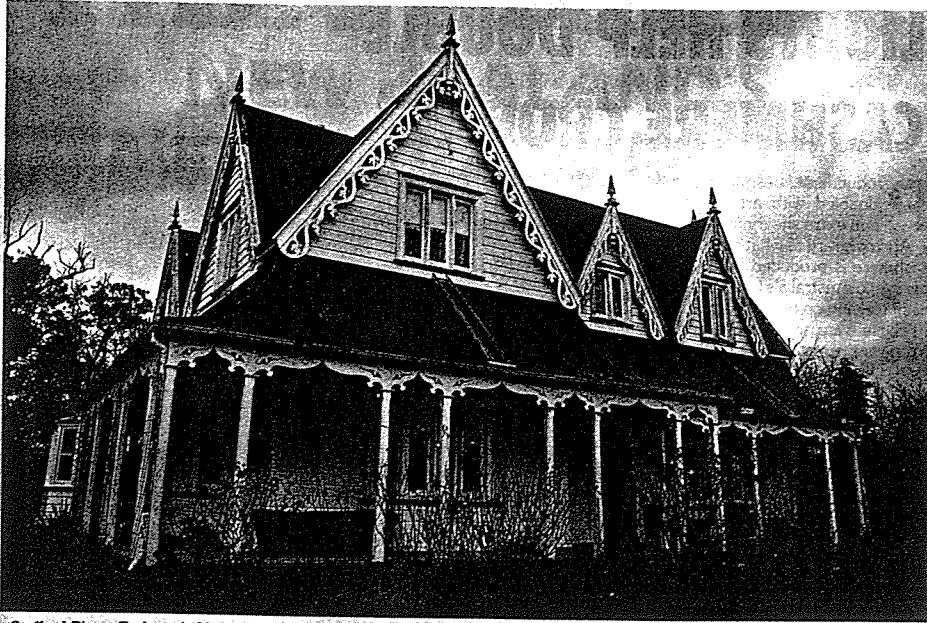


## HOMESTEAD



Stafford Place, Redwoods Valley, Nelson.

## ELEGANT STAFFORD PLACE A COLONIAL CLASSIC

BY HUGH de LACY

A colonial classic building, that is redolent of the history of the first pakeha settlement in Nelson, is the home of Adrienne and Colin Sutton of Redwoods Valley. Stafford Place dates back to the mid-19th century and was where two eminent figures in New Zealand's colonial history grew up.

An English Catholic, Henry Redwood arrived in Nelson aboard the *George Fife* December 1842, buoyed up by the impossible dreams of Edward Gibbon Wakefield and backed up by his wife and eight children. Though by no means poor, the Redwoods travelled in steerage — something like economy class, only

ten times worse — and their frugality, if not their numbers, made them one of the few success stories of a colony that otherwise got away to an inauspicious start.

The family moved to their purchased section on the Waimea Plains and housed themselves in a tent that

was 20m long and divided into compartments by wooden partitions. They set up a farming operation supplying the struggling community at

Nelson, and did well enough to be able to build a two-storey mud farmhouse that, in 1851, was regarded as the best in the district. This first house survived alongside the present Staf-

ford Place, built later, until it was wrecked in an earthquake in 1929.

There seems to be a bit of confusion as to when the existing, wooden Stafford Place was built. The house is celebrated as being the site of the first Catholic Mass, and headquarters of Catholic worship in Nelson. But that first mass was celebrated by an Irish priest, Father O'Reilly, on May 9, 1844. As such, the event probably occurred in the Redwood's tent rather than in either of the two houses they later built. Both permanent houses were used for worship later on, but the Sutton's present home was probably built no earlier than 1866.

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The first Catholic church was opened at Waimea West on December 16, 1855, but Stafford Place was probably still used irregularly as a church long after that date. The Anglicans, by contrast, had no such handsome house in which to congregate. Instead, they had to make do with John Kerr's barn at Waimea West until they could build a proper church.

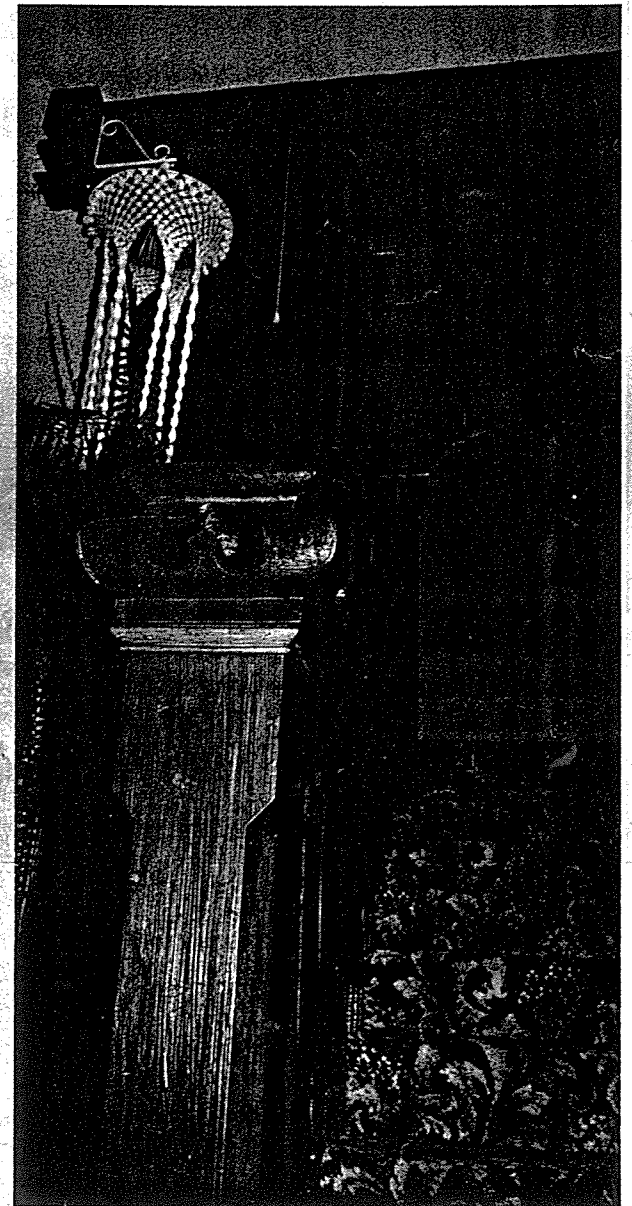
Whatever the date of its construction, Stafford Place is a beautiful building and has survived with little alteration that is unsympathetic — the original octagonal big-drop toilet building (seating for two) survives, with its slate roof, though its services have long since been usurped by the water closet.

Two members of the immigrant Redwood family stamped their names on history. Henry junior was an important force in the establishment of New Zealand's thoroughbred racing industry — he trained his horses on a rented part of nearby Rabbit Island — and is known today as the Father of the New Zealand Turf. His brother, Frank, became the country's first Catholic archbishop, bringing an English influence to a branch of the faith that was otherwise dominated by Irish immigrants after the Frenchman, John Baptiste Pompallier, left New Zealand in 1868.

### Breeder

The Suttons are only the fourth owners of Stafford Place. The Redwoods stayed at the farm until 1877 when it was sold to a noted Nelson figure, Paddy O'Connor, whose family kept it until 1931. It was then sold to Bill Gibbs, the romney stud breeder who provided the foundation flock upon which Graeme Sutton of Kikiwa, Nelson, built to achieve his award this year of Donaghy's romney farmer of the year (see elsewhere this issue).

Gibbs sold both his house and his flock to Victor Sutton — Graeme's and Colin's father — in 1958. Both the Kikiwa and the Redwood's Valley properties are part of the Sutton family company. On the old Redwood block, Colin and Adrienne presently milk 200 dairy cows and maintain a 6ha kiwifruit orchard.



The bannisters in Stafford Place are of kauri that was shipped to England to be fabricated by craftsmen there, then brought back to New Zealand when the house was being built.