

Settlement in Stoke



Stoke was first known as “Brook Green” but renamed by William Songer who arrived in Nelson in 1841 as Captain Wakefield’s personal attendant. He was Stoke’s first settler, and named the place in memory of his English birthplace. Settlers cleared flax and raupo and fruit growing became the main occupation of settlers in Stoke by the mid 1890s.

The first Stoke School shifted a number of times but had a building in 1851 where St Barnabas Church now stands. At one stage it was near the infamous Stoke Toll Gate, a rather unsuccessful venture of the Stoke Roads Board who had the unenviable task of trying to maintain the roads in the area with insufficient funds and constantly coming under criticism over where they took gravel from.

St Barnabas Church **1** was opened on 22 August 1866 and was the first stone church built in the Nelson Diocese. The stones came from nearby Marsden Valley stream and the half acre of land was given by Thomas Marsden. It had a new nave added in 1971 which blends well with the original architecture.

Isel House **2** and Isel Park **3** was part of an original property of 930 acres purchased by Thomas Marsden. He was one of the community’s larger landowners, acquiring a number of plots of land. He planted a great number of trees which still stand around the property today and this love of silviculture was shared by his son James, born in Nelson in 1844. James was one of the first scholars of Nelson College, and lived most of his life in Stoke grazing sheep and cattle, and growing crops of barley, wheat and turnips. Visit Isel House to discover stories of the Marsden family.

The Stoke Library **4** has had many homes but is now firmly situated in Neale Avenue. Established c1858 it first operated out of the primary school. By the 1920s books were held in store cupboards in the Foresters Hall, which was on the present Memorial Hall **5** site, and the service was run by volunteers. Foresters

Hall was a lively spot then, with old time dances and weekly ‘sixpenny hop’ dance classes held there. Silent movies were shown with a truck outside to provide the power.

The Railway Reserve **6** is a notable feature of the Stoke landscape, now providing a pedestrian/cycle route following the old Glenhope to Nelson railway line. The first sod for the railway was turned in Saxton’s paddock for the Nelson-Saxton section of the line. The ill fated line opened in 1876 and was intended to join the main trunk line. Frustrating delays occurred, then competition from road transport led to suspension of rail services. Despite huge public protest the last train ran in 1955 and the line was dismantled.

One of Nelson’s oldest residential buildings, Broadgreen House **7** is located at 276 Nayland Road Stoke. The charming cob cottage was built in 1855 for Mr and Mrs Edmund Buxton, and their six daughters. In 1855 Mr Buxton, originally from Derbyshire, founded the firm ‘E. Buxton & Co. Merchants’ in Nelson which sold “everything from firearms to sausage skins”. His house was built on the 100 acre property he bought in Stoke, near Nelson in 1854.

Samuel’s Rose Garden **8** established in 1968 contains 560 named varieties and over 3,000 plants. As roses are only native to the northern hemisphere, early settlers brought their favourite roses with them. The collection includes Slater’s Crimson China Rose which was the first variety of rose grown in New Zealand. The gardens are named after the late Mr S J Samuels, a rose nurseryman, who donated both the rose stock and bud wood, and undertook the budding assisted by his wife.

Otumarama **9**, was the site of Charles John Rayner’s homestead. He built there c1892 when he retired to Stoke from Temuka. Even though the original house is no longer standing, remnants of his garden are still there. The site is now occupied by a rest home.

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This trail is the companion to the Saunter in Stoke and highlights some of the historic background of central Stoke. Visit the PROW for more stories about Stoke and the people who lived there. www.theprow.co.nz

For all heritage trails plus information on these sites go to www.nelsoncitycouncil.co.nz (search phrase *heritage walks*).

