

THE OLD KARORI COTTAGE

Recently a friend and I walked the Southern walkway from Oriental Bay to Island Bay. On the last leg, as we approached Houghton Bay, we came across the Wellington wind garden and mead factory. We agreed to go in and explore. The mead tasting was a new and agreeable experience and we came out armed with a bottle each. But what really intrigued me was the cottage which housed the factory. I asked if the cottage was an original and had always been on the site. I was surprised to discover that the cottage had been bought from the Wellington City Council and had been moved from Curtis Street. I was even more surprised when the owner showed me the sign on the end wall: *The Devil's Bridge Cottage*. Surely there was only one Devil's Bridge, the infamous bridge on the nineteenth century route to Karori. And so it was. (All readers of *The Stockade*, will have a copy of the recent Karori Historical Society publication: *Karori and its People* – see p 28)

The present owners of the mead factory understand that the original owner of the cottage was Samuel Garwith, a Karori settler, who bought land in the area in 1864. There are various records of property sales over the next 20-30 years which appear to refer to the same land, including one dated 18/2/1885 which reads:

'Walter Thos Hazelwood, Bootmaker Lower Hutt ... agrees to sell land marked 32 on plan of Karori containing 28 perches numbers 1 and 2 on the plan of said section with all buildings there on and situated on Karori Rd near and known as the Devils Bridge.'

Curious to find out more, I decided to see what I could find in the Wellington City Council Archives. Unfortunately the early WCC records are sparse. The first couple of documents on the file were dated 1922 and referred to a Pound being erected at the Corporation Depot on the corner of Wilton Road and Old Karori Road which was to replace an existing Pound at the junction of South Karori Road and Makara Hill. In August of that year decisions were also made about a Pound Keeper which had some bearing on the cottage. The current Pound keeper for Karori, Mr T.C.G. Walker was *'relieved' of duties 'because of.. the distance of his residence.'* Mr E.H. Harlem who was currently *'overseer'* for the district was appointed temporary Pound Keeper because he lived close to the new Depot. The Council memo goes on to say that *'... it will be advisable to have a cottage erected at some later date at the Depot for the stableman who could discharge the duties of Poundkeeper.'* Two years later, in 1924, Mr Harlem resigned and was replaced by Mr Heap who *'arranged to lease a home alongside the site'*. There is no way of telling whether or not this is a reference to the Old Karori Cottage.

There are no further documents relating to the Pound in the WCC archives until the 1950's when there is an exchange of correspondence between several Curtis

Street residents and Council officers. The residents complain about the state of the Pound, the destruction of bush between Curtis Street and Chaytor Street and an 'unauthorised industry' Glenmore Motors operating in a residential area at 29 Curtis St. There is also concern about horses escaping from the Pound and bolting up the road causing danger to the traffic.

In the 1970's files there is a sketch of the Cottage (See below). Those readers who know the history of the Karori Historical Society will know that the Society was formed in 1973. I was delighted to discover a letter on the file for the following year from The Karori Historical Society to the Town Clerk stating that the Society was looking for a permanent meeting place and museum and a repository for its records. It was suggested that the Cottage would be a suitable building. According to the Historical Society, the cottage had been owned by the Council since 1921. The letter went on to say:

Preliminary research has been carried out in an attempt to obtain some information and details regarding the original construction and ownership of the cottage and its history. Unfortunately, no records have yet been discovered, and so far the Council's own Building Branch and Valuers Section have not been able to discover any relevant information. Notwithstanding this, it is clear that the cottage is very old, and possibly one of the first to be constructed in the Karori environs. Of particular interest is the fact that when the main route to Karori was over the Old Karori Road, one of the more perilous stages of the journey was down to the "Devils Bridge" which crossed the Kaiwarrawarra Stream only a short distance from the cottage. The bridge was constructed in 1842. A survey plan compiled in 1906 noted the existence of a footbridge on the north-west side of the cottage site. We can only speculate at this stage as to the purposes for which the cottage may have been used, but it may possibly have been associated in some way with the Devils Bridge crossing. Research is continuing.'

The letter goes on to emphasise that the Society is anxious that the Cottage is preserved and maintained because of its historic interest. Four requests are made of the Council: that the cottage and environs is designated as a place of historic interest; that the Society be given the opportunity to purchase or lease the property; that in the event of the Council requiring the land, that the Society be given the opportunity to remove the Cottage to an alternative site; and that the Society in conjunction with the Council be permitted to restore the cottage and use it as a tourist attraction.

In a Memorandum to the Town Clerk (15/8/74) on behalf of the City Planner (K.V.Clarke) supported the request of the Historical Association to lease or purchase the cottage. A 'small, local museum would be in accordance with sound own Planning principles'. He noted that the building was probably constructed in the 1860's/1870's and that unlike most cottages of that period had

a substantially unaltered interior which added to its interest. However, he doubted that the building was of sufficient historic interest *'to designate it as a place of Historic Interest.'*

A follow-up letter from J.T.Ingerson President of the Historical Society the following year (5/2/75), noted that he had inspected the cottage with Mr Norwood of the Town Planning Branch. After outlining some of the activities of the Society the letter notes that a grant of \$50 has been made to the Society by the Historic Places Trust towards the cost of adequate storage facilities. The President was confident that if the Council approved the lease or sale of the Cottage to the Society additional funds could be raised. The WCC File is silent on the final outcome of this proposal.

However, there is a undated newspaper report about the Cottage on the Historical Society files (probably from the Karori News,1975), which indicates that the Council did offer the Cottage to the Society for use as a museum but that an alternative building for staff at the depot who currently used the cottage, would have to be found. The possibility of a prefabricated building or builder's sheds being appropriate was raised in the article. Although not stated in the article, it appears that if the Society was to use the building the Council would require them to contribute up to \$8000 towards the cost of a replacement building, as well as upgrading the Cottage, which was *'badly off for dry rot'*, up to the standard required by the City Engineer.

At a much later date in 1998, when the Historical Society was celebrating 25 years since its founding, there is an article in its own publication Stockade which mentions the various attempts that have been made to find suitable storage for the Society's collections and files, including *'... the possibility of acquiring the old cottage at the junction of Curtis Street and Old Karori Road as a headquarters and museum but the Society was unable to afford the \$8000 required by the Council.'* It was at this point the Society accepted the offer from the Karori library to house its archives there.

In the 1980's requests to lease the land adjacent to the cottage, which was no longer used as a Pound but as a Council depot for storage of construction and drainage materials, were made by a range of organizations and businesses. These included: Northern Timber, Flyn Construction, the Lion's Club and the Terawhiti Licensing Trust. At least one of these submissions included a diagram including the position of 'a working man's cottage'. None of these applications appeared to have been successful. At the same time there were a number of letters from residents in Curtis Street complaining about the use of land, and potential use, by businesses in an area which had 'an underlying zoning of Residential A'

In 1987, The Heritage Committee of the Council recommended that: *'The Works Dept be requested to keep the cottage at the bottom of Old Karori Road in a*

reasonable condition, thus preserving the building with a view to possible relocation at a later stage". (18/11/87) The Works Department responded that the site and cottage was needed by the Council for the near future. Re-location of the building would be feasible if the brick chimney and fireplace were demolished and the underfloor framing reinforced.

In 1989, The Mayor of Wellington, Mr Jim Bellich, unveiled the plaque in Old Karori Road, which recalled the original route to Karori from the Kaiwharawhara Stream. The plaque had been suggested by the Historical Society. Mr Bellich referred to the: *'...representations from the Kaori Historical Society through its secretary, Miss Kitty Wood, for preserving Old Karori Road as a public walkway and the council was pleased to adopt the idea and set about a beautifying programme under the direction of Mr Richard Nanson of the department of Parks and Recreation... The plaque would remind all who passed that they were walking the original route between the city and one of its oldest suburbs.'* In the background to the photograph taken when the plaque was unveiled is the Old Karori Cottage. (see below) (Stockade 22)

In 1990 a new Council works depot was established in Tory Street. This led to the transfer of the Drainage Division from the Wilton Depot. A WCC memo (11/12/90) notes that the Cottage near the entrance of the Wilton Depot is now vacant. This development no doubt explains an application by Mr Hall of the Karori Garden Centre to:

- a) Extend the existing Garden Centre by infilling the stream bed and placing a 22m addition on the existing retail shop.
- b) To utilize the old cottage previously used by WCC Works Department as an office for staff members.

In the background notes for the application it was noted that the WCC had approved the establishment of the Garden Centre in 1976 on the grounds that it was *.. a good opportunity to clean up the site which was previously being used to store refuse bins ... that the site was unattractive for residential re-development and the Garden Centre would provide a useful neighbourhood amenity.* There followed a lengthy correspondence between the Garden Centre and the Council as well as objections from Curtis St residents. The objections were not sustained and the City Planner, A.A.Aburn, recommended that The Garden Centre's application be accepted. It was finally approved by the Council in August, 1991.

To get back to where we started - the removal of the Old Karori Cottage from Curtis Street to Houghton Bay Road and its use as a mead factory. There is a Solicitor's Certificate on the Council file (13/11/95) for the sale of the Old Karori Cottage to Jacobus Riter and Vanda Hyam. The purchasers agree to complete the upgrading and restoration of the exterior of the building so as to preserve and maintain the heritage features of the building to the reasonable satisfaction of the Council's Property Manager. Internal alterations may be made to the building but

the external of the cottage must be retained. Furthermore, the building cannot be removed from the land it is now on without WCC consent.

While enjoying my visit to Houghton Bay and the visit to the mead factory, I regret that the Council did not preserve this historic cottage on its original site. It's ironic that in 2010 the Council signposted a new walkway - The Sanctuary to the Sea – which follows what was once the route of the Kaiwharawhara stream from its headwaters in the Sanctuary to the harbor at the bottom of the Ngaio Gorge. The flow of the stream is now largely underground but the walk does go down Curtis Street and through the historic site of the Devils Bridge and the cottage. I'm saddened to think that the Historical Society's efforts in the 1970's did not succeed in having the area and cottage preserved. It would have been a great place for walkers to stop and contemplate an important historic site. I'm even further saddened to think that should the current consent application be successful, the area will be further destroyed by the arrival of a Mega Mitre 10.

Sources

Wellington City Archive Files 00001:2210:60/2388; 00001:2302:60/4726;
00277:322:28/6/4; 00001: 538:6/6959
Karori Historical Society Stockade 31 1998; 22, 1989
Evening Post Dec 23,1902 (Karori Historical Association File 1890-1920)
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