




HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND
POUHERE TAONGA

Greymouth Wharf Cranes, Greymouth
Site Reference: P169175
File: 12016-062



Mike Vincent (Heritage New Zealand), Greymouth Wharf Cranes, 19 September 2013

Address	Richmond Wharf, Gresson Street, Greymouth
Legal Description	Lot 3 DP 46406, Westland Land District
GPS coordinates	Northing: 5299125.0; Easting: 1452185.7 (GPS co-ordinates taken from Google Earth, converted from World Geodetic System to NZTM)
Extent	The extent is indicated by the red line on the plan below. Part of Lot 3 DP 46406, Westland Land District, including the structures known as the Greymouth Wharf Cranes and associated structures, the land between, and a suitable buffer.

	
Constructed by:	Cowans Sheldon, UK (manufacturer) Greymouth Harbour Board (installation)
Local Authority	Grey District Council

Summary:

The two wharf cranes at Greymouth Port, once part of a set of three, were built by the United Kingdom firm Cowans Sheldon, and operated from the mid-1950s until they were decommissioned in 2009, but remain in near-working condition. The cranes sit alongside the Grey River, and form a highly distinctive part of the port landscape, directly adjacent to the Greymouth central business area.

Greymouth became a shipping port in 1864, and grew rapidly as a result of the West Coast gold rushes of the mid-1870s, followed by the development of the coalfields. The Greymouth Harbour Board was created in 1884. The port remains very much as built in the 1880s to cope with the coal trade and its large ships. The difficulties of operating ports in West Coast rivers means that carefully integrated systems were required; ports, land transport, ships and schedules were all designed to allow a ship to enter, load and depart in one tide cycle (12.5 hours).

As ship sizes increased, cargo handling speeds also needed to increase, leading to changes in cargo handling equipment.¹ Ten hydraulic cranes imported from the United Kingdom were installed during the Harbour Board's first major period of growth from 1885 to 1890. They operated for 80 years, finally being disassembled in 1957. To replace these cranes, a 15 ton electric crane made by William Cable and Co Ltd, Wellington was installed in 1950, and then three 12 ton capacity level luffing electric wharf cranes from Cowans Sheldon in Carlisle were erected by Greymouth Harbour Board staff from 1955 to 1957, along with eight electric capstans from Strother and Pitt, England. The cranes were operated by New Zealand Railways until 1959 and the Harbour Board thereafter.²

¹ David Stapleton, 'Greymouth's Cowans Sheldon Cranes' [written to form a part of Ian Bowman, *Conservation Plan: Cowans Sheldon Cranes, Greymouth*, 2013], Greymouth Heritage Trust, Greymouth, 2012, p.11. Other information on the port can be found at Gordon McLauclan, *The Saltwater Highway*, Auckland 2012, pp.125-126 and Greymouth Harbour Board, *Port of Greymouth 1884-1959: A Record of 75 Years of Port Activities by the Greymouth Harbour Board*, Greymouth Harbour Board, Greymouth, 1961

² Cowans Sheldon also provided cranes to Auckland, Lyttelton and Wellington Harbour Boards, and New Zealand Railways, among many other ports around the world.

The cranes were used particularly to lift large coal hoppers from the wharf into the ships alongside.³ Each crane weighs 117 tonnes, and they sit on the wooden wharf deck stretching alongside the river; they were powered by an electrical sub-station and travelled along the wharf on rails.⁴

Port trade peaked during World War One, and then gradually declined, brought about by the improved railway and road links to Canterbury. One of the three cranes was moved to Westport in 1963 (and has since been removed).⁵ Despite the dramatic reduction of work at the port, the two remaining Greymouth Cowans Sheldon cranes continued working until 2009; the port now mainly serves only the local fishing fleet. The Greymouth Harbour Board was abolished in 1989 and the port land is now owned by the Grey District Council.⁶

Although their design was not uncommon technology when they were built, the two surviving Cowans Sheldon cranes are now extremely rare. They are the last surviving of the cranes designed specifically for the West Coast coal trade, the last surviving of the four Cowans Sheldon travelling wharf cranes imported to New Zealand. They are also only two of the four remaining wharf cranes from the pre-container ship era still surviving anywhere in New Zealand.⁷ They remain located in the context of their working situation and are still in close-to-working condition. They provide a vital link to the history of the Port of Greymouth, reflecting its place in an integrated transport system, and its contribution to the development of the West Coast. They are significant landmarks in Greymouth and integral to the port landscape.⁸

Other Names	Greymouth Cowans Sheldon Cranes
Of Maori Interest	Not assessed
Key Dates	1955-57: Installation 1963: Removal of one crane to Westport Harbour 2009: Decommissioned
Uses	Transport [Goods crane] (former)

³ These wagons were known as Q-wagons, and were specifically designed for Greymouth. The wharf had separate berths specifically for timber export and general goods; these were generally done using the ship's own gear. Greymouth Harbour Board, *Port of Greymouth 1884-1959*, pp.33-34

⁴ The hard-wood timber wharf deck was built 1885-1913, and then a new stronger section built 1946-1950. The cranes were originally able to move the entire 500 metres of the Richmond Quay wharf, but are now restricted to the 1940s 80 metre section as the remainder is not strong enough to support the cranes.

⁵ This was done in order to provide Greymouth with funds to build a new dredging system to replace the 1908 steam bucket-dredger *Mawhera*. Stapleton, p.43

⁶ From 1955 to 2000 the Cable and the Cowans Sheldon electric cranes handled 2.5 million tonnes, including 2.3 million tonnes of coal outward. Stapleton, p.67. In the 1970s the coal trade at the port had greatly reduced, and the cranes were largely used for timber. From 1988-2007 the shipments of coal were revived for a time.

⁷ Two pillar bases (only) of the 1887 Armstrong Mitchell hydraulic cranes also survive, below the Greymouth wharf deck. One is on display through a viewing area created by removal of the wharf deck at Charles O'Connor Heritage Wharf. The other remains hidden below the Richmond Quay wharf deck. Stapleton, p.79.

⁸ This summary of significance taken from Stapleton, pp.3-4

Current Protection Measures	None
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Attachments

Images



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