

# The Octagon

## ?! What the...?!

For many years the Octagon was not as well cared for as it is today. A particularly interesting suggestion about how to spruce it up came from John Barnes in 1873. It involved placing a statue of each of the eight City Councillors on a corner of the Octagon and a statue of the Mayor in the centre.

## Local nuggets

In 1864, the Provincial Government erected a monument in the centre of the Octagon to Captain Cargill, the leader of the original expedition to settle the city. It was moved in 1871 to the Exchange to allow a carriageway between George Street and Princes Street. It remains on that site today.

## Local lingo

The name 'Octagon' referring to the shape of its surrounding street was used informally almost from the beginning of its creation, but did not become official until many years later.

## My two cents

'Sitting in the Octagon on Friday night, taking in the 'buzz' of the atmosphere, enjoying the twinkling lights in the trees and people-watching.'

- Robyn Edgar

We can thank Charles Henry Kettle, the superintendent surveyor of New Edinburgh, for the reserve that now forms the heart of Dunedin City. Kettle completed surveying and drawing the plans for the city in 1846, and was waiting for Captain Cargill when he arrived on the *John Wickliffe* in 1848. The Octagon was one of several reserves set aside in his plans.

The statue of Robbie Burns was a conscious effort to raise the Scottish profile of Dunedin, which by the 1880s had lost its prominence. Burns' Scottishness was undeniable, and coupled with his link to the Reverend Thomas Burns who was the first Minister of the Dunedin settlement, he was an extremely appropriate choice. Situating the statue in the Octagon was decided on by public vote which required a payment for eligibility, and it was unveiled on its site on 24 May 1887 by the poet's great-grand niece. Robbie was restored in 2000, and still takes pride of place at the head of the Octagon, often with a seagull perched on his head.

It has taken many years of hard work and planning for the Octagon reserve to become what it is today. Until it was planted with grass and shrubs in 1874, it was an eyesore to the Council and community. Since then, the Octagon has been steadily improved, always retaining a distinctive grassed area and trees. The Octagon café culture began to boom in the 1990s, and it is now common to see alfresco dining during the daytime and summer months. Community celebrations and organised events occur frequently, including New Year, Chinese New Year, winter solstice, and Matariki celebrations.



Fireworks at midnight are a feature of New Year celebrations in the Octagon



The Octagon is bustling at night with café goers and revellers alike

