

HISTORIC GREYTOWN

New Zealand's First Inland Settlement 1854



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An hour from Wellington on the other side of the Rimutaka Hills is the small town of Greytown. Greytown owes its existence to the energy and initiative of early settlers in Wellington who were looking for small affordable portions of land to farm and to the assistance of the Governor, Sir George Grey. This was acknowledged by the settlers who names the town Greytown in his honour.

The Small Farms Association was set up in 1853. Each purchaser would have a town section of 1 acre, costing 1 pound and a 40 acre farm block nearby for which they were to pay 10 shillings an acre. The layout of Greytown, with its long main Street, dates from the original survey in 1853 when 120 one acre sections, 60 on either side of the main road, were surveyed by W Corbett. This makes Greytown the first planned inland town in New Zealand. The Greytown Soldiers Memorial Park with its native bush, camping grounds and sports grounds is part of an original 40 acre block.

Not all the sections were sold. In 1871 the Greytown Trust Lands Trust was set up, by Act of Parliament and its investments and land rents have enabled it to be a generous benefactor to the town, especially in recent years.

In late March 1854 the first party of six intrepid souls, including one woman, their possessions carried by 4 bullocks, crossed the Rimutakas on foot and arrived to camp near Cobblestones. A small memorial shelter marks the spot today. They immediately set to work to build shelters and small cottages. Within five years more substantial buildings, shops, hotels and larger houses were built. Fire was a continuing hazard but enough remains today to give a strong Victorian flavour to the Main Street.

Conservation of trees and the environment has always been important for local citizens. In 1890 the first Arbor Day planting in New Zealand was held in Greytown and trees from that planting still stand alongside the main highway just south of the town.

In 1919 an opportunity arose to buy 20 acres of O'Connor's Bush, an uncut remnant of lowland forest. Farsighted citizens gave money generously and the beautiful Memorial Park remains as a memorial to the men of Greytown who gave their lives for their country in both World Wars.

When the railway by-passed Greytown in the 1870's, Greytown's position as the pre-eminent town in the Wairarapa slowly declined. The years passed quietly until the 1970's. In a strong way this has helped modern Greytown, as little building went on from 1920 to 1970 and the lovely old colonial buildings with their exotic trees were left largely untouched.

The current inhabitants of the town are increasingly proud of their heritage. Old buildings have been sensitively upgraded and put to new purposes... cafes, craft shops, week-end cottages and homes of Wellington commuters. Today Greytown is an attractive and thriving community.

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Cobblestones Wairarapa's Early Settlers Museum

Once Hastwell's Coaching Stables, dating back to 1857. The Museum Project was initiated in 1969 by the Greytown Jaycees with assistance from the Wairarapa Horsesdrawn Society. Since then many early buildings of note, all with an interesting history, have been moved to Cobblestones from other parts of the Wairarapa. (See 25 on map).

The first Methodist Church built by Hart Udy in 1865 from timber sawn at his Matarawa mill just north of the Waiohine River, and the original Greytown Hospital, the first one in the Wairarapa, built in 1875 are now part of the complex.

Papawai Pa

Papawai Pa was once an important political and cultural centre. In the 1890's, 18 large carved figures were erected representing famous Tipuna. These have been restored with help from the Historic Places Trust and stand again guarding the marae.

The present Meeting House dates from 1888. From then onwards Papawai was famous for the great meetings held there. In 1897 the Kotahangi Movement Parliament was established at Papawai with Tamahau Mahupuka as Premier. Tribal delegations from many parts of the country travelled to Papawai to discuss Government proposals with Richard Seddon and King Mahuta among those present. After the death of Mahupuka in 1904 the importance of Papawai began to fade.

Much hard work has taken place at the Marae since 1980 and Papawai Pa stands proudly as a centre of Maori culture in the Wairarapa.

1. 12 Main Street

Wyett House built in the 1870's. It was once run by Miss Wyett as a finishing school for girls. The heavy wooden fence was a protection against floods from the Waiohine River, which originally flowed a few hundreds of metres north of the house.

2. 21 Main Street

The Hornblow House, nor Turkey Red, is thought to be the earliest commercial building (1867) still in existence in Greytown.

3. 33 Main Street

The Greytown Hotel. Investigation into the history of this building dates it earlier and earlier. A very large photograph in the public bar shows it well established in 1871 but it was known to be working in 1861. It is one of the oldest surviving hotel buildings in New Zealand.

4. 56 Main Street

The central portion of this house dates from the very early days of Greytown and was built in 1857. It was subsequently added to in 1866 when Gallager married.

5. Corner of Main and Kuratawhiti Street

The Catholic Church, built in 1880. The transept is the Greytown Court House 1883, which was moved across the road as an addition to the church in 1957. The building is typical of early rural church architecture.

6. Corner of Main and Jellicoe Street

Diagonally opposite Sacred Heart Church is St Andrew's Union Church. The original Methodist Church is now Cobblestones. The second church on this site dates from 1880.

7. 72 Main Street

This Victorian Shop was built as the Premier Boot Warehouse in 1891 for Mr Loasby, a prominent Greytown figure.

7.a The Lime Trees

Planted beside the BNZ building at the turn of the century they grace the street with their handsome appearance.

8. 75 Main Street

An imposing building built for the Bank of New Zealand in 1875 by R A Wakelin, and the town's principal bank until its closure in 1997.

9. 80 Main Street

This attractive brick building was built for the Permanent Investment and Loan Association of the Wairarapa in 1896. The Association, established in 1873, was the predecessor of the Wairarapa Building Society. It was the oldest building society in the Wellington Province and one of the earliest such societies established in NZ.

10. Corner Main and McMaster Street

Greytown's Town Hall was built in 1907 to replace the original hall a little further down Main St, when burnt down in one of the many fires that plagued small rural towns in colonial times.

11. 110 Main Street

The Borough Chambers is a handsome high Victorian building built in 1892.

12. 113 Main Street

Cabbage Tree Cottage possibly a gardener's cottage for a Kempton House once standing on the Library site. The cottage exterior was reinstated from a derelict state in 1996.

13. 126 Main Street

Beard House possibly built in 1874. The present legal firm has occupied the building for over 100 years.

14. Town Library

Built as a Masonic Hall on West Street in 1896 it was moved to its current site in 1980 and converted to its present use as the town library.

15. 123 Main Street

Built in 1872 for Richard Wakelin to replace an older, smaller cottage built in the first years of Greytown, on one of the original town acres of the Small Farms Settlement.

16. 125 Main Street

Jane Wakelin's Cottage built in stages and enlarged by the second owner in c1880's as a workshop and store.

17. 129 Main Street

Bright House. Parts of this building are thought to be the earliest remaining structure in Greytown.

17.a St Luke's Gum Tree

This huge Eucalyptus Regnans was reputedly wheeled over the Rimutakas in a wooden wheelbarrow and "removed" while the carter was at lunch in the nearby Rising Sun Hotel. With a girth of approximately 13m, a span of 30m and a height of 40m it is surely the biggest gum tree in NZ!

18. 163 Main Street

The original Kempton House built by Thomas Kempton c1859. The upper storey was destroyed by fire shortly after it was built.

19. 174 Main Street

Armstrong Saddlery. The earliest part of this building dates from the 1960's. It was a saddlers workroom and shop for many years and the shop facade still remains.

20. 100 West Street

Old Barber's Shop built by James Judd in 1906 and moved here from the Main Street in 1975.

20.a The Oak Trees

These magnificent English Oaks grow on what was once Ben Stephen's 40 acre section which he balloted for in 1854. One would like to think that they grew from acorns planted by the early settler.

21. 157 West Street

Drummond Cottage c1875 is one of the finest surviving examples of the ornate cottage style. Moved from Main Street to its present site in the 1970's it was restored from a neglected shell.

22. 18 Jellicoe Street

Registry Office. John Boyle was Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages in Greytown from 1863. About 1890 he built this house in Jellicoe Street and the front hallway was used as the Reigstrar's Office.

23. 18 Mole Street

Built by Nathan Kidd, of Kidd's Orange Apple fame, in 1895.

24. 40 Kuratawhiti Street

Izard house. This is one of the few substantial Victorian Houses remaining in Greytown. Built towards the end of the C19 for a local lawyer.

24.a Soldiers' Memorial Park

Purchased by public subscriptions as a Memorial to the men killed in WWI. The Lime trees in the Avenue were planted as individual memorials. The magnificent Totara and Matai trees in the bush are between 400 and 600 years old.

25. Cobblestones

Wairarapa's Early Settlers Museum. See above for further details.