



## OPPOSITION MOUNTS TO 'DARK TOWER'

**A** fiery public meeting in May has galvanised opponents of an apartment block proposed for Austin Street in Mt Victoria.

More than 80 people, including local politicians and aspiring mayors, attended the meeting to discuss the seven-storey apartment block.

The proposed 'Mayfair' development comprises 32 apartments, including five sub-penthouses and

three penthouses, and is aimed at the high end of the market.

However neighbours are unhappy with the location and lack of consultation, with one speaker saying the development would 'loom over the neighbourhood like Sauron's dark tower.'

Pressure is now being put on politicians to find solutions. Read more inside. ➤

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# Community fired up about apartment block

A lively public meeting regarding the proposed Mayfair apartment block has fired up opponents of the development, who are now looking for political support for their cause. **Jane O'Loughlin** was there.

**C**ouncillors, aspiring politicians and local residents were among the more than 80 people that attended the May meeting at the Tararua Tramping Club, which was led and moderated by Dame Gaylene Preston, an Austin Street resident.

Speakers included Ralph Highnam and Willy Trolove who both live in Westbourne Grove, and Mt Victoria resident Phil Kelliher, who showed aerial footage of the existing Westbourne house, to demonstrate the prominence of the site. The meeting was told that developer Mark Quinn had turned down the invitation to attend.

All three Lambton/Pukehinau city councillors attended the meeting, along with councillor Ray Chung and a number of council hopefuls.

In a colourful talk, Trolove said that 'appropriately' the Mayfair shared its name with a former Wellington high-end brothel, 'where those with the best intentions were led astray,' and that the Mayfair would 'loom over the neighbourhood like Sauron's dark tower.'

He told the crowd that the resource consent application showed that the footpath would be removed and there would be 72 truck movements every day for the first six weeks of the construction. "So it's not a small thing. It's a really, really big thing."

He criticised councillors that that brought the District Plan in on the basis of sustainable development. "Sustainable development? Five thousand, two hundred cubic metres of our mountain dug out and carted off for an underground parking garage."

High density housing within a 'walkable catchment' of the city was supposed to mean residents would walk and cycle, but the Mayfair would lead to 30 extra carparks in the area.

Councillor Iona Pannett said she had not voted for the higher density rules brought in by the District Plan

**High density housing within a 'walkable catchment' of the city was supposed to mean residents would walk and cycle, but the Mayfair would lead to 30 extra carparks in the area.**

that encouraged six-storey developments, and did not think the multi-million dollar apartment block belonged in the suburb. "We are not a wealthy suburb."

Although no council staff attended the meeting, Pannett explained the process for notification on their behalf. If the project received limited or full public notification, a commissioner would be appointed to receive submissions.



It was a full house at the Tararua Tramping Club





**Dame Gaylene Preston puts Councillor Geordie Rogers on the spot during the public meeting**

The council along with the applicant would provide their assessments, and the commissioner would decide the outcome.

Pannett said if the residents were unhappy with the outcome they had further legal options, such as challenging the decision in the High Court, or Environment Court, however these could be expensive.

Based on her discussions with the council staff, she believed the consent would receive limited notification.

City councillor and mayoral prospect Ray Chung said he opposed the apartment block as it did not fit with the neighbourhood, and there were other more suitable places.

He also questioned whether more housing was needed, noting that Wellington was the only metropolitan area in New Zealand where the population was dropping. "Don't sit still and allow this to happen."

Green Party councillor Geordie Rogers acknowledged he did vote for the District Plan changes but was concerned about specific aspects of the proposal, such as the loss of the footpath, and the increase in car parks, encouraging more cars.

Several members of the audience questioned why the development could go ahead, given the developer owned only half shares in the private road. Some

suggested that disruptive actions could be used to delay the construction process.

Highnam said that the legal advice he had received was that no changes could be made to the driveway without the permission of the other owners who lived along it and therefore the owners wondered "how come the developer is not even talking to us in any significant reasonable way."

Kate, a resident of Rixon Grove said she was a supporter of sustainable transport and housing equality but "none of these things are represented by this housing development".

"My neighbours in Rixon Grove are going to be living in the shadow of three-million-dollar penthouses." **TL**

### **Will the Mayfair be publicly notified?**

Opponents of the apartment development are asking the Wellington City Council to publicly notify the project, meaning anyone impacted by it would be able to make submissions to an independent commissioner.

This increases the risk to the developer, and the likelihood it could delay the project through appeals to the Environment Court.

The decision about notification has been delayed many times, and it is understood that the Wellington City Council is giving the project extra attention, as it is the first major test of the new District Plan's high-density zones.

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# Public debates and getting recognised

These days many debates occur virtually – on Facebook pages, X exchanges or online comments. So it was refreshing to attend a good old-fashioned public meeting last month, on the subject of the proposed Mayfair apartment block.

It's fair to say most people there were opposed to the development, but seemed to appreciate the opportunity to ask questions and express their thoughts.

An aspect of the story that many were curious about is how a developer can build something that requires changes (e.g. removal of the footpath, or upgrades of buried utility services) to the privately owned accessway when they don't have the permission of the co-owners (the home-owners along Westbourne Grove).

It's not yet clear whether this will be resolved as part of the resource consent or the owners are expected to contest the issue separately. It would seem strange for the council to approve a resource consent for a site that doesn't yet have its legal access sorted out.

On another note, I recently attended the Community Newspapers Association annual conference and awards in Christchurch.

Although we often hear much doom and gloom about the state of media in New Zealand, attention usually focuses on the plight of big name media outlets. Meanwhile, there are some great examples of independent newspapers thriving in corners of the country. It's always inspiring to come away from these conferences where you are reminded of the great work that is happening around the motu.

I was chuffed for *The Local* to get two awards. The newspaper was runner up in two categories: best idea/innovation (for starting a hyper local newspaper), and for best headlines (tied with The Devonport Flagstaff). Pleasingly, *The Local* was described by the judges as "a great read".

While it's great to get outside approval of our work, I get the most satisfaction from the feedback of the community. Don't hesitate to get in touch if you have anything to pass on! **TL**

**Jane O'Loughlin**  
Editor



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## New intermediate mountain bike track

**A** new intermediate level mountain bike trail will be built on the eastern side of Mt Victoria/Matairangi, after the Wellington City Council approved a request by Trails Wellington.

The new track will be a Grade 3 mountain bike priority trail, and will provide for approximately 1.5km continuous descent from the Matairangi peak to the Mount Victoria Skills Area near the Badminton Hall in Hataitai.

According to council documents, Trails Wellington believes that the new trail will direct the majority of downhill bike traffic to this trail, easing congestion on the city side trails, helping to reduce trail conflict and improve safety issues in the wider trail network.

The trail will be fully funded and built by Trails Wellington.

The council also agreed that no further trails will be constructed on Matairangi, and instead work would focus on realignment and improvement of existing tracks to increase user experience and to reduce conflict with walkers.

Officers will be directed to reassess walking and biking trails on Matairangi, and investigate changing some existing trails to walking only. Workshops are to be held with community and cycling stakeholders. **TL**



## Mural replaced

**A** well-known Pirie Street mural is being replaced. The mural 'Give nothing to racism / We love our Muslim Whānau' featured in a collection of photographs collected by Te Papa in response to the Christchurch terror attacks in 2019.

According to Te Papa's website, "this mural was painted the night after the shootings by owner Ross Teppert's son and mates".

The current owner of the house, Chris Bagley, said the retaining wall had to be repainted following repairs, and he hoped to replace it with another mural by a local artist. **TL**



Image: Google Streetview

## Midwinter festival

**W**ellington's annual midwinter festival, Lōemis, is coming up in June. Now in its tenth year, the festival is known for its diverse use of venues across Wellington, particularly outside the CBD. Mt Victoria has been a feature location in the past, having hosted shows and workshops in the town belt, and Mt Vic Hub.

This year two events will take place at the Tararua Tramping Club, featuring Berlin-based sound artist Lou Drago, plus there will be a series of standout music shows nearby at the Hannah Playhouse.

Local artist Miranda Manasiadis is a regular contributor and advisor to the festival, and was behind one of the festival's most memorable works, Ikaros, staged in the town belt above Elizabeth Street in 2018.

For tickets and information, visit [loemis.nz](https://loemis.nz) **TL**



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# Smart seniors flock to U3A



Dr Ganesh Ahirao discusses economics at a U3A session. Photo credit: Peter Kennedy

A popular education network for retirees is continuing to grow, and offers members the chance to improve their minds as well as socialise with others. **Jane O'Loughlin** found out more.

Perhaps you have noticed the hundreds of seniors spilling out of the Embassy on a Tuesday or Friday morning at around noon, discussing economic trends, obscure science or the latest treatment for illness?

The crowds are testament to the success of the U3A or 'University of the Third Age' group in Wellington.

The group, established in Pōneke for more than 30 years, helps keep the brains of retired (or semi-retired) people stimulated, as well as providing a valuable social network for older Wellingtonians.

President Bruce Levick and newsletter editor Janet Tyson are two volunteers on the Wellington committee that keeps the organisation running.

They say it is growing strongly, and has now reached 1,450 members, largely through word-of-mouth.

For a modest annual fee of \$50, members get access to talks by a wide range of experts, including some well-known academics and professionals.

The calibre of speakers is usually high, and sometimes the topics can be unexpectedly interesting.

For example, Levick says one speaker, who was a last minute replacement, gave an 'absolutely riveting' talk about dragonflies – "people have carried on talking about that one for years."

This being Wellington, the audience tends to be

well educated and often well qualified themselves.

Tyson recalls one talk by a former ambassador to the Ukraine. "In the audience were two other former New Zealand ambassadors to the Ukraine!"

But if talks don't tickle your fancy, membership also offers access to 29 diverse interest groups including books, cryptic crosswords, handcrafts, antiques and philosophy.

For an added cost, there's also special trips and events, such as excursions to Mana Island, and a memorable trip to the Feilding stockyards.

Although some people have asked, they don't stream the talks online, preferring to get people to attend in person.

June's talks include ecological overshoot, how the New Zealand environment has been depicted in art over time, and reflections from retiring Ombudsman Sir Peter Boshier.

Certainly plenty for to keep Wellington's seniors talking. **TL**



Photo credit: Peter Kennedy



# No time to wait

With the economy flatlining, now is as good a time as any to buy or sell, argues **Anji Foster** from Lowe&Co.

**R**ight now, in Mt Victoria the range of homes for sale starts at enquiry over \$380,000 all the way through to \$4,595,000 with all price levels in between. That's reflective of the melting pot of a suburb that we are, from small starter units through to luxurious and sprawling family homes along with all the interesting individuals that reside in this range of dwellings.

Property in our neighbourhood is often experienced as a tenant during a younger carefree time in life, and then many of those ex-renters return years down the track to buy their own piece of Mt Vic real estate. The central location and kids heading to high school are given as the reason for the return by many.

But there are also a core group of locals who have been here for decades and couldn't imagine living anywhere else. I know that I am biased, but I truly don't know why you would want to live anywhere else in Te Whanganui a Tara (don't tell my clients in other suburbs I said that!).

So, it's understandable that Mount Victoria is one of the suburbs that is both highly sought after and tightly held, and that is where the friction comes in, an imbalance between supply and demand.

As mentioned in a previous edition of *The Local*, the number of homes in Mt Vic that sold over \$1.5 million in the past year was half the volume of the previous year. So far in 2025 there have been 5 sales over \$1.5 million, so it appears pickings will still be slim for buyers looking at homes in this price range in the area.

While answering how long is a piece of string might be easier than picking when the market in Wellington might show some capital growth again, it was both interesting and a little sobering to recently hear from Gareth Kiernan, economist at Infometrics, about what growth they believe can be expected in the Capital in the next five years. And the answer = none.

That's right, just like the market post GFC, when we had eight years of no capital growth, it appears that we might be in for a long wait again. We've

already had three years with no growth, and according to Infometrics we're in for another five, so it could be very similar to our post GFC market.

If homeowners have been delaying life plans for the market to show some recovery, they might need to be prepared for a long wait. Of course, as events like the GFC and COVID have shown, no one knows, even the people whose job it is to know, but if Infometrics are anywhere near accurate, there would be a strong argument to get on with your life plans rather than wait for growth. Unless you are prepared to wait another half decade.

Homeowners that I have spoken to recently about the conclusions of Infometrics have found it to be both a little depressing but also somewhat freeing to base decisions on where we are right now not what might be happening in a year or two. If you are planning to buy and sell in the same market then there is even more reason to push on, as you will potentially be selling for less than hoped but also buying at less than expected.

While the supply/demand balance remains skewed in our suburb to favour sellers, if there is any chance of a premium price it comes from there being little competing choice for buyers. So, if you have been considering a sale, and you are realistic on price, this timing is probably as seller friendly as you could hope for. **TL**

**Right now, in Mt Victoria the range of homes for sale starts at enquiry over \$380,000 all the way through to \$4,595,000 with all price levels in between.**



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# Schools bring the talent to Showquest



Students from Wellington East Girls' College were among 12 school groups from across Wellington performing to a packed audience at the St James Theatre on 22 May for Showquest 2025.

**S**howquest is a nationwide student performing arts competition. Using Showquest's six elements of art, music, dance, drama, culture, and technology, student groups take on the challenge of creating an 8-10 minute performance around a theme of their choosing.

WEGC teacher Henry Ashby said the group's performance piece, entitled Mirror Mirror, was cho-

reographed, designed and created by a group of 30 Year 10 students.

"We began choreographing, creating the story and rehearsing at the beginning of term 1 - so around 2-3 months of focused rehearsals and work creating!"

"Ākonga (students) have to create the entire performance from scratch themselves, so it is a lot of work creating, developing and executing a ten minute multimedia, dance, music and drama performance."

Wellington East Girls College gained Recognition in two categories: Dance & Drama, and Art, Dance & Music.

First place in the open section went to Scots College, second place to Kuranui College and third place to Paraparaumu College. **TL**



## Kia ora Mt. Vic!

### Let's talk about our community.

Get in touch about any local issues or if you need support. I'm here to help and would love to hear from you!

**Tamatha Paul** MP for Wellington Central  
[wellington.central@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:wellington.central@parliament.govt.nz)  
(04) 3891290

Auth Tamatha Paul, MP for Wlg Cntrl. 72 Adelaide Road, Wellington. Funded by Parliamentary Services.



# Rising gas costs lead residents to electric options

Many gas meters around Mount Victoria are becoming obsolete as residents turn to cheaper, low pollution electric appliances. Environment correspondent **Kasey McDonnell** reports.

“It was initially about price,” explains Mount Victoria resident Joanna Newman, who is disconnecting from gas. “The cost of the line charges has gone up astronomically.”

Gas and electricity line charges have risen approximately 30% in the past two years, according to Consumer NZ. Many residents only use gas for specific appliances. Switching to electric alternatives can eliminate one of their two separate lines charges.

Gas prices are rising partly because fewer people are using the gas network. As customers switch off their gas meters, the cost of maintaining gas infrastructure is spread across fewer households.

Electric options are a common choice for Kiwis switching off gas. Appliances powered by electricity pollute far less than fossil fuels and are cheaper to run.

One appliance that has gained popularity is the heat pump. Annual New Zealand heat pump sales have grown from 38,000 units in 2004 to more than 200,000 in 2024, according to Consumer NZ.

“Heat pumps are the best heating option for homes in New Zealand,” says James le Page, Product Test Manager at Consumer NZ.

Consumer NZ estimates households can save \$8,000 over a heat pump’s lifetime compared to gas heating systems from efficiency.

Newman has already installed a heat pump to replace her gas fire. “It’s been a nicer, more ambient heat” compared to her previous gas fireplace, she says.

Newman is also switching to an induction stovetop. “I tried a benchtop induction plate and was surprised to find it was quicker than gas,” she says. “I also appreciate the safety aspects... there’s no chance of accidentally catching a tea towel on fire.”



Newman acknowledges the initial investment required. “There’s definitely an upfront cost,” she says. Her home needed electrical upgrades. “It couldn’t safely support an induction cooker without improvements to the wiring. That’s been a cost, but now I know the switchboard is modern and better.”

Financial institutions offer solutions for the upfront costs. ANZ provides loans at 1% interest for low pollution home upgrades, while Westpac offers interest-free loans for five years.

These loans exist because electric appliances have environmental advantages compared to fossil fuels. Heat pump systems produce nearly 90% less carbon pollution than gas heating systems.

Going fully electric has given Newman additional options. “There’s more incentive to look at solar as an addition. It makes more sense now that I’m fully electric,” she says.

Newman has advice for other Mount Victoria residents considering the switch: “Don’t be put off by concerns about disconnection costs. People say there’s a huge cost, but my supplier only required a final reading. I’m left with the gas meter, but it doesn’t bother me.” **TL**


**Gas and electricity line charges have risen approximately 30% in the past two years, according to Consumer NZ.**

Kasey McDonnell writes a Wellington-based climate change newsletter. Read it and subscribe for free at [threesixtysix.news](https://threesixtysix.news).



# ULO ? Unidentified Local Object

Identify the mystery object – something in the Mount Victoria area – to win a \$20 voucher for your favourite local cafe.

Email your answers to [editor@the-local.co.nz](mailto:editor@the-local.co.nz). If there's more than one correct answer the winner will be selected at random. Congratulations to Barbara Rouse, who identified the May photo as a detail from the foundation stone on St Gerard's Church. 



Featuring events at the Tararua Tramping Club,  
the Hannah Playhouse and across the city.  
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### U3A in June



Talks coming up for U3A Wellington City include environmentalist Paul Bruce on why learning to live closer to nature could avoid ecological collapse, Peter Boshier reflecting on his time as Chief Ombudsman, and Dr Annette Sullivan on the history and architecture of woolsheds. Lectures are Tuesdays and Fridays from 10.30 am at the Embassy Theatre. \$5 for visitors; \$50 membership. See the full list of activities at [u3awellingtoncity.org.nz](http://u3awellingtoncity.org.nz).

### Good Vibrations sound therapy



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neurological, physiological, and biochemical level to promote healing and relaxation. Harness the healing power of sound to benefit your life. Contact Sharon Grealley at Good Vibrations Sound Therapy, The Paddington, 140b 11 Jessie Street, Te Aro, Wellington 6011, phone 021 264 8544 or email [info@goodvibrationsoundtherapy.co.nz](mailto:info@goodvibrationsoundtherapy.co.nz).

### Feldenkrais classes

Awareness through Movement classes are held Tuesdays 6-7pm, from 11 February, at the Quaker room in Moncrieff St. Relieve pain and stress, improve posture, balance and breathing, in a friendly, relaxing environment. Sue 027 466 7123, [massagewellington.nz](mailto:massagewellington.nz).

## Delivery people needed!

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**Community notices are free for local groups and not-for-profits. Get in touch if you would like to include your listing in *The Local*.**

### One Mindful Breath

One Mindful Breath explores the role of meditation and mindfulness in embracing the wonders and difficulties of our modern lives. Our practice is secular, framed by Buddhist values. We meet every Wednesday at 7.30pm at the Friends' Centre, Moncrieff St, Mount Victoria. Each session has a meditation, discussion, and a cup of tea. The first Wednesday of the month is "Beginners' Mind", great if you're new to meditation. Find out more at [onemindfulbreath.org.nz](http://onemindfulbreath.org.nz).

### Pikopiko Clyde Quay Kindergarten

Spaces Available! Pikopiko is open for 2-5 year olds, Monday to Friday, 9am-3pm during school terms. 20 hours free from 2 years old. Phone 04 385 0441 or email [pikopikoclydequay@wmkindergartens.org.nz](mailto:pikopikoclydequay@wmkindergartens.org.nz). Please see [wmkindergartens.org.nz](http://wmkindergartens.org.nz) for more information.

### Crossways Community Creche

61 Majoribanks Street, is a parent-run early learning centre for children aged 1-5. It is open Monday to Friday and offers 20 hours of state-funded ECE for over 3s. Contact us at 04 384 8201 or email [info@crosswayscreche.org.nz](mailto:info@crosswayscreche.org.nz).

### Table tennis for over 60s

Table tennis is a fantastic sport for older people as it helps with movement, brain stimulation, and muscle/bone strength. We have eight tables and play three times a week at the stadium on Alexandra Road. We want to encourage new people to join our fun social event. Only \$4 each time - no subscription. For more information contact Diana Winn, email [winnich@xtra.co.nz](mailto:winnich@xtra.co.nz) or phone 04 801 9556.

### Innermost Gardens

Gardening Sundays: 10am-12pm on the first and third Sunday of the month. Also Tuesday morning gardening every week during school term 10am-12 pm. Everyone is welcome. Contact [innermostgardens@gmail.com](mailto:innermostgardens@gmail.com) or check out our website [innermostgardens.org.nz](http://innermostgardens.org.nz) to find out more about how the gardens are run and allotment and composting opportunities.

### Quaker meeting rooms

7 Moncrieff Street has meeting rooms for regular or one-off meetings for non-profit and government agencies. Wifi and projector available. Call 04 385 4897 or email [wgtnquakers@gmail.com](mailto:wgtnquakers@gmail.com)



### The Quakers

Each Sunday at 10:30am Wellington Quakers gather for worship as part of unprogrammed Friends Meetings. Our address is 7 Moncrieff St. We welcome all. For more information email [wgtnquakers@gmail.com](mailto:wgtnquakers@gmail.com).

### Hall for hire: Tararua Tramping Club

The Tararua Tramping Club offers a hall and a room for hire for meeting, theatre productions and more. Located at 4 Moncrieff Street, Mt Victoria. For details please contact [ttc.clubrooms@ttc.org.nz](mailto:ttc.clubrooms@ttc.org.nz).

### Mt Victoria Residents Association

MVRA holds regular monthly meetings at the Mt Vic Hub on the first Thursday of the month at 5.30pm. All members welcome.

# Whoa feijoa

When life give you lemons, make lemonade. If your backyard is full of feijoas, write a column about it, says **Jane O'Loughlin**.

**F**eijoas. Some people like them, others of us think they are strange smelling, with slimy insides, and weirdly overrated.

Nevertheless, they are in abundance. Mt Victoria seems to be a micro climate where feijoas like to grow, and thus we find them in many a back yard.

In our case, our neighbour's tree hangs over our backyard and as we are too lazy to trim it, come autumn we have a profusion of feijoas on our lawn.

Indeed, when I go out to put out the washing, the back lawn is a veritable minefield of squishy feijoas, that I need to dodge or squelch my way across.

Mowing the lawn risks creating some kind of vile smoothie, unless you are prepared to go around gathering them up and putting them in piles to rot.

Feijoas – what are they good for? Eating, obviously, if you like a strange sour gritty fruit that makes your eyes water.

Faced with a massive bounty, people will try and find things to do with them – jams, chutneys, muffins, etc, but whilst they may produce palatable results, you are still left with the nagging feeling that the product would be ten times better with a properly delicious fruit like a raspberry involved.

Some jam-makers even go so far as to include feijoa skins as well, achieving the goal of no waste (commendable) but resulting in a mud-coloured jam (urgh).

To avoid this column becoming an unbalanced rant against an innocent fruit, I asked my fellow home dwellers for their thoughts. "A very versatile fruit!" said my partner who inexplicably actually likes them.

When I demanded more details of these uses, he came up with a limited list that comprised of jams, muffins, and eating 'as is' before in desperation deciding that one of their attributes was that they are aerodynamically shaped and therefore good for throwing.

This gave me an idea. Perhaps we could stage a kind of Mt Victoria version of la tomatina, where we



chuck feijoas at each other every autumn, resulting in some visitor-friendly quaint festival where we all end up happily coated in feijoa pulp. But alas the feijoa is a hard kind of fruit, with spiky bits on it. Not suited to a family friendly festival; more like a chance to seriously cause some harm. Once again the feijoa disappoints.

Feijoas seem to be quite a polarising fruit. Those oddballs in my family who like them also despise coriander, so I can't help thinking it's a genetic fault.

Speaking of its back history, I also discovered that feijoas originated in South America. This means, according to YouTube, the word comes from Brazil and is correctly pronounced in the Portuguese way 'fay-joh-a'.

I do notice that there are four vowels in feijoa, so that's worth bearing in mind if you are playing Scrabble and end up with a pile of vowels. Paired with the valuable J and F you would get a decent 16 points.

Finally I have found a use for the feijoa. **TL**

**Mt Victoria seems to be a micro climate where feijoas like to grow, and thus we find them in many a back yard.**





# Trams and tunnels in Mt Victoria

Runaway tramcar accident, Pirie Street, 1920s  
(Wellington City Archives)

Trams used to rattle through the streets of Mt Victoria, as **Joanna Newman** from the Mt Victoria Historical Society explains.

Last month, *The Local* featured an article about airport buses. They might barrel down Pirie Street more numerous and heavier than ever (along with hundreds of other buses every day), but they still use a tunnel built nearly 120 years ago for trams.

In 1907, the Kilbirnie tram tunnel – which most people would now think of as the Hataitai bus tunnel – opened.

It gave access to the eastern suburbs and, needless to say, the developers subdividing the northern part of Kilbirnie (now known as Hataitai after the Hataitai Land Company) were keen to be involved; so keen, in fact, that they paid nearly half the total cost of construction. The Mayor of Wellington turned the first sod in October 1905. Many landowners in Elizabeth, Brougham and Pirie Streets gave up land for road widening because the trams could not negotiate the tight corners of the narrow streets.

In the days of the trams, it was the motormen and conductors who kept the service running. Unfortunately, the skills of the Tramways staff were not always enough to deliver their passengers safely to their destination. In 1920, a terrible accident occurred in Pirie Street, when a runaway tram crashed into a house at the intersection with Brougham Street. The motorman had died at the wheel and two passengers died with him when the tram ran out of control. This

incident led to the installation of the device known as the “Dead Man’s Handle” on trams, to automatically cut off the power and apply the brakes if the driver was incapacitated.

In 1961, one Mt Victoria teenager, who was a keen supporter of Wellington’s Save the Trams campaign, harboured an ambition to drive a tram.

As a sixth former at Wellington East Girls’ College, she sometimes used her lunch-pass privilege to take the tram to a favourite bakery in Hataitai. One week, the driver of the tram was someone that she and a friend knew a little, so they asked the driver if they could be at the controls in the darkness of the tunnel the next day – and he agreed! When they were nearly back at the Pirie Street entrance, she went to step aside so that the driver could take over but he indicated that she could stay where she was. The tram emerged into the full light of day with a 16-year old schoolgirl in Wellington East uniform at the controls. “The enormity of what we had done, and the possible repercussions, especially for the driver, did not sink in until some time later.” The following year, in late 1962, she was a passenger on the last tram to go through the Hataitai tunnel.

Trams have now been replaced by buses, of course. The tunnel, however, is still key to Wellington’s public transport system. It also still has a strange fascination; its beautifully-framed, dark ellipsis with the pinhole of light at the end both enticing and threatening. 



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