



MT VICTORIA

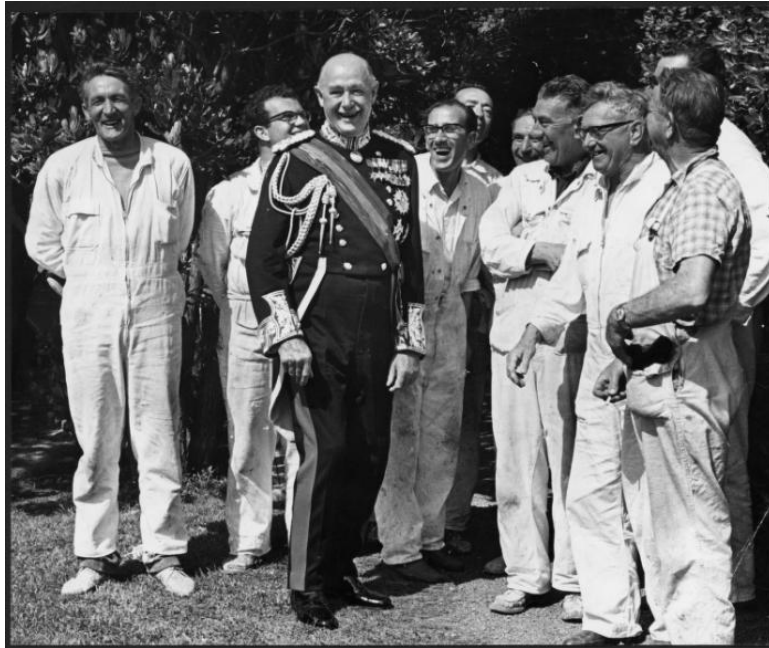
Historical Society News

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Governor-General, Sir Arthur Porritt, with painters on the lawn at Government House, 1967.
Alexander Turnbull EP-NZ Obits-Porritt, Sir Arthur-01

AGM followed by a talk by Gavin McLean on the Governor-Generals

Sunday September 20 at 2.30 pm

New Crossways, 6 Roxburgh St

Annual General Meeting

With this newsletter you will find details about proposed changes to the Society's Rules, which will be put to the vote at the AGM. The changes should be very uncontroversial. In order to retain its charitable status under the Charities Act 2005, the Charities Commission requires the Society to amend its Rules as set out on the attached sheet. The wording proposed is exactly what has been recommended by the Commission to ensure that our rules remain compliant.

We are very pleased to have been able to arrange for Gavin McLean to speak to us after the AGM. With massive renovations and restoration going on at Government House, I started off thinking it would be interesting to hear more about those. There is such a wealth of information on the official website, however, that it seemed a bit redundant (check out <http://www.gg.govt.nz/government-house> if you'd like to find out more). Far more interesting would be to have Gavin McLean, author of *The Governors: New Zealand's Governors and Governors-General*, published in 2006, talk to us about illustrious past occupants of the House, who have included among their number one who gave his name to a Mt Victoria street.

Historical Note

The historical note overleaf is in memory of Marcella Jackson. Marcella was a member of Mt Victoria Historical Society from the beginning and, in one of those sad fates of timing, not long before her tragic death I had decided it was at last time to search out some of the history of the house on Pirie Street which she and her late husband had so beautifully restored.

HISTORICAL NOTE

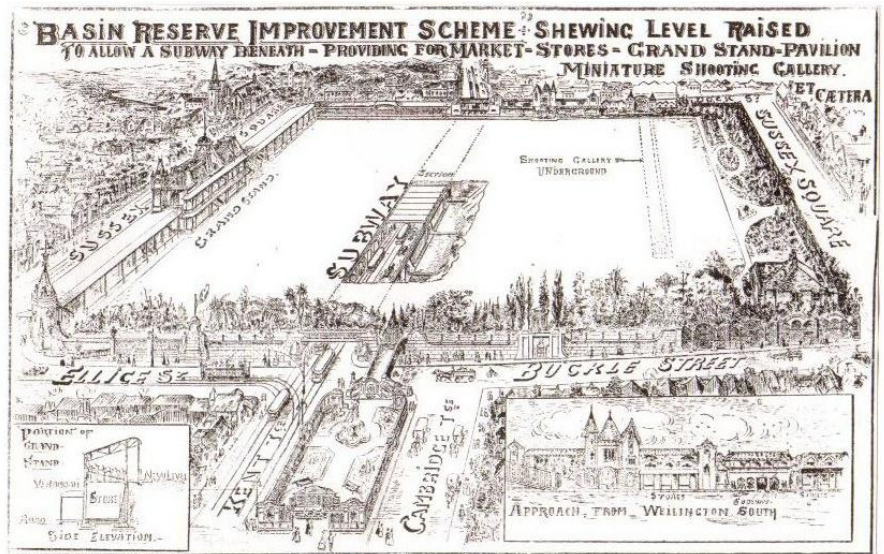
Off Brougham

55 Pirie Street was built for Edward Andrew Bonthorne in 1902. The builder, however, is at least as interesting as the owner.

Bonthorne's house was designed and built by George Humphries. (In the same year, he also built the house next door at No. 57.) George and his brother, L.S. Humphries, were in partnership as builders until May 1901 but then went their separate ways. It seems likely that at that point George decided to branch out with his new inventions. Later that year, he was advertising his patent window frames: "Patented throughout the world. . . Can be fitted to old windows. The sashes can be taken out and turned in any position for cleaning or glazing almost instantaneously. Sash cords and weights easily replaced. The cost of fitting the patent to old frames is trifling." By 1904, he was advertising his "Humphries' No. 2 patent window", which "greatly facilitates cleaning windows, as this can be done from inside the rooms, and replacing sash cords and glass if they should be broken. Allows for ventilation without draught, is weather-proof, and can be easily worked. Price 5s. more than cost of ordinary window. Having a staff of first-class tradesmen and machinery to promptly supply any orders, the public may rely on getting a well-made article." (I wonder how many Humphries patent windows still exist in Mt Victoria houses?)

In September 1905, the brothers were back in business together again as Humphries Bros. Then, in 1907, they formed The Humphries Patent Bracket and Scaffold Co Ltd for another building innovation, "with the object of placing their invention upon the MARKETS OF THE WORLD".

George and his brother were well-known builders in town, actively involved in trade affairs. L.S. Humphries was Secretary of the NZ Federated Builders and Contractors' Ass. for a number of years. In 1910, at a conference on "The Status of the Master Builder" he "contended that builders should have the right to draw plans, but not to submit them for competition." The conference concluded by deciding to register builders. The background to this decision was vividly described by one Mr Bennett: "We who move about the suburbs of Wellington know that classes of material are being put into buildings and covered with two or three coats of paint and so launched upon an unsuspecting public, that will not last more than seven years from the date of erection." Leaky buildings are clearly not a new problem!



Another interesting sideline in the career of George Humphries is that in 1909 he was the proposer of the famous plan for the Basin Reserve which included an underground shooting gallery, tram subway, market stalls and a grand north entrance with fountains.

Bonthorne and his family moved to the brand new house on Pirie Street from an address at the top of Elice Street. He was in the ironmongery business and worked for E.W. Mills & Co, hardware merchants, from 1897 to 1910 - on leaving them was presented with a handsome travelling bag, silver cruet, and cream jug and sugar basin. He too was involved in wider trade affairs, but apparently in a more social capacity. In 1893 he was on the organising committee of the fourth annual ball of the employees of the various ironmongery firms in Wellington, where the "hall was artistically decorated, reflecting the greatest credit upon the gentlemen who carried out the arrangements". He was also one of the three directors of ceremonies, for what the press acclaimed as an unqualified success. In 1901 he was on the organising committee of the eleventh annual ball of the combined wholesale ironmongers of the city, and one suspects that he was probably a mainstay of all the ball-organising committees in between. In 1912 he is still an ironmonger, but on his death in 1947, aged 85, he is described as a "retired commercial traveler".

One of the more interesting episodes in the life of the young Bonthorne must have been his active duty as a "citizen soldier". He was 19 years old when he departed Wellington on the "Hinemoa" on 2 November 1881 for "service at the front" with the voluntary Engineers Corps. And where were they heading? Parihaka. The press described events in terms of great excitement, and on arrival at camp in Opunake and Pungarehu the men, too, were apparently excited and enthusiastic - in "capital spirits" and "looking forward eagerly to the expedition of Saturday . . . the march to "the prophet's" settlement". They already knew that there was unlikely to be any resistance and it was reported that the Maori had decided on a novel and ingenious form of defence involving all the inhabitants stripping themselves naked, covering their bodies with grease, and surrounding Te Whiti to make it impossible to capture him. Another special correspondent hinted at a different picture, however. "As usual, the volunteers left the store at Wellington half equipped, and there is a general complaint respecting the management." When they returned to Wellington, while their commander was praised for capturing Te Whiti, Tohu and Hiroki, he was condemned for his provisioning of the troops. They appear to have been totally ill-equipped for the unpredictable weather. "It is not right, for instance, that volunteers should needlessly have been exposed to the heavy gale and rain recently experienced on the West Coast, through the absence of adequate shelter in the way of tents or housing. Even more objectionable is the extraordinary head-covering which the volunteers have been compelled to wear, and which has been the means of subjecting them to much suffering wholly unnecessary. And of causing serious injury to their health. Sunstrokes, epileptic seizures and fainting fits, have been experienced by the volunteers, entirely through exposure to the burning sun with the insufficient protection afforded to the head by the absurd and unsuitable cap furnished by the Defence Department."

By Joanna Newman