



Issue 23
December 2022



Auckland Council Archives

Auckland begins at the Archives

Welcome

The purpose of this newsletter is to keep you up to date with what's happening at Council Archives and share some of the interesting stories we uncover working with Auckland's records.

In this issue we visit Pukekohe, uncover the surprising history of the mayor's desk, and take a look at the Devonport and Mt Victoria Domain Boards.

Finally in staff news, we say 'bonjour' to our new conservator and 'sayonara' to our imaging specialist.

We hope you enjoy it.

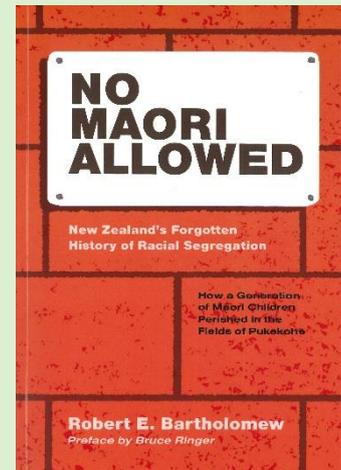
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Behind the scenes in Pukekohe

Some of you may have watched the documentary *No Māori Allowed* on TVNZ 1 on 18 October or read Robert E Bartholomew's book of the same name. Robert spent a considerable amount of time going through Pukekohe Borough Council minute books (PKB 001) researching for the book and documentary, which depicts the treatment of Māori living in Pukekohe during the first half of the twentieth century.

In the documentary, a number of Māori graves that no longer had markers were identified using records from the Pukekohe Cemetery held at Auckland Council Archives (accession AUC 2016 084). It is great to see the archives being used to help tell the stories of the past and let silent voices finally be heard. The documentary can be viewed online at <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/no-maori-allowed> and copies of the book available from Auckland Libraries.



Databases Update

All Auckland Council Archives databases were taken off-line for maintenance on 6 August 2022. This includes the Archives Online databases, the City of Auckland 1908 map, family history indexes, exhibitions, and digitised historic district schemes, reserve management plans and Waikumete Cemetery records. These will be restored as soon as possible; however we are not able to give an indication of when this might be. We apologise for any inconvenience this causes. Please feel free to contact us at archives@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz or by phone on 09 890 2427 for assistance.

You can still access much of Auckland Libraries' Heritage content on:

- [Kura Heritage Collections online website](#)
- Digital NZ - [Heritage Images](#)
- Digital NZ – [Manuscripts Online](#)

The Mayoral Desk



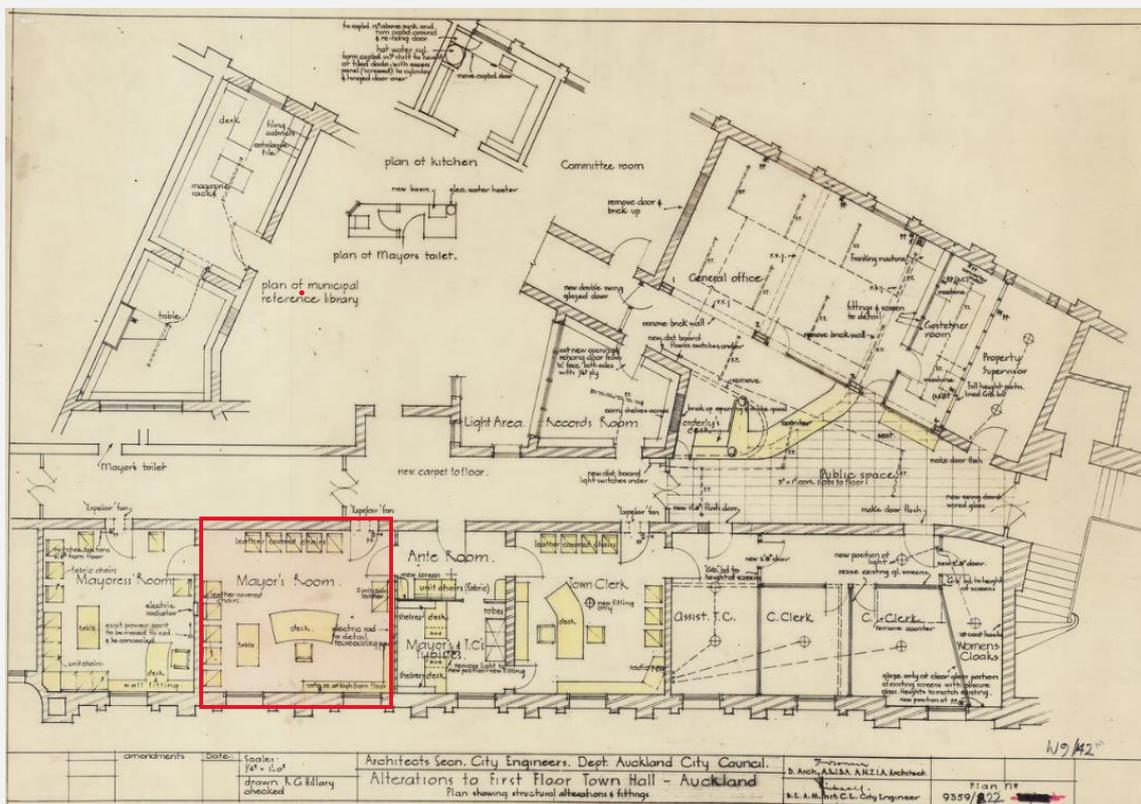
Mayor Wayne Brown and Senior Archivist Harvey Brahne at the mayoral desk at 135 Albert Street on 21 October 2022

Newly elected mayor Wayne Brown recently contacted Archives about the history of the mayoral desk in his office at 135 Albert Street. His enquiry was prompted by some existing damage to its veneer and a few makeshift tape repairs. One of the senior archivists was able to confirm the heritage value of the desk and its connection to one of Auckland's most important architects, Tibor Donner (1907-1993). Donner also renovated Parnell Baths and designed Freyberg Place's Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall (refurbished by council in 2017), and the Civic Administration Building at Aotea Square.

A label under the desktop identified its designer as Tibor Donner and described it as a 'modernist desk [...] part of a suite of controversial new furniture' and 'a significant heritage item [...] [that] should remain in council ownership within council offices'. Although Archives is primarily concerned with selecting, preserving, and making archives available for research, we recommended specialist furniture conservators registered with the New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials Pū manaaki Kahurangi. Council minute books and subject files held in Archives document the mayoral desk and establish why it was once considered 'controversial'.

Tibor Donner was born in Austria-Hungary, moved permanently to New Zealand in the 1920s and studied architecture at Auckland University College. He originally worked as an architect in the Public Works Department, designing schools, hospitals, and government buildings, and was co-winner of a competition in 1941 to design the Savage Memorial at Bastion Point. In 1945, Donner was appointed as Auckland City Council's first City Architect, providing testimonials with his application from people as notable as the Prime Minister Peter Fraser and the industrialist James Fletcher.

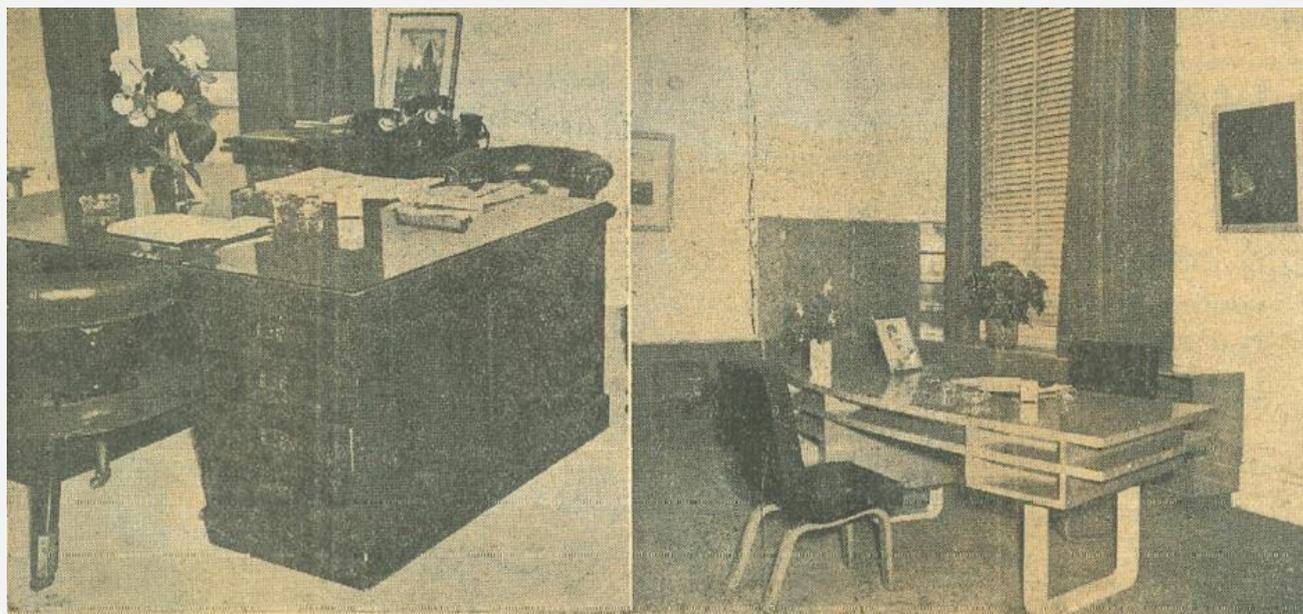
Auckland City Council resolved in August 1947 to make alterations to the first floor of Auckland Town Hall and in March 1948 gave the City Architect authority to decide on new furniture and interior decoration.



Plan showing proposed alterations to the first floor of Auckland Town Hall, including new curved desk and other furniture in the mayor's room, [1948]. Image electronically annotated in red [Auckland Council Archives, Auckland City Council City Engineer's plans, ACC 015 record no 9359-22]

Donner's design for a new mayoral desk recommended an ash or white sycamore veneer over plywood and core board. Plywood is cheap and strong. Because it retains its strength when cut, bent, or moulded, it was a material often used by boat builders in New Zealand.

cancelled], but, as that was to take place, now was an appropriate time to do the work'. Councillors were not unanimous in opposition to the changes; in September 1949, one 'said the whole matter was a storm in a teacup, and he thought it could have been dealt with more privately'. He complained that other councillors had taken advantage of the mayor's absence overseas to delay installing his new furniture and object to changes to the mayor's room that had been previously agreed: 'Schoolboys put a tack on the master's seat while he is out of the room: we have stolen the master's desk while he is absent'.



Photographs showing the old mayoral desk on the left and Tibor Donner's new curved plywood desk installed in Auckland Town Hall in November 1949. The old desk, believed to date from about 1910, was transferred to the City Treasurer [Auckland Council Archives, Auckland City Council Works Department classified subject files, ACC 219 record no 44-232 part 3]

Professor P W Burbridge of Auckland University College had earlier supported Donner's application to become City Architect. In a letter to the *NZ Herald*, published in November 1949, he claimed, 'the new design of desk is clean, original, practical [...] In that one gets service with design, practicality with line and expression, then I prefer the new. It is attractive and dignified in its simplicity'. For Burbridge, 'The remarks of some of the councillors seem to me beyond the limits of good taste in attacking the artistic judgment of one of their expert staff, whom, I think, the city is fortunate to have. It does not seem the right use of power to attempt to belittle one's staff in public. [...] the general over-emotional attitude of the council to something relatively new in artistic type augurs badly for future development in a new and growing city [...] Much civic building and many city improvements are wanted in the near future; if all these are to be limited by the desire to obey tradition and by a fear of the new, then we shall end up with a most dull and uninteresting city, having its civic features out of date before they are erected'.

In December 1949 council's Finance Committee instructed the City Engineer to leave Donner's new furniture and décor in the mayor's room unchanged. Donner retired as City Architect in 1967.

Sources:

Auckland City Council minute books, 1945, 1949 [Auckland Council Archives, ACC 101/53, ACC 101/62]

Auckland City Council Town Clerk's Department subject file on Auckland Town Hall, 1947-1948 [Auckland Council Archives, ACC 275 record no 47-30]

Auckland City Council Works Department classified subject files on Auckland Town Hall, 1947-1950 [Auckland Council Archives, ACC 219 record no 44-232, parts 2-3]

Jeremy Hansen, ed., *Modern: New Zealand Homes from 1938 to 1977* (2013), pp.16-29, 347

Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design* (2004), p.114

Staff News

We welcome Aline...

My name is Aline Curtis and I am the new Kaiatawhai Whakaora Taonga, Conservator, at the Auckland Council Archives. I have been practising as a book and paper conservator since 2006, the year I graduated a Masters degree in Book Conservation at the University of the Arts of London.

I am French and I first studied history in Paris before training in conservation. Since I am a student, I like to get experiences in different places, in order to understand and learn from various cultural, social and historical contexts. I studied in Italy, the UK and worked for 6 years in the South of Spain.



In 2014, I got selected for a challenging project organised by Antarctica Heritage Trust (www.nzaht.org), based in Christchurch, New Zealand. AHT is in charge of the conservation of the huts built by the explorers from the Heroic Era such as Ernest Shackleton and Robert Falcon Scott in various locations in the Ross Sea territory, Antarctica. I went for 7 months to Scott Base on Ross Island within an International team of 3 other conservators in order to inventory, monitor and conserve the artefacts held in the huts. This adventurous professional experience was unique and incredibly enriching. It is also when I first came to New Zealand and since then, I will come every year for both work and travel purposes.

After this project I went back to France and set up as a freelance book and paper conservator in Nantes, in a collaborative conservation studio, le 16 Ter, with 3 other conservators (specialised in murals, paintings and icons, furniture and plastics). I have been involved in many projects from preservation (collection management, storage facilities organisation, packaging, moving of collection) to conservation (conservation treatments, cleaning and re-housing, etc.), but also teaching and training Museum and Archives professionals.

It is in 2020, just before the pandemic of Covid-19, that I decided to move full-time to New Zealand. I started at the Auckland Council Archives as the conservator in September this year. My role is to preserve and conserve the collection, monitoring and acting on the environmental conditions of storage, ensuring the way the archives are handled, collected and packed is suitable, undertaking conservation treatments for the records which need further intervention. The task is extensive, especially with a collection spread in different locations, and that is why I am very happy to be part of the team, knowing that I have new challenges to achieve. Caring for this unique collection of records and taonga, which is fundamental for the knowledge of Auckland, means being part of the protection and survival of sources and references which reveal Auckland and Aotearoa's identity.

...and farewell Aya

I left the role of Digital Archives Imaging Specialist at Central Archives last November. I have been digitising heritage materials for the last 10 years - mostly GLAM (Gallery, Library, Archive and Museum) sectors in Aotearoa - including working for Auckland Council Archive for just over 4 years.

Making digitised records available online is significant for preservation and access purposes. Digitisation has been my passion since I was at university and this role was a great match with my passion and skill set. I have also learned many things about Tāmaki Makaurau, te Reo and te Ao Māori in depth.

The main three projects have been digitising historic District Schemes, indexes and registers of Waikumete Cemetery, and historic aerial photographs and making them available online. One of the other memorable projects was digitising Auckland Regional Council Biodiversity Unit aerial photographs (ARC 009) which are full of amazing landscapes around the Auckland region.

I will be working as a Communication Manager at Waiheke Resources Trust from the end of November. I am looking forward to the new challenge where I will be contributing to the community and creating a more sustainable future. I am very grateful for the opportunities I had at Auckland Council. Thank you and best of luck to everyone.

Ngā manaakitanga,
Aya Oba



The Devonport and Mount Victoria Domain Boards

Borough of Devonport, surveyed & compiled for the Devonport Borough Council by Harrison & Foster. Detail from Map 3404, Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections.



As part of the Mahurangi Purchases from Maori, around twenty-one acres of Flagstaff Hill (now Takarunga/Mount Victoria) and around twenty acres of what is now the Devonport Domain and Vauxhall Reserve became Crown Land. Thomas Duder, the initial signalman at the signal station, had grazing rights on the maunga until the 1870s, while amongst others Roderick Alison (1850-1882) who was the proprietor of the Willow Grove Strawberry Gardens tearooms, had a lease on part of Devonport Domain which at that time was still largely a swamp.

The Devonport and Mount Victoria Domain Boards were gazetted on 14 December 1880. On 8 January 1881 the members of the two boards, (they were the same people), met as one committee and the minutes are still preserved with Auckland Council Archives.

It's fascinating to read back through those early minutes. From the start, the Boards took direct responsibility for maintaining the grass, trimming trees and hedges, eliminating dock weed and gorse, draining the 'raupo swamp', fencing, and laying paths. They also issued tenders for grazing sheep, cattle and horses, and later cropping. In 1885 and 1887, the Devonport Domain Board took over the remainder of the swamp area.

What is also interesting is the Board's ready support for local sport. At that time, this was the recently formed Devonport lawn tennis club along with more established cricket in summer months and rugby football in winter months. One early addition was a roller for the cricket pitch, the laying of which was part financed by the North Shore Cricket Club.

One problem arose in 1887 with the rugby football club using the tennis club's changing rooms without permission. A tender was then let for a separate changing room for the football club. In 1888 the Boards issued a five Pound reward when all the glass windows of the tennis club's shed were broken by vandals. The tennis club lasted until 1963, while the bowling club was formed in 1895. The North Shore Athletic and Cycle Club also met on the cricket grounds from the 1890s.

Board tree planting was almost exclusively of exotic trees, including blue gums, poplars, willows, oaks and insignis, mainly along the boundaries. Some trees were donated. There was fencing along the boundaries with Devonport School and 'the burial ground', and local

residents had private gates onto the domains. Fencing also ensured that grazing animals didn't take over the tennis, cricket and football grounds. Some fences had palings while others were just heart kauri or puriri posts with horizontal strands of iron wire strung between them.

The Auckland Harbour Board paid for a path to the signal station and in the early 1880s a surveyors' trig station was erected. From 1886 the football club was allowed to charge admission fees to their leased grounds and other sports soon followed.

The Mount Victoria Domain Board continued to engage with the Devonport school committee regarding shared boundaries, including an extension of the school site for a playground. The Board also dealt with the Devonport Borough Council (formed in 1886 from the Devonport Road Board) regarding excavation work developing Kerr Street.

In 1889 an Order-in-Council added the Mayor of Devonport Borough as an ex-officio member of the two Boards and this heralded a closer relationship with the Council into the 1890s. In the early 1890s drainage work on the eastern half of Devonport Domain required the Boards to pick up a third of total costs. Later, in the mid-1890s the Boards worked with Council over water piping from Lake Pupuke to the reservoir on the summit of Mount Victoria.

The two Boards appointed a caretaker in September 1895 and in May 1897 the government combined them together as the Devonport Domain Board. Board meetings had often lapsed for lack of a quorum and the Boards were underfunded. Accordingly, in July 1901, the Domain was vested in the Devonport Borough Council, as had already occurred with the Rangitoto Island Domain in 1890.

Christmas shutdown

Along with the rest of Auckland Council, Auckland Council Archives will be closing for the summer holidays from 22 December 2022 until 9 January 2023. We wish you a Meri Kirihimete and a Happy New Year from everyone at Council Archives.



Find out more

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