

Colour design and conservation of Gummer Ford designed libraries in Auckland, New Zealand: Guidelines and comparison with other notable buildings (1923-28)

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Architect William Gummer (1884-1966) was born in Auckland, New Zealand. He left for the United Kingdom in 1908, studying at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and qualified as an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He notably worked for Sir Edwin Lutyens (and Daniel Burnham of Chicago). Upon his return home he set up the architectural practice “Gummer Ford” in 1923, (with Englishman C.R. Ford, who had travelled as the youngest member of Scott’s Antarctica 1901-04 expedition). The practice produced notable buildings in Auckland, firstly in the Beaux Arts tradition and later in the Modernist idiom. One small treasure is the Remuera Library (opened in 1926), which is clad in red brick cavity construction and some solid plaster rendering to the porticos, along with tall arched steel framed windows that activate the reading spaces. The interiors still retain their timber ceiling beams and panelling, giving a noble atmosphere well suited to the up-market, though conservative, suburb within which it sits. The goal of this research is to reveal the significance of this small architectural gem within the ‘minor’ heritage of New Zealand and to outline a proposal for the conservation of its colours in the near future. This study presents an analysis of the current building colours and a comparison with relevant buildings designed by the same Architectural firm within a similar period, notably: the Grey Lynn Library, (painted brick clad); the Auckland Wintergardens; the Jubilee Institute Building for the Blind Foundation; and the Auckland Railway Station. The research methodology includes a literature review, archival research, as well as on-site study. The latter includes the identification of the aforementioned buildings’ colour palettes of the external façades, by using the NCS Colourpin SE tool. The colour palettes – generated according to the NCS 1950 chart – have been compared with archival material (photos and drawings) to better understand the most appropriate strategy for colour conservation. A comparison with the colour palette of the above latter three (natural brick cladding) buildings provides further insights for conservation strategies. The final colour palettes will be useful to practitioners for future conservation projects of these gems from this period of early New Zealand’s 20th Century architecture. Our results also provide a brief guideline for the colour conservation of the Remuera Library.

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Introduction

An important milestone for establishing public libraries in Auckland city was set in motion by local bookbinder - William Ley, with his idea of encouraging literary pursuits within the inner city and the subsequent opening of The Ley’s Institute Library in St Mary’s Bay, (Ponsonby), Auckland, New Zealand, in March 1905. Then, as each city suburb merged with Auckland City, the council reciprocated by extending its library service into that district.

The residents of Remuera, (many of whom were opposed to an amalgamation with Auckland), were appeased when they were given a wooden building as a library in October 1915. Then, in 1926 that timber building was replaced by a new brick building designed by Gummer Ford Architects [1]. The new building still sits with its long (north) facing elevation onto Remuera Road, and its shorter (west) facing elevation onto the side street - St. Vincent Avenue.

The main entry into the Remuera Library is via a rather grand portico from Remuera Road, (comprising of solid plaster finished circular and square columns). Entering the main space, one surprisingly steps immediately into library space itself, (compared to the Grey Lynn Library with its tight entry vestibule). The Children's section is to the East, and the reading room to the West. The height of these spaces is 5.1m, (with down-stand beams at 4.875m AFFL), the light entering both flanking spaces is via pairs of arched steel joinery windows (like those of Grey Lynn Library). The Office space was originally in the middle, (it is now tucked behind the Children's area to the East), beyond this main entry space [2]. This middle space also has ceiling height of 5.1m, and like Grey Lynn Library it has high set laylights bringing natural light down into this central area [3]. Originally to the South, (and now behind this mid-space), was a separate 400 seat lecture hall [1], with its own entry from the West off St. Vincent Avenue. This external entry remains, complete with its portico. The wall between this hall space and the library has since been removed (as has the seating). The current ceiling height (and we assume of the original hall) is 5.47m (with down-stand beams at 5.20m AFFL). Originally this "hall" was softly lit (via South facing rectilinear windows) [1,3], rather than the grand arched windows of the North and West Main reading spaces, today, the opening up of this mid-space to the North and South Reading spaces enlarges the whole floor plan area allowing more book and magazine shelves (Figure 1b). This building won Gummer Ford Architects the NZIA Gold Medal award in 1928, "described as finest small library in the nation" [1].



Figure 1a: (left) Remuera Public Library – Main Façade facing Remuera Road, 28.08.2022.

Figure 1b: (right) Former Lecture Hall with West entry, 06.08.2023. Photos by Authors.

Methodology

The research was carried out in two directions following a methodology based on literature review and a field study using a NCS Colourpin SE tool. The literature review, based on various texts and online resources, helped to galvanize the research in its two-pronged approach: namely to establish what the

colour palette of the Remuera Library is, and to compare it with three other buildings designed by Gummer Ford in the 1923-28 period. Relevant colour theories and schemes of that time were also considered in the comparison. It is important to specify that we based our research on the current surface colours of each building, as it is not possible to capture some of the original colours due to the intervening modifications that have occurred over the years. It should also be noted that the buildings we considered in this study all have brick facades which are still the original brick cladding material from the 1920's. To establish the colour palette of each building a field study was carried out using the "Natural Colour System (NCS)" [4] which is the colour model most used by professionals in this field. Surface colours were detected by pressing the NCS Colourpin SE tool directly against each surface and reading the possible matches on the Colourpin software on an adjacent smartphone. The colours have been tabulated via the NCS 1950 chart and the relative RGB values provided by the Colourpin software, (refer below). The Remuera Public Library colour palette has been compared with the colour palettes of three other facades of notable buildings of the same period designed by the same architects. That is, we compared the Remuera Library façade with the painted brickwork of the Grey Lynn Library (1924) and then with other public buildings that have natural brick facades: the Jubilee Institute Building for the Blind Foundation (1926), Auckland Railway Station (1927), and the Auckland Domain Wintergardens (1928).

The Remuera Public Library

The Remuera Public Library's façades are essentially tripartite. They are characterised by a painted plastered base (white) (1), a main body clad with unpainted bricks (2) with white painted steel window frames and an upper fascia with balustraded parapet, plastered and painted in the same colour as the building base (3). The main façade is characterised by its portico (unpainted plaster) with white entry doors. The entire building's envelope presents the same colour scheme. The indoor spaces are painted white with the exposed timber structure of the ceiling and of the internal doors. The colour scheme is relatively simple and less decorated than other public buildings of the period. The current conservation status of the building materials used is generally very good, and the bricks are also of good quality, indicating the relatively high economic budget of the construction. Several colour samples have been taken of the bricks and all of them were very similar, thus indicating the homogeneity of the brick façade and a particular care in the selection of the bricks.

REMUERA PUBLIC LIBRARY (1926)

OUTDOOR				INDOOR			
	NCS 1950	RGB	ELEMENTS		NCS 1950	RGB	ELEMENTS
FACADES	S 1505-G80Y	212,210,193	PAINTED PLASTER: BASE	DOORS	S 0300-N	246,243,239	ENTRY DOOR: NORTH SIDE
	S 2005-Y20R	204,194,178	UNPAINTED PLASTER: PORTICO		S 0500-N	240,237,233	ENTRY DOOR: WEST SIDE (OUTER)
	S 5030-Y50R	144,90,62	BRICK: NORTH SIDE		S 8005-Y80R	69,53,49	ENTRY DOOR: WEST SIDE (INNER)
	S 5030-Y50R	144,90,62	BRICK: EAST SIDE		S 0300-N	246,243,239	DOOR: WEST SIDE
	S 2005-G80Y	201,199,180	WINDOW SILL: PAINTED PLASTER		INDOOR		
	S 0603-G40Y	235,236,226	WINDOW FRAME	MAIN ROOMS	S 1000-N	225,223,221	WALLS
	S 5030-Y80R	136,78,67	DOWNPIPE		S 0500-N	240,237,233	WINDOW FRAME
	S 0502-G	233,236,232	METAL BALUSTRADE (WHITE)		S 6030-Y70R	111,54,35	TIMBER STRUCTURE
	S 8005-R80B	51,55,63	METAL BALUSTRADE (BLACK)		S 6502-G	97,103,101	CARPET

Figure 2: Colour palette of the Remuera Public Library.

Comparison with other notable buildings by the same architects

The other buildings considered in this study were designed and built within just a few years, (between 1926 and 1928). The Grey Lynn Library was built two years earlier (1923-24). Although there are some noteworthy similarities between the two libraries (similar spatial planning and of the interior layout), there are also some substantial differences. The Grey Lynn's brickwork cladding was over painted, whereas the Remuera Library has remained exposed bricks [5]. The roof is also quite different, and the Remuera Library is less decorated, with a less articulated colour palette.

As can be seen from the following tables which collate the colour palettes from three other buildings from the similar period by Gummer Ford, the external colours are in a similar value band range, with just some minor shade variances. This is due primarily to the choice of bricks which may indicate a different budget, for example, for the Domain Wintergardens, where the external bricks are darker than the other ones (Figure 3). Downpipes are always in a similar painted colour to the bricks. The Wintergardens were designed by William Gummer in the early 1900s in the style of the famous English partnership of Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll and was opened in 1913. The Tropical House, designed by the expanded practice of Gummer & Ford, was added in 1928, along with the central courtyard areas [6].

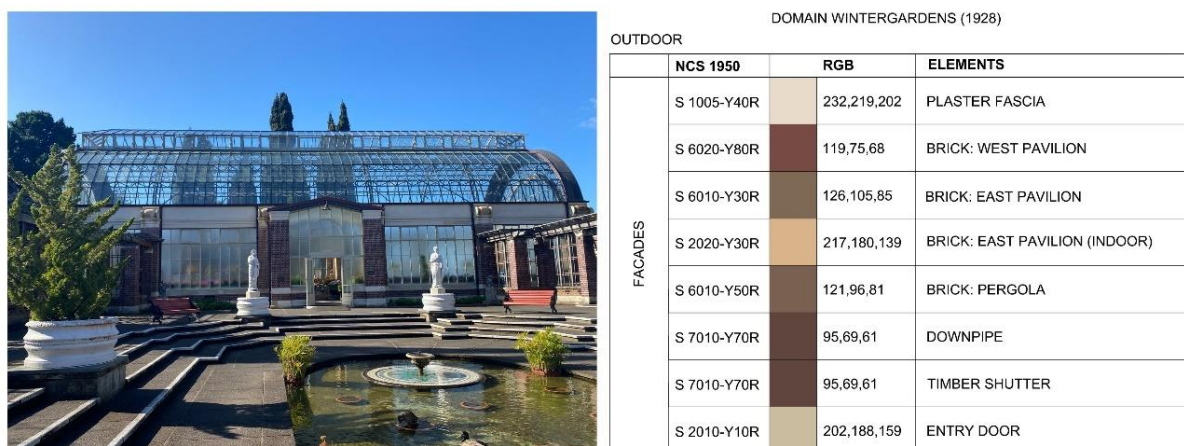


Figure 3a: (left) Domain Wintergarden – East Pavilion, 06.08.2023.

Figure 3b: (right) Colour palette of the Domain Wintergardens. Photos by Authors.

The Jubilee Institute Building for the Blind Foundation introduces “forest green” coloured external doors which is a typical paint of that period [7]. This building was part of a series of additions that Gummer and Ford designed for the original building. The headquarters of the Jubilee Institute for the Blind were in fact designed by Edward Bartley in 1909 and this new L-shaped block was built in 1926 [8]. This same building presents a colour scheme that is very similar to the Remuera Library. Besides the main body of the façade being clad with unpainted clay bricks, porticos are of unpainted plaster and window frames (timber in this case) are also painted white. The building has no base and presents a white cornice.

The Auckland Railway Station is one of the most ornate railway stations in the country. It was modelled on American prototypes. The structure of the building is made of reinforced concrete with a double-brick façade. Although the building has now been attributed a different function, (containing apartments and a restaurant), the main entrance and lobby space are still accessible to the public. It received the NZIA Gold Medal in 1931 [8]. The main facade presents a more articulated colour palette compared to the other buildings of this study, essentially due to the higher budget for such civic building

servicing a wider city public (compared to a suburban library). The base is clad with granite and fascias are clad with terracotta mouldings in yellow and pink. Doors are made of brass, instead of timber.



JUBILEE INSTITUTE - FOUNDATION BUILDING (1926)

OUTDOOR

	NCS 1950	RGB	ELEMENTS
FACADES	S 4502-Y	146,141,132	PLASTER: PORTICO
	S 4040-Y70R	161,88,68	BRICK: SOUTH SIDE
	S 5030-Y60R	142,83,58	BRICK: NORTH SIDE
	S 0804-Y10R	239,231,214	WINDOW SILL
	S 0804-Y10R	239,231,214	WINDOW FRAME
	S 5030-R	126,67,71	DOWNPIPE
	S 6020-G10Y	64,97,75	SIDE DOOR (GREEN)

Figure 4a: (left) Foundation Building of the Jubilee Institute – Façade facing George Street, 06.08.2023.
 Figure 4b: (right) Colour palette of the Foundation Building. Photos by Authors.



RAILWAY STATION (1927)

OUTDOOR

	NCS 1950	RGB	ELEMENTS
MAIN FACADE	S 4005-G80Y	152,150,133	GRANITE BASE
	S 4040-Y70R	161,88,68	BRICK (1)
	S 5030-Y70R	142,83,65	BRICK (2)
	S 6020-Y60R	123,81,64	BRICK (3)
	S 2020-Y80R	209,163,152	TERRACOTTA MOULDING (PINK)
	S 2020-Y50R	212,166,138	TERRACOTTA MOULDING (YELLOW)
	S 1515-Y50R	225,188,160	WINDOW FRAME
	S 6000-N	115,114,113	LEAD WINDOW FRAME
	S 8005-Y20R	71,62,52	BRASS DOOR
	S 2010-Y40R	210,182,157	METAL STRUCTURE (CANOPY)

Figure 5a: (left) Main Façade of the Auckland Railway Station, 11.08.2023.
 Figure 5b: (right) Colour palette of the Railway Station. Photos by Authors.

Brief guideline for conservation

Besides maintaining the current colour palette for the interiors and for the facades, as indicated for the Grey Lynn Library [5], we would like to suggest a potential review the colours of the main entry doors of the Remuera Library. All historical photos, as well as those available on Remuera Heritage website [9] indicate that the original doors were in natural or stained timber (preservative) with a similar colour to the interior face of these doors – S 8005-Y80R. Further reflection on the use of carpet flooring could be assessed in regards to its embodied carbon at the next maintenance review. We assume the original timber flooring is largely intact (under the carpet), but that any parts that are found to be rotten should be replaced with new matching timber flooring.

Conclusions

The Remuera Library's colour palette set out within this paper captures the current colours of the building, which seem to be aligned with the palettes (with subtle variations) of the Gummer Ford's three other buildings within the short time period of 1923-28. Conservation interventions should tend towards the preservation of existing colours, with a critical reflection that could be applied to the colour of external doors and potentially, to the flooring materials. This type of extensive colour mapping of New Zealand heritage buildings, in conjunction with literature reviews and investigation of historical material, demonstrates the potential of a more extended research on the local built heritage. A more extended colour mapping programme could provide a database for a more complete archive of various architect's buildings in New Zealand and their associated periods. So to provide some comprehensive guidelines, not only related to the preservation of the original building colours, but also to provide valuable data towards any possible change (or upgrade) in the future thus helping to re-align the buildings with their original design intent.

Our onsite research and Colourpin analysis of final colour palettes will be useful to practitioners in regard to any future conservation, without resorting to damage the architectural surfaces via 'paint scrapings'. This paper attempts to contextualise one small gem within the Gummer Ford Architect's oeuvre within New Zealand's early 20th Century architecture.

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