

# BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE SOCIETY



The Society was founded in 1979 by a group of enthusiastic people determined to see the area's history and heritage preserved for future generations. The Society holds regular functions, alternating speakers on historical themes, with bus trips to places of historic interest. In 2014 members voted to rename the Historical Society the Heritage Society.

Anyone interested and enthusiastic in preserving Birkenhead's history, 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.

## THE MUSEUM

Since its inception, the Birkenhead Heritage Society has been given many interesting artefacts 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 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 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 needed to be relocated. 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 21<sup>st</sup> 1997.

## 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 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 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 war broke out in 1939 over 300 left Birkenhead leaving a huge gap in the workforce. Women had to 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 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.

THE BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE SOCIETY INC.

# Membership Application Form

*Annual subscription \$35 (family), \$25 (single), \$5 (junior)*

I wish to apply for membership of the Birkenhead Heritage Society

DATE: ..... AMOUNT PAID: \$.....

PAID BY (DELETE THOSE NOT APPLYING): Cash / Cheque / Electronic Transfer

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

ADDRESS: .....

EMAIL (for newsletters): .....

- 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



### Options for Subscription Payment:

1. Pay by cash, and present this form (completed), at Society functions, **OR**
2. Post cheque, and this form (completed), to the Society's address **OR**
3. **NEW:** Pay by Electronic Transfer  
**Account Number** 12 3035 0511576 00  
 Details to appear on their statement:  
**Particulars:** "BHS Sub"  
**Reference:** Your name e.g. "Mrs. Brown"  
**AND:** Post this form (completed) to Society's address



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THE BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE  
SOCIETY INC.



President Ray Johanson 483 7160  
Vice President Brian Potter 483 3400  
Vice President Colleen Durham 483 4001

## Birkenhead Museum



**Farrington House  
Mahara Avenue, Birkenhead  
Just outside the gates to the  
War Memorial Park**

**Opening Hours: Most Sundays  
2pm to 4pm  
Or by appointment**

[www.historicbirkenhead.com](http://www.historicbirkenhead.com)