

„He didn't forget us”

Recollections of John Paul II's Apostolic Pilgrimage to New Zealand in November 1986 by Poles in Aotearoa.

Polish Pope's impact on the Polish Diaspora and the rise of Solidarity in Poland.



John Paul II's Itinerary in New Zealand

Saturday, November 22

- 2.00 pm Arrives Auckland International Airport
- 2.05 pm State Ceremony of Welcome
- 3.15 pm Maori Welcome at Auckland Domain
- 4.00 pm Circles Domain in Popemobile
- 4.30 pm Celebration of Mass at Domain
- 7.05 pm Youth Rally at Domain
- 8.00 pm Departs Domain for Airport
- 9.40 pm Arrives Wellington
- 9.55 pm Arrives Apostolic Nunciature, Lyall Bay

Sunday, November 23

- 8.40 am Leader of Opposition calls on His Holiness at Nunciature
- 8.50 am Meeting with Diplomatic Corps
- 9.30 am Prime Minister calls on His Holiness
- 10.20 am Call on Governor General at Government House
- 11.00 am Arrives in Athletic Park in Popemobile and drives around the Park
- 11.30 am Celebration of Mass at Athletic Park
- 2.10 pm Departs for lunch at Nunciature
- 4.30 pm Departs Apostolic Nunciature
- 4.40 pm Arrives at Wellington Show & Sports Centre for meeting with sick, elderly and handicapped, celebration of the Sacrament of Anointing of the sick
- 6.40 pm Departs Wellington Show & Sports Centre
- 7.00 pm Meeting with New Zealand Catholic Bishops at Apostolic Nunciature

Monday, November 24

- 8.00 am Departs Apostolic Nunciature for Airport
- 8.20 am Departs Wellington Airport for Christchurch
- 9.05 am Arrives Christchurch
- 9.40 am Ecumenical Service at Cathedral of Blessed Sacrament
- 10.25 am Arrives at Lancaster Park in Popemobile and drives through Park
- 10.45 am Celebration of Mass at Lancaster Park
- 1.15 pm Departs Lancaster Park for Airport
- 1.45 pm Ceremony of Farewell at Christchurch International Airport
- 2.00 pm Departs Christchurch for Australia



Auckland, 22 November 1986







Auckland. 22 November 1986



Michael Jarka

The year that His Holiness, Pope John Paul II was to visit New Zealand gave fresh heart to Catholics and Polish people here in New Zealand.

My late father, Jan Jarka, was involved with the preparations and organisation for the Auckland Mass and gathering and what a momentous occasion that turned out to be.

Even at this distance of 34 years, the memories are still as strong as ever. There was great anticipation in our house as to what a real live Pope might look like. It was amazing to think that, finally, after 146 years of a catholic Church in new Zealand that the chief shepherd was to visit and bless his most far-flung flock.

I recall that Dad had to attend many meetings with Bishop Denis Browne (who became a life-long friend of Dad's and mine) and other interested parties. Due to Dad's presence at the planning meetings . the Polish community were given the second best location on the domain that day. The first group to greet him were, fittingly, the Maori people; the original settlers here in Aotearoa and who so enthusiastically embraced the faith and salvation offered by Bishop Pompallier and his priests all those years ago.

I actually believe that Dad chose the better location for us to gather as we were closer to the altar than most and we got a fabulous view of all that happened that momentous day. We never forgot our homeland at the time too as Poland was in the midst of world shattering events that were to have a monumental effect of world history and here was one of the key players coming to our corner of the church.



Michael Jarka cont.

We were to be dressed in national costume (which Dad and I had specially made for the occasion) and we even had a dance group organised and we performed as His Holiness processed past his fellow countrymen and women. I recall that he paused briefly to admire us and gave us a special blessing. Awesome!

On a personal level, in June 1986 I had just returned from a two year overseas experience in the U.K. and Europe and the memories of Poland at the time were still fresh in my mind.

As a result of his involvement with the Auckland planning, Janek was asked, along with Cela Zazulak and Danuta Kupidura, to make the offertory presentation.

Dad always said that in a lifetime of achievement and highlights, that brief encounter stood head and shoulders above all the others. He was changed by it and never forgot it. After meeting His Holiness, Dad always referred to him as 'Uncle'!

After the events, Dad wrote to newspapers worldwide as well as to L'Osservatore Romano to gather photographs of the Auckland visit. As a result, we have a priceless collection today (...).



Image shows from left: Danuta Kupidura, Jan Jarka and Cela Zazulak at the conclusion of the ceremonies in Auckland.



„Poland and Polish Diaspora. In some ways, two different but corresponding, complementary parts of the same reality, the same soul, culture, thinking and feeling, and a history of aspirations, jobs, victories and defeats (...).

Today I will repeat once again that the Polish Diaspora is important to Poland, just as Poland is important to the Polish Diaspora. They both need each other. They both need spiritual, moral and religious renewal, constant renewal, because from it the internal order of man is born: the order of the family, society, the order of the nation. All of humanity. And that order gives rise to freedom and individual, social, economic and political development.”

JP2 at the Mass for representatives of Catholic Polish communities, Vatican (February 26, 1989)





„Every nation has its own culture. We have our millennial culture. This culture is Christian and therefore our faith is expressed in this culture. You can go from culture to faith, you can go from faith to culture. You have linked the two threads, and rightly so, because faith has to find expression in culture.”

From JP2's speech to the Polish Youth,
Castel Gandolfo (August 2, 1987)



Regina Wypych (nee Pāk)

I was a new mother when our Holy Father, Papież Jan Paweł II visited New Zealand.

My wider family were very excited to join with the Polish community to attend the Mass at the Domain and joined the enthusiastic Poles as we walked united together to the park.

We took along our firstborn son, Paweł Wypych, who at six months of age was the youngest member of our Polish contingent in attendance. He was too small for a Polish costume so we adorned his pram with Polish flags. To this day we still have those flags, and the crosses we waved fervently as Pope Jan Paweł II drove past in his Pope-mobile are now a fixture in each of the bedrooms in our home, reminding us of this significant historic occasion.



Wisla Schwieters

(from a booklet „Pilgrimage to New Zealand. Visit of Pope John Paul II in New Zealand 22-24 November 1986” published by the Polish Community in New Zealand in 1990)

(...) One of the gifts given to the Holy Father was an old Polish prayer book brought to New Zealand by the first settlers from Poland, who came to this country so distant from their homeland, over a hundred years ago, after the January Uprising. This prayer book was offered by Tadeusz Mazur, who had accidentally purchased it in an antique shop a few years ago. The new binding of the prayer book was made by the bookbinding workshop at the University of Auckland. (...)

The long-awaited, beautiful spring day of November 22, 1986 has finally come. The group gathered near the Polish House set off on previously reserved buses to the pitch of St. Peter's School, and from there we walked to the stadium, less than a kilometer away.

We walked, sons and daughters of the Polish land, people who had experienced many sufferings and humiliations in our lives, we walked that day with joy in our hearts and with a feeling of pride to meet the supreme servant of Him, whose Kingdom is forever and who is worshiped by all peoples of the earth. We walked, perhaps more than ever, aware of the enormous grace of God that befell the entire Polish nation.



Image courtesy of Pqk Family





Wellington. 23 November 1986

Roger Watkins

When Pope John Paul II visited Wellington in November 1986, one of his official engagements was with the then Governor General of New Zealand, Sir Paul Reeves, at Government House.

My late father Bill Watkins worked for Sir Paul, and he and my late mother Wisia lived on the premises. Wisia was Polish, born Wincentyna Helena Bronistawa Sobierajska, in Tajkury, Wołyń, in Kresy.

My parents were invited to the official welcome for His Holiness and when he was introduced to Wisia she, of course, spoke to him in Polish, which was a pleasant and unexpected surprise for him. Instead of simply shaking her hand, he held on to it while they conversed – he was very interested to hear her story, how she came to be living in New Zealand, where she was born and so on.

Their conversation caused some consternation with his entourage, as they were on a tight schedule and he was due to celebrate Mass very soon. He, however, indicated that he would be ready when he was ready and continued to chat with Wisia a while longer before finally blessing her and making his way out.

For my mother, this meeting was one of the highlights of her life.



Helena Fagan

My grandmother was Marysia Łatyszew (née Rauchówna). Her family moved to Wadowice when she was a young girl. At school she met an older boy, a friend of her brothers, called Karol Wojtyła. They got to know each other better through a shared interest in theatre and participation in the school productions that brought the boys' and girls' high schools together. The young Wojtyła was quite the actor and always had the lead role. Everyone expected that he would become an actor.

Life took them in different directions. My grandmother left Wadowice during World War II and was never to see her homeland, family or friends again, with the exception that she met Karol Wojtyła when he visited Wellington as a Cardinal in 1973. Despite the years, he recognised her immediately and regaled her with tales of old school friends. It was a source of great joy and comfort to her.

Some 5 years on, I remember well the morning we heard the announcement of John Paul II's papacy. My kiwi Dad heard it on the radio. My mother and I gathered around as he phoned to tell his Polish mother-in-law the news. When he said there was a Polish pope, she thought he was just teasing. Then she asked the name. Then there was stunned silence.



Helena Fagan cont.

Another 8 years passed and Wellington's Catholics were excited that the Pope was coming to visit. We would all bus into Athletic Park for Mass and to catch a glimpse of this man who defined the era. Like most Polish families, the excitement ran particularly high in ours. He was one of us. He understood us and the plight of our homeland. He was our voice and we wanted to cheer him on.

At this time a popular local radio station used to run a win-a-wish competition. One of my grandmother's piano pupils secretly phoned into the station with the wish that they arrange for my grandmother to meet John Paul II during his visit to Wellington.

The wish was granted and on that day in 1986 at Athletic Park, my grandmother saw her old school friend for the second and last time. Again he remembered her, and blessed my grandparents.

In a life of many goodbyes, it was a happy memory. The picture of the meeting never left her piano.



Celina Gawronek-Polaczuk

(from „A Bouquet of Thoughts and Reminiscences” published by the Polish Women's League in 1991)

(...) Now, the thought that we would be able to see our Pope in Wellington, filled my heart with pride and joy.

For this occasion I prepared myself, my husband and our large family. My husband repeatedly reminded me that everyone - young and old - would have to go to greet the Pope.

Our wait, full of anticipation and emotion, was further heightened by a telegram from the Nunciature at Lyall Bay, inviting us to attend a private audience with the Pope. Good Lord! Imagine the feelings I experienced! I wondered if I had enough courage, if I was worthy of that moment when I would hold his hand and kiss his relic-studded ring. At the same time I would address his Holiness and assure him that we all remember him in our prayers, and that we pray to God to give him health and strength to further his apostolic work. I simply couldn't believe it! Seeing my uneasiness, my family asked me if I would be able to handle - emotionally and physically - this great and honoured occasion.

Twenty-third of November 1986 and, co-incidentally, my husband's birthday. In the morning we drove to Wellington, to the old Polish Girls' Hostel in Lyall Bay; that beautiful building in its charming location. Forty years ago Polish girls lived there under the tender care of the Ursuline Nuns. Now the old Hostel is the seat of the Papal Nunciature. It was in this hospitable house that my husband and I had our wedding reception amongst our nearest and dearest. Time flies by, but memories are alive. It was no wonder that tears began to fill my eyes, because such moments are never forgotten. Soon we found ourselves in the main hall. Organisers, according to a pre-arranged plan, showed us to our places. My husband and I were first in line to greet the Pope.



Celina Gawronek-Polaczuk cont.

The Holy Father came in, attended by priests. His face was full of goodness and compassion. You could see the fatigue his journey had caused him, but he smiled sincerely and, approaching my husband, extended his hand and asked 'How is Mr Polaczuk from Polesie ? - I remember you from New Zealand and from Poland'. After that he put a few questions to us about Poles in New Zealand. 'He didn't forget us', I thought to myself, 'even amongst the millions of people he'd met up until then'. All I could think about after that was what a great privilege it had been to shake his hand and kiss St Peter's ring. In a quiet emotional voice I said 'Holy Father, we all pray to the Mother of Czestochowa that you may live long to administer God's commands'. 'And I bless you', replied the Holy Father, moving slowly to the next person. We stood speechless, holding the rosaries given to us as souvenirs. We left the main hall through the entrance door, where dignitaries of the government and other important people were waiting. I hoped that I would once again in my life be able to see the Pope.

After the audience we went to Athletic Park, to see his Holiness again, attend his Mass and listen to his sermon. I saw that his words and blessings filled the young and old (numbering about 35 thousand) with love, bringing them closer to God and strengthening their Holy Faith. He remembered us Poles and, speaking in Polish, he told us not to forget our native roots which stemmed from around the Vistula River and he told us always to remember that we were Poles. (...)









Christchurch. 24 November 1986



Krzysztof Pawlikowski

The Holy Father's visit to Christchurch was a great celebration for the Poles in the South Island, as well as a very important event for the entire South Island. The preparations began in April 1986 with the first news that the Holy Father would visit Christchurch. After establishing contact with the Diocesan Organising Committee of the Pope's visit to Christchurch, the Polish Community Organising Committee was appointed, which I chaired. The diocesan committee agreed that the Poles would give gifts to the Pope during the Holy Mass. Polish Community was also awarded a very favorable place at the stadium, on the right hand side of the papal altar.

On Monday, November 24, 1986, Pope John Paul II with accompanying persons flew to Christchurch from Wellington, around 9 am. On the way to the city, the Pope was greeted by numerous residents of the South Island. At 9.40 am, the Ecumenical Meeting began at the Catholic Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, where the Pope met representatives of various religions. Zbigniew Maciaszek represented our Polish Diaspora there.

The main event of the day - the meeting of the Holy Father John Paul II with the faithful and the Holy Mass he celebrated, took place in Lancaster Park, a sports stadium, which was specially adapted to this event. Popemobile entered the stadium around 10.30 am and the mass began 20 minutes later.

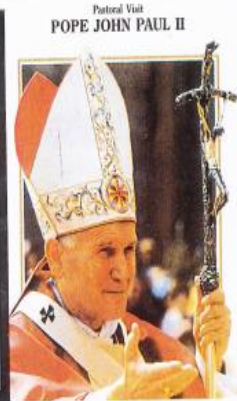
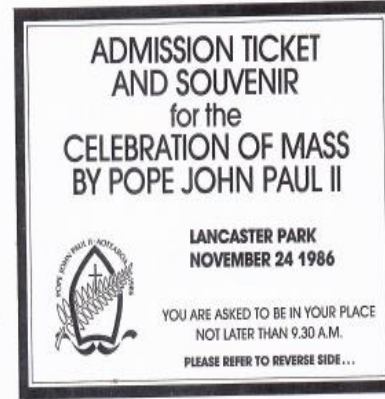


Krzysztof Pawlikowski cont.

During the greeting, the Pope asked about the distance between the Vatican and Christchurch. While the congregation tried to remember how many thousands of kilometers separate these two places, the Holy Father suggested that this distance is now zero, as the Vatican came to Christchurch. This statement caused enthusiasm among the gathered crowd.

The Polish community group placed near the altar was clearly visible to John Paul II. We proudly waved Polish flags and welcomed the Holy Father with occasional banners. During the mass, representatives of the Polish diaspora gave the Holy Father a special gift, a beautiful album "Wild New Zealand", with a two-sided dedication. Polish Community gathered sang „Sto Lat”. We also donated \$ 1000 for the purposes of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" (One Heart). When it was time to say goodbye, we left Lancaster Park with regret that this wonderful spiritual, religious and patriotic feast was over.

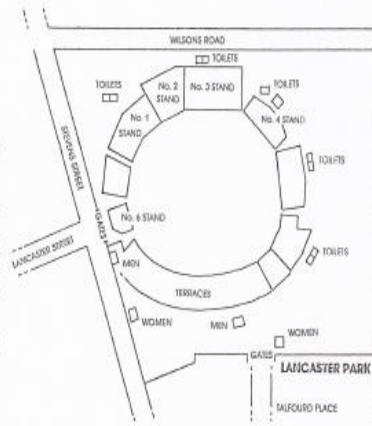
The Pope drove straight to the airport, from where he flew to Australia. He was farewelled by the Prime Minister and Governor-General of New Zealand as well as Catholic bishops.



PROGRAMME

- 8.30 a.m. Gates will be opened.
- 9.30 a.m. Rehearsal for the Mass and Celebrations.
- 10.35 a.m. His Holiness arrives.
- 10.45 a.m. Holy Mass commences.
- 1.15 p.m. Holy Mass concludes.
- 1.30 p.m. His Holiness leaves Lancaster Park for Christchurch International Airport.

The committee reserves the right to deny entry to any person or





„The last decades, and even the last years of our history, testify in a special way to the will to win, to the vitality of the nation. We paid dearly during the last war for "our and yours" freedom. We know the price of this sacrifice [...]. But from this terrible hecatomb our people emerged strengthened, in the conviction of their own dignity, of their right to live as the host of their own homeland, in the conviction of the right to their own history, to full freedom and independence, to self-determination and self-government; and all this is based on fidelity to Christ, who is Lord of history and Lord of our life. I think that this content is also expressed by the word "Solidarity", which I see written here in this stadium. I hear you react very lively to this word. I am not surprised [...], the whole gathered community of the Belgian working world reacted to this word with the same intensity as you all gathered here, and it was not just about the word, it was about all the effort, the effort of the working world to provide it with proper dignity, to ensure their proper place in society, to ensure working people the right to self-governing trade unions.

It can be seen that this issue, which is related to the word "Solidarity", is not only our Polish specificity, but also has a wide resonance outside of Poland, especially here, in those countries that have contributed greatly to making Christian teaching put into practice, especially working-class and working environments.”

Speech to the Poles from the Benelux Countries, Brussels (May 19, 1985)



Presentation of gifts to the Holy Father from the Polish community of NZ South Island by B. Pawlikowska and J. Kubiak.

After the presentation of the gifts, a delegation of the Polish community leaves the altar: B. Pawlikowska, J. Kubiak, M. Jacyna and M. Obirek. Images courtesy of K. Pawlikowski



„When World War II ended, nations - especially those who most experienced cruelty, violence, concentration camps, man's hatred for man, contempt for man - considered their first task to adopt a joint Declaration of Human Rights. And it was a great event. Everyone understood that if humanity and nations were to protect themselves from such cataclysms as World War II in the future, they had to put human dignity and human rights at the center. (...) When today, for a few days now, I have been passing through various cities of this country, I very often come across banners with the words "Solidarity". (...)

My dear brothers and sisters, my dear Compatriots, they mean that for 40 years, and especially in the 1980s, the Polish people tried to add content to that Declaration of Human Rights, which was consistent with the Declaration of Human Rights.

The inscription "Solidarity" is a symbol of such an order in which the human being is at the center. Human dignity and human rights are the criteria for creating the organisation of work and culture, social life, and the life of a national community. And that is why we revere this word, this symbol, this reality. I think that on the path of history that our nation is following, which is not an easy path, especially in the last generations, this word adds a homogeneous content, it is a stage resulting from the same premises, serving the same aspirations that animate our history. We want to be ourselves and live our own lives."

JP2 to the Polish community of Canada (September 14, 1984)

Photo courtesy of W. Brodowski











„Among other things, I spoke of this on the Polish sea-coast, and much of what I said refers to the whole world, including the United States. There, on the Baltic, “the word “solidarity” was spoken in a new way that at the same time confirms its eternal content. In the name of man’s future and the future of humanity, it was necessary to say that word, “solidarity”. Today it rolls like a wide wave over the face of the world, which realizes that we cannot live according to the principle of “all against all”, but only according to another principle, “all with all”, “all for all”. Solidarity must take precedence over conflict. Only then can humanity survive, can each nation survive and develop within the great human family. Solidarity means a way of existing, for example, of a nation, in its human variety, in unity, with respect for differences, for all the diversity that exists among people, and so, unity in variety, in plurality. All this is contained in the concept „solidarity””. (Address in Gdynia, July 11, 1987)

Address to the American Polish Community, Detroit-Hamtramck
(September 19, 1987)



„ (...) I thank you very much for your words, for your allocutions, for your songs, for your gifts, and now I want to offer you also a gift. Being the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, I am also a son of my people, and the Image of Our Lady of Czestochowa I offer you today expresses this fundamental attitude of myself and yourselves.”

*Welcome Ceremony, Address of John Paul II, Auckland,
22 November 1986*

St John Paul II's gift to the Auckland diocese: an image of Our Lady of Czestochowa kept at St Patrick's Cathedral in Auckland. Also on display at the Cathedral is the sculpture of St John Paul II created by artist Toni Cross de Chavannes, who is said to have experienced physical healing of cancer when she was creating this art.



This plaque commemorates
the visit to Auckland
of the late
POPE JOHN PAUL II
22nd November 1986
where he celebrated mass for all the citizens

It was made possible through the co-operation of
Mr. John Roy-Wojciechowski,
the Honorary Consul for the Republic of Poland,
his wife Valerie and the Auckland City Council

Unveiled by the
Most Reverend Bishop of Auckland, Pat Dunn
9th December 2007

WHO IS HE, JOHN PAUL II?

Who is he? Karol Wojtyla, deeply rooted in his native Poland. A man knowing personal grief - his mother, brother and father all died before he was 21. Always a brilliant scholar, he worked for a time in a stone quarry. A resistance worker in wartorn Poland, he had to study for the priesthood in secret.

He is a poet, an actor, a musician, a sportsman. He earned two doctorates, and was for a time Professor of Ethics at Lublin. He has been a journalist, and is the author of literally hundreds of articles, treatises and books. He is both linguist extraordinary, and traveller indefatigable.

And above all, Karol Wojtyla is a priest, a spiritual director and a religious educator, a man of prayer devoted to Mary and to the spirituality of Carmel.

Who is he? John Paul II, the man who walks 'in the shoes of the fisherman', heir to nearly 2000 years of tradition, whom people

have called 'Supreme Pontiff', 'Vicar of Christ' and 'Holy Father'.

A man called to be leader of the world's 800 million Catholics, and to be the Servant of the Servants of God.

Who is he, this man who passionately condemns violence, and forgave the man who shot him; this man who pleads for the poor and the oppressed, but is himself at home in the corridors of power and politics?

He has probably travelled further, and been seen and heard by more people, than anyone else in history. Seemingly inexhaustable, he is completely at ease in an age of jet travel and mass communication. And in every country he visits he pleads for the poor, for peace, and for a return to penance and prayer.

During his international travels, Karol Wojtyła (1920-2005), later known as Pope John Paul II, in 45 countries met with the local Polish Diaspora, with new emigration and with Polish national minorities. This happened in 20 European countries, the United States, Canada, eight countries in Africa, nine in South America, as well as in Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Kazakhstan. In his speeches to the Polish community abroad, apart from religious matters, he also touched upon social problems that were important to the audience and related to their life situations in their new home countries. He pointed to the fact that Christianity is not only the foundation of Polish culture, but also a vehicle of Poland's freedom and sovereignty. He emphasized that it was thanks to their faith that Poles as a nation had triumphantly survived the historical events that threatened them and that they had emerged from great national tragedies with new spiritual strength. John Paul II considered the meetings with the Polish Diaspora and his compatriots outside Poland to be his obvious and extremely important pastoral and patriotic duty.

The Polish Pope had a strong influence on Polish society at a time when the Church was the main power protecting Polish citizens against the communist regime's pressure. John Paul II was a spiritual authority behind the overthrowing of communism. Poles finally had an international non-communist figure to look up to. The Pope used this, fighting not against the communists but against the abnormal situation of Poland under authoritarian regime.

If it hadn't been for John Paul II's first pilgrimage to Poland in 1979, there would have most probably been no Solidarity. The pilgrimage was a groundbreaking, sociologically powerful event, since an entire generation of Poles became aware of their power and felt a surge of courage to act. People believed that it was possible to remain faithful to the truth despite the brutal and powerful regime. Solidarity became a nation-wide movement that clearly identified itself with John Paul II. It was no coincidence that the Gdańsk Shipyard's entrance gate, with its John Paul II's portrait, became the movement's symbol. In this sense, the Pope took part in the overthrow of communism, though not as a political actor but rather as an initiator of an ethical movement.





Embassy
of the Republic of Poland
in Wellington

Wellington, July 2020

Special thanks for their contribution and photos: Michael Jarka and Jarka Family (images on pages 7, 8, 9, 10), Regina Wypych and Pąg Family (6, 10, 11, 12), Roger Watkins (15), Helena Fagan (16, 17), Ela Rombel and Polaczuk Family (18, 19), Krzysztof Pawlikowski (24, 25, 26, 34), Waldemar Brodowski (23, 27, 28, 31), John Roy-Wojciechowski (33).

Page 20 photo credit: www.gg.govt.nz - Sir Paul Reeves welcomed His Holiness Pope John Paul II to New Zealand in November 1986. They are pictured in the Conservatory at Government House in Wellington.



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