



**DISTRICT PLAN – LISTED HERITAGE PLACE  
HERITAGE ASSESSMENT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE  
HERITAGE ITEM NUMBER 773  
*GRAVING DOCK AND SETTING -  
45 GODLEY QUAY, LYTTELTON***



**PHOTOGRAPH : R. BAIRD, 2014**

**HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*Historical and social values that demonstrate or are associated with: a particular person, group, organisation, institution, event, phase or activity; the continuity and/or change of a phase or activity; social, historical, traditional, economic, political or other patterns.*

The Lyttelton Graving Dock has high historical and social significance as one of the major engineering projects of nineteenth century New Zealand, and as a significant accomplishment of the extensive harbour works executed through the 1860s and 1870s by the Canterbury Provincial Government and its successor agency the Lyttelton Harbour Board. There are just two graving docks remaining in New Zealand today: the Calliope Dock at the Devonport Naval Dockyard, and that at Lyttelton.

Graving (or dry) docks are narrow basins that can be flooded to allow vessels to enter or exit, and drained to permit construction, maintenance or repair. Graving docks were debatable as economic propositions in colonial New Zealand, but were desirable status symbols for the country's harbour boards.

A graving dock for Lyttelton was first mooted in the mid 1870s, but delayed as major harbour works were still in train. Designed by prominent civil engineer Charles Napier Bell, the contract for the dock was awarded to Auckland contractors Ware and Jones – who had just completed the similar Calliope Dock in that city – in October 1879. The cutting-back of Naval Point and the reclamation of adjacent areas proceeded in tandem with the construction of the dry dock, which was one of the largest construction projects Canterbury had seen. At its peak, 300 men were employed on the site. A patent slipway to handle repairs to smaller vessels was commenced on a site immediately to the south of the graving dock by contractor John Stinson in late 1882 and completed in mid-1884. The graving dock was officially opened by the Acting Governor, Sir James Prendergast, on January 3 1883 when the *Hurunui* entered into the dock. The significance of the opening was marked by a public holiday, and ships and warehouses were decked in bunting. The opening ceremony itself was an elaborate function with seven hundred gentlemen being treated to a banquet where more than thirty speeches were proclaimed.

The new docks were a considerable achievement at the time for the Lyttelton Harbour Board and allowed them to overhaul their own ships. However the docks which had an initial capital cost of £105,000., barely broke even during the first two decades of their existence. Only after 1900 did the number of ships entering the facility increase. In the early twentieth century Lyttelton occupied a central place in the heroic era of Antarctic exploration, and the dock played host to four famous ships - the *Discovery*, *Morning*, *Terra Nova* and the *Nimrod*. In the same era the dock was also in use for swimming competitions. Christchurch Boys High School held their swimming sports at the dock from the late 1880s to 1928.

The original caisson which secured the mouth of the dock was replaced after 115 years in 1998. In 2010 and 2011 the graving dock pumping station was badly damaged in the Canterbury Earthquakes and demolished. The dock itself was little affected however, and although many modern ships are too large for the dock to accommodate, the facility is still in heavy use.

#### **CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*Cultural and spiritual values that demonstrate or are associated with the distinctive characteristics of a way of life, philosophy, tradition, religion, or other belief, including: the symbolic or commemorative value of the place; significance to Tangata Whenua; and/or associations with an identifiable group and esteemed by this group for its cultural values.*

The Lyttelton Graving Dock has cultural significance as a tangible symbol of colonial progress in nineteenth century Lyttelton, and for the intangible evidence of the consequent pride and achievement that the port and town felt on its completion. The grand opening celebration was a cultural expression of colonial pride that underlay the popular acclamation of the time.

#### **ARCHITECTURAL AND AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE**

*Architectural and aesthetic values that demonstrate or are associated with: a particular style, period or designer, design values, form, scale, colour, texture and material of the place.*

The Lyttelton Graving Dock, designed by noted civil engineer Charles Napier Bell, has architectural and aesthetic significance as a monumental work of construction. After working on public and harbour works in Glasgow and Brazil, Bell came to New Zealand in 1871.

Following his role advising on the Timaru Harbour works and the Rangitata Rail Bridge, he was appointed permanent engineer to the Christchurch Drainage Board in 1876, and then consulting engineer to the Lyttelton Harbour Board in 1878 where the graving dock was one of his first projects. Having overseen the completion of the graving dock, the building of jetties four and five, and the extension of the breastwork, Bell resigned in 1884 to take up a position with the Westport Harbour Board. In 1888 he moved to Greymouth to superintend the construction of the Midland Railway. He retired to Christchurch in 1902 and died in 1906.

Over three hundred men spent over two years carrying out the work required to excavate, under take land reclamation and the construction necessary to fulfil the contract. The caisson, a watertight retaining structure used for the repair of ships, was built by Messrs McKay and Stephenson of Glasgow. Its completion and late arrival from Glasgow delayed the opening a year.

Whilst utilitarian, the stepped sides, symmetry and massive proportions of the dock give it aesthetic significance. The now-demolished pumping station was a finely-detailed brick industrial structure with arched windows and blind arcading along the walls.

#### **TECHNOLOGICAL AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SIGNIFICANCE**

*Technological and craftsmanship values that demonstrate or are associated with: the nature and use of materials, finishes and/or technological or constructional methods which were innovative, or of notable quality for the period.*

The Lyttelton Graving Dock has high technological and craftsmanship significance as an important example of Victorian civil engineering in New Zealand, and as a design by leading colonial civil engineer Charles Napier Bell. The engines and pumps were imported from the English firm of Easton and Anderson and they make it possible to empty the dock in about four and a half hours. The dock has over 20,000 tons of concrete and 95,000 square feet of basalt from Port Chalmers and Melbourne. The extensive use of concrete was notable for the period. The original caisson was imported from Glasgow and the engines and pumps from England.

#### **CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*Contextual values that demonstrate or are associated with: a relationship to the environment (constructed and natural), a landscape, setting, group, precinct or streetscape; a degree of consistency in terms of type, scale, form, materials, texture, colour, style and/or detail; recognised landmarks and landscape which are recognised and contribute to the unique identity of the environment.*

The Dry Dock has contextual significance in the working port, and particularly in relation to the structural elements of the port (such as the mole and many of the wharves) which largely date from the same period. The Lyttelton Graving Dock is located in the large flat expanse of the port's working area, at the intersection of Godley and Cyrus Williams Quay. The facility is surrounded by modern structures which largely obscure it from public view at close quarters. The loss of distinctive pump house has also made the site less visible. It is however able to be seen from many elevated locations in the town, and therefore remains a landmark. To the immediate south of the Dock and the adjacent Patent Slip is the tank farm.

#### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC SIGNIFICANCE**

*Archaeological or scientific values that demonstrate or are associated with: the potential to provide information through physical or scientific evidence an understanding about social*

*historical, cultural, spiritual, technological or other values of past events, activities, structures or people.*

The Graving Dock and its setting are of archaeological significance because they have the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past engineering and building construction methods and materials, and human activity on the site, including that which occurred prior to 1900.

#### **ASSESSMENT STATEMENT**

The Lyttelton Graving Dock is of high significance to Christchurch, Banks Peninsula and New Zealand as one of the major engineering projects of nineteenth century New Zealand. The dock has high historical and social significance as a major colonial accomplishment of the extensive harbour works executed through the 1860s and 1870s by the Canterbury Provincial Government and its successor agency the Lyttelton Harbour Board. The Dock has cultural significance as a tangible symbol of progress for nineteenth century Lyttelton, and the consequent pride and achievement that the port and town felt on its completion. The Dock has architectural and aesthetic significance as a monumental work of construction designed by leading colonial civil engineer Charles Napier Bell. The Dock has high technological and craftsmanship significance as an important example of Victorian civil engineering in New Zealand. The Dock has contextual significance in the working port, and particularly in relation to the structural elements of the port (such as the mole and many of the wharves) which largely date from the same period. The Graving Dock and its setting are of archaeological significance because they have the potential to provide archaeological evidence relating to past engineering and building construction methods and materials, and human activity on the site, including that which occurred prior to 1900.

#### **REFERENCES:**

CCC Heritage File: Cyrus Williams Quay (Graving Dock)

<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/4389>

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PLEASE NOTE THIS ASSESSMENT IS BASED ON INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT THE TIME OF WRITING. DUE TO THE ONGOING NATURE OF HERITAGE RESEARCH, FUTURE REASSESSMENT OF THIS HERITAGE ITEM MAY BE NECESSARY TO REFLECT ANY CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF ITS HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE.

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