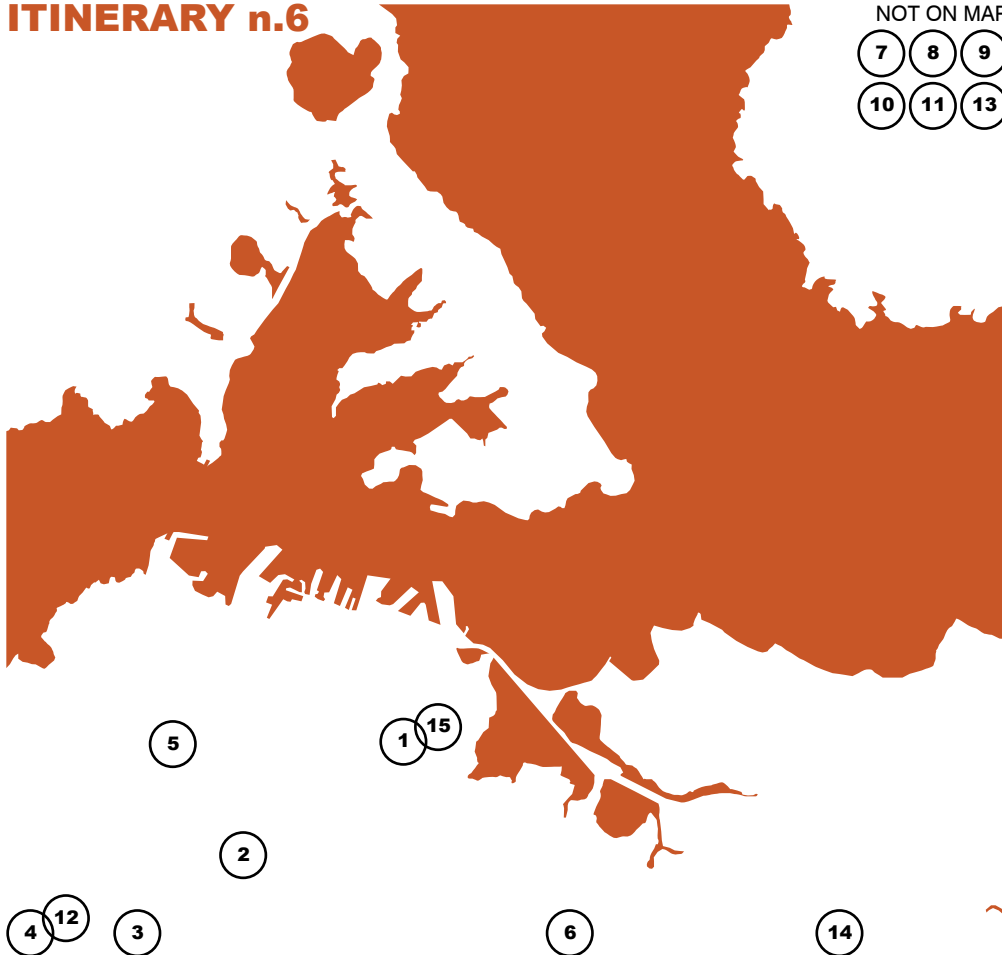


ITINERARY n.6



An exhibition and tour of Toy's churches is being prepared by Adam Wild and his team for Architecture Week '07. In support of this worthy endeavour, BLOCK presents an itinerary on Toy's public buildings.

Richard Toy's Schools and Churches

Attentive readers of the Property Press may have noticed a recently listed Arney Road house being described as "designed by Professor Richard Toy of Group architects". This estate agent's blunder demonstrates the extent to which the Group have come to dominate current thinking about modernism in mid-century Auckland. Toy was separated from the Group by half a generation. He and Vernon Brown taught them and their peers at the School of Architecture, and in that period of post-war agitation were the two educators who inspired and retained the respect of the burgeoning Group. It was within this network of students and teachers that ideas about an indigenous architectural expression were developed and pursued; but where both Brown and the Group struggled to make the transition to public buildings, Toy was more successful in developing models of Kiwi architecture at a larger scale.

Key books on New Zealand architecture – such as those by Peter Shaw and Errol Haarhoff, as well as Banister Fletcher's history – emphasise Toy's regionalist sympathies. These writers point to Toy's arrangement of the porch and forecourt to resemble a marae atea in his designs for the Holy Trinity nave and particularly at All Saints' in Ponsonby. These two designs bracket his career; the projects completed between them, however, are conspicuous in not using such arrangements, even where they were possible. It seems Toy's regionalist impulses were focussed much less on integrating Maori forms than on extending our colonial traditions, particularly those of the Selwyn churches with their steeply pitched roofs and expressed wooden structures.

Toy's concerns shifted throughout his long career, but as a teacher he stressed the fundamentals of architecture - inwardness and outwardness, the nature of community, and the need to understand the landscape. For an architect remembered for his concern with the specificities of geography, landscape and orientation, one of the surprises revealed in surveying Toy's 'from scratch' church designs is how similar they all are. In almost every case, a steep, double-pitched wooden roof floats over zigzagging masonry walls that enclose a rectangular plan. This uniformity is largely explained by the fact that these churches were designed at roughly the same time – they almost all originate in a period of prolific production from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s. What is most remarkable about these churches is not their similarity but that Toy was able to produce so many so quickly, especially given the difficulties that congregations present as clients.

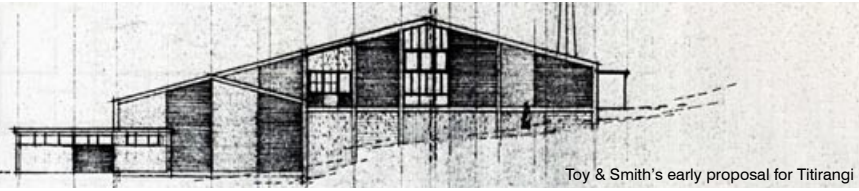
From the early 1960s, Toy largely abandoned architectural practice for academic life. As Auckland architecture's "grand old man", he taught generations of young architects, and his influence over architectural thinking in this country will be felt for years to come. *Andrew Barrie & Julia Gatley*

Biography:

Born in Ignace, Northern Ontario in 1911, Richard Horton Beauclerc Toy grew up in Birmingham. His family immigrated to New Zealand in 1923, settling in the King Country. His family later moved to Auckland, where in 1930 he enrolled in agriculture at Auckland University before transferring to the Architecture School. During his studies he received a residential scholarship from St John's Theological College, which brought him into contact with many of Auckland's future clergy. As a final year student he worked part-time in the office of E. Rupert Morton, during which time he designed the much-admired Berrisville Flats on Anzac Avenue.

In 1937 he left for Europe on a travel scholarship to work and travel in England and the continent, but the offer of a lectureship in architecture brought him back to Auckland in 1939. He later completed a PhD at the University of Dublin (1950). Toy held a Chair in Design at the University of Auckland from 1959 to 1976. He was awarded an OBE in 1981 and an NZIA Award of Honour in 1988. He died in 1995, aged 84 years.

Auckland Arch. Archive



1

1939

Holy Trinity Cathedral
Parnell Road, Parnell



Towle's winning scheme

Toy entered a scheme for the 1939 design competition, reportedly one of the only designs submitted which could have been built within the specified budget. Charles Towle, a Kiwi architect working in Australia was declared the winner of the competition, but delays caused by World War II and fund raising to cover rapidly rising construction costs meant that only a drastically reduced version of just part of Towle's scheme was eventually constructed between 1959 and 1973. During this time Toy offered his services free of charge as an advisor for constructing the nave and completing the Cathedral.

2

1940

St. Barnabas' Church
283 Mt. Eden Road, Mt. Eden



Auckland Architecture Archive

The nave of St Barnabas' is one of a series of prefabricated wooden churches completed to the design of Frederick Thatcher. Originally built in Augustus Terrace in Parnell in 1849, the building was later moved to Mt Eden and a brick chancel was added in 1907. Toy designed several alterations and insertions to the chancel during the 1940s. These include the design of ornately carved wooden screens, the insertion of the pipe organ, as well as furnishings such as candlesticks and a metal cross for the altar.

3

1954

St. Chad's Church
Cnr. Sandringham & Taumata Roads, Sandringham



Adding to an existing wooden building, Toy designed this reinforced concrete structure to house a chancel and choir; the existing building was adapted to serve as the nave. Due to the slope of the site, the addition is two storied – an undercroft has been formed beneath the sanctuary – and Toy's composition of the exterior emphasises the vertical dimension. Within, light is admitted to the charmingly simple interior via side lights behind the altar, as well as through a glass lantern on the roof. The building is now a satellite church of the Mt. Roskill parish, and has been renamed St. Martin's at St. Chad's.

4

1954-56

Mt. Albert Grammar School Sports Pavilion
Alberton Avenue, Mt. Albert



Toy returned to his alma mater to design this war memorial pavilion for the school's Old Boys Association. It is notable for its expression of structure, with 11 concrete vaults cantilevered on both sides of a line of supporting columns. A concrete screen between adjacent columns provides a wind break for the bleachers that seat about 400 spectators. Though smaller and simpler than concrete grandstands and stadia by Pier Luigi Nervi, whose Municipal Stadium in Florence dates from as early as 1928, the Mt. Albert building nonetheless demonstrates the enduring influence of the Italian engineer. Toy worked with engineer E. G. Ferriday on this project. See *Home & Building* Mar. 1957.

5

1956

All Saints' Church
1 Ponsonby Terrace, Ponsonby



The first of Toy's new church buildings, and perhaps the most celebrated, All Saints' is known for its combination of Maori and English references, with the building being compared to a whareniui and the entry forecourt to a marae atea. More than this, the building features all of the elements that would come to characterise the churches that followed. For example, the flattening of the eaves can be interpreted as the first tentative attempt at the dual pitched roof. In addition, the entry wall is extensively glazed, the far wall behind the altar has no glazing, side walls zigzag in and out, and fanlight windows are used to suggest that the roof is floating above the walls. All Saints' was the recipient of a local NZIA award for enduring architecture in 2002. See *Home & Building* Aug. 1960, and *NZIA Journal* July 1960 and Dec. 1968.

6

1956

St. Oswald's Church
251 Campbell Road
One Tree Hill



The second of the 'classic' Toy churches, a double-pitched wooden roof floats over a simple rectangular plan. The white-painted concrete walls have been cast with vertical grooves, recalling the board-and-batten timber walls of the 'Selwyn Gothic' churches. Inside, despite the steeply pitched roof the space feels remarkably intimate, largely due to the surprisingly low ceiling over the side aisles. Some of the detailing is remarkably direct; in the slot windows between the roof and walls, ventilation is provided by means of sliding panes of unframed, handle-less glass.

7

1957

St. Hilda's Church
Young Road, Mt. Wellington



Auckland Architecture Archive

With this project, Toy adapted an existing church hall to use for services by the addition of an altar, altar rail and other furnishings to the hall's existing low stage. The building was recently sold to the Auckland Chinese Methodist Church, who have radically remodelled and extended the building. Just a few traces of the original building are now visible in the facade.

8

1958-1961

Christ Church
99 Great South Road, Papakura



If Selwyn Court in Parnell was the initial inspiration for Toy's use of the double-pitched roof in his church designs, Selwyn Chapel (1862) provides reinforcement for his use of it here, for the new building was built alongside the old. Toy pays further homage in his material palette, his combination of bluestone and white plastering echoing, but not imitating, Selwyn Chapel's combination of bluestone and vertical board and batten cladding. The entry is near the building's glazed southern end; the altar at the street end is buffered by the bluestone cladding, and side walls again zigzag in and out. Internally, a chunky steel frame is in contrast to the timbered ceiling and sanctuary wall.

9

1959

St. Matthew's Church
60 Garfield Road, Helensville



In this design, Toy has manipulated the proportions of his distinctive double-pitched roof - the central roof gable is extremely high and steep, the lower sections on either side are relatively flat and very narrow. Within the sarked ceiling is supported by elegantly tapered steel portal frames. Frankly expressed and painted bright blue, the portals suggest an almost post-modern eclecticism. As with most of Toy's churches the sanctuary is relatively dark, the large windows being placed at the narthex (entry) end of the nave. Note the letterbox of the adjacent vicarage - a cute miniature of the church's distinctive profile.

10

Late 1950s?

St. Francis' Church
Cnr Park & Titirangi Beach Rds.
Titirangi



This simple building is interesting for the ways in which it contrasts with most of the other Toy churches. In particular, the roof pitch is shallow rather than steep, and exterior walls are a combination of red brick and dark stained vertical board and batten cladding. An earlier scheme for this site was developed by Toy and Maurice K. Smith in 1956. With its long low-slung roof lines, the Toy and Smith scheme extends First and Second Group House imagery into New Zealand church design and perhaps explains Toy's decision to stick with the shallower roof on the Titirangi site, characterised as it is by lush native bush.

11

1960

Henderson Church
Henderson, Waitakere City



Auckland Architecture Archive

This project consists of a single preliminary sketch now in the collection of the Auckland Architecture Archive. The scheme is very different from Toy's other church schemes - it shows a stretched octagonal plan surmounted by a pitched roof and a bell tower. A later handwritten note on the drawing tentatively suggests the scheme dates from 1960. The drawing shows that despite the remarkable consistency of his output, Toy didn't begin each design from a fixed starting point.

12

1961

Mt. Albert Grammar School
Clubroom
Alberton Avenue, Mt. Albert



Toy's second building for Mt Albert Grammar was built alongside his first just a few years later. It is a small rectilinear building with a mono-pitch roof and brick walls that have the rawness of New Brutalism rather than the warmth of Aalto or Toy's brick churches. Its geometry and materiality are secondary to those of the war memorial pavilion, and thus primacy remains with the earlier building. Internally, there is surprising synchronicity between this building and Toy's Arney Road house; both feature ceilings that are part sloping with exposed rafters, and part horizontal, boxed down and lined.

13

1963

St. John's Church
126 Arawata Street
Te Awamutu



This church stands next to an historic wooden church dating from 1854 - which contains fine stained glass windows - and overlooks a similarly old graveyard. The church has been pushed back from the street, and is reached via a porte cochere and a long covered walk. The nave is entered from one corner, and has an asymmetric arrangement - Toy omitted one wing of his characteristic double-pitched roof form. The walls - unusually high for Toy - are constructed in unpainted reinforced concrete.

14

1974

Christ Church
169 Ladies Mile, Ellerslie



Auckland Architecture Archive

This church, one of the oldest buildings in the area, was built in 1883. Toy's unbuilt proposal consists of a set of loose plans and sketches for an addition to the church. The proposed building, much of which was tucked down the hill behind the church, included a porch, lounge, offices, and a covered connection to the adjacent church hall. Toy's scheme was not taken up, and a fairly undistinguished addition was eventually made in 1990. One aspect of the 1990 alterations is worth noting: the interior of the church was reversed, the altar being moved to the opposite end of the building.

15

1977-95

Holy Trinity Cathedral
Parnell Road, Parnell



Charles Towle, who won the cathedral competition in 1939, retired from the project in 1960, by which time construction had only reached as far as the crossing. His scheme was abandoned in 1967. Toy began working on designs for the nave from this time, even though it was another 10 years before the Diocese would commit. He returned to the bicultural approach of All Saints', Ponsonby, albeit on a much larger scale. The building/wharenui faces and is entered from a large forecourt/marae. The theme is continued in the stained glass windows. Shaw describes the result as 'bewilderingly unsatisfactory'. Hugh Maguire adds that the 'unhappy juxtaposition is far from fusion and consequently, perhaps, a more apt representation of the socio-political status quo.'

Sources:

The photographs are by Julia Gatley and Andrew Barrie. Many thanks to Maria Ericksen at the University of Auckland's Architecture Archive and to Adam Wild for their invaluable help.

The University of Auckland's Architecture Archive holds drawings of the buildings documented in this itinerary. Biographical information on Toy can be found in secondary sources, including obituaries by John Dickson and Russell Walden (*Architecture New Zealand*, Sept-Oct 1995) and a more recent article by Douglas Lloyd Jenkins (*Architecture New Zealand*, Jul-Aug 2003). His own words shed further light on his architectural ideas: an interview was published in *AAA Bulletin* (Oct 1976); a copy of his PhD thesis, completed in 1950, is held in the University of Auckland's Architecture Library; and his 1977 essay 'Auckland: Water City of the South Pacific' was republished in Douglas Lloyd Jenkins' anthology, *New Dreamland: Writing New Zealand Architecture* (Auckland: Godwit, 2005). Writing on Toy churches more specifically, Hugh Maguire has teased out the complexities of collapsing Maori and English references at All Saints', Ponsonby, and the Holy Trinity Nave, Parnell (15th annual SAHANZ conference, Melbourne, 1998).