

NEWSLETTER

No. 72: May 2026

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



The historic Auburn homestead and setting provided a beautiful evening for our annual BBQ on February 25 . This was a week after the rainstorm on February 13 that had affected many families, roads and farms in the district. Fourteen people attended the evening with Nick Empson our main cook . Ros invited the members present to view their historical home, formerly built by G.Tisdall in the 1860's . An article on the Auburn homestead is planned for a future newsletter.

Passing of Alan Livingston 12th April 2026

On behalf of PHIC we acknowledge the passing of Alan Livingston, former Mayor of the Waipa District who was a great supporter of the Centre, especially in its early years when the second St Saviour's Church building was returned from Waikeria to Pirongia.

He had an encyclopaedic appreciation of the history of the district west of the Waipa readily answering our questions, giving an AGM talk about it and leading an escorted bus tour of the Te Pahu, Kaniwhaniwha, Harapepe, Te Rore West and Karamu districts organised by the Centre.

The fruits of his research are to be found in Te Pahu: a History, which he collated, edited and published in 1921.

We send our condolences to Janet and the Livingston families. He will be greatly missed.

Mayoral visit to The Centre.

Waipa Mayor. Mike Pettit, Vice Mayor Jo Davies-Colley & Hamilton City Councillor, Maria Huata visited the Heritage Centre on Tuesday 5th May

Welcome

The Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre's Committee along with our 14 volunteers hope you will enjoy our second Newsletter for 2026.

2026 AGM DATE Wednesday 24th June at 7.30 PM

To be held at the PHIC. Speaker to be advised. All welcome

Valued donations

We were very grateful in April 2026 to receive 2 donations from the Pirongia Racing Club and the Te Awamutu Darts Club following the closure of their clubs after many years and their distributions of remaining funds.

Professor Tom Roa (Ngāti Maniapoto, Waikato, Ngāti Apakura)

2026 New Year's Honours

We congratulated Tom who was awarded a NZ order of merit (CNZM) in 2026 for his services to Māori language and education. He was an early member of the PHIC, was involved with our opening ceremony and provided us with karakia for the official unveiling of Mac Bell's carved outside road sign. Te Whare Taonga O Ngaa Rohe O Arekahanara

Waterworks Destroyed on Mount Pirongia in 1920

The recent storm which seriously damaged the water supply from Te Tahi on Mount Pirongia to the Pirongia district and Te Awamutu was not the first such event to disrupt the gravitational water supply.

The original water supply scheme

The Te Awamutu Town Board opened the original waterworks on Mount Pirongia on 14 August 1914 to provide for a reticulated water supply after a loan of £18,000 for the project was made possible by ratepayers. The scheme was planned by a consulting engineer, H.Munro Wilson, with its construction undertaken by day labourers from September 1913, under the oversight of Mr A Wilkins.



The water supply was drawn from the Mahaukara Stream, which flowed along a shingle bed from its source near the head of the mountain. A 60 feet long reinforced concrete intake dam, constructed on five feet of foundations, had an outlet chamber into which water flowed through a natural filter of stones and a very fine screen. Provision was made to divert floodwater past the outlet chamber via an overflow sill.

From the outlet chamber, the water travelled in seven inch pipes for one and three quarter miles, down the steeply sided valley of the stream to a reservoir. The pipeline crossed the stream valley eight times, well above the stream level, and also spanned two tributaries. Each crossing involved the construction of a bridge of 12 x 9 inch timber girders to pro-

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Radio Interview

Our President Marilyn Yeates was recently interviewed by Ed O'Driscoll from the FM Radio station and gave an account of our early and present day history



New volunteer

We welcome Felicity Campbell, who kindly offered to volunteer last year. Felicity has her own business Breathe Free in Mangauika Road and we are grateful she can spare a half day every now and then.

School visits

On March 5 the Heritage Centre welcomed pupils from Pirongia. School. Donna Hobbs and Year 8 students visited as part of their literary English lesson. Marilyn Yeates spoke on the topic "Early Pirongia, Redoubts , river transport and buildings".

The students then choose one of these topics, viewed the Centre`s displays and were requested to write a literary paragraph. In the following weeks three Year.7 classes with lead teacher Amanda Foster visited to study similar topics .

Altogether with students, teachers and support parents 110 visitors from Pirongia School attended and boosted the March visitor statistics.



tect the pipe, supported by a reinforced concrete pier at each end. The pipeline left the valley via a tunnel 321 feet long, part of it through solid rock, to discharge into the reservoir.

Located on endowment land, the reservoir had a capacity for a quarter of a million gallons of water. Its floor was 316 feet higher than the Te Awamutu railway station, leading to the expectation that after travelling 8½ miles via an 8 inch main, it would provide a daily water supply to the town of over 430,000 gallons, with a water pressure of about 160 pounds per square inch, at a time when the normal daily consumption of the town was about 80,000 gallons.

The 8 inch pipeline from the reservoir travelled to the high level bridge across the Waipa River (now Pukehoua Bridge), running roughly parallel to Sainsbury Road where piers which supported it across a large gully still stand. It then followed Baffin Street in Pirongia before diverting to Frontier Road where it joined 5 miles of pipeline to Te Awamutu being laid by Battson and Prescott under a separate contract.

In Te Awamutu, water to households and businesses was reticulated over time, through smaller pipes, and 116 fireplugs were installed throughout the town.

Shortly after the water works scheme was established by the town board, in 1915, Te Awamutu elected its first borough council which assumed responsibility for development of the water supply and reticulation.

A major weather event

The original water supply scheme appears to have worked as planned for six years until January 1920 when a major weather event on Mount Pirongia, described as a cloudburst, created a disastrous flood, carrying away half the intake dam, including the intake chamber, and destroying about 30 chains of pipeline as well as most of the pipe carrying bridges between the dam and the reservoir. Because the intake was not supervised daily, the effects of the storm were not registered in Te Awamutu for two days, when the reservoir

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Centre Visitors

Late in March 2026 **, Elizabeth Mills** (nee Sherwin) and husband visited the centre.

She makes this visit every year from England with her brother Murray Sherwin and wife from Wellington. Irene Sherwin and 3 grand daughters also joined the visit. The photo pictures them with the display of their parents Harold and Margaret Sherwin. We thank them for their generous donation.



Pictured: Elizabeth (nee Sherwin) and her husband John Mills Murray Sherwin and wife Wilma, Irene Sherwin and her 2 granddaughters

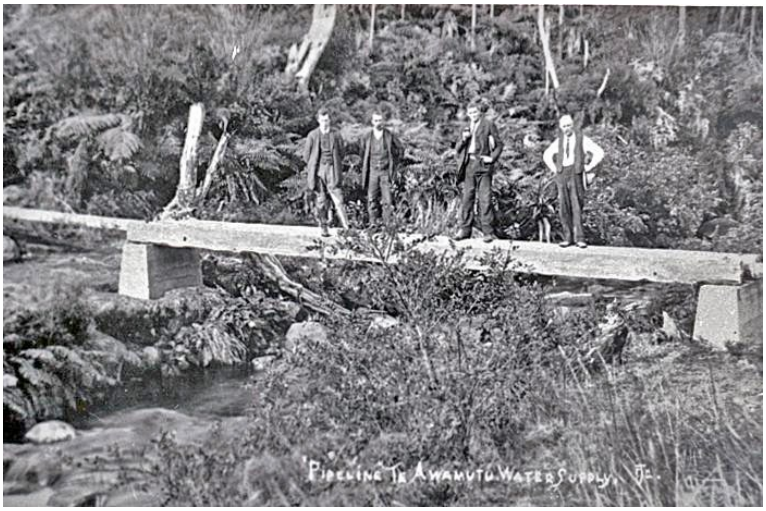
Centre displays

One of our popular displays has been on Mary Scott. A couple from Spain, who had been brought up in Switzerland, made a special trip to New Zealand and to our Pirongia Heritage Centre to visit this display. Mary Scott books (translated into German) are revered in Switzerland. As a young child every Christmas she would receive from her mother a Mary Scott book to add to her collection. She photographed the display and took Mary Scott's autobiography "Days Of Our Lives" to read and return the next day as well as purchasing 2 more books (the English versions) before she left saying she will return next year. During March 4 more of Mary Scott's books were sold and a further offer has been made of 15 books to be gifted to the Heritage Centre.

A list of available Mary Scott books can be viewed on our website.

supply began to run low. This created a water-supply crisis causing the Borough Council to organise tanks on lorries to make deliveries of water from door to door for some days until a makeshift supply to the reservoir could be re-established.

In addition to its regular staff, the Borough Council employed about 40 workers to re-establish a temporary supply line from the stream to the reservoir in a few days.



On 9 February, Stanley Orbell, a civil engineer who had recently moved to Te Awamutu, reported to the borough council his assessment of the damage to the water supply intake and pipeline. He also made recommendations for the permanent re-establishment of another dam with a supply chamber and a permanent pipeline to the reservoir.

Orbell recommended that a new concrete intake be built to tap the water in a natural pool about one and a half chains below the original dam; the intake to be on the. left bank of the stream and to follow that bank to within about three chains of the fourth bridge from the dam where a bridge would be required with sufficient height to place it and all below it well above flood waters. After crossing the first bridge, the pipeline would connect with the existing pipeline, which would then be followed, except for minor deviations to obtain better crossing sites for the bridges. He recommended that the bridges be of reinforced concrete, making them fireproof and permanent.

He added that it was not easy to estimate the cost of the work at that time but he considered £1250 to be a safe estimate.

[To be continued]

Centre News

New member

Danielle Aubin has recently become a member of the PHIC. She is a great-great-granddaughter of Jean Aubin. Danielle currently resides in Penrose, Auckland.

Heritage wagon repairs

Brent Mealing has recently completed the wagon wheel repairs and signage. A final report and photo are planned for the next newsletter

2026 Pirongia ANZAC Day Service

Wreath presented by Robert McWha

Book Collection

Waipa Glass recently installed glass sliders to extend the library book storage.

Past Newsletters and a list of books that can be borrowed by members may be viewed on our website:

https://pirongiaheritage.org.nz/

Our Facebook Page

The big Facebook topic recently has been the Valentine's Day flooding event in Pirongia, and the impact on bridges and areas directly under the mountain due to landslides.

However the topic that generated the most response was the Waikato River Course changes over past millennia. There were 101 likes and13 comments. An expert geologist gave further information taken from a recent book.

See: www.facebook.com/pirongiaheritage/ for more information.

