

Postal Box

Corner of Cuba Street and Manners Street (Manners Mall)



Image: WCC 2014

Summary of heritage significance

- The Penfold design combined simple design and functionality. The Cuba Street Postal Box is hexagonal in shape, and the roof is adorned with acanthus leaves while the cap is decorated with small spheres. It has architectural value for its design and construction in cast iron although it is no longer sitting upon its base as the Post Office Square Postal Box is.
- The Cuba Street Postal Box is a rare surviving example of a New Zealand manufactured cast iron pillar box that used the popular design of British architect John Wornham Penfold. It is associated with the postal service as these Postal Boxes are an important facility in a time when the post was essentially the only means of easily available distance communication.
- This Postal Box is an excellent representative of its type, this cast iron pillar postal box dates from between 1879 and 1910, and is one of the 'Penfold' designs. These are the most famous of the early designs and are named for the architect who designed them, John Penfold.

District Plan:	Map 16, reference 7
Legal Description:	
Heritage Area:	Cuba Street Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	-
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270
Other Names:	-
Key physical dates:	
Architect / Builder:	
Former uses:	Communication – post box
Current uses:	Communication – post box
Earthquake Prone Status:	Unknown at time of writing

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

This Postal Box, situated at the corner of Manners and Cuba Streets, is an attractive piece of street furniture that relates well to the historic character of the area. It is situated in the Manners to Dixon Street block of Cuba Street, just back from the corner of Manners and Cuba Street on the eastern side of the street.

It is unknown when this Postal Box was installed in Cuba Street, but this type of cast iron pillar postal box dates from between 1879 and 1910, and is one of the 'Penfold' designs. These are the most famous of the early designs and are named for the architect who designed them, John Penfold. In 1865 Penfold had been invited to design a new standard pillar box. These Postal Boxes came in three sizes, nine types, and are extremely widespread throughout Britain and the former colonies. The design was cast in New Zealand and remained the standard through until the 1950s.¹

Until the mid twentieth century, these types of postal boxes were extremely common throughout New Zealand's urban centres. They were an important facility in a time when the post was essentially the only means of easily available distance communication. Following this, the New Zealand Post Office Association had begun replacing the cast iron pillar boxes as they were considered unsanitary, leaky, and difficult to clear. Many were sold to museums or collectors, but some such as the Post Office Square Postal Box, and examples in Napier and Dunedin, were retained 'in those districts where they were of historical interest'.²

Its bright red colouring and bold styling give it considerable visual appeal and it has become a local landmark in the Cuba Street heritage area. This postal box appears to be of the same type as those installed in Post Office Square, Napier (Cat II, reference 4829) and Dunedin, which were among the last designs implemented in Britain and date from around 1872.³ The New Zealand Penfold boxes are the only ones worldwide that bear the insignia of King Edward VII, the rest throughout the former British controlled territories have the cypher of Queen Victoria.⁴ The Penfold design combined simple design and functionality. The Post Office Square Postal Box is hexagonal in shape, and the roof is adorned with acanthus leaves while the cap is decorated with small spheres. Red became the standard colour for the postal boxes in 1874.⁵

1.2 Timeline of modifications (original plans cannot be accessed)

c.1879-1910 Likely time of construction

Unknown time of installation in Cuba Street

¹ Rebecca O'Brien, 'Pillar Letter Box – Hardy Street Nelson', (Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report), 28 February 2003, accessed 16 December 2013,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=5116>

² Karen Astwood, 'Post Box (Former) – Emerson Street and Dalton Street, Napier' (Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report), August 2013, accessed 16 December 2013,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=4829>

³ Karen Astwood, 'Post Box (Former) – Emerson Street and Dalton Street, Napier', (Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report), August 2013, accessed 16 December 2013,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=4829>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 'John Wornham Penfold and his pillar box', The British Postal Museum and Archive, 24/07/2009, accessed 16 December 2013, <http://postalheritage.wordpress.com/2009/07/24/john-wornham-penfold-and-his-pillar-box/>

1.3 Ownership history

New Zealand Post

1.4 Occupation history

Not assessed

1.5 Architect

Penfold, John Wornham (1828-1909) - Designer⁶

Penfold was an English surveyor and architect famous for his British Post Office Department pillar box designs. There were three types of Penfold boxes produced in the 1860s and 1870s. Penfold boxes were subsequently adopted for pillar boxes manufactured in various British colonies, such as New Zealand. Although he was best known for his pillar box design Penfold was also a leading figure in his respective professional fields, becoming the President of the Architectural Association as well as being a founding member and longstanding honorary secretary of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The cast iron pillar postal box dates from between 1879 and 1910, and is one of the 'Penfold' designs. These are the most famous of the early designs and are named for the architect who designed them, John Penfold. In 1865 Penfold had been invited to design a new standard pillar box. These Postal Boxes came in three sizes, nine types, and are extremely widespread throughout Britain and the former colonies. The design was cast in New Zealand and remained the standard through until the 1950s.⁷ This postal box appears to be of the same type as those installed in Post Office Square, Napier (Cat II, reference 4829) and Dunedin, which were among the last designs implemented in Britain and date from around 1872.⁸ The New Zealand Penfold boxes are the only ones worldwide that bear the insignia of King Edward VII, the rest throughout the former British controlled territories have the cypher of Queen Victoria.⁹ The Penfold design combined simple design and functionality. The Cuba Street Postal Box is hexagonal in shape, and the roof is adorned with acanthus leaves while the cap is decorated with small spheres. Red became the standard colour for the postal boxes in 1874.¹⁰

⁶ Historic Places Trust, 'John Wornham Penfold', *Professional Biographies*, (Historic Places Trust, 2013), accessed 16 December 2013, [http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Penfold,+John+Wornham+\(1828-1909\)](http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Penfold,+John+Wornham+(1828-1909))

⁷ Rebecca O'Brien, 'Pillar Letter Box – Hardy Street Nelson', (Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report), 28 February 2003, accessed 16 December 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=5116>

⁸ Karen Astwood, 'Post Box (Former) – Emerson Street and Dalton Street, Napier', (Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report), August 2013, accessed 16 December 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=4829>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 'John Wornham Penfold and his pillar box', The British Postal Museum and Archive, 24/07/2009, accessed 16 December 2013, <http://postalheritage.wordpress.com/2009/07/24/john-wornham-penfold-and-his-pillar-box/>

The Penfold designs followed a fairly standard template featuring a roof, cap, indicator tablet, aperture, notice plate, Crown, Royal cypher, and post office legends, and a base (usually painted black) where the name of the manufacturer can often be found either at the front or the rear.¹¹ This example does not have a base, which has potentially been buried under the paving.

2.2 Materials

- Cast Iron

2.3 Setting

This Postal Box, situated at the corner of Manners and Cuba Streets, is an attractive piece of street furniture that relates well to the historic character of the area. It is situated in the Manners to Dixon Street block of Cuba Street, just back from the corner of Manners and Cuba Street on the eastern side of the street. This Postal Box is included in the Cuba Street Heritage Area as well as the NZAA Central City Archaeological Area.

¹¹ Paul Wicks, 'Anatomy of a letter box', 2002, accessed 16 December 2013, <http://www.wicks.org/pulp/stats.html>

Sources

Astwood, Karen. 'Post Box (Former) – Emerson Street and Dalton Street, Napier'. Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report. August 2013. Accessed 16 December 2013,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=4829>

Historic Places Trust. 'John Wornham Penfold'. *Professional Biographies*. Historic Places Trust, 2013. accessed 16 December 2013,

[http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Penfold,+John+Wornham+\(1828-1909\)](http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Penfold,+John+Wornham+(1828-1909))

O'Brien, Rebecca. 'Pillar Letter Box – Hardy Street Nelson'. Historic Places Trust, unpublished registration report. 28 February 2003. Accessed 16 December 2013,

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The British Postal Museum and Archive. 'John Wornham Penfold and his pillar box'. 24/07/2009. Accessed 16 December 2013,

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Wicks, Paul. 'Anatomy of a letter box'. 2002. Accessed 16 December 2013,

<http://www.wicks.org/pulp/stats.html>

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?*

The Penfold design combined simple design and functionality. The Cuba Street Postal Box is hexagonal in shape, and the roof is adorned with acanthus leaves while the cap is decorated with small spheres. It has architectural value for its design and construction in cast iron although it is no longer sitting upon its base as the Post Office Square Postal Box is.

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?*

This Postal Box, situated at the corner of Manners and Cuba Streets, is an attractive piece of street furniture that relates well to the historic character of the area. It is situated in the Manners to Dixon Street block of Cuba Street, just back from the corner of Manners and Cuba 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?*

Historic Value:

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

The Cuba Street Postal Box is a rare surviving example of a New Zealand manufactured cast iron pillar box that used the popular design of British architect John Wornham Penfold. It is associated with the postal service as these Postal Boxes are an important facility in a time when the post was essentially the only means of easily available distance communication.

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?*

The archaeological values are unknown, but the Post Box 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?*

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

There is technical value in the design and construction of this Postal Box. The construction in cast iron is of particular interest.

Social Value:

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

These Postal Boxes have a high nostalgia value and attract a great amount of interest. When the Postal Service was replacing them with more modern alternatives many were purchased by museums and private collectors, while some that were particularly associated with the historic nature of an area were left in place.

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?

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?*

As one of few remaining examples of a cast iron Postal Box found in New Zealand this pillar box has some rarity value.

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

This Postal Box is an excellent representative of its type, this cast iron pillar postal box dates from between 1879 and 1910, and is one of the 'Penfold' designs. These are the most famous of the early designs and are named for the architect who designed them, John Penfold.

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?*

It appears that no major modifications have been carried out on this Postal Box other than the addition of a new padlock.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

This Postal Box is primarily of local importance due to the value that it contributes to the Cuba Street Heritage Area, in particular aesthetic, historic, scientific, and social. As one of few remaining examples of its type in New Zealand, and its rarity values, it has some national importance.

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*