



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Mount Victoria Historical Society Heritage Month Celebration

The Town Belt – Wellington's Taonga

A look at the rich history of the Town Belt and the threat to its future.

Venue: New Crossways Community Centre

6 Roxburgh St, Mt Victoria, Wellington

Date: June 27th, 2-3 pm

Contact: David Lee

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This year is the 100th anniversary year of Government House. The site has a rich history with the former Mount View Asylum and the current Governor-General's Residence. Later this year, there is a possibility that we may be able to see through the partly renovated buildings, and be given a talk by the staff involved. This visit would be on a Saturday morning, and numbers attending will be limited. The exact date is undecided. If you would like to go on this please register your interest to Alan Olliver/Julie Middleton – email middletonolliver@clear.net.nz or phone 3851022. We will get back to you as soon as we know more.

Earlier this year, I led a walk up on to the Southern Ridge of Mt Victoria. The walk did not include the summit itself as this area is well documented with the display panels. If you would like a copy of the brochure covering the walk, please contact me.

With David Lee's forthcoming talk in mind, I thought it would be a good opportunity to put on paper some of the stories that I had researched for the Te Ranga a Hiwi walk.



Far Left: Alan by the Mt Victoria sewer tunnel vent. Alexandra Rd

Left: MVHS group at Ellice St Quarry Reserve

Tales of the Town Belt - Te Ranga a Hiwi Ridge

Ellice Street Quarry – “Butcher Boys” and bank robbers beware. Local Arthur Ashenden described as a lad searching for “Butcher Boys” at the Quarry. They are little boring insects that drilled into the clay, and by putting a blade of grass down the hole, this would irate (as only boys do) the Butcher Boy and they would grab hold of the grass only to be hauled out of their protective hole. To increase the element of adventure boys would dare each other to climb the cliffs. On more than one occasion, injuries were reported in the local papers such as six year Alexander Wilson who fell off the edge of the quarry and fortunately survived serious injury. *Evening Post 2/6/1910*

Council correspondence from 1955 to 1962 relating to the site includes applications by the ANZ, BNZ and Bank of New South Wales (part of today’s Westpac bank) to use the disused quarry /old Defence Department “musketry practise” site for pistol practise - presumably to defend themselves from robbers not defaulting customers! *City Archives*

On the same theme, there was an example of highway robbery on the **Old Kilbirnie Road**. Near top of ridge on the 1st Oct 1897, Mr Simpson, a tailor, passed through gate at top of reserve when he was accosted by 3 men who robbed him of £3 5s. They warned him that they would throw him into the quarry if he followed them or raised the alarm. One of the men quipped. “If they find you dead they will think that you were drunk and fell over the cliff” Bruised and fearing bodily injury Simpson retreated to Kilbirnie (Hataitai) and reported the incident. *Evening Post 2/10/1897*

War time saw the development of a large military presence on the Te Ranga a Hiwi Ridge, including a camp built for 176 personnel, an anti aircraft battery, and a search light unit. The heavy 3.7 inch guns could fire shells to 10,000 ft in 14 seconds, with up to 10-12 rounds per minute. As of July 1 1941 – Mt Victoria was a prohibited site, guarded near the radio station and at the Fever Hospital. The only enemy fired on were burglars seen fleeing the camp. *Defending NZ - Ramparts of the Sea 1840- 1950s Part 2, Peter Cooke, Defence of NZ Study Group*

The Velodrome – a relatively recent addition to the Town Belt landscape built in 1967-8. Track cycling was then in decline, and so has been the maintenance of this cycling venue. In January 2009, a 29 year old graffiti tagger painted a giant pink crocodile head on the circuit, using house paint, rendering it slippery and unsafe for users. Adverse publicity saw the tagger experience guilt and he came forward to do voluntary work at the Velodrome. *Dominion Post 26/1/2009*

Fever Hospital - built in 1919. The site was chosen for its isolation for TB and scarlet fever patients. Designed with large open verandas, this fitted the medical view at the time that plenty of fresh air added rehabilitation. Sonya Davies, nurse and patient said “I found the Fever Hospital high on the hill amongst the pine trees totally depressing. The TB patients slept in open verandas, taking in the cold air. Many had been there for years and the majority had not had a visitor”. One patient, in order to hasten death, hung himself in a bathroom. Nurses completing their shift had to walk down a track to the nurses’ home accompanied by a hospital orderly with a torch. “One temporary orderly tried to press his luck with a home-going nurse who knocked him out with her torch. After that the authorities sent taxis.”

Bread and Roses – Her Story, Sonja Davies

Sewer Tunnel Vent - next to Wellington Harriers Athletic Club Rooms. The elaborate brick chimney dates back to 1898 when the Council finally agreed on a comprehensive plan to remove the inner city’s sewage to Moa Point via a new Mount Victoria sewer tunnel (near Drummond St to lower Duncan Tce). The plan cost £165,000 (\$26m today), thus eliminating the back flowing sewage and vapours into the house of Te Aro. Health and safety had been made worse in the area by residents who were in the habit of burying night soil in their back yards. In 1890, 77 residents died of infectious diseases such as typhoid and cholera.

Wellington – Biography of a City, Redmer Yska

Alan Olliver