



Heritage Trail



# Aro Valley

## Cottages, Crannies & Curiosities



**ABSOLUTELY  
POSIT/VELY  
WELLINGTON**

Tumeke Peneke  
Wellington City Council

# Aro Valley

The trail will take approximately 2 hours to walk at an easy pace. It is mostly accessible by wheelchair but there are steps near the beginning of the Trail in Central Park which can be avoided by restarting the Trail at the corner of Aro and Ohiro Roads.

## Main Features of the Trail

Colonial Cottage Museum (Nairn St)

Small wooden buildings  
and workers cottages

Mitchelltown

Holloway Rd

Front Cover Photo: Raroa Road, Aro Street and Holloway Road meet at the top of Aro Valley, c.1900. This part of the valley has always been relatively free of development.

## Acknowledgments

Council gratefully acknowledges the significant contribution made by the Heritage Trails Committee: Oroya Day, Sallie Hill, Ken Scadden and Con Flinkenberg.

Historical research and author: Michael Kelly and Tony Wilson

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WCC as a member of the Heritage Trail Foundation

Brochures for other Council walks are available at the Visitor Information Office 101 Wakefield Street.

## Key

[H2],

Historic Place Category I



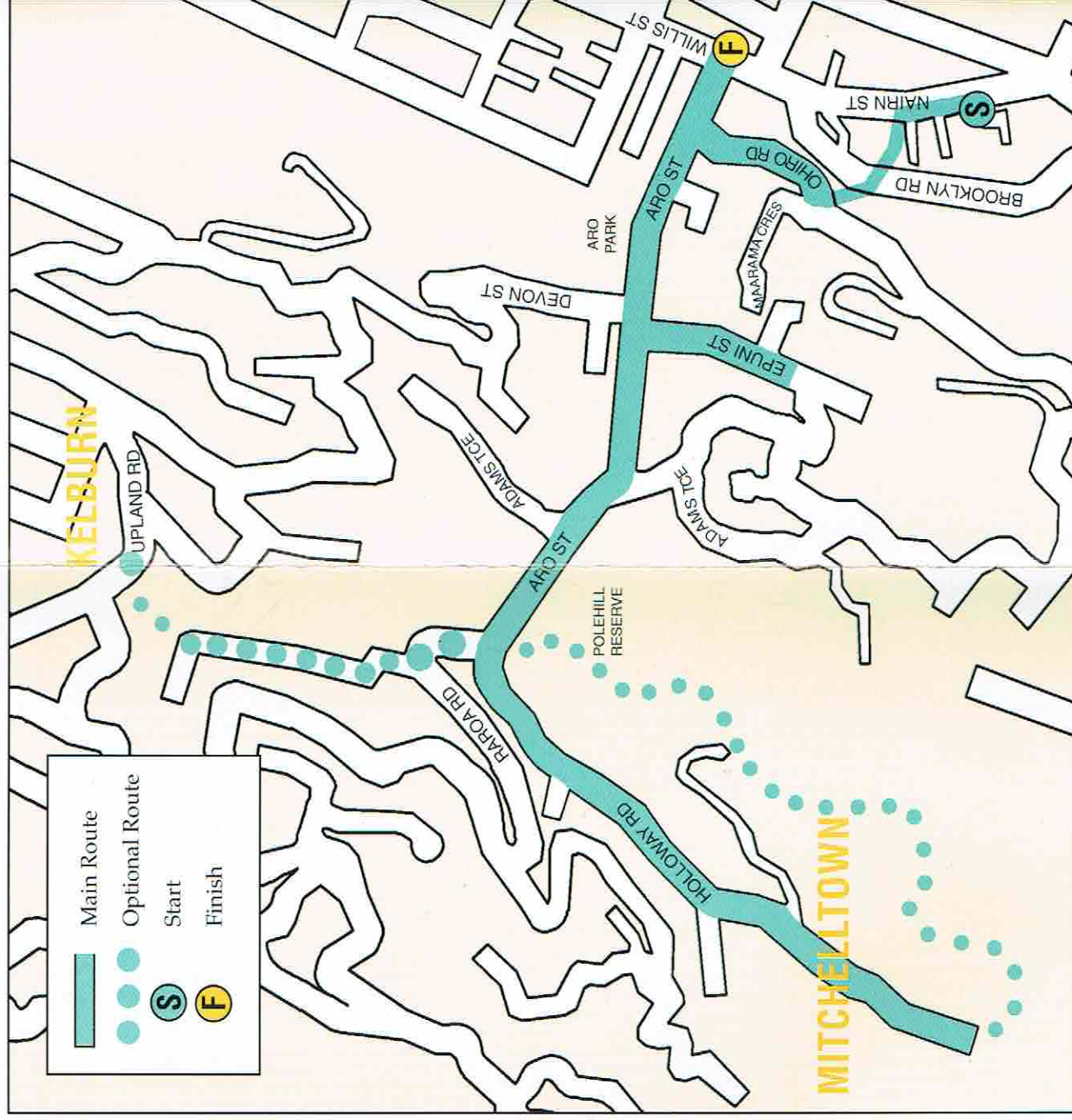
[H2],

Historic Place Category II





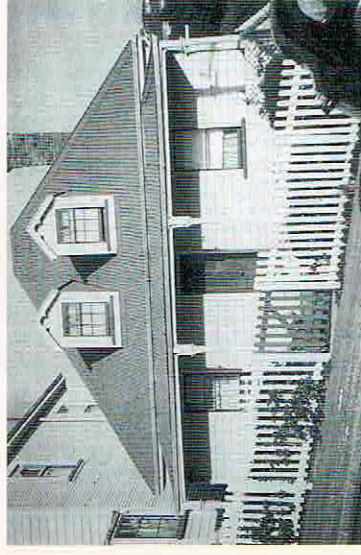
## ARO VALLEY Heritage Trail



## The Trail

### (1) 68 Nairn Street, Colonial Cottage Museum

This street, like Willis Street, was named after a director of the New Zealand Company, in this case Captain Alexander Nairn. Acquired by the Wellington City Council in 1977, Colonial Cottage is now a museum for the area. It is maintained by the Colonial Cottage Museum Society.



The Colonial Cottage Museum... In the late 1950s when it was still a private house (Colonial Cottage Museum Society)

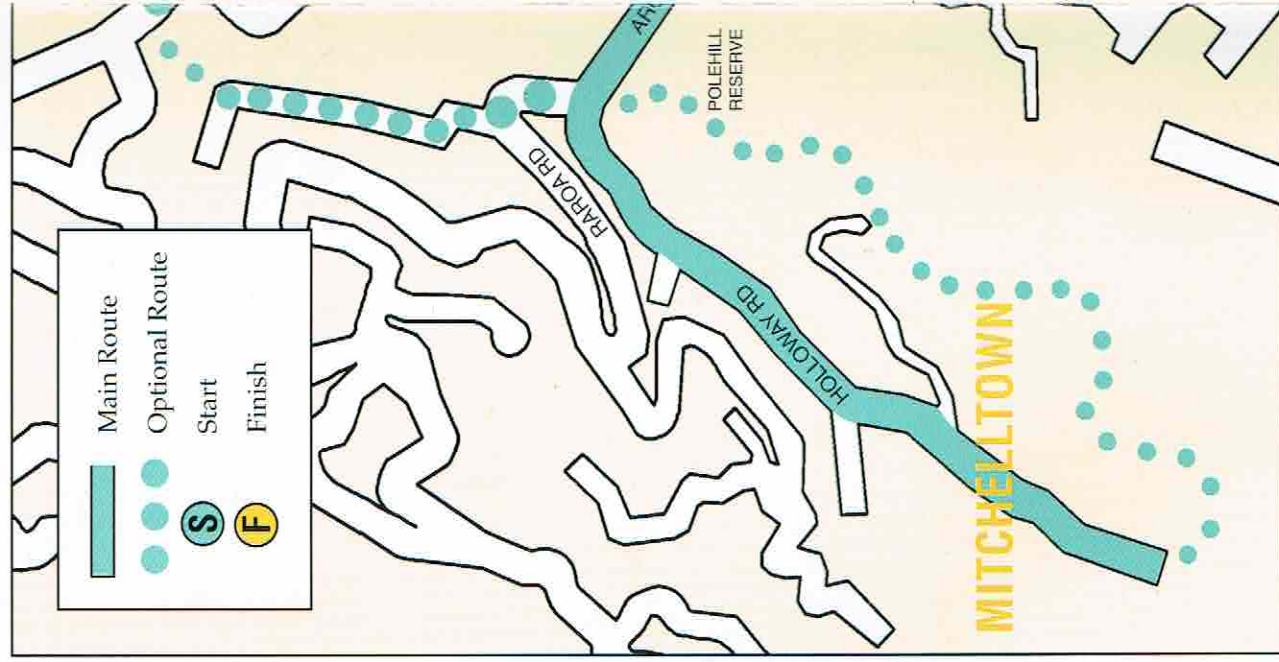
Home to the Wallis family from about 1858 to 1977, this Colonial Georgian cottage has been restored to its 1870s appearance. Its builder was William Wallis, a carpenter and timber merchant, with experience and capital earned building hospitals and barracks in the Crimean war. He bought land at Nairn Street after arriving with his wife in September 1857 and raised a large family in the house.

Originally the house was a simple four-roomed box with a steeply pitched dormer roof. From c.1870 a front verandah, rear kitchen, toilet and wash house were added. The house, including the verandah post brackets, has a simplicity typical of late Georgian style townhouses. Most framing has mortice and tenon joints.

Allow 20 minutes to view the interior and exhibits.



## ARO VALLEY Heritage Trail



> From here walk to the Aro Valley via Central Park. First, turn left at the concrete path next to 36-46 Nairn Street. This winds down to the Etonga Flats carpark across which you can reach Brooklyn Road.

Pause and look back to Nairn Street. The area you have come through was a market garden up to the early 1880s. By the 1890s developers had built 45 houses, numerous sheds and an access road (Franklin Avenue).

Brooklyn Road was originally a narrow tram track constructed in 1904-5.



The Brooklyn Hill tram accident, 4 May 1907, the day after a runaway tram hurtled backwards over the line and killed one woman. This photograph well illustrates how the Brooklyn Hill route was originally nothing more than a slender tram formation. (Alexander Turnbull Library)

> Cross the road to the ornamental wrought iron gate and stiles at the entrance to Central Park.

Central Park was established in 1913 from what was initially Town Belt land, later native reserve and general leasehold. The gates were presented in 1920 by the then Mayor, J.P. Luke, who came from a family of iron founders and engineers.

The park occupies a steep gully stretching up the hill to your left.

> Follow the path and steps to the right through bush up to Ohiro Road opposite Muarara Crescent.

Until the 1840s Ohiro Road was a site of Maori cultivation. Part of the gardens was included in Town Acres 43 and 49, granted to Maori chief Te Ropiha Moturoa (1790-1874), a chief at Pipitea Pa, Thorndon. It later passed into Pakeha ownership.

In 1847 Ohiro country section 11 (some 100 acres), stretching west from Ohiro Road, was purchased by John Fitchett, who established his Ohiro dairy farm there. He had arrived in 1842 with his wife, Louise and five of their (eventual) seven children. The Fitchett family farm supplied milk to Wellington until the 1950s. One son, a blacksmith and wheelwright, set up business on leased Maori land at the corner of Ohiro Road and Aro (then Wordsworth) Street in the early 1860s.

> Turn right down Ohiro Road

Houses worth a closer look as you walk down this street are: 36, a typical 1890 classically inspired house with an unusual, elliptically carved roof to the bay window and a crown of cast-iron decoration; 26/24 has Gothic-inspired decoration, a medieval Gothic bargeboard typical of those found on English country cottages of the 1800s.

> Continue down to Aro Street.

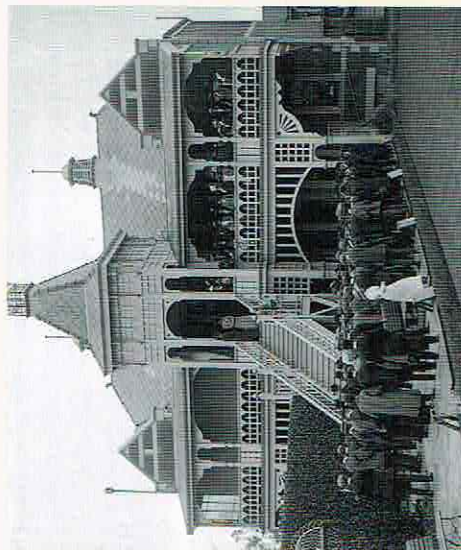
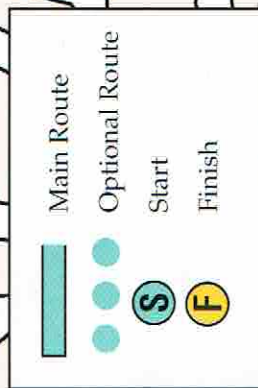
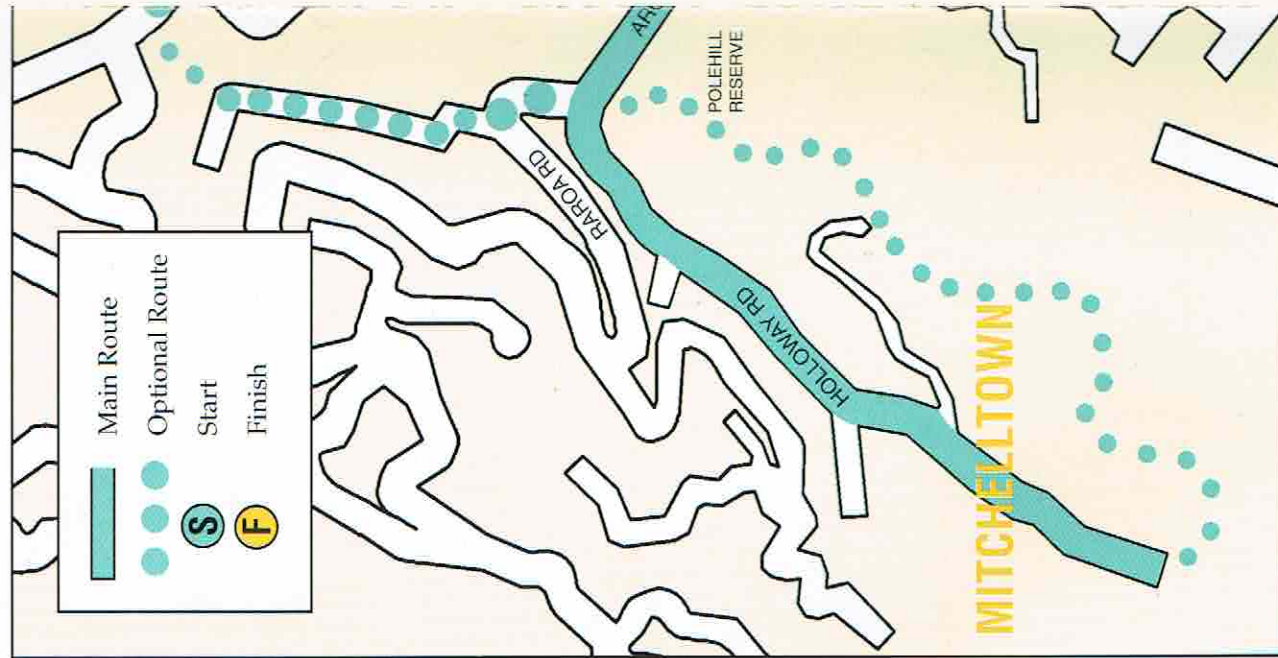
At this point, if you wish, you may want to turn right and walk the 100 metres to inspect Dransfield House at 335 Willis Street [H2], at the Aro Street intersection. This will allow anyone keen to continue on up to Kelburn at the end of the trail. Otherwise Dransfield House can be viewed at the end of the trail.

### (2) Site of Te Aro Bowling Club

If you look right at the bottom of Ohiro Road you can see the grassy area in front of Pukehinu Flats. This was the home of the Wellington Bowling Club, the first bowling club in the city, established in 1886. In 1966 it moved to Tanera Park, on Brooklyn Hill just off Ohiro Road.



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The Wellington Bowling Club's third clubrooms and pavilion, pictured at its opening in 1907. This building was some distance back from Aro Street and faced Ohiro Road.

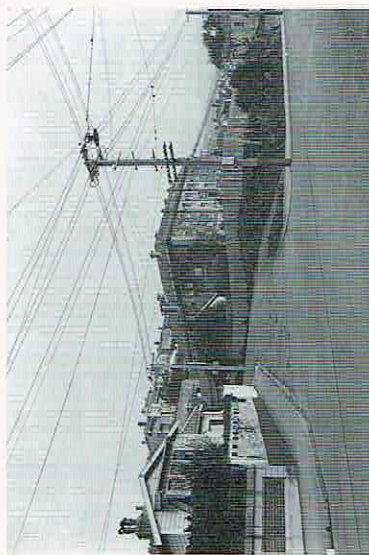
> Turn left into Aro Street.

## (3) 32-38 and 40-46 Aro Street [32, 34, 36, 40, 42, 44, 46 H2]

Across the road, at 32-38, are four workers' cottages whose exteriors, characterised by low-slung verandahs, are little altered from when they were built in the 1870s. Although one-storey high on the Aro Street frontage, they are two-storeyed at the back. They stand on Town Acre 42, a Maori reserve later sold into European hands.

By contrast 40 and 42 are simple but attractive two-storeyed workers' villas, built in the 1890s for tradespeople. At 44 and 46 are bigger structures - 1900s bay villas with hipped roofs and side entrances.

> Opposite the cottages on the left hand side of the street you can see the School of Philosophy.



The School of Philosophy in 1932 when it was owned by the Salvation Army. The intersection of Ohiro Road and Aro Street has been much changed over the intervening years. (Alexander Turnbull Library)

## (4) School of Philosophy

This grand, neo-Georgian building was originally erected in 1913 for the Salvation Army. Designed by S.W. Fearn and Austin Quick, it was originally named after the Salvation Army's founder, William Booth. Its location back from the road makes its facade even more imposing and disproportionately large in Aro Valley.

Next door to the school, note the large semi-detached (c.1880-90) villas at 39-41 [H2] and 43-45 [H2]. Both are in original condition externally, with two bay windows each.

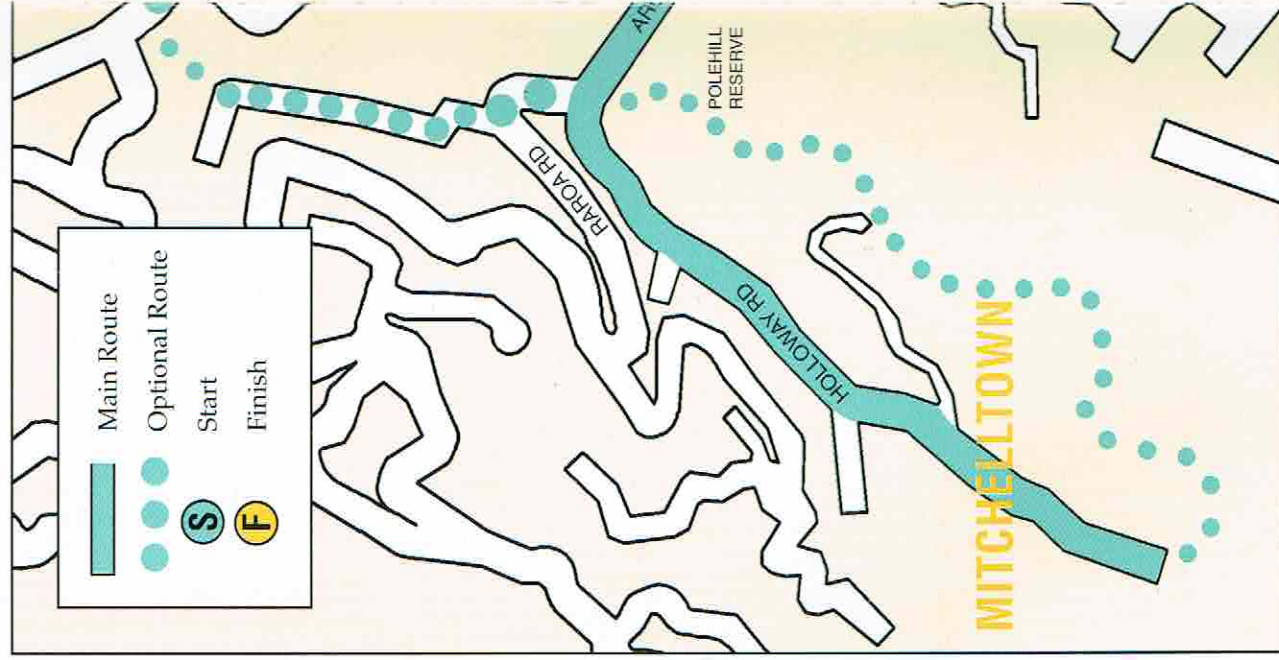
Both dwellings were built on leased Maori land. Side lanes were often needed to provide access to rear sections - Boston Terrace, next to 45, is a pleasant example. The view from here of the two-storeyed wooden houses along Maarama Crescent, above Boston Terrace, is striking.

## (5) Aro Park

Across the road is the small green oasis of Aro Park, formerly known as Seed's Hill after an early (1864) resident. The Park has been extended and landscaped in recent years and is a focus for community recreation, especially on summer nights and weekends; the Aro Valley Community Centre stands on part of the park.



## ARO VALLEY Heritage Trail



> See the Information Panel at Aro Park then continue up Aro Street

### (7) Aro Street shops

Bakers, butchers, tailors and greengrocers have long lived and worked in these buildings. For example, in the early 1900s Alice Topp, dressmaker, lived at 37, while at 57 William Meston and his wife ran the Clothiers' Union. A tailor, Solomon Garshook, lived at 89. The bakery at 94 dates from 1892 and, until recently, housed an oven from that era. Early this century, rival butchers, Messrs R.D. Bengie (at 105) and Haines (almost opposite), served the Protestant and Catholic communities, respectively.

Further up, at 119, lived members of the Luke family who, as noted earlier, were long active in the foundry and engineering business in Wellington.



Epuni Street to the right and above it on the left, the striking two storey houses of Maarama Crescent c. 1907 (Wellington Public Library)

> Turn left into Epuni Street just past the shops.

### (8) Epuni Street

European land holdings in this street date from the 1840s. Nine of the original 13 freehold acres for settlers were here. The street is named after the Atiawa chief Te Puni (?-1870). Close European settlement dates from the 1860s and 70s.



Terrace Gaol in the 1920s. Note the well tended prison gardens. (Photo: Pat Fry Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library)

### (6) Terrace Gaol site

Behind the park on the hill is the site of the former Terrace Gaol, now occupied by Te Aro School. The gaol was erected in 1852, replacing one damaged in the 1848 earthquake. It was closed in 1926 and the school built six years later. The school can be reached from Aro Street via the St John Street steps. Houses in nearby Devon Street were once occupied by prison warders.

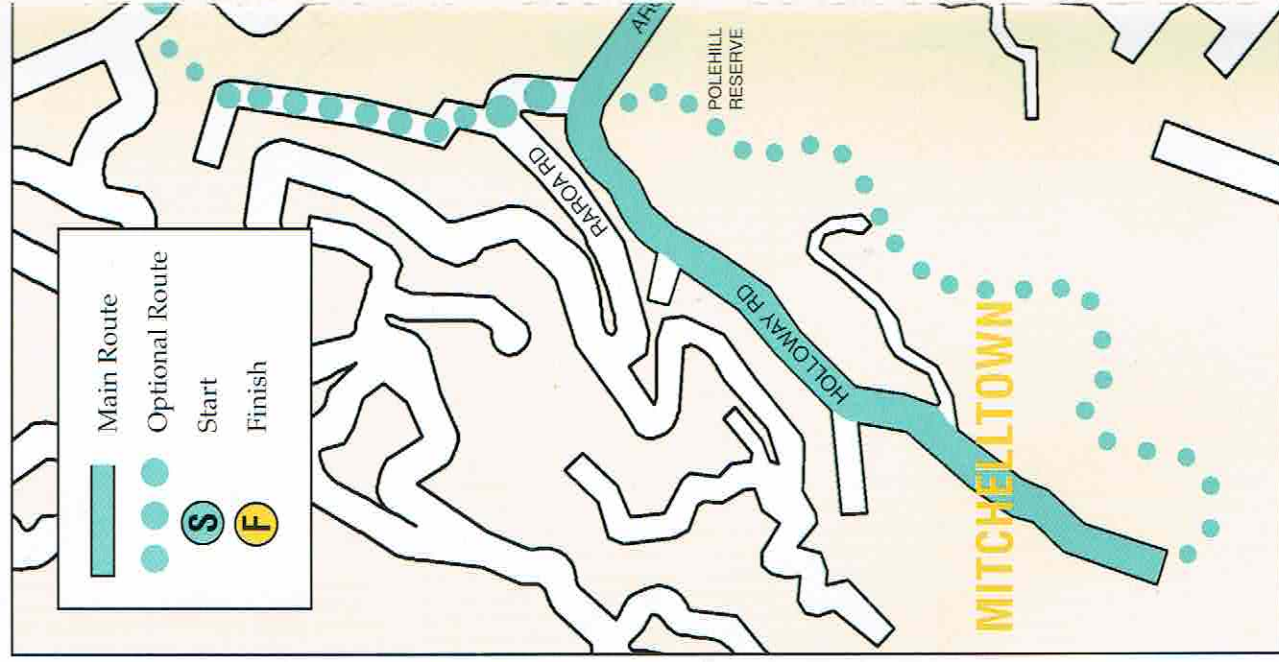
An 1897 account of the Gaol called it "exemplary", compared with the "eyesore" of the old Mt Cook Gaol in Buckle Street, although the routine and facilities were grim by today's standards - sparse meals in cells, constant surveillance by armed guards and weekly baths. The Gaol was often full, helped by Wellington's rapid growth after 1865 when it became capital city. Crimes against property, transients living in boarding houses and a big local police presence all helped fill the cells.



Te Aro School during construction in 1932. (Wellington Public Library)



# ARO VALLEY Heritage Trail



> *Continue up Aro Street*

## (10) Remainder of Aro Street

At 125 and 127 are further examples of near-original workers' cottages (1899). They were originally identical, but the bay window at 125 has been modified. Note the same simple form and design, with undecorated weatherboarding beneath the windows. Similar houses are at 205-7 Aro Street.

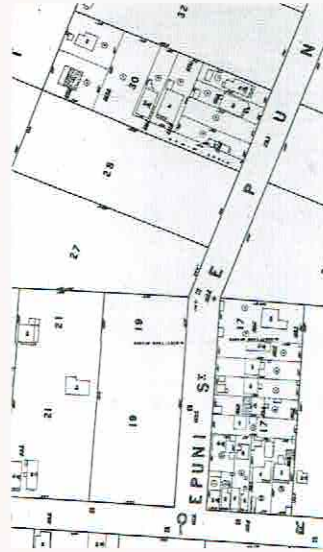
A commercial site of interest is Carter's at 162, which has long been a family business. The current owner is a motor-builder, and previous generations built coach bodies and operated a smithy on the site.

Behind 168 is a crumbling brick wall - all that remains of stables run by a Mr Welsby early this century. He grazed horses and cattle at his Mount Pleasant Road farm and would herd horses down to the stables. Before the advent of motor vehicles, Aro Street saw much pedestrian traffic, both animal and human, including prisoners in leg irons heading from the Terrace Gaol to the brickworks at the Mt Cook Gaol. There were also hearses. After the Karori Cemetery was opened in 1891 to supersede Bolton Street cemetery, the main access to it from town was via the valley and Raroa Road, especially formed for that purpose.

The valley has an almost rural feel as we reach the top, where parts of the Town Belt reach down to the street. There is a further reminder of the valley's strong working-class history in the 1904 Methodist Mission Hall at 213. The Methodists, notably the early missionary Rev. S. Ironside, had been active in Wellington since the 1840s. From the 1890s they moved among the valley's poorer residents and those in Holloway Road and other parts of Mitchelltown.

Houses of interest include 13, a rare Gothic-influenced house in the valley; 37, a slender, two-storey timber structure with corrugated iron side walls and a pronounced tilt; and 39, by Levina Avenue, built in 1890 by William Adams - one of his earliest houses and occupied at various stages by his sons.

Henry Mitchell bought Town Acre 17 in 1868 for £150 and more than recouped his investment. This was a self-contained island of houses by 1891, like the Adams developed Town Acre 30, and the money Mitchell made from this development may have given him enough capital to develop Mitchelltown.



A detail from map 56, City of Wellington, by Thomas Ward, 1891, showing the heavy development of town acre 17, and town acre 30, in contrast to the land around them. (Alexander Turnbull Library)

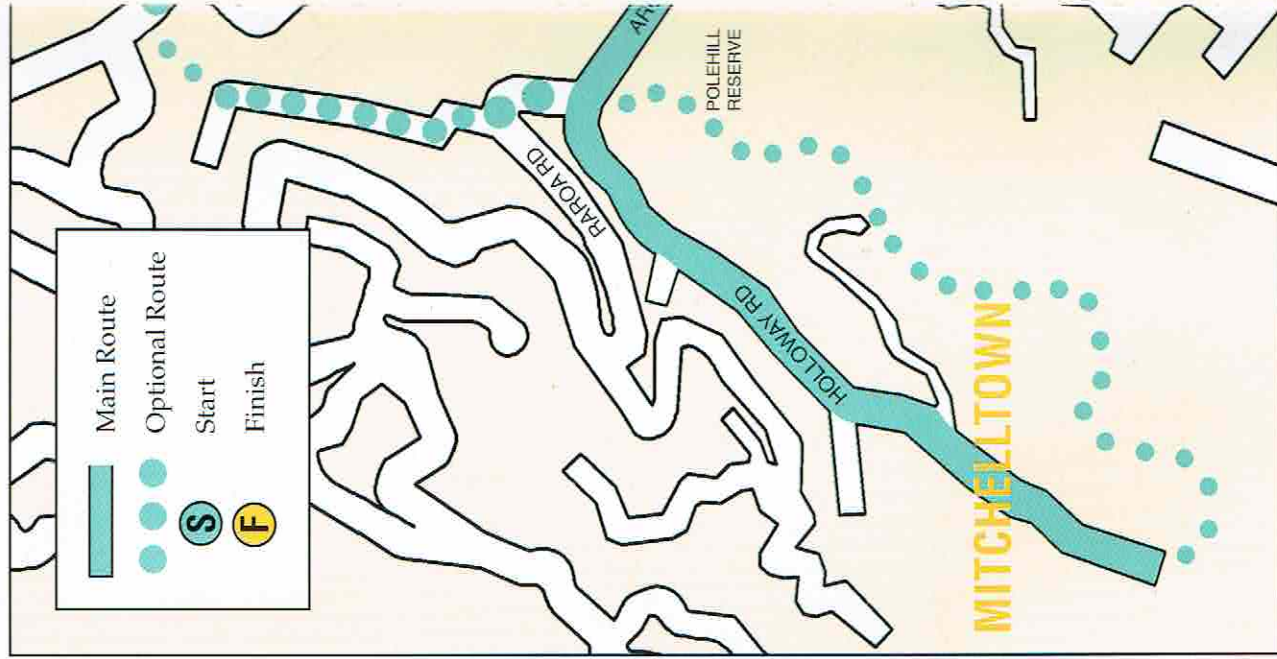
> *Walk back down to Aro Street. Off Aro Street, almost opposite Epuni Street, is Devon Street.*

## (9) Devon Street - optional

This street's principal developer, William Adams, came from the English county Devon. He purchased land here in 1885 and some of the houses built were occupied by his sons or grandsons. The street is worth seeing for its pristine streetscape. Note the similarity of the houses on the right side of the road. On steep sections the single-storey designs were forced to incorporate basements.



## ARO VALLEY Heritage Trail



**Opposite, between 178 and 208**, is a mix of turn-of-the-century cottages and villas and inter-war bungalows, most obviously cared for, if not renovated. Their unusual setting, on sites successively receding from the footpath, is a result of the impracticalities of imposing the 1841 New Zealand Company Plan on the valley. Aro Street, past Epuni Street, was intended to veer to the right towards Semeloff Terrace, off Adams Terrace. By the turn of the century, logic dictated that Aro Street was aligned along the valley floor, following the route of a road built in the 1870s to serve a pipeline from a newly constructed water reservoir above Polhill Reserve.

### (11) Polhill Reserve - optional

The energetic might, while walking up upper Aro Street, take a detour left at the sign for 'Polehill (more commonly spelt Polhill) Reserve'. It was apparently named for an early Cornish surveyor. In the mid-1840s a garrison of British troops was stationed on the upper ridges of this Gully, to protect the southern flank of the settlement from hostile Maori. The force grew to some 200 officers and men by 1845/6. By 1870 British troops had left the country, to encourage colonial 'self reliance'.

> Carry on up Aro Street to information panel.



The intersection of, to the left, Raroa Road, Aro Street, disappearing away in the distance, and Holloway Road, in the late 1890s, before the arrival of electric trams. (Alexander Turnbull Library)

### Mitchelltown - Historical Background

Mitchelltown was named by Henry Mitchell (1833-1913) in 1880. His father, John Mitchell (1794-1862), arrived in Wellington in 1841 with his wife and six children. In the mid-1850s the family prospered through farming and the supply of timber and firewood to British troops and settlers. They purchased some 215 country acres outside the original Town Acres of Wellington in the area between what is now the Karori Reservoir and the ridge between Holloway Road and Polhill Gully.

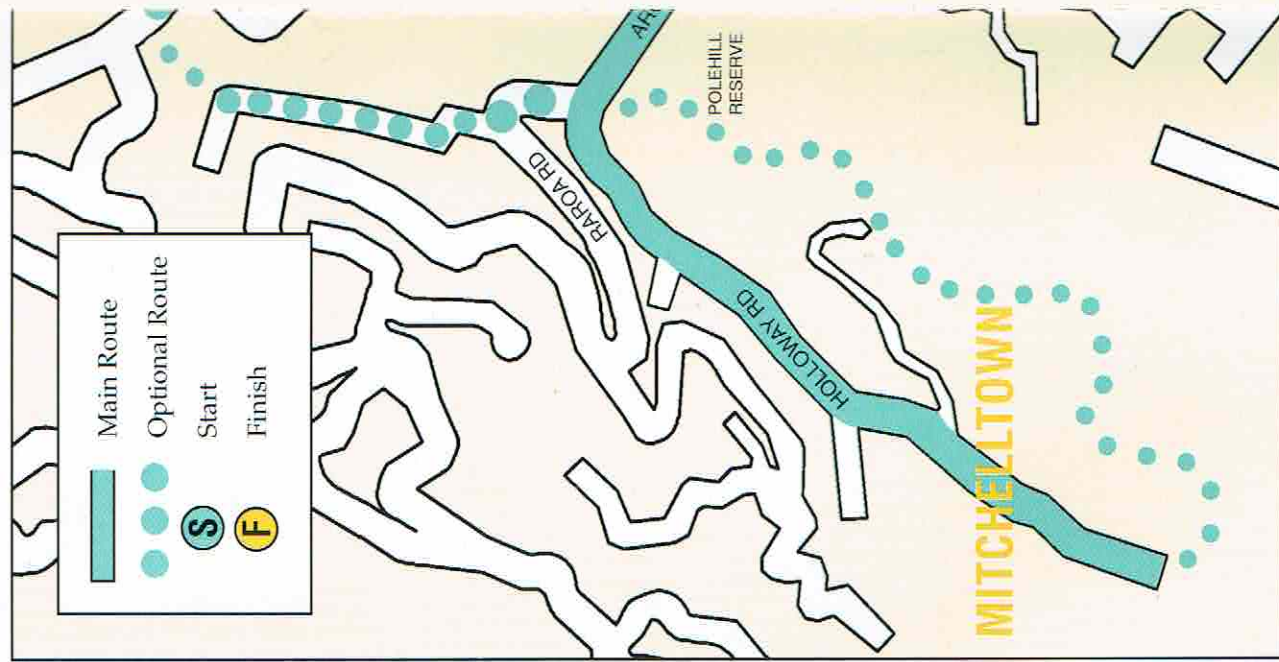


Three sons of John Mitchell pictured in the early 1900s (Wellington Public Library)

As timber supplies diminished in the 1870s Henry Mitchell began erecting cottages on the land he inherited, to be leased as part of a 'workingmen's settlement' in the area. Some of his adjacent land was sold to another developer, Robert Tait, who built houses between Entrance Street and Highbury, to be known as Taitville. You can visit his old home by climbing the steps to 4 Thule Street. Tait trained as an architect in the UK, but downgraded his profession to builder to get assisted immigration under the Vogel scheme of the 1870s.



# ARO VALLEY Heritage Trail



Mitchelltown prospered in the years up till 1914. Most of the houses we can see today were built by 1895 though some (17-23 and 41-45 Holloway Road were replaced with more substantial, two-storeyed buildings by the mid-1910s. [17 & 41 H2]

By the early 1920s some 24 of the 92 properties in the Gully were owned by three families, including locals William and Sarah Haines and John Brosnahan. Most residents were tenants, unskilled working class people like those who originally came to the Gully. Their work as watersiders or as labourers on streets or building sites was often casual; their incomes were precarious. After the First World War, and then the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, when trucks carried piles of coffins up Raroa Road to Karori cemetery, the residents had to face the economic depressions of the early 1920s and 30s.

Life was especially hard for gassed or shell-shocked servicemen who returned to the area and, out of despair at not holding down jobs, turned to drink and violence. For other men life was hard enough. The community spirit, perhaps exaggerated in subsequent recollections, was difficult to sustain in hard times, with malnutrition, high turnover of tenants (over 50% in 1935), poverty and constant 'making do'.

Post-war housing growth has been almost static. By the 1960s the area was in a state of advanced decay but expansion plans by Victoria University, involving the demolition of much local housing, were called off after protest by locals and conservation bodies.

Today the Gully is home to only a few hundred people - but in recent times it has become home to new residents attracted by the area's rural/bohemian feel. Their presence and that of the few remaining 'old-timers' determine the area's character and appearance - the distinctive mix of upgraded and resolutely unchanged dwellings with the masses of cultivated or wild plants (daisies, blackberry, nasturtiums etc) growing over elegant verandahs and unpainted fences, out of designer pots and beside abandoned cartwheels.

> *Cross the road to the World War I Memorial*

## (12) World War I Memorial

Before entering Holloway Road proper, pause for a moment on the pleasant slope of this park. The war memorial here was erected in 1920 "to the Boys of Mitchelltown School and District". Of the 108 men listed on it as serving in the First World War, 19 were killed and 31 wounded. The impoverished community could not afford a similar memorial in 1945.

> *Now turn into Holloway Road*

## (13) Holloway Road

Despite its recently gentrified appearance, the past weighs heavily on this road. There is an important heritage of buildings and people here. Fourteen houses here are registered category 2 by the Historic Places Trust.

The character of Holloway Road is shaped by the way the road snakes through the narrow valley revealing one stretch of streetscape after another. The houses are close together and close to the road. Note the widespread use of concrete retaining walls, essential for the creation of more land for building.