

⁶⁸ "To Builders [Richmond Boys' School]" p 2.

⁶⁹ "Enlargement of school Upper Wakefield" PL667.

⁷⁰ Ellis, Stead, Sheppard File E47.

⁷¹ "Public School Little Grey" PL465, PL466.

⁷² "To Builders - Tenders are required" p 3.

⁷³ Ellis, Stead, Sheppard File E47; "Proposed new school Pigeon Valley Wakefield" PL540.

⁷⁴ "Tenders are wanted" p 3.

School⁷⁵
 1886: Tākaka School⁷⁶
 1887: Brooklyn School, Riwaka,⁷⁷ Spring Grove School
 conversion into Public Hall,⁷⁸ Dovedale School,⁷⁹
 Redwood's Valley⁸⁰
 1888: Long Plain School⁸¹

He also completed the following non-school work as part of his practice:

1883: Parsonage, Richmond⁸²
 1885: Holy Trinity Chancel, Richmond⁸³
 1887: House, Waimea West⁸⁴
 1888: Mahakipawa House, Havelock,⁸⁵ Teacher's cottage,
 Long Plain,⁸⁶ Teacher's cottage, Motupipi⁸⁷

⁷⁵ Ellis, Stead, Sheppard File E47; "New school Wakefield for Senior Division" PL663, PL664

⁷⁶ Ellis, Stead, Sheppard File E47; "Public school Lower Takaka" PL625, PL626

⁷⁷ Ellis, Stead, Sheppard File E47; "Brooklyn School, Riwaka" PL364, PL365, PL366.

⁷⁸ "Education Board" (5 October 1887) p 3.

⁷⁹ "Proposed new school, Church Hill, Dovedale" PL382, PL383.

⁸⁰ "Redwood's Valley School" PL559.

⁸¹ Ellis, Stead, Sheppard File E47; "New School Long Plain" PL461, PL462.

⁸² "Richmond Parsonage. To Builders." p 2.

⁸³ "To Builders [Chancel and Vestry, Church of the Holy Trinity, Richmond]" p 2; "Trinity Church, Richmond, New chancel & vestry" PL970.

⁸⁴ "To Builders [House, Waimea West]" p 2.

⁸⁵ "To Builders [Residence at Mahakipawa]" p 2.

⁸⁶ "Teacher's Cottage Long Plan" PL459, PL460.

⁸⁷ "To Builders [Teacher's Cottage at Motupipi]" p 2.

1889: House, Richmond,⁸⁸ House, Waimea West,⁸⁹
 Teachers cottage, Lower Tākaka.⁹⁰

He also designed a further 22 schools in the 1890s, including the "delightful" Sunday School at Richmond in 1890, a church in Motupiko in 1892 and at least another 13 more schools in the period from 1900 leading up to his sudden death in 1908. Ellis may not have been sophisticated in his designs, but he was at least rather prolific in his output. He was a contemporary of Frederick de Jersey Clere, who became the Architect to the Wanganui Education Board in March 1883, a position that Clere held until May 1888. While Clere moved on to a bigger city and widened his scope of work, eventually specializing in churches, Ellis stayed on in Nelson and kept up with the school work.⁹¹

Nearly all the school buildings that Ellis designed have, over the course of 120 years, been removed, demolished, modernized, or in most cases completely replaced. Some have survived: East Tākaka School being largely

⁸⁸ "To Builders [House at Richmond]" p 2.

⁸⁹ "To Builders [House at Bearcroft, Waimea West]" p 2.

⁹⁰ "To Builders [Teachers' Cottage at Lower Takaka]" p 2; "Teacher's Cottage, Lower Takaka" PL628, PL629.

⁹¹ MacLean *Architect of the Angels* p 15.

complete, and now used as a community hall, after an extensive, but sensitive restoration in 2001 by Ian Bowman, but most others have been heavily adapted or destroyed. Architecturally and historically this is frustrating, but educationally this is entirely understandable, as means of teaching and attitudes of teaching have moved well away from the ideals of education in the nineteenth-century. Apart from changes in teaching methods and teaching curriculum, there are different attitudes towards room size, classroom layouts, window placement, and relationship to the outdoors. The schools that Ellis designed are by modern standards, completely unsuitable. Yet they were an important part of the Nelson system of education that was later to be adopted as the model for school teaching, throughout New Zealand.

Ellis also designed some small number of individual houses, including the obligatory tiny teacher's cottages - typically one per school. While plans of Ellis' house designs are of limited availability, it is possible that some of these houses may have survived, as there is not the pressure to upgrade compared with schools. Exact addresses however were not a feature on Ellis' drawings, and so the exact

locations remain a mystery at present. The residential scale of the schools is emphasized by the fact that in some cases, older schools were actually converted into residences for the teaching staff when the class size had outgrown the capacity, such as this:

TENDERS are wanted for certain ALTERATIONS and REPAIRS required to convert the Old School at Waimea West into a portion of the Residence for the Teacher. Specifications on view at the Old Schoolroom until 6th May, when Tenders are to be delivered to Mr. Christian Schwass, Chairman of the School Committee. STEAD ELLIS, Architect.⁹²

In his role as Secretary however, Ellis had frequent, fortnightly contact with the Bishop of Nelson, and that may have led to his commissions for church architecture. Apart from the Bishop's School, there are at least two prime Anglican church commissions, of which Ellis would have been very proud. The most prominent was a commission to add on a chancel and vestry to the Richmond church of Holy Trinity, largely to the design of the original architect William Beatson. While William Beatson had died almost ten years before Ellis even set foot in Nelson, his son Charles Beatson had typically been carrying on the family business, and so it is interesting

⁹² "To Builders [New School, Motupiko]" p 3.

as to why Beatson (junior) did not complete the works. However, the younger Beatson had secured better commissions by then, and had moved across the Cook Strait to Wellington, taking up a role as the Government Architect.

The Holy Trinity church is the region's largest church outside of the Cathedral, and it sits prominently on a slight rise in the suburb of Richmond. Bowman notes regarding Holy Trinity that:

The style of the church is Early English, the same style as Christ Church and Saint Barnabas. The formal elements of the style have been used accurately - projecting buttresses, steep pitched roofs, tall lancet windows, and a simple, well-proportioned composition.⁹³

The Holy Trinity church at Richmond has been well maintained but has had a number of alterations over the last century. Here at least, there is no confusion over responsibilities. The original architect, William Beatson, was also an immigrant from England, but died in 1870, a decade before Ellis arrived on these shores. Tunnicliff notes that "Beatson's son, Charles, carried on his father's work and completed the church, which was formally consecrated ...on 31 July 1872 by Bishop Suter."⁹⁴ The funding

⁹³ Bowman *William Beatson* p 127.

⁹⁴ Tunnicliff "Bishops' Nelson" p 28.

had not been enough to construct the full extent of the plan and so in 1885 the church was extended with a new chancel and vestry. Having recently completed the Parsonage at Richmond in 1883,⁹⁵ the architect for this new chancel and vestry was Stead Ellis:

TENDERS are wanted for the ERECTION of a CHANCEL and VESTRY proposed to be added to the Church of the Holy Trinity, Richmond. Plans and Specifications on view until MONDAY, the 4th day of May, when tenders are to be delivered. STEAD ELLIS, Architect. Nelson, April 16th, 1885.⁹⁶

Drawings for the extension, in Stead Ellis' hand, clearly show the extension, and it was tendered from his office as per his work with schools, but the design was a faithful addition of Beatson's earlier work in an identical style. Ellis also added a church school in the grounds around the same time as the project to add the steeple in 1890.

Eighteen years later, in a corner of the grounds, a schoolroom designed by Stead Ellis was opened. This dedication was one of the last of the bishop's long episcopate which had seen so many new churches and schools erected.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ "Richmond Parsonage. To Builders" p 2.

⁹⁶ "To Builders [Chancel and Vestry, Church of the Holy Trinity, Richmond]" p 2.

⁹⁷ Tunnicliff "Bishops' Nelson" p 28.

In the 1980s the church committee, having seriously considered demolition and replacement, decided to keep their historic church, but for reasons unknown to the authors, also decided to demolish Ellis' chancel and vestry. Although Ellis' work was an addition, as noted, it was a faithful copy, and quite probably designed to original indicative sketches by Beatson himself. The material quality of the timberwork would have been much the same. The church decided to replace Ellis' work with a greatly enlarged chancel by Warren and Mahoney, completed in 1984. Therefore, the only possible remnant of Ellis' work may be the steeple, although it is uncertain if that was an Ellis commission.

Most of Ellis' work was scattered widely across the large Tasman district. He had completed a school in Motupiko in 1885, probably a small, single-roomed school similar to the Bishop's School, although there appears no trace of the school in the township now:

TENDERS are required on or before the 12th May for the ERECTION of a NEW SCHOOL at Motupiko. Plans and specifications can be seen at the Motupiko School.

STEAD ELLIS, – Architect.⁹⁸

Of greater longevity however, is what is his arguably finest work of all: the Church of St George at Motupiko, completed in 1892, designed in a Gothic style similar to others in the district, but perhaps with a little more flair. At last, Ellis could spread his artistic ability more widely and escape the rigorous confines of school design – although of course church design was also constrained by precedents.

The Gothic style had appealed to the romantic; it was mysterious, imaginative, symbolic, and subject to no restraint save that of art. By the eighteen-fifties it had settled down into little more than an appeal to precedents and rules ... on the activities of the ecclesiological societies.⁹⁹

St George's church in Motupiko, was not the first.

There has been a church in the Upper Motueka Valley since 1865. The present St George's built of rimu on a boulder foundation, was designed by Stead Ellis and consecrated by Bishop Mules on 30 September 1892. It was described as "one of the prettiest little churches in the diocese."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ "To Builders [New School, Motupiko]" p 3.

⁹⁹ Kaye *The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain* p 117.

¹⁰⁰ Tunnicliff "Bishops' Nelson" p 24.

The church is indeed a pretty building, sitting in what is now just a small bend on the Kohatu-Kawatiri highway. It was built for what must have been hoped to be a booming population – Thornton notes that "its construction in 1892 was a leap of faith as there were only 32 families living in the district at that time."¹⁰¹ The population of Motupiko is now even smaller, and now contains perhaps only a half dozen local dwellings. Of the schools Ellis built, there is no sight. The church sits on an east west axis, with a very simple, pared-back bell tower near the road, constructed very properly in the Early English style.

The essence of the Early English style is of a simply ornamented building with steeply sloping roofs and a well-defined outline ... Timber was quite often the material used for the roofing and it's [sic] use was extended to the whole of the church in New Zealand.¹⁰²

Simple vertical board and batten cladding, with small external buttressing, enclose a single timber space inside, with four bays, each with a single gothic pointed window to each side, and a fifth smaller bay at the chancel. A triple trefoil window sits over the altar at the east end, with an entry porch at the

¹⁰¹ Thornton *Worship in the Wilderness* p 159.

¹⁰² Bowman *William Beatson* p 63.

southwest corner. The building uses no concrete - remarkably, the simple river-boulder foundations still being in solid position today, but the congregation, sadly absent, the church now only open a few times a year.

Conclusion

This paper has gone some way into finding out more on the works and life of Stead Ellis and his family. Having previously been an unknown character, he now is better understood, and his works are more clearly defined. Further research is needed on his work in the 1890s and 1900s, but his key works are outlined here. While the architectural quality of most of his work was simple (and much is now destroyed), Ellis' life is a good example of that of an architect in a small provincial town in New Zealand in the 1880s and 1890s. Having had a large family (the original eight boys added to by three girls), he does have an extensive family of descendants scattered across the globe, including co-author Robin Stead Marriage (née Ellis), Stead Ellis and Siobhan Stead Ellis, all great grand-children of Stead Ellis, as well as Briony Ellis-Wood, Markman Stead Ellis and architect Guy Marriage, all great-great-

grandchildren of Stead Ellis. The legacy of Stead Ellis lives on.

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