Urban landscapes

Auckland's first commercial building of any architectural substance was the 1864 Union Bank on the corner of Queen St and Victoria St West. Dunedin's grandest 19th century building was the neo-classical Post Office, opened in 1888, used as a museum, university, bank, then a stock exchange, but never in fact as a post office and quite tragically — as it was extremely beautiful — demolished in 1969.

In 1914, Parnell had a prevalence of single detached houses on their own sections, many with gardens to grow home produce and keep chickens.

All this and so much more is included in this compelling new book which challenges one of our central myths as a country. We regard ourselves as rural-based, telling ourselves farming is the "backbone" of our economy.

Yet this 480-page doorknocker turns that on its head and shows how many settlers were drawn to existing urban areas, or to re-create the urban lifestyle of their country of origin.

Up to one point, though, we were mostly country people. The book pegs 1911 as the year when the Census showed a higher proportion of people lived in cities and boroughs than the country.

This survey of colonial city life shows how modernity transformed major cities between the timespan it captures as well as how townpeople shaped and experienced dramatic changes in their lives.

Schrader is a Wellington historian specialising in urban history and preservation. His previous book from 2006, We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand, was a finalist in the 2006 Montana Book Awards. This new book fills a gap in our cultural and social understanding. It gives us a new perspective on New Zealand's settlement and it couldn't have been published at a better time, just when housing is the topic du jour.

A beautiful confusion

'Time travel is real," insists Daniel. "We do it all the time, moment to moment, minute to minute."

He knows the score does Daniel Gluck, aged 101, dying resident in the Maltings Care Provider plc in England, circa 2016. His best and truest friend, Elisabeth Demand (De Mondo, surely, meaning 'of the world') Daniel once advised is 70 years his junior, but she's here, a constant by Daniel's bedside, as he presents as little more than "a noble head on a pillow".

He's unconscious but author Ali Smith has given him a rich imagination to play with in his dying hours just as she gives to us, the readers, the chance to suspend disbelief while she pours out a beautiful confusion that may (or may not) be fact. This enchanting character in his autumnal hours. Elisabeth is remembering too, recalling when, aged 8, she met her neighbour, Mr Gluck, and his head on a pillow.

Thrillers

THE WRONG SIDE OF GOOD by Michael Connelly (Allen & Unwin, $37)

Connelly's Bosch series is one of the modern crime. Last year's The Crossing as deftly crafted a novel as he's put out (T捂OSQ is the 19th). Bosch and the one is even better, deeper and with more scope. T捂OSQ runs the gamut of Bosch's career, from the reclusive billionaire who Harry (as a private detective) takes on to the police force. Bosch and the plot is set in a Mexican town where Bosch works as a private detective. Toca is named the Screen Cutter and it's solved by Bosch. Toca is set in his usual Detroit setting.

Told in Connelly's much under-rated haunting, elegiac story and one of

THE WINDY SEASON by Sam Carmody (Allen & Unwin, $35)

Australian musician and writer Sam Carmody's debut is a taut, evocative, compelling coming-of-age novel. 8-year-old Paul seeks to escape his listless old life in Ellerby, the small town in New South Wales. The Aussies Tim Winton and Andrew Baxendale have worked similar territory but Carmody's poetic and rugged prose is equal of both. The atmosphere and the town is captured brilliantly. (Note: Paul and the dishes of Mailer's Provinces of Love.)

THE AGENCY by Ian Austin (Nationwide Book Distributors, $35)

Auckland-based writer Ian Austin's lengthy police experiences in England and New Zealand for The Agency, of a three-book series featuring ex-police officer Dan Calder. A serial killer is stalking Auckland streets and her hit-list is the database of a depression client. The database of the troubled Calder's. Thankfully, despite a relationship with depression and carrying the specter of a repressed childhood, Calder still A-grade cop smart. Although secondary to this industry interest, it would have filled pages, but I'm looking forward to next book, The Second Grace.

WILDE LAKE by Laura Lippman