

## APPENDIX A: William John Dewitt Prouse (1877-1956): Biography

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**ABSTRACT:** This appendix provides background material on William Prouse of Prouse and Wilson up to the time the University Senate Building was designed. The factual record suggests Prouse's life was experientially rich and unusual. He was a talented musician married to an even more talented musician, who travelled the world. He held partnerships in a string of significant architectural firms in early-twentieth-century New Zealand, and shareholdings in building development companies and in what appears to be pioneering ventures in motor camps in the Wellington region. 1940 was not only significant as the year that saw the design of the University Senate building - but it was also the year that his wife Ava died. Helliwell states that c1941, Prouse was "feeling the advance of age and did little at the office," suggesting that his involvement in architecture lessened from this time.

### Music, Timber and Travel

Prouse's father and two uncles (James and Richard) became timber merchants in Wellington and Levin respectively,<sup>1</sup> with the Wellington sawmill being located in Whitemen's Valley,<sup>2</sup> and the timber yard in Cuba Street.<sup>3</sup> The timber business had been established by June 1882, when the boiling-down works at Kakaramea burnt down due to a stray spark igniting the shingle roof.<sup>4</sup> In 1887, Prouse Bros donated the timber needed to line a de Jersey Clere extension to the

Wesley Church Sabbath School on Taranaki Street,<sup>5</sup> and in 1897 they were the successful tenderers for supplying 20,000 arms for telegraph poles.<sup>6</sup>

The relevance of this family background in the timber industry is two-fold. Some commentators assume Prouse's knowledge of timber was his substitute qualification for architectural training.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, in 1902, Prouse invented and patented a bevelled rebated weather board (patent no. 14922), which was stated to be "absolutely watertight," the cheapest board available, and "more artistic in appearance."<sup>8</sup> It was gazetted in June 1902 and available from Prouse Bros' Timber Yard in Dixon Street.<sup>9</sup> In his patent

application Prouse described himself as a timber merchant.<sup>10</sup>

Contrary to a stereotypical image of timber merchants and their families, music and international travel were frequent. In 1890, at the age of 13, Prouse travelled to London with his family.<sup>11</sup> His father, John, an emerging baritone, got a significant break the following year when he replaced principle singer, Signor Foli, in William Carter's choir's performance at St James' Hall, London.<sup>12</sup> A musical ability was clearly familial. In 1897, Prouse gained his Trinity College, London practical examination for organ playing (Junior Division),<sup>13</sup> and his senior division examination (organ playing) in 1898,<sup>14</sup> when

<sup>1</sup> Helliwell *The Plan Desk* p 10.

<sup>2</sup> "For Sale - A comfortable little Farm" p 4. John Prouse sold a 196-acre property in Whiteman's Valley in 1890. By 1905, advertisements indicated Prouse Bros mills at Levin and Shannon. "Timber, Timber" p 1.

<sup>3</sup> "Wanted, two or three Bulls or Stags" p 3; "To Builders [Wallaceville Presbyterian Church tenders]" p 3. The address for the timber yard was given as Dixon-street in 1898, when the company sold a house in Hay Street, Oriental Bay. "For Sale, a new seven-roomed House" p 8.

<sup>4</sup> UPA "Interprovincial" p 2.

<sup>5</sup> "Wesley Sabbath School Bazaar" p 7.

<sup>6</sup> "Local and General" (28 May 1897) p 2.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Helliwell *The Plan Desk* p 11.

<sup>8</sup> "To Architects, Builders, Etc." p 7.

<sup>9</sup> "To Architects, Builders, Etc." p 7.

<sup>10</sup> Prouse, W.J. Patent application.

<sup>11</sup> PA "Shipping News" p 10.

<sup>12</sup> "[untitled]" *Evening Post* (20 April 1891) p 2.

<sup>13</sup> "Music Examinations" p 5.

<sup>14</sup> "Musical Examination" p 3.

he accompanied his father (who sang "Prince Ivan's Song," and Gounod's "Nazareth") at the Auckland Exhibition;<sup>15</sup> Prouse on the organ, with his sister on the piano.<sup>16</sup> Prouse also advertised his father's performance in support of Fanny Howie in November 1900<sup>17</sup> and demonstrated the pianolo - when the first pianolo was exhibited in Napier in November 1901 - "in a manner that afforded delight to every musical ear."<sup>18</sup>

His father's singing career took him overseas numerous times. In 1905, John Prouse was engaged to sing in "The Redemption" at the Queen's Hall, London, prior to a tour of France, Germany and Switzerland, and then returning to Wellington via Naples and

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<sup>15</sup> "Exhibitions" p. 8; "Auckland Exhibition" p 6.

<sup>16</sup> "Exhibitions" p. 8; "Auckland Exhibition" p 6.

<sup>17</sup> "Sydney street hall" p 6.

<sup>18</sup> The pianolo was described as "an instrument which renders it possible to play with a mechanically supplied technique, and at the same time with so much personality of expression that the performance cannot be distinguished from that of the unassisted human fingers ... It is operated by means of pedals, stops, a tempo-regulator, pneumatic action, and perforated scroll music, and as the player is relieved of all technique, or fingering work, he is able to devote the whole of his attention to the all important considerations of expression and time." "Town Edition" p 8.

Australia.<sup>19</sup> Prouse jnr appears to have maintained his interest in music too and in 1910, he was the honorary secretary of the Orchestral Society, where his father was a vice-president.<sup>20</sup> In 1906, William Prouse accompanied his sister (Florence) to Monte Video where she was to be married to PE Davies, the British Consul at Buenos Ayes - who was the brother of English vocalist Miss Gwen Davies.<sup>21</sup> Prouse returned to New Zealand in July of that year with his father, after travelling to England and America.<sup>22</sup> In 1912, Prouse was gazetted as the vice-consul for Uruguay at Wellington.<sup>23</sup> It is clear the Prouse family was well-connected. For example, Sir Joseph and Lady Ward farewelled Prouse's mother when she departed for a trip to England in February 1909,<sup>24</sup> and the Prouse home was host to a number of personalities, including Mrs Stopford,<sup>25</sup> Dame Clara Butt and Dame Nellie Melba.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Personal Items" (2 June 1905) p 6.

<sup>20</sup> "Orchestral Society" p 5.

<sup>21</sup> "Personal" (13 February 1906) p 5; "Women in Print" p 9.

<sup>22</sup> "Personal Matters" p 5.

<sup>23</sup> "Personal Items" (26 July 1912) p 4.

<sup>24</sup> "Social and Personal Notes" p 2.

<sup>25</sup> "Life in the City" p 3.

<sup>26</sup> Helliwell *The Plan Desk* p 10.

After the war, in 1919, Prouse travelled to London with his mother, before travelling to Milan to visit his brother George, who was a professor of English at Milan University.<sup>27</sup> In 1920 Prouse married Aya Symons, a violinist, on 5 January at St Pancras Church, London.<sup>28</sup> Symons had toured New Zealand with Carrie Lanceley and a Miss Simpson (flautist) but met Prouse in San Francisco.<sup>29</sup> In 1924, Prouse was in Milan for the performance of Boito's "Nerone" or "Secret Opera," and was reportedly "profoundly impressed with the magnificence of the production, and the perfection of the performance."<sup>30</sup> He also attended a performance of "Aida" that the King and Queen of Italy also attended.<sup>31</sup> This was after Mussolini's election, who Prouse appears to have been supportive of.<sup>32</sup>

### Architectural Practice

Prouse's qualifications for architectural practice are not clear. Shaw states that he had

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<sup>27</sup> "Personal Items" (23 July 1919) p 6; "Women's World" p 9.

<sup>28</sup> "Stella" "Women Folk" p 6; "For Women" p 3; "Personal Items" (16 March 1920) p 5.

<sup>29</sup> "Personal Items" (16 March 1920) p 5.

<sup>30</sup> C.J.M. "Music and Records" (26 July 1924) p 20;

"Personal Items" (3 December 1924) p 8.

<sup>31</sup> C.J.M. "Music and Records" (23 August 1924) p 20.

<sup>32</sup> C.J.M. "Music and Records" (23 August 1924) p 20.

no formal architectural training,<sup>33</sup> and this is uncritically repeated by others.<sup>34</sup> This is despite his registration as an architect under section 8(1)(a) of the New Zealand Institute of Architects Act (1913), which required a formal qualification.<sup>35</sup>

*Hoggard and Prouse (1907-1913)*

By 1907, Prouse was a partner of the firm Hoggard<sup>36</sup> and Prouse located in the Union

<sup>33</sup> Shaw *New Zealand Architecture* p 128.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Helliwell *The Plan Desk* p 11.

<sup>35</sup> "The Register of Members" p 12. Section 8(1)(a) states that "Every person shall be entitled to be registered by the Board or the Council as a member of the Institute who holds some recognized certificate as hereinafter defined." Section 8(3) states "For the purposes of this section the term "recognized certificate" means a certificate, diploma, membership, degree, license, letters, testimonial, or other title, status, or document granted by some university, college, or other public institution in Great Britain or Ireland, or in a British possession or foreign country, which is recognized by the Board or the Council as entitling the holder thereof to practise architecture in the country in which it was granted, and as furnishing sufficient guarantee of the possession of the requisite knowledge and skill for the efficient practice of architecture." This level of qualification is the same as was indicated for Prouse's business partner John Hoggard.

<sup>36</sup> Hoggard was described as "a talented architect, who had done some good work in Wellington and other places in New Zealand." He had trained "under his

Bank of Australia buildings on 20 Hunter Street.<sup>37</sup> This partnership was announced in the November 1907 issue of *Progress* when it was stated that Prouse "had practical experience in timber construction and the use of New Zealand timbers."<sup>38</sup> The four-storey offices and warehouse for Prouse Lumber Limited and Residences (Taranaki St, 1908) appears to be the firm's first job,<sup>39</sup> indicating Prouse's family connection as vital to the establishment of Hoggard and Prouse. Other buildings this firm designed included the Hacon residence in Tinakori Rd (cnr Tinakori and Poplar Grove, 1908-09),<sup>40</sup> the Smith bungalow (Khandallah, 1908),<sup>41</sup> the Fitzherbert Terrace School additions (1908),<sup>42</sup> the Mander bungalow (Northlands, 1908),<sup>43</sup> the Partridge Annex (Golder's Hill, 1908),<sup>44</sup> the

uncle, Mr. W. C. Chatfield, and continued it under the late Mr. J. Charlesworth." He died in 1936. "Obituary" (22 May 1936) p 3; "[untitled]" (1 November 1907) p 30.

<sup>37</sup> "Hoggard and Prouse" p 4.

<sup>38</sup> "[untitled]" (1 November 1907) p 30.

<sup>39</sup> "New Offices" p 340; "How Wellington Goes Ahead" p 341; "Notes" (1 September 1908) p 380.

<sup>40</sup> "To Builders [Tinakori Rd residence] p 9; "Notes" (1 September 1908) p 380; "[untitled]" (1 February 1909) pp 135, 136.

<sup>41</sup> "Notes" (1 September 1908) p 380.

<sup>42</sup> "Notes" (1 September 1908) p 380.

<sup>43</sup> "Notes" (1 September 1908) p 380.

<sup>44</sup> "Notes" (1 September 1908) p 380.

Weston bungalow (1909),<sup>45</sup> the Evans residence (Kelburn, 1909),<sup>46</sup> the Meadowcroft residence (Mount St, Kelburn, 1909),<sup>47</sup> the Clark bungalow (Trentham, 1909),<sup>48</sup> the Tipping residence (Kelburn, 1909),<sup>49</sup> Cadbury Bros (steel-framed, Ghuznee St, 1909),<sup>50</sup> the Brittain chemist premises (steel-framed, cnr Manners and Herbert Sts, 1909),<sup>51</sup> the Ewatts residence (Willis St, 1909),<sup>52</sup> the Andrews' residence (Khandallah, 1909),<sup>53</sup> the Long residence (Burnett Ave, 1910),<sup>54</sup> Gaudin and Son's new grain store (1910),<sup>55</sup> Dirleton/Pike

<sup>45</sup> "[untitled]" (1 February 1909) p 136.

<sup>46</sup> "[untitled]" (1 February 1909) p 136.

<sup>47</sup> "[untitled]" (1 February 1909) p 136; "Notes" (1 February 1910) p 132.

<sup>48</sup> "[untitled]" (1 February 1909) p 136; "[untitled]" (1 April 1909) pp 209, 210.

<sup>49</sup> "[untitled]" (1 February 1909) p 136.

<sup>50</sup> "[untitled]" (1 April 1909) p 210; "Cadbury's Steel Frame Warehouse" p 316.

<sup>51</sup> "[untitled]" (1 April 1909) p 210; "Cadbury's Steel Frame Warehouse" p 316; "Notes" (1 September 1909) p 387; "Notes" (1 December 1909) p 63; "A Notable Wellington Improvement" p 280.

<sup>52</sup> "Cadbury's Steel Frame Warehouse" p 316; "Notes" (1 December 1909) p 63.

<sup>53</sup> "Cadbury's Steel Frame Warehouse" p 316. "Notes" (1 December 1909) p 63; "Mr. Andrew's House, Khandallah" p 280.

<sup>54</sup> "Notes" (1 February 1910) p 132; "Notes" (1 June 1910) p 280.

<sup>55</sup> "Notes" (1 February 1910) p 132; "Wellington

residence (Trentham, 1910),<sup>56</sup> alterations to Dalziell residences (1910),<sup>57</sup> alterations to White residence (Garrett St, 1910),<sup>58</sup> alterations to Kempthorne, Prosser and Co premises (1910),<sup>59</sup> Alcock and Co workshops (York St, 1910),<sup>60</sup> Belcher and Co. premises (1910),<sup>61</sup> the Adelphi Picture Theatre (Willis/ Boulcott Sts, 1911-12),<sup>62</sup> the steel frame, reinforced concrete Public Trust Office (Albert St, Auckland, 1911-12),<sup>63</sup> Public Trust Office (High St, Hawera, 1912),<sup>64</sup> offices for Watkins, Hull and Wheeler (Johnston Street, 1912),<sup>65</sup> additions to the Wellington Meat Export Co. Ltd (Ngahauranga, 1912),<sup>66</sup> Pritchard residence

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Developments" (1 July 1910) p 315; "W.J. Gaudin & Son's New Premises" p 629.

<sup>56</sup> "Notes" (1 June 1910) p 280; "Dirleton" p 662.

<sup>57</sup> "Notes" (1 June 1910) p 280.

<sup>58</sup> "Notes" (1 June 1910) p 280.

<sup>59</sup> "Notes" (1 June 1910) p 280.

<sup>60</sup> "Notes" (1 June 1910) p 280.

<sup>61</sup> "Wellington Developments" p 315.

<sup>62</sup> "[untitled]" (1 November 1911) p 883; "Building Notes" (1 April 1912) p 1077.

<sup>63</sup> "New Public Trust Office" p 7; "Tenders [Public Trust Offices]" p 4; "Land and Buildings" p 9; "Building Notes" (1 April 1912) p 1077; "The New Public Trust Building at Auckland" pp i, 497, 499, 501, 503, 505.

<sup>64</sup> "Personal Items" (4 April 1912) p 4.

<sup>65</sup> "To Builders [Watkins, Hull and Wheeler]" p 10.

<sup>66</sup> "To Builders [Meat Export Co.]" p 10; "To Builders [Wellington Meat Export Co., Ltd Additions]" p 10.

(Dannevirke, 1912),<sup>67</sup> James Smith residence (Khandallah, 1912),<sup>68</sup> Alcock & Co Factory (Newtown, 1912),<sup>69</sup> the Coverdale building (Willis St, 1912),<sup>70</sup> the Donne residence (Oriental Bay, 1912),<sup>71</sup> the Newton residence (Wadestown, 1912),<sup>72</sup> the Trades Hall (Auckland, c1911-13),<sup>73</sup> the Petone Woollen Mills (1913),<sup>74</sup> the Britannia Theatre and Duke of Edinburgh Hotel additions (1913),<sup>75</sup> and the NZ Shipping Co store (1913).<sup>76</sup>

The staff included Stanley W Fearn and Austin Quick.<sup>77</sup>

In March 1911, Prouse provided architectural evidence at a court hearing regarding a bakery built on the corner of Adelaide Road and King

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<sup>67</sup> "Building Notes" (1 April 1912) p 1077.

<sup>68</sup> "Building Notes" (1 May 1912) p 1120.

<sup>69</sup> "Building Notes" (1 May 1912) p 1120.

<sup>70</sup> "Building Notes" (1 May 1912) p 1120.

<sup>71</sup> "Building Notes" (1 May 1912) p 1120.

<sup>72</sup> "Building Notes" (1 May 1912) p 1120.

<sup>73</sup> "S.M. Court (Before Mr. C.C. Kettle, S.M.)" p 6; "The Trade Hall" p 7; "[untitled]" (18 July 1911) p 9; "Tenders" p 703; "Building Notes" (1 April 1912) p 1077.

<sup>74</sup> "[untitled]" (1 April 1913) p 435.

<sup>75</sup> "[untitled]" (1 April 1913) p 435; "Building Progress in Wellington District" p 805; "Building Notes" (1 June 1919) p 532.

<sup>76</sup> "[untitled]" (1 April 1913) p 435.

<sup>77</sup> "Personal" (1 January 1913) p 272.

Street,<sup>78</sup> and in 1913 in a dispute regarding the plastering work of the Auckland Trades Hall,<sup>79</sup> and in 1911 and 1918, he provided evidence in relation to the Willis-street widening scheme.<sup>80</sup>

#### *Hoggard Prouse and WH Gummer (1913-21)*

In early 1913 the formation of Hoggard Prouse and WH Gummer was announced.<sup>81</sup> William Gummer, who had "recently returned from abroad," headed the Auckland branch.<sup>82</sup> Presumably managing large Auckland projects (like the Public Trust Office and the Trades Hall) from Wellington prompted the hiring of the Auckland-based architect. This company reorganisation certainly expanded the geographic scope of work undertaken.

This company designed the Brett Publishing Co (Fort St, Auckland, 1913),<sup>83</sup> the Princess Theatre and Building block (Queen St,

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<sup>78</sup> "A Building Contract" p 9.

<sup>79</sup> "S.M. Court (Before Mr. C.C. Kettle, S.M.)" p 6.

<sup>80</sup> "Compensation Claim: Widening Willis Street" p 1;

"Compensation Claims: Willis Street Widening" p 8.

<sup>81</sup> "Personal" (1 March 1913) p 381; "W.J. Prouse and W.H. Gummer [advertisement]" p 144.

<sup>82</sup> "Personal" (1 March 1913) p 381; "Personal Items" (16 March 1920) p 5.

<sup>83</sup> "Building Notes" (1 October 1913) p 740; "Additions to the premises of the Brett Publishing Co." p 1186.

Auckland, 1914),<sup>84</sup> the New Zealand Insurance Company (Ltd) (Queen St, Auckland, 1914-18),<sup>85</sup> the Kirkcaldie business block (Lambton Quay, 1914),<sup>86</sup> the Grand (Manners St, Wellington, 1914),<sup>87</sup> Residence (Ponsonby, 1914),<sup>88</sup> Residence (Takapuna, 1914),<sup>89</sup> the Manawatu A and P Showground building and Cattle Pavilions (1915),<sup>90</sup> alterations to Barrett's Hotel (1915),<sup>91</sup> Freezing Chambers, Wellington Meat Export Co. Ltd.

<sup>84</sup> "Building Notes" (1 February 1914) p 925; "Building Notes" (1 April 1914) p 1050.

<sup>85</sup> "New Zealand Insurance Company (Limited)" p 7; "Building Notes" (1 March 1914) p 976; "Building Notes" (1 June 1914) p 1128; "N.Z. Insurance Company's New Premises" p i; "Building Notes" (1 December 1914) p 150; "Building Notes" (1 August 1916) p 706; "The N.Z. Insurance Building" p 31; "The N.Z. Insurance Coy., Ltd" pp 271, 273, 275, 277, 279-281, 283, 285-288. Hodgson credits the design of this building to Hoggard and Prouse. Hodgson *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* p 48.

<sup>86</sup> "To Builders [Kirkcaldie building]" p. 8; "Building Notes" (1 May 1914) p 1092; "Building Notes" (1 June 1914) p 1128.

<sup>87</sup> "Building Notes" (1 June 1914) p 1128.

<sup>88</sup> "Some Domestic Architecture" p 1187.

<sup>89</sup> "Some Domestic Architecture" p 1187.

<sup>90</sup> "Improving the Showground" p 3; "For Public Information" p 5; "Manawatu A. and P. Association" p 7; "To Builders [Cattle Pavilions]" p 12.

<sup>91</sup> "To Builders [Cattle Pavilions]" p 12.

(Ngahauranga, 1915),<sup>92</sup> a bakehouse and oven (Morrinsville, 1916),<sup>93</sup> the Winter Garden (Auckland Domain, 1916),<sup>94</sup> Dye House and Mill additions for the Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Co., Ltd (1916),<sup>95</sup> Bulk Store and Factory (1916),<sup>96</sup> brick residence (Wadestown, 1916),<sup>97</sup> Cunard Co. and New Zealand Shipping Company building (1917-18),<sup>98</sup> the YWCA building (Auckland, 1917-18),<sup>99</sup> and Grand Hotel (1918),<sup>100</sup> Residence (Remuera, 1918),<sup>101</sup> Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Company warehouse (Christchurch, 1919),<sup>102</sup> Sherwood premises

<sup>92</sup> "To Builders [Cattle Pavilions]" p 12.

<sup>93</sup> "Bakehouse, and Oven at Morrinsville" p 12.

<sup>94</sup> "Winter Garden" p 12; "Domain Winter Garden" p 4; "Building Notes" (1 October 1916) p 757.

<sup>95</sup> "To Builders [Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Co. Ltd]" p 12.

<sup>96</sup> "To Builders [Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Co. Ltd]" p 12.

<sup>97</sup> "To Builders [Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Co. Ltd]" p 12.

<sup>98</sup> "To Builders [NZ Shipping Company]" p 1; "Some Recent Wellington Buildings" p 107.

<sup>99</sup> "For Young Women" p 6; "Building Notes" (1 November 1916) p 793; "Building Notes" (1 May 1917) p 966; "Building Notes" (1 January 1919) p 414; "Building Notes" (1 January 1922) p 118.

<sup>100</sup> "Personal" (25 October 1918) p 4.

<sup>101</sup> "Building Notes" (1 July 1918) p 259.

<sup>102</sup> "To Contractors [Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Company]" p 4.

(Willis St, 1919),<sup>103</sup> Huddart, Parker and Co. (Quay St, 1920),<sup>104</sup> the State Fire Insurance Department (Hamilton, 1920),<sup>105</sup> and the State Fire Insurance Offices (Wellington, 1917-19).<sup>106</sup>

Despite having a strong history of large projects, such as Public Trust Offices, cinema, and factories, Hodgson specifically describes the New Zealand Insurance building (1914-18) as "a pioneer in new methods and [steel-frame] design" that "helped to launch Hoggard and Prouse."<sup>107</sup> The company also established the practices in New Zealand of rentable offices and ducting wires and services for ease of extension and alteration.<sup>108</sup> Another important event in 1917 was the firm's inclusion in *Modern homes of New Zealand by architects of standing*.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>103</sup> "Building Notes" (1 October 1919) p 631.

<sup>104</sup> "Building Notes" (1 April 1920) p 772.

<sup>105</sup> "State Fire Business" p 6.

<sup>106</sup> "Tenders [State Fire Insurance Offices]" p 14; Shaw *New Zealand Architecture* p 107; Hodgson *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* p 52; "Building Notes" (1 May 1919) p 507; "Building Notes" (1 June 1919) p 532; "Building Notes" (1 August 1919) p 581.

<sup>107</sup> Hodgson *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* pp 48, 49.

<sup>108</sup> Hodgson *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* p 48.

<sup>109</sup> This was a publication of over 80 bungalow and villa plans by New Zealand architects. The book, published

Staff at Hoggard Prouse and Gummer included William J. McKeon (who was the Clerk of Works for the N.Z. Insurance Company building),<sup>110</sup> Horace L. Massey,<sup>111</sup> N. Garlick,<sup>112</sup> F. Gordon Wilson,<sup>113</sup> and Eric Wiseman.<sup>114</sup>

*Prouse and Gummer (1921-23)*

Hoggard Prouse and W.H. Gummer dissolved in 1921, with Jack Hoggard going into sole practice and Prouse and Gummer forming a new company.<sup>115</sup> This short-lived company designed the War Memorial, Auckland Boys' Grammar School (Auckland, 1921),<sup>116</sup> State

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by Keyes, Mann and Co. in Auckland, was advertised as being 100 pages printed on art paper and the "only book of its kind" in New Zealand. "N.Z. Homes by N.Z. Architects [advertisement]." p 1; "Cheap Building!" p 11. (Thanks to Juliet Aabryn with help identifying the book advertised).

<sup>110</sup> "Our 25th Competition" p 56; "Our 30th Competition" p 266; "The N.Z. Insurance Coy., Ltd" pp 271, 273, 275, 277, 279-281, 283, 285-288.

<sup>111</sup> "Personal" (1 June 1919) p 527.

<sup>112</sup> "Auckland Architectural Students Association" p 640.

<sup>113</sup> "Our 69th Competition" pp 131-132; "Winning design, "Flight"" p 180; "Our 71st Competition" p 181; "Our 72nd Competition" p 206; "Our 83rd Competition" p 203.

<sup>114</sup> "[untitled]" (1 December 1917) p 84.

<sup>115</sup> "Notice of Dissolution of Partnership" p 2.

<sup>116</sup> "Memorial to Soldiers" p 5.

Fire Insurance Office (Wellington, 1921-23),<sup>117</sup> New Zealand Insurance Company building (Queen St, Auckland, 1921),<sup>118</sup> War Memorial (Dunedin, 1921),<sup>119</sup> Bridge of Remembrance (Christchurch, 1921-22),<sup>120</sup> Bryant and May's Factory (1922),<sup>121</sup> and the State Fire and Life Insurance building (Palmerston North, 1922-23).<sup>122</sup>

Staff at Prouse and Gummer included WE Aked (Structural engineer)<sup>123</sup> and Norman Frank Wilson (1901-73).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "Structures in Steel" p 9; "State Fire Office" p 8.

<sup>118</sup> "Structures in Steel" p 9.

<sup>119</sup> PA "War Memorials" p 6; "Dunedin War Memorial" p 5; "Dunedin's War Memorial" p 252; "Dunedin's War Memorial Competition" pp 271-273.

<sup>120</sup> "Memorial Designs" p 5; "Local and General" (3 September 1921) p 4; "Table Talk" p 1; "General News" p 6; "The War Memorial: Supervision Fees Questioned" p 6; "War Memorial: Bridge of Remembrance" p 7; "Christchurch War Memorial" p 10; "The Christchurch War Memorial Competition" pp 31, 33; "Building Notes" (1 November 1921) p 69; "Building Notes" (1 May 1922) p 213.

<sup>121</sup> "Bryant and May's Factory" p 4; "Big Contract Let" p 3; "A Big Contract: £90,000 Match Factory" p 3; "The Transformation of a Slum Area" p 11.

<sup>122</sup> "Advance Manawatu" p 4; "Building Notes" (1 January 1923) p 117.

<sup>123</sup> "Personal Items" (4 October 1922) p 6.

<sup>124</sup> Helliwell *The Plan Desk* p 9.

1923 saw the dissolution of Prouse and Gummer. The same year, in April, Wellington architects wrote an open letter to the candidates in the local body elections.<sup>125</sup> Its plea for the "urgent need for a sustained progressive and well-ordered policy for future civic development" appears to be a logical next step after the 1919 Town Planning conference held in Wellington. The letter requested a comprehensive topological survey of the Greater Wellington area, a 50-year plan, legislation to reduce the cost of housing and ensure the avoidance of slums, and that the local councils use the expertise and knowledge of architects, surveyors and engineers. The letter was signed by Prouse - but not Hoggard. Other well-known names included William Page, Gray Young, William Turnbull, Frederick de J Clere, Frank E Greenish, Llewellyn E. Williams, IM Dawson, Henry T Johns, John Swan and C Tilleard Natusch. Two of Prouse's former employees signed: Stanley Fearn and William McKeon.

*Earthquake design*

Prouse was described in 1923 (following the 7.9 magnitude Tokyo-Yokohama earthquake on 1 September), as an architect who had

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<sup>125</sup> "Developing Wellington" p 186.

"practically pioneered the steel frame structure in New Zealand."<sup>126</sup> The report stated that he had been in San Francisco shortly after the 1906 earthquake,<sup>127</sup> and referred to consequent engineering recommendations of steel-framed concrete buildings that had informed many of Prouse's buildings, including the

Public Trust Office, the New Zealand Insurance Co., the Star Office and Messrs Smith & Smith's at Auckland, the Cunard Building, State Fire Office, Bryant & May's an[d] Messrs John Chambers & Son at Wellington, and the Wellington Woollen Co.'s buildings at Christchurch.<sup>128</sup>

These, Prouse claimed, were built to the same standards as buildings in London.<sup>129</sup> Another example of Prouse and Wilson's earthquake design was in 1936, with their proposal to build the parapet of Tymons and Co of timber and plaster.<sup>130</sup> This interest in earthquake-proof buildings design predated C. Reginald Ford's 1926 book *Earthquakes and building*

<sup>126</sup> "Building Immunity" p 5; Our Own Correspondents "Risk from Earthquakes" p 8.

<sup>127</sup> This may have been on his trip home after attending his sister's wedding in 1906. "Personal Matters" p 5.

<sup>128</sup> "Building Immunity" p 5; "Ready for a 'quake" p 6; Own Correspondent "Earthquake Proof" p 7.

<sup>129</sup> "Building Immunity" p 5; "Ready for a 'quake" p 6; Own Correspondent "Earthquake Proof" p 7.

<sup>130</sup> "Borough Council" p 12.

*construction*, which Ford stated to be the first book in the English language on seismic design.<sup>131</sup>

*W.J. Prouse (1923-32)*

In 1923, Prouse established a practice on his own<sup>132</sup> (with offices at: 111 Customhouse Quay,<sup>133</sup> 18 Molesworth Street,<sup>134</sup> Wellington; 6 Moncrieff Street, Wellington,<sup>135</sup> 22 Hannah's Buildings, Lambton Quay, Wellington<sup>136</sup>). His firm designed a Tenement House (Goring St, 1925),<sup>137</sup> Vickers House additions (1927),<sup>138</sup> Fitzherbert Tce residence (1927),<sup>139</sup> the Majesty Theatre (Nelson, 1927),<sup>140</sup> the Majestic Theatre (Wellington, 1928),<sup>141</sup> the Hotel Majestic (1928),<sup>142</sup> Prince Edward Theatre,

<sup>131</sup> Skinner "Understanding the Risk" p 136.

<sup>132</sup> "W.J. Prouse [advertisement]" p 240.

<sup>133</sup> "W.J. Prouse [advertisement]" p 240.

<sup>134</sup> "To Builders [Tenement House]" p 10.

<sup>135</sup> "Tenders are invited [Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Co. Ltd.]" p 16.

<sup>136</sup> "To Contractors [New Masonic Hotel]" p 14.

<sup>137</sup> "To Builders [Tenement House]" p 10.

<sup>138</sup> "To Contractors [Vickers House addition]" p 4.

<sup>139</sup> "To Builders [Brick Residence, Fitzherbert Tce]" p 4.

<sup>140</sup> "New Majestic Theatre" p 6.

<sup>141</sup> "[untitled]" (18 February 1928) p 3; "Theatres Projects" p 7; "New Theatres" p 3; "Tenders [Majestic Theatre]" p 6; Peter Pan "Wing Whispers" p 70; "To Sheet-metal Workers and Plumbers" p 2.

<sup>142</sup> "Notes" (8 November 1928) p 4; "The Old "Albert"

shops and dwelling (Woburn, 1928),<sup>143</sup> brick office building (Torrens Tce, Wellington, 1929),<sup>144</sup> alterations to a steel and timber factory (Torrens Tce, Wellington, 1929),<sup>145</sup> a reinforced concrete parking garage (McDonald Cres and Whittaker Street, Wellington, 1929),<sup>146</sup> the Hotel St. George (1930),<sup>147</sup> the steel-framed Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Co. Ltd (Willeston St, Wellington, 1931),<sup>148</sup> and the Masonic Hotel (Napier, 1932-33),<sup>149</sup> and the Grand Hotel (Wellington, 1934).<sup>150</sup>

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Demolition Commenced" p 10.

<sup>143</sup> "To Builders and Contractors [Woburn Theatre]" p 20; "Theatre Opening" p 5.

<sup>144</sup> "To Builders and Contractors [brick office building]" p 24.

<sup>145</sup> "To Builders and Contractors [brick office building]" p 24.

<sup>146</sup> "To Builders and Contractors [brick office building]" p 24.

<sup>147</sup> "Unique in Design" p 17; Shaw *New Zealand Architecture* p 128.

<sup>148</sup> "Tenders are invited [Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Co. Ltd.]" p 16.

<sup>149</sup> "To Contractors. Tenders are invited" p 6; "New Masonic Hotel" p 7; "To Contractors [New Masonic Hotel]" p 14; "Tenders [Masonic Block]" p 3; "The New Masonic: Napier's Fine Hotel" p 10; "Items in Brief: About People and Events: Napier's New Masonic Hotel" p 11; "The New Masonic: Official Opening" p 9; Shaw *New Zealand Architecture* p 128.

<sup>150</sup> "Tenders are invited [additions to Grand Hotel]" p 16.

*Prouse and Wilson Ltd (1932-56)*

In 1932, Prouse and Wilson became partners: "[t]o acquire and take over the business or profession carried on by W. J. Prouse,"<sup>151</sup> with shareholdings in the new company of 250 and 400 shares respectively.<sup>152</sup> This company designed a building (Willis/Boulcott Sts, 1933),<sup>153</sup> three-storey concrete shop and office (Courtenay Place, Wellington, 1935),<sup>154</sup> Methodist Church and Bible Classrooms (Levin, 1935-36),<sup>155</sup> Turnbull and Jones (engineers) premises (Courtenay Place, Wellington, 1936),<sup>156</sup> Residence (Lowry Bay, Wellington, 1936),<sup>157</sup> Woolworth's Building (Victoria St, Hamilton, 1936),<sup>158</sup> Tymons and Co (Greymouth, 1936),<sup>159</sup> Mayfair Flats (Terrace, Wellington, 1936),<sup>160</sup> Trotting Club Stand (Hutt Park, 1936),<sup>161</sup> Victory Works

<sup>151</sup> "New Private Companies" (30 September 1932) p 10.

<sup>152</sup> "New Private Companies" (30 September 1932) p 10.

<sup>153</sup> "New Building" p 10.

<sup>154</sup><sup>154</sup> "Tenders [Three-storey reinforced concrete shop and office building, Courtenay Place]" p 20.

<sup>155</sup> "Tenders [Methodist church, Levin]" p 18; "New Methodist Church" p 8; "St. John's Church Dedicated" p 3.

<sup>156</sup> "New City Building in Courtenay Place" p 8.

<sup>157</sup> "Tenders are invited [Lowry Bay Residence]" p 18.

<sup>158</sup> "Victoria Street Block" p 8.

<sup>159</sup> "Borough Council" p 12.

<sup>160</sup> "To Contractors [Terrace Flats]" p 16.

<sup>161</sup> "To Contractors [Hutt Park Wellington Trotting Club

(Tory St, Wellington, 1939),<sup>162</sup> de Haviland Hangar (Rongotai airfield, 1939),<sup>163</sup> Service Station (Wakefield St, Wellington, 1939),<sup>164</sup> Trotting Club Stand additions (Hutt Park, 1939),<sup>165</sup> Flats (Hataitai, Wellington, 1940),<sup>166</sup> Women's Rest Room (Hutt Park, 1940),<sup>167</sup> Woollen Mills addition (Petone, 1940),<sup>168</sup> the *NZ Times* Building conversion (Lambton Quay, Wellington, 1940),<sup>169</sup> and the University Senate building (1940).<sup>170</sup>

Staff at Prouse and Wilson included Roy Haynes (draughtsperson).<sup>171</sup>

*Financial Misadventures*

In 1931 Prouse was suspended from the NZIA.<sup>172</sup> This was likely what prompted the formation of Prouse and Wilson, with Prouse

Stand]" p 16.

<sup>162</sup> "To Contractors [Victory Works]" p 16.

<sup>163</sup> "To Contractors [de Haviland hangar]" p 16; "Big Floor Space" p 11; "Aircraft Factory at Rongotai" p 9.

<sup>164</sup> "To Contractors [Modern Service Station]" p 16.

<sup>165</sup> "To Contractors [additional Stand, Hutt Park]" p 16.

<sup>166</sup> "To Contractors [Hataitai Flats]" p 14.

<sup>167</sup> "To Builders [Hutt Park Women's rest room]" p 14.

<sup>168</sup> "To Contractors [Woollen Mills addition]" p 12.

<sup>169</sup> "Turned into Flats: "N.Z. Times" Building" p 13.

<sup>170</sup> "To Contractors [Office Building, Wellington]" p 12.

<sup>171</sup> Helliwell *The Plan Desk* p 29.

<sup>172</sup> "Notice of Suspension of Members" p 77.

being the minority shareholder in the company. It also occurred at a time when both his parents died.<sup>173</sup> The suspension followed a complaint from Messrs. Beck & Nicol that alleged that Prouse had failed to refund £20 of a tender deposit.<sup>174</sup> A committee consisting of William Page, William Fielding and Frank Greenish was appointed to investigate the complaint and report to the NZIA Council.<sup>175</sup> The committee found "prima facie grounds for future proceedings" and Prouse was invited to attend the 2nd September council meeting to address the charge,<sup>176</sup> where he was unanimously found to

<sup>173</sup> "Obituary: John Prouse" p. 1; "Late Mrs. J. Prouse" p 7; "A New Zealand Woman Passes" p 17.

<sup>174</sup> Council meetings 29 July 1931 and 2 September 1931, NZIA Council Minute Book, pp 45, 47. This amount was equivalent to \$2,776 in 2024 Q3. Inflation calculator, RBNZ.

<sup>175</sup> Council meeting 29 July 1931, NZIA Council Minute Book, p 45.

<sup>176</sup> Council meeting 29 July 1931, NZIA Council Minute Book, p 46. A meeting of the complaint committee on 5 June 1931 had also been attended by Prouse at which Prouse stated that "the tender for the contract had been called without a deposit; that Messrs. Beck & Nicol after the contract was signed lodged with him a cheque for £25; the work on the contract was not carried out satisfactorily and the money was retained owing to the liability of the Architect and that he was so acting on the advice of his solicitor; that some of the £40 of fees due to the Architect still remain unpaid; that Mr. Beck called on



be "guilty of an act or default discreditable to an Architect,"<sup>177</sup> and suspended from the institute for a period of 12 months.<sup>178</sup> In the minutes of the 1932 Annual General Meeting the offence was described as "the misuse of deposit moneys."<sup>179</sup>

His suspension co-incided with a period during which Prouse was served numerous bankruptcy notices but appears to have avoided being declared bankrupt. This was largely the time of the Great Depression (1929-1933). There were at least 12 different parties that Prouse owed money to during the period from 1927 to 1933, with debts varying from

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him eighteen months to two years ago for a return of the amount paid and that he was advised by Mr. Prouse that he did not have the money available; that the cheque was given about two days after the date of the contract after demand had been made for bona fides from the contractor" (Minutes of Meeting 5 June 1931, [NZIA] Special Committees Minute Book 1921-1931, pp 183-184, Beaglehole Room, VUW). A response was requested from Beck & Nicol but this correspondence is not in the associated minute book.

<sup>177</sup> Council meeting 2 September 1931, NZIA Council Minute Book, p 47.

<sup>178</sup> Council meeting 2 September 1931, NZIA Council Minute Book, p 48.

<sup>179</sup> Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual General Meeting, NZIA Council Minute Book, p. 70. "Items in Brief: About People and Events: Suspension From Membership" p 11.

£42 10s 6d (equivalent to \$5,919 in 2024) to £882 6s 0d (\$122,420.30 in 2024). His creditors included lawyers, an engineer, a plumber, a gas company, a construction company, a rubber importer,<sup>180</sup> and his co-defendants are often family members.<sup>181</sup> However, it appears that these financial problems did not prevent him practicing architecture, but it is not until his NZIA suspension that he stopped sole practice and Wilson was elevated into the partnership.

Prouse also actively invested in various companies. He was not only a shareholder of

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<sup>180</sup> "Supreme Court: Cases to be heard" p. 11. Bankruptcy Files. R23210312; R23210313; R23210392; R23210527; R23210647; R232106669, R23210738; R23210868; R23211109. A William J Prouse owed money to the Wellington City Council, Briscoe & Co, Walter Edward Aked (engineer), and the Wanganui Sash and Door Co in the years 1928-1931. It is assumed this was Prouse. "Civil Cases" p 6; "Magistrate's Court: Civil Cases" p 6; "Magistrate's Court: By-Law and Civil Cases" p 9; "Supreme Court: Criminal, Civil and Divorce Cases" p 8; "Unpaid Debt" p 8; "Supreme Court: Civil Cases" p 15.

<sup>181</sup> The strong connection with his brother in business partnerships is also apparent in his sharing Prouse's office space. Helliwell writes that when Prouse moved to the Hannah's Building, Lambton Quay, "space was available for Oliver Prouse to share. This suite had two large rooms and the spiral staircase giving access to the penthouse room where ... [Wilson] worked." Helliwell *The Plan Desk* p 29.

architectural companies, but also ventured into at least eight other building-related businesses. Often other shareholders were Prouse's father and brother and/or business associates. These shareholdings were in the New Zealand Sawmillers' Agency Co., Ltd (1924),<sup>182</sup> Clifton Estates Ltd (1929-31) - a company owning residential flats,<sup>183</sup> Moncreiff Buildings Limited (1930) - which was likely named after the street his architectural office was in,<sup>184</sup> Grand Hotel, Ltd (1933),<sup>185</sup> and Devon Buildings Ltd (1935), which was formed to "[d]eal in real and personal property, to erect, buildings, houses, and incidental."<sup>186</sup>

Both Prouse and his business partner Wilson had minority shareholdings in the Phoenix Underwriting and Finance Co., Ltd (1937),<sup>187</sup> a

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<sup>182</sup> "Local and General" (7 August 1924) p 3; "Companies Registered" p 10.

<sup>183</sup> "Finance and Commerce" p 14; "Details Wanted" p 10.

<sup>184</sup> "Tenders are invited [Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Co. Ltd.]" p 16.

<sup>185</sup> "New Private Companies" (16 March 1933) p 14.

<sup>186</sup> "New Companies" (30 August 1935) p 3.

<sup>187</sup> The Phoenix Underwriting and Finance Co., Ltd was established "To underwrite the shares, interests, and debentures of any company, to establish and promote companies and associations for the prosecution of undertakings, works, projects, or enterprises of any"

business whose name appears particularly apt given by this stage the threats of bankruptcy appear to have somewhat subsided. This company (as well as Prouse, Wilson and Prouse's brother Oliver) was a shareholder in Wellington Motor Camps, Limited (1938),<sup>188</sup> which appears to have been formed to take advantage of business generated by the forthcoming Centennial Exhibition.<sup>189</sup> However, it was not just Wellington that was host to new motor camps, and later that year Prouse and Wilson became majority shareholders in the Raumati Motor Camp Ltd.<sup>190</sup> Their involvement appears to have been hands on, as they even wrote to the local council expressing their appreciation that electricity connections to their Raumati camp had been made prior to peak holiday season.<sup>191</sup>

### Conclusion

This brief biography identifies new aspects of Prouse's life worthy of additional study.

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description and incidental." "New Companies: Public and Private" p 7.

<sup>188</sup> "New Motor Camps Company" p 12; "New Companies: Registrations in South" p 7.

<sup>189</sup> "Town Talk" p 8.

<sup>190</sup> "New Companies: Private and Public" p 12.

<sup>191</sup> "Power Distribution" p 8.

Prouse has rarely been given the time of day in architectural histories, despite being a leading figure in such important firms as Hoggard and Prouse, and Hoggard and Prouse and WH Gummer. He has largely been ignored. I suspect because he did not fit the template of a "heroic" designer. His case is not unique. In many instances a simplistic fetishizing of "design" has prevented a more nuanced and sophisticated approach to the study of architectural history. It is clear that Prouse was well-connected and able to attract clients, but it is also clear that his connections played a role in his proactive engagement with business peripheral to architectural firms, including crossing the line into building development and seeking out new business opportunities such as underwriting and motor camp architecture. This likely situates the successful designs that continually occurred in his firms as deriving from a complex dynamic. Additionally, it is clear that Prouse's firms acted as incubators supporting future generations of leading architects, including Stanley Fearn, William Gummer, Gordon Wilson, and Horace Massey. Fearn and Wilson, in particular, repeated a workplace culture of nurturing talent, most famously in regard to Connell and Ward (Fearn) and the Ministry of Works (Wilson),

respectively.

Prouse died in 1956.<sup>192</sup>

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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<sup>192</sup> "Obituary: Mr. W.J. Prouse" p 8.

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