



Supplement to the Newsletter of the Friends of Pukekura Park, May 2007



Margaret Rossiter

Pukekura Tea House Refurbishment

Jenny Goddard, Architect

Work on the Pukekura Park Tea House Project started for my company in June 2005. We surveyed the building from “top to toe” and provided a rather sad report to Council on the state of this much loved building.

At this time Council was considering expansion of the building into a Function Centre. They had an operator keen to capitalise on the unique atmosphere the building and location offered. Concept plans were produced, but this option stalled on the cost, lack of vehicle access and the public’s perception that they were going to see the Tea House replaced by a modern building.

A hiatus of nearly five months then began by the end of which the sign rather hastily placed on the window stating that the building would be open in October 2005, started to become extremely embarrassing for locals and frustrating for visitors.

The call back to action came just prior to Christmas 2005 when we were asked to report to Council on the costs and feasibility of bringing the building up to current Building Codes. In February 2006 on the basis of that report, Council’s Policy Committee recommended that the building be restored to its former glory for the estimated sum of \$520,000. The real work had just begun.

While Council busied itself looking for an operator for the Tea House we set about determining the

best way to overcoming the following problems:

1. The building was incredibly damp. The damp was coming up through the floor and through the walls. When the linings were removed we found around 70% of the bottom plates and lower metre of framing were seriously wet. This was worst on the lake side of the building.
2. The Tea House had settled on its foundation to such an extent that the eastern (toilet) side of the building was lower than the other side by around 100mm. That is quite a slope across a 9 metre building!
3. The modernisation of the building in the 1970's had to go. The aluminium windows and doors and the covering/removal of the timber panelling inside was an unfortunate episode in the history of this building. External landscaping features of a similar era nudged up against the exterior walls of the building were not only out of keeping but causing damage.

The kitchen and shop areas were in a neglected condition with no redeeming features - it all had to go both from a health and practical point of view.

There is a perception that all old buildings were built well and that today's carpenters invented the



Chris Hill

Leaky Building Syndrome - not so! It seems that the dampness and slumped form of the Tea House can be traced back to some fundamental errors on the part of those 1930s builders.

The foundation on the lake side of the building is a solid concrete wall and has coped well with the load of the heavy tile roof. The foundation on the eastern side was more of a concrete pile and infill style and it does not seem to have had the necessary strength. The crumbly nature of the mid floor piles suggested cement was an unknown commodity on site that particular day so perhaps the foundation detail was a cost saving measure.

There was always a tiled terrace on the lake side of the building, but this unwittingly led to trapping water against the building and even under the floor. Original plans showed pipes cleverly passing through the terrace to ventilate the sub floor. There was no evidence of these ever having been inserted. This constantly damp area under the floor led to the severe deterioration of the wall framing.

Our plan of attack then was firstly to provide a new level floor. We actually raised the floor on one side and lowered it on the other to get a workable middle ground! It sounds easy enough, but it does cause complications in terms of weatherproofing. It also means the stud height is lower on one side

of the building to the other. This is readily apparent if you look at the northern bay window. Yes, we have our very own Leaning Tea House!

To combat the damp underfloor, more sub floor vents were installed, the new terraces installed at a lower level, stormwater was piped away from the building and polythene was draped over the ground between the piles. Within a few days of the polythene being laid the atmosphere in the building changed dramatically. The new flooring is a treated plywood so be assured, rot will not be a problem.

Large amounts of lower wall framing needed to be replaced. To ensure that the building did not have a tendency to snap off at the knees as a result of this replacement, full studs were bolted beside the half height replacements. All the walls were then lined with plywood to provide additional bracing, before being covered with rimu veneer wall panelling. New Plymouth had a minor earthquake at a time when the building was stripped bare and particularly vulnerable – thankfully it escaped unscathed.

New timber joinery custom made to fit the original timber frames already in the walls was drawn. Rimu veneer panelling was sourced and detailed drawings of the required timber trim were made. This trim was all made locally.



Chris Hill

Along with this remedial work there was always the need to provide a commercial operator with a venue that was workable and likely to be successful. This led to the decision to move the entry to the lake side of the building- where the public has always gathered. We utilised the existing bay window roof and inserted double entry doors in place of the window. This change was key to providing a more efficient layout and a more open and welcoming building. Early feedback from interested operators had made it clear that the dining room capacity needed to be maximised. With the help of some serious steelwork the dining room was pushed southwards towards the old kitchen to gain a few more metres. The heavy dark columns that had always divided the dining room were also removed giving much more flexibility in the way the room could be used. The ceiling on the eastern side was removed to insert the steelwork and reinstalled at a higher level with the decorative beams that had always been a feature. The “original” ceiling on the lakeside was retained though it is not in perfect condition.

After discussions with the lessee we also built in a fireplace on the eastern side of the dining room. Do not look for the chimney – that would have been an almost impossible task, but do look forward to seeing some club sofas positioned around the cosy gas fire come mid winter.



David Medway

The Tea House in August 2005, before refurbishment

It is vital that the Tea House works both as a summer and winter venue so ducted heating has also been installed.

The isolation of the Tea House coupled with its historic value led to Council requiring a fire sprinkler system throughout the building. This has been achieved unobtrusively and given the danger of fires in commercial kitchens it is obviously a very wise measure.

The tender for the Refurbishment was let in July 2006 to Graeme Evans Construction Ltd. Work started within a matter of days – in fact nearly before the Historic Places Trust had signed

off the Resource Consent! The Tea House is a registered building with New Zealand Historic Places Trust, but not protected to the extent that work can not be undertaken. Permission is however required to alter external features- and with the entry change and new canopies over the Kiosk servery and back doors, we were doing just that. Any concerns the Trust had were waived after an early site visit when they saw first hand the poor condition the building was in and the efforts being undertaken to extend its workable life.

The refurbishment took a little longer than expected, but an extremely wet November was mostly to blame. The first public functions were held in the newly finished building in early December, nineteen weeks after the site fences went up.

In terms of the interior finishes, we have attempted to use colours and styles that were appropriate for the 1930s period. Hence the use of “borders” inlaid in to the vinyl flooring and toilet foyer tiles. The carpet is a traditional Axminster and the counters are heavy with real timber detailing and marbleised tops. The red featuring in the Kiosk area is a little bit cheeky, but was a popular accent colour at that time - honest! It also references to the Poets Bridge which has always been red!

Overall, the end result is very satisfying. It has been a great project to be involved in and the enthusiasm of the subcontractors involved as the “tired old girl” began to turn in to a rather “fine old lady” was heart warming especially as some days I felt like I was carrying that very heavy tile roof on my own shoulders!

The public reaction to having the Tea House refurbished and back in business in their favourite park has been very positive. We all look forward to many a coffee in a very special building for years to come.



Margaret Kossiter