



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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No. 74, May 2015

Sunday, June 21 at 2.00 pm
New Crossways, 6 Roxburgh Street

Our First World War heritage – places of local and national interest

Imelda Bargas and Tim Shoebridge, Senior Historians at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, will talk about their book 'New Zealand's First World War Heritage'. They will be joined by Vanessa Tanner from Wellington City Council, who will talk about the Council's World War I heritage trail, 'Wellington's Parades and Places'.

Followed by afternoon tea

Victorian Gaiety

At great time was had by all at the Victorian Gaiety at the Basin Reserve. There were some wonderful costumes, with MVHS members standing out in the crowd for their creativity and elegance. The entertainment provided by Nota Bene choir, with humorous old English songs sung in wonderful harmony, was a highlight, as was cellist Charley Davenport's playing of Victorian music throughout the evening. Nearly \$900 was raised for the Basin Reserve flyover High Court Appeal on the silent auction alone. The organising committee says a huge thank you to all who came and made it such fun, to those who donated in lieu of participating and those who bought items in the auction. We also especially thank Jim Harper for donating so many items to the auction and the wonderfully supportive Mt Victoria businesses who gave costume prizes or contributions towards the entertainment: The Hop Garden, Strawberry

Fare, Saigon Taste, the Embassy Theatre and Regional Wines & Spirits.



Community Treasure Hunt

MVHS made a significant contribution to the highly successful treasure hunt held at the beginning of April, with Joanna Newman at an information stand in Crossways and David McCrone and David Colquhoun doing sterling duty at a checkpoint in the windy and increasingly chilly quarry at the top of Ellice Street.

More photos from the event can be found at:

https://www.facebook.com/newcrossways/photos_stream

Clyde Quay School 125th Anniversary Celebrations

In March, Clyde Quay School celebrated 125 years since its establishment in 1889. Mt Vic Historical Society was asked to speak at the opening ceremony, to place the school's history in the context of Mt Vic and Wellington. Unfortunately, this part of the ceremony was 'rained-off' when the heavens opened. Extracts from the random selection of events and recollections that might have been presented by the MVHS convenor that day are shared with members in this newsletter. More on some of the people, places and events referred to can be found in past MVHS newsletters (on our website).

Historical Note – Clyde Quay School 125th Anniversary

Perhaps nothing will help create a picture of how much things have changed for Clyde Quay School, Mt Victoria and Wellington since 1889 so much as the recollections of James Elliott, one of the first entrants at Clyde Quay School when it opened opposite Waitangi Park where the Central Fire station now stands:

. . . The playground was too small and hard for practice in the essential subject of football, so a new but similar game was invented . . . The Queensberry rules also were often invoked on the clear space across the road from the school beside a great and unsavoury open wood-lined sewer which emptied itself near by into the sea. . . . It was a disgusting practice of some of the bolder boys to fall deliberately into the evil-smelling and turgid drain, and return to the class-room as popular as a polecat in a drawing-room. The unsavoury boy would be promptly sent home to be dried and cleaned, happy as one who had really earned a holiday. . . . There was a morgue near by, and sometimes the rumour would circulate in the school that there was a man in the morgue. The minds of children are often morbid, and it was a great thrill to peep into a crack in the fence and through a window to see on a slab two ankles and feet white, hard and still like marble sticking out from under a white sheet . . .

In 1889, there was still a lot of empty land south of where the current school is. Just after the turn of the 20th century, the Council bought slices of land off the big three-acre property across the road from the school today to create lower Elizabeth Street – before this, Elizabeth St did not go down to Kent Terrace. Three years later, they took another slice off the same property, to allow the road to be changed for trams. In 1907, the Kilbirnie tram tunnel, at the top of Pirie Street, would open and trams required much gentler, wider curves in their tracks than the old roads allowed. The house of that original land owner, a well-to-do merchant, remains, across the road from the school, and eventually became Crossways.

Another momentous period in the life of the school, Wellington and indeed the entire country was World War 1, commemorating its own anniversary over the next few years and this year in particular. The first Wellington soldiers left on the troopship, *Arawa*, in October 1914 and at least one former Clyde Quay boy was on board. Staff also served. Those who were left behind worked hard for the war, too, and school children were especially co-opted to fund-raise and contribute to the war effort. Clyde Quay children raised money for various funds, such as the Mayor's Countess of Liverpool Fund, the St John's Ambulance and Red Cross, and for the Poor of Great Britain, Ireland and Belgium. The girls made handkerchiefs, bandages, scarves, slippers, pillow slips, balaclavas, feeders and other items for soldiers. All around the School, households were losing sons – and sometimes fathers or husbands – to the war and some never came back. A number are commemorated on the honours board from the former Kent Terrace Presbyterian Church which once stood where KFC is now. Its minister, the Reverend Elliot, had the unhappy task of conducting their memorial services. Next door to where his church once was the house built by his son, James Elliot, after the war is still standing. James's words, recalling life as a pupil at Clyde Quay, were quoted right at the beginning.

In 1921 an Infant School for Clyde Quay opened on Elizabeth Street. As it was getting established, big changes were taking place nearby in the Mt Victoria landscape. In 1924, the De Luxe theatre (which we now know as the Embassy) opened, and in 1925 Wellington East Girls College, originally called Mount Victoria Girls' College. (And, perhaps showing a lack of imagination in the education system at the time, there was also a proposal in 1920 to call the Clyde Quay infant school 'Wellington East School')

Clyde Quay School closed on its site opposite the Quay in 1935 and, in 1937, the new Central Fire Station finally opened there. It is a beautiful example of an Art Deco building and designed by an architect who attended Clyde Quay School, Cyril Mitchell. 1931-1941 saw one of the first periods of replacement of the original housing in Mt Victoria, and certainly the most dramatic because the opportunity was taken to build a number of dwellings in the very modern and distinctive Art Deco style. In this period, Mitchell also designed one of the most beautiful apartment blocks of the Art Deco era in Wellington, Owd Trafford in Brougham Street.

Moving forward a few decades, in 1970 the Greek Cathedral of the Annunciation opened in Hania Street and around this time, the first olive trees were planted in Mt Vic. Now, olive and fig trees line Elizabeth Street outside Clyde Quay School. These all acknowledge the presence and contribution of Greek people in Wellington, but particularly in Mt Victoria, the suburb they favoured for their homes. When they arrived, the first Greeks had difficulty getting work because they didn't speak the language and were 'foreign'. For that reason, many started their own businesses – often in the food line and round Courtenay Place. They chose Mt Victoria to live because it was handy and the sunny aspect reminded them of the Mediterranean. When they could afford to buy their own homes, they bought here, then brought out their relations from Greece. Stathy Boolieris, a Mt Vic resident, remembers calling Mount Victoria 'Greeksville' when he was a youngster.

In the 1980s, we start to move into Wellington's movie-making era. You could say Wellington's rise to film fame was kicked off by long-time Mt Vic resident and well-known director, Gaylene Preston whose movie – *Mr Wrong* – premiered in 1985. Gaylene was living in Roxburgh Street at the time. Here's a snippet of a conversation with Gaylene, when she was interviewed by MVHS in 2006:

'Mr Wrong' is about a woman who buys a haunted car and the woman who buys the car, she's got a flat in Mt Victoria – funnily enough, in Roxburgh Street. So we shot a lot of the film round Mt Victoria. And it's lovely to travel with the film. . . . it had a cinema release in America. And you'd sit in this cinema and the shot that comes up in the credit sequence where the car comes down Brougham Street and around Elizabeth and it's a stacked up shot and it's got all these telegraph poles and things in it and these lovely little houses, and people would go "Oh!" like that, when they saw Mt Victoria on the screen.

Then, of course, round 1999/2000, Peter Jackson filmed *Lord of the Rings* scenes in the Town Belt above Mt Victoria. And most recently, Taika Waititi's film *What we do in the Shadows*, has a scene set in the Pirie Street Reserve, which is where Clyde Quay School pupils used to go for sport 60-70 years ago.

Mt Victoria and Clyde Quay School have clearly been not only in the geographical heart of Wellington city for 125 years, but also at the beating heart of its development and culture, contributing significantly to the city we enjoy today.