

NEWSLETTER

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

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Waipa Heritage Awards

The Centre was well-represented in the 2011 Heritage Awards presented at St Andrew's Church Cambridge, on 25 August. Vice-President Marilyn Yeates received an award to the Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre for *Promoting the history of the district for visitors*. Individual awards were received by Secretary and former President Sabina Owen for *Outstanding contributions to heritage preservation*, and Alan Hall for *Exceptional heritage research, publications and tours*. Heritage awards for built heritage are made every two years, with awards for natural heritage being made in the intervening years.



The picture (left) shows members of the Centre who attended, including Mayor Alan Livingston who presented the awards.

Early Mangapiko Bridges

From the earliest days, overland travel between Te Rore and Alexandra was important, particularly when the river level was low and steamers could not get past Te Rore. The original road probably followed an established Māori trail shown on an 1864 sketch map, crossing the Mangapiko Stream in the vicinity of the old rubbish dump, now a reserve area.

The original 1864 bridge must have been washed away by September, when a militiaman named Isaac Alcock drowned while crossing the Mangapiko by canoe. A second bridge was in use in March 1866, but the local correspondent of the *Daily Southern Cross* newspaper feared that, like its predecessor, it would be washed away by floods. True to prediction, this bridge, was repaired in May 1866, before it was washed away in February 1867, and then reinstated in March 1867.

The answer was a higher-level bridge, probably in the vicinity of the present bridge. It was built 29 feet above water level by Robert McKibbin, a local man whose price of £302 was the lowest tender. Although it lasted much longer than any of the earlier bridges, extensive use of rimu timber meant that by 1886, rot made the construction potentially dangerous and major repairs were required.

Interpreting the Centre's Carved Sign

The top of the sign depicts the silhouette of Pirongia Mountain which dominates the area and was of great significance to the original Māori inhabitants as both a source of spiritual inspiration and a rich resource for timber, birds, berries and other plant products.

Originally, when it was established in 1864, the village was a government military settlement named Alexandra which is commemorated by the transliteration *Arekahanara* in the Māori name for the Centre. The name was eventually changed in 1896, with the agreement of the residents, because of postal confusion with Alexandra in Central Otago.

Te Whare Taonga O Ngā Rohe O Arekahanara translates as The House of Treasures of the Districts of Alexandra. The word *Pirongia* in the Centre's English name acknowledges the subsequent adoption of the Māori name for the mountain as the name of the village and the district, by which both are now known.



The refurbished carved sign

On the sides of the base are depicted two figures. One represents Rōtū, who originally named the mountain Pae-whenua. The other represents Hia-roa. They were family members of Raka-taura, the *Tohunga Iho* (High Priest) of the Tainui Canoe, and were members of the first party of Tangata Whenua who discovered and climbed the mountain to set up altars and perform sacred rites to preserve the *mauri-ora* (life principle) of *Nga manu o te wao nui a Tane-Mahuta* (the birds of the great forest of Tane-Mahuta – God of the forests).

Thanks for Support

To master carver Mac Bell, who originally crafted the Centre's sign which had become seriously discoloured. Mac gave it a face-lift to return it to its former glory. It seems that the oil we were using contained some dark stain. Besides removing much of surface staining, Mac introduced some discreet colour which helps highlight some of the features.

Come along and look at it. But before you do so, read the interpretation printed elsewhere in this newsletter and recognise what it portrays.

Thank you Mac. In the future, the sign will be treated with a different sort of oil.

To Waipa District Council for a Pirongia Ward Discretionary Grant to purchase a digital recorder for use in collecting oral histories.

For your diary

Thu 26 January Members BBQ, 6:30 pm at Pirongia Clydesdales..

Sat 18 February: Ngutunui District Tour with Keith Ormsby. Booking required.

Sat 17 March: Southern Tour: Frontier Road, Kaihiha & Te Kopua, with Alan Hall. Booking required.

Sat 21 April: Path of War Tour: Tuakau to Ngaruawahia, with Robin Astridge. Booking required.

NOTE that changes have been made to the dates for the Southern Tour and the Path of War Tour.

A further reminder

The Treasurer continues to eagerly await a few overdue subscription payments!

Don't forget

Join us at the Pirongia Clydesdales at 6:30 pm on 26 Jan for a Heritage & Information Centre BBQ to get the New Year under way.

Bring meat to cook on the Barbie, an accompanying dish to share, and your favourite tiple.

There will be no charge

New and Improved

The Centre's Library has now been fully catalogued and its books are available for borrowing by members.

We have a growing collection of historical texts with contents relevant to the local area, although some, such as the *Penguin History of New Zealand* are more general. If you want to read about local pioneer life, try *Battles, buggies and babies* by Sophie-May Johnstone-Smith.

The collection also includes an extensive holding of novels by local novelist Mary Scott whose books about rural life were widely read in the 1960s and 1970s. They offer interesting insights into life in farming districts in the era following World War II. The Mary Scott novels are housed separately near the Mary Scott Display.

For access, inquire at the desk.

Training for volunteers

During September, Debbie Courtney ran training for volunteers which was very well-received. It included an introduction to the Centre's archives database. Some of those who took part expressed an interest in further training to develop more confidence in using the computer.

It was pleasing to know that those taking part included some new faces.

School art display

If you visited the Centre on the Pirongia Craft Day, or afterwards, you will have seen a fine art and crafts display by Year 4 and 5 children from Te Pahu School, depicting mythology associated with Mount Pirongia. The display was organized by Vice-President Marilyn Yeates in liaison with Te Pahu teacher Penny Finn.

Recently, President Robin Astridge, Marilyn Yeates and Jim Henderson, President of the Lions Club of Mount Pirongia, visited Te Pahu School to award book tokens donated by the Lions Club in appreciation of the display which was later on show at the Mount Pirongia Art Awards. It may currently be viewed at the Baffin Street Gallery.



Te Pahu Year 4 & 5 students with some of their paintings and sculptures

Whatiwhatihoe

Whatiwhatihoe existed from October 1881 to 1891. Until May 1888, it was the headquarters of the Maori King Movement and the residence of King Tawhiao and his family.

It was located near the confiscation line, on land confiscated by the New Zealand Government in 1864, when the Kingitanga defenders were driven beyond the Puniu River into what became known as the King Country, where they were isolated for 17 years. Prior to the coming of the Pakeha, the land had been occupied by Ngati Hikairo, and after the confiscation it was awarded back to the Ngati Hikairo chief Hone Te One.

In February 1881, Tawhiao, who had been based at Hikurangi since 1875, on the hill country near present-day Ngutunui, was reported to be living not far from Alexandra in tents, at a place referred to as Ruahine. This seems to have been in the general area of where Whatiwhatihoe came to be established, but newspaper reports from the time did not use that name.

The development of the settlement gathered momentum in the spring following Tawhiao's declaration of peace in Alexandra in July 1881. It was then that the settlement seems to have become referred to as Whatiwhatihoe. The name which refers to "broken paddles" was figurative in meaning, rather than literal. It described the predicament of the Kingitanga followers who had been deprived of their Waikato Valley lands in the wholesale confiscation of 1864. They were like canoe paddlers with broken paddles.

A newspaper account from May 1882 described Whatiwhatihoe as comprising "several small settlements, each containing several whares and occupied by different tribes." By "tribes", the writer probably meant hapu. However, other tribes were also represented. A panoramic photograph, taken in 1884, from a hill on present-day Hanning Road, a copy of which hangs in the Centre, attests to the dispersed nature of the settlement which appears well-designed to accommodate large gatherings of visitors. Extensive ditch-and-bank fences surrounded large cultivated areas.

In August 1882, a bridge across the Waipa River made the settlement more readily accessible from Alexandra.

Although Tawhiao travelled widely, soliciting support for the Kingitanga, Whatiwhatihoe was where major hui of supporters from all over the North Island were held in March or April of most years until 1891 when the meetings were moved to Maungakawa. These were large meetings: it was estimated that 3000 people attended the hui in 1882. Europeans including members of the House of Representatives and Ministers of Native Affairs such as Bryce and Ballance attended meetings there.

By 1885, employment on the development of the main trunk railway in the King Country was attracting inhabitants from Whatiwhatihoe, others were away gum-digging, and some families had moved to the coast. The result was that the settlement gradually declined in importance until May 1888 when Tawhiao moved his headquarters down-river to Pukekawa. By that time, the fertility of the soil in the locality of Whatiwhatihoe also seems to have been running out. Thus, by 1891, Whatiwhatihoe was no longer occupied by the Kingitanga. In 1892 the remains of important people buried there, including three of Tawhiao's own children, were removed from Whatiwhatihoe urupa (burial grounds) to Taupiri. The land was surveyed into farms, many of which were sold to Europeans.

Thus, today, although there are two urupa on the farmland, much of which is now subdivided into lifestyle blocks, little remains to identify this place which for a short time occupied such an important place in the history of the Kingitanga.

What happened to Aubin's Store?

By 1870, John Aubin was operating his second trading store in a new building at the corner of Franklin and Belcher Streets, near his house. When he died in February 1889, the business, which had been very successful, continued to be run by his wife, Anne, and his second son, Eugene. This arrangement continued until 1904 when the business was taken over by John Skuse who moved to the district from Pukekohe, and Eugene Aubin moved from Pirongia to Hauturu on the Kawhia harbour where he set up his own trading store. It seems that Anne still owned the building which was probably leased by Skuse. When Skuse's tenure of the business ended is not known, but by 1911, he was working as a storekeeper in Hamilton.

In 1913, a new store was opened on the corner of Franklin and Crozier Streets by W.G.Moon. Aubin's son-in-law, Walter Bell worked for him. Eventually, this store became owned by Bell and his sons Reg and Eric. It is remembered by older residents as Bell's Store.

Until recently, the fate of Aubin's Store building was something of a mystery. Some believed that it had been burned, possibly in 1918 when Aubin's house was destroyed by fire. Recently, however, items in the *Waipa Post* revealed a different fate for the building. In August, 1917, it reported that "A building which played an important part in the early days of Alexandra is now being dismantled. The business ... has seen the advance, decline, and re-advance of Pirongia. It was one of the few remaining landmarks remaining in the town. Since the decease of the original occupier this building has had a very chequered career." Soon afterwards, fittings from the building were advertised for sale.

Welcome new members

- Joy McGregor
- Ann & Jim Beaton