

WUHOO TIMARU - 'WHERE WE SHELTER'

As someone who has an interest in heritage, and in particular, our historic buildings, I regularly undertake research on these buildings for the heritage groups I belong to in Timaru and Ashburton.

I am by no means an expert in historical research, but I do find it absolutely fascinating - it's like being a detective - finding buried information and piecing it together to reveal histories that have been previously lost or forgotten.

So when the guys at WuHoo Timaru mentioned that they were looking at ways to help people celebrate their heritage, arts and culture from home during the lockdown (under the theme of 'Where we shelter'), I thought I would share some of my research experiences, as an avid (amateur) researcher.

Research in the digital age has enabled much greater and easier access to information for everyone. The wealth of internet resources, which are available to anyone with an internet connection, opens up incredible opportunities for anyone to research their chosen topic, from the comfort of their own home.

I have listed below some useful information sources, where you might like to start your search, based on my own experiences, but again, I would like to reiterate that I am only an interested amateur researcher and I would recommend that you ask around and get advice from those who are much more proficient at this sort of thing than I am!

A Google search is always a good place to start, to see what published information is out there relating to your property. If your house is a 'listed' property (ie it is listed with Heritage New Zealand or with the local Council), then there has probably been a decent amount of research conducted on it already. Heritage NZ's searchable online database has entries for over 5,000 historically significant buildings and sites throughout Aotearoa, with detailed information on the history of each entry.

Papers Past (<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>) is an incredibly powerful resource, which gathers together all of the published information from most New Zealand's newspapers (both local and national) from the 19th through to the mid 20th centuries, into one, easily searchable digital database. Just enter your search terms, relevant dates, which papers you wish to search and the type of content. As well as news articles, you can search for adverts, obituaries, public notices, etc., and the Papers Past website also has searchable databases for NZ Magazines and Journals, selected Letters and Diaries and Parliamentary Papers from our House of Representatives.

Facebook - in particular local heritage group pages (such as Timaru History and Memories), which have a community of similarly historically interested people who are more than happy to share their knowledge and memories with anyone who cares to ask. Often talking with local people (either in person, or via social media) is a great way to uncover 'tidbits' of information that may not have been officially recorded anywhere, leading you on to new seams of discovery - but be aware that people's memories are sometimes fallible, so its best to try and double check the information you receive, form another source.

When researching house histories one good starting point is to obtain the Certificate of Title for the property. A CT is a legal document which lists the names of all previous owners of the property. It will also give the date that the property was first purchased and often has a simple drawing showing the land boundaries.

A Certificate of Title (or Record of Title, as they are sometimes known) is updated every time a property changes hands, so you may find yours in amongst all of the legal paperwork that was produced when you purchased your property. Copies of current CT's are also available online, from various providers (eg. from Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) <https://www.linz.govt.nz/land/land-records/order-title>), but they will cost you around \$15 each. Anyone can order a copy of a title for a New Zealand property - you do not have to be the current registered owner.

Another fascinating resource, which you may want to check out to gain a greater understanding about the pre-colonial history of the place in which you live is *Kā Huru Manu* - the Ngāi Tahu Digital Atlas (<http://www.kahurumanu.co.nz>), which charts Māori place names throughout the South Island (Te Waipounamu), and their associated histories.

Of course, not all information is available online, so sometime you have to leave your house and go to places like your local Museum or Library to search for information that has not yet been digitised. These facilities are generally free and the people who work at these institutions are skilled and dedicated researchers themselves, so make use of their expertise.

The Council also has records of local buildings and properties, some of which are online and searchable, with more work currently being undertaken to get all historical building files digitised, so that they will be available in digital format. This includes valuable research information on properties including building plans and specifications relating to building consents for each property.

The Council's online 'Property Maps' database (<https://www.timaru.govt.nz/maps>) has information on all properties in the district, allowing you to click on a digital map and get publicly available information such as the Legal Description, Certificate of Title number, Valuation Number, etc. The aerial maps on this site (provided by Canterbury Maps) also has some historic aerial photos for most urban areas. The Council's Map page also has a link to local Cemetery records, which can be a useful tool when researching people associated with your house (eg. previous owners).

CASE STUDY - DOCTOR'S HOUSE, KUROW



A recent photo of the Doctor's House in Kurow

A recent research project I have undertaken was for the Doctor's House in Kurow. I was contacted by the 87 year old Grandson of Kurow's first Doctor (Dr W. E. Stevens) who lives in the UK and, like his Grandfather, was also a GP. He was wanting to get recognition for his Grandfather's pioneering work as the regions first resident GP from 1891 through to 1911.

The Doctor's House was known to be historically significant as the site where Kurow's 'Three Wise Men' (Dr D. G. McMillan, the local GP; Rev. Arnold Nordmeyer, the local Presbyterian minister; and A. M. Davidson, the local school headmaster) met to discuss and develop a welfare scheme

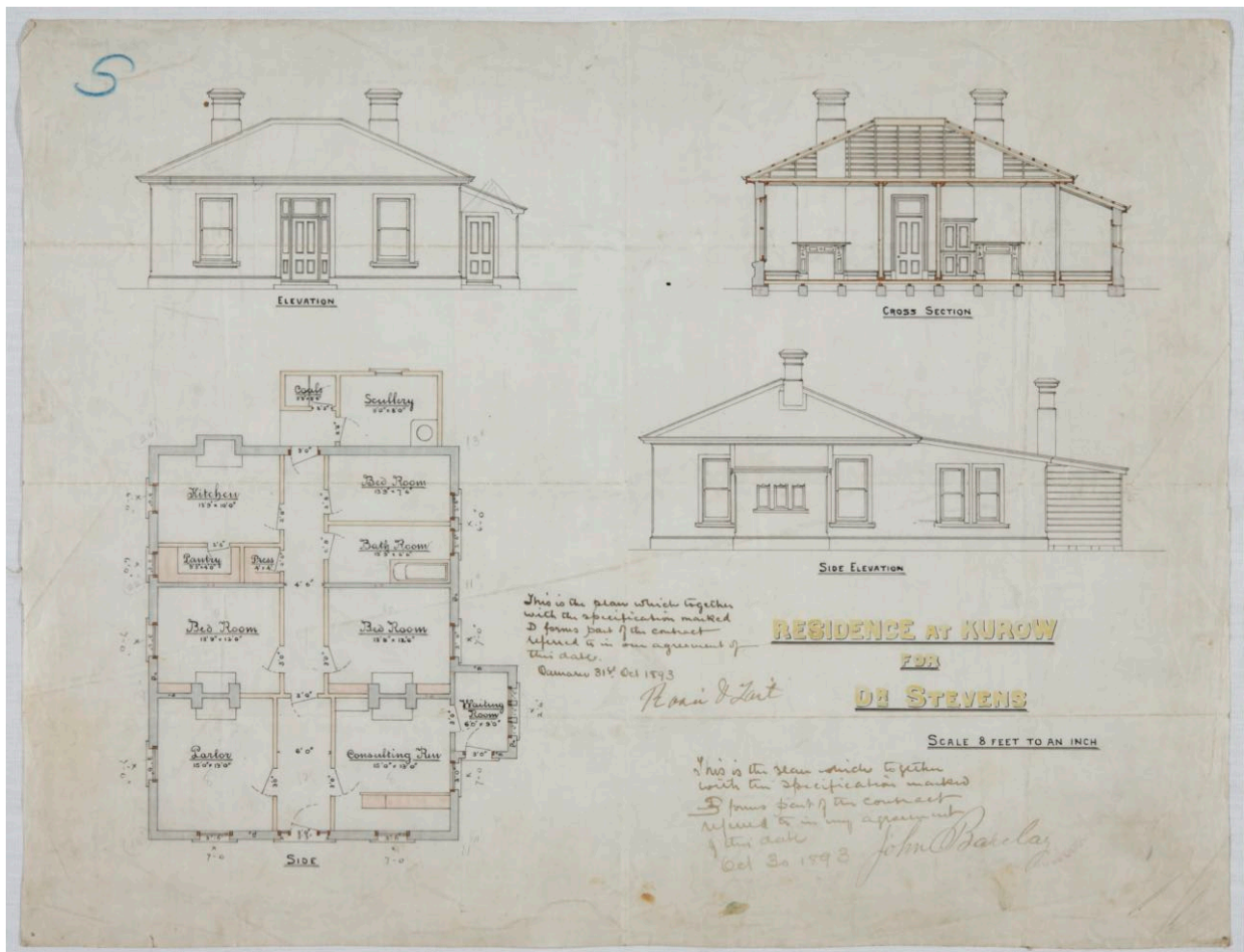
for local workers on the construction of the Waitaki Hydro Dam, who had few statutory rights and were forced to live and work in appalling conditions. The discussions that happened in the Doctor's house in the early 1930's led directly to the formation of NZ's Social Security Act of 1938.

A plaque had been positioned outside the Doctor's House in 2004 commemorating Kurow's famous *Three Wise Men*, but it neglected to mention Kurow's first Doctor (Dr Stevens), for whom the house was originally built for.

Through my research, I was able to confirm the date that the house was originally built (it was funded by the local community, in order to attract a resident doctor), as well as discovering new information about the architect who designed it. The Doctor's House was built in 1893 and is a modest, single storey Oamaru stone bungalow (see photo below), which seemingly little architectural merit. The building is not 'listed' with Heritage NZ, nor with the Waitaki District Council.

During the course of my online research (a simple Google search), I came across a reference to a 'Doctor's House' in Kurow in the collections of the Forrester Gallery in Oamaru. This lead me to a copy of an original drawing which was part of the gallery's collection of drawings produced by the celebrated architectural firm of Forrester & Lemon, who were an Oamaru based architectural practice who were responsible for designing many of the town's most significant Victorian-era architectural masterpieces, including the Oamaru Opera House. It turns out, that the Doctor's House was designed by John Megget Forrester (of Forrester & Lemon) and the original drawing was available online (see copy of drawing below).

Neither the current owner of the house, nor the Grandson of the first Doctor, nor the local Kurow Museum were aware of this fact, which elevates the historical significance of this building considerably.



Copy of the original architects drawing of the Doctor's House, Kurow, from the Forrester Gallery collection.

In January this year, we erected a replacement heritage plaque which now acknowledges that the house was built in 1893 for Kurow's first Doctor, as well as commemorating the significance of the houses later history of Kurow's *Three Wise Men* (see photo below).



A photo of the new heritage plaque which has now been erected outside the Doctor's House in Kurow.

Nigel Gilkison, 12 April 2020