



Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

T. S. Weston Residence (Former)

Address

26 Weymouth Street, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

This attractive two-storey villa has considerable historic significance as the final home of New Zealand lawyer, judge, and Member of Parliament Thomas Shailer Weston Snr. Designed by capable local architect Frank Messenger and constructed 1904-05, the former Weston House is an excellent example of an early-twentieth century two-storied bay villa influenced by the fashionable Eastern Stick style. It is a good and representative example of the types of two-storey villas constructed around New Plymouth during the late-1890s and early-1900s and its exterior form remains much as it was when first constructed. Since the 1950s the house has been home to a private hotel, boarding house, backpackers, bed and breakfast, and rest home. This history is well-known by the local community, and the house itself is a prominent landmark in the western end of town.



Heritage Buildings Report

Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description Lot 3 DP 7528

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1904-05

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals Frank Messenger (architect) Mr McLellan (builder)

History

Thomas Shailer Weston Snr & Family

Thomas Shailer Weston was born in London on the 7th of June 1836 and later emigrated to New Zealand with his parents and four brothers aboard the *Mariner*, arriving at New Plymouth on the 11th of October 1850.¹ Thomas was articled to local lawyer Frederick Norris in 1855, admitted to the bar in 1861, and practised at New Plymouth for just two years before departing for Invercargill.² However, Thomas disliked the southern weather so much that he considered returning to England.³ It seems he was persuaded to relocate to Auckland, where he happily settled and in 1867 married Maria Cracroft Hill.⁴ Maria would give birth to nine children, although only four would live into old age; Thomas Shailer Jnr (b.1868), George Thorngate (b. 1876), Walter Crowley (b.1876), and Claude Horace (b.1879).⁵

Whilst at Auckland he took a keen interest in the development of the Thames Gold Field.⁶ He was appointed Judge at Napier and Gisborne in 1873, but after only a short period the family relocated to Hokitika following his appointment as Judge for the entire West Coast of the South Island in 1874.⁷ Whilst on the Coast, Weston was appointed to the West Coast Reserves Commission, was a member of the commission on staffing and salaries of primary schools, and a member of the East and West Coast Railway Leagues.⁸ Weston's tenure as a judge ended in 1880 as a result of government retrenchment policies enacted during the depression.⁹

Thomas Snr and his family soon relocated to Christchurch where he set up practice as a lawyer. The family purchased a large two-storied house in Bligh's Road, Papanui.¹⁰ Each morning Thomas would walk to catch the tram to his Cashel Street office, followed by a maid twenty paces behind carrying a pair of shoes for him to change into at the tram station, followed by the cat twenty paces behind her.¹¹ Upon the resignation of MP Edward Masters in 1881 owing to ill health, Weston successfully stood

¹ Cushla, Randle. *A Very New Zealand Family* (Tauranga: Cushla Randle, 2014).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Taranaki Daily News*, 16 October 1912, page 4

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Taranaki Daily News*, 16 October 1912, page 4

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cushla, Randle. *A Very New Zealand Family* (Tauranga: Cushla Randle, 2014).

¹¹ Ibid.

Heritage Buildings Report

for Parliament in the Grey Valley electorate.¹² When the Grey District was divided in two during 1882 he was returned as a member for Inangahua, but resigned his seat in November 1883.¹³

Weston was a member and twice chairman of the North Canterbury Education Board, and from 1894, until 1902 was a member, and later chairman, of the Board of Governors of Canterbury College (Canterbury University).¹⁴ Aside from being actively involved in the local Papanui Church, Thomas and Maria lived an active social life, engaging with many senior members of the legal profession, business community, and political sphere.¹⁵

Thomas and Maria returned to New Plymouth in 1902, where, along with his son Claude, Thomas Snr took over the established legal practice of Thomas Shailer Jnr, who was soon to relocate to Wellington.¹⁶ In 1902 Thomas Snr sat on the Education Commission as chairman, and in January 1909 was appointed Crown Solicitor for the Taranaki Judicial District.¹⁷ After ailing for some time, Thomas Weston passed away peacefully at 9:30pm on the 15th of October 1912 whilst at home; he is buried in New Plymouth's historic Te Henui Cemetery.¹⁸ On news of his death reaching Wellington, the Prime Minister, the Hon. W. F. Massey, along with other members of the House of Representatives, paid tribute to Mr Weston's long Public Service, and moved that "the House place on record its appreciation of the deceased gentleman's services to New Zealand, and that assurances of sympathy be tendered to his family in their bereavement".¹⁹

In 1919-20, a lych gate and wall was erected on the north-eastern boundary of St Mary's churchyard in memory of Thomas and Maria. Funded by Thomas' brother Henry, and Thomas and Maria's children; it was officially unveiled at a private ceremony on In 2011 the wall was restored following donations from Lesley Weston and Shailor Weston.

The House

In May 1903, it was reported by real estate agents Messrs Callaghan and Company that Thomas Shailer Weston Snr had purchased eight full town sections (numbers 111-113 & 137-141), in St Aubyn, Young and Weymouth Streets, for an estimated price of between two and three thousand pounds.²⁰ At this time the property was surveyed to bring it under the Land Transfer Act, and the only significant structure present on the property being an old house called 'The Bungalow', located on Town Section 139; this was advertised for sale for removal during January 1905.²¹

Weston commissioned noted local architect Frank Messenger to design a new residence for the property, with Messenger advertising during August 1904 for tenders "for building a two-storey residence in Weymouth Street".²² A permit for the construction of the house was granted to Thomas Weston by the Borough Council on the 14th of October 1904; the estimated cost of the dwelling was noted as a massive £1250.²³ Maria took great interest in the construction of the new house and noted many details in her diary, which is still held by the Weston family. Timber for the house was stacked

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Taranaki Daily News*, 16 October 1912, page 4

¹⁹ *Taranaki Herald*, 24 October 1912, page 2

²⁰ *Taranaki Daily News*, 21 May 1903, page 2

²¹ DP2009, Land Information New Zealand; *Taranaki Herald*, 28 January 1905, page 5

²² *Taranaki Herald*, 15 August 1904, page 5

²³ NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

Heritage Buildings Report

at the site in late September and work on the foundations commenced on November 11th.²⁴ During early-December 1904 a notice appeared in the *Herald* warning persons “from removing timber or trespassing on the property (corner of Young and Weymouth Streets), where Mr T. S. Weston’s residence is now in course of erection”.²⁵

In January 1905 Mr Weston asked the Borough Council to set the final levels of Young and Weymouth Streets as he wished to fence his property and lay drains.²⁶ In February 1905 Messenger inquired about connecting Mr Weston’s new house to the sewerage system.²⁷ The Borough Council responded that they would lay the main sewer in St Aubyn Street, and a short length along Weymouth Street, at the earliest opportunity.²⁸ It was also suggested by the Sewerage Committee that Mr Weston could lay temporary pipes from his house to the Mangaotuki Stream as a means of disposing of his waste until the Borough sewer was completed; the idea was wisely rejected.²⁹ Tom and Maria moved into the house on May 6th 1905, with Tom and Maria’s son Henry hanging all the pictures on May 12th.³⁰ All the scaffolding was removed on May 25th, although McClellan continued to work on the house until late May, with exterior painting continuing into June.³¹



Circa 1909 view of Mr T. S. Weston’s Residence, New Zealand Graphic, 17 November 1909, p21, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, NZG-19091117-21-1

²⁴ Maria Cracroft Weston Diaries, Weston Family

²⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 10 December 1904, page 5

²⁶ *Taranaki Daily News*, 10 January 1905, page 2

²⁷ *Taranaki Herald*, 10 February 1905, page 4

²⁸ *Taranaki Herald*, 14 February 1905, page 8

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Maria Cracroft Weston Diaries, Weston Family

³¹ Ibid.



Heritage Buildings Report

Following Tom's death, the house continued to be occupied by members of the Weston family for a couple of years, with Walter Crowley Weston listed as the occupier in the 1914 edition of Wises Post Office Directory.³² A large sale of household furniture and effects was held at the house on December 10th 1913 as part of T. S. Weston's Estate and to prepare the house for sale.³³ The following year the house was sold to Alexander Alexander, who appeared to be living at the property by September 1914, when Mrs Alexander advertised for a 'good general' at Weymouth Street.³⁴ Alexander Alexander was born in Scotland and on arrival in New Zealand first settled at Turakina, before shifting to Hawera where he married Maria Peat in 1896, before later relocating to New Plymouth in 1907.³⁵ Alexander was for many years one of the most successful breeders and racers of horses in Taranaki, with many of his horses making a name for themselves at meetings across New Zealand and Australia.³⁶ Especially successful horses bred and trained by Alexander include Silver Link, Bonny Helen, Bisogne, Gaillard and Silvermine; all of whom won major New Zealand meets during the 1910s and 1920s.³⁷ Alexander was also involved in the administrative side of racing, and was a committeeman and steward of the Taranaki Jockey Club for twenty years up until the time of his death.³⁸ Maria was also involved in the New Plymouth community and was for a time president of the New Plymouth branch of the Y.W.C.A., being one of its most enthusiastic supporters since its formation in the city.³⁹

Whilst Alexander died on the 19th of April 1938, Maria continued to live in the house until her death on the 28th of December 1951. During the later period of ownership by the Alexander family the house was converted into a rest home. In February 1952 the house was advertised for sale by tender, being described at the time as 'well maintained' and included within the sale was a 'billiard table'.⁴⁰ The house was purchased by Lance Godfrey Smith, who owned the Kiwi Service Station and a number of other properties in New Plymouth.⁴¹ Smith converted the house into a bed and breakfast called 'Aotea' and then sold the lease on the property to new operators.⁴² In 1986 Trish and Mike Blundell took over the bed and breakfast lease, and a year later purchased the business and building.⁴³ With Trish a trained nurse, the Blundell's saw an opportunity to add a rest home to the site and had the large single storey building to the west of the original house constructed for that purpose; former owner Lance Smith later became a resident at the rest home and remained there until his death in 1992.⁴⁴ The property was later purchased by a community trust who with Glen Bennett as manager, operated the house as a hostel under the name 'Arcadia Lodge' until 2018, when the property was again sold.⁴⁵

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

³² Wises Post Office Directory 1914

³³ *Taranaki Herald*, 5 December 1913, page 7

³⁴ *Taranaki Herald*, 10 September 1914, page 1

³⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 19 April 1938, page 3

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *The Daily News*, 23 February 1952, page 8

⁴¹ *North Taranaki Midweek*, 19 May 1993, page 8

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Taranaki Daily News*, 25 July 2018, page 4

Heritage Buildings Report

Description

The former T. S. Weston Residence is located at the north-western corner of Young and Weymouth Streets a short distance west of New Plymouth's sprawling CBD. This area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, and is close to the site of the original Devonport Settlement established by Plymouth Company emigrants soon after arrival. Since the 1970s, development pressures have seen the demolition and removal of many older residential properties in the area. The house is a prominent landmark amongst a growing number of modern commercial and residential buildings with little architectural merit.

The main form of the building is an asymmetrical, yet well-proportioned, two-storied centre-gutter return-bay villa with full-height rear lean-to. The exterior incorporates elements of the Eastern Stick style, with walls clad in horizontal timber weatherboards and then decorated with flat boarding; this detailing is used sparingly when compared to Messenger's own Gill Street residence (1903) and is somewhat hidden by the current colour scheme. The roof is sheathed in pressed steel tiles, the eaves are sloping (as opposed to boxed), and two massive brick chimneys finished with decorative corbelling rise from the roof; only a few of the original tall ceramic chimney pots survive. The windows are mostly wooden double-hung sashes incorporating Messenger's signature six-light divided upper sash over single-pane lower sash.

The highly detailed principal elevation faces north-east into Weymouth Street. The full-height projecting bay at the southern end of the elevation begins as a ground floor faceted bay, rising to a first-floor square bay supported by fan shaped brackets with pendants and fitted with a shallow bay window supported by additional heavy timber brackets. The gable end is finished with wooden fish-scale shingles, and although now removed, originally incorporated timbering and a tall finial; a timber vent is now covered. A double-height post and beam veranda extends north across the remainder of the frontage and incorporates a low balustrade with simple timber balusters.

The principal entrance door sited beneath the southern end of the ground floor veranda is timber, with two solid panels to the bottom, and a single glazed panel to the top. The door is flanked by narrow timber and glazed panels, with coloured lead lights above. A pair of double-hung sashes is located north of the front door. The main entrance door at first-floor height is a simple timber and glazed affair, whilst a pair of double-hung sashes are positioned further north, directly above those on the ground floor. An additional door, presumably added more recently as a fire-safety measure, is positioned at the extreme northern end of the veranda. Decorative ground floor fretwork has been lost, but fish scale shingles still sheath the wall between levels.

The north-western elevation incorporates a full-height square bay fitted with timber double-hung sashes. As with the front elevation, the gable end is finished with fish scale shingles and timber vent; the original timbering and a tall finial have long since been removed. Further west, a second shallow full-height bay incorporates double-hung sashes and fish scale shingled gable end; a projecting ground floor room at this bay has since been incorporated into a small extension. The rear elevation is largely devoid of decoration and most of the windows are either more recent timber casements or aluminium replacements.

The south-eastern elevation faces into Young Street and incorporates a full-height shallow square bay fitted with double-hung sashes and finished with fish scale shingled gable end. A wide flat-roofed ground-floor bay projects from the eastern end of the elevation; this incorporates two standard and two slender double-hung sashes, with a dentil moulded frieze decorating the shallow bay eave.



Heritage Buildings Report

Assessment:

Historical	This house has considerable historic significance as the final residence of prominent New Zealand lawyer, judge, and Member of Parliament Thomas Shailer Weston Snr following his return to New Plymouth. It was later occupied by one of Taranaki's most successful horse breeders and racers, Alexander Alexander.	✓
Importance to Community	Since the 1950s the house has been home to a private hotel, boarding house, backpackers, bed and breakfast, and rest home. This history is well-known by the local community, and the house itself is a prominent landmark in the western end of town.	✓
Architecture & Construction	This building was designed by capable local architect Frank Messenger and is an excellent example of an early-twentieth century two-storied bay villa influenced by the fashionable Eastern Stick style.	✓
Setting and Context	The scale of this building and prominent corner position ensures this house has strong street-presence. Its detailed features and bold colour scheme helps it stand-out from its visually uninteresting neighbours.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	Weston House is a good and representative example of the types of two-storey villas constructed around New Plymouth during the late-1890s and early-1900s; of which many have since been demolished. The exterior form remains much as it was when first constructed.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓