

Saturday, December 4, 2010

Weekend Herald Section G

# HERALD homes

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CROSS**  
BUILDING SOCIETY



## Pioneer spirit

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# Queen of the wild frontier

Hulme Court, the gracious grande dame of Parnell, provided shelter and sanctuary for some of the country's most significant early settlers. Penny Lewis pays court and discovers a home that's redolent with 19th-century charm.

## HULME COURT 350 PARNELL RD PARNELL

Tucked discreetly between Parnell Rd and St Georges Bay Rd, in the midst of Parnell village, is a special home that has stood since the days when this now gentrified suburb was a frontier of colonial Auckland. Built in 1843, Hulme Court is Auckland's oldest home still standing on its original site. "Younger" former residences such as Ewmele Cottage, Highwic and Alberton are now museums managed by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, but Hulme Court is and has always been a private home.

Stand on the St Georges Bay Rd side of the 1745sq m site, look at the roofline at the rear of the house, and you will see a very 21st-century sign of domesticity — a satellite television dish. This slightly incongruous object is because, as conservation architect Adam Wild says: "This is the kind of place where you can put your feet up." It is not known who designed the Regency-style, rendered bluestone home, which was constructed for Sir Frederick Whitaker, who later became Premier of New Zealand.

Wild says there's been speculation that a business partner engineer of Whitaker's could have designed it, but there's no solid proof. "The research hasn't been done on the architect or the builder, but it would have been a significant house when it was built," says Wild. "Auckland in those days was a place of tents and rickety wooden buildings. Queen St was an open sewer to the harbour."

During the past 167 years, Hulme Court has been home to several dignitaries, including Bishop Selwyn and commander of British troops Colonel Hulme, after whom the house is named. In 1941, Hulme Court was purchased by Scotswoman Helen Clark, who had grown up in the Glasgow slums. Mrs Clark's husband was an invalid, so to bring in extra income to supplement her home cookery businesses she divided Hulme Court into flats and brought in lodgers. Mrs Clark's grandson Patrick Maguire grew up at Hulme Court with his grandmother and parents, Mary and Bryan, leaving home at 18. He remembers his grandmother as a kindly woman who would always help those in need. Mrs Clark and Mary died several years ago,

before Patrick and his wife Lyn returned to Hulme Court to look after Bryan, who dies last year. Recalling his childhood, Patrick says he knew of his home as "an old house, not a flash house". "But as a child you're not aware of these things. Parnell in those days [the 1950s and early 1960s] was quite downtrodden." He loved growing up in Parnell as it was then and recalls building huts in the Domain with school friends.

Throughout Hulme Court there's evidence it's been well-lived-in for generations. Interesting objects abound, including a set of 1913 photographs, which were tucked away and discovered by Lyn recently. In one of two attic bedrooms you can see Bryan's old American car hubcaps attached to the wall, while a peek inside another wall cavity reveals timber roof shingles, almost two centuries old; they provided shelter before the slate roof was installed the century-before-last.

It's easy to see how Hulme Court has functioned so well as a home, notwithstanding its monumental storage capacity. It's positioned for the sun, with elegant, shady verandas on three sides. Beautifully proportioned tall sash windows, still flanked by original shutters, can be opened to allow for our modern notion of indoor-outdoor flow. The views are special, too. From the front door you have a great sightline to Auckland Museum, while the view from north-facing rooms looks over the port to the harbour. In the days before land reclamation, you would have looked straight down to St Georges Bay.

Over time, the house has been extended to suit its occupants' needs. At some point a timber extension was seamlessly added to the original bluestone, while today a more obvious 1950s extension houses the kitchen.

Adam Wild describes Hulme Court as "eminently successful as it has survived for so long, with so little changed". Patrick and Lyn Maguire know how special the home is, but have decided to sell and allow others to continue as its custodians.

Sherry Reynolds, the New Zealand Historic Places Trust's general manager for the northern region, says Hulme Court is a "rare survivor in the city's history". "It has associations with significant early people. It's important that whoever buys [Hulme Court] continues to look after it and preserve it for future generations, whether it's by adaptive re-use or continuing as a home."



**SIZE:** Land 1745sq m, house approx 320sq m.  
**PRICE:** 2008 CV \$4.12 million. Tender closes December 8.

**INSPECT:** By appointment.  
**WEB:** [www.bayleys.co.nz/4101297](http://www.bayleys.co.nz/4101297)  
**SCHOOLS:** Parnell District School, Auckland Grammar and Epsom Girls' Grammar.  
**CONTACT:** John O'Brien, Bayleys, ph 027 453 9155.

**FEATURES:** Auckland's oldest home still standing on its original site, scheduled as Category A by the Auckland Council and registered as Category 1 by the Historic Places Trust. Various rooms could be configured as bedrooms or living areas — there are presently four bedrooms and four reception rooms. Off-street parking for 10 cars.

