



FACT SHEET ABOUT THE PUMPHOUSE

In 1904 the Waihi Cornish Pumphouse was commissioned to pump out the water from the underground workings of the Martha Mine. It housed two large steam-driven pumps which handled 7000 litres per minute (or 75,000 gallons an hour). Plans for building the Pumphouse were mooted as early as 1901 and as it was the Cornish miners who were working on the project the Pumphouse was built in the style of those in Cornwall, England. In 1913 electricity came to Waihi via the Waihi Gold Mine Company built Horahora station on the Waikato River, making the steam-driven pumping engines redundant. The steam engines were kept in tip top condition until the mid 1920s, “just in case that new-fangled electricity stuff failed.”

In the 1930s most of the machinery was stripped out of the building and in the 1950s even the beams inside were sold for scrap. The Pumphouse sat forlorn above No 5 Shaft as a sentinel to earlier times, after the Mighty Martha mine closed in 1952. In 1961, the collar or the No 5 shaft, west of the Pumphouse, collapsed, leaving the structure on the edge of a potentially dangerous void. The Cornish Pumphouse was moved to ensure its safety for future generations and to allow remedial safety work be carried out on the unstable south wall of the Martha pit. The ground the pumphouse originally sat on had become increasingly unstable after the 1961 collapse in No 5 shaft, over which it had sat for 102 years, causing it to tilt and this movement was continuing.

In 1987 the mining company fenced the area around the shaft for public safety, and a viewing platform was built so the public could view the new mine pit as it developed. With the town’s Information Centre and the Martha Mine Education Centre operating close to the Pumphouse the area was further developed as a significant tourist attraction. In 1995 regular monitoring of the building and its surrounds showed that the Pumphouse was slowly tilting. In 1999 access was restricted following a series of nearby subsidences. By 2005 the tilt had increased significantly and expert advice was that it should be moved if it was to be preserved.

The Cornish Pumphouse was originally completed in 1904 to house steam-driven pumping machinery to dewater the original underground mine. It had a relatively short working life as in 1913 the Horahora electric power station began to deliver electricity to the mine. Nonetheless the pumping machinery was maintained in tip top working condition for a further 14 years in case that “new fangled electricity” failed. It was not until 1927 that the steam pumps were dismantled and taken out. The concrete shell was abandoned and became a ruin over time. In 1952 the great Martha Mine closed down. Dwindling reserves of gold and silver, a static gold price, a lack of labour were all contributing factors to the closure. A 15 October 1959 report in the Waihi Gazette, in a letter from the Commissioner of Crown Lands, it was suggested a large concrete building situated on the lip of a shaft would be blown into the shaft’s mouth for safety reasons. This prompted a letter to the Editor from Waihi resident and then Waihi College Art teacher Campbell Smith. He believed the structure was the last monument to a vital period in Waihi’s development and worthy of preservation.

Jan 2006 scaffolding was installed inside the structure and the installation of internal steel beams to brace the building were installed. A final site and relocation route of some 300 metres was established and the Cornish Pumphouse was readied for its journey.

The Pumphouse began its journey to its new safer location on Friday August 5, 2006. In early August 2006 the four big rams started to push the Pumphouse on its way. By now the Pumphouse sat on teflon pads which sat on oiled stainless steel on top of concrete beams. And it wasn’t until November 8 that it arrived at its new location. It had travelled 26 metres south, been rotated and pushed a further 275 m west. Generally we refer to the Pumphouse’s journey as being 300 metres. It was a 300 metre jaunt which took three months and three days. On November 8, 2006, like a grand old lady, she settled at her new location at the top of Seddon Street to watch over the comings and goings of the townsfolk. Many artefacts were collected by archaeologists around the original Pumphouse site. These have been catalogued and recorded and are currently stored by Newmont Waihi Gold.

Today the Pumphouse is open again to the public and is proving to be quite a tourist attraction. Before too long, interpretation panels will be installed at the site, giving visitors more of an idea of its history. It is also proving popular as a ‘Wedding Photos’ venue and bookings for this must be made through Vision Waihi Trust, Ph 07 863 9015.