

Welcome - We are here today to recognise some of the history of Queens Park.

Queens Park was developed over 125 years ago as one of three European settler promenading parks around Central Wellington. These were a type recognisable around the world – landscaped areas with exotic trees suited to promenading while wearing the restrictive clothes of the Victoria era. The Wellington ones are interesting in that they are hybrid parks including some indigenous New Zealand planting.

In 1897 the Wellington City Council decided to name this particular park “Queens Park” in honour of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Today, the Park is not easy to identify. For the record, Queens Park is the part of the Town Belt below Wadestown Road. It extends from here up the hill to the houses on Orchard Street. It extends down to Grant Road and around the three colonial Town Acres around Newman Terrace.

There has always been activity around here. Wadestown Road was in use before 1841 and may be one of the original Maori tracks extending north from Pipitea Pa. In the early days of development of the City, the spring on the edge of Grant Road was one of the few reliable sources of clean water, which would have drawn the community to this area.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it was clearly a popular park for the surrounding community, and the newspapers of the time frequently recorded some sort of activity in the park or the donation of plants by residents. The Nathan family donated the fountain in memory of their son, who was killed in the Second World War. For a while the area we are standing in was renamed Lady McAlister Garden after a mayor's wife. Andy – would your wife like a park named after her?

Katherine Mansfield would have walked on these paths, along with a wide variety of notable members of the community. Remember that Thorndon has always had a combination of workers cottages with grand mansions and all walks of life would have enjoyed the Victorian and Edwardian version of this park, with its intensively managed landscape. At that time there was a Council Parks depot in Goldies Brae for this and nearby parks, with the Council still employing six staff based in this depot in the 1980s.

This community interest in Queens Park shows in the story which is background to one of the plaques to be planted today and which reflects the lifelong commitment to service by Queen Elizabeth. In 1940 the then Princess Elizabeth was reported to have had tea with several New Zealand airmen and the Evening Post at the time reported that they discussed the fact that acorns from Windsor Great Park were being used to feed pigs as part of the British efforts to grow food during the War. The Wellington leader of the Society of St George on reading this report, wrote to the Princess and requested some acorns for planting in Queens Park. There was a later report that the acorns had been sent, but no evidence that they were ever planted.

The Park was severely affected by the Wahine Storm when many of the mature trees on the ridge in the northern part of the Park were blown over – if you walk around that area now, there are a lot of deciduous trees but few that would date to the original planting of the park in Victorian times.

Active management of the park in its Edwardian form ended with Council restructuring in the 1990s. The colourful seasonal bedding plants that surrounded the Park Street steps and this lawn were removed and replaced with permanent planting. The Goldies Brae depot was closed and the buildings there, including the heritage Caretakers cottage were removed and the site grassed over. While the Councillors of the time worked to ensure that the Botanical Gardens would continue to be funded and maintained, the other Victorian promenading parks suffered from the systemic neglect that this restructuring caused, and there was a period of progressive decline.

There was no active tree maintenance or management in this park, with trees removed only when they had fallen across tracks. The only routine maintenance was lawn mowing, which progressively reduced in area as the bush regrowth encroached on the lawns. Apart from the sign below us, all signs referring to Queens Park disappeared. The Council noticeboards showing the tracks on Te Ahumairangi Hill show none of the tracks in this Park.

Since we established the Friends of Queens Park in 2017, there has been a progressive change, largely as the result of our monthly working bees starting to clear the undergrowth and replant, but also more recently with Council input.

The Council have funded a development plan for the Park and over the past year, we have seen a substantial amount of Council funded activity, with removal of a quite a few dying, dead or inappropriate trees – we welcome this long delayed work and would like to thank the Council's Parks team including William Melville, Ben Young, Joshua Symes and Rachel Mclellan for instigating this work.

One of the interesting aspects of our working bee group is that around half of our members live in apartments or townhouses with small or no gardens and enjoy working in Queens Park as a connection to the land – perhaps this is a model for how to enable central city residents to engage with Wellington's green spaces.

The Council has, as part of its Town Belt Management Plan, a Policy to “maintain and enhance the deciduous woodland below Wadestown Road” This area is Queens Park. It provides a superb contrast to the regenerating bush on the rest of Te Ahumairangi Hill. We fully support both this regeneration for the hill and the retention of the deciduous and exotic planting of this park – a reflection of the diversity of our community.

These are the first two trees that the Council has planted in this park in many years. I challenge the Council to make it the start of its planting input to Queens Park, not just a one-off event.