

Heritage Assessment of the Old Mangere Schoolhouse

Brief

Barnes & Associates Ltd has been contracted to provide a heritage assessment of the former schoolhouse which has been relocated to 9 Kukupa Rd, Sunnyvale, to evaluate its potential for statutory protection by inclusion as a scheduled item in the Waitakere City District Plan.



Acknowledgements

Particular acknowledgement is owed to Brent Withers, for giving free access to the former schoolhouse and explaining its history, its relocation and its repair and refurbishment.

It is acknowledged that historical information provided below is a brief summary of the history provided in an assessment undertaken for the Manukau City Council by Dinah Holman, heritage planning consultant, in 2001. A copy of this report was provided by Brent Withers.

History

The Old Mangere Schoolhouse was constructed in 1859 on an acre of land originally granted by the Crown to Major Joseph Greenwood. He sold his land to Henry Vercoe on 10 March 1856. To allow the construction of a schoolhouse, Vercoe transferred an acre of land into trust on 3 September 1889. The seven trustees were Presbyterian fathers and local landowners, who successfully obtained subscriptions to allow the construction of a schoolhouse, with accommodation for a schoolmaster and a schoolroom, that same year.

Soon after construction the schoolroom began to be used as a local hall and for church services. The first school committee was elected in 1861, and included local settlers and two military officers, Lieutenant Colonel Haultain and Lieutenant Colonel Nixon, both prominent in the Land Wars of the 1860s, during which use of the school appears to have been suspended. Nixon lost his life in the conflict.

The first schoolmaster was James Hewlett, who took up his position at the end of September 1859. After the temporary closure of the school, a new schoolmaster Mr E. Lambert took up duties in 1862, but was give notice a year later and replaced by William Burns, appointed in March 1863. After another apparent closure during the continuing period of unrest, John Lamont was appointed schoolmaster in October 1864, but vacated the position when James Hewlett was reappointed in 1865. The succession of teachers continued with William Collis in 1867-8, Miss H. Wigmore in 1869-73, Mr Revel 1874, Mr McKinlay 1875, Mr Phillips 1877 and Mr W.H. Airey 1878-81.

In 1876 the building was extended to accommodate a schoolmaster's assistant, but the arrangement was short-lived.

In 1879, the Auckland Education Board agreed to take over responsibility for the school, and construct a new school building. The schoolhouse on its one acre site was conveyed to the Board, which in 1880 agreed to accept another three acres of land from the school committee and allow the old schoolhouse to be removed to become a public hall and library. The new school was built in 1881, and the old building removed to another site about 100m to the west in Kirkbride Rd.

As discussed above, from the time of its construction the building accommodated a number of uses. It is also believed to have been used as post office from the 1870s, when the role of the schoolmaster included that of postmaster. About 1897 a separate post office was established and the role of postmaster passed to John Griffiths. It is unclear whether he used this building over the next few years, but he purchased it from the trustees in 1909 and operated the post office and telephone exchange from the building until his death in 1915. After that a relative, Elizabeth Griffiths, a spinster, took his role. Upon her death, it passed to another relative, Sarah Cumming, wife of John Cumming. The Cummings added a store to the front of the building in the mid-1920s, and ran the store and the post office until 1940. About that time the postal function was relinquished. A succession of owners and occupiers followed. From the mid-1980s it operated as a greengrocery, until the site was acquired by the Manukau City Council for open space purposes.¹

The Manukau City Council had already decided the building was beyond its economic life when it commissioned heritage planning consultant Dinah Holman to assess its heritage significance. Her report gave clear recommendations in regard to options to relocate the building for conservation on another site.² Accordingly the Council gifted the building to Brent Withers, who removed the 20th additions and relocated the core of the building (the schoomaster's house and schoolroom) to its current site in May 2002, and commenced an extensive repair and restoration process that is nearing completion.³

On its current site, the rear parts of the house have been rebuilt to incorporate a farmhouse kitchen, bedroom and bathrooms.

Assessment Against Plan Criteria

1. historic - the item is associated with a past event, notable people or activity, a social period, a particular technological milestone, scientific history or principles, or scientific data about fabric (such as the composition of mortar);

The Old Mangere Schoolhouse has numerous associations with the Mangere area. In addition to these, it is more generally representative of social patterns in the early colonial period, in which settlers arranged educational opportunities for their children and other local children before formal education was provided by the state. In this instance, it was a group of Presbyterians behind the formation of the school.

The building also has general associations with the postal service, including telegraph and telephone services.

Through its early trustees the building also has an association with the Land Wars of the 1860s. One trustee, Lieutenant Colonel Nixon, is a nationally important military figure, memorialised in a statue in Otahuhu, and in the naming of streets in Auckland and Hamilton.

2. architectural - the item is a good example of a particular architectural style, construction technology or the work of a notable architect;

The Old Mangere Schoolhouse is a rare example of an early colonial period combined schoolmaster's house and schoolroom.

Architecturally, it can be considered to be a 'close relative' of the colonial cottages of the time, which preceded the more familiar villa. It uses a plan similar to a large colonial cottage with a central hallway, but the large front room is a schoolroom. (A second small schoolroom has been added behind this.) On the other side of the hall is the domestic accommodation, with a small parlour at the front, and an access stair leading to an attic bedroom.

In its detailing such as window joinery and finishing trims it can be considered to be largely Georgian. (In the colonies, Georgian design persisted in the early Victorian period.) Some detailing, such as four panel doors, follows the Victorian pattern.

From a commercial point of view, the building was beyond economic repair a decade ago. Its restoration has only been viable because of the large amount of 'free' labour and carefully re-used material. While this work has been necessary because of the ravages of time and neglect, it has resulted in significant change to the original fabric and the assembly of components. Despite this, the house remains an important and uncommon example of construction technology from the early colonial period.

3. landmark - the item is a physical landmark within the City which is valued by the community;

The Old Mangere Schoolhouse is on a rear site and is not easily seen from public places. It has a domestic scale, and can not be considered to be a landmark.

4. the item has significance to the community - consideration given to value placed on an object by the local community, irrespective of other values;

The building has been on its current site for a limited time. While it will be of interest to many in the local community, it is considered that over time it will develop local associations and significance which can not be demonstrated at the moment.

5. visual - the item is important visually and contributes to the amenity, the form, scale, fabric and setting of the place or an area;

As discussed, the building is not clearly seen from the road. It is consistent in scale with other buildings in the area, and with its setting. At least one other apparently relocated colonial building was observed nearby.

6. patterns of settlement - the item is an important representative example of the surrounding settlement pattern (such as an example of a bungalow within an area where housing built in the 1930s dominates), or is a relatively rare example in an area which is dominated by another form of settlement.

As a recently relocated building it does not demonstrate a particular historic settlement pattern. It does, however, demonstrate the Kiwi tradition of shifting buildings to meet new needs (the provision of cost-effective and interesting housing) and agendas (the removal of historic buildings to liberate land for other uses).

7. sense of place - contributes to the identity of the local area or city e.g. orchards, special buildings, community halls etc.

At this time the building does not make a strong contribution to the sense of place in Sunnyvale. Its secluded site may result in it remaining relatively unknown, unless it is actively promoted.

Conclusion

It is concluded that despite its stronger associations with Mangere rather than Sunnyvale, the Old Mangere Schoolhouse is a very significant building from the early colonial period. If it remained on its original site, it would have qualified for the highest category of registration, but the loss of heritage values associated with its inevitable relocation does need to be acknowledged.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Old Mangere Schoolhouse is scheduled in Category II.

Barnes & Associates Ltd



Tony Barnes

20 August 2010

¹ Holman, Dinah: Heritage Assessment of Old Mangere Schoolhouse. Report to Manukau City Council, February 2001.

² *ibid.*

³ Personal communication with Brent Withers.