

NEWSLETTER

No. 17, August, 2009



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

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Another Successful AGM

The 2009 Annual General Meeting, held in the Centre on Tuesday 23 June, was attended by 25 members and interested members of the public.

This year's speaker was Heather Garrett who spoke about the early Pakeha-Maori trader, Johnny Cowell, who operated a trading store and a bush hotel at Te Rore between 1839 and 1863. Since 1866, Heather and Les Garrett have lived in Homewood, the house built by Cowell about 1840, and then extended for use as a bush hotel where many travellers, including Ernst Dieffenbach, stayed.

Heather told of other owners of Homewood since the Waikato War and of the Garrett's restoration of what is probably the oldest existing dwelling in the Waikato/Waipā district.

When thanking Heather, Robin Astridge observed how fortunate we are to have a member like Heather with such a comprehensive understanding of the history of the area.

The office-holders and committee members elected by the AGM were: President: Sabina Owen, Vice-President: Marilyn Yeates, Secretary: Robin Astridge, Treasurer: Glenyssa Hall, Committee: Debbie Courtney, Patricia Grierson, Alan Hall, Garry Howard, Clare St Pierre, Sharon Rayner, Barbara Walter, Murray Walter.

Special thanks to Sue Scott who stood down from the committee this year. She was a foundation member of the Visitor Centre Committee.



Heather Garrett talks about Cowell..

Alexandra's first policeman

The last Newsletter reported on the establishment of a Resident Magistrate's Court in Alexandra. The newspaper reports, on which our research to date is based, refer to the RM, R.C. Mainwaring, and to the Clerk of Petty Sessions, Lt. Coulter. But there is no mention of a constable, who would have been necessary to bring miscreants to court and enforce the court's decisions. Nevertheless, by June 1865, William Kelly, "constable of Alexandra", was giving evidence in a case referred to the Supreme Court in Auckland. He also gave evidence, in February 1866, at an inquest into a drowning at Alexandra. On that occasion he described himself as "a private in the 2nd Waikato Regiment, and the constable attached to this settlement". Militia records indicate that Kelly was a blacksmith before he enlisted.

There was no national Police Force at that time. Various provincial governments had their own police, but the Auckland Provincial Police of the time seem to have been concentrated in Auckland. William Kelly was a member of the 2nd Waikato Militia who was assigned to the role of constable by the Alexandra military authorities. That would have been similar to the arrangement made by the Armed Constabulary after early 1868 when armed constables were assigned to 'town bobby' duty.

Kelly's time as constable ended early in 1867. On 7 January, it was reported that he had arrested two soldiers and a militiaman named Michael Gleeson in conjunction with a robbery on 28 December 1866, from the old commissariat store at Te Rore, where supplies from the riverboat *Gymnotus* were stored en route to Thompson's store at Harapepe. On 25 January, it was reported that the two soldiers had been freed without evidence being heard and that Gleeson was remanded for trial in the Supreme Court, Auckland. However, Gleeson then escaped from Kelly's custody and the newspaper correspondent predicted that as a consequence Kelly was likely to be dismissed, although it was thought that many would regret such an outcome.

The prediction must have been accurate because in March, when Gleeson, who had been recaptured, was brought to trial in Auckland, Kelly gave evidence as a former "special constable at Alexandra", but described his current occupation as blacksmith, at Point Russell (Mercer). Jesse Sage, a former Militia Sergeant, seems to have been assigned the role of constable for the period until the Armed Constabulary took over from the Militia in 1868.

Thanks for Support

Robin Astridge for moving the hinges on the fridge door to make it open more conveniently.

Charlie Coles for spraying the church building, the archive store and the cobblestones outside the Centre to kill algal growth.

Heather Garrett who donated more printer paper.

The Southern Trust for a further grant of \$6,000 to bring the Centre's collections database up-to-date. This enables us to employ a data entry assistant for a further 6 months.

Te Awamutu Genealogy Group for the use of their Powerpoint projector at the AGM.

Murray Walter who installed cabin hooks to secure outward opening doors.

Bailey Ingham, Otorohanga for again reviewing the annual financial accounts.

A Correction

It has been pointed out that we are incorrect in referring to the urupa near Kiwi Road as the Ormsby Family Cemetery. Its use has not been restricted to members of the Ormsby family. Its proper name is **Te Akarauti**.

Calendar of events

At its first meeting, the new Executive Committee approved a schedule of Historic Visitor Centre events for the coming year.

Sat. 10 October	North Tour
Sat. 24 October	Walking Tour of sites in Pirongia Village
Sat. 14 November	West Tour
Sat. 23 January	Path of War: Te Rore to Orakau
Tue. 16 February	Members' BBQ.
Sat. 27 February	Kawhia Tour for members
Sat. 27 March	South Tour
Tue. 20 April	Family History & Research Evening.
Sat. 22 May	Mary Scott Workshop

Details of each event will be publicised in the preceding Newsletter, giving members the opportunity for preferential bookings before the event is opened to the public.

Collections Database

Last year, Sharon Rayner was employed to enter data about items in our growing collection of archives and artefacts. The work, funded by a grant from the Southern Trust, ran out early in 2008 with more than 900 items catalogued, but with many others remaining to be entered.

Towards the end of May, the Centre was advised that the Southern Trust had given another grant of \$6,000 for a further 6 months of work to complete the project. This was welcome news and we are very grateful to the Southern Trust for helping us to complete a task which is so important to our operations.

Sharon continued with the work, but recently was offered a full-time job which she accepted. Fortunately for us, Debbie Courtney, who is interested in museum work and has the necessary skills, had begun work at the Centre as a volunteer. She was appointed by the Executive Committee to take over Sharon's role.

Thank you Sharon for all your painstaking work in setting up the database and thank you Debbie for continuing the task which is scheduled to be finished in early December.

Mary Scott's Typewriter

Most members will know that Mary Scott was a prolific writer of novels about New Zealand rural life who lived for many years in Pekanui Road. Older visitors to the Centre frequently show great interest in our display about her, telling us that they were fans who had enjoyed reading her 37 novels published between 1953 and 1978.

She began writing for newspapers in the 1930s to supplement the meagre income from a struggling farm. Her son, Stuart Scott told how, "after working all day and getting the evening meal, she would often settle down to write at the typewriter on the kitchen table with a kerosene lamp on one side and a candle elevated on a couple of books on the other".

Recently, the Centre was given her first typewriter, a portable *Remington Junior*, on which much of her early writing was done. It was donated to the Centre by **Grace Shaw** whose mother was a friend of Mary Scott.

Two weeks later, **John Scott** of Clevedon (not a relative of Mary), who has located a number of publications for our collection of Mary Scott books, produced another treasure, a first edition copy of *Barbara and the New Zealand Backblocks*, the first novel published under her own name.

The typewriter needs conservation work, and safe arrangements for its display must also be arranged.

Congratulations

At the recent biennial presentation of Heritage Awards by the Waipa District Council, members **Mary Hurst** and **Heather Garrett** received long service awards, **Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre** an award for heritage education and **Pirongia Clydesdales** an award for traditional craftsmanship. Congratulations to all concerned.

Some Post Office history

Sue Scott worked in the Pirongia Post Office before it was closed. Last year she gathered information about the history of post and telegraph services in the district from the Postal History Society of New Zealand. That information, supplemented by newspaper reports and official notices in the *New Zealand Gazette* tells an interesting story.

In 1861, before Alexandra had even been planned, Robert Ormsby of Kaipahi, was the first postmaster for Upper Waipa. This probably meant that he distributed irregular mail deliveries and took advantage of any opportunities for mail to be sent to Auckland.

When Alexandra was settled in 1864, postal and telegraph services were separate. Edmund Lockhart was appointed postmaster (at a salary of £25 a year) to handle a weekly mail service. He appears to have operated in a military building. The telegraph service was located in the military telegraph station at Te Rore which was manned by Imperial troops.

When the British regiments left the area in 1866, the New Zealand Government took over the telegraph line, shifting the station from Te Rore to Alexandra where Robert McGruther and a youthful Aubin Ahier constructed a building which included accommodation for the new telegraphist, David Mahoney. It was probably located on the military reserve, possibly facing Crozier Street. About the same time, J.D. Hill was appointed postmaster. The Post Office was located in his store in Crozier Street which was quite close to the present post shop in the convenience store. By then, the Post Office was also offering money order and savings bank services.

In 1868, in an economy move, the Post Office was moved from Hill's store to the Electric Telegraph Office where telegraphist Mahoney also became postmaster. This required him to do two different jobs for which he was paid separately by different government departments. This arrangement continued with several telegraphist-postmasters until 1881 when the government merged the two departments to form the NZ Post and Telegraph Department which served the country for more than a century before its services were again separated in 1987.

A new Post and Telegraph Office was opened in 1882. A photograph of it hangs above the reception desk in the Visitor Centre. It was located in Franklin Street on a section opposite the Alexandra Hotel. The building included accommodation for a succession of postmasters and postmistresses.

Eventually, in 1960, that building was replaced by a more modern one which was removed soon after the Post Office was closed in 1987.



The Post and Telegraph Office building which was opened in 1882. [TA Museum PH283].

Coming Events

Sat. 10 Oct. North Tour. Travel by minibus to visit Matakaitaki Pa, Paterangi Pa, General Cameron's HQ at Te Rore, a flour mill site in Grey Road, redoubt sites in Pirongia, Whatiwhathioe, and Waiari Pa. 9:00-4:00. \$25.

Sat. 24 Oct. A Walking Tour of Pirongia Village. Spend the morning visiting many historic sites around the village, finding out about their significance. Have morning tea at one of the cafes. 9:00-12:00. The number of participants will be limited to 15. \$5.

Sat. 14 Nov. West Tour. Travel by minibus to visit historic sites at Te Rore, Home-wood, Harapepe, Te Pahu, Karamu and Kaniwhaniwha. 9:00-4:00. \$25.

Places on each Mini-bus tour will be limited to 10 people.

Payment is required with registration.

To join any tour, inquire/register by contacting **either** the Visitor Centre **or** Paula McWha Phone: 07 871 9585. Email: mcwharjpk@callsouth.net.nz.

Early registration is recommended as preference will be given to members, providing they register 2 weeks before the event.

Do You Remember?

We know that the last Post Office was built on Crozier Street in 1960 and that it replaced the previous one, pictured above. If you can remember it being built, can you please tell us whether the old PO was demolished to make way for it. Or was the new one built alongside it before the old one was removed?

Newspaper Clippings

The National Library website *Papers Past* gives electronic access to a growing number of old newspapers. When on duty, volunteer **Julie Karsten** is copying useful clippings about events in early Alexandra for our files. As they build up, the clippings will form an invaluable, interesting resource.

Welcome new members

- Heather and Les Garrett
- Janet and David Leggett
- Debbie Courtney
- Tony Roxburgh
- Pat Tata
- Alistair Livie & Sandra Holt