

## 200 Architects in the 1870s? Is that figure real?

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper we are using our architects dataset to identify every person who called themselves an architect in New Zealand in the 1870s. An initial check of our database produced around 200 names, but we know from our previous studies that this figure needs to be refined to gauge the importance of their work, or even determine whether some of them could be truly called architects.

We have taken our data and used key attributes to try to quantify and qualify our architects. For example, one initial crude sort was based on the numbers of buildings designed over their total careers; this should give some indication of their presumed competence and possible success in the profession. So-called architects who designed zero structures were assigned to the lowest class; other classes were; 1-5 structures; 6-20; and >21, the latter appearing to be the most successful. We also considered where each person was located for the bulk of the 1870s to see if there might be geographical trends related to their success or otherwise. To finish our analysis we have chosen a few architects as examples from each of our classes and described them in more detail to explain perceived trends.

### Introduction

Following on from our first steps in compiling our big dataset for New Zealand architects 1840-1940 as described at last year's symposium,<sup>1</sup> and in the light of additional data we have continued to add since then, we decided to extract every named architect from our database who listed themselves as such in the media between 1870 and 1879. Although we could spend the whole of our allotted presentation time reading out the almost 200 names we found, we decided that would be counterproductive unless used as a sleep-inducing alternative to counting sheep.

<sup>1</sup> Humphris & Mew "How to Characterise a 1914 Architect Using Big Data" pp 51-56.

Category	No. of "architects"	Auckland	Wellington	Christchurch	Dunedin	Other
Category 1: No buildings found	30	7	3	1	6	13
Category 2: 1-5 buildings found	56	6	9	6	6	29
Category 3: 6-20 buildings found	35	7	8	10	2	8
Category 4: 21+ buildings found	62	8	15	11	9	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>70</b>

**Table 1:** "Architects" active during 1870-1879, geographical location and grouped by category of number of building designs found.

Taking the animal hypothesis further, one could say that the first stage was to separate the sheep from the goats, that is the architects from the non-architects. Previous experience had indicated those with multiple skills such as surveying and/or engineering often threw "architect" into the advertising mix to try and strengthen their chances of obtaining work. We had to devise more objective methods for sorting out the relative skills possessed by the

range of people included in our 1870s "architects" rather than simple opinion. The very first sort was to remove obvious draftsmen, "designers," and a few people whose period of activity did not exactly coincide with the appropriate dates. This reduced the dataset to just over 180.

### "Successful architects" and others

One comparatively simple means of judging

"success" as an architect is to consider the numbers and types of buildings designed over their entire career, combined with their qualifications and status. Other factors of course come into play, such as broad economic conditions over time, location, and competitors. We decided to set up four basic classes defined by the numbers of buildings our architects had designed over their total careers rather than restrict them only to the 1870s where their careers may not have peaked or where they may have been in decline after an earlier time. Table 1 shows the number of buildings for each category, and gives a breakdown of our architects by location. It is worth noting that the results presented here are based on our dataset as it stands to date. Potentially for any one architect additional research may uncover more records of building designs, which would mean architects may move between the categories we are using. We are confident however that, taken as a whole, the number of architects we have identified is representative of the state of the "profession" as a whole.

#### **Category 1: Architects with no buildings**

30 architects had no recorded buildings to their names, with almost exactly half of them located in the main centres of Auckland,

Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, but with biases towards Auckland and Dunedin (seven and six respectively). The rest were scattered across minor centres from Thames south via Whanganui to Greymouth and Invercargill, usually with only one person in each place. Frequently these people advertised in a local newspaper for a limited period of months - seldom more than a year - and when no tenders eventuated they disappeared or surfaced elsewhere following a different form of employment. Many also advertised as civil engineers and/or surveyors, and although they may often have been trained as architects as well, that did not become their primary calling. Because of their lack of buildings, we have not followed their careers in any detail.

#### **Category 2: Architects who designed from one to five buildings.**

56 architects were assigned to this category, making it the second largest of the four, only exceeded by the 62 architects who designed more than 21 buildings during their careers. Just under half of the former were located in the main centres, six in each, except for Wellington where there were nine. The distribution in the smaller centres was similar to that found in the first category, except that there were more located in places such as

Thames, Wanganui and Oamaru, suggesting greater competition, or more work available. 13 of these architects only designed one or two buildings, and, in similar fashion to those in Category 1, frequently also described themselves as civil engineers, surveyors, or in some instances, agents or estate agents. Some in this broad category who have been investigated in more detail, such as James Baird and Robert Stokes, can be shown to have clearly pursued primary careers in fields other than architecture, although they possessed basic design skills.

#### **Category 3: Architects who designed from six to 20 buildings.**

35 architects were assigned to this category, only slightly more than the number in Category 1. About two thirds of them were located in the main centres with the most in Christchurch (ten) and the fewest in Dunedin (two). Auckland and Wellington had seven and eight respectively. Almost all the architects located in the main centres had more than ten building designs to their credit. There were only eight in the minor centres, scattered from Tauranga to Timaru, although half of them had designed buildings in double figures (11 to 13). Many in this broad category also had civil engineering backgrounds as

well as architectural training or experience; only ten had trained solely as architects. Two or three were still listing as builders in the 1870s but were soon to commence calling themselves architects for the rest of their careers. A few, such as Edward James Campion, eventually gave up architecture and dealt in real estate.

**Category 4: Architects who designed more than 21 buildings.**

62 architects were assigned to the final category, the largest of the four and the one thought to represent the most successful architects. Two thirds of these were located in the main centres, the most (15) being in Wellington, then in descending numbers, in Christchurch (11), Dunedin (nine) and Auckland (eight). The remaining 19 were located in 13 minor centres from Hamilton to Invercargill via Napier, Blenheim, Greymouth and Oamaru, several of which contained architects who designed buildings; numbers running into three figures during the courses of their careers. Some examples were Charles Lamb in Napier with about 117 buildings identified to date; William Douslin in Blenheim with 122; John Adam Eissenhardt in Greymouth with 130 and Angus Kerr in Invercargill with 160.

Several of these centres contained more than one successful architect, such as Oamaru and Invercargill with two each, but the outstanding example was Timaru with five. In 1874 Timaru was the second largest town in the Canterbury Province with a population of 2,000, and despite the breakwater that helped it become a safe port not being started until 1878, it became an important servicing and manufacturing centre.

Of the 15 architects practising in Wellington at this time, nine of them had designed over 100 buildings by the end of their careers, with the rest averaging 46 (range: 24 to 61). The other main centres did not fare so well, Auckland having only two architects with over 100 buildings, Keals and Cameron, whereas Dunedin only had one in the person of David Ross. There were no architects in Christchurch with more than 100 buildings although Joseph Maddison came close with 97.

Undoubtedly quantity should not be the only parameter used to judge the ultimate output of an architect and quality must play a significant role in how architects are judged by their peers and by posterity. Christchurch of course had Benjamin Mountfort designing in the 1870s - his apparent output of around

44 buildings appears modest but he was the leading Gothic architect of his day. Using the numbering system we have designed, he is nevertheless assigned to the "most successful" category.

Even at this high level, the number of fully-trained architects under the apprenticeship system is relatively small and there are a number who came up through the ranks so to speak, starting out as carpenters or builders and gradually becoming highly successful architects. Also included are several trained engineers such as Bartley, Petre, and Marchant, but surveyors are noticeably absent in this category. "Real Architects" i.e. those who trained as apprentices to other architects, number only 20 out of the 43 who designed in the main centres; a further eight had trained as engineers, but 12 started out as carpenters and the remainder trained within the Public Works system. The relative numbers in these categories for each main centre are shown in the Table 2, with Wellington leading in the numbers of professionally-trained architects (combined architects and engineers) at 10 and Auckland having the fewest at three. Dunedin and Christchurch had seven and eight, respectively.

Generally speaking, the "real" architects in Wellington produced the greatest numbers of designs during their careers, but two other locals, Frederick Mitchell and Charles Tringham, both of whom had been builders, each designed more than 100 buildings. In Christchurch the "real" architects almost produced more building designs than their differently-trained counterparts, although the total numbers were more modest compared with Wellington, except for Joseph Maddison at 97. In Auckland, those trained as engineers only just held their own in terms of numbers with those who began their careers as carpenters or builders, whereas in Dunedin the professionally-trained almost entirely outnumbered the few others in building design numbers.

**Example for Category 4: a highly successful architect - Joseph Clarkson Maddison<sup>2</sup>**

Maddison was born in London in 1850. His father was an engineer and his mother was a builder's daughter. He was articled to a London architect, probably James Morris, architect and surveyor. Maddison immigrated to New Zealand in 1872 and immediately commenced business in Christchurch where

<sup>2</sup> Wilson "Maddison, Joseph Clarkson" np.

City	Trained as Engineer	Trained as Carpenter	"Real" Architect	Public Works Department	Total
Christchurch	1	4	7	0	11
Auckland	2	4	1	0	7
Dunedin	2	1	5	1	9
Wellington	3	3	7	2	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>43</b>

**Table 2:** Architects who designed in the main centres in the 1870s, shown by location as well as form of training.

he practised for most of his life, although he designed buildings over a much wider area including some in the North Island.

Although Maddison has tended to gain a reputation for designing freezing works, he was an extremely versatile architect, producing plans for public buildings such as churches and hotels, as well as shops, warehouses, offices and many private residences. In 1879 he had both won and come second in a competition for a new Christchurch Town Hall with municipal offices.<sup>3</sup> His career extended well beyond the 1870s. Between 1905 and 1914 he designed nine buildings in Wellington; four office blocks, three houses, a bake house and a hotel. One of the houses, situated in Thorndon, was an Edwardian Arts & Crafts style house for the widow of Premier Seddon built in 1907.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Obituary, Mr J C Maddison" p 6.

<sup>4</sup> Building Permit, Molesworth Street.

In 1908 he designed Merchiston near Rata in the Rangitīkei District.<sup>5</sup>

Maddison became a Fellow of the RIBA in 1887.<sup>6</sup> He was a member of the New Zealand Institute of Architects from 1905 but was not involved in the running of it. The final part of his career was in partnership with Thomas Duncan Brown between 1913 and 1919 and they designed several warehouses, offices and houses.<sup>7</sup>

His wife Jane died in 1920. Maddison survived her until December 1923 dying of a heart attack in Napier aged 73. He had been in poor health for several years previously and had retired in 1920.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> McCracken "Merchiston Station Homestead" np.

<sup>6</sup> "Obituary, Mr J C Maddison" p 6.

<sup>7</sup> "Obituary, Mr J C Maddison" p 13.

<sup>8</sup> "Obituary, Mr J C Maddison" p 13.

**Example for Category 3: a moderately successful architect - Maxwell Bury<sup>9</sup>**

Bury was born at East Retford, Nottinghamshire, England in 1825, and the son of a vicar. He trained as a Civil Engineer near Derby and presumably also acquired some knowledge of architecture. By 1852, and probably before, he was in London working as a consulting engineer in a shipbuilding company. As part of a group, he emigrated to Australia in 1853 in the *Zingari*, a steam-assisted brig-rigged sailing ship said to have been built largely by him. Australia did not suit them and they moved on to New Zealand, arriving in Nelson on the 12th of December 1854. From then on until 1857, he, as one of the owners, used the *Zingari* for trading between Wellington, Nelson and Lyttelton.

Bury does not appear to have advertised as an architect prior to an entry in *The Colonist* near the end of December 1857. By May 1858 a Masonic Hall in Trafalgar Street was being built to his design and in November 1858 the Provincial Government announced that Bury had been appointed architect for the new Government Buildings, although the first

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<sup>9</sup> Marchant "Bury, Maxwell" np.

prize for their design went to JWG Beauchamp, another Nelson architect.

By 1863 Bury was selling the furniture from his Trafalgar Street South house in preparation for "leaving the Province."<sup>10</sup> He appears to have moved to Christchurch in May 1863 and in May 1864 he was reported as having been the architect for the Christchurch Orphan Asylum.<sup>11</sup> He is said to have joined Benjamin Mountfort in partnership in July 1864 - the Catholic Church in Lyttelton described in February 1865 was by Mountfort & Bury.<sup>12</sup> By November 1866 they had switched name order so the projected church at Fanton was to be by Bury & Mountfort.<sup>13</sup> A government tender notice dated October 1867 for additions to a safe at the Provincial Government Offices refers potential tenderers to plans held by Bury & Mountfort<sup>14</sup> - but in *A Dream of Spires* Bury is supposed to have sailed for London with his wife and family in March 1866!<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "New Advertisements" p 2.

<sup>11</sup> "To Builders &c." p 5.

<sup>12</sup> "Religious" p 11.

<sup>13</sup> "Fanton" p 2.

<sup>14</sup> "To Stonemasons [Tender notice]" p 3.

<sup>15</sup> Lochhead *A Dream of Spires* p 106.

Bury's movements then become somewhat obscure. A terse report of 30 November 1870 in the *Press* has him designing a memorial stained-glass window for an unnamed Christchurch church, the glass coming from London<sup>16</sup> - but it is unclear where Bury actually was at the time. In 1869, he appears to have been in London, as the *London Gazette* notifies the dissolution of the partnership of Harvey and Bury, effective from 6 March 1869.<sup>17</sup> Their company was called Colonial & Home Agents of Great Winchester Street, London, but how long they had been in partnership is unclear.

It is possible that Bury returned to New Zealand about 1870 as he seems to have owned two sections in the Town of Collingwood according to the 1870/71 and 1875 Electoral Rolls.<sup>18</sup> But there is definite evidence from the *London Gazette* of 6 November 1874 that Maxwell Bury, Architect, of 18 & 20 Queen Victoria Street London, was then bankrupt, with a creditors' meeting to be held on the 19th of November.<sup>19</sup> By 1877 he was definitely in Dunedin where he designed

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<sup>16</sup> "News Of The Day" p 2.

<sup>17</sup> Harvey & Bury "Notice is hereby given" p 1652.

<sup>18</sup> New Zealand, Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981.

<sup>19</sup> "The Bankruptcy Act 1869" p 5277.

a series of buildings for the Otago University, but these seem to have been his last fling in New Zealand and he died in obscurity in England in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup>

Bury undoubtedly had a considerable flair for designing substantial public buildings based on his knowledge of such buildings in the United Kingdom but adapting his designs to the local materials available. His initial career as a civil engineer and businessman appears to have partially failed, leading him into architecture. But his restless nature and the breakdown of his marriage meant he never stayed in one place long enough to develop a substantial and long-lasting practice.

**Example for Category 2: a marginally successful architect – William Northcroft**

William Northcroft of New Plymouth is an example of an only marginally successful architect, with less than five buildings to his credit, despite advertising his skills for just over five years. He made up for this apparent lack of success in other ways, being Taranaki Provincial Secretary from 1861 to 1866,<sup>21</sup> then

<sup>20</sup> Marchant "Bury, Maxwell" np.

<sup>21</sup> "Provincial Council" (4 January 1862) p 1; "Provincial Council" (17 November 1866) p 2.

Secretary to the local Education Board almost to his death, aged 81, in 1888.<sup>22</sup> It was during the latter period that he advertised as an "architect, surveyor, house and estate agent, valuer, etc." - all at the same time!<sup>23</sup> Only two definite tender notices have been found, one for a house in August 1866<sup>24</sup> and a second for additions and alterations to another house in September 1871.<sup>25</sup> It is possible he also designed a church for the Bell and Hua districts as early as 1856, as the plans were to be seen at his address but not under his name as architect.<sup>26</sup>

Northcroft and his family arrived in New Zealand on the *Cresswell* in 1852 and at first farmed on the Bell Block in Taranaki.<sup>27</sup> He was temporarily in the militia but was soon taken on by the Provincial Council.<sup>28</sup> Although he called himself an architect and was so

<sup>22</sup> "Death of Mr W Northcroft" p 3.

<sup>23</sup> "William Northcroft, Architect & Surveyor, House & Estate Agent, Valuer, &c" p 1.

<sup>24</sup> "To Carpenters & Builders, Tenders for erection of a house on the Bell Block" p 3.

<sup>25</sup> "Tenders for the erection of a building to be used as a Bonded Goods Receiving Shed and Post Office at the Waitara" p 1.

<sup>26</sup> "Church for the Bell & Hua Districts" p 1.

<sup>27</sup> "Death of Mr W Northcroft" p 3.

<sup>28</sup> "Death of Mr W Northcroft" p 3.

described in his obituary,<sup>29</sup> he can be tracked back through English census data as a carpenter and builder at one time employing four staff.<sup>30</sup> Like others of his era and later, he presumably thought he would benefit more financially if he used the superior term.

**Example for Class 1: an architect with several other titles – Gabriel George Samuel Richter**

As an example of an architect who had less than five buildings to his credit throughout his life in New Zealand we have chosen Gabriel George Samuel Richter, who had a particularly unfortunate career in New Plymouth and on the West Coast of the South Island.

Born in Hungary about 1848, he immigrated to New Zealand in 1875.<sup>31</sup> Although we have not been able to find out about his early life, he advertised as an architect, engineer and surveyor of mines - as well as a music teacher.<sup>32</sup> There is some evidence that he got work in the latter capacity, both in New Plymouth and on the Coast but probably not very much.

<sup>29</sup> "Death of Mr W Northcroft" p 3.

<sup>30</sup> 1851 England Census; 1841 England Census.

<sup>31</sup> Staatsarchiv Hamburg.

<sup>32</sup> "G G Richter, Teacher of Music" p 3.

He was naturalised as a New Zealand citizen in October 1877 while in New Plymouth,<sup>33</sup> but by 1878 he was in Auckland with just tuppence (two pence) in his pocket - and described in the newspapers as their "pet vagrant."<sup>34</sup> Shortly afterwards he was confined to the Whau (later Avondale) Asylum on doctors' orders.<sup>35</sup> He was later moved to Porirua outside Wellington, and eventually to the Seaview Asylum at Hokitika in July 1907.<sup>36</sup> There he languished until his death from heart disease just over 10 years later.<sup>37</sup>

Reports on him are still confidential so we have been unable to determine the nature of his delusions, but he had a good character reference when he applied for his citizenship. As he designed no buildings that we are aware of, there is no way of judging his real capabilities.

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<sup>33</sup> "Letter of Naturalisation issued to Gabriel George Richter" p 2.

<sup>34</sup> "Pet Vagrant" p 2.

<sup>35</sup> "Auckland, From Our Own Correspondent" p 5.

<sup>36</sup> Coroners Inquests: Case Files, Westland: Richter Gabriel.

<sup>37</sup> Coroners Inquests: Case Files, Westland: Richter Gabriel.

### Discussion

The category system we have produced gives a general means of distinguishing those who made architecture a full-time and productive career from those who ventured into the profession in the hope that it might be more productive than the other types of work that they might, or could obtain. Often it appears that they might have been itinerant "jacks of all trades" from the way they describe themselves in advertisements and this raises many questions about their training and actual qualifications.

Miles Fairburn in a 1979 paper on social mobility in nineteenth-century New Zealand pointed out that the occupational labelling employed at the time was fraught with ambiguity and was seldom accurate.<sup>38</sup> The Registrar-General in his reports on censuses between 1858 and 1878 castigated men for applying vague labels to themselves either because of carelessness or indifference, making statistical compilation extremely difficult.<sup>39</sup> We have encountered this in our own attempts to investigate careers where men calling themselves architects in the public

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<sup>38</sup> Fairburn "Social Mobility and Opportunity in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand" pp 43-60.

<sup>39</sup> Mackay "Principal Event" p 751.

sphere continue to describe themselves as carpenters or builders on electoral rolls. While it is comparatively easy to cross-check qualifications and some career details for prominent or well-recognised architects, it is much more difficult to obtain life data for minor individuals who may have moved frequently and/or pursued different occupations.

Our system will not identify well-known and/or well-qualified architects who only stayed in New Zealand a short time and designed few buildings. For these, one needs additional data on their qualifications, background and movements. We have not identified any such men in the 1870s, although a few have come to light in later decades.

McCarthy has pointed out that the decade of the 1870s was one of considerable expansion in New Zealand, both in terms of emigration numbers, government spending, and enlargement of businesses and creation of new industries.<sup>40</sup> While many of the new emigrants (some 50,000 of them) who went to the townships were housed in basic accommodation, lacking what we would

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<sup>40</sup> McCarthy "Introduction" pp 11-12,14.

consider essential services, the types of professionals who could afford an architect were also increasing in numbers and affluence. Clearly this situation favoured expansion in the numbers of architects and would-be architects, particularly in areas of rapid growth - but it could also lead to marked competition between individuals resulting in the extremes of success or bankruptcy.

Once the overall economy began to slide towards recession at the end of the decade, the pressure on the less skilled poorly-established architects was bound to increase. Vogel's time in office as Premier was very short (1873 to 1876) although he started his expansion programme earlier as Treasurer. Already in 1873, the cost of imports was exceeding that of exports, a situation that was not reversed until 1887.

The geographic distribution of architects and would-be architects in the 1870s was inevitably linked with the developing pattern of cities, towns and villages, many of whom were in competition with each other as they struggled to go ahead. Timber and mining towns were particularly susceptible to failure as their resources ran out unless they could

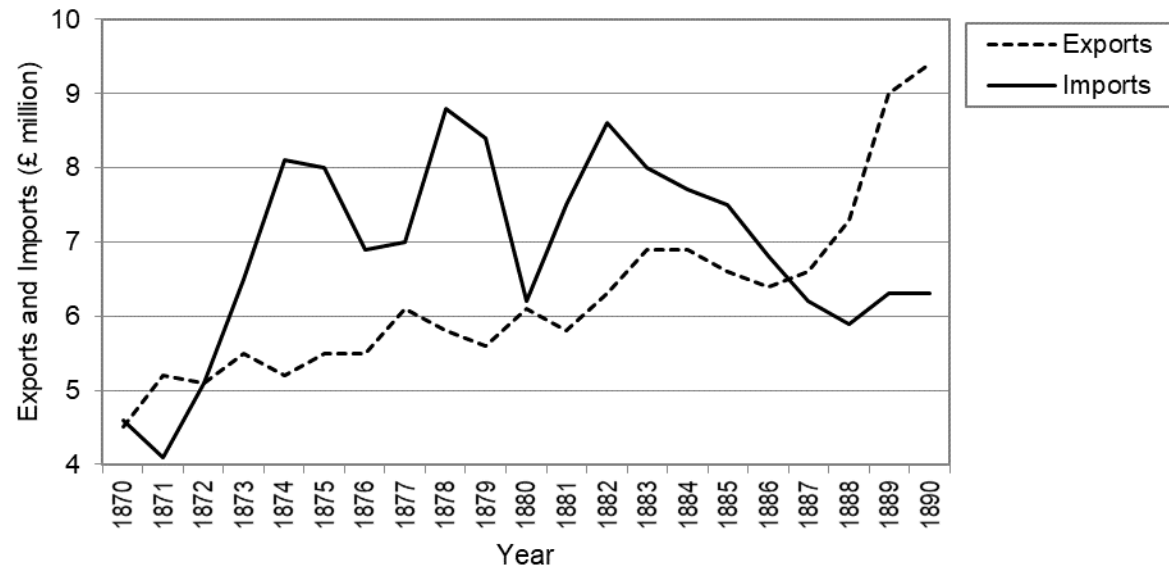


Figure 1: Exports and Imports, New Zealand, 1870-1890. Stone *Economic Development, 1870-1890* p 37.

diversify.<sup>41</sup> Towns on new railway routes or where new industries were being started had better chances of survival and growth. While an architect might survive while a small town was in a growth phase, as soon as it went into decline they would be forced to move elsewhere or find an alternative occupation. Undoubtedly this contributed to the mobility and varied fortunes of some of the minor architects in this era.

<sup>41</sup> Hamer "Towns in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand" pp 5-20.

In our 2013 paper "Sailing too close to the wind in the 1880s" we considered how the numbers of architects in Wellington specifically varied over the course of that decade, and postulated some reasons connected to the depression of that time. We also divided our individuals into "career architects" and "drifter architects;" basically, professionals contrasted with those who appeared to spread their talents in other directions. The system used then was a simplified version of that used here, but comparisons can still be made to show the downturn of the early 1880s and a partial



recovery for architects in the latter half of that decade.

Hodgson's assertion that "major cities were able to support up to eight or 10 different practices" in this period when colonisation was under way in top gear<sup>42</sup> appears to be something of an underestimate in the light of our current research. It is of course dependent on how an architectural practice is defined and whether support means financially viable. Our calculations show that Auckland had only eight highly productive architects at this time; of the other cities, Christchurch had 11, Dunedin nine and Wellington 15. The total numbers of architects and would-be architects in those main centres were significantly larger, but clearly not all of them had viable businesses, nor did they all practise for all of the 1870s.

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<sup>42</sup> Hodgson *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* p 33.

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