

## 2.40 Sealy Road, no. 23: Croyden (Blythe House)

**Schedule number:** NCC Heritage Group:

**Heritage New Zealand List number and category (if applicable):**

**Type of site (archaeological site/historic place/historic area):** Archaeological site, historic place

**Address:** 23 Sealy Road

**Legal Description:** PT LOT 2 DDP 876 (CT 54/181)

**Construction date:** Date of original house unknown, but a tender for additions and alterations occurred in February 1881 – so it was prior to this date.



Figure 325 Blythe House 23 Sealy Road, Napier. Source: Chris Cochran



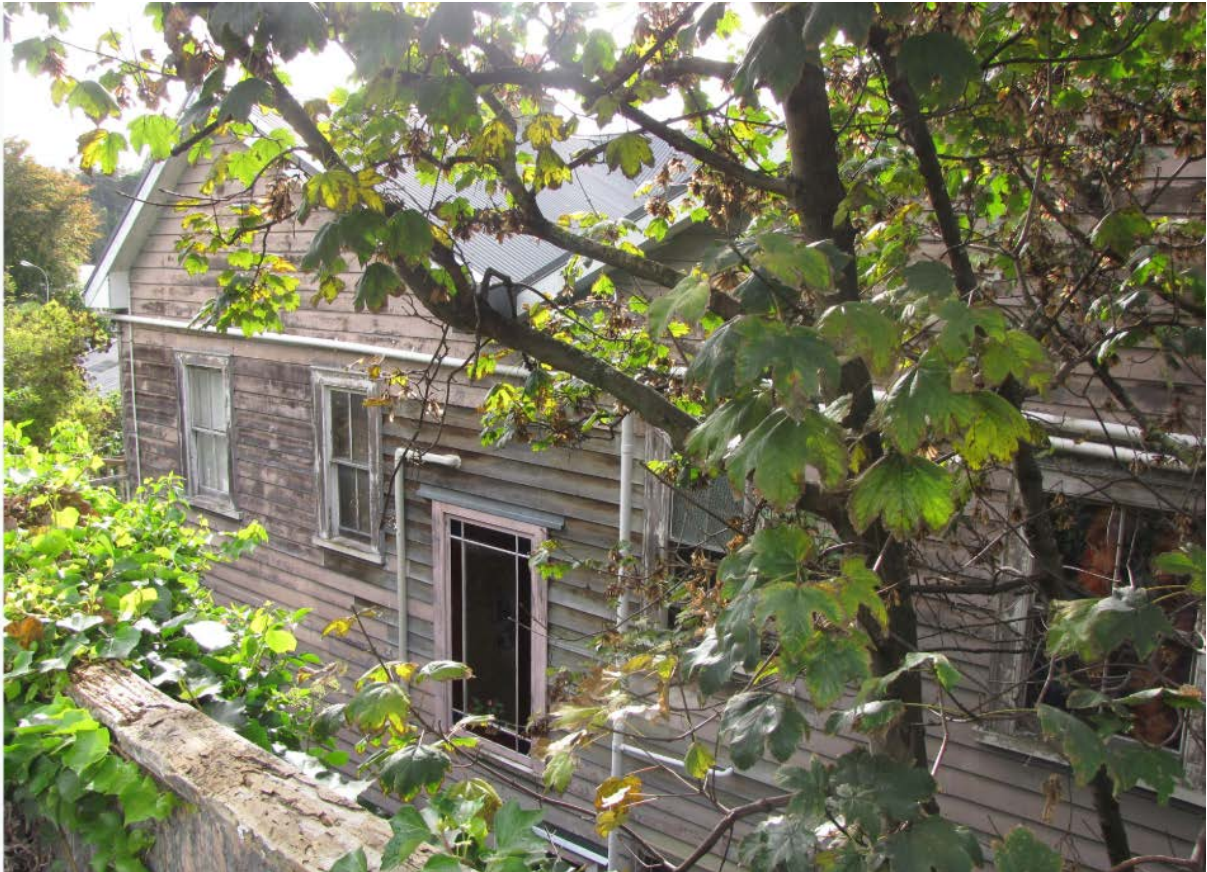


Figure 326 View of house from Sealy Road. Source: Chris Cochran, May 2019



Figure 327 Blythe House and land PT LOT 2 DDP 876, CT 54/181. Source: Napier City Council property on-line



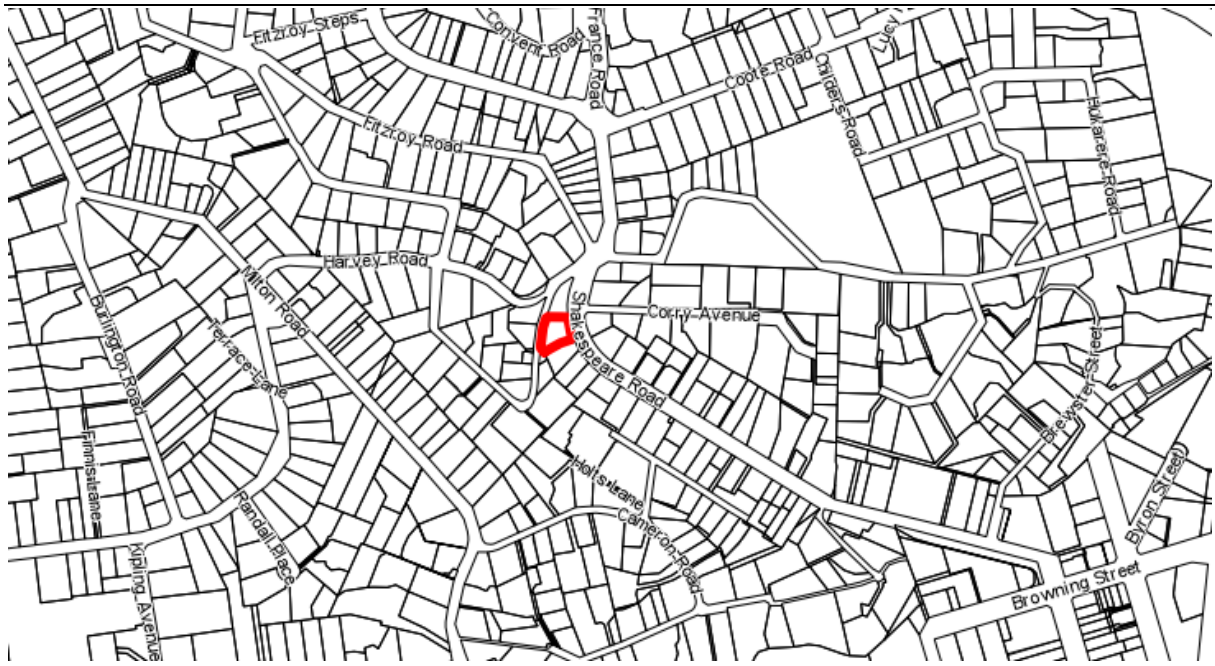


Figure 328 Location of the Blythe House, 23 Sealy Road, via <https://www.gis.napier.govt.nz>

**Architect:** Unknown. Robert Lamb was the architect for additions and alterations in 1881

**Builder:** Unknown. Robert Holt was the builder for additions and alterations to the property in 1881.

**Original function/use:** Residential

**Original owner:** First known owner: William Robert Blythe

**Current use:** Residential

**Current owner:** Christine Anna Breen & Denis Anthony Breen

**Significance:** historic, social, architectural

**Summary:** Croyden, or Blythe House, has historic significance for being the home of a notable Napier businessman who contributed to many of the public works in Napier particularly the beautification of Clive Square in the 1880s. A fountain was erected there in his memory by grateful citizens. It has social significance for its connection with Blythe as the founder of an important drapery store which became a department store and continued successfully into the 1960s when it was bought out by a national company. Architecturally, the building is especially notable for the front elevation to Shakespeare Road, which is dominated by two elaborately decorated gable ends, sheltering a verandah, and together making a verandah.

**History:** It is not known when the original house was built, or who the original owner of the property was. William Robert Blythe, founder of Blythe and Co. and his family were the owners of the villa in 1881 and had considerable additions and alterations made to the property.

William Robert Blythe was born on 6 August 1841 in the Gatehouse of Fleet, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland. He learned the drapery trade in Wigan, Lancashire, England and later became a partner in a chemical manufacturing business at St. Helens. In 1870 Blythe came to New Zealand and settled in Napier. He was employed by Messrs Newton and Company for nearly a year before he established Blythe and Company Drapers and Clothiers in Emerson Street, Napier in 1872 (*Cyclopedia of New Zealand*). On 20 May 1874 he married Fanny Maria Robinson at Glenorchy and they had 6 children: Isabella (Bie) May Blythe (1875-1899); Adair Douglas Blythe (1877-1924); Mary MacLean (Molly) Blythe (1879 – 1897); Catherine Douglas Blythe (1881 – 1898); Girthon Blythe (1882 – 1950) and Archibald Lewis Blythe (1884 – 1966).

William Robert Blythe took an active part in public life and was known for his kindly and benevolent disposition. He was a successful businessman, Commanding Officer of the Hawke's Bay Military District, and a liberal contributor to every movement with a charitable purpose. He was the founder of the Clive Square Improvement society established in 1884, and for 20 years was a tireless advocate and financial contributor to the development of this downtown garden. Following his death in 1903, the Blythe Memorial Fountain was created in 1904 in Clive Square in his honour.

Blythe house was the residence of the Bowler family from the 1920s – 1960s.

**Notable people:** William Robert Blythe (1841-1903)

**Architectural style/description:** This is a handsome late 19<sup>th</sup> century house, its front façade to Shakespeare Road being dominated by two spectacular gables which are richly decorated with timber fretwork, almost lace-like in its thin tracery. The gables are supported on thin timber posts, two at each corner, and they shelter a verandah at first floor level. The verandah wraps around as a deck on the north side of the house. The rear elevation of the house is quite plain in comparison, with the front gables running through to the rear; it is weather boarded and has double-hung windows. The roofing material is galvanised corrugated steel. Although the date of construction is not known, features of the house support a date of the late 1870s that is suggested by the alterations of 1881.

Despite the size of this house, and its prominent location between two roads (Shakespeare Road runs in front of the house, and Sealy Road runs behind it), it nevertheless has modest townscape value, being well above one road and below the other. It has a lush garden on the Shakespeare Road, side, and a massive concrete retaining wall with a path up.

#### **Alterations:**

Additions and alterations were tendered for by Robert Lamb on 3/3/1881

A building permit was issued for J.F. Bowler ESQ of Shakespeare Road to construct a reinforced concrete retaining wall upon the existing solid bank which had been standing for some 30 years (NCC Property file).

#### **References:**

Ancestry website: <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/34149868/person/18603005731/facts>

Astwood, Karen 2010. "Blythe Memorial Fountain, NAPIER Register No.1110 Proposal Report" prepared for Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga.

Cyclopedia Company, *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*:

<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc06Cycl-t1-body1-d2-d23-d14.html>

Papers Past <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>

- 'Obituary: Mr W.R. Blythe'. *Hawke's Bay Herald*. 8 December 1903. National Library of New Zealand.  
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HBH19031208.2.24>.
- Tender for Additions and Alterations to Blythe Villa 1881  
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/DTN18810301.2.20.1?query=Blythe's%20%20villa&snippet=true&title=BA,DTN,HAST,HBH,HBT,HBWT>

**Theme** Settlement, commerce

**Hapu / Iwi:**

**Cultural connections:**

**Recommendations:** Schedule as significant