

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Address

240 Devon Street West, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

240 Devon Street West is one of a pair of near identical dwellings constructed for early New Plymouth settler and retired farmer Robert Baker in 1900-01. The houses are associated with a speculative boom driven by a severe housing shortage in New Plymouth, which saw wealthier citizens commissioning builders to construct groups of cottages for occupation by members of the working class and people of lesser means. As a workers' dwelling, this building has the potential to offer valuable insights into the lives of a marginalised, yet important societal group during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The cottage is designed around the sloping topography of the section and has rarity value as one of only two early-1900s New Plymouth cottages (the other being neighbouring 242 Devon Street West) with a single-storey front elevation, rising to a two-storied rear elevation. Although the cottage has been subjected to a number of alterations it still largely retains its original form.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description PT Section 217 Town of New Plymouth

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1900-01

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals Unknown

History

This building is one of two neighbouring cottages constructed for retired farmer and early New Plymouth settler Robert Baker in 1900-01. These houses are associated with a speculative boom driven by a severe housing shortage in New Plymouth during the late 1890s and early 1900s. At this time, wealthier citizens commissioned builders to construct groups of cottages for occupation by members of the working class and people of lesser means; these houses were mostly rented out, although were occasionally sold. Seeing an opportunity, and with the necessary capital from the recent sale of his farm, Robert Baker set about having two rental cottages constructed in Devon/Aubrey Streets and another, larger group, erected in Glen Road (now Bracken Street).¹

The two Devon Street cottages are located on Part Town Section 217, with the first entry in the Land Deeds Register for the property being a conveyance from James Penwarden to James Pugh in December 1877, followed by a conveyance from Pugh to John Downs in November 1878.² Pugh and Downs were consecutive holders of the Education Reserve leases for neighbouring Town Sections 215 and 216 (Pugh from 1876 until 1879, and Downs from 1879 until the early 1900s), with the present cottage at 246 Devon Street West (now much altered), constructed sometime prior to 1880 for either Pugh or Downs.³ During the 1890s, Downs had a cottage constructed at the northern end of Town Section 217 and this survived at 21 Aubrey Street until regrettably removed in the early-2000s to be replaced with the present more modern house. The remainder of the section was presumably grazed until Downs sold the property to Robert Baker in mid-July 1900.⁴

Robert Baker was a young man in his twenties when he emigrated to New Zealand aboard the *Blenheim*, arriving at New Plymouth on the 7th of November 1842.⁵ He married Matilda Batten in 1848 and for many years was a farmer at Mangorei. Following the death of Matilda in 1894, he relocated to New Plymouth and subsequently built a number of investment properties in Devon Street West and at Glen Road (Bracken Street).⁶ Although suffering several bouts of serious illness in his final years, right up until the weeks before his death he was still advertising his cottages to let and could be found “seated in his accustomed chair outside Mr Newton King’s auction mart exchanging reminiscences

¹ Of the latter group, numbers 18, 24, 24A, and 26 Bracken Street all survive

² Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

³ Hamish Crimp, ‘246 Devon Street West (circa 1876-79)’, *Kete New Plymouth*, <http://ketenewplymouth.peoplesnetworknz.info/en/site>; accessed 20 January 2019.

⁴ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

⁵ *Taranaki Daily News*, 25 June 1913, page 5

⁶ *Taranaki Daily News*, 3 August 1894

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with old friends”.⁷ Baker died at his Glen Road residence on the 23rd of June 1913 aged 92 years.⁸



Gordon, William Francis, 4 August 1896, showing vacant site of 240 and 242 Devon Street West, present 246 Devon Street West at right, former 21 Aubrey Street cottage at centre. Puke Ariki, LN1869: A.2c.19

Construction of the Devon Street cottages probably commenced soon after Baker's purchase of the section, although the builder is unknown. At least one of the cottages is complete by early-March 1901, with Baker advertising to let a “six-roomed house in Devon Street West, five minutes from post office”.⁹ Both cottages were complete a month later, with the 1901-02 New Plymouth Borough Council rates book noting that as at 1 April 1901, three houses with a combined rateable value of £44 were present on Town Section 217.¹⁰ Later, during July 1901, Baker advertised “two 6-roomed cottages to let on Devon-Line, about 5 minutes' walk from post office”.¹¹

It seems that the cottages initially had a high turnover of tenants and at times may have remained vacant. Aside from frequent 'to let' advertisements, street directories show a number of different persons residing at the cottages, in some year's occupants are only listed for one cottage, and in other years for neither cottage. Early occupants listed in Stones Street Directories include labourer Charles Corkin in 1901, Mrs Sarah Bullock and carpenters Ernest and Albert Bullock in 1902, and a labourer by the name of Murphy in 1903; from 1904-06 no persons are listed as residing at the cottages.¹² Present 240 Devon Street West is listed as being occupied by labourer Francis Maye Siffleet from 1907 until 1909, at which time he is replaced by engine driver Frederick Golding; another

⁷ *Taranaki Daily News*, 25 June 1913, page 5

⁸ *Taranaki Daily News*, 24 June 1913, page 4

⁹ *Taranaki Herald*, 4 March 1901, page 3

¹⁰ New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book 1901-02, NPDC Archives

¹¹ *Taranaki Herald*, 27 July 1901, page 3

¹² Stones Street Directories, 1901-06



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engine driver, John Hartley, is listed as the occupier from 1910.¹³

After Baker's death in 1913, all his properties were advertised for sale by auction, with this house listed as being presently let for 9s per week.¹⁴ Following the auction, ownership of this cottage and part of Town Section 217 was conveyed to Alex Baker.¹⁵ The cottage remains a rental and is let to a number of different occupiers; Alex Baker only seems to have resided in the house for a short period during 1922.¹⁶ In November 1922 the house is conveyed to settler John Emison Gilby.¹⁷ Listed as residing in this location from the 1924 edition of Wises Post Office Directories, Gilby remained in the house until his death aged 83 years in 1929.¹⁸ Thereafter numerous different occupiers suggest that the cottage once again became a rental property.



The rear of 240 and 242 Devon Street West can be seen on the right of the image. Richard Cock Jnr's 'West End Store' is in the centre, Puke Ariki, LN1907: A.3.101

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

¹³ Stones Street Directories 1907-10

¹⁴ *Taranaki Herald*, 27 September 1913, page 7

¹⁵ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

¹⁶ Wises Post Office Directories, 1922

¹⁷ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

¹⁸ Wises Post Office Directories, 1924-29; NPDC Cemetery Search,

<http://www.newplymouthnz.com/Residents/Facilities-and-Services/Cemeteries-and-Crematorium/Cemetery-Search>



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Description

This cottage is located on Devon Street West a few blocks from New Plymouth's sprawling CBD. This area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, and whilst development pressures since the 1960s has resulted in an eclectic mix of architectural styles, the area still retains a number of older dwellings that contribute to a sense of historical character now uncommon in New Plymouth. Located adjacent to the near identical 40 Devon Street West, these cottages have strong aesthetic value through their homogeneity of form.

The building is part of a wider group of interesting older buildings and lesser known historical sites near the intersections of Devon Street West, Weymouth Street and Aubrey Street. These include the now much modified former 'West End Store' at 229 Devon Street West (1880); a row of three transitional style homes at 226-230 Devon Street West (constructed upon the site of the original Primitive Methodist Burial Ground and later West End Fire Brigade Station); and one of New Plymouth's oldest buildings, 'Fishleigh Cottage' at 20 Aubrey Street (1856-57); above which is the site of the pre-European Rungapiko pā and the later Fort Murray (erected in 1860).

The main form of this building is a box cottage modified to suit the sloping topography of the section. The front elevation is single-storey, rising to a two-storied structure at rear; 240 and 242 Devon Street West are the only 1900s New Plymouth cottages to follow this unique plan. The cottage is timber-framed, clad entirely in rusticated weatherboard, and its roof sheathed in mild corrugated steel.

The single-storey main front elevation faces roughly south-east into Devon Street West and features a full-length sloping post and beam veranda which has now been partially enclosed. The centrally positioned front entrance door is partially enclosed and a four-light double-hung sash is located at the western end of the elevation. As is typical of workers' cottages, aside from some replica fretwork, this elevation is unadorned.

The north-east and south-west side elevations are incorporate a number of timber casements in a wide variety of styles; A full-height external brick chimney originally rose at the centre of the north-eastern elevation, although has long since been removed. An early photo reveals these elevations were unadorned except for a finial at the gable apex; these no longer exist although could be easily re-instated.

The rear elevation faces roughly north-west onto a small backyard. Originally this elevation was symmetrically composed with four twelve-light double-hung sashes (two each floor), and a centrally positioned ground floor backdoor. Only the western sashes survive, with extensive lean-to additions and first floor deck with timber French casements taking their place.

Assessment:

Historical	This cottage has historic significance as one of a pair of dwellings constructed for retired farmer and early New Plymouth settler Robert Baker in 1900-01. They are associated with a speculative boom driven by a severe housing shortage in New Plymouth during the late 1890s and early 1900s and were originally occupied by members of the marginalised and under-studied working class.	✓
Importance to Community	-	
Architecture & Construction	This building has architectural and technical value as a box cottage modified to suit the sloping topography of the section.	✓



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Setting and Context	240 Devon Street West is one of a pair of near identical dwellings which have strong aesthetic value through their homogeneity of form. It is part of a wider group of interesting older buildings and lesser known historical sites which give the immediate area a sense of historical character now uncommon in New Plymouth.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	This building has rarity value as one of only two early 1900s cottages in New Plymouth with a single-storey front elevation rising to a two-storied rear elevation (the other being neighbouring 242 Devon Street West). Although the cottage has been subjected to a number of alterations, it does largely retain its original form and structure and is clearly identifiable as an early-1900s dwelling.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓

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