

NEWSLETTER

No. 20, May, 2010

Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre

Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara

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Kawhia Tour.

A tour of Kawhia Harbour, a visit to the Kawhia Regional Museum, and a visit to some historic sites in the township were enjoyed by 17 members on Saturday, 17 February. The occasion was an informal opportunity for members to find out about some of Kawhia's history, rather than a carefully orchestrated, guided tour. The group travelled in cars and met up at the Kawhia waterfront from where Grant Taylor of Kawhia Harbour Cruises took us to Te Maika, pointing out some of the numerous pre-European Maori sites on the harbour. He also identified a number of locations which became important after the arrival of Europeans. At Te Maika, on the southern side of the harbour entrance, a walk to a hilltop provided an excellent vantage point from which to see a number of Maori pa sites, including Te Totara, and Te Arawi where Ngati Toa were besieged by Tainui forces about 1821, before being forced to leave the region, to eventually settle on the Wellington West Coast around Kapiti Island.

In the brilliantly clear conditions, it was possible from Te Maika, to see the location of Whiteley's Wesleyan Mission at what became known as Te Waitere.



On the wharf at Kawhia

After lunch, we visited the Kawhia Regional Museum and several carloads then drove around the settlement to identify the sites of Cowell's (Later Charlton's) trading store, the AC Redoubt built in the 1880s and an AC Cottage which was relocated from the foreshore to near the Methodist Church. The opportunity to view the recently restored Methodist Church was a bonus. The quality of the restoration make it well worth a visit.

The experience gave a taste of what Kawhia has to offer to those interested in its rich history.

Thanks for Support

The members and Executive Committee would like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the work and activities of our Treasurer, **Glenyss Hall**.

After seven years of diligent service to the Centre Glenyss has decided it is time "to hand over the reins" and has tendered her resignation as Treasurer as well as from the Executive. The Centre (and members) owe her an enormous vote of thanks for the effort she has put in on our behalf. Her abilities and activities ranged from cleaner "extraordinaire" to an accomplished treasurer – and any task between! Glenyss has taken on many tasks, too many to list! However her computer skills have enabled our records to be entered digitally – either by herself or supervising paid staff. She was responsible for the raising of many dollars for projects through grant applications as well as keeping our financial records meticulously and in a manner easily followed for those who are not so familiar with such records. We will also remember her skills when we open up instructions she compiled for both volunteers and past paid staff, with clear, precise steps to get particular tasks done.

Your talents will be missed, Glenyss. Thank you.

We wish Glenyss well for the future and any task she takes up.

Our Volunteers, and members of the Executive Committee who have contributed to the successful operation of the Centre during the last financial year.

Trust Waikato and Pub Charity which funded the under-floor insulation which has now been installed and will reduce serious heat loss during the winter.

AGM - 22 June

The Annual General Meeting of the Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre will be held at the Centre at 7.30 pm on Tuesday 22 June, 2010.

Following the official business, this year's speaker will be Executive Committee member, Nick van der Sande, of Pirongia Clydesdales, who is an internationally recognized expert on traditional carriage driving. Since the days when Nick was the driver of the DB Clydesdales, based at Paterangi, the van der Sande family have done much to preserve and pass on the traditions of coachman-style driving, so successfully that they are called-upon annually to run clinics around the country. Nick is listed in the Hall of Fame of the National Shirehorse Centre at Plymouth, England and last year, Pirongia Clydesdales received a Waipa Heritage Award for their achievements.

Following the AGM, Nick will give an illustrated talk about the work and experiences of Pirongia Clydesdales in maintaining and promoting the skills and traditions of carriage driving.

A possible change of name

At its March meeting, the Executive Committee resolved to recommend to the AGM that the name of the Centre be changed to the **Pirongia Heritage and Information Centre, Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara**, providing that is acceptable to the Maori stakeholders who were not represented at the meeting.

The change is proposed because the present name appears not to clearly indicate to either local people or to visitors, the range of services offered. A number of residents have told us that the name *visitor centre* implies to them that it is for visitors rather than local people, and some visitors have been surprised by the variety of information available because they thought that the name implies that it offers only *historic* information. It has also been suggested to us that our historic displays are comparable to those most commonly seen elsewhere in heritage centres.

Don't forget the library

The Centre has a growing set of books on historical topics, mainly relevant to the local area. We also have a collection of books by local author Mary Scott.

Books from both collections are available for members to borrow.

However, it is important for all borrowings to be recorded in the loans book, and for all returns to be logged.

Ask the volunteer on duty for access to the collections which are in locked cabinets. They are there to be used by members.

Historic Tours

Since Newsletter 19, the Centre has run three more historic tours.

- A third Path of War Tour on 20 February
- The Kawhia Tour for members on 27 February
- A South Tour on 27 March.

This brought our total number of tours in the financial year to six.

Thanks to Paula McWha who juggled the bookings and Robert McWha, Charlie Coles and Robin Astridge who drove the minivans.

Another record

During the 2009-10 financial year, which ended in March, visitor numbers at the Centre exceeded 2500. This was an increase of more than 300 over last year's total. Saturdays and Sundays tend to attract the most visitors, and as might be expected, numbers tend to be greatest between September and March. During the last year, there was a noticeable increase in the number of inquiries about walks on Mount Pirongia and more visitors who have come to Pirongia for the day. We continue to be visited by tourists from a wide variety of overseas countries.

A Post Office Savings Bank in 1867

In April 1867, a Post Office Savings Bank began to operate at the Alexandra Post Office (separate from the Telegraph Office) which had been moved from a military building (probably the orderly room) to the store of J.D.Hill in Queen (now Crozier) Street where Hill became the Postmaster in late 1866.

A recently-discovered announcement in the *Daily Southern Cross* newspaper reveals that this Post-Office Savings Bank and Money Order Office was one of only twelve in the Auckland Province. There were three in Northland, three in the vicinity of present-day Auckland City and the others were at Newcastle (Ngaruawahia), Cambridge, Alexandra, Raglan and Tauranga.

The offices were open on every week day "for receipt and repayment of deposits, and issue and payment of money orders". The interest allowed on Savings Bank deposits (not exceeding £200) was five per cent per annum.

Make an offer

The Centre has two Canon MP240 Multifunction printers which are surplus to requirement. One has never been used, and the other was used only for a short time while our printer on the reception desk was being serviced.

The printers, which are suitable for home use, print in both black and white and colour. They can be used to copy documents and scan images.

View them at the Centre, read the manual and, if you are interested in picking up a bargain, make an offer.

Contact Sabina Owen.

Welcome new member

- Rachel Duncan

Will the real Gilbert Mair please stand up.

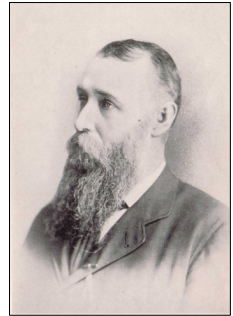
Major William Gilbert Mair lived in Alexandra in the 1870s when, in addition to being Resident Magistrate he also acted as a native agent for Donald McLean, Minister of Defence and Minister of Native Affairs in several governments. Mair was a leading member of St Saviour's Church where he served on the Vestry as the Vicar's Warden. In 1873, he was married here to Janie Cathcart Black, the step-sister of his friend J.D. Hill, store-keeper and another prominent citizen. It was Mair who King Tawhiao chose in 1881 to return to receive his declaration of peace in Alexandra.

When Mair's name is mentioned, people often nod wisely and say "Oh yes. Gilbert Mair", thinking of the celebrated bush fighter from the Te Kooti campaign, who was awarded the NZ Cross.

The man to whom they refer was **Captain Gilbert Mair**, William Gilbert Mair's younger brother. In fact, both men earned enviable reputations as bush fighters at different times.

The inclusion of 'Gilbert' in both their names is the obvious source of confusion. **Their father was named Gilbert Mair**. He built the mission vessel *Herald* at Paihia before setting up as a merchant, trading and supplying ships at Wahapu, south of Kororaraka. He then moved his family to Whangarei about the time of the northern war. **His wife was Elizabeth Gilbert Puckey**, the sister of William Gilbert Puckey, a missionary at Kaitaia. It seems that Gilbert was customarily used as a second name in her family.

So, William, the second son in the Mair family, appears to have been given the second name Gilbert, from his mother's family, and Gilbert, the fourth son, was named after his father.



Major W.G. Mair

Jesse Sage

A recent visitor to the Centre was Desmond Darby from Lower Hutt who is a descendant of Jesse Sage, a Waikato militiaman who was one of the original settlers at Alexandra. Desmond has been investigating his family history and presented the Centre with a copy of a carefully compiled research file which added considerably to our information.

It shows that Sgt Jesse Sage came to New Zealand in 1845 as a member of the 58th Regiment which fought several engagements in the northern war in 1845-46. Following the northern campaign, he married about 1851, obtained an honourable discharge in 1857 receiving a land grant of 40 acres near Auckland.

At the outbreak of the Waikato War in 1863, Sage volunteered to become a member of the 2nd Waikato Regiment with the rank of Sergeant. He served throughout the Waikato War and then served in Wanganui and Taranaki until 1866 when he moved to Alexandra where he was allocated a town lot on Penny Road, near the green belt, and an 80 acre farm lot (the standard allocation for a Staff Sergeant, as he was at that stage). Later he was to acquire another three town lots adjoining his original allotment.

The name of Sage appeared regularly over 25 years in newspaper reports about events in Alexandra. He was a versatile man who was employed at various times as a local policeman, mail contractor, pound-keeper, dog registrar, and owner of the Shamrock Hotel. Several of his appointments and his community service as a member of the Alexandra School Committee and Town Board, suggest that he was considered trustworthy. He held strong and sometimes controversial views which he was unafraid to express, although on occasions, his also appears to have been the voice of reason in the face of conflict.

The Sage family were loyal members of the Alexandra Catholic congregation, although Jesse Sage, who had been raised as an Anglican, and donated money when the first St Saviour's Church was built, did not formally join the Catholic church until he was baptised, at 80 years of age, in 1904, in Auckland where he had moved.

Desmond Darby's file indicates that although Sage had been given land grants in recognition of his military service in the Northern and Waikato wars, and was awarded a New Zealand medal for his service, he felt short-changed by not receiving a further grant in recognition of his service in Wanganui and Taranaki in 1867-68. He campaigned for compensation tirelessly, never accepting that official investigations confirmed that he had received his entitlement.

Jesse Sage died in Auckland in 1913, aged 89, one of the last survivors of the 58th Regiment who had served in New Zealand.

Renewals of membership

With this newsletter all members will receive a renewal of membership form.

Payment before the AGM will be appreciated and will allow you to vote at the AGM.

Suggestions invited

If you have ideas about an activity or an event which you would like to have considered for the next financial year, talk to a committee member about it so that it may be considered.