

# THORNDON TRIBUTE

*The fifth day of October in the Year of our Lord, 2022*

Today we celebrate the unveiling of two plaques in Queens Park, Thorndon, Wellington. One is in honour of Queen Victoria who was queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 1837 to 1901 and Empress of India from 1876 to 1901.



*Queen Victoria*

*(Source: Photograph by Alexandra Bassano 1882, thevintagenews.com)*

Queens Park was proposed in the early 1890's to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

Queens Park was established as one of three parks on parts of the Town Belt, developed with planning and paths for promenading on the edges of the city (Queens and Central Parks and the Botanical Gardens). These parks were formed with a network of carefully graded and excavated paths and were planted with then fashionable northern hemisphere exotic deciduous and conifer trees and shrubs, consistent with the fashion for urban park areas at the time.

There is no doubt that Katherine Mansfield would have walked around Queens Park with her family, friends and neighbours as the park was well used by the local community.

Initially developed was the southern area of the park with formed paths, entry gates and plantings of exotic trees with shrubs and hedges.

Wellington City Council confirms the Waipakaka Stream (that ran next to the Pakuao kianga/pa) and the waterfall in the northern area of the park were features, reflecting the Victorian interest in 'wild' landscapes.

The park and its original paths are shown on the 1915 map below. Queens Park extends north and runs between Wadestown Road and Grant Road/Grosvenor Terrace, from Park Street north to the properties on the south of Orchard Street. The park surrounds the properties occupying Town Acres 661, 662 and 663 on the western side of Grant Road.



Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith.

*(Source: thefamouspeople.com)*

A second plaque commemorates Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee in 2022. Celebrations occurred in the Commonwealth of Nations to mark the 70th anniversary her accession on 6 February 1952.

The origins of the oak forest at the northern end of the park is unclear but could very well have a direct link to Her Majesty.

Dinah Priestley of the Thorndon Society wrote an article in October 2009 about the possible origins of the oak glade.

*The New Zealand Company originally set aside areas to be kept as Town Belt. In succession land was passed to the Crown, to the Wellington Provincial Council and then in 1873 to the Corporation of Wellington. This was after the Wellington City Reserve Acts of 1871 and 1872 had been passed. The area of land that is now known as Queens Park was not called Queens Park until 1897.*

*Winsome Shepherd, author of **Wellington Heritage** said it wouldn't surprise her if the oaks in Queens Park were very old. There were plantings in Wellington in 1874 and many early settlers brought acorns with them when they came to Wellington. She wondered whether Tom Seddon M.P. (King Dick's son and father of the late Mary Seddon) might have had some influence over the planting of the trees. He was an enthusiastic founder member of the Wadestown Horticultural Society and his garden bordered on the Northern boundary of Queens Park.*

*It's even possible that the Yorkshireman, W.B. Rhodes who owned the Grange and Highland Park Farm above Orchard Street in Wadestown, may have planted a few experimental oaks in the 1850's and 60's before the Wellington City Reserve Act.*

*The Southern portion of Queens Park at the junction of Grant and Wadestown Roads is a small leafy part of the park...its statue and fountain was presented to the city by the Nathan family in 1957 in memory of their son, George Benson Nathan, who was killed in Crete on May 21, 1941. This part of the Queens Park was planted with pines between 1909 and 1911.*

*(Source: Thorndon Society Incorporated, Newsletter 157, ISSN 0112-3424, October 2009, The Mystifying Oaks of Queens Park)*

*(Source: Extract of a map of Town Acres and land placed aside for the Queens Park, Wellington City Archives)*



An Evening Post article in 1915 states that oaks were planted by Mr. G. E. Tolhurst.

Two articles appear in the Evening Post in 1941 reporting that the acorns came from Windsor Great Park. It was reported that Princess Elizabeth had talked about acorns from the forest with visiting New Zealand airmen. Miss Thompson, assistant secretary of the Wellington branch of the Royal Society of St. George, whose father came from Windsor, heard this story and wrote to Her Royal Highness asking that some of the acorns be sent to New Zealand. The reply said that Princess Elizabeth would send acorns for her to plant in Queens Park.

*(Source: Papers Past, Evening Post, 1941, Issues 95 and 116, Alexander Turnbull Library)*

It appears that contributions of oaks have been made by a number of people – from early settlers to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

Queens Park is the oldest of Thorndon's parks. At present it is being looked after by an enthusiastic group of gardeners, known as the Friends of Queens Park. Local residents meeting once every month on a weekend day, from 10am to 12 midday have made a considerable impact by clearing and planting areas. All are welcome to participate in this neighbourhood endeavour. While making considerable improvements to the garden it is also a time to meet and chat with others who enjoy gardening and see the garden return to glory.

An oak and a lime tree have been planted and marked by the commemorative plaques and will be appreciated in the future by those who walk the Queens Park.

Larger work dealing with the felling of trees is conducted by Wellington City arborists. This was certainly the case after the 1968 Wahine Storm which brought down many large oak trees.

The park is one that Thorndon can be proud of and 'hurrah, hurrah, hurrah', goes to Mr Peter Steel for having the foresight to propose this as a project of improvement and regeneration.



*(Source: One of the walkways into Queens Garden, Thorndon, Wellington c 1928, Reference EP-1750- 1/2-G, Alexander Turnbull Library)*



*(Source: WCC Archives, c1930, Intersection of Grant Road and Wadestown Road, Thorndon)*



*(Source: R Murcott, May 2017, photographs, Queens Park work begins.)*