JULY 2026

Valley Voice

Te Reo Hapori o Waimapihi – the Aro Valley Community Newsletter

Community Co-ordinator:
Ahmen Mahal 384 8499
community@arovalley.org.nz

Office hours: Weds closed; Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 10am – 2pm; Friday 12 – 4pm

Aro Valley Community Centre – 48 Aro St – managed by the Aro Valley Community Council Inc.

Contents

Octo's July DJ schedule	2
The writing on the wall	3
Night repairs of pipes	3
Research participants wanted	4
Click to enrol as an AVCC member	4
Community Centre events ahead	4
Publication info	4

Online only:

Brent rant – sewage woes	5
Know your stuff - reducing harm	5
Check out Cahoots!	6
Our centre is important	6
Conservation land NFS – Tamatha	7
Enrol to vote – key dates	7
Who are the vandals?	7
HISTORY FEATURE	
History lessons from an old photo	8
Mr Holmes' album, Mr Ward's map	9

Your contribution is welcome

Thanks to the advertisers and sponsors of Valley Voice, we can deliver four pages to your letterbox every month.

Use this QR Code to open the online version of Valley Voice or go to: http://www.arovalley.org.nz/valley-voice.html

AVCC Annual General Meeting

Do you enjoy living in our unique urban village and want to help build a fun and sustainable community? We need new committee members to share the work and the joy! Come to the AGM on 30 July.

6.30: Tea, food, chat, buy the book, make sure you are an AVCC member.

7.00: Guest speaker: Elizabeth Cox "Tracing Mr Ward's Map"

8.00: Aro Valley Community Council Annual General Meeting – election of officers and Committee; setting our future course (see below).

AVCC Management Committee report

Main points from the meeting on 10 June:

- **The Committee is reviewing the organisation's financial position, operational requirements, and long-term sustainability.** We discussed plans to conduct a review of our systems and processes and how we use our buildings to make sure we are efficient and optimise revenue and fit within the available fiscal constraints. because of this, **some key decisions will need to be made on the future of the AVCC and we encourage you to come to the AGM on 30 July to join the discussion.**
- Over the next 10 weeks local councils in the Wellington region are meeting to determine how and when they will amalgamate (as directed by Government). There may be **changes to community centre arrangements** and funding because of the amalgamation. Have your say at https://www.letstalk.wellington.govt.nz/amalgamation
- We discussed the **vehicle access** to the AVCC precinct and the need to use the bollards to restrict access and we agreed that the bollards were to be used to manage the risk to pedestrians.
- **Projects are underway** for a redesigned Valley Voice, a new AVCC website and we are reviewing our processes around community emergency management.
- The cochair and the secretary have met with Wellington City Council to discuss the **Memorandum of Understanding** that outlines the AVCC and WCC responsibilities for the precinct.
- **Derek Wallace** who was a secretary of the AVCC in the 1980s, attended the start of the meeting and handed over some papers from the early days of AVCC which will be added to the **AVCC papers in the WCC Archive**.

GARAGE PROJECT ARO ST WELLINGTON

Garage Project – the beer that made Aro Street famous – is a sponsor of the printing of Valley Voice.

Other sponsors are welcome – see page 4.

See 'Know your Stuff on page 5

Night repair of waste water pipes

Tiaki Wai is working in Aro Valley to repair over 1km of wastewater pipes to help prevent leaks and overflows. The work involves a mix of excavating and installing new pipes, and re-lining existing pipes to increase their durability and lifespan.

The pipe relining work started in Holloway Road and was notable for exceedingly poor communication, let alone consultation, with the affected residents. Some residents found the noise and other disruptions caused them considerable inconvenience.

The next section of this work is on Aro Street, between numbers 162 and 206. Because Aro Street is considered a major thoroughfare they will be doing the work at night. This avoids closing half the road in the middle of rush hour, morning and afternoon but again unfortunately locals have to put up with disruptive noise during the night.

Where: Aro Street (between 162 - 206)

When: Sunday to Thursday, **6pm–5am**

Duration: Approximately 25 nights

Further work will also be undertaken in:

- Adams Terrace
- Fairlie Terrace
- Landcross Street
- Maarama Crescent
- Upgrading one of the drinking water pipes on Aro St

Tiaki Wai says “the noisiest work will finish by 11pm, and the team will use acoustic blankets, or shielding, whenever possible throughout their shift. For most of the time, the main source of noise will be the re-lining equipment, which produces a steady hum, at a volume which doesn’t typically require ear protection.”

Learn more about the project here: https://www.tiakiwai.co.nz/.../aro-valley-wastewater...

Judy Buchanan

The writing on the wall

A memorial.

As old a tradition as the defining moments of sentience. To venerate ones ancestors. To become an ancestor, a relation. This sad occasion, this affront to the aim of life. It was life that wrote shapes on cliffside walls. Scrawled the memories of those we lost. So that those yet to be may know their names and hear of their deeds.

Whakapapa

Several hundred thousand years later, electronic obituaries fly across the night sky at the speed of data processing. A little more than a decade ago, another approach was enacted to remember a friend, a youth of the valley, a younger brother who was killed in a foolish fist fight one evening up the Kapiti coast. “Rest in peace Izak”, written in aerosolised ink, adorned one of the walls facing Aro park for 14 years.

Izak and his mates would frequent our block parties, our fairs, our break dancing workshops. They would practice their raps and listen to music in the park. And they would work on their tags as part of the growing hip hop renaissance that was happening at the time.

The valley has many walls that tell different stories, “I was here”, “This is what I see”, “Remember my name”, “Celebrate with me”, “Note my skill”, “This is who we are”, and sometimes “This is my place”. All sorts of messages woven into fancy stand up calligraphy

Concluded on page 4 >>>

VILDERS
Dorthe Kristensen

Vilders gallery presents handmade jewellery by Danish goldsmith artist Dorthe Kristensen. Silver and gold pieces with a range of semiprecious gemstones, precious gemstones and pearls.

Bring in your gold and gemstone jewellery to be recycled and upcycled for sustainable, economical, and sentimental reasons.

Friday 12pm–5pm
Saturday 11am–3pm

104 Aro St, Wellington

or by appointment

Shop online vildersgallery.co.nz

vilders@xtra.co.nz
021 615 971

@vildersgallery

Aro Valley Mini Mart
For your daily needs – Groceries,Wine and Beer.
Open to 9.30 pm
(liquor sales close 9.00 pm)

BECOME AN AVCC MEMBER ONLINE

SEE PAGE 4 FOR DETAILS.

Kia ora koutou
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 Green MP for Wgtn Central
wellington.central@parliament.govt.nz | (04) 3891290
Auth by Tamatha Paul, Green MP for WLG Central, Parliament Buildings, Wellington. **Funded by Parliamentary Services.**

See Tamatha's column on page 5

Custom Homewares

Brighten your home with locally upholstered pieces in NZ wool. Liven up your old lamps with locally made lampshades.

93a Aro St 04 972 5612
verdantdesign.co.nz
verdant

>>> *The writing on the wall – from page 3*

and exaggerated cartoon characters form a backdrop to the passing of the sun and moon, and the activities of the people.

It's an ongoing conversation. New talents challenging old, old talents correcting the new. But some things are agreed upon as sacred. Upon his unfortunate passing the name of this young man was one of those.

I have seen murals contested within hours of their erection, but for 14 years Izaks memorial remained untouched. We were told that it was listed as such and known by the Wellington City Council. Perhaps an overzealous or new member pursued their work with diligence to the point of carelessness. Perhaps, as time goes on and others pass into memory, we have not told Izak Millanta's story well enough.

His friend group are now in their 30's. All were heavily impacted by his passing. His assailant said he sought to teach a cheeky boy a lesson. Maybe with the same careless zeal that wipes the names of the fallen off of park walls.

Sometimes people will use their art to hurt others, or to sell magic beans. We are always competing for space and breath with the pressure of commerce for the sanctity of our minds and culture.

The park, like all of life, has seen lives end. There are missing faces and silent voices where once was conversation, smile, song, shouts of joy and frustration, whispers of comfort and concern. "Requiescat in pace" and let us tell the new ones about you. Those who celebrated the vast tapestry of consequence that lead them to be. Here. In the Valley. With all of us.

We are currently seeking to restore this memorial for Izak Millanta. Moe Mai Ra, Rest in peace.

Ahmen Mahal

Community Co-ordinator

Community Centre events ahead

July 2026 regular	***Monday***	**Tai Chi with Yi Ching** 8.30 – 9.30 am koha **Black book Jungle – Art book sessions** 6 – 9 pm koha
	Tuesday	**Chair Yoga with Kristin** 12 – 12.45 pm $8/$10 or koha **Community free yoga** 6 – 7 pm
	Wednesday	**Tai Chi with Yi Ching** 8.30 – 9.30 am koha **Dance 4 Us With Dance Therapy NZ** 1 – 2 pm GC **Wellington Young Actors Workshop** 4.30 – 6.30 pm **X-Práctica Tango** 7 – 9 pm fortnightly 3rd & 17th
	Thursday	**Kai Ora Food Co-op Pickup** 5 - 6 pm **Trash Planet Beat Clinic** 4.30 – 6.30 koha
	Friday	**Tai Chi with Yi Ching** 8.30 – 9.30 am koha **Community Singing With Jo Shrigley** 10:30 – 12pm $15/$100 per term
	Sunday	**Aro Valley Jazz Jam with Aro Valley Jam Band** 2 – 4 pm, 12th & 26th July – Drop in & play, dance or listen.
	See *arovalley.org.nz/* for details of each class.	
July 30th	**6.30 pm – tea, chat and check your AVCC membership** **7 pm – *Guest Presenter: Elizabeth Cox "Tracing Mr Ward's Map"*** **8 pm – Aro Valley Community Council Annual General Meeting** *– come and hear what we have been up to. Your chance to get on the Management Committee and really make a difference to your community.*	
October 15th	**7pm –** The world-famous in New Zealand, highly political, always hilarious Aro Valley **MEET THE CANDIDATES MEETING**	
November 7th	***ELECTION DAY – cast your vote in our hall***	

Ideas for other public events in the Aro Valley Community Centre are welcome, particularly if backed by organising and other resourcing. Contact Valley Voice Editor brent.efford@me.com or our Community Co-ordinator Ahmen Mahal on community@arovalley.org.nz.

Are you interested in learning English?
Visit www.dynaspeak.ac.nz for more information.

Click here or use this QR code to ensure you are an AVCC member – and get notified of Valley Voice online as soon as it is published!

Valley Voice is published on behalf of the Aro Valley Community Council Inc. This issue published on 9/7/26.

All opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the writers and not of the AVCC unless adopted at a General Meeting.

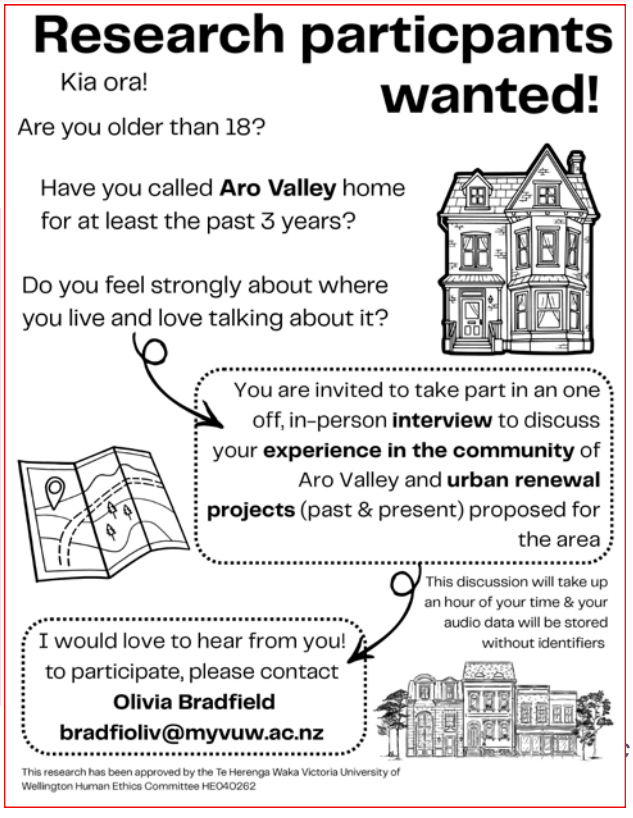
Photographs and text are by the credited authors or the Editor, Brent Efford.

Contributions wanted

***Contributions** – local personalities and stories, councillors' comments, poems, articles, letters, photos, environmental news, 'what's on', historical notes, news of events, business news, social action etc – relevant to the Aro Valley community are very welcome.*

***Advertising** - contact Janette on advertising.avcc@gmail.com*

Please email contributions, as emails or attachments in any non-proprietary format to:
*brent.efford@me.com The deadline for the August issue is **Thursday 30 July 2026.***



Brent rant ...

Sewage woes

Sleepless nights rile residents: The determination of Tiaki Wai – or its contractors – to proceed with necessary, but noisy, drainage streetworks at night is raising the hackles of sleep-deprived residents. Holloway Road resident Frances Forsyth wrote on 23 June:

> *After more than a week of excessive noise from the wastewater pipe replacement works, nerves in the Gully are decidedly frayed ...*
>
> *We ask for prior notice of areas of loud noise so we can make plans to go elsewhere but these have not eventuated. We asked why they were not employing acoustic barriers and they put up some totally ineffective cyclone fencing with padded plastic tied to it. There were large gaps under the barriers, gaps between the barriers and they were not tall enough or angled to provide a noise barrier for taller houses and were only on one side of the road. ...*
>
> *I think people from the other streets where this night work is proposed should seriously consider putting on their earmuffs and coming for a walk up the street. Works start at 5pm with trucks and machinery coming down from the depot on Raroa Road. By 6.30 the noise is starting up and between 7-10.45pm it's pretty horrendous. I don't think people understand how bad it is. It is very localised but also excessively loud. No works Friday or Saturday (except last week when the water main broke) but they start again on Sundays at 5pm.*

This whole farrago brings up two points:

- A general lack of officials' concern for 'ordinary people' during project planning, particularly the many who suffer from some form of mobility restriction . It also appears in various petty bureaucratic actions like removing the bus stop that served Boston Terrace and the Community Centre – and Aston Towers, shifting Lambton Quay bus stop seats from shelter into the rain, and similar annoyances.
- A lack of consultation with the residents' association – the Aro Valley Community Council – when the works were being planned. This is partly our fault – we have become less visible as a residents' group because of focussing so much on the Community Centre and our traditional role as the Vexatious Villagers, at least in City Council eyes, has fallen by the wayside a bit. A rebalancing set for discussion at the AGM.

The three waters of Waimapihi: the noisy sewer works in Holloway Rd, the spectacular Aro St gushers 'as seen on TV' and our historic Waimapihi Stream – the source of flooding in colonial times but long tamed into a culvert to the sea – are all a matter of interest, and, for sewage at least, very close to home for me (and even closer to my neighbour's front door step – see below). I believe we should have an AVCC general meeting to discuss:

- The history of the Waimapihi Stream and its role in draining our valley
- The role of Polhill's Gully (our old name) in Wellington's first water reticulation
- The current state of our water infrastructure
- The works needed to overcome defects and how Tiaki Wai plans to carry out these works (some of which is, of course, under way).

I have yet to get the Committee's approval for the meeting, which would have to be in August or September. **Comments welcome and 'watch this space'.**

Sewage close to home: meanwhile a sewage emergency on my doorstep – no, actually my neighbour's doorstep – is taking more of my attention. It came to notice when my neighbour texted me to advise that **our** sewage was flooding out of an inspection eye at **his** front gateway. (For reasons that maybe made sense when the sewer was installed in 1898, our sewer connection runs through the front of his property.)

So an emergency plumber was called, did a video inspection and established that the problem was a break in the old pipe which had been entered by tree roots. Fortunately the location was in the street (under the footpath), so fixing it was the utility's responsibility – then Wellington Water but now Tiaki Wai.

The break is beside a stout power pole which was put in many decades ago, and it is obvious that the process of installing the pole disturbed the sewer, made up of clay pipes with rubber collars at each join.

A case of one City Council department (Electricity, in those days) damaging the work of another (drainage). Now, of course, the City Council owns neither but must give approval for Boston Terrace to be closed so that a large truck can be brought in and parked to support the power pole while a hydro excavation truck creates a large hole that avoids the gas, water and other lines beside the pole in order to get down over a metre to the displaced sewer connection.

And while we wait for all this to be organised we try various methods to limit our sewage flow; best not documented for public consumption!

So, my apologies to all my neighbours in Boston Tce who will be inconvenienced – but it is, ultimately, the Council's fault!

Brent Efford

KnowYourStuffNZ – reducing drug-related harm in the community

New Zealand is known for being world leaders in drug harm reduction. We had the world's first Ministry-funded needle exchange programme in the 1980s, and in 2021 we became the first country in the world to have legal drug checking with KnowYourStuffNZ.

Drug checking effectively reduces the risk of accidental overdose by identifying what's in someone's substance **before** they take it. Substances that have relatively low risks associated with them like MDMA are sometimes cut with or swapped out for more potent substances that increase people's risks of being hurt.

Drug checkers provide evidence-based information that empowers people to make informed decisions. KnowYourStuffNZ has a decade of data showing that when people's substances aren't as presumed, and their substance is high risk, they'll choose not to take it. For those who still choose to take them, they are more aware of dangerous interactions and warning signs.

How it works

KnowYourStuffNZ uses FTIR spectrometry and other tests to examine a small sample of someone's substance.

When someone brings their substance to KnowYourStuffNZ for checking they'll be told what was found in their sample and given harm reduction advice based on these results. This usually includes things like dosing, risky interactions with alcohol or medications, and managing the comedown.

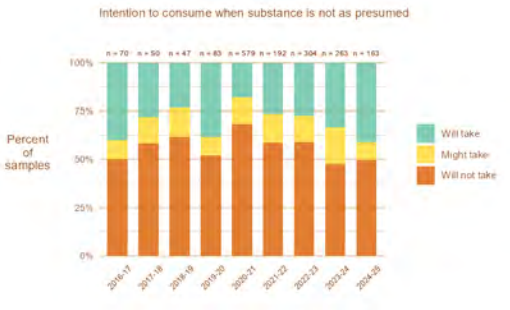
How is this legal???

The Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Act 2021 protects both drug checkers and their clients.

- **Section 35DD** states that someone can give a substance to a licensed drug checker for checking or disposal
- **Section 35DDE** states that drug checkers can't collect identifying information about people using their service.
- **Section 35DI** states that someone either using or being at a drug checking service and the testing results from their visit can't be used in either criminal or civil proceedings. That evidence is inadmissible in court.

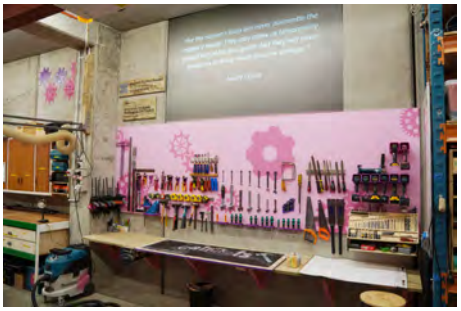
Rhiannon Davies

Wellington Regional Manager, KnowYourStuffNZ



A special place for women and gender minorities ...

Come Check out Cahoots Workshop!



The workshop your editor wishes he had!

Practical skills are powerful - they let you do that reno, tear down that wall, make your own furniture, or fix your favourite appliance, and they open up such a range of valuable, stable practical jobs! Sadly women and gender minorities have been restricted from learning these skills, through cultural standards and systemic barriers - but change is coming!

Cahoots workshop is a local makerspace, woodworking and metalworking workshop exclusively for women and gender minorities to come learn these oh-so-valuable practical skills!

Never picked up a power tool before? No worries! All skill levels are welcome, and we'll help you on your journey from wherever you are, however you like to learn. Our community is one that values respect, empowerment, sustainability, skill-sharing, feminism, queer pride, and safety.
We have a range of awesome tools, including a laser cutter, table saw, mitre saw, CNC router, metal lathe, vinyl cutter, 3D printers, MIG welders, and an industrial overlocker and sewing machine - and we've already delivered over 600 tool trainings!

The workshop is located not too far from the AVCC, in the Hopper Home, at 11 Hopper St, Mt Cook. If you're interested, come check out the workshop during our drop-in hours on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 AM to 3 PM, or better yet, book a spot in one of our classes, such as a picture framing workshop, intro to tools and working, or (yet to be posted) welding classes coming up in August!
Check the classes out at the following link: https://workshop.cahoots.nz/classes

Once you've been inducted and complete three tool trainings at Cahoots Workshop, you can become a full member which will give you access to the space 7-days from 7 AM - 10 PM. The membership is just $1 / week!

Cahoots is a charity aimed at reducing gender inequity in the trades and practical spaces, and the workshop is just one part of it!

This year we will be launching Cahoots Tradies, offering handyperson services across Wellington/Pōneke delivered by women and gender minorities.
If you'd like to support our mission, donations go such a long way.

https://workshop.cahoots.nz/support

Feel free to contact us through the website if you have any questions.

https://workshop.cahoots.nz

Your editor's old trade, not just for blokes!

Community building ...

Why our Community Centre is important

You may be aware that the funding from WCC for community centres has not increased for several years, and has reduced as a proportion of the cost of keeping them running. It seems to me WCC has lost sight of why a network of viable community centres helps keep Wellington a safe, lively city that people want to live in. Let me explain the background to why I think this.

Community centres, along with churches, sports and other clubs, etc are places where people of different backgrounds meet, share, connect and contribute in person.

Community centres, in particular, enable **local** connections to be made and maintained, usually without ability to pay being a major factor in being able to participate. It is well established that community centres result in people who are less at risk of social isolation, build trust in each other, are accepting of differences and a enjoy sense of belonging.

Plus they have a basis on which to work together in times of crisis.

Thus well-functioning, sustainable community centres are not just about doing nice things together, they act as accessible hubs for social interaction and support. This results in local communities being healthier, more trusting, more engaged with others, and more resilient.

Community centres may provide activities that support vulnerable people or those with special needs, but their primary function is not to provide expert social services. Behind the scenes of community centres, social cohesion is being built.

Social cohesion is often described as the glue that holds societies together. The term has been around a long time but discussion about it has reappeared in recent time as a way to consider reducing the impact of a number of emerging trends that have increased the isolation and separation of individuals.

These include the rise in the politics of injustice and exclusion post the pandemic, increasing distrust of politicians and formal institutions, insecurity because of rising global conflict, the increased influence of social media and the reduction in interpersonal connections as use of AI becomes more prevalent. To counter these growing trends social cohesion is more important than ever.

I hope I've given you some food for thought and as a result you'll become more involved in the Aro Valley Community Centre. As a collective, we need to show we value the community centre through increasing our involvement with it. There's lots of

options, e.g as a participant in activities, a volunteer committee member, a financial support, or organiser of an event, etc.

I know there are people in our community who are way better qualified than me to discuss and comment on these matters. It would be wonderful to receive feedback on this opinion piece. Or maybe you'll be moved to write a similar opinion piece on what's on your mind.

Judy Buchanan

From our MP ...

Conservation land = not for sale

Like hundreds of thousands of other New Zealanders, I was horrified to see the Government entertaining the idea of "disposing" parts of the conservation estate.

I watched in Parliament as the so-called Conservation Minister, Tama Potaka, used extraordinary cases of land and assets that DOC owns as rationale for selling off the most precious parts of our country's natural environment. When that didn't work, Potaka attempted to re-characterise this great sell-off attempt as a desire to give "iwi and hapū land back" – an argument that nobody was taking seriously after two and a half years of Māori being kicked around like a football.

In record speed, the Government backed down. Another embarrassing back down after just weeks ago, announcing that the controversial Fisheries Amendment Bill would not be passed during this term of government. All as a result of the overwhelming will of the people drawing the line when it comes to our conservation estate and the health of our oceans.

What I've been questioning over the last few weeks is why any government would be dumb enough to entertain these ideas that are so deeply unsettling and unpopular to the general public. Then the National Business Review put out their annual Rich List which is where I saw the commercial interests of the filthy rich fingerprinted all over the order paper of the New Zealand Parliament.

For the three governing parties of this Government, nothing is sacred. They would auction off Aoraki maunga, bottle every last drop from the Waikato river and sell it offshore, and kill every last endangered species even if it only meant prosperity for the filthy rich few. I'm sure they'd put the whole country up for sale and sell us all away to the highest bidder if they could.

But I am so proud of us. We stood up and we said no. We made it clear that Aotearoa is not for sale. We made it clear that the most beautiful parts of our country are a taonga that will be enjoyed by all for generations to come. We see, even, the potential of the parts of the conservation estate which have not had the love and care they deserve yet and may not have the same environmental values, but understand that once it's gone, it isn't coming back. So much of our original landscape has been sacrificed for the economic prosperity of our nation.

Which is why I'm proud that we held on. I'm also proud to live in one of the few cities around the world where native biodiversity is on the increase, rather than the decline. I'm grateful to live in a city that has regenerated urban ngāhere the city over, and how important it is to protect and daylight our native waterways. Think about the massive rainfall and severe weather we have had so far this year, and how much worse off we would have been had we not greened our city.

Let's continue to speak up for te taiao and let us never forget that we are not above or below nature, but that we are a very fragile part of an interdependent ecosystem worth protecting.

Tamatha Paul,

MP Wellington Central

Who are the vandals?

They came in the darkness of night, they painted the shelter grey, who were they, why did they do it, who gave the orders?

Several attempts to get answers to these questions resulted in the following information from WCC:

"The mural on the bus shelter on Aro Street in Aro Valley near the Durham Street intersection by Dhyana Beaumont (2011) – was in poor condition.

Paint had faded and was peeling off in some areas, and the shelter was a target for graffiti. Removal of graffiti can affect the mural beneath. ...

The mural that was removed was past its five-year agreement period. Murals are considered temporary public artworks that last between 5 and 20 years, depending on the site and how they are painted. Council's Creative Capital team are working to develop a more proactive approach to looking after murals, ensuring they are cared for during their agreed lifespan and when this is up, if the murals are in poor condition and beyond repair, they will be deaccessioned (painted out/removed).

It is Council's intention to ensure artists and communities impacted by murals are notified about deaccessioning. We didn't have an opportunity to do that in this instance as ***we weren't notified about when this work was going to take place. Maintenance of shelters is managed by Greater Wellington Regional Council.***

Currently Council does not have the budget to reinstate this mural (as it was) or to commission a new work at this site. If the community is interested, they may be eligible to apply for funding to support the development of a new artwork. The Creative Capital team would be happy to discuss this further if required.

The bus shelter along Aro Street near the Willis Street intersection with a mural by Xoe Hall is still in place. This shelter has not been recently painted."

Judy Buchanan

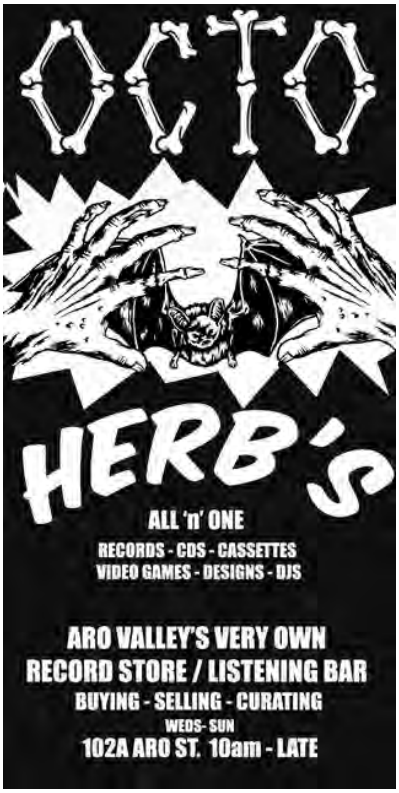
***[Editor's comment:** yes, the bus shelters should be sites for Aro Valley's expanding public artwork – and I suggest that the parts of the shelters not so painted should at least be painted the same lime green as the buses, thereby publicising their role as public transport infrastructure – anything but bureaucratic battleship grey!]*

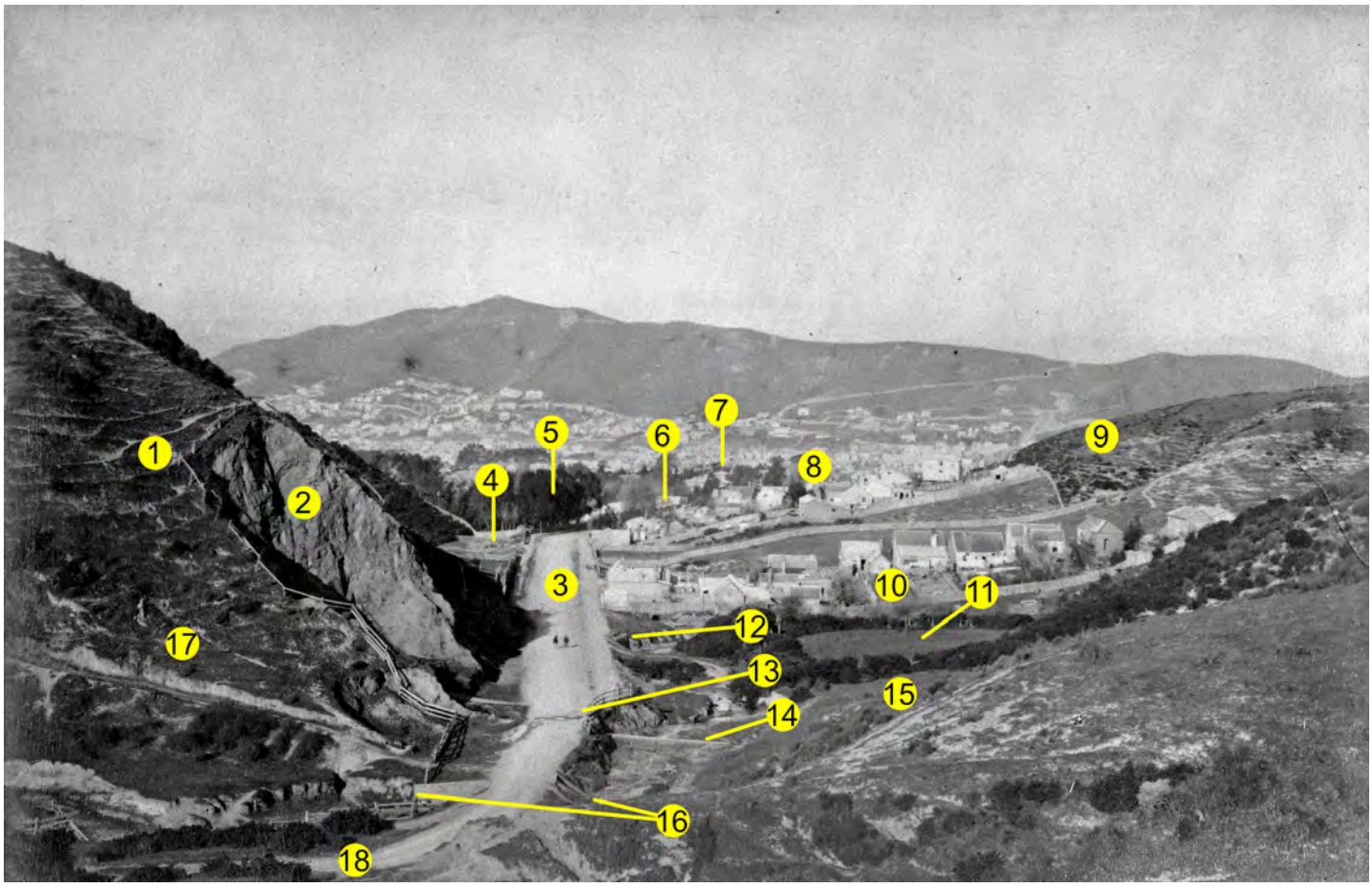
Make sure you are enrolled to vote in the 2026 General Election

Key dates

- 6 August, midnight - Last day for Maori who are already enrolled to change roll
- 4 October - Anyone who enrols after this date casts a special vote
- 21 October - Overseas voting starts
- 25 October - Last day to enrol to vote in the election
- 26 October - Advance voting starts
- 7 November - Election day, Voting places open from 9.00am to 7.00pm

For more information check out https://vote.nz/2026-general-election/about/overview





History notes feature ...

History lessons from an old photo

This 1882 photograph, captioned 'Polhill's Gully', as the Aro Valley was generally called in the 19th century, was digitised in the Alexander Turnbull Library from an album donated to the Library when it opened in 1920. The original negative has not been found, and this image has the poor resolution of a scan of a print of an old photo which itself will have deteriorated over more than a century.

Nevertheless, close examination of the photo, the oldest surviving image of upper Aro St, yields some fascinating extra information beyond what we already know from Papers Past and other sources. Except for Seed's Acre (see 5 below) and three acres around Epuni (now Hōniana Te Puni) street, all the land in the photograph was still Māori leasehold in 1882 and sparsely occupied, a situation which was about to change, as described by Elizabeth Cox in Mr Wards Map, page 265 ...

1 Apart from some small areas used by Māori for cultivation and the Moe-i-te-rā kainga, the Waimapihi catchment, like all the hills and valleys west of Te Aro, was originally covered in very dense forest (see the April 2025 Valley Voice) some of which survived until the 1870s. Dairy farming often took over cleared land, leased to a Dr Johnson, and the cattle tracks on this hill can be easily seen. (Running cattle on the land appears to have ceased by 1882, probably ready for the big land use changes about to take place – no cows can be seen in the photo.) Post and rail fencing has been placed to stop the cows falling into ...

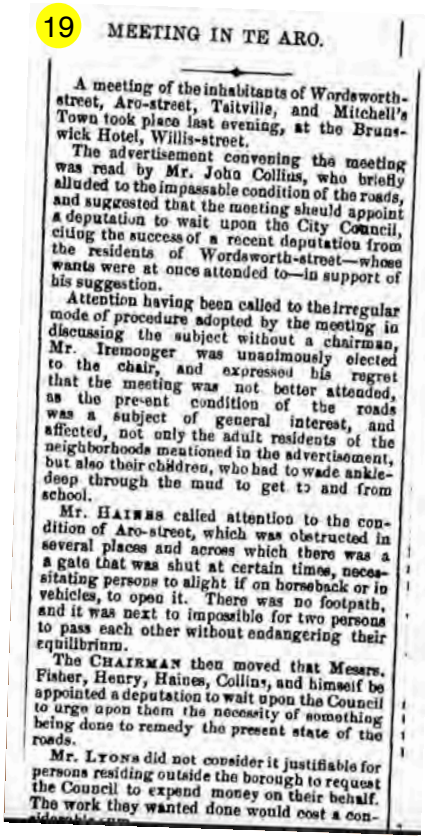
2 ... a gully formed by the removal of a large amount of spoil, which would have been used to form ...

3 Aro Street, as far west as the bend (which was drawn about 20 degrees too sharp) on the original 1840 map. The stream was some 2 – 3 metres below the finished level of Aro Street. The area where other streams joined – now the shopping centre – was quite swampy, and quite a lot of work by "pick and shovel men" filling the swamp and constructing culverts would have been necessary to create the roadway and the building sections fronting it.

4 The north side of Aro St around the corner of Devon St (not yet formed) appears to have no buildings yet, but ...

5 At the corner, where Aro St then became Wordsworth St, can be seen a large stand of mature trees – unlikely to have been planted after 1840 and therefore probably a remnant of the original forest. This was on one of the few original NZ Company town acres in the Valley which were not designated Native Reserve, and it was never subdivided. Instead it was owned by William Seed, a NZ Company employee who became the head of the Customs Department. The property was sold to the Catholic Church when his widow died in 1920 and is now our Aro Park.

6 Just visible – the roof of one of the original eight workers cottages – four on



19 MEETING IN TE ARO.

A meeting of the inhabitants of Wordsworth-street, Aro-street, Taitville, and Mitchell's Town took place last evening, at the Brunswick Hotel, Willis-street.

The advertisement convening the meeting was read by Mr. John Collins, who briefly alluded to the impassable condition of the roads, and suggested that the meeting should appoint a deputation to wait upon the City Council, citing the success of a recent deputation from the residents of Wordsworth-street—whose wants were at once attended to—in support of his suggestion.

Attention having been called to the irregular mode of procedure adopted by the meeting in discussing the subject without a chairman, Mr. Iremonger was unanimously elected to the chair, and expressed his regret that the meeting was not better attended, as the present condition of the roads was a subject of general interest, and affected, not only the adult residents of the neighborhoods mentioned in the advertisement, but also their children, who had to wade ankle-deep through the mud to get to and from school.

Mr. HAINES called attention to the condition of Aro-street, which was obstructed in several places and across which there was a gate that was shut at certain times, necessitating persons to alight if on horseback or in vehicles, to open it. There was no footpath, and it was next to impossible for two persons to pass each other without endangering their equilibrium.

The CHAIRMAN then moved that Messrs. Fisher, Henry, Haines, Collins, and himself be appointed a deputation to wait upon the Council to urge upon them the necessity of something being done to remedy the present state of the roads.

Mr. LYONS did not consider it justifiable for persons residing outside the borough to request the Council to expend money on their behalf. The work they wanted done would cost a con-

Evening Post 25/6/1879

Continued on page 7 >>>

Wordsworth (now Aro) Street and four on Palmer St with Waimapihi flowing between them – developed by Andrew Bonthorne. All the cottages still exist today.

7 The 'Italianate Tower' of the Morrah house on the corner of Aro St and Willis St, described on page 278/9 of Mr Ward's Map, is just visible. Now the site of the Lychgate funeral home.

8 Some housing development of Māori leasehold land in Wordsworth St and side streets such as Boston and Alameda terraces has started, soon to include ...

9 ... the site of the old kainga, developed by Māori as Maarama Crescent in 1890.

10 By 1882 the old town acres 17,19 and 21 which were not designated Native Reserve in 1840 and were either side of Epuni Street were already closely settled. Many of the houses survive today and are part of the heritage character of the Aro Valley.

11 In the September 2025 Valley Voice we looked at newspaper clippings referring to Mrs Leach's Paddock, open ground accessed from Epuni St and big and level enough to play cricket on – and wondered where it could possibly be in our confined and hilly valley. This appears to be it!

12 Waimapihi in its original course can be clearly seen. Here it disappears into a culvert under Aro St, to re-emerge where the Garage Project forecourt now stands.

13 A June 1879 meeting of local residents (see the cutting – **19**) complained about the state of Aro Street and a gate which obstructed passage to 'Mitchell's Town'. The gate was soon removed – very likely it was at this point.

14 Flooding, and shingle and other debris getting washed into Waimaphi during storms, was a constant problem as long as parts of the stream remained open and the City Council quarry at the top of Aro Street operated. See contemporary Evening Post cutting **21**. Screens to filter out the largest rocks and tree debris were installed and this is one of them.

15 A track, probably just used for rounding up the cattle initially, which became Durham St.

16 A brick culvert has been constructed to take Waimapihi under Aro St, but the road has only been formed over part of it. By this time the main water supply for Wellington City was piped under Aro St from the Polhill's Gully Reservoir at the hairpin bend in what was to become Raroa Rd (see Cox, p 270) and the end of Aro St was identified by Mr Ward on his map as Pipe Track Reserve. How the pipeline crossed the culvert, and how much of either might be revealed in the big water infrastructure renewal works now ahead in 2026 – remains to be discovered.

17 The removal of this hillside to fill the area on the south side of Aro St, between Epuni and Durham Streets, and presumably a culvert for the stream down Aro St, must have taken place shortly after the photo was taken. The original Mr Wards Map of 1891 (see page 10) shows the area as undeveloped but later amendments shown in Cox page 268 shows extensive housing, much of which survives today. That would have been a prodigious pick, shovel and wheelbarrow project which, alas, we have no photos of. The clipping – 20 – is typical of many advertisements for up to 500 "pick and shovel men" which appeared in the newspapers of the day.

18 Although Mitchell Town (Holloway Rd) and Taitville (Norway St) had been developed by 1882, and the reservoir and water pipeline constructed, the road access to these developments was still pretty rudimentary – the subject of complaint at that June 1879 residents' meeting.

Within a decade of the Holmes photo, the situation had completely changed. The hillside at the left of the photo had been excavated and used to fill the sunken land at the right to be level with Aro St. William Adams brought the land between Aro St and Kelburn in 1885 and set about subdividing and forming Adams Terrace, Devon St and Essex St and other streets (Cox, page 268).

Waimapihi had been further diverted into a culvert, the whole of Aro St was properly formed (though unsealed until the late 1920s), and the appearance of the area became quite similar to what still exists today.

We are excited that guest speaker Elizabeth Cox will speak to us about 'Tracing Mr Wards Map', the source of so much of the above information, at 7pm before the Annual General Meeting of the Aro Valley Community Council on 30 July. Copies of the book will be available to buy ($90).

Brent Efford

20

...l. Apply immediately Albert Hotel.

WANTED, ten good Pick and Shovel Men; wages, 8s 6d per day of eight hours, and paid for overtime. Apply to Robert Lyon, Contractor, Polhill's Gully.

WANTED, Men to contract for Road-work in small sections. Apply to Robert Lyon, Contractor, Polhill's Gully.

WANTED, good General Servants, for

Evening Post 22/11/1878

21

A correspondent, J. Collins, writes to us as follows:—"I observe that the Corporation officials are driving piles for making silt pits for the gravel, &c., that comes down the creek in Aro-street, Polhill Gully, which is found to wear out the bottom of the concrete drain. Now, sir, I appeal, through you, to the powers that be; is it not better to remedy the evil by preventing the gravel coming down than to go to the expense and trouble of trying to stop it half-way? Some people say that the new drains are not of sufficient area, and but for the culverts at Mr. Mason's and Mr. Bonthorne's, they certainly would have burst ere this and flooded our streets. It is not right that the ratepayers should be put to inconvenience and annoyance by loss of tenants through having their places under water, when the principal fault is caused by the Corporation. For instance, at the Corporation quarry the stripping is thrown into the creek, and comes down yards at a time at every freah, and also the banks of the creek and the road itself in some parts of Aro-street; and but for the culverts belonging to the said ratepayers, woe be to the expensive drains. Now, sir, I take it that if the Corporation were to put an open culvert from their drains to the quarry, and so prevent the creek from bringing down the gravel, the expense would be considerably less than making and working their silt pits, beside the advantage of preventing its banks and the roads in Aro-street from being washed away."

Evening Post 29/8/1882

...wood for lighting fires.

WANTED, for the Great Northern Railway, New South Wales, New England district, 500 men, comprising timberhewers, sleeper-getters, fencers, platelayers, and pick and shovel men. Two years' work. Highest Wages given. Splendid climate. Men make much more time per month, and all the year round, than in New Zealand. Mode of getting to works—by steamer or sailing vessel to Newcastle, thence by railway direct to site of works. Townships all along the line.—David Proudfoot, City Tramways, Dunedin. June 19, 1882. 320

WANTED KNOWN.—Watches, Clocks

NZ Times 14/7/1882
Luring a massive number of workers across the Tasman with the promise of better wages isn't a new phenomenon!

Examining Mr Holmes' Album

Essex St resident John Sullivan, retired Curatorial Services Leader at the Alexander Turnbull Library and member of the AVCC's History Group, is an expert in old photos of the Aro Valley. The collection he put together for a calendar in the 1980s can still be seen in the fish and chip shop. He considers the origins of the significant 1882 photo in the RW Holmes album ....

The photograph in question, a view looking East along Aro Street in the 1880s, is an albumen print approximately 10 x 15cm in size. An albumen print is basically a sheet of very fine paper, coated with salted egg white, sensitized with silver nitrate, exposed to sunlight in a frame with the negative, then chemically toned to prevent fading and produce its distinctive rich brown colour.

However, like most surviving albumen prints, it has faded significantly. It would probably have been made from a half-plate (4½ x 6½ inch) glass negative, now sadly lost.

It sits on page 18 of the Holmes Album, a photograph album containing 85 photographs, mostly of Wellington and environs in the 1880s, housed in the

continued on page 9 >>>

Alexander Turnbull Library[1]. It had been presented to the Historical Section of the Wellington Philosophical Society by Robert West Holmes, Engineer-in-chief of the Public Works Department and president of the Wellington Philosophical Society. The album's subsequent transfer to the Alexander Turnbull Library was probably influenced by moves in government and scientific circles to separate scientific and archival institutions, [2], and the Wellington Philosophical Society (subsequently to become the Wellington Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand) was definitely scientific. The fact that the secretary of the Historical Section, Johannes Andersen, was also the Chief Librarian of the newly founded Alexander Turnbull Library, would also have helped.

Although the album bears the name of Robert West Holmes, it is unlikely that he compiled it, or took any of the photographs. He had emigrated from England in 1871 at the age of 15, with his parents and sisters, settling in Greymouth. After training as an engineering cadet with the Public Works Department, in 1879 he moved to New Plymouth as Resident Engineer, the start of a distinguished career which included responsibility for the North Island Main Trunk Railway, and designing the Raurimu Spiral[3]. He did not settle in Wellington until he was posted here in 1899.

The compiler is much more likely to have been his father, Robert Thomas Holmes. In Greymouth he ran a brewery[4], but in 1878 he moved with his wife, Alice West, and their daughters, to Wellington, where Alice, a proficient artist, opened the Wellington School of Art, offering classes for children and adults. Following her death in 1879, her husband, a skilled engraver, ran the school with his daughters. He was active in Wellington's intellectual life, joining the Wellington Philosophical Society[5] and the Fine Arts Association of New Zealand[6]. In October 1886 he was one of three photographers to exhibit at the annual Fine Arts Association exhibition[7]. The album probably passed to his son after his death in 1914.

We do not know who took the photograph, but we can make some educated guesses. The album appears to be the result of a conscious effort to document all of Wellington and its suburbs, not just the picturesque localities. It is more likely to be the work of accomplished amateur photographers than professional, who would have signed their work and focused on more saleable views.

The most likely candidates are Robert Thomas Holmes himself and the two photographers who exhibited with him at the 1886 Fine Arts Association exhibition; William Williams and Arthur Thomas Bothamley. William Williams, a clerk with NZ Railways living with other young single men in a house at the top of Cuba Street, is represented in the album. Ten images can be matched with glass negatives in the collection of his work bequeathed to the Alexander Turnbull Library by his son Edgar[1]. Unfortunately, this image is not among them, and neither are two views of the rifle range at Polhill Gully.

Arthur Thomas Bothamley was a public servant employed by the Legislative Council, who later became Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod. He and Williams were both office-holders of the Wellington Amateur Photographic Society[1], and they shared third place in the paddling canoe race at the 1886 Anniversary Day Regatta[2]. He took many views of Wellington and boating activities around the coast. Photographs in the album of Lyall Bay and Kaiwharawhara bear a strong stylistic resemblance to his known work.

More than this we cannot say. Whoever took it deserves our gratitude for giving us this precious document.

John Sullivan

[1] Williams, William, 1858-1949. Holmes, Robert West, 1856-1936 :Album of photographs relating to Wellington. Ref: PA1-q-120. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

[2] Dominion, Volume 19, Issue 246, 1 July 1926, Page 7

[3] Peter Lowe. 'Holmes, Robert West', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, first published in 1993. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2h46/holmes-robert-west (accessed 28 June 2026)

[4] Grey River Argus, Volume XVI, Issue 2116, 21 May 1875, Page 3

[5] New Zealand Times, Volume XXXIV, Issue 5682, 16 June 1879, Page 2

[6] New Zealand Times, Volume XXXVIII, Issue 6629, 17 July 1882, Page 3

[7] New Zealand Times, Volume XLVII, Issue 7904, 13 October 1886, Page 3

[1] Evening Post, Volume XXVI, Issue 87, 10 October 1883, Page 2

[2] Evening Post, Volume XXXI, Issue 19, 25 January 1886, Page 2

Learning more about Mr Ward's map

As historian Elizabeth Cox will tell us on 30 July, surveyor and engineer Thomas Ward was first contracted by the Wellington City Council to produce a detailed map of the city, as it then was, in 1890/91.

The original 1891 map sheets 44 and 45, below, covering the area shown in Mr Holmes 1882 photograph – then the furthest west extent of Wellington City; Holloway Rd was in Melrose Borough – show the area still unsettled, except around Epuni St, and no sign of Devon or Essex streets.

But the later additions to the base map, shown on pages 266 and 267 of Elizabeth's book, show extensive housing along Aro St, Essex St and lower Devon St. The dates of these additions are not given, and probably were made piecemeal as houses were built.

As this excerpt from a report of a 1900 City Council meeting shows, Mr Ward continued to update his map into the 1900s and the sheets shown in 'Mr Ward's Map' are probably the final result of this updating.

meter for the water-service at the Terrace Gaol may be dispensed with. 5. That the arrangement formerly existing with Mr. Thomas Ward with respect to the City Map be renewed for three years at the same rate of payment, £50 per annum. (Note.—Under this arrangement Mr. Ward has to correct the City Map every six months, filling in all particulars as to new buildings erected during such period.) 6. That the amount on the City Improvements Loan schedule to

Evening Post 16/11/1900