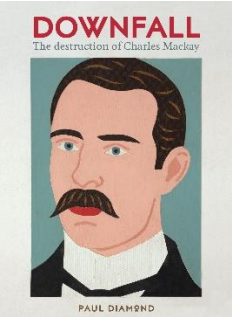
Downfall: the destruction of Charles Mackay: Paul Diamond



The following is a transcript of a talk by Paul Diamond on his recent book, *Downfall: the destruction of Charles Mackay* (Massey University Press, 2022). The talk was recorded live at the National Library of New Zealand in December 2022.

In addition to the usual podcast format, we have also published a version of this talk on YouTube so that you can see the images that Paul used in his talk. We encourage you to watch that if you can. It is on the Ministry's Youtube Channel.

Neill Atkinson: Tēnā koutou, ko Neill Atkinson tōku ingoa kei te Manatū Taonga au e mahi ana. Nau mai haere mai. Welcome everyone.

It's great to see so many people here today. This is the last in our monthly series and as this is a partnership between Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage and National Library it's great that we have Paul Diamond speaking to us today.

So Paul is of Ngāti Hauā, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi and has been Curator Māori at the Alexander Turnbull Library since 2011. He's been a journalist and broadcaster, and is the author of *A Fire in Your Belly*, *Makereti*, and *Savaged to Suit* and of course his latest book, *Downfall: the Destruction of Charles Mackay,* which you see here, this wonderful cover published by Massey University Press last month. And launched here in Wellington, and also in Whanganui. So this is a, you know, I think as Paul will tell us, I think you know this has been a long project. It's a really remarkable story. Many people will know something about it. Now it's certainly now, you may have already read the book, and you know it's a story that's has a much greater reason than it's just a story of the fate of the individuals involved. So it's – really looking forward to hearing Paul talk about *Downfall*.

Please join me in welcoming him.

Paul Diamond:

Kia ora Neill, otirā koutou katoa. Kei te whare nei, kei te ipurangi, tēnā koutou katoa.

Tuia te hā

Tuia te kupu

Tuia te kōrero,

Tau te māramatanga

Tihei mauri ora

Just to start with it, it's really important to thank those who've made this event today possible. So thank you, the Ministry and the Library, Neill, Kate, Joan, Mark and others. And I want to acknowledge the supporters who've actually made possible some of the things I'm going to be showing you, the research here and overseas. So Manatū Taonga again, for the History Award that I was lucky enough to receive. Creative New Zealand, I had their Berlin Writers Residency. The Library here for giving me spells of time away to do this research. The Goethe-Institut who – I'm still learning German, but anyway, I've got more than I had when I walked into the door of that place. They gave me two language scholarships and the Stout Research Centre, I had a little spell researching up the hill at that wonderful place as well and joined that community of researchers and there's lots of other supporters, here in the room actually, people who have been involved and supported even if that mean indulging me while I banged on about Berlin and Whanganui over the last 18 years, and I need to let you know that that books are for sale at the National Library store on the floor above and I'll be up there with them afterwards.

So today, I thought I'd do, is just give you a bit of an overview of *Downfall*. You are a slightly self-selected sample of people, predisposed to have an interest and to know who Charles Mackay was and Walter D'Arcy Cresswell, but I thought it would be good to just whizz through the bare bones of the story.

I'll show you some images of the research journey, which is something that was going to be more in the book than it is, but I've been using it for other things, like these talks and things.

And I'm going to present you with some of the mysteries and unanswered questions which I think, is part of the reason this story has intrigued people, but also confounded people a little bit as well.

So here's the photo of Mackay, that's the photo, I think, that Gavin Hurley used as a basis for the cover [of the book]. So in his political life, he had been on this thing called the Mataongaonga Road

Board, which was significant, because it was where his in-laws family owned land, and they had a big interest in bridges and roads and things built being built in the area where they owned land but Mackay became a counsellor on the Wanganui Borough Council in 1905, and the Mayor in 1906 in his early 30s. He caused a bit of an upset, you know the men – and they were all men – who ran Whanganui tended to be a lot older. This photo was used again in this montage, Whanganui: The Future River City of the Dominion that's from 1909. Mackay was really known for leading the introduction of electric trams to Whanganui. So if you look in each of those pictures, you can actually see a tram somewhere in the photo. So that was the first place outside the four main centres in New Zealand to have electric trams. And, in the book, I talk about how there was a bit of a row about steam trains versus electric trains, and I mean, I don't know how he knew, but the future was electric not steam.

Even though people had been to London and Paris, where they had steam trains at that stage and said, well, if it's good enough for London and Paris, it's good enough for Whanganui but Mackay went on a limb and pushed, he was the only one who pushed for the electric trams, which was a real achievement.

But going back in time – the Wellington College Archives actually just before the book was finished, sent me this photo. So Mackay was born in 1875 in Nelson where his father, Joseph Mackay, was a master at Nelson College. The family moved to Wellington when Joseph Mackay got a job as principal at Wellington College, where Charles was dux in 1891. So that's the same year this photo of the First XV was taken. The archive has a second copy of the photo, which is slightly clearer, and if you haven't worked out who it is yet – that's Mackay, aged 16. That year his father resigned as principle and the family moved to Taranaki. Charles won a junior scholarship and went to Canterbury College in Christchurch. And after Mackay was shot in Berlin in 1929, a columnist in the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney, shared a memory of what Mackay was like as a student, a tallish, young fellow noted for his walking stick, his smile, and his way of carrying his head on one side. He graduated with honours in mathematics, but his temperament was always the rovers. Mackay's shifted his digs again was a remark you heard in the college quadrangle every few weeks. So that's interesting and I only found that a few weeks ago, there's more and more material emerging thanks to Paperspast and Trove and these other digitised databases.

I love this photo because Mackay was sort of praised for you know looking the manor-born and you know it is quite grand, for the mayor of Whanganui, wearing a top hat at the opening of something Catholic I guess in Whanganui and I just think Mrs. Mackay looks really bored under that giant hat.

So after a brief stint teaching at King's College in Auckland, Mackay trained as a lawyer in Stratford with Malone, actually, later to become famous at Chanuk Bair and Mackay moved to Whanganui, in 1901. 1904, he married Isabelle Duncan, from one of the early Whanganui Pākehā settler families. The Duncan family named a street in their subdivided land in what became known as Wanganui East after Mackay. And this image just popped up a few weeks ago, Mackay as commodore of the Wanganui Sailing Club which had just been formed then in 1904. He did seem to have a habit of running things that he got involved with, but to jump ahead to 1919, 1920. I think the situation was quite different. Mackay was under a lot of pressure. He'd had an accident in 1919 late in that year. He was walking from his wife's house in Whanganui East to a council meeting along the riverfront in Whanganui, you know to go into town and he was run over by a milk cart, and so his legs were damaged, and there was a controversy because he sued the milk cart owner, and it was the milk, cad owner was going to have to sell, his milk cart to and his whole livelihood to pay the fine.

Mackay was involved with the building of the Sarjeant Art Gallery which opened in 1919, but he was criticised for enlisting, a few years earlier, but not serving in the Great War. And there was a big row with the RSA and other people in Whanganui, over the visit of the Prince of Wales, who was actually in New Zealand still, when the shooting happened in Whanganui and the town infrastructure was struggling to cope with the rapid growth. So that tram network relied on an electric plant that was gas fired, and it was designed for the tram network, which expanded, but I have read in the histories of the trams in Whanganui, but you know the hairdresser in Victoria Avenue wanted to be connected to it. Because all, you know, because people wanted electricity rather than gas and the network just couldn't cope.

And in fact, after Mackay went to prison, the whole network collapsed, and Whanganui didn't have any power for months while the part was being sent out from London, from England. So and then and amongst this Mackay, I think, had strong supporters, but he also had some quite powerful enemies among the soldiers, the Returned Servicemen and some of the others in the town. So, I just thought I'd show you this that when they decided to – because Mackay's portrait after he went to prison disappeared and they tried to find another portrait so they used this one. They found a version of this behind a wall in the Whanganui Museum. And they used that. So there's actually two versions, the version on the left is the one that is in the Council Chamber in Whanganui.

So of course this – oh, and he was – just to give you an idea of how old he was. He was 44 in 1920.

And here's his nemesis, Walter D'Arcy Cresswell and that's actually one of the photos taken when Cresswell left New Zealand, the year after the shooting. So, he was 24 in 1920.

I don't know what I think. No, I do know what I think about colourisation of archival photos, but I just thought I'd show you that I spotted that on Twitter the other day. It's kind of interesting. Not quite necessarily accurate, but it's interesting.

So in May 1920 Walter D'Arcy Cresswell arrived in Whanganui. He'd been training as an architect in London when the Great War broke out. He served with British and New Zealand armies, and was wounded from things like shell shock, and having had a nervous breakdown, and was still apparently on the sick list, and he was visiting Whanganui as part of his recuperation, because he had an uncle, and an aunt, and cousins who lived in Whanganui and these relations had lost a son, at Passchendaele and another Cresswell cousin had actually died at Passchendaele as well. Cresswell had aspirations to be a poet, but later would become quite well known for his homosexuality.

So D'Arcy Creswell arrived in Whanganui on the Monday of the week of the 10th of May. He had dinner with Mackay and his – the Cresswell cousin that night. They had dinner again on Thursday, when Mackay invited Cresswell to visit the Sarjeant Gallery, because Mackay had his own key, and then on Friday about 4 o'clock, Cresswell meet Mackay at his office in this Ridgeway Street building. So above the words limited in that photo is were apparently the office was. But I didn't really realise until I walked out, you know, what actually happened on those days during that week was that they actually met in that office four times. So they met there on the Friday. They went to the Wanganui Club in Saint Hill Street for a cup of tea, and then went to the art gallery, then they went back to the office and that's where Cresswell discovered a certain disgusting feature in Mr. Mackay's character, according to his statement. And that's where there was the sort of ultimatum either you resign or I'll tell everyone about you and this disgusting feature in your character. And then the next day, about 930 Cresswell, called on Mackay at that Office, they went to the Wanganui Club for another cup of tea, and then back to the office, and that's where there was this incident, which, according to Cresswell involved Mackay shooting Cresswell, but then not realise obviously not being, very good at using a gun because Cresswell didn't die and Mackay panicked and either closed or shut the door in the adjoining room and that's when D'Arcy Cresswell, threw the chair out of that window and fired shots and stood the window, and told everyone he discovered a scandal. And if you saw 'The Project' on TV3 the other night, it was quite hard case, that when they were interviewing people about that office, and how they might be putting it on the Rainbow list for Historic Places the window shattered into a thousand pieces. It's on the Massey website, if you want to have a look at it.

So Mackay was sentenced to 15 years hard labour, as he had been found guilty of attempted murder. He was released after six years, controversially on condition he left New Zealand and this is a photo that's not in the book, this is actually his sister, Margaret Jean Mackay, who she's in the

centre of that photo. She worked at the *Taranaki Herald* in New Plymouth. She sponsored him and took him to London, and set him up in a new business, so most of his siblings sort of stood by him and supported him, and we now know that that new business was advertising.

Mackay moved to Berlin in late 1928. He was working as a journalist and teaching English there. He was covering street fighting between the police and communist protesters when he was shot in May 1929.

So Hirschowitz, if you can make that word out on the picture on the left. That's a still from a collection of film footage of the fighting, and the barricades, are in the front of that photo so Mackay kind of drove down that street, and stopped outside that store so now that store, which was a Jewish clothes shop, is now a chemist. But we realised that it's actually largely intact, which apparently happened a lot and the buildings that survived the Second World War bombing for economic reasons were often just left or you know and so they are actually the same buildings on that side of the street. So Mackay was standing quite close to where I'm standing when he was shot.

So here I am, in Whanganui looking for bullet holes in the office, so that's what the office in the Meteor Building looks like, it was used as the smoko room for the printing company up until that company left that building.

When I was in Berlin a woman that I met said to me this word called spurensuche, and it's a search for traces and it's a word from police forensic inquiries, you know when there's a crime in the crime scene and they're looking for traces of what happened. They call it a spurensuche. But this woman said it's also got a metaphorical meaning. It's actually about historical searches for traces.

And I love that idea. And so really, that's where I've got to with the story, it's about trying to get beyond or underneath the story of the shootings, because the shootings grab your attention 'my goodness, a mayor shooting someone, oh, you know he was gay he was being blackmailed. But you know beyond that what was actually going on?

And I was really delighted – this, is my partner, Richard King, up at the Sarjeant. And there was a show for Pride Week last year was Symplegma, I think I'm saying that right. It was a collaborative project between the Auckland-based artist Shannon Novak and a curator Milly Mitchell Anyon and it was about searching for queerness in collections despite historical eraser and exclusion, they said, is like sifting through coded traces. And I love that these young artists and curators have picked up that idea, and used it to put together that collection of things from the Sarjeant's collection, as well as work from Shannon Novak on the right.

So taken together what I'm arguing is the traces that I've found as part of this project are evidence of homosexuality as these two men understood at their own time. The British historian Justin Bengry has argued that terms, such as lesbian and gay, cannot sustain the task of describing experiences in the past and they differ radically from our own lives today, and in the recent past, they start from an assumption of similarity or even sameness, which serves to reconstitute the past in our own image.

Can these terms ever accommodate people in the past who understood their desires and sexualities differently from us, if they even understood themselves to have sexualities. So instead of applying these terms, like gay and lesbian to people in the past, Bengry says we can queer the past. To queer the past, he says, is to let people in history define themselves in often complex and unfamiliar ways, or to accept, that even if they did define themselves, we may never know how. It is a conversation between us and them, these people in history, about the resonances we may feel with their lives without demanding from them a direct line of kinship and exclusive ownership. Queering the past is an act that happens in the present. So even if it is uncertain what homosexuality meant to Mackay and Cresswell, I think we can be reasonably confident that that part of their lives impacted on how others treated them.

So, I always acknowledge this person, Prue Langbein. So this all began in 2004, when we were working together at Radio New Zealand and Prue said why don't we do a radio documentary about this story which she'd found in Michael King's *History of New Zealand*, I'd found it in Peter Wells' essay in the *Best Mates* anthology, and so we toddled off to Whanganui in 2004. And that's Prue and I at the launch a couple of weeks ago. The programme didn't get made but I had the good luck to work with Bronwyn Daley at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, who said, Why don't you, oh, don't try and solve this, but why don't you, why don't you work on it in your new spare time and see where it leads? And look at the effect it had on other gay men? Which was a great tip.

So looking a bit at some of these mysteries, residual mysteries, to do with the blackmail, and the shooting. These are the two statements that weren't made public at the time of the shooting, but these are the statements from the doctor and the specialist, and these speak to this question of how did Cresswell know that Mackay was homosexual. So that first statement on the left is from Mackay's GP, Dr Earle written the same day that Mackay was tried and remained for his sentence. And it says, 'This is to certify that some six years ago, Charles Evan Mackay of Whanganui, Solicitor consulted me with reference to homosexual monomania. I advised him to attain suggested treatment and I believe that he acted on my advice'.

And the one on the right is by the specialist. This is to certify that Mr C. E. Mackay in August, 1914, acting on the advice of his Medical Advisor, came to see me about treating him. He was in a very

worried and depressed frame of mind and said, if I could not help them, life would be impossible. He had treatment intermittently until the end of November 1914. He then stopped the treatments because he said the homosexual ideas were gone, and he felt quite all right again. In my opinion intimidated treatments should have been kept up for 12 to 18 months then the cure would have been permanent. I have treated other cases of homosexual desire with success. The two chief causes of relapse are alcoholism and neurasthenia. For the part last two months, we know Mr CE Mackay has had great mental strain and worry and I'm sure that if this had not been so this trouble would have never come to pass. Albert Mackay.

And that's Albert Mackay there second from the right, in his plus fours or something, sixes or something on the golf course in Whanganui and that's a newspaper advertisement from the time when he treated Mackay. So there were two years, when Mackay wasn't there between 1913 and 1915 and I find it interesting that this treatment with Albert Mackay, who apparently, wasn't a relation, happened and we know now that that was probably this thing, auto suggestion, which Mackay used a lot in his advertising, possibly hypnosis as well. But before 1920, so those six years, who else knew about that treatment? Dr. Earle Albert Mackay, the metaphysician, but who else I mean?

I know, you know, patient confidentiality and things, but still Mackay would have been living with the knowledge that there could be a risk that someone would let that knowledge out, and you know six years was quite a long time to live with that. Why did Cresswell decide to blackmail Mackay and who was Cresswell's cousin and what did he have to do with the blackmail?

I think the cousin was this man, Roland Marshall Cresswell. So the eldest son of the aunt and uncle Charles and Eleanor, who, D'Arcy Cresswell, was visiting. And this is from a family reprinting of a scrapbook, kept by Eleanor Cresswell that was done by one of the grandsons, who is based in Australia, and as you can see the Roland Cresswell served in the Great War and ended up running the farm that was intended to be run by his brother, Jack Tennyson Cresswell, who's the one that was killed at Passchendaele, and the father, Charles Cresswell was actually appealing to the Military Service Board for his son, to be excused from military service but the war ended, before the appeal was heard. And also people have speculated that there was something, some sort of incident, you know, sexual encounter happened between Mackay and Cresswell you know that line, 'I discovered a certain disgusting feature in his character'. Well, how and what happened? And it's interesting that some things have resulted from the publication of this book, Chris Brickell who's been a very important person in the realisation of *Downfall.* So people will know about this book, *Mates and Lovers: A History of Gay New Zealand* published in 2008 and the cover uses an image from the

Turnbull Library here taken in Whanganui in 1888. And the catalogue says it's a full-length seated portrait of two men Mr. Collie and Mr. Gren, or green, with a golden Labrador dog between them. That could be Mr. Collie in the middle. And there have been some stage plays, retelling stories from that book. They happened in two different years in Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin, and they suggested that D'Arcy Cresswell and Charles Mackay had actually had sex. And I think in one of them, that I saw at Bats, I think they had sex and then Mackay gave Cresswell the money for the – I think he came back as a ghost, because he died in Berlin, and he came back. They had, sex, and then Mackay gave Cresswell the money, for the gas meter to gas himself. So quite a lot of dramatic licence.

But I find it interesting that you know gay creatives have kind of thought well, they must have had sex, they must have had some sort of encounter like that, but evidence found as part of my research, suggests that this may not have been what happened. And this is an article that I didn't find 'til just before the book was finished, this is from Pātea. So Pātea is the town just above Whanganui, and the little editorial is talking about these two cases that had happened that week, the case with Charles Mackay, and also one Dennis Gun, it was a murder in Ponsonby. 'There is one aspect of the Wanganui sensation that the public should not overlook, and that is the service rendered by the community – ah to the Community by the young men Cresswell, who courageously took it upon himself, to remove a deadly cancerous growth, that had unhappily taken root in the neighbouring town, Whanganui. There were probably others that knew of the existence of the evil in their midst and the part played by the chief actor, who is now paying the penalty but not having the proofs, that young Cresswell apparently, had had to be content with a vigorous and unrelenting campaign of hostility towards the culprit, and the hope that he'd take a hint and retire from public life. Instead of doing so he brazen things out, until the crash came and the campaign of righteous hostility was for a long time, regarded by many as a persecution. They are wiser now. Everything somehow comes to those who wait, and those who fight in a good cause. One word before the curtain has rung down forever. Let us hope on an unpleasing episode. If there are any further signs of the cancerous growth in Wanganui, that is to be hoped. the police will get to work and root it out completely'.

So that's June and then the next month this article appears in the *New Zealand Times and* is syndicated all over New Zealand in various other papers. So it reports as you'll see that Cresswell has recovered from the bullet that was near his lung. And he was about to leave Whanganui. And this article said that additional information was secured by Cresswell consequent on his discoveries in connection with the first case, and though in no information under this detail has been published it is understood that certain people have shaken the dust of Whanganui off their feet'.

And there was an inquiry when Mackay and two other middle-class prisoners were released in 1926. It's a bit of a complicated story, which I've tried to summarise in the book, but there was a report delivered in good bureaucratic fashion, just a couple of days before Christmas in 1926 and it went through the facts of the three cases and when it recounted what happened in Whanganui, it said it appeared at the hearing in May 1920 that Cresswell had discovered that Mackay had been guilty of indecent practices with young. That he had interviewed Mackay on the subject on several occasions and that he had assisted on Mackay resigning from his position as mayor or otherwise he would expose him. See, now, that's not the same as what I think those playwrights were assuming that there was some sort of incident, and that was the issue and that's why the blackmail. This sort of suggests that there was something else going on that perhaps didn't just involve Mackay, and could help, I think, explain why the town just wanted to put a lid on this as fast as possible, because there are things about the way the trial happened, like not interviewin, the cousin, not identifying the cousin, not locating two statements that were mentioned where Mackay had said he'd resign the mayoralty they went, completely missing that I think show that they were trying to get this dealt with as fast as possible.

There was a reference to the court case was going to be going to the hospital and hearing evidence from Cresswell in his hospital bed, but I think the statement which Cresswell never signed but Mackay did and it says on it, in as much as this relates to my own acts and deeds is substantially true, so what does that mean about the other person's acts and deeds? And I think perhaps there was something. There is a reference in an oral history, you know, it's very hearsay. It's a lawyer who practiced with a lawyer who practiced with Mackay, you know where there've been a group of men involved in some sort of scandal in the town with younger men and Mackay took the rap for it. But so that's the evidence, really for why, I don't really think it was as straightforward as some sort of sexual encounter in Mackay's office.

But were the men who may have been involved in places other than Whanganui, you know and why was this woman, Helen Shaw, interested in a man called Ronald Cuthbert. So Helen Shaw as I've written in the book was someone entrusted by Ormond Wilson with writing the biography and editing letters from D'Arcy Cresswell, who she had a lot of respect for. And Ormond Wilson said, well, if you could be going into this detail, you're gonna have to look at this Whanganui affair, and so Helen Shaw really is one of the first people, who sort of did, you know, trod the same path that I had and I've benefited from looking at her papers which are here at the Turnbull. But she had all this material relating to a man called Ronald Cuthbert, who was a close friend of Cresswell's at Christ's College. He trained as a lawyer, and he was based in Christchurch and I did find a letter from Helen

Shaw to Bill Mitchell who's someone else, who tried to write about the story in 1982 and Bill was trying to ask her about, well, what happened between these two men? What do you think?

And she wrote 'any additional information I might offer could be mere speculation, or at least unproven. I think one has to concentrate on what one knows beyond shadow of doubt'. And I thought that was really interesting that she was being so sort of cagey, but in the reading room upstairs I found this letter, there's a couple of letters from Ronald Cuthbert, who was quite unwell in the 1960s and he was actually at Hamner, and he was recovering from an operation, and so that quite strange handwriting but in that, what I was able to decipher so this is Helen Shaw had written to Ronald saying, What do you know about this shooting in Whanganui. And he's writing back, saying, could you send me a copy of the newspaper account, best of all a newspaper cutting telling about the Whanganui murder as narrated before I think Robert Stout. D'Arcy on one occasion did tell me at some length of that incident. But before writing about what D'Arcy told me, I would like to read at least the Press Association account of what happened. Failing that perhaps you can mention what you yourself have already learned, and its source and give me particulars of the press accounts of the trial, and that's the last piece of correspondence, because he died on the fifth of May, 1967, so the year after that letter was written. But when I thought about what he'd written I thought, well it's not implausible that he, you know, could have been involved in it somehow, and of course he was trying to see what she knew, and remember, you know 1967 is a long time before Paperspast. Helen Shaw in the 1960s didn't even know what year the shooting had happened, she had to write to the Town Clerk of Whanganui, who said yes it was 1920, because he remembered it as a boy. But Mackay did actually spend time in Christchurch. Cranleigh Barton wrote about, you know, meeting him there, and going prowling on the New Brighton dunes and Mackay actually got criticised quite a lot for being out of Wanganui and not spending enough time, you know, attending to the town's business. He was very connected to you know, local government networks around the country.

So it's not implausible that there was some sort of relationship between Mackay and this young man who's mentioned a lot in Cresswell's writing as you know, 'one of my dearest friends'. So that's another little mystery, that's left hanging.

But now just to talk about this thing, about you know was it a conspiracy, or what was it, as a previous partner of mine said, often it's a cock-up. This is the photo of the day that the Sarjeant Gallery was opened, and that's William Ferguson Massey sitting in the centre. And this, is at the Cosmopolitan Club where they'd just had an unveiling of the honours of people, club members who'd served in the Great War. So Mackay's to the right of Massey, and the mayor Veitch on the

left. But the person to the right is Thomas Boswell Williams and any students of body language, there was sort of, you know, I've looked at – this as a Turnbull photo, and I've looked at it a lot of course, but it was, you know, only recently, that I sort of locked at it, and looked at – Thomas Boswell Williams doesn't really, by his body language, look as if he's that comfortable sitting next to the major, and I just mention this because Williams was the person who took over as mayor for the two years that Mackay wasn't mayor from 1913 to '15. Williams led the campaigns for the people who tried to challenge Mackay each time they tried to unseat him, Williams was the chair, and it was Williams who wrote to the editor of the papers, and said that when Mackay enlisted and then didn't serve because he said he couldn't replace anyone and get a replacement in his business that it was a sham. And then Mackay, couldn't help himself and criticised Williams as mayor. But I can't help, I'm not saying it's a smoking gun or anything, but I just can't help thinking that you know Williams who took over in 1920, after Mackay went to prison and was very much seen as the older, safe pair of hands, and you know back to that normal mode of older men running things in Whanganui and only not this sort of new arrival upstart.

Anyway, and I know that some of his descendants live in Fielding. You know that's the thing, not everybody connected with the story, still lives in Whanganui. When they had the unveil, the commemoration of a 100 years of the Dublin Street bridge, some of the descendants of Tom Boswell Williams came over from Fielding and it would be interesting to know if there is anything in their family about these stories.

Why did Mackay have two offices? So his office In the street directories was in this building which was a billiard hall. So if you know Whanganui, this is Ridgeway Street, and that's the avenue, there, the old post office, the Rutland Hotel, but the actual Meteor Building is back where you would have been standing from where this photograph was taken. It's not clear why he had two offices, a man called Duigan, who owned the Meteor Building, was very closely involved with the Sarjeant, so perhaps he let Mackay use that office but that's another sort of mystery but the reason, we're pretty certain it was the Meteor Building, is this is the diagram that D'Arcy Cresswell did, which corresponds pretty closely with the layout of the office. All that's missing at the moment is the wall that was between the sort of anteroom – where Cresswell said the girl sat – and the bigger office and those are those two windows looking out on to Ridgeway Street.

After Mackay was sent to prison, he declared himself bankrupt. It was difficult for the official assignee which handled Mackay's trust account to work at how much his business was worth without his help. So rather than transferring the case to Auckland, the officials decided to bring Mackay back to Whanganui, where the records and creditors were. Against this Mr. Silk, the official

assignee, wanted the case transferred to Auckland and was worried that Whanganui didn't have the expertise to handle the case, and writing to the Justice Department of Wellington Silk, explained, he would not he was not the only one who did not want Mackay back in Whanganui. And he said yesterday, I had occasion to visit Mrs Mackay, who's assumed her maiden name of Duncan, and she requested me to endeavour to arrange matters so that it would not be necessary to bring the bankrupt to Whanganui. She expressed herself very strongly on the subject and appeared to be very distressed at the prospect of Mr. Mackay being brought to Whanganui. It is impossible to wind up the estates satisfactorily without the assistance of the bankrupt but suggested in view of the position of Mrs Duncan, it might be advisable to have the bankruptcy transferred to Auckland.

But that's not what happened. They did actually bring Mackay back to Whanganui and he spent about a fortnight there, helping the officials clear up his business affairs and I came across this photo in a book, *Memories of Old Whanganui*. You know, was excited it's a 1920 Studebaker apparently, which is the right year, and but that man hopping into the car looks nothing like Mackay. But the transfer from Mount Eden back to Whanganui was in November 1920, five years after he was sentenced, and what's interesting though when I looked at this photo is that everybody apart from the chauffeur is not actually looking at the guy getting into the car, they're looking at someone else and you can actually see that there's a person, just behind there, about to climb up in the car and I do wonder, if this could be Mackay. There's a reference in one of Blanche Baughan's books to him. It's anonymized as a character called Eteocles. She wrote that once he was taken on transfer not in prison garb, I'm glad to say through the very district, that he'd once faithfully served. Many prisoners would have welcomed the journey as a change, but to one of his sensitivities, it was the worst of possible tortures. I often had occasion to fear for Eteocles' brain.

So no one agrees with me about this, but I just still think it could be him and he had very distinctive ears. [laughs] I've collaborated with a number of photographers, including Ann Shelton, who's there, that's Bill Milbank, former director of the Sarjeant, and my friend Des Bovy who set up the Whanganui Gay Rights Group toasting Mackay when Ann had organised for the stone with Mackay's name to be gilded, which I'll tell you about in a minute. But Leigh Mitchell-Anyon another photographer, that I work with from Whanganui we all went up to New Plymouth prison, and Ann took this photo of the prison that had just closed in 2013.

We were keen to go there because the prison – that's me standing by that same corridor – is largely, you can see it's really not really that different from when it was open. The cells were 7 by 10 foot, and they were the smallest in the country when the prison was closed.

Just jumping to London and Berlin. This photo is apparently the earliest photo of men cruising in London before the '70s taken by Montague Glover. That's in Trafalgar Square, very close to where Mackay was based in the Adelphi area, between the Savoy Hotel and Charing Cross. We found Mackay's will in Berlin. If you read the book you say that was quite a saga finding, this and Mackay mentions a man, Chris Crags with a serial number, second battalion, Coldstream, Gaurdsman, and in the book I explain that the Coldstream Guardsmen were very famous for selling themselves for sex and St. James's Park and independently there are all these references from Hector Bolitho's writing, expat writer, gay writer in London, to Mackay going almost every evening to St James's Park and it took a few years, for the penny to drop that if you're doing that you're not going to get a good photo of Buckingham Palace.

And there was a second statement, that 1926 inquiry, just to say that that said, it referred to a written statement made by a Cresswell, some two years after he was wounded and there are some references in the prison file correspondence, to a friend of Mackay's going to London and on the advice of a lawyer who was at school with Mackay, talking to Cresswell, so I think there was – and there's a letter in the letter register that came into Mackay in prison. So there was some sort of contact so what was that second statement, and what happened to it. Oh, sorry that's Cresswell from an album of photos, kept by Lady Ottoline Morrell, in the Bloomsbury set.

And in Berlin, this is Petra Herdic the first person I ever met, so that's us in 2007 on my first trip to Berlin. When I had next to no German and so there's Petra with me at the German Historical Museum. But the place that was really helpful was this grandly named Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, the Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, which is even in Archive Street. [laughs] And that's where I found the investigation file which most of the information about what happened in Berlin is from. It's a huge, big file of all the investigation that the detectives and police did into the shooting of Mackay. Learning German I've been told about 'false friends', words that are not like what they look similar to in English. One of these is bekommen meaning not to become, but to have or to get something. So I got told that German kids come here and say I'm becoming a hot dog. So when I asked this archivist, where I was meant to pick up my file, she pointed to the door across the room. And she told me you go to that room, and then you become the file [laughs]. Which working in an archive, is a marvellous metaphor for historical research.

The third photographer that I worked with was Connor Clark who was living in Berlin when I visited. That's Connor in Wedding, one of the places where the riots were happening in Berlin. That's Connor in Neukölln just across from what used to be that clothes shop but is now the chemist shop, and

Connor took that photo of me outside the shop and it was always a highlight, actually of all the trips, most of the trips I went to Berlin, that Connor was there, and then Connor got the Sarjeant Galleries Artist in Residence at the Tiley Cottage in 2017, 2018. I was really excited to find this photo of the police outside their clothes shop and that pretty much show us the spot where Mackay was shot. But another mystery is what happened to the bullet that killed Mackay. Autopsies were ordered by the police for all those killed in the street fighting. The two doctors who completed the autopsy on Mackay, confirmed that he died, from bleeding caused by a shotgun, wound, but also explained how he was shot. And this is the translation from that reporter: the bulletin to the middle of the abdomen immediately above the pelvis in a left backward and upward direction and came out at the back above the left main trochanter, which is the bones connecting the muscles to the upper part of the thigh bone. So weird kind of injury that it sort of bounced off the pavement maybe and went right through him. But no bullet was found making it difficult to tell whether he had been shot with a police weapon.

So that's the spot today, and then a friend of mine in Berlin was actually able to overlay the two images. But I do wonder, if the police had the bullet. There is actually, unbelievably, there's a whole book about the three days of fighting by a French historian, Léon Schirmann, and the fighting was known as Blutmai, Bloody May, so that *Blutmai Berlin 1929: Dichtungen und Wahheit* 1991. Poetry in truth, so that's a reference to Goethe's autobiography and dichtungen I've been told implies inventions, something made up, poetry in contrast to truth. The book exposes the fabrications and falsehoods of the police and the authorities. They were a number of false statements, and Schirmann was outraged about this, and went through the archives and this book was how I found most of the sources in Berlin.

Oh, and that's just to show you that's a map from Sherman's book, that's where Mackay was killed and just to show you this is the sort of area that was cordoned off and these are the barricades here, that he couldn't get past when he came in a taxi. But you might be thinking about – if you're thinking about Berlin in 1929 and police falsifying evidence you might be thinking about Babylon Berlin. So on my way home on the Metro – this is the Hermannstraße station. So this is where Mackay had driven from down to where he was shot. One night, I, so it normally looked like that and then when I went back it looked like that and it had all these magazines and newspapers, from May 1929. And I'd just been with this woman, Barbara Kiefenheim who said to me, you need to find these magazines, that you should look at these as well, as the papers. And there they were there and it took me a minute and there was a case with things for sale in Reichsmark. And it took me a minute to tweak that they were dressing the set. It was nearly midnight, and they were getting ready for filming of Babylon Berlin. So that's based on that book, *Der nasse Fisch.* Because I was in Berlin and people said you

need to read this book, it's all about these riots. And then it got made into that series. I didn't actually know about the series, but this is 2016, they were filming it. It got released in 2017, lots of people will probably have seen it. Apparently, is still the most expensive series ever made in Germany. And it was a great series, because it so much of what was around in the '20s has been lost.

This is what the building where Mackay lived. This is in 1944, I think. Survey of bomb damage. So that building is still there. I mean this, is the classic style of architecture. The five storeys and I mean that's as close as I can get really to seeing where Mackay lived because the three places he lived are not there. One time, in Berlin I rented an apartment across the road from there, so it's a children's playground and that gives you an idea of the sort of buildings that are there now. That building remarkably did survive.

Just quickly, this is a letter that Mackay wrote in 1920, talking about someone, an artist called Alister Campbell. And he's writing to Government House recommending this young artist, architect of great promise. In the prison file you can see that Alister Campbell was in Wellington, then he went to London, and he was a beneficiary in Mackay's will, and I can't help wondering that when the housemaid in the pension where Mackay was staying was interviewed, and she said, Mackay's friend, who'd already moved to our pension a week before Mackay – because Mackay had just transferred flats, actually, when he was killed – she just talks about this man coming in and inquiring whether Mr Mackay had moved into the pension, and at the same time informed us that Mackay had been shot in Neukölln on Friday.

I do wonder if that was Alister Campbell. But yeah, man who never married, died in England in 1934. I have my contact with some of his family and people who knew him, but they don't really know much about him. And then apparently Mackay got a job working at the university. Someone told a newspaper in London that he obtained a post, as a lecturer in English, at the university and Mackay, was wearing a greenstone tiki apparently, that he'd been given by people in Whanganui. That actually ended up with this man Pembroke Stephens, who was the executor in Mackay's will. Mackay – again just before the book came out – I found this story, a report of a ball in Berlin, and it was a fancy dress ball and Mackay said 'I did not get a fancy dress but contented myself with a half face mask, and a small Māori tiki hung over my shirt like a decoration. Every woman stopped to touch it for luck, one even insisting on dipping it into her glass of wine'. But apparently, it was inherited by Pembroke Stephens, who got shot in 1938 working as a journalist in Shanghai and that's where the trail of the tiki stopped because people from New Zealand wrote to Berlin or the High Commission in London, and then in Berlin, to find out where that was, so that's another mystery.

Just wanted to show you this photo that I tried to include. Chris Brickell sent me this photo. It's in a French magazine. I understand this working in an archive, the archive said, they weren't able to photograph their copy because it needed repair. The archive in Arizona that controls the rights for this man, Goodman's photos, wanted to charge us $250 American. But anyway, I just thought I'd show you because the photos of the interiors of gay bars in Berlin are so rare. And you'll see that the same ones, usually with transvestites get used over and over and over again. This this is quite an amazing photo, so I'm glad Chris pointed it out, but I'm sorry I wasn't able to use it.

Just lastly, where is Mackay's grave? That's the cemetery where he was buried. In Germany, as I discovered the first time I went, you only rent a grave in Germany. So after a rental period, which I think, was 25 years, now it's 20, grave rentals need to be renewed, if possible. So that's what that note is saying that the right of occupation has expired. You need to go and talk to the office, and sometimes you can't even renew it. It's only if you're famous, like the Grimm brothers, their graves are kept, but you can't even necessarily get your grave renewed. But the chapel and the building used to store the bodies, before burial is still at the cemetery, but the Mackay family have a photo of the grave. So apparently, that's what the headstone, and things look like.

And then just the last mystery, is really all to do with the stone at the Sarjeant Gallery. So the beautiful Sarjeant which is being restored and strengthened and extended at the moment, has two stones at the front. One in memory of Henry Sarjeant and this one, acknowledging the people who helped the gallery be built. So at some stage after May 1920, it was altered and that's what it looked like. That's a photo taken by Bill Mitchell in the '80s of the stone with it altered.

But then in 1985 the Council decided to restore it. This is the memo from Colin Whitlock, who I did a wee interview with. He's just recently passed away, but he did say to me, you know, if they hadn't done this and that story just been acknowledged as part of Whanganui folklore, it wouldn't have been such a big deal but you know by doing what they did, it made it a focus of attention.

So that's what it looked like after it got restored. This is in the LAGANZ collection here at the library but by the time I arrived in Whanganui, the paint had disappeared again, and Mackay's name and a title. But as I told you earlier, Anne Shelton found in the archives that the original specification was for the whole stone to be gilded. So she persuaded the Sarjeant and the Council, to allow Mackay's name to be gilded.

You can't see that at the moment it's all covered over for the restoration.

But what we do know is that before this happened there was a wreath-laying protest, and that was organised during the first Whanganui Pride Week by the Whanganui Gay Rights Association. It took

another seven years to get Mackay's name back on the stone but just to finish, I'll just play you a couple of minutes of Des Bovey who launched the book a few weeks ago talking about why that protest was actually in the end significant. And thank you to Gareth Watkins for the audio, which we're going to hear now.

Des Bovey: Whanganui was a sleepy provincial town with the well-defined hierarchy of families. Mackay's scandal was buried, whispered about only by the best people. By referring to the story openly in the press and on the radio, we had outed not Mackay but the story of Mackay, and by association, the story of his expungement, the cover-up, which as we all know, is always the real story.

This was our temerity, this was our offence. I was taken aside more than once and firmly but politely scolded for my vulgarity in airing the city's dirty linen on national radio. The point I'm trying to make is that although the wreath-laying was a modest act, even a fiasco, it can be argued that it marked a moral turnaround, the exact point at which Mackay's reputation pivoted. At which he began his slow climb from villain to victim, and his blackmailer his slow slide, from victim to scumbag. Great events can turn on tiny fulcrums. I'm not claiming that if the Whanganui Gays Rights had had done nothing, Mackay's story would have remained buried. Sooner or later, someone would have done something to rehabilitate the man. It only needed a nudge. That that nudge came, not from some council official working quietly behind the seas, but from the hometown gay community, so noisily, so publicly is a source of pride to me.

Paul Diamond: I loved it when Des said that because I kind of pulled everything together, and sort of connected what happened earlier on with what's, you know, the significance as Neill was saying, the resonances of the story for us now and as Roger Smith pointed out you know the story really is a tragedy because there is a lot of evidence that Mackay was sort of on the verge of a sort of a reinvention in Berlin, you know, and as I've written at the end. You know when he left London in 1928, he was 53, but managed to get a passport, showing his age as 45. The eight year gap was the length of time from the shooting in New Zealand to his arrival in Berlin. Perhaps the move to Berlin was a new start, a bid for reinvention.

Charles Mackay's story is one of resistance, but refusing to settle with continually challenging norms of being knocked down, and getting up again. Perhaps this is what connects his story with the story of gay liberation, the determined push by queer people, throughout history to live their lives, on their own terms. Kia ora.

Neill Atkinson: That was absolutely fascinating. It would be great to kind of keep going, but I realise it is one o'clock, so some of you may need to leave and if you do that please feel free to do. But I think we could have a couple of questions if that's if we can. We do have some microphones, so we can hand around so if you'd like to ask.

Audience member 1: Kia ora Paul. Loved your book couldn't put it down.

I have a question, a bit more around that question that Bronwyn proposed to you around - did you find out much about what the broader impact was for homosexual men in New Zealand around that time? Whether the reporting of the case so there was a chilling effect, or anything like that?

Paul Diamond: Bits and pieces, yeah, so Matthew is asking did I find out about more about that broader impact of the case on gay men, homosexual men in New Zealand as Bronwyn had suggested.

A big bit of evidence is that Hector Bolitho told his biographer that he left New Zealand because of the shooting. Hector had been mentored as a writer by Mackay, and he just found it terrifying of a friend who was the mayor. You know, mayors had a lot of respect, there was a lot more, the respect for authority, I think, was quite different back then and I mean, I think it meant that authority could get away with things that they can't get away with now. So I thought that was really interesting, that that he was very definite, that the reason he left was because of that he went to Sydney and then he went to London.

And there's also Frank Sargeson apparently sent Janet Frame to the library to get clippings because he'd read about it as a young man, and actually he obliquely, he just vaguely refers to it in one of his autobiographies, and then just this observation, of all of these men leaving New Zealand and spending periods of time in London. I mean we think New Zealand's small now, it was really small then, and the odds of bumping into someone who knew your mother were a lot higher.

So, I can see why you'd want to go, and just be in a metropolitan, bigger, more anonymous sort of space. Cranleigh Barton – the wonderful Philip Rainer and Gerry Barton both told me about the references in Cranleigh Barton's diaries. Cranleigh Barton from Whanganui worked as a lawyer that was a gay man and wrote these quite coded diaries, and there's some lovely references to Mackay in London. You know, 'saw Mr Mackay at the New Zealand High Commission. He pretended not to see me. He looked quite prosperous'. So that's interesting and I guess one of the difficulties in this has been to reimagine yourself into the mindset of a time when all intimacy between men was illegal. You know there was no 16 year old age of consent or anything. And I just think that would have influenced the way people behaved.

So, yeah, bits and pieces of evidence. And I think this is kind of building on what Peter Wells has done what, and Chris Brickle's done. I know, Chris is looking at New Plymouth prison, which was set aside for homosexual men from about 1914 till 1956. When prisons were all organised by category. Apparently it had fantastic Christmas concerts, but then they realised it wasn't necessarily such a good idea to put all the homosexuals together, so that policy was changed. But Chris is actually looking, in quite a lot of depth at the archival records of that, which is going to be really interesting. So it's an ongoing project.

Audience member: I was wondering if you could tell us a bit more about the ongoing project because it sounds as though there's more and more.

Paul Diamond: The ongoing project, it's sort of early days really. We're looking forward to the film. Even at the time people said oh, this is like a movie ending, you know, shot in a dark street in Berlin. So that'll be interesting to see. But people in Whanganui were coming up to me over the weekend we were there, with new bits and pieces of information, which was really great, and I've been really gratified by the reaction in Whanganui. Because when Prue and I went there in 2004 people either, didn't know about it, or if they did, they didn't want to talk about it. That's if they were from Whanganui, and if they weren't from Whanganui, they couldn't stop talking about it because they just couldn't believe that something like that had happened in their adopted town, but the people who are from Whanganui were quite defensive about it.

Charles Mackay's daughter, Jo Duncan, was still alive then, but did an oral history for suffrage, which is here at the Turnbull and in Whanganui at the museum. And that was really valuable, you know. I looked at it initially, because Michelle Horwood who did that said, 'incredible, speak for three and a half hours and not mention your father once'. She actually did mention him a few times, but it's actually you know, when you listen to someone talk, you can kind of hear, you know, well, I think you can, their appearance you know, and there was the strong character that came through and the more I learned about her mother, as well, as her father, I think you could kind of hear elements of them in that , so that was quite valuable.

But it's a bit early really. There's been some great reviews and things and I, but I am nervously looking for the reaction from Whanganui. So far it's been really positive, and there's been a lot of activity going on with the push to get the Meteor Building on the Rainbow List, which will be really exciting, and the people in Whanganui in the Pride Group and things have done a beautiful job of connecting it, the meaning of it with what it means to be queer in Whanganui now. So I think that's really, really exciting. They're explaining it in ways that hadn't really occurred to me. So that's great. So it's a team now, it's not just me.