

HOUSE – 4 Highfield Road, Feilding



Architect: James Walter Chapman-Taylor

Construction date: 1919

Visible materials: Painted stucco, board and batten, timber joinery, Marseille tile roofing

Architectural style: Arts and Crafts

Use/building type: Residential

Date and compiler: Ian Bowman, December 2014

Heritage New Zealand listing: -

Proposed category: B

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY¹

Historical outline

The house was designed by well-known Arts and Crafts architect J. W. Chapman-Taylor in 1911 for Louis Albert Elliott and his wife Jackson, a lawyer with Bell, Gully and Martin of Wellington. At the time of the commission Elliott was intending to establish his own firm in Feilding with W. A. Sandilands. However, Mr. Elliot became the sole partner in 1910 when W.A. Sandilands died.

Siers suggests that the bricklayer for the house was Archie McMahon.

The house was designed for its panoramic views to the east and to give easy access from the house to the garden. Jackson Elliott lived in the house until she was 92.

Wellington architect Kyle Davey owned the house during the 1980s by which time the house had been converted into two flats with an extension of the dining room and a new bedroom wing close to the road. The current owners returned the house to a single dwelling and carried out many repairs to the building following the Davey ownership when the house became almost derelict. They added to and reorganised the kitchen and built the garage.

¹ Siers, Judy, *The Life and Times of James Walter Chapman-Taylor*, Millwood Press, Napier 2007

Architect²

James Walter Chapman Taylor was born in London, England, on 24 June 1878, the son of Theodore Chapman Taylor and his wife, Ada Thomas. Theodore was an agricultural graduate and quantity surveyor and Ada a teacher, linguist and journalist. In 1879 Theodore came out to New Zealand, where he purchased 62 acres of hilly, heavily forested land, part of the Ngaere block, a few miles south of Stratford. Ada Taylor, James and a younger brother joined him in June 1880.

James was initially taught at home by his mother and later attended the school at Ngaere. By his teenage years he had decided against farming as a career and became apprenticed to a local builder. On 12 April 1900 he married Mary Gibson at Stratford. After completing his apprenticeship, he constructed his first building, a single-storeyed timber house for his parents on their Stratford property. By 1903 he had enrolled in an architecture and design course with the International Correspondence Schools of the United States. He worked on the construction of the Taihape railway station in 1904 and then moved to Wellington. Clients there provided him with the opportunity to pursue a career as a builder, furniture designer, carpenter and architect. He worked on-site or in his workshop during the day and studied to complete his correspondence course in the evening. From around 1907 he used the surname Chapman-Taylor.

Over the years Chapman-Taylor moved house often, living in at least 11 houses, which he designed and built himself. Mary Chapman-Taylor died in October 1916, and at Hastings on 6 September 1917 James married Clara Annie Walton, a Plunket nurse. He shifted to Havelock North in 1919 and to Auckland in 1922. By the mid 1930s he was living at Silverstream in the Hutt Valley. His second marriage was dissolved in 1937 and on 21 May that year at Lower Hutt he married Dorothy Joan Pocock (née Lucas). After her death in March 1938 he was married at Silverstream on 27 May 1938 to Marion Hurst Gottwaltz (née Wickens).

Chapman-Taylor is best known for his domestic architecture. His career spanned nearly 60 years, during which period he designed and built some 84 houses. For the most part he was influenced by the ideas of the English Arts and Crafts movement, which promoted a return to the simple, traditional English cottage style, with interior features in adzed timber, whitewashed plaster walls, large beams and lintels, small framed windows and hand-crafted fittings. During his early years in Wellington he used the Australian native timber jarrah almost exclusively for interior surfaces and furniture, and his preference for this heavy dark wood earned him the nickname 'Jarrah-Taylor'. He admired the architectural work of Charles Voysey, M. H. Baillie Scott, Sir Edwin Lutyens, E. W. Gimson, Ernest and Sidney Barnsley and C. R. Ashbee. In 1909 and again in 1914 Chapman-Taylor travelled to England to view the work of these architects and to observe traditional English cottages at first hand.

On his return a mature style emerged. His designs became more cohesive, and concrete was used as the preferred building material. His first concrete building, Whare-Ra, in Hawke's Bay (1913--15), was designed as a centre for the New Zealand branch of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a modern Rosicrucian order. The consistency of his style and method is most evident in the homes he designed between 1915 and his last work in 1953. He experimented with a honeycomb concrete wall

² Siers, Judy. 'Chapman-Taylor, James Walter 1878 - 1958'. Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, updated 4 April 2003 URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

construction, with concrete-block work and a variety of design features, but overall his buildings repeatedly echoed the Arts and Crafts cottage style. Most Chapman-Taylor buildings are extant, proof of their quality (his Hawke's Bay houses withstood the major earthquake of 1931) and ageless, classic appeal.

Chapman-Taylor also made a significant contribution to photography in New Zealand. From 1907 his photographs appeared in the magazine *Progress* (renamed *New Zealand Building Progress* in 1914). The photographs were also used to illustrate his written articles. In the 1920s he was an active member of the Auckland Camera Club. His photography became increasingly art-inspired as he experimented with special lenses and discovered the variety of effects possible through choice of papers and exposures. *Egmont and the children of the mountain mist*, published in 1931, included 21 photographic plates and demonstrated his skill as a photographer.

In Silverstream in the late 1930s Chapman-Taylor installed a well-equipped darkroom in his home at Chatsworth Road and photography became a professional enterprise. He created a demand for a new style of personal photography, advertised as 'Portraits in your home'. This was his alternative to contemporary studio portraiture, which he considered too formal and unnatural. Other successes came from his membership of the Wellington Camera Club, which won the Bledisloe Cup for inter-club competition in New Zealand on eight occasions between 1942 and 1950 when Chapman-Taylor was a participating member. He also acted as a critic and judge in local competitions. In 1948 he became an associate member of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain.

The relationship between the spiritual and material concerned Chapman-Taylor throughout his life. He attempted to live for honesty of purpose, beauty in truth, and the greater reason for life, which were tenets of the Arts and Crafts philosophy. He was involved at various stages with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the Anglican Church, the Theosophical Society and the Liberal Catholic church. Astrology also played an important part in his life. A follower of Alan Leo and Margaret Hone, he became an adept reader and interpreter of horoscopes. During the 1940s and 1950s this too became a professional occupation.

James Chapman-Taylor died on 28 October 1958 at Lower Hutt, survived by his fourth wife and six children. The *Evening Post* obituary described him as a 'creative artist whose life was an inspiration to hundreds of New Zealanders in many walks of life'.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Planning

When designed, the house had an elongated, stepped 'L' shaped plan with three bedrooms, a large entry hall, a "houseplace" (living room), a dining alcove, kitchen, scullery, washhouse, toilet and coal shed off the tradesman's entrance and hall (back door), and, on a lower level a "den". It was set back from the road with a double gate to the street and a wide path with a pergola leading to the entry. The main bedroom, "houseplace" and den all had trademark Chapman-Taylor fireplaces.

The dining alcove originally had a large refectory table with built-in seating on three walls.

Style

The style of the house, as with all Chapman-Taylor's designs is Arts and Crafts. The Arts and Crafts movement, established by William Morris, became a guiding influence for the future direction of

architecture in the late Victorian period. As the name suggests, it was a movement, which admired traditional art and craft, especially that made by the mediaeval crafts guilds. Morris founded the firm of Morris, Marshall and Faulkner who manufactured wallpaper, stained glass, textiles, carpets, tapestries, furniture and books, which influenced many architects and designers. A major tenet of the Arts and Crafts movement was the use of local materials and building traditions, expressed honestly and to be seen to be hand made. The designs were suited to the particular site rather than using a standardised plan for all similar buildings. Arts and Crafts architecture, therefore, developed into a simplified, non-copyist architecture, but which, at the same time, took into account tradition.

Architects who designed in the Arts and Crafts style included Walter Crane, W R Lethaby, and C R Ashbee. The Movement spread to Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and Austria. The Movement also promoted a concern for appropriate conservation of historic buildings, which in turn led to the establishment of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

Other styles which owe their development to Arts and Crafts included the 'Old English' vernacular, 'Queen Anne', the 'Free Styles' explored by Charles Renee Mackintosh, flamboyant Classicism, the dignified Neo-Georgian, and graceful French influenced Beaux-Arts Classicism. Typical features of the Arts and Crafts style include a conspicuous roof, prominent eaves with exposed rafters, tall chimneys, oriel windows, eaves brackets, roughcast and contrasting textures and colours.

Form

The main wing of the house has a gable facing the street, which extends from the original northern bedroom to the south wall of the kitchen when it becomes hipped. The hip extends over the toilet and coal shed. The "houseplace" roof is gabled parallel to the main gable and meets the kitchen hip, while the roof of the den, also gabled faces east towards Feilding. The wide bay windows to the "houseplace" have a flat roof. The chimneys to the den and main bedroom are expressed on the exterior with small-scaled windows either side.

Today the current owners have extended the house with another bedroom towards the road and a garage towards the east, all matching the style of the house. A wide brick and concrete deck extends outwards from the entry with a pergola.

Materials

Originally the building was stuccoed over all external walls but the current owner, when refurbishing the house, elected to reclad using board and batten. Most of the original six paned casement windows have been retained, and are either single or grouped in two, three, four or five windows. The main entry has pairs of windows either side of French doors, which have nine small paned windows in each matching the size of the remainder of the house. The original drawings show tall chimneys with openings at the top, which have integral corners and cap. The existing chimneys are lower and do not have the designed openings. The timber used was rimu.

Setting

A hedge and corrugated steel fence obscure much of the house from the street, while the entry is made clear with trellis work at right angles to the fence. In front of the house beyond the deck is lawn and the eastern boundary is lined with medium sized trees. The view from the eastern side of the house is extensive and overlooks St Johns Church and Victoria Park in the foreground, Feilding in the

middle ground and the Ruahine Ranges in the distance. A gravel driveway leads from the street to the garage and “trademan’s” entry.

REPORT REVIEW

Based on a review of the report and viewing of Council files, the assessment undertaken in 2014 is still applicable as at April 2021.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

The building has **moderate to high regional** significance for **physical, historic, and cultural** heritage values.

The building has **high architectural** values in its original Arts and Crafts style, planning, detailing and craftsmanship typical of houses designed and built by JW Chapman-Taylor. Chapman-Taylor achieved a consistency of style with many of his houses, of which this is **highly representative**, particularly in terms of scale, materials, elements such as fireplaces, multi-paned windows, and ambience. In this regard it could also be considered as having **high group** value as one of the many surviving houses he designed throughout New Zealand, however it has **high rarity** value in being the only Chapman-Taylor designed house in the Manawatu.

The house has a **moderate** level of **authenticity** with major changes being the bedroom, dining room and deck additions and change in cladding from stucco to board and batten during repair work.

The house has **high associative** values mainly with two **people**, its architect and client, L. A. Elliott, who was a lawyer of some local standing in the early part of the 20th century. Given its rarity and impetus for the commission, it can contribute to **moderate educational** values in knowledge of Chapman-Taylor's practice as well as something of the professional and private life of his client.

SOURCES

Former NZHPT Manawatu Branch Committee files