

Pendennis

13-17 Burnell Avenue, Thorndon, Wellington



Pendennis, 13-17 Burnell Avenue, Thorndon (Photo: Charles Collins, 2015)

Summary of heritage significance

- Pendennis has architectural value for its association with the important Wellington architect Francis Petre. The house is an attractive design in a simplified Victorian Italianate style. Of particular interest is the large roof light, especially prominent in the rear view of the building from Grant Road.
- Pendennis is associated with early Thorndon and the propriety that grew there. In its later role as a boarding house for Maori women from the 1950s onward, it also has historical association with the urban drift that many Maori experienced in the mid-twentieth century.
- Pendennis has considerable historical value. It was designed by Francis Petre, one of early Wellington's important architects, for William Hort Levin, one of early Wellington's most successful businessmen, and for whom the town of Levin is named. And as a boarding house, it has been home to generations of young Maori women moving to Wellington for work and education.
- Pendennis makes a contribution to both place and a sense of continuity in Thorndon. Built in 1877, it has obvious age value, and it is a link back to Thorndon's early existence and a reminder of the suburb's prosperous beginnings.

District Plan:	Map 18, reference 45
Legal Description:	Lot 1 DP 2208
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	No
Archaeological Site:	Pre-1900 building
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	1877: Construction
Architect / Builder:	Francis Petre
Former uses:	Residential/Maori women's hostel
Current uses:	Boarding house
Earthquake Prone Status:	Outside Earthquake Policy (SR 15=268412)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

Pendennis stands on land purchased in 1874 by William Hort Levin, one of early Wellington's most successful businessmen, and for whom the town of Levin was later named. Pendennis was designed by the important Wellington architect, Francis Petre, the nephew of Lord Petre, a New Zealand Company director from whom Levin purchased the land. The house was constructed in 1877, and stood in 'splendid isolation' for twenty years, with the house and gardens dominating the area, until subdivision of the surrounding land began in 1897.¹ The house may have been named 'Pendennis' by W.H. Levin, but the earliest known date for this title is 1917.²

There is some discussion of Pendennis being the Imperial Chinese Consulate in the 1900s, but we could find no evidence to support this. In 1943 a fire damaged the roof of the house – which by this time was known as the Pendennis Private Hotel.³

In the 1950s, Pendennis became a boarding hostel for Maori women moving to Wellington, namely for work and education. The hostel aimed to smooth the transition for the women from rural to urban living.⁴ The hostel served this function for generations of women. In recent times, the house has become a general hostel, though it still offers marae-style accommodation.⁵

Pendennis has significant heritage value. It is a link to the early days of Thorndon, when the landscape was dominated by the grand houses of Wellington's more prosperous residents. It is important for its association with William Levin and Francis Petre. In the second half of the twentieth century, it became important as a hostel for Maori women moving to Wellington – the house becoming a symbol of Maori urban drift and the profound social changes New Zealand was undergoing at the time.

¹ Black, Jane, Chris Cochran, and Michael Kelly, 'Thorndon Heritage Project', for Wellington City Council, 2009, p 71

² *Evening Post*, 6 October 1917, Page 1; see also "The house called Pendennis in Grant Road, Thorndon, Wellington." Wright, Henry Charles Clarke, 1844-1936 :Negatives. Ref: 1/1-020597-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22756052>

³ FIRES IN CITY *Evening Post*, 15 February 1943, Page 3

⁴ Mark Derby, 'Daily life in Māori communities – te noho a te hāpori', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 9 July 2013, last accessed October 2013

at <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/40904/maori-girls-hostel-1954>

⁵ Wellington Housing Trust, accessed October 2014 at <http://www.wht.org.nz/housing.html>



The house called Pendennis in Grant Road, Thorndon, Wellington, [ca 1900s].
Reference Number: 1/1-020597-G, photograph taken by Henry Wright, circa 1900s.



Atareta Rennie plays the piano at Pendennis Maori Girls Hostel, 1954,
Alexander Turnbull Library, Tourist and Publicity Department Collection
Reference: 1/2-040753-F, photograph by T. Ransfield.

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1877	Construction
1922, 1924, 1927	Additions, alterations
1937	Addition (shed)
2010	Upgrade to bathroom, installation of safety glass

1.3 Occupation history

(not fully assessed)

1877-1893	William Levin
1982-Current	Te Poari Mihingare Pariha

1.4 Architect

Francis William Petre, 1847-1918⁶

Petre was born in Lower Hutt. He was the son of the Hon. Henry William Petre and grandson of the eleventh Baron Petre, Chairman of the second New Zealand Company. Petre trained in London as a naval architect, engineer and architect, returning to New Zealand in 1872. During the next three years he was employed by Brogden and Sons, English railway contractors, superintending the construction of the Dunedin-Clutha and the Blenheim-Picton railways.

He set up office in Dunedin in 1875 as an architect and civil engineer. He designed a house for Judge Chapman (1875), followed by "Cargill's Castle" (1876) for E. B. Cargill, and then St Dominic's Priory (1877), all constructed in mass concrete. From the Historic Places Trust files: 'Petre's frequent use of concrete at a time of masonry was the standard building material, earned him the nickname 'Lord Concrete'.⁷

Petre is best known for his Basilican church designs, and for his pioneering use of concrete in these buildings. His church buildings include St Joseph's Cathedral, Dunedin (1878-86); Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch, (1904-05); Sacred Heart Basilica (now Cathedral of the Sacred Heart), Wellington (1901); and St Patrick's Basilica, Oamaru, (1894 and 1903). Petre's commercial buildings include the Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance Building (1882-82) and Phoenix House (now Airport House, c.1885), both in Dunedin.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Pendennis could be considered a simplified and unique interpretation of the Victorian Italianate style. Its asymmetrical massing, bracketed eaves, faceted bays, grouped openings and pyramid roof on the large roof light are all elements commonly associated with this style. However, often a tower was employed in Italianate buildings - a device used to give the building landmark qualities. The large roof light on Pendennis is perhaps a concession to this.

⁶ Most of this information is sourced from the NZHPT Glossary.

⁷ NZHPT WRC Files, in District Plan: Heritage Building – 40 Hill Street – Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, WCC File No. 1041-06-HIL

2.2 Materials

Rusticated timber weatherboards and joinery, corrugated steel roofing.

2.3 Setting

Pendennis is located on the western side of Burnell Avenue, though the section runs through to Grant Road. A wide, quiet cul-de-sac, Burnell Avenue was only formed late 1897 or early 1898, twenty years after Pendennis' construction. The houses in the street are almost all to a high standard, with Pendennis being the stand-out structure on the street. As the largest house, and on the raised, western side, Pendennis dominates the streetscape.

Sources

Black, Jane, Chris Cochran, and Michael Kelly. '*Thorndon Heritage Project*'. For Wellington City Council, 2009

Derby, Mark. 'Daily life in Māori communities – te noho a te hāpori - Daily life in modern Māori communities'. *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. Updated 9 July 2013, last accessed October 2013, at <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/40904/maori-girls-hostel-1954>

Lowe, R.J. 'Historical background to the North Thorndon walk: Part I: Hobson Street, Hobson Crescent and Fitzherbert Terrace'. Adapted from a feature originally published in *Thorndon News*, Issue 128, November 2001, pp 3-7.

Ormsby, Louise. '*The Historic Context and Heritage Values of Thorndon*'. Report prepared for the Wellington City Council. August 2009.

Te Ao Hou. No. 16, October 1956

Wellington City Council. 'House – 15 Burnell Avenue'. In *Heritage Inventory 1995*. WCC.

Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

Pendennis has architectural value for its association with the important Wellington architect Francis Petre. The house is an attractive design in a simplified Victorian Italianate style. Of particular interest is the large roof light, especially prominent in the rear view of the building from Grant Road.

Townscape: *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

Pendennis is the most impressive, and imposing, building on Burnell Avenue, thus giving it significant streetscape value. The house's presence is emphasised by its location on the raised side of the street.

Group: *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

Historic Value:

Association: *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

Pendennis has considerable historical value. It was designed by Francis Petre, one of early Wellington's important architects, for William Hort Levin, one of early Wellington's most successful businessmen, and for whom the town of Levin is named. And as a boarding house, it has been home to generations of young Maori women moving to Wellington for work and education.

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

Pendennis is associated with early Thorndon and the propriety that grew there. In its later role as a boarding house for Maori women from the 1950s onward, it also has historical association with the urban drift that many Maori experienced in the mid-twentieth century.

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

Pendennis has archaeological value as it is a pre-1900 building.

Educational: *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

Having been the home of generations of Maori women moving to Wellington, Pendennis likely has significant social value for those who lived there while they were finding their feet.

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?

Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?

Pendennis makes a contribution to both place and a sense of continuity in Thorndon. Built in 1877, it has obvious age value, and it is a link back to Thorndon's early existence and a reminder of the suburb's prosperous beginnings.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

Pendennis is representative of the large late nineteenth century grand houses of Thorndon.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

Pendennis retains functional use values and authenticity of design, materials, and workmanship.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

Pendennis is important at a regional level.

3.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	N	
WCC Records – building file	N	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	N	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	N	
Plan change?	N	
Heritage Area Report	N	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	N	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	N	
HPT website	N	
HPT files	N	
Conservation Plan	N	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

Background research

Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*