

Getting Underway: The Association's First Few Years

Once the mechanics of administering the new Auckland Justices of the Peace Association were determined, one of its founding objectives was actioned - to familiarise and upskill Justices with their duties. This was first addressed within 3 months of its inauguration.

1922

On December 11th local Judge, Mr Justice Stringer, addressed a gathering of 50 members with a talk entitled "The Duties of Justices".



Mr Justice Stringer

Addressed Members' first training session

N. Z. Herald

He first traversed the early history of Justices, going back more than 500 years in England, who dealt with such old-time crimes as enchantments, sorceries, magic, and numerous other offences. Updating, His Honour thought that Justices of the Peace should exercise their jurisdiction sitting on the Bench, and opportunities should be given them of doing so. As an item of advice to Justices, he said that sometimes it was good policy not to give reasons for their decisions. In concluding, he touched upon various maxims in regard to legal matters, explaining their application.

1923

In March 1923 the President advised the Association was prospering... it now had 130 members, the badges of membership were ready for distribution... consisting of a watch-chain medal of gold and enamel, bearing on one side a circle containing the inscription "The Auckland Justices of the Peace Association", a crown being in the centre of the circle. On the other side is the name of the holder, and the year of appointment. He noted submissions to the Government had already been shaped to improve the lot of the Justice of the Peace. He was speaking at a very well attended training session in October, led by a talk by senior magistrate Ernest Cutten.



Ernest Cutten, SM
Auckland Libraries Collection

His address, "The Auckland Star" reported, will be of immense value to Justices in the carrying out of their duties. Mr. Cutten dealt with the rules of evidence and pointed out that the English law regarding evidence was the fairest in the world. It was the weight and not the amount of evidence that Justices had to consider, and one person's evidence might have more weight than six persons on the other side. Justices had great powers on the Bench, but he hoped they would never use it with sledgehammer severity. He advised members never to put their signatures to any paper which was not absolutely in order. He summed up, as he had indicated all through, that if the members used common sense in regard to their duties they would have the satisfaction of knowing that they had not gone far wrong, and if they did sometimes make a mistake in law and their decisions were upset, it was not because they had not exercised a sound judgment.

In June 1923 the training of Justices was furthered when the Association began distributing "The Justice's Handbook" by Wellington Magistrate W.G. Riddell, commissioned by the Department of Justice. The book set out all the powers and privileges of a justice, and, in concise form, "guides the layman in all his duties".

John Fray was elected President at the 1923 Annual General Meeting.

1924

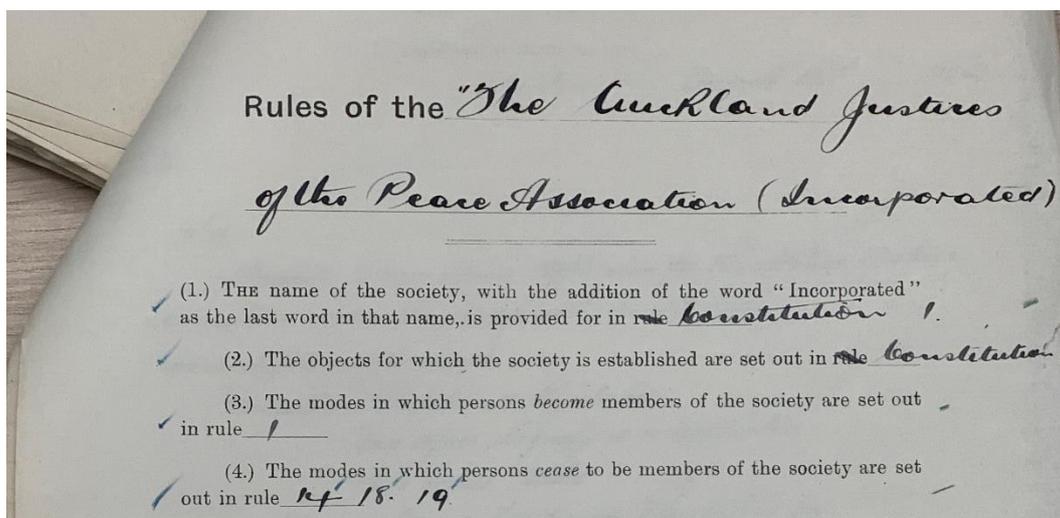
Charles E. Wheeler

He was appointed to the combined office of Association Registrar/Treasurer in 1924, beginning his sterling service to Justices of the Peace. He was to take the Association through its formative years, serving some 20 years.



Charles E. Wheeler JP
N.Z. Herald

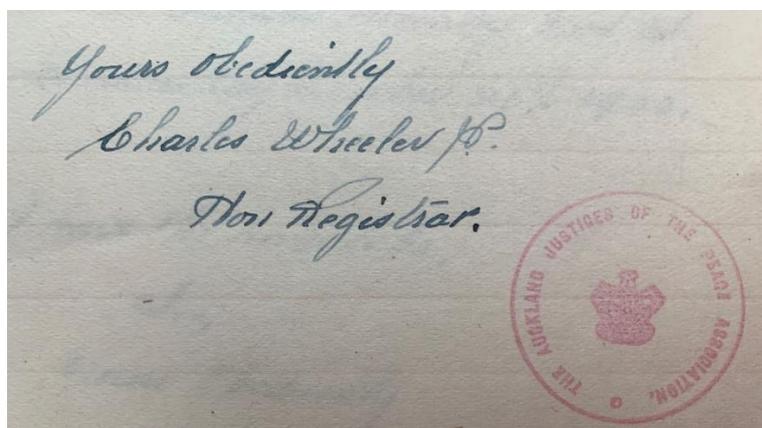
The Association was registered as an Incorporated Society on 25th August 1924, the Registrar of Incorporated Societies having perused the Association's Constitution and approved its provisions.



Part of the checklist in the Association's 1924 application to be an Incorporated Society
N Z Archives

The cost of registration was £2, and the Association's registered office was given as 8 Brentwood Avenue, Mt Eden: Charles Wheeler's home address.

The Association obtained a seal: for years Charles Wheeler's signature and the imprint of the seal were a familiar sight at the foot of all official Association correspondence.



1920s: the signature and the seal
N Z Archives

Charles Wheeler saw the introduction of "Justices Quarterly" and the first women appointed Justices of the Peace. He oversaw regular monthly luncheons with guest speakers and during wartime he witnessed Justices of the Peace on the bench in military uniform. Membership had risen to more than 600 in his time. While 12 Presidents and Executives came and went during the years Charles Wheeler served, 1924 – 1944, he seems to have been the organisation's very able "anchor". In 1945 the Association created the office of Life Member, and Charles Wheeler was the first to be given this accolade. He had been appointed a Justice in April 1907. Latterly he had been the Auckland City Council's Inspector of Dangerous Goods. He died in 1957 aged 90.

The Medallion

Justices' "badge of office", the medallion, received praise in 1924 when the newspaper, "The Auckland Star" reported "The J.P. medallion is now well known by those who are looking for a Justice of the Peace to witness a signature or take a Statutory Declaration"



"This innovation", the report continued, "has proved a most useful one". This was a direct benefit to the community as the result of the Association being formed.

Improvement in Public Relations

One of the stated objectives of forming an organisation of Justices of the Peace was to improve their standing in the community. For decades Justices had been criticised, lampooned and ridiculed in the Press, mainly the weekly 'Truth' newspaper. Lawyers occasionally joined in, spreading the anti "Jay Pee" or "Jay Pay" sentiment.

"It doesn't seem to matter a brass button nowadays who is appointed a Justice of the Peace. The office has long since ceased to be either an honour or a distinction, but before things go too far it is about time it was abolished altogether"

Typical of views aired in newspapers for more than 40 years

N.Z. Herald columnist 'Mercurio' April 1907

What is noticeable is that this bad publicity diminished immediately the Justices' Associations were formed, with their drive for better-informed and trained, competent, members. Even the campaigning 'Truth' acknowledged change in its columns, commenting just before Justices of the Peace met at the Federation's meeting in Christchurch in 1925.

In recent years greater care appears to have been exercised in the selection of reputable and just citizens as Justice of the Peace. The men so appointed, too, have as a rule fully appreciated their responsibilities and have sought to equip themselves to carry out their difficult duties in the interests of the whole community.

One method of doing this has been the formation of Justices' Associations for mutual help and guidance.

'Truth' October 1925.

Without the contact among Justices so readily afforded by membership in the new Associations, it's difficult to see how this improvement in relations with the public might otherwise have been achieved. In a few years the previous constant broadsides and criticism had all but ended.