



For almost one hundred years, Corstorphine House was home to the Sidey Family, who have contributed much to the political, social and economic life, and the uniquely Scottish flavour, of the City of Dunedin.

The Sidey (or Siddie) family originally hailed from Perthshire, in Scotland, but by the early 1800s John Siddie and his wife Ann had moved to Edinburgh, where he worked as a builder. Siddie shifted to London in 1843 with his son John, then aged 20, to work as speculative builders, but a downturn in the London economy forced their business to close. The four Siddie sons then sought their futures overseas – in the United States of America, Canada and New Zealand – each one changing his surname to Sidey as he left his homeland.

John Sidey and his brother Robert were attracted to the New Edinburgh settlement in Otago, New Zealand, by the ready availability of land – some 2,000 properties, each of which consisted of urban, suburban and rural holdings for the cost of 120 pounds 10s. The new town was called Dunedin, the Gaelic form of Edinburgh, and the site had been surveyed and developed after 1844 by the New Zealand Company, in a joint venture with the Lay Association of the Free Church of Scotland. However, street names aside, the hills, gullies and rough, swampy flat ground of Dunedin bore little resemblance to its grand Scottish namesake. Certainly local Maori, who had occupied the Otago region since the 12th Century, had not settled on the Dunedin site, the bushclad hills of which are a vestige of the inland and coastal forests which had

been cleared by fire by Maori in their hunt for Mōa, a huge, flightless and very edible bird. By the beginning of the 19th Century, Ngaitahu Maori preferred instead to live in fortified coastal villages, notably on the Otago Peninsula, which provided ready access to fishing grounds, and protection from attack by invading war parties from northern Maori tribes.

When John Sidey arrived at Port Chalmers on board the *Blundell* on 21 September 1848, the first Dunedin settlers, including his brother Robert Sidey, had already endured a harsh winter in primitive cottages and barracks. He settled on his 10 acres of suburban land, halfway between Port Chalmers and Dunedin, and immediately saw that the rapidly-developing town was short of essential supplies and food. Sidey therefore established a general store on his urban property on the corner of Princes and High Streets (close to the current Dunedin Casino), stocked with goods and supplies which he and Robert imported from England. The store proved to be a success, although their father, who visited Dunedin in 1850, reputedly reprimanded his sons for having imported Scotch whisky into the colony!

By 1855, as the town of Dunedin gradually became established, Sidey realised that the economic future of the Otago colony lay with farming. He consequently purchased a 2,000 acre estate located on steep, hilly land on the southern outskirts of the town, which prompted Sidey to name it 'Corstorphine' after Corstorphine Hill, a prominent landmark in his native Edinburgh. In 1857, as work on the main southern route from Dunedin commenced, Sidey gave up his work as a storekeeper to become a cattle farmer, and in 1858 he married Johanna Murray, who had arrived from Scotland in 1856. While Sidey was occupied in the laborious work of clearing and levelling his land, the couple lived in a small cottage where their first children were born.

In 1863, Sidey commenced construction of *Corstorphine House*, with the erection of what now comprises the north-eastern wing and central section of the present building.

Corstorphine was completed in time for Sidey to host the first champion ploughing match of the newly-formed Agricultural Association in October 1864, in which thirty-one horse and bullock teams competed for a first prize of 30 pounds and a gold medal. In 1910, Sidey, then aged 87, supervised the construction of the south-western wing of the house, including a drawing room and a billiards room, above which were built three bedrooms and a bathroom. The sprightly octogenarian kept a close eye on the workmen, regularly climbing up the scaffolding to inspect the alterations.

The house was also the scene of grand social occasions, such as regular meetings of the Otago Hunt Club and Sidey's annual champagne birthday dinner. John Sidey gradually sold or leased much of the Corstorphine Estate, involving himself instead in public affairs, international travel and – to the despair of his groom – fast driving. John and Johanna made several trips to Europe, England and Scotland, on each occasion bringing back furniture,

ornaments and paintings with which to further decorate their house. Sidey apparently gave his wife little warning of their departure, so that Johanna always kept a cabin trunk packed and ready for travel. Their last trip together was cut short by the outbreak of World War One in August 1914, although Sidey was planning his next grand tour when he died in 1915 at the age of 92.

John Sidey is buried in Dunedin's Southern Cemetery in a large family plot containing many of his descendants and his wife Johanna.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) details being taken from "Full History of Corstorphine House, Dunedin" from their website www.corstorphine.co.nz, and attributed to Dr. Aaron Fox