

# NEWSLETTER

No. 11, February, 2008



Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre  
Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara

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## A Great Barbecue

About 30 members, partners and family members gathered at the Pirongia Clydesdales on 17 January, for a barbecue hosted by the van der Sande family. It was a great evening.

Everyone rolled up with a dish to contribute to the pot-luck menu, some meat for the barbecue and something to drink and we were able to mingle informally and enjoy some relaxed time together. President Marilyn Yeates used the occasion to thank all our volunteers for their support. We are very grateful to Nick, Jill and their family members who provided such a pleasant venue and did so much to contribute to a great start to 2008 for the Centre. Thank you too to everyone who attended. Without you, it would have been a pretty tame affair.



*An opportunity to catch up after Christmas.*

## Thanks for support:

**Paula McWha** who donated an acid-free photograph album in which to store Craft Day photographs.

**Nick and Jill van der Sande** who hosted the Visitor Centre Barbecue on 17 January.

**Sabina Owen** who made some emergency repairs to the flag which flies outside whenever the Centre is open.

**Jessica Amore** for a generous donation to our funds from the proceeds of her sales of cards at the Persimmon Tree Café.

**Elsie and Dawn Russell** for another generous donation to the Centre's Library Fund, in memory of the late Bruce Russell.

**Roz Empson** for preparing plans and specifications for the garage upgrade.

## Te Rore to Orakau: The Path of War Part 2.

A tour of sites on the 1863-64 Path of War, between Te Rore and Orakau will take place on Saturday 29 March (the first Saturday after Easter). The tour will start at Te Rore where General Cameron consolidated his force and supplies before impressive Maori fortifications at Pikopiko and Paterangi. While they were there, units under his command were involved in the Waiari Engagement where Charles Heaphy earned the first VC awarded to a soldier recruited in New Zealand. We will trace the clandestine night march of Cameron's force which by-passed Paterangi to capture the settlement at Rangiaowhia, where there will be time to visit historic St Paul's Church, the Catholic Cemetery, adjacent to the site of the church of the Mission of the Holy Angels and Blewitt's Redoubt. Nearby is the site of another brief engagement with Maori forces at Hairini. Then we will go on to Kihikihi and Orakau, the scene of the final major action of the New Zealand War in the Waikato. The tour will end at St. John's church, Te Awamutu, where many of those who fell at Orakau were buried.

This tour, to be led by Alan Hall, will be by bus, so the number of participants will be limited to 20, and payment of \$20 will be required in advance. If you wish to take part, please contact **Paula McWha** (Phone: 07 871 9585; Email: [mcwharjpk@callsouth.net.nz](mailto:mcwharjpk@callsouth.net.nz)) **before 15 March**. After that date places will be offered to non-members.

## The Johnson Family Story

Keep **Tuesday, 22 April** free to join us **at the Centre at 7:30 pm** to hear **Ngairé Phillips** talk about her investigation into the history of the Johnson family who came to Mangapiko in 1908 and contributed so much to the life and development of the district after that time.

You may have read in the *Te Awamutu Courier* that Ngairé has been working on a family history for some time, in preparation for a family re-union early next month. On 22 April, she will repeat her presentation, made last year, to the Te Awamutu Genealogy Group about not only what she found out, but also how she went about the task. Her talk will be illustrated using a Powerpoint presentation which contains slides of other people and events, including the Daley family, which we are sure that people from Pirongia will enjoy and find informative.

If you are considering trying to collate information about your family, perhaps this talk will help to get you started.

## An electronic database

Late last year, we were advised that **The Southern Trust** had made a grant of \$8,000 to allow us to employ someone to work two days a week throughout 2008, putting data about our archival material into a database in the Past Perfect small museum programme which we purchased some time ago. When completed, it will allow us to locate items more easily (providing they are put away in the right place).

At present, Glenyss Hall and Sabina Owen, assisted by Jean Ryan and Julie Karsten, have been busy, sorting and cataloguing a small mountain of press clippings, as well as donated and purchased items, in preparation for the data entry.

The successful applicant for the data-entry position was Sharon Rayner who lives locally and brings to the job a background of study in archaeology. She will work on Tuesdays and Thursdays, commencing on 19 February.

## New Members

A warm welcome to new members:

- Ted and Vin Glynn (Raglan)
- Bill Thomson (Kawhia)
- Olwyn Verhoef (Te Rore)
- Peter and Glenys Wood (Koromatua Rd)

## New and Improved

Next time you are in the Centre, have a look at the windows. Sun filter film has been fitted to the inside of all the windows to reduce Ultra-Violet rays which are potentially damaging to displays and artefacts. The difference is that the windows are a little more reflective from the outside, and from the inside the glass is a little greyer in tint. However, the screening should do a lot to reduce the fading of display materials, particularly those exposed to direct sunlight. The filtering was funded by a grant from the New Zealand Community Trust to whom we are very grateful. It will make a huge difference.

You may also notice that there are new ramps in the Centre, and a grab-rail in the toilet, both of which help improve access for people with limited mobility. These additions were installed using a grant received last year from Trust Waikato.

## Tracing Family Histories

Increasingly, the Centre is being visited by people from other parts of New Zealand and overseas, inquiring about family members who lived here in the past. It is pleasing to report that our growing set of resources is proving helpful to them. For example, the list of members of the 2nd Waikato Militia, our own databases of people who owned land and paid rates in Alexandra, and a more recent list of land grants to the original military settlers, as well as our files on the various local families, are all proving useful. Those who helped create these resources will be pleased to know that they are being used.

## From the Centre Diary

A number of our December visitors came as members of organised groups. It is becoming more common for groups organising a day trip to Pirongia to contact the Centre by phone to check that we will be open and book a time to come. From our point of view, that is ideal because it allows us to arrange an additional volunteer and borrow extra chairs, if necessary.



Cambridge Garden Group at the Centre

The three December groups varied in size between 12 and 20 and two of them also took a conducted walking tour between the East Redoubt and the AC Redoubt. That seems to sharpen appetites before a nice lunch at one of Pirongia's two cafes.

## New information about old hotels:

In *Footprints of History, No.14* (1995), the late Jim Mandeno identified three hotels which existed at various times in Alexandra, before the change in the name of the settlement in 1896. They were the *Dorchester Arms*, which later became the *Alexandra*, on the site of the present *Alexandra Hotel*, the *Royal Exchange* on the south-east corner of the Parry Street intersection with Crozier Street, and later, the *Shamrock* on the south-east corner of the Crozier-Franklin Streets intersection. He pointed out, however, that there were only two licenses at any time, explaining that the license of the *Royal Exchange* was transferred to the *Shamrock* when it opened in 1882.

Recently-located information from the *Daily Southern Cross* newspaper suggests that the story is more complicated than that. A report by the paper's Alexandra Correspondent in May, 1866, said "we have three hotels, the oldest of which, the *Alexandra*, Mr T. Finch, is being very much enlarged." Licenses for three hotels were granted at the Hamilton Magistrate's Court on 17 April of that year. The hotels appear to have been the *Alexandra* (T.Finch), the *Dorchester Arms* (W. Appleyard) and the *Prince Alfred* (F. Rushtein) in Alexandra West, where a theft of £25 from the till was also reported. This clearly implies that another hotel was called the *Alexandra* before the name of the *Dorchester Arms* was changed. The *Daily Southern Cross* confirmed this in July 1870 when it reported "We have now only one hotel here. Mr Finch of the Alexandra Hotel, has bought the goodwill of the *Dorchester Arms* from the late landlord, Mr J. Pennington, and it is now opened by the name *Alexandra Hotel*, Mr Finch having transferred the licence of the old house which is now closed."

The hotel in Alexandra West seems to have closed by 1870. At present we do not know where it was located. In fact, there is even some uncertainty about its name as another report on 25 May, 1866 about a Coroner's Inquest held there, refers to it as the *Prince Arthur*. This public house appears to have not traded for long. It may have been a victim of the economic downturn which hit the settlement hard in 1867 when many people left. Equally, the opening of the bridge between East and West Alexandra, early in 1868, may have reduced the need for a hotel on that side of the river.

This new evidence suggests (1) that the first hotel in Alexandra, the *Alexandra*, already existed in March 1866 when the *Doncaster Arms* was nearly complete, (2) that in May 1866, licenses were issued to the *Alexandra* (Finch), the *Doncaster Arms* (Appleyard) and a third hotel in Alexandra West (Rushtein), so that in the second half of 1866, there were three licensed hotels, (3) that the *Prince Albert* or *Prince Arthur* had closed by 1870, and probably earlier, and (4) that Finch closed the original *Alexandra Hotel* in 1870 when he took over the *Doncaster Arms*, and changed its name to the *Alexandra*.

All this occurred before Mathais Asmus was licensed to open the *Royal Exchange Hotel*, on the corner of Crozier and Parry Streets, in April 1873, and long before the *Shamrock* opened in 1882 when, as Jim Mandeno reported, Connell transferred his license to it from the *Royal Exchange*.

## An upgrade for the Garage

For some time, the executive committee has been concerned that while the garage behind the Historic Visitor Centre is potentially useful as a work and storage area for our growing collection, it requires a serious upgrade before it can fulfill its potential. Roz Empson has drawn up plans which were recently approved by the committee. Quotes will now be solicited from tradespeople so that the Centre may apply for a grant to undertake the work.

## Another successful trip

Two carloads of enthusiastic members repeated the Path of War tour from Tuakau to Rangiriri on 15 March. They were led by Robin Astridge, who has a particular interest in the New Zealand Wars and was able to provide interesting detail about the military tactics and engagements. It was a full and interesting day. Thank you Robin.



## What do you do on Saturdays?

We are frequently asked why the Centre is not open on Saturdays, and it is clear that if we were to open on another day of the week, Saturday would be the logical day to add. To date, we have not had volunteers who can help on that day of the week.

Recently, however, a potential volunteer called in and said that he thought that he could do one Saturday a month.

Are there others who might be persuaded to do the same thing? If four more people agreed to each do one Saturday a month, that would give us the capacity to staff the Centre on the five Saturdays in four months of the year.