

Wellington Cenotaph

Corner Bowen Street and Lambton Quay



Image: Historic Places Trust

Summary of heritage significance

- The Cenotaph is of significant aesthetic and architectural value, it is an imposing presence in the Government Centre historic area, and a nationally significant monument. The memorial is a restrained but expressive composition that considerably enhances its setting.
- The Cenotaph has significant historic values based around its association with World War One and Two, the people of Wellington and New Zealand, and the armed forces. It is also associated with sculptor Richard Gross and prominent architectural partnership Grierson, Aimer, and Draffin.
- The Cenotaph is held in high public esteem due to its meaningful expression and its location in the Government precinct. This is demonstrated by the fact that it is still an important and popular element of Wellington's Anzac day services and has had several bouts of restoration carried out to preserve it.

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 31
Legal Description:	Pt Sec 491 Town of Wellington
Heritage Area:	-
HPT Listed:	Category I, reference 215, Government Centre Heritage Area
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270
Other Names:	Wellington Citizen's War Memorial
Key physical dates:	Constructed: 1929, Additions: 1952
Architect / Builder:	Sculptor: Richard Gross. Architects: Grierson, Aimer, and Draffin.
Former uses:	Commemoration – Memorial WWI, WWII
Current uses:	Commemoration – Memorial WWI, WWII
Earthquake Prone Status:	Unknown at time of writing

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

Standing guard over the city of Wellington, the Cenotaph is a nationally significant monument that presents a timeless message of the losses and realities associated with war. The Wellington Cenotaph is an imposing presence in the Government Centre historic area. Located at the junction of Bowen Street and Lambton Quay, this impressive memorial commemorates those lost in the 'Great Wars'; World War One (1914-1918) and World War Two (1939-1945).

The construction of the Cenotaph was administered by the Wellington Citizen's War Memorial Committee, which had been set up to coordinate fundraising for and building a monument to commemorate the New Zealander's lost in the First World War. The committee's desire was for a memorial "which by nobility of conception and perfection of execution will symbolise the glory and perpetuate the memory of the men of Wellington city and suburbs, who gave their lives at the call of the empire".²

A competition was held and the committee received 29 different sets of plans from different architectural firms and different sculptors. The competition was won by sculptor Richard Gross and architectural firm Aimer, Draffin, and Grierson, all from Auckland. It was estimated that the memorial would cost £25,000. Complications soon arose over the site that had been selected, which was to be the west side of Pigeon Park (now Te Aro Park), and the committee was not able to commit to any work for up to two years. In 1924 the Government gave permission for the wedge shaped site at the corner of Lambton Quay and Bowen Street to be used, however it would not be until 1929 that construction of the memorial would begin.

From 1927 there was a temporary cenotaph placed on the present day site that was used until the opening of the cenotaph in 1931. This was a smaller monument that was placed further towards Molesworth Street outside Parliament House. Upon the completion of the actual cenotaph, this temporary memorial was removed from the area.

The foundation stone of the Cenotaph was laid on ANZAC day 1929 by Governor General Sir Charles Fergusson, and at the same time a time capsule was buried holding Newspapers of the day, a copy of Bishop Scott's dedicatory prayer, a R.S.A badge, some coins, and the embarkation roll of the first New Zealand Expeditionary force in 1914.

The purpose of the Cenotaph was to recognise all the men who served New Zealand in World War One, and consists of a reliquary chapel surmounted by a pylon, with an equestrian on top. Gross described his sculpture as the most significant element of the design. The memorial is constructed with a Coromandel Granite base, supporting a Carrara Marble viewing room and obelisk capped by the bronze statuary of the "figure of victorious youth holding the victors wreath; but who in order to rise above mundane or material things has mounted the winged horse of inspiration to seek something finer and more ethereal; Pegasus spurning underfoot the victor's spoils of war, and rising into the heavens enables his rider to emerge from the deluge of blood and tears, and to receive the great spiritual assurance of peace".³ The sculpture

¹ History adapted from: Kayla Wilson, 'Wellington Cenotaph', (Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report), 6 October 2011, accessed 14 November 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=215>

² Wellington Citizens Committee, *Wellington Citizens War Memorial* (1932)

³ Wellington Citizens Committee, *Wellington Citizens War Memorial* (1932)

entitled 'The Will to Peace' emphasises the costs of war, and Gross believed that the facts of the war should be expressed by symbols.

The detailing of the stone reliefs on the base of the memorial call attention to the disillusionment felt at the commencement of the 'Great War'. The armed forces flow from the right showing the men who sacrificed everything for their country. The panel to the left shows the sacrifice of work, giving up hopeful careers, and leaving families. In detail it shows an elderly man taking up a shovel to enable younger men to leave and obey the call of duty, it also shows a young woman giving up her child to her sister so that she can join the red cross as a nurse. The right hand panel shows the sacrifice of human ties, first the mother and father sacrificing their son to the war, and a woman losing her husband and the father of her children. Elsewhere a trumpet is blown urging the men to hurry to get in the line with their counterparts who are shown passing out of sight on the panel. There is also a small detailing of a pelican feeding its life-blood to its young, a symbol of the women of New Zealand sacrificing sons, brothers, uncles, husbands, and fathers to the war. All of these reliefs tell a story, one leading up to the men, who left for the war, and the affect that this had upon others, and the actual events that occurred at war. They give an insight into the different impacts that the war had upon people. There are also a number of bronze plaques around the central shrine dedicated to the civilian effort, the New Zealand Army service corps, the New Zealand Army nursing corps, the New Zealand medical corps, the New Zealand field artillery, the New Zealand armoured corps, and the Royal New Zealand merchant navies. Over the door is an inscription from Rupert Brook, "These laid the world away; poured out the red sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be of work and joy and that unhooked serene; that men call age; and those who would have been their sons, gave the immortality".⁴

The war memorial was first officially used on Anzac Day 1931 and was officially dedicated as the citizen's war memorial in April 1932.

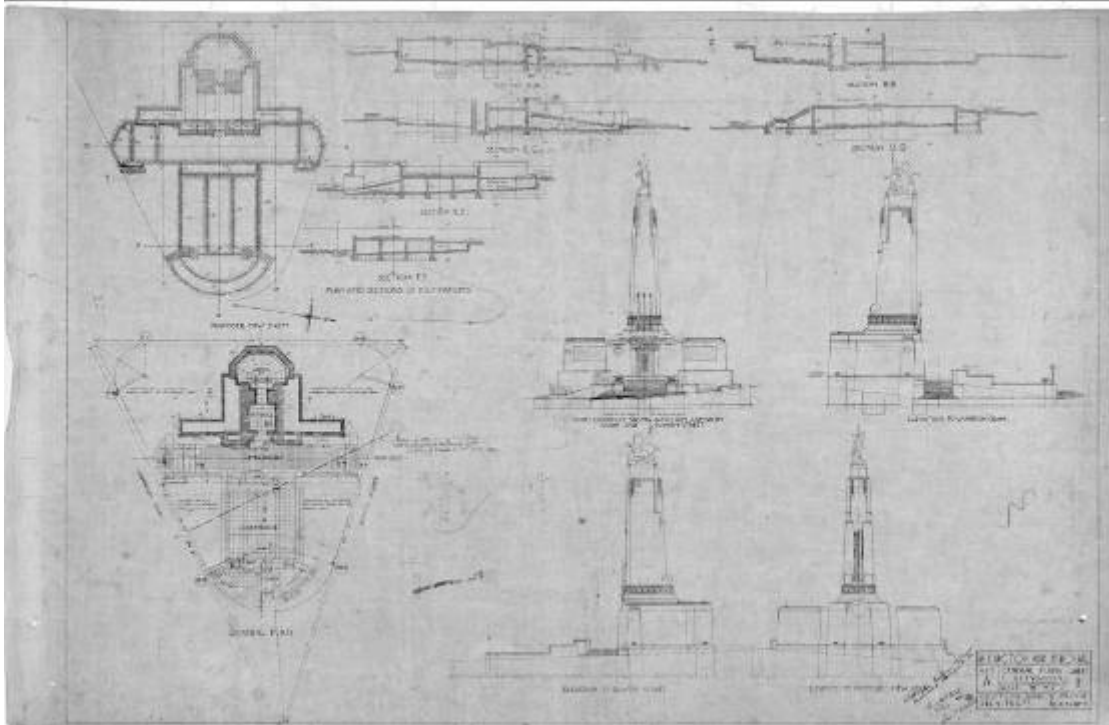
In 1952 the memorial was rededicated to include those who had fought and been lost in the Second World War. At this time the bronze lions were placed in the forecourt and a series of friezes depicting symbolic phrases such as peace, wisdom, amity, valour, and sacrifice. The insignia of the armed forces was also included, as well as images of falling bombs.

In the years since its construction the Cenotaph has been the focus of several restorations. These have had to take into account the effects of the city environment on the statues, natural weathering, and the age of the memorial. The first restoration was in 1997 when an internal video inspection by way of a miniature camera inserted through the horses stomach revealed corrosion. This was the only real trouble with corrosion found, and the steel pins in the bronze sculpture were replaced, and rust stains and fungus were removed from the column. The sculpture was also properly sealed after 13 litres of water were removed from inside the sculpture. Further restoration was undertaken in 2010.

The Cenotaph is a highly significant historic site and object that has been largely unaltered since the time of its construction. The memorial is a restrained but expressive composition that considerably enhances the Government Centre historic area. The Cenotaph remains an important feature of Wellington's Anzac day services.

1.2 Timeline of modifications

⁴ Garry McDermott, '*Conservation Plan: Wellington Cenotaph*', unpublished conservation plan prepared for ARCH273, 2008, 8-9.



- 1931 Construction completed
- 1952 Addition of bronze plaques and lions
- 1997 Restoration
- 2010 Restoration

1.3 Ownership history

Wellington City Council

1.4 Occupation history

Not Assessed

1.5 Architect

Grierson, Aimer & Draffin - Architectural Partnership⁵

Hugh Cresswell Grierson (1886-1953) was practising as an architect prior to the First World War. He served in the New Zealand Army and remained overseas to continue his studies at the Architectural Association in London. He became an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He returned to New Zealand and went into partnership with Kenneth Walter Aimer (1891-1960), a fellow student in London. Aimer was educated at Auckland Teachers' Training College and Auckland University College. He became a registered architect in 1918, and later travelled to England to continue his studies. He became an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1925. Malcolm Keith Draffin (1890-1964) was in partnership with Edward Bartley and his son Alva when the First World War began. Draffin served in the army and was awarded the Military Cross. He remained in London after the war

⁵ Historic Places Trust, 'Grierson, Aimer, and Draffin – Architectural Partnership', *Professional Biographies*, accessed 15 November 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Grierson,+Aimer+&+Draffin>

to study at the Architectural Association, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Following Edward Bartley's death in 1919, Alva Bartley and Draffin dissolved the partnership. The Auckland Institute and Museum complex was the major work of the firm, for which they were awarded a Gold Medal by the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1929. The firm's other work includes the South British Insurance Company, Shortland Street and a number of cinema's including the Capitol, Dominion Rd (1922), the Rialto, Newmarket (1923), the Colosseum/Majestic, Queen Street (1924) and the Edendale cinema (1926). They were one of the first Auckland firms to adopt the Art Deco style popular in America, as can be seen in the Gifford's Building (1929), and they also designed in the Stripped Neo-Classical style as seen in the Northcote War Memorial Pavilion (1922) and the Parnell Library (1923). The Depression halted most building activity and as a result the partnership was disbanded. Draffin and Aimer practised separately while Grierson took up farming.

Richard Gross⁶

Richard Oliver Gross made a major contribution to public sculpture in New Zealand between the wars. He was born in Barrow-in-Furness, Lancashire, England, on 10 January 1882 to George Gross, an engine-driver, and his wife, Emma Eliza Lines. After attending Barrow grammar school, he received training as a sculptor, first at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts under Albert Toft, an academic sculptor heavily schooled in the classics, and then in various London studios. Sculpture was, however, Gross's first love and after the war he moved to Newmarket, Auckland, and set up a studio. As communities looked for a way to commemorate the Great War, opportunities arose for public sculptures in war memorials. Gross's first commission was for the Cambridge memorial, which he completed in 1923. Characteristically, he chose to carve in marble a semi-nude male figure: a realistic portrayal of a shirtless digger with sandbags at his feet and also an expression of the ideal of sacrifice. Other memorial commissions followed, all carried out in association with two Auckland architects, William Gummer and M. K. Draffin, whom Gross had met through their mutual membership of the Quoin Club in Auckland. Working with Gummer, Gross sculpted in bronze an aspiring male figure on the top of the Auckland Grammar School memorial, the lion at the base of the Dunedin cenotaph, and the fountain at the National War Memorial carillon in Wellington. Draffin asked him to carry out the delicate bronze frieze around the Havelock North memorial, the stone frieze on the Auckland War Memorial Museum, and the decorative elements on the Wellington cenotaph including two panels of a call-to-arms relief and the equestrian figure on top, the Will to Peace. After the Second World War Gross added bronze lions to the cenotaph.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The memorial is constructed with a Coromandel Granite base, supporting a Carrara Marble viewing room and obelisk capped by the bronze statuary of the "figure of victorious youth holding the victors wreath; but who in order to rise above mundane or material things has mounted the winged horse of inspiration to seek something finer and more ethereal; Pegasus spurning underfoot the victor's spoils of war, and rising into the heavens enables his rider to emerge from the deluge of blood and

⁶ Jock Phillips. 'Gross, Richard Oliver', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30-Oct-2012, accessed 15 November 2013, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4g23/gross-richard-oliver>

tears, and to receive the great spiritual assurance of peace”.⁷ The sculpture entitled ‘The Will to Peace’ emphasises the costs of war, and Gross believed that the facts of the war should be expressed by symbols.

2.2 Materials

The main column of the Cenotaph is pre-cast concrete with marble tiles on the outer layer. The main entrance up onto the Cenotaph has been treated with granite. On the upper terrace quarry tiles have been used to form a formal space. The lower terrace is paved with pre cast concrete slabs.

The statue, lions, and plaques are cast in bronze.

2.3 Setting

The Cenotaph is an important element of the Government precinct and is an important Wellington landmark. It is located at the intersection of Lambton Quay and Bowen Street directly beside the Parliament grounds. The area is a busy thoroughfare between Parliament, the Railway station, and the city.

⁷ Wellington Citizens Committee, *Wellington Citizens War Memorial* (1932)

Sources

Wellington Citizens Committee, *Wellington Citizens War Memorial* (1932)

Historic Places Trust. 'Grierson, Aimer, and Draffin – Architectural Partnership.' *Professional Biographies*, accessed 15 November 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Grierson,+Aimer+&+Draffin>

Phillips, Jock. 'Gross, Richard Oliver', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30-Oct-2012, accessed 15 November 2013, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4g23/gross-richard-oliver>

Wilson, Kayla. 'Wellington Cenotaph.' Historic Places Trust. Unpublished registration report. 6 October 2011, accessed 14 November 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=215>

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 Cenotaph is of significant aesthetic and architectural value, it is an imposing presence in the Government Centre historic area, and a nationally significant monument. The memorial is a restrained but expressive composition that considerably enhances its setting.

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 Cenotaph is highly visible and situated on a major thoroughfare in the city. It is an important landmark in the city that helps to define the Government Centre historic area.

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?

The Cenotaph has significant historic values based around its association with World War One and Two, the people of Wellington and New Zealand, and the armed forces. It is also associated with sculptor Richard Gross and prominent architectural partnership Grierson, Aimer, and Draffin.

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

The Cenotaph is associated with World War One and Two, and the memorialisation of those who fought and were lost following these events. The solemn details of the Cenotaph provide an important insight into the feelings of disillusionment felt at the end of the First World War.

Scientific Value:

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

The Cenotaph is included in the NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270

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

The Cenotaph remains an important element of Wellington's Anzac day ceremonies and presents important insights into the disillusionment that people felt at the commencement of World War One. It presents a timeless message on the losses and realities associated with war.

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?*

The Cenotaph is held in high public esteem due to its meaningful expression and its location in the Government precinct. This is demonstrated by the fact that it is still an important and popular element of Wellington's Anzac day services and has had several bouts of restoration carried out to preserve it.

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?*

The Cenotaph has significant symbolic and commemorative values as a memorial for the men of Wellington and New Zealand who served in World War One and Two. It shares some spiritual value for the people of Wellington.

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 Cenotaph contributes considerably to the sense of place and continuity in the Government Centre historic area through its history of use and the attachment that people have to it.

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

The Cenotaph is a focus of community sentiment and connection as it is an important memorial in Wellington city. It holds special significance for many people in Wellington and New Zealand for its historic associations, the connections that people have to it, the memories that are associated with it, and the myriad of different uses that the site has.

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 Wellington Cenotaph is an excellent example of a sculptural memorial created by a talented craftsman and architectural partnership.

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 Cenotaph has had few major modifications carried out and has been through several rounds of restoration to ensure its survival. It retains significant authenticity of materials, craftsmanship, design, and use. Its setting has been impacted on heavily as the surrounding built form has increased in scale.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional,

national, or international level?

The Cenotaph is a nationally important monument with particular significance for the people of Wellington. It is the product of a nationally recognised sculptor and architectural firm, has significant townscape values, has important historic associations and educational values, is held in high public esteem, has high commemorative, spiritual, and symbolic meaning, is a focus of sentiment and connection, is an excellent representative of its type, and retains considerable authenticity.

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*