

# NEWSLETTER

No. 16, May, 2009

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

798 Franklin Street, Pirongia 3802

Phone: (07) 871 9018

Email: [pirongia.hvc@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pirongia.hvc@xtra.co.nz)



## Another Successful South Tour



*The view from Puketotara was great*

Saturday 21 March saw another successful tour of historic sites along the Puniu and Waipa Rivers south of Pirongia. Ten people joined Alan Hall to visit sites such as Mangatoatoa Pa, the Mangapouri and Te Kopua Mission Stations, the Ormsby Family Cemetery, and the Puketotara Pa from where there is a superb view of a number other sites along the Waipa. The weather was ideal and again we used a 12 seater van which Robert McWha drove.

We now have four tours in our repertoire and in the future, it is likely that the 12-seater van option will allow us to offer them more frequently. Consideration is being given to arranging another tour to Kawhia for members in our programme for the next financial year.

## Put the AGM in your diary for 23 June at 7:30 pm

The 2009 AGM is scheduled for Tuesday, 23 June. Over the last several years, we have developed a tradition of interesting speakers, and this year will be no exception. Following the official business, Heather Garrett will talk about **John Vittoria Cowell** who was an important Pakeha-Maori trader at Te Rore between 1838 and the start of the Waikato War in 1863.

Heather and Les Garrett live in Homewood, the house which was erected by Cowell as a cottage in 1841 and then extended. It is probably the oldest existing dwelling in the Waipa District and is listed as a Category 2 building by The New Zealand Historic Places Trust.

Heather has researched the history of both the building and Johnny Cowell over many years and is a mine of information on the subjects.

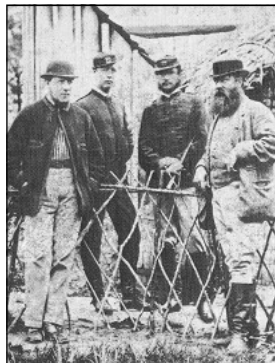
Put it in your diary for 23 June: **Heather Garrett—Johnny Cowell and Homewood!**

## The first Resident Magistrate's Court

In November 1864, the *Daily Southern Cross* newspaper reported that Alexandra was to have a Resident Magistrate's Court. The RM was Randle Cotton Mainwaring who lived in Whatawhata and Lieutenant Coulter of the Military was the Clerk of Petty Sessions. Early court hearings were held in the military Orderly Room, which the locals referred to as *The Courthouse*, before RM Mainwaring and a local JP (usually Tisdall). Cases from Kihikihi, Te Awamutu and Rangiaowhia were heard here. Many of the charges laid were civil. They involved debt, animal trespass and breach of contract. Minor criminal cases such as assault, vagrancy and petty theft were also heard, although the RM was limited in the penalties which could be imposed. More serious charges were heard in Auckland.

Mainwaring proved somewhat unreliable in appearing for hearings at both Hamilton and Alexandra and in 1867, he was replaced by RM Searancke who, from 1869, held monthly sittings in Hamilton, Cambridge and Alexandra.

In 1871, Major William Mair became the local RM and Native Agent. He held court hearings, but frequently, because he also travelled extensively in his role as Native Agent, RM Sear-



*Mainwaring (left) outside his raupo cottage at Whatawhata with Capt. Hamilton of Raglan.*

## Thanks for support

**Karen and Garry Howard** for the generous donation of an under-bench refrigerator for the Centre kitchen. Its installation means that volunteers can now bring fresh milk for a cup of tea and keep a salad lunch fresh.

**The Lottery Environment & Heritage Committee** for a grant of \$5800 to help fund the development and installation of a set of permanent displays about the development of Christian churches in the district.

**Pub Charity** for a grant of \$1700 towards the installation of gutter guard on the spouting around the Visitor Centre roof.

**Barbara Walter, Sabina Owen, Jimmy Abernethy and Charlie Coles** who painted and re-installed shelving in the collection store room.

**Claire Orbell**, Registrar at Te Awamutu Museum for invaluable advice about the conservation of objects in our collection.

**Heather Garrett** who donated a ream of high quality printer paper.

## That elusive leak

Our prediction in the last newsletter that the persistent leak in the roof of the Centre's foyer had been stopped was premature. Although the leakage appears to be much less than it was previously, we still have a problem during heavy downpours. New measures are being taken to locate it!

## Membership Renewals

This is the time of year when memberships must be renewed. A form is included with this newsletter. Please complete the form and include it with your subscription so that we can keep our records up-to-date. Of course, new memberships will also be most welcome.

## Any suggestions?

At this time of year, your Executive Committee drafts a programme of activities and events for the new financial year. Suggestions of new activities are always welcome. If you have an idea about a new activity or event, let us know about it. Tell a committee member, send an email to the Centre, leave a phone message, or simply call in, when the Centre is open, and tell us.

## Funding for a New Display

In *Newsletter 15*, it was reported that information is being collated on the history of Christian Churches in the district, for a permanent display incorporating the history of the former St Saviour's Church building which is now the Visitor Centre.

Recently, we were pleased to learn that an application to the Lottery Environment & Heritage Committee, for funding had met with approval. A grant of \$5800 has been made in support of the project. It is conditional upon a plan for the display proposal being approved. Research to complete the proposal is under way.

## Conservation of objects

Now that a number of measures have been taken to control direct sunlight in the Centre, attention is being turned to more specific ways to help conserve collection objects. Recently, Claire Orbell from the Te Awamutu Museum looked at a number of artifacts in our church collection and gave advice on cleaning, conservation and display. We are fortunate to be able to call on her informed advice.

## Gutter Guard

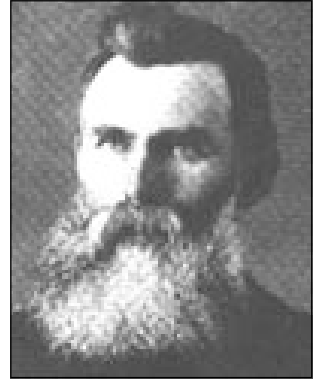
There has been a continuing problem with birds nesting in the roof and the walls of the Centre. Although a number of points of entry have been identified and blocked, others exist under the corrugated iron from the gutters. A recent \$1700 grant from Pub Charity to install gutter guard netting should mean an end to both leaves in the gutters and birds in the roof. Again, we are grateful for support from Pub Charity.

## A.C. Neil McLeod

Recent media coverage of the tragic death in Napier of Constable Len Snee told that he was the 29<sup>th</sup> New Zealand policeman to be killed on duty by a criminal act. Did you know, however, that the first policeman killed under similar circumstances was an Armed Constable in Alexandra who became the settlement's first policeman before he was transferred to North Auckland as a member of the Auckland Provincial Police?

Neil McLeod was a Scot whose family migrated to Auckland in 1865. In July 1871 he joined the Armed Constabulary, and in September of that year, after basic training, was stationed at Alexandra. Over the next two years, for varying periods, he served in a number of locations in the Waikato, at Ngaruawahia, Cambridge, Roto-o-rangi and Kihikihi. Nevertheless, he regularly returned to Alexandra which seems to have been his base. Eventually, from the beginning of 1874, he was mainly used on "Town Bobby" duty in Alexandra. This meant that he was assigned by the AC to preserve the law in the settlement. In April 1877, when the government began to separate the functions of police and defence forces, AC McLeod was assigned to the Auckland Provincial Police as the Alexandra policeman. He continued in this role until 1881, apart from a brief period in Raglan. From 1881 to 1886 he served in Warkworth and was then transferred to Dargaville about the time that the national Police Force was established, becoming PC No.91.

In 1890, when he and his family were moving to Auckland, on another transfer, an armed confrontation occurred on the steamer *Minnie Casey* at the Mangawhare Wharf near Dargaville. McLeod helped take a rifle from Henry Funcke who was returned to the wharf. However, Funcke then produced a concealed pistol and shot at figures on the bridge of the vessel – probably aiming for the Captain – but instead shot PC McLeod who died almost instantly.



Neil McLeod

We know quite a lot about Neil McLeod because he kept diaries during much of his time at Alexandra. They refer to local people and events such as playing in one of the first games of rugby football against Te Awamutu, attending concerts and 'balls' as well as 'rinking' (skating) in the Public Hall. They also give insight into the life of a rather lonely and serious young man, who was desperately seeking a wife. His first diary ends with his happy marriage to Rebecca Henry from Auckland in 1878. They had three children before she died in 1886. He remarried, and was travelling to Auckland with his second wife and two more children when he was killed, aged 44.

Alan Hall has been investigating McLeod's life and editing the diary. He plans to investigate a later diary which is held by the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Eventually, we hope to be able to make available an edited version of the diaries about McLeod's years in Alexandra, together with a commentary.

## When a whim is not 'a sudden fancy'?



A picture of the whim. The four sockets are on the top. The toothed gear wheel can be seen underneath and the drive-shaft is at the top right.

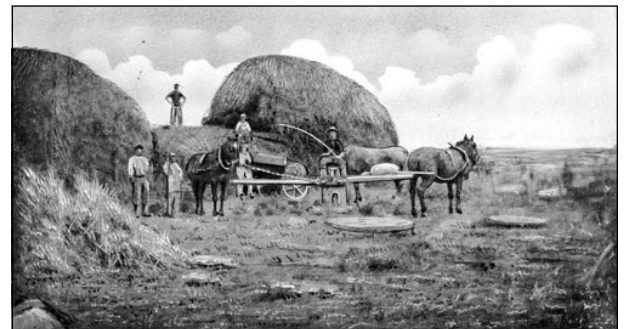
John Oberlin-Brown has an unusual piece of old machinery on his farm at Puketotara. He wondered if it might have been associated with a flour mill. Lettering on its top indicates that it was made by Reid and Gray, Dunedin. We passed his photographs to Neville Ritchie, DoC Archaeologist, who quickly identified it as a whim. Now by dictionary definition, a *whim* is 'a sudden fancy'. However, it seems that in the days of horse power, it also denoted a horse-powered device to power other machinery.

On John's photo, it is easy to see four sockets into which stout poles, several metres long, were fitted. A horse or horses were then harnessed to the ends of the poles and as they walked around the whim, a gear driven driveshaft powered a machine such as a chaff-cutter or a hay stacker. Reid and Gray in Dunedin were manufacturers of a wide range of agricultural machinery and it appears that they advertised their whim as a *horse gear* which clearly indicates that it was no sudden fancy.

Nick van der Sande tells us that he has seen a whim in operation, driving a chaff-cutter, and we are told that whims were

also used at mines and timber mills. Sometimes, bullocks were used to turn them. Evidently, there is a working model at the Matakoho Kauri Museum. We do not know what the Puketotara whim powered – perhaps a pump. If it was made by Reid and Gray (i.e. after 1880), it was probably made too late to have powered a small four mill; bigger, more efficient mills had taken over by then.

Thanks to John Oberlin-Brown for drawing the machine to our attention and for photographs of it.



A whim in use, powering a machine stacking hay. The man driving the horses is perched on top of the whim, apparently turning with it.

**AGM: Tuesday, 23 June at 7:30 pm. Bring a friend. Hear about Johnny Cowell and Homewood.**