



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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EVENT REMINDER

Digging up the past – life as an NZ archaeologist

Sunday 21st May at 2.30pm, Society of Friends Hall, Moncrieff Street

Mary O’Keefe, a professional archaeologist, will talk to us about her work. Mary has run her consultancy, Heritage Solutions, since 1996. Prior to this she worked for Historic Places Trust and Department of Conservation. Mary’s work has taken her all round New Zealand, to see some special places and hear some remarkable stories, including projects in Mt Victoria.

Feel free to bring along and share any archaeological finds from your property in Mt Victoria!

St Gerard’s Monastery

Just over a month ago, St Gerard’s Monastery was sold, after being on the market for a short time. Stuff reported on March 27: “However, the future of the building, a landmark on Wellington’s skyline, was yet to be revealed after it was sold to new owners this week. Real estate agent James Copeland confirmed on Monday evening the building had been sold after three weeks on the market. He was unable to say who the new owners were and what price it was bought for but said it attracted a lot of interest from potential buyers.” We now keenly await news of plans for this Category 1-listed heritage building.

District Plan

The District Plan Hearings process grinds on. You can find our submissions (with slides) to Hearing Stream 2 and 3 on our website, if you are interested: <https://mtvictoria.history.org.nz/submissions/>. With just one more hearing for us to present at, we’re starting to turn our minds to some projects that have been on the back burner for a while . . .

Logo refresh

We’re looking forward to getting on with a re-design of our logo. Do any of our members know of a designer they’d recommend for such a job? (Even better if they might consider a good price for a not-for-profit.) Please get in touch if you do.

Oral histories

Towards the end of last year we advised that, thanks to our volunteer Andy Haddleton, we were putting some of the content of our 2006 oral history project exhibition on our website. Here’s a link so you can check out some of the stories and experiences of long-time Mt Vic residents: <https://mtvictoria.history.org.nz/mt-victoria-stories/>

Murder and Mayhem

Our historical item this newsletter comes out of Alan Olliver’s guided ‘Murder & Mayhem’ walk for Heritage Week last, and includes the results of some additional research carried out since then.

Historical Note

The Rise and Fall of William Walter James Spreat (1840-1893)

William Spreat was a gifted lithographer draughtsman, working in Yorkshire.

With his partner Jane Sanderson, he came to Dunedin in 1863, to work for John Turnbull Thomson, the Surveyor for Otago Province. Thomson said William Spreat “was a brilliant worker and many of his maps are characterised by great neatness and skill.” A local example of his work is the plan for allotments in Te Aro Pah, 1872.

When Thomson was appointed Surveyor General for the newly formed Lands and Survey Department in Wellington, William followed him. In 1872, William’s partner Jane and her five children were recorded as also being in Wellington.

Right: Plan of allotments within Te Aro Pah, City of Wellington, W.W.J. Spreat, 1872 WCA, 00248-72



By 1878, William bought the land on the corner of Brougham and Pirie Streets, today’s 75 Brougham Street (shown below, unknown date).



William prospered in his work, and he was prominent in music circles as an oboe player. However, he took early retirement.

His intemperate behaviour eventually drove the family, through fear, to leave him. The children were loyal to their mother and used their mother’s family name. At his begging, they returned to his house while he lived separately in the stables. William's epilepsy and temper worsened, not helped by his consumption of alcohol. An example of his temper was described by the Wellington Correspondent for the Lyttelton Times in 1881 “A fracas took place in Brougham Street between Mr Baird, the city surveyor, and Mr W. Spreat, government surveyor, over a professional dispute. Walking sticks were used, the latter gentleman getting decidedly the worse of it.”

On Saturday 8 July 1893, William’s son, Louis, shot and killed William, after he failed to immediately help his father clear away some clay that spilt on to the footpath outside their house. Louis said he wanted to finish writing some letters and he would then come and help his father. William flew into a rage. Seeing his other son, Val (Ernest Valentine), he threatened him with a knife and baton. Val got away and armed himself from a room upstairs and locked the door behind him, so William could not gain access to the remaining guns. Val then climbed out the window, jumping down onto the water tank and onto the ground. Val helped his mother and three sisters to escape from the house. Meantime, William found Louis outside and chased him with a fire poker and a knife, up a ladder and through the same upstairs window that Val had moments before exited. Finding himself trapped, Louis loaded a Martini-Henry rifle stored in the room. Fearing for his life, he aimed it at William and said “Don’t come any closer or I’ll shoot you.” William, not believing Louis would do it, started to advance on Louis - and Louis shot him in the groin.

At first the wound was not considered life threatening. William remained conscious, and the doctor and police were called. Nine hours after being shot, however, William died at the house.

In evidence gathered by the police, William took the blame for the incident. He forgave Louis and Val for what happened and said he bore no grudge against them. All parties basically agreed on the evidence presented - except Jane. She contradicted William and said Louis and Val were not actually his natural sons. William left all his property and assets to Jane and the 5 adult children.

Louis was arrested but was released soon after. The coronial inquiry set up at the nearby Cambridge Hotel, where the coroner found Louis' killing of William a "justifiable homicide" - Louis had good reason to fear for his life and the shooting was in self-defence.

Some interesting observations come out, or follow on, from this tragedy, though. Why was William not taken to hospital? A doctor attended William at the house, but no further treatment occurred. My research has come to no conclusions as to whether William and Jane were married or not, or whether William was the father of Louis and Val.

Evidence presented in the court hearing noted that the door to the room where the guns were stored was not locked. This seems strange, as it is contrary to what Val and Louis believed. Louis, however, felt trapped and, fearing for his life, was still justified in shooting William.



Val Sanderson in later life appears to have developed some of William's mannerisms.

He set up the Native Bird Protection Society, which in 1935 became the Forest and Bird Protection Society. Val became obsessed in his attempts to clear Kapiti Island of predators and destroyers of the island's habitat. His mistrust of friends and colleagues associated with Kapiti Island in the end hampered the conservation work he set out to achieve.

Right: Val Sanderson
from Kapiti, by Chris Maclean, Whitcombe Press 1999

By Alan Olliver

And, connecting this story very much to the present, Forest & Bird has just celebrated its centenary and, at the end of April, unveiled tributes to "the life's work of visionary Forest & Bird founder, Captain Ernest "Val" Sanderson in Paekākāriki, where he lived and launched his campaigns to protect nature across the motu."

<https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/resources/forest-bird-founder-captain-ernest-val-sanderson-honoured-paekakariki#:~:text=Sanderson%20founded%20Forest%20%26%20Bird%20%E2%80%93%20known,of%20his%20beloved%20K%C4%81piti%20Island.>

You can also find a later colour photograph of Sanderson here:

<https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/natures-voice-100-years-and-counting>