

NEWSLETTER

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Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre
Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara

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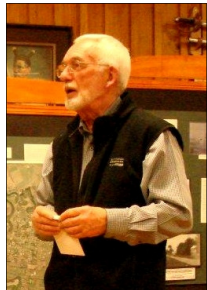


Another successful AGM

The eighth Annual General Meeting of the Pirongia Heritage and Information Centre was held on 21 June with 26 members present.

President Robin Astridge reported on a year of achievements which included hosting more groups, developing displays and conducting historic tours where mid-week tours have proved popular. He also noted a slight decline in visitor numbers which may reflect the current financial climate.

The meeting elected officers for the new financial year: President, Robin Astridge; Vice-President, Marilyn Yeates; Secretary, Sabina Owen; Treasurer, Murray Walter; Committee: Basil Coles, Debbie Courtney, Patricia Grierson, Garry Howard, Gloria King, Clare St Pierre, Nick van der Sande, Barbara Walter. Tom Roa has replaced Haupai Puke as the nominee of Te Kauhanganui, and Purekireki Maraë continues to be represented by Sally Uerata.



Alan Hall talking to the AGM

Following the formal meeting, Alan Hall gave an illustrated talk about the development of Alexandra between 1864 and the early 1870s. He explained why the military settlement scheme failed to retain sufficient soldier settlers, and was replaced by the Armed Constabulary in 1868. His analysis of changes in land ownership showed how a group of early settlers accumulated property in the new town and became important in the transition from a military settlement to a civilian settlement where, despite pioneer hardship, a library, literary and debating society, harmonic society, churches, concerts and dances were held from a surprisingly early stage.

Our local historian

Those of you who have accompanied Alan Hall on local history tours will not be surprised to know that he has been involved in education for most of his working life.

Graduating from Ardmore Teachers College, where he also began university studies, he taught at schools in New Plymouth, Whakenui Whaling Station, Rai Valley, Clareville (Wairarapa) and Tamahere. Alan completed university qualifications in Geography and Education, mainly through part-time study and lectured at Hamilton Teachers College and the University School of Education, eventually becoming Associate Professor and Associate Dean of the School of Education. He continues to be an Honorary Lecturer in the School of Education and an Honorary Fellow of the University.

When Alan and Glenyss came to live in Pirongia in 2002, they did not realise that they had moved into an area so rich in Maori and European history. The revered local historian, Mary Hurst, aroused Alan's interest in the history of the area. Her work and enthusiasm encouraged him to continue investigating the history of the area. This has led him to identify sites and buildings of historic significance, investigate events which shaped the changing fortunes of the district, and record the stories of local families who helped make our village what it is today.

The Pirongia Heritage Committee appreciates and thanks Alan for his tireless contributions to the work of the Centre.

Barbara Walter

A new resource

The Centre now has a catalogue of more than 2500 newspaper references to Alexandra between 1863 and 1886. Most refer to items in the *Daily Southern Cross* and *Waikato Times* newspapers which may be read online via the National Library's *Papers Past*. The references are listed in a spreadsheet and there is a brief resume of what each item is about. This makes it possible to search by keyword for items relevant to a specific historic topic.

Inquire at the Centre for a demo and/or how you might obtain a copy of the spreadsheet file (free to members) to run on your computer. The file can easily be copied onto a memory stick for transfer. A spirally bound, printed copy can be supplied for \$25.

Thanks for Support

- **Haupai Puke** was first appointed to the Executive Committee by Te Kauhanganui in 2003. The Centre is grateful to Haupai for her contributions since that time, particularly in regard to matters Maori. She was also instrumental in organizing our first afternoon tea meeting of long-time residents.
- **Tom Roa** will replace Haupai as the nominee of Te Kauhanganui. His willingness to fill this role, despite a heavy schedule is greatly appreciated.

New and Improved

Have you seen the new display about the Hughes brothers' mine at Okoko Road, Te Rau-a-moa? It was compiled by Barbara Walter and Marilyn Yeates. Most of the mining items on display were gifted to the Centre by Joe Hughes of Hamilton, who featured in the last newsletter.

A reminder

The Treasurer eagerly awaits overdue subscription payments!

For your diary

- Sat. 8 October**
Pirongia Craft Day. Come and see us at the Heritage Centre.
- Wed. 12 October**
Northern Tour: Matakītaki, War graves, Flour mills, Waiari, etc. [Alan Hall]
- Sun. 30 October**
Walking Tour: Matakītaki to Alexandra Cemetery. [Alan Hall]
- Sat. 19 November**
Path of War Tour: Te Rore to Ora-kau. [Robin Astridge]

Inquiries and bookings at the Centre or contact Paula McWha
[mcwharjpk@callsouth.net.nz]

Welcome new members

- Diane Sharpe
- Defy Williams

A new computer

For some time, there have been concerns about the reliability of the Centre's computer which is vital to many of our operations. Recently, we experienced a serious computer crash, and although it was possible to resuscitate the now aging machine, re-connection with the internet proved problematic. Fortunately, most of the Centre's files have been regularly backed-up and there was not a serious loss of data.

The Executive Committee decided that the prudent solution to the problem was to purchase a new, more up-to-date system, with Windows 7 as its operating system, which we expect to have in operation later this month. When the new system is up and running, it is hoped to re-commission the old computer for less onerous duties in the archives room (the former garage) from where it may be networked with the new computer. If this can be achieved, it will be possible for work on our steadily growing archives to proceed whilst leaving the main computer available for other uses.

Walking tours

We are trialling two walking tours of historic sites in the village with Alan Hall. Each takes a little over 2 hours for a group of no more than 12 participants.

The first, on Sunday 31 July, centred on sites in the central village. It attracted 10 participants and drew a very favourable response.

The second tour will be held at 1:00 pm on Sunday 30 October. This trip will include Matakitaiki Pa, the probable site of the first bridges over the Mangapiko, the Kane St and Beechey St areas and the Cemetery.

In the future, we hope to repeat these tours on Market Days.

Basketball in the 1930s?

Recently, a committee member of the Pirongia Netball Club approached us for information about the history of the club which probably began as the Pirongia Basketball Club. Sadly, the club's records do not go back very far and at this stage, the Centre holds no information apart from photographs in jubilee publications of school basketball teams after World War 2. There are a number of local women, such as Robyn Wood, Lou Kaumoana and Gloria King, who played nine-a-side basketball before the change in 1960 to the contemporary seven-a-side game. But at this stage, we know nothing of what went on in the 1930s. It is possible that basketball, like other sports, was severely restricted by war-time petrol rationing between 1939 and 1945, and perhaps went into recess.

There is a fragmentary indication that a basketball club existed at Pirongia in 1931. Amongst the papers of William Chappell is a hand-written list of dances planned for the "Saturday night dances season" of that year, and the dance held on August 8th, was for the benefit of a "Basket-ball" Club. This suggests that there was a club here at that time.

We would like to gather information about the early years of basketball/netball in the district. Old photos (which can be scanned and returned) would be great, particularly if any of the people included can be named. But any piece of information, even knowledge that someone's mother played at a given time, will help us to gradually assemble the jigsaw.

Up-stream by Punt

In April 1885, when the southern extension of the main trunk railway into the King Country began from Kihikihi, the railway route was planned to follow the watershed of the Waipa for 60 miles to a tunnel, south-east of Te Kuiti, which would carry it into the watershed of the Mokau River and on towards Taumaranui.

Because construction of the ¾ mile (1200 metre) tunnel at Poro-o-Tarao would take some time to complete, it was planned for construction to begin long before the railway reached the vicinity. This meant that alternative arrangements were needed to transport large quantities of construction equipment and supplies some 60 miles from either the railhead at Te Awamutu or the river steamer terminal at Alexandra.

In September 1885, the *NZ Herald* reported that the tunnel contractor, J.J.O'Brien, was investigating the possibility of transporting materials up-stream to Te Kuiti via the Waipa and its tributaries, the Mangapu and Mangaokewa. If this could be done, some 30 miles of transport across swampy country would be avoided. From Te Kuiti, sledges drawn by bullocks and horses would be used for overland transport to the tunnel site.

By October, the *Waikato Times* records that plant for the tunnel construction had arrived at Alexandra by steamer, where O'Brien was building two punts for the job. The punts were 35 feet long, 4 feet wide and 20 inches deep and said to be capable of carrying payloads of 2½ tons.

Each would be propelled by 4 or 5 men using poles (hence calling them punts) and they could also be pulled using ropes. Presumably, the punts were either dragged over obstacles such as the ignimbrite ridge near Whakairoiro Pa, or they were unloaded and re-loaded. Obviously, travel would be easier when river levels were higher. The fact that the punts travelled in tandem would have meant that in difficult places, up to ten hands were available to man-handle each craft.

In late November 1885, the *Waikato Times* reported that the barge (punt) transport had been a "complete success" although the trip had taken 2 days to travel upstream from Alexandra to Otorohanga, where 700 feet of timber was added to each load, and a further 3½ days up the Mangapu and Mangaokewa from Otorohanga to Te Kuiti. In other words, the 30 miles travelled took 5½ days. A further 2½ tons on each punt was transported in December.

Early in 1886 O'Brien was building a further two punts at Alexandra, but later in the year, when the new railway reached Otorohanga, and could be used to carry supplies that far, transport by punt was needed only between Otorohanga and Te Kuiti. Once the railway reached Te Kuiti, of course, the punts were no longer required.

Thus, it seems that punts were used for less than two years and their use was not without incident. On one occasion, for example, a boat overturned and an 1800 pound "monkey" was deposited in the river.

Interestingly, in November 1885, when the Maori Land Court had finished hearing the Maniapoto Lands case at Otorohanga, Judge Mair arranged for the staff and all the court records to be transported downstream to Alexandra in one of O'Brien's punts.

Early house sites at Kaipiha

Recently, Alan Hall and Robin Astridge visited the farm on the Kaipiha block where the Turner family and H.H. Reynolds and Mihi Pepene (Grannie Reynolds) lived for many years. They accompanied Lance Vernal who now owns the property on Ormsby Road which was previously farmed by Ian Henderson. Lance is keenly engaged in uncovering the history of the farm.

He took Robin and Alan to see two house sites above the river which appear to be those of the original Turner and Reynolds dwellings. The house sites are distinguishable because they appear to have been levelled. Nearby are trees, such as an oak and very old camellias, as well as wild snowdrops. It is not hard to imagine where the river landing places were located because originally the sites were accessed from the river. On the Ormsby Road side of the ridge is another, more recent house site next to a kahikatea tree and an old orange tree. There are still pieces of corrugated iron, bricks and shards of crockery in the soil.



The old house in the 1970s



A house site above the river with an oak and camellia.

A few days after the visit, Joy McGregor brought to the Centre some photographs of old houses taken from Ormsby Road in the 1970s. One of them appears to be the house beside the kahikatea and orange trees, in a dilapidated state, before it was demolished. We would be very pleased if anyone can tell us anything about who lived in that building, when it was demolished, or anything about other buildings on the property.