



# Lord of the manor



Complete with its own chapel, fruit grove, swimming pool and tennis court, **Dave Smith** visits one of New Zealand's finest stately homes, **Chapelwick**, tucked away in the Porangahau countryside

**D**eep in most of us is the secret yearning to be the lord or lady of the manor. Ever since I played that hoary old board game, *Cluedo*, I've wanted to spend at least one weekend in a stately home set in the mist miles from the city. The massive conservatory, the impressive library, the billiard room with its huge fireplace surmounted by an unfortunate stag's head; all present and correct, minus, thankfully, the corpses of Miss Scarlett, Colonel Mustard, Mr Green and team.

New Zealand is not overly provided with such former family piles but there are one or two – for instance Chapelwick, situated by the south Hawke's Bay sea just outside the tiny rural settlement of Porangahau. An "east of the sun and west of the sun" overview



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would declare it "a few miles south east of Waipukurau and fairly close to the Wairarapa as the tui flies".

Chapelwick, now owned by the warm and friendly Rod and Raewyn Sykes, claims an antecedence that goes back to the first colonial ships and the establishment of the Porangahau sheep station in 1854.

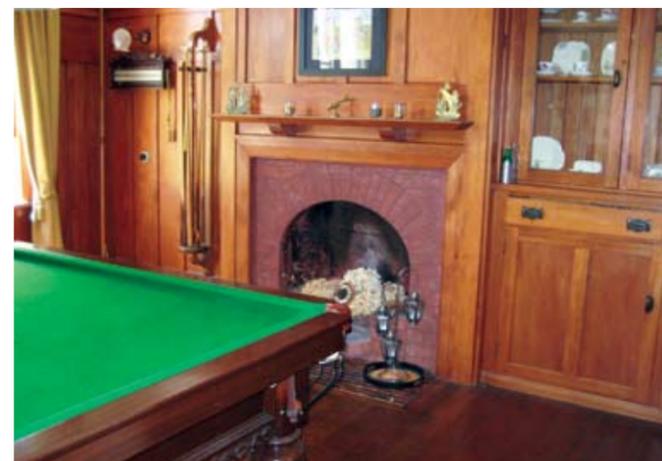
This is not a history lesson but Wellington's first Mayor, Sir George Hunter (a most unsquirelike philanthropist), was the first to build an ancestral family home at Porangahau. But in the finest Bronteian tradition it burned down and had to be rebuilt in 1920. From what we read though, the current imposing structure is quite an improvement on its starker predecessor.

Shortly after arriving we popped up to our enormous first floor bedroom with its 15-foot stud ceiling and balcony. Below we could see a spacious croquet lawn with lion statues, paddocks of Chapelwick cattle, tennis court and pool, the historic-listed church set in its own grounds that comes with the house and the South Pacific in the receding middle distance. We were standing in a place that is both beautifully self-sufficient and enticingly remote. In the exotic old days stores would have come in only twice a year, over the beach by sailing ship, in exchange for the wool bales. Agatha Christie would have loved it.

Staying in this great house solely on a "bed and breakfast" basis is a bit like using an Airbus 380 to tow an advertising sign. Rod and Raewyn have recently acquired Chapelwick because they fell in love with it, having sold their urban home in Auckland and feel they have bought into a mountain of tourism potential. There is still a good amount of work to do on the grounds and the land generally but the owners have made a wonderful start; at the heart of it all this is a ready-made treasure beyond price.

How many Kiwi houses can claim such accessible authenticity coupled with the ready resources to mount, say, an upmarket wedding with scores of guests in the style of the Earl of Cornwall? The indoor and outdoor space and the accompanying facilities go way beyond impressive. If a bride's family were to try such a big scale wedding operation in a major city it would be comparatively cramped.

Here the church belongs to the property and sits cosily next to a building where a wedding party could spread out and





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prepare themselves in regal space and isolation. The chapel welcomes all denominations including agnostics. Children could be parked in their own paddock and no marquee in the land is half as big as the Chapelwick front lawn.

Fresh fruit can be picked from the dozens of fruit-bearing trees (take it from me these are oranges, pears, apricots and plums to die for). And if the bridegroom gets stropky about what you have tied to the back of his BMW just hurl him into the sea before repairing for a well-earned scotch and a game of snooker.

We had dinner with Rod and Raewyn the night we arrived and breakfast with a delightful couple from Auckland in the conservatory, where the light and sea breeze pour in. The bric-a-brac looks just splendid and the herb baby sausages keep saying “go on, stay another night!”.

So what do you do to spin out the time? Well just being lord of the manor by the sea takes up quite a bit of imagination and energy. You can either savour the plush remoteness of the location or enjoy a full Sky service on a cinema-style TV. Looking forward to superlatively chunky farm feeds also makes the day roll by.

For the unhealthily energetic there is tennis, swimming, magnificent walks and views that take in both the estate and the heaving ocean beyond. You are also in easy striking distance of ten very respectable

golf courses. If rubbing shoulders with the human fauna of Porangahau appeals to you, the surprisingly commodious Duke of Edinburgh Hotel offers a change of cuisine (indoor and out) and a night on the turps from which you can easily meander erratically ‘home’ to your aristocratic bed and a cleansing ale.

The fax, phone and email are put nicely in their place at Chapelwick. If after about a fortnight you really have to take a message then you can do so but it is not encouraged. Why, after all, stay at Buckingham Palace and set up an office there? The ease and rural recline of Chapelwick is a welcome reminder that the upper classes really did know how to live.

It therefore makes good sense to let the future take care of what it has to offer you – just as the nobility have always made the world their oyster. Whether you go there in social groups, formally or informally, to play real life *Cluedo*, in splendid feet-up isolation or to hold a company seminar where the world can’t interrupt you, Rod and Raewyn will be waiting to see what you need rather than what they might require you to have. They are pleasantly customer-driven and welcome all lawful and inspired ideas.

**Chapelwick, 482 Hunter Road, Porangahau,  
Central Hawke’s Bay, Ph: 06 855 5119  
[www.chapelwick.co.nz](http://www.chapelwick.co.nz)**