

Ancient but Elegant : Pukekura's Band Rotunda

Ron Lambert

£ 1 REWARD

I WILL pay the above Reward to anyone who will give information that will lead to the discovery of the person who wilfully damaged the Concrete Steps [of the band rotunda] now in the course of construction in the Recreation Grounds.

H. HOOKER

(Taranaki Herald, 2 April 1887)

A spate of vandalism at the park and sites around the district has the council scrambling to find a solution to stop further destruction. At the end of October an arsonist caused \$55,000 in damage to the children's playground after a \$560,000 makeover, the park's band rotunda has been attacked twice and displays being set up for the Festival of Lights have also been damaged.

(Taranaki Daily News, 12 Dec 2013)

Vandalism in Pukekura Park, it appears, is not restricted to the present!

Pukekura Park's lakeside band stand or rotunda would seem to be the oldest remaining in New Zealand and has a Historic Places Trust Category II classification. Since 1891, when it was completed, the elegant structure has been a key attraction for the park's visitors.

It was late in 1885 when the Recreation Grounds Board decided to build a band rotunda in the park. They intended to approach local architects "to supply gratuitously a plan capable of extension when funds permit." *(Taranaki Herald, 17 Nov 1885)*

Architect James Sanderson, presumably 'gratuitously', supplied plans which the Board then forwarded to the well-known Scott Brother's Atlas Foundry in Christchurch for an estimate for the decorative ironwork and pillars. *(Taranaki Herald, 17 Nov 1885)* Their reply, reported in June the following year, was not received with delight by

the cash-strapped Board who then asked if the iron-work could be supplied in instalments. *(Taranaki Herald, 12 June 1886)*. The Christchurch firm may not have agreed to the 'drip-feed' but they certainly did eventually supply the order - "Scott Brothers, Ch.Ch." is cast into each one of the eight pillars.

Serious fund-raising got under way in September 1886 with a 'Plain and Fancy Dress Ball' hosted by the Foresters' Lodge and held in the Alexandra Hall - the predecessor of TSB Showplace. This was followed by a dazzling fireworks display around the lake which attracted over 1500 people and £10 10s of the proceeds was contributed to the cause. *(Taranaki Herald, 22 Nov 1886)*

Finally in 1887 the earthworks for the band rotunda were completed and Henry Hooker was contracted to construct the octagonal concrete base. *(Taranaki Herald, 1 March 1887)* and one of the first of many instances of vandalism in the park was recorded. The concrete base "has suffered to a considerable extent by having large portions of the unset mass stamped away." *(Taranaki Herald, 2 April 1887)* Hooker offered a reward of £1 for the 'discovery' of the perpetrators but it appears to have been unsuccessful (or unreported).

Lack of money constantly beset the Recreation Grounds Board but fund-raising continued through the following three years with a 'Fancy Fair' (1888) an 'Entertainment' (1889) and a 'Bazaar' (1890).

The Fancy Fair - arranged by the members of the Ladies Sewing

Amusements,

**FORESTERS'
PLAIN AND FANCY
DRESS BALL!**

*In Aid of the Band Rotunda in the
Recreation Grounds.*

**ALEXANDRA HALL,
Thursday, Sept. 2nd**

UNDER the patronage of JAS. PAUL,
Esq. (Mayor), O. SAMUEL, Esq.
M.H.R., COLONEL STAPP, and MAJOR ELLIS

COMMITTEE : Bros. Dr O'Carroll, Dr Gibbs,
J. B. Boy, A. H. Holmes, S. W. Jackson,
Hooper, Rober's, Goldwater, Davis, Tre-
main, Ramney, Arnold, Tribe, & F. Stohr.

Double Tickets, 7s. 6d.; Single Tickets, 5s.
Extra Lady, 3s. 6d.

Dancing to commence at 8 p.m.

F. STOHR,
CON. SEC.

a301 h sp2

Advertisement for the
Plain & Fancy Dress Ball
Taranaki Herald 27 Aug 1886

From the Archives cont'd

Committee - was replete with goods stalls, a refreshment booth and with two brass bands to supply music. There were also Punch and Judy shows, Aunt Sally, a greasy pole, a bicycle obstacle race and children's races among the host of attractions. (*Taranaki Herald*, 21 March 1888)

The Entertainment, or concert, and Bazaar were held in the Alexandra Hall with the bazaar raising a very creditable £70 for the project. By the end of 1890 the Board had begged, borrowed or otherwise raised sufficient cash to be able to finish the rotunda.

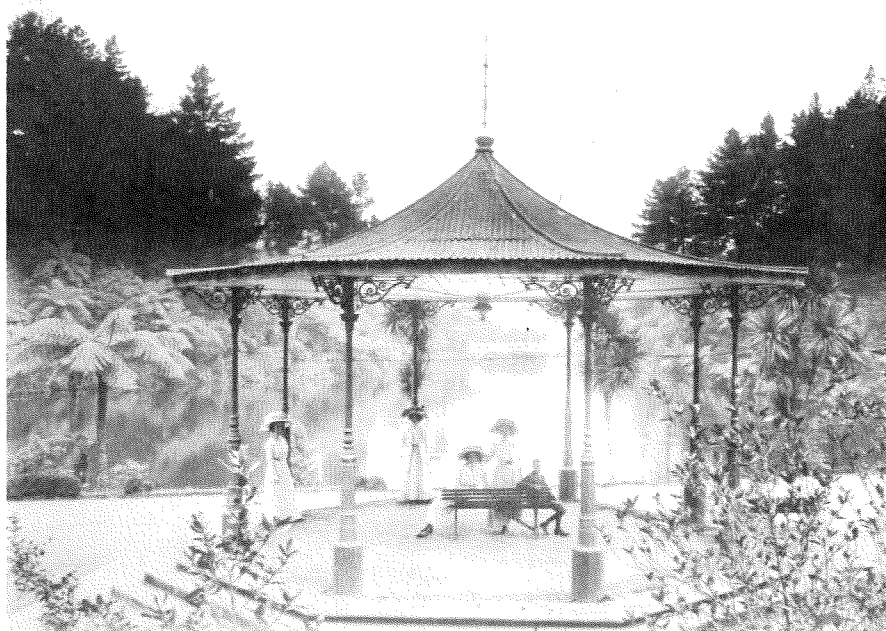
Arthur Mofflin - variously described as an architect or cabinetmaker - appears to have taken over the project from James Sanderson. "The band rotunda in the Recreation Ground, for the erection of which Mr Mofflin is now calling tenders, will be a handsome structure judging by the plans..." (*Taranaki Herald*, 22 Dec 1890) A month or so later the *Herald* reported that the 'iron framing ...was landed from the *Takapuna* on Saturday." (*Taranaki Herald*, 16 Feb 1891) but the trials and tribulations of the 'Rec' Board were not yet over! When inspected, the ironwork was not to their specifications, so the Board was able to negotiate a very-welcome reduction in price.

By that stage the Board would have been panicking. They desperately wanted the rotunda to be available for the brass bands playing at the grand fireworks display planned for the 50th Jubilee celebrations on Taranaki Anniversary Day. And so it was that the *Herald* was able to record that "The band rotunda, which was completed the other day, was used by the bands, who found it a great convenience." (*Taranaki Herald*, 1 April 1891)

In 2013 Pukekura's band rotunda underwent a major restoration with the decorative finial being repaired and replaced, the roof and pillars cleaned and repainted, the concrete base re-plastered and electrical fittings renewed. During the refurbishment the iron pillars were found to be filled with charcoal powder to stop them rusting. (C. Connolly, pers. comm. 2014)

The toadstool-topped rotunda also has had its original 1890s red and white candy-striped colour scheme restored - a format that has not always been used in the past.

New Zealand's oldest band rotunda may have had a chequered beginning but it has subsequently been an integral part of the setting of the area around the tea house and lower lake.



The Band Rotunda about 1908
(With Mary, Ida and Wilfred Blanchett, New Plymouth, also
Rene and Grace Donald of Dunedin.)
PHO2002-883 Puke Ariki Collection

The Band Rotunda 2014
Twilight Fair in January

