

NEWSLETTER

No. 44, May, 2016

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

Website: <http://www.pirongiaheritage.org.nz>



Roll of Honour Panel Unveiled

On Sunday 3 April, Waipa District Mayor Jim Mylchreest unveiled a panel in the Pirongia War Memorial Hall, about the men listed on the Roll of Honour tablets flanking the entrance. The panel is based on research reported in *Newsletter 40*. It was completed by Heritage Centre researcher Alan Hall, with assistance from Joy McGregor, Jan Kilham, Garry Howard, Marilyn Yeates and Alan Livingston. Alan Hall then worked with Sonia Frimmel of *What's the Story* who designed the layout and arranged its production by *Vivid Images* of Hamilton.

The panel was funded by the Pirongia Community Association that arranged the unveiling ceremony and afternoon tea which was enjoyed by the 70 people attending. They included a number of descendants of individuals listed.



"We will remember them."

The ceremony was chaired by John Wood, President of the Community Association, and involved RSA Padre Murray Olson, Bugler David Haberfield, Te Awamutu RSA Vice-President Terry Findlay, Haupai Puke and Tai Huata from Purekireki Marae, together with Tyler Storey, Zanthé White and Jack Ruthe from Pirongia School who recited the ANZAC Ode, and Alan Hall.

As a supplement to the panel, steps are now being taken by the Centre to obtain funding to publish biographical notes compiled about each of the men on the panel, together with notes on some others from the district who could have been listed, but were not.

Self-help in 1919

The period following World War 1 appears to have been a time of renewed hope after the war years, when the Pirongia community was imbued with a self-help spirit to be seen in the establishment of institutions such as a branch of the Farmers' Union, a Self-improvement Society, a Chamber of Commerce, and other local initiatives that eventually produced the War Memorial Hall, the first water supply, the beginnings of reticulated electricity, and the proposal to establish a light railway line to Te Awamutu.

It is possible that a renewed interest in self-improvement triggered the re-establishment of a Debating Society that had lapsed for many years following the disappearance of the original Literary and Debating Society that flourished in the early years of the settlement. Its soirees were said to have attracted up to 100 people and the early organisation was associated with the establishment of a library in the 1860s with the aid of a grant from the Mechanics Institute.

Newspaper reports tell that in 1919, the Debating Society met weekly in the Library building (until recently, the *Birdsong Gallery*) where diverse subjects of debate included "Should ladies smoke?", "Should bachelors be taxed?" (Mrs Simm), "Should ladies propose?" (Mr Dyson) and "Town v Country". Meetings were cheered by a fire, interspersed with "elocutionary items" and recordings played on Mr Grace's gramophone, with cakes and coffee making pleasant conclusions to interesting evenings.

There were also reports around the same time of a well-attended lecture series on "Home Nursing", delivered by Mrs Symes who was publicly thanked by Miss Aubin for her interesting and instructive presentations at a special afternoon tea where she was presented with a "handsome silver condiments set". On that occasion there were also musical and elocution items.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will take place in the Heritage & Information Centre at 7:30 pm on Tuesday 14 June.

It is anticipated that the meeting will take no more than 30 minutes, following which, Alan Hall, Heritage Centre Researcher, will give an illustrated talk about: *Policing the Frontier: The Armed Constabulary in the Waipa, 1868-1885*

Alan has been asked specifically to explain the difference between the Waikato Militia which established the settlement from 1865, and the Armed Constabulary which was responsible for its security over 17 years from 1868. He will distinguish between the differing roles of the local No.4 Division and the short-lived No.5 Division led by Inspector von Tempsky, and show how the functions of the AC changed over its 17 year life, particularly as they affected Alexandra.

Thanks for Support

BARBARA WALTER who, as Vice-President, stepped up to the role of President when Robin Astridge resigned in March and is doing a sterling job while familiarizing herself with the role.

Thank you Robin

We are sorry to report that President Robin Astridge tendered his resignation at a meeting of the Executive Committee in March.

Robin became a member of the Heritage and Information Centre in 2007, bringing a rich background of experience as President of the NZ History Federation over many years from 1984.

In recognition of this and his involvement in historical societies at New Plymouth and Cambridge, he was awarded the QMS for Community Service in 2000.

Robin has long been interested in New Zealand military history and he continues to be a member of the Defence of New Zealand Study Group. He is also interested in the history of the Methodist Church, particularly in this area.

Robin became a member of our Executive Committee in 2007 and President from 2010 to 2016. He drew upon his knowledge of military history to lead Path of War tours, did duty on the desk, and oversaw many developments in the Centre which he represented on the Waipa Heritage Council and the committee coordinating events for the 2014 sesquicentennial commemorations.

At the time of his resignation, Robin had been working to establish a plan for the future development of the Centre.

His contribution over nine years is greatly appreciated and will be missed.



Robin Astridge QSM

2016-17 Subscriptions

Renewals of subscription for 2016-17 that remain unchanged from last year, are due by 1 July. They are: Individuals \$15, Families \$25, and Institutions \$35.

For your diary

AGM: At the Centre on 14 June at 7:30 pm.
Speaker: Alan Hall on *Policing the Frontier*.
Supper will follow.

From the Committee

- The Centre was visited by 3046 visitors during the 2015-2016 Financial Year that ended in March. That was a pleasing result. But it was 76 short of the 3122 visitors recorded in 2013-14 which was our best year to date.
- The Committee has been working on its long-term plans for the development of the Centre. Following a brainstorming exercise, priorities are now being set for the future.
- Arrangements have been made to display a more up-to-date aerial photograph showing the present development of the village.
- Plans have been made to develop some new displays about early families in Alexandra.

New and Improved

- Tess McGruddy, who usually helps staff the Centre on Saturdays, has worked with Alan Hall to produce an index of items in our Newsletters, Numbers 1 to 44. They began compiling it to produce a quick way to find whether or not a particular topic has been the subject of entries in the past.

The index will be updated whenever a new edition of the Newsletter is published, and is available free to members as a computer file from which hard copies may be printed.

- The Centre has made an arrangement with the Waipa District Council that allows us to provide access to the Memorial Hall for visitors wishing to see the new panel about men named on the World War 1 Roll of Honour.

Because it will require someone to take them to the hall, it will be advisable for anyone seeking access to contact the Centre prior to their visit.

More on the Butchers Jones

The *Butchers Jones* entry in Newsletter 43 drew a useful response from member Karen Howard who used her considerable genealogy skills to track down information about Archibald Hubert Ashton Jones who died in Pirongia during the 1918 influenza epidemic. His distinctive given names allowed Karen to ascertain that he was a butcher from Railton, Tasmania, who moved to Pirongia about 1914 (not 1911 as suggested in *Newsletter 43*) with his wife Ada and son Alan.



Karen Howard

Karen also identified the other members of Archibald's family in Tasmania, who, it turned out, included Alfred William Henry Jones, the other butcher Jones who had come here with Rhoda Rockliffe in 1911. In short, the two butchers Jones were brothers.

Alfred purchased a farm at Pokuru and also worked in Te Awamutu as a land agent until his death in a freak motor accident in 1925. After that, his wife, Rhoda, raised their seven children and successfully worked the farm through the difficult years of the 1930s depression. She moved to live in Te Awamutu from the early 1950s until 1964 when she died in her 90th year.

You can read Karen's research that tracks the Jones family back to Ireland in the late 18th century, together with Te Awamutu newspaper clippings about Alfred and Rhoda Jones by asking at the desk for the Jones vertical file.

An 1881 settlement plan for Te Rore

1881 was an important year for the district. Early in January, contractor J.J. O'Brien began constructing a long-awaited bridge over the Waipa River between Te Rore and the Harapepe district. There had been protracted debate about the bridge's location. Some, led by E.G. McMinn argued that it could be built at less expense further downstream, but generally the local people preferred locating it where there had been ferries since 1866, which was also conveniently closer to Alexandra.

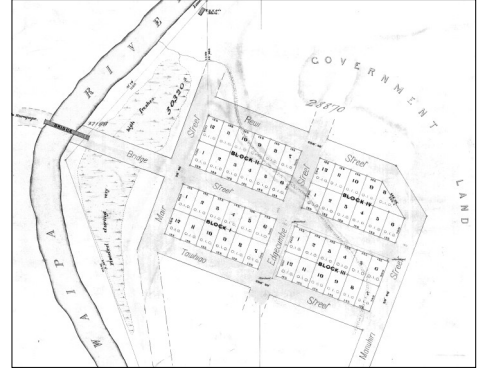
On July 12th, when construction was reaching completion, King Tawhiao rode into Alexandra at the head of 600 followers of the Kingitanga to declare an end to the 17 year armed confrontation between the Kingitanga and the New Zealand Government.

The Te Rore Bridge was opened with ceremony on 16 August.

Then, on August 30th, the *Waikato Times* reported that "Mr F Edgecumbe is engaged in laying out a new township at Te Rore". Edgecumbe's plan laid out a grid of 48 one-acre sections to the east of the new bridge and the names allocated to most of the streets were of individuals associated with the coming of the peace. Tawhiao, Rewi and Manuhiri Streets acknowledged the Kingitanga leadership and Mair Street commemorated the role of William Mair who represented the government at the laying down of arms in Alexandra. The other two streets were to be named Bridge and Edgecumbe Streets.

A copy of the map is on display at the Heritage Centre, together with some interpretive notes. However, although it is possible to imagine the settlement's location near the bridge, there is no indication today of occupation there.

We will be interested to learn of people or institutions that may have owned sections there. It is said that the Presbyterian Church owned one.



The 1881 map of the settlement planned for Te Rore when the bridge opened, included 48 one-acre sections.

The second Whatiwhatihoe Bridge

Newsletter 43, recounted the story of the first Whatiwhatihoe Bridge that was constructed in 1882 and then seriously upgraded in 1943. The measures taken extended the life of the old bridge, but did not nullify the need for a replacement; it continued in use for a further 11 years, but with load restrictions. However, in June 1950 it was announced that construction of a long-awaited, two-lane concrete structure was to proceed. The cost was estimated to be £45,000 [\$90,000], of which Waipa County Council would have to contribute £2,862 [\$5,724]. However, it was reported that although some preliminary work had been done, presumably to help estimate the costs, the bridge would not be built for another two years.

The contract for the construction of the new bridge was won by Tapper Construction Ltd of Auckland in 1953. The tender price of £42,665 [\$85,330], did not include metal supplied by the Ministry of Works, valued at £9,000 [\$18,000] together with extras valued at £1,650 [\$3,300] that brought the total cost to £53,300 [\$106,600] in round figures.

The old structure remained in use while construction of the new bridge took place alongside it. Land was taken under the Public Works Act for the new bridge to be located slightly up-stream of the old one, meaning that traffic along Kawhia Road, as Ormsby Road was known at the time, was not again seriously interrupted by bridge closure.

The new structure, the present bridge, was built entirely of reinforced concrete. Its total length is 371½ feet [113.2 metres], with a two-lane deck 24 feet [7.3 metres] wide, and a height above ordinary water level of 45 feet [13.7 metres], with the highest pier 51 feet [15.5 metres] above the stream bed. It was both longer and higher above the river than its predecessor. An unusual feature is that it is slightly curved, following an arc with a 60 chain [1.2 km] radius which is so slight that it was said to have "no appreciable effect on the driving of motor vehicles over it".

The new bridge was opened by the Hon W S Goosman, Minister of Works, at a well-attended ceremony on 5 November 1954, that also involved local body representatives and Ministry of Works officials. The occasion was only eight days before the 1954 General Election and a number of the speeches included good-natured political banter and references to some of the rivalry between adjoining local bodies involved in the early decision-making about the bridge. For example, Mr Goosman used the traditional meaning of Whatiwhatihoe to suggest that "a lot of would-be politicians, paddling up the river at present are going to end up with broken paddles", and C F Jacobs, Mayor of Te Awamutu, quipped that it was the Te Awamutu water main, attached to the side of the structure, about which there had been some controversy, that was really holding the new bridge up. Nevertheless, most speakers were fulsome in their praise of the influence of the National Roads Act 1953, referred to on the day as "Stan Goosman's Act", that had allowed the newly established National Roads Board to contribute 80% of the funding for the new Whatiwhatihoe Bridge. It is worth noting that powers conferred by this act eventually allowed the road crossing the bridge to be designated State Highway 39, as it is known today.

The final act in the story of the two Whatiwhatihoe bridges was the demolition of the original bridge soon afterwards, leaving the bridge and its approaches more-or-less as it is today.