

Preserving THE PAST

Heritage property owners up and down the country are achieving their restoration dreams thanks to a fund administered by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga

WORDS: MATT PHILP



To learn more about the National Heritage Preservation Incentive fund, view our video story here: [youtube.com/HeritageNewZealandPouhereTaonga](https://www.youtube.com/HeritageNewZealandPouhereTaonga)

The Edwardian Baroque former Geraldine Post Office dates to 1908 and has been restored with help from the National Heritage Preservation Incentive Fund administered by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga.
Image: Mike Heydon





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When Gerry Westenberg bought Cambridge’s Masonic Hotel a decade ago, he expected he’d have to spend some money to get the handsome but somewhat neglected Edwardian gem back to its best. It was going to be worth it.

“This was a fascinating, wonderful building with lots of potential,” says Gerry, whose long-term aim was to turn the Masonic, a Category 2 historic place, into New Zealand’s best regional boutique hotel.

But he concedes that he underestimated the complexity and expense of the task. The seismic bill alone would eventually top \$1 million – he says the strengthening report had recommended tearing the hotel down – and there was a long list of work required on both the exterior and the interior.

Thankfully, he was able to secure a \$300,000 grant from the Government’s Heritage EQUIP fund for the seismic work. He also found a lifeline in a Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga fund created specifically to provide incentives to heritage property owners considering projects.

Known as the National Heritage Preservation Incentive Fund (NHPIF), it’s an annual pool of \$500,000 available to applicants who need help to conserve or preserve privately owned properties that are on the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero. Initially limited to Category 1 historic places, it now embraces Category 2 as well as wāhi tapu and wāhi tupuna and National Historic Landmarks.

There are some caveats. Applicants can’t have access to lottery grants fund money and their projects can’t have already commenced; there is no allowance for additions, extensions, new construction or replicas; and the fund can’t be tapped to remove, relocate or demolish heritage properties.



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1. Cambridge’s 1912 Masonic Hotel is being restored with NHPIF help.

2. The Masonic is owner Gerry Westenberg’s first hotel development.

3. Public areas of the old Masonic during restoration.

4. The restoration in progress.
Imagery: Karl Drury

Even if an application succeeds, the grant is not a blank cheque. Applicants are awarded up to 50 percent of their projects’ costs, capped at \$100,000, but there’s no guarantee you’ll get everything you ask for. In some cases, especially if a grant is more than \$50,000, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga may require that a heritage covenant be registered on the record of title to protect the works and the building in the future.

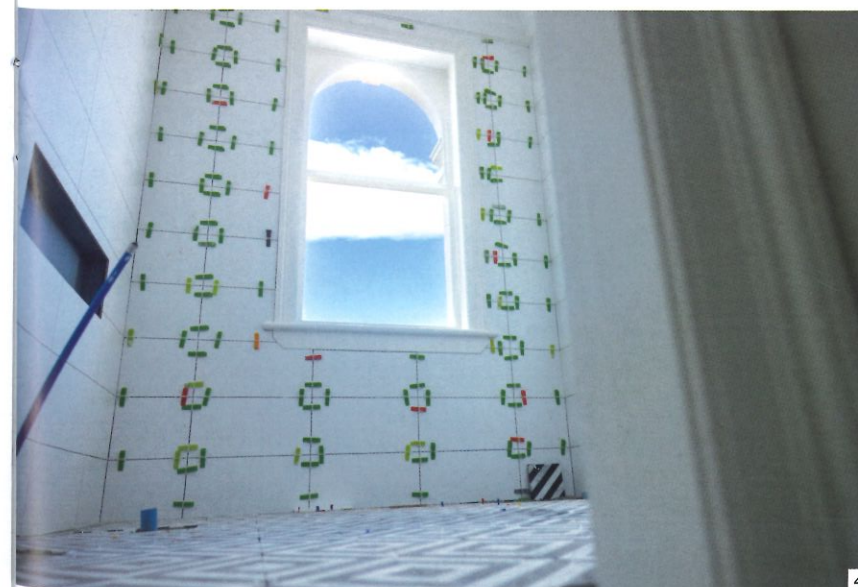
Additionally, the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Board sets priorities every year. In 2024 those priorities were the conservation and preservation of sites significant to Māori; conservation work to increase a heritage place’s resilience and to respond to the impacts of climate change; and seismic strengthening and risk management planning.

Notwithstanding those conditions, the application strike rate is high: 29 grants were considered and 21 were approved in 2023, ranging from a \$40,000 grant for the remediation of spalling in a bathroom and basement of central Auckland’s 1919 Courtville building to \$15,000 for a roof replacement and kitchen brick chimney reconstruction on a tiny 1880s cottage in Cust, a small town in north Canterbury. In 2024, there were 40 applications and 25 were successful.

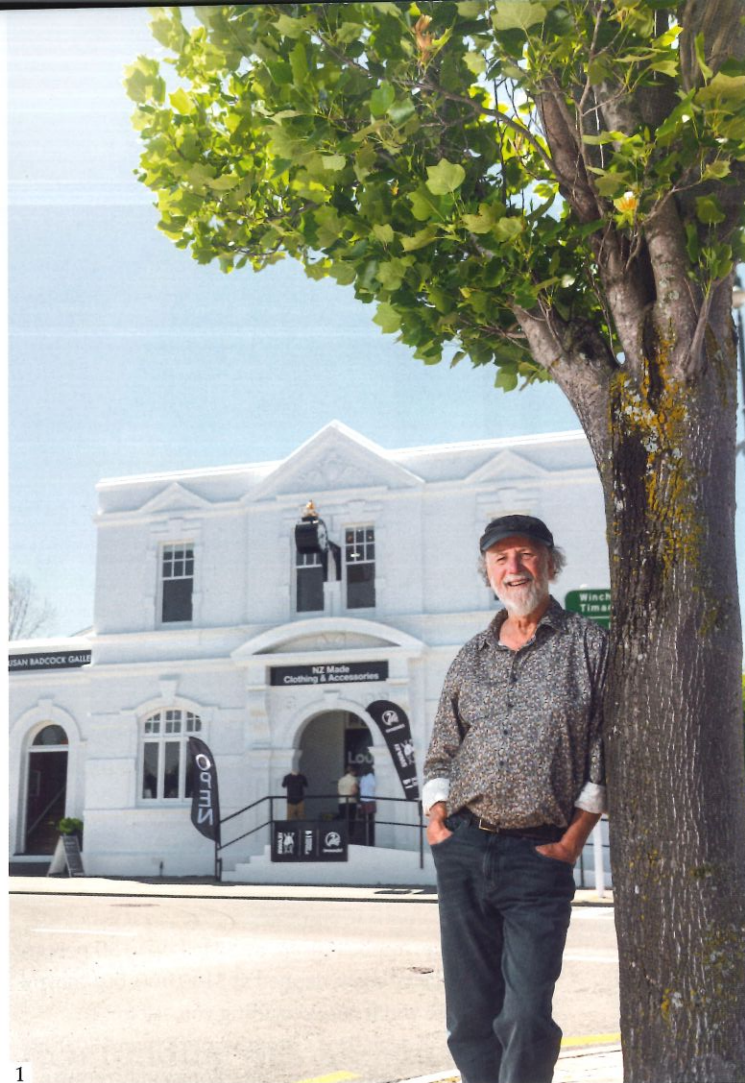
While applying is not especially complicated, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga regional staff often step in to guide applicants through the process. In the case of the Masonic Hotel, for example, Ben Pick, Area Manager Lower Northern Region for Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, was involved.

Ben notes that Gerry successfully applied twice for NHPIF grants – once for strengthening work in 2018, then again the following year for a fire system and insulation. He says both applications fitted the strategic priorities of the fund and made strong cases.

“The more work you put in, the better your application can be. He sent in lots of information and



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a well-written heritage assessment,” says Ben, who adds that the building itself was a powerful advocate.

“It’s quite prominent and fits well within the heritage landscape of Cambridge. But without someone like Mr Westenberg taking it on and putting in lots of work ... well, that allowed it to survive.”

Gerry says the two grants, which totalled \$139,000, were instrumental in saving the Masonic, which at the time of writing was due to open in February.

“That funding was enough to push me over the edge to say, ‘Look, there’s support here to restore this building, so I’m going to go for it,’” he says, adding that the application process was pain free.

“They wanted to know what the plan and vision was, how it would benefit the community and why it was considered worth restoring. It’s a beautiful building, so it was easy to show it was worth funding.”

South Canterbury artist John Badcock had a similar experience of the fund. In 2018 he and his wife Linda bought the former Geraldine Post Office, an Edwardian two-storey beauty on a CBD corner where SH79 and Inland Scenic Route 72 meet. The post office’s roof was leaking badly, and it needed painting and an earthquake assessment. There were risks involved, but John had wanted the building for years, and he figured that a post office must be solidly built. “So I just took the plunge.”

You can see why he felt so drawn to the 1908 building (Category 2 historic place). Designed by



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Government Architect John Campbell in the Baroque style, its decorative flourishes include keystone window arches, relief work and triangular pediments, as well as pressed tinned ceilings and classical columns. Above the central recessed entryway hangs a handsome double-sided clock that was funded by public subscription and installed the year after the post office opened. In John’s eyes, it’s the best building in Geraldine, and its prominent location seemed perfect for his dream of opening an art gallery.

As it turned out, his hunch that the building had ‘good bones’ proved correct. Despite the badly leaking roof, there was no rot found in any of the native timbers. And with some judicious strengthening, the building was able to be brought up to 64 per cent of code. The strengthening work, along with a full repaint (rather than revamp the post office’s traditional green-and-grey colour scheme, they painted it white to highlight the ornate features), a new roof, and the repair of the long-stopped clock were partly paid for with a \$60,000 grant from the NHPIF.

“We probably couldn’t have done it otherwise. That \$60,000 gave us confidence – and it gave our bank the confidence to loan us money,” he says.

“Heritage New Zealand was amazing throughout. They came down to Geraldine, assessed what we were trying to do and made sure that we were within the guidelines ... then they left us to it.”

The building is now tenanted downstairs by an outdoor clothing retailer, and John and Linda’s artist daughter Susan has opened a gallery upstairs.

In Inglewood, Taranaki, Mike Longstaff and Karen Moratti had their eyes on the 1875 Deem & Shearer building long before they bought it in late 2023. One of Inglewood’s oldest buildings and a café since the early 1990s, the building hadn’t had a paint job for years, according to Mike. “We wanted to get hold of it so we could look after it,” he says.

1. Artist John Badcock.

2. The double-sided clock was restored by Malcolm Iyall.

3. John and Linda’s daughter Susan has opened a gallery in the restored building.

4. Susan and John in the Susan Badcock gallery. Imagery: Mike Heydon

5. The 1875 Deem & Shearer building.

6. Karen Moratti and Mike Longstaff. Imagery: Mark Harris



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They both describe themselves as passionate about the low-slung Category 2 building on the corner of Kelly and Matai Streets. It began life as a butcher shop run by Herbert Bloomer Curtis, who went on to become Inglewood’s longest-serving mayor. In 1911 it was converted into offices for a law firm that over the next decades went through several name changes before ending up as Deem & Shearer. In 1993 the building underwent extensive renovations to turn it into a café – it’s currently trading as Caffe Windsor – and in 2019 a large verandah that had been removed from the Matai Street side in the 1980s was fully reinstated.

Karen and Mike intend to repaint the exterior and replace a verandah roof and some guttering, among other jobs. The total project is likely to cost between \$40,000 and \$45,000, but they have some help in the form of a \$19,000 NHPIF grant. Mike says they’re incredibly appreciative, as they realised funding is never a certainty and the long-overdue works still needed to happen.

“It’s a ‘custodian’ thing rather than a financial venture,” he says. “Both our families were original settlers here.”

“The Heritage New Zealand staff suggested that we could apply for this funding; they have given us contacts and kept us in the loop,” says Karen, adding that finishing the restoration in time for Inglewood’s 150th anniversary in January 2025 was driving them on.

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga recently initiated court proceedings to ensure the inclusion of the Deem & Shearer building in the New Plymouth District Plan heritage schedule – a move that Mike and Karen fully supported. Inclusion on the heritage schedule provides a level of protection for the building with respect to its recognised heritage values.

“It means that if we sell it, no one can come along and do something to the building that wouldn’t be respectful of its heritage value, and we think that’s important,” says Mike.

“People say, ‘Oh, your hands will be tied!’, but we have found it isn’t as constrictive as we thought it would be, and we all just want to ensure that this building is protected for the future.” ■