

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

F. T. Bellringer Residence (Former)

Address

363 Devon Street East, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

This attractive corner-bay villa was constructed in 1902 for Felix Templeman Bellringer, and remained his home for more than sixty years. Felix devoted much of his life to Municipal affairs and held the position of New Plymouth's Town Clerk for a record period of fifty years. The house was designed by noted New Plymouth architect Frank Messenger and is representative of the high-quality architect-designed villas once commonplace in New Plymouth's CBD fringe neighbourhoods. The exterior retains a high degree of integrity, and the building contributes positively to the surrounding streetscape.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description Lot 1 DP 356076

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1902

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals Frank Messenger (architect)

History

Town Section 2016 was purchased by Mr Felix Templeman Bellringer in November 1901.¹ The following year, Bellringer commissioned noted New Plymouth architect Frank Messenger to design the present residence as his family home. A permit for construction of the house was granted by the New Plymouth Borough Council on 3 July 1902, and the estimated construction cost was £575 15s.² The house was likely completed later that year, with Bellringer first listed as residing at this location in Devon Street in the 1903 edition of Stones Street Directory.³

Felix Templeman Bellringer was born at New Plymouth on 5th March 1877, and was the son of well-known local politician and businessman James Bellringer and his wife Mary Ann Johns. He was educated at Central School and New Plymouth Boys High School, and was admitted to the bar in 1900.⁴ On 11 June 1903, Felix married Miss Annie Lewrainer Abbott at St Mary's, and it seems likely this marriage was a factor influencing Felix's decision to construct the present house.⁵

June 1901 signalled the beginning of a long career with the New Plymouth Borough Council (and the later New Plymouth City Council), when he was appointed a temporary clerk in the Town Clerk's Office.⁶ From July 1901 to January 1902 he was appointed relieving Town Clerk in place of his brother, Charles Emanuael Bellringer, who had held the position since 1897.⁷ On 16th January 1902 he was officially appointed Town Clerk and Borough Treasurer.⁸ From October 1919 until May 1923 he held the positions of not only Town Clerk and Borough Treasurer but was also the Council's General Manager.⁹ From May 1923 until October 1930 he was Town Clerk, Borough Treasurer and

¹ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

² NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

³ Stones Street Directory, 1903

⁴ New Plymouth City Council. *Notes of the part played by the Town Clerk, (Mr F. T. Bellringer) in successes attained by the New Plymouth Borough Council (now New Plymouth City Council) in just a few phases of its activities during the past forty-eight years.* Unpublished Report. 1 September 1950. Puke Ariki (ARC2001-136).

⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 29 June 1903, page 4

⁶ New Plymouth City Council. *Notes of the part played by the Town Clerk, (Mr F. T. Bellringer) in successes attained by the New Plymouth Borough Council (now New Plymouth City Council) in just a few phases of its activities during the past forty-eight years.* Unpublished Report. 1 September 1950. Puke Ariki (ARC2001-136).

⁷ *Taranaki Herald*, 11 March 1897, page 2

⁸ New Plymouth City Council. *Notes of the part played by the Town Clerk, (Mr F. T. Bellringer) in successes attained by the New Plymouth Borough Council (now New Plymouth City Council) in just a few phases of its activities during the past forty-eight years.* Unpublished Report. 1 September 1950. Puke Ariki (ARC2001-136).

⁹ *Ibid.*

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Borough Solicitor, and from October 20th 1930 until his retirement in June 1952, he held the positions of Town Clerk and Borough Solicitor.¹⁰ Upon his retirement he had served continuously as Town Clerk for fifty years; a record unsurpassed in New Plymouth.

During his association with the Council, Felix was a driving force behind a number of projects for the betterment of New Plymouth, and a key focus was the acquisition, protection and enhancement of large areas of recreation reserve land in New Plymouth; especially those seafront reserves between the Port and Waiwhakaiho which now contribute strongly to the character of the City.¹¹ One of the seafront reserves which Felix was instrumental in acquiring land for was Peringa Park, with the long acquisition process beginning in 1916, and not complete until 1948.¹² The name Peringa is Māori for Bellringer, and honours Bellringer's contribution to the formation of the reserve.

Felix lived in the house until his death on 20 June 1965, aged 88 years. The house then passed to Felix's grandsons Trevor and Ted Sturmer, on the condition that their mother, Esma Alice Bellringer (Sturmer, Waters), could live in it as long as she wished.¹³

Reference Sources See footnotes.

Description

This single-storey house is located on a relatively large section in the eastern New Plymouth suburb of Strandon. Whilst this area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, CBD sprawl and development pressures since the 1960s have seen the demolition and removal of many older residential properties in the area, with those that remain principally converted to commercial use. The present villa stands out amongst low and medium density commercial buildings; most of which have little architectural merit.

Although not located on a corner section, this building follows the typical plan of a centre-gutter corner bay villa. The house is situated close to the western boundary to ensure the detailed southern and eastern elevations are visible on approach from the driveway. The building is constructed following the natural contours of the section which slopes towards a shallow gully at the rear. The walls are clad in horizontal weatherboards and the roof is sheathed in corrugated steel.

The southern and eastern bays are almost identical and incorporate square bay windows with Chicago double-hung sash window at the front, and a single, slender double-hung sash either side. The upper sashes incorporate a large clear pane, and also smaller, coloured panes. A dentil moulded frieze runs under the shallow bay eave, whilst the main gable features applied rosettes, decorative timbering, and a finial at the apex.

A return post and beam veranda with bullnose roof links the southern and eastern bays. This is decorated with fretwork and small pendants, with a low balustrade incorporating simple timber balusters running the length of the veranda. The boxed eaves above the veranda are decorated with slightly detailed wooden brackets.

The principal entrance door to the front elevation is timber, with two solid panels to the bottom, and a single glazed panel in patterned glass to the top. The door is flanked by narrow timber panelled and patterned glazed panels, with further glazed panels in matching patterned glass above. A further Chicago window with clear panes is located to the east of the front door. On the eastern elevation, two pairs of French casements with solid lower panels and clear glazed upper panels provide further access to the main interior living spaces.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Personal communication with Joanne Sturmer, F. T. Bellringer's great granddaughter



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Assessment:

Historical	This house principally has historic significance for its long association with the locally prominent Bellringer family. Felix Bellringer played an important role in local government for fifty years and was the longest serving Town Clerk in New Plymouth's history. The house was designed by noted New Plymouth architect Frank Messenger who contributed much to the built environment of New Plymouth during his long and distinguished career.	✓
Importance to Community	-	
Architecture & Construction	This building is a good example of an early twentieth century corner bay villa featuring typical architectural features of the style.	✓
Setting and Context	The building makes a positive contribution to the character of the local streetscape and is a reminder that this was formerly a residential neighbourhood.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	This house is representative of the high-quality architect-designed villas which were once common in New Plymouth's CBD fringe streets. The building has been well-maintained, and consequently retains a high degree of integrity with many original external features surviving intact.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓