



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Next event

You may have noticed that this newsletter is missing the usual box at the top advertising the next event. Unfortunately, we don't have another event planned for this year but we are working on some exciting things for early 2014. We'll ensure that you have plenty of notice of these.

Website address change

Please note our new website address in the newsletter banner. We have almost completed restoration of all the resources that were available before the closure by our old service provider. Once that is done, we will again be continually adding information and resources.

Labour Day

As I write this newsletter, it's Labour Day. As most will know, Labour Day commemorates the struggle for an eight-hour working day. New Zealand workers were among the first in the world to claim this right when, in 1840, the carpenter Samuel Parnell won an eight-hour day in Wellington. It was first celebrated in New Zealand on 28 October 1890, when several thousand trade union members and supporters attended parades in the main centres of New Zealand. Government employees were given the day off to attend the parades and many businesses closed for at least part of the day. Early Labour Days were more frequently referred to as Demonstration Day, with the 'Eight-hour Day' often being implicit in the name. Although workers in some industries had long enjoyed an eight-hour day, it was not a legal entitlement. Other workers, such as seamen, farm labourers, and hotel, restaurant and shop employees, still worked much longer hours. Unionists wanted the Government to pass legislation enforcing an eight-hour day for all workers but it was reluctant to antagonise the business community. What the Government did do in 1899 was to make Labour Day a statutory public holiday, first celebrated in 1900.

Our part of town featured large in the early history of Labour Day. For many years, the Basin Reserve was the venue for the sports and entertainments which followed the annual procession of unionists and supporters from the Government Building. The first Labour Day in 1890 was planned to be held in the Basin Reserve, with the venue booked by the unions, but it seems that cricket and influential councillors forced a move to Newtown Park that year. (The highlight at that inaugural Day was an appearance by the elderly Parnell, who died just a few weeks later.) From 1893, however, the procession of unionists and supporters marching behind banners and colourful floats culminated at the Basin Reserve. There, speeches by dignitaries, athletic sports, bicycle races, art union lotteries, auctions, bands, merry-go-rounds and swings for children and refreshments drew large crowds. At the first public holiday Labour Day in 1900, a record crowd gathered in the Basin Reserve to hear Premier Seddon speak and to enjoy the music and sports.

Sites of Struggle: guided walks of key Wellington sites

On a similar theme, you might be interested in a series of walks being offered by the Labour History Project.

To mark the centenary of the 1913 Great Strike, Labour History Project members in Wellington have developed a guided walk around Wellington's inner city. There is a walk every Sunday in November, starting at 10am from the Museum of Wellington City & Sea. The walk will take in sites of the dramatic events of 1913, enabling walkers to learn about the strike and related events.

TIME: every Sunday in November, 10am – 12pm (ish)
ROUTE: mostly flat; slight slopes. Suitable for wheelchairs
FITNESS: moderate

For more information, go to <http://1913greatstrike.org/walks/>

New committee member

We are very happy to welcome on board a new committee member for 2013/14. Jane O'Loughlin, a recent arrival in Mt Victoria, joined us at the AGM in September.

Owd Trafford and Art Deco Mt Victoria



Owd Trafford, more prosaically known as 17 Brougham Street, is one of most beautiful of a number of Art Deco apartment blocks in Mt Victoria.

It was designed in 1940 by Cyril Mitchell of the architectural firm Mitchell & Mitchell. At the age of eighteen, in 1909, Cyril was taken on at Atkins and Bacon as a draughtsman and became a partner in 1918. The 28 year-old Mitchell was left on his own in 1919, however, after Bacon left the firm because of failing health and Atkins died. Cyril built up the firm, and renamed it Mitchell and Mitchell when his brother Allan joined in 1932. Cyril Mitchell had roots in Mt Victoria, where he and his brother attended Clyde Quay School and on to Wellington College. He died in 1949, aged only 57.

Other Art Deco buildings by Cyril Mitchell are the Central Fire Station (1935), the Waterloo Hotel (1936) and the MLC Building (1940).

One of the current residents of *Owd Trafford*, Frank, has lived there since the 1950's. He moved there with his mother when he was twelve and they rented one of the twelve flats. Frank remembers it as being very nice even though Mt Victoria then "was generally thought of as one of the lesser suburbs of Wellington". He recalls that Jenkins & Mack Ltd, a well-regarded and long-established firm of engineers' and plumbers' merchants, were involved in its building. Since the 1960's, when a company-share structure was set up and the flats sold individually, it has been owner-occupied. When MVHS talked to Frank in 2006, he felt this was one of the reasons there hadn't been much change in the appearance of the flats, which retain most of their original features.

There were a number of architectural styles used between 1930 and 1950 in New Zealand, but Art Deco was probably the most distinctive because of its new colours, materials and decorations. Despite spanning the period of the great Depression and World War II, the style is notable for its vigour. *Owd Trafford* was, of course, designed and built during the War.

Art Deco was a style which arose quickly and ended quickly. It brought a new and distinctive decorative vocabulary to architecture and made the most of new materials such as stainless steel, plastic, chrome, vitrolite and neon. It was created mostly for big business, and was meant to be easily identifiable as "up-to-date". It appealed particularly to companies wishing to project a new image.

Owd Trafford has strong elements of the streamlined style, a variant of Art Deco notable for its rounded edges, smooth surfaces and low, horizontal profiles. It was emblematic of speed and efficiency and picked up on the fascination with the machine that prevailed at the time. You can also see these characteristics in 123 Brougham Street and the building on the corner of Majoribanks St and Kent Terrace; and somewhat in Belvedere (82 Majoribanks St) and St Malo Flats (53 Austin St).¹



123 Brougham Street, designed by BF Kelly in 1941 for A Gianoutsos



Cnr Majoribanks St and Kent Terrace, designed by FH Swan in 1939

From a heritage and design point of view, one of the unfortunate developments is the tendency to add additional stories to buildings to maximise rental returns, destroying the carefully crafted proportions of buildings such as the old City Hotel, above left. For the sake of one more floor, this Art Deco building, like many others, has lost something of the defining essence of its style.

By Joanna Newman

¹Other Art Deco buildings in Mt Victoria include two on Hawker Street and Brougham Street.