

SCANDRETT'S FARM, MAURANGI PENINSULA

Introduction

Scandretts Farm is located on the Mahurangi Peninsula north of Auckland. This paper describes a five year project to restore the historic buildings located on the farm.

Background



Farming was one of the earliest industries to become established in European New Zealand with the country's economy throughout the nineteenth century being based mainly on wool production and then on frozen meat from the early 1880s. Proceeds from farms helped towns and cities throughout the country to develop and prosper. The farming industry also contributed to the character of the New Zealand countryside with its distinctive buildings, plantings such as exotic trees and shelterbelts, farm tracks and fences.

Although other industries such as gold mining and forestry contributed to the country's early wealth, the farming community has arguably made the greatest on-going contribution to New Zealand's stability and prosperity.



The photo on the left was taken at Burnt Hill station near Oxford in mid Canterbury, probably in the 1880s. Joseph Pearson at left, my great grandfather, arrived in Lyttelton in 1851 and took up the station in the same year. At right, the homestead at Oxford.

The farming techniques used by the early farmers reflected the English model. Similarly, the buildings they erected, usually comprising a farmhouse with a group of ancillary structures nearby, might have come from the countryside of England. These secondary buildings ranged from large stone woolsheds built to house huge flocks of sheep in the South Island high country through to modest little scantling sheds at the gate where the cream was placed for collection. Other buildings might have included milking sheds, stables, dairies and barns.



Farm buildings at Homebush, central Canterbury.

The barn, in particular, is one of the oldest types of farm buildings and one that is synonymous with farming. Every farm had its barn and while the farmhouse might be a substantial structure, it was often dwarfed in size by the barn. The barn was also the centre of activity on the farm. It might be used as a general-purpose structure to house machinery and equipment, act as a workshop or provide space to store produce such as grain or hay.

Whatever their use, farm buildings were usually unpretentious, practical structures whose forms derived directly from the functions for which they were intended. They utilised straightforward forms such as gabled or hipped roofs and were usually sheathed with simple materials such as timber or corrugated iron. They were commonly painted with red oxide paint as a preservative. This colour became known as barn-red and contributed to their distinctive character. The honest simplicity of farm buildings makes them some of the most aesthetically pleasing to be found anywhere. Their proportions, arrived at intuitively, provide them with a visual appeal while their simple forms and use of traditional materials enable them relate well to the landscape.

On many historic farms, the homestead is rightfully accepted as being architecturally and culturally significant while the outbuildings are often dismissed as being of little consequence. But in reality no farm could have functioned without them. They are significant because of the fundamental role they played in the running of the farm and for the important contribution they made to the character of the New Zealand landscape.

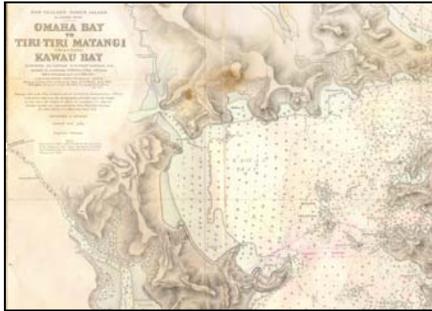
History

Farms in the North Island, particularly those in the upper part, were smaller than the South Island runs and the buildings more modest. Scandretts farm at Mullet Point on the Mahurangi Peninsula north of Auckland was typical of the area.

Mullet point overlooks Kawau Bay and the entrance to the Matakana River. The Maori knew the area as Purahurawai, referring to the large expanse of sparkling water in the bay. Kawau Bay was also a well-known Maori shark fishing ground. The muru or small spotted shark, in particular, was an important and highly valued seasonal resource, being caught and dried for winter food.



On early European survey maps, notably the map dating from 1904-05, Mullet Point is shown as Fish Point and it was famous for the quantities of mullet that could be caught there.



Survey map dated 1904-05.

Mullet Point and the bay were included in a Crown Grant to John Willis in 1853. For a while it was the location of a ship building enterprise. In 1864, the land was sold to George Scandrett and John Braithwaite settlers of Kawau', with Sir George Grey putting up part of the funding. Scandrett had arrived the year before from Northern Ireland and he married Helena Dillon in the same year as he bought the farm. So began the history of Scandretts farm as we know it today.



George & Helena Scandrett

Scandrett named the farm Lisadian after his hometown in Ireland and gradually brought it into production. In the 1870s, a Norfolk pine, which survives today, and oak trees, gifts from Sir George Grey were planted on the property. At first, the family lived in a wooden house on the farm before moving into the present concrete house after it was built in 1886. One of George and Helena's nine children, Thomas was born in 1876. In turn, he became a successful farmer and an orchardist supplying quantities of fresh fruit, vegetables, milk and meat to the surrounding districts. Fruit, honey, eggs and wool were all marketed under the Li/sad/ian label. Thomas had three sons, George (III), born in 1909, Raymond and Thomas (II). George and Thomas still live on the farm today, while Raymond who died in 1993, was the last Scandrett to live permanently in the concrete house.

In 1998, the property was purchased by the Auckland Regional Council for use as a Regional Park, ending 130 years of farming by four generations of Scandrett's. At the time of purchase, there was a near complete collection of farm buildings dating from the 1880s or earlier, including the homestead, a barn, boatshed, cow shed, implement shed, tractor shed and a calf shed.

In the past, whenever a farm has been purchased for use as a Regional Park, there has been a tendency for the old farm buildings to be demolished except for the farmhouse. In the case of Scandrett's farm, however, the heritage division of the ARC was keen to see all the buildings retained and preserved. The operational staff were less convinced and needed to be persuaded as to the value of some of the more humble buildings.

Historic Photographs

At the beginning of the project to restore the buildings, we were fortunate to obtain a large number of photographs of the farm in the early days. These have been of enormous value and have greatly assisted the work.



Early photographs of Scandretts farm.

There were also a number of other photographs that showed life on the farm. Scandretts farm was a place where ordinary people lived their lives. Children were born, spent their childhood there and later married. It is the personal history associated with Scandretts farm that sets it apart from other places.

Without these associations, the buildings could be in danger of becoming just another group of old farm buildings. The story of the people that lived there brings a place such as Scandretts to life. Visitors to historic properties are very interested in how our forebears lived and how their life was different from life today. Any interpretive material needs to include that information.



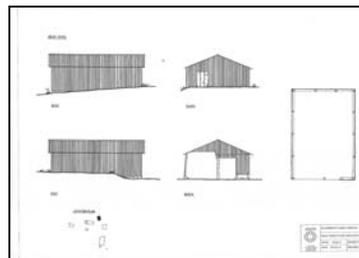
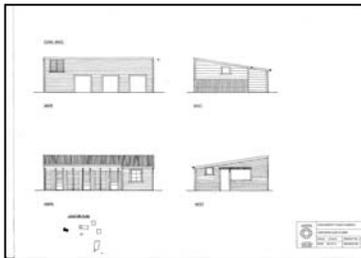
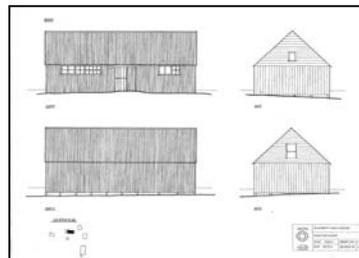
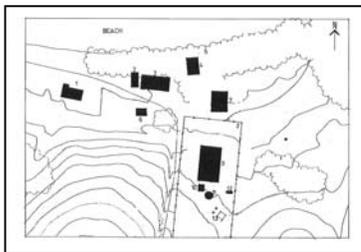
Life at Scandretts farm.

The Importance of having a Conservation Plan

The first stage in restoring the buildings was the preparation of a conservation plan. This became a vital document in determining the future of the farm buildings. Some of the benefits of having the conservation plan were:

- The historical research required for the conservation plan produced the first detailed historical account of the place.
- The research helped to determine the significance of the various structures. For example the boatshed was an old corrugated iron structure with apparently little value. In fact, it turned out to be highly significant in that it housed a launch that was used to take produce to Kawau Island during Sir George Grey's time. Without good research to determine its significance, it might have been dismissed as being of little consequence and subsequently demolished.
- In determining the significance of the buildings, it also became clear that social, cultural and technical values were as important as aesthetic and architectural values. The hen house was built for Thomas Scandrett's Leghorn hens. Its architectural values were low but other values such as social and technical values were high.
- The other conclusion was that the more humble buildings such as the dairy were as important to the running of the farm as more prominent buildings such as the farmhouse. Each building was part of the story and each now contributes to an understanding of the way the farm was run. If any one building were to be demolished, the story would no longer be complete.

- The conservation plan acknowledged that later fabric could have value. For example, the hen house later became a shed in which calves were reared and evidence of both uses was retained. Not all later fabric was deemed to be worthy of retention. Some accretions detracted from the significance of the place in as much as they concealed fabric of greater heritage value. Examples were the tractor shed addition to the dairy and a room on the front of the house, both of which were subsequently removed.
- The conservation plan put policies in place to guide the future care of the buildings. These needed to be well thought out and carefully considered. The recommendations for work to the buildings needed to be practical and easily understood.
- Included in the conservation plan was a set of record drawings of the various structures.



Measured drawings of Scandretts farm buildings.

Planning the Work

- In planning the work, good documentary research was again vital in helping to determine the previous form of a building when conservation work was being contemplated. The old photographs, for example, contained enormous amounts of information and needed to be carefully studied.
- The physical evidence provided by the building needed to be taken note of. The previous form of a building was sometimes only determined as work proceeded and more evidence came to light. The mesh in the dairy was an example. We thought that there must have had mesh along the sides for ventilation and it was only when we found a small fragment of the original mesh that we felt confident to restore it. The building contract needed to be sufficiently flexible to allow new evidence to be taken account of.
- The overall philosophy guiding the work was “do as little as possible and as much as necessary.” Material was repaired rather than replaced and only replaced where it was in such poor condition that it could not be salvaged.

- Horses for courses. Different buildings required different conservation techniques. The approach to conservation on the farmhouse was different to that which was applied to the cowshed. Repair techniques needed to be appropriate to the building and needed to match the original construction methods.
- Consideration was given as to how the farmer might have repaired his buildings. For example, he would have probably used second hand materials lying around the farm rather than new. He might have used a second hand window or a bent piece of corrugated iron rather than a proper flashing. This influenced the way the Scandrett's buildings were repaired.
- Farm buildings were essentially basic practical structures that were built for a particular purpose. We didn't feel any need to restore them to a pristine state. The patina of the buildings contributed to their character and this was respected. In other words, they were allowed to be old.
- It was important to get the details correct and again research was enormously important. It is too easy to make mistakes and to draw the wrong conclusions if the research is inadequate.

Personnel

- The value of working as a team. Architects, engineers, archaeologists and historians all had an important part to play at Scandretts. Susan Yoffe, the researcher, Andrew Marriott as engineer and Martin Jones as building archaeologist all made important contributions to the project, along with ARC staff, in particular Robert Brassey.
- Education. ARC field staff needed to be convinced that humble buildings such as the dairy and the barn had heritage value and were important as part of the story of the farm.
- Resolving conflicts. Differences of opinion within the ARC had to be resolved. Conflicts arose between a desire to retain heritage and practical considerations such as building maintenance and the need to provide a secure and safe environment. The boat shed was a problem in that it was an important part of the Scandrett story, however, it was also seen as a place where undesirable activities could occur.
- The importance of selecting the right contractor. The contribution a contractor can make is often underestimated although he is often the person most familiar with the job. A good contractor will "buy into" the project and be committed to it. He has to have a "feel" for the work and seek to understand the intentions of the person that originally built the particular structure. Peter Glithro was such a contractor.

Budget Considerations

- The budget has had a big effect on the project. In fact, the work has now been on-going for the last five years as money has become available.

Consequently, the work at Scandretts had to be prioritised. Sometimes we had to make the hard decision to postpone a project for a year rather than to proceed knowing there was insufficient funding to complete it. On occasions, we used second hand materials, such as roofing iron, both to add authenticity and to stretch the budget.

The Buildings

Farmhouse



- The house was built in 1885 in a simplified Georgian style.
- It was constructed of concrete with shingle brought by cutter from nearby Motuketekete Island. Analysis showed that the binder in the concrete comprised a high percentage of calcium carbonate indicating the use of lime. There was no evidence of calcium silicates of the type found in ordinary Portland cements and little or no fine aggregate component.
- The house had changed little over the years. A room was added at the front and the verandah enlarged. The building was also roughcast over the original plaster.
- By 1996, it was structurally in poor condition with large cracks evident at one corner and elsewhere as differential settlement occurred. Geotechnical investigations revealed a high water table and poorly compacted fill under the house as being the cause of the damage.
- The work comprised, firstly, the underpinning of two walls were underpinned to a depth of 2.5 metres. The northwest corner and one rear corner were reconstructed with concrete block to act as buttresses for the rest of the building. The blockwork was then plastered to match the original finish. At the same time, the front extension was removed and the verandah and front steps rebuilt.
- Future work will include replastering of the exterior and internal refurbishment.



Barn



- There is documentary evidence in the form of an invoice referring to repairs to a barn at the time the house was built. Although we cannot be sure, the barn may be one of the original structures built by George Scandrett in the 1860s.
- Over the years the walls had been resheathed with corrugated iron. The barn was out of level and the timber had been attacked by borer. One of the internal supports was also missing.
- The interior, however, was a treasure trove of farm machinery and equipment from the last 100 years.
- Conservation work has involved recladding the walls with vertical board and batten and repairs to the joinery. Future work will include repiling and a new roof.
- The repairs have not been concerned with getting the barn into a perfect condition. For example, if the floor remains slightly out of level, then so be it.



Henhouse/calf shed



- The building was originally constructed to house Thomas Scandrett's pedigree Leghorn hens and the perches can still be seen. It was later converted into a shed in which calves could be reared and the pens in the building date from this period.

- Conservation work included providing new timber piles, repairs to the framing and substantially resheathing the exterior.
- Future work is likely to include a new roof.



Milking Shed



- The present milking shed dates from 1934 and was built after an earlier barn burnt down.
- Conservation work included a new roof and repairs to the exterior walls and joinery.
- In the future it is intended that it be restored to a working milking shed with the machinery all being functional. The yards will also be restored to their original layout.
- It is hoped that at future working days at the farm, visitors will be able to see the milking shed in operation.



Boat Shed



- The boat shed was built in 1910 and housed the launch *Aroha* which was used to take provisions across to nearby Kawau Island.
- Because of its poor condition, it almost had to be rebuilt. Work included repairs to roof and wall framing, new ceramic pipe foundations were installed and the building reclad with corrugated iron.
- In the future it is intended that the building be used to house a collection of various old boats.



Dairy



- One of the highlights of the project. It is not known when it was built, however, it is seen on many of the old photographs of the farm.
- Over the years it had become incorporated into a tractor shed and two walls had been completely removed. Translucent plastic had been substituted for the original mesh in the wall openings.
- Conservation work involved demolition of the tractor shed and reconstruction of the dairy, with the assistance of Martin Jones from HPT. Two new walls were built, a new roof provided and new zinc mesh was obtained.



Other Buildings



- Outbuildings such as the toilet and the cream shed need to be conserved.
- The remains of structures such as the honey shed need to be interpreted.

Conclusion

The conservation plan was a key document in our endeavours to ensure the survival of the buildings at Scandretts farm. Its two basic conclusions of the conservation plan were:

- that there was a need to retain all the buildings as a group and
- that the seemingly most humble building can be as significant as a more prominent building in the contribution it made to the running of the farm.

Scandretts farm was a rare opportunity to preserve a near intact group of late nineteenth and early twentieth century farm buildings. With that now achieved, visitors to the park will be able to have a glimpse of life on an early New Zealand farm.