



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Issue 63 • July 2023

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Morningside Railway Bridge

As you travel along New North Rd between Sainsbury Rd and Rocky Nook Ave near Mt Albert Primary School, you pass underneath the Morningside Railway Bridge. You may catch a glimpse of its concrete arches, see a poster pasted to its side wall, or spot a train gliding overhead. If you ride the train between Baldwin Ave and Morningside stations, you may suddenly realise that there is a road flashing beneath you. This bridge is a small but significant part of Mt Albert's transport infrastructure and has played an important role in enabling the growth of the western suburbs.



New North Road, Morningside. January 1920 (detail). T.A. Bishop Collection Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections TAB-P-0235

This bridge was built in 1912 and 1913. The project involved lowering the level of New North Rd by 8 feet and raising the railway line over it in a sweeping curve. Why was it so important to do this?

Prior to the bridge, the Auckland to Kaipara railway line crossed New North Rd in Morningside at a level crossing. A railway line which crosses a road is a dangerous place for pedestrians and vehicles, and if the road is busy, as New North Road has always been, the danger increases. As well as damage to people and vehicles, a level crossing accident will cause disruption to users of both road and rail. By 1910 there had been too many accidents on this crossing, and it was considered to be a particular danger at night.

This level crossing was also a barrier to the westward extension of the tram service. Tramlines were rapidly being pushed out into Auckland's growing suburbs, and

as public transport improved access, so the suburbs grew. From 1903 the tram service ran from the city to Page's Store in Kingsland. From there, commuters had to walk, or transfer into horse-drawn buses to continue their journey.

Mt Albert's population more than doubled between 1903 and 1911, and pressure was on to improve the infrastructure through the area. Fortunately, the increasing population made it easier to raise the revenue to undertake the necessary work. During 1910, the Mt Albert Road Board lobbied the government to enter into a financial partnership to build the Morningside Rail Bridge. The Railways Department agreed to pay £6000 for the bridge (grumbling a little, because they perceived that the tramways company would benefit from their investment). The Road Board, with overwhelming public support, took out a £2000 loan to undertake the road works, and also contributed £700 towards the bridge. In April 1911, the Road Board became Mt Albert Borough Council, and this bridge was one of several major projects underway at the time.

The Morningside Bridge was the third stage of a project to upgrade New North Rd between the boundary of the Mt Albert district at Dominion Rd and St Lukes Rd. The first two stages involved widening and curb-and-channeling the road from Dominion Rd to Kingsland, then from Kingsland to the Morningside crossing. These two cost £10,000 and were completed by the end of 1912. The tramline was extended to Morningside along the improved road: the first tram ran between Page's Store in Kingsland and Morningside on 8 July 1912. It could go no further until the Morningside Rail Bridge was completed.

The Railways Dept started work building the rail bridge in late 1912. By November, the railway line had been temporarily diverted around the construction site, and the concrete buttresses and piers of the bridge were under construction. 10 chains of embankment were raised on the northern side of the bridge and eighteen on the southern side. There was only minor disruption to New North Rd traffic for the first six months of construction.

Mt Albert Borough Council began the road realignment in the second half of 1913. New North Rd was dug out to about 8 feet lower than its previous level, and excavations tapered off almost as far as St Lukes

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Church. Of course, this caused much more disruption with road closures and diversions in place as needed. Drivers had to be very careful on the rough lowered section, and lanterns were left to warn drivers after dark, although so many of these were stolen or broken by vandals that the Council offered a £5 reward for information leading to a conviction. In addition, accidents continued to occur on the temporary level crossing, and in August 1913 a railway carriage suffered a minor derailment after a train leaving Morningside was accidentally diverted to the new section.

On the steel bridge, the rail girders were installed at the end of September 1913, and it was opened to trains on 13 December. Finally, the dangerous railway level crossing across New North Rd could be removed.

After the Morningside Railway Bridge was opened, the way was clear to extend the tram line even further west along New North Rd, although progress was slowed because the road had to be upgraded before tram tracks could be laid, and there was financial uncertainty caused by the outbreak of war. On 1 September 1915 the next section of tramline was opened, linking Morningside with what would become known as the Terminus at the Mt Albert shops. The tramline could

go no further because of the next set of railway lines that crossed New North Rd. This was the Ballast Line which connected the quarry on the mountain with Mt Albert Station (see *MAHS Newsletters* #4, 6 and 7). When the Ballast Line tracks across New North Rd were lifted in January 1929, the tramline could finally be extended to Avondale: this final section opened in January 1932.

Between 2005-2010 the railway line between Britomart and Swanson (the Western Line) was double-tracked. A second set of arched supports was added to hold the new track, and extensive work was done on the embankment on the city side. Next time you walk under the Bridge, look up and see the different design of the two halves.

Access to reliable public transport via the extension of the tramline to Mt Albert was a key driver of the rapid development of the suburb in the 1920s. The Morningside Railway Bridge is more than just a bridge.

Article by Lynley Stone

Sources:

Albert-Eden Heritage Survey. Survey Report. Prepared by Auckland Council's Heritage Unit. September 2013.

Morningside Heritage Study Prepared by Matthews & Matthews Architects Ltd. Ngati Whatua O Orakei. Tania Mace & Lisa Truttmann. June 2009

Various newspaper articles accessed via Papers Past



Morningside Railway Bridge being constructed in early 1913.

This photo was probably taken from the Morningside Quarry building (approximately 670 New North Rd), looking north across New North Rd, which has not yet been lowered. Behind the bridge are houses at the intersection of Malvern Rd and Rocky Nook Ave, with the Western Springs Rd ridge behind.

The New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal, 5 March 1913. p.24. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections NZG-19130305-0024-06

Mt Albert 100 Years Ago: May to July 1923

- Sections were for sale in the Sadgrove, Mount Royal, Roganville and Lynwood Estates. Edendale was filling up fast. 7 new subdivisions were approved in one Council meeting in June.
- L.E. Rhodes replaced A.F. Bennett as Mayor.
- Work started on the Kingsland rail overbridge, which would allow the tram to be extended down Edendale (now Sandringham) Rd.
- Dr Graham Lindsay started practising from his home on the corner of Selkirk and New North Rds.
- Andrew and Lucy Caughey donated their home *Rahiri* to the Plunket Society for a Karitane Hospital.
- R & W Hellaby Ltd opened a butchery on the corner of Mt Albert and New North Rds
- Significant drainage projects were underway but residents were angry that severe flooding in parts of Edendale was not being addressed.
- There was an influenza outbreak which severely impacted school attendance.
- New North Rd was concreted from Dominion Rd to Kingsland.
- MAGS classrooms were found to be unacceptably cold, with temperatures well under 10 degrees.
- Cattle grazing in Fourth Ave were destroying footpaths and upsetting residents

DESCENT BY PARACHUTE.

SUCCESSFUL ACHIEVEMENT.

LANDING IN BACK GARDEN.

The parachute descent by Mr. A. E. Eastwood, under arrangement by the Auckland Rugby Union, took place on Saturday afternoon. The parachutist, in an aeroplane, after hovering in the clouds at the height of 3000ft. endeavouring to pick up Eden Park, mounted a further 500ft. before walking out on the wing of the plane prior to cutting off to drop 250ft. in the red parachute, which immediately opened out. Dropping gracefully, the parachute was swept by a light easterly wind outside the park boundary, where the parachutist cut away the blue parachute to descend safely in a back garden in Kingsland. Within ten minutes of his landing, Mr. Eastwood reached Eden Park by motor-car to receive the applause of over 8000 spectators, who had a perfect view of the aeroplane and the parachutist as he made his descent.

There was no hope of Mr. Eastwood landing at Eden Park, owing to the unfavourable air conditions. He attributes his successful drop from the aeroplane to the careful manoeuvring of Mr. G. Bolt, the pilot. Mr. Eastwood stated after landing that he made the first mistake in his career as a parachutist when he cut away the blue parachute instead of the white, which remained unfolded throughout the descent.

New Zealand Herald 14 May 1923

MAHS Past Event Report

21 MAY: Debbie Dunsford spoke about her recent book *Change and Tradition: Mt Albert Grammar School 100 Years*. About 30 members gathered at Ferndale House to hear Debbie's stories about her experience researching and writing the centennial history of MAGS, and to learn about how MAGS has changed over the decades. Debbie's book pays particular attention to the last 25 years, including the change to a co-educational school, and focus on school values. It complements R.C.J. Stone's book *Tradition and Change*, written for the School's 75th anniversary in 1997. This was a fascinating session, which we thoroughly enjoyed. Copies of the book are available from the MAGS office.



JUNE EVENT: We regret that our planned talk by Chris Hagon about his experience in English Heritage Houses has had to be postponed until next year.

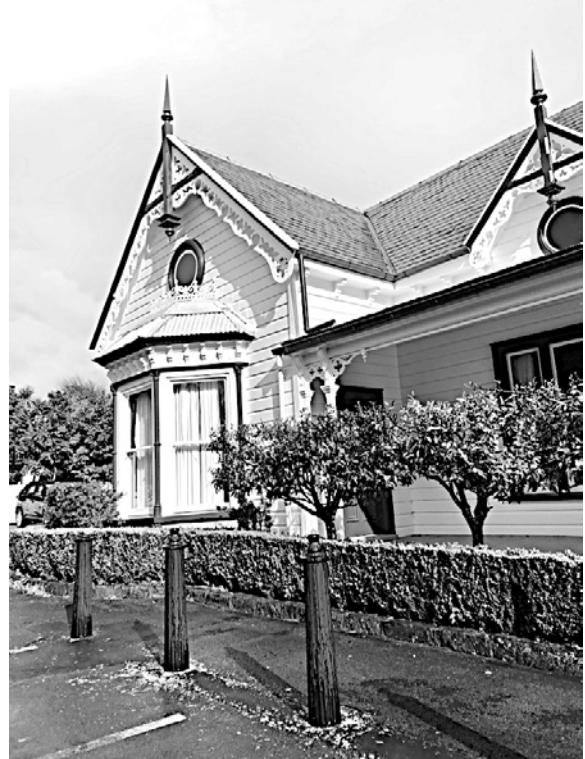
Mt Albert Historical Society Has Left Ferndale Annexe

In 2017 MAHS took out a lease of two small rooms in the Annexe at the back of Ferndale House. We have used these for storage and Committee meetings, and we planned to offer a drop-in research service to the community. Covid lockdowns scuppered these plans, and since we have been able to meet face to face again the Committee has preferred to meet in better-ventilated venues. These days, our research enquiries are coming in via email and the website, with no demand for in-person research assistance.

Our 5 year lease came up for review recently, with the likelihood of a considerable rent rise. After reflection, we voted to relinquish our lease. We have moved our filing cabinets of information, boxes of our book *Mt Albert Then and Now*, and all our other collections into a local storage facility, which can be accessed by arrangement. We are part-way through a project to digitise our physical collection, which will enable us to support research enquiries more easily.

We heartily thank Victoria Turner for the use of her table, chairs and bookshelves in the Annexe.

Ferndale is still our “home” in the heart of Mt Albert, and we will continue to use it as our regular venue for Events.



Membership Renewal Reminder

Your MAHS Annual Membership runs from July 1st to June 30th. Membership renewals for 2023-24 are now due - \$20 individual, \$40 family, \$100 corporate, donations welcome.

There are several ways to renew your membership:

1. **ONLINE.** Our website www.mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz has a big orange button in the top right of every page, labelled MEMBERSHIP JOIN OR RENEW. Click this and fill in your details. When you click SUBMIT you will be taken to a page which includes the Society’s bank account number. Please write this down, then use your online banking system to pay your subscription. (We are not set up to take payment through the website)
2. **IN PERSON AT AN EVENT.** At the AGM and other events, we will have copies of the Membership Form for you to fill in, and are happy to take cash or online payment via phone banking on the spot.
3. **SOME OTHER WAY.** We don’t want anybody to face barriers renewing their membership. Please contact us any way you prefer, and we will arrange a renewal.

MAHS DATES TO REMEMBER FOR 2023

All talks and meetings include a light afternoon tea. A gold coin donation is appreciated. Masks are encouraged to protect our vulnerable members.

Sunday 20 August. 2-4pm. Ferndale House. Mt Albert Historical Society Annual General Meeting. Please join us for our AGM. Our guest speaker will be Rendell McIntosh, Manager of Alberton House, speaking on his early life.

Sunday 8 October. 2-4pm. Ferndale House. Mike Wilcox will speak on important trees in Mt Albert.

Sunday 26 November 2-4pm. Ferndale House. Christmas Celebration. More details will be shared in the next Newsletter.