

# Peeping into our Past 2000

← 2000... 1990... 1980... 1970... 1960... 1950... 1940... 1930... 1920... 1910... 1900... 1890... 1880... →

Travel back through the last two centuries with local historian, Arthur Fryer

## Band rotunda became an observatory

"MY father joined the Hawera Band in the 1920s and he didn't ever speak of playing in the rotunda at King Edward Park," said Bill Croucher, a lifelong member of the Hawera Band.

The band rotunda in King Edward Park was a project funded by the borough council and the government to commemorate the accession of King George the Fifth on 22 of July 1911.

John Duffill, newly arrived in Hawera, was responsible for designing a combination band rotunda and kiosk that would allow the bandmen to sit high above the gardens and their audience, while underneath afternoon tea was prepared and served.

The idea was grand, Sunday strollers would be entertained by strains of popular airs wafting down to them.

Alas the reality was

quite different. It is easy to imagine the difficulties bandmen would have had in a light Hawera wind when their music stands blew down, each one knocking over its neighbour.

Beneath the musician's feet in the confines of the kiosk the sound of a rousing march such as 'Victoria' would have deafened the servers of tea.

Until 1952 the building was abandoned by band concerts and the orb shaped roof was merely an interesting part of the park skyline.

However, as a result of a successful adult education series of lectures by local astronomer G M Townsend, those taking part decided to reactivate the Hawera Astronomical Society that had flourished for a number of years after 1926.

Mr N R Burrell said he would present a five

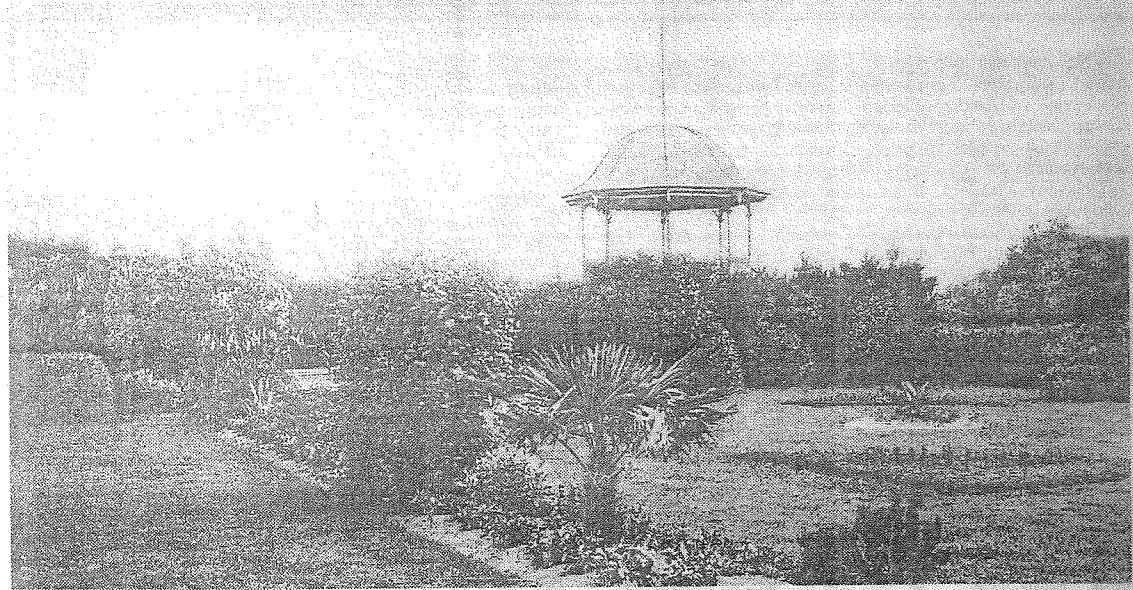
inch Cooke refractor telescope and an equatorial mounting which had belonged to his father A W Burrell, a pioneer astronomer of Stratford.

In his time Burrell senior had been highly regarded in the New Zealand astronomical world.

To house this equipment an all-weather dome had to be constructed and set up at a place not over shadowed by trees or buildings.

The old rotunda in King Edward Park was an excellent suggestion and the Hawera Borough Council supported the scheme of converting the building to an observatory with the proviso that members of the public could have access on certain occasions.

Over a period of nine months, local engineering tradesmen at the workshops of the



•A MUIR and Moodie Postcard dated 1915, made shortly after the building of the commemorative kiosk and rotunda in King Edward Park.

National Dairy Association and Burrell and Wood worked on the project to make a dome 12 foot six inches across.

Specialised shaping of the galvanised iron was done by another firm Skerton and Lines.

The building in the park was modified to make a lecture room and floor for the dome and on Saturday morn-

ing of April 24 1953 at quarter to nine 15 men shifted the 8 cwt construction on to a truck to take it to the park gates.

There the dome was lifted over the wrought-iron gates that were too narrow to allow it through.

With the aid of a break-down truck from the Farmers Co-op

garage the dome was lifted into position, only needing to be fitted to the trunnions and the shutter made to work easily so that the telescope would be able to view any part of the sky.

Since May 1953 thousands of people have used the five inch Cooke telescope and a good many of them have caught the enthu-

siasm to develop their understanding of astronomy.

Hawera is one of a small number of communities with an Astronomical Society and a telescope. Every now and then there are special programmes at the observatory to show interested people a remarkable piece of Hawera's heritage.