



# MT VICTORIA

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## Historical Society News

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## Show and Tell

Bring along one or two heritage items that mean something to you, or have an interesting story - share their stories and hear the stories behind items brought by others, at an end-of-year social. Items with Mt Victoria connections particularly welcome!

**Sunday, November 27 at 2.30 pm**  
**New Crossways, 6 Roxburgh Street**  
Drinks and nibbles provided.

*Items will be displayed on tables to allow members to enjoy a close-up look. To indicate interest and receive an information form to be placed alongside your item(s), contact Judy Southworth on [judyfs@hotmail.com](mailto:judyfs@hotmail.com) or 385 6090.*

### 100 years since Queen Victoria took up residence

Our newsletter masthead pays homage to Queen Vic, but the centenary of her arrival in our suburb is an appropriate time to share her story with those who may not be so familiar with it. Read on, to learn more about her place in Wellington.

### Other News

At the AGM on September 25, the committee was re-elected for another year. You'll find a copy of our annual report and financial report on our website.

### Tararua Tramping Club

For Wellington Heritage Month in September, we had a fascinating and very entertaining talk from Ian Baine, a long-standing member of the club. The club was established in 1919, but only moved to its current premises in Moncrieff Street in 1961. In addition to pioneering tramping in New Zealand, the club was one of the first to provide search and rescue services. In one of those coincidences of history, the first search and rescue trip Ian Baine's father (a founding member) participated in was to search for the missing pilot, Moncrieff, in the Tararuas. Lieutenant John Moncrieff and Captain George Hood were two New Zealanders attempting the first crossing of the Tasman on January 10, 1928. Thousands excitedly awaited their landing at Trentham in their aircraft the *Aotearoa*. Radio signals were received from their aircraft for 12 hours after their departure from Sydney, but they never arrived and no trace was ever found of their plane. In Wellington, the newly-created Moncrieff Street was named in honour of Lieutenant Moncrieff. The Tararua Tramping Club was meant to find its home here.



*In bookshops in November*

**Wellingtonians**  
*from the Turnbull Library collections*

by David Colquhoun

Pictures and stories for everyone who has ever experienced Wellington.  
Find out more at [www.steeleroberts.co.nz](http://www.steeleroberts.co.nz)

Queen Victoria and her disciples, Empire Day, 24 May 1957  
Photographer unknown (*Evening Post*), PAColl-7796-52, Alexander  
Turnbull Library

## Old Queen Vic

It's a Mt Victoria centenary we had almost forgotten to mention. In 1911 New Zealand's grandest statue of Queen Victoria was moved to her present home amidst the flower beds on Kent and Cambridge Terraces. Ever since she has been keeping a stern eye on the comings and goings from the suburb named after her.

Her Wellington history began much earlier, of course. Fundraising began in 1901, as part of a great outpouring of imperial sentiment after her death. Auckland already had a Queen Victoria statue, and Christchurch was planning one. Wellingtonians were determined that theirs would be the biggest and the best.

The aim was to raise £3000 and, to begin with, there were almost daily newspaper reports on progress, listing the worthy citizens who had donated money and proudly giving the running total. Within a few weeks over £1000 was raised. But then, embarrassingly, contributions slowed. They had been far too ambitious. By the following year barely half the amount had been raised. Luckily noted British sculptor, Alfred Drury, finally agreed to do it for £1800. His Queen Victoria is now regarded as a particularly fine example of high imperial statuary. Most importantly, for Wellingtonians, it was bigger than the one in Auckland.

A subsidiary feature is the bronze relief work around the base. There are three panels, showing the arts, inventions of the Victorian age and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. The Treaty panel was not in the original proposal, which had one about British colonies instead, but the local statue committee wanted something more distinctly New Zealand. The result is a very imperial interpretation of the Treaty, showing a kneeling chief before a heroic Governor Hobson. It proved very popular and was much reproduced, most notably on the ten shilling note put out to mark the 1940 centenary.

The statue was finally unloaded in early 1905, and placed in its new home, at the centre of commercial Wellington, on Post Office Square, in front of the Chief Post Office, gazing out along Queen's wharf.

This was a time of some social discontent. Workers were becoming militant and the statue site became the equivalent of London's Hyde Park corner. Victoria was soon listening, most lunch-times, to fiery speeches from left wing radicals, interspersed with equally impassioned religious evangelists convinced that salvation lay elsewhere. The crowds were often large and the heckling very lively. She was probably not amused.

Within a very few years she had to move. The trams had arrived and Post Office Square was soon a central point in the system. The statue was in the way. Various alternative homes were suggested – the botanic gardens, the university, Parliament – but the Council decided on Kent and Cambridge Terraces.

It was a quieter life now - no noisy soap box orators - although the drunks from the Cambridge public house to her left were probably a regular annoyance. The surrounding streets were spacious, while behind her right shoulder was the hill named after her beloved husband, Prince Albert.

Even more comforting must have been the annual Empire Day celebrations. Empire day had begun in 1902, on 24 May, her birthday. For over fifty years hard-core imperialists in Wellington gathered at the base of the statue to lay wreaths and make speeches – representing long-faded organisations like the Victoria League and the Royal Empire Society. Our British-born Governors were often present, and sometimes even a junior cabinet minister.

These Empire Day commemorations continued well into the 1950s. The Empire was fast disappearing, but that just strengthened the resolve of these hardy loyalists. It was a sad day for them when, in 1958, Empire Day became Commonwealth Day. They did not want to celebrate that. The President of the British Empire Union declared that those who supported the change “were inadvertently falling into line with Soviet-inspired propaganda against the Crown.” Few shared his despair.

There was not much interest in the statue in the following decades. She became dirty and neglected. A disconcerting tilt developed as her foundations subsided in one corner. Around her, cars and car yards clogged Kent and Cambridge. Mt Victoria continued to lose its original gentility. The patrons of the Cambridge Hotel just got noisier.

But, the 1990s brought changes for the better. It all began when the City Council put forward an ill-advised plan to shift the statue back to Post Office Square. Mt Victoria residents were having none of that. Local stalwarts Jim Harper and Alan Olliver were to the fore as research was done and submissions made. With the support of other heritage advocates they won the case. Now the statue is here to stay. Restoration work has been done, and her old self-confidence is back. She probably finds us an impossibly liberal, radical lot, but at least she knows we want her. Long may she glower over us.

By David Colquhoun