

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Mrs Cooper's Cottage

Address

49 Gilbert Street, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

Mrs Cooper's Cottage has heritage significance as a small workers' dwelling constructed about 1895 for prominent New Plymouth auctioneer and land agent William Courtney. As with many workers' cottages, it was not occupied by any persons of note, but 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 original cottage largely retains its original form and structure, and later additions of a similar scale and style do not substantially detract from the buildings' historic and aesthetic appeal. It is highly visible from the intersection of Gover and Gilbert Streets and being well-maintained contributes positively to the historic character of the area.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description	Pt Section 1058 Town of New Plymouth
District Plan Item/ Map No.	
Heritage New Zealand List	Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction	Circa 1895
Principal Materials	Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel
Construction Professionals	Unknown

History

Whilst the exact construction date of this small wooden cottage is uncertain, the original portion of the present structure probably dates to the mid-1890s; although the property has been occupied since at least the early 1860s.

Town Section 1058 was originally granted to Henry Henson Wood and was purchased by John Prout shortly before his death due to 'inflammation of the lungs' in 1862.¹ It seems likely that the property was purchased for his wife, Mary Ann, to live in upon his death. The original cottage lived in by Mary Anne from about 1862 was a simple, wooden structure of two parallel gables, and was located at the extreme eastern corner of the section. This building can be seen in both a sketch by Charles W. Wilson dated 09 August 1871 and also in a photograph taken around the same time; however, the present cottage at 49 Gilbert Street cannot.² Mary Anne occupied the property until her death in 1892, with the intersection of Gover and Gilbert Streets being colloquially known as 'Prout's Corner'.

Town Section 1058 was purchased by prominent New Plymouth land agent, property developer and auctioneer William Courtney in 1892.³ Although not widely known, William Courtney also played an important role in promoting New Zealand, and Taranaki in particular, as an attractive destination for emigrants during the 1870s and 1880s. In total he completed at least thirteen lecturing trips to England and induced more than one thousand persons to emigrate to New Zealand.⁴

In October 1894, William Courtney advertised Town Section 1058 for sale by auction in five lots.⁵ The section on which the present cottage stands was advertised in two lots, the eastern portion with "cottage known as the late Mrs Prout's, on corner of Gover and Gilbert Streets", and the western portion (present cottage site), as "a nice building site in Gilbert Street"; indicating the present cottage was yet to be built.⁶ Whilst the three sections facing Gover Street sold, the two facing Gilbert Street did not and were retained by Courtney.⁷ It appears that sometime after the auction Courtney decided to have the present cottage constructed on the section. The earliest reference to this cottage being

¹ *Taranaki Herald*, 29 November 1862, page 2

² At New Plymouth [pen and ink view of New Plymouth taken from the vicinity of Gover-Gilbert Streets, 09 August 1871], Charles W. Wilson, A58.395, Puke Ariki; circa 1870 view of Gover and Gilbert Streets from Eliot Street, A.3.158. Puke Ariki

³ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

⁴ *Taranaki Daily News*, 3 December 1908, page 2

⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 5 October 1894, page 3

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

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present is the 1896-97 Borough Council rating book, which notes that two houses are present on the portion of Town Section 1058 still owned by Courtney; one of these is Mrs Prout's old cottage, and the other this building.⁸ In September 1897, Courtney listed this cottage for sale by auction, being described at the time as a "neat little 2-roomed cottage and part section in Gilbert-Street" available on "exceptionally easy terms"; only a £5 deposit being required.⁹ The cottage didn't sell, and was rented, with Courtney advertising a "2-roomed cottage" for let in Gilbert Street, in February 1899.¹⁰ The cottage was again advertised to let in December 1902 for 5/- per week.¹¹



Detail from circa 1870 view of Gover and Gilbert Streets with Mrs Prout's cottage at centre, Puke Ariki Collection, A.3.158

By March of the following year Courtney had finally disposed of the property, selling it to Mary Jane Cooper.¹² Mrs Cooper first appears as living in this part of Gilbert Street in the 1903 edition of Stone's Street Directory.¹³ On the 18th of December 1907, the New Plymouth Borough Council granted M. J. Cooper a permit for the construction of 'additions' to a dwelling on Town Section 1058, Gilbert Street; N. Andrews was the architect/builder, and the estimated cost was £35.¹⁴ Whilst no plans are associated with this permit, it seems that it relates to either the construction of the small projecting front gable or rear lean-to.

In 1903, Courtney advertised for let or sale a "very small 4 roomed cottage, corner Gover and Gilbert Streets", indicating that Mrs Prout's original cottage was still standing at this time.¹⁵ However, its days were numbered, and the last time it appeared in Stone's Street Directories was in 1905, with George Main the occupier.¹⁶ The house was condemned by the Borough Council, and ordered to be pulled

⁸ New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book 1896-97, NPDC Archives

⁹ *Taranaki Herald*, 11 September 1897, page 3

¹⁰ *Taranaki Herald*, 28 February 1899, page 3

¹¹ *Taranaki Herald*, 10 December 1902, page 1

¹² Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

¹³ Stones Street Directory, 1903

¹⁴ NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

¹⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 12 March 1904, page 1

¹⁶ Stones Street Directories, 1905



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down and destroyed out of town boundaries.¹⁷ In 1909, Mrs Cooper purchased the section on which Mrs Prout's Cottage stood, and the properties were merged to form a larger section; although they remained separate deeds.¹⁸

In September 1912, the New Plymouth Borough Council granted Mrs M. J. Cooper an additional four months to connect her property in Gilbert Street with the sewers.¹⁹ Mrs Cooper retained ownership of the property until January 1920, when it was sold to watersider Herbert Shackleton. Shackleton later became a butcher and lived in the cottage until his death in April 1950, aged 78 years.

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

Description

Mrs Cooper's Cottage is located in a city fringe street several blocks south of New Plymouth's CBD. This area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, and is principally comprised of dwellings constructed between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1930s. Whilst development pressures since the 1970s have seen the demolition and removal of a number of older buildings, the area still retains a sense of historical character now uncommon in New Plymouth.

This small cottage is typical of 1880s-90s workers' dwellings. The main form of the building is a simple Georgian Box style cottage, with two projecting gables and rear lean-to. The walls are clad in plain horizontal weatherboards, and the roof in mild corrugated steel. The house is positioned behind a low picket fence amongst a small but well-maintained cottage style garden. A more recent garage is located at the extreme north-western boundary.

The front elevation faces roughly south-east onto Gilbert Street and is largely unadorned except for small wooden eaves brackets. A four-light double-hung sash is centred in the gable end, whilst later timber casements, including some with leaded and coloured glass, are positioned in the main gable wall. The later addition extends east beyond the original cottage footprint. This is fitted with a single double-hung sash on the north-west side elevation and a timber casement facing south-west.

Assessment:

Historical

Mrs Cooper's Cottage has heritage significance as a small workers' dwelling constructed about 1895 for prominent New Plymouth auctioneer and land agent William Courtney. As with many workers' cottages, it was not occupied by any persons of note, but 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.

✓

Importance to Community

-

Architecture & Construction

-

Setting and Context

The building is highly visible from the intersection of Gover and Gilbert Streets and being well-maintained contributes positively to the historic character of the area.

✓

¹⁷ *Taranaki Daily News*, 14 March 1905, page 2

¹⁸ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

¹⁹ *Taranaki Herald*, 9 September 1912, page 4



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Archaeology	As the cottage was constructed circa 1895, 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 cottage is representative of the types of dwellings occupied by workers and those of lesser means during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Although subject to some modification, the original cottage largely retains its original form and structure, and later additions are of a similar scale and style.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓

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