

2.11 Waghorne Street, J.J. Niven Manhole Covers x 4

Schedule number:

NCC Heritage Group:

Type of site (archaeological site/historic place/historic area):

Address: Waghorne Street

Legal Description: Road reserve

Construction date: 1912

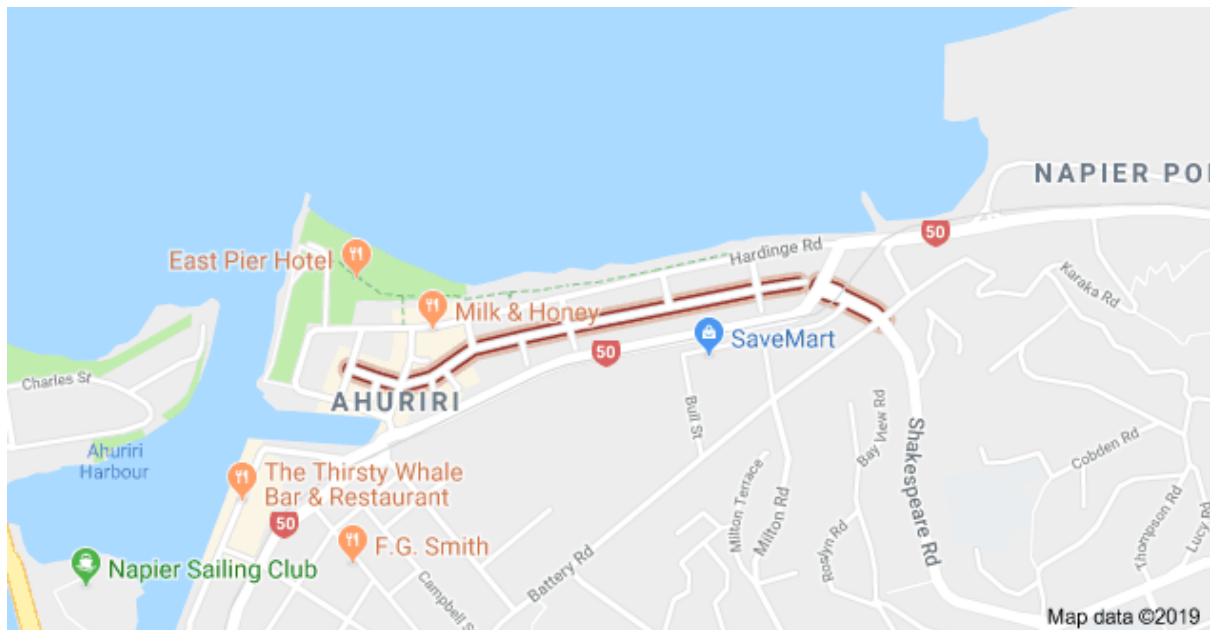


Figure 99 Waghorne Street Ahuriri (marked in red). Source: Google chrome

Architect/designer:

Builder: Jas J. Niven & Co.

Original function/use: Manhole cover

Original owner:

Current use: manhole covers

Current owner: Napier City Council

Significance: historic, technological

Summary: These manhole covers have historic significance as a reminder of a once-important engineering company based in Waghorne Street from the early days of Napier's settlement (1866). J.J. Niven built many structures and did engineering and blacksmithing work throughout Napier and the country. These particular manhole covers (dating from 1912) have technological significance and commemorate the time when Napier embarked on major sewerage works.

History:

The manhole covers commemorate the important engineering company that had its origins in Napier in 1866 and became a nationally important engineering firm. Jas J Niven & Co. Limited, later Niven Engineering was a New Zealand engineering business based in Wellington with operations throughout the country. Hawke's Bay Foundry which became Niven's business was established in Napier in 1866 and provided engineering and blacksmithing services for the local fishing, shipping and farming industries.

In 1882, the year of the first successful shipment of refrigerated meat from New Zealand to London, engineers Charles Scott Galloway and James Just Niven (1856–1913) in Glasgow, Scotland, decided to start their own business in New Zealand. Niven worked for William Cable & Company's foundry in Wellington as engineer's foreman and in 1886 bought Hawkes Bay Foundry from Hodgson, Bowler and Co, — said Niven: for “nothing”. In 1889 Niven left the business for Galloway to carry on, and went to work for Nelson Brothers Limited near Hastings. They had embarked on a programme of major expansion of its various freezing works. Galloway retired in 1893 and Niven and another engineer George Nelson, the son of one of the founders of Nelson Brothers, bought the business and renamed it Jas J. Niven & Co.

By 1900 Jas. J. Niven and Co. had a major factory with foundry, machine shop, boiler shop and a showroom. Niven retired in 1903 leaving George Nelson as chairman and managing director. He became a borough councillor and member of the Napier Licensing Committee and took on the management of the Napier Fish Supply Company. James Niven died in August 1913 aged 57. Among his pallbearers were George and Lionel Nelson.

In 1908 Jas, J, Niven was incorporated as a limited liability company and the business transferred to the new company's ownership. Many of the shareholders were the employees of the firm. Branches were opened in London and Christchurch in 1906, Gisborne 1907, Wellington 1910, Auckland, Palmerston North and Hamilton in 1911 and Wairoa in 1912. The branches at Napier, Gisborne, Hamilton and Palmerston North had engineering works. As well as making their own products, Nivens were New Zealand agents for many other companies.

Despite a fire in 1910 that was not fully insured for the business progressed and by 1912 the company had a wide range of contracts around the country and capital was increased to £300,000.

When George Nelson retired from the managing directorship in 1913 his younger half-brother, Lionel Nelson (1885–1937), who was already a director, was appointed company secretary, eventually becoming managing director. In 1913 Luke's Foundry in Wellington was bought and the administration of Jas. J. Niven Limited was moved there.

Up to at least 1969, Jas J. Niven was in Waghorne St, Ahuriri, now a housing estate. In 1971 the company advertised as itself as Niven Engineering. Jas. J. Niven was taken over by R. A. Brierley Investments and its businesses and assets were sold during the 1970s.¹¹⁹

The Manhole Covers

There is today no physical evidence of J.J. Niven Ltd.'s nearly century-long occupation on the site where the premises of this important Hawke's Bay business stood. However,

¹¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jas_J_Niven_%26_Co

scattered throughout Napier, Hastings and Havelock North are many examples of manhole covers manufactured for the local authorities of the area, and in Waghorne Street, the majority of these bear the identification “J.J.N. & Co., Napier.” - At least some of these, and almost certainly the ones that are in Waghorne Street, date from 1912, when Napier embarked on a major sewerage scheme for the Borough. Niven’s won the contract to supply the manhole covers for this project.¹²⁰ Ensuring that the manhole covers that still remain in place are retained and preserved will capture a unique aspect of the early history of the industrial development of Port Ahuriri and Napier, and will keep alive the story of what grew from a foundry at “The Spit” to become a nationwide business.¹²¹

Notable people: James Just Niven, Charles Scott Galloway, George Nelson, Lionel Nelson.

Architectural style/notes:

Theme (e.g. settlement, government, economics): Economics, engineering, commerce

Hapu/Iwi:

Cultural connections:

References:

Hawke’s Bay Tribune, Thursday March 7, 1912, page 2

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jas_J_Niven_%26_Co

Pilkington Dorothy, 2019. Research notes on J. J. Niven & Co. unpublished document

Alterations:

Recommendations: Schedule as significant (as a group)

¹²⁰ *Hawke’s Bay Tribune*, Thursday March 7, 1912, page 2

¹²¹ Dorothy Pilkington. 2019. J.J. Niven & Co. Ltd.