

SAVE THE BASIN RESERVE

NO FLYOVER

[www.savethebasin.org.nz](http://www.savethebasin.org.nz)

[stoptheflyover@gmail.com](mailto:stoptheflyover@gmail.com)

## Basin Reserve Heritage

### Introduction

The Basin Reserve is one of Wellington's most significant reserves and recreation areas. It is registered as an 'Historic Area' by the NZ Historic Places Trust – the first sports ground in New Zealand to receive this. All parts, including the Museum Stand (Pavilion), R.A. Vance Stand, Groundman's Shed, playing oval and picket fence, Reid and Dempster Gates, former Midland St Pats Cricket Clubrooms, the main fence, William Wakefield Fountain, toilets, scoreboard, play area, three light towers and the bank, are included in the registration.



In addition, the Pavilion has a Category 2 registration.

### Earliest days

The area occupied by the Basin Reserve was once a lagoon connected to the harbour by a stream, bordered by swamp. It was called the Basin by William Mein Smith, the Surveyor General in 1840, because he envisaged that, as the settlement grew, the stream could be widened and barges could be drawn up to a Basin created there. From surrounding warehouses, goods would be efficiently distributed to the city and Newtown. Mein Smith's plans for a canal and dock were put paid to by a very large earthquake in 1855. At 8.2 on the richter scale, it raised Te Aro Flat 5 feet so the lagoon became a mere swamp.

### Gift to the people of Wellington

The citizens of Wellington own the Basin Reserve. The land was first granted by the Crown in 1861 "in trust for the purposes of public utility to the Town of Wellington and its inhabitants".

A new Deed in 1884 specified that the Basin Reserve was conveyed to "The Mayor Councillors and Citizens of the City of Wellington upon trust to permit the same to be for ever used for the purposes of a Cricket and Recreation Ground by the Inhabitants . . . . but so nevertheless that the Council shall not permit or suffer any thoroughfare to be established across or over any part of the said premises".

In 2005 the Basin Reserve came under the administration of a new Trust Deed but The Council continues to hold it "in its capacity as trustee of the 1884 Deed". The land granted is also more extensive than the area now fenced as The Basin Reserve.

## Cricket

There was very little flat ground in the settlement of Wellington and no provision in for recreation areas. In 1857 some influential citizens succeeded in getting the Basin area set aside as a public park. In 1863 prisoners from the nearby Mt Cook barracks began work flattening and draining the Basin.

In 1866 it formally became the home of Wellington cricket. The first game of was played there in 1868. By the 1900's, the ground had been transformed into an international sports field. Thousands attended events there, especially cricket. The first test was played in 1930, between England and New Zealand, and with this the Basin Reserve became the world's 19<sup>th</sup> test venue.

## Other sports and events

Before Newtown Park and Rugby League Park, the Basin Reserve was THE sports venue in Wellington – rugby, soccer, athletics, marching, boxing. It was also a popular recreational area - in the early 1900's it was a favourite place for promenading and band concerts on a Sunday.

The Basin Reserve has also hosted many events over the years. Highlights include:

- 1879 In NZ's first floodlit sports event, a game of soccer was played under lights at night between the gentlemen of Te Aro and Thorndon.
- 1890 NZ's Jubilee celebrations. The Basin was the focal point with sports, amusements and food for the entire population of Wellington.
- 1908 NZ's first Olympic medalist won the one-mile walk National Championships before winning bronze at the London Olympics.
- 1908 The first Dominion Day celebration, with prime minister Joseph Ward and other dignitaries addressing a huge crowd.
- 1934 Archbishop Redwood's Diamond Jubilee, culminating in mass in the Basin Reserve attended by 25,000
- 1945 VE Day celebrations. And during World War II air raid shelters were dug in the northwest corner.

## Landmarks in the Basin Reserve

The Pavilion ('Museum Stand') – built 1924

Vance Stand – built 1978 and named after Rob Vance, the driving force behind a major refurbishment of the Basin Reserve completed in 1980. He played 44 games for Wellington between 1949 and 1962 and became involved

in administration while still a leading player. He was also a well-known businessman, a partner in the menswear shop Vance Vivian.

J.R. Reid Gate - named after John Reid, a special hero of the Basin Reserve for nearly two decades (1948-1965). The magnetic Reid played 44 first class matches here and was 191 not out for Wellington in 1959. He was an accomplished bowler, fieldsman, captain, coach, selector and referee.

C.S. Dempster Gate - named after Charles 'Stewie' Dempster, who made his first-class début for Wellington in 1921-22. New Zealand was awarded test status for the 1929-30 series against the MCC and he scored the country's first test century in the second test in the Basin Reserve. His stand with Jack Mills remains New Zealand's test opening record against England.

Groundsman's cottage - built c.1890

William Wakefield Memorial – erected in 1882, a monument to Colonel William Wakefield, regarded as the first leader of the Wellington settlement, who arrived in 1839. When the settlers formed a 'council of colonists' in 1840, he became its president.

## Threats to the Basin Reserve

Over the years, the Basin Reserve has been greatly reduced in size, but it has also faced off many other threats to its existence.

In 1897, with a view to continuing Kent and Cambridge Terraces through to Adelaide Road, a councillor moved that the Corporation be instructed to find out how much sections on the outer edge of the Basin Reserve could be sold or leased for. The Father of Wellington, John Plimmer, called this "greedy vandalism" and there was a massive public campaign against the move.

In 1904, the Council wanted to put tram tracks straight through the Basin. The matter was put before parliament in 1915, debated for three days and finally refused by the House of Representatives.

Then, in 1961, Council discussed selling the Basin Reserve to solve traffic problems. The Evening Post on 20 April 1961 attacked this as "selling the city's birthright".

J. P. Firth, the famous headmaster of nearby Wellington College, was a passionate supporter of the Basin Reserve and cricket. In response to the Mayor's comments that it cost the city £2,000 a year in wear and tear around the corners of the Basin Reserve he stated: "If that is all it costs to preserve this central ground for the citizens of Wellington, then it is cheap at the price."

## Home of Compassion Crèche, Buckle Street

On the northern edge of the road across from the Basin Reserve is a distinctive, solid little building designed by well-known architect John Swan and built in 1915.

It once housed a crèche run by Suzanne Aubert's Sisters of Compassion. Of such importance is Mother Aubert to the Catholic Church of New Zealand that they are seeking her canonisation by Rome. If successful, she will be New Zealand's first saint.



Mother Mary Joseph (Suzanne) Aubert arrived in Wellington in January 1899 to set up work at Buckle Street. Medical priests in Wellington had for some time been asking for her help in working with the sick poor. Mother Aubert arrived from Wanganui with three sisters and they occupied a small cottage next to St Joseph's on Buckle Street. By the end of 1900, half the Sisters of Compassion were based in Wellington. To feed the sick poor, the sisters went begging for food, pushing large wicker hampers on wheels, like a cross between a wheel barrow and a pram.

A year after Mother Aubert arrived in Buckle Street, she bought a property there and opened the St Joseph's Home for Incurables. It soon expanded to take over 30 patients. Nobody else cared for such people in New Zealand at the time and it was the first home of its kind. From 1901, the Home began to receive day clientele to meet the needs of largely unemployed men; 80-90 men a day came to Buckle St for hot soup served from the kitchen, and to receive food and clothing parcels. By 1903 the Home sheltered crippled and disabled children as well as the incurable adult patients.

That same year, she opened the first crèche in New Zealand. It was a 'daylight home for babies', established for poor children so their parents could work. The children were cleanly and newly clothed on arrival, fed and cared for from 7.00 am to 5.00 pm, for a charge of only a few pence to cover milk.

In 1915, the Sisters rebuilt the crèche in its current form and improved the routine of childrearing, standardising it under the Plunket system – the first institution in Wellington to do so. The crèche operated until 1996.

Like many of the properties around the Basin Reserve, the crèche building is now owned by the New Zealand Transport Agency. It is soon to be moved from its original site to make way for roading materials.