



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Annual General Meeting

Sunday, August 20, at 2.30 pm
At Crossways in Elizabeth St

The AGM will be followed by a slide show by Alan Olliver

Mt Victoria Past and Present



The corner of Brougham and Pirie Streets (north side) in 19// and 2006

AGM

The annual general meeting of the Society will be held at Crossways on August 21st. If you would like to join the committee, please get in touch with Joanna Newman before then, or volunteer to stand on the day. Late offers happily accepted!

With this newsletter you will find a subscription renewal form for the next financial year. Thank you for your support over the last year and we look forward to having you with us again next year.

Committee

We're pleased to advise that Judy Southworth agreed to join the Committee, so was gratefully 'co-opted' and participated in our last meeting in June.

Oral history project report

The main development since the last report is that we have selected a photographer for the project. Sarah Burton is currently a photography student at Massey University and some of her major project work is exactly the concept we have in mind. We're still keen to hear from anyone who would like to volunteer to help. There will be all sorts of tasks, from writing letters, to organising interviews, to transcribing.

A quirky slice of Mt Vic History

Did you know that the recent winner of the New Zealand men's static title (lying face down in a swimming pool) at the national freediving championships owes his success to holding his breath to go through the Mt Vic tunnel as a child? It's true. Wellington freediver, Guy Brewer, said it's a childhood habit which led to his love of freediving. "A lot of kids try to hold their breath while their parents are driving through the Mt Vic tunnel. I suppose it is really just taking that a little bit further." [The Wellingtonian, June 29]

HISTORICAL NOTE

George Shannon and Shannon Street

Shannon Street was formed (along with Moeller and Kennedy Streets) in 1878 when four town acres in Mt Victoria were subdivided. George Vance Shannon and his business partner bought town acres 403, 404, 405 and 406 in 1878 and proceeded to subdivide them.

George was born near the town of Antrim in Ireland in 1842 and came to New Zealand as a 23 year old. Years later, when his illustrious career assured him a place in the 1897 Cyclopedia of New Zealand, the entry (no doubt prepared by his own hand) records that he “married Emily, the eldest daughter of Lieut. Thomas Hewitt, R.N., of Sydney Lodge, County Wicklow, and arrived in the colony in 1865”. It is clear, however, that he arrived with Emily but that the couple married in Nelson. They went on to have nine children. George’s three brothers later followed him from Ireland and two, Graham and Ezekiel, worked in his business for a time.



*Part of Thomas Ward's 1891 survey map of Wellington
Wellington City Archives*



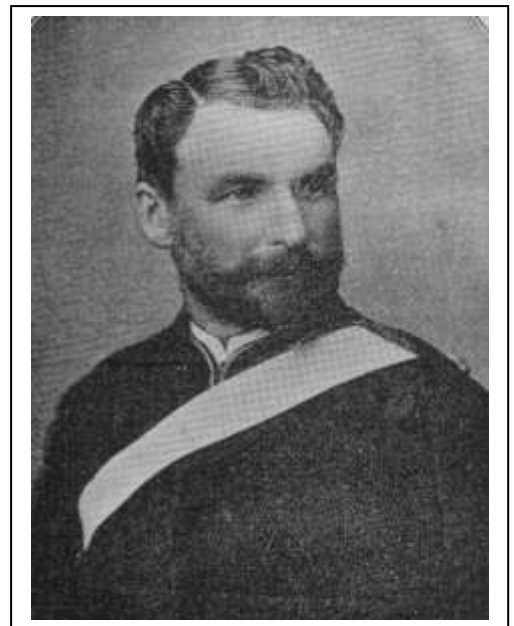
For nine years, George managed a large Nelson importing business. Then, in 1874, he moved to Wellington and entered into a partnership with J.S.M. Thompson. They established a successful soft goods-importing and clothing-manufacturing business under the name Thompson, Shannon and Co, which was the forerunner of the DIC department store.

*The photograph to the left shows the Thompson, Shannon and Co warehouse in Panama Street. It's the grand building with the wide frontage on the left.
Wellington City Archives*

Shannon was very involved in public life and, locally, served as captain of the Wellington Volunteer Fire and Salvage Brigade in the early 1880's, as Chairman of the Terrace School Committee, and as a member of the Wellington Education Board. He was also a Major in the New Zealand Militia and listed in one of the Wellington companies of volunteers.

Along with a number of other prominent Wellington businessmen, Shannon was the driving force behind the privately-owned Wellington-Manawatu Railway Company. When the company was formed he, John Plimmer and William H. Levin were the first to agree to take out 2000 five pound shares. He was elected a director and then served as vice-chairman of the Company until he resigned in 1887. In addition to giving his name to the street in Mt Victoria, his name was also given to the town of Shannon on the Wellington-Manawatu railway line.

George and his brothers had strong connections with the Manawatu from 1877, when they bought a 1000-acre block of land there. They also made other land purchases in the area. Although Shannon thought he had retired to a rural lifestyle in 1887 when he left the board of the Wellington-Manawatu Railway Company and moved to his property “The Totaras” in Rangitikei, he was invited by the Premier to be an adviser to Customs in 1888. He accepted and the Premier announced in the House in 1889 that the “customs expert” had saved no less a sum than £5000 during the first seven months of his appointment. Shannon went on to hold the position for 20 years.



*George Vance Shannon in his militia uniform.
Cyclopedia of New Zealand, Volume1, 1897*