

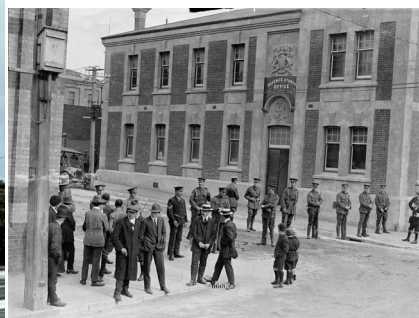


# Mt VICTORIA

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Photos: Alison Dangerfield, Sydney Charles Smith [Alexander Turnbull Library Ref 1/2-048786-G]

## **Heritage military building earmarked for demolition**

Representatives of about 30 organisations turned out on Armistice Day for a silent gathering in support of saving the General Officer in Command building (also known as the General Headquarters Building) adjacent to the Pukeahu National War Memorial Park. The New Zealand Defence Force has obtained a building consent to demolish this listed Category 2 historic building. Built in 1911 using bricks made by prisoners in the nearby gaol, it is “probably the oldest existing military administration building in New Zealand” according to Heritage New Zealand. It was designed in Edwardian Baroque style by Government Architect John Campbell, who also designed the Public Trust Building in Lambton Quay and won a nation-wide architectural competition for the design of Parliament Buildings. During the 1913 Maritime Strike the building housed Special Constables, mostly farmers’ sons, enlisted to reinforce the regular police. On 3 November, mounted specials repeatedly charged a crowd of over 2000 striking watersiders and supporters gathered at the intersection of Taranaki and Buckle Streets, causing some serious injuries.

## **Wellington Town Belt Bill**

MVHS has made a submission to the Local Government and Environment Committee on the Wellington Town Belt Bill. We welcome the provision in the proposed legislation to return former Town Belt land owned by the Council to Town Belt trust status, and the scope to add land to compensate for land which cannot be restored. Our key concerns with the current draft are that the Town Belt Deed of 1873 no longer provides protection as the governing document of the Town Belt, and that the Council is given broad and ill-defined powers to construct buildings and undertake business activities.

## **Villa Victoria House Tour 22 November 10.30am - 3.00pm**

Villa Victoria, a Clyde Quay School fund-raiser, is a tour of a variety of houses in Mt Victoria, including homes of architects, designers, and artists. Buy tickets (\$35) online at <https://bookaticket.co.nz/event/VillaVictoria>

## **Annual General Meeting**

At the Society’s AGM in August, the following members were elected to the 2015/16 Committee: David McCrone (Convenor), Jane O’Loughlin (Secretary), Sue Watt (Treasurer), David Lee and Alan Olliver.

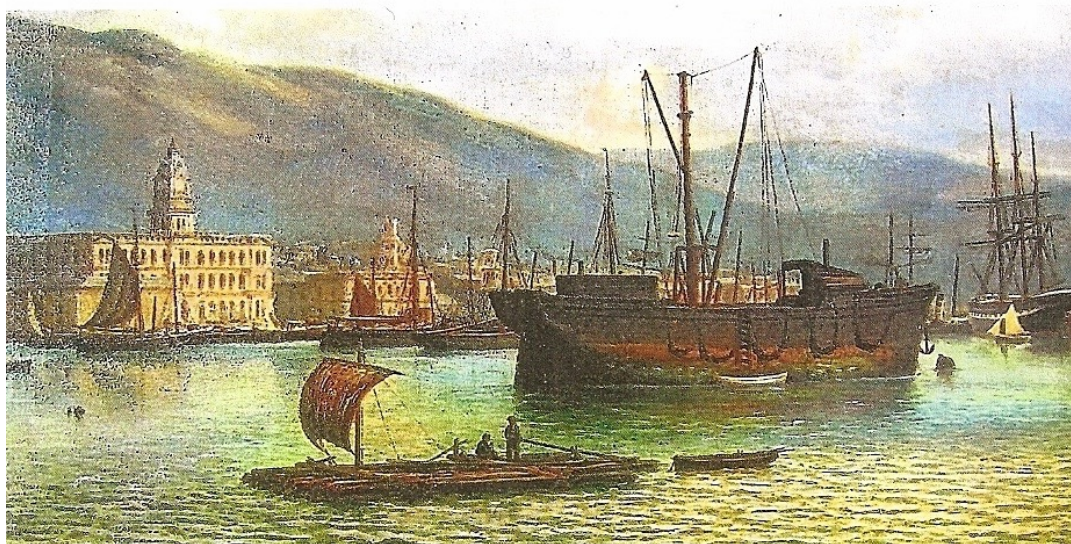
Joanna Newman, our Convenor for many years, has gone to live and work in East Timor for a year but has promised to be back! Jo is finding life in Dili “incredibly different from anything I’ve ever done or anywhere I’ve ever lived” and reports that despite some “bizarre administrative hassles”, “totally crazy” traffic, whining mosquitoes and the hot weather she is “really enjoying it”.

## **The hulks of Wellington**

David Lee’s grandmother, Olive Alicia O’Reilly, was brought up on a hulk in Wellington harbour. David has written a fascinating account of the lives of hulk keepers and their families, and the place of hulks in Wellington’s maritime history. Read on to find out more.

## When families lived on the harbour: The hulks of Wellington By David Lee

My grandmother, Olive Alicia O'Reilly, was brought up on a hulk in Wellington harbour. She lived on board with her adopted parents who were hulk keepers. Hulks were mainly old sailing ships (there were also a few old steamers), often recovered from strandings, which ended their days as floating warehouses, freezers, and even on one identified occasion, a prison from which all the prisoners ended up escaping!



*Lambton Harbour 1885 by John Gibb (1831-1909) featuring a hulk  
(Wellington Harbour: A heritage of Tara D R Neilson)*

Not surprisingly, given coal's importance as fuel in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the most common were coal hulks. An article in *The Evening Post* (8/12/1934) lamented the vanishing fleet of coal hulks in the harbour, saying that there were only 11 left. At the outbreak of the First World War there were 21.



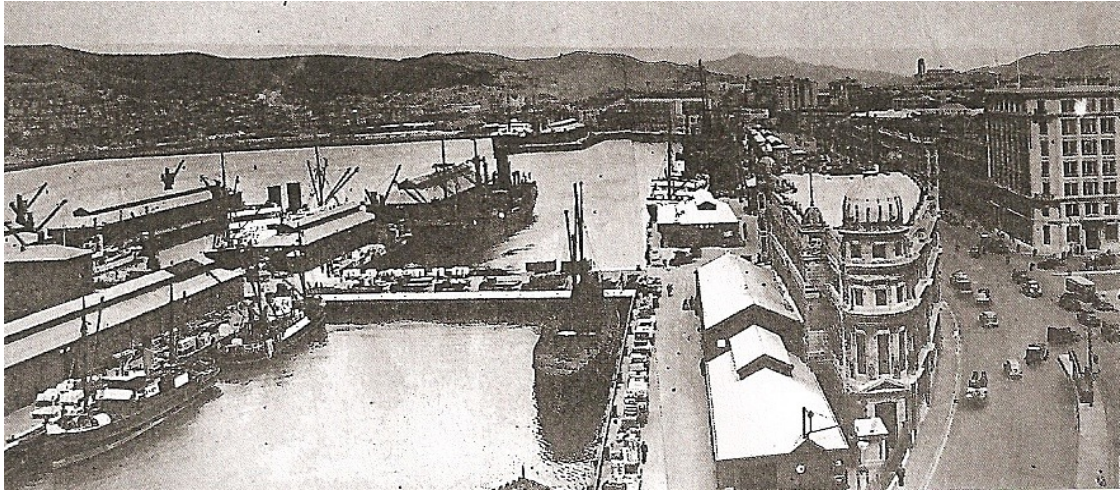
### A hulk keeping family

Edward ('Ted') O'Reilly was born in Dublin in 1848. He ran away to sea as a boy of 10. After serving in the United States navy, he sailed schooners and fired railway engines in Argentina. Eventually he turned up in Lyttelton, wearing high-heeled boots and speaking Spanish. His wanderings and philandering ceased there when he met and married Teresa (who used to say that before they met he was a member of the 'froth blowers club!'). He joined the Lyttelton navals and was mate on Union Steam Ship and Blackball Coal company ships before taking a hulk keeper's job in Wellington. The 1890 and 1900 electoral rolls show his address as the hulk *Woodlark*. He had a day job on his last hulk, the *Mayflower*, berthed at Queen's Wharf. His working days ended there when his ribs were crushed by basket of coal. The accident was serious enough to be reported in *The Evening Post* (2/7/1923).

Teresa May O'Reilly was the daughter of Captain Davis who had once commanded a gunboat on the Whanganui River. She had sung in a choir in Lyttelton before moving to a hulk keeping life on Wellington Harbour. The O'Reillys would often invite visiting sea captains for home-cooked dinners on their hulk and afterwards Teresa would entertain them singing and playing an organ in the great after-cabin.

Olive O'Reilly would sail a cutter by herself each day from the hulk to Thorndon Quay, to attend her apprenticeship as a seamstress. She later became a stewardess on Lyttelton ferries and on other vessels belonging to the Union Steam Ship and Blackball Coal companies.





The hulk *Mayflower* (centre) at Queen's Wharf 1936  
(Photo: The Wellington Harbour Board Collection)

Hulk keeping was a dangerous occupation. *The Evening post* (8/2/1902) reported that six hulk keepers had drowned in the previous 18 months in the course of their duties. Hulks could be wrecked after breaking their moorings in a gale. A fire on such old, mostly wooden vessels, full of coal, was always a serious risk. Then there was the terrifying threat of being run down by another vessel in the middle of the night, especially if a hulk's lights had failed: such was the fate of the *Eli Whitney*.

#### **The *Eli Whitney* tragedy**

In the early hours of 24 February 1877, during a storm, the vessel *Taupo* collided with the coal hulk *Eli Whitney* and sank it. *The New Zealand Times* of that date gives a harrowing account of the *Eli Whitney*'s last moments and the tragic fate of the family of the hulk keeper, Edward Davey. At about one o'clock he "was awakened by hearing the rushing of water beneath him in the hold of the vessel. To rouse his wife and get on deck with children was the work of a moment, no time being wasted by putting on clothing, for the sounds they heard were ominous, and seemed to tell of a coming struggle for dear life. They were not a moment too soon, The man and his wife, with their two poor little infants (16 and four months respectively), were scarcely on deck before the *Eli Whitney* literally parted in two and rapidly sank, and this terrifying scene occurred in the pitch darkness of the night and no one near to lend a helping hand. Davey saw that he only had one chance. Giving one child to his wife, he took the other himself, and getting hold of a large plank, he and his wife with their frail burdens got on it and submitted themselves to the mercy of the sea." Edward Davey eventually staggered ashore to seek help near the present Freyberg Pool. Sadly, Mrs Davey and their two little children did not survive their ordeal that terrible night.

For close on 100 years from the beginnings of European settlement, hulks were a feature of Wellington (*Plimmer's Ark* being the first well known one). They and their keepers contributed to Wellington's development. The mooring fees charged to their owners were a valuable source of revenue for the then Wellington Harbour Board. The hulks' romantic names – *Countess of Errol*, *Oceola*, *Elinor Vernon*, *Prince of Wales*, *Dilpussand* and *Alameda* (to name a few) – were the only vestige of their former glory days, sailing the world's oceans under different flags. Dilapidated, shorn of their brass and finery, with stumps for masts, it would have been easy to forget that among them had been a China tea clipper, an ice breaker as well as immigrant and training ships. The *Prince of Wales*, which ended her days as a lowly coal hulk, once had royalty dining aboard. Launched by King Edward VII (then Prince of Wales), she had been specially built for service in the Arctic for the Hudson Bay Company. On one voyage to New Zealand, she had been a silent witness to the Battle of Cherbourg between the Confederate raider CSS *Alabama* and the USS *Kearsage* during the American Civil war. The hulks of Wellington were some of the last representatives of the once-noble 'winged fleets'. They are an important part of our maritime history.