

# NEWSLETTER

No. 19 February, 2010

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)



## Three 'Path of War' Tours

The Centre has run a Path of War Tour in each of the past three years, but this year, a surge of interest resulted in us running the tour three times. The first was led by Alan Hall on 23 January, as originally scheduled. However, when the places on that trip were filled, Paula McWha had a waiting list sufficient to fill two more mini-buses. As a result, Robin Astridge led a second group on 13 February, and Alan will lead a third tour on 20 February.

We continue to use self-drive minibuses which are cheaper to hire and can travel along farm roads to sites not so easily accessed by larger vehicles. Participants also tell us that they prefer the smaller groups where discussion occurs naturally. It is good to know that more people are taking an interest in this aspect of our local history. Of course all of this depends upon our being able to call on the services of drivers such as Charlie Coles and Robin Astridge, as well as the perseverance of Paula who juggles the bookings.



A tour group at Orakau.

## Barbecue for Members

The Visitor Centre is indebted to the van der Sande family for again hosting a barbecue for members at Pirongia Clydesdales as our first activity of the new year. We had planned to hold the event during February when more members would have been able to attend. However, the date was brought forward to 17 January because alterations to the function centre used for the BBQ were scheduled to begin later in January.

Despite the change in date, the attendance of 35 members was pleasing. The occasion allowed members to catch up with one another after the holiday period. President Sabina Owen reviewed recent developments at the Centre and host Nick van der Sande talked about plans for new developments at Pirongia Clydesdales which include the establishment of a café which we hope to use in 2011 for what is becoming an annual event.

Thanks to Barbara Walter for coordinating the arrangements and to Nick and Jill van der Sande for their wonderful hospitality, despite an extremely busy schedule.

## The Alexandra Rifle Ranger Volunteers

Did you know that in 1873, Alexandra had its own volunteer colonial defence unit?

In May of that year, a meeting was held in Alexandra to propose to the government the formation of a light infantry volunteer force to be named the *Alexandra Rifle Rangers Volunteers*. The meeting was chaired by E.O. Ross who, as an ensign in the Forest Rangers, had been severely wounded at Waerengaahika on the East Coast in 1865. According to newspaper reports, in the early 1870s he was farming at Harapepe. The meeting proposed that Ross should be appointed Captain, that Kennedy Hill, an auctioneer who was a good shot, but lacked military experience, should be his lieutenant, and that Thomas Finch, a former sergeant in the Waikato Militia, should be ensign. The practice of electing and nominating officers was common in volunteer units, but the decision about who would be commissioned was made by the government.

The government responded by gazetting the new unit in mid-June.

When government approval of the unit was received, the *Waikato Times* reported that at a further meeting, 22 volunteers were enrolled. At that meeting, it was also decided that Captain Ross should command the unit, but that his Lieutenant should be Edward Hall of Te Rore.

At present, little is known about the fate of the unit, how long it existed, or who commanded it after Captain Ross moved to Opotiki a few years later. It seems not to have been operational in 1882 when Te Awamutu volunteers were called out to help arrest the prophet Mahuki.

## Thanks for Support

**The New Zealand Lottery Grants Board** whose grant of \$5,800 dollars funded the newly installed churches history display panels.

**Charlie Coles** who made a superb job of cleaning the 100 year-old church organ and repairing a broken panel.

**National Services Te Paerangi** which provided a *Helping Hand Grant* of \$1000 for conservation materials for the Centre's archives. Field officer, **Julia Gleeson**, who visits the Centre periodically, suggested necessary supplies and gave useful advice on cleaning and conserving Mary Scott's typewriter.

**Trust Waikato** for a grant of \$500 towards the installation of under-floor insulation to help control the wide temperature fluctuations in the Centre which make the conservation of objects problematic.

**Pub Charity** for a grant of \$700 which will allow the Centre to complete the under-floor insulation project.

**Barbara and Murray Walter** who performed some serious jungle clearance between the outside storage building and the boundary.

**Paula McWha** who continues to handle tour bookings. The arrangements for the repeats of this year's Path of War tours were particularly onerous.

**Nick van der Sande & Peter Robertson** who installed posts at the sides of the internal ramps to stop visitors stepping over the edge. Now, what about some cord or perhaps an electric fence?

## No more leaks

At long last, after repeated false starts and some serious testing during torrential rain, Murray Walter confidently says that the leak in the foyer is fixed. Well done Murray and Peter Robertson.

## New Members

- Arnold and Kathy Watson
- Mick Scown and Vicki Anderson
- Maureen McGonagle
- Anne O'Halloran

## Coming events

### 27 February: Kawhia Tour for Members

In the last newsletter, it was reported that the planned tour was on hold until another tour boat begins operations on Kawhia harbour. In January, a smaller craft which is licensed to carry 18 passengers began operations. Our tour will now go ahead on Saturday 27 February, but will be limited to 18 people. We will pool transport to Kawhia and the boat trip will cost \$35 per head. There are still a few places available.

### 27 March: South Tour

A tour of historic sites south of Pirongia will be led by Alan Hall on Saturday, 27 March. It will include visits to the sites of Mangatoatoa Pa, the Mangapouri CMS Mission station, Te Akarauti Cemetery on the original Ormsby family farm, Te Kopua Wesleyan Mission Station and Puketotara Pa from where there is a great view of the Kaipia district. Along the way, a number of other sites will be pointed out, amongst them the location of Turner's farm and Whatiwhatiho. There are still a few places available.

Book for either tour with Paula McWha (Phone

## New and Improved

Have you seen the long-awaited display about the history of Christian churches in our district since 1834? The four display panels were designed by Sonia Frimmel, of *What's the Story*, using text and photographs collated by the Centre.

The design and production of the panels were funded by a grant from the NZ Lottery Grants Board for which the Centre is very grateful. Steps are being taken to produce more detailed information in display books to supplement them.



*The fourth panel tells the story of the second church building which is now the Visitor Centre*

The purchase of another filing cabinet has eased pressure on the Centre's filing system which was reaching bursting point. The need for a further cabinet is testimony to the continuing growth in materials about families, organizations and historical sites in Alexandra/Pirongia and the wider district.

## Useful details

Last year a descendant of the Ormsby family told us that the driver of the Kawhia Mail Coach in the enlarged photograph hanging above the Centre reception desk is Gilbert William Ormsby, the oldest son of Robert and Rangihuriria Ormsby.

Fragments of information such as the names of people in photographs are small, but useful pieces of information which can help us piece together more of the jigsaw of local history.

## An early native commissioner

Between 1873 and 1879, Major Wiremu Te Wheoro was based at Alexandra and played important roles in helping achieve the understanding between the Kingitanga and the government, which resulted in Tawhiao's declaration of peace in Alexandra in July 1881.

Te Wheoro was chief of Ngati Naho, located south of Mercer, who was closely connected to Ngati Mahuta. However, he argued against the use of the title 'King' before King Potatau was appointed. At the beginning of the Waikato War he, and many of his tribe aligned with the government which made him a captain in the colonial militia. Following the battle at Rangiriri, Te Wheoro began to be used as an intermediary between the government and the King movement. He and a contingent of Ngati Naho built and manned what is now known as Te Wheoro's Redoubt at Rangiriri.



Major Te Wheoro

Between 1865 and 1872 he served as an assessor for the Native Land Court but became increasingly disaffected with the work of the court which he came to regard as corrupt because he considered that it conferred land titles on those most likely to sell. He eventually resigned in 1873 and was made a major in the colonial forces. It was in that role that he came to Alexandra where initially, he and a contingent of Ngati Naho, serving as Armed Constables, built and occupied the Ford Redoubt on Frontier Road.

From that time, he worked as a native commissioner, in tandem with Major W.G. Mair, the resident magistrate at Alexandra, continuing negotiations between the government and the King movement. He understood the predicament of the Kingitanga only too well because in the Waikato land confiscation, his tribe lost most of its lands despite it remaining loyal to the government.

Eventually, in 1879, Te Wheoro resigned as land commissioner, feeling that he was not listened to and that his people were being treated unfairly. He was elected to parliament later that year as MP for Western Maori, on the nomination of Rewi Maniapoto and continued to campaign against the government attitudes towards Maori. He also campaigned tirelessly but unsuccessfully for the return of confiscated lands to his hapu.

After the declaration of peace in 1881, Te Wheoro travelled to England as a supporter of King Tawhiao when he attempted to obtain a meeting with Queen Victoria, seeking redress. They were unsuccessful and Te Wheoro lost his seat in parliament in the 1884 election which took place while he was overseas.

An old map shows that Te Wheoro was allocated several town sections in Alexandra, which were marked 'Te Wheoro to occupy' in the block bounded by McClure, Bellot, Colinson and Baffin Streets. Newspaper reports tell that he built and extended a house during his time here, possibly in the same area. However, at this stage its location is not known. Church records also show that he was a member of St Saviour's Church.

## Collections Database

The Centre's collections database has now reached the stage of development where it has become useful.

Over the past 18 months, grants from the Southern Trust allowed us to pay for data entry. So, at the end of 2009, when the grants for data entry ran out, the database contained over 1200 entries about documents, photographs and objects in our possession. That is impressive progress when account is taken of all the associated work involved in checking and recording the provenance of every item and copying all photographs so that the originals may be conserved, with only copies being included in displays.

To be fully useful, the database must continue to be updated as further items are added. This ongoing task requires commitment by a member or members with keyboard skills who are willing to learn about the system and regularly input data about additional collection items as they are added to the collection.

Anyone interested in finding out more about helping, should contact the Centre.

## Burial Records

Burials at the Alexandra Cemetery date back to 1864. Initially, a reserve (*Res 334*) at the end of McClintock Street appears to have been used. The adjacent undeveloped road reserve was then used before a Cemetery Reserve was set aside combining the existing burial ground with Reserves 518 and 519 on the eastern side of the old roadway. That is why McClintock Street was ended at Beechey Street in the 1930s and replaced by a new lane to the cemetery, later named Oak Lane.

The Centre has a list of burial sites identified from headstones in 1977. There is no record of burials prior to 1875 and there are gaps in the record for graves which were unmarked in 1977.

Visitors sometimes ask about the location of the graves of residents who were buried after 1977. We need to get our burial record up-to-date so that we have answers to such questions.

This is an ideal project for a couple of volunteers to check and record all burials since 1977. Anyone willing to help should contact the Centre.