

# NEWSLETTER

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Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre  
Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara

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## 150<sup>th</sup> year Commemoration Events

The Heritage Centre got the 150<sup>th</sup> Jubilee year of the village off to a great start on Sunday 16 February with a ceremony marking the 100<sup>th</sup> year of the Pukehoua Bridge. Sabina Owen organised the occasion which was chaired by President Robin Astridge at the bridge. Local MP Shane Ardern and Mayor Jim Mylchreest spoke to over 200 people who attended on a beautiful summer afternoon. The bridge was re-opened by nonagenarian Mrs Mary Jacobsen. Her family, the McClunies, still farm to the west of the river where families early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were dependent on the bridge for access to Pirongia and elsewhere. The Te Awamutu Brass Band led the way across the re-opened bridge, followed by wagons of Pirongia Clydesdales carrying distinguished guests, many of them dressed for the occasion in old-fashioned costumes. The horse-drawn vehicles were followed by vintage cars and pedestrians.

Following the ceremony at the bridge, an old-fashioned afternoon tea was hosted at Auburn, the historic home of Roz and Nick Empson. Tea was served in traditional style by St Saviour's church women, ably assisted by a team of suitably-attired young waitresses. It was a great event.



Clare St Pierre and a visiting French student, both dressed for the occasion.



The Pirongia Clydesdales always add authenticity to historic events.

wedding dresses from the 1940s. Although initially planned only for the weekend, the display generated sufficient interest to remain open throughout the following week.

A Reunion Day on 1 March attracted many former residents back to the village. The occasion was coordinated by Joy McGregor under the auspices of the Pirongia Community Association. Problems with obtaining permission to close Franklin Street meant that the planned street parade was replaced by a Village Green event on the Rangimarie Reserve where there were stalls, a display of agricultural machinery by the Otorohanga Vintage Machinery Club, demonstrations by the Pirongia Fire Force and entertainment by Johnny Nelson. A particular highlight of the day was an outstanding display of photographs and memorabilia in the Memorial Hall, assembled by Joy McGregor, Gloria King, Marilyn Yeates and many others who contributed treasured personal items such as three

## AGM – Tuesday 17 June

The Annual General Meeting of the Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre will take place in the Centre at 7:30 pm on Tuesday 17 June. It is anticipated that as in previous years the formalities will be completed in about half an hour. The committee will welcome some new members.

Following the formal business, this year's speaker will be Haupai Puke who is a descendant of the Papesch family and grew up in the village. She is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Waikato where she teaches Te Reo Maori but retains strong links with Purekireki Marae where she is the Chairperson of the Purekireki Marae Trust. Haupai will speak about **Iwi Landscapes**, presenting the Maori world view through relationships with the land, giving local examples.

There will be an opportunity to socialise over supper.

## Did you know?

Alexandra celebrated its first anniversary on 27 June 1865 with an invitation ball held in the East Redoubt, which was attended by 160 married settlers. They danced "with extraordinary spirit" to the music of a brass band detachment until 3:00 am. *NZ Herald*, 7 July 1865.

## Thanks for Support

- **TRUST WAIKATO** for a \$2,000 grant for the continuing employment of our administration manager.
- **LOTTERY GRANTS BOARD:** \$6,900 for administration, travel and events.
- **BENJAMIN HEMI**, Waipa District Council, for sterling support at the Pukehoua Bridge Celebration events and on the Reunion Day.
- **JOY MCGREGOR, GLORIA KING AND MARILYN YEATES** for all the work that went into the display of photographs and memorabilia in the Memorial Hall on Reunion Day.
- **CAMBRIDGE MUSEUM**, for the loan of mannequins to display vintage apparel.
- **OTOROHANGA VINTAGE MACHINERY CLUB** for its support of our Village Green event.
- **THOSE MANY MEMBERS WHO ATTENDED THE TWO COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS** - particularly those who dressed up for the occasions.
- **PATRICIA GRIERSON**, for her dedication over many years in managing the Centre's Duty Roster.
- **PIRONGIA CLYDESDALES** for donating to the Centre the proceeds from wagon rides around the village on Reunion Day.
- **THE GEDGE FAMILY** who provided activities for children on the Reunion Day.

## Berwyn Sterling

It is with sadness that we record the passing of Berwyn Sterling, a member and former Vice-president of the Centre who had much to do with its establishment.

## For your diary

### 31 May

- 11:00 am Luncheon: Honouring Pirongia's Founders. *School Hall.*
- 2:00 pm Public 150 Year Commemoration. *School Hall.*
- 7:30 pm Grand Edwardian Ball. *Memorial Hall.*

### 1 June

- 2:00 pm Inter-denominational Church Service. *School Hall.*

### 17 June

- 7:30 pm Heritage & Information Centre AGM. *Heritage Centre.*

## From the Committee

Visitor numbers during the 2013-14 financial year which ended in March reached an all-time high of 3,117.

Patricia Grierson has retired from managing the staffing roster, a duty she has undertaken for some years. Barbara Walter will take over in the future. In the meantime Faith Haakma is looking after the roster.

The Centre is seriously in need of more volunteers willing to staff the Centre on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays. For more information, talk with Sabina Owen.

The purchase of a new 3 drawer vertical filing cabinet has led to some re-organization of our files that store information about local families, sites and institutions. These files which continue to grow, are used regularly. Having additional space will make them more functional and allow for continuing expansion.

## The Ball

We are told that the Grand Edwardian Ball will be the event of the year. Tickets (\$50) are on sale at the Heritage Centre and the TA iSite.

Dance to the music of the Grey Haired Daddies. Enjoy a delicious continuous supper.

There will be prizes for the best dressed man, the best dressed woman, the best dressed couple and the best whiskers. See you there.

## A change of venue

Please note that the venue for the Public Commemoration of the Establishment of Pirongia will take place at 2:00 pm on 31 May in the School Hall and not on the East Redoubt as previously advertised. We regret the need to make the change.

## Subscriptions

Members are reminded that the subscription rates for the 2014-2015 Financial Year were raised at the last AGM. Membership subscriptions for individual members will be \$15, for families \$25, and for institutions \$35.

The new membership year commences on 1 July.

## New and improved

A new library acquisition donated by Robin Astridge: *The Waikato River Gunboats* by Grant Middlemiss. A hot-off-the-press, carefully researched, and informative account with outstanding illustrations.

Our new display about *Waipa Bridges and River Travel* is well worth a visit.

A digital copy of the *Alexandra School Minute Book, 1872-1879*, from the Alexander Turnbull Library, has been transcribed and annotated. Ask for it at the desk.

## Welcome new member

- Graeme Kenyon

## Finch's Hotels

On 12 July 1865, the *New Zealand Herald* reported that "In the flourishing district of Alexandra, which promises ere long to become a formidable township, a large public house was opened on Monday last, under the title of 'Alexandra Hotel'. It consists of eight bedrooms on the second story, and a bar and parlour, with a large room for concerts and balls on the ground floor. The landlord, formerly a sergeant of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Waikato Militia, invited his friends to a splendid supper, at which a great number attended, and did proper honour in the way of *house warming*. Songs and speeches, etc., kept the party together until nearly daylight the following morning." We now know that this hotel was located on the town acre of publican Thomas Finch, near the junction of Parry and Bellot Streets, where Miss Miller later built *Sedgemoor*, now known as *The Maples*.



*Finch's first Alexandra Hotel*

and the hotel catered for many other local events.

In 1870, Finch leased the more centrally located *Doncaster Arms* building from the estate of William Appleyard who had died, and changed the name of the house to the *Alexandra*. His original hotel building was sold to store-keeper J.D.Hill who later leased it as a residence to Major W.G. Mair when he became the local Resident Magistrate and Native Agent. That building was destroyed by fire in 1875 while Mair was living there.

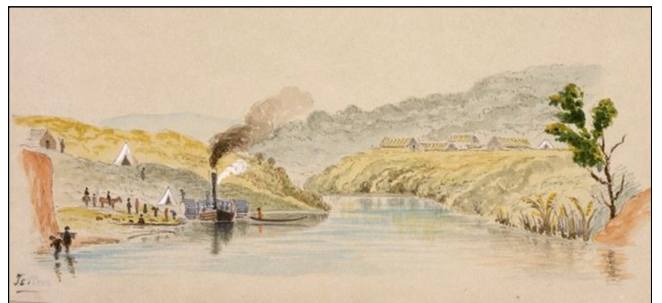
Apart from a two year period between 1874 and 1876, when he developed a farm at Paterangi, Finch leased the former *Doncaster Arms* building from the Appleyard Trust, and later L.D. Nathan, until his death in 1892. After that, his widow Jane, with the assistance of other family members, continued as the licensee until 1906.



*The location of the first hotel building may be seen to the right of the first church on what became the AC Redoubt site. This photo was taken in 1871, just before the church was moved and after Finch had transferred his license to the former Doncaster Arms building.*

## Nine days on the Waikato/Waipā Rivers

Graeme Kenyon is an Aucklander with a deep interest in the activities of the Naval Brigade on the Waikato and Waipā rivers during the Waikato War. Recently, he made two visits to our Heritage Centre as part of his investigation of where supplies were landed at General Cameron's Camp Te Rore early in 1864. On one of those visits he explored the likely site with Bruce Kilham, Jan Kilham and Alan Hall. Graeme had recently completed a 9-day exploratory trip up the river system from Port Waikato to Te Rore in a small fibreglass boat and a canoe, going ashore at the many places visited by riverboats during the invasion. He used as his guide the diary and detailed maps of 17 year-old Cecil Foljambe, a Midshipman who was on several of the vessels, including the *Avon*. He also used the diary of naval Assistant-Surgeon Messer, old photographs and newspaper clippings. Since visiting the Centre he has sent us a copy of what he calls his "scrapbook" about his journey entitled *Nine Days on the Waikato River*. Although still a work-in-progress, it is a fascinating, well-informed, 175-page commentary which is studded with reproductions of many newspaper clippings, photographs (historic and contemporary), sketches and maps.



*A water-colour painting by Osbertus Hamley, of the Avon unloading stores at Te Rore, which was one of the sources of information used by Graeme Kenyon to identify the Te Rore landing spot.*

We will put it in the library for any interested member to read. For the enthusiast, it will be a rewarding read.