



NEWSLETTER

No. 108, June 2024

Mt Victoria Historical Society Inc.
www:mtvictoria.history.org | Facebook: MVHS.Inc

Save the date!

Our next event is our AGM, September 15

We'll have a fascinating speaker to entice you to come along, because this is also an important AGM. We need to amend our Rules to meet the requirements of new Charities legislation.

More details in the next newsletter.

This newsletter represents the first outing for our new logo.

District Plan matters

Well, it's all over bar the shouting, as the saying goes. The final District Plan, as voted by the Council and against the recommendations of the expert Independent Hearing Panel, was largely agreed to by the Minister, Chris Bishop.

It has resulted in a major loss of Character Precinct areas in Mount Victoria but, even worse, a very large area of zoning for at least six-storey developments. The rules protecting Character housing are also not as strong as in the old Plan. In addition, we are left with incomprehensible outcomes such as part of tiny Tutchen Avenue, in the middle of a Character Precinct and adjacent to a Heritage Area, being zoned for at least six-storeys.

On the other hand, we do now have designated Heritage Areas with quite strong protection. And 12 houses have been added to the list of heritage buildings. Selection of these appears somewhat random, and it is not all the houses originally proposed by WCC in the Draft District Plan (and certainly doesn't include others proposed by MVHS), but it is something. The Council's evaluations were all based on Michael Kelly's work in the 2017 Heritage Study of Mt Victoria (which he acknowledged could not cover the suburb adequately). We will feature some of these in future newsletter issues.

We will continue to advocate, with others, for the protection of Wellington's heritage and will put forward amendments to the District Plan in future, whenever it's possible (e.g. on the Tutchen Avenue anomaly) – by which time perhaps the Council and Government might have got the message that, nationally and internationally, it is accepted that zoning alone does not make housing cheaper and heritage does not need to be destroyed to provide more housing.

LIVE WELLington, an advocacy group for density done well, recently announced that it is going to file for judicial review proceedings against the decision regarding the character areas in the High Court. It believes there is a good case due to the lack of evidence the Council and Minister provided for their decision. If you would like to know more, you can find their press release here: <https://www.livewellington.org>.

Such action doesn't come without significant cost, so if you would like to support this cause you can donate towards the legal costs. You can email Jane O'Loughlin at admin@livewellington.org for more information or details.

Wellington Heritage Festival

Plans are well under way for this annual event, which just seems to get bigger every year. This year, we pitched to the Council the idea of events around the centenary of the Embassy Theatre, a Mt Vic and Wellington icon. They have enthusiastically come on board but we can't reveal their plans yet. We're focusing on creation of a new heritage panel about the theatre's history, for the Majoribanks Street side of the Embassy, and guided tours of the Embassy Theatre to share its history. The heritage panel, which will sit alongside the one we unveiled in 2012 surveying the history of Mount Victoria, will be a major piece of work. If you'd like to be involved somehow, do contact jonewman@xtra.co.nz.

The Heritage Festival starts on October 26 but you might like to sign up to their newsletter, because events can book out quite quickly: <https://wellingtonheritagefestival.co.nz/>

HISTORIC NOTE

Westbourne Grove

You will have read in *The Local* recently about current goings on around Westbourne Grove, off Austin Street. The writer described it as an historic home, so the Historical Note in this Newsletter shares some of its story. And thanks go to Ralph Highnam for his assistance with research.

The land on which the historic home, 43 Austin Street, sits was once part of Town Acre 359. It stretches from the edge of the Town Belt through to Austin Street. The original house was probably built in the 1880s, but there was possibly an earlier, small house behind it, remnants of which may still be there. As best we can work out, its first resident was Joseph Hyde, who was living there in 1888. He wrote to the Town Clerk in January that year, with the following request:

Sir,

I am about to fence my property, Acre No. 359 Austin Street, adjoining the Town Belt. I find quantities of Furze (or gorse) growing on the belt close up to the boundary line of fence.

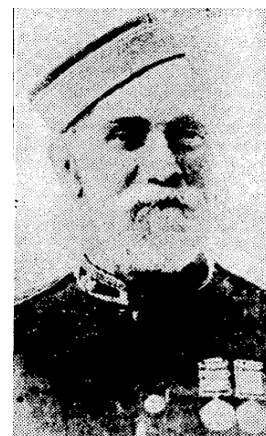
May I request that you will be good enough to take the necessary steps to cause the same to be removed, otherwise the fence I am about to erect (which will be of wood) will be in danger of being burned.

While on the ground on the 10th inst. For a short time, the Furze on the belt close by was fired in three different places, by some little Boys, whom I chased from the Belt.

I am Sir

Yours

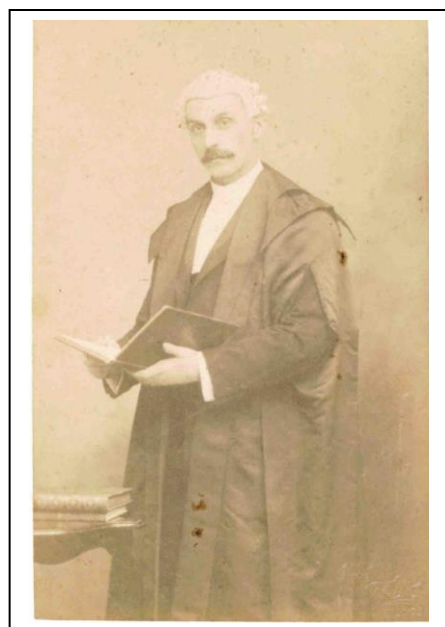
Jos Hyde



Hyde was a Crimean War veteran and one of two artillerymen who helped win an important battle for the British. He came to New Zealand in 1876 at the age of 45 as a field artillery instructor (with the rank of sergeant-major).

Superannuated from that service, he went to live in Nelson, probably in 1892/93 when he sold 43 Austin St.

Then, one Percy Butler owned it for a couple of years and, in 1894/95, it was in the name of Louisa Turner. Her husband was a manufacturing chemist, with premises on the corner of Manners Street and Willis Street.



The Turners seem to have sold the three sections along the private way called Westbourne Grove to Henry Walker, a builder living in Majoribanks Street. Walker then built three houses for his two daughters and their husbands, and for his son, also Henry.

The large house was bought in 1911 by John Palmer, Town Clerk at Wellington City Council. Tragically, the Palmers' two daughters died in 1911 and 1913, Ida at age 21 and then Irene at age 22.

Palmer had been appointed Town Clerk (the equivalent of the Chief Executive today) in 1902 and retired due to ill health in 1925 – at 23 years, a very different duration of tenure from the modern Chief Executive.

He arrived in Wellington (after being mayor of a New South Wales town and Town Clerk of Sydney) at a time of great change in the city.

Photo: John R Palmer, WCC Archives, 00001-60/1135 Pt 1

The City Corporation had just bought the tramways, the Town Hall was under construction and the city was about to expand by amalgamation with Melrose Borough, then Karori, Onslow and Miramar.

Over Palmer's term in office, cars started to invade the city, tramways moved from horse-drawn to electric, the Hataitai tunnel through Mount Victoria was constructed, the 1918 flu epidemic arrived and many of Wellington's worst slums were condemned.

Palmer and his wife celebrated their golden wedding anniversary here in 1937, but John died in 1941. His wife and a son continued to live there, however, until the house was sold to Vernor Hamill in 1954. The Palmer residency, therefore, clocks up an impressive 43 years.

The Hamill family also had a very long connection with, and love for, this slice of land. Three generations lived there over the next 69 years. Vernor Hamill bought the property in 1954 and his son has described how they bought the ten-room house with plans to convert it into a two-flat property, living in one half of it themselves. "Dad could just about do anything as a builder – from a farming background. And he wanted the investment to pay for the mortgage, which was pretty high in those days. But there were very few flats around." Vernor was a Justice of the Peace and his granddaughter reports that No. 43 was occasionally used by the Wellington Police as a stakeout for drug busts. The police sat on the roof with telescopes whilst her nana bought them cups of tea. Vernor grew maidenhair fern in the two glasshouses in the garden and would regularly bundle it up and sell it at the Tory Street fruit and vegetable market. When he died, he passed the house to his son, Rex.

Rex had come to live at No. 43 with his parents in 1954. He worked in management in a number of companies. His involvement in Mount Victoria included joining the battle for protection of its character, motivated by his horror at Melksham Towers and plans for more of its ilk. When he died in 2021, his association with the property had stretched over 67 years (though with some gaps).



Vernor (l) and Rex (r) at 43 Westbourne Grove, 2006

You can also read some of the oral history of Rex Hamill that Mount Victoria Historical Society recorded in 2006 on our website: <https://mtvictoria.history.org.nz/mt-victoria-stories/>

The name 'Westbourne Grove' seems to have been 'formalised' by 1903, when Wise's Street Directory starts recording it as a feature. Rex Hamill's daughter believes it derives from the fact that the house at No. 43 faces the setting sun in its prominent site near the top of the suburb – hence 'born in the west'.