



# MT VICTORIA

---

## Historical Society News

For more information contact:

Joanna Newman on 385 2254 (hm)

Alan Olliver on 385 1022 (hm)

**No. 39, September 2006**

## **Architects and Mt Victoria**

### **A Guided Walk**

**Sunday, November 12, at 2.30 pm**

Meeting at the Queen Vic statue on Kent and Cambridge Terrace

Join us for a guided tour of parts of Mt Victoria  
with Adrian Humphris and Geoff Mew  
and find out about well-known architects and their connection with Mt Victoria.

*Numbers will be limited to 20 to ensure an enjoyable experience for all  
so please register your interest by phoning David McCrone on 384 3031*

### **Oral history project**

There's been lots of activity on our oral history recording and photography project in the last month. We have spent many enjoyable and interesting hours with John Horgan, who's been very generous with his time. We've purchased recording equipment to make it easier to undertake future recordings and, with the help of our photographer, we've put together a proposal for an exhibition about the middle of next year at the Arts Centre. It really feels as though we're underway.

### **A City Council Archive: tedious bureaucratic records or treasure trove?**

It would be easy to think that the archives of a municipal authority are full of boring records about drains, roads and committees. They have those, too, but they are also a wonderful source of detail about people's lives. They can be a mine of information to flesh out the character or antics of an ancestor or to add colour to some aspect of city life.

To illustrate, our Historical Note this month shows what we can learn about George Winder, the original owner of the large residence until recently called Victoria House, which stands proudly above Pirie Street. No. 58 Pirie Street is undergoing a spruce up, but has a long history.

First, a bit of background on George Winder from another source. The popular weekly, *Freelance*, described Winder in 1904 as the most popular city councillor. He was Irish, from Dublin, and clearly proud of it because it was frequently referred to. He was chairman of the Council's Street Widening Committee and the paper considered him the man responsible for any street widening that had happened in Wellington. It also acknowledged his huge success as a businessman. When he was running for national elections in 1908 it affectionately described him as "the people's George", saying "he goes to the top of the poll as easily as he jumps a counter or sells a razor."

## HISTORICAL NOTE

### George Winder, councillor, businessman, Mt Vic resident



So, what can Wellington City Archives tell us about George Winder and his life?

George's home was on Pirie Street. He bought Town Acre 324, Section 5 in 1884. It was still known as part of the Tutchen Estate even by 1892 when he was altering it to make it the grand, two-storey dwelling it is today. The new house had four fireplaces upstairs and downstairs and cost £250 to build. The survey map of the city from that same year shows that, from his home, he looked across the street to a large empty section. In 1902 he built new stables on the back of the property, off Tutchen Avenue, but by 1930 it was a garage for a car that he was adding. In 1913 he had added yet another room to the house.

Winder was an Importer of Furnishing and General Ironmongery. Letterhead on correspondence with Council announces this and lists the goods he deals in - galvanised iron, fencing wire, spouting, ridging, white lead, oils and paints, ranges, grates, wringers, bedsteads". By 1907 carpets, linoleums, lace curtains, table linen have been added to the top sellers. He calls his business "The Corner Shop, corner of Cuba and Manners Streets."

We find out from one of the earliest building permits in the Archives that George built a two-storey shop on the corner of Cuba and Manners Street in 1892 (where James Smith's building is now). Over the next few years, permits and correspondence tell us how he added a verandah, extended the building, changed the frontage and made several additions to the premises up until 1905. His business was clearly growing rapidly. In 1907, he pulled down the original premises and built a new two-storey brick building designed by architects, Penty and Blake. He took out a lease on a block of reclaimed land in Victoria Street in 1896, too – where the West Plaza Hotel is on Wakefield Street. He immediately enquired about any restrictions: "*I would like to know if there is any condition as to height of building in this block.*" By 1903, he was making additions to this warehouse.

(left) Councillor George Winder, on a visit to the tram barns in 1900 [Wellington City Archives 00138:0:8703]

As a councillor, streets seem to have been George's passion. He sent a notice of motion to the Town Clerk on February 6, 1900 stating, "*As intimated last night, I wish to give notice that I intend to move in Council on Thursday night next. 1<sup>st</sup> That the Engineer be instructed to forthwith put Kent Terrace roadway in a thorough state of repair so as to relieve the extra traffic now existing in Cambridge Terrace. 2<sup>nd</sup> That the watering cart will visit Kent Terrace alternately with Cambridge Terrace. 3<sup>rd</sup> That portion of Hay Street (Oriental Bay) being in a very bad condition and dangerous to traffic the Engineer make such repairs as he thinks necessary.*"

By 1902, he had moved that a subcommittee be formed to deal with street widening issues. For the next five years, he was constantly raising issues about road widening and footpaths.

In 1903 he was dealing with a particular case and asked for a City Solicitor's opinion: "*I can settle with the freeholder of a property but the leaseholder's claim is excessive. Can we take the leaseholder's interest under the P. W. Act without taking the freeholder's*". (The answer was no, but he was asked in return if he would like the legislation changed so that it was possible.)

It wasn't long before street widening affected his own interests. In 1907, when the Tramways Engineer heard that George Winder was considering rebuilding his premises on the corner of Cuba and Manners Street, he was approached to give up part of his land so the street could be widened and the tram tracks set further from the kerb. Winder sold a piece of his Cuba and Manners Street frontage to the Council for £1050.

Clearly George wasn't always on the right side of the Council, though. Files in the Archives also have a note from an Inspector to the Town Clerk reporting on a case against Winder and enclosing the press clipping about it. The *Post* of August 23, 1907 reported: "*A case arising out of evidence given against the dynamiters who were recently sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, was heard before Mr. Riddell, S.M., to-day, the defendant being George Winder, who was charged at the instance of Corporation Inspector Doyle with having stored at 60 Cuba-street, dangerous goods (detonators) without a license. The Inspector explained that the bylaw provided that these explosives must be kept in a fire-proof safe or magazine constructed to the satisfaction of the corporation's inspecting office, and that the defendant had no license in respect of them at the premises in question. After evidence had been heard, Mr. Gray, for the defence, said there was no evidence that defendant had no license to store detonators at No. 60 Cuba-street. Defendant, he said, had not been required to produce a license. His Worship held that proving a negative did not prove a positive; no notice had been given to produce the license, and on that ground alone the information must be dismissed. Defendant was allowed £1 Is costs.*"

All this, and more, can be found in Council records at Wellington City Archives!

By Joanna Newman



Sketch of The Corner Shop, 1892 [Wellington City Archives 00053:7:205]