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PRELIMINARY REPORT ON EXCAVATION IN BACKYARDOF 68 NAIRN STREET (R27/176), WELLINGTON

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This is a brief account of the conduct of the excavation carried out in the backyard of the colonial cottage at 68 Nairn Street (R27/176) in Wellington, December 1989 to February 1990, and provides some initial results, based on observations during excavation.

The Colonial Cottage Museum is owned by the Wellington City Council. It is run by the Colonial Cottage Museum Society Inc., a group of volunteers keen to preserve some of Wellington's history. The Society was formed in the early 1970s when a group of enthusiasts decided to find an early European cottage and restore it for public display. This cottage at 68 Nairn Street was the cottage they decided to restore. It was built in 1858 by William Wallis, a carpenter (Plate 1).

Today the Colonial Cottage is open for public viewing. It has a part-time manager who takes care of the cottage during the week while volunteers caretake on weekends. School groups are specially catered for; volunteers assist with the making of butter in a butter churn, and baking pikelets on a wood stove in the outdoor wash house.

The Society has not only restored the cottage to its former condition but they have also tried to reconstruct the garden, planting the types of plants that would have been grown in it at the time it was first occupied.

As a special project to celebrate 150 years since Wellington was settled by Europeans, the Society decided to build a replica of a privy seen in photographs of the backyard.

Two areas were excavated in the backyard (Fig. 1). Area 1 was excavated to locate the site of the "original" privy belonging to the cottage. The probable location was based on photographs taken about the turn of the century, one from the back of the cottage, and one taken from a greater distance showing the side of a privy (Fig. 2). After excavation of Area 1 was completed nothing could be interpreted as foundations of an outhouse, except a wooden post near the northeast corner of this area. This approximately coincided with the south east corner of a rectangular symbol drawn on a map in 1891 by Thomas Ward and thought to indicate the site of a privy, so Area 1 was extended another 2 m northwards.



Plate 1. Nairn Street Cottage - built 1858 by William Wallis



Plate 2. Artefacts exposed in the household rubbish dump along the northern edge of Area 2.

Area 2 was excavated in a corner of the backyard where it was thought household rubbish may have been thrown, the corner furthest from the cottage on the down hill side.

Hand tools only (trowels and spades) were used during excavation and all cultural deposits were put through a 3 mm sieve.

Results

Area 1 and Area 1 extension

1) Outhouse: Decayed remnants of four wooden piles were found. These correspond to the position of the outhouse seen in the two photographs taken at about the turn of the century and indicated on Thomas Ward's 1891 map (Fig. 1). Several large pieces of pottery and a glass Codd ("marble") aerated water bottle were found along the southern wall of the outhouse, possibly on the edge of a footpath leading to the gate in the rear fence shown in Fig. 2.

The Codd bottle has "George Dixon" embossed on it: George Dixon acquired his father's cordial manufacturing business on Cuba Street in 1876 and opened a branch office in Bridge Street, Nelson in 1879. He was lost overboard from the S.S. Tairoa on 26 June 1883 (Pratt n.d.:13).

Along the western (rear) wall of the outhouse area were several large stones, perhaps to block up draughty holes. Part of a cinder covered path leading to the outhouse was found. This had been cut into at a more recent time when postholes were dug for a trellis fence, part of which is still standing.

2) "Old" household rubbish dump: A very small portion (c. 20 sq. cm) of a household rubbish dump was found in the northeast corner of the extension to Area 1. It is not clear if this dump was on the edge of a bank (cut to form a terrace) or if it is in a pit. Further excavation would clarify this but the former seems most likely. This dump contains a very dense concentration of artefacts dating to the period of first occupation of the cottage. Artefacts recovered so far include many sherds of black glass beer and stout bottles, part of a glass cordial bottle, an almost intact Hamilton ("torpedo") aerated water bottle, a stoneware stout bottle, several sherds of a 6 quart stoneware food storage bottle, a sherd of a stoneware water filter, part of a possible earthenware cup with a transfer pattern decoration, a small sherd of an earthenware chamber pot, window glass, a metal lamp attachment and wood shavings.

3) Modern rubbish dumps: Most of the western side of Area 1 was a rubbish dump, containing artefacts dating to this century

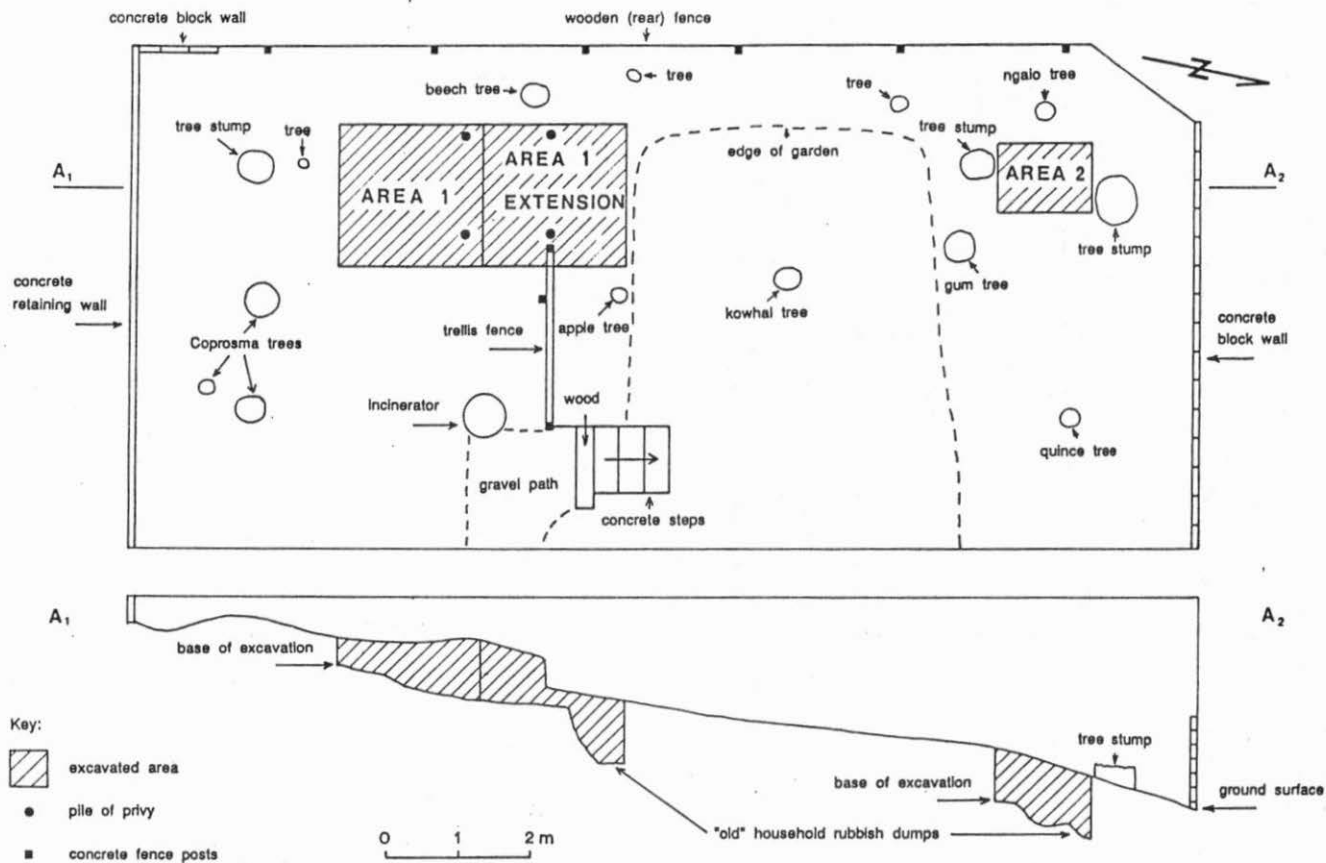


Figure 1. Plan and cross section of backyard of Colonial Cottage Museum at 68 Nairn Street, Wellington showing the two areas excavated.

and evidence of burning, at least one fire occurring on the ground in this area. More interesting was a modern dump on the eastern side of Area 1 which contained debris from the rebuilding of the chimney in the currently standing outdoor wash house. Pieces of lime mortar of a shape which matched the frog of the bricks originally used in the chimney were recovered from this dump as well as brick fragments with matching frogs. The rebuilding was undertaken in the 1970s (Hill pers. comm. 1989). However, the debris contained a mixture of "old" (dating to last century) and "modern" (dating to this century) artefacts. Some small "old" ceramic sherds with attractive decorations were recovered here.

Beneath this dump was another "modern" dump containing many machine made nails and other carpenter's items dating to this century.

A pile of timber was found at the junction of Area 1 and the extension to Area 1 which contained some ogee mouldings presumably from the house; parts of the currently standing trellis fence; and other pieces of timber, some of which had handmade nails in them. This pile of timber was probably thrown out when one of several additions were made to the cottage.

Area 2

The main feature located in this area was an "old" household rubbish dump, of which only a very small portion (c. 30 x 100 cm) was found within the excavation area. The dump extended across the full length of the northern edge of Area 2 and was located in a shallow hollow approximately 20 cm deep (Fig. 1). It contains a very dense concentration of artefacts apparently of similar age to those of the "old" household rubbish dump in Area 1 extension, and possibly dating to the first occupation of the cottage (Plate 2). Artefacts recovered include 2 intact glass vinegar bottles, 4 intact and 2 broken glass "whirly" salad oil bottles (3 with glass stoppers), a glass Florida water bottle with "Murray & Lanman Druggists New-York" embossed on it, a glass Porter bottle, a glass perfume bottle, part of a glass poison bottle, a stoneware ink bottle, part of a ceramic chamber pot, part of a delicately decorated ceramic lid, and oyster shells.

Summary

Evidence recovered from the location of the outhouse shown in the two photographs and indicated on the 1891 map suggests that the services of a night cart were already being used by the time this outhouse was built. A street directory entry in the 1885 *Wellington Almanac* (p. 248) for Night Soil Contractors on Manners Street is further support that night carts were



Figure 2. Photograph of backyard of Nairn Street Cottage taken about 1900.
The arrow points to the privy to the left of the gate in the rear fence.

Alexander Turnbull Library.

being used by the time the outhouse was built in this location.

The Colonial Cottage Museum Society has borrowed many of the items on display in the Nairn Street Cottage. Many of the artefacts recovered during this excavation are suitable for display in the Nairn Street Cottage, especially the glass beads, some of the decorated earthenware, an intact ring seal glass beer bottle and stout bottle, part of a "Burns Cutty" clay tobacco pipe, some handmade nails and many of the artefacts found in the household dumps in Area 1 extension and Area 2 which date to the period of first occupation of this site by William Wallis. These artefacts add to our knowledge of the life style of the people who have occupied this cottage from the time of first occupation to the present, and their display would add to the authenticity of the exhibit.

The household dumps encountered in Area 1 extension and Area 2 would be worth excavating further for items which belonged to the first occupants of the cottage, William Wallis and his family.

A report containing analysis of artefacts and detailed plans and sections is to be prepared. A preliminary report has however been sent to the Colonial Cottage Museum Society.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Colonial Cottage Museum Society Inc. and the volunteer excavators for their assistance during excavation of this site.

Reference

Pratt, M. n.d. Edward Dixon - cordial manufacturer, Wellington. Strike [Magazine of Wellington Antique Bottle Club] No. 36, 12-17.