

Fort Ballance

Point Gordon



Summary of heritage significance

- Fort Ballance is the largest of the military installations and is an excellent representative of the coastal fortifications that were constructed in the 1880s. Fort Ballance has architectural value as an example of the types of coastal defences that were constructed in the 1880s in Wellington. The remains of this fort are the most significant of any built in and around Wellington at this time.
- Fort Ballance, and the associated positions on Point Gordon, has historic significance resulting from their role in coastal defence. It was the city's principal coastal defence in the period between 1885 and 1911. It was built in a time of rapid change in armaments and coastal artillery, and remained in use through World War One and saw 'active' duty again in World War Two.
- Fort Ballance has some rarity value as the principal coastal defence work in the period 1885-1911 and for its intact state, and the 'see-saw' light emplacement is the only one still existing in New Zealand.

District Plan:	Map 13, reference 49
Legal Description:	Pt Sec 2 Watts Peninsula District
Heritage Area:	-
HPT Listed:	Category I, reference 5074
Archaeological Site:	Pre 1900 activity associated with site
Other Names:	-
Key physical dates:	Built: c.1885
Architect / Builder:	Major Henry Cautley, Lieutenant Colonel Tudor-Boddam
Former uses:	Defence
Current uses:	Defence/Historic reserve
Earthquake Prone Status:	Unknown at time of writing

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History¹

Fort Ballance, situated on Point Gordon, is Wellington's most historic coastal fortification, constructed as the city's principal coastal defence in the period 1885-1911. The Fort remained in use up until the end of World War I and saw active duty during the Second World War when it was rearmed.

During the first Russian Scare (1878) the New Zealand Government had been forced to acknowledge that they could not rely upon the British alone for protection, and an ambitious programme of battery construction in and around the country's main ports ensued. 22 Rifle Muzzle Loading (RML) guns were purchased but not emplaced at this time and spent the next seven years in storage. In 1880, Colonel Scratchley, who had recently returned from Australia, recommended the construction of a system of coastal defences to protect New Zealand ports from a sea-bourne attack.

In 1884, tensions between Britain and Russia escalated, and Major Henry Cautley was commissioned to design fortifications. Initially the emplacements were constructed with great haste, but upon the realisation that the threat had receded, with more leisure. By 1898 Wellington boasted four fortresses, Ballance, Buckley, Gordon, and Kelburne, as well as batteries at the Botanic Gardens, Halswell, and Kau Point.

Fort Ballance, named after then Minister of Defence John Ballance (1839-1893), was built on the site of the Mahanga Pa, later known as Point Gordon. It was built in 1885 as a response to fears of an impending war with Russia by the Armed Constabulary, day labourers, and prison inmates; Fort Ballance was to prevent enemy ships entering the harbour and provide covering fire for the minefield between Gordon Point and Ward Island. Work had begun in 1885 on an emergency timber built emplacement with two RMLs separated by an open gallery. The timber fort, gradually, was augmented with more permanent brick, concrete, and plaster between 1886 and 1888.

The initial design was by Major Henry Cautley, who designed most of the country's first forts. The work was continued by Lieutenant Colonel Tudor-Boddam, who incorporated the existing works and completed the remaining structures. In all, it took over a decade for the structures to be completed. When it was fully armed, the Fort had more guns than any fort in the country, and although the Russian attack never eventuated, it remained active for some years.

The fort was criticised for being too prominent but it changed little after construction although some work was carried out to the southern RML pit to take another 6 inch breech loading gun after 1896. A 'see-saw' searchlight was also added, which although innovative, was not very successful. Attempts to blow it up in 1899 resulted in the deaths of three engineers. A separate one gun battery – Fort Gordon – was built near the searchlight emplacement between 1893 and 1896, and another emplacement – Low Battery – was constructed further down the hill.

The key role that Fort Ballance had played was assumed by Fort Dorset in 1910-11, and although the fort was armed throughout World War One, it was thereafter used mainly for storage. The guns were declared obsolete in 1925 and the fort abandoned.

¹ History adapted from: Rebecca O'Brien, 'Fort Ballance (including associated positions at Fort Gordon)', (New Zealand Historic Places Trust registration report 2002); and Russell Murray, *Fort Ballance – Point Gordon* (Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 53, 2005).

It was briefly revived during World War Two when army housing was built at the rear of the fort and two 4 inch guns were emplaced in front. After the war the gun pits were filled in and part of the defence wall was demolished.

Fort Ballance continued to be used for army accommodation following the war but the accommodation proved to be too damp for comfortable use, and in 1946 three four man huts were built behind the fort. This continued utility saved the fort from being demolished during the 1960s and 1970s when similar coastal defences around New Zealand were being destroyed.

In the 1990s, retired soldiers led efforts to have the earth removed and the fort's importance recognised. Some minor vandalism has occurred at the fort, and apart from the effects of age and rampant plant growth, the fort is essentially intact although the army houses have been removed.

Fort Ballance is an impressive collection of largely intact late 19th century military structures arranged around the site. It is a highly significant historic site, designed and built by the New Zealand Government; it is a tangible reminder of New Zealand's first step towards independence from the British Crown. Fort Ballance was the first fort built in Wellington and remained the primary protection for the capital city between 1885 and 1911. It is a site of great physical significance and as it is largely unaltered gives a good impression of the defence strategies employed in the nineteenth century. Although no longer used as a fort, Fort Ballance retains its links with the Defence force and is one of few military sites in New Zealand that has been continually associated with it. Fort Ballance has immense educational value as a rare illustration of New Zealand's response to wartime threats, and the responses that were made to the developments in military technology that characterised the first half of the twentieth century.

1.2 Timeline of modifications (original plans cannot be accessed)

1886-1892	Construction
1886	Construction begins on emplacement for) Armstrong Vickers disappearing gun
1891	Low Battery constructed
1892	Installation of two Nordenfelt quick-firing 6-pounder guns
1895	Installation of 6 inch BLHP disappearing gun
1924	Removal of disappearing guns, gunpits roofed and converted to magazine storage
1941	Reoccupied for coastal defence, installation of two 4-inch MkVII guns
1942	Installation of two 75mm guns

1.3 Ownership history

New Zealand Army/ Ministry of Defence

1.4 Occupation history

New Zealand Army/ Ministry of Defence

1.5 Architect

Cautley, Henry - Architect²

Henry Cautley served in the Corps of Royal Engineers of the British Army. From 1876 he was an instructor in fortification at the Royal Military College, Woolwich, England. Cautley came to New Zealand in 1883 to advise on coastal defences of the four major ports; Auckland, Wellington, Lyttelton and Port Chalmers. He prepared plans for the fortifications of these ports before leaving New Zealand in 1885. He was posted to Belfast in 1888. He was succeeded as engineer in charge of defence works and harbour fortifications for New Zealand by E.M. Tudor Boddam who had trained at the Royal Military College, Woolwich, and served in the Royal Artillery before being posted to Australia where he was involved with the development of fortifications in Tasmania. While he had no formal training in engineering, Boddam possessed a good knowledge of military engineering and was a diligent and industrious draughtsman. Boddam held this position until 1888 when he returned to Australia.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Fort Ballance itself is located at the eastern edge of the flattened ridge while the extended battery structures run for some distance down the slope towards the sea to the north, east, and south. A large flat area is all that remains of the army houses that previously stood on the site – a rough track runs down from this level to the lower battery on the south western slope.

At the rear of the fort is a high cavalier incorporating what were the battery observation post, command post, and communications post. There is a bomb proof casement below for the engine room, along with rooms for accommodating personnel. There is a rear trace formed by a wall of loop holed casement and continued by freestanding, corrugated iron framed walls filled with rudimentary concrete also with loopholes.

The fort walls are generally constructed of brick or concrete (of varying quality) and rendered with cement plaster. No ordnance remains on site but there are three emplacements for heavy for 6 pounder guns, quick firing guns on either side. The magazine, sited between one of the BL guns and the RML gun, is sunken and there is an artillery store above it.

2.2 Materials

- Brick
- Concrete
- Rendered with cement plaster.

2.3 Setting

Fort Ballance is the largest of the military installations located on the spur between Mahanga Bay and Scorching Bay. The fort has a dramatic setting atop a flattened ridge at Point Gordon on the Miramar Peninsula.

² Historic Places Trust, 'Henry Cautley', *Professional Biographies*, accessed 22 November 2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Cautley,+Henry>

The elevated position gives it sweeping views out to sea past the South Wairarapa coast, around Wellington, and to the Hutt Valley and beyond. Much of this peninsula is reserve land (most for military purposes) and the Fort sits at the centre of a substantial area of open space that protects views from and to it from land and sea.

3.0 Sources

Historic Places Trust. 'Henry Cautley.' *Professional Biographies*, accessed 22 November 2013,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Cautley,+Henry>

Murray, Russell. *Fort Ballance – Point Gordon*. Wellington City Council: Unpublished report, prepared for Plan Change 53, 2005.

O'Brien, Rebecca. 'Fort Ballance (including associated positions at Fort Gordon).' New Zealand Historic Places Trust: Unpublished registration report, 2002, accessed 22 November 2013,

<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=5074>

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?*

Fort Ballance has architectural value as an example of the types of coastal defences that were constructed in the 1880s in Wellington. The remains of this fort are the most significant of any built in and around Wellington at this time.

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?*

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?*

Fort Ballance is one of a group of forts constructed in the 1880s as part of a coastal defence network. . By 1898 Wellington boasted four fortresses, Ballance, Buckley, Gordon, and Kelburne, as well as batteries at the Botanic Gardens, Halswell, and Kau Point.

Historic Value:

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

Fort Ballance is primarily associated with the New Zealand Government, the early Defence forces, and its designers Major Henry Cautley and Lieutenant Colonel Tudor-Boddam.

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

Fort Ballance, and the associated positions on Point Gordon, has historic significance resulting from their role in coastal defence. It was the city's principal coastal defence in the period between 1885 and 1911. It was built in a time of rapid change in armaments and coastal artillery, and remained in use through World War One and saw 'active' duty again in World War Two.

Scientific Value:

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

Fort Ballance has archaeological value as it is known to have been associated with pre-European occupation and was constructed pre-1900.

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

Fort Ballance has immense educational value as a rare illustration of New Zealand's response to wartime threats, and the responses that were made to the developments in military technology that characterised the first half of the twentieth century.

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

Fort Ballance has technical value for its structural integrity; many of its key features remain and it offers a comprehensive guide to the typical 19th century New Zealand fort. The emplacements and mountings are still in place and remain in good order.

Social Value:

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

The fort is held in high public esteem and the uncovering of the gun pits and tunnels which had previously been filled in by the army have greatly raised the fort's profile. Retired soldiers led efforts to have the earth removed and the fort's importance recognised in the 1990s.

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?

Fort Ballance is a focus of community, regional, and national identity and is a highly significant site. Constructed by the New Zealand Government in response to the 'Russian Scare' and as an acknowledgement that the British could not be relied upon for protection, it is the among the first movement towards a more independent New Zealand.

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?*

Fort Ballance has some rarity value as the principal coastal defence work in the period 1885-1911 and for its intact state, and the 'see-saw' light emplacement is the only one still existing in New Zealand.

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

Fort Ballance is the largest of the military installations and is an excellent representative of the coastal fortifications that were constructed in the 1880s.

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?*

Fort Ballance retains a high level of authenticity and integrity and is the largest example of a coastal fortification found in Wellington. It has authenticity of materials, design, craftsmanship, and setting.

Local/Regional/National/International

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

national, or international level?

This site has national significance. Fort Ballance is Wellington's most historic coastal fortification and marks the beginning of a period of rapid change in armaments and coastal artillery. It was designed to address the threat of war and as a response to the realisation that acknowledgement that the British could not be relied upon for protection, so is associated with early nation building in New Zealand. It has high levels of architectural, group, historic, archaeological, educational, technical, and social values, as well as being associated with the military for over 100 years. The majority of the site is intact and retains some now rare features.

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*