

## Heritage Buildings Report

**Site ID**

**Building/Site Name**

Airlie House

**Address**

161 Powderham Street, New Plymouth



### Statement of Significance

The original rear portion of this house was constructed as a rental cottage for respected early Taranaki settler Thomas Oxenham during 1878-79. Although now somewhat altered, it is both a rare surviving example of the types of combined-box cottages constructed in New Plymouth during the 1870s-80s, and a rare surviving example of the work of local architect James Cartwright George. The original cottage was substantially enlarged for well-known bank manager Alexander McHardy and his wife Gertrude in 1905-06, with the house remaining in the McHardy family for more than fifty years until 1961. Designed by noted New Plymouth architect Frank Messenger, the 1905-06 additions are an excellent example of Messenger's larger-scale domestic work and a representative example of the types of two-storey villas constructed in New Plymouth during the late-1890s and early-1900s. The house was converted into a well-known bed and breakfast called 'Balconies' in 1992, with the original 'Airlie' name reinstated during the 2000s. The exterior retains many original architectural features and conveys a strong sense of historical authenticity; being well-maintained the house contributes positively to the character of the local streetscape.



## Heritage Buildings Report

### Legal Information and Heritage Status

**Legal Description** Section 298 Town of New Plymouth

**District Plan Item/ Map No.**

**Heritage New Zealand List** Not listed

### Construction Information

**Date of Construction** 1878-79/1905-06/1929

**Principal Materials** Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

**Construction Professionals** James Cartwright George (architect 1878-79 cottage); Frank Messenger (architect 1905-06 additions); Alfred Edward Kretschmar (builder 1929 additions)

### History

Airlie House is located on Town Section 298 of the original Town of New Plymouth surveyed by Frederick Alonzo Carrington in 1841. The section was initially allocated to William Rutley Mowle by the Plymouth Company in the 1840s, with the agents for the transaction being 'Carrington & Aubrey'.<sup>1</sup> It is unclear if Mowle ever occupied the section, or even resided in New Zealand, and is noted as being in rates arrears for the property (and several other sections) during the mid-1850s.<sup>2</sup> Mowle seems to have retained ownership until about 1865, when the section was conveyed to a member of the Carrington family.<sup>3</sup>

In 1866, 'Carrington' sold the section to 'Trigger', who only retained ownership for a year before the property was purchased by William Mumford Burton.<sup>4</sup> The earliest surviving rates book covering Burton's period of ownership is for the 1875-76 rating year, with Thomas Veale (who presumably rented the property) noted as the ratepayer for this and a number of surrounding sections.<sup>5</sup> The absence of a fire rate, generally only levied when structures are present on a section, seems to indicate that the section was vacant at the time, with the property probably grazed.<sup>6</sup> Burton retained ownership of the section until late-1878, when it was sold to farmer Thomas Oxenham, although the transaction is not recorded in the Land Deeds Register until March the following year.<sup>7</sup>

Born in South Devon about 1806, Thomas Oxenham married Elizabeth Veale in 1834, before emigrating with his family and a number of friends to New Plymouth aboard the *Amelia Thompson* in 1841.<sup>8</sup> Initially settling on a farm at Tataraimaka (lower Timaru Road), Thomas and his family were forced to flee to the relative safety of New Plymouth during the Taranaki Wars (1860-65), with their farmhouse and most of their belongings destroyed by Māori forces.<sup>9</sup> Upon conclusion of the conflict, Thomas purchased another property (Glendower Farm) near Pahitere on the Koru Road, at which

<sup>1</sup> Reference to the Sections Comprising the Town of New Plymouth, New Zealand, 1842, Puke Ariki, ARC2001-365/5

<sup>2</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 28 November 1855, page 4; *Taranaki Herald*, 18 October 1856, page 4

<sup>3</sup> Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> New Plymouth Town Board Rating Book 1875-76, NPDC Archives

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

<sup>8</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 4 February 1896, page 3

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## Heritage Buildings Report

Thomas and Elizabeth resided until old age forced their retirement in 1890.<sup>10</sup> Thomas was a well respected Taranaki settler and at the time of his death was described as “...strictly honourable and just, of strong moral fibre, and blessed with a splendid constitution”.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas had the original cottage on this section (rear portion of the present house) constructed soon after purchasing the property in late-1878. The building was seemingly designed by well-known local businessman, builder and architect James Cartwright George, who advertised for tenders for “the erection of a cottage in Powderham Street, for Mr Oxenham” during November 1878.<sup>12</sup> George was a well-known local citizen, who learned the building and cabinet making trade under a Mr Watson, before establishing his own successful business in 1869.<sup>13</sup> He operated a furnishing store on Devon Street until 1887, before entering into the dairy business, establishing the Tikorangi Dairy Factory, and along with two others, founded the Crown Dairy Company, which would go on to become one of New Zealand’s largest dairy companies.<sup>14</sup> Whilst not his primary occupation, based on tender notices in the *Taranaki Herald*, it appears George designed a number of Taranaki buildings during the 1870s and early-1880s, although very few of his commissions now survive.



New Plymouth Views [Detail from circa 1890s view of New Plymouth looking east from Western Park showing rear of original cottage] Te Papa, B.027297

It seems that from its construction until 1890, the cottage was rented out, although it is unclear from street directories as to whom. The oldest surviving New Plymouth Borough Council rates book covering Oxenham’s ownership is that for the 1887-88 rating year; although Town Section 298 is strangely absent.<sup>15</sup> The property is included from the following 1888-89 rating year onwards, with Oxenham noted as the ratepayer and the section with house valued at £19.<sup>16</sup> Upon the Oxenham’s retirement and sale of their Koru Road farm in 1890, they subsequently shifted to New Plymouth and took up residence in their Powderham Street house, where they both remained until Thomas’ death in February 1896.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 25 November 1878, page 3

<sup>13</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 6 March 1907, page 4

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book 1887-88, NPDC Archives

<sup>16</sup> New Plymouth Borough Council Rating Book 1888-89, NPDC Archives

## Heritage Buildings Report

Thomas' final will specified that upon his death, Town Section 298 be gifted to his daughters Susannah Wright and Jane Dingle as tenants in common, subject to the right of Elizabeth to "occupy and enjoy the same and receive the rents issues and profits thereof during her life time".<sup>17</sup> Mrs Oxenham chose not to continue to reside at the house and moved out soon after Thomas' death, later shifting to Whanganui.<sup>18</sup> The property was subsequently rented out, with the first tenant being surgeon Hugh A. McClelland, who is noted as the occupier for 1896 and 1897.<sup>19</sup> McClelland emigrated to New Zealand from England in 1896, first landing at Wellington, before almost immediately relocating to New Plymouth.<sup>20</sup> McClelland established a successful medical practice at New Plymouth and was for a time port health officer; he died whilst on a family holiday in Australia during 1922.<sup>21</sup>

For 1898 and 1899 Mrs Margaret Sproute is listed as residing at the property.<sup>22</sup> It seems Mrs Oxenham initially let the house furnished, as on March 10<sup>th</sup> 1899, auctioneer Newton King held a sale of furniture "on account of Mrs Oxenham, on the premises next to Mr R. Bayley's residence".<sup>23</sup> From 1900 until 1903 accountant George William Palmer appears to be the occupier, with manager Walter Menzies Bayne listed as residing at the property for 1904-05.<sup>24</sup> In March 1905, following Mrs Oxenham's death at Whanganui, the property was formally conveyed from the late Thomas Oxenham to his daughters Susannah Wright and Jane Dingle, before being sold later in September to Alexander McHardy.<sup>25</sup>



A General View of the Lawns [Spectators at the New Plymouth tennis tournament showing rear of original single-storey cottage before 1905-06 additions and also the neighbouring two-storey Braemar], NZ Graphic, 06 February 1904, p41, Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections NZG-19040206-41-2

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Oxenham, 1896, probate file including will, New Plymouth Probate Files, 1867-1981, Archives New Zealand (21954)

<sup>18</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 17 February 1905, page 8

<sup>19</sup> *Stones Street Directories*, 1896-97

<sup>20</sup> *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 12 July 1922, page 4

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Stones Street Directories*, 1898-99

<sup>23</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 9 March 1899, page 2; Reginald Bayley resided at the now demolished Braemar House which stood at neighbouring 159 Powderham Street

<sup>24</sup> *Stones Street Directories*, 1900-05

<sup>25</sup> *Taranaki Land Deed Indexes* (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand





## Heritage Buildings Report

Born at Strathdon, Scotland in 1866, Alexander emigrated to New Zealand with his parents at a young age. He joined the National Bank at New Plymouth and later relocated to Auckland where he worked at several different branches before becoming manager of the Newton Branch in 1898.<sup>26</sup> Alexander married Miss Ethel Gertrude Whyte in 1899, with the couple continuing to reside in Auckland until 1905, when Alexander was appointed manager of the New Plymouth branch.<sup>27</sup> Upon their departure from Auckland a large function was held in the McHardy's honour, at which Alexander was presented with a gold watch and chain, and Gertrude (as she was known) with a silver coffee service.<sup>28</sup>

On arrival at New Plymouth, the McHardy's initially resided in Pendarves Street, with Mrs McHardy advertising during September 1905 for a "...young girl to assist with housework and take out baby" at a Pendarves Street address.<sup>29</sup> However, they didn't intend to reside at Pendarves Street for long, and soon engaged noted New Plymouth architect Frank Messenger to design extensive additions to the original cottage on their recently purchased Powderham Street property. Messenger advertised for tenders for "building additions to residence in Powderham Street" during late-September 1905.<sup>30</sup> A permit for this work was granted to McHardy by the New Plymouth Borough Council on the 23rd of October 1905, with the estimated construction value being £591 17s 6d.<sup>31</sup>

Francis John Messenger was born on 4 July 1865, the second son of William and Arabella. Frank was educated in New Plymouth, and trained with local architect Henry J. T Edmonds, before moving to Melbourne, where he worked for Oakden and Kemp for ten years.<sup>32</sup> In 1891, Messenger married his second cousin Lucy Messenger, before returning to New Plymouth in 1893; he commenced practice in New Plymouth the following year.<sup>33</sup> Frank Messenger and Horace Victor Griffiths entered into partnership in 1917, with William Taylor joining in 1920.<sup>34</sup> This partnership ceased in 1930, with Messenger and Taylor forming a new partnership; Leonard Wolfe later joined in a partnership that would last up until Messenger's death on 11 October 1945.<sup>35</sup> Throughout his long career Messenger designed residential and commercial buildings in a variety of styles and made a significant contribution to New Plymouth's built environment.

It is unclear exactly when the additions were completed, but the McHardy's were occupying the house by at least mid-February 1906, when Mrs McHardy advertised for a "young girl to assist in house" at a Powderham Street address.<sup>36</sup> The earliest reference to the name 'Airlie' is an advertisement for a "good general", placed by Mrs McHardy in July 1907; why the name Airlie was chosen is unknown, although may relate to their Scottish heritage.<sup>37</sup> In 1929, the house was extended again, with a two-storey half-hipped gable added to the south-western elevation. A permit for this work was granted to Mrs McHardy by the Borough Council on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1929; Alfred Edward Kretschmar was the builder, with the estimated value of the additions being £100.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 January 1942, page 8

<sup>27</sup> *Auckland Star*, 16 August 1905, page 2

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 8 September 1905, page 1

<sup>30</sup> *Taranaki Daily News*, 30 September 1905, page 3

<sup>31</sup> NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

<sup>32</sup> Pritchard, Ian. (1994). *Frank Messenger, Architect: The work of a New Plymouth architect*. New Plymouth: Ian Pritchard.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 19 February 1906, page 1

<sup>37</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 30 July 1907, page 1

<sup>38</sup> NPBC Building Register Book 1927-33, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)



## Heritage Buildings Report

Alexander retired from his position at the National Bank about 1930, following 42 years' service with the institution.<sup>39</sup> Soon after Alexander's retirement, the McHardy's purchased the neighbouring Braemar, which stood at 159 Powderham Street.<sup>40</sup> In 1931 they engaged builder C. L. Rawlinson to design extensive alterations, converting the Braemar into a hostel which was run by Mrs McHardy until about 1961.<sup>41</sup> Alexander continued to reside at Airlie House until his death in January 1942, with ownership transferred to Gertrude the following year.<sup>42</sup> In 1961, the Airlie House property was purchased by Reginald and Marjorie Weeden of Auckland, with Mrs McHardy later relocating to Auckland where she died in 1964 aged 90 years; she is interred at Mangere Lawn Cemetery.<sup>43</sup>

Soon after purchasing the property, the Weeden's had the house converted into two flats.<sup>44</sup> Following Reginald Weeden's death in 1976, farmer Douglas Managh of Urenui became a part owner.<sup>45</sup> Upon Majorie's death in 1979, Managh became the sole owner and retained ownership until 1981, when the house was purchased by Stuart and Sandra Ellice.<sup>46</sup> In October 1992 the house was purchased by John and Annamarie Brbich.<sup>47</sup> The Brbich's promptly set about renovating the house and converting it into a bed and breakfast called 'Balconies'. The name was chosen to reflect the prominent front balconies; apparently the Brbich's toyed with the name 'Verandas' but eventually settled on 'Balconies' as it would appear earlier in alphabetical accommodation listings.<sup>48</sup> Minor alterations were made to the first floor at this time, with a fire wall and fire door installed; the outside fire escape is also thought to date from this time.<sup>49</sup>

In 1996, the house was purchased by Trevor and Viv Lewis.<sup>50</sup> It was during a visit in 2000 by two of the McHardy's grandson's that the Lewis' discovered the history of the home, with the McHardy family still holding the original plans for the 1905 Messenger addition and also photographs of the house.<sup>51</sup> In May 2002, the house was purchased by Lisa McCreedy and Wayne Masters, with Lisa Gundeson becoming a part owner later that year.<sup>52</sup> In 2003 ownership was transferred to Dean and Gabrielle Masters, who, following the devastating fire which destroyed the neighbouring Braemar Restaurant, purchased that property and incorporated it into the Airlie House garden.<sup>53</sup>

### Reference Sources

See footnotes.

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<sup>39</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 January 1942, page 8

<sup>40</sup> A two-storied villa constructed in the late 1890s for Reginald Bayley, The Braemar was run as a hostel by Mrs McHardy from the 1930s until the 1960s, before being opened as a restaurant which survived until the building was destroyed in a devastating fire in January 2008.

<sup>41</sup> NPDC Archives

<sup>42</sup> CT TN124/210

<sup>43</sup> Ibid; Auckland Council Cemetery Search, <https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/cemeteries/Pages/find-burial-cremation.aspx>; accessed 14 March 2019

<sup>44</sup> NPDC Archives

<sup>45</sup> CT TN124/210

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *North Taranaki Weekender*, 31 January 1993, pages 10-11

<sup>49</sup> NPDC Archives

<sup>50</sup> CT TN124/210

<sup>51</sup> *The Daily News*, 29 September 2001, page 33

<sup>52</sup> CT TN124/210

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

## Heritage Buildings Report

### Description

Airlie House is located on the western side of New Plymouth city, a short distance from the CBD. Whilst this area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, intensification didn't begin until the 1920s. Development pressures have seen the demolition and removal of a number of older dwellings in recent years, with the area now home to an eclectic mix of architectural styles with a growing commercial presence.

This building is roughly centred on a full and level town section. There is a detached carport at rear and mature trees along the frontage; notably a large scarlet gum (*Corymbia ficifolia*). Asymmetrically composed, the house comprises two distinct but contiguous portions; a single-storey nineteenth century mixed box cottage at rear, with an early-Edwardian two-storey L-plan villa with hipped-gable extension at front. The entire structure is timber-framed, with walls clad in horizontal rusticated weatherboard, and roof sheathed with mild corrugated steel. A two-flue painted brick chimney rises through the roof and is finished with corbelling and distinctive cap.

The main front elevation faces roughly north-west into Powderham Street and incorporates a full-height projecting flat-faced gable. At ground-floor level is a square bay window fitted with a pair double-hung sashes at front, with a slender sash either side on the returns; a dentil moulded frieze runs under the shallow bay eave. At first-floor level is a pair of central double-hung sashes, above which the shallow stepped-out gable end is sheathed in fish-scale shingles, incorporates angled moulding, and is supported by a regular row of corbels. Further decorative elements include a central louvred ventilator, applied decorative rosettes and a finial at the apex.

A prominent feature of the front elevation is a two-storey post-and-beam veranda with sloping roof. The frontage incorporates two asymmetrical bays divided by paired timber posts. A balustrade incorporating simple timber balusters extends between the posts, whilst the upper portion is decorated with heavy arched mouldings decorated with four-leaf clovers, above which is a wide latticework frieze. The main front entrance door is timber, panelled and glazed, with further slender glazed panels above and either side; a pair of French casements with a solid lower panel and three clear glazed upper panels is sited further east.

At first-floor level, a balustrade incorporating simple timber balusters runs the length veranda and is broken only by a modern fire escape on the north-eastern elevation. Decorative elements include heavy arched mouldings featuring four-leaf clover designs. Access to the first-floor veranda is provided through two pairs of panelled and glazed French casements, with a further (more recent) timber casement providing additional light to interior spaces.

The north-western elevation of the villa extension features a pair of ground-floor sashes and two single sashes at first floor level. The upper gable end is treated identically to the front elevation, being stepped-out, supported by a regular row of corbels, and sheathed in fish-scale shingles. Further decorative elements include a central louvred ventilator, angled moulding, applied decorative rosettes, and a finial at the apex. Further to the south, a lower flat-roofed extension projects from the north-eastern gable end of the original cottage.

The south-western elevation of the 1905-06 villa is now dominated by the 1929 half-hipped gable extension. Set-back from the main front gable-end, this extension is stylistically similar to Messenger's earlier design, although overt decorative elements are largely absent. On the north-western elevation, a single central sash is positioned at each level, whilst the south-western wall incorporates a mixture of sashes and 1920s style casements.



## Heritage Buildings Report

### Assessment:

<b>Historical</b>	Originally constructed for well-respected early settler Thomas Oxenham, the house was initially rented and is associated with the historically significant trend of residential property investment. The architect for the original cottage was James Cartwright George, with examples of his work now very rare. Additions completed in 1905-06 were designed by noted New Plymouth architect Frank Messenger, with the building an excellent example of his larger-scale work for wealthier clients. The house was occupied by the well-known McAllum family for a significant period from 1906 until the 1961.	✓
<b>Importance to Community</b>	Airlie House is a local landmark and is relatively well-known by the public, principally owing to its operation as a bed and breakfast.	✓
<b>Architecture &amp; Construction</b>	The front portion of this building is an excellent example of an early-Edwardian two-storied bay villa in the local vernacular. Overall the building is a good illustration of how nineteenth century cottages were adapted to cater to changing trends and needs during the early decades of the twentieth century.	✓
<b>Setting and Context</b>	Set amongst mature trees the house contributes positively to the character of the local streetscape.	✓
<b>Archaeology</b>	As the original cottage was constructed during 1878-79, the property likely has archaeological evidence relating to pre-1900 human activity and has the potential to reveal information about the past through archaeological investigation.	✓
<b>Representativeness, rarity and integrity</b>	Although somewhat altered through the 1905-06 additions, the original rear cottage is a representative example of the types of combined-box cottages constructed in New Plymouth during the 1870s-80s, of which few now remain. The front portion is a representative example of the types of two-storey villas constructed in New Plymouth during the late-1890s and early-1900s. The exterior is little altered since the 1929 additions and retains many original architectural features; consequently, the house consequently conveys a strong sense of historical authenticity.	✓
<b>Meets threshold for listing</b> (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓