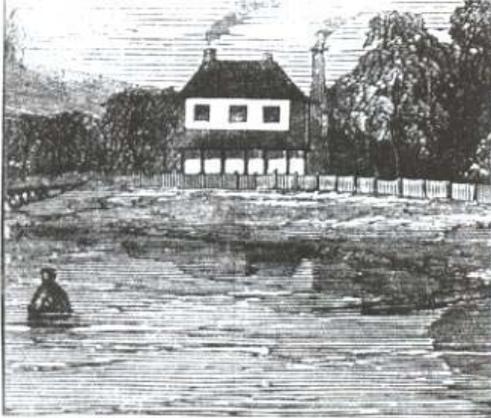
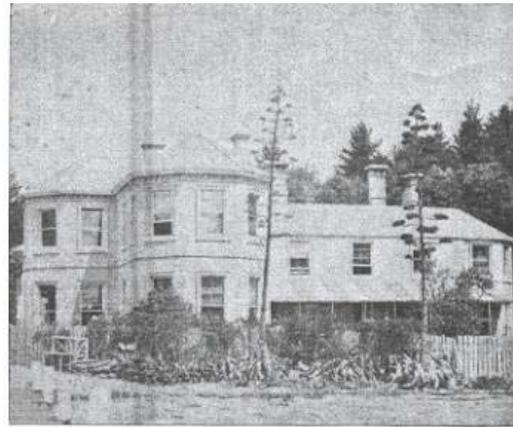


The Mansion House Story



The Mine Manager's House 1855



The Mansion House built for Grey C1865

The story began in 1845 when a red brick house, *English in appearance*, was built for Captain Ninnis who had come from Cornwall to manage the copper mining operation on Kawau Island.

By the late 1850s the mining operations had ceased and Kawau Island was in the care of Mr A.T. Harris, who was running a successful store and Post Office for the passing coastal ships.

Sir George Grey, Governor of New Zealand, purchased Kawau Island in 1862. He paid 3,700 pounds (approximately \$7,000) and set about creating the estate of his dreams. By 1867, with the help of Frederick Thatcher, a leading architect of the day, Grey had transformed the 20 year old house into an imposing mansion. He added 20 more rooms to the original 10 and imported exotic plants and animals from all over the world with the intention of creating a gentleman's estate on the island.

In 1888 Sir George Grey sold Kawau Island and Mansion House had a succession of owners for the next 67 years – most of whom opened the house for guest accommodation. The first of the new owners, Mrs Eliza Thomson immediately set about building the verandah that is such a feature of the house today. The next two owners, William Holgate and a partnership of James Thomson and William Skeates, made some attempt to re-open the mining operation but this was not successful.

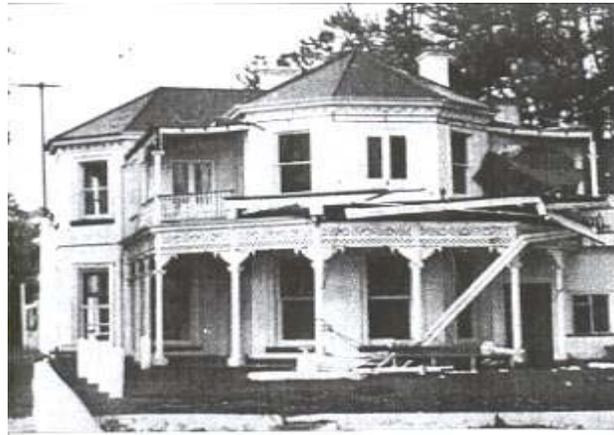
Kawau Island was purchased by Andrew Farmer, a former mayor of Te Aroha, who added a large two storey “annex” adjacent to the house. He ran a steamer between Auckland and Kawau, which he named “Daphne” after his daughter. The annex burnt down within a very short time and as operating costs increased it became necessary for Farmer to sell some of the land. By 1912 only 107 acres were left with the Mansion House.

From 1923 to 19345 Mansion House was owned by Lawford Reeves who, together with his family, operated a lively and popular holiday spot. The grounds sported a 4 rink bowling green,

4 tennis courts and an eleven-hole golf links. Dances and parties were held each night for guests and on various parts of the island small industries were carried out; wood, fruit and vegetables were sent to Auckland, arum lilies were exported, wallaby and opossums were caught for their skins and a ship yard was operating.

In the late 1949s a company called *Mansion House Kawau Ltd*, leased the house to a succession of managers and set about cutting and selling the pine trees on the property. The land was further subdivided and only 22 acres remained with the Mansion House. However, in 1951 when Mr A.E. Horsfall took over the property, the process of diminishment was reversed. Mr Horsfall was keen to see the land and house maintained as an historic property available to all who came to Kawau. He was able to add further 86 acres to the property and in 1967 it was sold to the Government, becoming part of the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park.

For the next 10 years Mansion House was leased to Dominion Breweries that ran the house as a hotel. Considerable changes were made – a large modern dining room was added, a public bar and swimming pool was built in the grounds and the interior of the house was extensively renovated. Despite the island's popularity with visitors and guests it was difficult to make the operation viable and the lease was surrendered.



Mansion House 1977 when work began on restoration

In 1977 work began on restoring the house and grounds to the form they were given under Governor Grey, however the decision was made to retain the verandah. All extraneous buildings and additions were removed and the original Mine Manager's wing, which had been most affected by renovations over the years, was virtually rebuilt.

The task of restoring Mansion House was made possible by surviving letters and diaries of the time, old photographs and information revealed by the house itself. The form of construction used in the rebuilding was metal lath and plaster on a timber frame of double thickness, which had to have the appearance of the plastered brick of the original building. Details were carefully matched with the originals – the lines of the ashlars (square hewn lines), window architraves, chimney details and wall finishes. Layers of paint were removed to find the original colour and the interior woodwork was returned to its original stained finish.

Most of Grey's original furniture had long since been dispersed, but the magnificent gift of furnishings and household items offered by Mr and Mrs Louis Wintle of Mangawhai greatly eased the task of furnishing the house. Fortunately the articles in this collection were very suitable in period and style for Mansion House, and in addition to many large pieces of furniture, the collection included Chinese and English porcelain, crockery, glassware, paintings, a chandelier, alabaster figures and numerous small items.

Many other gifts and loans have helped to furnish the house, including articles that belonged to Sir George, given by the Thorne George family, descendants of his niece Annie Matthews.

Loans from Sir George's collections which are now in the Auckland Institute and Museum, the Auckland City Art Gallery and the Auckland Public Library have enabled some of his own books, paintings, artifacts and personal items to be returned to the house.

