



Hokianga Historical Society Inc.

PO Box 26 Opononi 0445

Ph. 09 405 8498

Incorporating
Hokianga Museum

NEWSLETTER AUG/SEPT 2015

“Mud, mud, glorious mud
Nothing quite like it for cooling the blood....”

Nothing quite like it either for splashing up beyond the gumboots on to your best pair of pants. Here in Hokianga we are getting very familiar with the weather forecaster’s “Showers in western Northland” but it would be very kind of them to let us dry out with no showers for just for a few days! Not that the rain has kept Spring at bay: the museum’s red kaka-beak, the kowhai and the manuka - and the daffodils along the front – have all burst into bloom and really brighten the day for those on duty there.

Our AGM was held last Saturday afternoon as scheduled, with 17 attending (two better than last year!) After all, most of our members live Elsewhere, and flu has started to hit as well. But thank you to all of you who took the trouble to send in your apology: it is always good to know that you think of us up here. And thank you too to Hilda Field, who has never missed sending her greetings.

It was really a very quiet affair with no raised voices. The only major change was to free Hiku finally from his eleven years of chairmanship: you might recall that last year he was persuaded against his better judgment to carry on till December, then that went on – and on - until he was still in the hot seat for this meeting. In our defence, our able vice-president Barbara Coulter took over many of his duties and we did try not to make too many demands. Looking back, as one does at times like this, it’s been an exciting eleven years under his watch. From the first, the continuing search for a replacement site, consulting with the Hokianga Marae for their support, putting forward ideas, applications for funding - and all the dashed hopes and plans that brought. Then the move into storage when the old building was finally condemned, later the negotiations with the Ministry of Education – Hiku had been in the forefront of all of that. Then, the opening of the new building! Its building had ups and downs of its own and we were very lucky to have an Executive then which included Michael Lough, engineer, and John Metcalfe, clerk of works, to help steer it through. After that, of course, there were the teething problems of how everything should be arranged, with several newbys, a new curator in Donna Washbrook and a somewhat different team.... That first year must have taken all the forbearance and unflappability he had. We have a lot to thank you for, Hiku, and believe me, we are very grateful.

So now we have a new president, and it’s **Dawn Metcalfe**, once known to many old Hokianga-ites as Dawn Ambler. She and John came to retire in Omapere/Opononi some years ago after a fairly itinerant lifestyle with the army, and Dawn has been enjoying (mostly) relief-teaching round the area. She’s also been a duty-volunteer in the museum in the weekends so it’s familiar territory for her.

Otherwise, the officers remain the same: **Barbara Coulter** as vice-president, **Doug McKenzie** as treasurer, **Donna Washbrook** as curator and **Alexa Whaley** as secretary. Of the five **executive members**, Carol Lee decided to stand down as she has taken on the treasurership of the St John local area committee, a demanding job with a three-year commitment. We’re grateful though that she will continue with her fortnightly museum time. Thank you, Carol, for your work over the past two years. In her place we have **John Askew**, who like Carol gives his all to everything he takes on. As the other four members – **Diane Hunia, Denis Ryan, Grace Wilkinson and Jackie Walker** – were willing to be nominated again, we didn’t need to have a full-blown election and that did contribute to the peacefulness of the meeting mentioned above.

Our Patron **Heather Ayrton** was present, and agreed to continue as patron – thank you, Heather! **Teresa Lomas** is willing to continue with the annual audit, and the membership fee will remain at **\$15.00 /**

\$25.00 (family) And under Doug's careful management, we ended the financial year with a net increase in funds of \$110.00. (He had prudently budgeted for a loss) No doubt Doug will be sending out membership reminders shortly, though a number have beaten him to it already. Those who receive this by snail-mail will find theirs with it – we're saving ourselves 70¢.

So what have we all been up to?

Earlier on, Donna our curator made sure we entered this year's regional **Trust Power Volunteers Awards**, under the Culture and Heritage section. It's a searching form to fill in – takes a good deal of stickability to get to the end of it. Her effort paid off though as the judges announced a special commendation for the Society, with a citation mentioning particularly the work on our WW1 project. (Special thanks must go to Ken Baker for that – the judges left no stone unturned and had looked at our website. All the WW1 material there is his work).

The awards ceremony was held in Opononi this year so Donna and Diane Hunia were there to receive their certificate and a \$100 voucher as well. Congratulations to all involved! And we need also to congratulate our own Hospital Auxiliary whose sterling fund-raising work won them the overall award for the region.



In the Heritage and Environment category "For going above and beyond to mark an important centenary", Donna Washbrook and Diane Hunia accepting the certificate at the Trust Power Award Ceremony at the South Hokianga Memorial Hall on 27 July 2015
(photo courtesy Trustpower Community) see more at:

<http://www.nz museums.co.nz/news/award-for-hokianga-museum-and-archive-centre/>

A note about Ken Baker's book Hokianga Remembers, describing his visits to the WW1 cemeteries of Europe to locate the graves of Hokianga 's men: he has had a second printing done of this with an improved format including its ISB Number. We've received a batch of this new printing now, selling at \$30 each. It's beautifully photographed and very movingly told.

Not quite our area, but closely connected is another very recent book about the Okaihau men who were caught up in that war – Puriri and Poppies, by Brian Jordan. He has managed to research the experience, the family and the subsequent life of each Okaihau man who went – not just those who died, but everyone who was accepted into the army during those years. He has donated a copy to our collection since many of the men have family connections in Hokianga, but copies are available from him (for \$38) at braz.jordan@gmail.com .

Our 2015 **Sunday Afternoons in the Museum** series wound up this weekend with an excellent and very entertaining talk and demonstration of **Rawene's Sailing Club's** operation, by its Club Captain Dr Paul Bowker. It became a real 'show and tell' affair as he'd brought along one of their Lasers to demonstrate on, complete with mast and sail (It rained, of course, so eyeing its neat lines as it sat on the trailer we suggested it might fit into the museum ok - NO, he said in horror -: she's got to have the mast and it would never fit in there. So we stood outside and sure enough, the mast once up was taller than the building) Inside, while it really rained, he brought out his sheet of 15 quiz questions which tested most people most of the time: try these ones for size:

Few people with anacrophobia become sailors. Why? What are they afraid of?

A heading of one eight zero will take you which direction? – north, south, east or west?

What was a brass monkey, as in the phrase "freeze the balls off a...." [fireplace ornament – a cold matelot – tray to hold cannonballs – or a ship's figurehead?]

....and 12 others of that sort. He had put a lot of preparation into the afternoon and it's just a pity there weren't more there to enjoy it.

Four weeks before, we had a really good session with **Sister Anne of St Isaacs Retreat House** who had been asked "Who was St Isaac? And why is there a St Isaacs on Waiotemarama Gorge Road?" Her explanation was so relevant as part of the recent history of Hokianga that we asked for the text of her talk, and I plan to include it with our next newsletter (we have to run the transcript we made past her first) There were a number of people who had to miss it, for one reason or another, so this will help to fill the gap.

In June the museum held an Art Competition with a Matariki theme for the local school classes. We occupy what is, after all, a corner of the school grounds and we have always hoped that they would regard us as an extension of their classrooms. We've let them know each time a new exhibition goes up, we've invited them to visit when they're planning a new theme to see what might be relevant. But it's taking a while! So with the Matariki season approaching it could be time for a new approach. We asked for an art presentation of any sort as long as it had a Matariki theme, and offered certificates and monetary prizes for the classes which took part (and Donna persuaded the local store to donate eatables too) The entries were all on show before and after the judging. Three classes took part. It was a good start!. Well, that's what's been happening over the past few weeks / months and now it's time to look to the future. Here we are at the start of another year, in pretty good heart and with a good number of plans for the future. So what are they?

For next year it's hoped to build on this first Matariki experience, and extend the competition to other schools, perhaps enlarge the age-range, publicise it for longer beforehand and launch it as a recognised event in the annual calendar. It's got to be something they want to do, and be a genuine competition for the best work, or the most imaginative, creative, or unexpected.

Another entirely new departure is to work with the Dept..of Corrections as an agency providing community service for a local 'offender'. The approach first came from a Probation Officer and we thought about it and decided yes, if she's local we did have enough special work to fill 150 hours. This will be over the next several weeks in the museum and Donna will be her sponsor and supervisor. It will be quite a blessing to have her attack some work that takes uninterrupted concentration – usually impossible when dealing with visitors.

Some members will be aware that there are great things happening in Rawene at present, with new enterprises opening up and a new atmosphere of purpose and excitement in the air. We'd like to contribute our bit to this if we can, making our collections (in copy form) available where they could be useful (like dated photographs showing the history of some of the shops and houses) or information on the events and happenings that have left small traces behind. Mind you, we didn't make a very good start by supplying information on Rawene's street-names in which Campbell Rd. was listed among the paper roads only. Not sure whether that came from a map or the Council, but we got it WRONG! Campbell Rd. dwellers were not pleased. And there it is, locked behind glass for all to see....we haven't so far been able to change or delete it. Sorry, Campbell Road.

I mentioned "dated photographs": this is a plea to everyone to name and date your photographs while you're still able to do it! We have just had a visit from Shane Mitchell, one of the Australian Mitchell branch, whose grandfather was one of Mabel Mitchell 's and Sylvia King's brothers. Apparently more than

one of the family went to Oz, as there is now a whole branch there who know nothing about their NZ counterparts. He is here to find out. He has been lent an album and a box of the NZ Mitchell family photographs while here, mostly from the '50s and '60s, which he's passed on to us temporarily for copying if we wish. But none are named, dated or placed, so though we've selectively copied the ones that show faces, houses, situations clearly, they would all be so much more useful to everyone if... The ones we copied will be here in the Mitchell Family File for anyone who'd like to have a go at identifying.

Still on photographs: recently we've had a request from another Australian who descends from a Kenneth Cumber, teacher at Taheke 1918 – 1940 (she thinks) – she's hoping for a photo of him as she's never seen one. Believe it or not, we don't have any ourselves for that period, So this is an SOS to anyone who might have been at school at Taheke or played football there during that between-wars time, who might have a photo with the teacher in it. I have rather a soft spot for this enquirer as her email; instead of ending with all the anti-virus protection it has (like most do) it simply says "*Lord, help me to be the kind of person my dog thinks I am. Amen.*"

This newsletter is starting to look like a written version of Talking Heads Too much verbiage! I had planned to insert a photo or two for light relief, but the ones that would be best aren't down-loaded yet. So I'm afraid you are stuck with words and more words, if you're still with it at all.

But some good news to end up with! This afternoon, a phone-call from a delighted **Olive Harris** ('Remember Hokianga'?) to tell me her second book was finally in her hands. **BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER** it is titled, about the same size as her first, will be retailing at \$55.00. That's all I know so far, we'll certainly find out more and I trust we will have copies for sale in good time for Christmas. Congratulations Olive – and your editor Chris Lancaster – you can't keep good women down!!

We will be in touch again before too long, more briefly I hope next time, but we have to publicise the events of the end of the year sometime soon and they are not yet set in concrete.

Best wishes
Alexa Whaley