



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

Website: www.mtvictoria.history.org

Facebook: MVHS.Inc

Email: jonewman@xtra.co.nz

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AGM Reminder

Sunday September 25, 2.30 pm
Friends Meeting House, Moncrieff Street, Mt Victoria.

Followed by a talk by Barbara Brookes, Professor Emerita in History at the University of Otago.

(See last newsletter for details)

Heritage Week

This year, Wellington's Heritage Week is actually two weeks. Our contribution to the programme is another guided walk, this time led by Alan Olliver:

Murder & Mayhem in Mt Victoria
Sunday October 30 at 2pm.

You'll hear the stories and see the sites of vicious murders, raging fires, a tram tragedy, and much more. The walk will start at St Gerard's Monastery carpark in Hawker St and end in Paterson St near the Mt Victoria tunnel.

Be in quick to be sure to reserve a place, as the Heritage Week programme goes out to 'early birds' on September 16. Contact Alan Olliver on 0211229875.

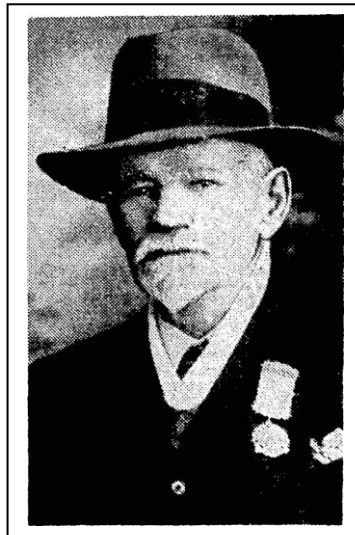
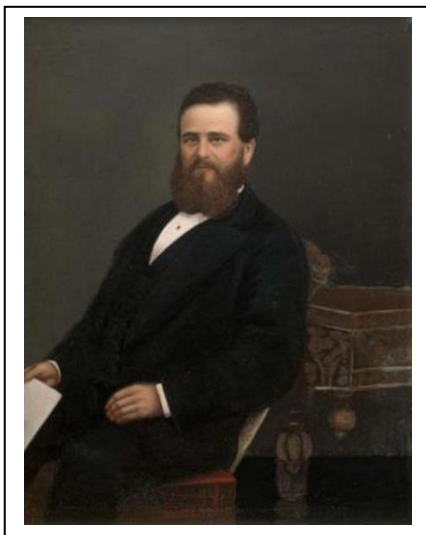
Website

We are very fortunate to have found a volunteer expert in web design to tackle some of the projects we've had on our list for a while. Andy Haddleton has already completed the first one, which was to share more widely some of the content from our 2006 oral history exhibition, Mt Victoria Stories. It may even be live on our website by the time you read this, so do check it out.

Membership

The committee is keen to expand the Society's membership, so we've decided to put a notice in the next Mt Vic newsletter offering free membership for one year to Mt Vic residents if they join by November 30.

So as not to discriminate against our faithful members, if you have renewed your sub (or have newly joined recently) by November 30, we will give you free membership for 2023-24.



The two Harbour Pilots featured in our Historical Note over page:
Lancelot Holmes (left, Te Papa 1992-0035-1658) and William Shilling (right, Evening Post 17 August 1939).

Historical Note

Mt Victoria: home to Wellington Harbour Pilots

By Jo Newman

Mt Victoria has been home to two early Wellington Harbour Pilots, whose residences can still be seen. One of the great values of preserving our heritage is to be able to walk past such houses and imagine the lives once lived there.

Captain Holmes was one of the earliest harbour pilots. He owned land in Stafford Street from 1877/78 and built what is now No. 23 in 1886. (After he died, his wife continued to live there for another 41 years.)

Lancelot Holmes and his descendants claim he was the first European child born in the new Port Nicholson settlement at Petone, coming into the world on March 25th 1840. Even if this is disputed, and it comes down to whether a baby was born on ship or on shore, he can certainly claim the honour of being one of the first Pakeha children born in the settlement.

Lancelot took to a seafaring life early and at the age of about 20 became coxswain to the pilot boat for Wellington harbour. Within a couple of years he was promoted to harbour pilot. Later, he was appointed chief pilot at the Heads, where he remained in charge until February 1888.

As we know, the harbour entrance can be treacherous and the pilot had a unique responsibility and challenges. As shipping increased during the 1840s, the New Zealand Company became aware of the need for skilled pilots to help guide vessels into Wellington harbour. It was the job of the pilot, with the permission of the captain, to board ships arriving at the mouth of the harbour and guide them safely through the heads and into Port Nicholson.

When Holmes left the service in 1888, pilots were still required to get out to arriving vessels in a 9-metre whaleboat, under sail and oar power. In 1883, for instance, Holmes rowed 20 kilometres out to a steamer that had lost power and finally brought the ship safely into the harbour after dark.



Pilot Holmes (left) and crew at Worser Bay, c.1883. Bob Shilling may be fourth from left, judging by the photograph below.
Alexander Turnbull Library 1/2-140314-G

Holmes would have spent much of his time based at the pilot station in Worser Bay. (Built in 1866, the Pilot's Cottage is still there.)



Worser Bay pilot station, c.1883 - Rachel and Lancelot Holmes. Alexander Turnbull Library PAColl-6348-39

Holmes was forced to take leave of absence in February 1888 and to retire from the service later that year. The contracting of the sinews in his hand after 28 years of gripping the steering oar in the pilot boat threatened to make him a complete cripple. Holmes was universally esteemed as a pilot and seaman, and considered “an exceedingly capable man at handling a vessel”. Not only was he the chief pilot, but in 1874 he also sailed to victory the first real yacht (that is, one designed only for racing and cruising) built in Wellington.

William (Bob) Shilling, almost immediate successor to Holmes as Wellington Harbour Pilot, lived at No. 1 Tutchen Avenue from 1896. He died there in August 1939 at the age of 91.

Shilling was the last pilot to live in the Cottage at Worser Bay, which housed seamen of the pilot service from 1866 to 1894.

Shilling had joined the Royal Navy at the age of 14 and served for two years before joining the merchant navy. In 1868 he signed on to the *St Vincent*, which was bound for Wellington, carrying coal. Shilling and a friend deserted the ship on arrival – a fortunate move as it was wrecked in Palliser Bay on 14 February 1869 on the outward voyage.

Bob began duties as coxswain at the Worser Bay pilot station in 1877. Work at the station ranged from the tedium of keeping watch and routine maintenance to extreme hardship and moments of danger. At the time, this was an isolated outpost and survival required strict discipline and tight teamwork. They were on call to provide round-the-clock pilotage services for ships entering or leaving the harbour. Often, after hours of strain on the oars, the crew saw ships turning to run before the weather, leaving them to make a long wet and dangerous row home. Regular tasks included fetching stores from Newtown on horseback, collecting firewood and ferrying people and stores across to Pencarrow Head lighthouse. In 1889, after the previous pilot drowned, he took charge at the heads and moved into the pilot's cottage. During his tenure at the station Shilling was involved in numerous rescues from shipwreck at the heads, but he never lost a boat. On one occasion he boarded the *Margaret Galbraith* as the vessel was running towards Barrett's Reef in a strong southerly wind, and narrowly averted disaster by swinging the barque clear of the rocks at the last moment. On another occasion he boarded a barque at the heads but was unable to enter the harbour for 10 days because of strong, shifting winds.

The Shilling family vacated the house at the pilot station in 1894, when the operations of the pilot service moved to Lambton Harbour.