



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Notice of Annual General Meeting

Sunday, September 16 at 2.30 pm
Crossways

followed by

Redmer Yska

Author of the wonderful *Wellington: Biography of a City*, published in 2006, Redmer will entertain and inform us with stories, scandals and colourful details from Wellington's past.

Annual General Meeting

Nominations are invited for the positions of Convenor, Secretary and Treasurer of the Society, and for committee members. If you'd like to join the committee, please don't hesitate to put your name forward (nominations will also be accepted from the floor). If you'd like to know more about what's involved, please call Joanna Newman on 385 2254.

The AGM is a time when all members have an opportunity to give us feedback, so we look forward to seeing you there and hearing your thoughts about the activities of the Society.

Membership renewals

Membership renewal forms are enclosed with this newsletter. Thank you for your support over the past year. The Society is going from strength to strength, so we trust you'll have no hesitation in rejoining! (If you have joined since April 30, 2007 you do not need to renew your membership for 2007/8).

Next meeting – Sunday, November

Celebration of the centenary of the opening of the Pirie Street tram (now bus) tunnel – details to be confirmed.

The Baker Family

Last weekend a major exhibition of the paintings of William George Baker closed at the Pataka Gallery in Porirua. The curator described Baker as possibly "this country's first and one of its most successful itinerant artists". He travelled the country sketching, photographing and painting. He had no formal art training, but at the age of 19, in 1883, he started exhibiting his oil paintings with the Fine Arts Association in Wellington and continued painting until he died aged 64 in 1929.

William, and the Baker family, had very strong Mt Victoria connections. Early in my own Mt Victoria history, I discovered that my house was built by George Baker, William's father (though I didn't know of the artist at that point). In fact, many Mt Victoria houses were designed and built by George Baker. I had trouble pinning George down, however, because there were two George Bakers who were builders. The exhibition at Pataka sorted it all out for me, so now the story can be shared with Historical Society members.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Baker Family

By Joanna Newman

The George Baker who built several houses in Mt Victoria, including the one he and his family lived in at 70 Brougham Street, arrived in Wellington on the *Lady Nugent* on 17 March 1841. He was one year old. His parents, George and Susan, came from Exeter with him and his two-year old sister, Harriette. When they arrived, they were given a fortnight's provisions and free rent in the barracks until the next batch of immigrants arrived. George, the father, was a carpenter and joiner and was first employed assembling immigrant cottages brought out from England in sections. He is particularly known, however, for the fact that his property in Karori gave its name to the Baker's Hill Mining Company, when it became the scene of the Wellington 'gold rush'.

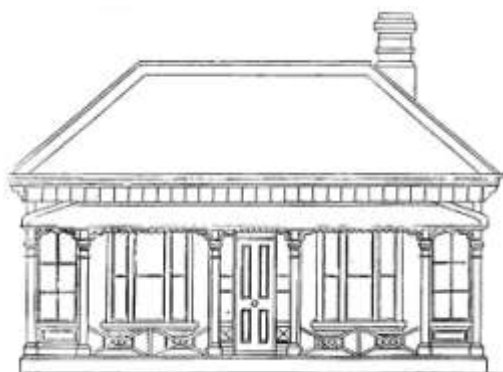
George, the son, became a carpenter like his father and worked with him as soon as he was old enough. When he was a young man he accompanied his father to Ballarat in Australia and the two probably worked there for a time. They came back to Karori and young George worked as a journeyman carpenter (a qualified carpenter, working for wages) for a few years before going into business on his own account. He married Emma Stockbridge early in 1864 and the couple had twelve children.



George and Emma Baker (centre) with their 12 children. William George is 2nd from left in the front. [Photograph courtesy John McNeil, ChCh]

The young George owned and built a number of houses in Mt Victoria between 1893 and 1897. Today we would probably call him a 'developer'. About 1895, he built the house at 70 Brougham Street, which is still there, and came to live in it. A few years later, they briefly lived in Austin Terrace (probably the house on the left below) before moving out to Petone where George worked as a night-watchman. The *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* in 1897 described him as a "hale and hearty gentleman" and expressed the hope "that he will live for many years to enjoy the competence he has earned by assiduous devotion to business". He died, however, in 1903 at the age of only 63.

William, the painter, was the eldest of the seven girls and five boys in the family. In spite of being an itinerant artist, and even travelling with his young wife in a horse-drawn caravan throughout New Zealand in search of scenes to paint, William and his family also lived briefly in Mt Victoria. In 1893 they lived in Moir Street.



Left: Dwelling off Austin St, 1896, owned and built by George Baker. [Wellington City Archives 00053:222:1574]



Right: Dwelling Ellice Ave, 1897 (now 20 Porritt Ave and 12 Albany Ave), owned and built by George Baker. [Wellington City Archives 00053:35:2213]