



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Tales of the Sea

Sunday, September 23, 2.30pm
Crossways, 6 Roxburgh Street

Following the AGM there will be a presentation of a selection of Mt Victoria nautical-themed stories. September is Wellington Region Heritage Month, with the theme 'Our Heritage – Our Stories', so we also invite you to share stories of ancestors' connection with the sea and Wellington.

For information about other Heritage Month activities, pick up a brochure in the NZ section at the Central Library or the I-site.

Annual General Meeting

The annual general meeting of Mt Victoria Historical Society will be held on September 23 at 2.30 pm. We would welcome new committee members! Nominations will be sought from the floor, but we are also happy to receive expressions of interest before the meeting. You can email jnewman@xtra.co.nz. Visitors are welcome to join us for the AGM.

Membership subscriptions for 2012-13

We apologise for the late dispatch of membership renewals this year. They are coming to you with this newsletter. We look forward to your continued support and renewal for the coming year.

Tram Heritage

Thanks to one of our founding members, Jim Harper, we still have a piece of important tram heritage in our neighbourhood.

Many locals will have noticed the road works going on around the statue of Queen Victoria recently. Unbeknownst to most, they came perilously close to destroying the last tram switch in the country. Fortunately, Jim noticed this one evening as he came home in the half-dark, snapped a photo as evidence and raised the alert immediately. This set in train a number of actions in motion which resulted in the switch being saved. What's more, it is likely there will soon be a plaque in place to mark the points and explain the history behind them. As far as The Tramways Museum know it was the only one like this in Wellington - the bar-lever lifted up out of the ground to change the point.

Turnbull Library re-opens

After over two years of relocation and partial services, the Alexander Turnbull Library is open again in the refurbished National Library building in Molesworth Street, although construction continues on the ground floor.

The Turnbull's new hours are 10am to 5pm from Monday to Saturday (that is, you can now work there all day on a Saturday.) For those who would like an introduction to the refurbished Turnbull, there will be guided tours all through August, every day, including Saturday, at 11am.

There is also a new Turnbull Gallery on the first floor which is well worth a visit. You can find out more on the National Library website www.natlib.govt.nz.

Historical Note

The Historical Note in this newsletter talks about the last major subdivision in Mt Victoria, which was between Brougham and what is now Porritt Avenue. You can see how the land looked just before the subdivision by going to the 1892 Thomas Ward map to which we provided a link in the last newsletter:
<http://www.wellington.govt.nz/maps/webmaps/webmap/wccmap.html>.

105 Brougham Street



Once one of the grandest homes in Mt Victoria, 105 Brougham Street is now a some-what tattered old lady in faded harlequin colours, with just hints of her former handsome visage discernable in her superb ‘bone’ structure.

This house was designed by Thomas Turnbull and Son for Catherine Gray in 1910 and built on part of the last great subdivision in Mt Victoria. The land had been bought by William Gray about 1870. He and his wife arrived from Aberdeen on the “Simlah” in 1852 and settled first in New Plymouth. He became Postmaster in New Plymouth, Chief Clerk at Nelson, Secretary at Dunedin and Auckland and Inspector of Post-offices then Secretary of the General Post Office. He travelled a lot with his work in the last two posts, both within New Zealand and overseas. In 1871, for instance, he went to America with Vogel (who was Postmaster General at the time) to complete arrangements for a

San Francisco mail contract. He went to America again in 1873 but was “weak and infirm” when he left. He knew it was a risk to travel in his state of health but felt that duty obliged him to. He died overseas in 1874. Catherine was left a widow with at least five boys. In 1893, she sold five town acres –320, 321, 326, 327 and 328 – which only had two houses on them at the time. Catherine and two of her sons, David and Alexander, also owned Town Acres 325 and 329. By the time this house was built, Alex had already built 111 Brougham Street next door - but more of Alex and this house another time.

After the house was built, Catherine Gray lived here until she died at home in 1919 aged 95, having survived her husband by 45 years.

From 1920 to 1944/45, James Paul of the firm Townsend & Paul lived in the house.



Townsend & Paul's wholesale fish market, Wellington, ca 1910
[Alexander Turnbull Library 1/2-047904-G]



Premises of Townsend & Paul Ltd in Blair Street
[Alexander Turnbull Library 1/2-211866-F]

Architecturally, the house is very important and is listed on Wellington City Council’s heritage inventory (although its entry has been removed from the Council’s website). By the time it was designed, Thomas Turnbull’s son had joined him in practice so plans were submitted under the name Thomas Turnbull and Son. Turnbull senior was one of the most important architects in Wellington for much of the Victorian period. He designed the three great timber churches: St John’s (1885), St Peter’s (1879) and Wesley (1880), all in gothic style. His commercial buildings include the National Mutual Life Association building (1883), which is one of Wellington's oldest masonry buildings, in classical style and considered one of his finest commercial designs. The outstanding gothic masonry architecture of the General Assembly Library in 1899 is also his. The ‘old’ Bank of New Zealand (1901) is also considered his design, though it was prepared under the name of Thomas Turnbull and Son. Another commercial building closer to Mt Victoria is the former Wellington Gas Company premises on Courtenay Place, now occupied by the National Bank.

Turnbull came to New Zealand in 1871 and went into practice on his own in 1872. Wellington was still largely a town of two-storey wooden buildings as a consequence of the earthquakes of 1848 and 1855. Turnbull, however, advocated strongly in papers and lectures, as well as by example, for structurally sound methods of building in masonry to resist earthquakes. As his churches show, though, he still built in wood outside the central city – partly because it was cheaper and because many clients still felt more comfortable with wooden buildings. After an extraordinarily successful career - he achieved international recognition for his work in 1883 and 1884 and became the first president of the Wellington Association of Architects - he experienced major disappointment in the 1890’s when his design for the Government Insurance Buildings was rejected and changes were made to his plans for the General Assembly Library.

Another house along Brougham Street, number 91, was also designed by Thomas Turnbull in 1898.