

Kawana Flourmill and Waterwheel



Location: Whanganui River Road, **Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga**
Matahiwi

List Number: 158

Physical Description: The replica two storeyed timber framed flour mill, has a rectangular plan with a lean-to extension on the river side over the water wheel. The entry is through double doors facing the Millers cottage with the only other opening double hung sash windows at the first floor level. Its gabled roof is

Register Item Number:

25

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



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steeply pitched and is weather boarded, while the walls are clad with corrugated steel. The wheel dominates the open ground floor is an open space while the mill stones and other grinding equipment are displayed on the first floor.

Other known names:

Current Use: Tourist Attraction, Museum

Former Uses: Flour/grain mill

Heritage Status. Heritage NZPT List **District Plan Class: Class A**

(Cat. 1)

Architectural Style: Industrial

Date of Construction: 1854, 1930/40,
1978/80 replication

Materials: Painted corrugated steel cladding and roofing, timber joinery, weatherboards and coverboards

Registered owner:

Legal Description: Gaz 86-5082 Lot 1 DP 56192 Blk VII Tauakira SD – Maori Reserve

History: The Kawana Flour Mill at Matahiwi has the only surviving set of mill machinery dating back to the 1850s in New Zealand.¹ The mill was established in August 1854 on land belonging to the Whanganui iwi Nga Poutama.² It was built from totara logs salvaged from the Whanganui River by Reverend Richard Thomas, Church Missionary Society, the millwright Peter McWilliam, and local Maori.³ The cast-iron machinery and brass bearings were brought out from England and the millstones were imported from Australia as a personal gift from Governor Sir George Grey.⁴ The mill was named after its benefactor – Kawana Kerei.⁵

The mill was powered by an overshot water wheel, relying on the force and weight of water to operate the machinery.⁶ The wheel was built of pit sawn timbers and measured 18'16" diameter and 5' wide.⁷

¹ NZHPT Registry Entry - 158 (1983).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ deLambert J.R. 1957. "Kawana Water Wheel." Letter to Ministry of Works, Wanganui.

⁷ Ibid.

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The flour mill was one of four erected on the Whanganui River at the behest of Grey in order to keep local Maori on their tribal land and encourage them into agricultural interests.⁸ The Kawana Mill was the longest operating mill on the Whanganui River.⁹ As the other mills at Mataongaonga, Operiki and Kaiwhaiki closed, they were cannibalised for replacement parts for the Kawana Mill.¹⁰ At one time during operation of the mill, Maori at Matahiwi had over 200 acres of wheat and corn in cultivation.¹¹

The first miller was Richard Pestall, a French flour miller appointed by the New Zealand Government and Governor Grey.¹² Pestall lived at the settlement of Karatia, on the opposite side of the river to Matahiwi.¹³ In 1856 he married Makareta Panitua, also of Karatia.¹⁴ His son, Richard Jnr, born on the 25th December 1871, assisted his father in running the mill, until eventually took over as the owner and miller.¹⁵

The mill ceased operations in 1913.¹⁶ During the 1930s, the top storey of the building were dismantled and the iron used for the Matahiwi school.¹⁷

Interest in maintaining the site began in the early 1950s. A fence was erected around the wheelhouse in 1953 and minor maintenance work was undertaken on the wheel housing.¹⁸ The mill itself was reconstructed between 1979-1980 by members of the local tramping club and regional committee of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.¹⁹ The restoration work included moving the miller's cottage alongside the mill.²⁰ The mill was officially reopened by the then Governor General, Sir Keith Holyoake, in October 1980.²¹ The land on which the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ NZHPT Registry Entry 158.

¹⁰ deLambert J.R. 1957. "Kawana Water Wheel." Letter to Ministry of Works, Wanganui.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² NZHPT Registry Entry 158.

¹³ deLambert J.R. 1957. "Kawana Water Wheel." Letter to Ministry of Works, Wanganui.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ NZHPT Registry Entry 158.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ deLambert J.R. 1957. "Kawana Water Wheel." Letter to Ministry of Works, Wanganui.

¹⁹ NZHPT Registry Entry 158.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

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mill is sited was designated as a Maori Reserve for historical purposes in 1986.²² Today the mill is a tourist attraction with interpretation panels illustrating the history of the site.²³

Architect/Designer:

History of changes:

Date Period: 1850s

Rarity / Special Features: The Kawana mill machinery is the only surviving set of mill machinery from the 1850s in New Zealand and was the longest operating mill on the Whanganui River.

Integrity: Machinery is in good condition. Mill building is a reconstruction.

Representativeness: The cast iron machinery and brass bearings were imported from England and the mill stones were imported from Australia, all of which are presumed to be typical of the period.

Context/Group Value: In a wider context, the mill is representative of the efforts of Governor Grey to encourage Maori to become self-sufficient in the newly introduced Pakeha economy and in a local context, the mill machinery reflects the development of a flour local flour milling industry.

Diversity (Form and Features): It is presumed that the elements comprising the machinery are typical of the period.

Fragility / Vulnerability: The machinery components may be vulnerable to vandalism and fire, as the structure is open to the public and is in an isolated rural area.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

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Summary of Significance:

Archaeological Qualities

The site is pre-1900 and should be considered as an archaeological site.

Architectural Qualities

The building has no heritage significance being a conjectural reconstruction of a building demolished in the mid twentieth century, while the machinery has technological significance as components of New Zealand's earliest surviving flour mill.

Historic Qualities

The mill machinery is associated with Reverend Richard Taylor of the Church Missionary Society, Peter McWilliam, a local millwright and local Maori who built the original mill as well as Richard Pestell who was the first miller appointed by the NZ Government and Governor Grey. Pestell's son then took over running the mill from his father until 1913. The construction of the mill is a significant event in the development of a self sufficiency for local Maori.

Scientific Qualities

The machinery has scientific qualities as an example of flour milling technology and use of materials of the mid nineteenth century.

Technical Qualities

The machinery has technical qualities as an example of flour milling technology and use of materials of the mid nineteenth century.

Cultural Qualities

The machinery and the original flour mill have a strong relationship with local iwi who constructed and used its services for nearly 60 years. The efforts of local volunteers to reconstruct the mill reflect a strong desire to recognise the significance of the original mill and the part it played in the local economy in the early years of European settlement.

Reference Source:

de Lambert, J.R. 1957. "Kawana Water Wheel." Letter to Ministry of Works, Wanganui. From NZHPT Building File, Wellington.

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New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) Heritage Registration Entry No. 158

Kawana Flour Mill. From NZHPT Website: <http://www.nzhistoric.org.nz>.

Associated Pictures:

Date of Survey: 2012

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