

Railway Cottages 188 – 195 Anzac Parade



Location: Anzac Parade, Whanganui **Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga List Number:** nil

Physical Description: The precinct includes a number of single storeyed, timber framed, standardised railway cottage plans with their typical symmetrical street elevations, variety of roof forms and entries with a range of porch designs. The houses have a double hung sash window either side of the front door with most having hood over the windows, either as an independent element or as a continuation of the entry porch roof. The houses have lean-tos at the rear.

Other known names:

Current Use: housing

Former Uses:

Heritage Status: **District Plan Class:** BR Precinct

Architectural Style: Railway housing **Date of Construction:** 1926

Materials: Painted timber rusticated weatherboards, coverboards, entry detailing and joinery, corrugated steel roofing,

Registered owner:

Legal Description:

Register Item Number:

461

Building Type:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Recreation
- Institutional
- Agriculture
- Other

Significance:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Cultural

Thematic Context

- Early Settlement
- Residential
- Industry
- Agricultural
- Commerce
- Transport
- Civic/Admin
- Health
- Education
- Religion
- Recreation
- Community
- Memorials
- Military

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History: The extent of the NZ Railways Department-supplied housing subdivision at Wanganui East has not been researched in depth. This was a major NZR-focused area surrounding the Eastown Railway Workshops. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that NZR supplied many more than just the distinctive 1920s-style cottages being covered here, given its large staff in the vicinity over a great many years. The presence of the walkway over the Aramoho Railway Bridge, also allows for additional NZR rental houses perhaps having been erected on the other side of that bridge.¹

A page dedicated to the Eastown facility on the Wikipedia website records that it was commissioned in 1880 and these were the second set of railway workshops established as part of the Vogel Public Works Scheme:

“A contract was let in 1879 by public tender to the Wanganui firm of Gibbes and Pinches for the construction of a Locomotive Erecting Shop, Machine Shop and Wood Mill. The following year, a second contract was let to Thomson and McLean to construct the Blacksmiths Shop and attached Boiler Shop. Work up to 1900 focused on the repair of rolling stock operated in the area between Taranaki and Hawke's Bay. In 1900, the Engine Shed was relocated to the north-west corner of the yard. A single-road Paint Shop was erected, a wagon servicing pit was built, and the Erecting Shop was extended.

“As a result of the Royal Commission of 1925 conducted by English railwaymen Sir Sam Fay and Sir Vincent Raven, the output of the workshops changed. The capacity of the Locomotive Shop was dramatically reduced, and the Tarpaulin Shop augmented to handle the production requirements of the entire North Island. The Points and Crossings Shop previously located at the Addington Workshops was relocated to East Town.

“East Town had been operating as two complete sets of workshops for both the Maintenance Branch and the Locomotive Branch, separated by only a road. In August 1931, it was decided to amalgamate the facilities into a single operation, a move that proved to be beneficial for the staff in the form of improved conditions and schedules. As a result of this amalgamation, it was necessary to move the Points and Crossings Shop to the Hutt Workshops and the workshops once again focused on the repair of locomotives, carriages and brake vans. Later work done at East Town also included the manufacture and repair of tools,

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velocipedes, track gauges, railway huts, furniture for railway stations and offices, and heavy track machinery. Overhauls on shunting locomotives were also carried out at East Town from 1963, work that was previously done at the Hutt Workshops.

“Between 1947 and 1949, land was purchased at the west end of the yard and various workshop buildings were extended. A new Motor Shop was also erected. The first intake of apprentices, comprising nine carpenters and six fitters, started in January 1949 once a suitable building had been acquired. Further extensions were made to the Tarpaulin Shop in 1950, and a new Wagon Shop was also built.

“One thing for which East Town became particularly well known was the production of tarpaulins to cover goods wagons which were used at stations across the country. These were originally made of canvas and treated with linseed oil and vegetable black to weather-proof them. As the work was initially done by hand, those employed to make them were usually sailmakers by trade, with mechanisation not introduced until 1915. At the end of 1914, a new Tarpaulin Shop was commissioned, but it did not last long, being destroyed by fire in January 1915. In 1928, a dedicated tarpaulin factory was opened and, with the transfer of staff from the Newmarket Workshops, production increased to the rate of 50 tarpaulins per week. The Tarpaulin Manufacturing Shop was raised by fire on 5 August 1954, requiring an increase in the output of the Addington Workshops until the destroyed facility at East Town was replaced mid-1955. Just two months later, on 18 October, the Tarpaulin Depot Repair Shop was similarly destroyed. In 1973, NZR switched to using PVC tarpaulins which were cheaper to make and easier to repair.

“East Town closed on 17 October 1986 as the result of an effort by the New Zealand Railways Corporation to rationalise its workshop facilities around the country. At the time it closed, it was the employer of over 450 local residents. A replacement facility constructed at Aramoho has also since been closed.”ⁱⁱ

The *Wanganui Chronicle* of 14 December 1883 (p. 2) reported on a meeting held by Easttown residents demanding to have their area created into a township, with a Town Board to rule over them. The area’s development at the time was at a very early stage. However, the article commented that “Every

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encouragement should be given to the railway workmen to live close to their work, not only for their own convenience, but also that they may be at hand in case of an emergency. Government should therefore help in the establishment of a proper township at Eastown, - provided, of course, that it does so without injury to the interests of the community. From a mere cluster of houses around railway workshops have sprung many large and busy English towns, and though Eastown may not be destined to become a Swindon, a Macclesfield, or Clapham Junction, it has certain natural advantages of position, amongst which is its proximity to the river and to town, that should give it a promising future.”

The suburb of Wanganui East came into existence with the subdivision of Sedgebrook Estate in 1896, with some 500 members of the public competing to buy its approximately forty sections.ⁱⁱⁱ Another subdivision, Ahuwhenua - consisting of some 70 sections, followed in 1899. These were aimed at the ‘many working class’ people employed at *“the Eastown Workshops, Mitchell’s Meat Works and Mr McGregor’s Timber Mills, (which had created such) a demand for cheap residential sites adjacent to those centres of industry...”*^{iv}

In March 1920, the Prime Minister, William Massey, announced that 400 houses were to be built as part of a Railways housing scheme. This was to include establishing a factory for cutting timber to standard lengths, with the houses typically consisting of a kitchen, sitting room, three bedrooms, bathroom, scullery, washhouse with copper and tubs, hot and cold water service, and electric light where available, and in those cases provision for plugging in an electric iron. *“The (Railways) Department intended to work on sound town-planning lines, and, where practicable, each settlement would have its recreation reserve. Tree-planting would be carried out by experts, and advantage would be taken of the natural features of the landscape.”*^v

Gael Ferguson, in *Building the New Zealand Dream* (p. 93) states that the Railways Department had been building cheap housing for its staff since the 1880s. Its innovative scheme involved producing prefabricated dwellings, milled by its own mill from timber produced from its own forests, and prefabricated at its own factories at Frankton, Hamilton. Over six years, the Railways Department produced 1,591 houses for its own workers, at a cost far below what the state housing scheme then in place could achieve. Between 1920 and 1926, it reduced the cost of the Railways Department houses from £971 to £635

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– and in doing so created a distinctive set of railway cottage subdivisions throughout the country.^{vi}

Most of the Railways Department houses were produced between 1925 and 1928, and amongst these there the houses destined for the Eastown subdivision. Accordingly, on 29 March 1926, a building permit was issued to the NZ Government for thirty new dwellings on Block 91, in Anzac Parade – their total value being £21,000.^{vii}

In 1938, the construction of another 42 houses for Wanganui was announced by the Minister of Railways – as part of a total of 320 railway houses to be built throughout the country. How many – if any - went to Eastown was not researched, but most likely at least some did.^{viii}

Bibliography

Ferguson, Gael, *Building the New Zealand Dream* (Palmerston North, 1994)

Smart, M.J.G., & Bates, A.P., *The Wanganui Story* (Wanganui, 1972)

Also newspapers and online articles as referred to in the footnote.

Architect/Designer: Architectural Branch, NZ Railways, under G.A. Troup

History of changes:

Date Period: 1925-1928

Rarity / Special Features: The cottage designs are unique in New Zealand.

Integrity: Not all houses are able to be assessed.

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Representativeness: The houses are representative of the Railway cottage styles used throughout New Zealand.

Context/Group Value: The houses form a distinct group and are one of a number of similar groups throughout New Zealand such as those near the original factory in Frankton Hamilton, Moera in Lower Hutt and Tarikaka Street in Ngaio in Wellington.

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: Being timber houses, they are potentially vulnerable to fire.

Summary of Significance:

Architectural Qualities

Railways housing design had been based on a simple cottage plan form 1909 and this was to remain the standard until the 1950s. Those designed and manufactured at Frankton had three bedrooms, central entry corridor, and kitchen, bathroom and laundry at the rear. While the house plans were mostly identical, to create variation, roofs could be hipped, or gabled, gable hipped, and entry porches had a number of standard variations. These included trellised porches with hipped roofs and Bungalow styled exposed pointed rafters, gabled hips with Art Nouveau bracketed posts, Arts and Crafts shallow hipped arches with trellised posts or a combination of these different elements.

Street front windows had hoods, which were either separate from or joined to the porch roof and were in the same style as the porch. Windows were timber double hung sash with Queen Anne styled multi-panes on the upper sash.

Historic Qualities

The cottages are a unique New Zealand innovation in the prefabricated housing market built and designed by New Zealand railways and transported throughout the country via the railway network. The cottages can be seen almost anywhere the railway extended.

The demise of the factory came about when private housing construction manufacturers complained to the Government that they could not compete against this very successful enterprise.

The house designs are associated with George Troup a highly significant architect in the realm of public architecture. Troup began his career with the Railways Department after vacancy as draughtsman t in 1886¹. Two years later he was transferred to Head Office, in Wellington, where his first major project was the design and construction of the Railways Department Head Office. This was opened in 1901². It was a building in the Edwardian Freestyle which incorporated elements of Baroque and Jacobean and was of brick construction with Oamaru stone facings and a Marseille tile roof.

His next major commission was the design of the Dunedin Railway Station, one of a considerable number of railway stations in his term of office with the Railways Department. These included the Oamaru, Wanganui, Mercer, Picton, Dannevirke, Masterton, Kaiapoi, Blenheim, and Riversdale Station building and District Railway Offices, New Plymouth, Bluff, Gore, Kaiapoi, Lower Hutt and Petone³. His engineering talents were brought to bear on steel viaducts such as those over the Mangarangiara, the Kopua viaduct over the Manawatu River and the Matamau viaduct between Dannevirke and Ormondville

In 1902 George Troup was promoted to Office Engineer 4, and while Office Engineer he contributed significantly to the Railways publication “Pocket Book of Information for Engineers in New Zealand Railways”. The first edition was published under the Chief Engineer in 1904, and a second edition was published in 1914.

Technical Qualities

The houses are interesting as a rare example in New Zealand of a large scale prefabricated housing development.

Cultural Qualities

The houses are very popular and have sentimental values to many owners.

Reference Source:

¹ibid page 20

²ibid page 36

³ J.D. Mahoney, op cit, page 73

⁴ibid page 48

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Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Val Burr

ⁱ G.P. Holland, great grandfather of the writer, Val Burr, lived at Halswell Street from the 1890s, and worked for decades thereafter at Eastown workshops as a blacksmith – as well as being captain of the Eastown Railway Fire Brigade. The Holland family owned their house however.

ⁱⁱ 'East Town Railway Workshops,' Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Town_Railway_Workshops

ⁱⁱⁱ M.J.G. Smart & A.P. Bates, *The Wanganui Story* (Wanganui, 1972), p. 261

^{iv} *Wanganui Herald*, 23 August 1899, p. 2

^v *Evening Post*, 26 March 1920, p. 6

^{vi} Gael Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream* (Palmerston North, 1994), pp. 93-97

^{vii} Email, Wendy Pettigrew to Val Burr,, 8 February 2012

^{viii} *Evening Post*, 1 July 1938, p. 10