

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Thomas Sole's Cottage no.1

Address

251 Courtenay Street, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

This building is one of two neighbouring investment properties constructed for early New Plymouth settler Thomas Sole about 1894. Thomas Sole arrived at New Plymouth with his family aboard the *Oriental* in 1841 and became a well-known and highly-respected member of the district. Along with neighbouring 253 Courtenay Street, this building is one of a rare pair of mid-1890s cottages in New Plymouth. Originally constructed 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. Although the cottage has been subjected to a number of alterations, it does largely retain its original form and structure, and is clearly recognisable as a nineteenth century cottage.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description Lot 1 DP 12783

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction Circa 1894

Principal Materials Wooden framing, rusticated weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals Unknown

History

This building is one of two neighbouring investment cottages constructed for early New Plymouth settler Thomas Sole about 1894. Town Section 2053 was originally allocated to William Holroyd Bing by the Plymouth Company during the early 1840s.¹ However, it is unclear if Bing ever occupied the section or even resided in the colony, and by the 1875-76 rating year, Thomas Sole is listed as the ratepayer for Town Section 2053 (and neighbouring Section 2054).² However, it wasn't until 1883 that the Crown Grant for Town Section 2053 was advertised as being ready for registration and delivery to Thomas Sole, with the property title later issued under the Land Transfer Act.³

Thomas Sole was born at Kent and emigrated to New Plymouth in 1841 aboard the Plymouth Company's *Oriental*, accompanied by other members of the Sole-Foreman families.⁴ Thomas married Sarah Devenish in 1855, and the couple had two children; Rosina and well known surveyor Thomas Gore Sole. Thomas Sole Senior initially farmed at Mangoraka, and then Mangorei, where he remained until the outbreak of the First Taranaki War, at which time he shifted into town.⁵ Sole was a member of the first mounted corps formed, and also accompanied missionaries on their early travels to remote areas of the North Island.⁶ Sole was in good health up until a short time before his death, when he caught a chill whilst working at his cottages; he passed away on the 14th of June 1909, aged 81 years, and is buried in the nearby Te Henui Cemetery.⁷

It seems Town Section 2053 remained vacant for the first decade of Sole's ownership, and along with neighbouring sections, was presumably grazed. The 1894-95 New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book lists Town Sections 2053, 2054, 2083 and 2084 together; all are without dwellings, and as at 1 April 1894 have a combined rateable value of £9.⁸ The 1896-97 New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book lists only Town Sections 2053 and 2054 together; this time the sections are noted as having 'two houses' on them and as at 1 April 1896 have a combined rateable value of £18.⁹

¹ Reference to the Sections Comprising the Town of New Plymouth, New Zealand, 1842, Puke Ariki, ARC2001-365/5

² New Plymouth Town Board Rating Book 1875-76, NPDC Archives

³ *Taranaki Herald*, 1 August 1883, page 3

⁴ *Taranaki Herald*, 15 June 1909, page 3

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book 1894-95, NPDC Archives

⁹ New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book 1896-97, NPDC Archives



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The absence of a rates book for 1895-96 makes narrowing down the construction date difficult, although based on information contained in street directories, and accounting for collection and collation of information, a construction date of mid-late 1894 seems most likely. No persons are listed as residing on the left side of Courtenay Street between Hobson and Watson Streets during or before the 1894 edition of Stones Street Directories, but by the 1895 edition two persons are listed as residing at this location; painter James William Nash (probably this cottage), and a Miss Rosina Caldwell (probably 253 Courtenay Street).¹⁰

Both cottages were rented out by Sole, and occupants were mostly members of the working class and people of little means. The working class are an important, yet often forgotten group of late-nineteenth century settler society, and these cottages provide insights into the types of dwellings they occupied; once common, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century workers cottages are now rare in New Plymouth. Compared to 253 Courtenay Street, which was occupied by Richard Birch since at least early 1896 until about late-1914, the turnover of occupants in this cottage was high.¹¹ Nash appears to have only occupied the cottage for a short period, and other early occupants include grocer's assistant William Gray who is listed as the occupier from 1896; storeman Edward Sutton Riggall from 1897; Mrs John Crockett from 1898; grocer Herbert Cocker from 1899; gardener Charles Peapell from 1903; gardeners William John Prentice, Thomas Prentice and Reuben Jacklin from 1905; and lithographer Alfred Lee from 1907.¹²

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

Description

This single-storey cottage is located in the eastern New Plymouth suburb of Strandon, just a short distance from the CBD. The area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, and whilst development pressures since the 1970s have 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.

The cottage is located near the front of a relatively level section and is highly visible from Courtenay Street. The frontage is mostly asphalted carparking space, with a trellis fence and shrubs at the eastern end. A driveway extends along the western boundary to provide access to a more recent dwelling constructed at the back of the section on the same property title.

To the immediate east of this dwelling sits the similarly scaled cottage at 53 Courtenay Street; constructed for the same owner at the same time. Such pairings of late-nineteenth century workers dwellings are now very rare in New Plymouth, and as a pair the houses have aesthetic value through their homogeneity of form.

The main form of the building is a single storey, timber-framed box cottage with rear lean-to. The front elevation is clad in rusticated weatherboard, whilst the less-visible side elevations were originally clad in plain boarding; the plain boards were regrettably, recently covered with corrugated steel. The brick chimney which formerly rose through the roof at the eastern end of the cottage was removed some time ago.

The front elevation is symmetrically composed and features a central multi-paned front entrance door surrounded by two circa 1950s replacement sets of wooden casement windows. The original windows

¹⁰ Stones Street Directories, 1895-96

¹¹ Ibid., 1896-1915

¹² Ibid., 1896-1907



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were likely double-hung sashes and may have been replaced to allow additional light into the main front living spaces; installation of replica sashes would greatly enhance the aesthetic appeal of the cottage. A simple post and beam veranda with sloping roof extends the full length of the frontage.

Assessment:

Historical	This building has historic significance as one of a pair of mid-1890s workers' dwellings constructed as investment properties for respected early New Plymouth Settler Thomas Sole. The working class has until recently been largely silenced in the historical record, and this building offers valuable insights into the types of dwellings lived in by an under-studied, yet important societal group during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.	✓
Importance to Community	Although the Sole connection is not widely known, a large number of proud Sole family descendants remain living in New Plymouth District.	✓
Architecture & Construction	-	
Setting and Context	Together with neighbouring 253 Courtenay Street, this cottage is one of a pair of workers cottages of a similar style and scale that were constructed as rental properties for a local resident during the mid-1890s.	✓
Archaeology	As the cottage was constructed circa 1895-96, the property likely has archaeological evidence relating to pre-1900 human activity and has the potential to reveal information about the past through archaeological investigation.	✓
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	This building is representative of working-class dwellings constructed in New Plymouth during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries - of which few now remain. Although the cottage has been subjected to a number of alterations, it does largely retain its original form and structure, and is clearly recognisable as a nineteenth century cottage.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓