



## THE RICHMOND COTTAGE

The Richmond-Atkinson migration from England to New Plymouth in the 1850s was not so much a family as a tribal affair. The first members to emigrate were John and Helen Hursthouse (Helen Hursthouse was a sister of Maria Richmond), and they arrived at New Plymouth in 1843. At the beginning of 1851 two of the Richmond brothers, James Crowe and Henry Robert, arrived at Auckland in the *Victory* and walked overland to New Plymouth, reaching it in March of the same year. The main body, this time both Richmonds and Atkinsons, followed in the *Sir Edward Paget* in 1853.

In July 1853 Jane Maria Atkinson (née Richmond) wrote that Henry Richmond and Arthur Atkinson had gone 'to lodge in town and work on the beach house, on the roofing and woodwork that is, the stonework having been done by contract with a mason . . . We shall have no need for our paperhangings in the beach house as it will be

lined with red pine wood . . . the roof will be open showing the rafters . . . and woodwork is to be nicely finished.' The cottage was to be built for C. W. and Emily Richmond and there was some haste to finish it in 1853 in time for 'poor Emily's confinement'. But it was not until late in 1854 that the C. W. Richmonds and child moved into the Beach Cottage. In a letter to an uncle in England about the Richmond holdings in New Plymouth C. W. Richmond estimated its value at £150. The letters give little in the way of description, nor do they say precisely where it was. However a letter from H. R. Richmond to his brother C. W. Richmond of 6 January 1862 refers to its being on three sections of land all owned by C. W. Richmond, and the map attached to a list of New Plymouth town sections of 1856 makes clear that it corresponded exactly with the stone cottage in St. Aubyn Street, at the rear of the Tasman Hotel, prior to the removal of this cottage to its present site.

C. W. Richmond was appointed Clerk of the Provincial Council and Attorney for the province, and from the end of 1854 until he left to represent the town of New Plymouth in the General Assembly in 1856, lived with his family and his mother at the Beach Cottage. From then on he was seldom in New Plymouth for any length of time, although the Beach Cottage seems to have been held in his name for some years after. In November 1856 it was let to a J. P. du Moulin. From then until July 1862, when the A. S. Atkinsons moved into it, the Beach Cottage was not lived in by any of the family, but during the Taranaki war Richmonds and Atkinsons occupied other cottages in New Plymouth, one of which was also built of stone, and facts connected with these other houses have been written into the history of this particular Richmond Cottage. In February 1860 the A. S. Atkinsons moved from Hurworth to S. P. King's stone cottage in New Plymouth, on the corner of Dawson and Devon Street. The Bank of New Zealand's first premises in New Plymouth were in a cottage built for J. C. Richmond on Mt. Eliot. This house was begun in February 1861 and by November he had let it to the Bank for £25 a year.

On 14 July 1862 Jane Maria Atkinson and her husband A. S. Atkinson moved into the Beach Cottage. They intended to add two rooms, 'constructed on moveable principles', which could be taken away if thought fit. The Atkinsons remained at the Beach Cottage

while Arthur was variously engaged in New Plymouth as 'bush-ranger', editor and co-proprietor of the *Herald* and member both of the Provincial Council and later, of Parliament. Then at the beginning of 1868 he and his family left New Plymouth for Nelson.

The third and youngest Richmond brother, Henry, still remained in New Plymouth where he served as Superintendent, Resident Magistrate, and provincial councillor. In 1872 he began school-teaching in New Plymouth partly for his boy's sake, 'there being no good school there'. The Henry Richmonds must have moved into the Beach Cottage when the Atkinsons left, because the school was conducted there. An advertisement in the *Taranaki News* of 4 January 1873 refers to the Beach Cottage School 'Mr H. R. Richmond's school at the Beach Cottage, St. Aubyn St', to which pupils could be admitted at any age if they 'could read tolerably freely' and had mastered 'the first four rules of arithmetic'. One of the pupils at this school was later Sir Truby King. But Henry Richmond did not last long as a school teacher; in 1875 he entered his brother-in-law's legal firm in Nelson, and on qualifying returned to New Plymouth and established a practice. He returned also to the Beach Cottage and there another son, Howard Parris Richmond, was born on 30 March 1878—the same who on 30 March 1963 opened the Richmond Cottage to the public.

In the 1870s a boarding house was built hard by the Beach Cottage. This was known originally as the Beach House, and by 1883 as the Railway Terminus Hotel. A description of it appears in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, 1908, with a photograph of the Beach Cottage, which by that date had become absorbed into the hotel establishment as an early version of a motel: 'A short distance away from the hotel . . . there are two detached cottages; one of which contains nine rooms, and the other two rooms. In each case the rooms are well furnished, and at either cottage married couples or private families can enjoy the privacy of a home.'

While one must regret that the Richmond Cottage could not have been left standing on its original site, overlooking the sea, the citizens of New Plymouth and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust can share a pride that their joint efforts have secured the preservation of the original stone portion of the cottage in a new and worthy setting. And yet there is an element of irony in this achievement. The members

of the Richmond-Atkinson families—'the mob' as they called themselves, 'literary bushmen' as their fellow settlers called them—were more interested in ideas and politics than in domesticity; they all tended to circulate round New Zealand rather than to be people of fixed abode; to them, the substance of things was in art, in language, in metaphysics, rather than in material possessions. But they were not birds of passage; the impact they made on New Plymouth was solid and to the other settlers it must have seemed at times almost massive; and the Richmond Cottage stands today as a reminder of that fact.

*The Richmond Cottage,  
New Plymouth, was removed  
in 1962 to the corner of  
Brougham Street and Ariki Street,  
and is open to visitors.*



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1971