

Book charts steps' eventful past

A thanksgiving service for the survivors of an immigrant vessel shipwrecked on Farewell Spit in 1877, the awarding of a Victoria Cross during World War II to a soldier from Richmond, and verbal and physical attacks on a Riverside Community conscientious objector all have one thing in common – Nelson City's landmark Church Steps.

The granite Cawthron Steps celebrated the centennial of their opening late last month and a new book highlights some of the many gatherings of celebration, thanksgiving and commemoration held on them and their wooden predecessors, which were built in 1858, up to the present day.

Meet You At The Church Steps – A Social History Of A Nelson Landmark has been written by local history writer Karen Stade. The rich photographic collections of the Nelson Provincial Museum, the *Nelson Mail* and private collectors, form the core of the book, partnered with newspaper reportage of the events which have played out with the steps as their backdrop.

"In the city, the steps have always been a natural gathering point for the wider province," Karen said. "People travelled long distances to get to the steps for particular events, including patriotic fundraisers during World War I, the province's 50th and 100th jubilees, the visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 1954, and to protest at the planned closure of the region's railway."

Three stories in particular stood out for Tasman.

In 1877 the immigrant ship *Queen Bee* was wrecked on Farewell Spit in bad weather and its crew and passengers cast to the winds on various lifeboats and a raft. All except one crew member survived the experience but it took rescue vessels several days to find everyone. One boat made it safely to Motueka and raised the alarm, while another was found at



Gathering steps: Returning thanks to those who had been instrumental in rescuing the survivors of the *Queen Bee*.

Photo: NELSON PROVINCIAL MUSEUM

Awaroa. However, several drifted across Golden and Tasman Bays before making landfall on D'Urville Island. A thanksgiving service was held at the Church Steps a few days later to thank the rescuers.

In 1942 a Victoria Cross was awarded on the Church Steps for valour in the Crete Campaign of May 1941. Karen says Sergeant Clive Hulme lived in Richmond with his wife and young children, including Denny, a future champion Formula One racing driver.

Hulme senior was welcomed home a hero when he returned to the province later that year. During the province's centennial celebrations in February the following year, he was officially awarded the VC on the steps by the Governor General. "Stories of daring, outstanding courage and coolness, and a sheer indifference to danger, were told of Hulme's action on Crete," Karen said.

Just four years after the end of World War II, feelings ran high when pacifists held public demon-

strations on the Church Steps against proposed peacetime compulsory military training. Large crowds gathered at the steps to jeer at the anti-conscription activists, who included AC (Archibald) Barrington, a member of the largely Methodist Christian Pacifist community at Riverside in Lower Moutere.

Barrington and the other pacifists were pelted with fruit and eggs, drowned out by singing, and forcibly marched down Trafalgar St on a number of occasions by

large angry crowds, which included many returned servicemen.

The pacifists were taken into protective police custody and on another occasion, arrested and later convicted for obstructing police.

■ *Meet You At The Church Steps* has been supported by the Cawthron Trust, the Canterbury Community Trust and the City of Nelson Civic Trust. It is available for sale at the museum and bookstores.

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