William Wakefield Memorial
Dufferin Street

Summary of heritage significance

- The Wakefield Memorial is of architectural value for its design and form, in particular as a Victorian interpretation of Classical architecture and the Grecian temple form. The structure is simple but well formed and attractive.
- This memorial is one of Wellington’s most significant monuments. It is primarily associated with William Wakefield, whose life and achievements it commemorates. William Wakefield (1803-1848) was the first leader of the Wellington settlement in 1840, a key official in the New Zealand Company, and a significant figure in the European colonisation of Wellington and New Zealand.
- The Wakefield Memorial is an unusual type of structure for a memorial, with most others in Wellington being statues or obelisks. Nationally it is a rare structure as prefabricated monuments are unusual in New Zealand, and the cast iron elements add to its significance.
Date: 26 November 2013

District Plan: Map 16, reference 11
Legal Description: Lot 1 DP 90475 (CT WN58A/615), Wellington Land District
Heritage Area:  
HPT Listed: Category I, reference 1441, Basin Reserve Historic Area
Archaeological Site: NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270
Other Names: -
Key physical dates: Construction: 1850s, Relocated: 1882, 1917, 2006
Architect / Builder: -
Former uses: Memorial
Current uses: Memorial
Earthquake Prone Status: Unknown at time of writing

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013
1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

The Wakefield Memorial commemorates Colonel William Wakefield (1803-1848), the first leader of the Wellington settlement in 1840, a key official in the New Zealand Company, and a significant figure in the European colonisation of Wellington and New Zealand. The memorial was erected in 1882 but had been planned immediately following the death of Wakefield in 1848.

Wakefield arrived in New Zealand in 1839 and was responsible for negotiating land purchases from Maori on behalf of the Company, and assisted in laying out the new settlement of Wellington. Upon his death in 1848 there was a great amount feeling amongst the Wellington community, and local shops closed for the day to commemorate his passing. Shortly after this, a meeting was held at the Aurora Tavern, where mourners decided to erect a monument to his memory, and a committee composed of some of Wellington’s most influential men was set up to raise the funds.

In December 1849 the committee decided that the memorial should be a permanent object of public utility and suggested that a clock tower would be the best option. This idea was discarded and it was not until 1862 that a memorial was ordered.

There is little known about the memorial; the designer, constructor, and most of those involved in its organisation are unknown. There seems to be some consensus that it was purchased from England, and arrived in New Zealand in 1863, but sat in George Hunter’s yard (Bethune and Hunter’s) until 1866, and thereafter was in Council storage. The memorial is a good example of Victorian Classical architecture, which employs pre-fabricated materials, predominantly concrete and cast iron. The structure is well proportioned, and has a Greek Temple like formation, which is unusual for Wellington. The style of the memorial is rather uncommon, with obelisks and statues being the far more common choices to commemorate individuals.

In March 1882, Councillor Thomas McKenzie suggested that the memorial be moved to a new, permanent, space. The Wellington City Corporation requested a report from the City Surveyor on the possibilities of a suitable site for the memorial, and in the interim it was placed on display in the Wellington City Corporations yard. The Public Works Committee decided that the monument should be placed in the Basin Reserve, and in 1882 it was placed on a small mound on the eastern side of the sporting ground. Four years later Thomas McKenzie gathered public subscriptions for a drinking fountain to be installed in the memorial. This was built by ironmonger Mr Dawson.

There were no major changes made to the memorial until 1917 when it was relocated to outside the grounds on Dufferin Street as part of wider renovations of the grounds. Further renovations to the grounds in 1981 meant that the memorial is no longer visible from inside the grounds.

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After its removal to outside the grounds, it appears that the memorial was left to deteriorate, with reports in the newspapers showing that, while repairs were occasionally made, the memorial had fallen into disrepair. By 1948 the memorial had suffered further deterioration, and a report to the Director of Parks and Recreation stated that it was ‘in a neglected condition’ and had a ‘drab appearance’; the columns were rusting and the dome was in disrepair. By the mid 1960s, the dominion reported that the base was crumbling and had been badly vandalised. In 1969 the City Architect, C.M. Muir, reported to the Town Clerk that the damage that had occurred to the memorial and a restoration was proposed, including the installation of a plaque donated by the Founder’s Society. At the behest of the Historic Places Trust and City Councillor R.G. Button, the restoration finally went ahead. Sandblasting and repainting was finished in 1974 and the Founder’s Society plaque was attached. The water fountain, which was no longer working, was not repaired and was later removed.

Little more happened until 2005 when it was again found that the memorial was falling into disrepair. The Founder’s Society Plaque had been removed, and the fountain was still missing. The concrete base had a number of cracks in it, and there was a significant piece missing from the fence side. The chequered plates had worn away, the paint on the Doric Columns was chipped and showing rust, the entablature was also rusting and chipped, and some of the decorative elements were missing. Both the interior and exterior of the dome were cracked and a portion of the dome interior was missing. Following this inspection, the Wellington City Council carried out a restoration to remedy these defects and structural issues. Some loss of heritage fabric ensued; however, the majority was retained.

This memorial is a rare example of a memorial erected pre 1900 in New Zealand to commemorate the early settlers and settlement of New Zealand. This is the oldest known memorial to a European settler in Wellington and is also one of the oldest in the country. It is directly associated with William Wakefield and developed out of a sense of public esteem for him. It provides a direct link to New Zealand’s colonisation and provides an opportunity to learn about New Zealand’s past. It is an important element of the Basin Reserve and is the oldest surviving structure in the complex.

1.2 Timeline of modifications (original plans cannot be accessed)

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<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c.1850</td>
<td>Original construction</td>
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<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Relocation</td>
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<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Relocation</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Restoration</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Restoration</td>
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1.3 Ownership history

Wellington City Council

1.4 Occupation history

Not Assessed

1.5 Architect

Unknown
2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

The Wakefield memorial is an unusual structure. It reflects the Victorian interest in Classical architecture, in particular Grecian style temples, and is a good example of this style. The structure is simple but perfectly formed and aesthetically attractive. The style of the memorial is rather uncommon, with obelisks and statues being the far more common choices to commemorate individuals.

2.2 Materials

- Concrete
- Cast iron

2.3 Setting

The Wakefield Memorial is a distinctive structure and has great recognition since the installation of new traffic lights below the Mt Victoria Tunnel. It is an important element of the Basin Reserve and is the oldest surviving structure in the complex. The memorial is a local landmark.
3.0 Sources


4.0 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 Wakefield Memorial is of architectural value for its design and form, in particular as a Victorian interpretation of Classical architecture and the Grecian temple form. The structure is simple but well formed and attractive.

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 Wakefield Memorial is a distinctive structure and has great recognition since the installation of new traffic lights below the Mt Victoria Tunnel. It is an important element of the Basin Reserve and has become a local landmark.

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 memorial is one of Wellington’s most significant monuments. It is primarily associated with William Wakefield, whose life and achievements it commemorates. William Wakefield (1803-1848) was the first leader of the Wellington settlement in 1840, a key official in the New Zealand Company, and a significant figure in the European colonisation of Wellington and New Zealand.

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

The memorial was erected in 1882 but had been planned immediately following the death of Wakefield in 1848 and represents possibly the earliest example of memorialising in post-colonial Wellington.

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

The Wakefield Memorial 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 Wakefield memorial has educational value because it provides a direct link to New Zealand’s colonisation and provides an opportunity to learn about New Zealand’s past.
**Technological:** Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?

The memorial has technical value for its prefabricated structure and the predominant use of cast iron. The technology used is representative of its time and reveals the excellent craftsmanship and skills held by the Victorians in the use of cast iron.

**Social Value:**

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

The memorial is an element of the basin reserve but it is in a location where it cannot be seen to its best advantage. It is held in high public esteem due to its association with early Wellington, but there is a lack of interpretation of the memorial and its history.

**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 memorial has high commemorative value due to its association with William Wakefield, early Wellington history, and the founding of the city.

**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 Wakefield Memorial contributes significantly to the sense of place and continuity in Wellington through its long standing association with the basin reserve. It is a distinctive structure that has become a local landmark.

**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?

The Wakefield Memorial is an unusual type of structure for a memorial, with most others in Wellington being statues or obelisks. Nationally it is a rare structure as prefabricated monuments are unusual in New Zealand, and the cast iron elements add to its significance.

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

This memorial is an excellent example of Victorian Classical architecture. It is an unusual type for a memorial, but a good representative of Grecian-style temples.

**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 memorial has been relocated several times, and has had several rounds of restoration. Despite this it is in reasonably authentic condition, with changes being practical and necessary.

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

The Wakefield Memorial is of national significance for a number of reasons. This memorial is a rare example of a memorial erected pre 1900 in New Zealand to commemorate the early settlers and settlement of New Zealand. This is the oldest known memorial to a European settler in Wellington and is also one of the oldest in the country. It is directly associated with William Wakefield and developed out of a sense of public esteem for him. It provides a direct link to New Zealand’s colonisation and provides an opportunity to learn about New Zealand’s past. It is an important element of the Basin Reserve and is the oldest surviving structure in the complex.
## 5.0 Appendix

**Research checklist (desktop)**

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**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*