

## **Mt View Asylum Wall**

Dufferin Street (Government House Grounds)



Photograph by Antony Paltridge, Copyright Government House.

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### **Summary of heritage significance**

- The Mt View Lunatic Asylum garden wall is an imposing albeit relatively simple utilitarian structure. The wall is an excellent example of brickwork; it is a well built and authentic example of early brick wall construction.
- This wall is the only physical remnant of the Mt View asylum that once occupied this site. It is associated with the history of mental illness in New Zealand and its treatment.
- Although part of the wall has been demolished, it retains significant original materials and has had few alterations made. It has authenticity of materials, craftsmanship, and design.

District Plan:	Map 6, reference 10
Legal Description:	Secs 1250, 1362 (SO 33757), Pt Sec 1394 and 1395 (SO 32412)
Heritage Area:	-
HPT Listed:	Category II, reference 1407
Archaeological Site:	Pre 1900 construction
Other Names:	-
Key physical dates:	Built: c.1870s
Architect / Builder:	Unknown
Former uses:	Civic facilities – Psychiatric hospital garden wall
Current uses:	Garden wall
Earthquake Prone Status:	Unknown at time of writing

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



## 1.0 Outline History

### 1.1 History<sup>1</sup>

The treatment of mental illness in New Zealand has a long, if often hidden, history. The earliest known home for 'lunatics' was a wooden building attached to the Wellington gaol in 1844 but it was not until the 1860s and 1870s that mentally ill people were not simply held alongside drunks, vagrants, and criminals. As awareness increased that the mentally ill needed special attention, and that their care was not really appropriate for a gaol, a public demand developed that they be housed separately in an asylum, separate from gaols and ordinary hospitals.

The first legislation providing for those suffering mental illness was passed in 1846. The 'Lunatics Ordinance' stated that after certification a mentally ill person could be sent to a gaol, house of correction, or public hospital; or alternatively to a public colonial asylum. Although the latter did not exist at the time, this legislation represented a step forward in the development of special services for the mentally ill. In 1852 the Constitution Act placed the responsibility for health services on the Provincial Governments, and between 1854 and 1872, a network of asylums were established throughout the country. These small purpose built asylums were set up with the intention of providing better care for mentally ill people with a minimum of physical restraint – however, these facilities were mainly staffed by people who had no medical training.

Following the abolition of the Provincial Government in 1876, the social services of the country were reorganised and the Lunacy Department was established as a department of state bringing asylums under central control. General hospitals and charitable institutions which had a lot of public support passed into local control at this time, and with local funding came the power to pass by-laws that could be used to deny admission to the mentally ill. People who were ill therefore had no choice but to seek admission at the asylums that had to accept them, and by the mid 1870, the clientele of the asylums had changed from admitting acute and recoverable cases to mostly long term chronic cases. The situation worsened towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the effects of the depression, lack of social welfare, and the consequences of an aging immigrant and mostly male population. Those suffering the effects of alcohol and syphilis that had no one to care for them and nowhere else to go would enter the asylum and never leave. Public views of the asylums were also affected by the expectation that medical control of the institutions would lead to more recoveries.

Asylums had also become terminal institutions for the incurable as well as therapeutic places for the acutely ill, and because all mental illness was treated only within asylums overcrowding became a major issue. At this time public perception of asylums changed from one of sympathy to one of fear and withdrawal, as a result tighter security was demanded and the use of mechanical restraints and custodial care re-emerged.

Wellington has had a number of permanent asylums, primarily The Karori Asylum (1854-1873), The Wellington Lunatic Asylum: Mount View (1873-1910), and The Porirua Lunatic Asylum (1887-1990s). The Mount View Asylum was opened on 22 May 1873 with Dr Charles France as Medical Officer. The asylum was constructed on the portion of the town belt that is now occupied by Government House.

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<sup>1</sup> History adapted from: "The Origins of Mental Health Care in New Zealand and Wellington", from *The Porirua Hospital Museum*, accessed 3 December 2013, <http://www.poriruahospitalmuseum.org.nz/the-origins-of-mental-health-care-in-new-zealand-and-wellington>

Between 1873 and 1875 the grounds were levelled and an approach was constructed from Adelaide Road by prisoners from the Wellington gaol who had been sentenced to hard labour. The building was designed by architect Christian Julius Toxward who was later to design Wellington Public Hospital at Newtown. The original two storey structure became the central portion of the building when it was later enlarged by the addition of two wings.

It can be assumed that the wall was constructed at the same time as the buildings. The wall is constructed in brick with a cement rendered gate at the centre, is about three metres high and ten metres long. The bricks are distinctive to the gaol located on The Terrace, and some of the bricks feature the distinctive arrow motif used to signify Crown property. Some additional historic graffiti is present on the bricks, probably created by the men laying the bricks and is mostly made up of names and pictures. The precise function of the wall is unclear, but it appears to have served as a retaining wall, which explains the rake of the wall which required the bricks to be laid on a shallow angle. For most of the length there is earth piled up from the slope rising behind the wall that follows the original contour of the slope. The central section of the wall has been modified where the sloping contour has been excavated to form a path that runs from the gate up the ridge behind. The edge of the northern section of the wall appears unfinished, suggesting that this part has been demolished. It also appears that there may have been a porch over the entrance to the gateway that is now missing. The contour of the land immediately behind this stretch has also been altered, as some earth has been removed for the landscaping of the rose garden.<sup>2</sup>

By 1905 the number of patients at Mount View reached 250 and for variable periods it was closed to new admissions which were sent to Porirua. In May of 1910, the remaining patients at Mount View were transferred to Porirua, Christchurch, and Seacliff asylums following the site being chosen as the location for the new Government House and the asylum was demolished to make way for the new building.

The Asylum Wall is now the only remnant of the Mount View Asylum that once occupied this site and is a physical link to the history of the area. The wall appears to have no significant cracking or subsidence and has technical value as a well built, authentic example of brick wall construction.

## **1.2 Timeline of modifications** (original plans cannot be accessed)

c.1873	Original construction
1910	Demolition of asylum

## **1.3 Ownership history**

c.1873	Mt View Asylum
1910	Crown

## **1.4 Occupation history**

Not assessed

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Bowman, 'Government House, Wellington', unpublished conservation plan, prepared for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2008, 9-10.

## **1.5 Architect**

The wall is likely to have been designed at the same time as the asylum building, so the architect is likely to be Christian Julius Toxward.

## **2.0 Physical description**

### **2.1 Architecture<sup>3</sup>**

The Mt View Lunatic Asylum garden wall is an imposing albeit relatively simple utilitarian structure. The wall is constructed in brick with a cement rendered gate at the centre, is about three metres high and ten metres long. The bricks are distinctive to the gaol located on The Terrace, and some of the bricks feature the distinctive arrow motif used to signify Crown property. Some additional historic graffiti is present on the bricks, probably created by the men laying the bricks and is mostly made up of names and pictures. The precise function of the wall is unclear, but it appears to have served as a retaining wall, which explains the rake of the wall which required the bricks to be laid on a shallow angle. For most of the length there is earth piled up from the slope rising behind the wall that follows the original contour of the slope. The central section of the wall has been modified where the sloping contour has been excavated to form a path that runs from the gate up the ridge behind. The edge of the northern section of the wall appears unfinished, suggesting that this part has been demolished. It also appears that there may have been a porch over the entrance to the gateway that is now missing. The contour of the land immediately behind this stretch has also been altered, as some earth has been removed for the landscaping of the rose garden.

### **2.2 Materials**

- Brick
- Cement

### **2.3 Setting**

The Mt View Asylum wall is situated on the western side of Mount Victoria at the northern end of Newtown. It is found within the grounds of Government House. The setting is extensively landscaped gardens with a number of outbuildings, entrance gates and a lodge.

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<sup>3</sup> Ian Bowman, 'Government House, Wellington', 2008, 9-10.

## Sources

“The Origins of Mental Health Care in New Zealand and Wellington.” *The Porirua Hospital Museum*, accessed 3 December 2013,

<http://www.poriruahospitalmuseum.org.nz/the-origins-of-mental-health-care-in-new-zealand-and-wellington>

Bowman, Ian. ‘Government House, Wellington’. Unpublished conservation plan prepared for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. 2008.

Paltridge, Antony. Photograph. Copyright Government House. Accessed 3 December 2013,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1407>

## 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?*

The Mt View Lunatic Asylum garden wall is an imposing albeit relatively simple utilitarian structure. The wall is an excellent example of brickwork; it is a well built and authentic example of early brick wall construction.

**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?*

**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?*

#### **Historic Value:**

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

This wall is the only physical remnant of the Mt View asylum that once occupied this site. It is associated with the history of mental illness in New Zealand and its treatment.

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

#### **Scientific Value:**

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

This wall was constructed pre 1900 and possesses significant archaeological value.

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

As there is little other evidence present of the asylum history of the area, the former asylum garden wall provides considerable opportunity for interpretation, so has significant educational value.

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

There is technical value in this as a well built, authentic, example of a brick wall. It remains in good and serviceable condition.

#### **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 former Mt View asylum garden wall contributes to a sense of place and continuity on the site as it is the only remnant of the former asylum and a physical reminder of the early treatment of mental illnesses in Wellington.

***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?*

It is in good condition with no significant cracking or subsidence and has value as a well built and representative example of brick wall construction.

***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?*

Although part of the wall has been demolished, it retains significant original materials and has had few alterations made. It has authenticity of materials, craftsmanship, and design.

***Local/Regional/National/International***

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

The Mt View Asylum garden wall is of local significance as it is so closely associated with the development of mental health treatments in early Wellington. It has architectural, historic, archaeological, educational, technical, social, and authenticity values.



### 3.0 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*