



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Jubilee Bonfires on Ōwairaka/Mount Albert

Fourteen of Auckland's maunga will be closed for 4 nights around Guy Fawkes night, to avoid catastrophic fires. In 2019 both Maungawhau/Mount Eden and Maungarei/Mount Wellington suffered destructive blazes. With so many wood-framed houses, and an increasing number of higher-density dwellings close to these public parks, the risk of fire is one that must be taken very seriously.

However, in earlier times there was much less thought of health and safety, and Auckland's mountain tops were the scenes of frequent, large bonfires. Imagine the effect of bonfires simultaneously flaring from the summits of each of the city's volcanoes, viewed without today's tall trees and light pollution. Up until the 1920s, areas around Mount Albert were still largely farmland, and flames would have been spectacular in the dark landscape.

As well as many private parties, there are reports of official bonfires organised by community leaders. In a young, growing city, lighting a big fire on a mountain top was a reference to the signal beacon tradition from the Old Country, a symbol of progress of the New, and jolly good fun all round. Here are two patriotic examples.



Mount Albert in the 1890s, showing the quarry and bare summit and surrounds. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 7-A10149.



The bonfire on top of Mount Mangere being prepared for the 1897 Jubilee. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections Footprints 01121

a spectacular, military focused programme, and in the evening, bonfires were simultaneously lit on nine high points around Auckland, including Mt Albert. It was estimated that 2–3000 people attended the Mt Eden bonfire, so it is likely that there was a good turnout at Mt Albert too. These bonfires were lit around the world by Boy Scout troops, as part of the Empire Chain, representing a pledge of loyalty to the Crown by the youth of the Empire.

In 1939, a columnist in the Auckland Star lamented that good old-time bonfires had fallen out of fashion. Did they? Do you remember bonfires, fireworks or other community celebrations that were held on Mount Albert, or in our community in other places, or even in your own backyard? Please share your memories with us.

Sources:

Chain of Beacons. 1935, 7 May. *New Zealand Herald*

The Record Reign: Conclusion of the celebrations: Bonfires on the hills. 1897 24 June. *New Zealand Herald*.

Tokalau, Torika. 2024, Oct 8. Auckland's ancestral maunga closed for Guy Fawkes. *Stuff*.

On 23 June 1897, the residents of Auckland and their guests turned out en masse to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond (60th) Jubilee. That night, celebrations were held in the city centre with extensive illuminations on shops and businesses. Each suburb held their own party too. One feature was the simultaneous lighting of bonfires on the volcanic cones on both sides of the harbour, including Rangitoto. Mt Albert's bonfire was about 20 feet square, and 20 feet high, and included "tar barrels (given by Mr Page of Kingsland), sacks of kauri gum dust (given by Mr Miller), pine branches and various other inflammables." Hellier Harbutt, George Fowlds and Wesley Spragg were the organisers, and Mr Harbutt lit the fire.

On 6 May 1935, there was another royal celebration: King George V's Silver (25th) Jubilee. Auckland put on

Newton's Apple Tree – the Auckland Connection

In March, Chris Hagon spoke to MAHS about his time working in English stately homes, one of which was Woolsthorpe Manor. This article links Chris's story back to Auckland.

Most of us know the story of Isaac Newton's apple and his theory of gravity. Newton was sitting under an apple tree when, all of a sudden, an apple landed on his head. In a moment he realised that the force which brought the apple to the ground was gravity, the force that pulls together all matter, the force that brought an apple free from its tree towards the ground rather than sideways or even upwards. This story is, indeed, almost correct. According to William Stukely, Newton's biographer, who actually got the story from Newton himself, "After dinner, the weather being warm, we went into the garden and drank thea [tea], under the shade of some apple trees ... he told me, he was just in the same situation, as when formerly, the notion of gravitation came into his mind, It was occasion'd by the fall of an apple as he sat in a contemplative mood. Why should that apple always descend perpendicularly to the ground ...". The story was told to so many contemporaries that it is unlikely to be apocryphal even if the embellishment that the apple actually landed on Newton's head seems a later "improvement".



The incident occurred in autumn of 1666 when an outbreak of the plague forced Newton from Cambridge University back to his childhood home, Woolsthorpe Manor, near Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. An account written in 1806 stated "The tree is still remaining and is showed to strangers." There was only one apple tree in the garden. It blew down in a storm in about 1816 but the tree rerooted and dendrology has shown it is about 400 years old. The tree appears to be very similar to an old and rare cultivar, 'Flower of Kent'. This possibly originated in France and was described by Parkinson in 1629. It is a cooking apple, rather inferior, of coarse quality and somewhat mealy although juicy and sweet.

Now, clones of this tree have arrived at the Auckland Botanic Gardens. Through the efforts of Sir Ernest Marsden (1889–1970), budwood was obtained from a tree propagated from the tree growing at Sir Isaac Newton's garden at Woolsthorpe. This tree was grown at the Physics and Engineering Laboratory of DSIR (Department of Scientific and Industrial Research) at Gracefield, Lower Hutt, and subsequently propagated. The Wellington Botanic Gardens has since taken cuttings from the apple trees at Gracefield and have very generously made two trees available to Auckland. These are to be planted in the orchard near the Potter Children's Garden. The fruit may not be that exciting but the trees themselves are definitely "heritage" trees of a remarkable history.

Article by Ross Ferguson

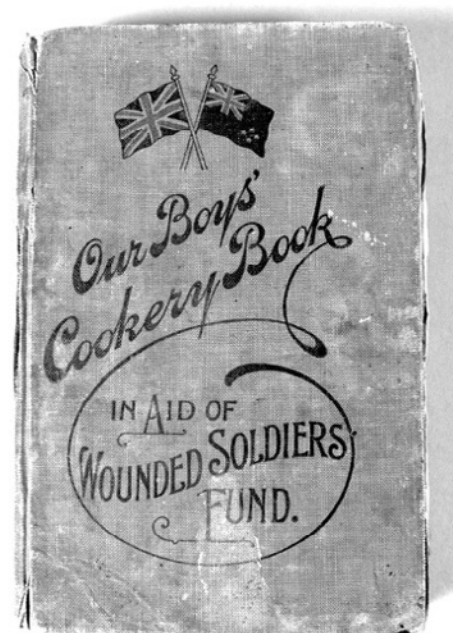
Photo of Woolsthorpe Manor with apple tree from Wikipedia, by Bsu10e01-Own work, CC BY-SA4

MAHS Cookbook Project

At the Meeting at Ferndale on 6 July, attendees expressed interest and support for the idea of creating a Mt Albert Historical Society Cookbook. If we can collect and share recipes and some stories that go with them, this would be a way to gather information about the social history of Mt Albert, as well as being a tasty exchange of recipes!

Many of our members have been involved in creating cookbooks like this as part of fundraising activities in schools, churches and other community groups. We are not planning this project to be a fundraiser, but apart from that, it is a similar idea.

Would you like to be involved in planning this project? If so, please can you get in touch with a member of the Committee. We will start work on this project early in 2025.



Our Boys' Cookery Book. In Aid of Wounded Soldiers Fund, 1915, New Zealand, by Whitcombe & Tombs Limited. Te Papa (GH024199)

Memoir Writing

In 1979, during one sleepless night in Green Bay, my grandmother, Elsie Gibson (nee Hopkins, 1899–1980), picked up a pen and a Croyley letter pad and wrote 14 pages of memories of her childhood in England. She wrote about her family, home, friends, school and community. She explained why the family moved to New Zealand, and drew maps of her neighbourhood in south London, and of the small Bedfordshire village where her grandparents lived.

She delighted in recalling these stories, and her pages have been shared amongst our family: several of us have retraced her steps, and copies have been lodged in relevant English community archives. This small document has become one of our family's most treasured possessions. While we do not have photos, we have this precious description of our great-great grandmother Elizabeth Smith. She was born in 1823, and was 87 when 10 year old Elsie stayed with her in 1910.

*Gronny must
have been in her eighties, but
she was a little old lady, always
in black with thin white
hair pulled tight back, & a little
black lace cap on top.*

Memoir writing is about capturing the small stories that make up our lives, and telling them with as much detail and colour as we can. We encourage our members to write down or record even a few stories, for your own enjoyment and for sharing with your loved ones (and if you would like to deposit any memoirs to the Mt Albert Historical Society we would love to have a copy).

We have prepared a brief guide to memoir writing, which we will send you with this Newsletter. We hope this will inspire you to pick up a pen, sit at a keyboard, or hit the record button. Most mobile phones and computers have apps and programmes that do audio or video recordings easily. Alternatively, you could invite a MAHS committee member or some other oral historian to do an oral history interview with you, which will produce higher quality audio and a more structured interview.

Next year, Mt Albert Historical Society will be partnering with Mt Albert Ladies Rebus Club to run a pilot Memoir Writing workshop. We will be in touch with more details soon.

If you are interested in exploring memoir writing more fully, you might find Deborah Shepherd's website interesting (<https://www.deborahshepardbooks.com/>). It includes helpful information in the *Writing Memoir* section, and the *Writers' Stories* section includes examples of short pieces of memoir writing (you might recognise some of the writers there!).

Lynley Stone

Memoir Writing Request – Smith and Caughey's

Earlier this year, the news that Smith and Caughey's were planning to close after 144 years stirred up many memories. The decision has now been made to keep trading in a reduced manner, but we feel it is the right time to capture some of those memories if we can.

The Caughey family were Mt Albert residents, and most of us shopped there at some stage in our lives. MAHS would like to pay tribute to the Smith and Caughey's store in an article in a future issue of the *Newsletter*.

Please, would you write down (or record) your memories of the Smith and Caughey's store, and/or of the Caughey family and their house (at any stage in its history), and give them to the Mt Albert Historical Society. Tell us what place they had in your life, any stories you can remember, etc. If you have photos, we would love a copy.

Please email your stories to us at info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz, or give a written document to a Committee Member. Thank you.



Illustration: Auckland Star, 1 April 1939, p.17 (Papers Past)

MAHS PAST EVENT REPORTS

Saturday 6 July: Food, Cooking and the Kitchen

This event held on at Ferndale House was attended by about 35 members and friends, a great turnout on a cold mid-winter's day.

Six members told entertaining stories of culinary mishaps, learning to cook new cuisine, wooing via the art of cooking, long-gone fruit trees at Ferndale House, and vintage kitchen technology.

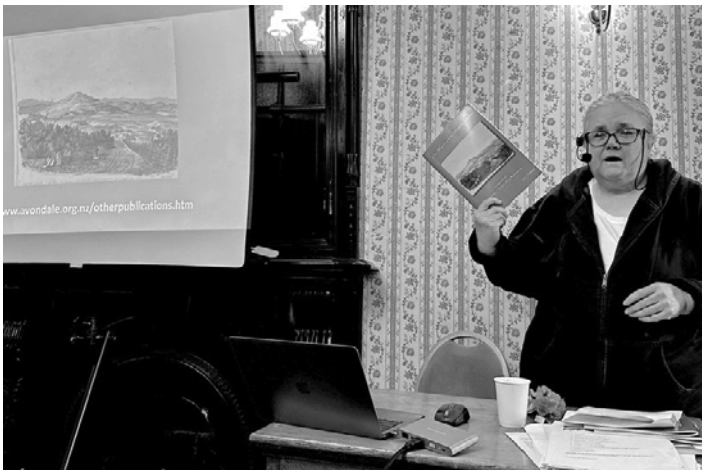
Spurred on by this foody fun, it was agreed that we would consider assembling a book of recipes contributed by members, not as a fund-raising effort, rather as a social history collection of favourite Mt Albert recipes and related stories. A printed guide to memoir writing was given out to support and encourage capturing of memories.

Following storytime, President Lynley Stone gave a presentation on the work of the Society since its inception in 2006. This was an expanded version of one that had recently been made to a meeting of The Mt Albert Ladies Rebus Club, and it was recognised that it would also be a useful way of updating and reminding our own members of the Society's work. Lynley summarised past and present projects, such as the photographing of Mount Albert houses and the oral history projects. The talk also highlighted the Society's online and paper-based resources on Mount Albert, including the wealth of searchable information in the newsletters published over 17 years, the website, and the Alice Wylie Research Collection.

Summary by Cathie Hutchinson

Photo by Irene Wan

Sunday 15 September: MAHS Annual General Meeting



Our AGM Meeting at Ferndale was attended by 44 members. Anna McGlashan and Sue Aitchison-Windeler were farewelled from the Committee, and Kathryn Twort was elected. Your Committee for 2024-5 is: Lynley Stone (President), Janet von Randow (Treasurer), Mary Inomata, Anne and Eric McKenzie, Cathie Hutchinson and Kathryn Twort. A lively meeting was chaired by Lynley and Janet.

Following the formal meeting, our guest speaker Lisa Truttman shared some of her research about Mount Albert/Ōwairaka Maunga, drawing from the history of the mountain that she published in 2020.

A digital copy of Lisa's book *The Maunga at Mount Albert* can be downloaded for free from the Avondale

Waterview Historical Society website <https://www.avondale.org.nz/otherpublications.htm> . We encourage all our members to read this fascinating book.

If anybody would like photos from MAHS events they have attended, please contact us.

Photo by Cathie Hutchinson

MAHS DATES TO REMEMBER

Sunday 3 November 2-4pm. Visit to Belmont House, 29 Stilwell Rd. Members event, **RSVP essential – limited places available now.** Contact janetvonrandow@gmail.com.

A visit to one of Mt Albert's grand houses. We will hear about the history of the house and enjoy afternoon tea. MAHS has visited Belmont twice before, most recently in 2018 – these visits have been amongst the most enjoyed in our Events programme. Please come and visit again, or come for the first time and see inside this special house.

Saturday 7 December 9-12. MAHS will have a table in Mt Albert Library. We will be promoting the Society and the history of Mt Albert, and will have copies of our book, *Mt Albert Then and Now* by Deborah Dunsford for sale (\$10 each, perfect Christmas gifts for family, friends and new neighbours). If you are near St Lukes Mall on the 7th, do pop in and say hello.