Above: The Karaka Bay family home of Avis Higgs, one of Australasia’s most innovative textile designers of the 1940s – one of the stopping points on the editor’s summer bike ride round the Wellington coast. See page 6.

Don Picken’s online museum

Highlights from Don’s online museum, begun in 2014 with items from the garage of Karori Historical Society’s Gordon Tait, have now been compiled in a PDF. You can explore the complete museum at: http://www.wrhpc.org.nz/museum/gallery01.htm

Long-term WRHPC stalwart retires

Don Picken (left) lives in an apartment high above Wellington; so high, in fact, that you can almost peer into the Stadium. But you won’t find him gazing out the window for any length of time. Instead he is more likely to be found in the ‘nerve centre’ that is his home office, a room that bristles with large computer screens – the current tally is around nine different devices, he says. This is where much of his work for the WRHPC over the past 14 years has been done. Don has been the organisation’s webmaster, and manager of membership lists and group emails from February 2005 to October 2019; has worked as treasurer from October 2011 to October 2019; and done various secretarial duties from October 2012 to October 2019.

As Don’s mammoth voluntary contribution drew to a close, I asked him how he first came to be involved with WRHPC.

"In early 2005, Susan Bartell at the National Library was a prominent organiser for WRHPC matters. If you wanted anything done then Susan would do it, such as design and printing, providing meeting rooms and so on. She asked a friend of hers if he knew of someone who could build a website for WRHPC and, as I had designed one for her friend, he asked me. Hence my introduction to WRHPC. The WRHPC Publicity Officer was well supported.

What do you think has been the main strength of WRHPC over the time you have been involved?

The main drive in its formation was to be an umbrella for the suburban historical societies and to organise a Heritage Month for them. If there was a common problem confronting these societies then WRHPC is formed and ready.

Thanks to the many contributors to this issue, which is generously funded by a grant from Lion Foundation, a Member’s donation, and Members’ subscriptions. We are always interested to hear what you have been doing. Please contact Anne Taylor, Editor: E: editor@wrhpc.org.nz T: 04 388 6584 | M: 027 489 0704.
Do you have any ideas on how you’d like it to evolve?
I’d like to see Heritage Month grow to become a significant annual event in the region. To do this it needs a group of enthusiastic people to organise and promote it and to obtain the support of local councils – the latter have shown very little interest in heritage matters in recent years which is very disappointing. In support of this, we need to look at what the digital age can do for us – each supports the other. This raises an interesting question: which of these best promotes and preserves heritage?
a) a display of items in glass cases that you travel to to see or b) a digital display of those items that you ‘dit-dit’ to see.

I would suggest that the latter be given prominence because it’s cheaper; it can include all the items you hold; it provides informative captions and information – and links to more information; the public can ‘pop in’ frequently whenever it is convenient and stay for as long as their time allows; and it would create an interest to travel to visit the venue to see actual items themselves.

What could be a future path for WRHPC?
The future is ‘digital’ so create a large ‘Online Museum’ for the region, supported by all local historical societies, where the people with the knowledge and items are supported by local councils; government, professional designers and digital artists, with wide publicity of items on the site. Everyone has difficulty in getting volunteers and many of our member societies do not have a full complement of elected officers. WRHPC could supply support by having a ‘WRHPC Book-keeper’ to take pressure off several treasurers by doing the routine matters such as banking, maintaining a cash book and members’ list, and financial reporting. This would be a paid grant-assisted position and the person would not have to attend committee meetings.

What did you do in both work and leisure time before you got involved in WRHPC?
I was born and raised in Gisborne. In 1961 I joined the Bank of New Zealand and after a few years I was transferred up the East Coast to Tokomaru Bay, then to Te Kuiti and finally to Wellington the late 1960’s. I worked in several Wellington branches in various positions and retired in 1998. Thirty seven continuous years was the norm for those days – today that would be seriously questioned. My interests included squash, photography, hydroponics, and tropical fish, among others.

And don’t forget your expertise on orchids!...Thank you Don, on behalf of all the WRHPC members, for your truly tremendous years of service to the organisation. Your friendly, gentlemanly bearing and ‘can do’ attitude was always inspiring.

The WRHPC website that Don established will remain online and key features of it are the extensive archive of Heritage Today and other history-related newsletters from our membership base, plus Don’s online museum of fascinating objects. For regular news, stories and upcoming events, please go to our Facebook page created by Peter Anderson of Karori Historical Society.

SEEKING A TREASURER FOR WRHPC
We’d love to hear from anyone among our readers who could help out in this role. Enquiries to Phil Parnell: landy@xtra.co.nz

If you have enjoyed reading Heritage Today, why not forward the email link you received to others. We welcome donations towards our production costs. A donation form is on our website http://www.wrhpc.org.nz/ & scroll down to the Donate paragraph. Membership is $30 per year, & you’ll receive Heritage Today bimonthly, details of meetings & events, & access to an extensive library of newsletters. Thank you.
**CELEBRATING PERCY SCENIC RESERVE’S BOTANICAL LEGACY**

The heritage and ongoing conservation efforts of Percy Scenic Reserve were celebrated on its public open day on Saturday 2 November. With surprise visits from some of the past curators and caretakers (Paul Coles, Philippa Argue, Robyn Smith and Tony Silbery), it was a rare opportunity for those involved over the past 40+ years to share their experience with current staff (Cliff Keilty, Jonathan Frericks and John van den Hoeven) – they even got an excuse to check up on their favourite plants.

The Percy Family, who give the reserve its name, settled in Lower Hutt in the 1840s and operated one of their two flour mills in the park. The mill soon became a social hub; hosting dances and events and from the early 1900s, the Percy Gardens were a popular local attraction. The Percy’s next door neighbour, Sir James Hector, was a giant in the scientific community, who went on to leave a great scientific legacy to future generations of New Zealanders.

In later years, three of the Percy grandsons looked after the native plantings, orchard and market gardens until they could no longer work the land. In 1939 they donated the park to the Crown for the purposes of a scenic reserve and the reserve was officially opened to the public in 1949. The historic mill tragically burnt down in 1945 and now the site is memorialised with a replica waterwheel which Paul Cole helped install. From the 1950s, the reserve was regularly used for a variety of cultural events such as dances and performances. During the 1990s, under Tony Silbery’s supervision, the collections expanded to become nationally significant, receiving donations from notable botanists such as Tony Druce and Arnold Dench. Many of these original plants are still growing. In the early 2000s Robyn Smith was looking after the collection and the site was also used by WelTec to teach their horticulture courses.

Today the park is a place of recreation, heritage, and learning, with beautiful lawns, gardens and walkways. The waterwheel and mill pond tell the story of a young developing colony and the previous site of Sir James Hector’s home, ‘Ratanui’, connect this place with New Zealand’s esteemed institutions and organisations. The open day was also a time to look to the future. Two new greenhouses, which are currently under construction, will ensure that the collection thrives as a safeguard against plant extinctions, and continues to serve as a resource for education and research. *Reproduced from Hutt at Heart.*

---

**PETITION POWER**

The popular *Suffrage in Stitches* exhibition has returned to Wellington Museum for the summer. The artwork matches the length of the original Suffrage petition and consists of 546 individually designed and stitched fabric panels (reflecting the number of pages in the petition). They tell the stories of those who signed the petition and relatives who have influenced the 546 makers.

The exhibition will be the final destination of three two-hour suffrage-themed walking tours starting from the National Library. The tours start with a visit to the *He Tohu* exhibition at the Library, where you will see the original petition. The tours conclude with tea and biscuits plus a chat with people who have been involved in the project.

*Suffrage Tours: Mon 13 Jan; Wed 15 Jan; Thurs 16 Jan, 10am-12.10pm, $10. Bookings essential. Please go to [website](#).*

Stewart Collis with a panel inspired by his ancestor and Petition signatory Eleanor Collis. Photo: Arohanui Hospice
Clareville Cemetery tour
This tour coincides with the anniversary of Ellen Dougherty becoming the world’s first Registered Nurse. Ellen is buried at Clareville, and hers will be one of many stories touched on during this event. Friday 10 January, 2pm. Meet at first gate. E: pentonygraham@xtra.co.nz

An invitation to visit Ohariu Valley
John and Liz Hume are inviting Onslow Historical Society members and friends to visit Forest Hill Farm this Waitangi Day. This is an opportunity to walk up the hill to see the historic plaque that the Hume family erected to celebrate 150 years of farming in Ohariu Valley. It was unveiled in November 2018, and the following year descendants from the pioneering family attended a celebratory event. John will share information and the family’s fascinating history. The view is magnificent and given a clear sky the South Island will be visible, so bring your binoculars! Also, wear warm clothes – it can be cold and windy. The walk is quite steep and will take about 30-40 minutes, and those not so agile can take the car, or be driven, as the private road is sealed. Refreshments will be served after the walk at a small cabin in the garden.

Regular visits to Ohariu Valley have been on the OHS calendar since 1968 and through the 1970s and 1980s, so members are pleased to recommend this visit and see a revival of what used to be a regular event. Forest Hill Farm, 109 Rifle Range Road (turn left at the Crossroads; last house at the end of the road. There is plenty of parking space), 6 February 2020, 4-6pm. E: onslowhistorical@gmail.com

Waitangi Day in Wellington
Learn more about local social and political history at the Old Government Buildings, Lambton Quay, on Waitangi Day. Tours are $5 each and bookings are essential as each tour is limited to 25 people. Tours will be running 10am-11am; 11.30am-12.30am; 1pm-2pm; and 2.30pm-3.30pm. T: 64 4 472 4341 / E: information@heritage.org.nz W: www.visitheritage.org.nz
February 6 2020, Old Government Buildings, 55 Lambton Quay Wellington. Free entry. For all Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga events and more details, please go to the website.

Colonial cottage life
Weekend tours of Nairn Street Cottage are happening on the hour between 12pm-4pm. You will have an expert guide and can also enjoy an exhibition detailing the history of the cottage. Saturdays & Sundays, adults $8, children $4. Email to book and door sales available. W: www.museumswellington.org.nz/nairn-street-cottage
Whanganui beckons this summer
The ‘River City’ is one of New Zealand’s oldest cities, founded in 1840, and at 195 km north of Wellington it’s a pleasant summer road trip away. From 3-31 January there will be a month-long programme featuring bus trips, guided walks and talks to showcase the town’s fascinating history. For details on all events go to:
www.whanganuisummerprogram.weebly.com / E: whanganuisummerprog@gmail.com / T: 06 349 0508 / 0800 926 426.

Karori Streets publication updated
Well-known Wellington author, Judith Burch, has done a fine job updating an earlier publication, *Karori Streets 1841-1941* compiled by the late Will Chapman and Kitty Wood and published in 1991, with the addition of new roads and subdivisions and history of the people the streets are named after.

Launched by the Karori Historical Society late last year, Judith Burch’s book, *Karori Streets* is a definitive account of Karori’s pioneers and how this podocarp-forested valley became Wellington’s largest suburb. Judith has described how Karori was subdivided and how streets were named. For instance Alanbrooke Place was named after Alan Francis Brooke (1883-1963), a British Field Marshal during World War II. He was Chief of the Imperial Staff from 1941-1946, and was created First Viscount Alanbrooke in 1946.

Then there is Lemnos Ave where I live, near the British High Commission just off Homewood Ave. “This was formerly named Earl Street but was renamed in 1925 to avoid confusion with Earls Terrace in Mt Victoria. Lemnos Ave is named after the Greek Island of Lemnos, near the Dardanelles which was used as an Allied naval base during the Gallipoli campaign, taking advantage of the large and sheltered harbour of Mudros.”

Many streets in Karori have been named after WWI battlefields. Wellington Mayor Andy Foster, also a Karori resident, was instrumental in getting new streets signs recognising these battlefields added during the past three years. Judith Burch, a past President of the Karori Historical Society, has also produced the sought-after *Karori and Its People*, a 368-page history describing Karori’s growth from a rural outpost in the 1840s to one of New Zealand’s largest and most significant suburbs.

David Watt, Central Region Outreach Advisor, Heritage New Zealand
Artist Avis Higgs captured the freshness and vitality of a Southern Hemisphere summer in her textile designs. She was born in Wellington on 21 September 1918 and attended St Anthony’s School in Seatoun, Wellington East Girls’ College, and Wellington Technical College where she trained as a commercial artist. Her textile design career took her to Australia and Europe, and she later became a successful painter in Wellington. Read more about Avis here. Images from the website: *Untitled (Mermaid)*; *Karaka Berries* and *Bondi*. 