The Russian Scares

New Zealand's Coastal Defences in the 1880's

Chapter 4 – Wellington Harbour

Wellington Harbour – Defence Positions
East Side of Harbour Batteries

Fort Kelburn, Fort Buckley and the Garden Battery, Kelburn were manned by the Petone “Navals”. The other Wellington batteries manned by the Wellington “Navals”.

1. Ngauranga – Fort Kelburn

Fort Kelburn had 2 x Breech Loading 8 inch guns mounted on a bluff in 1885 to what is now the left hand side at the start to Ngauranga Gorge motorway. The guns have since gone but the bluff is still there.

2. Kaiwharawhara – Fort Buckley

Sited above Ngaio Gorge.

Fort Buckley – 2 x 64 pounder RML guns
3. Garden Battery, Kelburn -

1 x 7” rifle muzzle loading gun. The gun has long gone but the Dominion Observatory now sits on top of the old magazine. The Observatory is located near the Cable Car in Salamanca Road.
Submarine Mining Depots

1. **Shelly Bay** – In 1885, Shelly Bay was selected as suitable for relocating the Submarine Mining Depots which were at the time, located in Thorndon and Mahanga Bay. The Depot was finally constructed in 1887 replacing the Thorndon Depot. The minefield for which this depot was built, was never actually laid. However, all shore based facilities were completed. Fort Ballance on the other side of the Miramar Peninsula had a control room for remotely detonating mines within the field – this was a link connected between Point Gordon and Ward Island.

![Submarine Depot Shelly Bay](image)

*Submarine Depot Shelly Bay*
(The building with the verandah is now the Chocolate Fish Cafe)

**Torpedo Boat** – three permanent structures, including a shed and slipway for the torpedo boat, the *Poneke*, and a small shed that probably served as a magazine were erected. The *Poneke* and the *Waitemata* arrived in Wellington at the end of August 1884 but facilities for *Poneke* would not be finished until 1886. As nothing had been prepared for the *Waitemata* in Auckland, she stayed in Wellington until 1885. The two torpedo boats arrived as deck cargo on the Sailing Ship *Peter Stuart* 25 August 1884.

2. **Mahanga Bay** – A small wharf was built at the bay to accommodate the two torpedo boats and for the delivery of supplies and ammunition to the Forts Ballance and Gordon, with a cable-operated tramway built up the side of Point Gordon.

Miramar Peninsula Batteries

1. **Point Halswell Battery** – 1 x 8” Breech loading gun erected at the northern point of Miramar Peninsula in 1889. The battery has long gone and the Massey Memorial now stands in its place.
2. **Kau Point Battery** – 1 x 8 inch Breech Loading Gun.

![Kau Point Battery diagram](image)

3. **Point Gordon** –
   (A) **Fort Ballance** – This was Wellington's primary Fort until 1911 when Fort Dorset was established.

![Fort Ballance diagram](image)

Fort Ballance – guns as above
(B) Fort Gordon – 1 x 8 inch Breech Loading Gun.

Mine-laying Steamers

Ellen Ballance was the first “so-called” mine-laying steamer that started off service in Wellington in 1884. However, she was found to be unsuitable for her intended role in rough weather and two larger vessels were ordered for the ports of Wellington and Auckland. These were the Janie Seddon and the Lady Roberts. The Janie Seddon replaced the Ellen Ballance in 1902. From about 1898 until 1902, the Ellen Ballance played a support role in providing stores and ammunition to Forts Gordon and Ballance.

Defence Department sub-mining steamers, Wellington 1902
Left to right – Ellen Ballance, Lady Roberts and Janie Seddon
(Pic courtesy Wellington Harbour Board Maritime Museum)
Janie Seddon spent many years working for various government departments at Wellington including WWII before she was finally sold to the Motueka Trawling Company in December 1946. Converted for fishing, but laid up at Nelson then Port Motueka early 1950s. Holed and sank at moorings 23 April 1953 and beached near Port Motueka.

Janie Seddon circa 1930's

Janie Seddon hulk Motueka Beach today