

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION NON-LISTED HERITAGE PLACE 266 PRESTONS RD**

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### **HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The Prestons Road residence was most likely constructed between the years 1895-1905 and probably while under the ownership of Herbert Free, a farmer in the Marshland area. Land records reveal that a number of mortgages were taken out by Free within the first several years of buying the property, however, this is only indicative and not conclusive evidence that he built the existing house.

Free purchased part of Lot 46 in 1901 from Friedrich Kars as part of Rural Section 3686. Kars himself acquired this land parcel during a major subdivision of land that Christchurch solicitor Leonard Harper, gentleman Edward Circuit Latter, and the merchant Frederick Banks had secured in 1886.

The Prestons Road property remained directly in the family of Herbert Free from 1901 until the death of his daughter Ruby Augusta Sophia Clack in 1976 (Probate No. CH882, CH837/1983).

Freidrich Kars and his family were from Germany, and were passengers aboard the *Friedeburg* – the ship that arrived from Hamburg on 30 August 1872 (Shipping Lists, Friedelburg, 1872). A large Polish and German contingent were passengers on the *Friedeburg* and many of them came to settle in Marshland. Augusta Sophia Kars was daughter to Freidrich Kars and married Herbert Free. This union seals a connection to the land between the German Kars family and the New Zealand born Herbert Free – son of Irishman Thomas Free Jnr and Sarah Ann Turner who came out from Strafford, England at 12 years of age.

It is important to note that at the time the land was transferred from Kars to Free, there was a lease of 2 acres of land at the very southern end of the property to Friedrich and his wife Sophia Kars for the remainder of their lives.

It is highly significant that one of the first owners of this land was a member of the large Polish and German community of Marshland, and that they retained part of this Prestons Road property as tenants in perpetuity after the marriage of their daughter, who lived on the main portion of the section.

The development of Marshland really began with the sub-division of the two major runs covering the area – the Sand Hill’s Run taken over by Dr Moore (one of the primary practicing doctors in Christchurch) which included the first three sections east of the Canal Reserve Road, now called Marshland Road, and the Fooks’ Run which extended west of the Canal Reserve Road. Charles Fooks was one of the earliest architects to arrive in Canterbury in 1851. After initially purchasing land in North Canterbury, he experienced financial difficulties in 1861 and consequently returned to work full-time as an architect and surveyor (GR McDonald). It is highly likely that these two men were both speculators of the land rather than having an interest in the runs themselves.

It was between the years 1869 and 1879 that the two runs began to be sub-divided, and again two men bought up a large portion of each run. R.H Rhodes (the father of Sir Heaton Rhodes) acquired much of Fook’s run, and a man named Reece acquired a considerable block of the Sand Hill’s Run. Until 1887 most of the Marshland land was leased from these two large land-holders, and the two respective areas were often called ‘Rhodes’ Swamp’ to the west of the Canal Reserve Road, and ‘Reece’s Swamp’ to the east (Hughes & Walter, Arch 196).

The Preston’s Road property is situated on part of Rural Section 6386 which the Crown Grant shows as belonging to Robert Heaton Rhodes and his brother George Rhodes – sheep farmers of Purau (Crown Grant, Acc. 290, 42/24, Folio p.31). Therefore, it can be duly identified as having been part of the original Fook’s run.

## Development of Marshland

Drainage of the swamp really began after subdivision of the runs into small holdings was near complete – from the late 1870's onwards. Drainage created land of agricultural value by turning a low-lying swamp area into land fit for cultivating produce which met local demands. Therefore, although Marshland struggled in its early days of settlement, its proximity to Christchurch and the demands of the city ensured more rapid development.

Settlement of Marshland is most interesting in terms of the immigrant population and how they worked the land. In the early 1870's Reece is said to have introduced several large families of Poles and a couple of German families to Marshland, namely the 'Rhodes' Swamp' area. The Polish and German cluster had been based previously at Holmes Bay on Banks Peninsula having arrived in New Zealand as Government immigrants on the ship *Friedeburg* and upon arriving at Marshland established a peasant community who flourished in vegetable-growing and dairying (Norman, 1951).

By 1903 Marshland was well under way as a strong and productive suburb, which due to its relative isolation from other areas remained distinct for quite some time. From the 1870's settlers started to grow carrots, potatoes and cabbage, and soon discovered that the soil condition was well suited to onion-growing. While there was a strong European contingent in the area, the majority were mainly Polish. It is said that the settlers energies were "directed to the soil", and that Marshland owed its reputation as a prosperous and thriving community to "the nature of its Polish settlers, their triumph in the face of adversity, and their victory over natural odds.." (Hughes and Walter).

The 1903 Cyclopaedia of New Zealand also reinforces this point by not only describing the area as a rich and closely settled district, but one which requires a great deal of hard work to get results. "In some places it costs as much as £20 an acre for grubbing out the buried timber, and clearing and draining the land. So soft and spongy is the soil that the feet of horses have to be padded to prevent them from sinking" (Cyclopaedia of New Zealand Vol.3, 1903, p.412). The Polish and German arrivals to Marshland eventually created a prime market garden area in Christchurch. Therefore, the Marshland settlement is unique in terms of land development as well as the cultural make-up of its community.

The Marshland community welcomed the opening of the school – originally named New Brighton Side-School but known as the Rhodes Swamp School – in 1888 (Morrison, 1948). The school was the first public building in Marshland and doubled as a meeting hall and church. Growth of the area then naturally continued around this social hub and the hall, three churches, store, blacksmith's shop and garage were all built within 100 meters of the school (Walters and Hughes, Arch 196). Therefore this intersection of Marshland and Preston's Roads was seen to be the heart of the Marshland settlement.

The history of housing in the area has been documented in the 1939 manuscript of H.W Hughes' *Marshland: a social survey of a New Zealand rural community*. During the 1930's the Marshland district was little more than fifty years in age, and at this time only two houses from the 1870's survived. Housing development in Marshland could be differentiated by a marked stylistic change from the earlier utilitarian homes of the labourer and swamp drainer of the late nineteenth century, to the more prosperous farmer of the first few decades of the twentieth century (Hughes, 1939).

The first houses in Marshland were established along Brigg's and Reeve's Roads and were made of either sod, or cob and wood. As settlement progressed houses took on two forms. The first was a small wooden structure built on piles with a corrugated iron roof, and approximately three rooms. A small verandah extended from the front of these houses which usually minimised the light, while shelter was sought from strategically planted trees and hedges (Hughes, 1939). This type of structure describes the Prestons Road cottage which has all the features mentioned above, although, as it was built in the late 1890's to early 1900's there is a slight move towards the early colonial villa style .

The second house described by Hughes is one that shares similarities to the first in terms of structure (wooden, built on piles and with a corrugated roof and verandah), yet was slightly larger with four to five bedrooms and stylistically differed in shape, "they appear as tall as they are long" (Hughes and Walter, Arch 196, p.32). However, during the 1930's it was noted that there were only two two-storeyed houses in the district and these were relatively recent in construction (Hughes and Walter, p.33).

It can therefore be concluded that single storey housing like the Prestons Road cottage was predominant in Marshlands from the beginning of development until at least the first half of the twentieth century. The two main housing styles outlined by Hughes and Walter share some key features, however, the more modest, earlier cottage accurately reflects the Prestons Road dwelling.

## **CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

This cottage exists as an example of an early Marshland dwelling that was representative of the utilitarian residences of the settler community. Comparative examples were the 303 Radcliffe Road cottage (destroyed by fire) and the house at 261 Prestons Road (now demolished).

Its proximity to the Marshland Road and Prestons Road intersection is important to the cultural significance of the district, as close settlement occurred around the first school building located one street away.

Polish and German immigrants who migrated to Marshland to create a thriving market garden community, directly relates to the cultural significance of the Prestons Road cottage. As with most of the properties in this area, the house always sat at the front of the section, and the market garden would be located at the rear. This property is reflective of the fact that it was owned and worked by members of this unique settler population, and was typical both in architecture and land use.

### **ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE**

266 Prestons Road is a stylistically common example of colonial architecture. Dating from the turn of the century it is a double box cottage with a hipped roof and bull nose verandah. As with many colonial cottages, the architect and builder is not documented so it cannot be ascertained who constructed the Prestons Road residence.

The simple square-plan cottage is a weatherboard structure with a later lean-to addition. The front of the house remains largely untouched with an iron fret-worked bracket between the posts and the beam, and sash windows. Fenestration around the east side of the building however is dated from around the 1920's, while the kitchen lean-to has windows that date between the 1940's-1950's.

The timber skeleton is currently propped up on concrete piles, yet, the current owner mentioned that old stone blocks have been sighted around the foundation. There was visible evidence of part of a stone block at the north-east corner, although it cannot be confirmed that this was part of the original foundation. Brick piers and earthenware blocks were more commonly used after 1900, and were reasonably prevalent in Christchurch. Stone blocks were more stable than earlier wooden piles, though the Prestons Road house interior has an uneven flooring surface due to the state of the foundation.

Decorative brackets under the eave of the roof run around the entire house bar the later lean-to addition. The original house would have had four rooms until this 1940's – 1950's kitchen and dining lean-to was added.

The fireplace in the living room is a much later addition, and the chimney also looks to have been altered as it is comparatively smaller and less detailed than what is expected in a colonial cottage.

The north facing cottage is situated close to the roadside and the large solid panelled door is centrally positioned with sash windows on either side. The architraves around the door and windows are all similar – being plain panels – and there is no additional decoration. The lack of ornamentation reflects the more utilitarian nature of a worker's cottage, and is reminiscent of the early dwellings in Marshland described by Hughes in the 1930's.

### **TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE**

The 266 Preston Road house is a typical domestic cottage of the time that reveals more of a shift towards a villa style dwelling with its square plan, hipped roof, and bull-nose verandah. Use of weatherboards and corrugated iron for the roof are common colonial materials that were readily available.

### **CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Located on the corner of Prestons Road and Walters Road, the Prestons Road property in question is close to the central Marshland and Prestons Road intersection – deemed to be the historic heart of the district. Settlement was close in Marshland, and early reports indicate this style of house was typical for the district. From extant photographs of other earlier houses along Prestons and Marshland Road it would have once formed part of a group of housing in a similar style. These residential dwellings were part of an important market gardening community for which the area is still known. Therefore, the contextual significance is relevant to the specific location of the dwelling, as well as the nature of the agricultural community that settled in Marshland.

The Prestons Road cottage is located well to the front of the section facing the street, and was marked off by hedges – as was common for private property in suburbs. A survey of the property in the mid-1970's reveals that a very old evergreen and gorse hedge is established along the Prestons Road corner which then becomes an evergreen hedge along Walters Road interspersed with poplar trees. As a prominent corner site the hedges would have been significant to the setting as a place of residence.

Marshland in the present day still remains an area of open spaces and small farm/market garden sections. There has not been a large build up of residential development in comparison to other areas within Christchurch. The character of the district then continues to function for much the same purposes as it did in the early days of settlement.

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Given that evidence suggests the 266 Prestons Road cottage was the first dwelling on the site and dates from between 1895 and 1905, consideration must be given to the fact that pre-1900 activity occurred. For example, drainage of land on this property pre-dates 1900 and this is clearly shown on the 1898 Certificate of Title under the name Friedreich Kars.

Consideration must also be given to any wahi tapu significance. While no evidence to date suggests Maori settled on this land – as it was uninhabitable as a swamp – it provided an important place for food and clothing. The Maori named this area 'Whenua Roto' – "The place where flax grows profusely" (Walters and Hughes, Arch 196, p.15), and therefore this should be taken into account in terms of archaeological significance.

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