

"Slum Clearance" in 1890s Wellington

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ABSTRACT: In 1892, a remarkable map of Wellington was completed. Stretching from Thorndon in the north to Berhampore to the south, and taking in the teeming inner-city areas of Te Aro and Newtown, the remnants of Māori kāinga, the town belt, the Basin Reserve, the prison, "lunatic asylum" and hospital, reclamations and every street in between. The map, drawn by engineer and surveyor Thomas Ward, is actually 103 maps, drawn on A1 sheets. On the map, the exact footprint of every single building in Wellington is recorded every commercial building and house, every garden shed and outdoor toilets. Bay windows and verandahs are carefully drawn. Data is recorded for every building, including how many rooms it contains, what the roof and walls are made of and how many storeys it has. Legal titles are exactly mapped, as are the city's streams and even the street lights. Once complete, one full pristine set of the maps was set aside and preserved intact. Another set of the maps was updated regularly, for approximately the next ten years. For that decade, we can follow every change in the city, down to the smallest detail such as the replacement of slate rooves with corrugated iron, but also bigger-scale work such as the reconfiguration of whole streets.

The Thomas Ward map is a touchstone for the history of our city. It is used every day by Wellington's archaeologists and historians. Wellington City Council provides the map online as a digital overlay over modern satellite images of the city, allowing us to compare the city of 1892 to the city of today. A well-known feature of the history of Wellington in the 1890s was the outbreak of typhoid and other diseases in the inner-city, a result of overcrowding and lack of clean water. To combat this, a number of "slum clearances" were ordered by the city council, resulting in whole streets of working-class houses being demolished. This paper, a part of a much larger project, will examine some of the stories shown in the two sets of maps, with a particular focus of the changed landscape of the inner-city brought about by this "slum clearance" work of the 1890s.

On the evening of Friday, 2 December 1898 Alfred Browett, a seafaring man, had an altercation with a woman in Cambridge Road in Wellington.¹ She ran away into a house, but he followed her, and, using "foul language," demanded her come back outside. He went away but came back, smashed in the panels of

¹ Please note at the time there were three roadways called Cambridge in central Wellington – the substantial Cambridge Terrace, still in existence, and two smaller streets running off it. One of these, was Cambridge Road discussed here (sometimes called Cambridge Row, and now Tennyson Street), and the other was Cambridge Avenue (now Fifeshire Avenue), which was a slightly more salubrious street.

the front door of the house, and broke all the windows.

After spending the weekend locked up with all the other drunks in Wellington, the next Monday Alfred was taken in front of the Magistrates Court. He was charged with drunkenness, obscenity and willful damage to property. He told the judge this woman had "driven him to it," by following him everywhere he went. The judge responded that even if that was so, the woman couldn't be held responsible for making him drunk, or using bad language, or damaging property.

He was sentenced to pay a fine, or go to gaol for a week. Even though he pled guilty to all three charges, he did defend himself against the charge of foul language. He commented "everybody used those words in that street; they were on everybody's lips and were thought nothing of." The policeman in the court had to explain to the judge where this place was - that it was one of the tiny laneways running off Cambridge Terrace.²

² "Damaging Property" p 3. Alfred Browett obviously didn't learn his lesson – a year later he smashed 18 panes of glass in a house in Nelson, which was lived in by a woman not his wife, but who was using his name as her married name. "The Haven Road Fracas" p 2.

Within a year of this incident, this little laneway, Cambridge Road (sometimes also called Cambridge Row), had been wiped from the map. Likewise, the street where Alfred Browett himself lived - Grainger Street - was also wiped from the map. Indeed, in this year, 1899, around 100 houses were pulled down in the inner city, mostly for slum clearances.³ This paper will chart the progress of some of these slum clearances in Wellington in the late 1890s, which helped change the urban and working-class landscapes of inner-city Wellington.

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These changes to the city can be charted on what is known as the Thomas Ward Map. Stretching from Thorndon in the north to Berhampore to the south, and taking in the teeming inner-city areas of Te Aro and Newtown, the remnants of Māori kāinga, the town belt, the Basin Reserve, the prison, "lunatic asylum" and hospital, reclamations and every street in between, the Thomas Ward Map is a remarkable taonga of our city's history.⁴

³ "Local and General" (3 February 1900) p 5.

⁴ Ward, Thomas Ward Map, 1891 and c1900 (and associated archival notes); "Mr Thomas Ward" p 6.

The map, drawn by engineer and surveyor Thomas Ward (1849-1934), is actually 103 maps, drawn on 88 A1 sheets, at a scale of 40 feet to the inch [1:96]. On the map, the exact footprint of every single building in Wellington is recorded – every commercial building and house, every garden shed and outdoor toilet. Bay windows and verandahs are carefully drawn. Data is recorded for every building, including how many rooms it contains, what the roof and walls are made of and how many storeys it has. Legal titles are exactly mapped, as are the city's streams, where they were still at ground level and even the street lights and fire plugs.

Once complete, towards the end of 1891, Ward organised for a number of copies of the map set to be lithographed. At least one set of the maps was set aside by the Council and was preserved intact. Another set of the maps owned by the Council was updated regularly, for approximately the next 12 years. For a number of years, Ward was paid by the council to keep the map up to date, "filling in all particulars as to new buildings erected during such period." He had to renegotiate this contract every so often, and records show

that he was paid to do this until at least 1903.⁵ When a building was pulled down he would paste a tiny blank piece of paper where the building had been, and draw a new building when it was replaced. For that decade, we can therefore follow every change in the city, including large scale work such as the reconfiguration of whole streets, and the addition of new streets, and down to small details such as when a timber shingle roof had been replaced with corrugated iron. (Other, less skilled people, appear to have occasionally made changes to this map set, with wobbly lines and scribbles which don't match Ward's professionalism).

The Wellington City Archives now holds both the unaltered set and the set on which annotations were made. For this paper I will refer to the "1891 set" and the "1900 set," but actually the second set contain changes made throughout the 1890s and the exact date when people stopped making changes to the second version of the map has yet to be determined.

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The outbreaks of typhoid and other infectious

⁵ "City Council" p 18.

diseases in inner-city Wellington in the 1890s have been well documented by Ben Schrader's *The Big Smoke* and Redmer Yska's telling of the Wellington life of Katherine Mansfield, *A Strange Beautiful Excitement*.⁶ A particularly bad epidemic in 1891 and 1892 led a crusading doctor, Dr Chapple, to carry out a scientific investigation of the origins of the epidemic. Chapple produced a map which showed the exact locations of the houses affected by the outbreaks. The boundaries of the epidemic were a small area between Cambridge Terrace to the west and Cuba Street to the east, and Buckle Street to the north down to the harbour in the south. One centre of Chapple's investigation was Holland Street, but there were many streets within that larger boundary that which had the disease.⁷

What he found was truly horrifying: putrid backyards, shallow drains and plumbing that went nowhere, residents which had no access to either a toilet or the night soil service, waste laid up against other people's fences. He carried out smoke tests which showed that people's kitchens were acting as the

⁶ Schrader *The big smoke* pp 320-323; Yska *A Strange Beautiful Excitement* pp 57-67.

⁷ Chapple "Prevention of typhoid fever"; See also Schrader *The big smoke* pp 320-323.

ventilation for the sewers, and showed how the disease outbreaks were connected to heavy downpours of rain, saturating people's backyards with sewerage.⁸ As Yska argues in his book, it was this epidemic, and ones like it, that forced Katherine Mansfield's Beauchamp family out of leafy Thorndon, fearing for their lives, up to the healthy wilds of Karori.⁹

As Schrader and Yska show, Wellington City Council had long been ignoring the problem and pretending to itself that the rudimentary sewage system installed in the virtually completely flat Te Aro inner city, which ran directly into Wellington harbour, was enough. Chapple's expose helped finally shock the complacent council into doing something about the sewers and drainage. Once they had instituted a proper sewage system in these streets, and houses were connected to it, and in turn connected to a city-wide project to remove sewage not into Wellington Harbour but out to Moa Point, disease plummeted. However, as we shall see below, since landowners were required to connect themselves to the new system, this was not always done.

⁸ Chapple "Prevention of typhoid fever"

⁹ Yska *A Strange Beautiful Excitement* pp 57-67.

Drainage improvements were not the only way in which the city tried to improve itself in this decade. Both the wholesale clearing of entire streets, and also the clearing of individual "slum" houses in the inner city, by order of the council, began in earnest towards the end of the century, using the workings of the Municipal Corporations Act 1886 which allowed councils to order the destruction of "insanitary" houses.

Cambridge Road

Cambridge Road and neighbouring Argyle and Lorne Streets, were three of the streets in which Dr Chapple drew his dots marking out where families had been impacted by typhoid. Sheet 50 of Thomas Ward's map shows Cambridge Road. There are 32 three-roomed semi-detached houses, with outhouses in the back gardens lining the street, plus a small one-roomed building (possibly a stable or similar). These houses had three rooms in total, not to be confused with three bedrooms. These houses, plus six more substantial two-storey five- and six-roomed houses with verandahs, which fronted Cambridge Terrace, were all packed in one town acre - Town Acre 282. This made 38 houses within this one town acre, which had not been subdivided, so they were all owned by the same owner, but leased

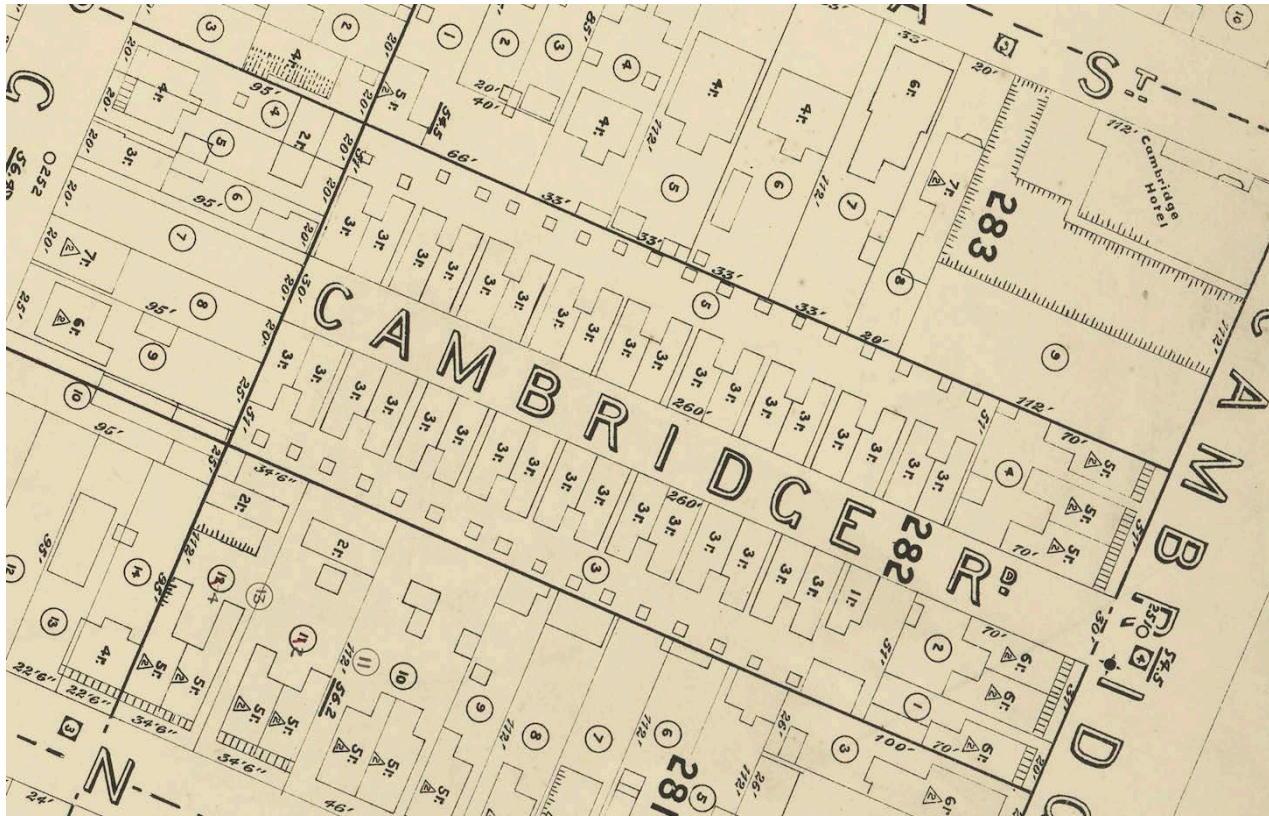


Figure 1: Cambridge Road, as it appeared on the 1892 Thomas Ward map, with Cambridge Terrace to the right (map orientated with north at the top). Note the outhouses at the back of the gardens. Thomas Ward Map, 1891, detail from map sheet 50, Wellington City Archives.

out to others and then subleased again to individual families.

The two lines of three-roomed houses were all semidetached pairs, with brick dividing/party walls, with a narrow alleyway between each

pair and the set next to them. Later testimony said the front rooms of these houses were 9ft by 9ft, the middle room, called a "day room," was 12ft by 10ft, and the third room was a

combined kitchen, scullery and washhouse.¹⁰ As described in one newspaper report they were "of uniform construction."¹¹ The entire line of 16 houses on each side was 260 feet long (63 meters), and each house, including its back garden, had a depth of 51 feet (15 metres). They were built directly onto the road. The road itself was only 30 feet (9 meters) wide. It was technically a dead-end street, but by that point, since no one had built on the section of Argyle Street which backed onto the end of the street, the empty section was still used by the locals as a throughfare into Tory Street. It is difficult to find photographs of the houses in detail, but from a distance it is possible to see that the houses have chimneys at the rear, and "to let" advertisements indicate the houses had two fireplaces. It appears the houses were perhaps built in the late 1870s.¹² The larger houses built facing Cambridge Terrace were also built around this time.¹³ It later becomes clear that

¹⁰ "Local and General" (7 April 1899) p 5.

¹¹ "Serious Assault Case" p 38.

¹² Advertisements using the name Cambridge Road first appear in 1878/79, including houses to let. For example, "TO LET, a three-roomed Cottage, in Cambridge Road" p 3. The claim that the houses were "well-drained" is rather difficult to believe, given the later reporting.

¹³ "T. Kennedy Macdonald & Co are favoured with instructions" p 2; "Absolute Sale of Valuable Freehold

the council was unsure even how long the houses had been there, but they were certain that the street itself had been built without permission.¹⁴ Despite this, in 1888 the council had changed the legal status of the street from a private way to a public street, on the strength of a petition from the owners of the Town Acre at the time.¹⁵

In August 1898, as part of the drainage scheme mentioned above, the council attempted to serve a notice on the leaseholders of the houses that they must organise and pay for the work to connect the drains of the houses to the new scheme. The leaseholders refused, saying their leases were almost expired. A local lawyer representing the actual owners of the land, who appear to be absentee landowners from London, tried to insist that the tenants should have to pay, and the whole thing turned into something of a bureaucratic muddle.¹⁶

In the end, it appears the houses were never connected to the new sewage system. Dr Albert Martin, accompanied by one of the city

and Leasehold Properties" p 3.

¹⁴ "Cambridge Road Drainage"

¹⁵ "Cambridge Road"

¹⁶ "Cambridge Road"

councillors, called around to inspect Cambridge Road in April 1889 and the pair was horrified by what they found. There were as many as eight people living in some of these houses, and Councillor Anderson said that unless he had seen them himself "he could not have believed there was anything equal to the disgusting state of these houses in Wellington."¹⁷

In 1899 the two medical officers, Martin and Dr Thomas Cahill, signed a document to say that they were in agreement that numbers one to 16 and numbers 18 to 35 Cambridge Road "are in a condition unfit for occupation and dangerous to public health."¹⁸ The Council gave the owners two months to pull the buildings down. This was under the auspices of sections 301 and 302 of the Municipal Corporations Act 1886.¹⁹ The City Solicitor carefully explained to the Town Clerk that the doctor's certificate must not make mention of the overcrowding, as that was not a ground for pulling the buildings

¹⁷ "Local and General" (7 April 1899) p 5.

¹⁸ "Old houses in Cambridge Road" Ref: 00233:63:1899/742.

¹⁹ "Old houses in Cambridge Road" Ref: 00233:63:1899/742.

down in the legislation.²⁰

The doctors' report said that the houses had been built virtually on the ground, and that the subsoil was damp and "saturated with the refuse of years,"²¹ the wood decayed and rotten, and the scrim and wallpaper torn, filthy and undergoing decomposition. "The sanitary arrangements are not only defective, but absolutely disgusting."²² The doctors ordered that not only should the houses be pulled down, but because the backyards were so full of sewage and other rubbish that the subsoil be removed down to a layer of 2 feet.²³

A small flurry of bureaucratic activity occurred when it appeared that the lawyer who paid the rates on the property was attempting to try to avoid telling the council who owned the property. A council staff member certified that the document had been served on the lawyer, in order for the clock to start ticking for the buildings to be pulled

²⁰ "Old houses in Cambridge Road" Ref: 00233:63:1899/742.

²¹ "Old houses in Cambridge Road" Ref: 00233:63:1899/742.

²² "Old houses in Cambridge Road" Ref: 00233:63:1899/742.

²³ "Old houses in Cambridge Road" Ref: 00233:63:1899/900.



Figure 2: The two lines of "houses of uniform construction" on either side of Cambridge Road are shown on the far left. Six two-storey houses facing onto Cambridge Terrace (facing the photographer) are in the same town acre. The trees follow the line of Cambridge and Kent Terraces. The triangle of grass marks Courtenay Place. Further to the right, between Courtenay Place and the sea, is the Grainger/Allen Block. Detail from "Te Aro Reclamation" (1887). Photographer: Burton Brothers, Dunedin Ref: 00148-76, Wellington City Archives.

down.²⁴ Eventually the buildings were dismantled in late 1899.²⁵

Once the street had been cleared, the very active Wellington building firm of Hawthorne and Crump was given authority to erect new houses on the land. The replacement 18

houses were both designed and built by the firm as speculation houses.²⁶

On the second Thomas Ward map set, we can see the replacement of the original houses with the new houses. Strips of paper have

been glued onto the map on both sides of the street, and the new houses have been drawn in, including careful notation of the positions of the bay windows and porches. There are 18 new detached two-storey houses, to replace the 32 that were there (the six two-storey houses/shops facing Cambridge Terrace were not pulled down).

Each of the new houses are two-storey with six rooms each. There were two houses built

²⁴ "Old houses in Cambridge Road" Ref: 00233:63:1899/742.

²⁵ What happened to the families who lived in these buildings will be examined in a later stage of this project.

²⁶ It appears the council sold the land to the building firm to develop and on-sell. The firm paid, for example, for the expenses for the change of name of the street. It also advertised the houses for sale once completed in 1900 and 1901.

on each lot. The elevations have two designs, one with a hipped roof, porch over the front door and square bay window. The other design also had a hipped roof but also a gable end above an angled bay window and a smaller porch, both the bay and porch having rounded corrugated iron hoods. The two designs were staggered along the street so that the square bay window examples are mixed in with the angled.

The ground floor of each house was a large drawing room and dining room, both with fire places, a kitchen with what is probably a coal range, and a separate scullery. As was common at the time, the kitchen had no sink, the sinks for cleaning dishes were in the scullery. The scullery also contained the laundry and the copper for washing clothes, which is slightly unusual as often kitchens were made up of three separate spaces (kitchen, scullery and pantry), which were separate again from the laundry at this time.²⁷ To get to the toilet, residents would walk through the kitchen and the scullery/laundry, out the back door and back into the house via another external door. Indoor water closets (WCs) were still fairly uncommon in

²⁷ Leach *Kitchens* pp 35-36.

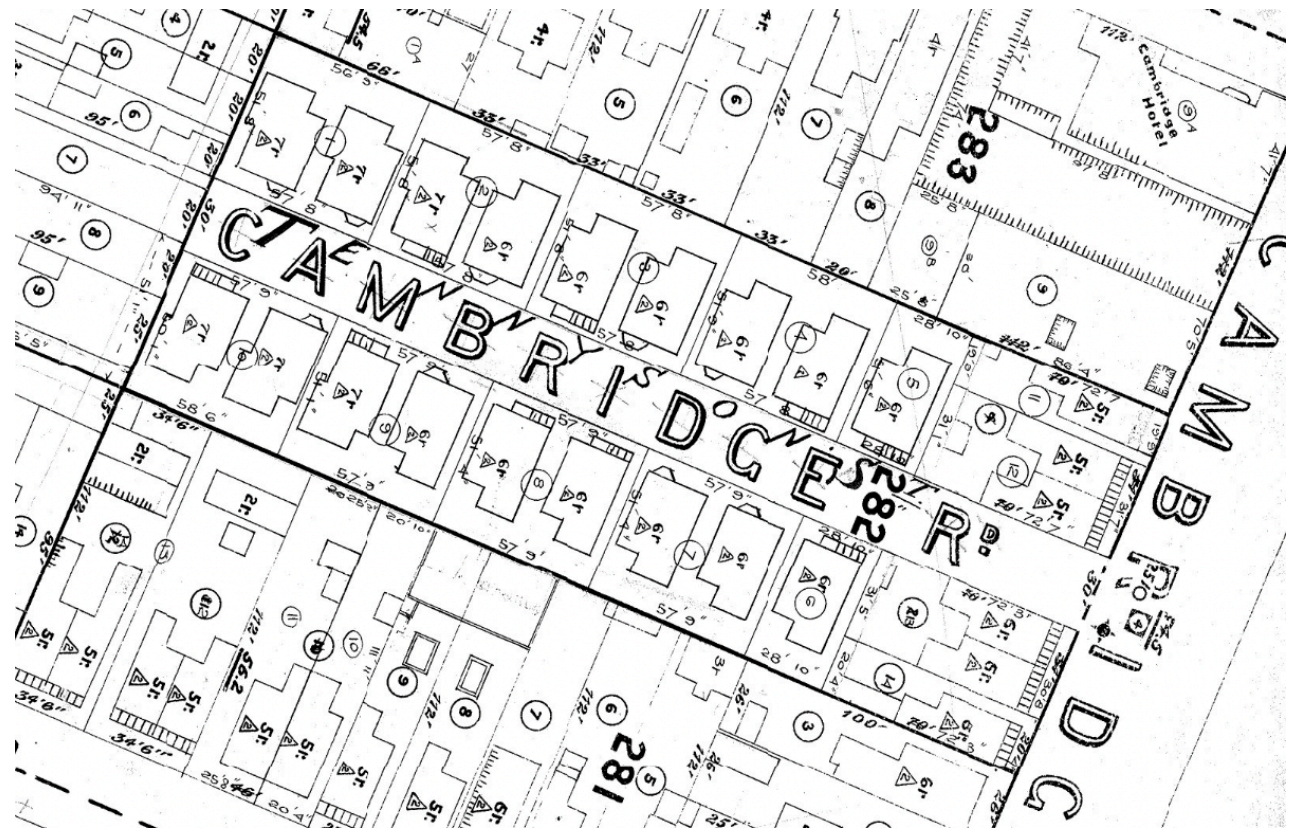


Figure 3: The new landscape of Cambridge Road - with new housing and renamed Tennyson Street - as shown on the later version of the Ward Map, c1900 (map orientated with north at the top). Note the crossing out of the name in pen and replacement with 'Tennyson Street'. Thomas Ward Map, c1900, detail from map sheet 50, Wellington City Archives.

Wellington at the time.²⁸ There is also an

²⁸ Information provided by Adrian Humphries, (unpublished). This information, taken from Wellington 1890s building permits at Wellington City Archives, indicates less than 40% of new houses with permits

unmarked space with another external door at the rear of each house which is presumably a coal store. Upstairs are three bedrooms and a bathroom (with a bath but no toilet). They

issued in 1899 contained an internal WC.

were advertised as "new substantially built and up-to-date Houses containing six lofty and cheerful rooms, with bath, lavatory, copper, and tubs, hot and cold-water service complete, new drainage, electric light, and every modern convenience."²⁹

Although the houses were definitely more spacious than the ones they had replaced, and were detached, they were still very close to each other. The houses faced the street but unlike their predecessors, were built slightly back from the road. Significantly, though, the council had not taken the chance to widen the street and it remained only 30 feet wide.³⁰

The other thing to note about the work was the new name for the street. The name Cambridge Road had been sullied by its slum connotations, and while doing the work on the building, Hawthorne and Crump suggested that the name should be changed to Tennyson Street. Tennyson Street, and two of these houses built in 1900, are still in existence today, amongst the car yards and apartment buildings. One of these two remaining houses is an example of the straight bay window

house pattern and one is the rounded bay window pattern.

The *New Zealand Times* warmly congratulated the building firm on their work on the new Tennyson Street, and likened it to the work of Baron Hausmann's transformation of Paris (which might be a slight exaggeration).³¹ The newspaper also noted that the firm was also currently at work replacing a former "rookery" in Wallace Street. Investigations of the Thomas Ward map and archival records appear to indicate that these slum houses were replaced with houses which almost exactly match those of the houses built in Tennyson Street (and which are also still in existence).³²

"A broomstick demonstration": Grainger and Allen Street

To return to Alfred Browett, whose story opened this paper - I mentioned earlier that the neighbourhood he had been living was also destroyed in the same year. This neighbourhood, which was on the same map sheet of the city (Map 50 of the Thomas Ward

map), was another large block of working-class houses pulled down in 1899-1900. This was known as the Grainger/Allen Street block. The difference was that in this case, the neighbourhood was not dismantled by the Wellington City Council, but instead by the Wellington Harbour Board, which undertook this work somewhat against its will.

This block of working-class housing and factories was close to the harbour's edge, near the city destructor – indeed in its early years the sea was virtually lapping at the back doors, but by this time reclamation had increased the distance between the houses and the sea. Even so, in 1893 when a massive storm hit Wellington, the entire area completely flooded; the Mayor described the situation of those who lived there as "pitiable in the extreme."³³

The block was 4.5 acres, of which about 3.5 acres owned by private owners. The Harbour Board had its hand forced to undertake this "slum clearance." Premier Richard Seddon, no lover of the way Wellington City Council managed itself or its slums, engineered a requirement to force the Harbour Board to

²⁹ "For sale" p 8.

³⁰ "Tennyson Street, six dwellings"

³¹ "Local and General" (9 October 1899) p 5.

³² "Local and General" (9 October 1899) p 5; "Wallace Street: Two Dwellings." Thanks for Adrian Humphries help in piecing this information together.

³³ "Sufferers from the storm" p 15.

clear this block of land and to build new, wider streets 66 feet (20m) in width while passing legislation that empowered the Harbour Board to build a graving (dry) dock nearby.³⁴ ("Street widening" often being a euphemism for "slum clearance"). The Harbour Board was then faced with the headache of clearing the houses, deciding adequate compensation for the owners of the properties and right of ways within the block, and redeveloping the land.³⁵

The *Evening Post* wrote an editorial approving the idea of removing all the houses of this area saying the block was:

one of the worst eyesores in the city. The land itself is in part below the general level of the reclamation, and the closely-packed, ill-built houses on it, with the narrow blind street running through part of it, constitute a veritable slum.³⁶

A letter to the editor, written in response, questioned this claim. The letter writer, called "Ratepayer," said the block was "just as respectable and decent as any portion of the

³⁴ Wellington Harbour Board and Corporation Empowering Act 1898. Yska *Wellington* pp 87-91.

³⁵ For more information about this saga see Johnson *Wellington Harbour* pp 227 - 228.

³⁶ "City Improvements" p 4.

city."³⁷ The street was metalled, and the footpaths asphalted, and the people who lived there were "hard-working, industrious mechanics and artisans, some owning the property they live in."³⁸ The *New Zealand Mail* reported that many of the residents were "greatly perturbed" about the possibility of being turned out of their houses.³⁹

The second version of the Thomas Ward map has a coloured area marking some of the proposed boundaries of the work by the Harbour Board, and some of the buildings in the block, especially those facing Courtney Place, are shown as having been removed and replaced. Half of the name "Grainger" has been removed. Even so, his work on tracing the changes to this block were never completed, presumably as he stopped updating the map before the work was complete. Other maps were drawn of the area by the Harbour Board, annotated with the names of the owners and tenants of the properties, which showed that, as suggested by "Ratepayer" quoted above, the block had a mixture of tenants and owner-occupied

³⁷ "City Improvements [Letter to the editor]" p 6.

³⁸ "City Improvements [Letter to the editor]" p 6.

³⁹ "[untitled]" *New Zealand Mail* (13 October 1898) p 31.

homes and businesses.⁴⁰ Street directories and electoral rolls show that the houses had had fairly stable community of residents and businesses in the years prior to the clearance. When he was finally forced out of his business, for example, painter and paperhanger Ben Clayton advertised that he had been located in Grainger street for 21 years, and was now relocating to Donald McLean street, Newtown "where he trusts to receive a share of the support accorded to him at his old address."⁴¹

The Harbour Board was surprisingly reticent about taking this slum clearance task on, and even asked the council if it would be possible to just build a wider street, as required of them in the legislation, and let the residents move their houses to the edge of the newly widened street, rather than have to clear them away.⁴²

To assist the Board's consideration of this idea, in December 1898 a photographer was

⁴⁰ "Plan showing occupancy of houses &c, Grainger Street" and "Lands to be taken".

⁴¹ "Removal Notice" p 6.

⁴² "Public Works Committee" (4 October 1898) p 2; "Grainger Street Block" p 3; "Wellington Harbour Board" p 4.



Figure 4: The line of new Tennyson Road houses can be seen in the centre of this detail. The city's gasometer is at the bottom. Detail from "Aerial of Wellington, 1947, Te Aro Flat, Courtenay Place to Winter Show Buildings" (1947) Ref: 00278-10-12, Wellington City Archives.

sent to take photographs of the houses on Allen and Grainger Street in order to chart the quality of each housing. A striking set of photographs of Grainger and Allen Street as

they were before the clearance are now stored at Wellington City Archives, and these are presumably the same photographs.⁴³

⁴³ Wellington Harbour Board Grainger Street

The photographer's task was not an easy one:

An amusing incident has occurred in connection with

Photographs

the alterations going on at the Grainger street block. Several owners in the vicinity rather resent the interference of the authorities with their domiciles, and when a day or two ago a photographer, who had been engaged by the Harbour Board to take views of the buildings so that their suitability or otherwise to remain *in situ* could be seen at a glance, a most exciting scene ensued. One section of the little community busied itself with tying sheets along their verandah posts to hide the defects of their residences, while the remainder - the womenkind - made a broomstick demonstration in the vicinity of the camera man with such threatening vocal accompaniments that he was obliged to remove himself with all haste from the vicinity.⁴⁴

This demonstration of working-class disapproval at the destruction of their homes is not easy to find so this account is particularly fascinating, especially as it also describes the actions of the "womenkind."

However, despite the "broomstick demonstration," the removal of the houses commenced in December 1889. In that and the following few months, a local auctioneer began to offer the houses from Grainger and Allen Streets for sale in large bulk lots, sometimes offering 20 houses for sale at a time. The proviso of the sales was that the purchasers had to remove the houses within one month of the date of the sale.⁴⁵ These

⁴⁴ "Local and General" (2 December 1898) p 2.

⁴⁵ See for example "Monday Next" p 8; "Sale of property"

advertisements even named the residents who had previously lived in the houses to be shipped away. Also included in these advertisements were various small factories and coal merchants, a brass foundry and other buildings to be carted away. Although compensation claims lingered on through the courts for some time afterwards, the clearing of the block proceeded fairly rapidly, with the final tenant was finally removed, under protest, in February 1900. He did not go quietly:

Considerable commotion was caused in the vicinity of Grainger and Allen streets yesterday by the eviction of a tenant of one of the condemned houses. This tenant was the last to leave, and the ejection took place under a writ issued by the Supreme Court, all other measures having failed. The somewhat unusual sight of furniture being passed out of the house by authorised officers and stacked up along the street was witnessed by a number of people.⁴⁶

One resident, a clerk called Denton B Duncan was even imprisoned for seven days with hard labour for contempt of court for failing to remove his house by the deadline.⁴⁷

p 3; "Today (Wednesday)" p 8.

⁴⁶ "Local and General" (24 February 1900) p 4.

⁴⁷ "Local and General" (3 October 1900) p 5.

In March 1901 there was a suggestion made that the newly-cleared Grainger/Allen Street land could be used for working class social housing. Members of the progressive municipal socialist movement, which was active in Wellington in the 1890s and early 1900s, discussed the tenement blocks of Glasgow and London in approving tones, and suggested that these could be built in Wellington to house working people. At a meeting of Wellington's Progressive Municipal Association, set up to advocate for non-ratepayers in the city, MP John Hutcheon suggested that the land should not be sold into private ownership but revert to the city council, so it could be used to house no less than one to two hundred families in "the most healthy manner" in "a block of magnificent tenements," which would invigorate the Te Aro area to become a "hive of industry."⁴⁸

However, this idea was not progressed and unlike Cambridge Road/Tennyson Street, the newly cleared land was not replaced with more housing. Instead, the new configuration of these streets (renamed Blair and Allen Streets, with the location of Allen Street

⁴⁸ "The New Municipal Association" p 5; Yska *Wellington* pp 89-90; Stromquist *Claiming the City* pp 341-349.

slightly altered, and with Blair and Allen Streets extending down to what it is now Wakefield Street) eventually housed large brick commercial warehouses, many of which are the buildings in these streets today.

This dismantling of working-class houses – around 100 in one year in the inner city alone, chiefly in Cambridge Road, Allen and Grainger streets – did not (of course) solve the myriad housing problems of working people in Wellington. In early 1900, the City Valuer, who completed a detailed tour of the city, stated that as a result of the removal of these 100 houses, there are very few empty houses left to rent in Wellington.⁴⁹ In the same year, a carpenter's union argued that workers' salaries should be increased to compensate for the increased rents brought about by the high number of houses being pulled down in that year.⁵⁰

Bubonic plague arrived in New Zealand from Sydney in 1900 - unsurprisingly focusing all of the residents' attention on urban slums. Eight special sanitary inspectors, assisted by the police, were sent out to inspect houses,

visiting 3,000 houses in one week, issuing clean-up notices to tenants and owners as they went.⁵¹ Newspaper reporters followed the inspectors around and breathlessly reported on houses being condemned all over the city, as well as reporting on the number of dead rats delivered to the destructor to be burned.⁵² More houses were pulled down during this scare, some with only two weeks' notice, although luckily the plague never reached Wellington.

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Post Script: "Suburban slum"

So what happened to all the houses that were advertised for removal in Wellington in 1899-1900?

When the Cambridge Road houses were pulled down, there was a concern that the filthy timber that had been sitting in sewage might be reused elsewhere in the city. The City Engineer was sent to inspect the timber and find out what was to happen to it. He came back to reassure the council that the timber was nearly all going outside the

boundaries of the city and that it was going to be shipped off "for firewood."⁵³

In fact, many of the houses, from Cambridge Road and Allen and Grainger Streets, and elsewhere in the city, were carted off, either whole or in pieces, out of the Wellington City council boundaries and used in the neighbouring parts of the city to build new houses.

A letter to the editor records, in October 1899, that some of the "wretched hovels" which had been pulled down were being carted, in sections, to Roseneath and Kilbirnie and were in the course of being rebuilt there. The letter writer, on complaining to the Melrose Borough Council, had been told there was no by-law to stop this from happening.⁵⁴ Another letter writer wrote about watching a "hideous shanty" being built in Hamilton Road, Kilbirnie, composed of the cobbled-together "soundest portions" of two or three houses. The weatherboards and linings had not been removed from the studs, because they were so rotten they could not be taken off. The Melrose Ratepayers Association objected to

⁴⁹ "Local and General" (3 February 1900) p 5.

⁵⁰ "Local and General" (13 July 1900) p 4.

⁵¹ "State of Wellington City" p 5.

⁵² "The bubonic plague" p 6.

⁵³ "Public Works Committee" (19 September 1899) p 3.

⁵⁴ "Condemned houses" p 7.

the use of this timber while it was still lying on the ground, but the house was still built.⁵⁵

Complaints apparently forced Melrose to take a stand against the importation of these old Wellington houses, but in May 1900, residents of Onslow Borough Council noticed that a number of the Grainger Street houses and their timber had been shipped into their area as well, to build houses in Kaiwharawhara and Ngaio, and were told that there was no by-law to stop them.⁵⁶ Likewise, according to a letter to the editor in the same year, Seatoun, (which was then outside both Melrose and Wellington City boundaries), was being "dotted with these old houses" – the letter writer warning that "unless Seatoun is on the alert, it will become a suburban slum."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ "Suburban Sanitation" p 3.

⁵⁶ "Plague and Sanitation" p 2.

⁵⁷ "Seatoun Road Board" p 2.

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