



Incorporating  
Hokianga Museum

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### NEWSLETTER May 2013

At last there is a year's programme to offer so it's urgent that we also have a newsletter to broadcast it. It's a pity that so many members live so far away, because the event coming up very soon is something for us all to celebrate: It's forty years since, on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1973, the Omapere / Opononi / Pakanae / Waiotemarama / Waimamaku and Wekaweka communities all got together and formed a branch of the Hokianga Historical Society. And said they wanted to gather material to start a museum.

We have decided to celebrate this by having a big get-together on **Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> May, starting at 2 pm**. It will be at the Omapere Church Centre, as the museum is a bit small to hold all the people we hope will come. We'll have minute-books, photographs, landmark events, some of the early attempts at record-keeping, reminders of past meetings and people... we will be unashamedly nostalgic! It's only about three weeks away, and I apologise for the short notice.

Last year over the winter months we tried holding 'Sunday Afternoons at the Museum' inviting local people to speak on their area of expertise or major interest. It turned out to be quite a successful experiment, so....

On **Sunday June 23<sup>rd</sup>**, our first "Sunday afternoon in the Museum" for this winter will feature **Noel Hilliam** (borrowed from Dargaville) to talk about digging up shipwrecks. This has some current significance since the recent storm has uncovered more of the *India*, which was wrecked in 1883 and very conveniently buried herself along the foreshore fronting the museum. We already have some of the bits that previously showed themselves in 1997, were rescued and hauled with some difficulty up to the museum. This time though we're all that much older and the bits that are showing above the sand seem to indicate there's a lot more underneath (like an iceberg) – so for the moment, there they stay. Our apologies, though, to the late Alec Griffiths for whom the *India* was a pet project.



The following month, **July 28<sup>th</sup>**, we hope to hear from **Nick Williams** (son of Hughie Williams) talking about his family and their association with the harbour.

Then it's **August**, our **AGM** month. The date for that is almost certainly the **25<sup>th</sup>** and there will need to be a fuller announcement closer to the time.



However, we hope to have a representative from NZ Historic Places Trust (now becoming "Heritage NZ"), **Mita Harris**, to talk about the changes coming about in structure, funding and attitude.

Finally, **September 29<sup>th</sup>** – We hope, **Stephen King** of Waipoua Forest fame. (We haven't managed to ask him yet) The problem of kauri die-back and the future of kauri in a changing climate is on everyone's mind just now, especially as DoC proposes altering the route to Tane Mahuta to reduce the polluting visits.

These meetings will all be at the museum and will start at 2 pm – open to everyone

In **October** we just might aim at a Labour weekend cruise, but that will have to be decided closer to the time.

**November** is usually the month for celebrating with our annual dinner. This year, as you'll recall, Grace has suggested holding a lunch instead, since we have a significant number of members who are unable or unhappy to drive at night. So it will probably be on one of the Saturdays or Sundays in November – more of it later, as nothing has been set firmly in place yet. (I was going to say "Set in concrete" but that doesn't sound inviting when discussing lunch.)

Having described what's planned, we turn to what has already happened.

The museum's summer exhibition, **Soaring over the Hokianga**, came to an end finally in March after a quietly successful season. We found it was the older generation who really pored over each aerial view, finding landmarks and pointing out where a road used to go, or so-and-so had lived, praising the clarity of the photographs. As with some other exhibitions, it is the "ex-local" visitor who really appreciates what is offered. But there is a sequel too, because Kohukohu's Village Arts Gallery has asked to borrow the single Kohukohu view to act as an introduction to their new exhibition just about to open. **Slice of Life** is based on the iconic truck (a 1937 International) which for many years sat on its derelict platform over the water, in full view of passers-by on Kohukohu's road north. An eyesore to some, an affectionate memory of the past to others. Their exhibition is not just a collection of the paintings and photographs the truck inspired, but includes a looped tape of interviews with the people connected with it – "like a community's memory bank", says Marg Morrow who curated it.

In the museum, our exhibitions currently on show are **Carrying the news**, about how and when different developing communication styles affected Hokianga, and this year's **Anzac** display, left up a little longer as it features so many photographs of the 'sons of Ramaroa'. (More on this further on)

**The Ventnor Project:** At the beginning of April there was a three-day visit to Hokianga by the Chinese-NewZealand Society, visiting the places closely connected with the sinking of the *Ventnor*. It culminated on the Saturday evening with a final ceremony in the Opononi Memorial Hall to which we were invited. It was a very impressive gathering, the hall filled with Chinese people of all ages, all speaking in English and Maori as well as Cantonese and Mandarin, (well, 3<sup>rd</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> generation NZers, what should we expect!) with addresses, songs, a play-reading, and a presentation to the Historical Society of the files of research which Wong Liu Shueng has been gathering over the last several years. There were many accolades for Liu Shueng for her



persistence and determination in working on this, and keeping others working too – we have certainly found, in our dealings with her, that she gets things done! It was a memorable night and when the archive has been sorted and documented completely, another whole segment of history will have been added to what is offered the public..

The **Opo and Boy** saga (see left) still goes on, though it's nearing its end. Te Papa is helping us with an "Expert Knowledge Exchange" grant for a stone conservator to advise on the care and housing of the original sculpture.

This has, in fact, arrived back in Hokianga, mended and restored, but is resting in the shed of Ian and Sue Leigh Mackenzie until the stone conservator is free to come. It would be a good deal simpler just to go ahead and shift it to the museum ourselves, and Ian would be very pleased to have the space in his shed back, but the conservator has said she'll come after the school holidays so we should really wait until then. The replica is still being completed, the space on the waterfront still sits empty as it has done for the last eighteen months.

**WW1 Commemoration** There has been a strong suggestion that Hokianga should take a full part next year in the hundred-year recognition of the outbreak of WW1. So many of our young men enlisted as early as they could, and our memorials testify to the great number who never returned.

What sort of effect did this have on the lives of the families remaining? And the men who returned – did they resume where they had left off? How did Maori families fare? (Sickness / Disablement Benefits were less for Maori than for pakeha) How much Hokianga land went into in the Returned Servicemen's land-ballot? These and a lot of other questions will be investigated over the next year and we would be very grateful for input of any sort from affected families. 100 years is beyond personal memory now so we are reliant on written records, though family tradition has a part to play too. (A warning though: we've found that it's very easy to slip into WW2 stories by mistake)

Over the summer the museum volunteers have met such a lot of interesting people in search of their family roots! Some of the oldest Hokianga families are now into their eighth or ninth generation (it's a bit hard to count sometimes) and every summer one or other of the many descendants turn up wanting to find out about their forebears, and adding their own bit to the files we already have. This year we've had some Leafs, Bakers, Martin (James, not John), Russell, Freese, Bourke, and two new names, **Wright** (John Wright was a blacksmith buying land in the Mangamuka in 1838) and **Cook** – William Cook was Bay of Islands-based from 1822, later a whaler in Southland, but some of his descendants farmed at Rangiahua and linked up with the Baker family through marriage. Often it's a matter of connecting two researchers up so they work together rather than separately, so what could we call ourselves? A marriage bureau? However while we're at it, we'd be grateful to hear of anyone with knowledge of the Cook family in Rangiahua because we don't have much to offer and they seem to have lived fairly quietly. Any offers?

Alexa Whaley.

