

# BROWNS BAY WALK

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North Shore City heritage trails



NORTH SHORE CITY

[www.northshorecity.govt.nz](http://www.northshorecity.govt.nz)

## BROWNS BAY HERITAGE WALK

### *From seaside resort to suburb*

Before developing into the suburb we know today, Browns Bay was a well-known seaside resort established by the family that gave the bay its name.

On a fine spring day in 1876 the Brown family, formerly of Mt Albert, made their way to the bay. Peter Brown had purchased 136 acres comprising of much of the flat land in the bay, then covered in tutu, fern and ti-tree. The farm gradually took shape with crops grown, an orchard and apiary established and pastures formed. Brown and other neighbouring farmers initially transported stock right around the Waitemata harbour to the saleyards at Newmarket. Clay roads provided summer access to the bay while goods came by cutter.

*Cover image:  
View of the beach at Browns Bay, 1920s.  
Morrison Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z.*

*Aerial view of Browns Bay, 1930. Browns Bay would later be the home of one of the country's leading aerial photography companies, Air Logistics (now known as Geosmart).  
Photo courtesy of Geosmart neg. 62663.*



*Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*

The annual summer carnival held at Browns Bay was popular with locals and holidaymakers alike and included sporting events and other entertainments. Ray Natali and Ray Jones are pictured in fancy dress at the carnival in 1952. Natali was the son of businessman, benefactor and community leader Jelal Natali who became one of New Zealand's first Asian millionaires and campaigned against discrimination particularly toward Indians. In 1986 he was awarded a Queen's Service Medal for service to the Indian community and assistance to Maori and Pakeha.

Soon holidaymakers were regularly travelling by steamer to the bay to enjoy picnics and games on the beach. Peter and Mary Brown initially provided tourist accommodation at their residence, later offering visitors the opportunity to purchase their own slice of Browns Bay paradise. In 1916 the Browns subdivided their property into residential sites and over the coming years baches grew upon the landscape. Transport links with the city improved in the 1920s with a regular bus service connecting with the ferry at Bayswater.

Over the 1930s and 40s the permanent population increased substantially while holidaymakers continued to flood in over the summer months. The settlement was becoming well equipped with shops, churches and clubs while the roll at the local school continued to grow. Browns Bay was the key commercial area amongst the neighbouring east coast bays.

By the early 1950s a number of manufacturing concerns were operating in the bay. Concrete roof tiles were in production using local sand and there were also clothing manufacturers including Ambler & Co. who produced well-known Summit brand shirts.

The late 1950s heralded a new era in the history of the North Shore with the opening of the Auckland Harbour Bridge. Browns Bay was now far better connected with the city, and gradually the bay shook off its identity as a holiday resort and became another suburb of an ever-increasing Auckland.

In 1992 a new form of entertainment came from the bay when Shortland Street burst onto New Zealand television screens and quickly became a favourite programme in homes across the nation. Originally filmed on location in Browns Bay, the series has won numerous awards and is now New Zealand's longest running soap opera. It was in the Browns Bay studio that Nurse Carrie uttered the immortal words "You're not in Guatemala now Dr Ropata".



*Begin at the War Memorial and walk south along the Esplanade Reserve*

## STONE OF REMEMBRANCE

1

On Anzac day 1968 the Stone of Remembrance was dedicated by Reverend M. Walsh while a guard of honour provided by the Navy looked on. The stone itself was donated by Smale's Quarry and its installation was funded by the Returned Services Association and the East Coast Bays Borough Council. It has witnessed regular Anzac Day services since its erection.

*Stone of Remembrance, Anzac Day, late 1960s.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*



## NORFOLK PINES

2

The row of Norfolk pines sheltering the Stone of Remembrance have watched the changes to Browns Bay for seven decades, having been planted in the 1930s.

## HEADLANDS

3

Flanking the beach at the northern and southern ends, the headlands are comprised of sandstone interleaved with layers of soft mudstone and siltstone dating back millions of years. The stone was formed under the sea and gradually rose up and weathered to form the characteristic layered cliffs we see today.

## SITE OF BROWNS BAY WHARF

4

Erected soon after the turn of the twentieth century, the Browns Bay wharf eased the landing of goods and passengers, particularly at high tide. However, the larger steamships that plied the route from Auckland during the summer holidays were too large to dock when the tide was low. This meant that frequently passengers were brought closer to the shore in lifeboats, with male passengers then expected to roll up their trousers and carry the women ashore.

In 1936 the coast was lashed by a severe storm and the Browns Bay wharf was severely damaged. By this stage land transport had improved significantly and the council elected to demolish the wharf.

*The division of the foreshore by the wharf tolled the demise of the horse races that had been held each year at Browns Bay beach, the course having been bisected by the wharf. Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*



*Skating at the rink, 1955.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*

## SITE OF FORMER SKATING RINK

5

During the 1950s the East Coast Bays Borough Council built a roller skating rink that became a popular attraction. Saturday nights at the rink included men's and ladies' speed skates and a men's hockey game. The young women displayed their skating prowess wearing brightly coloured dresses, while the young men were stylishly clad in checked shirts, black jeans and skating boots with an inch of luminous green or burnt orange sock showing between. In early June 1959 local skaters were no doubt more exhausted than usual after a skating endurance test was held at the rink as part of the celebrations for the opening of the Auckland Harbour Bridge.

## ESPLANADE RESERVE

6

The grassed strip bounded by Beachfront Lane and the shoreline presented a very different appearance in earlier years. By the 1930s the beachfront was dotted with baches, many of which would later be extended or replaced to provide more comfortable housing for Browns Bay's increasing resident population. From around the 1960s the council began purchasing the beachfront properties to provide a seafront reserve.

*Seafront baches.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*



*Michael King at Browns Bay, 1986.  
Photo courtesy of Peter Hamken and Metro magazine.*



In the 1980s historian Michael King lived in a house on the beachfront where he enjoyed his view of the sea:

*'Looking eastwards across the gulf, shops and houses out of sight and mind behind us, we could be a hundred miles from suburbia. Rangitoto, Motutapu and Rakino slumber on unchanged, Coromandel lies along the far horizon like a great whale.'*

*Metro magazine, January 1986, p.55.*

The former King residence was purchased by the council in 2004 and demolished to complete the beachfront park.

## SITE OF SURF CLUB

7

*Now part of the Esplanade Reserve at the beach end of Anzac Road*

In December 1932 the Browns Bay Surf Club was formed to serve the beaches from Long Bay to Campbells Bay. Two years later a clubhouse was built on a site provided by the Browns Bay Progressive and Ratepayers Association and the club became known as the Eastern United Surf Life Saving Club. The club held regular life saving demonstrations and met with success at numerous national surf life saving championships. Falling membership saw the club join the North Piha Surf Club, and in 1979 the surf club building was demolished.



*Members of the club outside the clubhouse, 1945.  
Photo courtesy of Surf Life Saving New Zealand.*

## PROGRESS HALL

8

*6 Anzac Road*

In 1934 the original timber Progress Hall was built after much hard work by the Browns Bay Progressive and Ratepayers Association who were key players in the provision of amenities in Browns Bay. They lobbied for improved services and raised funds to be spent on recreational facilities including the purchase of much of the land now forming Freyberg Park. The old Progress Hall was moved to Stillwater in 1980, where it was reused as a hay barn, and the present building was erected soon after.

*Walk down the side of the Progress Hall and over the footbridge. Then proceed down onto the beach where the World War II machine gun emplacement can be seen under pohutukawa trees growing just above the beach.*



*Original Progress Hall with members of the Browns Bay Progressive and Ratepayers Association. Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*



## WORLD WAR II MACHINE GUN EMPLACEMENT

9

Machine Gun emplacements like this one were installed along the coast during the Second World War when enemy invasion seemed imminent. Built of reinforced concrete measuring a foot thick, they housed Bren, Lewis or Vickers guns and contained bunks for the Home Guardsmen who manned them. Other coastal defences included barbed wire laid along the beach to hamper enemy landings. At Browns Bay the wire entanglements were capable of being electrified. Browns Bay residents and visitors no doubt breathed a sigh of relief when the barbed wire was removed from the foreshore in 1944 and civilians were allowed back onto the beaches.

*Retrace your steps  
back to Anzac Road  
and head towards  
Clyde Road.*



*The Home Guard who manned the machine guns, shown here exercising on Browns Bay beach.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*



## FORMER BAYS PRESS BUILDING

10

*7 Anzac Road*

Built in the early 1950s as a block of three shops, this building was soon home to Browns Bay's first local newspaper *The Bays News*. The first edition of the fortnightly free newspaper rolled off the press in 1960 and kept locals informed for a decade until competition from the *North Shore Times Advertiser* forced production to cease.



## MERCURY BUILDING

11

*11-19 Clyde Road*

Erected in the mid 1950s the Mercury Building was built for Messrs Kearns and Turvey and housed their real estate business, as well as a number of other enterprises.



## SITE OF BROWN HOMESTEAD

12

Now occupied by Foodtown supermarket and carpark

In 1876 the Brown family moved into a small kauri dwelling on their newly acquired land. Substantial extensions were later made to provide accommodation for holidaymakers. Amongst the many visitors to stay at the Brown guesthouse over the years was trade unionist, journalist and politician Peter Fraser who would serve as Prime Minister from 1940 until 1949.

In the early 1920s the property was leased to Robert and Anne Douglas who continued to run it as holiday accommodation. However the house burned down towards the end of the decade. With the former Brown homestead gone, the property was redeveloped as a camping ground catering to large numbers of holidaymakers over the summer months.

*Turn right into Clyde Road*



**BROWN'S BAY HOUSE, BAY.**

Offers attractions for a limited number of visitors who seek a quiet, cheerful home in the country, being charmingly situated on the Sea Beach.

**GOOD FISHING, BOATING, and BATHING.**

**ROUTES.**  
Per s.s. "Orewa" (See advertisement in daily papers). Fares: Single, 1/-; Return, 1/6.  
Per Mail Coach from Devonport: Monday and Wednesday, 9 a.m.; Friday, 8 a.m.

**TARIFF.**  
Per Day, 4/- By the Week, 25/- Per Week (for two or more weeks), 22/6.  
Children under 12, Half-price.  
Horse Feed, 1/- Grazing, 6d. per day, or 2/- per week. Well-watered Paddocks.

Address: **PETER BROWN, Brown's Bay, Takapuna.**



Facilities at the Brown guesthouse included the first local shop. The bay's first post office was run from a small room off the back verandah. Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.



Brouns Bay Camping Ground, January 1953.  
Photo courtesy of Geosmart neg. 32323.

## BROWNS BAY MALL

*Connecting Beachfront Lane and Inverness Road*

13

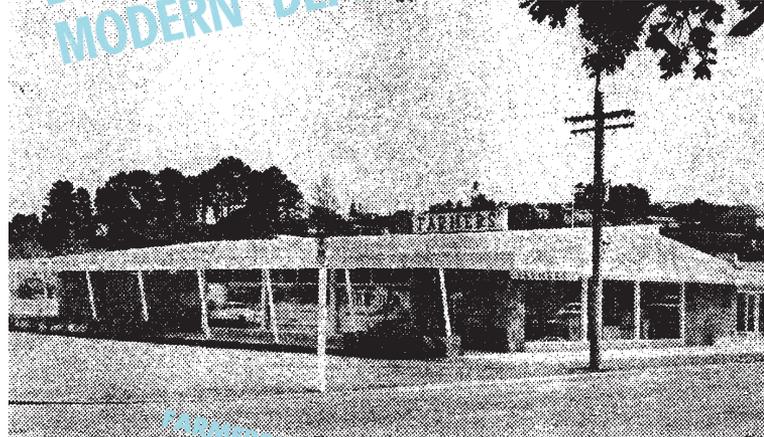
The development of Clyde Road from the mid twentieth century resulted in the commercial area at Browns Bay being cut off from the beachfront. The new mall was erected in the early 1990s to reconnect the suburban shopping area with the sea. The design by Isthmus Group won the 1993 George Malcolm award for project design at the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects/Monier Awards, the judges noting that the development had transformed an ordinary suburban shopping area into a Riviera style environment.



Clyde Road, Browns Bay  
PHONES: 1244 & 1291



BROWNS BAY'S NEWEST MOST  
MODERN 'DEPARTMENT' STORE



## FARMERS

*Corner Clyde and Inverness Roads*

14

The year 1963 saw a local branch of Farmers Trading Company open bringing department store shopping to the bay. Established in 1909 as a mail order business by Robert Laidlaw, Farmers grew to become one of New Zealand's best known retailers. The Browns Bay branch is one of fifty five located throughout the country.

*Turn left into Inverness Road*

FARMERS'

**FARMERS' THE FRIENDLY FAMILY STORE now brings big store services to BROWNS BAY!**

Shop at FARMERS' Browns Bay and you choose from New Zealand's greatest range of merchandise.

Our guarantee of absolute satisfaction or your money back covers every single transaction

**Guarantee** We will accept your phone orders for all than groceries. O T H E R however, deliver all goods including groceries

Outstanding values are equivalent in quality to similar items advertised elsewhere at higher prices.

Farmers' credit systems are easy, convenient, choose the easy credit system which suits you best.

## BROWNS BAY VILLAGE GREEN

15

*Bounded by Inverness, Glen and Bute Roads*

Prior to the 1970s the Village Green area presented a very different appearance. As part of the Brown estate, this area was subdivided into residential sites in 1916. By the 1970s new and improved recreation facilities were needed to serve Browns Bay's growing population, and with this in mind the East Coast Bays Borough Council began redeveloping the area. Dwellings and churches gave way to a recreation hall, library, old folks association clubrooms and other community buildings while the grounds were attractively landscaped. The green is a well-used recreation space hosting a number of public events each year including the annual Teddy Bears Picnic.

*Turn left into Beach Road*

*The Village Green area as it appeared in 1964.  
Photo courtesy of Geosmart, neg. 63098.*



## ST ANNE'S HALL

16

*Corner of Glencoe and Beach Roads*

This much-loved simple weatherboard building has served a number of purposes over the years. Originally built as a dwelling, it was converted into an Anglican church in 1943 and retained this role until the early 1970s. St Anne's Hall now serves as a venue for hire and is used by a wide variety of community groups.

*Walk up Glencoe Road and along the path leading into Freyberg Park. Walk around Freyberg and Sherwood Parks emerging at Woodlands Crescent.*



## FREYBERG PARK AND SHERWOOD RESERVE

17

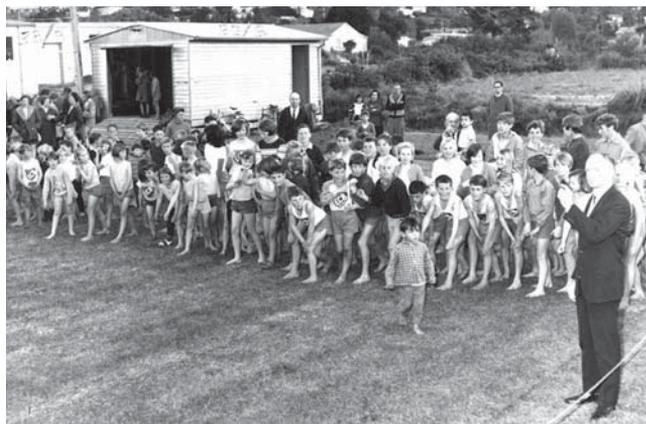
Opened in 1946 Freyberg Park owes its existence to the Browns Bay Progressive and Ratepayers Association who purchased the land for a sports field. The park was named after Bernard Freyberg, Governor General and leader of New Zealand's armed forces during World War II. Having worked on improving the park, the Association gifted the land to the Crown in 1952. Over the coming years the park was enlarged and developed with a number of local sports groups' facilities. Today bowls, rugby league and tennis are all played in the park.

Adjoining Freyberg Park is the Sherwood Reserve which was formed during the 1970s when the surrounding land was subdivided for residential use. The waterways are home to eels and frogs while birdlife includes muscovy, grey and mallard ducks along with pukeko. White faced herons and rosellas have also been seen enjoying the reserve.

*Follow Woodlands Crescent along to Bute Road.*



Opening of Freyberg Park in 1945. A.S. Oldham, President of the Browns Bay Progressive and Ratepayers Association is speaking.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.



Children of the East Coast Bays Athletic Club await the starting gun at Freyberg Park.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.

## KEITH ATKINSON'S BOATYARD

18

23 Bute Road

In the early 1960s this building was erected to house Keith Atkinson's boatbuilding yard, and was one of a number of boatyards that operated in the bay. Atkinson was a true craftsman who built a number of award winning boats. He was well-known for his love of the 18 foot kauri-clinker M-Class yachts originally designed by Arch Logan at Auckland in 1922. After a decline in their popularity, M-Class yachts regained favour in the 1980s, and most of the yachts of this type racing at the time had been built by Atkinson at Browns Bay. Atkinson was also responsible for restoring the first M-class yacht *Mawhiti*, after she was found rotting at the local children's playground. Atkinson's role in the success of the M-class is remembered each year when yachts of this type compete for two Keith Atkinson Memorial Cups at the Victoria Cruising Club regatta.



Drawings for Keith Atkinson's boatyard building.  
Courtesy of North Shore City.



## NORTH SHORE CITY COUNCIL BUILDING

19

*Corner of Glen and Bute Roads*

In the early 1970s this building was erected as the first purpose-built home of the East Coast Bays Borough Council, the third local body to serve the area. Local government at the bay dates back to the 1860s when the area was gazetted as part of the Lake District, and in 1876 administration passed to the newly formed County of Waitemata. The county comprised of an enormous area measuring some 600 square miles (1550 square kilometres). By the early 1950s it was clear that the growing eastern area of the county required a more truly local government. A petition signed by nearly half of the eligible voters in the area was sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and in 1954 Browns Bay became part of the new East Coast Bays Borough. The new borough council, serving a population of 7500, presided over an area with poor roading, few footpaths and no water reticulation, sewerage or refuse collection services. The years that followed saw an improvement in local amenities and services, while the opening of the Auckland Harbour Bridge encouraged rapid population growth. Browns Bay had the largest area of flat land in the East Coast Bays area, and was the commercial hub of the borough. In 1975 East Coast Bays attained city status. The year 1989 brought further changes when the East Coast Bays area was amalgamated as part of the new North Shore City Council area.



*Opening of the East Coast Bays Borough Council building. Norman King, M.P. is speaking.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*

## JOHN SPENCER'S BOATYARD

20

*17a Bute Road*

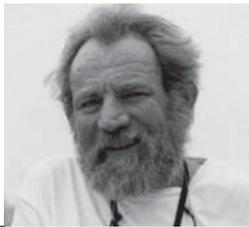
This building was the workshop of world famous boat designer and builder John Spencer, who lived and worked at Browns Bay from the 1950s to the 1980s. Spencer pioneered lightweight construction of small boats in the 1950s and later developed larger yachts from his successful small boat designs. These 'lightweight flyers' changed the basics of keelboat design internationally.



His most famous design was the Cherub class, a 12 foot yacht that became New Zealand's only fully fledged international class, still raced in New Zealand, Australia and the UK. He also designed numerous other popular small boats including the Flying Ant, Javelin, Jollyboat, Firebug and Frostply and a number of larger racing yachts including *Infidel*, *New World*, *Sirius*, *Frederick* and *Buccaneer*.

Spencer died in 1996 but his legacy lives on in the large numbers of yachties who first learnt to sail in a Spencer designed boat. His boats were cheap and relatively easy to build, bringing sailing within the reach of a larger (and very appreciative) proportion of the population.

*John Spencer sailing in the first Cherub on launch day.  
Photo courtesy of Peter Tait.*



*John Spencer.  
Photo courtesy of Peter Tait.*

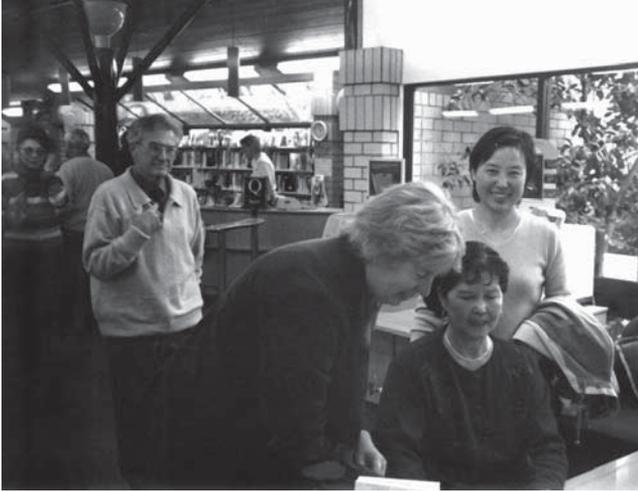
## RSA

*13-15 Bute Road*

The Returned Services Association have been active in Browns Bay from 1925 when meetings were held in the 555 Theatre. It was not until 1951 that the first RSA hall was erected in Browns Bay following substantial fundraising efforts. The design of the original hall featured high windows to make the hall private enough for the Freemasons who rented the building for their secretive meetings. It was also the venue of the swearing in ceremony for the first East Coast Bays Borough Council in 1954. The present building was erected in the mid 1990s.



*The original RSA building (with additions), as it appeared just prior to its demolition 1995.  
With a membership of over 3,000 the East Coast Bays RSA is one of the largest the country.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*



East Coast Bays Library interior.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.

## EAST COAST BAYS LIBRARY

22

Though a lending library had earlier been operated by the Central Store in Clyde Road, it was not until 1970 that the first purpose built public library was opened at Browns Bay. Housed in a little building with a relatively small book stock, the library offered readers the opportunity of accessing a larger book collection through an agreement between the East Coast Bays Borough Council and the Takapuna City Council. The Browns Bay Library was effectively operated as a branch of the Takapuna Library with books being sent from Takapuna to Browns Bay as requested.

The present library was opened in 1982 and the design by Dodd Patterson Architects won the prestigious New Zealand Institute of Architects national award.

*Turn left into Clyde Road*

## VENTURE BUILDINGS

23

78-88 Clyde Road

The Venture buildings were erected in the early 1950s as retail and commercial space. Amongst the building's long-term tenants was the East Coast Bays Borough Council, who held their meetings on the first floor of this building until the 1970s when the new council offices opened in Glen Road. Early meetings were often the scene of heated debate providing entertainment for the many locals who attended.



Venture Buildings, c1970.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.



## SITE OF 555 THEATRE AND CABARET

24

87-107 Clyde Road

The 555 Theatre and Cabaret, named after a popular brand of cigarettes, was erected in 1925 and became popularly known as the flea pit. It was the largest building in the bay at the time and had multiple uses. During the early 1930s films were screened by Phyllis Lovell, reputedly the first woman projectionist in New Zealand. The theatre seats were canvas deck chairs that had a habit of collapsing. After the film the chairs were packed away and the venue converted into a dance hall. The Saturday night dances attracted numerous visitors, many arriving on yachts laden with beer for consumption on the beach. The absence of any local police in the early days allowed rowdy behaviour to go largely unchecked and earned Browns Bay the moniker “Naughty Bay”. The morning after the night before brought an entirely different crowd to the 555 with a monthly Catholic Mass being held during the 1930s. The mid 1950s saw a Browns Bay concert party known as the “Utopians” put on a number of benefit concerts in aid of charities. Their performances were evidently popular, with the theatre frequently filled to capacity. After an eventful life the 555 was demolished in 1985.

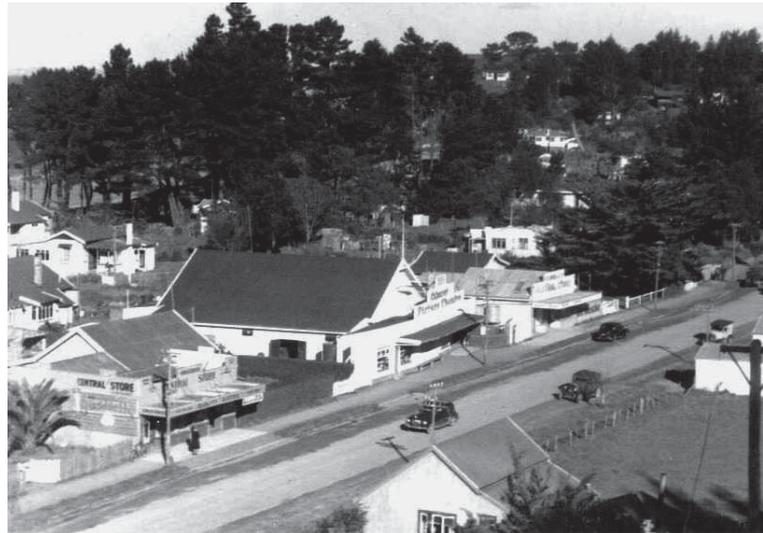


## SITE OF GENERAL STORE

25

87-107 Clyde Road

During the early 1920s a general store was established on this site selling every essential. For many years it was run by Mrs E. Wilkinson who was well-known as a supporter of the Returned Services Association and other local causes. Her contribution to the community earned her an MBE in 1953.



*The 555 Theatre and Cabaret with the Central Store next door, 1946.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*



*Mrs E. Wilkinson, MBE.  
Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*

## POLICE STATION

Corner Clyde and Bayview Roads

During the early years the long arm of the law reached Browns Bay only on weekends and holidays when Constable Maloney would arrive from Takapuna to keep order. In the mid 1940s steps were taken to establish a permanent local police presence in the bay and soon a local cop was on the beat. The present station is the third on this site and was opened in January 1992.

*Turn right into  
Bayview Road*



26

## MAUREEN PLOWMAN HOME

2 Valley Road

During the second decade of the twentieth century the Salvation Army established a holiday camp on this site for children living at Salvation Army homes. Among those who holidayed at the camp were the girls from “The Grange” home in Herne Bay who spent six weeks each summer at the camp. Initially tents provided accommodation but more permanent structures were subsequently built including a well-used Salvation Army hall. The site is now occupied by a rest home, which was officially opened in March 1984 by Sir Robert Muldoon, and named after the wife of Auckland businessman and benefactor Jack Plowman.



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*The camp was used by a number of groups including the brethren, shown here assembled outside the hall, c1929. Photo courtesy of East Coast Bays Library.*

*We hope you have enjoyed this heritage walk.*

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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