



# NEWSLETTER

## No. 109, August 2024

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

**September 15, 2.00 pm**

**The Cambridge Hotel, Atrium Room**

### **Annual General Meeting**

Important business at this AGM is to approve our new Rules, required by legislation to be done by 2026. The AGM will be followed by:

#### ***Restoring the Cambridge - Wellington's historic hotel and pub***

*The original Cambridge Hotel has been serving patrons since at least 1881. The current building - which replaced the timber original - dates from 1930.*

*The owner, Jeremy Smith, who oversaw the renovation of the hotel in 2023, will tell us all about it and show us behind the scenes. Get an insight into the challenges of the project and the motivation for restoring one of Wellington's few remaining historic pubs.*

#### **AGM**

We're always keen to welcome new committee members so, if you'd like to become involved, please let us know and we'll put forward your nomination at the AGM. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor, on the day, so you can signal your interest then.

And, also, a gentle reminder about subs being due. Thank you to all members who have already renewed.

#### **Heritage Festival**

A reminder that Wellington's Heritage Festival starts on October 26 and you can sign up to their newsletter to get early notice of events: <https://wellingtonheritagefestival.co.nz/>

#### **Embassy Theatre centennial**

Work is progressing on research for the panel we're creating to provide a lasting commemoration of the Theatre. An especially huge thank you to members who have generously donated towards the cost of this.

#### **An Olympic connection**

With August being Olympics month, it seems fitting to make a local, if somewhat tenuous, Mount Victoria connection to the Games.

The media has expended quite a few words reminding us that it is 100 years since Arthur Porritt won a bronze medal in the Olympic Games, also in Paris in, 1924. Our Historic Note this month highlights the local connection to this remarkable New Zealander.

#### **Another centenary**

It's a year of centenaries in our neck of the woods. There's the Embassy, of course, whose 100<sup>th</sup> birthday we have a significant stake in celebrating.

It's also nearly 100 years since the foundation stone for Wellington East Girls' College main building was laid by Lord Jellico on 30 September 1924. The school has always dominated the southern end of Mount Victoria, even before the changing light displays that have lit it up since its redevelopment and restoration of the façade. One of most important examples of the work of its architect, Charles Lawrence, it's a New Zealand Heritage Pouhere Taonga Category 1 historic place. Designed in 1923, the building was completed and opened in April 1925. You can find out more about the architect and the schools he designed in an earlier newsletter here:

<https://mtvictoria.history.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Newsletter-65.-April-2013.-Charles-Lawrence-architect.pdf>

### Olympian and Governor General: Arthur Porritt

One of the lasting reminders of Arthur Porritt's significance as a New Zealander is Porritt Avenue in Mount Victoria.

The name was bestowed on the street, however, not directly for his Olympic achievements but to commemorate his time as Governor General. He was a man of many talents, though – as Joseph Romanos and Graeme Woodfield describe him in their biography “No Ordinary Man”.

From 1967 to 1972, Arthur Porritt served as New Zealand's eleventh Governor General and the first New Zealand-born.

Even during that time, The Governor General was heard to remark “So far I have achieved a few streets, a sports stadium and a medical lecture”, in terms of naming rights. Porritt Avenue is perhaps particularly appropriate being so near to his official residence near the Basin Reserve.



Governor General Sir Arthur Porritt with a group of painters at Government House. Photo by Morris James Hill. [ATL EP-NZ Obits-Porritt, Sir Arthur-01]

The street was given its new name in 1979, after his term had ended. It had previously been Ellice Avenue and Tutchon Street. Between 1891 and 1900 Tutchon Street was extended through to Ellice Street and the extension named Ellice Avenue. It only became a public street in 1905.

Porritt was something of a ‘transitional’ Governor General, having been born in Whanganui in 1900 but spending most of his life in Britain. Some described him as becoming more English than the English. He was, however, always devoted to New Zealand and kept his New Zealand passport. In his own words he became a “complete Pommy”, but “never ceased to be a New Zealander”.



He had initially gone to England as a Rhodes Scholar and studied medicine from 1924 to 1926 at Oxford University.

He was also an exceptional athlete and was one of only four to represent New Zealand at the 1924 Paris Olympics. He won a bronze medal in the 100 metres and is still the only Kiwi to win an Olympic sprint medal. (That 100-metre race was later immortalised in the film *Chariots of fire*, but due to Porritt's modesty – and to the bewilderment of many New Zealanders – the bronze medallist was portrayed as a fictional ‘Tom Watson’.) After the Games, Porritt beat the Olympic gold winner, Harold Abrahams, over 100 yards and in 1925 set an Oxford–Cambridge record for that distance. It stood until 1962.

He maintained his involvement with the Olympic movement at the highest level for many years. Here he is (second from left) as Manager of the New Zealand Team at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin Games, with Jack Lovelock on the winning podium.

[ATL MSX-2261-066]

After completing his medical qualifications, Porritt practised in Harley Street as a consulting surgeon. He was also surgeon to King George VI from 1946 and sergeant surgeon to Queen Elizabeth II from 1952 to 1967.

Arthur Porritt died in London, aged 93, on 1 January 1994.

By Joanna Newman