

90 COLERIDGE STREET

Hearing: Thursday 15 December 2011 at 2.15pm

Summary

Stephen Cochrane was killed in the 22 February 2011 earthquake when a concrete block wall collapsed and crushed him as he ran out of Classique Furniture, 90 Coleridge Street (the building).

Graeme Dreaver the owner of Classique Furniture, purchased the building some 10-12 years ago. On the eastern side of the building there is a driveway which accesses a sliding door. On the eastern boundary of the property, very close to the boundary wall (which is the concrete side wall of the neighbouring building) was the wall in question. It was a free standing wall, approximately 6 metres high and 3 metres wide.

When Mr Dreaver purchased the property the wall was as it was just prior to the 22 February earthquake. At the time of purchase he was told by the previous owner that it had been part of a lean-to, connected to the building by a roof going across the driveway. Apparently that roof collapsed in heavy snows (likely in 1992), leaving the wall standing near the boundary where it had remained ever since.

After the September earthquake (and Boxing Day) there did not appear to be any structural problems with the building.

There was no Council or Civil Defence assessment of the building between the September earthquake and the February aftershock.

During the February earthquake sideways movement of the wall resulted in the top two layers of concrete blocks breaking off the wall, where they landed on the roof of the neighbouring building

The rest of the wall fell in one lump - in the other direction towards the building. Because the top two layers of blocks had already come off, the wall just cleared the building as it toppled over.

Stephen Cochrane who had been working in the building ran out of the side door to escape the building. Tragically just as he ran down the driveway the wall toppled over crushing him underneath it. Efforts were made to rescue Mr Cochrane by lifting the wall but he had died as a result of being crushed.

Subsequently it was discovered that the wall only had two, approximately 20ml, reinforcement rods – one at each end.

Witnesses:

1. Peter Smith, Spencer Holmes Ltd, structural engineer
2. Graeme Dreaver, owner, 90 Coleridge St
3. Marc Hobson, employee

Likely Issues:

1. The need to remove or support any free standing wall, the structural strength of which is unknown.