

Taranaki Street Terminal Breastwork, pictured from Taranaki Street Wharf, 2018

Taranaki Street Terminal Breastwork

May 2020

1.0 Outline History

1.1. History

The Taranaki Street Terminal Breastwork, completed in 1969, is the culmination of a series of reclamations of the western end of the Te Aro foreshore. The Wellington City Corporation undertook the first reclamation in the early 1880s using a trestle tramway and fill from Oriental Bay. A second, larger reclamation by the Wellington Harbour Board (WHB) followed in 1901-04. It was part of a significant expansion of waterfront facilities in this area, including new wharves and a proposed graving dock (which was begun but never finished).

As part of this work, a wharf was planned at the western end, opposite the northern end of Taranaki Street. Plans were prepared in 1901, but work was delayed for three years while the reclamation was finished. The contract was let on 23 March 1905¹ and the wharf, and a shed, completed towards the end of 1906.² The adjacent wharf gates are thought to have been built in 1907. In 1911, a plan was prepared for additions to the landward side of the wharf, incorporating staging to the nearby Jervois Quay breastwork.³ Once completed, this arrangement was left largely as it was for the next 60 years. The wharf handled coal and timber for many decades and was also used for the berthing of a variety of ships.

In the mid-1960s the Wellington Harbour Board (WHB) decided to undertake a major reclamation of Lambton Harbour, a scheme ultimately known as Harbour Development: Scheme H1. It included reclamations at Taranaki Street Wharf, alongside Jervois and Customhouse Quays and a large reclamation alongside Aotea Quay reclamation.

The immediate priority was Taranaki Street Wharf, where the WHB planned a roll-on, roll-off ferry terminal, to be operated by the Union Steamship Company, not the WHB, for a new fortnightly trans-Tasman freight link. Ro-ro shipping, as it was known, had started in New Zealand in the early 1960s with New Zealand Rail's inter-island ferry service being a prominent early adopter. In order to provide enough room to operate the service, a reclamation was planned for that part of the harbour between the Taranaki Street Wharf and a point just west of the Herd Street Post Office. A plan was prepared in September 1966 by the WHB chief engineer that is largely what was constructed.⁴

¹ *Grey River Argus*, 2 November 1904

² *Poverty Bay Herald*, 17 August 1906

³ 'Additions to Taranaki Street Wharf and extension to Jervois Quay Breastwork', 1911, AC106:4:165, Wellington City Archives (WCA)

⁴ 'Taranaki St Wharf Proposed Roll on Berth', Plan S1223, WHB, 00009:22:173 Pt.1, WCA

The service was intended to begin in mid-1968, so the Taranaki Street Wharf extension, later known as the Taranaki Street Terminal, was pushed forward.⁵ However, work could not proceed before the passing of the Wellington Harbour Board Loan and Empowering Act 1967, which gave the authority 'to reclaim land and to authorise and empower the Wellington Harbour Board to carry out certain harbour works and to borrow the sum of \$6,200,000'⁶ to undertake the work. The act was passed on 2 November and work began soon after.

At least some of the fill came from the Kiwi Point Quarry, Ngauranga, which was owned and operated by the Wellington City Council, but a variety of sources were used to recover different grades of rock before the reclamation was completed. The tender for the main shift of fill (over 306,000 cubic metres) was won by Feast Contractors Ltd, at a rate of 42 cents per cubic yard.⁷ This work was augmented by the movement of different types of rock by a variety of carriers. The tender for spreading and compaction of fill was won by Cameron's Carrying Co. For many months, trucks of fill were brought in at night until the area was filled, graded and levelled. The tender to provide rip-rap to protect the reclamation was won by Waikanae Asphalters Ltd., who also undertook sealing. The project was completed in January 1969.⁸ The reclamation wasn't without its issues, with subsidence a significant problem that had to be monitored and rectified.

A second, smaller reclamation covering 800m² was undertaken late in 1968 to add a roadway and stacking area to the east. Four contractors were asked to provide the fill. This work was largely completed late in 1969, although the provision of rip-rap may have taken until the following year to be completed.⁹

In 1969, a 16-metre wide breastwork of Australian hardwood piles and framing covered by a concrete deck and finished with bitumen was built directly in front of and connected to the reclamation. This meant that some of the piles had to be driven through the rip-rap. The wharf continued around the western side of the reclamation to abut the southern end of Taranaki Street Wharf. (This was almost certainly completed before the breastwork proper). It is not known who undertook this work. The kinds of timbers used can be gleaned from work reconstructing parts of the Taranaki Street Wharf in 1967. There, turpentine was used for piles and a variety of other species (mahogany, jarrah, gum, karri and others) proposed for what were

⁵ Secretary, Wellington Harbour Board to Town Clerk, Wellington City Council, 5 October 1966, 00009:22:173 Pt.1, WCA

⁶ *Wellington Harbour Board Loan and Empowering Act 1967*

⁷ Chief Engineer, WHB to tenderers, 31 July 1967, AC058:10.02:14 Pt.1, Taranaki St Wharf Reclamation Scheme, WCA

⁸ There is no date given on file for the conclusion of work, just advance notice that work might finish in September 1968.

⁹ See image WA-68374-F, taken in 1969, which shows the reclamation largely finished, but with no rip-rap.

described as girders.¹⁰ The timber came from local suppliers of Australian hardwoods.

Shed 26 was built in 1969 to service this new link and it was located on the reclamation, close to the breastwork. To the rear of this was a Union Steamship Co. office. The Union Steamship Company's operation was fenced off, excluding the breastwork.¹¹ A link span bridge and an associated Link Span Building (a Customs' office) were constructed right next to Taranaki Street Wharf. Designed by architect Roger Walker (then of prominent Wellington firm Morton, Calder, Fowler and Styles), the building was also completed in 1969.

The trans-Tasman ro-ro service was short-lived, as Wellington had by then already announced its intentions to become a container port, based at an enlarged Thorndon reclamation. Container shipping very quickly became the mainstay cargo activity in the port. Nevertheless, the link span was in use as late as 1984, by which time the reclamation was primarily being used to store containers.¹² By the late 1980s it was a carpark. Ships still tied up at the breastwork and alongside Taranaki Street Wharf.¹³

The Nissan 500 motor race ran along the waterfront annually from 1985 to 1996.¹⁴ A controversial event, it took the cars on a circuit that incorporated nearby streets and the waterfront, including the breastwork. The race was eventually abandoned after public complaints and a looming incompatibility with waterfront redevelopment plans.

An imminent issue was the decision to build the country's new national museum and art gallery on the site of the 1967-68 reclamation. Work began in 1993 with the removal of Shed 26 and other structures, including the shifting of the Museum Hotel (facing Cable Street) and then extensive compaction of the reclamation. The building, known as Te Papa Tongarewa, opened in 1998. As part of its design, the museum incorporated a lagoon linked to the sea underneath the breastwork. The breastwork was kept in the expectation that racing would continue (or return) but it never did.

¹⁰ See file Hardwood Piles and Girders (Reconstructing Taranaki St Wharf) 1966-68, AC068:1968:4, WCA

¹¹ Plan AC046-6281 [1974], WCA

¹² See EP/1984/5963-F (Aerial view of Wellington City), Evening Post Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library

¹³ https://files.interpret.co.nz/Retrolens/Imagery/SNC8937/Crown_C8937_B_18/High.jpg [retrieved 11 May 2020]

¹⁴ 'Wellington 500' in Supply of Material from Kiwi Point Quarry, Ngauranga for filling at Wellington Harbour Board Reclamation at Taranaki Street and Fryatt Quay, 00009:11:3/8/1 Pt.1, Wellington City Archives (WCA). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellington_500 [retrieved 11 May 2020]

Three concrete sculptures containing quotations that are part of the Wellington Writers' Walk were installed at intervals on the southern edge of the breastwork. Installation of these began in 2001.

In 2002, work began on redesigning the area to the east of Te Papa, towards the former link span building. A number of concepts were eventually pursued, including 'cut-outs' of the breastwork to the south and east of the site of the former link-span bridge. These were in place by 2004. The timbers taken from these cut-outs were used to form an installation of upright timbers on the western side of Taranaki Street Wharf.¹⁵ A new, stylised link span bridge was built to cross the gap where the bridge had been, but this time oriented east-west.

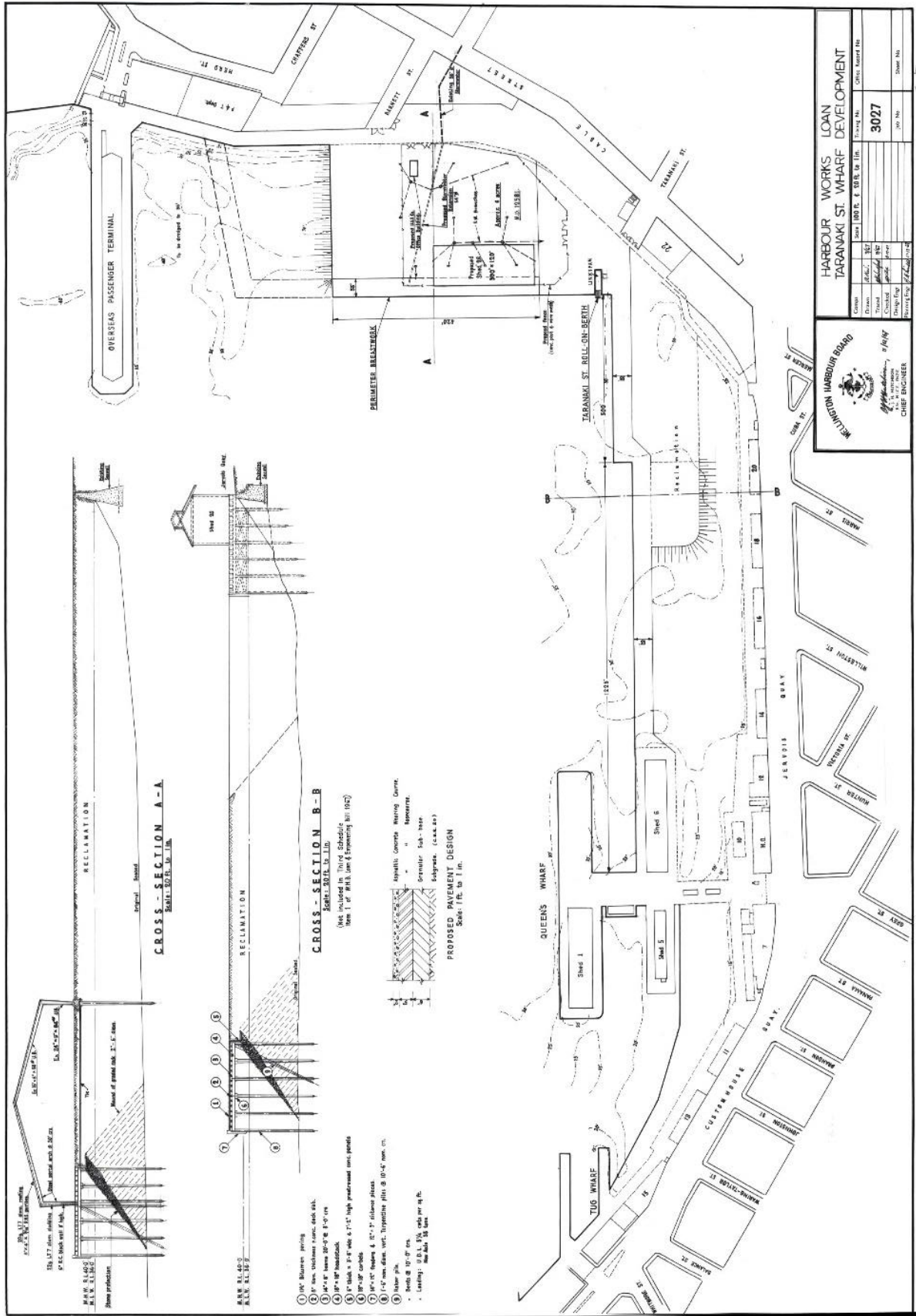
In 2008, Solace in the Wind (Naked Man) sculpture, by British-born artist Max Patté, was installed on the edge of the breastwork. Its popularity saw the work purchased by the Wellington City Council three months into a 12-month temporary installation.¹⁶ Today, the sculpture is a highlight of the popular promenade around Te Papa that is walked by thousands of Wellingtonians every week.

Chronology, modifications

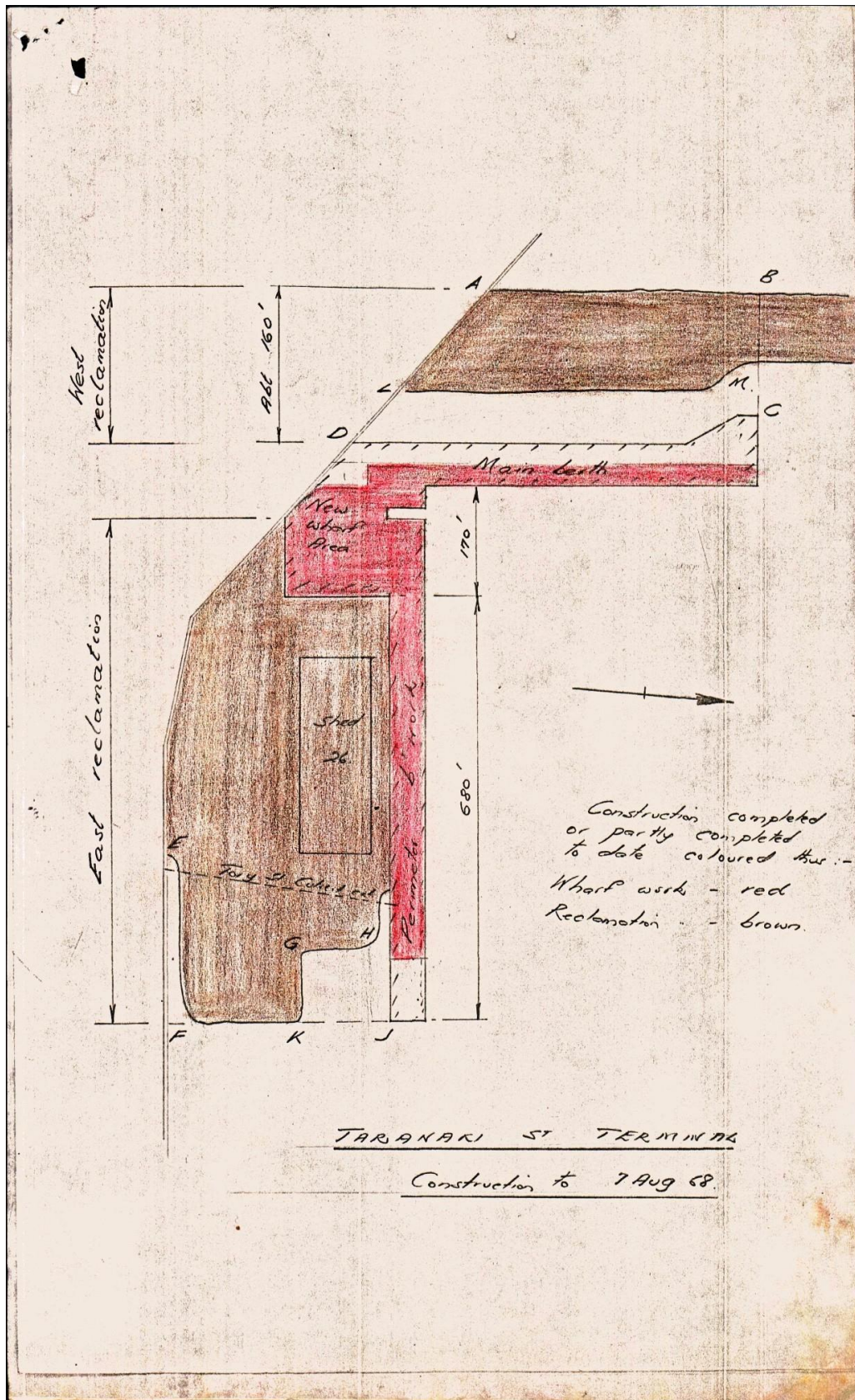
date	activity
By 1886	First Te Aro reclamation completed by Wellington City Corporation.
1901-04	Second Te Aro reclamation undertaken by Wellington Harbour Board.
1906	Taranaki Street Wharf constructed.
1967-68	Reclamation east of Taranaki Street Wharf undertaken.
1969	Second reclamation, breastwork, Shed 26, Union Steamship Co. office, Link Span bridge all constructed at new reclamation.
By 1993	Buildings removed from the site to allow the construction of Te Papa.
1994-1998	Construction of Te Papa.
From 2001	Installation of three concrete slab sculptures for Wellington Writers' Walk.
By 2004	Construction of new Link Span bridge and cut outs.
2008	Installation of sculpture 'Solace in the Wind' by Max Patte.

¹⁵ Registration Report for a Historic Area (Draft), 'Wellington Wharves Historic Area (Volume II)', 2009, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, p.115

¹⁶ <https://www.maxpatte.com/about-solace-in-the-wind> [retrieved 11 May 2020]



The plan for the reclamation in and around Taranaki Street Wharf, 1967. (AC047-3027, Wellington City Archives)



A plan of the reclamation and breastwork part way through construction, August 1968. Note the portion labelled 'new wharf area' that remains intact today just to the west of Te Papa. (From file 'Taranaki Street reclamation' AC058_10.02;14 Pt.2, Wellington City Archives)



An image of site in March 1969. The breastwork is nearing completion, along with additional reclamation at the bottom of the image. (WA-68374-F, Alexander Turnbull Library)



The reclamation and breastwork in 1984. The ro-ro facility was still in use. (EP-1984-5963-F 1953, Alexander Turnbull Library)

2.0 Location

2.1. Map



WCC Local Maps

2.2. Ownership

Owner: Wellington City Council

Legal description: Lot 2 DP 436892

2.3. Listing

Not listed.

3.0 Physical Description

3.1. Setting

The setting of the Taranaki Street Terminal breastwork is dominated by its near neighbour to the south, Te Papa Tongarewa, which fills the whole of the landward side of the breastwork. Indeed, they more or less adjoin for the greater part of the length of the breastwork, and a portion of this is well treed with pohutukawa and other hardy natives on the landward side; this bushy edge softens the impact of the large scale of Te Papa. The inner face of the breastwork is exposed only where the Te Papa water feature allows a clear landward view of it. Towards the western end there is a cut-out in the wharf that allows views of the sub-structure, while the extreme western end forms one edge of an extension to the indent in the wharfage that now boasts a high diving board.

The structure has a commanding harbour-edge site, being seen in its full length from the Taranaki Street wharf. At its eastern end is the Chaffers Marina and the Clyde Quay wharf and apartments, while the steam crane *Hikitea* and the Taranaki Street wharf anchor its western end. Circa Theatre, Shed 22 and the former Odlins Building stand close by at this end, while further around to the west the high-rise buildings of the CBD frame the views. The structure faces north across the harbour of Whanganui a Tara to the Hutt Valley and surrounding hills.

3.2. Breastwork

This breastwork is a long straight length of berthage running more or less east-west. It is framed at the eastern end by Chaffers Marina, and by the Taranaki Street wharf at the western end, the length between being 230 metres and the width (for most of its length) some 16 metres. It is somewhat wider than this at the western end, where it extends well back to the south and beyond the cut-out towards Circa Theatre.

It is built of heavy cross section hardwood timbers (see the history section for species) according to design details that have been perfected over many years - vertical and bracing piles supporting short capping pieces (or corbels) and large cross-section beams. The deck is cast in-situ concrete, with a concrete upstand and cast iron bollards at the outer edge. The finished surface is bitumen, with timber insets providing a grid pattern to the surface. At the western end, there is a buffer structure, in timber, attached to the seaward side of the breastwork; this has rubber bearings designed to cushion the breastwork itself from heavy loadings.

An understanding of the structure can be gained from the drawings above, and from a cut-out section of the decking at the western end (see photo 2). Here the piles range from 400 up to 600mm in diameter, the corbels and many of the beams are 400 x

400mm, and fixings are galvanised or stainless steel. The cut-out has two flights of steps down to a platform near high tide level, designed to allow the mysterious underside of the wharfage to be seen; photo 2 is taken from this platform.

In addition to Solace in the Wind, the structure has three other sculptures, large concrete slabs from the Wellington Writers' Walk, with Wellington-inspired words of well-known writers: Katherine Mansfield (see photo 3), Robin Hyde and Alister Te Ariki Campbell.

4.0 Evaluation of Significance

The assessment of significance that follows is based on the criteria in Policy 21 of the operative Regional Policy Statement (2013).

4.1. Historic Values

These relate to the history of a place and how it demonstrates important historical themes, events, people or experiences.

The Breastwork, completed in 1969, is a structure of some historic value; it is the last of the harbour's timber wharves and has had a range of uses over its history. It is associated with the major port expansion for the trans-Tasman roll-on/roll-off shipping service. That was short-lived and under-utilised but the area remained in port use for some period and the breastwork played an operational role as a place for ships to tie up at. Its reuse as a public space in a revamped Wellington Waterfront and its integration into the immediate setting of Te Papa in 1998 gave it a completely different role as a place to promenade and to move from one part of the city to another. This role has been enhanced by the passage of time.

4.2. Physical Values

Architectural Values

The place is notable for its style, design, form, scale, materials, ornamentation, period, craftsmanship or other architectural values.

The breastwork is notable for its scale, it being the longest length of uninterrupted wharfage in the inner harbour, and an impressive sight when viewed from the Taranaki Street wharf. It is a basic working structure, engineer-designed, with a robustness and direct form-follows-function aesthetic. It forms an admirable setting for the seaward side of Te Papa Tongarewa. The worn and weathered appearance of the timberwork gives an impression of greater age than its actual 50 years.

Technological Values

The place provides evidence of the history of technological development or demonstrates innovation or important methods of construction or design.

The structure is a good example of wharf construction of the modern period, 1969, especially as its construction came at a time when timber as the main structural material was giving ground to concrete. It is the last major use of Australian hardwood, thus ending over 100 years of timber wharf construction in Wellington.

Integrity

The significant physical values of the place have been largely unmodified.

With the exception of the cut out at the western end, there is no evidence that the structure has been significantly altered since its construction. It can be considered largely unmodified.

Age

The place is particularly old in the context of human occupation of the Wellington region.

This structure, at 50+ years old, can still be regarded as modern, and is not old in the Wellington context.

Group or Townscape Values

The place is strongly associated with other natural or cultural features in the landscape or townscape, and/or contributes to the heritage values of a wider townscape or landscape setting, and/or it is a landmark.

As noted above, the breastwork provides an admirable seaward setting for the cultural institution of Te Papa Tongarewa, its long, low and regular form standing in contrast to the complex architecture of the museum. It is comfortably integrated into a maritime setting of Chaffers Marina at one end, and the *Hikitea* floating crane and Taranaki Street wharf at the other.

4.3. Social Values

Sentiment

The place has strong or special associations with a particular cultural group or community.

As part of a much-used and loved open space and recreational asset, the breastwork has a special significance to the wider community. The sculpture *Solace in the Wind* is a particular highlight of the promenade and is much photographed.

Recognition

The place is held in high public esteem for historic heritage values or contribution to the sense of identity of a community.

The use of the waterfront for public recreational purposes has turned the area into one of Wellington's most-loved assets. The walk around Te Papa that travels across the breastwork is one of the most used on the waterfront, with wide sweeping views to the harbour and beyond.

4.4. Surroundings

The setting or context of the place contributes to an appreciation and understanding of its character, history and/or development.

There has been vast transformation of this area over time, although change has slowed and the setting stabilised since the completion of Te Papa. The proximity of the Taranaki Street wharf is important in reinforcing the shipping history of the area.

4.5. Rarity

The place is unique or rare within the district or region.

The breastwork is rare for its long uninterrupted and unmodified length.

4.6. Representativeness

The place is a good example of its type or era.

It is a good example of timber wharf construction of the modern era, important as marking the end of the era of timber wharf construction in Wellington.

5.0 Recommendation

The Taranaki Street Terminal breastwork has heritage value and meets the criteria to sufficient degree to justify listing on the Greater Wellington Regional Plan.

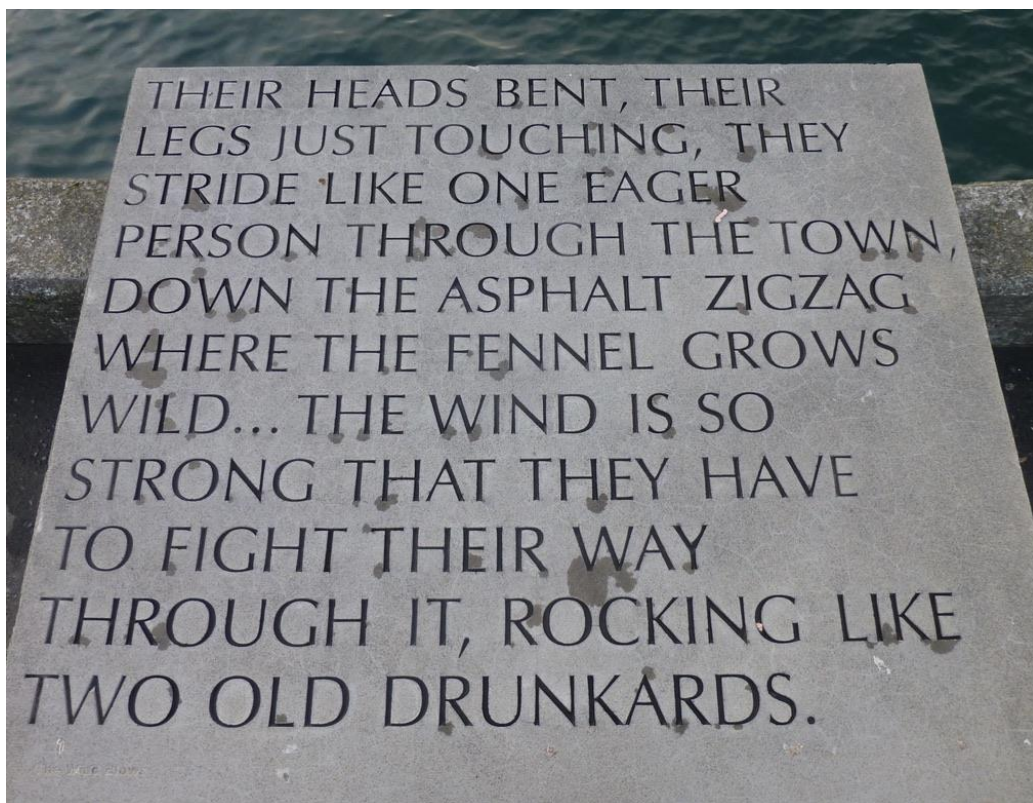
6.0 Photographs



- 1 The breastwork, some 230 metres long. The Clyde Quay wharf apartments show in the distance, and the buffer structure shows on the right.



2 Piles, corbel and a major 400 x 400mm beam in the sub-deck structure of the breastwork.



3 Words of Katherine Mansfield, on the outer edge of the breastwork at the far eastern end.