



WHAT IF? WHAT NEXT?

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VERTICAL LIVING IN THE 1910s: NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST PURPOSE-BUILT BLOCKS OF FLATS

Julia Gatley | University of Auckland

What if research impact becomes a major driver for the funding and assessment of research projects in all academic disciplines? In architectural history, this would encourage increased engagement with the public and with the heritage industry, more research with practical application or demonstrable benefit to society, and more cross-disciplinary research.

Motivated by an interest in, rather than a requirement for, work with practical application, the larger project from which this paper draws examines the history of medium- and high-density housing in New Zealand. The aim is to demonstrate its long history in a country that has a severe housing shortage, combined with commentators who remain focused on the “New Zealand dream” of the detached house and garden, regardless of its consequences for the environment, infrastructure and transportation.

Framed within this broader project, the paper seeks to identify New Zealand’s first purpose-built blocks of flats, and asks, who realised them, what characterised the designs, and for whom were they built?

Auckland’s Middle Courtville (1914-15) is reputedly the country’s first. The paper discusses it and the handful of others from the 1910s. Identifying a definitive “first” is complicated by the fact that two of them also operated as hotels. The paper confirms architect A. Sinclair O’Connor as the primary designer of New Zealand’s first purpose-built blocks of flats. It shows that the flats were aimed at professionals and office workers, and that period media focused on the positive attributes of the building type, interpreting the buildings, their “conveniences” and the lifestyles they offered as modern. Finally, it reveals a clear relationship between the building type and women’s history, deserving of further investigation.

Introduction

In 1919, an Auckland newspaper observed that the city had two purpose-built blocks of flats: that known today as Middle Courtville, and a lesser-known building called Rexcourt.¹ Both were built in 1914-15. Rexcourt was demolished at the end of 1983. Julie Stout and Graeme Burgess, separately, have described Middle Courtville as Auckland's first block of self-contained flats.² More recently, Megan Walker has suggested that Cargen (1912-13) was Auckland's first multi-storeyed block of flats.³ Why was Cargen absent from the *Auckland Star's* 1919 list, and were similarly early examples being built in other New Zealand cities? This paper seeks to identify the country's first purpose-built blocks of flats, and asks, who realised them, what characterised the designs, and for whom were they built?

There are multiple books on the history of New Zealand houses, but no account of the country's blocks of flats. Architectural survey texts focus on stylistic rather than typological developments, and make little or no observation about the emergence and development of blocks of flats as a building type. Peter Shaw, in *New Zealand Architecture from Polynesian Beginnings to 1990*, recognises the architectural value of Corner Courtville (1919-21) and mentions its neighbour, Middle Courtville (1914-15), and Shortland Flats (1922-24), before jumping to Cintra (1935-37) and Berrisville (1937), all of which are in Auckland.⁴ The earliest blocks to feature in Terence Hodgson's *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* and Douglas Lloyd Jenkins' *At Home* are from the 1930s.⁵ Lloyd Jenkins actually states that by the 1990s, "New Zealand ... had had only a sparse and sporadic history of apartment building".⁶ Gordon Holden and Emina Petrovic compound this claim, describing the state rental flats of the first Labour government (late 1930s-40s), and Wellington's roof-top apartments of the 1990s, as "eccentric excursions" away from the norm of the detached house and garden.⁷

These assertions about New Zealand's blocks of flats having been "sparse", "sporadic", "eccentric excursions" worry me, given that the country has a more than 100-year history of building them, and today has a severe housing shortage, meaning it would benefit from building more higher-density housing. Many commentators, however, remain fixated with the "New Zealand dream" of the detached house and garden, regardless of its consequences for the environment, infrastructure and transportation. The larger project from which this paper draws examines the country's history of medium- and high-density housing, in an effort to understand the history better and, ultimately, to help normalise higher-density housing.

New Zealand's heritage literature contains detailed information on some of the individual blocks of flats. In the 1990s Graeme Burgess wrote conservation reports for Middle Courtville and Corner Courtville, and more recently, Dave Pearson's firm has written a heritage assessment for Cargen.⁸ Heritage New Zealand has listed Middle and Corner Courtville and many more of the better-known blocks of flats from the 1920s and 1930s, and local authorities have also scheduled some of them.⁹

This paper connects the dots provided by these analyses of some of the individual buildings. To create as full a picture as is practicable, it also includes discussion of buildings that have been demolished. The National Library of New Zealand's newspaper search engine, Papers Past, proved invaluable, complemented by archival research.

Context for the Building Type

Sophisticated urban apartment buildings began to appear in eighteenth-century Paris. The building type was embraced throughout Europe, Britain and the Americas in the nineteenth century, encouraged in the second half of the century by the advent of iron and then steel framing and elevators. In an effort to disassociate middle-class flats from squalid tenement blocks, Americans called upmarket apartments like those in the Stuyvesant, New York (1869), "French flats" or "Parisian flats", after the eighteenth-century precedents.¹⁰ Private hallways and bathrooms were also important considerations in middle-class apartments.

In New Zealand, changing demographics, particularly growing urban populations, influenced developers to build blocks of flats. Erik Olssen describes urbanisation as the “most striking demographic change” apparent in New Zealand in the period 1890 to 1940.¹¹ He provides the numbers for the country’s urban populations, but for Pākehā only, demonstrating the extent to which Māori and Pākehā generally lived separately in this period, and Pākehā dominated urban life. Auckland’s Pākehā population, for example, was increasing by approximately 50% every ten years, from ca 67,000 in 1901, to almost 103,000 in 1911, and up again to almost 158,000 in 1921.¹² Olssen comments that the 1900s and 1910s were also a time of expansion and bureaucratisation in the public and private sectors.¹³ White-collar and semi-professional roles, such as clerical, secretarial and retail roles, proliferated, producing a “new, affluent, urban middle class”.¹⁴ This generated the market for city flats. It included couples and single people, and women as well as men. Historically, single people had boarded, whereas flats afforded them greater independence and privacy.¹⁵

In New Zealand, the term “flat” was already used to describe multiple tenancies created through the subdivision of big old houses. Some might have been luxurious, but many were not. Thus, purpose-built blocks of flats were initially called “modern flats” to differentiate them from the converted old houses. In 1913, for example, the *Evening Post* commented that, “No doubt the time will come when modern flats will be built. There are so-called flats available now, but they are not flats in the modern sense at all”.¹⁶ Modern flats would be purpose-built and self-contained, with shared entry foyers and circulation systems, and vertically stacked units. Shared circulation and vertical stacking differentiated blocks of flats from terrace housing and from residential units built above shops. Blocks of flats were built under single ownership in this period, with individual flats rented to tenants, not sold. Unit titling came much later.

Cargen (1912-13)

As noted, Megan Walker has identified Cargen, at 10 Eden Crescent, as “the first multi-storey flats built in Auckland.”¹⁷ The seven-storey Cargen Flats were built as an extension to the two-storey Cargen Hotel for the Cargen Proprietary Ltd, on land already owned by one of the newly formed company’s four directors, Gregory Osmond. The directors sold shares in the company to raise the capital needed for construction.¹⁸ The owners of the old hotel, Edward Francis Black and his wife Pauline Black, took out a lease on the new extension, initially for 16 years.¹⁹ The extension carried the name “Hotel Cargen” on its parapet, but period newspapers emphasised that it was a block of flats. The first article on it, for example, titled “Flats for Auckland”, reported: “The growth of the city and the consequent need for increased residential accommodation ... will shortly be exemplified by the erection of a large block of ‘flats’ in Eden Crescent.”²⁰



Figure 1. Robert Wladislas de Montalk, Cargen, Auckland (1912-13). Photograph by Julia Gatley.

Cargen was designed by Robert Wladislas de Montalk (1871-1942), a New Zealand-born architect of Polish descent who had served articles with Frederick Strouts in Christchurch. His Auckland buildings include Knox Church and Hall, Parnell (1899), the former New Zealand Laundry Company Building (now Quay Building), in Quay Street (1906), and the Premier Building, Queen Street (1908).²¹ He was a shareholder in the Cargen Proprietary Ltd,²² and had reportedly made a “special study” of British and European apartment buildings.²³

De Montalk designed Cargen in the first half of 1912,²⁴ and it was built from mid-1912 to late 1913 or early 1914.²⁵ Because the flats were an extension to an existing hotel, it is not clear when they were first advertised for rental. The original floor plans show suites (five per floor) with three rooms and a bathroom, but individual kitchens are not depicted.²⁶ The building also had a large dining room, suggesting that tenants ate their meals there rather than cooking for themselves.

The Blacks sold their interests in Cargen in 1920. First, they sold all the chattels – from 200 rooms. The sale took three weeks and newspapers identified it as one of the largest such sales to have taken place in Auckland.²⁷ The number of rooms and the length of the sale suggest that all the suites and rooms in the complex were furnished, while the observation that “some 30 boarders continued to claim Cargen as their home during the whole sale time”,²⁸ suggests occupancy by a combination of short-term guests and longer-term residents. Changes in ownership and management followed, with further use as both flats and a hotel, and eventually an office building. Cargen’s enduring hotel associations explain why it was not included on the *Auckland Star*’s 1919 list of purpose-built blocks of flats in the city, which, as mentioned, included only Middle Courtville and Rexcourt.²⁹

Middle Courtville and Rexcourt (both 1914-15)

Middle Courtville is located around the corner from Cargen, at 9 Parliament Street. Rexcourt was also nearby, on the corner of Symonds Street and Havelock Street. Havelock Street was closed in the 1960s when the land was absorbed into the University of Auckland’s city campus. The University then demolished Rexcourt to make way for its Hill Manning Mitchell-designed Music Building (1984-86). The old portico that provides entry to the School of Music once provided entry to Rexcourt. The second portico to its north belonged to an older building, King Edward’s Hall. In addition to the University of Auckland, the immediate area is home to Old Government House, the High Court (former Supreme Court) and the Northern Club, and a short walk from the city’s main commercial thoroughfare, Queen Street.

Middle Courtville and Rexcourt were both designed during the first half of 1914 and built from mid-1914 to early or mid-1915.³⁰ A January 1914 design for the Middle Courtville site comprised three terrace houses, but this was replaced by the design for 13 flats; the increased rental income from 13 instead of three is obvious.³¹ Middle Courtville was designed by A. Sinclair O’Connor (1884-1943). Period newspapers state that he also designed Rexcourt,³² although primary sources confirming his authorship have not been located as yet.

The name Courtville was selected upon the building’s completion, reportedly because of proximity to the Supreme Court.³³ It grew to Middle Courtville to differentiate this building from that to its immediate south, built 1919-21, which was also named Courtville initially, but became known as Corner Courtville. The “Middle” in Middle Courtville reflects the fact that the house known as Braemar (1901), to the immediate north, operated as part of the Courtville complex from 1917 and was sometimes called Little Courtville or the Courtville Annex.³⁴ The name Rexcourt, too, reflects proximity to the Supreme Court.

Middle Courtville was developed by the partnership of Ernest Herbert Potter (1866-1951) and William Walter Stanton (1872-1944).³⁵ Burgess has recognised Potter and Stanton as “pioneers” in the development of apartment buildings in Auckland.³⁶ They already owned and managed a well-known Auckland china and cutlery shop, Tanfield Potter Ltd, before commissioning at least

three apartment buildings in the city: Middle Courtville; its neighbour Corner Courtville; and, on the same city block, the Courtville Residential Flats (now Westminster Court; 1934-35). They also bought Braemar in 1917, and converted it into five flats.³⁷ The four neighbouring buildings effectively formed one large Courtville complex. Potter and Stanton retained ownership of all four and appointed caretakers to manage them.³⁸ Additionally, Potter was involved in local government, becoming a Mt Eden borough councillor and then mayor of Mt Eden from 1923 to 1931.³⁹



Figure 2. (L) A. Sinclair O'Connor, Middle Courtville, Auckland (1914-15). Photograph by Julia Gately.

Figure 3. (R) Rexcourt, Auckland (1914-15), as viewed from Symonds Street ca 1980. Photographer not known, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services, Digitool: PID418286.

Potter and Stanton were important clients for Sinclair O'Connor. Underscoring the professional relationship, Stanton and O'Connor were good friends – they are said to have had lunch together daily.⁴⁰ O'Connor was born in Fremantle, Western Australia, and practised there before arriving in New Zealand around 1908.⁴¹ He had a small office, with just one draughtsman.⁴² He designed more of Auckland's early inner-city apartment buildings than any other architect. This included the three that Potter and Stanton commissioned, seemingly Rexcourt as mentioned above, along with Radnor (1913), Alverstone (now Windsor Towers; 1928), Espano Flats at the south end of Myers Park (1926-28), and Brooklyn in Emily Place (1929-30). O'Connor also undertook public and commercial work, including a cluster of public buildings for the Mt Eden Borough Council in the 1920s when Potter was a councillor and mayor.⁴³ O'Connor's other key projects include the Orange Coronation Hall (1922), neighbouring commercial buildings the Fergusson Building and Civic House (both 1928), and picture theatres, among them the Lido, Epsom (1923).

Rexcourt was developed by Rachel Basten (1848-1938), a widow and long-term boarding house owner and manager,⁴⁴ initially with a 21 year lease on Auckland Hospital Board endowment land. She was already of retirement age, and from 1922 her daughter Caroline Basten (ca 1879-1960) managed the building.⁴⁵ In her will, Rachel left Rexcourt to her two unmarried daughters, Caroline and Alice (1876-1955),⁴⁶ both of whom were among the first women in New Zealand to practise as chartered accountants. Alice Basten was also Auckland's third woman city councillor, where she worked to improve the services available to women.⁴⁷ The two sisters are believed to have lived at Rexcourt into the 1940s.⁴⁸

Other Blocks of Flats Designed in the 1910s

Of Sinclair O'Connor's many buildings, Radnor and Corner Courtville warrant further discussion here. Radnor was located at 20 Waterloo Quadrant, to the immediate west of the site on which Corner Courtville would be built. Radnor was designed and built in 1913.⁴⁹ It pre-dated Middle Courtville and Rexcourt, but differed from them in having been built as a private hotel or boarding house.⁵⁰ The developer and manager, Edith McDonald, was a widow, with experience in owning and managing hotels.⁵¹ Perhaps influenced by what was happening next door at the Courtvilles,

McDonald converted Radnor into flats in 1920.⁵² This required her to sell the hotel chattels. She then sold the building in 1927.⁵³ It went through several more changes of ownership, until 1978 when it was demolished.⁵⁴



Figure 4. A. Sinclair O'Connor, Radnor, Auckland (1913), in 1978. Photographer not known, Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, 7-A10120.

Corner Courtville warrants a place here because the first design for the Middle Courtville site, dated January 1914, included four-storeyed “mansion tenements” for the Corner Courtville site.⁵⁵ The design underwent further development, and O’Connor lodged the drawings for a building permit in March 1917.⁵⁶ Work did not begin on site until 1919, however, because of late-war and post-war labour shortages and the concurrent influenza epidemic.⁵⁷ The tender was accepted in September 1919,⁵⁸ and in June 1921, the *Herald* reported that the building was nearing completion.⁵⁹



Figure 5. A. Sinclair O’Connor, Corner Courtville, Auckland (1919-21). Photograph by Julia Gatley.

Paralleling Auckland’s Corner Courtville was the Majestic Mansions at St Clair Beach in Dunedin, designed in 1917 and built 1919-21,⁶⁰ with construction again delayed because of labour shortages and the influenza epidemic.⁶¹ There is further connection between the Auckland and Dunedin buildings as Fletcher Bros, or the Fletcher Construction Company as it became in 1919,

built Middle Courtville and Corner Courtville,⁶² while company director James Fletcher (1888-1927) was a one-third investor in the Majestic Mansions.⁶³ The timing of the Majestic Mansions project suggests that he took his lead from the Courtvilles. The Dunedin building was then designed by William Dunning, who was effectively Fletcher Bros' in-house architect.⁶⁴ James Fletcher had arrived in New Zealand in 1908, settling in Dunedin and building houses there from 1909. From 1912, he and brother William traded as Fletcher Bros, expanding rapidly in Dunedin, in Invercargill from 1914 and then in Auckland and Wellington.⁶⁵ Thus, Middle Courtville was an early Auckland building for them. They expanded their activities to include property development,⁶⁶ but the Majestic Mansions differed in that it was Fletcher himself who invested, rather than the company. When work picked up after the war and the epidemic, Fletcher Bros restructured and rebranded itself as the Fletcher Construction Company,⁶⁷ the name under which it continues to operate today.



Figure 6. William Dunning, Majestic Mansions, Dunedin (1919-21). Photograph by Julia Gatley.

There was also a proposal to build a block of flats in Wellington in 1917. Described as “the first flat to be erected in Wellington”,⁶⁸ the building was designed by Frederick de Jersey Clere and Llewellyn Williams for a site at the far end of Oriental Bay, on the corner of Lindum Terrace and Carlton Gore Road. A permit was sought for a five-storeyed structure to comprise “fifteen double flats and nine single flats”. It remained unbuilt, however. The labour shortages and influenza epidemic may again have been a factor.

Design and Construction

The blocks of flats designed and built in New Zealand in the 1910s were generally in the classical tradition, with some Art Nouveau decorative detailing, bay windows alluding to residential use, and recessed balconies that were large for their time and were sometimes described as sleeping balconies.

Radnor, Middle Courtville and Corner Courtville shared stylistic similarity and are, or were, in the case of Radnor, the most interesting architecturally. Of the three, Corner Courtville has attracted the most commentary. Burgess concludes that it was O'Connor's best building and a skilful response to “a complex design problem”.⁶⁹ He emphasises its classical references – its symmetry, with the main entrance and dome both on the line of symmetry, and its axiality. He discusses the rhythms created by the arrangement of piers, projecting bays and recessed balconies.⁷⁰ Radnor and Middle Courtville anticipated several of Corner Courtville's design moves. The three shared symmetry and axiality, the combination of projecting bays and recessed balconies, and ornamental plasterwork seemingly hanging from both the upper-level cornices and

the bay windows of the top floor flats. All three buildings carried their names in relief, somewhere above their main entries.

Newspapers described these buildings as English Renaissance in style.⁷¹ Shaw has suggested Otto Wagner's turn-of-the-century apartment buildings in Vienna as an influence.⁷² More practically, Burgess has highlighted the importance of a trip that O'Connor made to North America in 1908.⁷³ He visited Hawaii, Victoria and Vancouver, and then worked in San Francisco, which in the wake of its devastating 1906 earthquake, provided him with the opportunity to study earthquake-resistant construction in reinforced concrete.⁷⁴ In a letter to his father, O'Connor described the beauty of Hawaii and the devastation still visible in San Francisco, where Market Street comprised "a heap of fallen ruins, bricks, and a great network of tangled girders, bent and twisted about like so many hairpins."⁷⁵ He would have seen blocks of flats there, although his letter does not mention any in particular.

Rexcourt had less of the ornamental plasterwork than Radnor or the Courtvilles, and a more conventional classical pediment above the main entry. The balconies appear timber framed and that on the north side was communal. Cargen is bigger, relieved by projecting bay windows on its south side and recessed balconies on its north. The south façade is symmetrical other than the staggered central windows, which convey the location of the stairwell. The main entry is to one side. The Majestic Mansions building is symmetrical, with fewer balconies and less ornamentation, but a bold parapet design.

The buildings were progressive in their construction technology. Most of them had reinforced concrete columns, beams, floors and roofs, with brick infill for walls, and the concrete and brick plastered to give a smooth wall finish. At Middle Courtville, the walls too were of reinforced concrete.⁷⁶ Reinforced concrete construction was still comparatively new for public, commercial and residential architecture. This made it newsworthy. Milica Mađanovic has shown that in Auckland's key public buildings of the late Edwardian period – the Town Hall, the Chief Post Office and the Ferry Building, all built between 1909 and 1912 – the "early employment of reinforced concrete was well documented by the press and interpreted as a sign of progress and prosperity."⁷⁷ In those buildings, it was used "mostly for the foundations, floors and stairs".⁷⁸ Thus, its use for columns and beams in the blocks of flats shows how quickly architects were embracing the new material. Newspapers described it as fireproof and emphasised its ability to withstand earthquakes. Geoffrey Thornton reports that on the other hand, the Auckland Master Builders' Association opposed and even boycotted its use in the early 1910s, because they considered it new-fangled.⁷⁹

Like O'Connor, R. W. de Montalk was an "early advocate of reinforced concrete".⁸⁰ He had already been using it for over a decade when he designed Cargen.⁸¹ He was honorary architect for the 1898 Auckland Industrial and Mining Exhibition and this may have encouraged his interest in it, as the exhibition's top prize and gold medal were awarded to John Wilson and Co., producers of hydraulic lime and Portland cement. De Montalk designed a house for one of the Wilson brothers, Nathaniel, and his wife Florence, 65 kilometres north of Auckland in Warkworth in 1901.⁸² Nathaniel had developed the cement works there from the 1870s, and Thornton identifies him as New Zealand's "father of cement manufacture".⁸³ The house too was partly built in concrete. De Montalk also invented and patented new types of concrete construction, and the 1919 house he designed at 1 Grosvenor Terrace, Wellington, was completely of concrete, even the rafters.⁸⁴ The reinforced concrete construction of flats allowed developers and architects to design these buildings such that additional floors could be added in the future. Cargen, for example, was initially to be built to five storeys, with allowance for two more floors to be added.⁸⁵ During construction, the decision was made to build to the full seven storeys.⁸⁶ Middle Courtville was also designed so that two additional floors could be added, although they never were.⁸⁷

In terms of their spatial layouts and planning, these buildings generally had centrally located entrances, staircases and hallways, privileging flats for the building perimeters and thus for natural light and ventilation. Cargen and Rexcourt also included a number of smaller, single rooms

with shared bathroom facilities. Cargen, Corner Courtville and the Majestic Mansions were all fitted with lifts. Like the use of reinforced concrete, newspapers highlighted the inclusion of lifts. Cargen's hotel-like amenities attracted particular comment. The *Auckland Star*, for example, mentioned its ballroom, supper room and lounge, as well as crediting its "huge" dining room with being "one of the finest in the southern hemisphere", with a grand piano, artworks by well-known artists and a 100 foot long wall almost fully glazed with views over the harbour.⁸⁸ The Majestic Mansions, too, included hotel-like amenities – a drawing room, a café and a billiards room open to the public – plus a small dining room for the exclusive use of tenants.⁸⁹

Marketing, Advertising and Occupancy

As noted, these blocks of flats were built mainly for professionals and office workers wanting privacy and independence. They also wanted a certain degree of amenity, described in period articles as "modern conveniences", with electricity repeatedly noted.⁹⁰ An article reported that Cargen's "modern conveniences" would include electric lighting and heating,⁹¹ "a modern hot-water system", and, on each floor, "telephonic communication".⁹² In 1917, a local newspaper suggested the Majestic Mansions would be "the most up-to-date residential building in New Zealand".⁹³ Its eight garages associated it with the most modern means of transportation.⁹⁴ In advertisements for the rental of flats, upper case letters emphasised key points. The flats at Rexcourt were described as "the modern idea", with "HOUSEKEEPING MADE EASY. Electric light throughout, gas for all domestic purposes, up-to-date conveniences."⁹⁵ At Middle Courtville, the flats were described as, "FIREPROOF, Self-contained Residences, With Garden Roof.... Three Rooms and Bathroom and Balcony to each. Electric Light Throughout."⁹⁶ The mentions of fireproof construction and electric lighting convey the building's modernity even when the word "modern" was not used explicitly.

In addition to articles on the buildings and advertisements for the rental of flats, the society pages of newspapers reported on some of the more high profile residents renting or staying at flats. Typical were the likes of, "Mr and Mrs R. M. Algie have taken a flat at Courtville", published in the *Otago Witness*, and "Miss Joan Quane, Christchurch, will be in Auckland next week, and will be the guest of Mrs D. G. Hunter, Courtville".⁹⁷ Longer than usual was, "Professor Brown and the Misses Brown (2) have taken one of the 'Cargen' flats. Mr and Mrs George Blomfield and their family are renting the top flat. These flats are in connection with Cargen Private Hotel, in Eden Terrace [sic], and are luxuriously furnished and fitted up throughout."⁹⁸ Residents at the Majestic Mansions included Sir Robert and Lady Stout.⁹⁹ Sir Robert had retired from politics by this time and been appointed chief justice. Even as residents included judges and politicians, Burgess notes that the early Courtville tenants were considered rather bohemian,¹⁰⁰ and recites a period joke, "Are you married or do you live in Courtville?"¹⁰¹

Conclusions

This paper has discussed the buildings believed to be New Zealand's first purpose-built blocks of flats. Cargen and Radnor were the oldest, although Cargen seems to have operated more like a hotel, with furnished rooms and communal rather than individual kitchen and dining facilities, and Radnor was certainly built as a hotel. Middle Courtville and Rexcourt were next, both purpose-built as blocks of flats. Of these four buildings, Radnor and Rexcourt have been demolished, and Cargen has had various uses over the years, while Middle Courtville still operates as a block of flats. The paper included discussion of Corner Courtville and the Majestic Mansions as their construction was planned to start in 1917, before being delayed by external constraints.

Of the six, Radnor and the two Courtvilles are/were the most interesting architecturally, while more generally the blocks were technologically advanced – modern – in their use of reinforced concrete construction. Further, they were equipped with the full range of "modern conveniences", such as electric lighting, "telephonic communications", lifts in the taller buildings, and, in the Majestic Mansions, garages. The degree of amenity was appropriate for the targeted demographics. The press provided commentary on the design and construction of the buildings.

It was largely favourable, suggesting that in the 1910s, the building type was welcomed as a positive addition to New Zealand's housing stock.

Burgess has highlighted the importance of Potter and Stanton, Sinclair O'Connor and Fletcher Bros in the early development of blocks of flats in Auckland.¹⁰² This paper has provided additional context for their achievements, while highlighting James Fletcher's role as an early developer of flats. It has also newly recognised the pioneering role of single women as developers and managers of early blocks of flats, namely, Rachel Basten and Edith McDonald, both of whom were widows who had experience in owning and managing boarding houses before turning their hands to blocks of flats. Their initiatives extended the tradition of single women and widows running private hotels and boarding houses in old houses. Property development was a field in which women without formal qualifications could succeed – if they had the means to invest. Those with inheritances were more likely to have had the means. Basten's daughter Caroline, an accountant, also became a manager of Rexcourt. Cargen, on the other hand, was developed by a private company. It had four male directors, but three of the 22 original shareholders were women (two were the wives of directors and the third was a widow),¹⁰³ and the building was managed by a married couple, with Pauline Black believed to have taken an active role in the work. Additionally, women were among the tenants in these early blocks of flats, as they sought increased independence and privacy. The relationship between the early development of the building type and women's history is clear and warrants further consideration in future research on New Zealand's history of medium- and high-density housing.

After the completion of Corner Courtville in Auckland and the Majestic Mansions in Dunedin in 1921, more purpose-built blocks of flats were built in New Zealand cities, including the Shortland Flats in Auckland (1922-24), Inverleith and Braemar in Wellington (1922 and 1923-25 respectively), and the Devonport Flats in New Plymouth (1923-24). The economy was fluctuating rather than booming, but the block of flats from the 1910s had shown that there was a demand for this new kind of accommodation among the urban middle classes. The demographic was expanding, and this gave more developers the confidence to invest.

Endnotes

¹ "Five Blocks of Flats to be Erected Here: Total Cost £200,000; Housing for 250 Families", *Auckland Star*, 14 October 1919.

² Julie Stout, "Courtville in Context", BArch thesis, University of Auckland, 1983, 1, 11; and Graeme Burgess, "Middle Courtville, 9 Parliament Street, Auckland City: Conservation Report", for the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 1991, 7. Online at www.burgessandtreep.com/c-o-u-r-t-v-i-l-l-e (accessed 27 April 2020).

³ Megan Walker, "Historic Heritage Evaluation: Riverina, 46 Wilson Road, Warkworth", Auckland Council Heritage Unit, May 2019, revised July 2019, 15. Online at www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-plans-strategies/unitary-plan/auckland-unitary-plan-modifications/proposed-plan-changes/docspc31evaluation/riverina-evaluation.pdf (accessed 28 April 2020), 15.

⁴ Peter Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, 2nd edn (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997 [1991]), 123-24, 140-44. He also mentions Marina Garden Flats, Mt Eden, Auckland (1935) in passing, as an early building on which Vernon Brown worked (p. 144).

⁵ Terence Hodgson, *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* (Wellington: Grantham House, 1990), 69; and Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design* (Auckland: Godwit, 2004), 75.

⁶ Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home*, 286.

⁷ Gordon Holden and Emina Petrovic, "Eccentric Excursions: Apartments in Wellington", in Andrew Leach and Gill Matthewson (eds), *Celebration: 22nd Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* (Napier: SAHANZ, 2005), 67-72.

⁸ Burgess, "Middle Courtville", and Graeme Burgess, "Corner Courtville Conservation Plan: Sister Document to Middle Courtville Conservation Report", for Courtville Apartments Ltd, April 1993. Online at www.burgessandtreep.com/c-o-u-r-t-v-i-l-l-e (accessed 27 April 2020). Dave Pearson Architects, "10 Eden Crescent (Former Hotel Cargen), Auckland: Heritage Assessment and Impact Statement (Revised)", for Foster + Melville Architects, June 2019.

- ⁹ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, “The List”, www.heritage.org.nz/the-list.
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- ¹² Olssen, “Towards a New Society”, 256.
- ¹³ Olssen, “Towards a New Society”, 259-60.
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- ¹⁶ “Tram Fares & Rents: Houses in Wellington; A Problem”, *Evening Post*, 17 March 1913.
- ¹⁷ Walker, “Historic Heritage Evaluation: Riverina”, 15.
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- ¹⁹ Cargen Proprietary Ltd, “Prospectus: Issue of Shares”, 8.
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- ²⁴ Permit drawings are dated 28 June 1912. See AKC 339, Record ID 177430, Auckland Council Archives.
- ²⁵ “Building Notes”, *Progress*, 7, no. 9 (1 July 1912); “Additions to Cargen: Seven New Storeys”, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 December 1912; “Cargen Flats: A Big Establishment”, *New Zealand Herald*, 7 April 1913; and “Concrete Building Movement in Auckland”, *Progress*, 8, no. 8 (1 April 1913).
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- ²⁸ “Furnishings of Cargen: Good Prices Realised”, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 July 1920.
- ²⁹ “Five Blocks of Flats to be Erected Here: Total Cost £200,000; Housing for 250 Families”, *Auckland Star*, 14 October 1919.
- ³⁰ On Middle Courtville, see “Terrace in Eden Street”, *Auckland Star*, 12 June 1914; “Concrete Terraced Houses: Block to Cost Over £4000”, *New Zealand Herald*, 13 July 1914; and “Apartments Vacant”, *New Zealand Herald*, 20 May 1915. On Rexcourt, see “New Apartment House: Building to Cost £3785”, *New Zealand Herald*, 13 July 1914; and “Apartments Vacant”, *New Zealand Herald*, 6 February 1915.
- ³¹ “Big Tenement Scheme: Structure for Eden Street”, *New Zealand Herald*, 19 January 1914. The Auckland City Council approved both designs on 30 June 1914, seemingly giving the developers the choice. See O’Connor’s drawings of Middle Courtville, Architecture Archive, Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services.
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- ³³ Burgess, “Corner Courtville”, 21.
- ³⁴ “History: About Braemar”, *Braemar on Parliament Street*, <https://aucklandbedandbreakfast.com/braemar-history/> (accessed 24 April 2020).
- ³⁵ Certificate of Title, NA 228/17.
- ³⁶ Burgess, “Corner Courtville”, 12.
- ³⁷ Burgess, “Corner Courtville”, 12.
- ³⁸ Burgess, “Middle Courtville”, 17. The two families continued to own the Courtville buildings until 1972.
- ³⁹ Burgess, “Middle Courtville”, 16.
- ⁴⁰ Burgess, “Middle Courtville”, 15.
- ⁴¹ Burgess, “Middle Courtville”, 19. Passenger lists include the arrival of “O’Connor (2)” on the *Maheno* in December 1908. See “Passenger Lists, 1839-1973”, Archives New Zealand online, www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1609792?collectionNameFilter=false (accessed 2 July 2020).
- ⁴² Burgess, “Middle Courtville”, 19.
- ⁴³ Burgess, “Middle Courtville”, 19.

- ⁴⁴ “Contract in Dispute: Question of Penalty; Authorisation of ‘Extras’”, *New Zealand Herald*, 25 November 1916; and “Mrs Rachel Basten”, *New Zealand Herald*, 7 January 1939.
- ⁴⁵ Valuation records replace Rachel Basten’s name with Caroline’s from 1922-23 to 1943-44. ACC 213, Item 171C, Record ID 329399, Auckland Council Archives.
- ⁴⁶ Will and probate of Rachel Basten, Archives New Zealand, R9393695, www.archway.archives.govt.nz/ViewFullItem.do?code=9393695&digital=yes (accessed 22 June 2020).
- ⁴⁷ Raewyn Balzeil, “Basten, Alice Henrietta Gertrude”, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 1998, republished in *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4b12/basten-alice-henrietta-gertrude> (accessed 19 June 2020).
- ⁴⁸ “Personal Items”, *Auckland Star*, 3 October 1941.
- ⁴⁹ Permit drawings are dated 31 July 1913. See AKC 339, Record ID 179120, Auckland Council Archives.
- ⁵⁰ “New Boardinghouse: Estimated to Cost £18,000”, *New Zealand Herald*, 28 July 1913. Rooms were advertised by October 1913. See “Tourist Resorts”, *New Zealand Herald*, 18 October 1913. It was built by Messrs J. Lyons.
- ⁵¹ “Deaths”, *New Zealand Herald*, 18 October 1909; and “Tourist Resorts”, *New Zealand Herald*, 6 March 1912.
- ⁵² “Five Blocks of Flats to be Erected Here: Total Cost £200,000; Housing for 250 Families”, *Auckland Star*, 14 October 1919.
- ⁵³ Certificate of Title NA 216/282 shows the land transfer from Edith McDonald to Bensen Ltd on 5 November 1927. Bensen Ltd were the developers of Alverston (1928-29).
- ⁵⁴ Burgess, “Corner Courtville”, 13.
- ⁵⁵ “Big Tenement Scheme: Structure for Eden Street”, *New Zealand Herald*, 19 January 1914.
- ⁵⁶ Permit drawings are dated 23 March 1917. See AKC 339, Record ID 178465, Auckland Council Archives. Shaw, *Pride of Place*, 20, records that the City Council approved the building permit in April 1917.
- ⁵⁷ Shaw, *Pride of Place*, 20.
- ⁵⁸ Untitled, *Evening Star*, 5 September 1919.
- ⁵⁹ “Building Activity: New Works in Auckland; Fresh Business Premises; Labour More Plentiful”, *New Zealand Herald*, 11 June 1921.
- ⁶⁰ “Board and Residence”, *Otago Daily Times*, 5 April 1921.
- ⁶¹ Shaw identifies its construction two years later as part of a catch-up on the backlog work that had built up in the latter part of the war. Shaw, *Pride of Place*, 21.
- ⁶² Rexcourt was built by a Mr J. H. Ellisdon.
- ⁶³ “Finance and Commerce”, Press, 8 November 1919. Alfred James was a two-thirds investor.
- ⁶⁴ Shaw, *Pride of Place*, 15-20.
- ⁶⁵ Peter Shaw, *Pride of Place: A History of the Fletcher Construction Company* (Auckland: Fletcher Construction Company, 2009), 2-8. On Auckland, see pp. 14-15, and Wellington, p. 17.
- ⁶⁶ Shaw, *Pride of Place*, 11. It was not until 1925 that the Fletcher Construction Company formed its dedicated development company, the Fletcher Trust and Investment Company. See Shaw, *Pride of Place*, 34.
- ⁶⁷ Shaw, *Pride of Place*, 21.
- ⁶⁸ “The Flat System: Coming to Wellington; Opinions and Particulars on the New Venture”, *New Zealand Times*, 18 December 1917.
- ⁶⁹ Burgess, “Corner Courtville”, 11.
- ⁷⁰ Burgess, “Corner Courtville”, 11.
- ⁷¹ On Radnor, see “New Residential Hotel: Four Storeys High; To Cost £12,000”, *Auckland Star*, 15 August 1913; on Corner Courtville, see “Five Blocks of Flats To be Erected Here: Total Cost, £200,000; Housing for 250 Families”, *Auckland Star*, 14 October 1919.
- ⁷² Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, 2nd edn, 105.
- ⁷³ Burgess, “Middle Courtville”, 18, and “Corner Courtville”, 21.
- ⁷⁴ Burgess, “Middle Courtville”, 18.
- ⁷⁵ Letter, Arthur Sinclair O’Connor, San Francisco, to J. O’Connor, Fremantle, in *West Australian*, 12 September 1908, 9. My thanks to Graeme Burgess for sharing this reference.
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- ⁷⁷ Milica Mađanović, “Concrete Complexities: Reinforced Concrete in the Architecture of Auckland’s Town Hall, Chief Post Office and Ferry Building”, in *Proceedings of the 35th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand: 35, Historiographies of Technology and Architecture*, edited by Michael Dudding, Christopher McDonald, and Joanna Merwood-Salisbury (Wellington: SAHANZ, 2018), 327.

- ⁷⁸ Madanovic, “Concrete Complexities”, 331.
- ⁷⁹ Geoffrey Thornton, *Cast in Concrete: Concrete Construction in New Zealand, 1850-1939* (Auckland: Reed, 1996), 128.
- ⁸⁰ Thornton, *Cast in Concrete*, 162.
- ⁸¹ For information on de Montalk, see Walker, “Historic Heritage Evaluation: Riverina”, 15.
- ⁸² Walker, “Historic Heritage Evaluation: Riverina”, 6-9.
- ⁸³ Thornton, *Cast in Concrete*, 86.
- ⁸⁴ Walker, “Historic Heritage Evaluation: Riverina”, 15.
- ⁸⁵ “A Sign of the Times: Residential Flats”, *New Zealand Herald*, 11 June 1912.
- ⁸⁶ “Additions to Cargen: Seven New Storeys”, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 December 1912.
- ⁸⁷ Burgess, Middle Courtville, 18.
- ⁸⁸ “Cargen”, *Auckland Star*, 21 December 1918.
- ⁸⁹ “Flats at St Clair: Contract Let for the Majestic Mansions”, *Evening Star*, 5 September 1919.
- ⁹⁰ See, for example, “New Apartment House: Building to Cost £3785”, *New Zealand Herald*, 13 July 1914.
- ⁹¹ “Additions to Cargen: Seven New Storeys”, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 December 1912.
- ⁹² “Flats for Auckland: Important Building Project; A Five-Storey Block; Estimated Cost, £15,000”, *New Zealand Herald*, 5 February 1912.
- ⁹³ “Luxurious ‘Flats’ at St Clair: To be Built at Once; On the Latest Take-Life-Easy Plan”, *Evening Star*, 15 May 1917.
- ⁹⁴ “Flats at St Clair: Contract Let for the Majestic Mansions”, *Evening Star* 5 September 1919.
- ⁹⁵ “Apartments Vacant”, *New Zealand Herald*, 6 February 1915.
- ⁹⁶ “Apartments Vacant”, *New Zealand Herald*, 20 May 1915.
- ⁹⁷ “Table Talk”, *Otago Witness*, 20 February 1918; and “Notes for Women”, *New Zealand Times*, 19 September 2019.
- ⁹⁸ “Hearth and Home”, *Star*, 15 October 1913.
- ⁹⁹ According to “Women’s World”, *Evening Star*, 20 January 1923, “Dr Stout (Wellington) is visiting his parents, Sir Robert and Lady Stout, Majestic Mansions, St Clair.”
- ¹⁰⁰ Burgess, “Middle Courtville”, 23.
- ¹⁰¹ Burgess, “Corner Courtville”, 25.
- ¹⁰² Burgess, “Corner Courtville”, 12.
- ¹⁰³ “Summary of Capital and Shares”.