



# MT VICTORIA

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## Historical Society News

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**No. 86, October 2018**

**Sunday, November 25 at 2.30 pm**

## Nurses in World War I

Author and historian, Jane Tolerton, will share her research on New Zealand nurses in World War 1 – fascinating stories of intrepid and dedicated women.

Generously hosted by Jane at her home, Booklovers Bed & Breakfast, 123 Pirie Street

*Followed by afternoon tea*  
*Jane will also have copies of her book "Make Her Praises Heard Afar" for sale.*

### In Memorium – Sue Watt

Sue Watt, MVHS committee member and treasurer since 2002, died - far too young - on September 9.

Other eloquent tributes have been paid to Sue, but this is a special one from MVHS, and for MVHS members.

It's hard to believe that it's 16 years since Sue took on the role of being our treasurer. She brought professional accounting skills and knowledge which set us up soundly and kept us running seemingly effortlessly for many years. We knew we could leave the financials to Sue, and everything would be correct and up-to-date. Over the more complicated period of the Save the Basin campaign, she was also a great advisor. Sue joined the committee saying that she was only available to look after our accounts but it wasn't long before she was involved in everything from writing submissions to Council, to organising events, to putting on the Zip and making the tea. She was also great company, whether at a committee meeting or a glamorous Victorian Gaiety. We can all feel enormously grateful to Sue for her commitment to Mt Victoria and its heritage, and to Mt Victoria Historical Society in particular.

[Photo: Sue in Victorian costume at our 2012 Mary Taylor picnic on the top of Mt Vic.]



### New Committee

Following the AGM in September, the committee for the coming year is Joanna Newman (Convenor), Jane O'Loughlin (Secretary), Colin Carr (Treasurer), David Lee and Alan Olliver.

### 1918 flu epidemic commemorations

With the centenary of the 1918 influenza epidemic coming up in November, one of the commemoration events will be a programme held at the Karori cemetery:

#### Sunday 18 November

11.00am-4.00pm Open day at the Mortuary Chapel [the one with the beautiful stained glass windows]

11.00am Programme Opened by the Mayor of Wellington

11.30am Professor Geoffrey Rice will talk about the epidemic at the Main Chapel.

#### Sunday 25 November

11.00am-4.00pm Open day at the Mortuary Chapel

During both open days there will be guided tours of the graves. (Some walking uphill may be involved.) There will also be permanent interpretative panels set up in each of the four areas of the cemetery talking about the epidemic.

The whole programme is free.

To learn more about the 1918 Influenza Karori Cemetery project or to add your stories to the website visit:

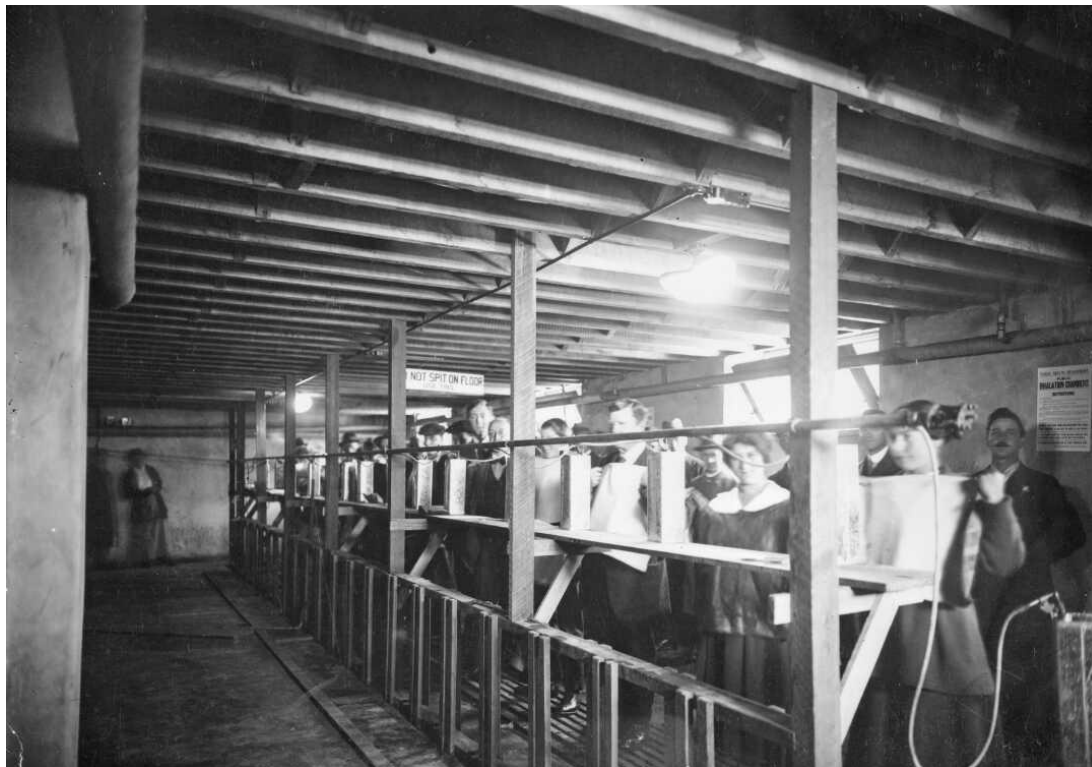
[www.1918influenzakarori.weebly.com/](http://www.1918influenzakarori.weebly.com/).

If you have information to contribute or would like to be put on the organiser's email list, contact her on [flu1918karori@gmail.com](mailto:flu1918karori@gmail.com).

## Mt Victoria and the 1918 Flu Epidemic

This month marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the devastating 1918 influenza epidemic. No part of the city was spared, and we've unearthed some Mt Victoria connections.

When the only inhalation chamber in the city, at the Town Hall, was becoming overwhelmed in mid-November, the Mayor JP Luke, asked a number of schools to set aside rooms to be used as inhalation chambers. Clyde Quay School was one of these. (And, as we know from the last newsletter, the Mayoress was also very involved in the city's response to the epidemic.)



This photo shows people in an inhalation chamber in Christchurch in 1918, but no doubt the one in the Wellington Town Hall looked very similar.

natlib.govt.nz:emu:  
1/1-008545-G

Nearby, Wellington College hosted an emergency hospital. On November 18<sup>th</sup>, it held 66 men and 25 women. Six people had died over the previous night and that morning. A day later, the Mayor and the Medical-Officer-in-Charge, Dr AK Newman, published an urgent call for women to help at the recently established women's hospital there.

Meanwhile, the populace was being urged to take preventive measures, whether the household had been visited by influenza or not, though how effective the suggested actions would be is debatable. The Acting-Chief Health Officer suggested any of the following to disinfect dwellings:

- (1) Formalin solution – one part with 30 parts of water, and spray room thoroughly. An ordinary garden spray pump may be used for this purpose.
- (2) Four to six pounds of sulphur to be burnt in the room. Get an old kerosene tin, fill it up near to top with garden soil or ashes. Put the sulphur on the soil or ashes. Pour a tablespoonful of methylated spirit or whisky on sulphur and set alight with a match. . . .
- (3) Burn plenty of sulphur candles.

Chemists got in on the act, too. One advertised Coronoleum Gargle to prevent influenza. It could be used “in conjunction with Inhalation Cakes, supplied with gargle complete for 1s 6d or 1s 9d posted”. Brittain, chemist and public vaccinator of Manners Street, promoted Brittain's Anti-grippe mixture: “This Great Specific contains the most powerful germicide known to medical science, and will, if taken at the onset, DESTROY ALL EVIL INFLUENCE OF INFLUENZA or SPANISH GRIPPE GERMS within twelve hours.”

A heroine of the influenza epidemic with a local connection was Miss Gill, of Ellice Street. At the time a night sister in charge of the Normal Temporary Hospital in New Plymouth, she was suddenly sent to Fiji to help fight the epidemic there. She and three other nurses left with such urgency that they had only half a day to prepare. In the company of a doctor and four orderlies, Nurse Gill was sent to Navua district, where the epidemic was still severe amongst the Indian and Fijian population. The local “picture palace” was converted to a hospital for the natives and the hotel next door for the “white” people and, as the only nurse, Gill shuttled between the two. She was moved on to another island, then to a private rubber plantation, where the epidemic was very severe among the Indian labourers. Most of the fortnight they were there she was in charge, as the doctor worked in the surrounding district. One of the great difficulties she described was that the Indian patients would not take the drinks provided and would only eat rice. When the medical party returned to Suva “they received the most generous hospitality, including some dances”, and managed to leave Fiji for Australia in February just before a severe hurricane.

Miss Gill (whose first name has not yet been discovered) was the daughter of Mr T H Gill, headmaster of Newtown School for eight years from 1899-1907, before becoming an Inspector. They lived at 71 Ellice Street.