

# NEWSLETTER

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## Making our archives more accessible

The Heritage Centre gathers and preserves documents, photographs and other artefacts relevant to the history of our district in order to make them available to later generations. It is important, however, for those items to be all catalogued so that information in them may be located and accessed. Initially, when the centre began its archive collection, a computer utility was set up with this in mind. But the cataloguing process did not keep up with the acquisition of new archives, and it ceased to be useful.

Recently, committee member Garry Howard, who is an experienced computer user, and his son Clayton, a computer programmer, envisaged a new catalogue system, designed with our collection of documents, photographs and other artefacts in mind. Garry discussed the possibility with our collections manager, Ros Empson who has been working on making items in our collection more accessible and she welcomed the proposal. As a result, Clayton has worked for some time on the development of a sophisticated program which will provide an accurate record of what is in our collection, and also tell users where they can find items about a nominated person, event, or topic. In this, Clayton is being assisted by his son Tim who also has interests and skills in information technology.



Clayton, Garry & Karen Howard  
with Ros Empson

Another Howard grandson, Brooklyn, is about to use his photography skills to add images of other artefacts to the catalogue. And at the same time, members Garry and Karen Howard are doing invaluable work digitising, sorting and recording details of documents and photographs in our collection with the intention of eventually feeding that information into the new catalogue. The Howards must have IT in their DNA.

This is all work in progress, but it has been indicated that the first draft of the new catalogue programme is not very far away.

## Annual General Meeting

The 2021 Annual General Meeting of the Heritage and Information Centre was attended by 20 members on 29 June. Reports were received from President Marilyn Yeates and Treasurer Charlie Coles, indicating that the Centre's affairs are in good shape despite the effects of the Covid 19 lockdowns which caused closure for several weeks.

The Executive Committee elected for the 2021-22 financial year is: President Marilyn Yeates; Vice-President Ros Empson; Treasurer Charlie Coles; Committee members: Garry Howard, Brent Mealing, Nick van der Sande and Barbara Walter. Secretarial services are being provided by Jenny Mortland as the Heritage Centre Administration Co-ordinator. The new committee is empowered to co-opt more members.

Following the formal business, Alan Hall gave an illustrated talk about *Public Halls in Pirongia*, focussing particularly on the significance to the community and the varied uses made of the original Public Hall from 1876, and the War Memorial Hall which replaced it in 1922. This generated considerable discussion which continued over supper.

## Frogs in the Government Paddock

Although New Zealand has a number of small species of silent native frogs, the Auckland Acclimatisation Society introduced a larger species from Tasmania in 1867 and the frogs referred to in this newspaper entry from 1886 were probably introduced at Alexandra from there.



The introduced species.

*We haven't succeeded in raising a real crocodile or alligator here yet, but there is a sudden appearance of frogs in all directions from Alexandra up to and beyond Kopua. They have been in the swamp in the Government paddock, where they were introduced for some time, but this spring their discordant croaking is heard the whole distance I have mentioned, where they were not known before. How they travel is a puzzle, but there they are, and in considerable numbers from the noise they make of an evening.*

Waikato Times 5 Oct 1886

## Thanks for Support

- **WAIKATO DISTRICT COUNCIL** for a grant of \$2300 to support scanning and preservation of archival material.
- **GARRY & CLAYTON HOWARD** for their work on developing a new archive catalogue.
- **GARRY & KAREN HOWARD** for much scanning and digitizing of items in our collection.
- **ROS EMPSON** for her leadership in improving the functionality of the archive room..

## June Bright

We were saddened by the news that member June Bright passed away on 24 June after a full life of community service which involved her in the establishment of a playcentre in Te Awamutu, work for CORSO and the Marriage Guidance Council and deep involvement in the development and operation of the Women's Centre and Mahuika House. June became a member of the Heritage Centre in its early years, supported its activities, and between 2005 and 2020, when she eventually stepped down, was a volunteer who opened the centre for visitors once a month. She was a loyal and valued member. Together with her family, we mourn the passing of a woman who contributed so much to the community.



## Lockdown again affected our visitor numbers

The resurgence of Covid 19 in August and the resulting lockdown was disappointing for the Centre which experienced pleasing visitor numbers in the first four months of this financial year. By the end of July we had recorded 168 more visitors than in any previous year and were looking forward to our best year ever. Then came the lockdown in August, when numbers were still tracking nicely. The good news is that the improved numbers are made up of mainly New Zealand visitors.

## Could you help?

The AGM empowered the Exec Committee to co-opt up to two more members.

If you are willing to be a committee member involving monthly meetings, please contact Marilyn Yeates or Ros Empson.

## Overdue Subscriptions

The Executive Committee is becoming seriously concerned about the large number of unpaid membership subscriptions for the 2021 – 22 financial year. We have 90 subscribing members, but at this stage of the financial year, only 25 subscriptions have been paid. One reason is that the termination of chequebook accounts by trading banks means that many of our members who do not use online banking are obliged to pay by cash, requiring them to visit the Heritage Centre. Its closure for several weeks during the recent lockdown, and the official expectation that people should limit their travel has added to the problem. However, it will be appreciated if those whose subscriptions are overdue can make an effort to get their memberships up-to-date.

For anyone paying online, the Heritage Centre Internet Banking Account Number is 38-0997-0639270-00. Please reference your payment with your name or the name of your business.

## Genealogists are using the archive room

An arrangement has been made allowing researchers from the Te Awamutu Genealogy Group to use the Heritage Centre Archive Room a few times each week. They are working on school enrolment registers from the Te Awamutu Museum Archives which are being held temporarily with the Centre's archives for a few months while the work continues. Access for the genealogists is provided while the Centre is open. The arrangement was negotiated by Vice-president Ros Empson and the Te Awamutu Museum Collections Manager Megan Denz to facilitate the time-consuming research when time in the museum research room is limited.

## Will the real Gilbert Mair please stand up!

When William Gilbert Mair's name is mentioned, people often nod wisely and say "Oh yes. Gilbert Mair", thinking of the celebrated bush fighter from the Te Kooti campaign, who was awarded the NZ Cross. The man to whom they refer was Captain Gilbert Mair, Major William Gilbert Mair's younger brother. In fact, both men earned enviable reputations as bush fighters at different times.



Capt. Gilbert Mair

The inclusion of 'Gilbert' in both their names is the obvious source of confusion. Their father was named Gilbert Mair. He built the mission vessel *Herald* at Paihia before setting up as a merchant, trading and supplying ships at Wahapu, south of Kororareka. He moved his family to Whangarei about the time of the northern war. His wife was Elizabeth Gilbert Puckey,

the sister of William Gilbert Puckey, a missionary at Kaitia whose family customarily used Gilbert as a second name. So, William, the second son in the Mair family, appears to have been given the second name Gilbert, following the Puckey tradition, and Gilbert, the fourth son, was named after his father.

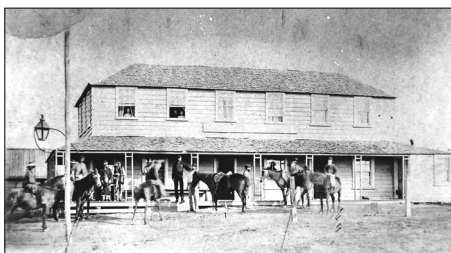
## William Gilbert Mair

William Mair played significant roles when he lived at Alexandra between 1871 and 1877 and continued to be important to the community after he moved away.

Mair was the second son of Gilbert Mair snr and grew up in Northland where he became a fluent Maori speaker with a sound knowledge of Maori culture. He was formally educated at Te Waimate Mission Station and St John's College, Auckland. After spending three years in the Victoria goldfields in Australia he returned to New Zealand in time to join the Colonial Defence Force under Colonel Marmaduke Nixon, and took part in the Waikato war as an Ensign in that unit, also serving as an interpreter for General Cameron. He is remembered particularly for his courage in helping to recover his commander, Col Nixon when he was fatally wounded at Rangiaowhia and for acting as Cameron's spokesman at Orakau.

In 1864, after the Waikato War Lieutenant Mair was appointed Resident Magistrate at Taupo and briefly at Rotorua, before being gazetted Major in 1865 in command of an Arawa auxiliary force operating against Hauhau in the Bay of Plenty where he earned an enviable reputation before being appointed Government Registrar in charge of the Bay of Plenty district.

In 1871, at 40 years of age, he was selected by Donald Maclean, Minister of Native affairs, to be stationed at Alexandra, entrusted with the task of reconciling the Kingitanga who were sequestered in Te Rohe Potae (today's King Country). Mair also became the local Resident Magistrate in 1873.



The former Alexandra Hotel building where Mair later lived.

At Alexandra, Mair established a close friendship with J D Hill, leasing from him the former Alexandra Hotel (Finch's original hotel) which became Mair's residence until it burned down in 1875. Three of Mair's sisters lived with him there, following the death of their mother. In 1872, Mair married Hill's stepsister, Janie Cathcart Black, in the original St Saviour's church. They had three children born here: Florence Agnetta (Flossie) in 1873, Harold Marmaduke in 1874 and Norman in 1876.

Both William and Janie entered fully into the social life of the frontier community. William was elected to the St Saviour's church vestry, and was later appointed Vicar's Warden.

Soon after his arrival at Alexandra in 1871, and before he married, Mair travelled into the King Country where he established a working relationship with leaders of both Ngāti Maniapoto and the Kingitanga, fulfilling the expectations of Maclean who later accompanied Mair on visits to other meetings in the Rohe Potae, but Tawhiao and Manuhiri continued to insist on the return of their confiscated lands. Rewi formed a close relationship with Mair, naming him *Te Mea Mata Ora Roku* (Mair, the Weakening Wedge), acknowledging Mair's success in establishing a good relationship with the Kingitanga, based on mutual respect. The last of these meetings took place in Reynold's house at Kaipiha, near Alexandra, in September, 1876.

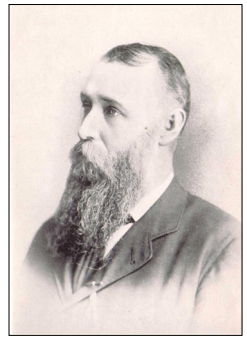
McLean, who had protected Mair from other political pressure, died unexpectedly in January 1877, and after that, in October 1879, Sir George Grey, the new Premier who, with Sheehan as his Native Minister, wished to negotiate directly with the Kingitanga, took over negotiations, dismissing William Mair and his brother Gilbert, in Rotorua, from government service.

A year later, John Hall who became Premier with Bryce as his Native Minister, reinstated Mair as a magistrate in Auckland with responsibilities which continued to bring him to the Waipa regularly, helping him to maintain contact with Tawhiao. So, it is not surprising that when Tawhiao finally chose to declare peace between the Kingitanga and the Government at Alexandra in July 1881, he insisted on making his declaration to Mair as the government representative. Mair had indeed become the weakening wedge who, after 17 years, had helped engineer the beginnings of reconciliation between the government and the Kingitanga.

In 1882, following the successful conclusion of his King Country mission, Mair was appointed a Judge of the Native Land Court, where his knowledge of the Maori language, custom, and usage admirably fitted him. He presided over many important cases, including large Rotorua claims and the Rohe Potae case affecting a million and a half acres of Waikato and contiguous land. He was retired by Ballance in 1891, but reinstated in 1894 by the Seddon Government and served until his final retirement in 1909.

After retirement he farmed a leasehold run at Rerewhakaaitu until his death at Rotorua on 8 July 1912. He left two sons and a daughter.

During his 50 years in Government offices Mair rendered most valuable service to his country. In the military forces he was noted for his calmness, courage, and sound judgment, and he led his forces with spectacular success. The Maoris, friendly and rebel alike, had great respect for him and confidence in his sense of justice, and this, more than any other factor, made possible the successful outcome of his patient and tactful negotiations with the Kingitanga.



Major William Mair

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