

A History

For Archibald MacLean, the building of Greenhill homestead was the beginning of a thirty year commitment to creating a haven of calm and beauty overlooking the productive Ngatarawa Plains of Hawke's Bay.

Born on the island of Tiree in the Scottish Hebrides, Archibald arrived in New Zealand in 1868 at 24 years of age. In 1876 he was appointed manager of Maraekakaho Station, a position he would maintain for twenty years. In 1880 Archibald purchased 3,300 acres from his employer and kinsman, Sir Donald Maclean. The land, part of several blocks acquired from the Ngati-Kahungunu in 1850, had been taken up by Sir Donald in 1855 and was named 'Greenhill' after Archibald's home on Tiree.

Following his marriage in 1897 to Eliza Lyons, a widow with three sons, Archibald began work on a substantial homestead. Sited to give panoramic views of the surrounding countryside, the building replaced an earlier dwelling that lay at the foot of the hill, believed to have been destroyed by fire.

In executing his grand vision, Archibald sought the aid of Yorkshireman George Sollitt, one of Hawke's Bay's first architects. With a decade of experience in building homes for the new gentry of Christchurch behind him, Sollitt rapidly established a flourishing architectural practice, Sollitt and Allan, in Hastings.

Greenhill is arguably the best surviving example of his work, and an outstanding example of New Zealand's High Victorian wooden architecture. Porticoed verandas, complex rooflines, distinctively ornate fireplaces, mouldings and stained glass, together with elaborately carved woodwork both within and without are typical of Sollitt's style.

Similar excellent examples of his work included the Church of the Sacred Heart in Hastings (1895) and the original Horonui homestead (1899), both sadly lost to fire late last century.

Building began at Greenhill in 1898 and took two years to complete, with the woodpanelled billiard room added in 1901. The original laundry was designed with generous proportions and a sprung floor to allow dances, and the annual district Christmas parties always featured the arrival of Father Christmas down the capacious chimney.

The laundry wing was destroyed by fire in the 1930s; a decade which also saw the loss during the 1931 earthquake of a bedroom wing - situated where the swimming pool is today sited - and the original brick chimneys.

An unexpected survivor of the earthquake was the ornately framed mirror which fell from the wall of the dining room but remained intact, and is today situated in the gymnasium. Following the earthquake the original breakfast room which adjoined the kitchen, dining room and butler's pantry, was converted to a bedroom, serving that purpose until late last century when it again became a sitting room.

A commonly remarked feature of the outbuildings are the concrete 'bunkers' which open onto the rear courtyard. These provided storage as well as housing a carbide plant for the production of acetylene gas, used for lighting prior to the advent of electricity.

Built of heart totara from the Whakapirau Forest, Greenhill also features rimu and matai panelling and matai flooring throughout. Additional elements of note include the ornate pressed-zinc ceilings, imported from Britain at the time the house was built, and the delicate hand-painted stained glass which features throughout the house.

On Archibald's death in 1929, the homestead was inherited by his daughter-in-law, Grace Lyons. A highpoint in the house's history came with the visit of the late Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, who in 1958 spent two days at Greenhill hosted by Gladys and Dick Hudson, daughter and son-in-law of Edmund and Grace Lyons.

Six generations of the Maclean-Lyons family have lived at Greenhill, while the surrounding land, Greenhill Station, is today farmed by Gladys' grandson, Archibald's great great grandson.

Development of the Garden

As soon as building of the homestead was completed, Archibald set about establishing an appropriate setting. Ornamental trees and flower gardens were planted, an extensive citrus orchard bordered the newly sown croquet lawn behind the homestead, and pip and stone fruits, together with vegetable gardens and a berry orchard, were soon flourishing.

Around 1920, in the expansive mood that followed the end of the First World War, Archibald enlisted the aid of Cantabrian garden designer Alfred William Buxton, whose work he had seen exhibited at Agricultural and Pastoral Shows.

Considered one of New Zealand's foremost early twentieth century garden designers, Buxton was much influenced by the work of English designers such as John Claudius Loudon. His use of curving forms which allowed the inclusion of formal and informal elements, stately driveways which kept the homestead hidden until the last moment, grassy terraces, rockeries and grottos make his garden designs quite distinctive.

Buxton also promoted the use of natives in New Zealand gardens, and did much to extend the variety of native and imported plants available through his burgeoning plant nurseries.

Another element common to many Buxton gardens is the masonry-pillared pergola, though this may derive more from the input of Buxton's draughtsman, Edgar Taylor, who was influenced in this direction by English architect C.E. Mallows.

In the mid 1920s Buxton commissioned photographer R.P. Moore to take panoramic photographs of the gardens he had designed, ensuring that an extensive record of his work remains.

Six of the trees originally planted in the extensive gardens of Greenhill are registered with the Notable Trees Register. These are a white elm (*ulmus americana*), Spanish fir (*abies pinsapo*), Japanese pagoda tree (*sophora japonica*), medlar (*mespilus germanica*), Holm oak (*quercus ilex*) and almond (*prunus communis*)