

Site ID

Building/Site Name 'Tea-pot' Roberts Store (Former)

Address 70 Eliot Street, New Plymouth



Statement of Significance

This building has considerable heritage significance for its use as a corner store/dairy from 1895 until 2017; a period of more than 120 years. For much of its early history this building was known as 'Tea-pot (or T-Pot) Roberts Store', and was operated by well-known local citizen James Annear Roberts (T-pot Roberts), and his wife Nellie Elizabeth. The attractive villa frontage was designed by capable local architects Sanderson & Griffiths in 1909 as an addition to the original shop situated at rear. The prominent position of the building, combined with the retention of many original external features, ensures that this building contributes positively to the historical character of the area.

Legal Information and Heritage Status

Legal Description PT Section 1602 Town of New Plymouth

District Plan Item/ Map No.

Heritage New Zealand List Not listed

Construction Information

Date of Construction 1895/1909

Principal Materials Wooden framing, weatherboard, corrugated steel

Construction Professionals Sanderson & Griffiths (architects)

History

Town Section 1602 was purchased by Mrs Nellie Elizabeth Roberts (nee Jones) in November 1894.¹ Nellie was the wife New Plymouth shopkeeper James Annear Roberts, with the pair having married in 1881.² They seem to have shifted to New Plymouth during the mid-1880s, where James established a fruit and grocery business on Devon Street; this became known as 'Teapot Roberts' (or T-Pot Roberts) Store.³

Sometime during 1895, and whilst still operating his Devon Street store, Roberts had a small shop erected on his section at the corner of Eliot and Lemon Streets. This store was originally managed by Charles N. Smith and his wife, who are first listed as operating a store at this location in Eliot Street in the 1896 edition of Stone's Street Directory, with the earliest newspaper reference to the store being in October 1895.⁴ The 1894-95 NPBC rates book indicates that Town Section 1602 was vacant, whilst the 1896-97 rates book (the earliest known to survive under Roberts ownership), notes that a shop is now present on the section, and the property had a rateable value of £14.⁵ This store was probably housed in the narrow-gabled structure now forming the rear portion of the present building. The structure is not present in an undated, circa early-mid 1890s image of the area, but appears to be present in an 1898 view of the area taken from Fort Niger.⁶

In early-1898, Roberts relocated his shop from Devon Street to Eliot Street, taking over from the Smith's, and bringing the 'Tea-Pot' name with him. An auction of Roberts household furniture was held at the Devon Street premises on 5 October 1897.⁷ The last mention of Mrs Smith at Eliot Street is in December 1897, and Roberts is first listed as operating a store in Eliot Street in the 1898 Edition of Stone's Street Directory.⁸ The Roberts seem to have owned another house in Lemon Street, and it's thought they lived there from 1897 until 1909, when local architects Sanderson and Griffiths (James Sanderson & Horace Victor Griffiths) designed extensive additions to the original shop.

¹ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

² Births Deaths and Marriages Online, <https://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz>; Accessed 8 August 2018

³ *Taranaki Herald*, 3 November 1917, page 2

⁴ *Taranaki Herald*, 3 October 1895, page 4

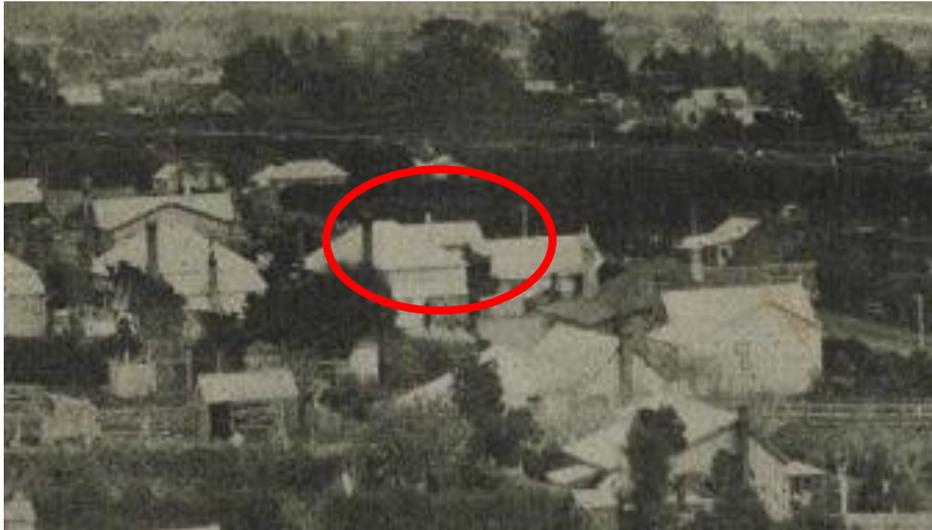
⁵ NPBC Rates Books 1894-95 & 1896-97, NPDC Archives

⁶ View of New Plymouth from Fort Niger., Puke Ariki, A.3.297; View of New Plymouth from Fort Niger.

Supplement to the Auckland Weekly News, 25 June 1898, page 2, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-18980625-2-2

⁷ *Taranaki Herald*, 30 September 1897, page 3

⁸ *Taranaki Herald*, 16 December 1897, page 4



Detail from 1898 image of New Plymouth taken from Fort Niger with original shop just visible (circled). *Supplement to the Auckland Weekly News*, 25 June 1898, page 2, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-18980625-2-2

Sanderson & Griffiths called for tenders for the construction of a cottage for Mrs J. A. Roberts in Lemon Street during early July 1909.⁹ A permit was later granted to Roberts by the New Plymouth Borough Council on 24 July 1909 for the construction of a 'cottage' on Town Section 1602, Lemon Street, with the new building having an estimated construction cost of £333.¹⁰ It is possible that the original store was initially located closer to the Eliot Street frontage, and that this was shifted further to the west during construction; although this cannot be confirmed.

Architect James Sanderson had practiced independently since the 1880s and was one of the New Plymouth's foremost late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century architects. He joined in practice with Horace Victor Griffiths in 1907, and this partnership continued until 1915 when Sanderson moved to Auckland; Griffiths continued in sole proprietorship for a time, before joining with Frank Messenger in 1917.¹¹ Individually and as a partnership, Sanderson and Griffiths were responsible for a considerable number of commercial and residential buildings in New Plymouth; both Veale's Building and Abram's Building are notable extant examples designed by the partnership.

In 1914 the Roberts' had the present bungalow at neighbouring 72 Eliot Street constructed; although they appear to have remained living at the shop premises.¹² On 3 November 1917, James Roberts passed away after a long period of ill health, and is buried in New Plymouth's historic Te Henui Cemetery.¹³ Nellie continued to operate the store until 1919, when the property was subdivided, and the portion containing the shop and associated dwelling purchased by Charles Brien.¹⁴ Nellie retained ownership of the bungalow, and is noted as residing there until the 1924 edition of *Wises Street Directory*.¹⁵ Brien only operated the store for a few years before selling the property to Samuel E. Chapman in September 1923.¹⁶ Chapman continued to operate the store for a considerable period of time, with the property leased to Edward (Ted) Whittaker and his wife about 1950. The Whittaker's

⁹ *Taranaki Herald*, 9 July 1909, page 3

¹⁰ NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

¹¹ *Taranaki Herald*, 20 June 1907, page 2

¹² NPBC Building Register Book 1902-22, Puke Ariki Archives (ARC2011-204)

¹³ *Taranaki Herald*, 3 November 1917, page 2

¹⁴ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

¹⁵ *Wises Post Office Directory* 1924

¹⁶ Taranaki Land Deed Indexes (23516), c.1858 - c.1928, Archives New Zealand

held the lease for 27 years until 1977, although for the last few years they rented the shop to Jim and Doreen Copeman.¹⁷



Undated, circa 1950s view of shop with original post and beam veranda. LN3696: A.2a.103, Puke Ariki Collection (PA)

Reference Sources

See footnotes.

Description

The former 'Tea-pot' Roberts Store is located on a prominent corner section on the western side of New Plymouth's main southern entrance on Eliot Street/SH3. This area was settled early in New Plymouth's history, and the surrounding blocks contain a number of pre-1900 dwellings. Whilst development pressures since the 1970s have resulted in an eclectic mix of architectural styles, the area still retains a sense of historical character now uncommon in New Plymouth.

The main form of the building incorporates a steeply-pitched narrow gabled structure at rear (the original shop), and a moderately-pitched double bay villa addition. Both sections are wood framed and clad in rusticated weatherboard. The roof is clad in corrugated steel, and a single brick chimney finished with decorative corbelling rises from the southern gable. The main front elevation faces north-east into Eliot Street, and is dominated by two wide flush bays. The southern bay incorporates a Chicago style window with wooden sashes and window hood. The hood is sheathed in wooden shingles and the heavy wooden brackets slightly decorated.

The northern bay incorporates the main shop area and is slightly deeper than the southern bay. A large window occupies much of the gable frontage and replaces the original divided shop window. At the corner is a pair of slender wooden doors forming the main shop entrance; these are likely original, although the glazing has been covered with sheet steel for security reasons. The original post and beam veranda which wrapped around the corner was replaced with a stayed veranda during the 1960s; this stayed veranda was subsequently removed in 2018. Reinstatement of a post and beam veranda would greatly enhance the heritage and streetscape values of the building.

¹⁷ Taranaki Daily News, 3 June 1977, page 1; *Taranaki Daily News*, 14 July 2012, page 21

A shallow sloping veranda runs between the two projecting gables, and this is decorated with a single fretwork bracket and small pendants. The principal entrance door to the front elevation is located at the southern end of the veranda. This is timber, with two solid panels to the bottom, and two slender glazed panels to the top. The door is flanked by slender timber panelled and glazed panels, with a further glazed panel above. To the north of the door is located a pair of four-light double-hung sash windows.

The north-western elevation faces into Lemon Street and incorporates a substantial four-light window and wooden loading door. Two small fanlights have been added at a later date to provide additional interior light. At the rear of the shop a wide gable extends the living quarters, and a lean-to provides additional space at the rear of the original shop. A small attached washhouse is sited at the southern corner of the main building, and a detached wooden framed double-car garage and workshop clad in rusticated weatherboard faces into Lemon Street.

Assessment:

Historical	This building principally has historic significance for its use as a corner store/dairy for a period of more than 120 years between 1895 and 2017. Long-time proprietors including T-Pot Roberts, Samuel Chapman and the Whittaker's, resulted in the store achieving 'legendary' status amongst its regular customers. The 1909 additions are associated with capable local architects Sanderson & Griffiths.	✓
Importance to Community	-	
Architecture & Construction	A rather unusual example of an architect-designed double bay villa purpose-built to house both a shop and residence.	✓
Setting and Context	Located on a prominent corner position on New Plymouth's main southern entrance, this building contributes positively to the historic character of the area.	✓
Archaeology	As the original portion of the shop was constructed in 1895, 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.	✓
Representativeness, rarity and integrity	Aside from the removal of the veranda and replacement of the north-eastern shop window, the building largely remains as it was following the completion of the 1909 additions.	✓
Meets threshold for listing (three or more ticks, or two ticks in one criterion)		✓