

Memory boxes



To say that Raglan is a popular summertime destination is akin to saying I'm not very tall. Both are statements of such obvious fact that they do not need to be made. Following on from last week's Mercury Bay Cottage Hospital in Whitianga, this week's feature building is another heritage building that may catch the eye on the way to the wharf or the fish-and-chip shop.

Raglan's Bow St is a terrific main street, one in which its historic buildings and palm trees provide a distinctive backdrop that favours people over cars. At the top end of the street is the former Raglan Town Board Municipal Buildings, which opened in December 1928. They replaced an earlier town board building that burnt down, along with two neighbouring shops, in March 1927.

The fire started in Messrs Hardey Bros' Drapery around midnight on March 17. Although the village possessed neither a fire brigade nor a water supply, aside from the obvious, a bucket brigade was quickly formed once the bell at the Anglican Church had alerted residents to the unfolding disaster. There was no loss of life, but the Town Board Building was completely destroyed, which meant Raglan lost its council boardroom, public library and ladies' rest room.

Tenders were called for a Municipal Hall and Offices for Raglan Town Board in October 1927. Hamilton architect Thomas Cray (c. 1889-1962) was the



designer of the new building, which was built in ferro-concrete to prevent, one assumes, a recurrence of the loss by fire of the earlier building. Cray, who had earlier been in partnership with Fred Daniell, also designed the Parish Hall for St Andrew's Anglican Church in Cambridge in 1931. A year later, as proprietor of the Masonic Hotel in Cambridge, Cray was declared bankrupt. At a meeting of creditors in May 1932, he declared that he had only earned £230 as an architect over the preceding three years.

Heritage consultant Ann McEwan continues her tiki tour of summer resorts.

Former Raglan Town Board Municipal Buildings: Still a presence in Bow St.

Photo: Ann McEwan

But before the Great Depression cast its pall over architects' livelihoods and everyone else in the Waikato, "Raglan was en fete" on December 16, 1928, when its new town hall was opened (*New Zealand Herald*, December 17, 1928, p.15). Mr T Parker, chairman of the Town Board, oversaw the formal opening in the absence of the local MP W Lee Martin, who was unable to attend the event.

Waikato Museum holds plans dated 1958-59 for alterations to the Town Hall for Raglan County Council by Errol Care-Cottrell.

The Hamilton architect appears to have been the county council's preferred supplier of architectural services, to use modern council parlance, given how many commissions he undertook at this time.

Today Raglan Community Radio is located at the Municipal Buildings. And as for Mr Cray, he was practising in Tauranga by the late 1930s, a Depression-era survivor who made a notable contribution to Raglan's historic town centre.