



# NEWSLETTER

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

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## Life Memberships

**Haupai Puke and Alan Hall** were made Life Members of the Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre at our recent 20th Anniversary Celebrations. Two members who have given their time and expertise to the Centre.

**Haupai Puke** was in the foundation group who worked with Sabina Owen, Lady Mahuta from Tainui, Waipa Council, and Pirongia Ratepayers, to get the consent for the St Saviours Church to be sited in the Rangimarie Reserve. She attended the first inaugural Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre meeting in 2003.

Haupai followed Te Taka Keegan as the Te Kauhanganui representative in 2003. So for the last 20 years she has travelled out from Gordonton to attend monthly executive meetings, originally for the 7.30pm meetings, and later for 1.30pm meetings. Haupai was chairperson for the Purekireki Marae. And at this time Haupai, and Sally Uerata (also a foundation member of the PHIC) kept us informed of their events. Many of our members attended the opening of the new marae kitchen which Haupai had worked hard to have installed..

Haupai had great interest in her former home village, and had lived at Te Tahi Road as Marie Papesch. I have memories of her competing in races at the former Ngutunui Puketotara Summer Sports Meetings at the Ormsby farm property on Kawhia Rd. Later we challenged each other at netball or basketball as it was known in 1950s. Fifty-four years later we meet up at a PHIC AGM in Pirongia, 2004.

In the last five years Haupai, and committee members Ros, Brent and myself have met for special meetings to work on the upgrade of the Maori display, A Mt Pirongia 3D Topo model was created, financed by the Purekireki Marae, colour and lights were added to bring the model alive. The large King Tawhiao display panel with Te Puea and Wahanui Huatare was finally printed and displayed. However with extra input from Haupai, who was often side-tracked into telling us more history, in particular she enjoyed explaining Maori place names, as language is her forte. She was one of the first Maori Language tutors at Waikato University, after being a teacher of German at a Hamilton College. She had taught herself Maori and also, as a young student, she had won the top German language award at Te Awamutu College.

Haupai's input has been very special and she has brought and encouraged many local marae members and visitors into PHIC.

Marilyn Yeates

**Alan' Hall** was elected to the committee in 2004, and what followed has been a huge contribution with endless hours of work, dedicated to the success of the Centre.

For someone not born or raised in the area, his thirst for history has led to him becoming the best informed resident, and indeed an authority on local history and the wider area as well.



He instigated, organised and escorted many bus tours to historical sites and places of significance. This often involved gaining permission from farmers to travel across their land to some of these sites. One tour even stretched as far as Bombay for his "Path of War" tour. These tours were of great benefit to the Centre,

but rules and regulations brought them to a stop.

The Newsletters. Alan wrote, set the layout, and took care of the printing and addressing of them. The contents of news, events, history etc, gave the Centre a high profile, and kept our membership well informed. Each newsletter took many hours of work. He recently retired from the task after producing newsletter number 65. His monthly visitor numbers in graph form has provided very useful and interesting comparisons over the years.

He found time for producing booklets for us to sell such as *Where Did That Name Come From* referring to street names in Pirongia. No author's fee was ever paid. Alan has become our "Research Consultant" We get endless requests for historical information from families tracing their heritage or events or early residency. These all go to Alan to solve with his meticulous research and investigation. The inquirer receives detailed notes in return and often learns things completely new to them. Grateful payment is usually offered. Alan declines, but suggests a donation to the Heritage Centre would be appreciated. Consequently, we have been the beneficiary of Alan's generosity over the years.

His meticulous research of checking and cross checking of events and dates has often shown that past events and facts have been inaccurately recorded, resulting in some history being rewritten. Through his work he has accumulated so much experience on how to fast track research without time wasting. The Centre and others are the beneficiaries of the large number of very useful contacts he has made within Universities and Libraries where his research is highly respected. This has also been helpful when guest speakers are needed for our AGM. Alan himself has filled the need for us from time to time, sometimes at short notice like this years AGM.

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The book written on the Pirongia Races illustrates the critical value of his research. As the book progressed, it struck me, that if it had not been written, there are facts and information that would have been lost forever. Organisations such as ours, only survive because of the time and effort members put into them.

To Glenys we say a big thank you for tolerating the amount of time Alan puts into the Centre, and also, an added thank you for the time you yourself put into the Centre a few years ago. Alan has made Saturday his duty day at the Centre, probably to the detriment of their gardens and lawns.

We thank you Alan for all your time and effort you have given to the Centre, and have much pleasure awarding you Life Membership.

*Charlie Coles*

### **From the President Marilyn's annual report 2022-2023**

- Total visitors for the year ended 31st March—2048
- Purchased a glass cabinet to display the 100 year old heritage dress from the Timms family
- In August 2022 the committee met with Mt Pirongia Lions to hold a dedication service at the Pirongia War Memorial Hall to mark 100 years. Followed by a successful village celebration in November.
- New panel of King Tawhiao completed and now on display.
- August 2023 we celebrated the 20th year since PHIC building has been opened.
- Leading up to the 150th School Celebrations Labour weekend, several school groups took advantage of visiting the Centre.

### **Thanks for your support:**

- Brett Mealing for erecting the new teardrop Museum sign.

### **The Archaeology of 341 Franklin Street**

(The cottage behind the palm trees)

At the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Luncheon Dr Alexy Simmons presented the archaeological and historic architectural work taken throughout the cottage carried out during 2021-2022.

Pre-1900 archaeological sites, including houses, are protected under the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act (2014). Before the owner (Waipa District Council) could demolish the cottage an application to modify an archaeological site was made to Heritage NZ. Approval was given provided additional research and a physical examination of the building was carried out.

Early photographs of the building were found, dating from the 1920s, but no original plans, so it was measured and photographed, to understand the original and modified construction. Over the years it had been added to, and modernized by dropping ceilings, recladding walls, rebuilding part of the chimney and fireplace fronts, building porches, filling in decks and adding new rooms. But despite this, some original elements remained, like the old double hung sashes with some original mouldings.

Tangata whenua blessed the site to remove any tapu prior to the next stage of invasive investigation and demolition. It is important to remember that this site is very close to Matakitaki, where a major battle was fought in 1822. In removing the foundations and underground structures, we found no signs of earlier gardens or structures.

Sample pieces of wallpaper and timber were removed, this gave a much clearer idea about the date of the building and the alterations. For example, the original kauri four panel doors had been covered in plywood panels and had 1940s hardware and door-knobs installed. We discovered the wood panel ceiling boards and battens with their original paint or shellac finishing underneath the softboard panels. Measuring the old hearth space, we checked the dimensions of the small Shacklock Orion No 1, which would have fitted perfectly before it was partially bricked up. Finally, the work of demolition was undertaken mainly using a large digger. An extremely skilled machine operator proceeded slowly and carefully, so we could record construction details exposed by the work. As floors were removed to each area, all exposed artefacts were collected and recorded.

Samples of profiles, wallpaper, and hardware were collected, to enable a careful measurement to be made or research carried out. It was fascinating to see the gradual reversal of the construction, from removing the roof, stripping out fittings and walls one at a

time, removal of the floor and foundations. The last thing to be uncovered was the brick foundation to the chimney, sitting remarkably close to ground level! The process has enabled us to understand the original building and its layers of addition and alteration, to put some dates to when these were carried out, and to enable us to understand the story of the place after the first land grant was issued. Once there were many similar cottages built in Pirongia, but these have become quite rare now, which makes this in depth record an important resource for future researchers.

*Ros Empson*



*photo taken during the 1930s*

## Reminiscences of Early Pirongia

In the Centre's files we have an article written by R.M.Mawdesley in 1973, when she was 85. Entitled Reminiscences of Pirongia 1908-1912 - it was found after her death by nephew Rev. R Hattaway.

Mrs. Mawdesley was a teacher at Pirongia School during that time, and with Pirongia School celebrating its 150th anniversary in October I thought I'd share a small piece from her article - first published in the Auckland-Waikato Historical Journal September 1987. No.51

I am 85 years old, but still remember the happy time when I did my country service at Pirongia (then Alexandra) school. The village had a fine type of settler, and consequently the school children were well turned out, mannerly, and a pleasure to teach.

I arrived to begin on the 4th October 1908. Mr. Skuse, of the local store, introduced me at the boarding house where my predecessor had boarded. On Monday morning I arrived at the school and met Miss S.B.Airey the head teacher, and my new pupils, the primers and standard 1 and 2.

I found myself the only permanent woman boarder at the boarding house, but soon became friendly with Miss Woods sole charge at Mangapiko. She decided to board with me at Pirongia and travel each day by the mail coach which dropped her off at Mangapiko on it's way to Te Awamutu. We also became friendly with Miss Murphy, sole charge teacher at Te Tahi, and she often rode in to join us at Pirongia during the weekends. These became life long friendships, as also was my friendship with Miss Airey.

In the [old Pirongia] hall, our school put on an operetta. The committee had need of extra funds so I produced The Doll's Wedding. Miss Airey coached the cast to make them word perfect and I attended to the musical side of it. Our doll, Muriel Russell, was dressed as a beautiful bride with a string of equally beautiful bridesmaids (who formed the choir). She was wooed in turn by Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, etc, who pleaded their cause in song. The bride replied to each one, in song, giving her reasons for refusal. The chorus came in frequently and the grand finale literally 'brought the house down'. It was a huge success - the school's first concert - and in response to requests there was a repeat performance - to another full house which was equally successful. Parents co-operated by dressing the characters and arranging bouquets.

*\* let the Centre know if you have photos or stories of this period - we'd love to hear from you.*

Correction: In the story headed *Methodist Church*, issue No 66, the date Mr. JT Johnson arrived in Pirongia was given as 19th March—it should read 10th March.

## Across the Ditch

Christina Moynihan is an Australian descendant of Richard Seccombe (who we featured in issue No 66) and his second wife Christina Allan who farmed at Alexandra/Pirongia, prior to 1900. And whose farm later became the property of Thorne Seccombe. Christina and her family visited the Centre when Alan Hall was able to help them locate the farm.

More recently, Christina has been investigating what happened to two daughters of AC Edenborough and his wife Grace (nee Allan), Edith Vane and Mabel Kate. Both attended school in Auckland and each appears to have qualified as a teacher. In 1900 they were living at Grange Road, the address of their widowed mother, Grace. But after that they simply disappear from the New Zealand electoral rolls.

Alan suggested to Christina that they may have left the country and wondered if they had moved to Australia. Christina was then able to locate Edith Vane at Kalgoorlie in 1903, before she married a Mr. Anderson at Perth in 1917. However, by 1949 she was living at Beverly Canning, Western Australia.

Earlier, in 1922, Edith Vane Anderson appears to have been in a farming and grazing partnership with Caroline Matilda Burrows which was dissolved in July 1922 when Edith took over the assets and liabilities of the partnership.

Edith is buried at Karrakatta Cemetery in Perth.

Although Mabel Kate also appears to have moved to Australia, at this stage Christina lacks details about her circumstances.



The Centre being assembled after its journey from Waikeria



## Alexandra becomes Pirongia

When it was first surveyed in 1864, the township now known as Pirongia, was named Alexandra in honour of the young bride of Prince Edward of England, who later became King Edward VII. Alexandra continued to be used as its name for thirty-one years despite the existence of another Alexandra in Central Otago. This duplication posed a problem for the Government and some of its agencies such as the Post Office and the Telegraph Department.

To distinguish between the two settlements, the northern Alexandra was sometimes referred to as Alexandra (Waipa) or Alexandra (Auckland). Nevertheless, after the abolition of Provincial Government in 1876, when all New Zealand settlements came under the jurisdiction of one central government, the problem of duplicated place names needed to be sorted out because there were a number of towns with the same names. Alexandra was hit by three events in the 1880s: the decision to route the railway from Auckland via Te Awamutu, rather than Alexandra, meant that several Alexandra businesses migrated to the railway which provided more reliable transport than the river; King Tawhiao's declaration of peace in Alexandra in July 1881 led to the withdrawal from the area of the Armed Constabulary which had been an important source of income for local businesses and also boosted the local population; moreover, in the hard times of an economic depression, the population of Alexandra was already in decline as young people sought opportunities in other places. By 1888, when the population had fallen to 88, the Alexandra Town Board used the provisions of recent legislation to give up its town status and petitioned the Waipa County Council to administer the township as a county settlement. This meant the demise of the Town Board.

In 1894, the Government passed legislation determining that each settlement in the country should have a unique name and that the original name should apply to the first settlement to have it. This meant that Alexandra in Central Otago was entitled to retain its name and that a new name was required for Alexandra on the Waipa. Thus early 1895 the New Zealand Gazette called upon the Waipa County Council. Which now governed the settlement, to propose a name. The Waipa County Council asked the local people for suggestions and a newspaper account records that at a public meeting in Alexandra, four possible names were considered. One was *Areka*, the first part of Alekahanara, the Maori translation of Alexandra, which was literally Alex in Maori. A second less understandable suggestion was *Pomare*, the name of the leader of a Ngapuhi expedition up the Waipa River in 1825. which was ambushed and wiped out by local Maori. A third was *Matakitaki*, the longstanding name of the Maori Pa settlement near the confluence of the Mangapiko and Waipa Rivers from the days before the arrival of Pakeha settlers. And the fourth was *Pirongia*, the name of the mountain overlooking the settlement.

The meeting petitioned the County Council to re-name Alexandra as either Matakitaki or Pirongia, although there seems to have been a preference for Pirongia. It was the Council which made the final decision, reportedly because Pirongia was considered more euphonious (more pleasant sounding).

The name was adopted officially from 10th May 1896. In December 1895, the Government advised all schools of the change to the settlement name. However, it seems iconic that Alexandra school did not officially change its name until 1928. Of course, the names of the Alexandra Cemetery, the Boxing Day Races and the hotel have never changed.

An old portable stream boiler built in the late 1800s, believed to be a Robey, was found on the banks of the Waipa River. Research has shown it came to Kawhia Harbour and then was transported to Oparau, Do you know its history beyond Oparau, how did it come to be in Pirongia, what would it have been used for?

Contact: Robert McWha at the Centre.

