

NEWSLETTER

No. 15, February, 2009



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

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Urgent Maintenance

For some time, the Executive Committee has been aware that maintenance was required on several window frames of the old church building. There was more putty and filler than wood in some sections, and during storms from the north and west, three windows leaked badly. Over the last three months, builder Peter Robertson put in 130 hours of work on the windows, replacing rotten frame sections and surrounds, first on the north side of the building and more recently on the west wall. This sort of work is like dentistry on tooth decay where problems are inclined to become increasingly worse as they are exposed. What began as an apparently small job on the west wall became a major one when facing boards were removed to reveal extensive rot caused by water leaking from the top where flashing had been omitted above a set of three windows. Peter did a great job using materials fished from demolition yards, and in some cases, hand-crafted. In this way, he repaired both the damaged sections and the sources of damage without breaking a single pane, some of which are more than 100 years old. The cost of the work, which could not have been estimated in advance, and which increased with the complexity of the repairs required, was largely paid for using some of last year's generous grant to the Centre from the Pirongia Darts Club. Guthrie Bowron, Te Awamutu, also donated 10 litres of paint and two tubes of *No More Gaps* for the work. We are very grateful for both these contributions which have lent new life to an old building.



Maintenance under way on the west windows. The newly-installed flashing can be seen above the windows.

About our building

During January, Andrew Johnson visited the Centre on several occasions, gathering information on the architecture, construction and alterations made to the former St Saviour's Church which is now the Visitor Centre. He was working on a project for an architectural drafting qualification under the supervision of WINTec Architecture Tutor Roz Empson. Amongst other things, Andrew looked for evidence of changes made to the building after it was first constructed on the AC Redoubt site in 1901. His careful examination of old photographs has disclosed that the present exterior cladding of the building is different from the original cladding, that the original vestry was replaced at some stage by the present kitchen area which was the vestry when the church was at Waikeria, and that at some stage the belfry was moved from the western end of the main roofline to its present position above the entrance. Besides examining documents and photographs, Andrew has been in touch with a former staff member at Waikeria, who was in charge of some of the alterations made after the building was removed from the redoubt site and before it was returned to its present location in Pirongia. We look forward to receiving a copy of Andrew's report which will be of wide interest.

Past postal officials

Sue Scott who worked at the Pirongia Post Office, before it was closed, is compiling a list of past postal officials. If you can add any names to the list, together with when they were here, or know anyone who may be able to help, please contact the Centre and let us know.

Thanks for support

Apologies to **John Moore** of Pirongia, for not acknowledging in an earlier Newsletter his contribution by crafting two tawa fittings to support the ceremonial sword currently on display. John also burnished the sword and scabbard in professional style. His fine craftsmanship is greatly appreciated.

Guthrie Bowron, Te Awamutu for the donation of paint and gap-filler for the maintenance project.

Charlie Coles and Murray Walter who sprayed the roof of the Centre building with a solution to remove unsightly algae.

John Scott who donated more copies of Mary Scott novels from second-hand bookshops in Auckland.

Peter Robertson who charged reduced rates for some of his time working on the maintenance project to contain costs.

Jim Rayner who dug a trench for communication wiring to the archive store.

No more leaks?

Over some considerable time, a variety of measures have been tried to stop a leak in the foyer, occurring at times of heavy, driving rain from the west. Water seemed to get into the belfry and every possible point of entry was systematically stopped, but the leak continued ... until recently, when it appears that Peter Robertson's latest measure was effective. Well done Murray, Peter, Simon and others who persistently attempted to deal with the elusive leak.

Welcome new members

- John and Jody Oberlin-Brown.
- Ailsa Mearns

The Mary Scott Collection

With the help of a number of members, the Centre is accumulating an impressive collection of novels by local author Mary Scott who was well-known for her books about rural life. Two sets are being built up—one in the collection and the other for lending to members. We wish to put plastic covers on the copies to be borrowed. Anyone willing to help with this should contact Glenyss Hall at the Centre.

Path of War Tour

Another successful *Path of War* tour, from Te Rore to Orakau, was led by Robin Astridge on Saturday, 14 February. The 10 people registered for the tour did not justify hiring a 20 seater bus, but Go-Bus were able to provide a 12 seater van which Robin drove. This is an attractive option for any future tour when numbers are below expectation. A tour member who had been on several of our other tours commented favourably on the experience in the smaller group. An added advantage was the reduced time spent getting tour members on and off the vehicle. Thank you Robin for a successful tour.



On the Path of War tour.

Up and Coming

Remember that we will be running another tour South of Pirongia on 21 March. This will visit sites mainly along the Waipa and Puniu Rivers, notably Mangatoatoa Pa, Anglican and Wesleyan Mission sites, Whatiwhatihoe, the Ormsby family cemetery and Puketotara Pa on the Pokuru side of the river, which provides an outstanding vantage point. At the time of writing, there are still three places available. Cost \$25 each.

Contact Paula McWha to make a booking (Phone: 07-871-9585 or Email: mcwharjpk@callsouth.net.nz).

Collections Database

Over the last year, Sharon Rayner has been employed to input data about our collections onto an electronic database which will allow us to quickly locate information for our own research and in response to inquiries. Sharon's work was funded by a grant from the Southern Trust which has now expired. Glenyss Hall, who is leading the project says that a great deal has been accomplished, but that more work will be necessary to make the system fully functional. Amongst other tasks, every item still needs to be digitally photographed.

An application will be made for further funding. However, voluntary assistance will also be welcome. Anyone interested in finding out about how they might help should contact Glenyss at the Centre.

Research for a new display

Sabina Owen has gathered accounts of the development of Anglican, Catholic and Methodist congregations in the Pirongia district and the Centre is currently collating these and attempting to fill in gaps in the story of Christian churches in the district from the coming of the Pakeha to the present-day. When completed, the account will be used as the basis of a new display which will incorporate the story of the Old St Saviour's Church building. One aspect which emerges clearly is that the stories of each denomination are intricately linked with developments in the wider district because congregations in Pirongia were all ministered to as parts of wider church districts which included Te Awamutu, Kihikihi, Te Pahu, Paterangi and Ohaupo. Some early developments in the new settlement were as follows.

After settlers came to Alexandra in 1864, early newspaper records indicate that services of worship were held here from time to time in the military buildings by visiting ministers of various denominations. Prominent amongst the visiting clergy was the Anglican Bishop Selwyn who was instrumental in having town lots allocated to the Anglican Church in Alexandra East and Alexandra West. From time to time, he held services of worship and performed baptisms at both Alexandra and Harapepe. He encouraged the construction of the first church on Picquet Hill which was completed in 1867, where Rev B.Y. Ashwell, from Taupiri, also visited to hold services.

The first Christian minister who resided in Alexandra, appears to have been Rev Thomas Blain, a Presbyterian who worked here from March 1867 to late 1868. Blain's parish included Harapepe, Raglan and Te Awamutu. He is recorded as having established a thriving Sunday School with 30 scholars of different denominations and three teachers. However, his widespread flock proved unable to support its minister financially, particularly following the trying economic circumstances of 1867 when there was a major exodus of settlers from throughout the Waikato. Late in 1868, Blain resigned and left in response to a call from Tapu, Coromandel, leaving his sister, Mary, who had married John Harsant. Later, the couple moved to Australia.

Blain's ministry here preceded that of the first Anglican minister Rev Laurence Brady who came here as a deacon in late 1870 and was inducted to St Saviour's in 1871 after his ordination, about the time the original church was moved from what became the AC Redoubt to the vicinity of the present Anglican church. Brady remained the local Anglican vicar until 1880. Throughout that time, he seems to have lived in the old mission house in Te Awamutu from where he also ministered to a wider parish which included Kihikihi, Harapepe, and Rangiaowhia. He played prominent roles in the Alexandra community, taking part in concerts and serving as a member of the School Committee as well as a trustee of the cemetery from 1872.

A Catholic congregation was established here in 1871 by Father Hoyne who was based at the Mission of the Holy Angels at Hairini. The first St Joseph's church was opened in 1872 before Father Hoyne left in 1873, to be replaced by Father John Golden, also based at Rangiaowhia. Father Golden ministered to Alexandra parishioners until 1880. His recollections, written in the 1920s, indicate that he held mass in Alexandra on Sundays and during the week at Harapepe, although some of his Harapepe flock also travelled to Alexandra on Sundays. After Father Golden's time, the centre of Catholic activity in the area moved from Hairini to Kihikihi.

The beginnings of Wesleyan activity in the area are less clear at the moment. There are newspaper records of visiting ministers such as J.H. Simmonds preaching in Alexandra in 1870. By the late 1870s, Te Awamutu was considered a part of the Cambridge Circuit and services were also regularly advertised at Paterangi. By the 1880s, land had been acquired and funds were held in trust for a church in Alexandra. However, it seems that in the economic circumstances of the long depression of the 1880s, when the prosperity of Alexandra was in serious decline, further developments were delayed.

Another successful barbeque

Activities for 2009 commenced with a very successful barbeque for members, hosted by Nick and Jill van der Sande at Pirongia Clydesdales. Forty members, partners and friends attended a convivial occasion, enjoying good food, excellent company and enjoyable conversation. We are again indebted to the van der Sande family for hosting the occasion. Barbara Walter noted that she received a number of apologies from other members who would have liked to attend, but were not free to do so during January. As a result, the Executive Committee has resolved to hold next year's barbeque in February.



Roz and Nick Empson with Stephanie Lambert and Claire Orbell from Te Awamutu Museum