



## THE BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE SOCIETY INC.

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Birkenhead

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### April - May 2015 Newsletter

#### New Zealand Wars – North Waikato - Visit, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2015

Postponed from the previous year because of a storm warning. Overcast skies with the possibility of some rain for dry farmland and gardens meant a perfect day for the Feb. trip, a little cooler after weeks of sunshine. The bus collected members from Birkdale and Beach Haven then arrived promptly at the Museum and we were soon on our way to down the Southern Motorway to Drury. Here our historical journey began, Alec Utting previous President of our BHS and a friend joined us at the local Anglican Church where Brian Potter pointed out the Memorial to the armed constabulary who fell during the 1862 conflicts with the Waikato Maori. The Maori were endeavouring to maintain ownership of their arable and very desirable lands from the land hungry settlers who had arrived in increasing numbers and expected land to be available.

Next the bus crossed to the west under the motorway and followed the old road south through some lovely farmland, then under the motorway to the east and followed the Razorback Road to the west of Bombay. These old roads were made by axing through bush, and pick and shovel by the slowly advancing constabulary. Brian pointed out where an ambush by Maori warriors had occurred, and an area where the labouring soldiers had laid down their jackets and guns while they worked on a small dip on the high ridge – returning later to discover all their guns had been quietly removed by cunning warriors. They were left in a vulnerable situation until further soldiers arrived to provide cover.

Descending to Pokeno, many had not seen before a new venture – the Chinese owned Dairy Factory, and more recently a large subdivision and houses springing up across what was farmland last year. Brian showed us the 1862 Redoubt which is on the edge of the former small settlement, a large ditch and high square rampart was obvious, - a large shed or farm building on the top suggested no respect for the heritage significance at the time the building was erected. With the encroaching house building it is to be hoped this remarkably intact site is preserved for the future.

We learned more of the history of the Waikato land wars, and various Pa and redoubt sites were pointed out, we crossed the Mangatawhiri Stream which was the boundary; the Waikato tribes asked the advancing troops and settlers not to cross for land. We learnt about the gunboat which was used to bombard the Maori defences from the Waikato River, and saw the actual gun turret at Mercer, now the base of the WWI Memorial.

At Rangiriri we stopped at the Café to view the private collection of historical facts and items on display. A video was shown of local historic sites and gave a good overview of the land features and defensive ditches and walls built by the Maori defenders at Rangiriri prior to the 1863 battle. The area between swampy land and the local small lake and the Waikato River was an important land link which the advancing European forces had to cross. The central defences withstood the first attack by the armed men, many were killed and the remaining Maori were able to escape undetected. Standing on this central defensive position we were impressed by the view to the south over Waikato land, down to a significant bend in the river which featured in sketches and paintings commemorating the 1860's events. We could not help to notice more recent earthworks as a new bypass is under construction, and large pylons carrying power to Auckland obstruct the clear view of the river. We cannot stop progress but it is good to stop and reflect on the places that played a significant part in shaping and making our New Zealand history, and understanding why the Tangata Whenua and the Europeans have differing perspectives on past events, and we can acknowledge those differences as we head into the future.

We visited Ngaruawahia, the historical home of the Maori king movement and drove by the Turangawaewae Marae.

Our journey home had a slight distraction. Our driver was alert to a warning light and alarm and stopped beside the busy main road to investigate. Eventually something we had noticed at the back was brought to the driver's attention – and emergency 'hammer' had come loose and safely placed out of harm's way. The driver received a call from his manager suggesting the same source so with the 'hammer' replaced we were soon on the road again, time for generous ice creams to be purchased at Pokeno and we arrived back at the Birkenhead Museum on the dot of 4.30pm. Only slight rain had fallen during our time off the bus so it was a very successful and enjoyable day thanks to Brian Potter, the Birkenhead Heritage Society committee, and the many members who participated.

Marcia Roberts



## COMING EVENTS



**18 April 2015**

**Stories Day**

**Venue:** St Andrews Church, Hinemoa Street, Birkenhead.

**Time:** 2pm

**Cost:** \$2.00

Come along and bring a story for us to hear and enjoy with a friendly cuppa and catch up with others afterwards.



**25 April 2015**

**ANZAC DAY**

**Museum Opening**

**All welcome to come and visit and join the commemorations at the War Memorial Park**

**Service begins at 10.00am.**



**23 May 2015**

**Birkenhead Heritage Society AGM – Speaker to be confirmed**

**Venue:** St Andrews Church, Hinemoa Street, Birkenhead.

**Time:** 2pm

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**Annual subscription Singles \$20.00 and \$25.00 family**

I wish to apply for membership / Renewal of the Birkenhead Heritage Society membership.

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

MR/MRS/MISS/MS .....PH: .....

ADDRESS: .....

Email:.....

I am interested in:    Attending talks and lectures.

Going on historical trips.

Archiving and sorting material in the Museum

Setting up displays in the Museum

Officiating at the Museum when it is open

Serving on the Committee

Other.....

