History

Mahora House, Kilbirnie

Mahora House was built around 1910 for a local timber merchant, John Wallace Easson, his wife Mary and their three daughters. The man whose profile appears in the elaborate plaster moulding in the living room is probably Mr Easson himself.

The house was originally called Harston Hall and the original plans show an attractive four-bedroom home with large reception rooms. Harston Hall was a single-family home for only a short time though and with the advent of the First World War it was opened to 'paying guests'. Neighbours of the time recall both Harston Hall and the adjoining lumber yard, visible in the upper left quadrant of this 1931 photo of Kilbirnie.

Overlooking Kilbirnie, Wellington, 1931.

Ref: 1/2-111724-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. http://beta.natlib.govt.nz/records/23031280

With its original name long forgotten and its large living spaces divided into bedrooms (ten in all), the building remained a boarding house until 1985, when the Society acquired it for its present purpose.

The Society

Mahora House was set up in 1985 as a residence for people who were 'deinstitutionalised' from Porirua Hospital and similar facilities. The house was leased from a private landlord before being purchased in 1989 by the newly constituted Mahora House Incorporated. However, the demand for suitable housing for mental service health users wasn't matched by the supply. Motivated by a strong desire to provide housing, some Mahora House founders used their own homes as security for the mortgage.

Before the merger with Wellington Housing Trust, the Society leased nine properties in addition to Mahora House. Five houses were leased from Housing New Zealand through the community housing scheme, two are leased from Wellington City Council and two from private landlords. The society had leased most of their houses for over a decade, placing new tenants in landlords' houses when the previous tenants moved on.