

NEWSLETTER

No. 27, February, 2012

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

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Barbecue for members starts the new year

A well attended barbecue was the first Heritage and Information Centre event for 2012. It was hosted on 26 January by Nick and Jill van der Sande at the Pirongia Clydesdales Café which is an outstanding venue for such an occasion. Barbara Walter and Sabina Owen made most of the arrangements and everyone who attended contributed meat, an accompanying dish and a drink. The result, as in previous years, was a delicious meal. It is always surprising how balanced such a pot-luck smorgasbord turns out to be.

President Robin Astridge thanked members for their contributions in 2011, outlined planned Heritage Centre events for the coming year and urged members to continue their support.



Nick and Jill van der Sande
prepare for the BBQ

Thanks for Support

- ◆ To **Keith Ormsby** for leading the Ngutunui District Tour.
- ◆ To **Waipa District Council** for a grant of \$500 which allowed the Centre to purchase a digital recorder.
- ◆ To Trust Waikato for a grant of \$500 which will help purchase additional chairs.
- ◆ To Fiona Hood who provided useful advice about specifications for the future repainting of the Centre.

Ngutunui Tour

Eleven members, led by long-time resident and member Keith Ormsby, enjoyed an informative day touring the Ngutunui/Oparau Districts on 19 February. The tour which commenced at the Centre stopped at various properties in the Kaipia area on Ormsby Road, the Ngutunui old sports ground, Ngutunui Hall, and Ngutunui School. At the School all undertook a walk around the premises with the added bonus of talking to the Principal who just happened to be there. The property is a credit to all concerned. From here the tour visited the site of the original Ngutunui School on Pekanui Road, drove up to a high point on Keith Ormsby's farm to be shown a ridge track over which the original mail track to Kawhia ran.



Members of the Tour Group

The tour continued to the Walter Scott Reserve and the sites of the homes of Mary and Walter Scott and the Valder sisters who donated the land for the Walter Scott Reserve. From Scott Road, we followed the Pirongia West Road to Oparau, where Keith pointed out past features of this once-thriving community. A short drive took us past the sites of the Oparau dairy factory and abattoir to the modern Oparau Roadhouse where we all enjoyed lunch. The stop was blighted by discovering when we were about to leave, that the mini bus had a puncture! However willing hands, including assistance from a Fairview Motors employee, soon had us on the road again!

We visited the Te Rua-a-moa area, stopping to be shown various sites including those of the school and what was once a major sales yard. From there we travelled along Okoko Road to the site of Hughes Coal Mine which now lies under a lake. It was explained that after the Hughes brothers' sold their underground mine in 1969 to Glen Afton Collieries, the mine was converted to an open cast operation which left a huge hole in the ground when coal extraction ceased about 1995. The land surrounding the pit was landscaped and the pit itself was allowed to fill with water to become a lake.

At Ngutunui School the day's circuit was completed.

It was a day enjoyed by all participants, with much talking and genuine knowledgeable input. Our thanks to Keith Ormsby for sharing his vast knowledge of the area. Worth repeating again in the future.— Robin Astridge



Today's lake in Okoko Road

Whatiwhatihoe

The explanation of the meaning of Whatiwhatihoe in the Newsletter 26 was incorrect. A comment about the name was erroneously taken to be the meaning.

The name Whatiwhatihoe was used by Tawhiao during his tour of the Waikato, immediately following his declaration of peace in 1881, when he announced that he intended to establish a new township. It was said to mean 'the continuous breaking of paddles, an injunction to paddlers to pull hard and long on their paddles when a great exertion is required'.

Ronald William Phillips

It is with regret that we mark the passing of Ron Phillips. He and his wife, Ngaire, have been members and active supporters of our Centre for the past six years. Ron has been responsible for propagating millions of native seedlings. He has contributed to the plantings of native plants throughout New Zealand. Ron and Ngaire have also been extremely generous to schools, clubs and individuals. They feature in the book *Living with Natives*.

Wanted

More volunteers to assist with opening the Centre. The duties are not onerous, and you meet some interesting people.

Contact Sabina at 871 9992.

From the Committee

- ◆ Because the exterior paintwork on the Heritage Centre building is showing signs of weathering, advice was sought from local woman Fiona Hood who supervised the painting of the building by Waikeria inmates after the former church building was moved back to Pirongia 12 years ago. Steps are now being taken to obtain funding to re-putty the windows and repaint the building in the present heritage colours.
- ◆ The Centre recently purchased a digital voice recorder to record oral history interviews. It was purchased with funding from a Waipa District Council Community Grant. The Centre is also grateful for a generous discount by Heathcotes in Te Awamutu where the recorder was purchased.
- ◆ In the pipeline is a purchase of additional chairs for meetings and to accommodate groups at the Centre. A grant for the purchase has been approved by Trust Waikato.

Congratulations

To Executive Committee member Tom Roa who was recently returned to the chair of Te Kauhanganui, which is effectively the parliament of Tainui, a position which he held some time ago. Tom serves on the Executive Committee as the nominee of Te Kauhanganui.

Did you know?

The Centre is quite frequently called upon by schools and community groups varying from Probus to gardening and walking groups to provide talks about the history of the area, historical walking tours around part of the village, and interpretative visits to specific sites such as the redoubts and Matakītaki Pa? Some of these groups visit the Centre and are included in our visitor statistics. But others with limited time are catered for at historical sites and are not included. In addition, we are occasionally called upon by Te Awamutu Museum and other organizations to conduct Path of War tours.

Robin Astridge recounts that he recently ran a Path of War tour from Tuakau to Ngaruawahia with a small University of the Third Age (U3A) group. They stopped at Rangariri to view the DVD on the Waikato War at the tearooms. On arrival, Robin was singled out by a staff member and asked to see that they were on their best behaviour as Mr Tukuroirangi Morgan was having afternoon tea there. It would be interesting to know if Mr Morgan was also requested to behave with decorum in the presence of members of U3A!

Visitor Numbers

After 11 months of the financial year, our numbers to date are about the same as 2009-10 which was our best year. A good return for March could mean a record year.

Welcome new members

- Pam and Craig Young

Sedgemoor Re-visited

On Sunday 26 February, a group from the Centre visited the home of Maurice Borland and Joan White at 220 Parry Street which was originally the dwelling of Miss Emily Miller for whom the house was being built in 1897. Today the house is named *The Maples*, although unknown to the present owners, it was originally known as *Sedgemoor*.

Miss Miller migrated to New Zealand in 1896 and originally lived with her brother Edward who was farming on Te Tahi Road. However, about the time he married Bernice Berry in 1897 she acquired 4 acres of land in Pirongia, between Parry Street and the river and arranged the construction of the stylish house which she named *Sedgemoor* where she lived until the time of her death in 1930.

Income from investments in Britain made Miss Miller well-off by Pirongia standards. She employed staff to develop and run the property as well as to manage stock on other grazing land which she leased. Miss Fanny Michell was followed by Miss Charlotte (Lottie) Webb as companion/housekeepers, and she also employed a handyman/gardener. Lottie Webb, who had grown up at Paterangi, was still her companion/housekeeper in 1930 when Miss Miller died. A 1950s photograph shows a number of other buildings on the property which appear to date back to this time, or even earlier. They included a garage near the road where one of the first cars in the district, a Daimler, was housed. It was driven by the gardener/handyman, named Sim, who also acted as her chauffeur. The photograph also shows a fowl-house, stable and a second dwelling for the handyman/gardener/chauffeur.



The Maples Today



Miss Miller (left) and Lottie Webb in a phaeton outside Sedgemoor

Miss Miller is remembered for her generosity towards the community. Besides paying £100, with her brother, to build and furnish the second Anglican church (the present Heritage Centre building) on the AC Redoubt site, she provided £200 towards the erection of the Pirongia Memorial Hall in 1920 and was a generous contributor in fundraising during World War 1 and later for war relief. She supported many clubs and other local organizations. In other words, she made significant contributions to the community over many years.

This was not the first dwelling on this site. It was originally surveyed as Lot 82 and allocated to Sgt

Thomas Finch of the 2nd Waikato Regiment who appears to have established the original Alexandra Hotel here in 1865. The building was then extended in 1866. A substantial building, which is probably *The Alexandra* after it was extended may be discerned on a photograph of the settlement taken between 1868 and 1871. In 1870, Finch moved his bush hotel licence to the Dorchester Arms hotel, on the corner of Franklin and Crozier Streets, which he then re-named the *Alexandra*, a name retained by the present hotel on the same site.

About the time Finch moved his hotel licence to Franklin Street, he sold Allotment 82 to local businessman J.D. Hill. The former hotel building was let to Hill's friend Major W. G. Mair as a dwelling when Mair moved to Alexandra as Native Agent and Resident Magistrate. Mair lived there until June 1875 when the building burned down.

As the Centre visitors discovered, the present owners have restored Miss Miller's house to its former glory, in the process discovering that the building appears to have been planned to incorporate a second story. Outside, they have identified where the hotel was located, close to the northern boundary. As the garden was re-developed, a dump of bottles was unearthed, apparently from the days of the hotel, as well as evidence of a well and a cellar, also possibly associated with the hotel extension.

Our thanks to Maurice and Joan who were gracious and informative hosts. They are to be congratulated for their restoration of one of Pirongia's treasures.



Joan White (left) and Maurice Borland (right) with visitors from the Centre

Well done Joy

Joy McGregor, who can remember living at *Sedgemoor* or *The Maples* as it is currently known, when the property was owned by her father, Percy Harper, has been gathering information and photographs which now fill a substantial folder. We hope to add a copy to the Centre's collection when a few sections have been typed.