

NEW LISTING



HISTORY BEHIND RIVERSTONE FRONTAGE 82 BARRETT STREET, WESTOWN

Many historic homes in New Plymouth have been compromised over the years by owners keen to bring them "up to date" with modern conveniences and finishes. *By Mike Shaw*

Less so at 82 Barrett St, however, where present owners Peter and Lisa have valued the wealth of original features throughout this almost century-old home.

There have been changes, of course, but they have been relatively minimal in the overall presentation of the house. It was built in 1919 and is impressive with its substantial riverstone frontage.

That striking feature means it's a home that's familiar to many people, located as it is in a prominent position at the corner of Barrett St and Cutfield Rd, looking out over the Sanders Park sports fields across the road.

That familiarity has also embraced life here in more than a few cases, Peter says. "It was in three flats years ago," he explains. "It was a party house and a lot of people have been here."

Its original builder/owner probably wouldn't have been happy with that, but despite the rental background, most of the home he lived in has survived intact.

Records show the house was built for Captain Frank Locke Hartnell and a building permit was issued to Hartnell on December 13, 1919, at an estimated cost of £1000 (a reasonable sum for the time). The "architect" was listed as Hartnell himself and as he was a carpenter working for Boon Bros before WWI, it's likely they built the house and perhaps the design was a project between Hartnell and Boon Bros.

Hartnell became well-known in the city through his military service and subsequent roles with the New Zealand Returned Servicemen's Association. A newspaper obituary following his death aged 64 in 1939 notes he had joined the Taranaki Guards about 1899 and when the volunteer system was discontinued was granted a commission in the 11th Regiment (Taranaki Rifles).

War service followed although that was cut short. He left New Zealand with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (3rd Reinforcements) in March 1915 for active service in France and Gallipoli. In July, his promotion from lieutenant to captain was reported, but in August he was listed as severely wounded in the back – presumably during the fighting in Gallipoli. He was sent home to recover in October.

After the war, he joined the NZRSA, becoming New Plymouth president and serving on the national executive. He was also a nationally renowned rifle shooter and croquet player.

The detail and finish Hartnell planned into his home starts with that striking riverstone frontage and continues inside the front door, where there's a spacious lobby with a wide window seat to greet visitors. In here, the dark timber features are first seen in the grid of beams and battens across the ceiling; they are repeated throughout the home. As was the standard for the era, the kitchen, dining and lounge rooms are separate, but there is an easy flow through glazed French doors between the dining and lounge rooms. Both these rooms have open fireplaces with appealing variations on a red-brick-and-concrete theme.

A wide bay window is a feature in the dining room and lets in plenty of natural light. Three windows in the adjacent lounge also make this room a light and airy space. These windows, and those in the lobby, have leadlight features. The kitchen is a spacious area that has been updated with new cabinets and modern appliances, but the original space is still there where Mrs Hartnell would have cooked meals on a wood stove. It's a nice feature now for the stainless steel oven with a tiled splashback behind.

Two bedrooms are located downstairs – the master with walk-through wardrobe and a modern ensuite, the rear bedroom with another fireplace although that is no longer used and has been boarded up. Upstairs, there's a large living area and two more bedrooms – one looking out over Barrett St, the other looking over Cutfield Rd to the playing fields of Sanders Park.

The living area up here is impressive, with its ceilings shaped into the roofline and a window seat across the end of the room. Oregon and oak timber features abound in here as well and you imagine that its carpenter owner was responsible for the built-in cupboards and cabinets.

The latter includes a fold-out writing desk – the working surface still showing dark stains from the ink that Hartnell or his wife would have been using to write letters and documents.

The cabinet built in below the desk is locked and Peter and Lisa have never forced it open. They have left it as a mystery touch to life here. I wonder what's inside its door.

There are also two separate single wardrobes in here, allowing this to become a large fifth bedroom if new owners wanted the extra sleeping space.

Along the landing, there are two more bedrooms, one with an unusual walk-in wardrobe that you could even call a dressing room.

The hallway has been closed off to leave the rest of the space upstairs as a separate, self-contained studio, accessed by an exterior staircase from the back of the house – a great option for extended family or an independent teenager.

New owners could open up the hallway again and the studio could become an integral part of life here again – it would make a great master suite as the Oregon and oak features are in keeping with the rest of the home.

Peter understands the kitchen and bathroom services were added to create this studio area when it was developed in the 1940s, probably to enhance its rental options at the time.

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