

# (Re-)Uses of Historical Knowledge in Architectural Education

## The Value of the Client - Reginald Ford on Professional Practice

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### Abstract

With the support of Tūāpapa Rangahau Research and Enterprise at Unitec New Zealand, a research project devoted to Gummer and Ford – an Auckland architectural firm founded in 1923 by William Henry Gummer (1884–1966) and Charles Reginald Ford (1880–1972) has been developed by a team of researchers. This paper announces the second stage of the research project devoted to Gummer and Ford, which builds up to the 2023 centenary of the firm's establishment – seen as a milestone in the New Zealand architectural calendar. In 1921 Reginald Ford, a founding partner of Gummer and Ford, often described as New Zealand's most eminent architectural firm from the interwar period, wrote an explanation of architectural practice titled "Architect and Client." Ford's explanation, written one hundred years ago, of what an architect is and what an architect does still rings remarkably true today. In framing his explanation from the client's point of view, he naturally prioritises the ability of the architect to communicate, both with the client to manage expectations and to make clear the value of the architect, and to the contractor to assist in construction.

This paper aims to show that, though commonly understood as detached from practice, history can teach us valuable lessons and provide solutions for contemporary professional challenges. With a little effort, architectural history could be reinvented by researchers and educators, reflecting all of the

latest demands, pressures and priorities of higher education and the architecture profession throughout the world, enhanced by the accreditation process (NZRAB and AACA). In doing so, the teaching of history would produce knowledge that would stand the test of time and help equip students to practice architecture with confidence.

### Introduction

The relationship between academy and practice is important to foster from first year through to post graduate study. Architecture schools must have an open dialogue with both the national and regional profession, facilitating positive and critical exchange of ideas and knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Unitec's School of Architecture is recognised in New Zealand as a school that advocates a pedagogy of architectural practice. With this pedagogy, the school necessarily teaches professional skills, creating a multifaceted framework for design thinking. Similarly, research of architectural history conducted at Unitec is primarily executed to reinforce architectural teaching and learning processes. Accordingly, the second phase of a three-year project focused on the practice that has often been described as New Zealand's most eminent from the interwar period – the firm of Gummer and Ford – is dedicated to applying architectural knowledge in education. This short communication will concisely

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<sup>1</sup>Lorraine Farrelly, "Foreword," in *Defining Contemporary Professionalism. For Architects in Practice and Education*, ed. Alan Jones and Rob Hyde (London: RIBA Publishing, 2019), xi.

introduce one of the topics – based on the understanding of Gummer and Ford’s business processes acquired during the first phase of the project – that will be covered by a one-semester elective paper offered at Unitec’s School of Architecture. Condensed from various texts written by both naming partners of the firm, the paper will focus on their advice on managing professional practice and, more specifically, engaging with clients.

### **Setting the Stage: Unitec School of Architecture Accreditation and the Relevance of Professional Practice Education**

Unitec’s School of Architecture is accredited by the New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZRAB). The procedure is licensed by the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA), which also recognises the professional degree. This extends to mutual recognition agreements internationally. Reviews conducted by the NZRAB and AACA Panel assess compliance with these competencies every five years (the last one was completed in 2021). The agreed competencies underpin the requirements of the programme’s Aims and Graduate Profile in the School of Architecture at Unitec.

In preparation for professional accreditation, the National Standards of Competency for Architects (NSCA) performance criteria<sup>2</sup> were mapped, indicating the major impact that the two undergraduate and postgraduate courses in professional practice have in this accreditation process. The regulatory domain is explicitly introduced to students through the undergraduate course Professional Studies, with architectural practice management and ethics extended upon in the postgraduate course Professional Business Management (PBM). The Professional Business Management course brings the notion of the professional to the students’ approach to the practice of architecture and creates a framework for design thinking.

The Professional Business Management course aims to prepare students for business procedures necessary to successfully practice architecture in New Zealand. Learning outcomes are clear in their intention to help students navigate the waters of the profession. The ambition is to teach students how to:

1. Critically examine business strategies including strategic and marketing plans, business taxation strategy, quality management strategies and Total Quality Management.
2. Devise a strategic plan, with budgets, for a business opportunity.
3. Devise a marketing plan for a business opportunity.
4. Evaluate various management styles.
5. Evaluate management and accounting systems and

interpret company financial reports.

6. Critically examine and debate business ethics.

This is scaffolded on the learning outcomes of Professional Studies:

1. Analyse the structure of architectural practice.
2. Demonstrate the use of available management tools and processes in the control and administration of architectural projects.
3. Analyse procurement typology options; the impact on project programme and documentation requirements.
4. Discuss the New Zealand legal system and its concepts related to the practice of architecture.
5. Examine the rights and obligations of parties to a contract under New Zealand contract law.

Though covering a wide variety of relevant topics, these courses might benefit from allocating more space to teaching various communication strategies that would better prepare students for working with clients. In perspective, though initially developed with the ambition to inform the course offered in the second phase of the Gummer and Ford project, the knowledge accumulated during this research might contribute to other papers taught at Unitec’s School of Architecture.

### **Learning from the Past: Early-twentieth-century Tactics for Working with Clients**

Founded in 1923 in Auckland by William Henry Gummer (1884–1966) and Charles Reginald Ford (1880–1972), the Gummer and Ford architectural firm has been described as one of the most prominent practices in New Zealand architectural history.<sup>3</sup> Charismatic and influential, Gummer and Ford played an essential role in the professionalisation of New Zealand architecture, founded earthquake construction techniques, and contributed to the development of the country’s institutionalised architectural education.

While Gummer often pondered about design challenges and solutions, the entrepreneur of the charismatic duo, Charles Reginald Ford, was more interested in successful business strategies. Contemplating professional processes, Ford wrote a series of articles titled “Architect and Client,” published in *Progress*, the leading architectural magazine of the times. Ford started the series expressing his wish “that there were some book explaining the ordinary building procedure in New Zealand, the relations between architect and client, to which he [the architect] might refer an owner about to engage in some building operation for the first time.” Ford stressed that he had often felt “that not only much loss of

<sup>2</sup> “2021 NSCA Performance Criteria,” Architects Accreditation Council of Australia, accessed September 1, 2021, <https://www.aaca.org.au/national-standard-of-competency-for-architects/performance-criteria/>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: Terence Hodgson, *Looking at the Architecture of New Zealand* (Wellington: Grantham House, 1990), 48; Bruce Petry, “The Public Architecture of Gummer and Ford” (master’s thesis, University of Auckland, 1992); Peter Shaw, *A History of New Zealand Architecture*, rev. ed. (Auckland: Hodder Moe Beckett, 2003), 19, 67, 88, 90, 111–15, 146, 197; Paul Waite, *In the Beaux-Arts Tradition. William Gummer Architect*. Exhibition catalogue (Napier: Hawke’s Bay Cultural Trust, 2005); Denis Welch, writing for the *New Zealand Listener* the following year, described the firm as “the best architectural practice of all time in New Zealand.” Denis Welch, “The Best of New Zealand,” *New Zealand Listener*, August 4, 2007.



**Figure 1. Charles Reginald Ford, photograph by Clifton Firth, 1948. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 34-147.**

time, but subsequent misunderstanding and annoyance might be avoided were such a work available for ready reference.<sup>4</sup> He complimented the efforts of the English architect Inigo Thomas and the American critic Charles Matlack Price to help prepare the expectations and behaviours of the architectural audiences - and potential clients.<sup>5</sup> However, in his words, though valuable, the advice these two authors provided could not suit New Zealanders as they were written "for other conditions than our own."<sup>6</sup>

Ford strove to educate the lay public so that he might inspire honest communication and confidence in architects. To do so, he explained what an architect was, quoting the American Institute of Architects:

An architect is a professional person whose occupation consists of originating and supplying artistic and scientific data preliminary to and in connection with the construction of buildings, their appurtenances and decorations; in supervising the operations of contractors therefor; and in preparing contracts between the proprietors and contractors thereof.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, Ford stressed,

architecture is at once a science and art, and its practice a profession. Every building project in which an architect is engaged involves the exercise of his functions as an artist, craftsman, man of science, and both professional and businessman. He has to engage in correspondence; interview clients, contractors, and various agents and suppliers of building materials; evolve schemes for many and varied planning problems; develop these problems in both scientific and artistic aspects; compute and design footings and sustaining powers; compute and design supporting columns, beams, investigate and select materials of construction; manage an office; prepare working drawings in detail and write specifications; estimate costs; design sanitary, heating and ventilating systems; arrange for bell and telephone wiring; design ornament and embellishment; draw up contracts; check accounts; superintend construction. This is surely a formidable list, yet it is far from complete.<sup>8</sup>

In the following pages, Ford continued to explain *How an Architect Works*.

After receiving instructions from the client, the architect's first step is the preparation of preliminary drawings for the purpose of consideration and discussion of the project with the client. The preliminary drawings having been approved by the client, the architect next proceeds to prepare the 'from working drawings,' that is, those drawings which the contractor makes up his tender and from which, supplemented by other 'detail' drawings, the building is erected.<sup>9</sup>

Having completed the plans and specifications, the architect still has the important work of supervising the erection of the building. Ford stressed that this was primarily the contractor's responsibility; however, architects ought to try and give their best to help guide the contractor towards success. He quoted Matlack Price upon the matter of supervision:

after all, it should be remembered that the architect's reputation is at stake, not only in the design of the house, for which he is directly responsible, but for the contractor's part of the work, for which he is indirectly responsible. It stands to reason, therefore, that the architect will not wittingly allow a contractor to erect a monument which will reflect upon his professional ability, and much of the client's apprehension regarding insufficient supervision may well be allayed by this reflection.<sup>10</sup>

Ford explained that the amount of time given by a 'conscientious' architect to that part of his work coming under the heading of 'supervision,' even on a work of small size, would astonish the uninitiated. There are innumerable matters, small and large, referred to him for his determination. Not only do these entail visits to the building

<sup>4</sup> C. Reginald Ford, "Architect and Client," *Progress* 16, no. 11 (July 1, 1921): 253.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Inigo Jones, *Keystones of Building* (London: John Lane, 1912); Charles Matlack Price, *The Practical Book of Architecture* (Philadelphia; London: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1916).

<sup>6</sup> C. Reginald Ford, "Architect and Client," *Progress* 16, no. 11 (July 1, 1921): 253.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

and to the contractor's workshops where certain portions of the work are being made, but various tradesmen engaged upon the building are constantly in and out of his office asking for instructions upon many matters of detail. For all large works, the employment of a clerk of works is very advisable. For some classes of work, for example, that in which reinforced concrete forms a part of the construction, his employment is absolutely essential in the interests of safety alone. In every case, he acts as a check upon a possibly dishonest or incompetent contractor, or dishonest or careless workmen, and conserves the interest of the owner throughout.<sup>11</sup>

Having outlined the client's duty in the second part of the paper,<sup>12</sup> in the third one he expressed his business ethics, explaining the primary motivation behind architectural design. Namely, in the third part of the paper Ford attempted to clarify - this time, by quoting Lethaby from memory - the difference between *architecture* and *building*, stressing that the former is the latter "touched with emotion."<sup>13</sup> In other words, "Building - however efficiently for the satisfaction of physical needs only; architecture, on the other hand, while providing equally well for the physical needs, satisfies in addition the needs of the spirit."<sup>14</sup> For Ford,

the craving for beauty as a spiritual activity cannot be denied. That beauty in building can evoke the spiritual emotions and minister to the spiritual side of life, many glorious temples and cathedrals have testified throughout the centuries. But temples and cathedrals no longer form the main building activities of whole peoples. To-day schools, libraries, hospitals, post-offices, factories, and other utilitarian or altruistic buildings are taking their place in common life .... All these buildings touch the common life of people at every point - surely they should be made to minister to their spiritual and not alone to satisfy their physical needs?<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

Ford's explanation, from one hundred years ago, of what an architect is and what an architect does, at least in the residential sector, rings remarkably true today. In framing his explanation from the point of view of the client, and what their incentives are, he naturally prioritises the ability of the architect to communicate. The architect communicates with the client to manage expectations and to further clarify the value of the architecture, and the architect communicates with the contractor to assist during construction, and offer a broader perspective of the project. The ability of the architect to communicate well might be even more critical today, with the proliferation of other professional consultants in the building industry, yet achieving standards of communication itself is not a stated learning outcome in either professional practice course at Unitec. Alex Maroya, Gill Matthewson and

Louise Wallis, in *Architectural Education and the Profession in Australia and New Zealand*, found that both verbal and written communication were considered either extremely or very important in the profession by both practitioners and academics, ranked just below critical thinking and problem solving.<sup>16</sup> In the same study, professional practice was ranked the most important subject area (along with design studio) by practitioners, but not as high among academics, while the opposite is true for architectural history.

Where does this leave the study of architectural history as it applies to the profession? This project aims to show that, though commonly understood as detached from practice, history can teach us valuable lessons and provide solutions for contemporary design challenges. With a little effort, architectural history could be reinvented by researchers and educators, reflecting all of the latest demands, pressures and priorities of higher education and the architecture profession throughout the world, enhanced by the accreditation process (NZRAB and AACA). In doing so, the teaching of history would produce knowledge that will stand the test of time and help equip students to practice architecture with confidence.

Further avenues of research in this area might include updating Ford's work to include the roles of other construction consultants and their relationships with the architect, and how much, if at all, the architect's relationship with the client has changed in the last one hundred years. But perhaps more fundamentally, and certainly outside the scope of this paper, is a careful consideration of architectural value. For Ford, the value of architecture lies in its beauty. He even frames the search for beauty as an ethical imperative, an architect's duty. It follows that such a closely held belief demands the effective communication of that belief to others who are also responsible for the delivery of the project. This begs the question: What fundamental principles are architects communicating in today's world?

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> C. Reginald Ford, "Architect and Client (II)," *Progress* 16, no. 12 (August 1, 1921): 278.

<sup>13</sup> C. Reginald Ford, "Architect and Client (III)," *Progress* 17, no. 1 (September 1, 1921): 14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Alex Maroya, Gill Matthewson, and Louise Wallis, *Architectural Education and the Profession in Australia and New Zealand* (Sydney: Architects Accreditation Council of Australia [AACA], 2019), 50.

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