

Three Cheers! Ōtaki

Christina Mackay, Interior Architecture, Victoria University, Wellington

ABSTRACT: The District Plan Heritage Register for Ōtaki, Kāpiti Coast includes nine buildings from 1890s; two residences, a children's home, a maternity hospital, solicitors' offices, a church and three hotels – the Jubilee (1891), Telegraph (1895) and Railway (1891) (Kapiti Coast District Council "Heritage Register" v 1, s I, pp 9-11). The Telegraph and Railway hotels continue to serve patrons today, but the Jubilee Hotel is currently a community house, the House of Hope. Two other hotels operated in Ōtaki in 1890s, the Family (1881) and the Central (1893). This paper focuses on the development and role of these hotels within Ōtaki in 1890s and then tracks the changing patterns of use against the alterations to the building fabric since that time.

Introduction

In undertaking this research, local history books (including the many publications of the Otaki Historical Society) have been reviewed, together with texts on New Zealand hotels and licensing laws. Interviews with the present occupants of the hotels and a photographic survey of the buildings were undertaken on the 22nd and 23rd November 2007. Kāpiti Coast District Council records for the four surviving hotel buildings were reviewed, although, due to a fire in the archive, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century documents were not available. A survey of citations in 1890s *Evening Post* newspapers was also undertaken.

Firstly, the hotels of 1890s Ōtaki are placed within their historical context. Secondly, changes in the building fabric are identified and discussed in relation to the pattern of use and liquor licensing legislation. Finally, the

future of these now historic buildings is considered.

The Hotels of 1890s Ōtaki

From the 1300s, the Ōtaki area was occupied by the Waitaha people. By the mid 1800s, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Toa were settled in the area. A mission station was set up by Octavius Hadfield in Ōtaki in 1839. By the 1850s, European whalers and traders had come ashore to trade with the Māori population. Access was mainly from the sea or by the coach road which ran up the beach but detoured inland to ford the river. After the Ferries Act of 1853,¹ a ferry service crossed the Ōtaki river south of the settlement. In 1858, when the mail-coach service began between Wellington and Whanganui, Ōtaki become a natural staging post.

¹ Dreaver "One More River to Cross" p.18.

The first hotels were Ben Gray's Hotel on the south bank of the Ōtaki River² and Martin's Hotel,³ on the corner of Hadfield and Te Rauparaha streets, opposite Rangiātea Church (1851). In 1859, T and W Dodds' hotel, the Royal Arch⁴ was operating, situated some distance from the north river bank on the corner of the road to Rangiuru.³ These first hoteliers would have required a licence to sell "less than two gallons of spirits, wine, ale or beer" to any person under the Licensing Ordinance 1842.⁵ The hours of sale were stipulated at 6am-10pm on working days and 1-7pm on Sunday. Māori may not have been welcome as the Sale of Spirits to Natives Ordinance of 1847 "forbade absolutely the sale of liquor to Maoris in any specially proclaimed areas – and almost immediately

² Simcox *Otaki* p 35.

³ Dempsey "The Old Beach Road" p 50.

⁴ Mountjoy "Bush Rangers of Otaki" p 57.

⁵ Bollinger *Grog's Own Country* p 15.

the whole country was proclaimed to be such an area."⁶

In 1872 the licence was transferred from Martin's Hotel to the first Telegraph Hotel, which opened on its present site, corner of Mill Road (now Main Street) and Rangiuuru Road. In 1875 Frederic Bright and his wife Mary Ann Bills took over the management.⁷ The two-storey double gabled building was clad in plain weather-boards, with nine paned double-hung windows and balcony finished in cross-braced railings. In *Old Wellington Hotels*, Pat Lawlor includes an unidentified 1890s photograph of the Telegraph with the caption "a country hotel, ostensibly near Wellington."⁸ The style of the stage coach inn is in sharp contrast with the Victorian hotels of the period in Wellington city.

Prohibition and Temperance lobbies had been present since the colony's beginnings but the movement's first big victory was the Licensing Act of 1881.⁹ New hotel licences required approval by the majority of the district's rate-payers. New licensing committees were

⁶ Bollinger *Grog's Own Country* p 17.

⁷ Harris "Memories of Main Street" p 33.

⁸ Lawlor *Old Wellington Hotels* p 82.

⁹ Bollinger *Grog's Own Country* p 22.

established to approved license renewal on the basis of the condition of the premises and could cancel licences on grounds of disorderly behaviour. Also, Sunday opening was abolished.

In 1881, Mr & Mrs Bright took over Langley's Hotel (now the Family Hotel) a block away from the Telegraph on the corner of Mill Road (now Main Street) and Matene Street.¹⁰ They renovated (or rebuilt), renamed it Brights and "conducted" it for the following six years. This timber framed building, was in "town" style. An early photograph of a Main Street¹¹ procession shows a two storey building with rooves concealed by a parapet, stepped only to take the sign. The rusticated weatherboard façade is defined by a plain molded cornice with decorative brackets positioned above upper floor arched topped windows. The entry was directly off the street unprotected with verandahs or balconies. In 1897 the building is described in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, as:

a fine hostelry ... established in 1883. ...The house contains twenty-eight rooms, all told, including nineteen bedrooms, which are completely furnished, five sitting-

¹⁰ Harris "Memories of Main Street" p 36.

¹¹ 46 HorowhenuaCo. Otaki. Processions, F110907½.

rooms, two of which are set apart for the use of ladies and families. There are two dining rooms, which together afford seating accommodation for fifty guests.¹²

In August 1886, the Wellington and Manawatu Railway Company opened the service. The chosen site of the railway bridge across the Ōtaki River was a distance upstream from the ferry crossing. The subsequent location of the station spawned a second settlement, known as "New Otaki" then later "Otaki Railway." The railway opened up the area to development and an influx of workers; bushman, sawmill and flaxmill workers and road builders. The 1890s were to be a boom time for Ōtaki. Existing hotels expanded and three new hotels were built.

The Railway Hotel was built opposite the station in 1891, under the management of publican Dennis Quill. No nineteenth century photographs of this hotel have been located.

Two new hotels were built in Ōtaki Township. The Jubilee Hotel, 17 Waerenga St, close to Ōtaki township opened in 1890, and the Central Hotel, cnr Mill Road and Aotaki

¹² "Otaki" p 1097.

Street, in 1893 by Hakaraia Te Whena, proprietor. In 1896, the Central had:

seventeen rooms in this house without the bar, five being sitting rooms, one which is specially set apart as a ladies' private sitting-room. There is a balcony, which adds greatly to the appearance of the hostelry. A large dining-room, as well as a billiard-room with a full size table, deserve special mention. Stables, which consists of six loose-boxes and eight stalls, are situated as the rear.¹³

In an early photograph of the building,¹⁴ a generous upper level balcony extends the full depth of the footpath and is finished with a fine turned wooden balustrade. The roof is hipped and the building is without a parapet.

The dramatic increase in the hotels for a relatively small population (856 people in 1896)¹⁵ is at odds with the growing prohibition movement in New Zealand. In 1894, only 11-20% of electors in the local Pākehā licensing district voted for no publicans' licences.¹⁶ The 1893 Licensing Amendment Act had introduced Licensing Districts and, on 7 June 1894, the first annual meeting of Ōtaki Licensing Committee was

¹³ "Ōtaki" p 1097.

¹⁴ 46 Horowhenua Co. Otaki. Processions, 110908½.

¹⁵ "Ōtaki 1896" p 3.

¹⁶ Eldred-Grigg *Pleasures of the Flesh* p 191.

held.¹⁷ Police inspectors reported on the state of the hotel buildings, fire escapes, furnishings and conduct of the publicans. Applications were granted to the Jubilee, Family, Central and Railway but the state of repair of the 19 year old Telegraph was debated.

During the 1890s, as today, the climate in Ōtaki was known as "particularly genial, the air most pure and salubrious."¹⁸ The tourism potential of Ōtaki was recognized by E Tudor Atkinson when, in 1892, he developed the settlement at the seaside, "Rangiuru by the Sea." He created a sub-division of 83 building sites close to where Ōtaki river meets the sea and moved a hotel building from Manakau to a neighbouring site. Rangiuru House, as it better known, was run as a private hotel or boarding house.¹⁹

In late 1897, the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* reported that the Jubilee had expanded. It described the hotel as:

the leading hostelry in the district. Erected on a freehold section of five acres, it is a two-storey wooden building having a verandah and balcony, containing fifteen

¹⁷ "Licensing Matters" p 3.

¹⁸ "Ōtaki" p 1091.

¹⁹ Swabey "Some Early Otaki Families" pp 47-51.

bedrooms, six sitting-rooms commercial-room, and a good dining-room that will seat thirty guests. The stabling accommodation comprises four stalls and eight loose-boxes, with two good paddocks adjoining. There are also two large tennis courts. ... As the conveniences were inadequate, the proprietor has recently erected a handsome two-story club-house with balcony and verandah. This fine building, which is detached, will provide a club-room nineteen feet by twenty-four, and a billiard-room twenty-four feet square. These rooms, which are situated on the ground floor, are furnished as elegantly as the best city clubrooms. The building is leased to the Otaki club. The Masonic Hall [is] upstairs.²⁰

The Otaki Maori Racing Club also held its annual meeting at the Jubilee. Although horse races were held in the district since the early 1850s the club had its first meeting in 1887. Race meetings bought crowds from Wellington and the Rangitikei.

The *Cyclopedia* also summed up the holiday mood of the town, describing Ōtaki as:

the largest township since setting out from the Capital, is well situated, and near the sea coast, and although under Maori rule, as it were, is yet destined to become an important town, for, apart from the fact that the town and district have many elements of prosperity, there is every reason for believing that Otaki will become a

²⁰ "Ōtaki" p 1097.

resort for invalids, globe-trotters, and people seeking relaxation from the cares of city life.²¹

After the turn of the century, a new era arrived. In May 1901, the premier, Mr Seddon opened the new Ōtaki bridge to road traffic and attended at a banquet in celebration of the event at the Jubilee Hotel.²²

Changing Building Fabric

In December 1906, the Central Hotel was destroyed by fire. Photographs²³ convey that the 1907 replacement building was grander in style; a twenty-roomed structure complete with parapet and pediment. The higher stud heights produced a "bulky" building with a narrow upper floor balcony, resembling later-day fire escapes. Fire destroyed this second hotel in the early hours of July 1961.²⁴

Although no record has been found that it was due to a fire, the Telegraph was also extensively re-built in 1907. The rebuilt hotel "included eight bedrooms, and a large dining room to accommodate fifty guests. It was reputed to have "every modern convenience."

²¹ "Ōtaki" p 1089.

²² "Local and General" p 4.

²³ Macpherson & Swabey "Then and Now" p 83; 46 Horowhenua Co. Ōtaki. F110915½.

²⁴ Macpherson, Carpenter & Swabey "Main Street" p 36.

It had a large stable attached to it containing ten stalls and nine loose boxes."²⁵ The stable building is presently run as a garage. A 1914 photograph²⁶ shows this building very similar in design to the Central. As the building is narrower than its predecessor and built to the footpath edge, it appears to have been completely rebuilt.

Less than ten years later, in 1916, after being severely damaged by fire, the Railway Hotel was renovated or rebuilt too. A photograph of Arthur Street from 1933²⁷ shows a two-storeyed hipped roof building (without parapets) and a wooden verandah over the Arthur Street footpath supporting a balcony over. The building has an underground cellar, reportedly flooded in the 1931 floods.²⁸ It is interesting three hotels were re-built in fire-prone timber given that in 1892 a brick kiln was established in Waitohu Valley Road on the plateau above the settlement. The 1905 Post Office was constructed in solid construction.

²⁵ "The Telegraph Hotel" cover photograph.

²⁶ Harris "Memories of Main Street" p 32.

²⁷ Kerr *Otaki Railway* p 94.

²⁸ Kerr *Otaki Railway* p 88.

The Licensing Amendment Act (1910) prohibited the supply of liquor to "intoxicated male Native or to any female Native, not being the wife of a person other than a Native."²⁹ In 1912, barmaids were made illegal.³⁰ It became illegal to employ barmaids other than members of the licensee's family or those barmaids employed before the Act was passed. Hotels were set to become a male domain. Within increased pressure from the Temperance movement, in 1918, the hours of the sale of liquor were reduced to 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. In the previous year alcohol was forbidden to be served with meals after 6pm.

In his book *Tavern in the Town*, James McNeish, proposes that from 1919 to 1967 six o'clock closing "destroyed the image of pub as a meeting ground and leveler for both sexes."³¹ In this era, Jock Phillips describes bars with "no chairs, few tables and if there was a carpet it served less as decoration than to soak up the dregs."³² Further, no other activities were permitted in bars – no food to

²⁹ Phillips *A Man's Country?* p 66; see also "Licensing Amendment Act" 1910 pt II, s44 (1)(a) and s44 (1)(b).

³⁰ Phillips *A Man's Country?* p 66.

³¹ McNeish *Tavern in the Town* p 8.

³² Phillips *A Man's Country?* p 77.

eat, no dancing girls to watch and no music to listen. The six o'clock swill required large quantities of beer to be dispensed quickly and cold. Council documents chronicle a series of additions and alterations to the Family Hotel designed to achieve this. Under private ownership of the Cooksley Brothers (early 1950s to 1970s), both bars and counters were enlarged in size. An enclosed barrel store (with pressure unit) was positioned on the main street frontage. A series of concrete block additions were added at the rear; bulk stores, cool stores and tank rooms. Following the Sale of Liquor Amendment Act 1967, which allows bars to stay open until 10pm, New Zealand Breweries bought the business in the early 1970s and continued to "develop" the site with a new tank room, more toilets, and a wholesale outlet with bottle store, cool store, and bulk stores plus alterations to provide accommodation for the management upstairs. (The Sale of Liquor Act 1962 dispensed with the privilege to distribute liquor being linked with the duty to supply accommodation). The breweries' final building consent applications, in the late 1980s, were for under-verandah signs advertising "Lion Brown on tap." Under private ownership ever since, the only building consent application was for an

accessible toilet in 2003. Today, apparent from surface finishes, the designs of the New Zealand Breweries architects are intact. The ground floor bar spaces display no hint of their nineteenth-century origins save an uneven floor, and the framed old photographs of the hotel in the bar.

As evidenced in the November 2007 survey, the interiors of the upstairs accommodation in all hotels had a 1920s to 1960s "make-over" too. Ceilings have been framed down and both ceilings and walls lined in gibraltar board, hard-board, soft-board and/or plywood paneling; solid paneled doors replaced with modern flush hollow core doors finished in rimu veneer with high gloss paint finish. Everywhere cornices are pinex, skirtings and architraves are basic profiles and half rounds as used as joint covers. The only remnants of original linings were patterned wallpaper on scrim hidden in a wardrobe (Family), match-lining in internal linen rooms in the (Railway and Family) and tongue and groove lining and moulded trim to an entry porch (Railway). Few original doors have survived; one balcony door in the Railway, one cupboard door in the Family; the only attempt at "making good" the building fabric was found in the entry hall at the Railway.

New rimu moulded skirtings are fitted, but are ill-sized and ill-fitted. The accommodation was as basic as the public bar and the absence of a "woman's touch" painfully present. It was, however, at the time, prudent to renovate the interiors. Fire destroyed the Central twice and severely damaged the Railway. It was not until 1918 that a volunteer fire brigade was formed in Ōtaki³³ and wallpaper on scrim on sarking made perfect kindling. Gib-board provided some fire-protection. Lowered ceilings provided some additional thermal insulation and formed less space to heat. The need for safe fire egress modified the interiors too. Today, the internal staircases are enclosed by partitions (sometimes with wired-safety glass glazing) and doors. The only original stair joinery visible is the newel posts at the Railway (and even they are minus their pommels).

The need to provide safe egress in the event of fire changed the exteriors of the hotels too. Around the turn of the century, the upper level balconies over street verandahs of the Central and Jubilee provided elegant egress pathways. At the verandah-less Family Hotel, each bedroom was supplied "with a strong

³³ Simcox *Otaki* p 153.

rope as a means of escape in the event of fire; and, in addition to this precaution, a wooden suitcase outside the building afforded a means of exit from the upper floor to the ground."³⁴ The changing façade of the Telegraph is dominated by the fire egress challenge. The 1875 building had an exterior balcony. Photographs confirm that the replacement building had a narrow fire escape in 1914,³⁵ a full-width balcony over a street verandah in 1922,³⁶ a timber-framed fire escape in 1948³⁷ and a mild steel framed fire escape in 1991³⁸ and today. Conversely, the Family began life with a flush façade but by 1922 had a balcony over a street verandah. Today it is still in use although the timber posts and balustrades have been replaced in mild steel. The wide balconies appear a most useful feature of these early hotels. As well as facilitating fire egress, a verandah is formed over the footpath providing protection from both rain and sun. In photographs of street processions, these balconies were vantage points used by spectators and photographers alike. The present proprietors of the Family, Carol and

³⁴ "Ōtaki" p 1097.

³⁵ Harris "Memories of Main Street" p 32.

³⁶ Olson "The Waters under the Earth" p 38.

³⁷ 46 Horowhenua Co. Ōtaki. 1948 39357½.

³⁸ Swabey & Macpherson "Then and Now" p 45.

Doug Newton, reported enjoying their only remaining such balcony for outdoor living.³⁹ The demise of these features is not surprising. Before the advent of timber preservation, it is likely that the balcony would succumb to rot and/borer infestation. At an early century auction of the Jubilee Hotel, it was reported that a timber balustrade gave way and a Chinese man fell to his death. Importantly, aesthetically, the feature "softened" the façade and made spaces for patrons to inhabit the street edge.

On all hotels, the exterior weatherboards have disappeared too. The historic hotels today are recognizable from their overall form and remaining original windows only. All the hotels have been re-clad either in stucco and/or fibrous cement tiles. Analysis of old photographs suggests that this occurred between 1922 and 1950. As fires generally start in the interior, the expense of on-going maintenance is the likely reason for over cladding. The following advertisement was posted in the *Evening Post* 7 March 1899, "Tenders will be received up to Noon of Friday, 11th March, for the painting and paper-hanging of Railway Hotel, Ōtaki.

³⁹ Newton Pers. Comm.

Labour and material and labour only. Apply Hotel. D Quill."⁴⁰ The weatherboard hotel required re-painting eight years after it was built. Today, exterior paint has a longer life. Stripped of the trimming and definition provided by verandah, balustrades and timber mouldings, some hotels are dressed up by other features; the Railway's window are hooded with canvas canopies, the windows of the House of Hope have mock timber shutters as well as a canvas portico. The "Tele" relies on a few signs, but the building looks "sad."

Along with the fabric, the planning has altered also. The public bars are "removed" from the street by solid doors, screened windows and passages. Generally the bars have gravitated towards the north and west, towards the sun in the outdoor courtyard spaces created as beer gardens. Covered outdoor spaces, built with 100 x 50's and transparent roofing, have been created following the banning of smoking indoors by the Smoke-free Environments Amendment Act 2003. Floor space has been purloined for gambling machine dens, devoid of natural and connection with the outside world. The Telegraph and the Railway have positioned

⁴⁰ "To Painters" p 8, column 7.

the "dens" on the street corner, sealing any windows and doors. The Family has used the old concrete block bulk liquor store. The planning of upstairs rooms has largely remained unchanged. Upstairs, the Railway had exactly the required twelve bed rooms for their original liquor licence, but the rooms are so small that today two single beds must fit end on end.

The Jubilee was the only hotel designed in a grander scale with wide hallways, spacious public and generous bedrooms. Today, it is the only one that is no longer a hotel. On 17 March 1994, outside the Jubilee Hotel, a local young man Wade Harrison (30) was stabbed in a gang related incident. The verdict was manslaughter, but the town rallied against the social plaque of alcohol abuse and a group of Christian Ōtaki business people, purchased the Jubilee Hotel and converted the building into Te Whare o Awhero (or the House of Hope), a community house for those in need and at risk. Te Whare o Awhero provides accommodation, counseling and support services, a hall for youth groups and church services and an adjacent gym facility.

Conclusion

Early this year, across the road from the Railway Hotel, the Traffic, a new bar/restaurant opened in a brand new building. It is wide open to the street with shop-front windows and tables and chairs spilling out onto the pavement. The décor, cuisine (and prices) are designer Wellington style. In contrast, the Telegraph, Family and Railway have weathered over 100 years, their fabric altered to suit the demands of ever-changing licensing laws and profit driven breweries. The timber shells have been covered on both the interior and exterior to prevent the structures from ravages caused by water and fire.

As New Zealand society is still recovering from a century of socially-destructive licensing laws, this research confirms that Ōtaki's nineteenth-century hotel buildings have some recovering to do as well. As local pubs, they are firmly positioned in hearts of the town and its people as centres of community life and entertainment. Ōtaki's "slow" development over twentieth century has ensured that they are still erect, but their fabric (both exterior and interior) require attention. Strategies for preserving, perhaps restoring, and maintaining the 110-old-year

structures are not common knowledge, and the design work and construction work expensive. These historic pubs could continue and develop as places to remember and celebrate town's heritage, but the task is probably to onerous for the proprietors alone; it will require a community, or even a society, effort.

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