

Heritage Buildings Report

Site ID

Building/Site Name

Chew Chong's Villa (Former)

Address

272 Courtenay Street, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

This house has considerable historical significance for its association with two prominent New Plymouth citizens; surveyor Thomas Gore Sole, for whom the house was built, and Chinese businessman Chew Chong, who purchased the villa as his town residence in 1913. The association with Chew Chong is especially significant, with Chong being one of Taranaki's best-known nineteenth century businessmen, perhaps best remembered for his role in establishing the trade of the fungus dubbed 'Taranaki wool', and as a Taranaki dairy industry pioneer. Chong was residing at this house at the time of his death in 1920, with the house remaining in Chong family ownership until 1961. The house itself is a representative and increasingly uncommon example of the types of single-storey bay villas constructed in New Plymouth's suburbs during the early-1900s. Although subject to some additions and alterations, the principal Courtenay and Watson Street elevations still retain a good level of integrity.



Heritage Buildings Report

Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description PT Section 2083 Town of New Plymouth & PT Section 2084 Town of New Plymouth

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1902

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals Albert Arthur Pikett (architect & builder)

History

Early Section History

The parts of New Plymouth Town Sections 2083 and 2084 on which the present house at 272 Courtenay Street now stands were originally owned by Thomas Sole Snr.¹ A prominent early settler, Thomas Sole was born at Kent and emigrated to New Plymouth in 1841 aboard the Plymouth Company's *Oriental*, accompanied by other members of the Sole-Foreman families.² Thomas married Sarah Devenish in 1855, and the couple had two children; Rosina and well known surveyor Thomas Gore Sole.

Thomas Sole Senior initially farmed at Mangoraka, and then Mangorei, where he remained until the outbreak of the First Taranaki War, at which time he shifted into town.³ Sole was a member of the first mounted corps formed, and also accompanied missionaries on their early travels to remote areas of the North Island.⁴ Sole was in good health up until a short time before his death, when he caught a chill whilst working at his cottages; he passed away on the 14th of June 1909, aged 81 years, and is buried in the nearby Te Henui Cemetery.⁵

It seems Town Section 2083 and 2084 remained vacant during Thomas Sole Snr's ownership, and along with other neighbouring sections, were presumably grazed. During 1896, Town Sections 2083 and 2084 were acquired by Thomas Sole Snr's son, Thomas Gore Sole.⁶ Born in New Plymouth on the 6th of September 1858 to parents Thomas and Sarah Sole, T. G. Sole joined the Survey Department in the Provincial Government in 1875 and trained to become a surveyor.⁷ On passing his examinations, he joined in partnership with Thomas Kingwell Skinner, and was involved in the survey of railway routes throughout the district.⁸ The partnership with Skinner was dissolved in 1890, and Sole became a farmer for some years, before returning to practice as a surveyor in April 1894.⁹

¹ CT TN15/89, Land Information New Zealand (LINZ)

² Taranaki Herald, 15 June 1909, page 3

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ CT TN15/89, LINZ

⁷ Taranaki Herald, 20 January 1936, page 2

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.



Heritage Buildings Report



MR. T. G. SOLE.

Thomas Gore Sole, *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, 1908

During 1896, it seems Thomas Gore Sole had a large villa residence constructed on part of Town Sections 2083 and 2084. This villa faced Courtenay Street but was set well-back from the front boundary, being positioned near the site of the present houses at 22 & 24 Watson Street, which were constructed following the original villa's demolition in the 1960s. Thomas Gore Sole and his family resided in the 1896 villa until early-1903, when they took up residence in their new home, this being the present villa at 272 Courtenay Street.

Construction of the Present House

During November 1902, Thomas Sole subdivided off a small portion of Town Sections 2083 and 2084, forming a new section at the corner of Courtenay and Watson Streets; being a surveyor, Sole surveyed the property himself.¹⁰ Soon after, Sole had a new villa residence constructed on the property, with a permit for the construction of a 'cottage' on Town Section 2084 being granted to Sole on the 11th of November 1902; Albert Arthur Pikett is noted as the architect/builder, with the house having an estimated construction value of £405.¹¹

Builder, contractor and undertaker Albert Arthur Pikett was born at Thames in 1870 and learned the building trade under the direction of his father.¹² He relocated to New Plymouth during the 1890s, first entering into business on his own account, before later forming partnerships with both a Mr Spencer, and later, Herbert Joseph Wilkie.¹³ Pikett was responsible for the construction of a number of houses, along with several major commissions, including a bridge over the Te Henui River (1903); rebuilding the Moturoa Freezing Works (Pikett & Spencer, 1904); NPBC water reservoir (Pikett & Spencer, 1904); additions to the New Plymouth Post Office and construction of clocktower (Pikett & Wilkie, 1906-07); and construction of the Fitzroy Methodist Church (Pikett & Wilkie, 1907).¹⁴

Pikett was well liked by the townspeople and was elected a New Plymouth Borough Councillor during April 1907.¹⁵ However, Pikett's life was cut tragically short, when on the morning of the 10th of September 1907, he was fatally injured in a horrific accident at a stone crushing plant at Fitzroy whilst attempting to fix a slipping chain.¹⁶ Pikett appeared to have slipped and was struck repeatedly by steel straps and nuts protruding from the fly-wheel; he suffered severe head injuries which lead to his death later in the day.¹⁷ He left a widow, and five children, the youngest just five weeks old.¹⁸

It seems the Sole's new house was complete by early-1903, with it being reported during early-February 1903 that a telephone line had been connected to T. G. Sole's private residence at Te

¹⁰ DP1914, LINZ

¹¹ NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

¹² *Taranaki Daily News*, 11 September 1907, page 2

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Taranaki Herald*, 11 September 1907, page 7

¹⁸ *Taranaki Daily News*, 11 September 1907, page 2

Heritage Buildings Report

Henui, the number being 261.¹⁹ Thomas Gore Sole and his family resided at this house until 1907, when Thomas had another new villa residence constructed on a nearby section, this being located just south of his first (1896) villa.²⁰ This 1907 villa still survives and stands at present 26 Watson Street.²¹ Following relocation to their new residence, the present villa appears to have been rented, with land agent Finlay John MacLean noted as the occupier in street directories from 1908 until 1910.²² Mrs Ann Guilford then appears to have occupied the house for couple of years, before the property was purchased by well-known local land agent Edward James Carthew, during April 1912.²³ Carthew continued to rent out the house, with subsequent tenants including insurance agent Beauvoir de Lisle de, clerk Shearer Treveling Joll, and carpenter Reginald Gore Sole.²⁴

Chew Chong

It was during May 1913 that perhaps the most significant chapter in the history of this house begins, with it being reported that "Mr E. Carthew's 1/8 acre and villa residence, corner of Courtenay and Watson Streets, [has been] sold to Mr Chew Chong of Vogeltown".²⁵ Chew Chong was born in Canton, China sometime between the 1820s and 1840s.²⁶ After spending time in both Singapore, where he worked in a merchant's office, and Castlemaine (Vic, Australia), where he was a storekeeper for 11 years, he shifted to Otago during 1867, where he collected scrap metal for shipment to China.²⁷



Chew and Elizabeth Chong and family, Puke Ariki, PHO2004-292

¹⁹ *Taranaki Daily News*, 4 February 1903, page 2

²⁰ Crimp, Hamish, 'Thomas Gore Sole Residence, 26 Watson Street (1907)', *Kete New Plymouth*, <http://ketenewplymouth.peoplesnetworknz.info/en/site>; accessed 08 November 2019.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Stones Street Directories, 1908-10*

²³ CT TN50/145, LINZ

²⁴ *Wises Post Office Directory, 1912-13*

²⁵ *Taranaki Herald*, 21 May 1913, page 7

²⁶ James Ng. 'Chew Chong', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 1993. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2c17/chew-chong> (accessed 3 October 2019)

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Heritage Buildings Report

Chong made his way north in 1870 as a pedlar, finding in the Taranaki bush the Jew's ear fungus (*Auricularia cornea*) growing profusely on mahoe, tawa and pukatea trees, especially burnt, decaying specimens.²⁸ Chong knew this fungus as a gourmet and medicinal food, and he settled in New Plymouth as a storekeeper, buying fungus for export to China and selling imported Chinese goods.²⁹ The fungus became the principal cash income for many Taranaki dairy farmers, since they usually bartered their butter to storekeepers.³⁰

By the 1880s, Chew Chong had become involved in butter making, and in 1887, opened his Jubilee factory at Eltham, along with several other creameries.³¹ In 1891 he purchased the Mangatoki butter factory and had become a shareholder in the Egmont Co-operative Box Company.³² The Jubilee factory was awarded 'the palm among butter factories' by the government dairy inspector in 1888, and by 1889 had been fitted with a Hall's refrigerating machine; probably the first to be installed in a New Zealand butter factory.³³

Chong later helped to pioneer today's share-milking system, invented a rotary butter worker, an air cooler and an impressed brand for butter boxes which standardised butter into the one pound blocks that we are familiar with today.³⁴ However, from 1892, Chong lost many of his milk suppliers to the co-operative dairy movement, eventually closing his Mangatoki and Jubilee factories and retiring to New Plymouth.³⁵

However, Chew Chong retained the respect of his fellow-citizens, and in 1910, 85 prominent citizens presented him with another purse of sovereigns and an illuminated address.³⁶ This stated that he had saved "many a family from want and penury" through his export trade in fungus, and had "led the way" in butter manufacture in Taranaki.³⁷ In 1996, 76 years after his death, Chong was inducted into the Enterprise New Zealand Business Hall of Fame.³⁸ During 2019, local brewery Shining Peak released the Chew Chong Saison brew as a tribute to Chew Chong.³⁹

Later Ownership

Following Chew Chong's death, ownership of the property was transmitted to his widow Elizabeth, and son's Wilfred Howard Chong and Gerald McNaughton Chong.⁴⁰ Elizabeth remained living at the house until her death during 1935, with ownership of the house remaining with Wilfred and Gerald as survivors.⁴¹ The house appears to have been rented out following Elizabeth's death, first by Gilbert E. Parker during 1938, and thereafter by George H. Pope, who occupied the house until his death during 1950.⁴² It seems Pope's family continued to rent the property, with the villa eventually purchased by Charles Henry Pope during 1961; Pope retained possession until 1982.⁴³ The property changed hands multiple times during the 1980s and 1990s, before being purchased by the present

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Taranaki Daily News*, 29 October 2019, page 7

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ CT TN50/145, LINZ

⁴² Ibid.

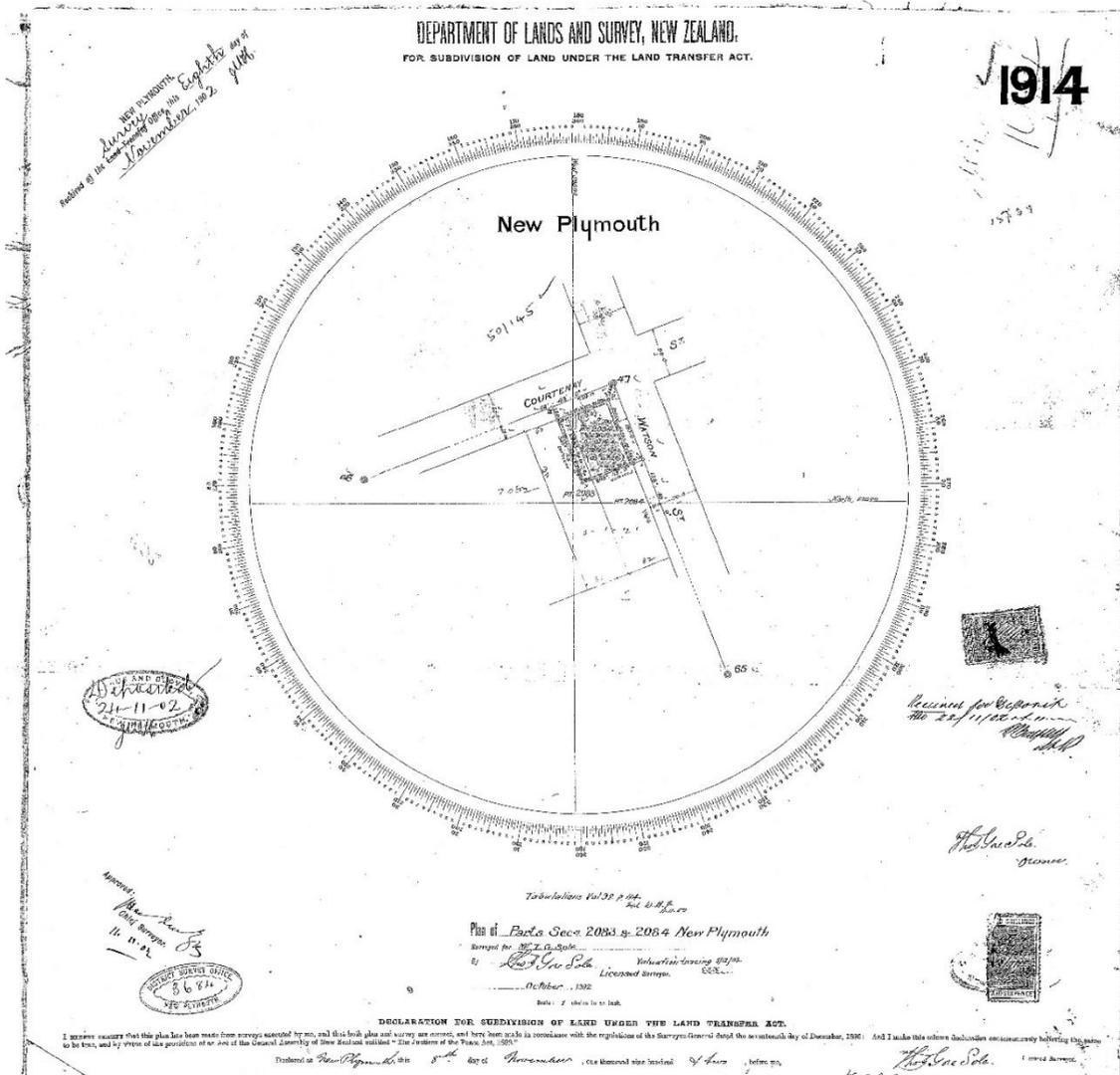
⁴³ Ibid.



Heritage Buildings Report

owners in 2001.⁴⁴

Despite owning a number of properties in New Plymouth, this villa is thought to be the only surviving building once owned by Chew Chong. Several other New Plymouth houses located in Buller Street, and which were once owned by Chong, survived until relatively, however, were all regrettably demolished during 1990.⁴⁵



DP1914, LINZ

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

⁴⁴ CT TNF2/874, LINZ

⁴⁵ Demolition of Chew Cong Houses Buller Street, Puke Ariki, PHO2011-2071

Heritage Buildings Report

Description

The former Chew Chong villa is located in the eastern New Plymouth suburb of Strandon, just a short distance from the CBD. The area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, and whilst development pressures since the 1970s have resulted in an eclectic mix of architectural styles, the area still retains a number of older dwellings that contribute to a sense of historical character now uncommon in New Plymouth. Although located on a prominent corner site, the house is at present partially obscured by a number of mature trees, with an attached garage positioned near the southern boundary fronting Watson Street.

The main form of this building is a single-storey pyramidal bay villa of a type once common in New Plymouth's older residential areas. The timber-framed house is clad in rusticated weatherboard cladding (bevelled profile), with the roof sheathed in corrugated steel roof. A double-flue brick chimney rises through the roof of the rear lean-to, whilst several skylights provide light to the converted roof space.

The main front elevation faces roughly north-west and is symmetrically arranged with a central main entranceway flanked by two wide gables. The eastern and western bays are treated identically, each being fitted with a square bay window incorporating a Chicago style arrangement of sashes at front (wide central sash flanked either side by narrower sashes), with a single slender sash window on each of the side returns. Both upper gable ends feature return eaves, decorative timbering, timber fretwork insets, rosettes, and a tall finial at the apex. The central main front entrance door is a timber panelled and glazed affair incorporation side and top lights.

A more recent sloping post and beam veranda links the north-western and north-eastern elevations and is fitted with timber trelliswork. A pair of glazed French casements provide access to the veranda on the north-eastern elevation, with a further flush bay gable projecting further south. Whilst also fitted with a square bay window, the original sashes have since been replaced by timber casements with accompanying fanlights (fitted with green patterned glass). The upper gable end features return eaves, decorative timbering, timber fretwork insets, rosettes, and a tall finial at the apex. A smaller pair of timber casements with sloping hood is positioned further south in the side lean-to wall.

Assessment:

Historical

This house has historical significance for its association with two prominent New Plymouth citizens; surveyor Thomas Gore Sole, for whom the house was built, and Chinese businessman Chew Chong, who purchased the villa as his town residence in 1913. Chong was residing at this house at the time of his death in 1920, with the house remaining in Chong family ownership until 1961. The association with Chew Chong is especially significant, with Chong being one of Taranaki's best-known nineteenth century businessmen, principally for his role in establishing the trade of the fungus dubbed 'Taranaki wool' (*Auricularia cornea*), and as a Taranaki dairy industry pioneer.

✓

Importance to Community

Chew Chong's association with this villa is generally valued by New Plymouth residents, with the house of considerable importance to his descendants.

✓

Architecture & Construction

A good example of a house incorporating a number of features associated with the villa style.

✓



Heritage Buildings Report

Setting and Context	Despite being partially obscured by mature trees, this villa, located on a prominent corner site, still makes a positive contribution to the character of the local streetscape.	✓
Archaeology	-	
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	A representative example of the types of single-storey early-1900s bay villas once common in New Plymouth's older residential areas. Although subject to some additions and alterations, the principal Courtenay and Watson Street elevations still retain a good level of integrity.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓

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