

The architectural legacy of John D Healy

History
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In an obituary to the late John D Healy it was written that 'the Stratford district owed an incalculable debt of gratitude' to him.

So who was he and why should a man born in 1868 still be relevant? Edwardian entrepreneurs and leaders of industry moved into the towns around Taranaki as cleared bush produced dairy, wool and meat products.

It's hardly surprising that the commercial buildings and private houses built at the time reflected solid pioneering values as well as the wealth that the province generated.

John D Healy was born in New Plymouth where he was educated and learned the building trade before setting off to study architecture. Once qualified he moved to Stratford where he continued to build and set up as an architect.

For almost 30 years he worked as the architect for Stratford's Hospital Board, Racing Club and the Dairy Factory.

Some of his notable buildings are Eltham's St Joseph's Catholic Church, which South Taranaki Council listed in Eltham's Heritage Inventory, the Municipal Building in Stratford's Broadway, and Otago Chambers on Fenton St, which was commissioned by Lawyers

Thompson, O'Neil and Clifford. Also on Fenton St is Egmont Chambers commissioned by lawyers Rutherford, MacAlister and Coleman and built by a local, Mr W. Simmons. Egmont Chambers recently won the Western Institute of Architectural Award for Alterations and Additions.

This is not surprising. Healy created buildings along the



Egmont Chambers on Fenton St was a John D Healy design.

timeless principles of architecture such as balance, clarity, harmony, and functionality. But he was also a man well before his time.

He incorporated the idea of sustainability in his building by ensuring they were well-crafted and of great quality.

Aside from his architectural contribution, Healy contributed to the community by being the founder of the Stratford Agricultural and Pastoral Association and serving as a borough councillor with the object of always putting the progress of

the town before all else.

Prominent New Plymouth houses Healy built have been well maintained and some acknowledged on the New Plymouth District Council's listed heritage buildings. These include a house on Bracken St, (once known as Glen Rd prior to 1920).

It was built in 1912-13 for Charles Stuart Curtis, who had been a Stratford businessman. 435 Devon St East was another of Healy's commissions. Initially it had been a private residence for George Parker, a

dentist from Eltham.

The estimated cost for the house was 4000 pounds, a considerable amount at the time. Since then it has been transformed so many times into a restaurant, RSA, and lodge that the original layout is lost.

If you look for some acknowledgement of Healy in Stratford - a statue perhaps or maybe plaques on the buildings he designed - then you will be disappointed.

Like the men and women who cleared the land, built their homes,

raised children, bred their stock, travelled by horse and cart and wore their best to town, small stories and significant personalities fold over with time into the fog of memory until they are lost.

That is why our heritage, the bricks and mortar of who we are is so important. Left to many of the small town landlords it will fall into disrepair and be lost, placed in the hands of foreign investors it may be lost. To ensure what is left of our building heritage is preserved councils, not landlords, should

identify significant buildings and work alongside the owners to secure their future.

Many of our old buildings are relics of the past but it is that heritage that makes us proud, affirms our identity and gives our place soul. If one digs deep enough John D Healy remains alive. But it's a shame one has to dig at all.

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