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# **Problems Involved in the Conservation of Historic Buildings in New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Philosophy  
in Regional Planning at  
Massey University

Joanne P. Lewis  
1984

"We smile at each other when we see it,  
thinking how much nicer it is than what  
would have replaced it, and how much nicer  
we are than the people who wanted to knock  
it down..."

- Lord Kenett Young  
Preservation, 1972 (p.14)

# Abstract

This empirical research derives, by way of case studies, the range of problems involved in the conservation of historic buildings in New Zealand. A dichotomy of problems is evident and consequently discussed - legislative/regulatory problems, and problems pertaining to held attitudes.

The first category looks at the problems of inadequate legislative provisions for historic building protection (in both the Historic Places Act 1980, and the Town and Country Planning Act 1977), the earthquake standards and design codes, and 'legislative omissions' (a phrase coined to cover aspects neglected in the current legislation). In the second category, conservation problems attributed to the attitudes of government, the public, local authorities, owners/developers, and the Historic Places Trust are discussed as they present a hindrance to the effective protection of historic buildings in New Zealand. Finally recommendations are tendered which, if actioned, would go a long way towards counteracting these problems, and consequently render historic buildings in New Zealand more likely to be conserved.

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# Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used throughout the text:

HP Act '80 - Historic Places Act 1980

TCP Act '77 - Town and Country Planning Act 1977

The Trust/NZHPT/HPT - New Zealand Historic Places Trust

M.O.W.D. - Ministry of Works and Development

C.S. - Case Study (usually followed by a number referring to a specific Case Study)

D.P.S. - District Planning Scheme

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- Appendix 'A'            Factors taken into account when the Building Classification Committee rates a building.
- Appendix 'B'            Notation used throughout case studies to reference source material.
- Appendix 'C'            Knox Church Manse Committee's proposal for conservation of Knox Manse, Dunedin.

# Part One

## Introduction

# Introduction

Recent years have seen an increasing interest in the issue of historic building protection. The focus in research, theses and journal articles has been upon evaluating the legislation (Anonymous, 1980; Davidson, 1982; Dennis, 1979; Vennell, 1974), local authority involvement in preservation (Dennis, 1980; Hineman, 1972; Moss, 1981; Neave, 1981), and the expression of dissatisfaction with the state of current historic building protection (Blackley, 1982; Cochran, 1980; Tilly and McGill, 1980).

There does not exist a body of theory against which to assess such historic building protection efforts. There is, however, a recognised practice of historic building conservation in New Zealand. This involves both legislative provisions (see Figure 1), and a network of bodies active in advocating historic building conservation (see Figure 2).

Whereas the successful cases of historic building preservation are well documented (Lawn, 1976; Williamson, 1982; Pollard, 1980), there has been little intensive research into those which have not been successful. It is by looking in detail at a number of historic buildings which have been demolished amidst public controversy, that this thesis aims to determine the range of problems existing in New Zealand which preclude the application of preservation techniques so successfully employed overseas.

The conclusions reached and recommendations tendered would, if acted upon, render the New Zealand conservation system (of legislation, and attitudes and actions of those concerned bodies) more suitable for the successful adaptation of

**FIGURE 1** LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS FOR HISTORIC BUILDING PROTECTION IN NEW ZEALAND

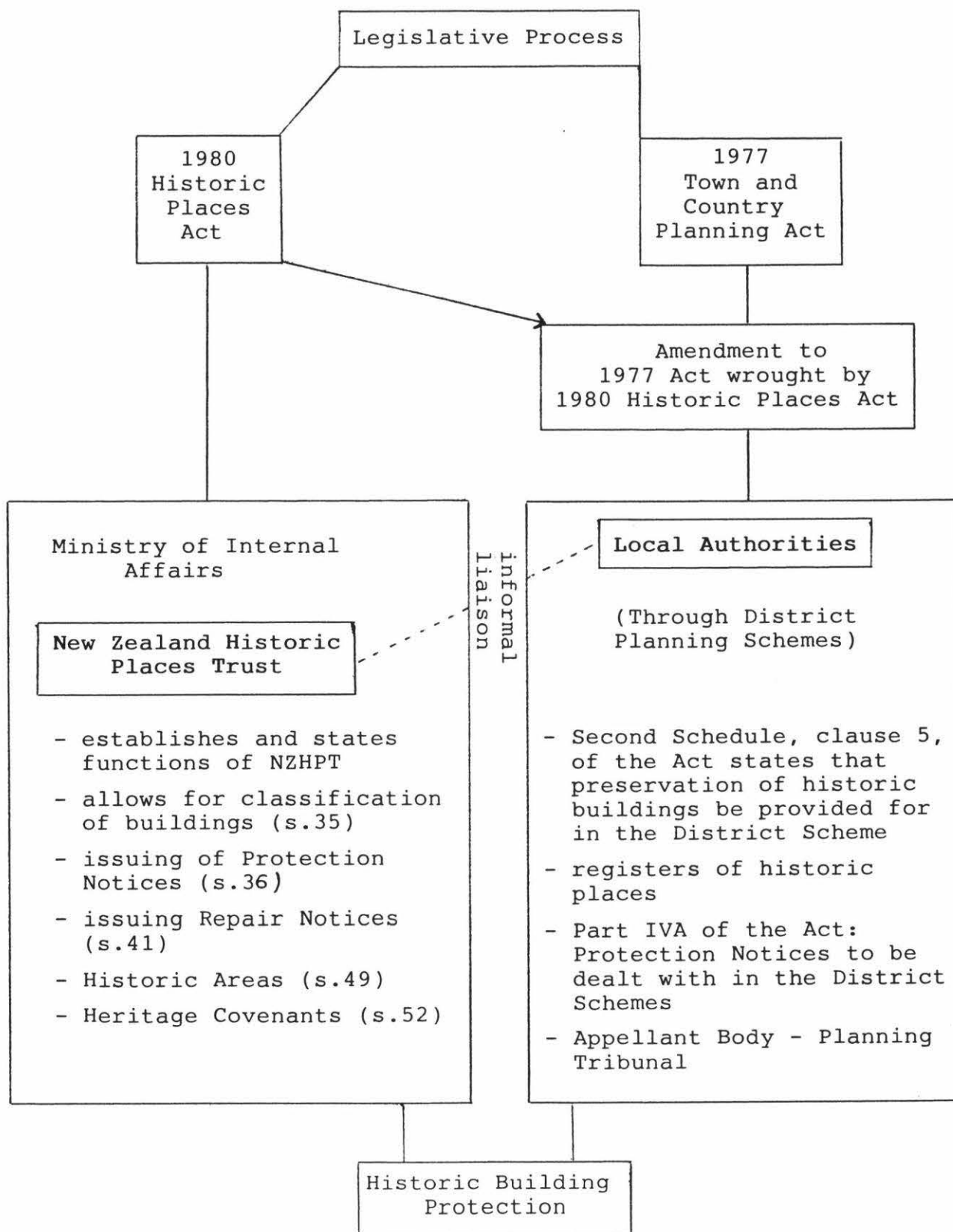
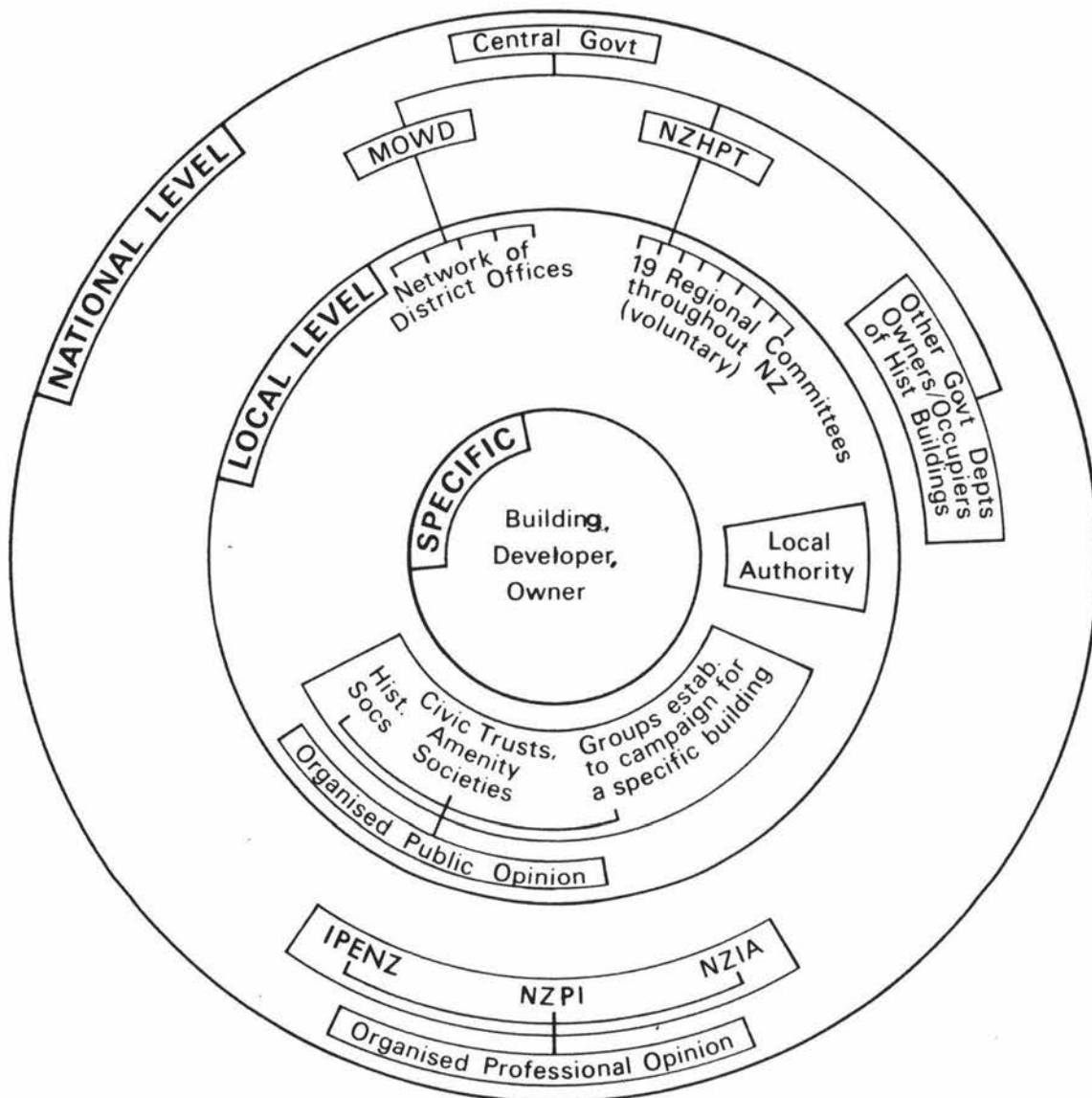


FIGURE 2 BODIES INVOLVED IN THE CONSERVATION/PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS



There exists no formally stated process of communication between these groups (except those procedures laid down in the 1977 TCP Act concerning protection notices and district scheme provisions). Practice has established an informal network of advisory and information pathways in accordance with the peculiarities of each specific circumstance.

Note: IPENZ: Institute of Professional Engineers in New Zealand  
 NZPI: New Zealand Planning Institute  
 NZIA: New Zealand Institute of Architects

effective conservation techniques.

The seventeen case studies to follow, were chosen with the help of suggestions from the Regional Committees of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (HPT) throughout the country. Information was collected from files held by those regional committees (and the headquarters of the HPT), as well as local newspaper files.

Each of the case buildings was either classified by the HPT at the time of demolition or was unclassified but, in the retrospective opinion of the HPT, would certainly have warranted classification (in these cases the buildings were demolished either before the Buildings Classification Committee of the HPT had been established, or before the Committee could inspect them). The HPT may classify historic buildings in one of either category 'A', 'B', 'C', or 'D' according to a particular set of criteria (see Appendix A).

The case studies represent a broad geographical cross-section of New Zealand (see Figure 3), and a diverse range of life spans (see Figure 4).

The main body of each case study looks at events leading up to the ultimate demolition of the building, and critically discusses the roles played and actions taken by those people, organisations, and local authorities involved in decision-making pertinent to that building's future. Appendix B explains the notation used throughout the case studies where references are made to reports, letters, and files used.

At the conclusion of each case study, the conservation problems demonstrated by the events leading to that building's demolition are stated.

A complete set of conservation problems (as specified in the conclusion of each case study) was then collated. It became obvious that two broad types of 'problem' were represented - firstly those of a legislative (or regulatory)

**FIGURE 3**    LOCATION OF CASE STUDIES

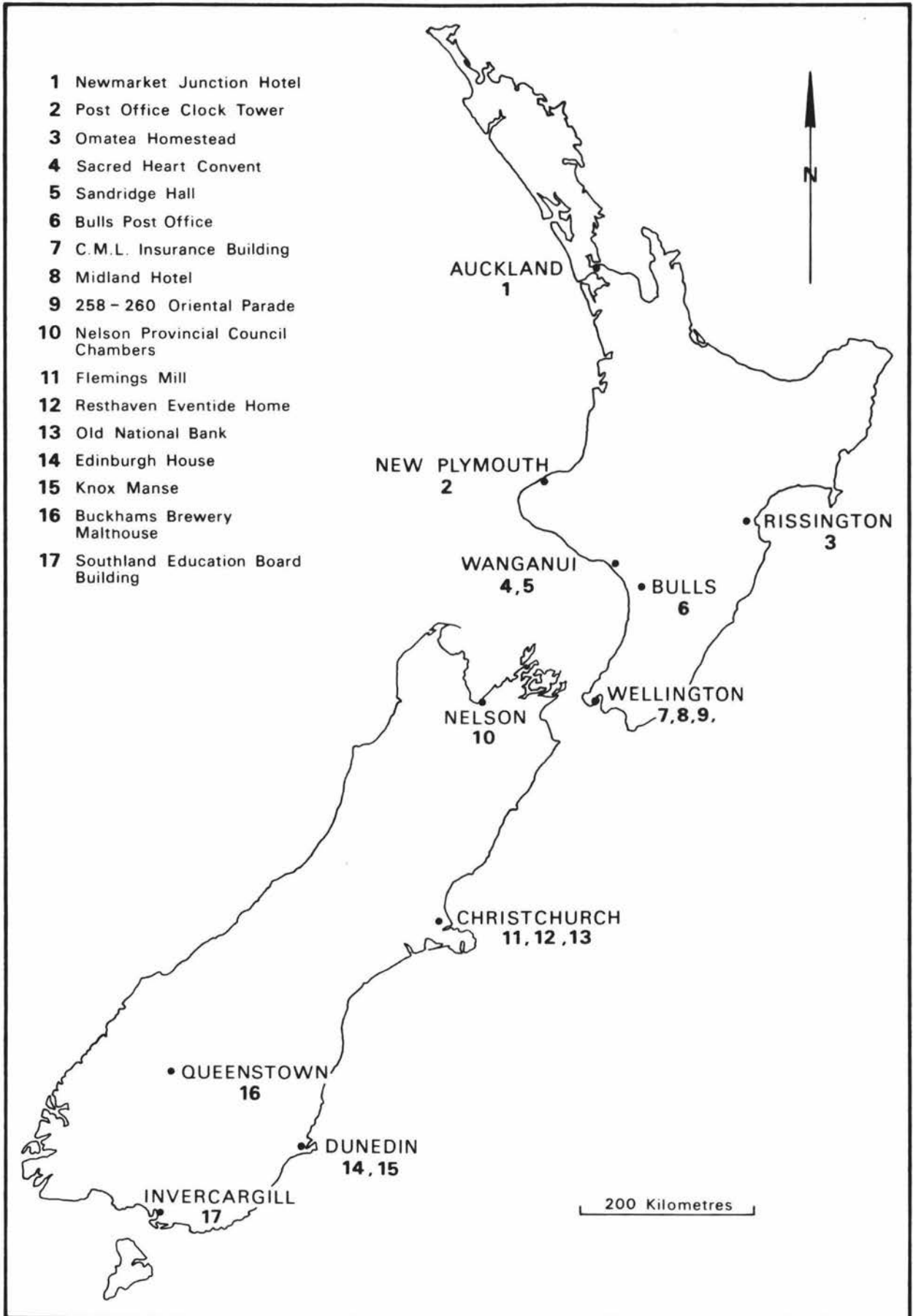
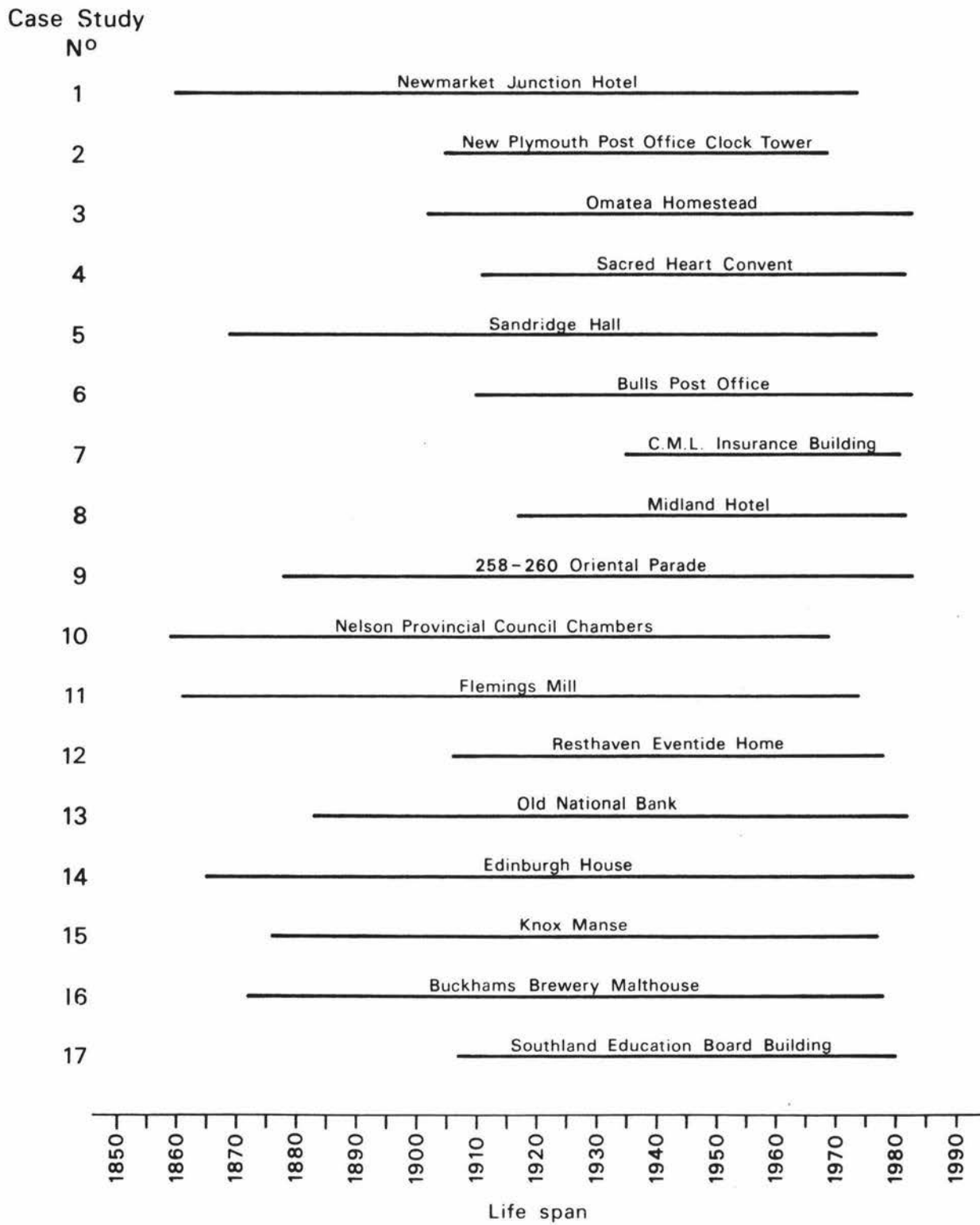


FIGURE 4    LIFE SPANS OF CASE STUDY BUILDINGS



nature, and secondly, problems derived from the attitudes held by the various participating bodies in the preservation process. Hence the problems revealed by the case studies were eventually categorised (see Figure 22) into subject groupings under those two main headings - Attitudinal, and Legislative Problems (see Figure 23).

Each type of conservation problem is then discussed (exclusively in the New Zealand context) and an attempt is made to determine its cause.

Finally the recommendations made, following the conclusions drawn, aim to suggest ways in which the revealed problems can be overcome and consequently historic building protection in New Zealand made more effective.