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**PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS  
AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND  
VOL. 33**

Edited by AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad

Published in Melbourne, Australia, by SAHANZ, 2016

ISBN: 978-0-7340-5265-0

The bibliographic citation for this paper is:

**Christopher McDonald** "Arches and Industries: Modelling Natural Resources and National Enterprise During the 1901 Royal Visit to Wellington." In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 33, Gold*, edited by AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad, 464-473. Melbourne: SAHANZ, 2016.

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## **ARCHES AND INDUSTRIES: MODELLING NATURAL RESOURCES AND NATIONAL ENTERPRISE DURING THE 1901 ROYAL VISIT TO WELLINGTON.**

*When the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York arrived in Wellington in 1901, their carriage passed beneath twelve elaborately decorated 'welcome arches'. Four of these structures promoted the colony's natural resources and primary industries. They were part of a Government initiative that sought to model the nation as a productive space. Devised by the colony's bombastic Premier, Richard Seddon, the project obliged each of New Zealand's provinces to sponsor a representative arch in the nearest major city. In Seddon's ambitious plan, the colony's leading export commodities would appear in symbolic form on the streets of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.*

*So, Wellington's 'Cereal Arch' was thatched with barley and wheat from Marlborough. The city's 'Butter Arch' was clad with butter boxes and cheese crates from dairy producers in central New Zealand. Westport Harbour Board built an impressive 'Coal Arch' on Lambton Quay. Finally, the 'Wool Arch' was built by a local textile company. Although each construction was noteworthy, the combined effect of Wellington's four 'produce' arches fell well short of the Premier's vision. Seddon's proposal generated little enthusiasm among provincial officials, many of whom were aggrieved that their district had been omitted from the tour itinerary. Instead of creating a coherent narrative about natural resources and national enterprise, Seddon's arches drew attention to parochial jealousies and a fragmented polity.*

*Nevertheless, Wellington's 'produce' arches were successful in one sense. They were usefully multivalent, capturing the colonists' compound identity in a single positive image. Using the idiom of British festival architecture, these structures attested to Pākehā New Zealanders' persistent loyalty and affection for King and Empire. At the same time, the four arches celebrated a bountiful new land, where certain forms of production enjoyed natural advantages. This message was part of a broader royal visit narrative about progress, which set Pākehā New Zealanders apart from their metropolitan cousins.*

## Introduction

Within New Zealand's historiography, royal tourism is less well documented than comparable nation-building events such as centennials and exhibitions. Several architectural historians have addressed the narrower subject of royal visit decorations. Their research appeared at a series of S.A.H.A.N.Z. conferences during the 1990s. First, Greg Bowron delivered a paper entitled: "An Architectural Illusion: The Construction of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall's Visit, 1901."<sup>1</sup> Six years later, Julia Gatley presented "'With Shields and Bunting': The Ford Motor Company Building, Seaview, and the 1954 Royal Visit."<sup>2</sup> This was followed by Sarah Treadwell's paper "Electric Images: Illuminating Anxiety."<sup>3</sup> Like Bowron, Treadwell focused on the illusory nature of decorative installations, specifically lighting displays for Queen Elizabeth's 'coronation tour'. Interest in royal visit decorations waned after 2000. However, commencing in 2006, this author presented a series of conference papers dealing with public spectacles staged for the Duke of Edinburgh between 1867 and 1869.<sup>4</sup> In more recent publications, royal visit performances were linked to an emerging sense of New Zealand identity.<sup>5</sup>

This paper deals with a single episode during the Duke and Duchess of York's 1901 visit to Wellington. Specifically, four ephemeral archways that celebrated New Zealand's primary industries are examined. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'welcome arches' were a staple feature of royal visits to British colonial cities. Most arches belonged to well-recognised genres: historical, floral, 'Native' and maritime. Another common variant promoted local produce and industries. In 1901, all these prototypes were invoked, as New Zealand prepared to receive the Duke and Duchess. However, in an unprecedented move, the colony's Premier, Richard Seddon, conceived an ambitious plan to model New Zealand as a productive space within the main streets of major cities. Through the agency of the Government's Royal Reception Commissioner, Seddon invited outlying provinces to sponsor an arch in the nearest main centre. In Seddon's imagination, each construction would advertise the products of a particular district. The combined scheme would depict New Zealand as a bountiful land and a profitable field for investment.<sup>6</sup>

## 'Progress' Theme in Royal Visits

The 1901 royal tour occurred mid-way through twenty-one years of Liberal government, a period that David Hamer has called "the beginning of 'modern' New Zealand".<sup>7</sup> Political stability was linked to the country's exceptionally high standard of living. It was time of national good fortune, which Seddon liked to recognise with the phrase "God's Own Country".<sup>8</sup> So, New Zealand welcomed the Duke and Duchess with an assertive self-confidence that matched the swagger of its leading statesman. Seddon, himself, articulated the country's desire to remain independent from Australia and play a more prominent part in imperial affairs. He used the royal visit to promote these ambitions. Coinciding with the South African War and Australian federation, the tour generated a burst of nationalist feeling that promised to renew bonds with the Motherland. Closer imperial ties were a useful corrective to Australia's increased size and influence.<sup>9</sup> So, the Duke and Duchess's lavish receptions were not simply the product of fervent patriotism. They were also shaped by New Zealand's regional rivalries and Seddon's attempts to gain influence in London.

The royal visit also gave New Zealanders an opportunity to reflect on the development of their young country. In royal visit discourse, the 'progress' theme was centred on one clear message: New Zealand had advanced at a remarkable speed, and growth would continue apace. Prosperity was attributed not just to New Zealand's abundant resources but also to the energy and vitality of the British race. On-going progress and prosperity were signs that the population had remained true to its British roots and still possessed the pluck and determination of the pioneers. At the same time, the pace and direction of change seemed to set Pākehā New Zealanders apart from Britons elsewhere.

So, claims about progress reinforced ethnic Britishness but also promoted allegiance to a geographically distinct homeland. These two sources of solidarity are sometimes referred to as “ethnic nationalism” and “civic nationalism”.<sup>10</sup> In combination, they produced a composite entity that was both “fervently British” and particular to the colony: the so-called “British-New Zealander”.<sup>11</sup> An attractive feature of the ‘progress’ narrative was its ability to articulate both sources of identity without apparent contradiction.<sup>12</sup>

The 1901 tour was the first to depict New Zealand’s advancement as an urban scene. Royal visit ephemera frequently recorded progress by contrasting contemporary cityscapes with scenes from the early days of British settlement. For example, Wellington’s civic address juxtaposed an 1841 view of Lambton Harbour with a similar scene sixty years later.<sup>13</sup> Laying foundation stones for important public buildings provided another opportunity to chronicle the achievements of the host city and foretell its prosperity. In 1901, the Duke of Cornwall and York laid foundation stones for the Wellington Town Hall and new offices for the Department of Railways. Each building was a benchmark for measuring progress.<sup>14</sup> Gifts also made reference to the country’s abundant resources. The Duke of York received a souvenir trowel at each foundation ceremony. These artefacts were crafted from some of the colony’s most precious commodities: gold, silver and greenstone.<sup>15</sup> The objects were more than souvenirs or tokens of appreciation. They advertised New Zealand’s untapped wealth and promoted confidence in the country’s future.

### Street Decorations as Emblems of Progress

Street decorations provided another medium through which to express the ‘progress’ narrative. In 1901, the Duke and Duchess’s entry procession joined Wellington’s major streets into a single ceremonial route. Other royal events transformed the government precinct, the nascent civic centre and the city’s growing business district. Few permanent improvements were made in these locations. However, at a few privileged venues, government agencies and business associations created highly ordered spaces that approximated the formal ceremonial axes of European capitals. Arches helped to modulate uneventful nineteenth-century street grids. Venetian masts delineated the edges of processional routes, bringing regularity and order to the jumble of Victorian commercial architecture. When flagging or garlands of foliage spanned a street corridor, the temporary canopy diverted attention from erratic parapet lines and the typically uneven scale of colonial urban development.<sup>16</sup>



FIGURE 1 Building facades illuminated for the 1901 royal visit, Customhouse Quay, Wellington. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z. George Moore Collection. “Buildings in Wellington etc.” Photographer: George Moore. Ref. no. G-65217-1/2.

Electric illumination was still in its infancy as a decorative medium, so Wellington's special lighting displays were rudimentary. (Figure 1) However, they captured the contemporary imagination and had a more profound effect on perceptions of the city than traditional decorations. For most of the capital's residents, groups of brilliantly illuminated buildings were a marvel made possible by the arrival of advanced technology. Darkness concealed the drab or deficient daytime fabric of the city and, as if by magic, a virtual landscape of domes and towers appeared in its place. This substitution produced an ennobled capital, better matched to ambitious claims about progress in royal visit rhetoric.

Dressed and illuminated, streets and buildings appeared more dignified. It would be wrong to suggest that Wellington was consciously modernised by the new street furniture. Faux armorial devices and other historical references meant that displays were seldom prescient or forward looking.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the elaborate scenography bolstered claims about the rapid pace of New Zealand's development. The adornment of streets and venues seemed to portend greater regularity within Wellington's permanent urban fabric. People were amazed by the sudden appearance of the decorations and by the large scale changes they wrought. For some observers, this transformation was analogous to the rapid growth and development of the colony. Both processes seemed to have been affected by magic or propelled by a superhuman force.

### Modelling New Zealand as a Productive Space

References to natural resources and primary production helped to distinguish New Zealand's decorative installations from those in other colonies. Themed arches promoting local industries were nothing new. They became a recognised decorative strategy in the 1860s, when the British Royal Family began making extended overseas tours. Nevertheless, great ingenuity could go into the showcasing of local exports. A novel, well-executed display earned its sponsors much favourable attention. During the Duke of Edinburgh's 1867 visit, Hobart received critical acclaim for a 'Whale Arch' composed of whale bones and barrels of whale oil surmounted by a fully-crewed whaling boat.<sup>18</sup> In 1927, the Duke of York was welcomed to New Zealand's Ashburton by a 'Meat Arch', which featured freshly butchered carcasses of lamb.<sup>19</sup>

Within New Zealand, the practice culminated in 1901, when businesses and public agencies used arches to promote regional economies. What made these installations unusual was the fact that several constructions were part of a nationwide project, which aimed to display primary products and resources on the streets of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. The scheme was conceived by Premier Richard Seddon. Three months before the royal visit, Seddon told Wellington's reception committee: "there could be arches to represent the colony's industries, such as of coal, frozen mutton, timber, wheat, oats, and quartz."<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, Seddon asked the Mayor of Wellington to invite five lower North Island districts to contribute to the capital's welcome. Each area was to be identified by its industries and products presented in "the form of arches".<sup>21</sup>

The premier's proposal answered several imperatives. It allowed the country's more remote regions to participate in the receptions, even though the four main centres monopolised the Duke and Duchess's time.<sup>22</sup> It promised to enhance welcomes in the big cities and spread the cost of the decorations. Most of all, the arches promoted the colony's economy by "advertising the products and manufactures of the various districts".<sup>23</sup>

Initially, Seddon's plan was well received. This was especially true in the four main centres, which all stood to benefit from the initiative. Wellington's *Evening Post* ran several articles supporting the proposal.<sup>24</sup> The *New Zealand Free Lance* called it an "excellent" idea and playfully predicted that "arches of frozen mutton and tinned meat" would "stamp New Zealand in indelible characters upon the memory of the future King and Queen".<sup>25</sup> There was even a call for the theme of the displays to be expanded. A Napier City Councillor suggested that the arches should record not only economic progress but also the colony's social and political advancement. Specifically, the councillor proposed that the "women of New Zealand should be represented by an arch typical of the female franchise".<sup>26</sup> A 'women's arch' was never a serious proposition, but concerted efforts were made to implement Seddon's more prosaic objectives. Mr Holmes, the Government's "Organising Commissioner", was dispatched to lower North Island districts, where he attempted to persuade borough councils and county boards to "make special decorations in Wellington".<sup>27</sup>

Seddon's proposal generated little enthusiasm in the provinces. Some localities, like Palmerston North, claimed - possibly with a sense of grievance - that they still hoped to be included in the tour itinerary and would therefore prefer to decorate their own streets. Other local bodies, such as the Wairau Roads Board, declared that they were "impoverished" and could not afford to participate in the receptions. The *Evening Post* reported on failed attempts to build a "Hawkes Bay" arch in Wellington.<sup>28</sup> This episode illustrates how difficult it was to obtain the co-operation of intensely parochial public authorities. Napier Borough Council led the Hawkes Bay initiative, and set up a special committee for this purpose. A target budget of £300-£400 was established, and two hundred circulars were issued to local bodies between Wairoa and Woodville. Hastings Borough Council registered an early objection to the idea. The local education board and the Napier Harbour Board soon followed suit. In the end, the Mayor of Napier received only twelve replies to his circular, and the whole idea was dropped.<sup>29</sup>

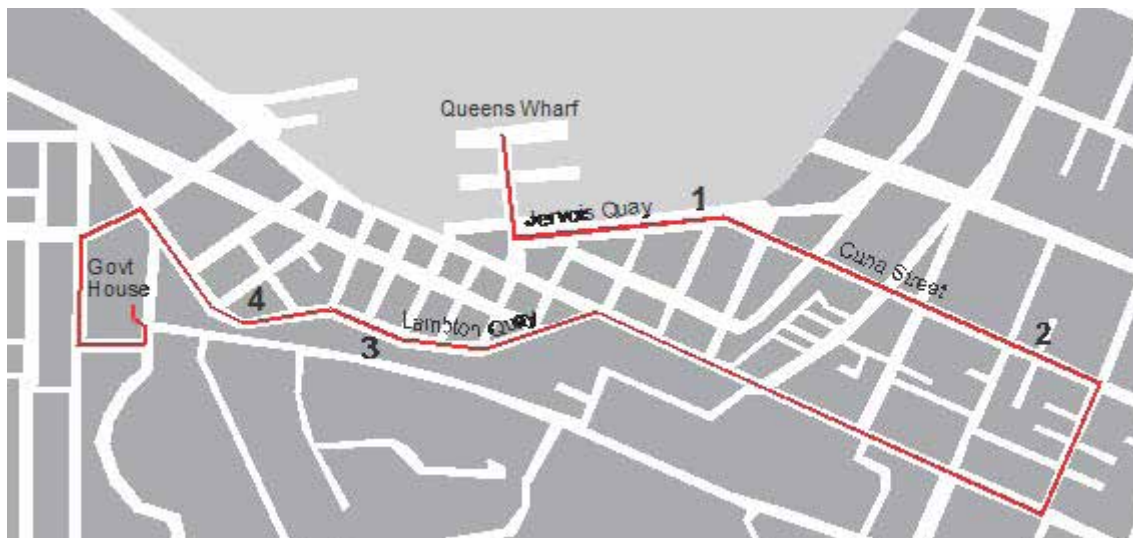


FIGURE 2 Route of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York's entry procession, Wellington, 1901, showing approximate locations of the Wool Arch (1), the Cereal Arch (2), the Butter Arch (3) and the "Coal Arch" (4). [Source: the author.]

With only a month to go before the start of the visit, Commissioner Holmes still had no firm commitments from any of the rural districts in Wellington's hinterland. He told the capital's reception committee that several regions had indicated their intentions to build arches in Wellington or to help with reception costs.<sup>30</sup> However, nine days later, the situation remained unchanged, and the committee's secretary was instructed to send an urgent appeal to potential contributors.<sup>31</sup> The poor response compromised Seddon's plan to model New Zealand as a productive space. Wellington erected eleven arches for the royal visit, more than any other city in the colony. Four of these structures promoted products or industries, but their combined effect fell well short of the premier's ambitious vision. (Figure 2)



FIGURE 3 Marlborough "Cereal Arch", Cuba Street, 1901. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z. George Moore Collection. "Ceremonial archway etc." Photographer: George Moore. Ref. no. G-65215-1/2.

The 'Cereal Arch' was conceived as a celebration of Marlborough's hot summers and arable farmland. (Figure 3) Sheaves of oats, wheat and barley were thatched by a tradesman from Blenheim, and the completed structure was decorated with scythes and "hayforks".<sup>32</sup> However, the province struggled to raise the £90 required to fund the project. When other shortfalls arose, Wellington's reception committee forged an expedient alliance between Marlborough and three of the capital's suburban boroughs. Incongruously, shields representing Karori, Melrose and Petone were added to the impostes and apex of the 'Cereal Arch'.<sup>33</sup> In the end, the hybrid composition did not record Marlborough's prosperity and progress so much as fragmentation and the narrow self-interest of local government.



FIGURE 4 Westport Harbour Board "Coal Arch", Lambton Quay, 1901. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z. Thomas Price Collection. "Pipe band passing etc." Photographer: unknown. Ref. no. PA1-q-1003-22.

There was no shortage of money for Westport's arch. (Figure 4) Sponsored by the Westport Harbour Board, it was 48 feet high and qualified as the capital's most imposing tribute.<sup>34</sup> The arch occupied a prestigious location at the corner of Lambton Quay and Stout Street, where it marked the start of government-sponsored street decorations. Its "Byzantine-Greek" architecture incorporated blocks of real coal supplied by the Westport Coal Company.<sup>35</sup> Decorative motifs were based on gold ingots and coins. The base of the arch was inscribed with the names of West Coast coal companies and gold mining centres in the Buller District. Even the applied nikau palms and mamuku ferns came from the West Coast. Beside the arch, the Westport Harbour Board built a stand for 250 guests. When the Duke and Duchess made their state entry into Wellington, this staging was filled with representatives from Westport, Greymouth and Hokitika. As a result, the "Westport Arch" created a regional microcosm along the route of the procession. Informally known as the 'Coal Arch', it advertised two of the West Coast's "staple product[s]", and it provided a rendezvous for "Coasters" who travelled to the capital to witness the royal visit.<sup>36</sup>



FIGURE 5 Dairy Association "Butter Arch", Lambton Quay, 1901. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z. Ref. no. G-7954 1/1.

Wellington's 'Butter Arch' also resulted from energetic lobbying by the Government's commissioner. (Figure 5) Holmes met several times with the secretary of the National Dairy Association, urging him to arrange special representation for the dairy industry during the royal visit. In response, the association sent a circular to dairy factories throughout the Wellington, Marlborough and Hawkes Bay provinces, inviting them to contribute to the construction of "an arch composed of butter boxes and cheese crates".<sup>37</sup> Later, the appeal was extended to Taranaki.<sup>38</sup> Holmes telegraphed some of the factories himself, calling on them to support a strong demonstration by their industry: "Private and public institutions will make special display, and as your industry is one of the principal exports of the colony the unanimous opinion is that the Wellington display will not be complete without special representation of the dairy industry."<sup>39</sup>

In recognition of the dairy industry's status, Holmes promised the association a "prominent position" for their arch.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, the structure was sited at the intersection of Lambton Quay and Panama Street, in the heart of the capital's business district. A simple greeting carried across the single span. On either side, towers were clad with the ends of butter boxes stamped with the names of participating dairy factories. Arranged in courses, these panels produced a masonry effect which gave the arch a castle-like appearance. The tops of cheese crates made a similar display at the base of each tower. Remaining ornamentation drew upon conventional military and heraldic motifs. The towers were relieved with shields and trophies of flags, and the colour scheme was patriotic red, white and blue. Despite its traditional appearance, the Dairy Association's tribute represented a version of prosperity which was typical of New Zealand. Recognising this underlying symbolism, the *Evening Post* described the 'Butter Box Arch' as "a fine testimony to the wonderful strides made by our dairy manufactures".<sup>41</sup>



FIGURE 6 Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Company "Wool Arch", Jervois Quay, 1901. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z. Ref. no. G-65218/2.

The Wellington Woollen Company's idiosyncratic arch was the capital's most successful advertisement for local industries.<sup>42</sup> Built opposite the company's offices on Jervois Quay, the 'Wool Arch' was the first privately-sponsored installation to be encountered during the entry procession.<sup>43</sup> In this location, the arch provided the coda to an elaborate decorative scheme, which incorporated the 'Citizens' Arch' and the site of the civic welcome. (Figure 6)

The arch's timber framework was unremarkable. Each of its four sturdy pillars was surmounted by a small cupola. Spanning between the pillars was a simple box truss. Once again, the decorative treatment favoured traditional patriotic colours and motifs. The tops of the pillars were dressed with the Union Jack and the national flags of the United Kingdom. At the arch's mid-point, a coronet and lion symbolised the Duchy of York. Hanging beneath the central span was a crude representation of the metopes found in classical architecture. The underlying red, white and blue colour scheme was supplied by woollen cloth which was stretched around the four pillars and draped beneath the central span. However, the arch's defining features were columns of blanket rolls stacked against the outer faces of the pillars together with 'blanket flags' flying from masts atop the four cupolas. "The frieze and parapet of the arch [were also] formed by lines of rolled blankets, arranged to represent a battlemented top".<sup>44</sup> A witty greeting made reference to these unusual materials. Emblazoned below the central parapet was the phrase: "See the Warmth of Our Welcome."<sup>45</sup>



The Duke and Duchess evidently appreciated the humour and the arch's inventive design. When poor weather prevented an excursion into Wellington's hinterland, the royal tourists made an impromptu visit to the Woollen Company's factory in Petone.<sup>46</sup> Hoping to exploit royal patronage, the company quickly produced a souvenir booklet. This contained a smug assertion which placed Wellington in the forefront of woollen goods production: "It was in the fitness of things that so progressive a corporation as the Wellington Woollen Manufacturing Company, Limited, should have the honour to entertain and initiate Royalty into the mysteries of woollen manufacture."<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

Like other emblems of progress, Seddon's arches were usefully multivalent. They neatly conveyed the *dual* identities of 'British-New Zealanders', supplying evidence of British patrimony while also advertising the unique pace and direction of New Zealand's development.

The sponsors' 'ethnic' attributes were evident in formal gestures and decorative motifs, because the arches employed the familiar idiom of British festival architecture. Among the panoply of Wellington's entry procession, these tributes demonstrated the persistence of a core British trait: loyalty and affection towards the Royal Family. More specifically, Seddon's arches asserted that progress was every Briton's birth right. According to this trope, New Zealand's prosperity resulted from an enterprising spirit and an innate talent for colonisation that were essentially British.

At the same time, installations like the 'Butter Arch' and the 'Wool Arch' were a reminder that the colonists occupied a different environment from that of the British Isles. In this bountiful new land, climate and geography gave certain forms of production a competitive edge over equivalent industries 'at Home'. In the colonial imagination, these favourable conditions allowed British-New Zealanders to advance faster and further than their metropolitan cousins.

Nevertheless, Seddon's attempt to model productive space was problematic and revealed the limits of nationalist sentiment in the late colonial period. Although each of Wellington's arches was noteworthy, the combined effect fell well short of the Premier's ambitious vision. Instead of creating a coherent narrative about natural resources and national enterprise, Seddon's arches drew attention to parochial jealousies and a fragmented polity.

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