

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BIRKENHEAD

Prior to the 1840's this area had no permanent European settlers, and was only sparsely populated by Maori, most of whom had been driven out by marauding tribes from the North. The main pa sites were on Stokes Point at Northcote and at Kauri Point. The area now known as Birkenhead was sold by the Maori in April 1841 as part of a huge block of land which stretched from the Waitemata to Mahurangi. The first recorded use of the name "Birkenhead" was on a sale plan in 1863.

During the 1860's the first European settlers arrived, and began the farming and fruit growing that the district was to become famous for. The land was hilly, bush clad and the clay soil gave little to the settlers who found the going very tough. Clearing the bush to grow grass and crops and building fences to hold the stock was no easy task. Strawberries became a profitable crop for some and so began a tradition that was to last almost 100 years. During the 1870's the area was still very much a pioneering settlement occupied by a few settlers, a few Maori and some gum diggers.

In 1880, the first church was built at Zion Hill. Previously settlers had either met in their homes or had gone to Northcote Point. The opening of the Chelsea Sugar Works in 1884 brought workers, more houses and more settlers into the district. Gradually Birkenhead and Birkdale were surveyed and became more populated. In 1888 the Birkdale (now Beach Haven) wharf was built, the Birkenhead Borough Council was established, and the current Zion Hill Church was built. The Council meetings were held in the old church and were planned to coincide with the full moon as there were no street lights. Other services were established in the district. The first school at Birkdale opened in 1894.

The new century saw the Sugar Works still dominating the district with a third of the men working there. Most orchardists changed from apples to stone fruit because of the codling moth which was unstoppable. Some grape growing and wine making was also tried. By 1913 there were shops and with a more regular ferry service going from Birkenhead rather than Stokes Point, the area thrived.

There were schools in Birkdale and Northcote but trudging that far on clay roads was too far for many children and they chose to go to Auckland by ferry instead. Although land for a school in Birkenhead was eventually purchased, the 1st World War prevented it being built until 1919. The first motor cars arrived in 1920 and as their numbers steadily increased, the Council had to impose traffic regulations. Bicycles were a common method of transport and their riders were required to ring their bells continually to warn pedestrians and horses.

In 1923 Beach Haven was surveyed and opened for sale. Sections starting at about £40 sold quickly. Repeated pleas were made to the Council for better roads to this far corner of the Borough as cars sunk in the clay. Groceries had to be delivered by wheelbarrow.

One of the greatest milestones for Birkenhead was the switching on of electricity in 1926. This allowed the area to develop steadily. During the 1930's Depression many families suffered heavily but the Sugar Works and the fruit growing helped most to survive. The last gum diggers seeking kauri gum worked at Verran's Corner in 1934.

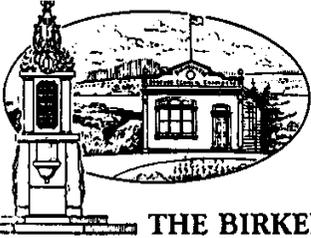
In 1933 Birkenhead Transport was founded and is still owned today by the same family. When the World War II broke out in 1939 over 300 left Birkenhead leaving a huge gap in the workforce. Women had to work the farm or do the jobs of their men folk. An ammunition store was formed at Kauri Point, a site chosen for its isolation. Locals soon became used to air raid drills and blackouts as the area was very vulnerable being between Kauri Point and Devonport Naval Yards.

Soon after the war it became obvious that a harbour crossing was necessary to cope with the growing population and vehicles. The contract was signed in 1954 and work finally began. May 1959 saw the Bridge opened with thousands walking across to celebrate. Birkenhead lost its rural fruit growing country atmosphere and soon developed into the beautiful and heavily populated place it is today. Thankfully large areas of native bush have been preserved and we can still see and experience the conditions those early pioneers had to contend with. Those areas also provide us with some fresh, healthy areas for recreation, and the opportunity to see natural New Zealand forest.



THE MUSEUM

Since its inception, the Birkenhead Historical Society has been given many interesting artifacts and documents. Some of these were first displayed in Cliff Utting's old dairy, our first "Little Museum" about 50 metres further up the road from the current site. This particular area was once strawberry fields and gardens before the farm was subdivided for houses, the War Memorial Park and bush reserves. The present Museum is situated on the site of an old ensilage pit. The "Little Museum" was demolished some ten years ago, and subsequently the society searched for another suitable Museum building. Anne Farrington came to the rescue with the gift of a house which had been lived in by her family for four generations and now needed to be moved. The Council leased a site on the edge of the War Memorial Park. The house was moved to its present site in January 1993 and many hours, weeks, months and years of voluntary work were donated by a dedicated band of members to restore Farrington House, named after the long serving President of the Society, Edward Farrington. The Museum was officially opened on December 21st 1997.



PO Box 34419
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THE BIRKENHEAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Birkenhead Historical Society was founded in 1979 by a group of enthusiastic people interested in the past history of the area, determined to see that history and heritage preserved for future generations.

The Society holds a function each month, alternating interesting speakers on historical themes and Stories Days, with bus trips to places with historical interest.

Anyone interested, or enthusiastic about preserving Birkenhead's and local history as part of our heritage, is invited to join the Society. We require people to help in running and maintaining the Museum and setting up displays. Please contact us if you can help, or just wish to participate in events. A very warm welcome awaits you.



Birkenhead Historical Society **President: Marcia Roberts 418-0397**
PO Box 34419 **Vice President: Brian Potter 483-3400**
Birkenhead Auckland 0626 **Vice President: Colleen Durham**

Annual subscription \$25.00 (single), \$35 (family), \$5 (junior)

I wish to apply for membership of the Birkenhead Historical Society

DATE: AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \$.....

MR/MRS/MISS/MSPH:

ADDRESS:

EMAIL (for newsletters):

- I am interested in:
- Attending talks and lectures.
 - Going on historical trips.
 - Archiving and sorting material in the Museums
 - Setting up displays in the Museum
 - Officiating at the Museum when it is open
 - Serving on the Committee

05.2018



Birkenhead Historical Society

Birkenhead Museum



Farrington House

44 Mahara Avenue, Birkenhead

Just outside the gates to the War Memorial Park

Opening Hours: Every 2nd & 4th Sunday

2pm to 4pm

Or by appointment

For further information or to contact us use the website -

www.historicbirkenhead.com