

Durie Hill Memorial Tower



Location: Tower Crescent, Durie Hill, Wanganui **Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga List Number:** 978 2

Physical Description: The multi-level, circular, rusticated stone tower has three equidistant stepped buttresses, and a crenelated top above which is a metal skeletoned dome. At the base of the memorial are wide steps with stone balustrading which lead to the main entry, above which are narrow openings at

Register Item Number:

11

Building Type:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Recreation
- Institutional
- Agriculture
- Other

Significance:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Cultural

Thematic Context:

- Early Settlement
- Residential
- Industry
- Agricultural
- Commerce
- Transport
- Civic/Admin
- Health
- Education
- Religion
- Recreation
- Community
- Memorials
- Military

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

each level. The first opening is shaped in the form of a cross. Each of the buttresses has plaques with inscriptions

Other known names: Durie Hill War Memorial

Current Use: War Memorial, Viewing lookout

Former Uses: War Memorial, Viewing lookout

Heritage Status: Heritage NZPT List **District Plan Class:** Class A
(Cat 2)

Architectural Style: Romanesque **Date of Construction:** 1925

Materials: Shellrock, bronze plaques

Registered owner:

Legal Description: Lots 1 2 DP 5464

History: The suggestion to build a war memorial on Durie Hill dates back to at least August 1916. At that time, the Mayor, C.E. MacKay, suggested at a ratepayers' meeting, that at some future date that a memorial might be erected. He suggested that *"this might take concrete form in the shape of a water tower for Bastia and Durie Hills."*¹

On 10 January 1919, the *Wanganui Chronicle's* editorial announced that it thought the time was right for the people of the district to begin thinking about what kind of war memorial Wanganui should have to *"commemorate for all time the part played by her sons in the Great War."* There would certainly be a war memorial, but what kind - and would the Council or the people organise it. The *Chronicle* suggested a tall look-out tower that would *"be placed on the most commanding site in the whole neighbourhood, i.e., in the vicinity of the Flagstaff on Durie Hill. Such a tower, sixty to eighty feet in height, handsomely designed, and crowned with a powerful light, would be a conspicuous landmark day and night, visible for miles around the countryside and far out to sea..."*²

In response, a lengthy supportive article by 'Fountain Pen' was published in the *Chronicle* of 11 January 1919 (p. 5). This commented that: *"The idea of erecting a tall tower on Durie Hill which shall tell its story by night and day, to travellers by land and sea, seems to me to have a peculiar fascination. World travellers are agreed that few finer views are obtainable than that opened up from the Durie Hill flagstaff."* Then Alfred Burnett also wrote at length to the *Chronicle*,

¹ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 19 August 1916, p. 4

² *Wanganui Chronicle*, 10 January 1919, p. 4

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

expressing great interest and pleasure from the editorial and stating that he had suggested this site about three years earlier. He wanted an edifice that, when looked at, effectively reminded viewers both of those who had died, and *“also our duty to the living, especially to those who have become maimed, and also those fortunate ones who have been spared to return safe and sound, and (have) done their bit.”*³

‘Soldier’ also wrote in support of the editorial. He stated that there were at present two proposals, the tower and a soldiers’ club. He did not consider a soldiers’ club for the living, could also be a memorial to the dead. *“I feel certain that the feelings of the soldiers if expressed, would be in favour of the memorial tower to their dead comrades first, and that nothing else should stand in its way...”*⁴

Other suggestions included renaming Dublin Bridge ‘Victory Bridge’, but another correspondent, I McDonald, thought that a *“second-hand”* memorial was inappropriate. He wanted any memorial to be on Durie Hill also.⁵

On the 31st August 1921, a committee was formed with a view to erecting a war memorial for Wanganui. This consisted of representatives of the Borough Council and adjoining local bodies, the Patriotic Society, and returned soldiers. The committee had come *“to a decision to erect a memorial tower of striking design on Durie Hill, near the site of the flagstaff. The spot commands a wide view of the country and sea, and as an electric elevator carries people to the site, the tower is very accessible.”*⁶

The meeting was shown a picture of the Victoria Tower in Darwin, Lancashire, and this was cited as the type of structure the committee had in mind. It was then published in the *Wanganui Chronicle* of 7 September 1921.⁷

³ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 January 1919, p. 6

⁴ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 21 January 1919, p. 4

⁵ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 29 September 1919, p. 7

⁶ *Ashburton Guardian*, 2 September 1921, p. 4; also *Wanganui Chronicle*, 1 September 1921 ‘A Worthy Monument’

⁷ Wendy Pettigrew’s File: ‘Durie 1’, Wanganui Heritage Study Files (Wanganui District Council Archives)



The Jubilee Tower, usually called the Darwen Tower (opened 1898), and in Wanganui in 1921, it was referred to as the 'Victoria Tower'. It is located at Darwen, Lancashire, England. This tower was the basis of the design of the Durie Hill Memorial Tower – as at August 1921. However, the Wanganui tower was never completed.⁸

Not everyone wanted their memorial to be so far away, and there was a fierce debate over where to site it. As a result, the *Evening Post* of 1st February 1922 (p. 6) reported that: “Some months ago, following a public meeting in Wanganui, the various local ladies appointed delegates to select a site and form of memorial to the men of the town, suburbs, and district, who took part in the war. A memorial tower and hall of memories, to be placed on Durie Hill, were decided upon, but an objection was raised by a section (of the community) who wanted a small memorial in Queen’s Park. A plebiscite was taken today, the Queen’s Park proposal receiving 987 votes, as against 487 for Durie Hill. Something like 7,000 voters are eligible.”

In Anzac Day 1923, the foundation stone for the second memorial, to be erected in Queen’s Park, was laid by Colonel Mitchell in front of a large crowd. This one, which became the city memorial, was to stand 30 feet high. It was in due course unveiled on Armistice Day - 11 November 1923.⁹ Meanwhile the Durie Hill tower came to be considered the Wanganui District memorial.¹⁰

⁸ Wikipedia: Jubilee Tower: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jubilee_Tower_6331.jpg ; See also: Wikipedia: Jubilee Tower history: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jubilee_Tower ; An early photo of this structure was published in the *Wanganui Chronicle* of 7 September 1921, and is in W. Pettigrew’s File: ‘Durie 1’

⁹ L.J.B. Chapple & H.C. Veitch, *Wanganui* (Hawera, 1939), p. 246; Wanganui Library: The Cenotaph: <http://www.wanganuilibrary.com/site/pages/heritage/queens-park-tour/the-cenotaph.php>

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

By March 1924, the tower on Durie Hill was becoming a place of interest to visitors, *“and many of those who have been to have a look at what was going on have expressed themselves as being favourably impressed with the tower, and charmed with the view obtained from the top...The shaft has reached a height of about 75ft., approximately three-quarters of its total height.”*¹¹

The early plans for the tower had included a light on the top, but in February 1927, the Marine Department advised that it would not give its support for this. The Wanganui Chamber of Commerce wanted a flashing light on the tower, and at a recent meeting it had been stated that overseas mariners who visited the port thought that a light on the tower would be an excellent improvement. *“At times the port lights were puzzling and a definite light flashing from Durie Hill would be of valuable assistance.”* The organisation decided to approach the Marine Department again, and to point out that there was no possibility of the light causing confusion.¹²

The actual date in 1925 upon which the tower was officially opened, was not discovered during this limited study. Nor were the architect and building contractor identified.

However, the owner of the land upon which the tower is built is known. This was W.J. Polson, Dominion President of the Farmer’s Union. In 1927 he took Hope Gibbons, the former Mayor of Wanganui, to court seeking payment of £413 for the land, plus interest since March 1924. Polson claimed that the transaction had been a *“straight-out sale,”* while Gibbons said that he had told Polson he was acting for the War Memorial Committee and wanted to get the transfer of the land through before Gonville amalgamated with the Wanganui Borough. Polson claimed that he had been led by Gibbons to believe that *“he was running the thing himself, without the committee, as it was too slow, and that he would pay Polson, but he would have to wait for the money. Gibbons, on the other hand, contended that it was a straight-out gift, and referred to Polson’s name being included in the list of donors published in January 1925.”*

¹⁰ *Evening Post*, 26 April 1923, p. 9; Chapple & Veitch, p. 246

¹¹ *Evening Post*, 4 March 1924, p. 6

¹² *Evening Post*, 26 February 1927, p. 28

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

The result of this litigation was that “*Mr Justice Ostler held that an oral contract had been proved, and in consideration for the land being transferred Gibbons would personally pay the balance of the purchase money due. Judgement was given for the plaintiff (Polson) for £567.17.3, which includes interest set at 7 per cent.*”¹³

M.J.G. Smart and A.P. Bates, in *‘The Wanganui Story’* (p. 281-2) wrote that it took two years of hand labour to build the tower, with the shellrock blocks for the tower being cut at the Harbour Board quarries upriver, mostly at Kaiwhaiki. They were then transported free of charge by settlers. “*Originally it was intended to shape the tower to a point with a perpetual light to shine from the top, but not only did the Marine Department object but also money became short, so it was never actually finished to the original plan.*”

Plaques on the building advise that

- (a) “This tower was erected to the Memory of Members of the Armed Services from this City and District who fell in the 1914-1918 War.”
- (b) “Height of base above sea level 273.5 feet; Height of lookout deck 372.2 feet; Height of tower ground level to top of parapet 104 feet; Number of steps 176 base to top floor level.”
- (c) “This tower was opened in 1925 and built as a memorial to the 513 young people from Wanganui and District who died in World War I. It is made from shellrock from the quarry at Kaiwhaiki some 15 km upstream.”¹⁴

Bibliography

Chapple, L.J.B., & Veitch, H.C., *Wanganui* (Hawera, 1939)

Maclean, Chris, & Phillips, Jock, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials* (Wellington, 1990)

Pettigrew, Wendy, File ‘Durie 1’, Wanganui Heritage Study Files (Wanganui District Council Archives)

¹³ *Evening Post*, 1 December 1927, p. 9

¹⁴ NZHistory online: Durie Hill War Memorial: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/durie-hill-war-memorial>

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

Smart, M.J.G., and A.P. Bates, A.P., *The Wanganui Story* (Wanganui, 1972)

Also newspapers and online articles as referred to in the footnotes.

Architect/Designer:

History of changes:

Date Period: The structure was unveiled in 1925

Rarity / Special Features: The building form for a memorial is rare in New Zealand.

Integrity: From a brief visual inspection from the ground, the memorial appears to be in reasonable condition.

Representativeness: Although not representative of war memorials in form, its function has been replicated throughout New Zealand where there are many memorials commemorating those who have died in local wars or overseas.

Context/Group Value: The structure is associated with the Durie hill garden suburb development and the Durie Hill elevator as well as the various war memorials in Wanganui including the Veterans steps, Queens Park memorial, the War Memorial Hall, the cenotaph, the Boer War memorial, and the Moutoa memorial.

Diversity (Form and Features): The design of the memorial was unusual with clocktowers more common when tall memorials were considered.

Fragility / Vulnerability: The structure is vulnerable to earthquake, as a stone structure.

Summary of Significance:

Archaeological Qualities

Not known.

Architectural Qualities

The structure is an unusual response to the requirement for a war memorial, with the site and design chosen for high visibility to create a local landmark structure. Its design successfully reflects the concepts of permanence and durability through the use of stone and architectural style which evokes a

Built Heritage Inventory



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

fortified mediaeval tower. The concept behind the design where memorials were to be symbolic and ornamental rather than utilitarian followed the more common approach of the period. The tower retains a viewing platform, however.

Historic Qualities

The structure commemorates the lives lost in the First World War and signifies the importance with which the local citizens felt such commemoration necessary. The number of war memorials from the 1840s onwards is indicative of the strength of feeling of New Zealanders that memorialising the dead in war was an essential civic duty.

Scientific Qualities

There is some scientific interest in the use of local shellrock for the construction of the memorial.

Technical Qualities

The tower shows a high degree of proficiency in masonry construction.

Cultural Qualities

The structure is commemorative of local citizens who died during World War One and is a focus for the local community to celebrate the actions and lives of fallen soldiers.

Reference Source:

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Val Burr