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Where Do You Go To?: The Class of '76



Fig. 1 The Auckland School's Old Heavy Breather Network/Annual, 1976. [Cover graphic by Geoff Fletcher]

In 1976, each student in the University of Auckland School of Architecture received a booklet (see Fig. 1) with the names, addresses and phone numbers of all the students (Auckland School of Architecture 1976). Spread across the four professional years of the degree are 310 people, 74 of whom were first-year students, including the author. This article tracks that first-year cohort over the 40-plus years since; a time span that gives an opportunity to trace the ins and outs, and ups and downs of architectural study and careers. It also allows the outcomes of this cohort to be compared with available statistical data (including some incomplete data from the 1978 and 1980 student contacts booklets) to help test and understand that data.

There has traditionally been a mismatch between the social stereotypes of architects held by the public and the actuality of being an architect, which means that many students who begin architectural study do not complete it (Cuff 1991: 117). For those who graduate and wish to participate in the profession, economic and other conditions sometimes render a continuing career in architecture difficult. So, what happened to the first-year students of 1976, and how might their journeys illustrate the complexities of architecture, its education, and practice?

In 1976

The School of Architecture at the University of Auckland was established in 1917 and was until the mid-1970s the only school in New Zealand. Those arriving in 1976 came into a School that had recently had its “narrow” professional training focus questioned by student protest in 1972, which subsequently ushered in a wider range of course content and options (Francis 2016).

This period at the School is described by Bill McKay in the formal history of the School as “the loose years”, marked by hippiedom and a somewhat anti-intellectual kind of humanism (McKay 2017: 98). Perhaps one sign of that looseness is the contacts booklet itself. Twenty-first-century privacy legislation means that such a document would be very unlikely to be formally distributed today. Even in the 1970s, there must have been some awareness of the potential for the booklet to permit both privacy invasion and unsavoury behaviour because it is titled “Old Heavy Breather Network/Annual”, and the cover graphic by Geoff Fletcher