

# NEWSLETTER

No. 45, August, 2016

Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre

Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara

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## Another Successful AGM

A successful Annual General Meeting was held in the Heritage Centre on 14 June with an attendance of 20 members. In her annual report, Barbara Walter described the past year as one of consolidation following the very busy 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. She noted that during 2015-16 over 3000 people visited the Centre. Barbara intimated that the Executive Committee is working on a programme to upgrade some of the current displays, and stressed the importance of volunteers for the functioning and further development of the Centre. The financial report, presented by Charlie Coles, showed that the Centre's affairs are in a sound financial state.

The officers elected for the new financial year were Barbara Walter as President, Marilyn Yeates as Vice-President and Secretary, and Charlie Coles as Treasurer. The other members of the new Executive Committee are Basil Coles, Patricia Grierson, Garry Howard, Gloria King, Joy McGregor, Brent Mealing, Sabina Owen, Nick van der Sande, Robert McWha, Haupai Puke and Sally Uerata.

Following the formalities, Alan Hall gave an illustrated talk about the Armed Constabulary which maintained a station at Alexandra from 1868 until 1886 and in its varied roles made important contributions to the development of the settlement. He spelled out differences between the Waikato Militia and the AC.

## Volunteer Refresher Course

With five new volunteers, it was timely, on 21 July, to have a refresher course for volunteers which brought together Committee and Desk Volunteers. Desk Volunteers meet and greet visitors. Their input determines when the Centre can open; it cannot function without them. Currently we open on five days a week. Our aim is to open on six or seven days.

Unfortunately, the weather did not allow a visit to the Alexandra East Redoubt but Alan Hall talked about the history of the redoubt and related that to what may be seen there today. Many members knew of the site, but had not paid much attention to it.

Clare St Pierre addressed the group about the Mount Pirongia Mountain flora and fauna, hut accommodation, walking times and the restoration programme. Because it is impossible to predict demands for hut accommodation, Clare said that trampers who intend to stay overnight should be advised to carry a tent.



Volunteers enjoyed lunch at the Coach House Cafe

Robert McWha outlined his involvement as both a volunteer and maintenance manager. He explained the use of the recently installed security panel on the main door. Brent Mealing presented his plan for a new "OPEN" sign which will allow the inclusion of information about current and future displays. Andrea Thrower, office coordinator, spoke about the process to be followed when acquiring objects, explaining the importance of accurately completing the acquisitions form.

Marilyn Yeates outlined her involvement in the presentation of displays, noting the ongoing need for them to be updated.

At 1 p.m. the group adjourned to the "Coach House Café" to enjoy a roast dinner and good company.

## Thanks for Support

- **Te Awamutu and District Memorial Returned Services Association** for funding the publication of biographies of WW1 servicemen on the Pirongia Roll of Honour.
- **Robert McWha** whose countless maintenance tasks included cleaning the entrance ramp to make it safe when wet and installing the new security panel on the front door.
- **Brent Mealing** whose engineering knowledge is producing a new "OPEN" sign for the Centre.
- **Marilyn Yeates** for her tremendous input on the development of displays.
- **Flora Bouma** who donated to our library a copy of her recent book, *Under the Dannebrog*, another resource about the Alexander family.
- **Lyn Jackson** who frequently opens the Centre on Sundays and is a particularly diligent volunteer.

## 2nd Waikato Militia Badge

This badge from the Te Awamutu Museum collection is believed to have been worn by a military settler in the Waikato 2nd Regt which settled Alexandra and Kihikihi in 1864. There are said



to be few of the badges in existence, although archaeologist Warren Gumbley who excavated the Alexandra East Redoubt site in 1998-99, and attended our annual meeting this year, said that several were retrieved during his excavation.

To our knowledge there is in existence no comparable badge for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Regiments that were settled at Tauranga, Cambridge and Hamilton.

## Te Kopua Wesleyan Mission Site

Members who have visited the site on Cannon Road may recall that the memorial to the Te Kopua Wesleyan Mission was showing signs of the ravages of time. Over the last 12 months, Jim Rogers from Otorohanga led an initiative which resulted in an upgrade of the memorial, incorporating the plaques and headstones from the old structure, all mounted on a stable, new concrete base, with a new metal cross and a secure surrounding fence. The memorial was re-dedicated at a ceremony on Sunday 5 June that was well-attended by Maori descendants of people associated with the mission and the later Native School (see *Newsletter 41-42*, p.3) which was also on the mission land. Several members of the Heritage Centre were also present.

George Searancke who spoke at the ceremony, later told us that although today we regard Te Kopua as being to the east of the river, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was on the western side. It was in this locality that Sir George Grey met with the Kingitanga in 1878 and it was there that Maori folk, led by William Searancke, ran the first Te Kopua Races in the same year.



The refurbished Te Kopua Mission memorial

## Visit by Museum Staff

On 20 June, as a follow-up to an initiative by committee member Haupai Puke, the Centre was visited by four staff members from Te Awamutu Museum: Anne Blyth, Haylee Alderson, Henriata Nicholas and Tereora Crane, who were invited to comment and suggest ideas for the Centre's displays and processes as well as to talk about the relationship of the Centre with the Museum. A fruitful sharing of ideas took place, much of it confirming our current policies.



*A useful discussion with TA Museum staff members*

## Memberships

A reminder that a number of subscriptions are still outstanding for the current year that began in July.

## New & Improved

Steps are in train to cycle some of our displays about families who have made significant contributions to the development of Pirongia Village and the district. Since the Centre opened in 2003, there have been displays about the Aubin/Bell and Berry/Ahier families. Descendants of Robert and Rangihurhia Ormsby, led by committee-member Gloria King, are currently finalising a new display about the Ormsby family and it is anticipated that others will follow. As we have limited display space, over time some displays will be replaced by others, but those taken down will be stored in a way that will make them readily accessible on request.



*Gloria's team included: (L-R ) Gary King, Steven King, Gloria King, Pam Ormsby-Ball and Beverley Hoyes.*

## New Volunteers

We are pleased to record the recruitment of 5 new volunteers who are assisting with staffing the Heritage & Information Centre when it is open to the public. They are Mary Wilton, Keith Ormsby, Margaret Ormsby, Alfredo Huerta and Alison Clements. As a result, taking advantage of the fact that Andrea Thrower works there for parts of Tuesdays and Thursdays, we are trialling opening the Centre on every day of the week. Of course, the success of this will depend upon having names on the roster. So further volunteers will still be welcome. Contact the Centre or President Barbara Walter if you are willing to join the crew.

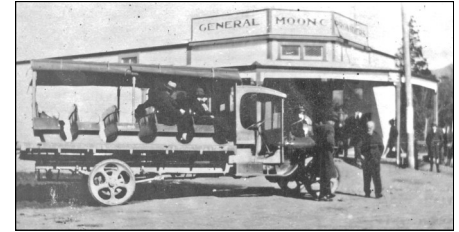
## Welcome new members

- Alison Clements
- Alfredo Huerta
- Mary Wilton

## Early motor vehicles around Pirongia

There were internal combustion engine motor vehicles in the wider Pirongia district from at least 1913 when we know that Edward Ingleby Miller, brother of Emily who lived in Parry Street, owned a Daimler motor car in which he motored from his home in Te Awamutu to Cambridge, and it would be surprising if he had not also driven it to Pirongia. We also know that about the start of World War 1, Emily Miller also owned a Daimler motor car driven by a chauffeur "all done up in a uniform – leggings, peaked cap and leather gloves". Her vehicle may even have been that imported by her brother who died in 1913.

Motor cars became more common during and after World War 1 and the transportation of people who did not own cars, in vehicles built on truck chassis, became more common in the 1920s. In Te Awamutu, for example, in March 1924, both Advance Taxi Service and Fred Parsons advertised "charabanc" services that included transport to and from a dance in the Pirongia Memorial Hall for 3s-6d (35 cents) a head, return. In the UK, charabancs had become popular for group day outings to places like seaside resorts. The vehicles were like elongated open-topped motor cars with bench seats for about 30 and side door access to each row. They had canvas tops that were erected with some difficulty in the event of rain, but lacked any overhead protection if a vehicle overturned. Whether or not the local so-called charabancs of the time had such sophisticated motor car bodies is a moot point. There is a photograph of a vehicle with bench seats on a truck deck outside Moon's (later Bell's) Store, post World War 1 that may have been a local version of a charabanc. It had solid rubber tyres, the luxury of a roof, but no sides. And travel across the roads of the time must have been pretty bumpy on the rudimentary seats.



*This may have been a local version of a charabanc in the 1920s.*

The first motor lorries appeared around the time of World War 1. A recollection by Jack Peters who attended Alexandra School (as it was still named) between 1915 and 1921 says that the first motor lorry that he could remember was a "chain-driven Briscoe owned by Jim Prentice". That must have been shortly before Fred Parsons brought a lorry here from Kohimarama in 1922 to commence Pirongia's first motor transport business that he operated until 1928 when Ariel Mounsey took it over.

## Motor fuel

These vehicles all ran on motor spirits referred to at the time as *benzene* or *petrol* that was imported, in bushel timber cases containing two four gallon cans. The cans were the same as the ubiquitous "kerosene tin" that was widely used in NZ households until the advent of plastic containers. Prior to World War 1, 8 gallon cases of benzene cost 8 shillings (80 cents), but the price went up sharply during World War 1 to 13 shillings (\$1-30) and later as high as 22s-6d (\$2-25) in times of shortage.

As motor vehicles became more common, hand-cranked *bowzers*, as the early pumps were known, became a more convenient way for motor vehicle owners to be supplied with motor spirit from a garage or store. As Roland Mounsey told us a few years ago: Petrol was originally purchased for their business in bushel wooden cases, each containing 2 kerosene cans of petrol. Later, it came in 44 gallon drums. A hand-operated bowser was installed to pump petrol into the vehicles. The bowser was connected to a supply container and a lever was moved backward and forward by hand to pump a gallon of petrol at a time into a chamber high on the bowser from where gravity fed it into the petrol tank of a vehicle. Electric powered bowzers did not appear locally until the early 1940s.



*The sign above the petrol bowser may be seen at the end of the veranda on the left of this photograph of Bell's store in the 1930s*

In Pirongia, a photograph of Bell's store about 1930, shows a petrol bowser that would have pumped petrol from cans. The signage tells that the store was selling Plume brand petrol. In the 1930s, it was common for country stores to sell petrol from such a bowser. After 1928, Ariel Mounsey's transport firm in Franklin Street that used petrol in large quantities, also had its own hand-powered bowser. *[To be continued in Newsletter 46]*

## World War 1 Roll of Honour Publication

A publication containing biographies of the 48 servicemen commemorated on the World War 1 Roll of Honour and the recently unveiled panel at the War Memorial Hall is currently being printed. It was written for the Centre by Alan Hall and designed and formatted by Sonia Frimmell of *What's the Story*. The publication is funded by a grant from the Te Awamutu District Memorial Returned Services Association for which the Centre is very grateful. The grant will allow us to make copies available, free of charge, to the families of the servicemen whose biographies are included, to local libraries, schools and museums. The Centre is also indebted to Auckland City Libraries, Hamilton Public Library and Te Awamutu Museum for permission to include photographs from their collections, free-of-charge.