



BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE SOCIETY INC.



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Newsletter July/August 2016

Events:

Stories Day

Was held on Saturday 9th July.

It is always interesting hearing members and visitors recollections and stories

Saturday 13th August 2.00pm at St Andrews Hall –

Guest Speaker:

Ross Henderson

Hear the real story behind the famous Gallipoli painting of ‘Simpson and his Donkey ANZAC 1918’ by Horace Moore-Jones.

Plus **Marcia Roberts** will share some of **Malta’s history** after a recent visit.

Saturday 10th September – Helensville Bus trip

Cost \$30 each

Helensville Pioneer Museum and the Railway Museum

Bookings: Contact - Mavis Throll 483 - 7230, paying in advance ensures a seat.

Cost: \$30.00 including Museum entrance fee. (By chq., cash or Electronic Transfer

Account Number 12 3035 0511576 00 – need to add ‘name’ and ‘bus trip’.)

Times: Leave Verran’s Corner 9:30, Farrington House 10:15

Return: Expected return time 4.15pm.

October 8th 2.00pm

Suggested meeting to be held at our **Farrington House Museum**, to enable members to be shown the displays by the Committee and share their memories.

Transport and interest to be discussed at prior monthly Meeting.

Auckland Heritage Festival

Birkenhead Heritage Society Farrington House Museum

at 44 Mahara Ave

will be open three Sundays

25th September, 2nd October and 9th October between 2.00 and 4.00pm.

Looking Back

Birkenhead Disaster 26 Feb 1852

"But to stand and be still to the Birkenhead drill. Is a damn tough bullet to chew".
From Rudyard Kipling's poem, *Soldier an' Sailor Too*.

The story behind Rudyard Kipling's line above.

Originally called the H.M.S Vulcan, the Birkenhead, H.M. troopship, left Cork in Ireland in December 1851 under the command of Captain Robert Salmond.

The vessel carried troops from ten different regiments, but predominantly from the 73rd Regiment of Foot, to the 8th Frontier War being waged against the Xhosa people in East London, South Africa. In total, there were an estimated 643 people on board - 138 ship's officers and crew, 480 army officers and drafted men, as well as a civil servant, 7 women and 13 children. Some horses (between 9 and 30 were recorded) were also on board. Among those on board was a draft for the Queen's (Second) Royal Regiment of Foot consisting of a Corporal and fifty one men under the command of Ensign Boylan.

On February 25th, 1852 H.M. Troopship Birkenhead steamed out of Simon's Bay near Cape Town, South Africa set on a course for Port Elizabeth, further north on the East Coast.

The ship was iron built by the famous John Laird shipbuilding family in 1845. She was just over 200 feet long and of 1400 tons. Propulsion: Sail, plus 2x Forrester & Co 564 hp.(421 kW) steam engines driving two 6 m (20 ft) diameter paddle wheels. On board the original 643 personnel and several officers' horses. Soon after midnight the Birkenhead struck a hidden reef off the aptly named Point Danger, some fifty miles out from Simon's Bay.

There were not enough serviceable lifeboats for all the passengers, and the soldiers famously stood firm, thereby allowing the women and children to board the boats safely. Only 193 of the 643 people on board survived, and the soldiers' chivalry gave rise to the "women and children first" protocol when abandoning ship. The "Birkenhead drill" of Rudyard Kipling's poem came to describe courage in face of hopeless circumstances.

Source: Wikipedia Search revealed several sites – Summary above from Geni.

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From the NZ History Federation Inc. Conference in 2016 at Alberton House in Mt. Albert came some local information relevant to the district.

Puketapapa is the name of the Local Board made up of the suburbs of Mt. Roskill, Three Kings, Lynfield, Hillsborough, Wesley, and Waikowhai, also parts of New Windsor and Royal Oak. The name Puketapapa is the Maori Name for the volcano Mt Roskill and Te Tātua-a-Riukiuta for the volcano summits of the Three Kings.

Further research provides evidence that the original cluster of scoria cones and craters known as Te Tātua-a-Riukiuta or Three Kings, was Auckland's largest and most complex volcano, which erupted about 28,500 years ago. The explosion threw huge amounts of volcanic ash and debris onto the existing ridged landscape of Waitemata sandstones and mudstones, thereby creating a roughly circular tuff ring nearby, and ash layers up to four kilometres away. There were five significant scoria cones and about a dozen smaller scoria mounds, formed by 'fire fountaining', sitting inside an explosion crater measuring approximately 1 km in diameter. Molten basalt lava flowed down the Meola-Motions Valley towards the sea, with the outside layers of this large lava flow cooling faster than the inside. As the outside solidified, the inside kept flowing, creating a complex of caves and tunnels where the still -hot lava flowed.

Meola Reef visible from the coast and high points of Birkenhead and Beach Haven facing the Waitemata Harbour reaches out towards our local cliffs. There remains a deep water channel close to our local shores influenced by the barrier created by the volcanic reef from Te Tātua-a-Riukiuta or Three Kings, providing the deep water required by the Sugar Refinery, and the ferry services we enjoy using today.

From Papers Past in 1910 comes an interesting interpretation of a different form of volcanic activity triggered by a lecture by Mr Clement Wragge who was featured in the May/June Birkenhead Heritage Newsletter.

SERMONS IN STONES.

ACCORDING TO MR C. L. WRAGGE. AWAY IN THE FAR NORTH. ALLEGED ANCIENT TEMPLES.

Mr Clement Wragge has been to the Bay of Islands, and he has seen things which have convinced him that a wave of civilisation swept over New Zealand in ancient times, and he points to souvenirs that have been beached. A Press Association message from Auckland today states:

Mr Clement Wragge, who has been lecturing and doing some exploring work in the Far North, claims to have discovered in the neighbourhood of the Bay of Islands "the remains of an ancient city or temple that probably dates back to the time of sun worship." He says "The huge blocks of stone, some nearly 15ft. long, were evidently hewn by prehistoric man. Some have cups or holes scooped out on their faces, which are evidently 'written' records of immense antiquity, and others are marked with long and short strokes, one being an ansated ¹ cross. Mr Wragge has taken a series of photographs of this weird place, which is probably unique in New Zealand - probably, he says, dating back to the megalithic track of ancient man when he was forced by change of climate to migrate from the northern to the southern Hemisphere.

RECORDED LONG AGO.

Mr Wragge has the glow of discoverer, but the interesting stones were observed long before he came to New Zealand. They were mentioned by the early missionaries, and Mr John White referred to them in a lecture delivered at Auckland in 1858. "I am afraid Mr Wragge is going rather fast," was a comment this morning by Mr H. H. Stowell, A well-know native interpreter and Maori antiquarian. "I have known about the stones very well ever since I was a child. They are on high ground, in the open, on the edge of the primeval forest. I visited the spot a few years ago, and I did not then notice those marks described by Mr Wragge. There is another group of stones in that locality similar to those which were seen by Mr Wragge."

PLACED THERE BY KUPE.

There is a Maori legend that the great Kupe, the mighty Polynesian navigator, had the stones put in their present position at a place between Kerikeri and Whangaroa (says Mr. Stowell). Kupe decided to give a great feast, and for this purpose, by magic spells and arts, he induced the subterranean powers to strand a number of whales at Tako, a roadstead between the Bay of Islands and Whangaroa. These whales formed part of the feast, and he had these stones (hakari) placed together to make a staging for the feast. These stones are known us hakari to this day. One of the chiefs, who was afraid of Kupe, and belonged to Hokianga, on the West Coast, decided to retire southwards. A local chief complained to Kupe that the absconding one had

stolen a canoe to assist him in his flight. Then Kupe, with the aid of the subterranean powers, sent some volcanic bombs after the fugitive, who was terrified, paddled ashore, and abandoned the canoe on the Ripiro Beach. Three or four bombs of that nature may be seen today on the banks of the Whairinaki, a tributary of the Hokianga River. They weigh, perhaps, over five tons each, and they have all been named by the Maoris. Mr Stowell's opinion is "that all the stones mentioned by Mr Wragge are volcanic 'bombs'."

THE ANCIENT FEASTING PLACE.

Mr Hamilton (Director of the Dominion Museum) remarked that probably the stones were put in their present position by the natives to make a hakari or staging for a feast. Sometimes these stagings were a chain long and 50ft high, built of spars lashed together. In the case under notice the stones had probably formed the lower part of the staging. With regard to the markings, he continued, the alleged "writing" had not been noticed by other observers, but it was customary to find air cavities in volcanic stones and bombs, and these features might be regarded by some observers as due to the human agency the eye of faith could see much. It was also probable that the stones had been arranged by the Maoris in a special order. There were evidences of design in the erection of the stones. The whole ground in the neighbourhood was thickly covered with stones of a similar character, but they were of smaller size, and were without arrangement.

1 Ansate Cross (*crux ansata*) a common symbol of immortality in Ancient Egypt:
Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary

Source: Evening Post, Volume LXXIX, Issue 55, 7 March 1910, Page 7

I have been asked a question: What were the original colours of the Birkenhead Transport buses that we see in old Black and White Photos? Were they also cream with black writing as we recognize the familiar local transport today? Controversy remains in published letters to the Editor of the local newspaper over the Auckland Transport required change to a dark blue colour.

The answer: Yes they have always been cream and black, and continued when the company was bought by the Inwards family.

Marcia Roberts, Editor.