



BARTONS, a house with a tunnel story to tell, is guarded by the spaniel dog of the present owner, Mr Peter Young, New Plymouth.

BARTONS' SECRETS

Barton St, Fitzroy, is a short street. But it has a house with a long and fascinating history.

Few New Plymouth residents have seen the Victorian-style home, which is hidden in the trees and approached by a curving drive.

The house, called Bartons, is 75 years old. It was built in 1900 by Eustacius Barton Griffiths and was the homestead on a farm that consisted of the area that is now Rimu, Lismore and Barton Sts.

Mr Griffiths was a well known breeder of Jersey cows and at the time had one of the biggest Jersey studs in Taranaki.

The lawns of the house were used as a grass tennis court and a croquet lawn.

In the 1930s Mr Griffiths subdivided the farm into sections and sold them. The two acres surrounding the house were kept clear and still provide a well kept appearance around the home today.

The house has 10 rooms and when first built its verandas were large enough to be used for local dances. In 1940 Mr Griffiths sold the house to a local builder, who, according to legend, built hidden rooms and passageways to hide his son, an army defaulter.

In 1951 the house was sold to Mr D. F. Sandys Wunsch, who, while redecorating, found several rooms built into the walls of the house.

His daughter, Miss P. Sandys Wunsch, yesterday told of the discoveries made by her father while redecorating the house and digging the garden.

Her father decided to put an extra room under the stairs. He found a room had already been built there with a passageway leading from it to a group of bushes in the

garden. There was also another passage leading up to a linen closet on the second storey.

"There was no visible door to the room, so it was obviously to hide something," Miss Sandys Wunsch said.

She remembered her father removing a wall in the house and finding another room. This too had passageways which led to the attic.

When Mr Sandys Wunsch was digging the garden, he unearthed a tunnel which passed under the garage and came up in an empty lot next door to the house.

Miss Sandys Wunsch said the tunnels were very well constructed and were boarded up to prevent cave-ins.

In the hidden rooms they found mattresses and candle ends and there were candles in the tunnels.

While the builder and his family were living there, neighbours often reported sightings of the son, who had defaulted from the army, but police were never able to find anything on several visits to the house.

Miss Sandys Wunsch said she believed the police finally

caught the defaulter after the family had moved to Auckland.

When the tunnels were discovered, hundreds of people from all over Taranaki came to inspect them.

"It was a common occurrence to look out the window and find a family wandering over the grounds," she said.

All the tunnels found were later destroyed.

In 1966 the house was again sold to Mr Bruce Burnmaster, who last year sold it to the present owner, Mr Peter Young, a New Plymouth solicitor and well known golfer.

MECHANICAL TOYS SHOW

A New Plymouth man, Mr Laurie Petty and his mechanical toys will host two shows sponsored by the Fitzroy Plunket Society on Wednesday of next week.

The shows will be held at the Fitzroy School and Community Hall and proceeds will go to the Plunket Society's general fund.

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