

## Heritage Item 15

### Pillar Box (Ashburton Postal Utility)



#### Location

<b>Address:</b>	Burnett Street, Ashburton
<b>Co-ordinates:</b>	Northing 5699514 , Easting 2409464
<b>Legal Description:</b>	Road Reserve
<b>Owner:</b>	Ashburton DC

#### Purpose

<b>Current Use:</b>	Pillar Box
<b>Original/Past Uses:</b>	Pillar Box

#### Heritage Significance and Category

<b>Heritage Significance:</b>	Physical; Historic
<b>Heritage NZ:</b>	Not registered
<b>Ashburton DC:</b>	Category A

#### Site Assessment

<b>Assessed by:</b>	Arlene Baird, Davie Lovell-Smith Ltd.
<b>Date Assessed:</b>	27 November 2014

## Detail

### Description:

This is a 'Penfold' style pillar box or 'letter receiver' as they were originally known. The Penfold pillar box was designed by leading British architect and surveyor, John Wornham Penfold (1828-1909). The date of construction or erection of this pillar box is not established, however other similar boxes were manufactured in New Zealand around the turn of the century, mostly between 1890 and 1905 (one in Napier which is listed with Heritage New Zealand was installed in 1905, one in Hastings in 1903).

It is thought to have been manufactured by P & D Duncan of Christchurch using the well-known Penfold 1872 hexagonal British pillar box design, and is a characteristic example of a late Victorian New Zealand letter receiver. This pillar box bears a 'VR' insignia on the lower front, which indicates it was manufactured prior to Queen Victoria's death in 1901.

Penfold boxes come in three sizes and altogether there are nine different types. They are very widespread, with the biggest English accumulations in London and Cheltenham. Others are spread across England, Ireland, India, British Guyana, Australia and New Zealand.

Penfolds, distinguished by their hexagonal construction and Acanthus bud surmounting the cap, were originally exclusively city-based, but were later installed rural areas as well. About 300 were made in total, of which 150 survive. Nearly 100 replicas were made at the end of the 1980s, mostly in England. The New Zealand boxes are the only Penfolds to bear the cypher of King Edward VII; all others in the former British controlled territories have the cypher of Queen Victoria.

### History:

The Ashburton Post Office was established on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1868. The first postmaster was a Mr J Turton who received a salary of 20 pounds a year. In 1871 a telegraph office was established with Mr F Doherty taking the role of postmaster and telegraphist. He was succeeded in 1877 by Mr W St. George Douglas who remained in the job until 1897.

Until the mid-twentieth century, Victorian and Edwardian pillar boxes or 'letter receivers' were common along the streets of New Zealand urban centres. Remaining examples have historic and social significance because they were an important facility in an age when post was the quintessential means of distance communication.

Stamps became compulsory for national post in 1862, and prior to this New Zealanders had to go to a post office for their items to be marked with the correct postage cost. Stamps quickly became popular and correspondingly the Post Office installed post boxes which meant people did not need to travel to a post office to mail letters and could do so at any time.

Letter receivers were predominantly installed to meet the demands of large towns and cities. In the early twentieth century the number of post boxes consistently increased by one or two per year, following the 1 January 1901 introduction of universal penny post in New Zealand. This significantly cut the cost of posting letters nationally and internationally and more people starting using the postal service.

The design used here is that of the British receivers, designed by Penfold, and named after him. In 1865 Penfold was invited to design a new standard pillar box, and there were subsequently several variations. Unlike Britain, in New Zealand Penfold boxes continued to be manufactured into the Edwardian period, and those ones have an ER insignia, as opposed to the VR of this box.

## Detail

By the mid twentieth century the New Zealand Post Office Association began replacing the cast iron pillar boxes. They were considered to be leaky, and difficult to clear, so most boxes were sold to museums and private collectors or scrapped. It is believed that about 25 of these pillar boxes still survive in New Zealand.

### **Penfold, John Wornham (1828-1909)**

Penfold was an English surveyor and architect famous for his British Post Office Department pillar box designs. Penfold boxes were subsequently adopted for pillar boxes manufactured in various British colonies, such as New Zealand. Although he was best known for his pillar box design Penfold was also a leading figure in his respective professional fields, becoming the President of the Architectural Association as well as being a founding member and longstanding honorary secretary of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

#### **Notable Features:**

Hexagonal design; acanthus bud surmounting the cap; VR insignia; cypher of King Edward VII.

#### **Condition:**

The pillar box appears to be in relatively good condition. The red paintwork is adequate over most of the box, with a few areas showing wear and flaking – this is mainly around the letter entrance and at corners of the hexagonal iron. There does not appear to be any obvious damage. The pillar box is still used on a daily basis.

#### **Setting:**

The pillar box is located on the pavement at the northern entrance to the arcade, underneath the external verandah. The setting is functional and practical. It is not established if this was the original position of the pillar box or if it has been relocated.



