

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Kincora Private Maternity Home (Former)

Address

23 Mt Edgecumbe Street, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

Constructed circa 1902, this small bay-cottage is principally significant for its use as a maternity home from 1903 until about 1917. The home was named 'Kincora', and was run by well-respected local nurse Mrs Winifred Sisley. The building is a good example of an early-1900s bay-cottage, and although subject to minor modifications, principally through its conversion to commercial premises, the building largely retains both its original form and key exterior features such as sash windows and rough-sawn weatherboard cladding.



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Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description PT Section 294 Town of New Plymouth

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction Circa 1902

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals John Wilson Tong (builder and presumed architect)

History

This house was one of two constructed on Town Section 294 by New Plymouth builder John Wilson Tong during 1902. Town Section 294 was purchased by Tong from former New Plymouth District Police Commander William Stone Pardy in December 1901.¹ Tong subdivided the section in August 1902, and at this time the northern portion was conveyed to Albert Johnston, and the southern portion, on which this house is constructed, to John Duffin.² John Duffin was a railway porter, and also the son of another former New Plymouth Police Sergeant, John Duffin Snr.

The New Plymouth Borough Council (NPBC) started recording building permits in April 1902, and whilst a permit has been found for Johnston's house (present 177 Powderham Street), no permit has been located for Duffin's.³ It thus seems that construction of the present house had already commenced prior to April 1902, and before ownership of the property was transferred to Duffin. The 1901-02 NPBC rates book notes Pardy as the ratepayer for Town Sections 191-194, with a house present on the property.⁴ However, by the following 1902-03 rating year, Pardy is noted as the ratepayer for only sections 191-193, still with house, whilst Tong is now the ratepayer for Town Section 194, also with house.⁵ Tong is further listed as residing at this location in Mt Edgecumbe Street in the 1902 edition of Stone's Street Directory, and it seems likely he occupied the house during construction and for a period before its sale to Duffin.⁶

John Duffin didn't own the property for long, and it was sold by local land agents Messrs Carthew and Company, who reported the sale of "...Mr J. Duffin's new residence, Mt Edgecombe [sic] Street", in early October 1903.⁷ The purchaser of the house was Mrs Winifred Sarah Sisley, who advertised in November 1903 that she had "...removed into her own house, in Mount Edgecombe [sic] Street, lately occupied by Mr J. Duffin".⁸ This buildings historic significance is principally related to Mrs Sisley's period of ownership, during which time the house operated as a maternity home.

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

² Ibid.

³ NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

⁴ New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book 1901-02, NPDC Archives

⁵ New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book 1902-03, NPDC Archives

⁶ Wises Street Directories, 1902-03

⁷ *Taranaki Daily News*, 10 October 1903, page 2

⁸ *Taranaki Herald*, 23 November 1903, page 1

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Detail from 1923 panoramic photograph of New Plymouth taken from Western Park. Panoramic photographs of New Zealand taken by R P Moore. Ref: PA6-194. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

By the early 1900s, maternity services in New Zealand were mainly provided by lay midwives who generally had low levels of local training under doctors or other midwives.⁹ In urban centres, private maternity hospitals were relatively common, and these were often located within private residences.¹⁰ The homes were generally run by women, with services usually provided by those who had been mothers themselves (although not always), and frequently by widows as a way of earning an income.¹¹

The *Midwives Act 1904* was introduced to help curb New Zealand's high infant mortality rate, and for the first time established a national structure for training and registering midwives. This Act also established state-run maternity institutions known as 'St Helen's Hospitals'. However, as a state-run maternity hospital was not initially established in New Plymouth, private hospitals continued to cater for the majority of births well into the Twentieth Century.

Mrs Sisley was the husband of Francis Sisley, a carpenter who seems to have retired owing to ill health, and whom Mrs Sisley looked after. In September 1904, she advertised that she was "...open for engagements in town or country, or will receive patients at her residence".¹² The home initially seems to have been known as 'Mrs Sisley's Nursing Home', although later the name 'Kincora Maternity Hospital' was used.¹³ Mrs Sisley had received no formal midwifery training, so was registered as a Class B midwife who met the requirements of having been in practice for at least three years, and being of a good character.¹⁴

Many births occurred at the home, and were regularly reported in the local papers; although the house was also the location of the death of Winifred's husband in 1907, and also of her mother, Catherine Byrne, who died aged 95 years, in 1913.¹⁵ At least one of Winifred's daughters, Grace, also became a nurse, and lived at the house whilst she trained at the nearby New Plymouth Hospital (Barrett Street).¹⁶

⁹ Gilkinson, Andrea, Giddings, Lynne, and Smythe, Liz, 'The Shaping of Midwifery Education in Aotearoa, New Zealand', *New Zealand College of Midwives*, Vol. 47. No. 1, June 2013, pp.18-23.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Taranaki Herald*, 28 September 1904, page 1

¹³ *Taranaki Daily News*, 15 October 1915, page 6

¹⁴ 'Register of Nurses and Midwives', *New Zealand Gazette*, 29 April 1909, Issue 36, p.1198

¹⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 23 May 1913, page 2

¹⁶ *Taranaki Herald*, 9 July 1907, page 3



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In 1915, Sister Grace left New Zealand and volunteered at the Walton-on-Thames New Zealand Military Hospital at Islington.¹⁷

It's unclear when Mrs Sisley closed her maternity home, but births were still reported until at least late-1917.¹⁸ In late 1918, Taranaki, along with the rest of New Zealand, was grappling with a massive influenza epidemic. Mrs Sisley unfortunately contracted the virus, and on 30 November 1918, died at New Plymouth Hospital aged 62 years.¹⁹ Following Sisley's death, the property was transferred to the Public Trustee, and it wasn't until July 1920 that it was sold to New Plymouth baker Albert Hay.²⁰ The property title was issued under the Land Transfer Act in 1928.

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

Description

This single-storey building is located in a principally residential street on the western side of New Plymouth City. This area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, although intensification didn't begin until the 1920s. Whilst development pressures have seen the loss of a number of older dwellings in recent years, the surrounding houses are principally from the 1900s-1930s period and contribute to a sense of historical character now uncommon in New Plymouth.

Typical of an early 1900s bay-cottage, this building follows a simple L-plan, with a wide north-south gable and projecting east-west flat-fronted gable. The cottage is clad in horizontal rough-sawn weatherboard, and the roof is sheathed in corrugated steel. Windows are of a variety of styles, but the cottage principally retains its original four-light double-hung sashes. A brick chimney rises from the northern end of the main gable and has been finished with a skim coat of cement.

The front elevation incorporates a simple post and beam veranda, with replica decorative wooden brackets, on a concrete foundation. The rest of the frontage is minimally decorated, although a simple stayed window hood is located above a pair of sashes on the projecting gable. Historical imagery reveals that the gable apex was once finished with a finial and decorative fretwork.

A modern porch with concrete foundation and ramp has been added to the northern elevation, and through an aluminium sliding door, access is provided to the office reception area. A pair of slender hinged casements are also located near the front of this elevation.

Assessment:

Historical

This building principally has historic significance for its use as a private maternity hospital from 1903 until about 1917 and is associated with a period in New Zealand's history where many births occurred in such institutions. The hospital was operated by well-respected New Plymouth nurse Winifred Sisley, who also lived in the home until her untimely death during the 1918 influenza epidemic.

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Importance to Community

For present New Plymouth residents whose ancestors were born at the hospital (of whom there are likely many),

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¹⁷ *Taranaki Daily News*, 20 August 1915, page 4

¹⁸ *Taranaki Daily News*, 25 September 1917, page 4

¹⁹ *Taranaki Daily News*, 2 December 1918, page 4

²⁰ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand



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this building provides a tangible link to an important event in their family histories.

Architecture & Construction -

Setting and Context

Unobstructed, and located close to the street frontage, this building makes a positive contribution to the character of the local streetscape.

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Archaeology -

Representativeness, rarity and integrity

The building is representative of early 1900s bay-cottages, and although subject to minor alterations, largely retains its original exterior form, and contributes positively to the streetscape.

✓

Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)

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