

A Scotsman abroad: the architecture of John Scotland in colonial Nelson

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ABSTRACT: John Scotland was one of a small number of architects practising in Nelson during the 1870s. Born in Stirlingshire in 1812, he was the son of a master mason and followed that same calling. However, only scant details of his life are known until he emigrated to New Zealand aged in his mid-50s. As with a number of his contemporaries in the building trades, Scotland turned to architecture, and established a practice in Nelson in 1866. He designed some of that city's grandest homes, including Melrose and Fellworth, both now listed by Heritage New Zealand, as well as various commercial premises and a synagogue. Scotland returned to his native land in 1885, and died in Glasgow two years later.

Early life and family background

Born in the village of Dunipace in the Scottish county of Stirlingshire on 8 October 1812, John Scotland was the son of John Scotland and his wife, Isobel Turnbull.¹ Little is known of his early life, but it seems that his father was a master mason, and that young John followed him into that trade. In the 1841 census, John Sr was living with Isobel in Stirling Street, Dunipace, and was described as a mason.² In that same census, John Jr appears to have been living at Bowling Bay on the north bank of the Clyde with an architect named Robert Crawford, aged about 40.³ This is probably the Robert Crawford listed in the *Dictionary of Scottish Architects* as having a practice in nearby Glasgow from 1843 to 1860, before retiring to Ardenslate, near Dunoon in Argyll,⁴ where he died unmarried in 1861.⁵

¹ Old Parish Registers: Births 478/10/220 Dunipace.

² 1841 Census: Census 478/2/7.

³ 1841 Census: Census 501/2/9.

⁴ "Basic biographical details: Robert Crawford" np.

At the 1851 census, John Jr, aged 38, was back living with his parents in Dunipace. John Sr, aged 65, was a mason and the head of the household, while John Jr was described as unmarried, and a master mason employing one man.⁶ Ten years later, at the time of the 1861 census, an unmarried John Jr, mason, was still living in Dunipace but was now the head of the household. Residing with him was his servant, Helen McGregor, aged 44.⁷

The Nelson years: 1866-85

John Scotland emigrated to New Zealand around 1866, and on Christmas Day 1866, the first advertisement for his architectural practice appeared in *The Colonist* newspaper. It read:

J. Scotland, Architect, (Late of Stirlingshire, N.B.).
Having commenced business here, in Hardy-street,

⁵ Statutory Registers: Deaths 510/48, 1861.

⁶ 1851 Census: Census 478/3/26.

⁷ 1861 Census: Census 478/4/1.

Nelson, in his profession as an Architect, hopes, from his experience and the attention that he intends to give to his business, that he will meet the views and merit the patronage of those who intend erecting buildings here or in the surrounding country.⁸

The same advertisement ran in the *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle* and *The Colonist* for about a month. In August 1867, he began advertising his services as an architect in the *Nelson Evening Mail*,⁹ and from the end of that month he was describing himself as an "architect and inspector of buildings" in advertisements in the *Nelson Evening Mail* and the *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle*.¹⁰

⁸ "J. Scotland, Architect [advertisement]" (25 December 1866) p 2.

⁹ "J. Scotland, Architect [advertisement]" (17 August 1867) p 3.

¹⁰ "J. Scotland, Architect [advertisement]" (29 August 1867) p 2.

The first reference to a building designed by Scotland appears in January 1868, with reports of plans for a shop and dwelling-house for Mr Johns, confectioner, in Trafalgar Street.¹¹ Over the course of his practice in Nelson during the next 17 years, Scotland designed a range of residential and commercial premises, as well as a synagogue. The following list is gleaned from tender advertisements and other reports in the *Nelson Evening Mail*, *The Colonist*, and the *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle* newspapers:

- 1868**
 Shop and dwelling-house for Mr Johns, Trafalgar Street.
 Shop and dwelling-house for Mr J.C. Phillips, Trafalgar Street.
 All Saints' Church, Vanguard Street (unbuilt).
 Shop and dwelling-house for Mr Milner, Trafalgar Street.
 Building for Mr Trask.
 Synagogue, Trafalgar Square.
 Hotel for Mr T. Field, corner of Trafalgar and Hardy Streets (designed by John Scott, works inspected by Scotland).
- 1870**
 Building for Mr E. Green, The Sands (now known as Tahunanui).
- 1871**
 Cottage in vicinity of Nelson for Thomas Field.

¹¹ "The Nelson Evening Mail" (8 January 1868) p 2.

- Wooden tenement, Nelson.
- 1872**
 Completion of house for Mr E. Green, The Sands.
- 1874**
 Bonded store for H. Davis & Co, opposite the Post Office.
 Store and dwelling-house for W. Phillips, Bridge Street.
- 1876**
 Dwelling-house for John Sharp.
- 1877**
 Repairs to "Newstead" for T. Renwick.
- 1878**
 Additions and alterations to Colonial Bank of New Zealand, corner of Hardy and Trafalgar Streets.
- 1879**
 Building for C.F. Watts, Brougham Street.
 Additions to dwelling-house for T.S. Wymond, Trafalgar Street.
- 1881**
 Cottage for Mrs A. Watts.
 Repairs to Presbyterian Church.
 Dwelling-house for H.O. Ledger, Wakapuaka.
 Repairs to be put on dwelling-house for Mrs M. Marsden, Stoke.
- 1882**
 Additions to warehouse for Moss Davis, Bridge Street.
- 1883**
 Repairs to dwelling-house for Mrs. M. Marsden, Stoke.

Large villa residence for Mr A.S. Collins, Kaikoura.

If the above is close to a comprehensive list of Scotland's work, he would not appear to have had a prodigious output. However, his commissions included grand houses for some of Nelson's most prominent citizens, including John Sharp and Arthur Shuckburgh Collins.

During the 1850s and 1860s, there were few architects practising in the city, with Maxwell Bury and William Beatson being responsible for most of the buildings of merit.¹² Bury's commissions included extensions to Frederick Thatcher's 1848 Christ Church on Pikimai/Church Hill at the southern end of Trafalgar Street, the Provincial Council Chambers and Nelson Institute in 1859, the Chapel of the Holy Evangelists completed in 1877 and probably the adjacent residence, Bishopdale, for the Bishop of Nelson, in 1868.¹³ Beatson designed a number of significant churches, including: St Barnabas' in Stoke and All Saints' in Vanguard Street in the 1860s; the original buildings for Nelson College on the current site in Waimea Road; and many fine houses still standing today including Sunnyside (now Warwick House)

¹² Stacpoole *Colonial Architecture* p 69.

¹³ Stacpoole *Colonial Architecture* pp 71-72.

for Alfred Fell, Woodstock at Stoke for Captain Nicholson, Stead House (now known as Holland House) at Stoke,¹⁴ and Broadgreen, also at Stoke, for Edmund Buxton.¹⁵ Also practising in Nelson from the 1850s were John William Gay Beauchamp and Henry Bogie Huddleston.¹⁶

Fires were a common occurrence in Nelson in the 1860s. In the early hours of 7 August 1866, a fire broke out at the Nelson Hotel at the corner of Bridge and Collingwood Streets, and 18 buildings in all were destroyed, including three hotels, the YMCA hall, Temperance Hall, five houses, and various commercial premises.¹⁷ The following year, on the evening of 7 November, a fire originating in one of the bedrooms at the Masonic Hotel, on the corner of Trafalgar and Hardy Streets, quickly spread and ten commercial premises in Hardy and Trafalgar Streets were lost, with total losses estimated at up to £30,000.¹⁸ Newspaper editorials at the time noted that the recent conflagrations had shown the "folly

¹⁴ Stacpoole *Colonial Architecture* pp 72-75.

¹⁵ Bade "Early Housing in New Zealand" p 5.

¹⁶ Wilson "Thematic Historical Overview of Nelson City" p 30.

¹⁷ "Destructive Fire" (14 August 1866) p 8.

¹⁸ "Destructive Fire" (9 November 1867) p 3.

of wooden buildings," and called upon the government to pass a Building Act that made it illegal to construct buildings in heavily populated areas of the city in timber, and that brick walls and slate or iron roofs should be mandatory, within certain limits.¹⁹

It was in this milieu that John Scotland found himself when he arrived in Nelson, and so it was an opportune time to establish an architectural practice there at the end of 1866. His experience as a master mason would have stood him in good stead, and his time residing with Robert Crawford would perhaps have inspired him. It can be seen from his list of works that 1868 was Scotland's busiest year in Nelson, and many of his projects at that time were rebuilds arising from the 1867 fire.

Israel Johns, a confectioner and pastry-cook, commissioned Scotland to design a replacement for his two-storey shop and dwelling in Trafalgar Street that had been destroyed in the 1867 fire. Scotland's design was described as forming as "handsome addition" to the town,²⁰ and "of a character decidedly superior to any of the buildings,

¹⁹ "Great Fire in Nelson" p 2.

²⁰ "Rebuilding of the Houses Destroyed by the Late Fire" p 2.

with a few notable exceptions, that have been erected in this city for some past time."²¹ The two-storey building was said to be "in the Italian style" with a height of 32 feet. It was constructed using local Dun Mountain stone and Portland cement, which allowed greater enrichment of its ornamental features at a lower cost than if the decorations had been executed in wood. The total construction cost was estimated to be about £160 more than if it had been built of wood, but only about 75 per cent of the cost of building in brick.²² Scotland prepared a similar design for James Charles Phillips, a tailor and outfitter, whose store on the neighbouring site had also been destroyed in the 1867 fire.²³

The new buildings for Johns and Phillips were also notable in that Scotland's plans included four double columns in cast iron, each column weighting 13 cwt (660 kg), which were cast locally at Moutray and Barclay's foundry in Bridge Street. These were said to be the largest and heaviest castings made in the Nelson province up until that time, with

²¹ "The Nelson Evening Mail" (8 January 1868) p 2.

²² "The Nelson Evening Mail" (8 January 1868) p 2.

²³ "Building in Nelson" (10 January 1868) p 3.

previous similar elements having been imported from Australia.²⁴

A third rebuild resulting from the 1867 fire designed by Scotland was for a new building containing two shops in Trafalgar Street for William Milner, a draper and haberdasher. It was similar in design to those executed for Phillips and Johns, although it was more ornamented, with enriched architraves and modillions to the upper storey, and enriched cornices to the lower storey. The columns had Corinthian capitals, and the overall effect was said to be "rich and satisfactory."²⁵ An earthquake occurred during the construction of the building, which caused some alarm. Early on 19 October 1868, a magnitude 7.2 earthquake struck 55 km north-east of Collingwood.²⁶ The tremor was felt strongly in Nelson, and subsequently a "long and threatening fissure" was observed in Milner's new building.²⁷ However, Scotland claimed that the crack had been evident for a few days prior to the earthquake, and that it was caused

by the connection of the building to an adjacent one, and not by the earthquake.²⁸

Although he was not the architect, Scotland was involved as inspector of works for the construction of the new hotel for Thomas Field on the site of the Masonic Hotel where the 1868 fire had started. The substantial two-storey building measuring 74 feet by 49 feet was 32 feet high and was built of brick.²⁹

In 1868, Scotland also drew up plans for All Saints' Church in Vanguard Street, which were tendered.³⁰ The new building had originally been designed by William Beatson, but the project stalled because of the cost of between £1200 and £1400 for Beatson's design. However, Beatson also prepared revised plans, costed at £800-900, which were eventually approved,³¹ and so Scotland's scheme went unrealised.

That same year, however, Scotland was more successful in securing the commission for a Jewish synagogue, which was built at the corner of Trafalgar Square and Nile Street

West. The building, 20 feet wide by 32 feet long, with a height of 21 feet, was constructed in wood with a stone foundation, at a cost of £400,³² and was consecrated in August 1869.³³

Between 1870 and 1872, Scotland designed a cottage for Thomas Field in the vicinity of Nelson,³⁴ a wooden tenement in the city,³⁵ and a house for Mr E Green at Tahunanui.³⁶ The construction of the latter building was the subject of a contractual dispute between Scotland and Green, with Scotland claiming £65 5s in additional commission and costs. The magistrate's court awarded him £23 15s, and legal costs of £9 15s.³⁷

In 1874, Scotland was awarded the commission to design bonded stores for Messrs H Davis and Co opposite the Nelson Post Office.³⁸ Hyam Davis was a leader of the Jewish community in Nelson, and had donated the site for the synagogue designed by Scotland.³⁹ The two-storey warehouse was

²⁴ "[Untitled]" (11 February 1868) p 2.

²⁵ "[Untitled]" (3 July 1868) p 2.

²⁶ GeoNet "M 7.2 Cape Farewell" np.

²⁷ "The Earthquake" (19 October 1868) p 2.

²⁸ "The Nelson Evening Mail" (20 October 1868) p 2.

²⁹ "The Nelson Evening Mail" (20 November 1868) p 2.

³⁰ "All Saint's Church" p 2.

³¹ "All Saints Church" np.

³² "[Untitled]" (23 July 1868) p 2.

³³ "Consecration of the New Synagogue" p 2.

³⁴ "To Builders [Tender Notice]" (27 February 1871) p 3.

³⁵ "To Builders [New Advertisements]" (13 July 1871) p 2.

³⁶ "To Builders [New Advertisements]" (5 July 1872) p 2.

³⁷ "Resident Magistrate's Court" p 3.

³⁸ "To Contractors and Others" p 2.

³⁹ "[Untitled]" (23 July 1868) p 2.

76 feet long by 42 feet wide, 34 feet high, and was designed for strength and fire resistance rather than appearance.⁴⁰ Also in 1874, a store and dwelling for William Phillips, a grocer and furniture dealer, was designed by Scotland.⁴¹

By 1875, perhaps Scotland was receiving insufficient work to make a comfortable living, as he submitted a tender to the Nelson City Council for the office of valuer. The successful tenderer was auctioneer John Row Mabin, with a bid of £75; Scotland's tender sum was not disclosed.⁴²

However, the situation seems to have improved for Scotland, as over the next few years he was commissioned to design new homes, extensions or repairs by several of Nelson's leading citizens. In 1876, he designed Fellworth for businessman, magistrate and politician John Sharp; in 1877 he oversaw repairs to Newstead in Alton Street,⁴³ recently purchased by Dr Thomas Renwick from the estate of Sir David Monro, and earlier the first

premises of Nelson College.⁴⁴ In 1879, he executed Melrose House for Charles Fowell Willett Watts.⁴⁵ In 1883 he completed a stone front extension to Isel House in Stoke for Mrs Mary Marsden, the widow of farmer and philanthropist Thomas Marsden,⁴⁶ and in 1883 he designed Rockwood for politician Arthur Shuckburgh Collins on the latter's run at Mt Fyffe, inland from Kaikoura.⁴⁷

Fellworth, built on the hill beside Milton Street, and Melrose House in Brougham Street, share many strong architectural features. Built in native timbers, both are Italianate in style, having low-pitch hipped roofs with projecting eaves supported by corbels, imposing cornices, angled bay windows, glazed doors, and tall arch-headed sash windows, particularly on the upper storey, suggesting a *piano nobile*. Timber corner boards have been used on both houses to appear as quoins. Fellworth is now listed as a category 2 historic place by Heritage New

Zealand,⁴⁸ while Melrose enjoys category 1 listing.⁴⁹

Scotland's extension to the front of Isel House in Stoke, although built in local stone, shows a portico entrance and arch-headed sash windows similar to those seen at Melrose and Fellworth. Isel House, like Fellworth, now has a Heritage New Zealand category 2 listing.⁵⁰ Rockwood was a large, 25-room villa completed in about 1885 at a cost of £2000. It was unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1933.⁵¹

Other commissions by Scotland towards the end of his career in Nelson included: additions and alterations to the Colonial Bank of New Zealand at the corner of Hardy and Trafalgar Streets in 1878;⁵² a cottage for Mrs A Watts in 1881;⁵³ additional warehousing and a bond store, measuring 85 feet by 40 feet, between Bridge Street and Wakatu Street, for merchant and general importer Moss Davis, the son of Hyam Davis,⁵⁴ and a dwelling

⁴⁸ "Fellworth" np.

⁴⁹ "Melrose House" np.

⁵⁰ "Isel House and Park" np.

⁵¹ "Kaikoura Home Destroyed" p 14.

⁵² "The Colonial Bank of New Zealand [Tender Notice]" p 2.

⁵³ "To Builders [Tender Notice]" p 3.

⁵⁴ "Town Improvements" (7 September 1882) p 3.

⁴⁰ "Town Improvements" (13 October 1874) p 2.

⁴¹ "To Contractors and Builders" p 2.

⁴² "Valuer" p 3.

⁴³ "To Builders [Tender Notice]" (3 August 1877) p 2.

⁴⁴ Allan "The Story of Newstead" pp 31-33.

⁴⁵ "To Builders [Tender Notice]" (23 July 1879) p 2.

⁴⁶ Stadel "Isel House and Park" np.

⁴⁷ "Nelson Evening Mail" (17 July 1883) p 2.

house for Horace Octavius Ledger at Whakapuaka in 1881.⁵⁵

The latter structure, known as Montrose, although less grand than Fellworth or Melrose, nevertheless shares a number of architectural features with the aforementioned residences, including an angled bay window and Scotland's favoured arch-headed sash windows. Montrose may be of some historical interest, as it was suggested in an item in the *Nelson Photo News* in 1967 that Te Whiti o Rongomai had been quartered there during his imprisonment in Nelson between 1882 and 1883.⁵⁶ While it is known that Te Whiti and Tohu Kākahi were lodged in a large house at Whakapuaka,⁵⁷ contemporary newspaper reports suggest that the house was owned by George Harper.⁵⁸ Te Whiti and Tohu did make many visits around the area, however, and it is possible that they visited Montrose.

Apart from his professional practice, Scotland seems to have led a quiet life, largely out of the public eye, during his time in Nelson. He

⁵⁵ "To Builders [Tender Notice]" (1 November 1881):2.

⁵⁶ "Historic Homes: No. 9, 'Montrose'" p 82.

⁵⁷ Keenan *Te Whiti* p 199.

⁵⁸ "Te Whiti and Tohu" p 3.

was called for jury service in 1870,⁵⁹ 1871,⁶⁰ 1873,⁶¹ 1874,⁶² 1877,⁶³ and 1879.⁶⁴ His only other contributions to civic life appear to have been as one of 160 electors to sign a requisition requesting that Nathaniel Edwards permit himself to be nominated for a seat in the House of Representatives in 1868,⁶⁵ and at a meeting to elect the local education committee in 1875 where he nominated Joseph Henry Levien.⁶⁶ On the morning of 8 February 1881, Scotland's small cottage reportedly narrowly escaped destruction by fire when a smouldering pillow and mattress were discovered just as they were about to burst into flame.⁶⁷

Return to Scotland

In July 1885, it was reported that Scotland was leaving Nelson and an auction of his books and other effects was being held.⁶⁸ He evidently returned to Scotland, as he died at

⁵⁹ "Criminal Sittings" p 2.

⁶⁰ "Supreme Court" (1 August 1871) p 3.

⁶¹ "Supreme Court" (2 September 1873) p 3.

⁶² "Supreme Court" (5 January 1873) p 2.

⁶³ "Supreme Court" (1 October 1877) p 2.

⁶⁴ "Supreme Court" (26 September 1879) p 2.

⁶⁵ "Election Notice" p 1.

⁶⁶ "Election of School Committee" p 3.

⁶⁷ "Nelson Evening Mail" (8 February 1881) p 2.

⁶⁸ "[Untitled]" (8 July 1885) p 2.

his residence, 17 Windsor Place, Hillhead, Glasgow, of natural causes on 15 March 1887.⁶⁹ His estate was valued at £138 18s.⁷⁰ He received a short obituary in the *Nelson Evening Mail*:

The death is announced of Mr John Scotland, architect, who will be remembered as having been a resident for some years in Nelson, where he designed many of the more conspicuous buildings.⁷¹

Conclusion

Although Scotland appears not to have received any formal training as an architect, he showed considerable skill, no doubt influenced by his years as a master mason and perhaps also by Robert Crawford. During his practice in Nelson he produced some of that city's most enduring and loved grand old residences, and made a significant contribution to its architecture over a relatively short professional career.

⁶⁹ Statutory Registers: Corrected Death Entries 646/03 003 192.

⁷⁰ Wills and Testaments, Reference SC36/48/118, Glasgow Sheriff Court Inventories.

⁷¹ "Town Edition: Nelson Evening Mail" p 2.

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