

Seddon Statue

Parliament Grounds, Molesworth Street, Thorndon, Wellington



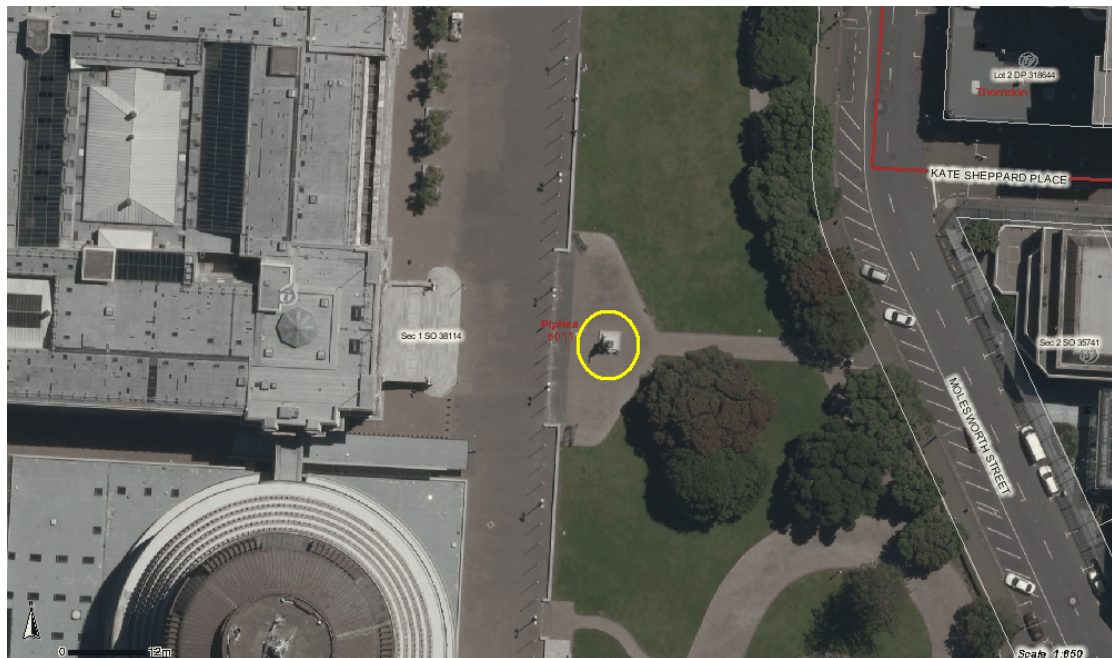
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Summary of heritage significance

- The statue of Richard Seddon has architectural value for the quality of its sculpting and craftsmanship. It also admirably fills the space, dominating Parliament's forecourt and interacting well with the grounds.
- The statue of Richard Seddon has historical importance, as it commemorates one of New Zealand's most important Prime Ministers. The statue's maker, Sir Thomas Brock, was an important sculptor of considerable renown. The connection with Thomas Brock gives the statue added historical importance.
- The statue of Richard Seddon makes a strong contribution to a sense of place for Parliament. Structurally, the Parliamentary precinct is dominated, and very much defined, by the Beehive, Parliament House, and the Parliamentary library. However, the statue, along with that of John Ballance, importantly injects a degree of humanity into the grounds, reinforcing the idea that Government is made of the people.
- The statue of Richard Seddon is held in very high public esteem. Seddon is still thought of as one of New Zealand's most important Prime Ministers, especially for the significant pieces of social legislation passed during his reign. The statue is an icon of New Zealand's Parliament and its grounds, and often a prop for protests.

District Plan:	Map 18, object reference 36
Legal Description:	Secs 1210 1211 SO 24133 Town of Wellington
Heritage Area:	Parliament Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Historic Place Category 1, register no. 230
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270
Other Names:	-
Key physical dates:	1915: Unveiling
Designer / Sculptor:	Sir Thomas Brock
Former uses:	Commemoration/public art
Current uses:	Commemoration/public art
Earthquake Prone Status:	Unknown at time of writing

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

Richard Seddon (1845-1906) was the fifteenth Prime Minister of New Zealand, and to date remains the longest serving Prime Minister in New Zealand's history. He held the office from 27 April 1893 to 10 June 1906, winning a record five consecutive general elections. He is regarded by many, notably including the New Zealand historian Keith Sinclair, as New Zealand's greatest Prime Minister. He was extroverted and popular with crowds. He emphasised the role of the Prime Minister, working long hours and taking on numerous, important portfolios such as education, immigration, labour, defence, and he was also native minister and colonial treasurer. He was known to reward loyalty above competence, which often found him having to compensate for his less capable Cabinet Ministers. His premiership saw the passing of many reforms that were initiated by his predecessor, John Ballance, including the Government Advances to Settlers Act 1894 and the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1894. Seddon is most closely associated with the Old-age Pensions Act 1898, partly because of his determination to see the legislation passed against stiff opposition, and partly because of his underlying concern for aging West Coast miners. Seddon's time in power also saw women gain the right to vote, though Seddon himself initially opposed it. Seddon was imperialist in international politics – he sent troops to South Africa, and he unsuccessfully lobbied for the annexation of Samoa and Fiji, though he did see New Zealand annex the Cook Islands at his bequest. Along with his reforms and his outsized persona, his political legacy is the affirmation of state authority in New Zealand.

Seddon's high regard has not just been accumulated since his death: contemporary society held him in high esteem as well (his five consecutive electoral victories are testament to this). Which goes a long way to explaining both the statue's creation and, perhaps more remarkably, its position at the centre of Parliament's foreground. Located at the boundary between Parliament's forecourt and grassed expanse, and directly in front of the Parliament buildings, the statue of Richard Seddon simultaneously greets visitors to Parliament and declares the importance of the grounds they have entered.

The statue was built by Thomas Brock, an English sculptor of great note (see S1.5). The statue was unveiled in 1915 following the landscaping of the much more spacious Parliamentary grounds, developments brought around after the fire in 1907 destroyed much of the original Parliament House. The statue was funded half by public subscription and half by the Government.²

The Richard Seddon statue inevitably features in political gatherings occurring at Parliament grounds. His outstretched right arm with partially open right-hand perfectly grasps a flag pole, meaning the statue has often been commandeered into supporting whatever cause is being brought to Parliament's attention.

¹ See: Gavin McLean, 'Richard Seddon', Ministry for Culture and Heritage, updated 9 April 2013, last accessed October 2013, at <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/people/richard-seddon>; and David Hamer, 'Seddon, Richard John', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30 October 2012, last accessed <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s11/seddon-richard-john>

² 'Statues in Parliament grounds', NZ House of Representatives, last accessed October 2013 at <http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/features/00NZPHomeNews150520091/statues-in-parliament-grounds>

The statue of Richard Seddon in Parliament's grounds is an iconic piece of public art in Wellington. Parliament's website says that it is one of the most photographed parts of the grounds.³ The statue is a memorial of one of New Zealand's highest regarded Prime Ministers, a politician who left his indelible mark on the country. Of the utmost prominence in Parliament grounds for almost a century, the statue has become a fixture of our governmental buildings.

1.2 Timeline of modifications

1915 Unveiling

1.3 Ownership history

1915-present Crown

1.4 Occupation history

N/A

1.5 Sculptor

Sir Thomas Brock (1847-1922)

Thomas Brock was an esteemed British sculptor born in Worcester in 1847. He attended the School of Design in Worcester then undertook an apprenticeship in modelling at the Worcester Royal Porcelain Works. In 1866 he became a pupil of the sculptor John Henry Foley.

Brock gained prominence with several royal sculptures, most notably the Imperial Monument to Queen Victoria outside Buckingham Palace.

Brock's other works include the:

- Monument to Henry Philpott, Bishop of Worcester. South Transept of Worcester Cathedral. Seated white figure. (1892)
- bust of Henry W. Longfellow, Grand Pre, Nova Scotia
- Queen Victoria Monument, Carlisle - UK
- Statue of Richard Baxter, 17th century English Puritan church leader and divine scholar. Originally in the Bull Ring, Kidderminster but moved to its present site, outside St Mary's parish church in March 1967. Unveiled 28 July 1875.
- Statue of Sir Rowland Hill, inventor of the Penny Black and modern postal system. Vicar Street, Kidderminster. Unveiled 26 June 1881.
- Statue of Queen Victoria on the grounds of the Belfast City Hall
- Memorial to the victims of the sinking of the RMS *Titanic*, also on the grounds of Belfast City Hall
- Statue and bas-relief on the Sir Henry Bartle Frere Memorial, Whitehall Gardens, London
- Statue of Sir Henry Irving on Charing Cross Road, London
- Figures of *Navigation* and *Gunnery* at the Admiralty Arch, London
- Equestrian bronze *A Moment of Peril* (1880) now in the collection of Tate Britain.

³ 'Virtual tour', Parliament NZ, last accessed October 2013 at <http://www.parliament.nz/virtual-tour/4/?tourType=lite>

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The statue is cast in bronze and sits atop a base of Aberdeen granite. Seddon is positioned with his back to the Parliament buildings, facing Molesworth Street, and by extension, the New Zealand public. His right arm is outstretched in an act of oratorical gesticulation, while his left arm clutches a collection of papers to his chest. Seddon is wearing his trademark 'frock-coat'.

2.2 Materials

Bronze, on an Aberdeen granite base.

2.3 Setting

The statue of Richard Seddon is located in the centre of Parliament's foregrounds on Molesworth Street. It is an incredibly prominent position at the boundary between Parliament's forecourt and grassed expanse, and directly in front of the Parliament buildings. The statue of Richard Seddon simultaneously greets visitors to Parliament and declares the importance of the grounds they have entered.

3.0 Sources

McLean, Gavin. 'Richard Seddon'. Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Updated 9 April 2013, last accessed October 2013, at <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/people/richard-seddon>

Hamer, David. 'Seddon, Richard John'. From the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Updated 30 October 2012, last accessed <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s11/seddon-richard-john>

'Statues in Parliament grounds', NZ House of Representatives, last accessed October 2013 at <http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/features/00NZPHomeNews150520091/statues-in-parliament-grounds>

'Virtual tour', Parliament NZ, last accessed October 2013 at <http://www.parliament.nz/virtual-tour/4/?tourType=lite>

'Thomas Brock'. Wikipedia. Last accessed October 2013 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Brock

Papers Past. 'Seddon Statue'. *North Otago Times*. Volume CI, Issue 13302, 24 June 1915, Page 8. Accessed October 2013, at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=NOT19150624.2.45>

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 statue of Richard Seddon has architectural value for the quality of its sculpting and craftsmanship. It also admirably fills the space, dominating Parliament's forecourt and interacting well with the grounds.

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 statue of Richard Seddon has considerable townscape value. It is a very prominent structure in Parliament grounds, occupying centre stage between the Parliamentary buildings and Molesworth Street.

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 statue of Richard Seddon can be considered as one half of a pair with the statue of John Ballance in front of the Parliamentary library. Together, 'the two statues embody the importance of the Liberal government of the 1890s and 1900s in bringing in a wide range of social and labour reforms' to New Zealand.⁴

Historic Value:

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

The statue of Richard Seddon has historical importance, as it commemorates one of New Zealand's most important Prime Ministers. The statue's maker, Sir Thomas Brock, was an important sculptor of considerable renown. The connection with Thomas Brock gives the statue added historical importance.

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?*

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?*

⁴ Statues in Parliament grounds', NZ House of Representatives, last accessed October 2013 at <http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/features/00NZPHomeNews150520091/statues-in-parliament-grounds>

Social Value:

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

The statue of Richard Seddon is held in very high public esteem. Seddon is still thought of as one of New Zealand's most important Prime Ministers, especially for the significant pieces of social legislation passed during his reign. The statue is an icon of New Zealand's Parliament and its grounds, and often a prop for protests.

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?*

Obviously, the statue has high commemorative value, built to memorialise one of New Zealand's best remembered Prime Ministers, Richard Seddon.

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 statue of Richard Seddon makes a strong contribution to a sense of place for Parliament. Structurally, the Parliamentary precinct is dominated, and very much defined, by the Beehive, Parliament House, and the Parliamentary library. However, the statue, along with that of John Ballance, importantly injects a degree of humanity into the grounds, reinforcing the idea that Government is made of the people.

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?*

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?*

Local/Regional/National/International

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

The statue of Richard Seddon in Parliament grounds is important at a national level.

4.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

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

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 Cyclopeda of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*

SEDDON STATUE

North Otago Times, Volume CI, Issue 13302, 24 June 1915, Page 8

TO BE UNVEILED ON SATURDAY

A FINE WORK OF ART
WELLINGTON, June 23

The statue of the late Right Hon. Richard Seddon, to be unveiled by the Governor in Parliament House grounds on Saturday, will, it is said, rank as one of the finest examples of the sculptor's art in New Zealand, if not the finest. Sir Thomas Brook, the famous English sculptor, who carried out the work, was responsible for the beautiful Victoria Memorial opposite Buckingham Palace, towards the east of which all the overseas dominions subscribed. He has followed a typical pose of New Zealand's great Democrat. Mr Seddon is depicted speaking to the people, emphasising his point with outstretched right arm. The left holds a roll of papers. A platform photograph taken on a big public occasion in the Wairarapa has been the sculptor's chief guide. He also had the advantage of Mrs Seddon's advice in the early stages of the work.

The bronze statue stands on a pedestal of Aberdeen granite, of quiet yet singularly beautiful colour. Bronze shields appear on each of the four sides, displaying the initials R.S.S.

A private ceremony took place when the foundation stones were being fixed in position, the dead statesman's widow placing beneath one of the massive stones a casket containing coins, newspapers, and documents. Mrs Seddon will be present at Saturday's function, together with Mrs Morice, Mrs Bean, Miss Mary Seddon (daughters), Captain R. Seddon, Mr T. E. Y. Seddon, M.P., and Mr Stuart Seddon (sons). Two other members of the family are Mrs Gilmer, of Wellington, who is ill at Rotorua, and Mrs Woods, wife of Fleet-Surgeon Woods, residing in London.