

THE GABLES

COLONIAL HOSPITAL



NEW PLYMOUTH

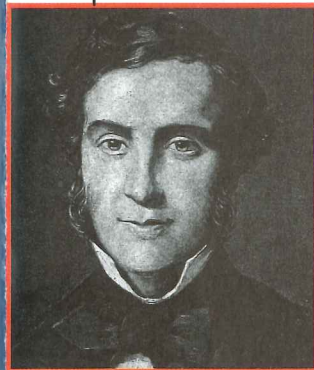
NEW ZEALAND

The Gables Colonial Hospital

stands as a fitting memorial to the establishment of western medicine in New Zealand. A building of national importance it has a '1' classification from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Administered by the New Plymouth District Council, it is open to the public as an historic building and exhibition centre for the Taranaki Society of Arts.

History

The Gables Colonial Hospital, built during 1847 - 48, is the oldest standing hospital in New Zealand. It is also unique in being the only survivor of the four Colonial Hospitals built. These were the brainchild of Governor, Sir George Grey, who hoped to encourage both Maori and Pakeha to use the facilities.



Governor George Grey

In fact the hospital did not function as Grey had envisaged as, on its original site in Mangorei Road, it was too far from the New Plymouth township to attract Pakeha patients. In 1848, 55 inpatients and 570 outpatients were treated and 380 small pox vaccines were administered. Of these all, except four, were Maori.

Specifications for the building were prepared in November 1846. The timber was to be heart rimu, the floor Baltic pine, and the roof sheathed with kohekohe shingles. The spaces between the timber were filled with closely packed sawdust to act as insulation. The stonework was 'hard beach stone' and, because there was no good quality lime available locally, twenty tons of limestone and 1500 bricks were brought from Nelson. A small 'deadhouse' (mortuary) was situated adjacent to the main building. The stonemasons were Thomas Rusden and Samuel Curtis, George Robinson was the carpenter. The completed hospital was handed over to Captain Henry King, Resident Magistrate, in September 1848.

Dr Peter Wilson & Hospital orderly Thomas McGuinness (left) c1860

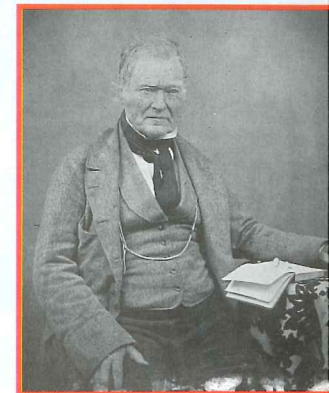


The architect of the Colonial Hospital, Frederick Thatcher (1814 - 1890), was influenced by the Gothic Revival movement in building design. This influence is evident in several other well-known buildings he designed, including St Mary's Church, New Plymouth, and Old St Paul's in Wellington.

The building was, however, found to be totally impractical as a hospital.

It was reported as cold, draughty and inconvenient with an inadequate water supply and with wards barely large enough to house half the intended number of patients.

It was described by one contemporary as, "that gloomy building at the Henui, whose internal arrangements were most remorsefully sacrificed to the Elizabethan style of its external decorations."

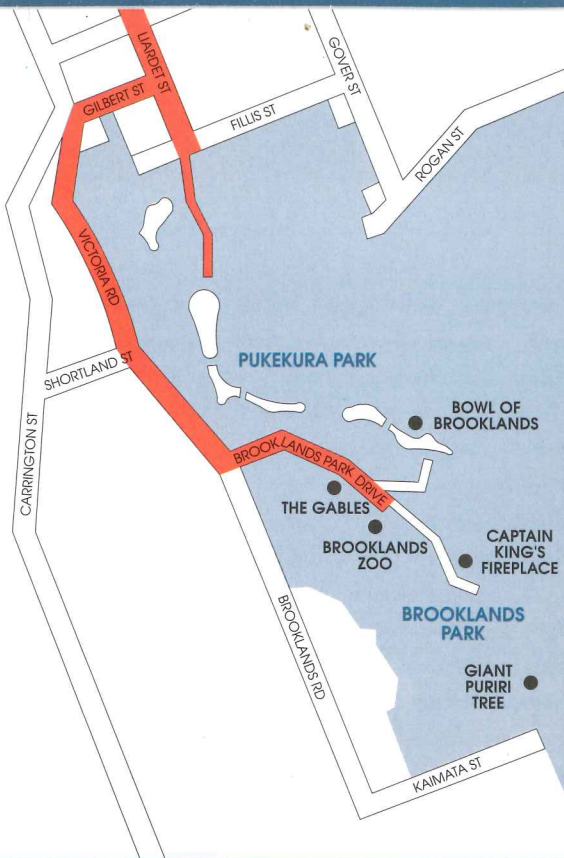


Dr Peter Wilson

The first Colonial Surgeon appointed was Dr Alexander Macshane (1812 - 1849), but within ten months he died of tuberculosis in the surgeon's quarters at the hospital. During the final weeks of his illness

both he and his patients were cared for by Dr Peter Wilson (1791 - 1863) who was officially confirmed as successor in September 1849.

How to get to "The Gables"



Opening Hours

Saturday, Sunday and Public Holidays 1 - 4pm
Boxing Day till end of January
and scheduled exhibitions daily 1 - 4pm

At other times
Tours by arrangement through:

Information Centre

81 Liardet St, New Plymouth
Ph (06) 758 6086



NEW PLYMOUTH
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History

In 1850, the circular porch was built on to the front door and a lean-to storeroom to the kitchen. There was still no washhouse and the addition of a boiler and chimney to the 'deadhouse' confirmed its multi-purpose role. A side entry was also added to the dispensary to enable easier outpatient access.

The hospital continued to provide a valuable service to local Maori until August 1854. It was then that a confrontation between two factions of the Puketapu hapu of the Atiawa iwi resulted in one member, Rawiri Waiaua, being mortally wounded and taken to the hospital for treatment. Following the chief's death a tapu was placed on the building. This unfortunately caused a dramatic fall in the number of patients treated. It did, however, save the building from destruction during the land wars a few years later.



Dr Thomas Rawson

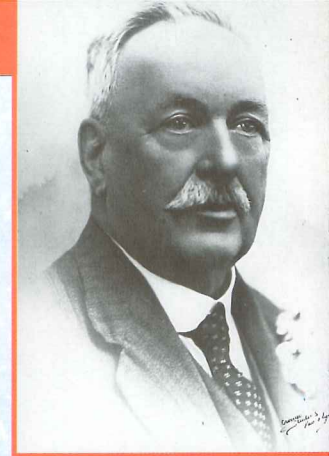
Dr Thomas Rawson (1810 - 1879) succeeded Wilson as Colonial Surgeon in 1863, but had little opportunity to make use of the hospital's facilities during the ensuing years of war. Once fighting ceased the Taranaki Provincial Council reluctantly agreed to take over responsibility for the neglected and derelict hospital.

By 1880 the building had become an old men's home known as 'The Refuge'.

Responsibility had now passed to the Hospital and Charitable Aid Board who left the inmates very much to their own devices until 1903, when they were transferred to more regimented quarters.

The land became an education reserve (now New Plymouth Girls' High School) and in 1904 the hospital was put up for auction.

Mrs Mary King purchased it for ten pounds but the cost of removal to the Newton Kings' property at Brooklands proved to be a rather more expensive exercise. Over five hundred pounds were finally spent in moving and faithfully reconstructing the building. It was probably at this time that the second upstairs room was created by adding flooring over one of the wards.



Mr Newton King (1856 - 1927)

On 10 March 1934, in the presence of the Governor-General Lord Bledisloe, the building, as part of the land which now forms Brooklands Park, was gifted to the city by the trustees of Newton King's estate.



"The Gables" soon after its re-erection in Brooklands

The building was subsequently used as rented accommodation until 1983 when a sub-committee of City Council, Historic Places Trust and Friends of Taranaki Museum was formed to encourage an appropriate community use. The Gables Colonial Hospital opened as the Taranaki Society of Arts Gallery in 1985 after a substantial restoration programme.