

Whanganui District Heritage Inventory

Heritage Assessment and Statement of Significance

Item: Aramoho Tram Shelters

Register Item No: **330** Class: **A**

Address: **Opposite 236 Somme Parade; 462 Somme Parade**

Legal Description: **Road Reserve**

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga List Number and Category (if applicable): **Not applicable**

Heritage Values: ☒

- ☐ Archaeological
- ☒ Architectural
- ☒ Cultural/Social
- ☒ Historic
- ☒ Scientific
- ☒ Technological
- ☒ Setting/Context
- ☐ Interior



Fig. 1: The terminus shelter at 462 Somme Parade by the Aramoho Cemetery, historically referred to as the Aramoho Park Shelter.
Photographed 4.10.2024 by Scott Flutey.



Fig. 2: The shelter opposite 236 Somme Parade, historically referred to as the Field Street Shelter, photographed 4.10.2024 by Scott Flutey.

Statement of Significance

Two stuccoed shelters were built in 1925 to provide place for users of the Aramoho tram line to sit out of the weather. With a half timber effect modelled into the rendering of each structure, they were much more substantial and artistic than other surviving timber or iron structures built around the same period for the tram service, which were of a strictly functional nature.

They are important remnant elements from the Aramoho tram line infrastructure, and the larger of the two structures served as the terminus for the service. Their Arts and Crafts architectural styling elevates them aesthetically above the simpler shelters, providing architectural and technological importance as local expressions of the influential style. They have become unique landmarks in their respective surrounds. Surviving associated drawings suggest they were designed by Harry Herbert Stroud, a registered architect (and later Wanganui Borough/City Council engineering staffer) who designed several innovative Arts and Crafts houses in the area as a private architect, as well as the Heads Road Cemetery Morgue during his time working for the Council.

Physical Description

The shelters which are the subject of this assessment report are sited along Somme Parade – one halfway along, and one at the end of Somme Parade near the junction with McNeill Street (the Aramoho Cemetery).

They are of masonry construction – likely reinforced, and with stuccoed exterior and interior walls. Mock timber beams have been modelled in the stucco and an additional decorative beam sited horizontally across and over the entrance provides a visual lintel effect. The shelter closer to town has had one corner modified to improve its sightline to the north, with a vertical beam at the corner providing structural support.

Timber benches are arranged around the inside walls of the structures for users of the shelters.

The roofing of the structures was initially diamond asbestos slates, replaced at a later date with corrugated iron.

The shelter which served as the terminus for the line is slightly larger than the one closer to town and it contains a small toilet cubicle on the southern end of the structure. This has been boarded off to seal it from being accessed.

Historical Significance

None Low **Moderate** High Outstanding

Whether the place is associated with important or representative themes or aspects of local, regional, or national history; whether the place is associated with historically important events, persons, groups, ideas, movements, social patterns, activities, or developments or advancements; and/or whether the place retains a use, function or integrity of association that contributes to the historical importance of the place.

The shelters are strongly associated with the development of Aramoho as a suburb of Whanganui, and with the historic tramway network which the town had in place between 1908-1950.

Still actively maintained used as bus shelters, a direct function and integrity of association with public transport has been continuously held. They are not simply artefacts of their time, but an important component of their respective places.

In early 1914, the Borough Council was facing the problem of finding a new cemetery location – the one at Heads Road having been nearly filled up. Part of the rationale for the purchase of the Aramoho Cemetery site was that the Aramoho tram line would be extended to Upper Aramoho. It was argued that although the extension would likely be unprofitable, due to the sparse population of Upper Aramoho at the time, “if it did not show a profit, it would at least be part of a profitable system”.¹

The need for a decent shelter along the line was raised shortly afterward, as a September 1915 Borough Council meeting resolved “to have a combined tram shelter with conveniences erected at Aramoho”.² Ultimately this was not to be constructed for another ten years.

In April 1915, the extension to the new terminus at Quick Avenue came into use.³ A “cheap corrugated iron shelter shed” was ordered to be erected by the Tramway Committee but this has not survived to the present day.⁴

In his earlier assessment for the Cemetery Terminus Tram Stop, Ian Bowman references Ron Alexander’s assertion that the Council 1918 land purchase to form Aramoho Park, across the road from the cemetery, was in part to “provide an attraction to help make the extension pay”.⁵

The impact of the First World War on non-essential infrastructure meant no further progress occurred for several years, partly because a larger tram network required more rolling stock and a larger electricity generator. In September 1923, the extension all the way to the cemetery finally opened – a new powerhouse having been installed that year at Taupo Quay to support the expanded network.

In 1925, the Wanganui City Council’s Tramway Committee was recorded to have recommended “the erection of a shelter shed at Field Street and at the Aramoho terminus, the work to be proceeded with at once”. The two shelters in this scheduling report are likely to be the result of that recommendation.⁶ The Aramoho School committee contacted the City Council after this report, urging the work to go ahead. Consequently the committee was reported it “desires to confirm its previous decision and recommends that the council proceed with the work early in the next financial year”.⁷ No further reference to the shelters were made after this – presumably the work was followed through and they were completed in 1926.

¹ (Wanganui Chronicle 1915)

² (Borough Council 1915)

³ (Alexander 2006, p.9)

⁴ (Tramway Committee 1915)

⁵ (Bowman 2012)

⁶ (City Council: Fortnightly Meeting 1925)

⁷ (Wanganui City Council 1925)

Very little maintenance on the tracks was carried out through the Depression years, worsening during the Second World War. In the late 1940s the condition of the Aramoho line had become particularly unsafe and on 22 May 1950 the line was closed beyond Calver's Corner (the Somme Parade-Glasgow Street junction).⁸ After September 1950, the Greyhound buses replaced Whanganui's tram network entirely.

Although the tram service was shut down and most of its components lost to time, the tram shelters along Somme Parade never lost their usefulness and have always been home to a public transport stop of some sort since their construction.

Social Significance

None Low **Moderate** High Outstanding

Whether the place has a strong or special association with, or is held in high regard by, a particular community or cultural group for its symbolic, spiritual, commemorative, traditional or other cultural value; whether the place makes a significant contribution to the uniqueness or identity of the locality, district, region or nation; whether the place is an icon or marker that a community or culture (past or present) identifies with; and/or whether the place is significant to tangata whenua.

Residents of Aramoho will connect strongly with the shelters as local landmarks and signifiers of the suburb's unique identity. No other shelters in Whanganui were ever built to the same design of those in Aramoho.

Construction of the shelters was encouraged by request of the Aramoho School committee on behalf of families and children in the area and their association with the Aramoho community has continued, by virtue of their ongoing functional contribution to the locality.

Architecture, Technological and Construction Significance

None Low Moderate **High** Outstanding

Whether the place has architectural value; whether the place belongs to important architectural styles or is a good example of vernacular architecture; whether the place has distinctive attributes of an aesthetic or functional nature (including massing, proportion, materials, detail, fenestration, ornamentation, artwork, functional layout, landmark status or symbolic value); whether the place demonstrates innovation or accomplishment, through design, use of materials or technology,, method of construction or of craft skill; and whether the place is associated with an architect, engineer, designer or builder who has made a special contribution to their profession or work.

The shelters are of high architectural, technological, and construction significance. The Arts and Crafts Movement was a highly influential style at the time Whanganui was expanding into the suburbs and though reasonably small, the shelters express some signature attributes of Arts and Crafts Design. Stuccoed walls, half-timber effect visual treatment, and decorative beams are examples of these attributes.

⁸ (Bowman 2012)

Drawings held by Whanganui District Council link the design of the structures to Harry Herbert Stroud, a local architect active through the 1910s-1930s. Stroud arrived in Whanganui in late 1913. In early 1914, he lodged a patent for the construction of concrete buildings.⁹

Describing himself and his work in a letter to the editor of the Wanganui Chronicle in January 1914, he stated:

“Having had over 20 years’ practical experience in designing and building in concrete both in the Old Country and in several of our Colonies, I have invariably found that to build cheaply one must use local material, and if possible adapt it to meet local requirements and conditions... On arriving in Wanganui some months ago I was impressed with the lack of cheap and substantial houses... I hope within the next few months to be in a position to demonstrate that houses that are earthquake proof, fire resisting, practically indestructible and cheap, can be built as cheaply as in timber.”¹⁰

In September 1915, he was registered as a Fellow of the NZ Institute of Architects.¹¹

Stroud called his system of construction “Veandhor” and it involved hollow pumice concrete breezeblocks set into a concrete foundation, subsequently strengthened and interlinked with pipework and liquid mortar. A cavity wall could be formed on the exterior walls to keep moisture out, and single block partitions could be made in interior walls or to partition off rooms over existing floors.¹² Exteriors were stuccoed over to keep the pumice blocks dry and interiors were rendered.

At least two houses were built using the Veandhor System – a small cottage at Durie Hill, on Plunket Street, and a larger one-and-a-half storey home at Mosston which doesn’t appear to have survived.

Around 1919, he joined the Engineer’s Department of the Wanganui Borough (later City) Council and many drawings through the 1920s and 30s have H.H.S. marked in the corner indicating his involvement with their design.¹³ The 1930 Morgue at Heads Road Cemetery is one of his designs, although it used simple brick construction rather than his Veandhor System of the 1910s.

Two architectural drawings survive which are associated with the masonry Shelter Sheds at Aramoho – a “Shelter Shed and Conveniences – Aramoho Cemetery” dated 1920 and one simply labelled “Shelter Shed” and dated 1925. The former is signed H.H.S. but was not proceeded with for another five years, and not to the design in the drawing. The latter is dated 1925, concurrent with the 1925 initiative to proceed with the Field Street and Cemetery Terminus stations.

The shelters potentially hold very high technological significance in that their construction may be a potential example of the Veandhor system, which has not been studied or written about since it was conceived just before the First World War. This method was cutting edge at the time and forecast later methods of mass-produced construction components and technologies. It combined some elements of construction technologies overseas, such as Frank Lloyd Wright’s textile block system of the 1920s, while also being reminiscent of monolithic concrete technologies closer to home like the

⁹ (Evening Post 1914)

¹⁰ (Concrete Houses 1914)

¹¹ (Heads Road Cemetery 2007)

¹² (“Veandhor” Re-inforced Concrete System: A New Zealand Patent 1916)

¹³ (Heads Road Cemetery 2007)

Konka Board system which was developed in Manawatu-Whanganui around 1912.¹⁴ If the structures were confirmed as simply stucco over brick, then they would only be of moderate technological interest as an example of a brick-built public transport shelter.

By the 2020s, their architectural value has come to be appreciated more widely, having been repainted in a colour scheme referencing colours popular during the era of Whanganui's Arts and Crafts Movement.

Setting and Contextual Significance

None Low Moderate **High** Outstanding

Whether the place contributes to or is associated with a wider historical or cultural context whether the place contributes to the streetscape, townscape or landscape; whether the place has collective value as a part or member of a group of inter-related, but not necessarily contiguous, heritage features or places or a wider heritage landscape; and whether the place is part of a group of heritage features or places (contiguous or discontinuous), that, taken together, have a coherence because of such factors as age, history, appearance, style, scale, fabric or use.

The primary contribution of the tram shelters is their contextual value in the streetscape, townscape, and landscape along Somme Parade. Highly visible, they are inter-related markers of a wider heritage landscape formed around public transport in Whanganui.

Taken together, they share a high level of coherence due to being built as part of the same 1925 initiative to provide shelter for Aramoho commuters after the tram line had been extended to Aramoho Park and Cemetery. They share the same age, history, appearance, style, scale, fabric and use.

Archaeological and Scientific Significance

None Low Moderate High Outstanding

Whether the place has the potential to contribute new or important information about the history of the place or wider area through archaeological or scientific investigation; whether the place retains a physical form that can be appreciated by the community to aid in the understanding of past uses or history; whether the place has the potential to provide evidence to address archaeological or scientific research questions.

The archaeological significance of the shelters is minimal, due to their twentieth century date of construction. The ground surrounding each shelter may potentially be of interest as a pre-1900 archaeological site, however.

¹⁴ (Wrigglesworth 2020, pp.113-115)

Representativeness, rarity and integrity

None Low Moderate **High Outstanding**

Whether the place is a representative example of a particular class or type of place; whether the place or a component of it is rare, unique, the first such place or is the only such place in the locality, district, region or nation; whether the place retains a significant amount of original or early fabric, or fabric from an important period in the place's history.

The rarity of the shelters is outstanding – no others to this design exist in Whanganui. Very few shelters from the 1908-1950 tram system have survived in Whanganui. As a pair, they are the only example of stuccoed tram shelters in the district. They retain a high amount of original fabric, although the Poilite diamond asbestos slates and decorative electricity brackets have been removed. An apparent alteration was made at some point to provide greater visibility for the Field Street shelter by removing part of the wall and replacing it with a post. These alterations have not drastically affected the significance of the shelters although it means they are only of high integrity rather than outstanding.

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Research by: Scott Flutey

References

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Additional Photographs and/or images:



Fig. 3: At the south end of the terminus shelter at 462 Somme Parade by the Aramoho Cemetery, (historically referred to as the Aramoho Park Shelter), the boarded up public toilet remains in situ. It's unknown when this was closed off to the public.

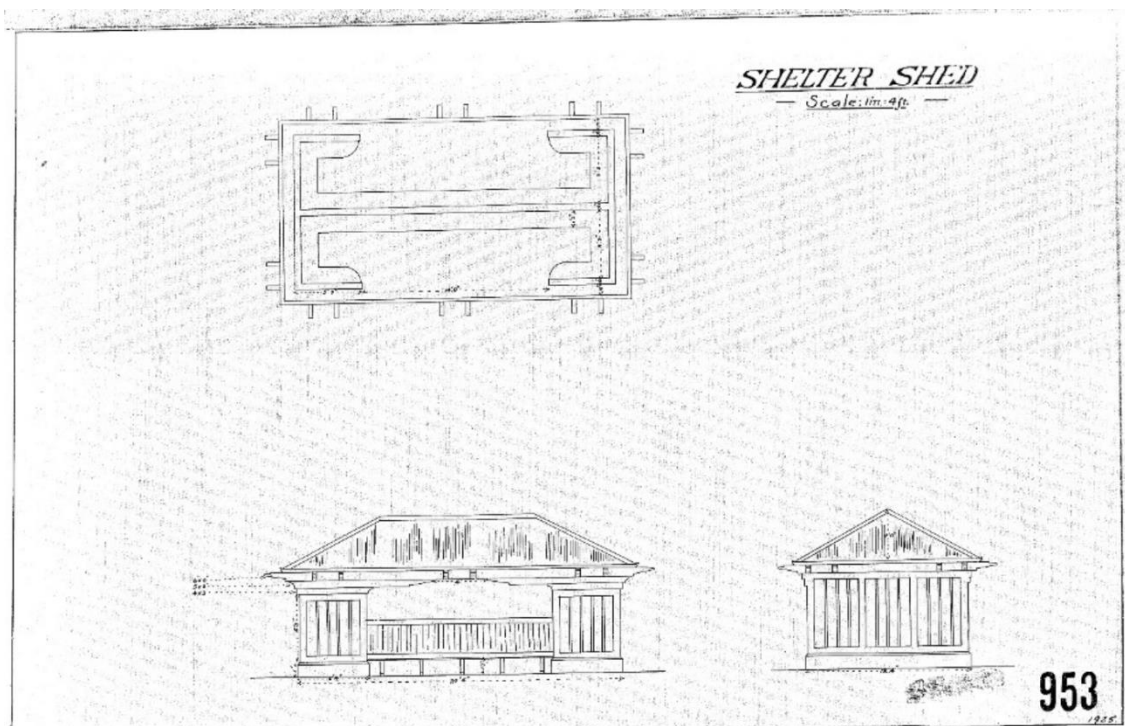


Fig. 4: Dated 1925, this plan was likely prepared for either or both the two shelter sheds comprising this scheduling report. Both shelters share the essential design with the plan above, although as

built, they are only accessible from one side and accommodate half as many passengers. Infill panels between the half-timbering are were likely timber tongue and groove, but were in fact stuccoed when they were constructed. Via Whanganui District Council Archives, Ref. 00168:0:953.

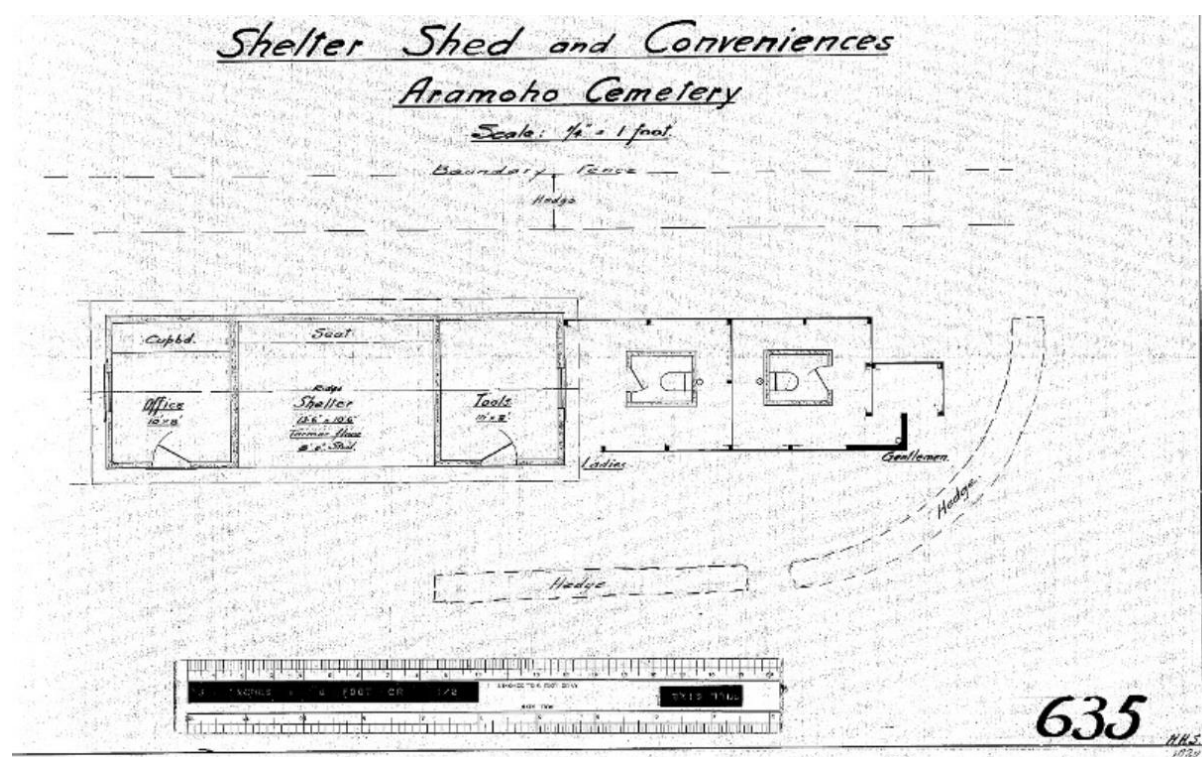


Fig. 5: Unexecuted design for the Aramoho Cemetery shelter from 1920, signed H.H.S. identifying Harry Herbert Stroud as its author. From Whanganui District Council Archives, ref. 00168:0:635.