

NEWSLETTER

No. 26, May, 2012

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

798 Franklin Street, Pirongia 3802

Phone: (07) 871 9018

Email: pirongia.hvc@xtra.co.nz



Record Visitor Numbers

Our visitor number statistics at the end of the financial year in March show that the Heritage and Information Centre attracted 2612 visitors which is the highest total over the last four financial years.

The best month was October when the Centre catered for 387 visitors. October has consistently topped the numbers over the last three years. The March total of 358 visitors was a significant increase over recent years. April, January, February and June also produced totals in excess of 200 visitors.

The record came as something of a surprise because the September total, which is usually boosted by very high numbers on the Pirongia Craft Day, was rendered disappointingly low by heavy rain last September.

Another pleasing feature of our visitor numbers is that an increasing number of visitors are making return visits, or have come to Pirongia specifically to visit the Centre. We must be doing something right!

A story with a bang!

Recent visitors to the Centre were Bill and Brian Bromell from Auckland whose family lived here between 1941 and 1984. For much of that time, the recently re-roofed cottage at 378 Crozier Street was their family home. Their father, Bernard, was involved with Clarrie Schwartzfeger in the arrest of two burglars in Bell's store in October 1948 (See Newsletter 21-22).

They told a number of stories about local events from their youth, one of which involved a traction engine which stood on land to the south of Crozier Street between Bell's store and the house sometimes referred to as 'the Bank' at 164 Crozier Street, where the Bray family lived at that time. In the past, some of our members have heard vague references to this disused traction engine. Its size, and huge flywheel made it a landmark as it slowly rusted. Nelda Bray has told Joy McGregor of how she and her friends played on it as children. She, and others have said that it was later buried somewhere near where it stood.



Brian (left) and Bill Bromell

The Bromell brothers told us that after World War 2, when scrap metal was attracting high prices because of shortages created by the war, two Aucklanders came to Pirongia intent on demolishing the traction engine and selling the metal. Apparently, their progress was slow, so they decided to speed things up by attaching explosives to a number of parts they were having trouble dismantling. Then, without advising anyone of their intentions, they ignited the explosives in sleepy Pirongia in mid-afternoon. It seems that they did not know very much about the use of explosives

because the blast was not as effective as had been hoped. However, a number of parts were dislodged. Metal fragments are said to have gone through the west wall of Bell's store, and others were picked up to the east of Franklin Street, having been blown over the store.

It is hardly surprising that the two miscreants left in a hurry, "virtually run out of town" as Bill Bromell put it, and were never seen again. As a result of the incident, the dismantling of the traction engine is said to have been completed by local men with the remains being buried – probably on what was originally Section 56, which was the site of J.D. Hill's store from the late 1860s.

Someone must have a photograph which shows the traction engine. The Centre would appreciate a copy.

Another St Saviour's

An Auckland visitor to the Centre in May was interested in the story of our Heritage Centre building and intrigued that it had been the second St Saviour's Church in the village. She said that in the past her family were members of the congregation of another St Saviour's Anglican Church at Blockhouse Bay Auckland. Like its Pirongia counterpart, it was later moved, in that case to make way for a new church building. The Blockhouse Bay St Saviour's was deconsecrated and moved to the site of MOTAT (Museum of Transport and Technology) at Western Springs, where it continues to be used for weddings. The replacement church at Blockhouse Bay is named *The Church of the Saviour*.

Thanks for Support

• Those volunteers who staffed the Centre during the last year:

Robin Astridge
June Bright
Olive Clements
Basil Coles
Debbie Courtney
Roz Empson
Patricia Grierson
John Halford
Alan Hall
Gloria King
Paula McWha
Jodie Oberlin-Brown
Sabina Owen
Clare St Pierre
Audrey van der Hoeven
Barbara Walter
Rowena Whale
Marilyn Yeates

- **Sabina Owen** who regularly turns on the heaters early on cold mornings to make the Centre comfortably warm for staff and visitors.

Believe it or not

An Alexandra girl ate four pounds of a wedding cake in order that she might dream of her future husband. And now she says money wouldn't hire her to marry the man she saw in that dream.

Waikato Times, 27 February 1877.

For your diary

Tuesday 26 June at 7:30 pm, AGM, at the Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre.

From the Committee

AGM scheduled for 26 June

The AGM for 2012 will be held in the Centre at 7.30 pm on 26 June.

The Executive Committee has signalled its intention to recommend to the meeting (a) That the Centre's name be formally changed to 'Pirongia Heritage and Information Centre' and (b) That the start of the membership year be changed from 1 April to 1 July.

The formal change of name will be the final step in a change begun at the 2010 AGM.

Changing the new membership year to follow the AGM will avoid the annual panic to get all subscriptions paid before the AGM so that members are eligible to vote.

After the business part of the meeting, Garry Howard will talk about the work undertaken at the Centre, drawing attention to the displays.

New and Improved

The Centre has acquired a new Brother laser printer and scanner to replace the old Canon colour printer as its workhorse printer. The new machine prints only in black and white, although it scans colour images. Its great advantages over the older machine are its speed, quality and the reduced operating costs of 3 cents a sheet. The Centre does a considerable amount of black and white printing each month; this newsletter is an example.



The new laser printer

The new printer will allow us to do more of this printing for ourselves, rather than contracting it out. At the same time, we still need to be able to do some printing in colour, and for that reason, the old printer will need to be retained or replaced for supplementary printing. However, colour printing is considerably more costly and is not a good option for black and white operations.

Margaret Holroyd

We were saddened to learn of the death of Margaret Holroyd in late February. Margaret was a long-standing member and supporter of the Centre who lived in Hamilton, but retained strong links with the Pirongia district, where she grew up.

Despite living all her life with a hip dysplasia which meant that she walked only with sticks or crutches, Margaret lived a life of accomplishment and service to others as a qualified social worker with the Department of Maori Affairs and later the Waikato Hospital. She was a fluent Maori speaker, a licensed interpreter and an advocate for the disabled. Most recently, she played a leading role in the initiative to establish in Hamilton a hydro-therapy pool for treatment of the disabled, for which she received a Hamilton Civic Award in 2010.

Margaret was one of 6 children of Kathleen and Jack Holroyd – descendants of the Eyre family. She attended Pirongia school and Te Awamutu College and retained fond memories of the district, maintaining contacts with some of her contemporaries. For example, a few years ago, when the Centre was researching butchers past, she put us in touch with her school friend Betty Tosland, daughter of George and Agnes Glassey who ran the butchery during World War 2. We also enjoyed Margaret's participation in several of our historic tours.

She is sadly missed.

Alexandra Hospital

The establishment of Waikato Hospital 125 years ago was a major step forward for the district. Recent newspaper reports tell us that in May 1887 a local man, James Daley, who had suffered a gunshot wound to his hand, was taken to Te Awamutu by buggy and then travelled to Hamilton by train to be operated on by candlelight in the hospital's first operation which was totally successful.

Prior to this, medical services were either dispensed locally, or those suffering from conditions requiring more than rudimentary medical diagnosis and treatment had to travel to Auckland.

Newspaper reports from 1864 tell that the need for medical services was recognized in the earliest days of the settlement when a site was identified for a hospital building in the Military Reserve (on present day Aubin Close). Its construction was under way in September 1864. At that stage, according to a newspaper, "those who are unfortunate enough to go to hospital receive every care and kindness at the hands of our worthy physician, Dr Stuart" – probably in a hospital tent until the hospital building was completed.

'Unfortunate enough to go to hospital' is a telling phrase because a high proportion of those who went into hospital at that time died, frequently of infections. Many deaths in the fledgling settlement occurred when patients were hospitalised after accidents. Infection was not well understood and disease was generally believed to emanate from unhealthy vapours rising from the ground or other sources which were thought to infect the air, causing disease and spreading infection.

When it was completed in March 1865, the hospital building was immediately in use with Dr Joseph Snape, assistant surgeon of the 2nd Waikato Militia in charge. However, Dr Snape, together with other militiamen, was struck off the military list in June 1865, when the government reduced military expenditure by striking militiamen off pay as soon as they received land grants.

At present there is no evidence of who provided medical services at the hospital between mid-1865 and 1870. Indeed, the status of the hospital building itself, during this period, is unclear. The hospital was functioning in mid 1866 when a young soldier died there of tetanus, but by the end of the year, when it was being re-painted, it was rumoured that the hospital was to close and was being converted to barracks accommodation.

In 1869, when the first church had been fortified by the AC, Divine Services were being held "in one room of the hospital", and in late 1870, when surveyor Todd was murdered about a mile west of Alexandra, his assistant, Nopera, who was wounded in the same incident, was reported to be recovering in the AC Hospital at Alexandra, under the care of Dr Duval who was working there until at least 1872. At present we do not know who was Duval's successor, if there was one. Thus, it seems that the hospital was still functioning in the early 1870s, although there are no newspaper references to it after that time.

Dr Waddington

Dr Edward Waddington was a surgeon in the 2nd Waikato Regiment who lived in the settlement until about 1876. He was the District Coroner and also a JP who sometimes sat on the bench of the Resident Magistrate's Court. However, he still did work as a medical practitioner but the extent to which he provided medical services here is not known. He lived on two town acres where the tennis courts and sports centre are now located and owned the Junction Farm at the confluence of the Puniu and Waipa Rivers.

In 1876, he moved away to set up a medical practice in Hamilton from where he is recorded as travelling widely to tend to accident victims as far away as Mercer, Piako, Cambridge and Te Awamutu. In 1877 and 1878 his household effects and stock from his farm at Alexandra were sold. Later, about 1880, he moved from Hamilton to Cambridge.

Between 1873 and 1875, it is likely that Waddington looked after the medical interests of the AC in Alexandra as he did later, in Hamilton, when he moved there.

A trip to the Winter Show

A recent edition of the *Waikato Times* re-printed a column from 1917 about the impressive Schools Section of the Waikato Winter Show in the Agricultural and Horticultural Hall, which featured school work by children in schools throughout the Waikato.

Children from even the smallest schools took part. The Centre has a memoir of Rosalie Bernice Ahier, the sixth daughter of Aubin and Julia (nee Berry) Ahier who lived on Te Tahiroad. Rosalie lived there for the 13 years between 1906 and 1919 when they moved to Alfriston. In it, she recounts visiting the Winter Show in Hamilton when she was about 9 years old:

One outstanding thrill was when our teacher [at Te Tahiro School], Oscar Pound, later my brother-in-law, took we school children to the Waikato Winter Show. We went as far as Te Awamutu by buggy, and then on by train. It was great day, and I felt very dressed up in a navy blue flannel dress, red ribbon and a new red belt [with] long black stockings and boots which had to be done up with a button-hook! I had put in a pillow case which I had sewn all by myself – I must have been 9 at the time – and wonder of wonders, I got First Prize. My one and only sewing attempt.

If you are interested, ask at the desk to read Rosalie's Memoir about her life as she recalled it in later life when she was Rosalie Olsen. Besides life at their farm the memoir talks of monthly church services in the Te Tahiro School, visits by Uncle Edward and Aunt Bernice Miller and of visiting Miss Emily Miller in Pirongia and having a ride in her new Daimler car.