

'THERE GOES THE NEIGHBOURHOOD'

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as Remuera Road filled up with townhouses and apartments where once old houses had sat in spacious splendour, locals organised and voiced concerns over infill housing and unwanted development. In December 1992, *Metro* magazine ran a story about a costly but ultimately unsuccessful battle conducted by Remuera residents to prevent the construction of a petrol station on the corner of Greenlane Road and Peach Parade.

Two years later, in December 1994, the same magazine featured an article entitled 'There Goes the Neighbourhood'. This described how infill housing was changing the traditional face of Epsom, Meadowbank, Remuera and the eastern suburbs, and recounted residents' angry battles to halt the process. The eastern areas, the article explained, were targeted by city planners because Auckland didn't want to encroach on valuable farmland to the south, nor sprawl further and further northwards. It also told how in September 1994, some 600 residents gathered at Selwyn College, where they booed and jeered the then mayor Les Mills to protest against the impact of infill housing.²⁷⁹

These and other similarly irate residents were accurately described by *Metro* as generally affluent and 'a highly motivated protest force'.²⁸⁰ Nevertheless, despite ongoing conflict, and some few victories, their protest did not halt the inexorable process. In the late 1990s the local press continued to use military language to describe infill protest — in October 1999, for example, the *East and Bays Courier* described Arney Road as 'a battle zone'.²⁸¹ At that time, the Arney Road Residents Association was trying to effect a zoning change that would preclude more infill housing.

In the early twenty-first century, the outcry was not just over the increasingly crowded and visually unappealing development due to infill housing, but the threat to Remuera's, and New Zealand's, architectural heritage from ongoing development. December 2006 saw 95-year-old 'Coolangatta' (see page 253), a gracious mansion in Remuera Road, destroyed

Below

Coolangatta was an elegant Remuera Road house designed by Noel Bamford and Hector Pierce. It took bulldozers just a few minutes to reduce it to rubble in December 2006. The apartments planned for the site have never been built.



to make way for apartments, raising public awareness of heritage issues and the dangers of unbridled development. Several irate letters to the newspapers lamented the way in which the demolition of this architecturally significant house had been decided on. One Remueraite observed:

I felt quite sick when I came past 464 Remuera Road last week and saw only a pile of rubble. This was the most beautiful house of its time in Auckland. What disturbed me most was that the council made no effort to preserve the house, and worse still, concealed its decision from the public.

*Last year the council set up a department for the specific purpose of preserving heritage buildings. The least we could have expected was consultation among heritage professionals and the community. It would be in the public interest to know how the votes went for and against the demolition.*²⁸²

A *Herald* editorial, entitled 'Wrecking ball leaves bad smell', added its voice: 'There can be nowhere for the elected councillors to hide when a vote is taken to suppress how they voted on a matter of obvious public interest.'²⁸³ Ironically, the demise of the mansion coincided with Auckland City Council announcing that it was introducing new planning protections for heritage suburbs.²⁸⁴

Yet despite the various threats to Remuera's character in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it is by no means altered beyond recognition. There are still, despite new malls and arcades, old-fashioned small shops in Remuera; new parks and reserves have been created and developed and older ones maintained. Long-established families still live in imposing residences, as do the newly wealthy.

Although the practice of accommodating elderly parents and maiden aunts in a capacious family home or enclave of homes has given way to professionally run institutions, family bonds, as well as friendships between neighbours and old school mates, are maintained. The neighbourhood, still adorned by many venerable old trees and picturesque churches, remains well to the right on the political spectrum. High achievers continue to graduate from private schools such as Diocesan and King's. But some of the older generation of Remuera residents have the sense that, along with the loss of spacious lawns and elegant heritage homes, there has been a lessening of that increasingly rare commodity: a sense of neighbourliness and community.



Above

The destruction of Coolangatta in December 2006.