

# Hawera's Unique Statue of Wendy

Arthur Fryer

*An enquiry from London stimulated research into the history of a unique statue in Hawera.*

On 1 May 1997, to mark the eighty-fifth anniversary of the surprise appearance of the famous and much loved statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, Princess Margaret unveiled a plaque describing Sir George Frampton's famous sculpture. This prompted a member of the Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, John Empson, to research the statue and he discovered there had been later castings made of it.

With assistance from correspondents in several countries he has found seven statues of Peter Pan and about fifteen statuettes made between 1912 and 1929. As well, he was assured, there was a companion piece in New Zealand, a bronze sculpture of Wendy standing in King Edward Park, Hawera. The Wendy sculpture is indeed similar to Frampton's original Peter Pan statue, with its base a tree stump with birds, animals and fairies. This is not co-incidence, for although Wendy was made nearly forty years after Peter Pan appeared, the sculptor was a member of the same "New School of Sculpture" as Frampton.

*Main picture, right: The statue of Wendy in Hawera's King Edward Park.*

*Below: Details of the sculpture on the base of the statue. (All photos: Leigh Mitchell-Anyon)*







In 1944 the trustees of Marion Campbell commissioned F.V. Blundstone to produce a sculpture as a memorial to her late husband, James Campbell, a popular and hard-working mayor of Hawera. The choice of a bronze sculpture of Wendy was an interesting one and in part reflected the enthusiasm of a keen gardener, councillor and family friend of the Campbells, James Edmonston, who had grown up near Oamaru and had been very impressed with Robert Milligan's gift in 1927 to the children of that town of Thomas Clapperton's "Wonderland" group (see the following story).

In 1944 a package of four photographs of different proposals for the sculpture was sent from London to the trustees' solicitor in Hawera and the mayor, visitors and office staff all favoured the one that looked like the Peter Pan statue in London.

The selected artist, Ferdinand Victor Blundstone (born 1882), was an acclaimed sculptor of animal sub-

*Above: Detail of the base of the statue of Wendy in Hawera. (Photo: Leigh Mitchell-Anyon)*

**T**he name Peter Pan is known almost universally, but not everyone is familiar with the full story of the play. To the night nursery of the Darling children, Wendy, John and Michael, comes Peter Pan, a motherless, half-magical boy who teaches them how to fly and leads them to Neverland, among whose inhabitants are pirates under the leadership of the dreadful Captain Hook. Hook wears a steel hook in place of his right hand, which was bitten off by a crocodile who keeps "licking his lips for the rest of me", as Hook explains. The crocodile gets Hook eventually, but not before he has tried to poison Peter Pan, half-killed Peter's fairy Tinkerbell and made prisoners of Wendy, John and Michael and the Lost Boys who live with Peter. With Hook despatched, the Darling children are reunited with their parents and with Nana, the huge dog who is their nursemaid. But every spring Wendy is allowed to go back to Neverland to spring clean for Peter.

jects in his early years and had produced some fine war memorials after World War I. The New Zealand commission was to be his last. Hardly had it commenced when a V2 flying bomb crashed through his studio destroying his equipment. Not long afterwards Blundstone became terminally ill leaving the supervision of the casting (by Morris Singer Foundries) and the finishing to Gilbert Baynes, then president of the Royal Society of British Sculptors. On completion the sculpture was crated and dispatched to New Zealand where it waited three months in the ship's hold until the end of the waterfront strike of 1951.

On 9 July 1951 the Wendy statue was uncovered in Hawera's King Edward Park. In front of a crowd of several hundred the Mayoress, Mrs Clapham, revealed the new sculpture standing on a plinth made of local andesite stone. The statue is more than two metres high and shows Wendy holding out a lantern. The base is about two thirds of the total height and depicts an oak stump with two gnomes, sitting next to a raven and an owl. There are four fairies, two hares, a rooster, three squirrels, four rabbits, four mice, two hedgehogs, two toads and a fox. Since 1951 thousands of small visitors have rubbed the bronze animals and birds to give them a warm polished appearance.

Photographs of Hawera's Wendy were sent to John Empson who has placed copies in the reference library of statues in the Courtauld Institute of Art. Blundstone, highly regarded in the 1920s and 1930s, is still thought of as a very able sculptor.

In the December 1997 issue of the Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens newsletter John Empson writes of his researches on the Peter Pan statues to date and in a separate item mentions the only known companion piece to that statue in Hawera, New Zealand. He quotes his Hawera correspondent writing that the statue continues to be a delight to children who trace "with their fingers the little creatures gathered round the base." John Empson concludes "It would thus seem that things are much the same with Wendy's statue in Hawera as they are with Peter in Kensington Gardens."

There are seven Peter Pans by Sir George Frampton and three more by other sculptors throughout the world, but there is no record of another casting of Blundstone's Wendy. A true companion piece to Peter Pan she stands in Hawera's King Edward Park, a generous gift by a former mayoress and for fifty years an object of civic pride.

**Arthur Fryer, a retired headmaster, is one of Hawera's leading local historians.**