

Seatoun Tunnel

Broadway, Seatoun, Wellington



Crawford Tunnel, Seatoun, Wellington (Photo: Fairfax)

Summary of heritage significance

- The Seatoun Tunnel has massive historical importance. It opened up the suburb of Seatoun, previously only reached by ferry or an arduous journey through the dense bush of Seatoun Hill.
- The Seatoun Tunnel is associated with the Crawford family for their early championing, and funding, of the tunnel and tram project. The Crawford family were early owners of much of the Miramar peninsula (James Crawford's original purchase was 500 acres), and very important of the development of the area.
- The Seatoun Tunnel is one of a group of tunnels constructed in the first half of the 20th century designed to link Wellington city with other suburbs. The Karori Tunnel, Hataitai Tunnel, Northland Tunnel, and the Mt Victoria Tunnel can be seen as a part of a group with the Seatoun Tunnel as they are of similar ages, uses, history, and built using similar materials and techniques.
- The Seatoun Tunnel remains a focus for the community that continues to use it. While other entry points into Seatoun and onto the eastern side of Miramar peninsula, the Seatoun Tunnel remains the main access point. It has been used as a transportation point for over one hundred years, giving the tunnel considerable continuity value.

District Plan:	Map 7, reference 4
Legal Description:	Unknown; possibly Part Section 16 Watts Peninsula District
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	No
Archaeological Site:	Risk unknown
Other Names:	Seatoun Tunnel
Key physical dates:	1906-1907: Construction
Architect / Builder:	Unknown
Former uses:	Transport - Tunnel
Current uses:	Transport - Tunnel
Earthquake Prone Status:	

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The Seatoun Tunnel links the suburbs of Strathmore and Seatoun through Seatoun Hill, joining the roads of Broadway and Ferry Street. The tunnel was constructed in 1906-1907, opening in 1907.

The need for the Seatoun Tunnel was driven by the isolation of the Seatoun community. A ferry service, for so long the dominant mode of transport for a young Wellington (and indeed, pre-colonial Whanganui-a-Tara), was Seatoun's only reliable connection with the rest of the city.¹ Ferries ran between the city and wharves at Evans Bay, Karaka Bay, and Seatoun.

In 1904 The Miramar Borough Council began debate over how the community of Seatoun could break its dependency on the sea. On 12th December 1904 Seatoun's transport situation was the first urgent consideration for the council's meeting. The council was presented with three options²:

- (1) running a ferry service, estimated cost, £20,000;
- (2) straightening the road at Chinaman's Gardens and running a tunnel through Seatoun Hill, estimated cost, £10,000;
- (3) establishing buses and buildings to connect Miramar Wharf with the Flat, estimated cost £6,000.

Miramar historian John Struthers wrote that the population of Seatoun was less than 1,000 at the time. With logic that seems strange in hindsight, the Council considered funding all three, though that would mean running two services in competition with each other.

To induce these developments, two members of the preeminent Crawford family met the proposal with an offer of ten acres for a park at Chinaman's Gardens if the plan went through, while Miramar Limited offered twenty-five acres in Miramar North if a tramway system were extended there.

However, the plan to develop all three options was met with considerable opposition due to the cost and questionable logic behind the idea, and the scheme was abandoned.

The situation shifted once more, however, when it became known that Wellington City made plans to extend its tramway services to Kilbirnie, finishing at Rongotai Road.³ The Miramar Borough Council investigated extending the tramline through Miramar to Seatoun via a tunnel through Seatoun Hill, with the project costed at £23,000.⁴ It was put to a vote (presumably within the borough) and it passed by 360 votes to 47.

¹ John Struthers, *Miramar Peninsula* (Wellington: John Struthers, 1975), p 44

² *Ibid.*, p 45

³ *Ibid.*, p 46

⁴ 'A Tramway for Miramar', *Evening Post*, Volume LXX, Issue 147, 19 December 1905, Page 6, last accessed December 2013, at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19051219.2.21&srpos=4&e=-----50-DOM%2cEP%2cNZFL%2cNZH-1-byDA---2seatoun+tunnel-->

Local figures and syndicates put up £21,500 for the project: £5,000 came from H.D. Crawford, £8,000 from A. and C. Crawford, £5,000 from Miramar Limited, £2,000 from Watt's Peninsula Land Company, and £1,500 from the Evans Bay and Miramar Estate Company.⁵

The contract for the tunnel was signed on 21st August 1906, but construction was not completed until December 1907. The tunnel measures 144m (470 feet) long, and 8.2m (27 feet) wide. From local newspaper reports it appears there were delays in construction, which left the council and public unhappy with the progress. One of the apparent reasons was that the project was understaffed⁶, while the death of the chief contractor Jonathan Sanders/Saunders also stalled things.

In 2011 increased earthquake scrutiny called into question the strength of the Seatoun Tunnel (along with Wellington's other transport tunnels).⁷ While not judged a large risk of damage or collapse, engineers said the tunnel's portals were deemed in need of bracing. Seatoun Tunnel's bracing and strengthening work is scheduled for 2017-2018, after similar work has been completed on the Northland and Hataitai tunnels, and is forecast to cost \$2 million.⁸

John Struthers writes that 'the installation of the electric tramway system proved to be the making of the Borough', with the Miramar peninsula's population growing rapidly. The completion of the tunnel was integral to Seatoun's development and following its completion, Seatoun grew into one of Wellington's most prestigious suburbs. The suburb has some of Wellington's highest property prices, and the numerous beaches and lengthy coastline make it an oft visited destination for Wellingtonians. Though Seatoun now has multiple points of entry, the tunnel remains the primary access route.

The Seatoun Tunnel has tremendous historical and utility value. It is hard to imagine the development of Seatoun, one of Wellington's most distinct suburbs, without it. Perhaps more than anything, the tunnel and Seatoun's development demonstrate the power of infrastructure and the various barriers to unlocking a city's geography.

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1906-1907: Construction

1.3 Ownership history

1906-present: Wellington City Council

1.4 Occupation history

N/A

⁵ Struthers, p 46

⁶ 'Seatoun Tunnel', *Evening Post*, Volume LXXIII, Issue 31, 6 February 1907, Page 2, last accessed December 2013, at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19070206.2.12&srpos=18&e=-----50-DOM%2cEP%2cNZFL%2cNZH-1-byDA---2seatoun+tunnel-->

⁷ Rebecca Thomson, 'Wellington tunnels not quake safe', *Dominion Post*, 26 May 2011, last accessed December 2013 at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/local-papers/the-wellingtonian/5053956/Wgtn-tunnels-not-quake-safe>

⁸ Kat Duggan, 'Seatoun tunnel's \$2m facelift', *Dominion Post*, 26 September 2012, last accessed December 2013 at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/local-papers/the-wellingtonian/7730864/Seatoun-tunnels-2m-facelift>

1.5 Architect

Unknown

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The Seatoun Tunnel closely resembles the Karori Tunnel, built not long before in 1897-1901. Both are Late Victorian in style. The tunnel measures 144m (470 feet) long, and 8.2m (27 feet) wide. The tunnel used to feature a tramline down the centre flanked by twin footpaths, but with the disappearance of trams from Wellington streets and the rise of the motor vehicle, the tunnel was adapted to feature two car lanes and a raised, separate, footpath. Trolley bus cables run through the tunnel. The wall is plastered up to the spring line (where the tunnel starts to curve inward), while above which the bricks are still visible. The tunnel's interior has been painted white, presumably to increase visibility.

Both portals of the tunnel feature the commencement date of the tunnel's construction (1906).

2.2 Materials

Concrete, plaster, brick

2.3 Setting

The Seatoun tunnel runs on a northwest-southeast axis through Seatoun Hill and joins the streets of Broadway in Strathmore and Ferry Street in Seatoun. The approach to the portal from Strathmore is shrouded in green and makes for a very attractive entrance. The approach from Seatoun is perhaps more impressive for the steepness of the hill above it. The Seatoun approach is best for giving an idea of the scale of the hill and the sort of isolation it created for pre-tunnel Seatoun.

Sources

Duggan, Kat. 'Seatoun tunnel's \$2m facelift'. *Dominion Post*, 26 September 2012. Last accessed December 2013 at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/local-papers/the-wellingtonian/7730864/Seatoun-tunnels-2m-facelift>

Struthers, John. *Miramar Peninsula*. Wellington: John Struthers, 1975

Thomson, Rebecca. 'Wellington tunnels not quake safe'. *Dominion Post*, 26 May 2011. Last accessed December 2013 at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/local-papers/the-wellingtonian/5053956/Wgtn-tunnels-not-quake-safe>

Papers Past

'A Tramway for Miramar'. *Evening Post*. Volume LXX, Issue 147, 19 December 1905, Page 6. Last accessed December 2013, at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19051219.2.21&srpos=4&e=-----50-DOM%2cEP%2cNZFL%2cNZH-1-byDA---2seatoun+tunnel-->

'Seatoun Tunnel'. *Evening Post*. Volume LXXIII, Issue 31, 6 February 1907, Page 2. Last accessed December 2013, at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=search&d=EP19070206.2.12&srpos=18&e=-----50-DOM%2cEP%2cNZFL%2cNZH-1-byDA---2seatoun+tunnel-->

3.0 Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

Seatoun Tunnel has architectural value for its design and quality of craftsmanship. A late Victorian tunnel built over one hundred years ago, the tunnel has survived well, needing only remedial work for its upkeep.

Townscape: *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

The Seatoun Tunnel is indeed a landmark of the area. It is an impressive 'object', especially from the Seatoun side. The tunnel defines the access point between Strathmore and Seatoun essentially because it created it.

Group: *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

The Seatoun Tunnel is one of a group of tunnels constructed in the first half of the 20th century designed to link Wellington city with other suburbs. The Karori Tunnel, Hataitai Tunnel, Northland Tunnel, and the Mt Victoria Tunnel can be seen as a part of a group with the Seatoun Tunnel as they are of similar ages, uses, history, and built using similar materials and techniques.

Historic Value:

Association: *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

The Seatoun Tunnel is associated with the Crawford family for their early championing, and funding, of the tunnel and tram project. The Crawford family were early owners of much of the Miramar peninsula (James Crawford's original purchase was 500 acres), and very important of the development of the area.

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

The Seatoun Tunnel has massive historical importance. It opened up the suburb of Seatoun, previously only reached by ferry or an arduous journey through the dense bush of Seatoun Hill. It is hard to imagine the suburb developing to the same extent without the tunnel.

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

Educational: *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?

Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?

The Seatoun Tunnel remains a focus for the community that continues to use it. While other entry points into Seatoun and onto the eastern side of Miramar peninsula, the Seatoun Tunnel remains the main access point. It has been used as a transportation point for over one hundred years, giving the tunnel considerable continuity value.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The Seatoun Tunnel is a very good example of an early twentieth century Wellington tram tunnel.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The Seatoun Tunnel has likely received considerable maintenance over its century of use, but the tunnel has retained a high degree of authenticity. Some of the portal features are scheduled to be modified in the next few years. The tunnel has also been modified from a tram and pedestrian tunnel to motor vehicle and pedestrian tunnel.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

The Seatoun Tunnel is important at a local level.

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website		
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

Background research

Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*