



# MT VICTORIA

## *Historical Society News*

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## **Annual General Meeting**

**Sunday September 15 at 2.30 pm**  
St Joseph's Church, Brougham St

Followed by

## **Brickmakers and Potteries of Mount Cook**

*An illustrated talk presented by Alan Olliver*

*Then afternoon tea*

### **Annual General Meeting**

As usual, at the AGM we will hold elections for the committee. If you would like to stand, we would love to have you on board! Please contact [jnewman@xtra.co.nz](mailto:jnewman@xtra.co.nz) if you might be interested, or just come along on the day and let us know at the appropriate time in the AGM.

### **99 Elizabeth Street**

You may have read the item about demolition of this house in the last Mt Vic newsletter. It is very sad to see another original house disappear, particularly in this street. It took us by surprise, because we believed consent to demolish had been denied; but the Council changed its mind and approved it. The replacement will theoretically be built with the 'same frontage' . . . let's see.

February 2019 and July 2019



### **Anniversary**

This year is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the construction of William Waring Taylor's house in Paterson Street. Built in 1869, this very significant historic building is still not registered by either Heritage New Zealand or the Council, despite our submitting a request for registration to the former in 2010. It also still remains under threat from a second Mt Victoria tunnel. (We will be formally raising the issue again with both these organisations.)

### **Share the love**

We're keen to build our membership and expand the base of committed Mt Victoria heritage supporters, so do tell your neighbours and Mt Vic friends about the Historical Society.

## In which we describe the previously unknown intimate relationship between Queen Victoria and Walter Tonks

The Historical Society's website connects us with people around the world. Liam Daly in Australia sent us this anecdote about his maternal grandfather, Walter James Helyer Tonks. It's a story particularly appropriate for this newsletter, which also invites you to a talk on brickmaking that will feature the Tonks family.

The Tonks name is known to most Wellingtonians and the family were amongst the earliest European settlers, arriving in here in 1841.

Walter Tonks was born and raised in Tonk's Grove (Upper Cuba St). His father, Henry Edward, died at an early age, leaving his mother Kate (nee Helyer) responsible for the upbringing of Walter and his brothers, Edward (Ted) and Joseph (Joe).

Walter was a well-known contractor in Wellington and successfully won a tender for the reclamation work of the large area which is now part of Thorndon and including the Wellington railway yards and the Wellington Regional Stadium. He went on to become a successful monumental mason, with his yard situated next to the main entrance gates of Karori Cemetery.

One of Walter Tonks' more notable achievements was shifting the statue of Queen Victoria, in one piece, from Queens Wharf to the island between Kent and Cambridge Terraces in 1911.

The story told to Liam by his grandfather went something like this:

*The statue was encased in a scaffolding and raised up off its original resting place adjacent to Queen's Wharf and successfully moved to the present-day site at Kent/Cambridge Terrace.*

*There the statue stood while my grandfather and his workmen set about preparing the base work and the plinth for the statue to rest on. This took several days to complete. Much careful planning had to be done, before any attempt to manoeuvre the statue up, over and above the final resting place. This part of the job could not be finished in one day and, with failing light, it was decided to leave the statue in place overnight and complete the job the next morning.*

*During the night, a prisoner escaped from nearby Mount Cook Prison. In the morning the police were out and about, scouring the city and surrounds for the escapee.*

*Grandfather and his men arrived on the job that morning and prepared to lower the statue down onto its final resting place. As the lowering process began, my grandfather called out to halt; he wanted to check the cavity under the statue to ensure there were no tools left behind. He scrambled underneath and lit a match. There, cowering in a corner dressed in prison garb, was the escapee.*

*My grandfather told the prisoner that he could not stay there; they were about to lower the statue down and he would be entombed. He climbed out from underneath Queen Victoria and called out to a passing Bobby to come and fetch "his fellow" out from under the statue.*

*Grandfather had a wicked sense of humour. From that day on, he delighted in telling the "refined ladies" who visited my grandmother in their home that he'd had his hand up Queen Victoria's dress!*



Left: Queen Victoria statue c.1928  
(ATL EP-1749-1/2-G)  
Right: Walter Tonks, circa 1941  
(Collection of Liam Daly)

