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A New Zealand Townscape by H.A. Nicholson

This dissertation has been submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Diploma in Landscape Architecture at the University of Canterbury.

Hugh Nicholson, B.Sc.

1987

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There are more similarities than differences between most New Zealand towns. This common landscape is a product of society interacting with the land. The nature of the common landscape reflects the nature of society.

As well as being a concrete, three-dimensional phenomenon, the common landscape is inbued with significance and meanings which are unconsciously understood by its everyday inhabitants; meanings which serve to remind and to define the order of society for its members. By understanding the common landscape as a participant, designers can begin to consciously participate in this dialogue.

This study is based upon Cambridge, New Zealand, but its concern is with the typical landscape rather than with the unusual. A common landscape which occurs time and again in towns throughout New Zealand.

A school, a War Memorial

Hall, the store, neighbourhood of salt

and hills. The road goes through to somewhere else.

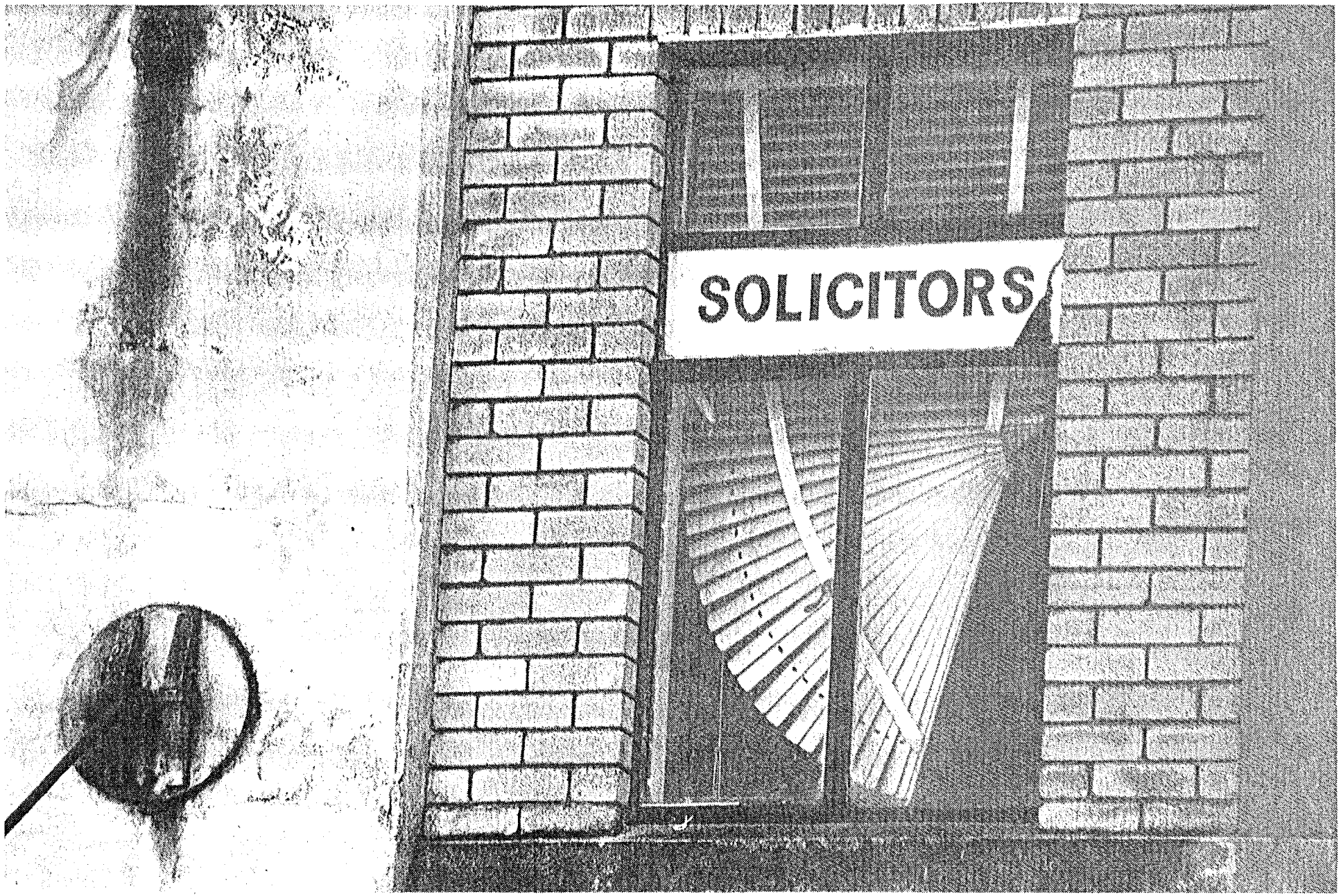
Not a geologic fault

line only scars textures of experience.

Defined, plotted; which maps do not speak.

Kendrick Smithyman "Colville" (1972)

An Ordinary Landscape



Landscape is one of those slippery elusive words we use all the time and think we understand until someone asks us. We can paint it or study it, design it or write about it, or even "do landscaping" but we struggle to say what it means.

The conservative among us immediately refer to the dictionary, deferring to established authority, which tells us that the landscape is a "portion of land which the eye can comprehend at a glance." A definition that is three hundred years old. Upon reflection it is apparent that we use the word in many other senses. S.R. Swaffield and K.F. O'Connor describe a "plurality of usage" of the term landscape and review a range of varied senses. (1)

J.B. Jackson follows the word back to its Indo-European roots and suggests that the basic meaning of "landscape" is that it is "a composition of man-made spaces on the land." (2) The relationship of the community and the landscape is something we intuitively understand and yet this definition leaves no room for the "natural landscape", a landscape without human influence. J.B. Jackson suggests that no such thing exists, he says of landscape that "it is never simply a natural space, a feature of the natural enviornment; it is always artificial, always synthetic." (3) Yet the usage of "natural landscape" is so common, the concept so pervasive, that one cannot help but feel that there is more to the words than meets the eye.

There is a common thread in the above definitions; they are both based upon a relationship between people and the land. In each case the people are the subjects, as the ones whose eyes comprehend, or who make the spaces, and the land is the object which is seen or shaped. For me a landscape is defined by the relationship of the people and the land. A lack of interaction is as significant a relationship as any other, the defining feature of a natural landscape is the lack of interaction with people.

Our understanding of the relationship between people and the land has evolved from the traditional subject-object relationship in two ways. The traditional subject-object relationship is derived from Cartesian dualism, with a presupposition that the individual is the basic unit.

A growing body of theory treats humans as social beings. We do not and we probably could not survive on our own, in almost all our activities we learn and benefit from the experience of others, we are part of a community, a social order. We are, as Aristotle said, political animals. In this light we can see landscape as a cultural phenomenon, the landscape is the reflection of a society on the land, through their interaction with it. Pierce Lewis asserts that "all human landscape has cultural meaning" (4), and Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that we can see "from the landscape to the values and pathos of a folk." (5) But people do not set out to create landscapes, they are concerned to survive, to create a community, and the landscape is a by-product or unintentional expression of these activities.

The traditional subject-object relationship presupposes the independant existence of the subject and the object. However, as well as being social creatures, we are also inhabitants of the earth. We rely on the land for food, shelter and the other necessities of our lives. The landscape and people are interdependant, we cannot survive without the land, and in surviving we create landscapes. Far from being independant observers who can "take the landscape in at a glance," or the people who create landscapes by making spaces, we are submerged in the landscape. The world around us affects every aspect of our lives and far from being spectators, we are participants in it. Ittelson argues

> "Objects require subjects - a truism whether one is concerned with the philosophical unity of the subject-object duo, or is thinking more naively of the object as a *thing* which becomes a matter of psychological study only when observed by a subject. In contrast, one cannot be a subject of an environment, one can only be a participant. The very distinction between self and nonself breaks down: the environment surrounds, enfolds, engulfs, and no one thing, and no one can be isolated and identified as standing outside of and apart from it." (6)

The landscape embraces all that we live amidst, it engaged all our senses, the visual nuances, the smells, sound, taste and touch. In Denis Cosgrove's words "landscape is anchored in human life, not something to look at but to live in, and to live in socially." (7)

But if landscape is defined by the relationship of community and the land we should not lose sight of the fact that landscape manifests itself as a concrete, three dimensional shared reality. It is the tangible "infrastructure or background for our collective existence," argues J.B. Jackson, "and if background seems inappropriately modest we should remember that in our modern use of the word it means that which underscores not only our identity and presence, but also our history." (8)

The central thesis of this work is that the landscape reflects the kind of community we live in; it reflects how we survive, where we get our food from, how we shelter from the elements; it reflects how we organise our society, and what values we hold dear, in tangible visible form. The landscape is equally strongly related to the nature of the physical land, its topography, climate, geology and vegetation. Most of the changes a community makes are ways of modifying or stabilizing environmental conditions in order to enhance survival. The extent of these changes is a function of the technological ability of the community. In order to make sense of the landscape we need to understand the physical environment and our society and its technological ability. But if the central thesis is simple, that the landscape is a tangible reflection of our community in the physical environment, then the ways in which we can understand this are as many as the ways in which we understand ourselves and the ways in which we understand the land. These might range from a religious interpretation to an artist's vision, from a scientific model of quantified indices to a semiotic system, from a structural analysis of the power relationships in society to a simple description of what we see.

Out of Place - a common landscape

One of the strong theoretical currents at present is an exploration of the concept of *place* as a way of understanding the interactions we have with the environments we shape and that

shape us. Philosophers, psychologists and cultural geographers have all contributed to the literature analysing our pre-conscious and conscious experience of place. The common landscape is the other side of the same coin, whereas places are by their nature unique phenomena, there are often more similarities than differences between places.

Both the physical environment and the people who live in it are unique in space and time, so we can see the existence of common elements in landscapes as a societal phenomena given flesh by different individuals and physical environments. (9) Implicit within this is the assumption that there are underlying structures in society. These structures are expressed in different communities in different places, and reflected in the interaction of the community and the physical environment. Pierce Lewis puts it this way "that culture is whole - a unity - like an iceberg with many tips protruding above the surface of the water. Each tip looks like a different iceberg, but each is in fact part of the same object." (10)

There is no problem finding descriptions and analyses of famous buildings and structures or unique landscapes, but it is much harder to find any information about everyday landscapes, about things such as garages, suburban houses, garden fences, country towns and sharemarkets. Perhaps it is because *everybody* knows about them, yet it is this pervasiveness, this commonality which is characteristic of a common landscape. Every culture has a characteristic way of life, the people in it hold certain values and have similar worldviews, there is a particular social order and typical land ownership patterns; the culture is characterized by a certain technological ability. The interaction of these characteristics and a common land results in a common landscape.

The landscape reflects us, our values, our ideals, our technology, our social order, and it reflects the land. It has become common to revile the bland monocultural landscape of modern agriculture, the large fields, the lost hedgerows, the monotonous landscape with every hollow filled and every mound levelled. But if we ask why we make landscapes like this we might see that the farmer is no longer the husband with the earth as his wife whom he

impregnates and makes fruitful. The modern farmer is a business person using scientific and technical skills to create a product, the land is a factory. The modern farmer has a business relationship with the farm rather than an emotional commitment, and the new agricultural landscape is no more than a reflection of this new relationship, a functional efficient agribusiness. For the modern farmer, the new landscape is not ugly or bland, it is a heart-warming sight - a productive efficient landscape.

Another reason for the absence of knowledge of our common landscapes is our preoccupation with the rare and unique, and the dismissal of the typical as uninteresting and uninformative, a hangover from Victorian English attitudes. Geoff Park describes our national system of protecting landscapes as "a museum cabinet of curiosities, British in its design." (11) Pierce Lewis' statement about the situation in U.S.A. might just as well apply to New Zealand.

> "It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that we have perversely overlooked a huge body of evidence which - if approached carefully and studied without aesthetic or moral prejudice - can tell us a great deal about what kinds of people Americans are, were, and may become." (12)

The focus of this study is the common landscape of small town New Zealand. All the examples are from the town of Cambridge, but the elements are ones which seem to me to be typical of any small town in New Zealand. Almost anywhere in New Zealand a small town is predictable, the pub, the post office, the war memorial - a common landscape. But why is this so? What is it about New Zealanders, our society, or values, about our history that has shaped this common landscape?

Footnotes

1. S.R. Swaffield and K.F. O'Connor, Perceiving, Conceiving, Protecting and Using New Zealand Landscape Systems. Information Paper No.6, Centre for Resource Management, University of Canterbury and Lincoln College, New Zealand, 1986.

2. J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, pp.6-7.

3. Ibid., p.156.

4. The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, ed. D.W. Meinig, p.12.

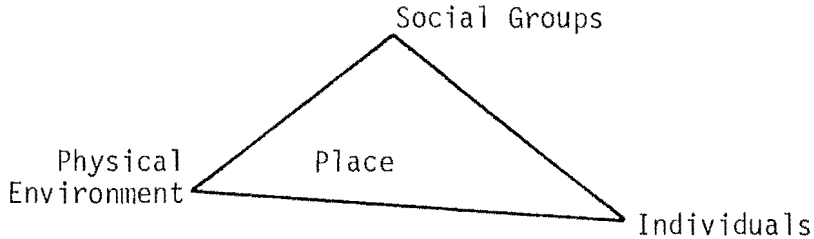
5. Ibid., p.93.

6. Environmental Perception and Behaviour: an Inventory and Prospect, eds. Saarinen, Seamon and Sell, p.71.

7. Denis Cosgrove, Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape, p.35.

8. J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, p.8.

9. A way of exploring this is through the model for place suggested by Lister and Alington (Sense of Place: an assessment of inner city Christchurch (1987)). They see place as a three-way dialectic. Place is defined as "a reality negotiated between individuals, social groups and the physical environment. The relationship between each of these three aspects is dialectical.



10. The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, ed. D.W. Meinig, pp.18-19.

11. Geoff Park "A Most Essential Landscape to Understand", part 4.

12. The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, ed. D.W. Meinig, p.19.

David Lowenthal describes a fundamental difference between the external independant observer, and the insider-participant, of a landscape. (1) It is a distinction Denis Cosgrove calls one of "the central contradictions of the landscape idea." (2) Lowenthal uses an example from William James of the different responses to pioneer forest clearing in Appalachia of an experienced traveller and a responsible landholder. The traveller saw the clearing as destructive, chaotic and visually offensive amidst the natural majesty and harmony of the forest. In contrast the landholder saw it as a mark of pioneering effort, symbolic of a prosperous future for his family and the nation, while laying little importance on the actual visual form. James argued that "the spectator's judgement is sure to miss the root of the matter and to possess no truth." (3)

The outsider distinguishes clearly between self and the landscape, between subject and object, and having separated themselves theoretically from the landscape can then proceed to describe it objectively. Denis Cosgrove argues that this relationship is derived from the original common English usage of landscape as a painter's term. He suggests that the landscape painting, by its framing and control of subjective responses to landscape, is an outsiders view. (4) "Perspective locates the subject outside the landscape and stresses the unchanging objectivity of what is observed therein." (5) The archtypical outsider's view is that of the scientist. Traditionally the scientist ensures the objectivity of his work by rigorously excluding any values, personal idiosyncracies or individual situations from their work. The scientist goes a step further than the landscape painter for not only is the scientist located outside the landscape, but they espouse no particular viewpoint. M. Mikesell suggests of the geographer that "he makes no distinction between foreground and background," (6) (it is unclear whether the other half of the discipline see things likewise).

The scientist creates a model of the phenomena they are studying, they see not the phenomena itself but its quantified indices. For some phenomena the indices are almost indistinguishable from the phenomena itself. Thus a physicist can only see atoms and smaller particles via sophisticated and elaborate instruments. It is ironic that it is recent developments

in the theory of physics such as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and Einstein's theory of Relativity which have placed the scientist back in the picture alongside the phenomena. These developments have emphasized that a phenomena can only be described from a *particular* viewpoint, that the viewpoint affects the description of the phenomena, and that the scientists are not independent of the phenomena they observe but that the act of observation is a participatory one which affects the phenomena. (7)

Like the hero in C.S. Lewis's novel *That Hideous Strength,* the scientist has learnt a particular way of seeing the world,

> "His education had the curious effect of making the things he read and wrote more real to him than the things he saw. Statistics about agricultural labourers were the substance; any real ditcher, ploughman or farm boy was the shadow." (8)

Yi-Fu Tuan suggests "that scientific analysis leads to abstraction and removes us from any personal involvement with landscape," and tells the story of the Princeton physicist who walks about in very large boots because to him the ground is not solid but is made up of atoms in empty space. (9) Relph argues that a landscape

> "cannot be touched, embraced, measured or even walked around on the outside. Only by a distorting act of imagination can we separate ourselves from a landscape and treat it as an object." (10)

The insider-participant does not clearly distinguish between self and landscape and experiences it subjectively and idiosyncratically. Relph argues that for this *existential insider* (11) the landscape is a dimension of existence collectively produced and maintained. Anne Buttimer and Ted Relph have argued for the concept of *lifeworld,* the lifeworld is a social phenomena, the product of a culture, people's experience of the lifeworld is subjective but through a shared language and needs and culture, it is a shared subjectivity, or inter-subjectivity. Each individual can experience the lifeworld in an individual and personal

fashion but it is part of *a shared world horizon*. Anne Buttimer argues that

> "People are born into an intersubjective world, i.e. we learn language and styles of social behaviour which enable us to engage in the everyday world. Our natural interest in day-to-day activities is pragmatic, not theoretical. Most of its features - social, physical, technical - are assumed as given, reasonably predictable and manipulable; ways of relating to it have been transmitted through our sociocultural heritage, which provides guidelines and schemata for actions and interactions." (13)

Many facets of the lifeworld are pre-consciously understood, automatic reactions to features we already know and which enable us to cope with the complexity and sheer quantity of stimuli we are daily subjected to. Ted Relph admits

> "landscape includes all the ordinary and changing contexts of my life that I encounter in myriad forms every day. They are so commonplace, yet so confusing, that even though I am concerned about landscapes, I usually treat them as backgrounds to more immediate matters like parking my car. When I look at these ordinary landscapes I often find I can say little more about them than "there is a nice place where I go for picnics", or "there's nothing much to interest me here"." (14)

The visible forms and their aesthetic value form a part of the insider's lifeworld, but they are less important than the social and personal meaning attached to various elements of the landscape. Denis Cosgrove argues that

> "The visible forms and their harmonious integration to the eye may indeed be a constituent part of people's relationship with the surroundings of their daily lives, but such considerations are subservient to other aspects of a working life with family and community." (15)

Meinig is more explicit about the social meaning and significance we attach to the landscape, suggesting that

> "every landscape is a code, and its study may be undertaken as a deciphering of meaning, of the cultural and social significance of ordinary but diagnostic features," but qualifies it with
> "Every landscape is so dense with evidence and so complex and cryptic that we can never be assured that we have read it all or read it aright." (16)

This study is an insider's view of the landscape pointing to symbolic meanings which arise from Pakeha culture in a small town landscape in New Zealand. In one sense my analysis has been a shallow one. I have been content to limit my understanding of the landscape to proximate cases, rather than trying to reveal a deeper reality. Thus the study is in terms of our culture and has made little attempt to strip aside the facade of beliefs to reveal the underlying structures which shape our society; or to provide a verifiable quantified model of a New Zealand small town. Although in this sense the analysis is facile, in another it is significant, because it is an understanding within a cultural context which allows us to participate and communicate within our society. We might draw an analogy with the English language, on one level we can analyse the language in terms of underlying grammatical structure and rules, on another we understand the language as a means of communication, we understand what people are saying to us. Arguably the former understanding is of a deeper reality in that it explains how language works, but it is only on the second level that we can participate in the language, that we can become part of the community who uses the language.

The Clayton's Method, the method you have when you're not having a method (17)

The landscape of the insider-participant is one of experience. There is no hard and fast method which will allow us to describe this landscape, in fact any attempt to use a fixed method is one which threatens the integrity of the experience which by its nature is personal and subjective. Denis Cosgrove argues that the nature of the insider's landscape "makes it difficult to employ the term as a category within a rigorously scientific enquiry, for in attempting to do so we risk denying the integrity of the insider's experience, prising it apart and subjecting it to the cold blades of classification and analysis." (18) Basically anything goes as long as it captures the significance of some feature of experience.

However, for the work to have anything more than personal meaning the experience must be one which other people share. It must make explicit a part of our collective or shared experience of landscape. For example, Feininger's "Fisher and Cutter" and Rita Angus's "Boats at Island Bay" are paintings which represent quite different personal responses to similar scenes, but common threads run through each allowing recognition and appreciation.

Many different methods can capture aspects of our shared experience, perhaps a work of poetry or prose evoking a characteristic landscape, or a sketch or painting capturing the features of a landscape as experienced, or perhaps an account in the tradition of the observant thoughtful traveller. (19) The important thing is that it allows an honest expression of experience, traditionally this is achieved through patient and rigorous self reflection.

Relph describes three procedures, seeing, thinking and describing, which are part of his way of understanding landscapes.

> "For me this requires looking carefully at landscapes, allowing my thinking to respond to what I see, and then attempting to describe clearly the character of these landscapes." (20)

These procedures are not clearly distinguished, they overlap and occur in no particular order, and each one may influence the others. Thus Relph says

> "the activity of describing a place may cause me to think about it differently; my reflections on a landscape may lead me to come to see it in a new light; and it is impossible to see without thinking." (21)

However, for the purposes of explanation, it is convenient to treat seeing, thinking and describing separately.

Familiarity makes many elements of the landscape invisible. It is important to see the landscape anew, *with a child's eyes,* to see those features we know so well that we take them for granted. Seeing is a faculty that can be developed with practice. With concentration and wonder seeing can be made more sensitive and more acute. John Ruskin suggested that to see clearly it is necessary to develop an unpretentious attitude of vision that strives to omit nothing and yet does not impose sentiment on what is seen; it should be clear and precise and open-minded to all that exists. (22) There is no set of rules to help us see this way, such seeing requires constant effort and an awareness of the typical and of the unusual. Within our culture our primary experience of the landscape is visual (23), but we should not overlook our other senses and ways of experiencing the landscape.

Balanced with seeing is thinking, the two go hand in hand. Seeing alone will not result in understanding a feature of the landscape, we need to ask what function it serves? Why does it look like it does? What values does it express? How does it relate to neighbouring landscape features? What does it tell us about the way our society works or has worked? It is in the answers to questions such as these that we can start to interpret the landscape. Seeing and thinking must proceed together although no standardization is needed. Relph suggests

> "Too much looking leads to a confused welter of impressions; too much thinking results in cold abstractions and false images

being imposed on places. Seeing and thinking must therefore be held in tension." (24)

It is important that our preconceptions and prejudices are held consciously and reflected upon. Otherwise they may blind us to significant features of our experience. For example, W.G. Hoskins' claims that "Since the year 1914, every single change in the English landscape has either uglified it, or destroyed its meaning, or both" (25) leads him to overlook the new meanings and aesthetic of the modern landscape. However, held consciously and with recognition of their constraints they give us a framework within which we can order our understanding of the landscape. Relph suggests

"we need to identify our biases, not with the intention of purging them, but so we recognize how our seeing orders our environment and imbues it with personal significance." (26)

The description is the piecing together from the seeing and the thinking of an account of our experience. Relph says "To the person who has written it, a description is simply the most true and accurate account of the state of things that could be presented." (27) He goes on to say "In each description there is an individuality that reflects the biases and attitudes of the author, yet they can all be accounts of somewhere that is recognizable to others." (28)

The question arises as to what value such a study has. It is of value only insofar as it captures something of our shared experience of the landscape, that common core of understanding and experience which is the result of speaking the same language in the same culture and place. This understanding is not something we can verify, it is something we intuit, whether the study makes sense, whether we believe it or are enlightened by the way it pulls together experiences and ideas we had not associated before. Relph suggests of his work that "it is, however, not egocentric if what I describe makes sense and clarifies matters for others." (29)

Footnotes

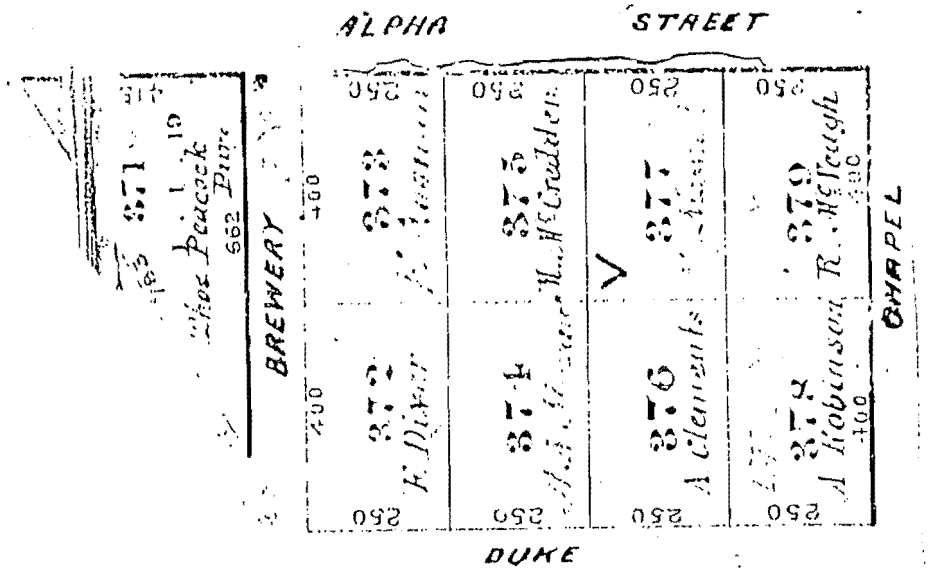
1. From D. Cosgrove, Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape, p.19.
2. Ibid., p.37.
3. Ibid., p.19.
4. Ibid., pp.16-17.
5. Denis Cosgrove, ibid., p.27.
6. As quoted, ibid., p.31.
7. Two books which provide a relatively approachable account of these developments for the layperson are Fritz Capra, The Tao of Physics and The Dancing Wu Li Masters.
8. C.S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength.
9. The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, ed. D.W. Meinig, p.95.
10. Environmental Perception and Behaviour, eds. Sayrinen, Seamon and Sell, p.221.
11. Quoted, op.cit., footnote 1, p.19.
12. Anne Buttimer "Grasping the Dynamism of the Lifeworld", A. of A. of American Geographers, Vol.66, No.2.
13. Ibid., p.285.
14. Ted Relph "To See with the Soul of the Eye" Landscape, Vol.23, No.1, p.28.
15. Op.cit., footnote 1, p.19.
16. Op.cit., footnote 9, p.6.
17. Paraphrase of an advertisement for a non-alcoholic drink. The term *Claytons* has passed into everyday usage in New Zealand as something which is not what it says it is, or is not the real thing.
18. Op.cit., footnote 1, p.19.
19. For example, Pierre Dansereau "New Zealand Revisited" Garden Journal, 12, (1962) pp.1-6.
20. Op.cit., footnote 10, p.212.
21. Ibid., p.212.

22. From Ibid., p.216.
23. R. Kaplin, "Some methods and strategies in the Prediction of Preference," Landscape Perception, p.119.
24. Op.cit., footnote 10, p.217.
25. Quoted op.cit., footnote 9, p.206.
26. Op.cit., footnote 14, pp.28 and 31.
27. Op.cit., footnote 10, p.220.
28. Ibid., pp.221-2.
29. Ibid., p.214.

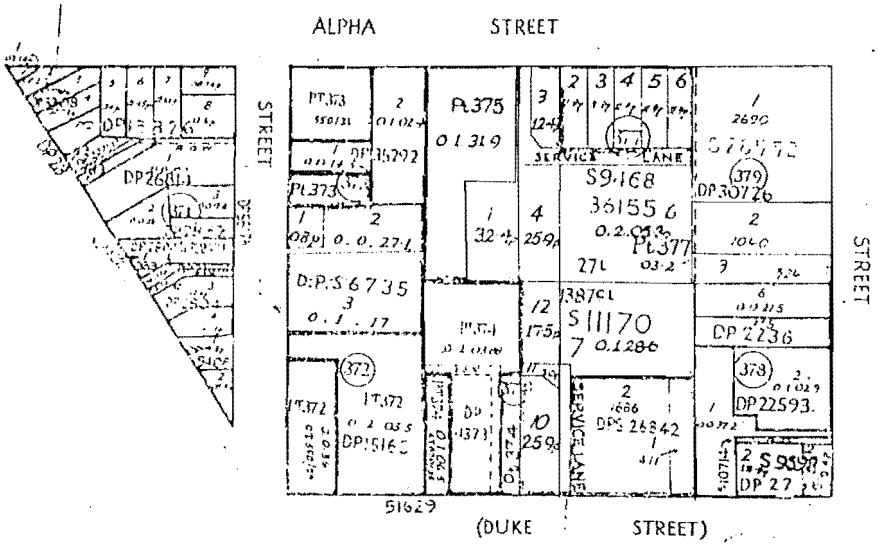
Ideas and the Landscape

Probably one of the most influential factors in shaping the common landscape of small town New Zealand were the preconceptions or ideas in the minds of a small group of men, the surveyors of colonial New Zealand. A comparison of the initial survey map of Cambridge and a map of present-day Cambridge shows the remarkable similarity of layout. The initial blocks have been subdivided, the buildings have changed and trees have grown, but all within an initial framework created by the surveyor, derived from a concept and lines on a piece of paper. Thomas Harvey describes the railroad towns of Minnesota suggesting "original town plats...imposed a framework for the future development of the towns and stamped indelible patterns on town morphology." (1)

Such a beginning is by no means peculiar to Cambridge. Stilgoe suggests that the spatial organisation of two-thirds of the United States of America was laid out on a grid of townships, each six miles square. (2) The section lines which formed the grid ran rigidly north-south and east-west, in the late eighteenth century they existed only in surveyors notebooks. Only as the farmers settled the rectangles and started to shape the land did those lines become more than legal abstractions. The grid is a framework for the inhabitants of the Middle West



Initial subdivision of the blocks bordered by Victoria, Duke, Alpha and Anzac (formerly Chapel) Streets, Cambridge, 1865.

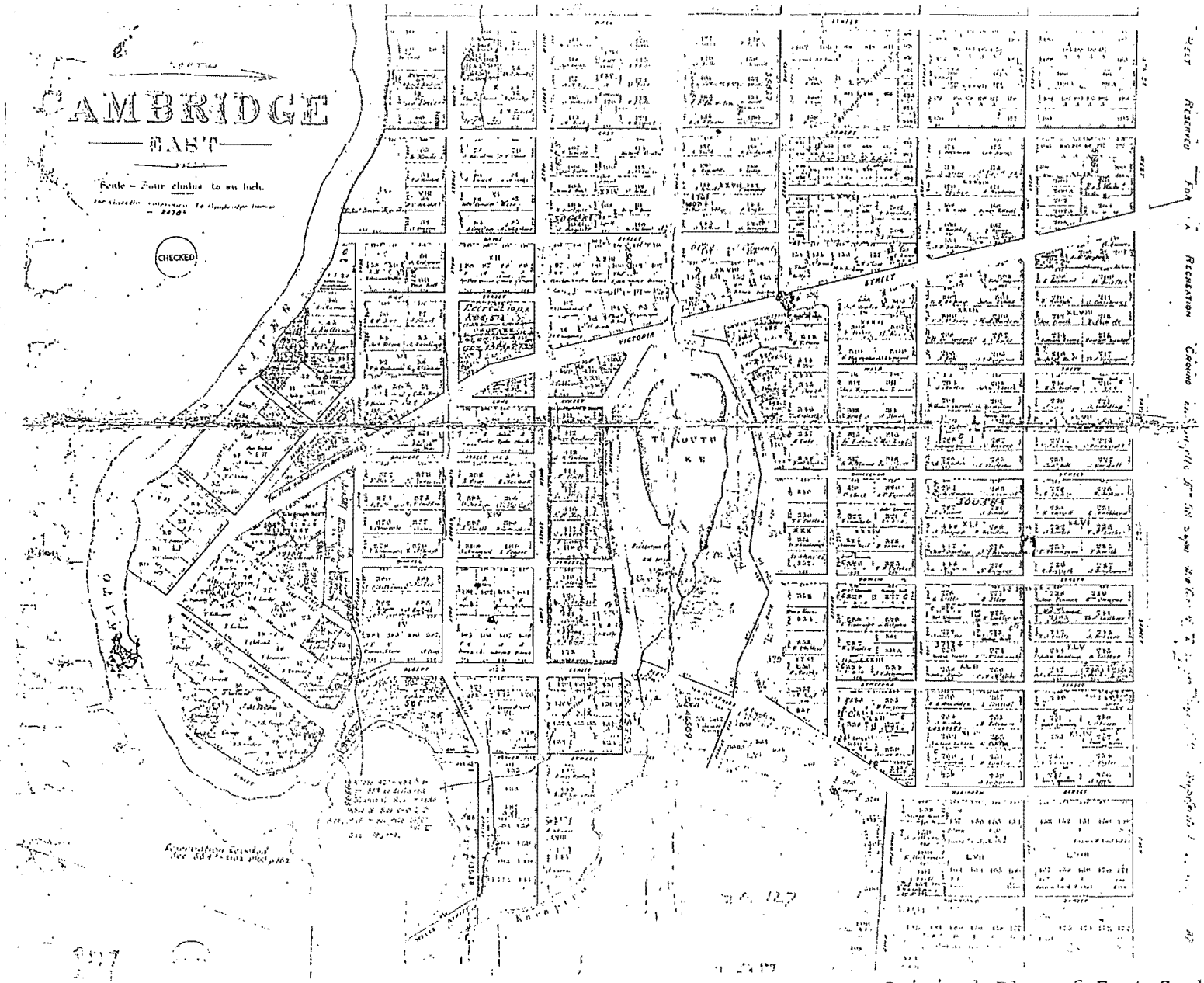


Present subdivision of the blocks bordered by Victoria, Duke, Alpha and Anzac Streets, Cambridge, 1987.

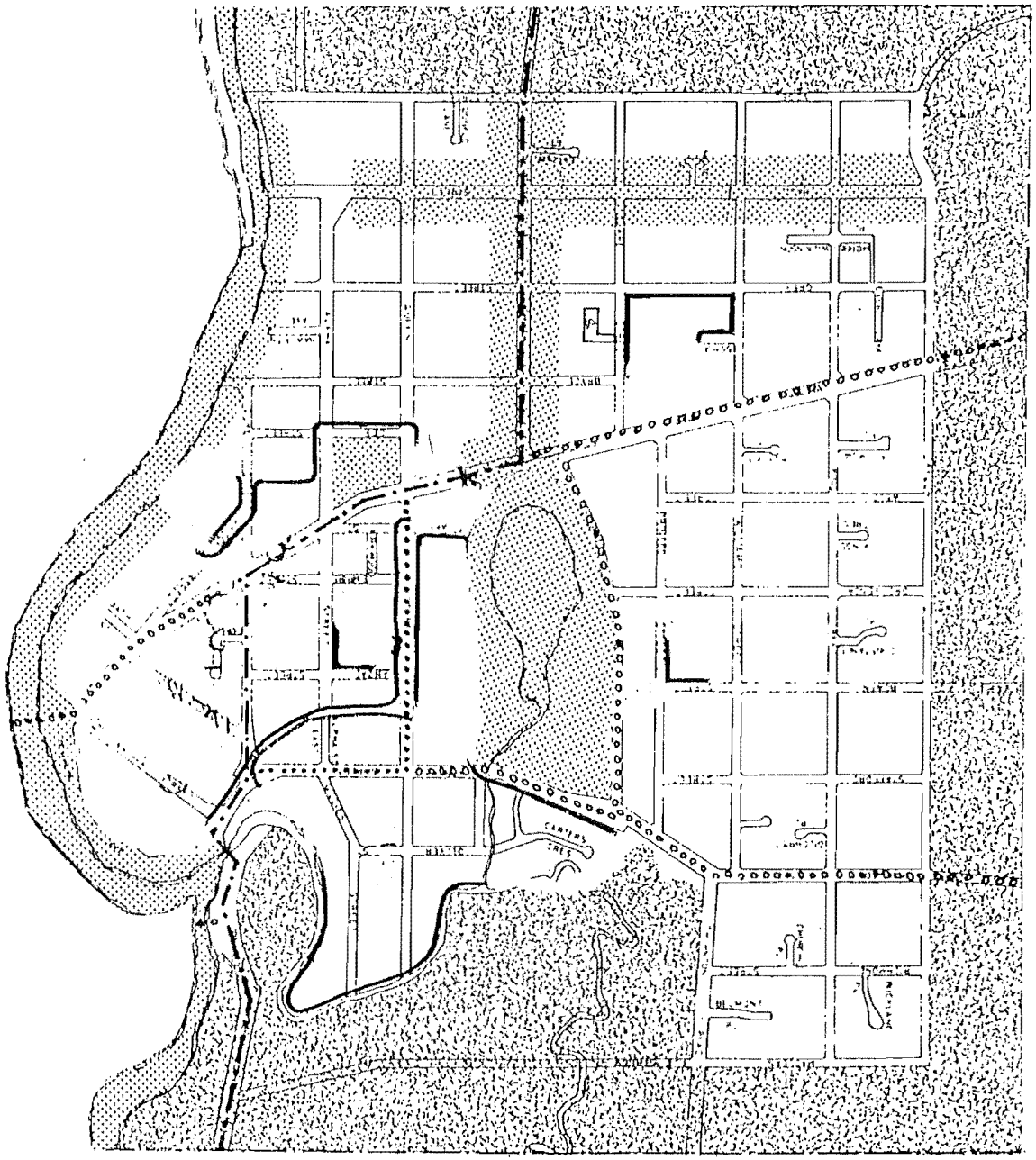
which "shapes their space, colours their speech, and subtly influences their lives." (3) Stilgoe suggests that these lines resulted from a combination of Enlightenment reason imposing man-made form on the wilderness and codified traditional or common spatial design which designated six miles square as the ideal size for a township, and numbered the lots in boustropledonic order ("as the plough follows the ox") of oscillating rows. (4) J.B. Jackson suggests that we see the grid as an attempt to create a mathematically ordered landscape, an expression of the inherent order of the universe as revealed in Newton's cosmology. (5)

However, the grid as an abstract way of ordering space has a much longer history. It is a form characteristic of colonisation in the Western world. The grid is the imposition of an abstract way of ordering and conceiving space on a new landscape. Part of establishing control over new lands involves the ordering of the landscape in a way which is an expression of the colonizing people, and in western history this has frequently taken the form of an abstract gridiron division of space.

Norberg-Schulz suggests "The Roman castra and city - and Rome itself - are based on the same model: the square or rectangular area is divided into four parts by two main streets intersecting at right angles;



Original Plan of East Cambridge, 1865



Present-day plan of East Cambridge

the primary cardo and the secondary decumanus." (6) Large areas of the Roman landscape were ordered on this model. J.B. Jackson observes that as the Roman Empire "found itself engaged in the settling of new or vacated territories...the usual procedure was to divide the publicly owned lands into large squares of about 120 acres, called centuriae, of a little less than half a mile to the side.... The nucleus of the landscape was the point of intersection of two highways, the decumanus maximus (east-west) and the cardo maximus (north-south), and it was here that a town was usually built." (7) John Bradford argues that "Virtually it would have been possible to ride from Turin to Trieste - a distance of 300 miles from west to east - within centuriated systems all the way." (8) Norberg Schulz continues "regardless of building task and environmental level, the Romans employed the same fundamental spatial image." (9)

The grid, whether derived from abstracted natural phenomena as in the case of the Romans, or Enlightenment reason in the case of the American grid, seems to be a characteristic spatial form used to order the colonisation of new lands by western peoples.

The layout of Cambridge and the majority of New Zealand towns is a grid, perhaps with one or two diagonal streets leading to the main routes out of town.

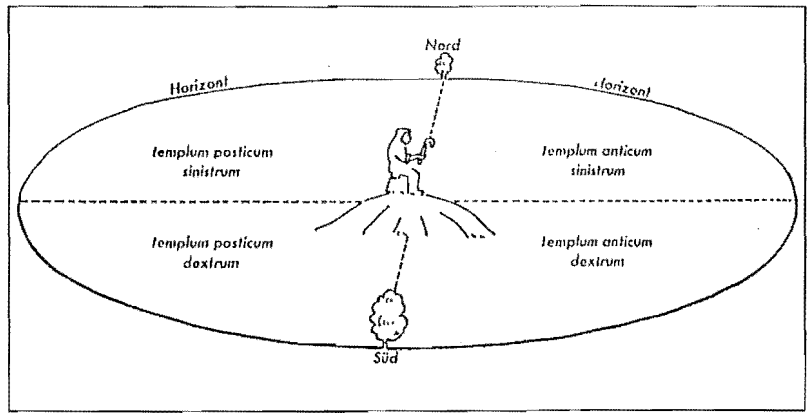
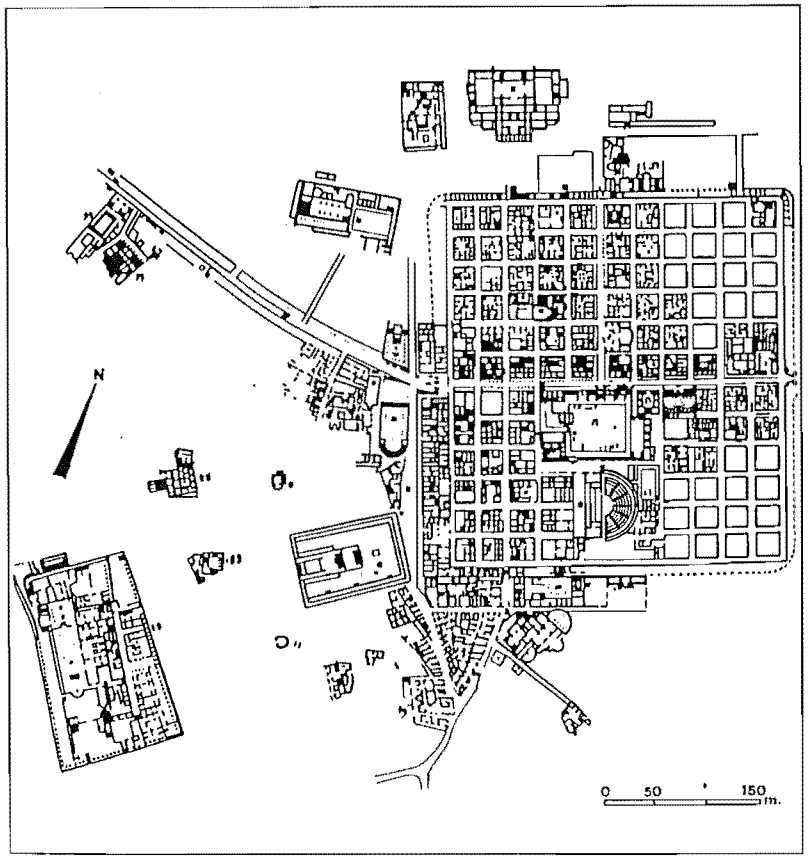


Diagram representing the subdivision of space made by the Roman Augur when consecrating a place. After Norberg-Schulz (1975).



Plan of a Roman city, Timgad, 100 AD.
After Norberg-Schulz (1975).

Robin Hall suggests that in Australian country towns "The rectilinear pattern prevailed because it is simple, cartographically expedient, and produces uniform, marketable real estate." (10) The same is very likely true of New Zealand, in the trying conditions of many early surveys, practicality and simplicity were probably essential attributes of the layout. Graham Densem suggests of the surveyors of Christchurch

> "The surveyors were facing a gigantic task. Early on they only numbered less than a dozen, but it was their job not only to measure and cut up hundreds of thousands of acres of unmapped land in Canterbury and Westland, but also to set up and enforce a system of application for, assessment, recording and enforcement of land tenure. It is not to be wondered that in the circumstances land was set out by squares and straight lines." (11)

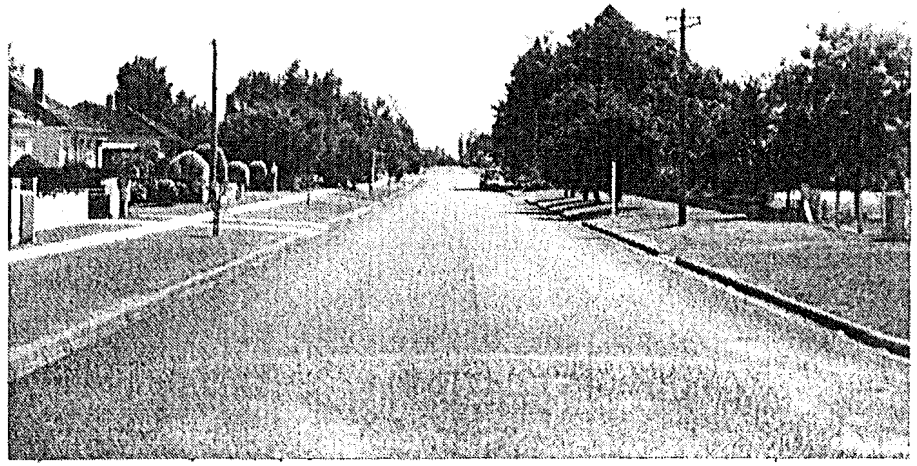
The grid layout is also easy to subdivide or extend.

J.B. Jackson suggests of America "What better expression of an egalitarian political ideal than the uniform squares of our grid landscape and our grid cities." (12) New Zealand too had relatively egalitarian social ideals and the grid allowed these to be expressed.

Spatially the grid is characterized by a lack of enclosure, the streets have no focus, they disappear into the distance with no apparent ending. Sharp observes "on a simple gridiron plan there are no architectural termini to street vistas: each vista merely wanders out into the hazy distance of sky above some faraway vanishing point." (13)

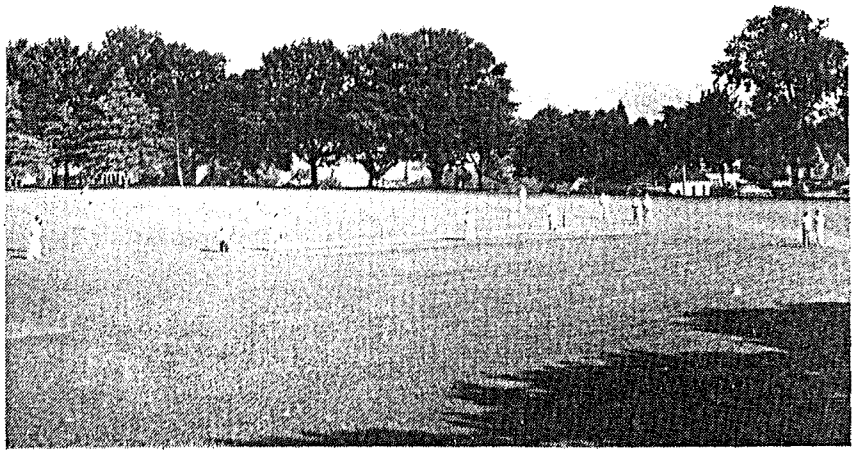
New Zealand towns are also characterized by wide streets, the typical width being one chain. Set by law this was a reaction against the unsanitary and cramped streets of England in the first half of the nineteenth century. Graham Densem suggests that the founders of Christchurch, the Canterbury Association "were going to set up a model cross section of the best of the English community....The physical nature of the community was envisaged to match. Streets would be wide and straight, houses warm and airy." (14) Together with the grid layout, and the relatively large sections this produced towns which were open, low density and sprawling.

The towns mostly lack a central core or focus. The surveyors frequently laid out a reserve in the centre of the town, as in Cambridge, but the reserves bear little relationship to the public buildings in the town which are distributed haphazardly, and the low density of the town gives



Typical view down a street on a gridiron plan, Cambridge, 1987.

no sense of architectural enclosure. The reserves have generally ended up as quiet grassed parks rather than civic centres.



Victoria Square, Cambridge.

Footnotes

1. Thomas Harvey "Railroad Towns: Urban Form on the Prairie," Landscape, Vol.27, No.3, pp.26-34.
2. John R. Stilgoe, Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845, p.99.
3. Ibid., p.88.
4. Ibid., p.104.
5. The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, ed. D.W. Meinig, pp.154-5.
6. Christian Norberg-Schulz, Meaning in Western Architecture, p.42.
7. J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, pp.24 and 26.
8. As quoted, Ibid., p.26.
9. Op.cit., footnote (5), p.53.
10. Robin Hall "An Australian Country Townscape," Landscape, Vol.24, No.2, p.44.
11. Graham Densem, Suburban Christchurch: Proposals for a Residential Subdivision, unpublished dissertation, University of Canterbury, 1973, p.21.
12. Op.cit., footnote (6), p.33.
13. As quoted in op.cit., footnote (5), p.44.
14. Op.cit., footnote (10), p.14.

People do not usually set out to create a landscape, rather landscapes are a by-product of people living on the land. Living is not a solitary experience but as part of a community, and the landscape can be seen as a reflection of the political organisation of the community. J.B. Jackson suggests that "each society develops its own unique kind of spatial organisation." (1) The basic elements of the political landscape are things such as boundaries, roads, monuments and public spaces, and the organisation of these elements is not only a reflection of the way the community is ordered, but also it serves to remind and to define this order for the members of the community. As J.B. Jackson says

> "They exist to insure order and security and continuity and to give citizens a visible status. They serve to remind us of our rights and obligations and of our history." (2)

Everywhere in the landscape we come across these elements, we create them and understand their meaning unconsciously, signs that enable our society to function.

In our society the basic space is the piece of land and the dwelling where the family lives.

Detached bungalow and spacious section, Cambridge.

J.B. Jackson suggests

> "the most common, the most elementary space is that small piece of land where a family lives and works.... In the political landscape we learn to perceive it as the prototypal minispace." (3)

Gordon McLaughlan describes the social phenomena

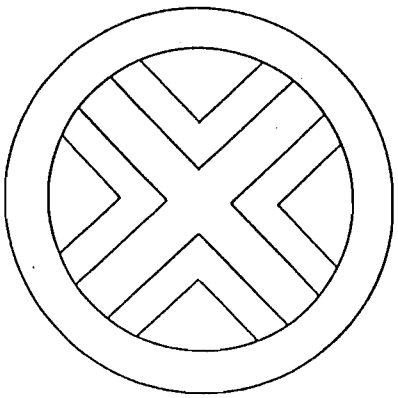
> "the tiny family has the feeling that our territory is the quarter acre section with mum and dad." (4)

In New Zealand this basic unit is the quarter-acre section, a space which has been incorporated into our national identity through such books as *The Half-Gallon Quarter-Acre Pavlova Paradise*. (5) The building blocks of our political landscape are quarter-acre sections with detached bungalow dwellings set back from the road and surrounded by extensive grass or cultivation. Allan Correy describes a similar phenomena in Australia, "These suburbs consist of single-storey detached houses, widely spaced along either side of wide roads." (6) This is the kind of landscape one might expect in a society which has stressed egalitarianism from its formation, and where land is not in short supply.

But while it is a landscape formed by private land ownership, it is not a truly individualistic

landscape such as Stilgoe describes in eighteenth century Pennsylvania. (7) Here there were no towns or villages as such, houses were scattered over the countryside, perhaps half an hour's walk from one to another. The political landscape was ordered in *neighbourhoods*. The neighbourhood was based on the individual house and identified the range of the occupants frequent concerns, which in practice was the area within one hour's walk of the residence. Scattered through the countryside, often over relatively large areas were churches and places of business. These centres of religion and trade were often located separately, and there might be no single focus for the settlement. This was the landscape of an individualistic and market-oriented agricultural society.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are societies where the land is communally owned. Here the basic unit of the political landscape is the community territory. Such a community was the medieval European village. The typical landscape of these villages consisted of three concentric zones surrounded by forest, the enclosed village, a space devoted to cultivation, and a large belt of meadow. (8) J.B. Jackson describes the *open-field system* of



Layout of a medieval European village, after Stilgoe, 1982.

agriculture which was prevalent in these villages throughout the Middle Ages,

> "it was based on community ownership (or community control) of all the land... with fields apportioned to the individual under certain strict conditions. Among them were rules as to when the land was to lie fallow, what day it was to be plowed, and when the village cattle were to be allowed to graze upon it." (9)

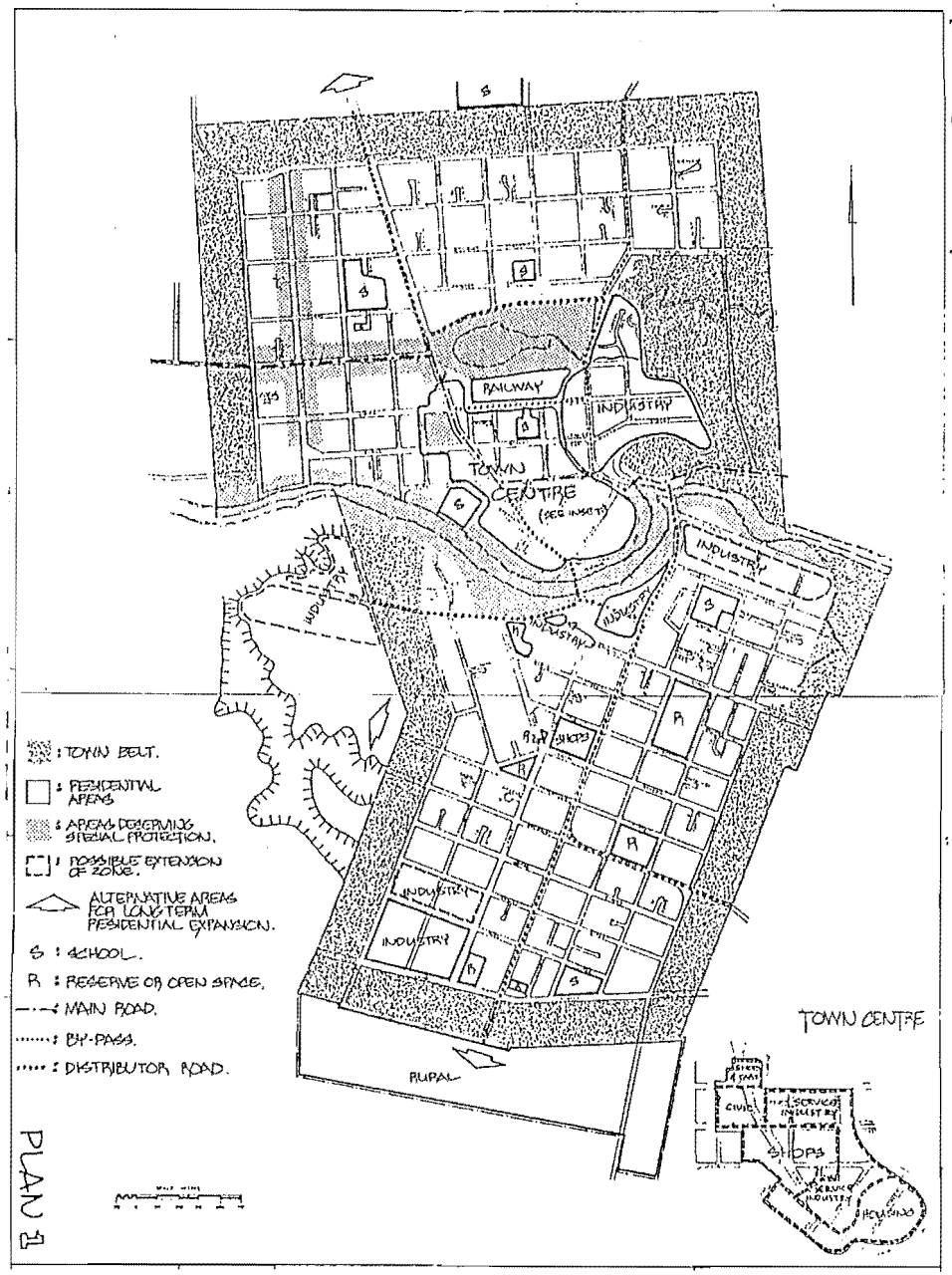
Fences and hedges which signify boundary lines had no place in such a system. Jacob Grimm observes, writing of early Germanic communities,

> "Property in land begins with possession in common, the forest in which I pick an apple, the meadow where I graze my cattle, belongs to *us*. The land which we defend against enemies, belongs to *us*; soil and earth, the air in which we live - no one can own even a fragment of these for himself. They are owned in common; like fire and water they belong to all." (10)

J.B. Jackson suggests that in such a situation "the distinct natural spaces...can never be divided into individual holdings. Specifically, no individual using them can build a fence around any portion of

them." (11) Fences and hedges are so familiar to us that we do not realize what powerful symbols of private ownership they are. Jackson argues that the Communist governments of Europe realize their symbolic significance and that "when they collectivize the farms they first of all destroy the hedgerows - even when the fields are not to be altered in size." (12)

While the New Zealand town is a landscape of private ownership, it is also one which expresses a strong social order and fabric. The individual sections and houses are held in an overall framework of the grid layout, and based around a distinct, if elongated, community focus. On the main street the commercial, religious, social and governmental centres are grouped together. It is the landscape of a social democracy, the individual has the right to own land, but society has the power to limit individual rights in the interests of the wider community. The community interests have played an important part in shaping the New Zealand town as well. For example, the characteristic set back of individual dwellings from the road has been enforced by government legislation for the health of the greater community, a reaction against the diseased and dirty narrow streets of Europe, which the colonists had abandoned for a new land.



Planning Zones for Cambridge, Cambridge Borough Council District Scheme, (Rev.1), 1978.

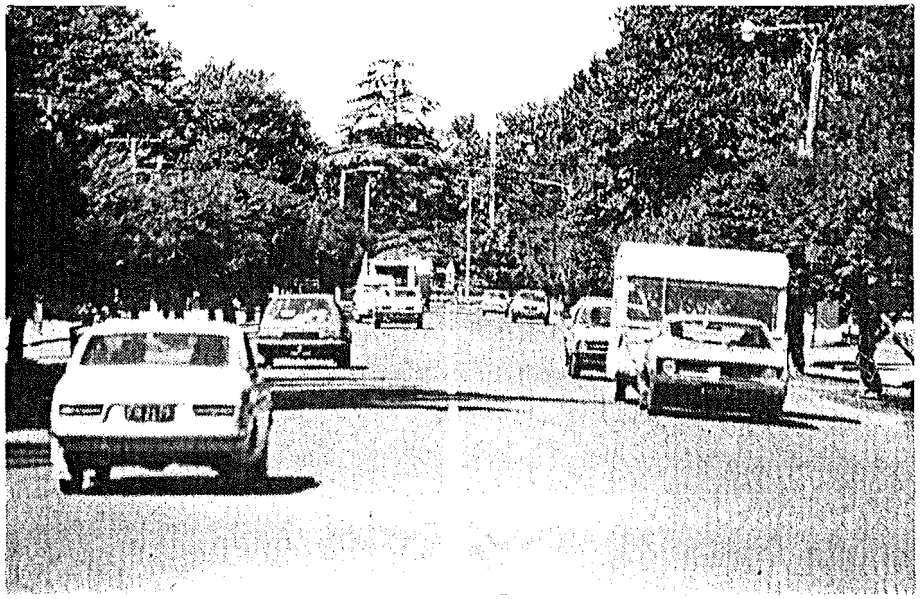
In contrast, Zelinsky suggests that "the buildings in a thoroughly Pennsylvanian town not only huddle together laterally but also press as closely as possible against the sidewalk and street," and he goes on to point out that "neither noise, nor dust, nor fumes are thereby minimized for the householder." (13)

The community control of the New Zealand townscape is also expressed in the clear spatial differentiation of different land uses through the Town and Country Planning Act. Thus residential, commercial, and industrial areas are all clearly separated, while churches, schools, parks and playgrounds are encouraged in residential areas. In contrast Zelinsky suggests that in the Pennsylvania Town

> "we find nearly total anarchy in the spatial allocation of retail, residential, professional, and government activities.... Dwellings, shops, and offices consort cheek by jowl in adjacent buildings or under the same roof, at street level or above; but with rare exceptions, churches, cemeteries, schools, parks, and playgrounds, if any, and manufacturing and wholesale enterprises are consigned to peripheral locations." (14)

This situation has evolved through *cultural tradition* rather than by specific community control (through government legislation) as is the case in the New Zealand town. Again the landscape can be seen as a reflection of the political organisation of the society living on the land.

Probably the best known roads are the great royal highways, those of the Romans, the Incas, the Persians and the French. Great feats of engineering, they disregarded topography in favour of straight perspectives and shorter alignment, the quality of their construction ensured a relative permanence. These roads served to consolidate economic and military control over large areas for particular groups of people. J.B. Jackson argues "All of them in one manner or another, tend to restrict their traffic to a small and powerful group of users - either by edict, by accessibility, or by their destination." (15) By decree, only the Inca's soldiers, officials and messengers were permitted to use the Incan highways. J.B. Jackson suggests that the French purposely located their highways on ridgetops partly to avoid becoming involved with local traffic, (16) and that the kings of Persia ensured that their highways avoided all provincial centres lest an invading army, using the highway, should gain access to supplies and arms. (17)



A steady stream of traffic flows through Cambridge along State Highway 1.

Such roads are major elements in the political landscape, they allow a group of people to maintain power over large areas and populations. As J.B.Jackson points out they provide mobility and "mobility thus fostered the growth of an effective and powerful ruling group. But the rank and file, particularly those in the countryside, were doomed to immobility and to political inaction." (18)

It is tempting to compare our state highways with these royal roads, and the state highways are certainly a system unifying the country in economic and political terms. Perhaps the difference lies in that the state highways are a system designed for the entire population rather than for an elite. A guidebook for visitors to New Zealand comments "many small towns... seem no more than wooden encampments thrown up at random alongside highways rammed with vigour through the country's heartlands." (19) Quite apart from its scathing description of some small towns, this comment provides a clue to the nature of our political landscape. Small towns are dependant on transport, on the economic, social, and political mobility provided by the highway system, as opposed to the self sufficiency of a medieval European village. The small town is part of an interdependant nationwise network, it is not an independant entity. The mobility

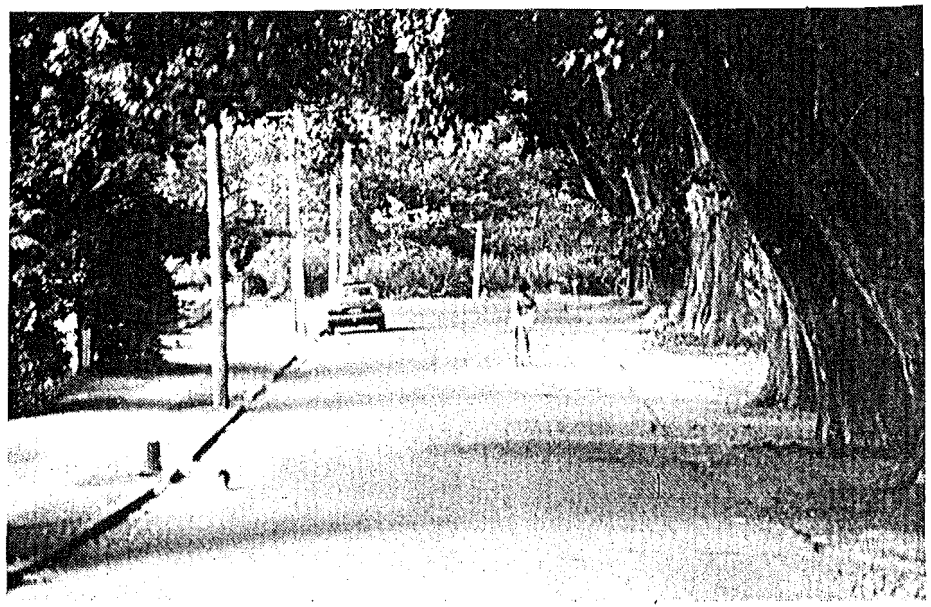
is not necessarily provided by roads, Cambridge was initially dependant on river transport. The town was sited at the highest navigable point on the Waikato. The main street and centre of commercial activity was originally alongside the river.

The local roads are an important feature of the political landscape as well. Traditionally these roads have been interpreted in economic terms, as providing access to markets and to transport points. While an important function, the roads also reflect a more fundamental aspect of our society. They provide mobility and thus political interaction for members of our society. J.B. Jackson argues

> "The United States offers one of the largest and most ambitious examples of a nation once so politically minded that it was determined that every citizen, every landowner should have easy access to a road leading to the political centre." (20)

And

> "The purpose of these roads...was to provide every landowner with a means to get to the nearest town in order to vote, pay taxes, go to church, go to court, attend lectures - most of these being political errands." (21)



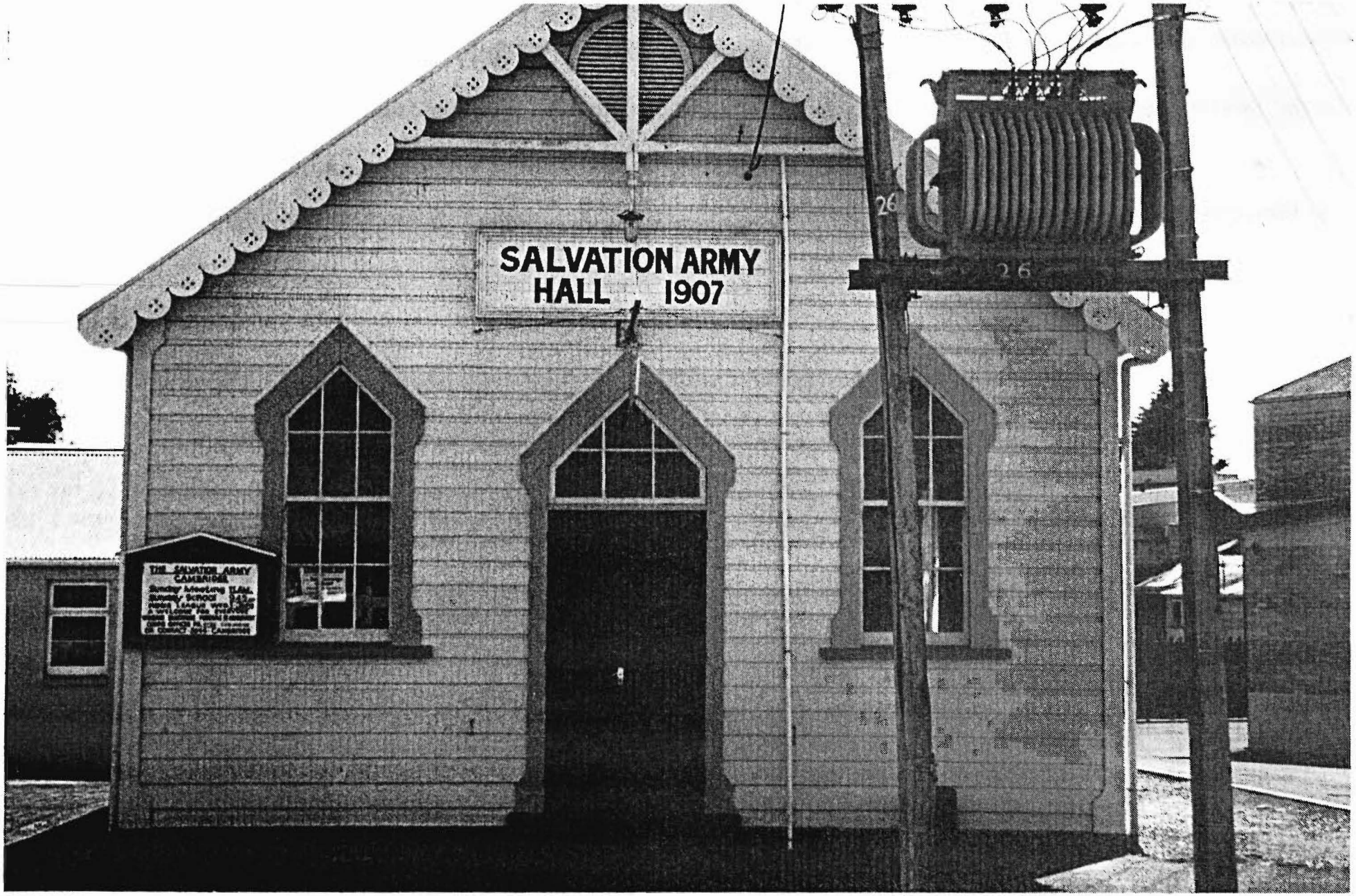
The local roads are quiet, often deserted.

The grid system which covers two-thirds of the United States divides the country into square miles and each side is, in theory, bordered by a road. While in practice there are vast areas where these roads do not exist, the legal provision for creating them is in place. Similarly in New Zealand, while the initial surveys were not so orderly, they made at least theoretical provision for roads to all potential areas of settlement. Many of these *paper roads* exist on maps alone.

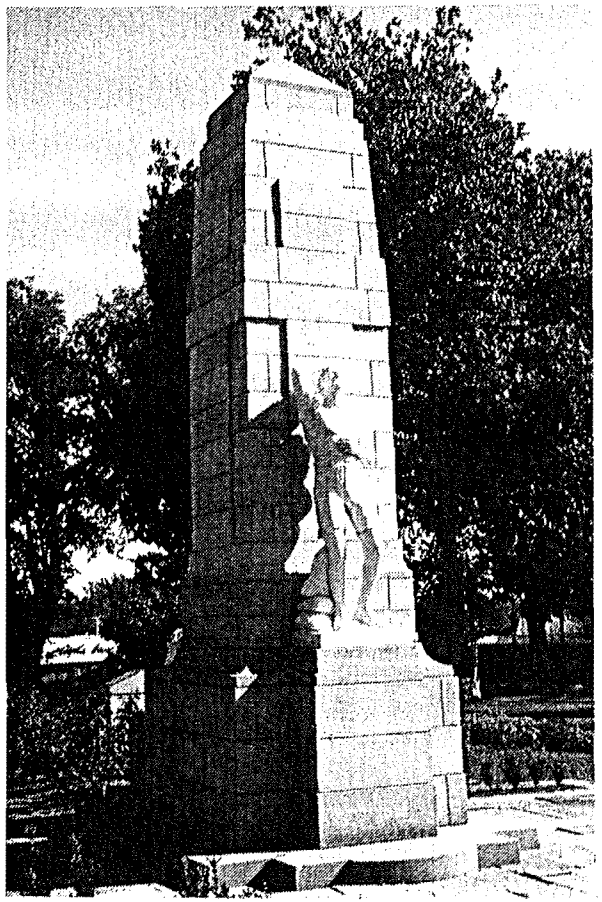
The local road systems are a fundamental part of our political landscape, they provide the members of our society with the mobility to participate, economically and politically, in the larger society. They are vital to the functioning of an egalitarian and nationwide society. As J.B. Jackson suggests "an essential element in any healthy political landscape is the network of neighbourhood or rural roads." (22)

1. J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, p.28.
2. Ibid., p.12.
3. Ibid., p.28.
4. Gordon McLaughlan, The Passionless People, p.29.
5. Austin Mitchell, The Half-Gallon Quarter-Acre Pavlova Paradise.
6. Allan Correy, Landscape Australia, 2/85, p.161.
7. Stilgoe, Common Landscape of America, pp.80-88.
8. Op.cit., footnote 1, p.44.
9. Changing Rural Landscapes ed. E.H. and M.J. Zube, pp.48-9.
10. Quoted in op.cit., footnote 1, p.49.
11. Ibid., p.49.
12. Op.cit., footnote 9, p.49.
13. Zelinsky, "The Pennsylvania Town: an overdue geographical account" The Geographical Review Vol.67, No.2, pp.131-2.
14. Ibid., p.132.
15. Op.cit., footnote 1, p.36.
16. Ibid., p.36.
17. Ibid., p.24.
18. Ibid., p.37.

The Public Interface



Robin Hall suggests that "Country townscapes usually exhibit a public face that mirrors the nature of the local community." (1) This public face consists of a number of spaces where the community interacts, and a variety of objects which have symbolic meaning for the community and which may play a functional role in the interactions. J.B. Jackson says of the public spaces "sometimes the space is the civic centre, ornate and immense, sometimes it is nothing more than an empty lot or a wide space in the street. It is always enjoyable, and instinct tells us that a public space of one kind or another is essential to any community." (2) The structure of the public spaces reflects the role they play in the community. They are shaped by the variety of people who use them, and the ways in which they are used. Yi-Fu Tuan observes that public buildings and monuments are foci of interest, they generate local pride, they give identity to the town, and they are centres of meaning both for visitors and locals. (3) Some of these objects are functional as well as symbolic, the public buildings, for example, may house many of the important social interactions as well as having symbolic meaning.



War Memorial, Cambridge.

War Memorials

War memorials have a place of pride in most New Zealand towns, strong phallic statements prominent throughout the country. Usually they were built to commemorate the First World War and the Boer War, with a plaque in reminder of the Second World War added later.

Sinclair believes that "After the war (the First World War) there was a very general agreement among the New Zealanders that they were a new nation." (4) W.P. Morrell explained it further

> "The men who fought, fought for the Empire, but also for New Zealand. The Empire belonged to the realm of the imagination: New Zealand belonged to the realm of experience. They thought of it as their country. They might not be reasoners thinking of nationality in terms of status or of history, but they were nationalists for all that.... By the very fact of coming to the Old World and coming in a body, they could not but realize that they had as New Zealanders their own individuality, that they were not, as Seeling had once thought, merely Englishmen living overseas." (5)

The war memorials represent a coming of age, they mark a new independance, a former British colony achieving nationhood.

The unsuccessful attempt by several thousand Australian and New Zealand soldiers to capture the Turkish-held heights at Gallipoli is an image burnt deep in our national identity. Donald Horne observes "Australia was probably the only modern nation to celebrate its nationhood by recalling with solemnity and pride an overseas military expedition." (6) He forgot to mention New Zealand. Anzac Day is a national holiday commemorating Gallipoli, it starts with the Dawn Parade of veterans and the Armed Services, and the laying of a wreath at the War Memorial.

The Main Street

Like most New Zealand towns Cambridge lacks a central focus. The primary public space is the main street. This ribbon of development is a highway lined with services and public buildings. The banks, churches, the Post Office and pubs are prominent, and interspersed are dairies, chemists, the new supermarket, hardware stores and restaurants. The pavement is covered by a cantilevered steel awning mixed with the occasional veranda and posts,

Main Street - Victoria Street, Cambridge.

The old and the new side by side, Cambridge.

and ornamented with a conglomeration of painted and illuminated signs of all sorts of colours and shapes. Cumberland observes

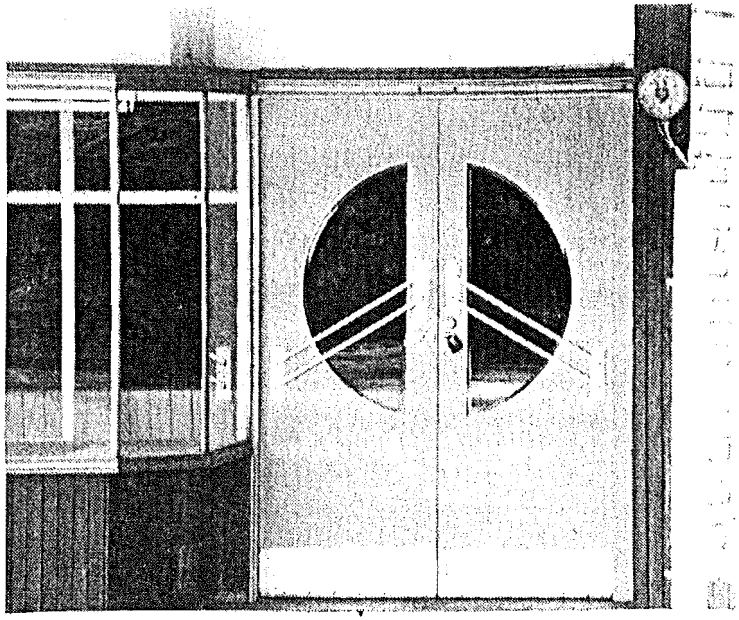
> "It is possible...to construct a model *Kiwitown* or *Cockyville* ....One wide street forms the axis. Along it are strung the buildings that accommodate nearly all its major functions....The buildings are usually one-storeyed, wooden and false-fronted, or two storeyed and of concrete. Here or there is interspersed a new building...a modern post office or bank, and a new or remodelled pub. All are fronted by verandas of assorted heights, angles and materials, with a variety of struts, supports and downpipes. A plethora of suspended advertising signs of all colours adds to the visual confusion protruding above the footpath." (7)

The main street is like the armature of the town, where people meet and socialize, go shopping and do business, where the representatives of the local authority are to be found. The main street is a market street where market day has been replaced by Friday night when the shops are bustling and busy,

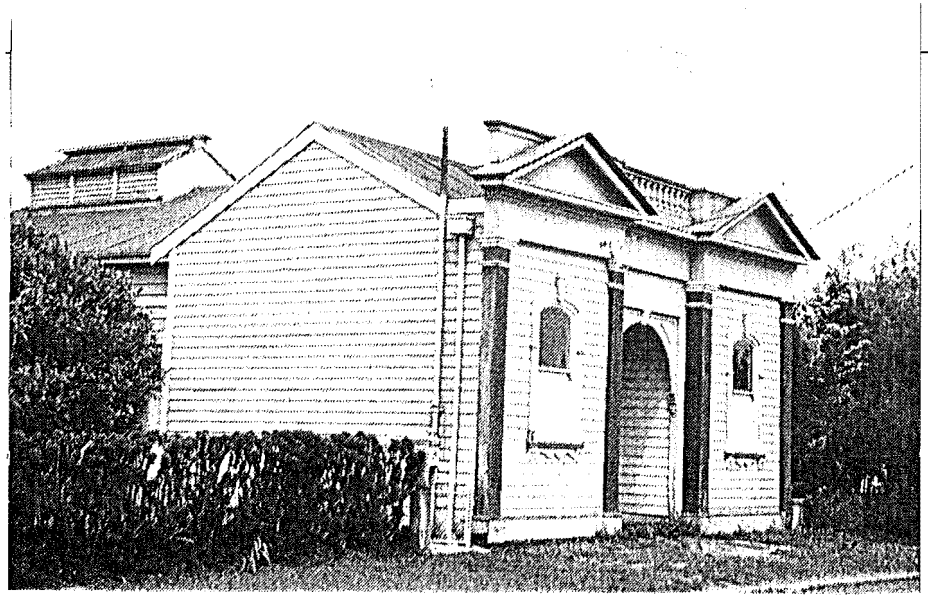
the pavement is thronged with friends and acquaintances and the pubs and restaurants are full of smoke and conversation. The young people cruise up and down the street in Holdens or Falcons and congregate round lamposts or street corners looking at one another.

The main street is a landscape for the automobile and the consumer, two of the fundamental features of our society. The automobile is our primary means of transport, almost every home in New Zealand has one. (8) This is especially emphasized in service towns for rural areas and satellite towns for cities, and many small New Zealand towns, including Cambridge, fall into these categories. The main public space is structured around the automobile. Cumberland describes the main street,

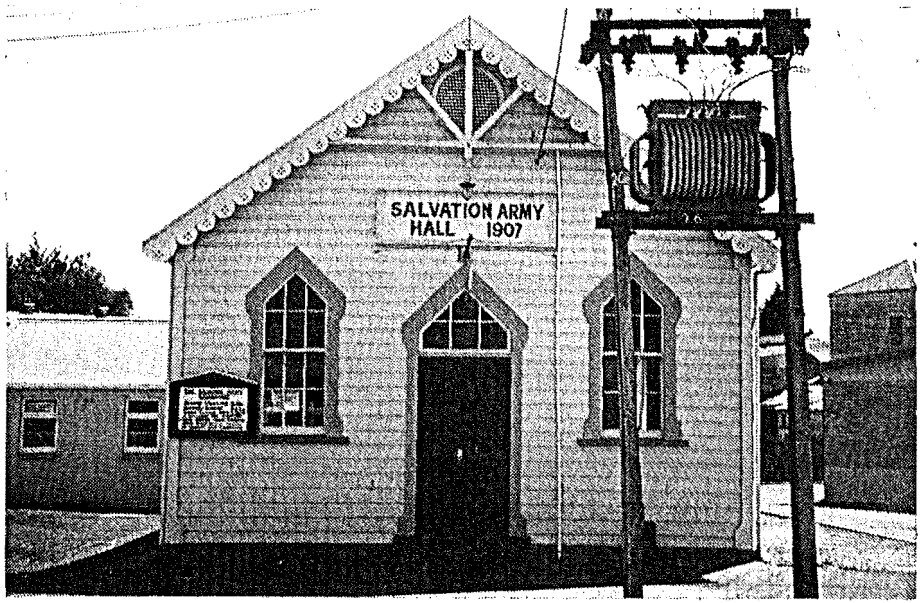
> "Occasionally a lesser road, a minor axis, crosses the main thoroughfare, or the main road itself forks at one end. But very rarely does any other accessway detract from the concentration of activity along the main street. Broad enough to take scores of carts, traps, gigs, drays and coaches in the old days, now it has angle parking for cars,



A door - Main Street, Cambridge.



Former Bank facade, Alpha Street, Cambridge.



A Gothic shorthand - Salvation Army Hall, Cambridge.

utilities and light trucks beside both kerbs or down the centre." (9)

While the wide roads were originally constructed for quite different reasons they have adapted easily to the automobile. In the cities the density and volume of traffic might make this impossible, but it is the obvious solution for a small town.

Buildings

Banks are prominent features in New Zealand towns, and probably towns worldwide. In Peru and Ecuador banks are conspicuous by their relative modernity and ostentation in towns where the norm is poorly maintained older buildings. In countries where inflation is measured by the month, a bank's image of reliability and competence is even more important than here, or is it just a sign that looking after people's money is a profitable business? Many of the older New Zealand banks sport heavy classical facades suggesting solidity, certainty, and no-nonsense. In Cambridge most of these have gone with the times and the banks now hide in modern glass and concrete boxes showing that while perhaps not quite as dignified they are at least progressive.

There are seven churches in Cambridge. In New Zealand towns the characteristic church architecture

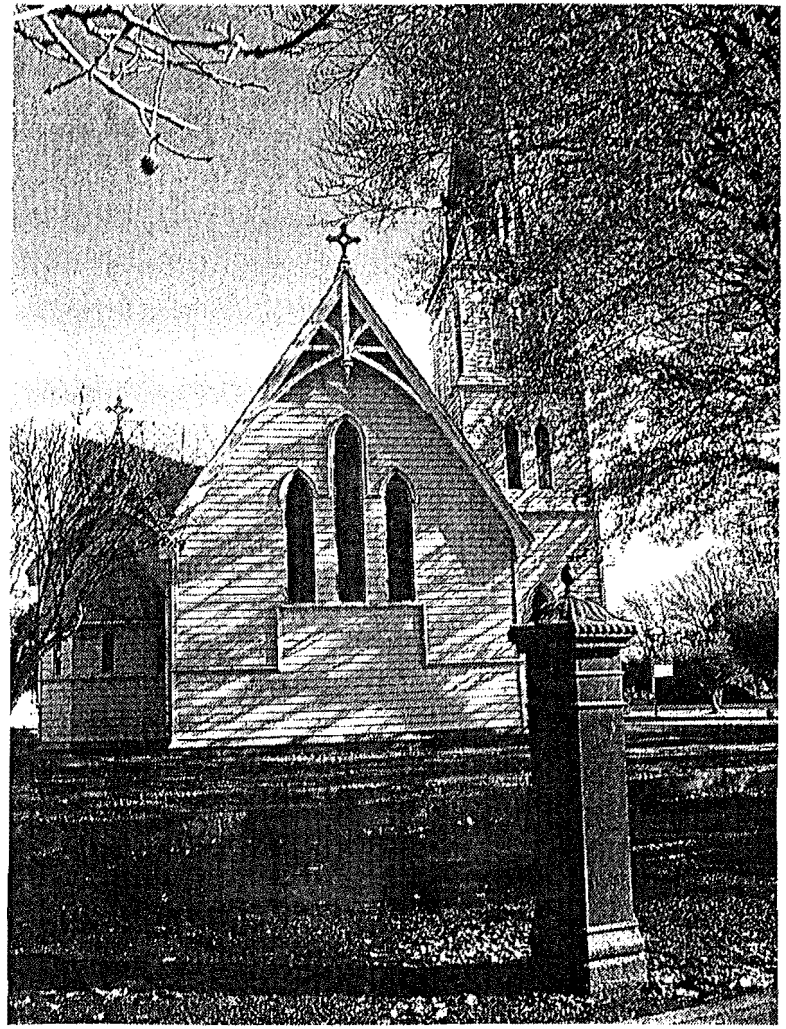
has been in the neo-gothic style. Robin Hall observes a similar phenomenon in Australian country towns,

> "Religion has played a strong role in the development of Australian education so ecclesiastical buildings and schools together appear in Gothic garb, while public buildings appear in classical robes." (10)

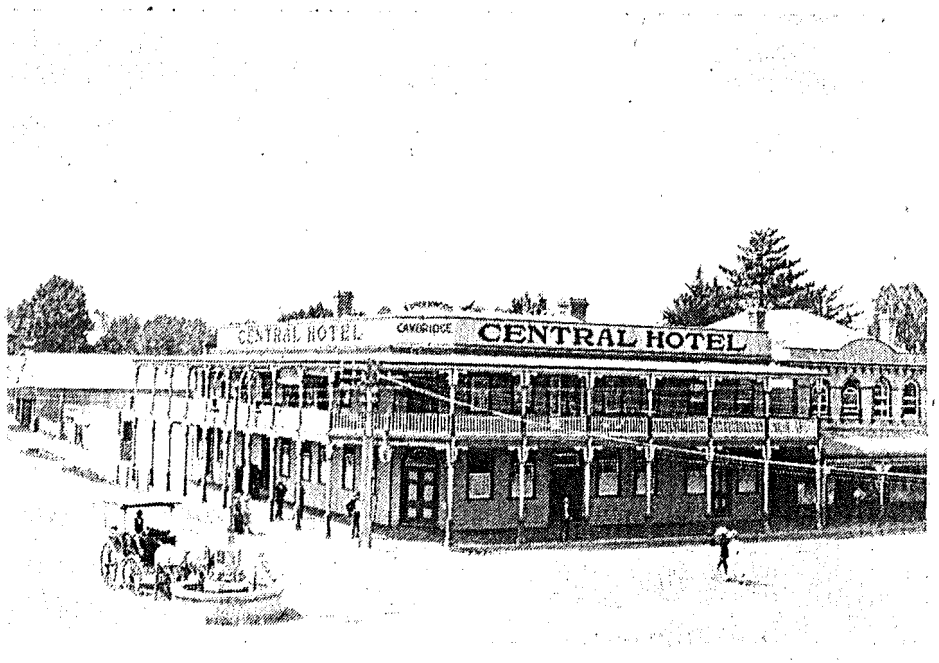
Often even the simplest of religious buildings has a gothic shorthand revealing its inner nature.

Of all the public buildings the churches are the most likely not to be on the main street, perhaps their patronage is at different times and for reasons other than convenience. Many of the modern churches have departed from the gothic style, but there is something unmistakable about the sight of a spire in the distance. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that "When we look at a landscape and see a church spire at the end of a tree-lined road...our mind has integrated, with little conscious effort, diverse clues and experiences to give a rich meaning to that image." (11) And the bells of the Church of England still call the faithful on a Sunday morning.

Frequently a convent school is huddled alongside the Roman Catholic church. The churches played a major part in education in the early years



St. Andrews Church, Cambridge (built 1882).



The Central Hotel in the early 1900's. Note the corner site, two storeyed verandas, and covered ground floor windows.

of New Zealand's colonisation, and today 5% of the primary and 15% of the post-primary pupils in New Zealand attend religious or private schools, predominantly run by the Catholic church. (12)

The pubs are notable features in the main street. Traditionally and through legislation the sale of liquor has been linked with the provision of accommodation. In pre-automobile times the availability of accommodation was a basic necessity for travellers covering any large distances. Michael Fowler argues that the association "allowed successive legislative acts to browbeat the licensed trade to provide and upgrade accommodation for travellers over the ensuing century, (after 1842) but additionally, it created in the public mind a dependant relationship between premises which sold liquor and provided accommodation." (13) The association is obvious in the older pubs, they were typically a "two-floored building, fronted by a double veranda, with the public room and bars on the ground floor and bedrooms above." (14)

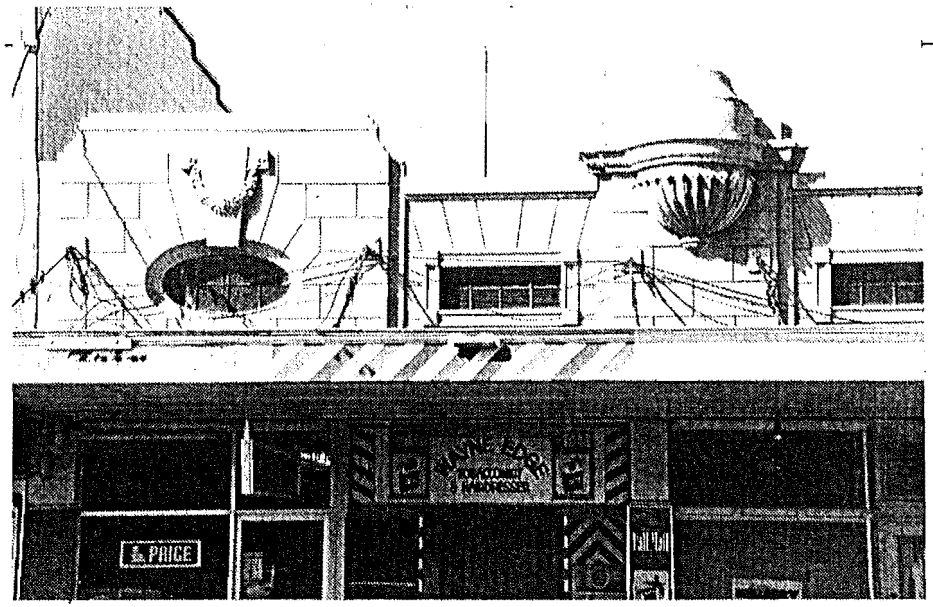
The pubs have flourished as a social institution, male-dominated they maintain the "mateship" camaraderie common in New Zealand society that originally developed in the face of a harsh physical environment. (15) This role is reflected in what

David Mitchell refers to as "the grand corner pub" (16). These buildings are often large and well-maintained, and the corner site gives better access and visibility.

But their social position has not been uncontested. The Temperance League was strong throughout New Zealand around the turn of the century. In Cambridge they watched the despised drinking establishments for any irregularities. They particularly incensed patrons by seizing and interrogating a child leaving the National Hotel about the behaviour of those inside. (17)
Many travellers stayed in boarding houses rather than the dens of iniquity, and in 1917 six o'clock closing was introduced, leading to the infamous six o'clock swill. The hangover from this movement is still with us, evident in the inward-turned nature of the pubs and the characteristic frosted glass ground-floor windows shielding innocent passers-by from the excesses within.

Traditionally the Post Office has been the focus of government authority in a New Zealand town. It does everything from registering your birth and death to registering your car, as well as being the centre of communication. The Post Office itself is usually a dignified building in a prime location

Cambridge Post Office - little in this life is beyond its control.



The abstracted remnants of the striped barbers pole, Main Street, Cambridge.

A juxtaposition of the old and new pharmaceutical ornamentation, Main Street, Cambridge.

on the main street as befits its status and the respect due. The New Zealand flag waves above it, legitimizing its position. The original Post Office in Cambridge was a grandiose piece of Victorian architecture which was demolished after being damaged in an earthquake in 1931. Its replacement has a suitably formal and restrained air, and the sign outside reminds us that little is beyond its regulation.

In between these key buildings is a matrix of small shops and offices, spatially undistinguished but with their own traditional forms of ornamentation. David Mitchell suggests "In the *ordinary* architecture of the New Zealand street there is a language we all understand. It is a pastiche, with sources that are mainly English or American, made unique by adaptation to the local culture." (18) The striped barbers pole and the painted mural of fish on the fish shop wall are conventionally understood. Traditionally, the pharmacy was denoted by a mortar and retort, but in a business where the most up-to-date product is the best, quaint old-fashioned pharmacies do not have the selling power. The dairy boasts a large "7 Day" sign, a window packed with notices and advertisements, a couple of sandwich boards on the pavement and a waste basket on the nearest pole. Occasionally discrete gold lettering indicates a lawyers or accountants office

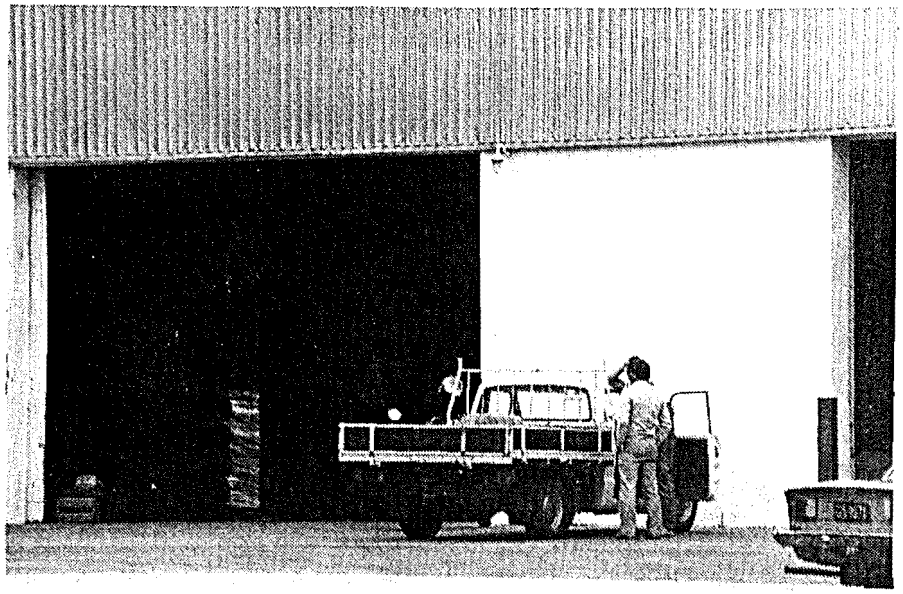
among the vacant second floor windows. They are everyday forms we understand immediately and unconsciously in our everyday experience.

The Strip

A gathering place which is frequently misunderstood and vilified is the strip development. In New Zealand towns the strip is located either alongside the main road at the outskirts of the town or beside the railway siding if there is one. It consists of a ribbon of garages, engineers, panel-beaters, timber and machinery yards, new and used car lots, stock and station agents, fitters and turners and perhaps some light industry. It is a public space built around the automobile, all the services and shops have individual drive on access and parking, their signs and billboards are intended to be read from a moving car, and it is here that the automobiles themselves are bought and sold, serviced and repaired.

The buildings themselves are usually functional, unadorned, concrete block and corrugated iron affairs, but the signs and facades are eye-catching and gaudy, characterized by their large size and bright colours. The trip is a centre of technology and associated service skills for the rural community and for passing travellers. It is here we can find the brightly

A second storey solicitor's office, Main Street, Cambridge.



Stock and Station Agent, Cambridge. Note the concrete block and corrugated iron building with parking out the front.

coloured mechanical farm equipment and irrigation systems, the construction firms and timberyards, the fertilizer and pesticide suppliers, as well as the specialized skills and knowledge to use and repair these items.

While it is often an eyesore we would be missing an important part of the landscape if we wrote it off. Ugly it may be but it is an essential part of a service town, an area of vitality and the interchange of ideas, a place where things get done. The main highway is the obvious site for the strip, to the farmers and travellers it is the way they come into town, and it gives the garages and services direct access to the passing public.

J.B. Jackson said of the Mid-West strip "I know of no more vital area in the town, and a well-equipped, well-planned, versatile strip is what these new towns depend on to attract outsiders and to maintain contact with the rural economy." (19)

Other Spaces

There is a great richness and variety of public spaces in our towns, spaces we take for granted but where people come together to interact and participate. J.B. Jackson suggests "The sports arena...is where we demonstrate local loyalties - loudly as the Greeks

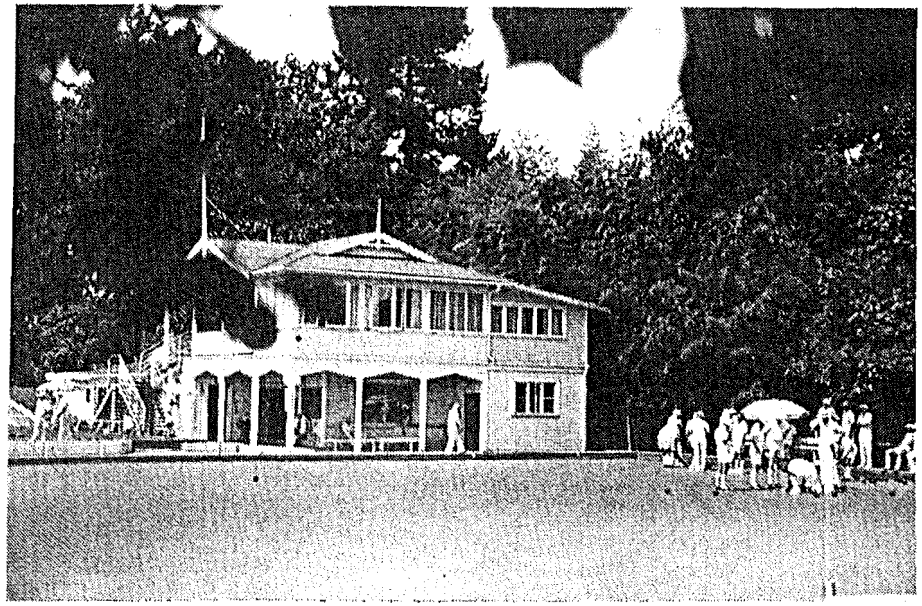
would have done and with gestures." (20)
Characteristic sports arenas in New Zealand towns are race tracks, golf courses, bowling greens and playing fields.

The golf courses are oases of typical English landscape straight from Capability Brown, with their green sward framed by clumps of trees, with artificial lakes and controlled vistas. This type of landscape fits one of our cultural ideals, our images of archetypal landscapes. J.B. Jackson calls these ideal landscapes *proto-landscapes* and argues

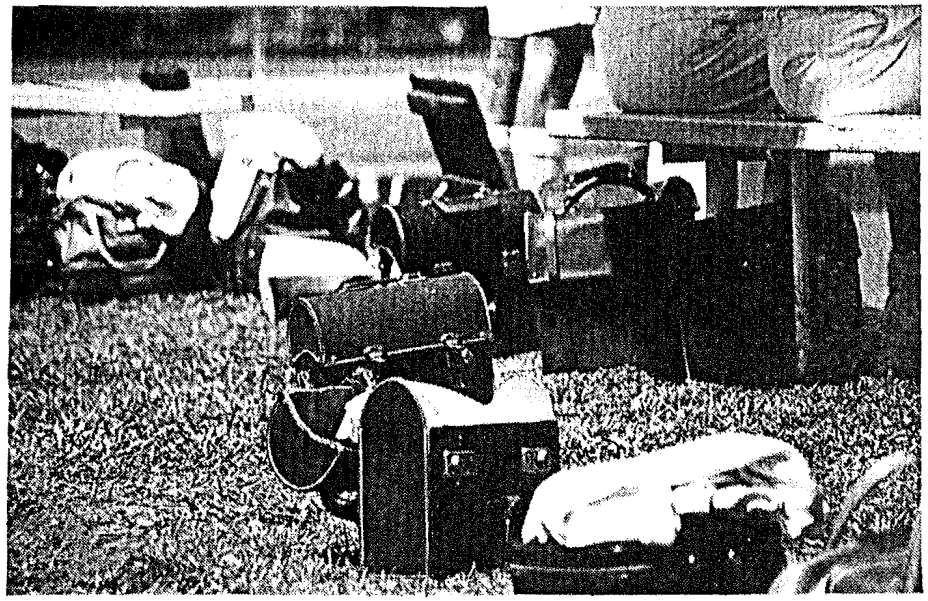
> "Such was the countryside of our remoter forebears; such was the original, the proto-landscape which we continue to remember and cherish, even though for each generation the image becomes fainter and harder to recall." (21)

Such an idyllic landscape is part of the appeal of the sport.

Racecourse stands have a characteristic form, distinguishable at any scale, with tiered seats and a roof either cantilevered or supported by posts. The oval tracks and stands are clearly distinguishable on aerial photos throughout the country (see page 21 the Cambridge Trotting Club track is visible in the upper left hand corner).



The bowling green, Cambridge.

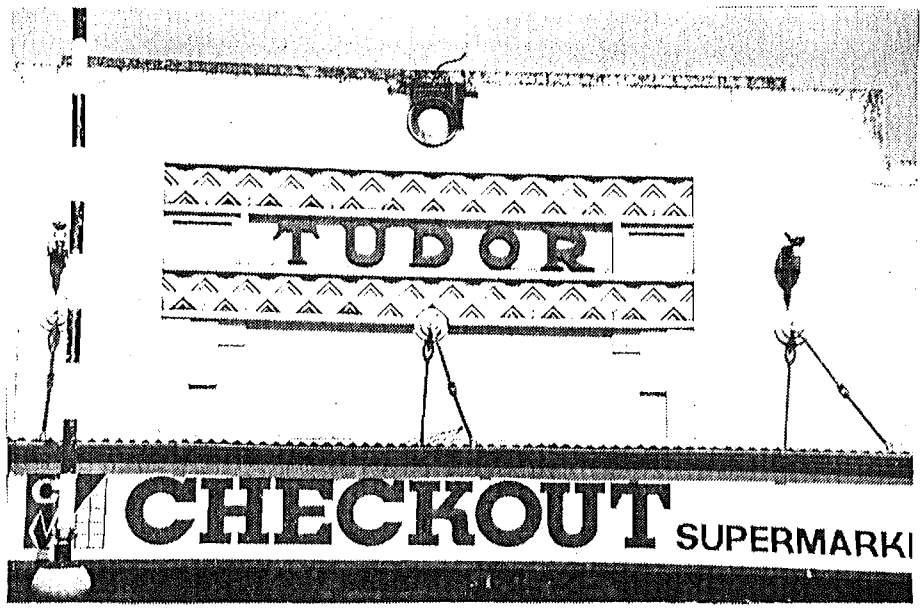


The bowling green, Cambridge.

The racetrack is deserted most of the year, apart from the occasional trainer exercising their horses. On some of the smaller courses there is only one meeting each year, but it is then that the space comes alive with the energy and excitement, the smells and sounds of raceday. Playing fields are other public landscapes which function as such for relatively short periods at distinctive times. It is usually on sunny summer weekends we hear the crack of a cricket ball and watch the measured running of the batsmen. And those cold grey winter Saturdays when we see a lazily spiralling oval ball above a wall of spectators on the sideline. The majority of the time they are deserted paddocks, left to the lawnmowers.

In many rural service towns an essential public space is the stockyards. Cumberland observes "The pens and walkways and parking areas are forlorn and deserted much of the time. But on sale day they are crowded and noisy with the fearful bellowing of cattle and the confident thundering of the auctioneer." (22) Although empty and unused most of the time they are an important space in the functioning of the local economy, usually found near the railway siding or just off the main highway approach.

J.B. Jackson suggests "It is next to impossible to enumerate all the new spaces we are using and enjoying together. Wherever we look we see a new one: the cluster of campers in a recreation area, the Sunday meetings of classic car buffs in the empty parking lots of supermarkets," (23) flea markets, and community classes in the local high school; all of them public, and fulfilling a variety of needs in our society.



A shopfront, Main Street, Cambridge.

Footnotes

1. Robin Hall, "An Australian Country Townscape", Landscape, Vol.24, No.2, p.42.
2. J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, p.16.
3. As quoted op.cit., footnote 1, p.42.
4. Keith Sinclair, A History of New Zealand, rev.ed., p.233.
5. Quoted in ibid., p.232.
6. Quoted in op.cit., footnote 1, p.42.
7. Cumberland, Landmarks, p.254.
8. Michael Fowler, Buildings of New Zealand, p.13.
9. Op.cit., footnote 7, p.254.
10. Op.cit., footnote 1, p.43.
11. Yi-Fu Tuan "Thought and Landscape", The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, ed. D.W. Meinig, p.96.
12. Op.cit., footnote 8, p.54.
13. Ibid., p.157.
14. Ibid., p.157.
15. Robin Hall points to a similar phenomenon in Australia, op.cit., footnote 1, p.42.
16. David Mitchell, The Elegant Shed, p.11.
17. Sally Parker, Cambridge: an Illustrated History 1886-1986, p.43.
18. Op.cit., footnote 16, p.12.
19. Op.cit., footnote 2, p.80.
20. Ibid., p.20.
21. J.B. Jackson, "Ghosts at the Door" Changing Rural Landscapes, ed. Zube & Zube, p.43.
22. Op.cit., footnote 7, p.255.
23. Op.cit., footnote 2, p.20 .

The Dwelling

The dwellings in Cambridge are almost indistinguishable from those in any other New Zealand town of a similar age. They are mainly detached, single family houses on generous sections, interspersed with the occasional multiunit rows of flats at right angles to the road to take advantage of long narrow sections. In contrast Zelinsky suggests that the dwellings of a typical Pennsylvanian town include significant numbers of terrace and duplex housing. (1) The houses in New Zealand towns are in a mixture of imported styles, the Georgian cottage, the Italianate villa, the Art Deco flat, the Californian bungalow, and more recently a variety of facades, the Spanish mission, the Tudor mansion, the American log cabin, the neo-colonial cottage or the Swiss chalet. (2) Almost all of these styles are purely ornamental, facades over a ubiquitous light timber frame. In recent times especially, the facade bears little relationship to the means of construction or the actual load-bearing structure.

David Mitchell suggests that fashion is responsible for the range of styles

> "We intimately associate the image of our houses with our conceptions of ourselves, just as most of us take some care over what we wear, and even over what we drive.

Tudor style house, Cambridge.

> We are extremely susceptible to the influence of fashions engineered by merchants sensitive to the anxieties of the clientele." (3)

It is easy to dismiss it as something frivolous or unimportant, yet fashion is a cultural phenomena and if we can understand the fashionable landscapes of our society we can begin to understand the relationship of the land and society. Pierce Lewis argues

> "Different cultures possess different tastes in cultural landscape; to understand the roots of taste is to understand much of the culture itself." (4)

This range of styles seems to represent a series of idealized landscapes, or a series of archtypical relationships between people and the land. The styles are not representative of real landscapes, the difference between the real and the idealized is often significant as Meinig points out in the case of Walpole, a village in New Hampshire. He describes two views of Walpole, the symbolic picture postcard of the well-to-do and visitors, and harsh economic situations of the local businessmen and workers. (5) The styles are fantasies, idealized landscapes and associated lifestyles. Mark Wigley recognizes "the importance of the facade - a way of creating a

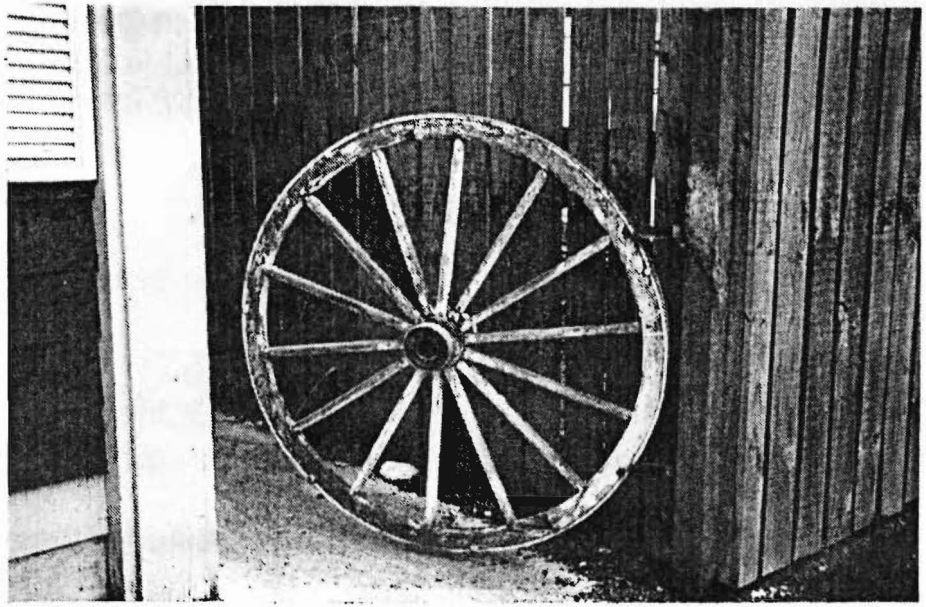
fantasy," (6) and suggested of a Spanish-mission style hotel in Pahia that "a night spent here is a night in a Spanish fantasy." (7) His description of "a floating version of the old favourite, the alpine chalet," (8) leaves us in little doubt as to the realism of the fantasies. The styles are symbolic of the mythologies of our culture, signs representing archetypal landscapes.

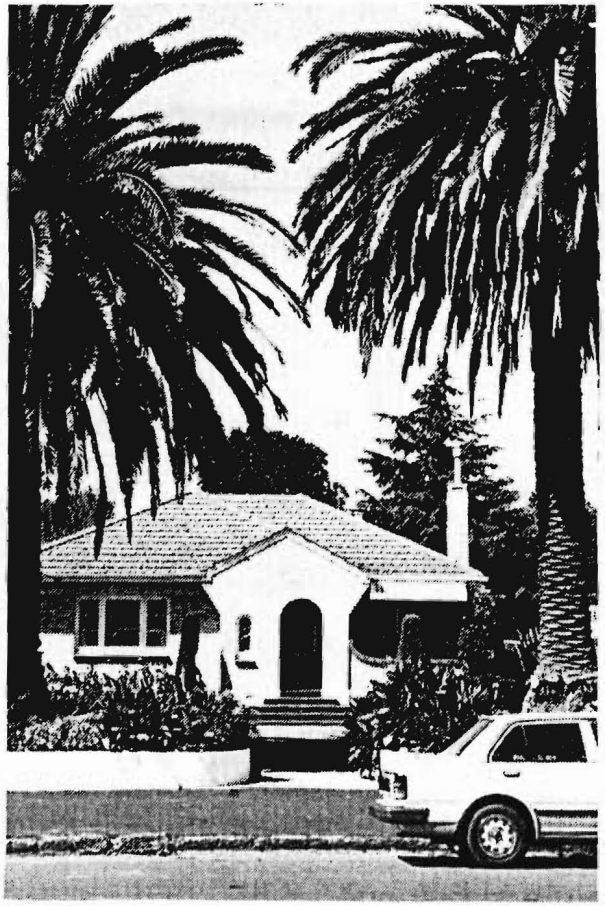
Rod Barnett suggests of the first Pakeha colonists in New Zealand

> "the settlers did not, to their dismay,
> find a Garden of Eden in New Zealand.
> They had to make it." (9)

He sees the distinction between what was familiar, the mother country, and what was other, the New Zealand wilderness. Their houses and gardens were cut out of the wilderness to create something familiar, something knowable. The housing styles were a part of this cultural baggage, imported from England and Australia, the Georgian cottages and Italianate villas were part of an attempted recreation of a European landscape.

Distance and time have made the home country the 'other' and the new country 'familiar'. So that now David Mitchell suggests "Perhaps the instantly antique neo-Colonial house owed its popularity in the late 1970's to that public taste for nostalgia that blossoms





House, Cambridge.

during periods of national economic insecurity." (10) Now it is an idealized colonial landscape which we turn to for the security of the familiar. However, the popularity of the Tudor style houses suggests that we have not completely let go of archetypal English landscapes yet.

The Californian bungalow was an import from the United States, a building style often associated with a particular functionalist garden style. More than just a style of building it symbolized a modern lifestyle and associated landscape, pushed by the new powerful mass medium, the cinema, and produced by the Hollywood movie industry. Meinig characterises the lifestyle as

> "featuring relaxed enjoyment of each day in casual indoor-outdoor living, with an accent upon individual gratification, physical health, and pleasant exercise....The patio, swimming pool, and backyard barbecue furniture, and clothing designed for relaxed daily living.... The automobile was an integral part of this new individualistic, informal, immediate life-style." (11)

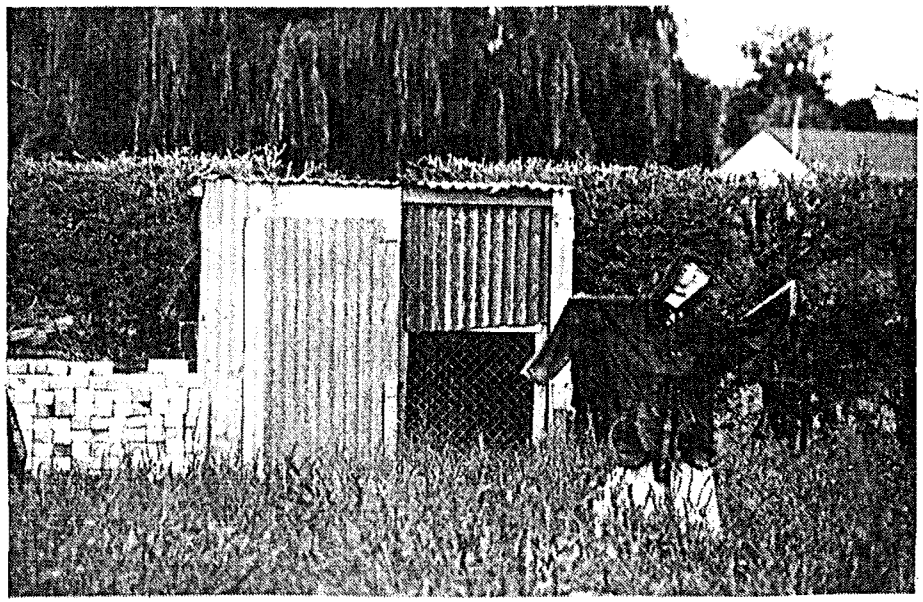
He goes on to suggest that the landscape associated with this way of life has become a symbolic one, one spread world-wide by Hollywood, even though today the

suburb has become a tarnished image, regarded more with loathing than love.

Two housing styles which may be peculiar to New Zealand, and which have become symbolic of a certain lifestyle/landscape, are the old corrugated iron and weatherboard lean-to baches with the water tank and and outside dunny; (12) and the unpainted timber house with a steeply pitched roof and native garden fitted to hillsides with poles or multilevels. Neither of these is significant in Cambridge.

The construction and internal subdivision of the typical suburban houses is similar (13), the exteriors a pastiche of styles reflecting our eclectic cultural background, a series of borrowed, or adopted images. Rod Barnett describes this as "suggestive of a desire to enervate cultural forms from without, a desire which masks an inability to engage either presence or place." (14) A series of displaced suburbs throughout New Zealand. On the other hand David Mitchell puts the case for the Kiwi town

> "Smart alecs may sneer at the staple Kiwi house, saying it is just like its neighbour, predictable and boring. But there is more variety in a New Zealand suburban street than in a Himalayan village, or a street of Sydney terrace houses. The detached family house is the world's favourite kind." (15)

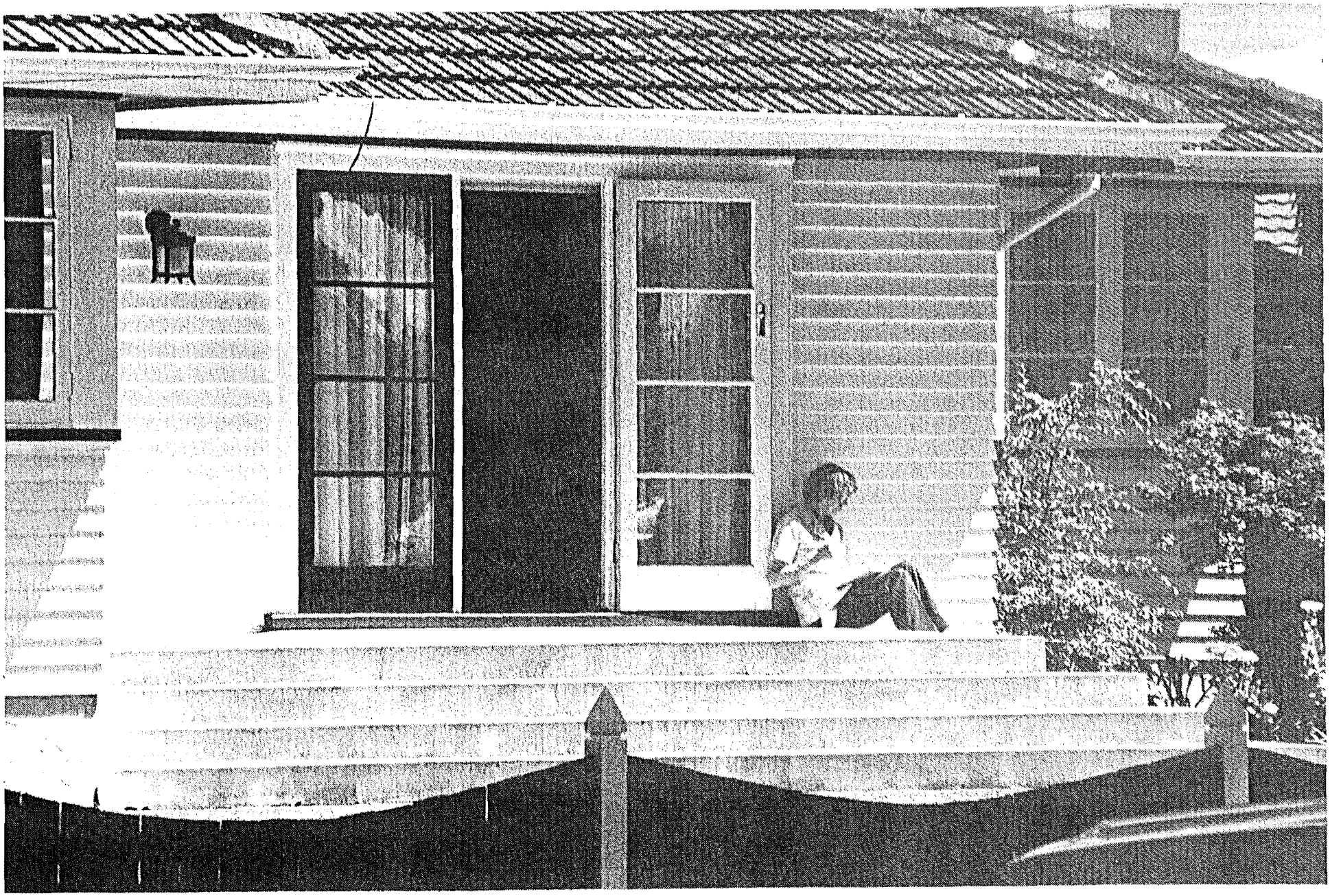


Corrugated iron lean-to, Cambridge.

Footnotes

1. Wilbur Zelinsky, "The Pennsylvanian Town: an overdue geographical account", The Geographical Review, Vol.67, No.2, p.136.
2. For accounts of housing styles in New Zealand and Australia see The Shell Guide to New Zealand, ed. Maurice Shadbolt, pp.36-42, and Robin Hall's "An Australian Country Townscape" Landscape, 24/2, pp.45-48.
3. David Mitchell, The Elegant Shed, p.15.
4. The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, ed. D.W. Meinig, p.17.
5. Ibid., pp.176-7.
6. Mark Wigley quoted from "Architectural Resorts" a programme shown on Kaleidiscope 25/9/87 Channel 1, TVNZ.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Rod Barnett, "House and Garden", Antic 2, 1987, p.74.
10. Op.cit., footnote 3, p.15.
11. Op.cit., footnote 4, p.171.
12. See op.cit., footnote 3, pp.17-21.
13. Ibid., p.14.
14. Op.cit., footnote 9, p.72.
15. Op.cit., footnote 3, p.14.

The Front Yard

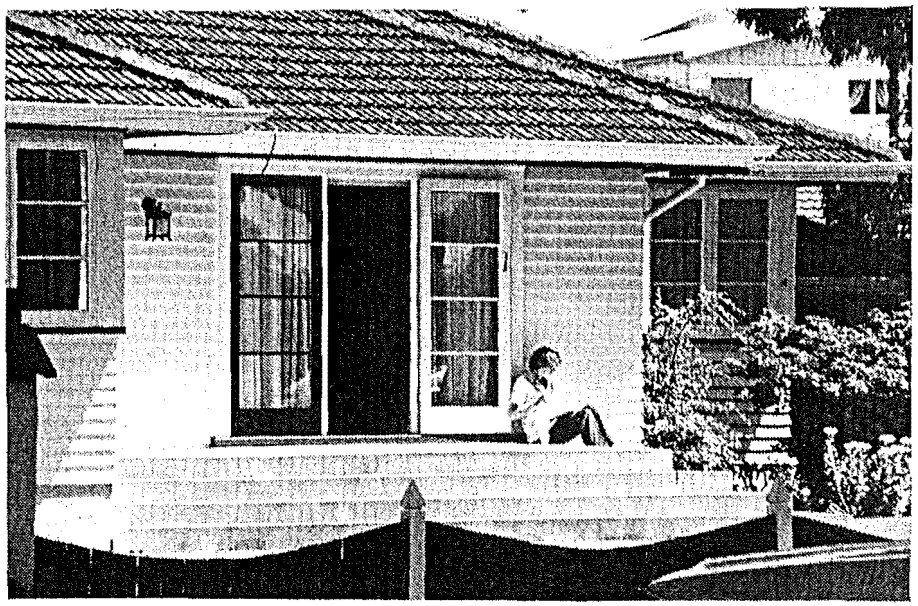


To the passerby in Cambridge, or in almost any other town the length of New Zealand, the private landscape is characterized by the front yard; so common that we are not likely to question its existence. Yet considerable time and energy is spent in creating and maintaining a typical front yard, mowing the lawn, cultivating the garden, creating attractive fences, letterboxes and garden furniture, enough to make one wonder if there is not more to the front yard than meets the eye.

The front yard is defined by boundaries, in one sense they are abstract lines defining property rights, in another they are physical boundaries dividing up spaces. J.B. Jackson suggests "that insofar as every landscape is a composition of spaces it is also a composition or web of boundaries. But here we must be cautious, for boundaries can serve a variety of functions." (1) There seems to me to be two distinct types of boundary around front yards in New Zealand. There are high fences or hedges, usually two metres or more in height, which act as a protective barrier between the private space of the front yard and the public space of the road. In this case the front yard is more closely related to the house, and is commonly used for recreation. The second type of boundary is the low fence or hedge,

Cultivating the front garden, Cambridge.

typically about one metre high, which acts as a demarcation between public and private space, and discourages physical access, but encourages visual access. This type of front yard is typically unused although carefully maintained. J.B. Jackson suggests that "In the contemporary Western world we assume that a boundary is the point (or line) of contact between the two defined spaces, a way of regulating contact and communication with neighbours, even while it protects us against invasion or unwanted entry." (2) These two types of boundary regulate differing amounts of contact with the surrounding spaces. The emphasis of the high fence is on exclusion, it is a defensive boundary allowing limited entry. The low fence regulates a more open interaction, the property is defined, and the passerby discouraged from casually wandering through, but they are invited to view the garden. In this sense the yard is semi-public, it is intended to be a part of the streetscape.



Sitting in the sun and reading, front porch, Cambridge.

The semi-public front yards are typical of Cambridge, and most New Zealand towns, with their low fences and deserted but well kept atmosphere. The yards are relatively spacious, a typical one might measure eight by ten metres. In contrast is the typical Pennsylvanian town where Zelinsky describes "the frequent practice of eliminating the front yard

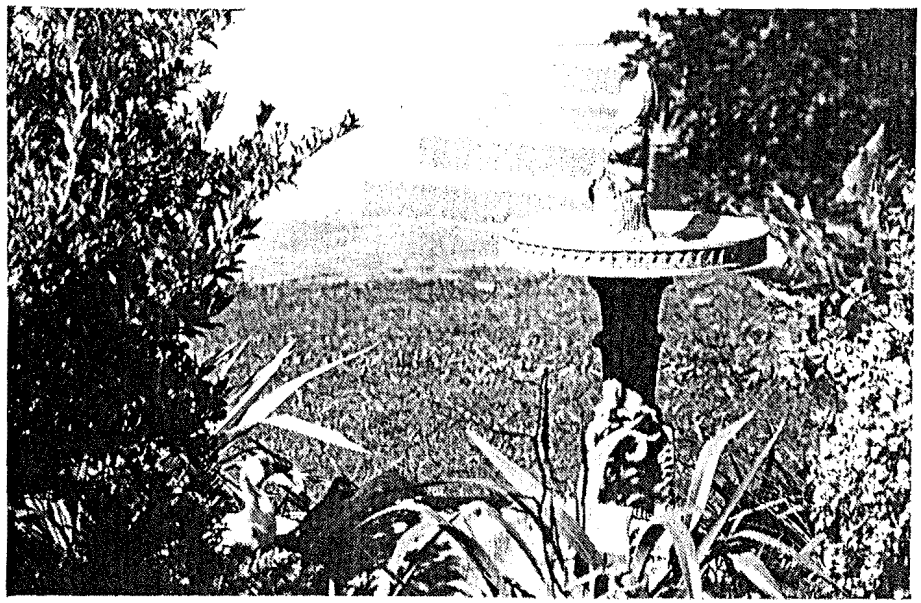
or lawn for dwellings." (3) The family is content to sit on the porch or use the back yard if they want fresh air.

The semi-public New Zealand front yard is seldom used recreationally, apart from gardeners and the occasional soul sitting on the front porch in the sun and reading, they are deserted. The yards create a pleasant environment, but something similar could be created which was less energy intensive if this was the sole reason for its existence. The energy and creativity, the care and money are to create a message which can be read from the road. Christopher Grampp says of the Californian front yard "they reveal few signs of activity. They are just for other people to see." (5)

J.B. Jackson describes the American front yard as a social indicator, "By common consent the appearance of a front yard, its neatness and luxuriance, is an index of the taste and enterprise of the family who owns it. Weeds and dead limbs are a disgrace, and the man who rakes and waters and clips after work is usually held to be a good citizen." (4) The same is undoubtedly true in New Zealand, uncut lawns are a sure sign of lack of moral fibre.

But the front yard as a public statement is more than just an indicator of the moral character

No. 41, Cambridge.



Birdbaths and gnomes, front yard, Cambridge.

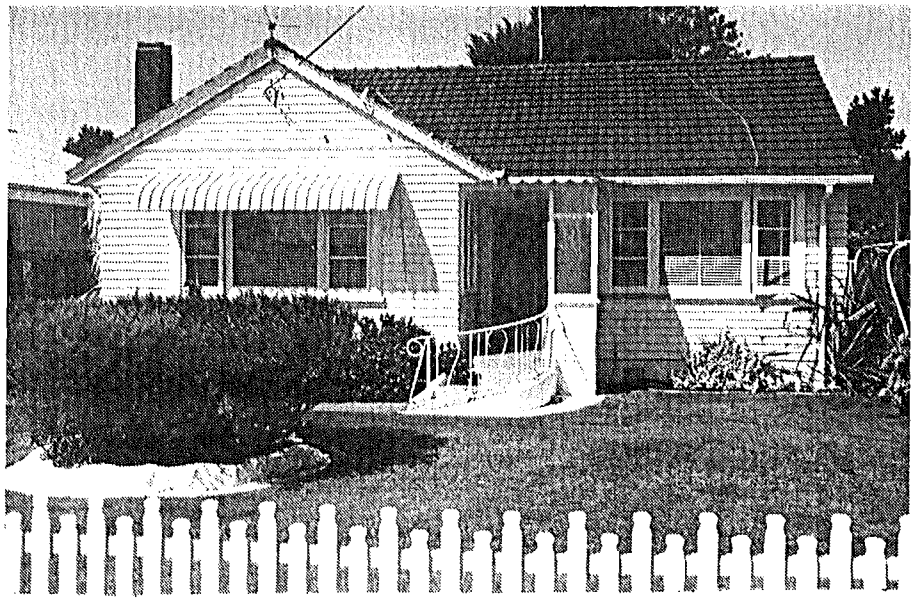
of the owners. It is a message about their personality and their values, but primarily it is a message about beauty. J.B. Jackson suggests that "The true reason why every American house has to have a front yard is probably very simple: it exists to satisfy a love of beauty." (6) It is a form of beauty which is traditional in its nature, the layout of the garden, the plant species, the bird baths, the gnomes and the pergolas are vernacular, things agreed upon by the common people and passed from generation to generation. J.B. Jackson argues "loyalty to a traditional idea of how the world should look is something which we not always take into account when analyzing ourselves or others. Yet it is no more improbable than loyalty to traditional social or economic ideas or to traditional ideas in art." (7) It is more than just a love of beauty, which can be satisfied privately, it is a public statement of what the owner thinks is beautiful.

J.B. Jackson suggests that the traditional front yard is a landscape in miniature. The "proto-landscape" upon which we base our front yard is derived from the lands of our cultural origins, north-western Europe. (8) The protolandscape is an idealized version of the north-western European landscape of the Dark Ages, a landscape of woods, meadow, and strips of cultivation. The front yard with

a few trees, some lawn, and a couple of garden beds is like a reduced version of this protolandscape, a recreation of a cherished but distant ideal. Rod Barnett suggests

> "Because people make conscious attempts to inscribe culture on the land, they make, among other things, the artifacts we have come to call gardens. How and why people make these inscriptions is a matter of the various mythologies which move in and through their societies." (9)

The front yard is where the ordinary person interacts with nature. In our own front garden we can set up whatever sort of relationship with nature that we feel most comfortable in. We might cover it in concrete, or just let it run wild. The grass and gardens of most front yards is recognition of a desire for interaction with nature. But it is an interaction where people are dominant. We control what grows where and how big, everything is trimmed and shaped as we think best, and the undesirable is ruthlessly stamped out with sprays, poisons or brute force. The manicured subdued nature of our front yards is symbolic of our relationship with nature, one where nature is harnessed and controlled for our purposes, where we accept nature on our terms.



Nature tamed, front yard, Cambridge.

Is it art? Front yard, Cambridge.

We might interpret the front yard at its best as a vernacular art form. It possesses many of the attributes of such a form. It is a public statement concerned with aesthetics, but also reflecting human ideals and the relationship of humans with the environment. An art form which is non-elitist and vernacular in its forms and values.

Footnotes

1. J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, p.13.

2. Ibid., p.13.

3. W. Zelinsky, "The Pennsylvanian Town: an Overdue Geographical Account" Geographical Review, Vo..67, No.2, p.131.

4. J.B. Jackson, "Ghosts at the Door" Changing Rural Landscapes, eds. Zube & Zube, p.42.

5. Christopher Grampp, "Gardens for California Living" Landscape, Vol.28, No.3, 1985.

6. Op.cit., footnote 4, p.42.

7. Ibid., p.43.

8. Ibid., pp.43-6.

9. Rod Barnett, "House and Garden," Antic, 2, p.69.

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"the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and to tell what it saw in a plain way." (1)

My intention has not been to provide a definitive guide to the New Zealand town. Rather I have studied historical and contemporary accounts and images, made my own observations and sketches, and taken photos and from this I have tried to construct a coherent account of a New Zealand town as I understand it. I have been concerned with the typical rather than the unusual. In this age of science it is easy to look at a set of quantified indices, at statistics and plans and to lose sight of the landscape as a real three dimensional thing we interact with and live in. If nothing else, this work is a plea to see and to reflect upon our own experiences, to strive to understand and not to be content with the superficial or the taken for granted. Peirce Lewis suggests that "One can...quite literally teach oneself to see" (2) and that this is an end in itself. He goes on to say that "the alternation of looking and reading, and thinking...can yield remarkable results, if only to raise questions we had not asked before. Indeed, that alternation may also teach us more than we had ever dreamed: that there is order in the landscape where we had seen only bedlam before. That may not be the road to salvation, but it may be the road to sanity." (3) These abilities of observation and self reflection are ones which are undervalued and little practiced in our society. Jusuck Koh suggests that the scientific positivism, which is characteristic of our society seems to have led to a situation where "the tangible, measureable and observable were emphasized over the intangible, immeasureable and unobservable, and the investigative study over the reflective one." (4) This study is an attempt to redress this imbalance in a small part.

The Common Landscape

In order to consciously use cultural symbols and meanings, in order to consciously attempt to design a landscape which is relevant to our culture and addresses our society's lifestyle and problems, we need to have some understanding of the relationship which is revealed in the common

landscape. Thus Jusuck Koh writes advocating that the attention of the designer should be "not so much on the environment as product as on the interrelationship between humans and their environment" and goes on to say that it is just as important to explain "why a building or landscape takes the form it takes" as to describe "what comprises the building or landscape and how good it is." (5)

Rod Barnett suggests the need for studies of cultural meanings and symbolism in the landscape. "In order to limn landscapes own meanings and to discover how they work, both designers and interpreters...must proceed by way of a frame of reference which permits landscape its own effective presence." (6) A study of the common landscape is one of the ways we can start to understand these meanings and the symbolism of the landscape, and to participate consciously in the landscape relationship.

An example of the failure of designers to understand the common landscape, is our obsession with plazas. Robert Venturi argues that "architects have been bewitched by a single element in the Italian landscape: the piazza".(7) Yet although we build places they fail to live up to our expectations, they don't recreate the atmosphere of the Italian piazza or of the South American plaza that we had dreamed of. It is because the Italian piazza and the South American plaze are more than paved spaces in the centre of the town, they are a part of a culture. The landscape we yearn for is the interaction of the community and the plaza, not the space itself. J.B. Jackson writes "my objection to the contemporary American plaza derives from a suspicion that most of its proponents do not really understand what it is. They think of it as an environment, a stage set, yet it has always been something much more worthwhile than that. It was, and in many places still is, a manifestation of the local social order, of the relationship between citizens and between citizens and the authority of the state." (8)

But while we may have rejected the plaza as an important element of our political and social lives, other public spaces are thriving and well. The New Zealand main street is the armature of our public lives. A place where our consumer oriented society can interact, around

our dominant form of transport, the automobile. As J.B. Jackson says of American society "It is hardly necessary to point to the importance of the automobile in our life, and in rural or semirural areas our dependance on the automobile is magnified." (9) While it may be desirable or even necessary to pedestrianize shopping streets in the cities, it is a move which can easily backfire in the smaller towns, especially if we fail to recognize and cater for the needs of an automobile based society. As David Mitchell says

> "The main street of the New Zealand town is more convenient and is more fun with cars cruising through it, than it is blocked off as a pedestrian mall, sparsely populated, and generally crudely detailed." (10)

An empathy with the common landscape can suggest design opportunities. The strip is one of the most underrated and vilified pieces of our landscape, yet it is one which offers many opportunities for a designer with a sympathy and understanding for the people and the aspects of our society which exist there. J.B. Jackson suggested of the American strip "we can if we choose transform these approaches into avenues of gaiety and brilliance, as beautiful as any in the world." (11)

The common landscape is a warning as well, a warning against simple-minded solutions and utopian dreams. Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that "Dire consequences ensue when that dream is set prematurely in concrete." (12) Although we naturally yearn for an ideal landscape, the temptation to oversimplify and to gloss over the complexity of human nature and society is one to be wary of. Tuan argues that "As we let our thoughts wander and then refocus them on the landscape, we learn to see not only how complex and various are the ways of human living, but also how difficult it is to achieve anywhere a habitat consonant with the full potential of our being." (13) It is also a warning against a recurring fallacy, the suggestion that social and psychological problems can be solved by somehow manipulating the physical environment rather than tackling the fundamental social and political issues involved. Changing the landscape in a

significant way probably involves fundamentally changing our social system. Meinig suggests that

> "if we want to change the landscape in important ways we shall have to change the ideas that have created and sustained what we see. And the landscape so vividly reflects really fundamental ideas that such change requires far-reaching alterations in the social system." (14)

Understanding the common landscape of New Zealand is a step towards being able to express our own cultural values. Rod Barnett holds the "paradoxically it seems that the more (professionally) designed a garden has been in this country the less it has looked like a New Zealand garden." (15) It may be because most of the teaching in design schools has been drawn directly from overseas sources and we have not articulated our own identity. It is important to realize that a Kiwi landscape will not emerge through using New Zealand plants, materials and forms, but through the design expressing a harmonious relationship between New Zealanders and their land. Rod Barnett argues that "the singularity of its expression (the New Zealand Garden) is to be discovered not in its constitutive elements but in its design." (16) Studying the common landscape of New Zealand is part of understanding our own relationship with our land. In understanding the New Zealand landscape we can start, as designers to consciously participate in the continuing relationship/dialogue between our culture and the land.

Footnotes

1. John Ruskin, quoted in Environmental Perception and Behaviour, eds. Saurinen, Seamon and Sell, p.222.
2. The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, ed. D.W. Meinig, p.27.
3. Ibid., p.27.
4. Jusuck Koh, "Ecological Design: A Post-Modern Design Paradigm of Holistic Philosophy and Evolutionary Ethic" Landscape Journal, Vol.1, No.2, 1982, p.77.
5. Ibid., p.79.
6. Rod Barnett, House and Garden" Antic, 2, p.82.
7. Quoted in J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, pp.17-18.
8. Ibid., p.18.
9. Ibid., p.79.
10. David Mitchell, The Elegant Shed, p.11.
11. J.B. Jackson, Landscapes, p.72.
12. Op.cit., footnote 2, p.101.
13. Ibid., p.101.
14. Ibid., pp.42-43.
15. Op.cit., footnote 6, p.76.
16. Ibid., p.76.

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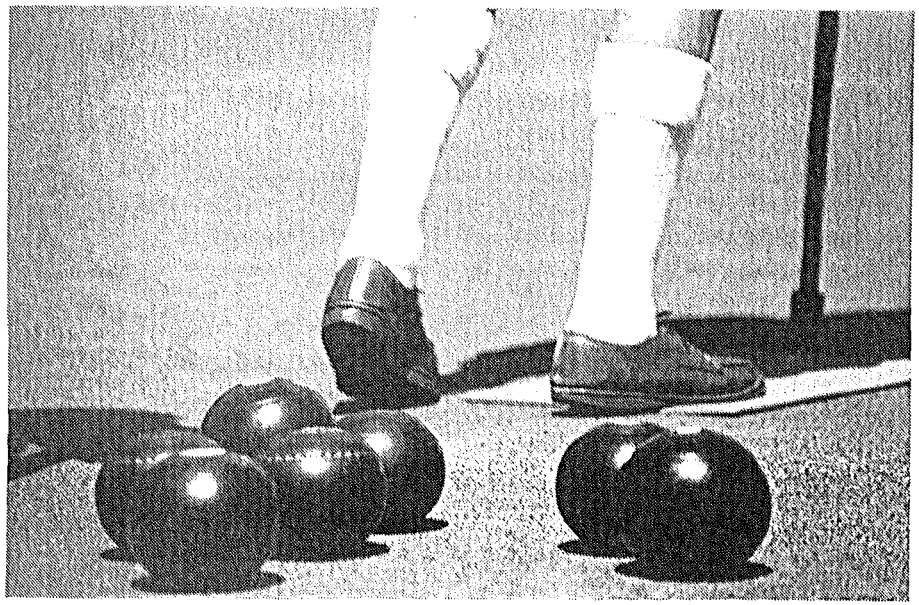
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