

# Nigel Hanlon Memorial Hut

Sir Algernon Thomas Green, Waitakere Ranges Regional Park  
Seaview Road, Piha, Waitakere City



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## **1.0 Introduction**

This report was commissioned by the Auckland Regional Council in March 2010. The brief was to produce a heritage assessment for the Nigel Hanlon Memorial Hut and comment on the acceptability of The Boys' Brigade Northern Regional Trust's upgrade proposals for the hut in light of the building's level of heritage significance.

## **2.0 Location**

The Nigel Hanlon Hut is located on the Sir Algernon Thomas Green a section of land more or less bounded by Seaview Road and Glen Esk Road which once formed part of the Piha Mill site. Access is currently via the grounds of the adjacent Piha Outdoor Education Centre on Seaview Road.

## **3.0 Land Ownership**

The land on which the hut stands is administered by the Auckland Regional Council and forms part of the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park. It comprises approximately 1.21 hectares in Lots 1, 3, and 4 of DP 25709 and is part of a bequest from Norman Russell Withiel Thomas, carrying out the wishes of his late father, Sir Algernon Thomas, who had intended to gift this land and 40.47 hectares to the Waitakere Park Scheme (later the Auckland Centennial Memorial Park) in May 1939. <sup>1</sup>

## **4.0 Physical Description**

### *Architect/Engineer/Builder*

The hut was built by carpenter and Boys' Brigade Captain, Ian McIntosh, assisted by boys of the 31st Auckland Company, North Memorial Baptist Church, Remuera.<sup>2</sup> The architect, if any, is currently unknown.

### *Architectural Description*

The Nigel Hanlon Hut is a simple building with a shallow gabled roof. A pre-cast concrete chimney is attached to the west gable end.

The principal (south) elevation has two centrally located ledged and braced T&G access doors surmounted by eight top-hung clerestory sashes that run the full width of the top of the wall. This window layout is repeated on the north elevation. This arrangement affords an excellent view of the regenerating forest on the adjacent hills from the upper bunks, provides good cross flow ventilation and floods the building with soft light, while at the same time providing a measure of security for the hut while untended.

The interior consists of a single combined kitchen/dining space and bunkroom with three tiers of bunks at the east end.

The only decoration as such is the yellow paintwork to the reverse side of the exterior sarking boards. A pot belly stove is located in a pre-cast chimney breast at the west end. This is flanked on the left by an L-shaped stainless steel kitchen bench and sink and on the right by a 4-door built-in, red-painted cupboard. A centrally located stainless steel-covered table is flanked by timber forms and narrow shelving is attached to walls.



**Figure 1:** Location of Nigel Hanlon Memorial Hut showing access through the former Piha School (Piha Outdoor Education Centre) land. Source: ALGGI Website

### Construction details

The wall and roof are timber-framed using dressed but probably un-treated Radiata pine. Later repairs have introduced dressed tandalised Radiata pine rafters and purlins into the roof structure. The wall frames are attached to a concrete nib wall integral with the float-finished concrete floor slab. The painted stud frame and bracing is expressed internally; the walls and unpainted roof structure are unlined.

The exterior of the hut is clad with 75 mm x 25 mm (possibly pine) sarking covered with what appears to be its original Fibrolite asbestos cement cladding. Joints are battened with 50 x 20 mm pine battens and the exterior is painted olive green with grey joinery. A number of small fibrolite patch repairs are evident where the cladding has been damaged in the past. The shallow gable roof is clad with new corrugated Colorsteel.

Heating was originally from a coal or wood range in the concrete chimney on the west wall. A Klondike pot belly stove now provides heating and a cooking surface.

## 5.0 Condition

The hut is in sound structural condition following recent repairs. In 2009 the original pine rafters were augmented with matching new ones in treated pine. Original purlins were replaced and a new Colorsteel roof was applied. New PVC spouting is in good condition and feeds rainwater to a new 1600 litre polythene tank on a recently rebuilt tank stand.

The exterior fibrolite cladding is in good condition with most of the past repairs confined to the east elevation where one early fracture needs some attention.

Paintwork is thinning and the exterior walls and joinery would benefit from a repaint in colours more sympathetic to its surroundings, now that replacement of the red oxide roof with deep green (Karaka) Colorsteel has been undertaken.

The interior is a little spartan, but appropriately so for a hut associated with an organisation that valued semi-military discipline, recreational camping and the adventure ethic. The interior paintwork is clearly old but is holding up well and may be a low priority for attention at present.

The relatively new pot-belly stove is connected to a steel flue liner that runs through the original pre-cast concrete chimney minimising fire risk.

6.0 Condition Photographs  
Exterior



Figure 2: Nigel Hanlon hut (north and west elevations) and its associated re-built double long-drop privy.



Figure 3: South elevation facing Glen Esk Road.



Figure 4: Detail of the hut nameplate



**Figure 5:** East elevation showing past repairs to the fibrolite cladding.



**Figure 6:** West elevation showing pre-cast concrete chimney, with its extension, a concrete drain pipe, and the recently repaired tank stand.

**Interior**



**Figure 7:** Roof framing showing replacement purlins and new rafters inserted alongside original work.



**Figure 8:** Detail of interior walls and clerestory windows.



**Figures 9 & 10:** Interior, west end showing sink bench, heating, food storage and preparation areas.





**Figure 11:** *Tiered bunks on the east wall.*

## 7.0 History of the structure

The Nigel Hanlon Memorial Hut (named for a Boy's Brigade member killed in a motorbike accident)<sup>3</sup> was built in 1954 after Auckland Centennial Memorial Park Board agreed to grant the Brigade the use of "up to half an acre" to develop a camp site, on condition it also be made available for "organised parties such as schools, Territorials, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, the Community Sunshine Association and others"<sup>4</sup> A Boys' Brigade newsletter described the hut as "... scene of hundreds of Company camps from 1954 to the early 1990s."<sup>5</sup>

Fund-raising took place during the 1953-54 Royal Tour with the sale of commemorative itineraries printed by the Boys' Brigade and sold by officers and boys in all Companies.<sup>6</sup>

### 7.1 Alterations and additions

Recent remedial works have seen replacement of all purlins and rafters with treated pine, where new rafters have been placed alongside the old untreated ones. Original wooden sink benches, ornamented by the carved signatures of many boys, have been replaced with stainless steel ones. The original interior has been repainted at least once, obscuring the names of all those who were associated with building the hut, which had been painted on the wall directly opposite the doors.

The aging red oxide corrugated steel roof has been replaced with a new Colorsteel cladding in deep green *Karaka*.

The tank stand has been repaired and a new black polythene water tank installed.

### 7.2 Other structures on the site:

A newly reconstructed timber-framed and plywood clad double long-drop privy is located to the east of the hut. This replaces an earlier privy of the same dimensions and incorporates parts of it.

## 8.0 Significance

### 8.1 Historical significance

#### *The Boys' Brigade*

William (later Sir William) Alexander Smith formed the first company of the Boys' Brigade on 4 October, 1883, at Free Church Mission Hall, North Woodside Road, Glasgow, Scotland, to develop "Christian manliness" by the use of a semi-military discipline and order, gymnastics, summer camps, and religious services and classes, a pattern which has survived to a greater or lesser extent to the present.

The Boys Brigade began in New Zealand 1889 with companies in Auckland and Timaru and soon flourished in other centres but went out of existence in following the outbreak of WWI due to the lack of trained leaders.

Re-established in Dunedin in 1926, by the 1960s there were 12,000 members in New Zealand in 220 companies, usually associated with churches but also with schools, clubs, or institutions.<sup>7</sup>

The movement pioneered leisure camping in Britain and one early officer of the Brigade included Robert Baden-Powell. As Vice President he promoted the idea of scouting and outdoor pursuits for boys modelled on the military in his *Scouting for Boys (1908)*, which led to

the spontaneous formation by boys of scout patrols, ultimately formalised into the Boy Scout movement.

The stated object of the Boys' Brigade was "*The advancement of Christ's kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness.*" Except for the addition of the word "obedience" in 1893, the object has remained unchanged from the beginning. In 2003 the Boys Brigade was partially reorganised and a less formally structured subsidiary organisation, called ICONZ Adventure, now provides after school or weekend programmes for 8-11 year olds. It currently consists of 36 units throughout New Zealand. <sup>8</sup>

### *The Hut*

The Nigel Hanlon Hut was built by the Boys' Brigade for the recreational purposes of Auckland Boys' Brigade companies and similar youth organisations. Its location on land gifted to the people of Auckland under the Waitakere Park Scheme (later the Auckland Centennial Memorial Park) fulfilled the wishes both of the late Norman Russell Withiel Thomas to make the land available to the public and of the Park Board to grant the Brigade the use of "up to half an acre" to develop a camp site, on condition it also be made available for 'kindred youth organisations ...'. <sup>9</sup>

The hut has associations with the 31<sup>st</sup> Auckland (North Memorial Baptist Church) Company of the Boys' Brigade and was constructed during a period of growing popularity with outdoor pursuits movements in New Zealand. Its builder is associated with pioneering work in glue lamination of timber beams.

It is the only example of a purpose-built Boys' Brigade camping hut in the Auckland Region, One other, the Michael Stead Memorial Lodge is at Kauaeranga Valley, near Thames.

## **8.2 Physical significance**

### Architectural quality

The hut has features in common with simple bush shanties, scout dens and tramping huts of the 1950s. Like them it was probably built to a budget and the use of untreated Radiata pine is not unusual for the time of its construction.<sup>10</sup>

It shares with other recreational huts the gable roof, the focus on a central fireplace on one wall, benches for the preparation of food and bunks on an adjacent wall. It is an exceedingly modest and utilitarian building, its clerestory windows providing a light modernist design touch.

## **8.3 Townscape/Landmark value**

Located on a river flat in a valley bottom the hut cannot be considered a significant landmark.

## **9.0 Potential effects of upgrade proposals on the building's heritage significance**

The substantial part of the upgrade has been completed, leaving only decorative aspects to be attended to. The strengthening of the building has been approached in such a way that there is no chance whatsoever of any future conservator mistaking the repairs for old fabric. The original rafters remain with new rafters alongside. All other repairs have been

undertaken with a light touch and apart from the change of roof colour from red iron oxide to deep olive green, the building remains substantially as it was completed in 1954.

The double long-drop privy uses some new materials which are currently unpainted, and which, for the benefit of both the longevity of the plywood cladding, and the visual impact of the structure in this environment, should be painted in a colour which will help it recede against its bush background.

## 10. Conclusion

The upgrading undertaken to date has had little impact on the hut's heritage significance.

It is understood no further work is planned which would have negative impacts on the building or its site.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> ARC draft Camp Site licence application report March 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Pers. comm. Murray Scott. Ian McIntosh went on to establish McIntosh Timber Laminates in 1957, a company which pioneered the production of glue laminated timber (Glulam) structural beams. Murray Scott was a carpenter who maintained the hut from the mid 50s onwards, initially clearing gorse from the site, and spent many summers camping there.

<sup>3</sup> Pers. comm. Graeme Johansen

<sup>4</sup> ARC draft Camp Site licence application report March 2010.

<sup>5</sup> *Leadership* Edition 145 November 2007

<sup>6</sup> Pers. comm. Murray Scott

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/youth-organisations/2>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.iconz.org.nz/> ; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boys'\\_Brigade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boys'_Brigade);

<sup>9</sup> ARC draft Camp Site licence application report March 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Treatment using boron salts was introduced in 1952, and CCA (copper chromium arsenate) treatment developed in India in 1933 by Sonfi Kamesan, was introduced to New Zealand in 1955.

## References

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