

## HISTORY BEING SACRIFICED ...

# MONEY BLAMED FOR INACTION ON PARSONAGE

A solitary lavatory pan is the only item unravished by decay in New Plymouth's historic stone parsonage in Courtenay Street as its would-be saviours muddle along in their thinking.

The at least 121-year-old building, home of the city's first vicarage and some 10 years older than Richmond Cottage, stands alone on a third of an acre section surrounded by overgrown trees and gradually being robbed of its treasures by vandals.

- To preserve the building where it is would cost about £1800 to £2000.
- To shift it to a proposed site the cost is estimated to be between £3000 and £4000.

Once it was situated "very romantically," according to an account from an early journal.

Now it is little more than a broken down old house, steeped in history.

### Preserve

However, it need not be so. In fact, if the regional committee of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust would make up its mind to preserve the building on its present site the 1844-47 home of the Rev. William Bolland could be added to Taranaki's museum pieces.

As it should be.

Lack of money is being blamed by all interested parties as the major reason for something concrete not being done with the old parsonage.

But an investigation of the facts surrounding the most recent developments (and there have been few) makes it plain that indecision is the main bugbear.

The building withstood the Maori Wars, though wooden additions were destroyed, and except for a crumbling in some of the stonework toward the rear, the original stonework is in good repair.

### Takeover

The council had given the trust the opportunity of doing something, but so far he had not been advised of the trust's intentions.

### Divided

Some time ago the trust favoured shifting the building to St. Mary's Church grounds, said a former chairman of the regional committee, Mr F. J. Bowering. This had not been on a recommendation of the committee, which was somewhat divided as to whether or not it should be shifted.

The committee had been advised by the trust to find ways and means of shifting it, including an estimate of the cost.

"Quite frankly," said Mr Bowering, "I feel that if the building cannot be preserved on its site then it would be better to forget it."

A member of the city council and the trust, Mrs A. N. Gale, said the problem all boiled down to money. The council had agreed that it could be moved and St. Mary's had agreed to receive it, but there was the cost.

Mrs Gale felt that the front of the building should be preserved and the rest—because of crumbling stone—could be improvised.

The council could use the ground to better advantage.

The trust had agreed to contribute the sum of £1500 towards the shifting of the building and the council about £500 or £600.

The Ven. Archdeacon K. Liggett agreed that the future of the old parsonage was not so much up in the air but very much on the ground.

"We agreed in principle to the shifting of it to St. Mary's," he said. It all depended on the cost.

The secretary of the regional committee of the trust, Mr H. D. Mullon, was asked if the £1500 from the trust to shift the building would apply if the building was left where it was and repaired. Mr Mullon said there was no guarantee.

### Maintenance

The actual cost of repairing the building on its present site is independently estimated at £1800. This would enable the building to stand for about 50 years.

Maintenance is a major factor, especially if the building is to be left largely unattended.

However, the New Plymouth Historical Society has been looking for somewhere to establish a headquarters and for the extra cost of about £200 for kitchen facilities the old parsonage could be made into a good home.

## GUNS IN THE ATTIC

Some confusion surrounds the early days of the old Courtenay Street parsonage.

In 1947 epidemics of typhoid fever were rife in the North Island. The Rev.

City Express 8.8.1965

P.1.

In 1950 the Church of England Trust Board sold the house and section to the city council and at that time the council agreed to repair and preserve the building.

It was occupied at the time of the takeover and actually continued to be so until about two years ago. After Richmond Cottage was rebuilt on its present site, the Historic Places Trust decided that the old parsonage was next on its list.

The city council obtained a quote of about £2000 to repair the building. The council then had second thoughts and suggested to the regional committee of the trust that it take the building over.

The town clerk, Mr W. J. Connor, said last week his council was not prepared to repair and maintain the building, but was keen to see that something was done.

A front view of the old vicarage. — (City Express photo).

From writings in the Turnbull Library it is clear the building of the house was started some time in 1842 or 1843.

Suitable stone had to be found, hauled by bullocks from the Hentui Stream to the site and rough-dressed, while long stones were required for the mullioned windows and limestone from Nelson.

It has been estimated that there is approximately as much stonework in the house as in the original Church of St. Mary's. It took about 13 months to build St. Mary's.

#### BURNT DOWN

As far as is known, the first vicar in New Plymouth, the Rev. William Bolland, lived in the house when a nearby wooden place he was occupying was burnt down.

He, his wife and sister-in-law lived there during those early difficult years when money was almost non-existent and establishing a ministry of the church heart breaking.

Bolland contracted the disease and as there was no doctor available he died in May of that year.

The Rev. Henry Govett arrived in New Plymouth to assist with the missionary work at that time and he worked on till he shifted to Wellington and then to Nelson. In 1948 Mr Govett returned to New Plymouth as vicar and lived in the parsonage till 1860.

The strain between the Maoris and white settlers ended in open warfare in 1860 and the Govett family had to leave the parsonage and seek refuge in town.

Probably because it was made of stone, the parsonage was thought to be an ideal place as an outpost during the wars. Guns were stored in the attic.

During the war all the additions made by Mr Bolland were destroyed by the Maoris but the original building was unharmed.

