

## Overseer's House

Wellington Botanic Gardens



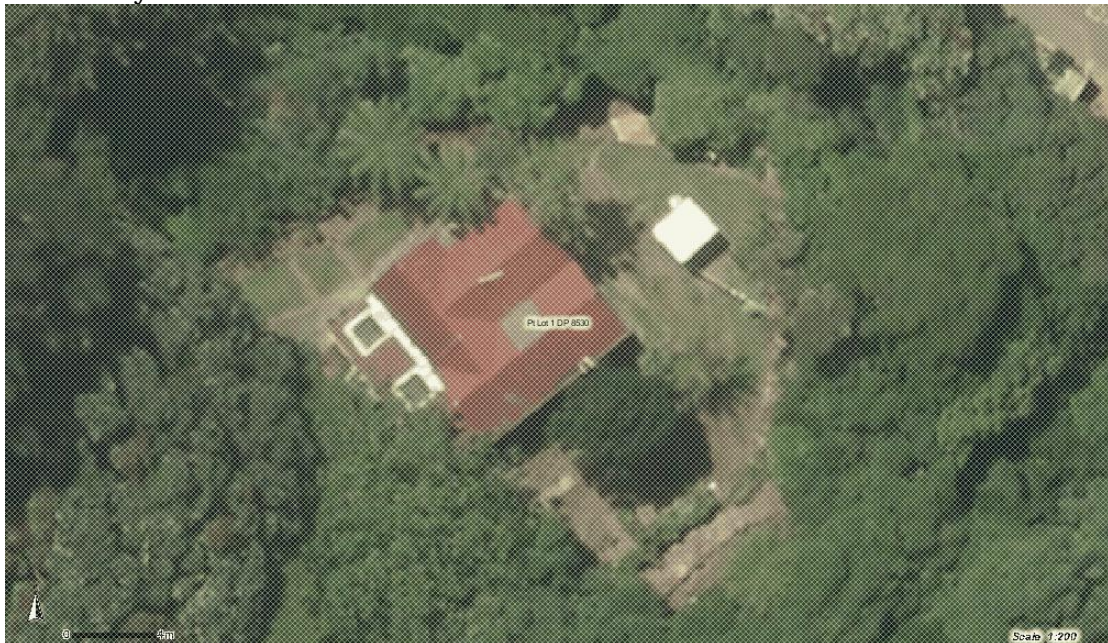
Image: *Charles Collins, 2015*

### Summary of heritage significance

- The Overseer's House is of architectural value as a small cottage designed with the stylistic characteristics of the Carpenter Gothic style, with a complex skyline, steeply pitched roof, finials, ornate bargeboard, and hood moulds over the openings.
- The overseer's house has considerable historic value being 130 years old. It is associated with the time in which Sir James Hector was manager of the botanic garden. The building was the home of the keepers and curators of the gardens, and then the constables placed in the garden to deter theft and vandalism.
- This building is one of the most visible in the gardens and is regarded as a landmark, it is highly symbolic of the development of the botanic garden.

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 19
Legal Description:	Pt Lot 1 DP 8530
Heritage Area:	Botanic Gardens Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Category II, reference 1414
Archaeological Site:	Pre 1900 building, Pre 1900 human activity associated with area
Other Names:	
Key physical dates:	Built: 1876
Architect / Builder:	Engineer: A.J. MacDonald. Builder: Douglas and Heder
Former uses:	Residential
Current uses:	Residential
Earthquake Prone Status:	EQ Not Necessary, Outside EQ Policy – SR 269329

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History<sup>1</sup>

The Wellington Botanic Gardens Overseer's House is the oldest building associated with the Gardens. It is closely associated with the establishment of the Botanic Garden which was provided for in Mein Smith's surveys of Wellington for the New Zealand Company in 1839. The Botanic Garden was part of the Town Belt and was established as a 12 acre block, which was increased to 13 acres in 1868.

In 1851 the Horticultural Society approached the Colonial Secretary for a Crown Grant for the land designated as Botanic Garden Reserve and named a committee. The land was declared as a Botanic Garden Reserve; however, no further action was taken until 1867, when Dr. James Hector was asked to look over the reserve. Dr. Hector recommended it as a good site, and a year later the Botanic Gardens Reserve became a public domain.

In 1869 Alfred Ludlam, a Member of Parliament and a keen horticulturalist, introduced the Wellington Botanic Garden Bill to Parliament. The Bill passed, and a Crown Grant was executed, giving control of the Botanic Garden to the Governors of the Wellington City Corporation (later Council) ever since.

David Hall was hired in 1869 as the first Keeper of the Botanic Garden, but was replaced by William Bramley as the Botanic Garden's keeper and gardener in 1870. Bramley and his family lived initially in a cottage known as the Randall cottage. This cottage was already at least twenty years old in 1876 and was decided not to be suitable accommodation. £150 was voted by the Botanic Garden Board for the construction of the Ranger's cottage and a tender of £123.10 by Douglas and Heder was accepted. 2000 feet of Kauri was ordered for lining the cottage and the Glenbervie section of the Garden was selected as the site of the new cottage due to its commanding views over the Botanic Garden. The cottage is a simple, timber cottage, of physical interest as an example of late nineteenth century construction techniques and has elements particular to that period such as label moulds. It was also constructed with a relatively unusual double roof.

As well as upkeep of the Botanic Garden, Bramley had the responsibility for keeping law and order on the sizeable and isolated site. Bramley was injured keeping the peace in 1880, and following this incident, a police constable was appointed to the Botanic Garden to assist. Constable Campbell moved into the Ranger's cottage which became known as the Constabulary or Constable's Cottage. Other constables to reside there included Constable Gleeson, who replaced Constable Campbell in 1882 and Constable Whelan who replaced Gleeson in 1890. In 1889 Bramley retired and was replaced by George Gibb.

The cottage remained a constable's residence until 1896, when it was reclaimed by the Botanic Garden's staff as the custodian's cottage. It was then renamed the Overseer's House. Horticultural staff and students have lived in the Overseer's House from 1898 to the present day.

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<sup>1</sup> History adapted from: M. Hill, '*Overseer's House – Botanic Gardens*,' (Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report), 15 February 2005, accessed 30 August 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1414>; and Ian Bowman, '*Overseer's House, Botanic Gardens*,' unpublished conservation plan prepared for Wellington City Council, April 2006, 6-7.



## **1.2 Timeline of modifications<sup>2</sup> (original plans unavailable)**

- 1876 Tender for cottage for £123.10 by Douglas and Heder accepted
- 1903 Survey to determine repairs to cottage
- 1905 Repairs to make cottage watertight
- 1906 New lights installed
- 1943 Inspection of chimneys following earthquake
- 1946 Inspection before a new caretaker – estimate of £590 for repairs and additions
- 1947 Borer treatment
- 1949 Addition of lean to
- 1970s Kitchen upgrade

## **1.3 Occupation history**

Not assessed

## **1.4 Architect**

Architect unknown

Engineer: A.J. MacDonald. Builder: Douglas and Heder

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture<sup>3</sup>**

The exterior decoration of the overseer's cottage appears to be influenced by the Carpenter Gothic tradition, which includes finials, decorative bargeboards, and hood moulds over the windows. The interior is a simple plan consisting of a central hall off which are two bedrooms, a living room, and kitchen in the main body of the house, while a scullery and toilet are accessed from the kitchen. The roof form is two gables facing north meeting a single gable facing west.

### **2.2 Materials**

The cottage is constructed with timber framing, corrugated steel roofing, rusticated timber cladding, and timber joinery.

### **2.3 Setting**

The overseer's cottage is set in the Glenbervie section of the garden. This setting was chosen for the cottage because of its commanding view over the Botanic Gardens. It is visible from key areas of the Gardens such as the Lady Norwood Rose Garden.

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<sup>2</sup>Ian Bowman, 'Overseer's House, Botanic Gardens,' 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

### **3.0 Sources**

Hill, M. '*Overseer's House – Botanic Gardens.*' Historic Places Trust. Unpublished registration report, 15 February 2005, accessed 30 August 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1414>

Bowman, Ian. '*Overseer's House, Botanic Gardens.*' Unpublished conservation plan prepared for Wellington City Council, April 2006.

## 4.0 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?

The overseer's house is of architectural value as a small cottage designed with the stylistic characteristics of the Carpenter Gothic style, with a complex skyline, steeply pitched roof, finials, ornate bargeboard, and hood moulds over the openings.

***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?

The overseer's house is a highly visible landmark above one of the most highly visited areas of the garden.

***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?

The overseer's house is the oldest structure remaining in the gardens and relates well to the other buildings constructed to service the garden such as the stables.

#### **Historic Value:**

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

The overseer's house has considerable historic value being 130 years old. It is associated with the time in which Sir James Hector was manager of the botanic garden. The building was the home of the keepers and curators of the gardens, and then the constables placed in the garden to deter theft and vandalism.

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

#### **Scientific Value:**

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

Risk unknown although likely – The building was constructed pre 1900 and is in an area known to be associated with pre 1900 human activity and has been a source of archaeological and paleontological material in the past.

***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?

The house was constructed in materials and using technologies common at the time, there is some technical interest in the double roof.

**Social Value:**

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

This building is one of the most visible in the gardens and is regarded as a landmark, it is highly symbolic of the development of the botanic garden.

**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?*

**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?*

The long history of the building, and its prominent siting, have led to it becoming a local landmark and in this way it contributes to the sense of place and continuity in the botanic gardens.

**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?*

This building is a good representative of the construction techniques of the time and is representative of the development of the botanic gardens.

**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?*

The cottage has had few exterior alterations, other than the addition of skylights in the 1940s lean to. It retains significant amounts of original material and has good authenticity values.

**Local/Regional/National/International**

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

The cottage is important at a local level, being purpose built for the overseer of the gardens. It is the oldest structure in the gardens and dates from the time in which Sir James Hector, a nationally important figure, was manager of the garden, which is recognised as being a historically important national facility for plant research as well as local recreation. It is a highly visible landmark that has important landscape and symbolic values.

## 5.0 Appendix

### Research checklist (desktop)

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

### 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*