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The Archaeology of a Kitchen and Servants' Quarters in Maori Hill, Dunedin.

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Rooms

*In the morning the maid of all work
throws open the heavy curtains
and unlatches the windows
picks up the cigar bands
and clears the brandy balloons
from the occasional table.*

*But this is supposition: there are no accounts
of the woman on her knees at the grate
just the presence of an unheated room
under the attic roof reached by a narrow stair
shown on the architectural drawings
and labelled 'maid's room'.*

(Heather Bauchop 2018)

Introduction

In 2013 the house at 26 Drivers Road, Maori Hill (I44/559; Figure 1 and 2) was demolished to make way for new construction. Though heavily renovated in the twentieth century, this historic structure dated from 1889 and originally served as a kitchen and servants' quarters attached to the Driver estate, the former home of a wealthy Dunedin family. This paper discusses the archaeological investigation of the kitchen and servants' quarters carried out in April 2013 by New Zealand Heritage Properties under Authority 2013/530. On-site work also included the monitoring and recording of earthworks, though these are not covered here (for a full report on the site see Moyle (2014)).

The aims of this report are twofold. Firstly, to document essential aspects of the building's history and architectural fabric. Secondly, to provide some insight into the relationships between servants, their work and living space, and their employers. Several research questions informed this second element. How do the kitchen and servants' quarters contrast with the other buildings formerly present on the Driver estate? What material contrasts exist within the kitchen and servants' quarters itself? What is the significance of these

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relationships? How did they affect and shape the lives of servants working and living at the site? Though these latter questions are only addressed briefly, the site at 26 Drivers Road serves as a case study to demonstrate how buildings – as a type of material culture – can be situated within and help understand wider patterns in New Zealand's Victorian and Edwardian culture and social history.

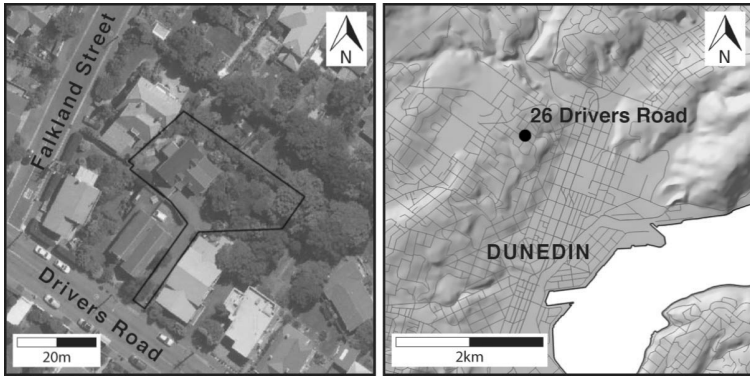


Figure 1. The location of 26 Drivers Road in Dunedin (right) and the extent of the property investigated (left).



Figure 2. The house at 26 Drivers Road, looking north (J. Moyle).

Historical Background

The property 26 Drivers Road was historically part of a substantial suburban estate purchased by Henry Driver in 1862. Driver was an American who followed the Australasian gold rushes, moving first to Melbourne in the 1850s, and on to Dunedin in 1861. Shortly after his arrival in New Zealand he married Mary Francis Morton and established himself as a merchant and businessman. Though regarded by some as an unscrupulous character – a contemporary described him as “a swaggering unprincipled Yankee” (Tyrell 1998: 138) – Driver had several successful business ventures and appears to have become one of Dunedin’s wealthiest early residents. Throughout his life he also pursued public office, serving as a Dunedin City Councillor, a Member of the Otago Provincial Council, and a Member of Parliament. Driver would continue to live in Dunedin until his death in 1893. There is little historical information relating to the life of Mary Driver, but it appears that in the early twentieth century – before her death in 1926 – she was very active in the New Zealand Baptist community and ran a missionary training home in Dunedin. Henry and Mary Driver had eight children together over the course of their marriage: five sons and three daughters.

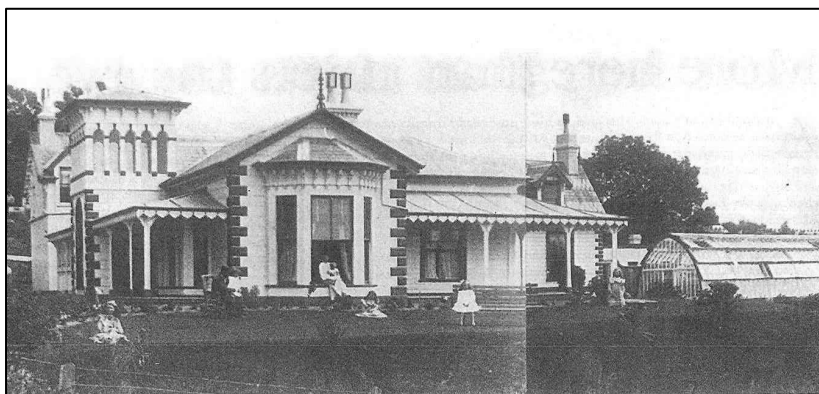


Figure 3. The Driver homestead circa 1900, looking north (Galer 1981).

By 1865 the Drivers had built a home on their Maori Hill estate. Designed by the architect William Mason, this large single-storey timber villa looked out over North Dunedin and the Otago Harbour from its hilltop site (Figure 3). A two-storey brick addition was made to this building at some point prior to 1904. The Drivers’ kitchen and servants’ quarters – the main subject of this study – was constructed circa 1889 as an annex connected by passageway to

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the main body of the house. Historic survey plans show that a stable, several garden sheds, two domestic outbuildings, and a greenhouse made up the balance of structures on the driver estate before 1904 (Figure 4).

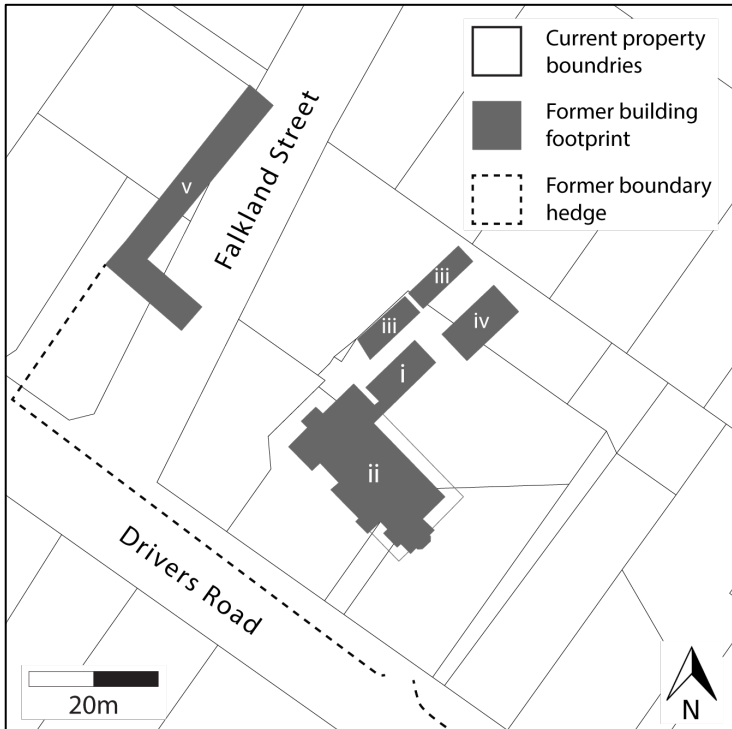


Figure 4. The approximate locations of buildings on the former Driver estate: i) kitchen and servants' quarters, ii) house, iii) outbuildings, iv) greenhouse, v) stables and garden sheds (based on DP 1703 and DP 3537).

After Henry Driver's death Mary continued to live at Drivers Road until 1899 when the estate was put up for sale. It failed to sell for several years before the land was eventually subdivided in 1904, and a one-acre section containing the house and outbuildings was purchased in the same year by Oscar Balk, another Dunedin merchant. Over the twentieth century the property saw many further subdivisions and building modifications, with the Driver's home remodelled into several separate flats. As part of this conversion, major additions and alterations were made to the kitchen and servants' quarters to create a stand-alone dwelling circa 1927. A further small

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addition to this structure was made in 1971 (Figure 5). Around the same time, the original house and its two-storey brick addition were demolished. By 1955 all but one of the outbuildings had also been demolished or had collapsed. At the outset of site inspections in 2013 this remaining building had also been demolished, apparently around the time of the 1971 addition and demolitions.

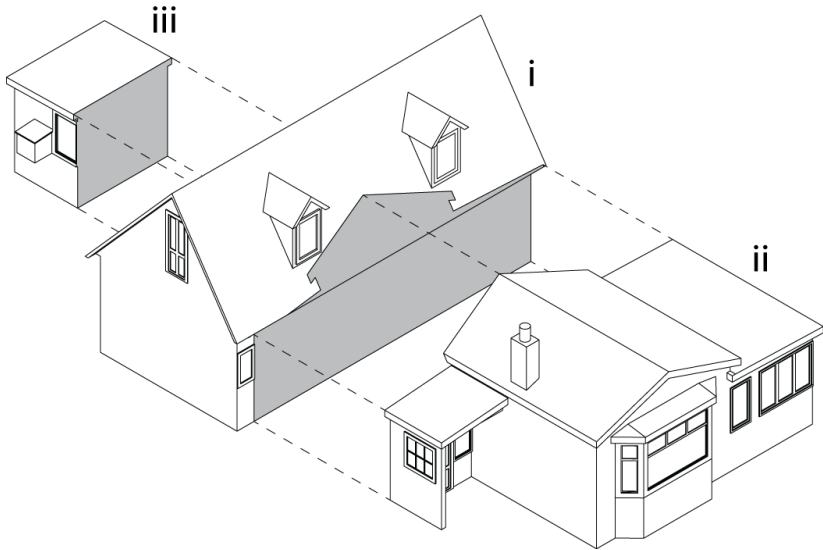


Figure 5. Isometric sketch showing: i) original kitchen and servants' quarters, ii) 1927 additions, iii) 1971 addition.

Building Investigations

The physical investigation of the servants' quarters sought to confirm the extent of the building as suggested by the historic record, determine the original layout of the structure, record significant construction details, and try and understand the historic use of space in and around the building. The building's modern layout is shown in Figure 6.

The original layout, as determined by the investigation, is shown in Figure 7. This included a large kitchen (Ea), a scullery (C), a hallway from the kitchen to the main homestead (A), servants' bedroom (H, Figure 8), a possible servant's sitting room (I), and an unidentified room (B) that may have been intended as a nursery, a further servants' bedroom, or even a bathroom (its

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use at the time of investigation). It’s unclear if the door in the first-floor gable was original or a later feature.

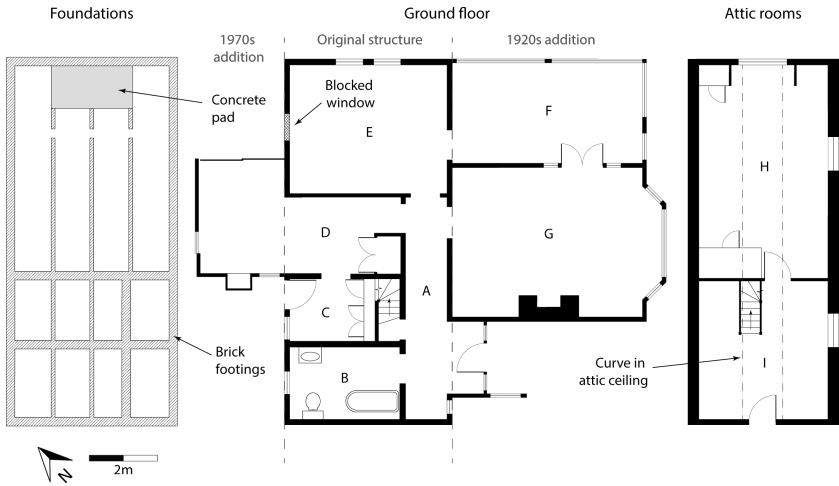


Figure 6 (above). Plan of the structure as recorded.

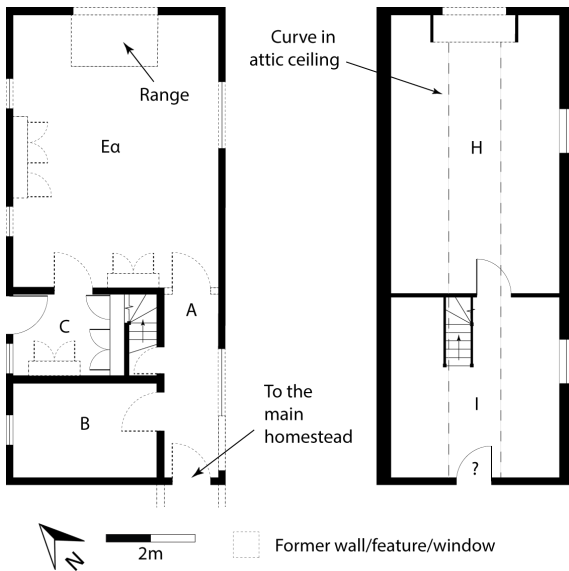


Figure 7 (left) Interpretation of original plan. Room functions include: Ea) kitchen, C) scullery, A) hallway, H) servants’ bedroom, I) possible servant’s sitting room, B) unidentified room, possibly nursery/bedroom/bathroom.



Figure 8 (left). Servants' bedroom, looking north-east. The window at the end is a 20th century addition; the gable space formally held the chimney for the kitchen range below.

Figure 9 (below). Varnished match lining in what was originally the kitchen. The outline of a former south-east window removed in the 1927 alterations is also visible.



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Match lining was used for the interior walls and ceilings throughout the entire original structure (Figure 9). The original treatment of this lining varied between rooms. 'Work' areas like the hallway and the kitchen had varnished timber. In other rooms it was painted: yellow-cream in the scullery, green in Room B, dark green in the staircase and Room I, and grey in the upstairs servants' bedroom. Marks on the walls of the scullery and kitchen indicated former shelving.

As can be seen from a comparison of Figure 6 and 7, many of the building's original walls remained in situ. The visible remains of a top plate and coving revealed beneath later ceiling lining showed the site of a former wall between the hallway and kitchen. The doorframe leading to the passage that previously provided access to the main house was also discovered behind the later wall in the hallway.



Figure 10. Original kitchen range foundation visible after the building demolition.

A particularly notable feature encountered during investigations was the kitchen range foundation discovered beneath later flooring at the north-east end of the building. This was a substantial $7\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ ft (2286 x 1295 mm) concrete pad (Figure 10). This size suggests that the range was itself a massive item like the Shacklock No. 5, a 6 ft (1829 mm) wide, twin-oven, 760kg cast-iron behemoth (Angus 1973). A range like this would have

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dominated the kitchen space. Filled cuttings and remanent walls were evident in the attic room and roof-space above to accommodate the former chimney.

The building's small staircase stood in contrast to the large range. Measuring just 2 ft (610 mm) in width, this staircase provided a narrow passage up from the hallway to the attic rooms (Figure 11). Cuts for hinges in the frame at the base of the stairs showed that it was originally closed off by a door.



Figure 11. The top of the narrow Staircase in Room I relative to the door to Room H. The age of the linoleum floor remnants is unclear.

Light was provided around the building by a variety of different window types. Two very large 5 x 8 ft (1524 x 2438mm) sash windows were originally present on the south-east elevation. The remnant marks of which were most visible in the former kitchen space (Figure 9). On the north-west elevation there were smaller 6½ x 3¼ ft (198 x 991 mm) windows. While only three windows were evident on this side, it is possible there was a fourth that was destroyed by the 1970s addition. Above, the two attic rooms were each lit by single small sash windows set in south-east facing dormers (Figure 2).

Several interesting original fittings were observed around the structure. In the scullery there were brass gas fittings: a lamp fixture and a utility nozzle. Elements of a bell-pull system connecting the kitchen and servants' quarters

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to the main house were discovered in the floor space of Room I, while plain ventilators were present in the ceilings of both attic rooms (Figure 12). A brass twist doorbell was located in the exterior door adjoining the scullery.



Figure 12. Plain ceiling ventilators in the attic Rooms I and H.

On its exterior, the kitchen and servants’ quarters had decorative features that harmonised with the main house it was attached to (Figure 2). Dormer windows were fitted with finials and small fretwork bargeboards, and the corners of the building were trimmed with timber quoins. On the roof, polychrome slates provided further decoration.

Finally, it was also possible to situate the kitchen and servants’ quarters within the wider context of the Driver estate (Figure 13). It appears that the south-east elevation was the ‘front’ of the building. This looked out onto a terraced lawn area and the Drivers’ formal gardens. There was no evidence for access to the kitchen and servants’ quarters from this area. Opposite to this was the ‘back’ area to the north west of the building. This was separated from the front area by the passage leading to the main house and a gate and garden wall running from the adjacent greenhouse. Walking out the door from the scullery you would be standing in a narrow alleyway between the kitchen and servants’ quarters and the outbuildings housing the washhouse, coal storage, and other shed space. From here there was a stone stairway leading towards the rear of the estate, providing route from the stables and a tradesmens’ access (Figure 14).

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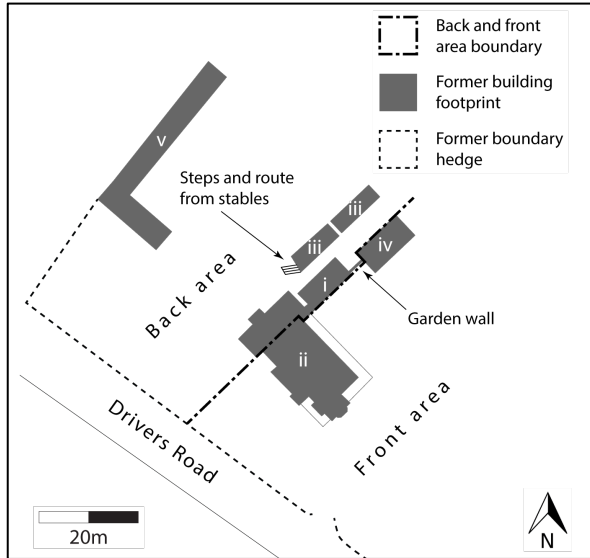


Figure 13. Site plan showing the division of back and front areas at the Driver estate. Buildings include: i) kitchen and servants' quarters, ii) house, iii) outbuildings, iv) greenhouse, v) stables and garden sheds.



Figure 14. The stone stairway to the rear of the estate, looking north. The west corner of the original kitchen and servants' quarters structure is visible in the foreground at the right of the image.

Discussion and Conclusion

The spatial division of dwellings into high-status 'front' and low-status 'back' areas is a well-established architectural pattern of Victorian and Edwardian New Zealand. In house designs from this period there is a distinction between rooms of varying social importance, ranging from a 'principle bedroom' or formal parlour, to more utilitarian areas like the kitchen or washhouse. This division is usually expressed in terms of size and position, with the more significant rooms being larger and closer to the house's entrance and/or street façade and vice versa (Leach 2000). A 'hierarchy of finish' can also exist, where finer materials and more ornate decorations are positioned towards the front of a house while back areas are be plainly finished (Chappell 1984). From the inside, divisions spill over to the house exterior: elaborate decoration on a façade, with plain weatherboards along the side and back; ornamental gardens by the roadside, with practical but arguably unsightly vegetable gardens at the rear. Though widespread, this sort of design was still the prerogative of the middle and upper classes. These were the individuals and families with enough wealth to create a home and garden that was actually large and detailed enough to articulate the sort of divisions which seem to have been expected in the local architectural tradition.

Henry and Mary Driver were certainly rich enough, and their kitchen and servants' quarters is a particularly overt expression of the period's architectural status divisions. It is the epitome of 'back space': a utilitarian work area, physically separated from the main homestead, finished with cheap match lining, and housing servants of explicitly low social status small rooms. Some of these qualitative characteristics are dramatically thrown into relief by the Drivers' own living spaces. The homestead building was both comparatively immense – historic plans suggest that it covered at least 440m² – and sumptuously furnished. An 1899 sale notice for the Drivers' surplus furniture reveals the Victorian opulence present in the house:

Walnut suite in rep, red-and-gold settee, couches in leather, easy chairs in leather, chandelier, office table, walnut revolving card table...carpets, walnut marble-top sideboard, horsehair sofa, marble clock, leather office chair, case stuffed birds, pictures, marble ornaments, Parian ornaments, folding screen, crystal crockery...double mahogany half-tester bedstead and hangings... (Otago Daily Times, 26/05/1899: 8).

This excerpt is only a fraction of the full range of goods advertised. Similar divisions and contrasts continued outdoors, as already implied above, with the servants' space confined to the narrow rear alleyway while the Drivers

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were free to relax in their manicured gardens and enjoy a magnificent view over Dunedin and the Otago Harbour.

It is also interesting to consider the way space appears to have been subdivided within the ‘back area’ of the kitchen and servants’ quarters. Most notable is the abundance of space given over to the kitchen and scullery work areas versus the servants’ personal spaces. The kitchen is a reasonably substantial 20ft. x 21ft. 8in. room with a 10ft. high ceiling. Its size is mirrored in the large coal range that would have dominated the north-east end of the room. A further 6ft. x 7ft. 2in. supplementary work space was provided by the adjacent scullery. Compared to this relative grandeur the servant’s own rooms upstairs are noticeably small, with most space being truncated by the pitch of the attic ceiling. Even at its highest point the ceiling was only 6ft above the floor. The tiny 2ft wide staircase that provided access to these rooms further emphasises the small scale of the servants’ personal space. Though these spatial differences are the most obvious, some distinction between the work and personal areas was also provided by the use of different finishes – varnished lining for work areas and painted lining for personal areas – and the inclusion of a door at the base of the stairs to the attic rooms.

Material contrasts like those present in the Driver Estate were not simply a reflection of differences in the status or function of a space, they also imposed and reinforced a social order which saw domestic servants living a largely marginalised existence. The inequality evident in the Driver Estate and its servants’ quarters served to ‘naturalise’ the servant-master relationship, transforming it from a purely social construct into a concrete reality. The way that these differences in status and power were designed to seem self-evident made it difficult to challenge the prevailing social order (Miller 2010). An important dimension of this situation was the fact that the servants’ not only worked but also lived in these spaces. It would appear that there was little opportunity for servants’ to dissociate themselves from the inferior status conveyed by their job and surroundings considering both were so fundamentally entangled with their daily lives. The limited distinction that did exist between personal and work space within the kitchen and servants’ quarters largely served to emphasise the primacy of service work over their personal lives. Obviously, these circumstances were created by the Drivers and for the Drivers. The servants had little to no agency and presumably no interest in the construction of a building that forced them into to such a marginalised role.

The presence of this sort of marginalisation at the Driver estate has a wider significance as it can also help us begin to understand the general pattern of domestic service in Victorian and Edwardian New Zealand. By the late 19th century and early 20th century the ‘servant problem’ was a well discussed topic of public debate. The servants – mostly young women – deemed necessary to maintain an appropriate standard of middle- and upper-class life were proving hard to find, hard to keep, and often inadequately servile. At the Driver Estate, the potential existence of this situation is hinted at by the at least 65 newspaper advertisements posted by Mrs Driver, who appears to have been constantly on the lookout for ‘good,’ ‘strong,’ ‘respectable,’ and ‘willing’ girls to work as cooks, housemaids, laundresses, and general servants at the Driver Estate (e.g. *Evening Star*, 02/12/1891: 2 and 19/03/1897: 2). Anecdotal accounts are also borne out by official statistics that see servants as a proportion of the population declining from the early 1880s through to the 1911 census (Macdonald 2000). Considering the situation at the Driver estate, it is small wonder there was little enthusiasm to be a servant. Not only would it have simply been unpleasant to live such a marginalised existence, but their situation – subject to their social ‘betters’ and the architectural contrasts that expressed this difference – ran directly against the popular ideology of the time that cast New Zealand as a ‘workers’ paradise’: a place to find freedom and escape the social injustice of the old-world (Fairburn 1989).

At the time of its recording the former kitchen and servants’ quarters at Drivers Road was the sole remaining portion of a far larger homestead at the centre of the Driver estate, the 19th century suburban home of the wealthy Driver Family. The remaining structure was modified several times in the 20th century but investigation was able to reveal much of its original layout, fabric, and room functions. In its original context, the kitchen and servants’ quarters was part of a larger architectural division between ‘front’ and ‘back’ areas at the Driver estate. A distinction between ‘work’ and ‘personal’ areas also existed within the kitchen and servants’ quarters itself. This material contrast reinforced status divisions, condemned servants to a marginalised existence, and gives some insight into the sort of less-than-ideal conditions that helped create the ‘servant problem’ of Victorian and Edwardian New Zealand. As well as documenting some of the history and architectural fabric of the kitchen and servants’ quarters at 26 Drivers Road, this paper has briefly touched upon some of the building’s wider cultural and historical significance as a type of material culture. Hopefully this demonstrates some of the potential for further interpretive archaeological studies into the New Zealand’s historic buildings.

Acknowledgements

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