

Government House

1 Rugby Street



Government House (Photo: NZHistory.net)

Summary of heritage significance

- Government House is a two-storey Edwardian mansion that was designed as in an eclectic 'English Domestic' style with Classical and Tudor inspired elements. The house is notable for its fine interiors, for its spectacular site, and its well-tended park-like grounds. It is also an important work of the Public Work Department.
- Government House has very high historical value as the residence of New Zealand's Governors-General (and before the creation of that position, the Governors) since 1910. As such, the house has hosted various dignitaries and important ceremonies.
- The building has high social value for its continuing role as the official home of New Zealand's Governor-General.

District Plan:	Map 16, reference 103
Legal Description:	Pt Sec 1248 Town Of Wellington
Heritage Area:	
HPT Listed:	Historic Place Category 1, Register No. 218
Archaeological Site:	Unknown
Other Names:	Dufferin Street
Key physical dates:	1908-1910: Construction
Architect / Builder:	Claude Paton
Former uses:	Governor General residence
Current uses:	Governor General residence
Earthquake Prone Status:	Outside Earthquake Policy (SR 268516)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

Completed in 1912, this is the third Governor's residence in Wellington. The first was the house built for Colonel William Wakefield, the de-facto head of the Wellington settlement in its earliest days. Wakefield's house, the site of which is now occupied by the Beehive, was purchased to house Lieutenant-Governor Eyre, Grey's second-in-command, but was taken for use as a hospital for victims of the great 1848 earthquake.

In 1865 the seat of government was moved from Auckland to Wellington and in 1870 Colonial Architect William Clayton designed a new Government House on the Beehive site. It was completed the following year. A large timber Italianate house, it was later used as a Parliamentary debating chamber after the disastrous fire of 1907, which burned the General Assembly to the ground. The Governor-General was temporarily moved to Palmerston North¹ and planning began on a new Government House. The second Government House was later demolished in 1969 to make way for the construction of the Beehive.

The site of the former Mt View Asylum, alongside Wellington College, was chosen for the new Vice-Regal residence. Some 300 acres had earlier been set aside for a Governor's residence, asylum and the college.² The asylum was demolished to make way for the new building. It was designed in the office of John Campbell, Government Architect principally by his assistant Claude Paton.³

Work began in 1908 and the building was completed in 1910. The first Governor-General to occupy the building was Lord Islington. Designs for the landscaping of the garden were prepared by Trevor Buxton of the Christchurch firm of A.W. Buxton Ltd. in 1935.⁴

Every Governor-General since 1910 has occupied the house, the principal vice-regal residence in New Zealand. It has also hosted numerous visits by British royalty, including the Queen, as well as many heads of state and other visitors. The house underwent a major refurbishment in the early 1980's during the term of Sir David Beattie. More recently, 2008 saw the beginning of a nearly three year process to conserve Government House. It received a new roof, seismic strengthening, and extensive renovations to the interior and exterior lay-outs of the house and grounds.⁵ The project was designed by Athfield Architects and overseen by a civil service project manager; it was one of the most rigorous, most expensive, most extensive, and best documented conservation projects ever to have been carried out in New Zealand.

Government House has very high historic and social value as the official residence of the Queen's representative to New Zealand, and for the public and state functions that are held there. The house and grounds have correspondingly high architectural and aesthetic value, to suit the building's prominent and highly symbolic role in the governance of New Zealand.

¹ Cook R. 1988, Parliament: The Land and Buildings from 1840, Parliamentary Service, Wellington p 36

² Department of Internal Affairs 1989, Government House, DIA, Wellington p 4

³ NZHPT Buildings Record Form - Government House

⁴ Ibid. Notes by Wayne Nelson from Tipples R. 1989, Colonial Landscape Gardener: Alfred Buxton of Christchurch, New Zealand 1872-1950, Lincoln College

⁵ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Government House Conservation Project: Application for Resource Consent', July 2008, p 1; 'Government House Conservation Project', accessed June 2013 at <http://gg.govt.nz/government-house>

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1908-1910	Construction
1980s	Refurbishment
1995	Alterations (00061: 74: 12210) Repile (00061: 122: 13987)
1996	Dwelling alterations (00061: 175: 15598) Dwelling alterations (00061: 203: 16433)
1997	Additions and alterations (00078: 103: 33933)
1998	Alterations to ballroom and office (00078: 233: 40942)
2000	Additions to butler's residence to accommodate laundry (00078: 778: 64093)
2008	Seismic bracing to walls and chimney (00078: 2708: 184638) Level 1, 2, and ground, internal alterations (00078: 2741: 186888) Structural strengthening, refurbishment of roof and wall cladding (00078: 4730: 185953)
2008-2011	Restoration project: re-roofed, seismically strengthened, interior and exterior extensively renovated
2012	Installation of fire place into existing brick chimney (00078: 4611: 280944)

1.3 Occupation history

1910-present The Governor-General of New Zealand

1.4 Architect

The principle designer of Government House was Claude Paton, working in the office of the Government Architect, John Campbell.⁶ Paton (1881-1953) was born in Scotland, and moved to New Zealand in 1904. He was employed in the Public Works Department in 1906, and stayed there until his retirement in 1953. Though he was never achieved the title of 'architect', Paton was an influential figure in the Department.⁷ Sharing a commitment with John Campbell to the Edwardian Baroque style, he was an important force in the Department during the last decade or so of John Campbell's tenure as Government Architect until Campbell's retirement from the position in 1922.⁸

⁶ See 'House and Grounds, accessed June 2013 at <https://gg.govt.nz/government-house/house-and-grounds>

⁷ New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Paton, Claude – Architect', accessed June 2013 at <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Paton,+Claude>

⁸ New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Campbell, John – Architect', accessed June 2013 at <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Campbell,+John>

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Government House is a two-storey Edwardian mansion, with extensive attics built into the roof space. The building is stylistically mixed, combining Classical and Tudor features; the general effect is that an eclectic English Domestic design.

The house has one dominant roof which terminates that is punctuated by three abutting gables on the garden side - one in the centre and one at either end. These three bays are not well-integrated and stand rather awkwardly. Indeed, the house seems rather less than the sum of its parts. Other wings about the building:- the conservatory, and an administrative block on the east end, and a staff accommodation block on the west end. The central tower marking the main entrance adds a rather eclectic, Italianate touch to the building, as does the incorporation of roof dormers, and the porte-cochere on the south side with Oamaru stone columns.

The interior is the most successful aspect of the building and there are impressive formal spaces, well-detailed, on the ground floor: the ballroom, drawing room, conservatory, smoking room, dining room and entrance hall with its wide formal staircase and the coats-of-arms of all Governors General who have lived in the residence. Rimu finishing work is a feature of some of these spaces, and the interior finishes are particularly fine.

2.2 Materials

The construction is of timber, with extensive use of jarrah members. The upper storey is half-timbered, with roughcast plastering. The ground floor is clad in lapped weatherboards while the roof is clad in English tiles.

2.3 Setting

Government House is situated on the western ridge of Mount Victoria, at the northern end of the suburb of Newtown. The house is integral with its setting; the extensive landscaped grounds contain numerous outbuildings, including particularly fine entrance gates and lodge. The elevation, flora, and scale of the grounds separates Government House from its neighbours to the north and south, Wellington College and Wellington Hospital respectively, while it is bounded by the Mount Victoria town belt to the east. The main front lawn faces north with obscured views over the city.

Sources

'Government House' website, accessed June 2013 at <https://gg.govt.nz/government-house>

Cook, R. *Parliament: The Land and Buildings from 1840*. Wellington: Parliamentary Service, 1988

Department of Internal Affairs. 'Government House'. Wellington: DIA, 1989

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Nelson, Wayne (notes). From Tipples R. *Colonial Landscape Gardener: Alfred Buxton of Christchurch, New Zealand 1872-1950*. Lincoln College, 1989

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_____. 'Paton, Claude – Architect'. Accessed June 2013 at <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Paton,+Claude>

3.0 Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?

Government House is a two-storey Edwardian mansion that was designed as in an eclectic 'English Domestic' style with Classical and Tudor inspired elements. The house is notable for its fine interiors, for its spectacular site, and its well-tended park-like grounds.

Townscape: Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?

Government House plays a curious role as a landmark in Wellington. On one hand, its location is well known by Wellingtonians, but the building is nestled in park-like grounds and obscured by mature trees from many nearby vantage points.

The stature and function of the home contributes to the identity of Wellington as New Zealand's capital city.

Group: Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?

The building has some group value with the other government buildings, embassies and High Commission buildings in Wellington that have a similar official/residential function. Examples include Premier House (WCC ref 18/308), the Cook Islands High Commission (WCC 15/442) and the Papal Nunciature (WCC ref 1/158).

Historic Value:

Association: Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?

The Governor General is a significant figure in the constitutional life of the country, in their role as representative of the Queen in New Zealand, and the role has been filled by very distinguished people from a variety of backgrounds. Government House has been the official residence of Governors General from the time it was completed in 1910 to the present day. It has hosted many visiting dignitaries and been the location for state and public ceremonies, occasions and functions.

Association: Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?

Educational: Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?

Technological: Does the item have technological value for its innovative or

important construction methods or use of materials?

There is technical interest in the large-scale timber frame of the house and in its high-quality internal fixtures, fittings and finishes.

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

The building, although discreetly sited from public gaze, is nevertheless held in very high public esteem as many people have visited the house for investitures and social functions; it has also been the scene of numerous visits by royalty and visiting dignitaries.

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

Government House has commemorative and traditional value for the official role it plays in the New Zealand Government.

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?

Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?

Government House contributes to a sense of continuity, having housed New Zealand's Governors General since 1917 (and the country's Governor beforehand). For this reason, the house is also a focus of national identity.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

Government House is a focus of national sentiment and connection, especially for those that have been received there, and had honours bestowed on them at the grounds.

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

Government House is a large New Zealand Edwardian mansion that fulfils a unique role as home to New Zealand's Governor-General.

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

Government House is good representative example of an Edwardian mansion.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The house's restoration from 2008-2011 was one of the most rigorous, most expensive, most extensive, and best documented conservation projects ever to have been carried out in New Zealand. The house has, as such, retained a high degree of authenticity in its built fabric, design intent, use and setting.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

Government House is important at a national level for its function as the official residence of the Governor-General.

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	N	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	N	
Plan change?	N	
Heritage Area Report	N	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	N	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	N	
HPT website	Y	
HPT files	Y	
Conservation Plan	Y	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	