

Breakwater and Moorings Clyde Quay Boat Harbour

Heritage significance assessment

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for Wellington Regional Council

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Commission details

This report was commissioned by Wayne Hastie, Manager, Resource Policy, Wellington Regional Council. It was researched and written by Michael Kelly, heritage consultant.

1.2 Opportunities and constraints

The availability of a full set of Wellington Harbour Board annual reports at the Wellington City Library provided a solid base of information for the report. Small but significant information was provided by the Wellington City Archives and the author was able to draw on information previously prepared for the Wellington City Heritage Inventory.

Unfortunately some key sources were not very forthcoming and principal amongst these were the former Wellington Harbour Board archives, under the management of the Wellington Museum - City and Sea. The archives are in an understandably disorganised state, having recently been moved from the former Maritime Museum to storage in a building at Ngauranga. Files relating to Clyde Quay Boat Harbour were found for the period after 1940, but no papers or plans relating to the early years of the harbour could be found.

The outcome of this is that while a broad understanding of the history of the breakwaters and their role in the boat harbour was obtained, specifics about the moorings were not easy to glean, and even then the information was confined to those affixed to the breakwaters. Further research, and in particular access to the key archives would improve this situation no end.

2.0 Description

2.1 History

Clyde Quay was originally the western part of the rocky beach between Courtenay Place and Oriental Bay. A narrow road connected the city with its then distant bays. Houses were built there from the 1860s onwards but development was slow.

Probably the first public use of the quay was the salt water Te Aro Public Swimming Baths, built in 1862. The men's and women's baths – “securely protected from the visits of sea monsters”¹ – were located roughly where Freyberg Pool is today. They were owned and operated by Henry Meech, and after his death in 1885 his wife took them over. Despite criticism from the Wellington Harbour Board (WHB), who argued in favour of an all-year, covered and heated pool,² the baths were rebuilt by the Wellington City Council in 1900. They were finally demolished in 1962 and replaced the following year by Freyberg Pool, the foundations of which delineate the eastern edge of the boat harbour.

¹ Wilson A. and Kelly M. 1996, Maritime Heritage Trail, WCC, Wellington (no.23)

² Wellington Harbour Board Annual Report (for year ending 31/12/1898)

Other early occupants of Clyde Quay were boat builders, who had premises there late in the 19th century. By this time the still undeveloped promenade to Oriental Bay was the most popular of any recreational walk in Wellington.³

During planning of the Te Aro reclamation, the WHB, prompted by the lack of satisfactory accommodation for recreational boats in Wellington Harbour, decided to set aside part of Clyde Quay for a boat harbour. The decision, made at least as early as 1898, was followed by a plan,⁴ although this bore little similarity to the eventual design. As part of a much wider and complex land swap between the WHB and WCC over the Te Aro reclamation, the WHB agreed to make available a 75 metre frontage along Clyde Quay for the new Te Aro Baths. This manoeuvre was actually enshrined in its own act of parliament – the *Wellington City Reclamation and Baths Act 1898*.⁵ The siting of the new baths was important, for the further along the quay they were built, the more room it allowed for the boat harbour. In 1899, while the decision to build the baths was in the process of being reconsidered, the Clyde Quay frontage to the harbour was extended from 204 m to 300 m.⁶

The reclamation began in 1901 and it was completed in 1904. The WHB annual report for the year ending 1901 described the works in progress on the boat harbour: “The works provide for the protecting wall on the eastern and southern sides, the south side being formed by Clyde Quay, and for a sheltering wall of about 400 ft (120 m) in length along its northern or sea front, leaving an opening 360 ft (108 m) in width to the north-east, which it is intended to partially close at a later date by a continuation of the wall built on the eastern boundary. There will be room along the Clude Quay frontage for the erection of a large number of boat houses, which it is suggested should be built by the Board, from time to time as the demand may arise, and be leased out to the owners of boats.”⁷

The contract for the sea wall boundaries to the reclamation (west) and baths (east) and the breakwaters was let to Charles Pulley in January 1902. The contract was to be completed in August 1903. After work on these walls was sufficiently advanced, the WHB was able to examine more closely the role of the breakwaters, with particular regard to the extent of protection that might be offered moored vessels. It was decided “to complete the north-eastern arm of the harbour in direction overlapping the outside of the north-western arm, in place of lying inside it, as it was first proposed. The boat harbour will then be completely sheltered from all easterly weather and it is anticipated that perfectly smooth water will be obtained inside.”⁸

The sea walls were finally completed by 1904. They enclosed seven and a half acres with a maximum depth of 3.6 metres. The north eastern arm was 135 metres long and ended in 5.4 metres of water. There appears to have been an electric lamp light lamp operating on the end of this arm virtually from the beginning. There was no mention of fore and aft moorings, nor moorings on the sea walls, in official descriptions of boat harbour construction.

The WHB had the first 24 sheds built by 1905.⁹ There were two lots of sheds, 12 small and 12 large, approximately 80 metres apart. The sheds were leased by members of the Port

³ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Cyclopeda Co. 1897, Wellington p.29

⁴ Wellington Harbour Board plan 247, Sketch of Suggested Boat Harbour, Clyde Quay, 1898 (Wellington City Archives)

⁵ WHB Annual Report (to year end 31/12/1898)

⁶ Ibid. (to year end 31/12/1899)

⁷ WHB Annual Report (to year end 31/12/1901)

⁸ Ibid. (to year end 31/12/1902)

⁹ Ibid. (to year end 31/9/1906)

Nicholson Yacht Club (later Royal PNYC) and other clubs and used for boat and gear storage and as workshops. To meet increasing demand, another 14 sheds were built in 1922.

The first major work done on the harbour was in 1909, when it was dredged, which would have necessitated the removal of any moorings on the harbour floor. Dredging continued every year thereafter for some period. By 1910, 83 craft of various types used the harbour. The following year 12 extra ring bolts for mooring purposes were fixed on the inner side of the eastern wall. By 1913 there were 114 craft accommodated in the harbour and all available space was taken. In 1923 repairs were “undertaken in enclosure walls”, although the nature of the repairs and which walls is not known.¹⁰

The arrival of American troops in Wellington in early 1942 transformed the boat harbour. Along with the wharfage built along the shore, the building of two storey structures and other sheds, numerous extra piles were driven in the harbour bed and more ring bolts installed in the breakwaters (and possibly the other walls). The latter two were for the numerous amphibian craft and launches moored where the city’s pleasure craft had previously anchored. After the departure of the Americans in 1944, any mooring piles not required were removed and the boat sheds were returned to their original condition.¹¹ Wellington’s recreational boaties returned to claim their old moorings and sheds.

After the war pressure on available space again grew. The harbour master reported, year in and year out, that demand for moorings could not be met.¹² The board was besieged with written requests from boatowners desperate to get their boat within the harbour. In 1951 the moorings rings on the sea walls were rearranged to provide yet more accommodation. The eventual response to all this was the construction of the Evans Bay marina

In 1960 the electric power main out to a light on the breakwater was renewed. Within at least the last 25 years, the dredge Keremoana has been used to lower the harbour bed so the moorings have been lifted and relaid in that time.

The most significant alteration to either breakwater was when the western wall was raised, in concrete, at least a metre above its original height in 1989-90.¹³ This work, which may have principally been undertaken to strengthen the wall, was conducted by the Wellington Harbour Board. The engineers were Beca Carter Hollings and Ferner. It is possible that new ring bolts were fitted to the inside of the breakwaters at the same time.

2.2 Physical description

The breakwaters consist of two separate walls of concrete, one emerging from the eastern side of Clyde Quay harbour at the end of the foundations to Freyberg Pool, the other from the edge of the Clyde Quay reclamation. The eastern arm overlaps the western arm but they are sufficiently apart to allow the ingress and egress of boats. The walls are about 750mm thick at the top although the exact dimensions are not known and original plans for the structures have not been located. The rest of the walls are underwater and it is not known if the walls are reinforced in any way.

¹⁰ See selected WHB annual reports, 1909, 1910, 1913 and 1923.

¹¹ Ibid. (to year end 31/9/1944)

¹² WHB 6/3/8 - Mooring sites, Clyde Quay Boat Harbour (Wellington Museum – City and Sea)

¹³ Pers. comm. Wayne Hastie et al, 28 April 2000

The fore and aft moorings are all underwater, with the exception of the ring bolts fixed to the inner side of the breakwaters. It is understood that the vast majority of the sunken moorings are concrete, with some sort of attachment (often a railway wheel) embedded in them to affix lines to. They remain in place on the seabed simply because of their size and weight. The moorings are the property of the boat owners, again with the exception of those attached to the breakwaters.

3.0 Significance assessment

3.1 Historical

The breakwaters have considerable significance – the equal of any other part of the Clyde Quay historic area. Recognition of that significance would complement the listing of all the other constituent historic parts of the harbour by the Wellington City Council and would recognise that it is not just buildings which are an important part of the historic fabric.

The breakwater arms, completed in 1903-04, are among the oldest structures associated with Clyde Quay boat harbour. They are, in their own way, as lingering a landmark as the boatsheds and, such has been the transformation of Wellington Harbour in the past 100 years, are now amongst the oldest visible harbour structures left. There are no older waterfront building or structures, with the obvious exception of some of those remaining at Queens Wharf. The breakwaters have nearly 100 years association with recreational boating, in particular the Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club, and have sheltered many of the greatest and best loved of Wellington's yachts and launches.

It is impossible on present evidence to ascribe a particular significance to the moorings. Those on the seabed are the property of boat owners, they are moveable, and their age is difficult to determine. Some have undoubtedly been handed down through generations or from boat owner to boat owner, others are relatively new.

3.2 Physical

The physical significance of the breakwaters is not immediately obvious, in that they are not structures of any great aesthetic significance. They are simple structures, made of concrete and with no decorative flourishes. The eastern wall is straight; the western wall leaves at an angle and has a distinctive kink at its end, added as an afterthought by the WHB.

The eastern arm has a great deal more integrity, as the western arm had a significant addition in the form of the extra metre high of concrete along its entire length, and is partly compromised for that fact.

The various fixed moorings on the breakwaters are of varying ages but in the absence of evidence of their precise age it is difficult to ascribe a level of significance. No physical significance can be properly attributed to the fore and aft moorings.

3.3 Other factors

As mentioned above, it is highly desirable that all the heritage items that make up the Clyde Quay boat harbour are given the same legal status. At present the WCC protects those parts of the harbour that are under their jurisdiction as part of the Clyde Quay Boat Harbour Precinct. Ultimately, all the buildings, structures and objects of recognised heritage value that are part of the precinct should be accorded the same status, albeit by different authorities.

3.4 Additional items of interest

The Wellington Regional Council could consider also listing the sea walls that were constructed at the same time as the breakwaters. It is not known just how much of the wall on the eastern side survived after the construction of Freyberg Pool in 1962, but the wall on the western side is largely original, and its listing should be investigated.

The status of the derricks (there are two of them) should be investigated. The earlier of the two was erected in 1913. These may more properly lie within the jurisdiction of the WCC, given that they are fixed above the mean high water springs mark.

4.0 Recommendations

- 1) That the breakwaters have sufficient heritage value to be listed on the Wellington Regional Council's schedule of heritage items.
- 2) That consideration be given to listing the two parallel seawalls that mark the east and west boundaries of Clyde Quay boat harbour.
- 3) That, because of the difficulty in ascribing any particular significance to the fore and aft moorings, they not be listed on the schedule.

5.0 Sources

Primary

Wellington Harbour Board files, Wellington Museum – City and Sea

WHB 6/3/8 – Mooring sites, Clyde Quay Boat Harbour

WHB 6/3/1a – Application for pleasure craft facilities

WHB 6/3/8 – Mooring sites, Clyde Quay Boat Harbour

Wellington City Council Archives

File 1904/1947, Application for water to be laid on for users of Clyde Quay Boat Harbour
Wellington Harbour Board plan 247, Sketch of Suggested Boat Harbour, Clyde Quay, 1898

Wellington Harbour Board Annual Reports 1896-1987 (held at WCC Library)

Secondary

Cronin J.B. (ed. and comp.) 1983, The Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club, Millwood Press for RPNYC, Wellington

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Smillie S. 1998, "Clyde Quay Boat Harbour – Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club, Heritage Significance Assessment", WCC, Wellington

Wilson A. and Kelly M. 1996, Maritime Heritage Trail, WCC, Wellington (no.23)

Kelly M. and Cochran C. "Clyde Quay Boat Harbour Precinct" in Wellington Heritage Buildings Inventory, Boffa Miskell and Chris Cochran for Wellington City Council, 2000

Other

Pers. comm. Bruce Askew, member, Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club

Pers. comm. Wayne Hastie, WRC