Ports of Auckland’s magnificent red-painted wrought iron fence, ornamental gates and lamps were built in several stages between 1913 and 1923.

The original work was done to enclose Queens Wharf, then known as Queen Street Wharf. The Auckland Harbour Board called for tenders in January 1912, awarding the contract to G. Wragge Ltd, of Salford, Manchester, that October.

The installation of the gates and first sections of fence coincided with one of the most turbulent periods of Auckland’s history – the waterfront strike of 1913. As the picture below shows, the installation of the fence was abandoned and the fence panels lay waiting as farmers, (dubbed ‘Massey’s Cossacks’ in reference to Prime Minister William Massey) rode into town to confront striking wharf workers trying to prevent the loading of farm produce for Britain by ‘volunteer’ labour. After a month, the strike collapsed and work on the fence and gates resumed. The contract was completed and the lamps were lit for the first time on March 12, 1914.

Plans to continue the fence along Quay Street were delayed several times, until a report in September 1921 describing “pillaging of goods from the wharves” gave the Harbour Board the impetus to call tenders. On March 21, 1922, James Allen Sen & Son Ltd, of Elmbank Foundry, Glasgow, were awarded the contract to supply nearly 950ft (290m) of fencing to Princes Wharf (then under construction) and 113ft (35m) of fencing, gates and lanterns to Kings Wharf (formerly Railway Wharf). The contract was completed in 1923.

The Auckland Star reported on April 17, 1926, that there were 1400 applications for the twelve gatekeepers required to guard the Auckland wharves (above right). For those fortunate to be chosen, being “the keeper of the port’s main gate” was a source of pride, as the photograph (top right) from The Sun of May 5, 1928, shows.

The fence was extended further to the east in 1994, when Quay St was re-aligned some 50 metres to the south to allow the rail exchange to be incorporated inside the Port of Auckland. While not as elaborate, the 500m of new fencing is in keeping with the original Wragge fence.

In 2002 Ports of Auckland undertook a $500,000 restoration of the original Wragge gates, fences and 25 ornamental lamps, removing rust, renewing wiring, and stripping and painting the ironwork. They are designated a Category A Heritage Object by Auckland Council.
This walk takes approximately one hour, allowing for pauses at points of historic interest. The Rainbow Warrior Memorial is the half-way point.

1. Voyager New Zealand Maritime Museum: Home to many of New Zealand’s maritime treasures. Archives include the extensive records of Ports of Auckland’s predecessor, the Auckland Harbour Board (1871–1988).
2. War Memorial Beacon: Erected in 1915 by AH&B to record names of staff who served in World War I. Restored and re-erected in 2000 by ‘a grateful refugee from Nazi Germany’.
3. Princes Wharf (built 1921–1924): Named for Edward, Prince of Wales (later, the Duke of Windsor) who visited Auckland in 1920. Ormston cast iron lamp stands (with gates and fences) were erected in 1923.
4. Ferry Building (built 1912, restored in 1988): The Ferry Building has long stood at the foot of Queen Street as the city’s hub for harbour and gulf passenger transport.
5. Queens Wharf Gates and Red Fence: The ‘Red Fance’ was erected between 1913 and 1903. Installation was interrupted by the waterfront confrontation of 1913.
6. Queens Wharf (built 1906–1913): The present concrete wharf was built to replace the original wooden Queen Street Wharf, which, as the hub of the early port, extended 474m from the foot of Queen Street out into Commercial Bay.
7. Queens Wharf Sheds: Shed 10, the only remaining shed—was known as the ‘Liberty Shed’ as it was used to process soldiers on their way for leave during World War 2.
8. Admiralty Steps (between Captain Cook and Queens Wharves where the tugs now berth): These steps were used by royal visitors arriving on British naval ships.
9. Captain Cook Wharf (1922): Named for Captain James Cook, who made the first recorded circumnavigation of New Zealand in 1769-70.
11. Fergusson Terminal: Named after members of the Fergusson family who served as Governors of NZ from 1873 to 1967. The first container ship to visit Fergusson arrived on June 23, 1971, heralding a new era of containerised cargo.
12. Bledisloe Multi-purpose Terminal: Designed for frozen export cargo, was built between 1937 and 1948. In 1985 it was expanded and upgraded, to become Bledisloe Terminal, the port’s second container terminal. In 2012 most container operations moved to Fergusson Terminal to the east. Bledisloe is now a multi-purpose terminal, used to handle cars and other vehicles, ‘break-bulk’ (non-containerised) cargo and a small number of containers.