

Right: Detail from the base of the statue of Peter Pan in Wanganui. (Photo: Leigh Mitchell-Anyon)



The Wonders of Childhood

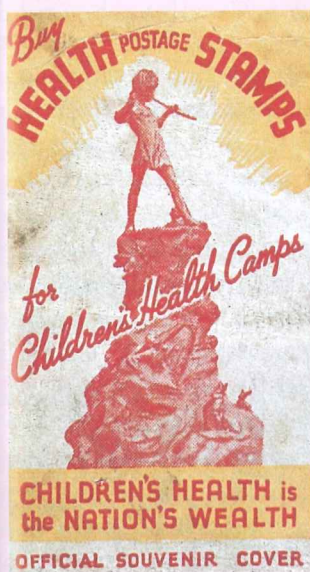
John Wilson

Far right: A visitor to Oamaru is shown the town's Wonderland statue.

This column, above: Figure on the base of the Wonderland statue. (Both photos: Ash Spice)

New Zealand boasts an impressive collection of statues which celebrate childhood.

The statue of Wendy in Hawera (see the previous article) which attracted interest from London is only one of eight statues in New



In 1945 the famous statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, London., was chosen for the year's issue of New Zealand health stamps. The statue, the work of a leading British sculptor, Sir George Frampton, was erected secretly at James Barrie's expense in April 1912. The statue was placed in Kensington Gardens because Peter Pan made his first appearance in literature in Barrie's novel *The Little White Bird* which is set in the Gardens. It was also in the Gardens that Barrie walked with the Llewelyn-Davies boys. The statue has become beloved of many generations of English children, and of adults visiting London from as far away as New Zealand who first read of Peter Pan in their own childhoods.



Far left: Detail of the 1945 first day cover for the year's health stamps (above) which featured Frampton's Peter Pan statue. (Both pictures: Collection of John Wilson)



Zealand which were inspired by J.M. Barrie's tale. John Empson of the Friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens noted in his summary of his research into Peter Pan statues throughout the world that "it would seem that New Zealand ... has a special affection for Peter Pan" and that the statues in five separate towns or cities make "in all an impressive collection".

Barrie was Scottish by birth, so it is fitting that the majority of these New Zealand Peter Pan-related statues are in Otago or Southland. The oldest is the Wonderland statue in Oamaru's Public Gardens. Robert Milligan, a mayor of Oamaru, had seen children in Kensington Gardens enjoying the original Peter Pan statue and wanted to give the children of Oamaru the same enjoyment. He was referred to a pupil of Sir George Frampton (who had sculpted the original Peter Pan statue), Thomas Clapperton, who came up with a design that has two children (not Peter Pan and Wendy) looking into a make-believe world of elves, fairies, birds and animals including rabbits, squirrels, mice, frogs and an owl. The children were modelled on Clapperton's London paper-boy and his older sister. The form of the statue – of a figure or figures on a tall, tree-stump-like base – is clearly derived from Frampton's original statue of Peter Pan.

Once Milligan had approved a miniature of the work, the two-and-a-half-metre bronze statue was cast in London and sent out in time to be unveiled in March 1927. The *Oamaru Mail* declared that the statue expressed the "enchantment exercised by the fanciful over the child's mind". Milligan, the paper continued, realised that "children in this new world have few opportunities of viewing the art works of the old" and was determined "that this disability would be removed as far as the children of Oamaru were concerned".

Further south, in Invercargill, there are no fewer than three statues in Queens Park which belong to this interesting group. In 1949, Miss E.W. Bellamy left money for a statue for the children of Invercargill. There was not enough money to erect an exact copy of the Wonderland statue in Oamaru, which was her plan, so instead a statue of Peter Pan and Tinkerbell was executed by a New Zealand sculptor, Doreen Bricknell, who used her son Rex as model for Peter Pan. The work was commissioned in 1960 and finally placed in the park in 1968. This was probably the only one of the eight statues cast in New Zealand.

Meanwhile, in 1956, to commemorate the centenary of Southland, the Invercargill Licensing Trust gave money for a children's statue. The statue was to have been of Wendy, but was changed to one of an

Opposite page: The three children's statues in Queens Park, Invercargill.

Above: The 1957 statue of the "typical Southland boy".

Below, left: The Peter Pan fountain of 1966.

Below, right: The 1968 statue of Peter Pan and Tinkerbell.

This page, right: Detail of the statue of the "typical Southland boy".

(All photos: Ash Spice)



almost-life-size kneeling boy, a "typical Southland boy" embodying "the best physical features of three boys". The boys, finalists in the quest for "a typical Southland boy", were Fergus Keen, Peter Driscoll and Gerald Gimblett.

Who sculpted this work and where exactly it was cast are not yet known, though the name M. Painter appears on the base. It was unveiled in December 1957. Around its base are fairies and northern hemisphere animals, but also fantails, a tuatara, kowhai and ferns, making the work unmistakably of this country.


In the year this statue was unveiled, it was learned that J.B. Thomson, a prominent Invercargill business man, had left a large bequest to provide something "for the enjoyment of children". The result of this generosity was an impressive group of statuary. Two concrete paths surround a central pool. On the outer circle are lions, seals and an eagle, large enough for children to clamber over. On the rim of the pool are six smaller animal sculptures. Atop a pedestal in the centre of the pool is a one-metre high bronze figure of Peter Pan on tip-toe. The statues were the work of Sir Charles Wheeler and were unveiled by the Queen Mother in April 1966.

Two statues in Dunedin's Botanic Gardens recall Barrie's story. Both were donated by a Dunedin businessman, Harold Richmond, who had grown up in Oamaru and enjoyed the Wonderland statue there in his childhood. One, of Peter Pan, Tinkerbell and the Lost Boys, was unveiled in 1965 by Christopher Johnstone, the twelve-year-old intermediate school boy who had been the model for Peter Pan. The other statue given by Richmond is of Wendy and her two brothers, flying through the air to Neverland, with their dog Nana at their feet. It was unveiled in 1968. Both these statues were sculpted by Cecil Thomas. At the unveiling of the Peter Pan statue the donor expressed the hope that the statue would instill a love of beauty and respect of property in the children of today and reduce the rate of vandalism in the city.

The statue of Peter Pan and Tinkerbell near Virginia Lake in Wanganui was also executed by Cecil Thomas and is similar to, though not identical with, the Peter Pan statue in the Dunedin Gardens. It was unveiled in 1967, two years after the Dunedin statue. It was given "for the enjoyment of the citizens, young and old, of beauti-

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ful Wanganui" by Frank and Eleanor Burnet. Peter Pan is standing with his hands on his hips on a sawn-off tree stump, with Tinkerbell on the stump. The relief sculptures on the stump include, among the expected animals, the six Lost Boys, a tuatara, a morepork, a fantail, a limpet, a skink, snails and penguins. Cecil Thomas visited New Zealand before executing this statue and had been entranced by the fantail. The Burnets sent him shells from Pelorus Sound to fashion into the base. The Burnets, like Harold Richmond in Dunedin, expressed the hope the statue would instill a love of beauty and respect for property in the children of their day.

The statues, collectively, reflect that New Zealand was, as late as the 1960s, culturally still a colony. Only the Invercargill statue of Peter Pan is known definitely to be the work of a New Zealand artist. But it is intriguing, and perhaps indicative of a loosening of colonial bonds, that the Peter Pan statues in Dunedin and Wanganui and the statue of the school boy in Invercargill incorporated New

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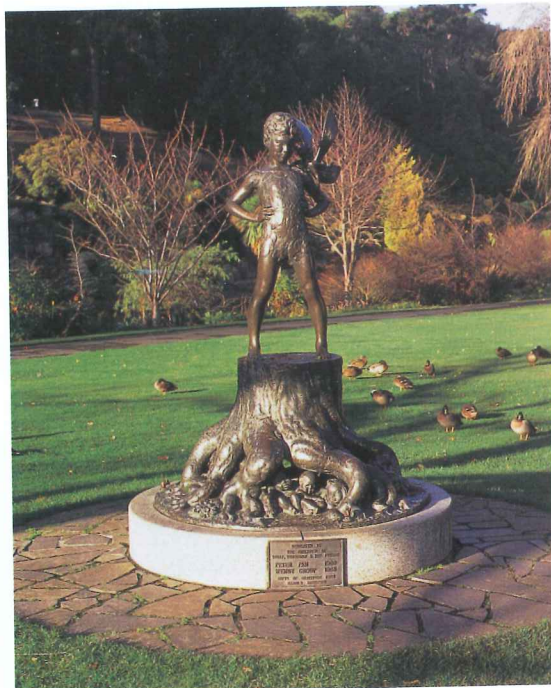
Right: The statue of Peter Pan and Tinkerbell in the Dunedin Botanic Gardens (Photo: Ash Spice)

Far right, above: The statue of Wendy and her brothers flying to Neverland, also in the Dunedin Botanic Gardens. (Photo: Ash Spice)

Far right, below: The statue of Peter Pan in Wanganui. (Photo: Leigh Mitchell-Anyon)

Below, top: Detail of the base of the Wanganui statue. (Photo: Leigh Mitchell-Anyon)

Below, bottom: A sprite on the base of the statue of Wendy in Dunedin. (Photo: Ash Spice)



The Wonderland Statue in Oamaru has been registered by the Historic Places Trust as a category 2 historic place.

Zealand plants and animals in their bases. It is interesting, too, that one of the statues of Peter Pan and the statue of the school boy in Invercargill were modelled on known New Zealand children, as were the statues of Peter Pan in Dunedin and Wanganui.

Though the statues suggest cultural dependence, it is satisfying that New Zealanders captivated by Barrie's story do not need to travel to London to see representations in bronze of the characters of the story or, in the cases of Oamaru's Wonderland statue and the Invercargill statue of the kneeling boy, statues which took their inspiration or form from the original Peter Pan statue. The New Zealand statues are less famous than the original, and some are of greater artistic merit than others, but all are worth admiring as interpretations of the magic of a much-loved story.

In several cities around the globe (Brussels, St Johns Newfoundland, Camden New Jersey, Liverpool, Perth and Toronto) there are copies of Frampton's original Kensington Gardens statue. There is also a tiny Peter Pan on Frampton's memorial in St Paul's Cathedral and Peter Pan statues in Melbourne and Pretoria, by Australian and South African sculptors respectively. It is satisfying that we have in New Zealand not copies of the English Peter Pan but a unique collection of original works that speak of childhood, its joys and sense of wonder.

John Wilson is editor of this magazine.

The research on which this article is based was the work of Myk Davis of Hawera.



Many questions still remain about the New Zealand statues. If any readers can fill any obvious gaps in our knowledge about them, the information can be sent either to the Editor, P O Box 512, Christchurch, or direct to Myk Davis, 27 Maire Street, Hawera.