

A GUN AT THE PARK

In years gone by an obsolete gun was a popular centre-piece for a public park. Many New Zealand parks had guns brought back as trophies from the South African or First World War. A great number of these were buried during the Second World War as they might have been regarded as potential targets in the possible Japanese invasion. The guns might have been useless, but their presence was a liability.

The cannon in Hawera's King Edward Park has been a curiosity for well over a hundred years and no-one knows if it was ever used to frighten anyone let alone fire at some enemy. There are few clues to tell us of its origin.

The George III cipher and the date 1843 can be found on it, as well as the numerals 25-0-20 which refer to its weight of 25 hundredweight 0 quarters and 20 pounds. This means that it was about a tonne and a quarter in weight - not an object to be easily transported. The broad arrow was the sign that it had been made for military use. The smooth bore barrel was big enough to load the gun with an eight-inch shell of about 35 kilograms.

It is believed that the cannon was unloaded at Auckland to be used in defence of the town during the 1860s. In 1885 a Mr Alfred Trimble of Hawera requested Colonel Stapp for a gun that the Hawera Volunteers could train with. It duly arrived and a gun carriage was built to carry it. The only time it was officially fired was during a parade at the Racecourse. The public of Hawera were most impressed.

After that big bang it was ignored for some years until it was retrieved from a ditch at Normanby. It was then mounted outside the Drill Hall, now a gymnasium in Princes Street. After that it was taken to Caledonia Park where the High School now stands. Even here it was a useless relic. In 1912 John Finlay of Ohawe saw it lying in a corner and declared that if the Borough Council allowed it to moulder away in a corner he would come one night and remove it to Normanby where he would set it up next to the Memorial in Victoria Park. The next year the Borough foreman was instructed to make a concrete support for it in the middle of King Edward Park. This was done and the gun had a permanent home.

It was to be fired once more. Late one night three high spirited young men loaded the gun with gunpowder and scrap metal and woke many of the sleep-

ing townsfolk with the resulting roar and its accompaniment of breaking glass. Beyond some shattered windows there was little to tell of the affair because it was many years before the identities of the gunners were known. Leo Chadwick was the last survivor of the escapade when as an old man he revealed that his two companions were “Toe” Barnett and Villars.



*Four-year old Geoffery and 2 year-old
Frances Young polish the gun in
King Edward Park*