

Dress Circle Walk



Start at Fairfield Park which was once the Trafalgar Street cemetery (1851-1909). Early gravestones can be found in an informal way along side paths under trees. **Neil McVicar's headstone** **1** looks across to Fairfield House. McVicar emigrated from England in 1849 and built a cottage on the site where Fairfield House now stands. He also established an orchard of 500 fruit trees, shrubs and forest trees. Four years later he died leaving his sons William and John orphans, who moved to Blenheim and trained to become builders and cabinetmakers.

Fairfield House **2** was built for Maria and Arthur Atkinson in two stages between 1872 and 1883, and many significant trees still in the grounds were planted at this time. She worked for women's education and rights while he was the Nelson MP and an astronomer. A replica tower replaces the original where Arthur's five inch reflector telescope was once mounted. Fairfield became a school boarding house for many years and was rescued by the Friends of Old Fairfield who restored it for community use today.

Melrose House **3** was designed by architect John Scotland for Charles Watts and his family. Watts was 17 when he arrived in Nelson in 1841. He worked as a surveyor and sheep farmer. After Charles died in 1881, daughter Frances and lawyer husband Percy Bolland Adams lived there. Their gardener Joseph Busch, planted many of the heritage trees still standing in the garden. In 1944 Percy's son Noel gifted Melrose to the Women's Division of the Farmers Union to use as a place of rest and recuperation for country women. In the 1970s Melrose was gifted to the citizens of Nelson. Today the Melrose Society (volunteers) has the responsibility of the day to day management and preservation of the house.

19 Richmond Avenue **4** is one of the earliest homes in Nelson. Dr Thomas Renwick, a popular doctor prominent in local affairs, and his wife Adeline resided in this house in the late 1850s and early 1860s. William Houlker and family took up residence here on arrival from Lancashire in 1886. By 1887 Houlker had established a high quality vinegar manufactory in Waimea Road with a patented vat of his own design. His son, also called William, went to Nelson College, then trained as an architect and his drawings can be found in the Nelson Provincial Museum archives.

36 Brougham Street **5** built in 1925, was the home of Sir Jack and Lady Newman. Sir Jack was born in 1902, eldest son of Tom Newman, mail contractor and cofounder of Newman Brothers coaching firm. He joined the business in 1922 and it expanded into tourism, freight and transport services. He was awarded a CBE in 1963 and a Knight Bachelor in 1977 for his services. Sir Jack was a Nelson City councillor and a Nelson College governor. He excelled at sport, playing three test cricket matches for New Zealand between 1931-1933, represented Nelson in golf, and was a local champion at bowls.

Architect William Beatson designed the charming house at **224 Collingwood Street** **6** in 1865 for William Moses Stanton who wanted it for his mother Mary and mother-in-law Sarah James, both widows. Each lady was to have their own sitting room and bedroom but the kitchen was to be shared. Percy Adams of Melrose bought the cottage in 1899 for Joseph Busch, his gardener at Melrose. Busch lived here with his family until he died in 1937. The garden can be glimpsed through the gate.

46 Brougham Street **7** was built in 1935 for Charles Griffin and designed by cousin, Arthur Griffin, architect of the Anchor Building at the Port. Charles was John Griffin's grandson. John arrived in Nelson in 1854 with his wife and seven children, and set up as a flour and cocoa miller. This became a thriving biscuit and confectionary business later known as Griffin & Sons Ltd. The business employed many Nelsonians in a series of factories until 1988.

Warwick House **8** once known as 'Sunnyside', is a spectacular early Victorian neo-Gothic home. The first owner was Alfred Fell who came to Nelson in 1842. Building took place on his 20 acre section in 1843-1854. Nathaniel Edwards, founder/owner of the Anchor Shipping Line, added to the house in the 1860s so it had 50 rooms and covered 1000m². Main internal features are the 100m² Grand Ballroom and the four storey octagonal tower on the east side. Apart from timber and bricks, all building materials were imported from the UK, including the wrought iron gates (still showing their makers' name from London), all the glass, nails and slate roof tiles. It was also home to Sir David Monro, Liberal member of parliament, father of Charles Monro who first brought the game of rugby to New Zealand.

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On the foot hills of the Grampians, above the Cathedral, a pleasant moderate hill walk can be enjoyed in "the Dress Circle" of the city. Some beautiful old houses nestle amongst mature trees and many have a story to tell. Some are privately owned and can only be viewed from the footpath. Fairfield Park and the gardens of Melrose and Fairfield House are public spaces. Parts of the houses may be viewed when not used for community hire. An extended audio version of this walk can be downloaded from www.theprow.org.nz along with other stories of Nelson.

More heritage information, walks and events, including a special garden tour of Melrose, can be found on www.nelsoncitycouncil.co.nz

