

# BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE

— SOCIETY INC —

✉ P O Box 34419, Birkenhead, Auckland 0746

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

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

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2-4pm**

**At Farrington House Museum 44 Mahara Ave, next to the War Memorial Park entrance**

### **Celebrating Birkenhead and surrounding area Fruit Growers**

**commemorating the local shows of days gone by. View collections new layout.**

**Brian Potter will show our unique tools and implements used by our local pioneers.**

**Welcome to bring your largest lemon, garden produce, or brightest bloom to show.**

Derek Whaley from Takapuna Library: topic - “Devonport horse trams” – at Senior Citizens Rooms, to North Shore Historical Society Wed. 18 Feb. at 10am

**Sat. 11 March – 2-4 pm Farrington House - Bottles lost and found in Birkenhead. Exhibits from our BHS Collection.**

**Sat. 8 April - Easter Weekend. No Meeting.**

**Sat. 13 May – 2-4pm Farrington House - Kauri Gum and Gum digging**

**Farrington House Museum, Birkenhead Opens 2-4pm 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays:  
February 12<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> and March 12<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup>**

**Closed Easter Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> April Opens April 23<sup>rd</sup> and May 14<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>**

*Our appreciation for sponsoring printing to*

**Trish Love** [trishlove@premium.co.nz](mailto:trishlove@premium.co.nz)

**09 558 4518 or 021 22 66 099**

*Premium | On The Points*

*94 Hinemoa Street, Birkenhead.*

*Premium Real Estate Ltd.*

*MREINZ Licensed REAA 2008*



## CONTENTS

**P2 Memories of Milford Track – a senior Birkenhead resident recalls a 1946 walk.**

**P3 A Brief History of Milford track**

**P4 A Guardian of Chelsea Archives points out an error in historical facts.**

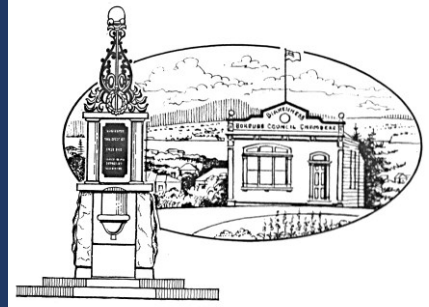
## CONTACT US

President – Erica Hannam

[birkenheadheritage@gmail.com](mailto:birkenheadheritage@gmail.com)

Vice President – Brian Potter 483 3400

Vice President – Colleen Durham 483 4001



January  
February  
2023

## Early Memories of Milford Track.

This month (Jan. 2023) I was intrigued by a 96 year old Birkenhead resident's recall of her 1946 tramp of the Milford Track. Back then Guides lead walkers through the beech forest to the open Clinton Valley, pointing out the beautiful mountains views, waterfalls and tiny lakes, and provided their meals. I learnt ponies carried the food in for the walkers, returning with the rubbish to the head of Lake Te Anau.

Jocelyn Perry had joined the Youth Travel Association run by an Australian living in N.Z.- Jim White. They travelled by hired bus to Te Anau and "by boat up Lake Te Anau to Glade House for lunch." The track had just reopened after WWII years, with no maintenance during the War was "very rough and overgrown". The group of approx. 12 stayed "overnight at Pompolona Hut with dinner; bedding was provided (no sleeping bags in those days), and they slept in rooms marked for Boys or Girls". "Up early for the Pass, past Mintaro Lake and up and over, stopping to eat dried fruit and chocolate we carried in the little Red Shed."

Jocelyn recalled the name of Mt. Balloon and observed an avalanche fall from Mt. Elliott – from the top of McKinnon Pass. Here the guide was asked where the route went? They were told "You just find your way down." For today's walkers there are steep metal steps with hand rails for support. No such aids in 1946.



They would have had to sidle along a steep slope to reach the head of the valley, and very carefully cross an open slope before negotiating the rocks beside the cascading stream. "At the bottom of a waterfall there was a small pool where many had a quick dip." The route only possible for very fit walkers.

The group walked to the bottom of the Sutherland falls with their guide, and stayed overnight at nearby Quinton Hut. The track next day was very rough and rocky, Jocelyn and some others in the lead were able to cross Lake Ada on a rowing boat (similar to a whaler she recalled) and along part of the Arthur River – missing a lot of rough track. They walked on to Sandfly Point, and laid down with towels over their heads avoiding sandflies until their boat arrived. The next 3 nights the group stayed at Milford Hotel and completed two day trips on a fishing boat, boat making a brief stop onshore., while the crew continued their fishing.

The 1946 party not only walked over McKinnon Pass, but later from Milford Hotel walked to the newly completed Homer Tunnel. Donning their raincoats, and with weak torches headed through dripping water to the faint light in the distance, to await their bus to collect them, after their 55km Milford Track walk.

Jocelyn Perry later met and married Ken Windsor, and has enjoyed countless years walking our Birkenhead bush tracks and streets to keep fit. She shared her immense knowledge of book binding skills with our members a few years ago.

### **View from track of the Clinton Valley and Lake Mintaro below.**

Today the track to McKinnon Pass follows 11 zigzags & climbs 500m. over 4km to the top. (Photo Dec.1988 Ed.)

## **The History of Milford track**

The Milford Track was established in 1888 as an overland route between Lake Te Anau and Milford Sound. Local Maori were the first to use an overland route between Lake Te Anau and Milford Sound in search of greenstone - pounamu. The dense and challenging journey was a barrier to settlers who arrived later. It wasn't until 1888 that a talented bush navigator and local character carved an established track through the bush. Quintin MacKinnon came to Milford Sound from the Shetland Isles in Scotland and soon became one of the area's pioneering settlers. [Editor and family walked the track in the centennial year 1988, notes from that walk also credits Donald Sutherland 'Hermit of Milford' track" who was commissioned to cut a track to the Sutherland Falls (580m or 1,904ft), build a hut there, and a boatshed at Lake Ada].

Quinton MacKinnon became the first Milford Track guide, and fittingly the 1,154m. [3,786ft] pass was named after him. Visitors were in good hands with Mackinnon. He was good-natured, highly-skilled and renowned for cooking up a delicious pompolona (a type of scone). Guests would board his sailing boat *Juliet* for the ride up the lake to the start of the track before hiking over the pass, across Lake Ada and down to Donald Sutherland's hotel at Milford Sound.

The road that wasn't; and the 'the finest walk in the world'. Word soon spread about this great new walk, and by 1890 it became clear that the track would need an upgrade. An ambitious plan was suggested to turn the track into a road and build overnight huts along the way. This was no simple task. The rock in the area is very hard, and the conditions of the day were tough. Prison convicts were brought in and set to work hacking their way through the rock by hand. But their skills and equipment were poor, and many fell sick or escaped into the bush.

When the Prime Minister turned up to inspect the work, he wasn't impressed. He quickly got rid of the prisoners, abandoned the road idea in favour of a packhorse track, and put the government in charge. When the Public Works Department finally finished the job, tourist numbers increased, and in 1900 more than 100 trampers walked the track. In 1908 the London Spectator would seal the Milford Track's fate by calling it 'The Finest Walk in the World'. Unfortunately, Mackinnon himself didn't live to hear this impressive accolade, sadly drowning in Lake Te Anau in 1892. But he is remembered in some of the names along the track: Pompolona Lodge, Quintin Falls, and of course, Mackinnon Pass. [Also by Dumpling Hut Ed.]

Some facts: From 1935, workers began to build the Homer Tunnel, drilling through solid rock from the Hollyford Valley into the Cleddau Valley. The work was hard and the conditions tough, but they persisted. The road tunnel finally opened in 1954, - several years after Jocelyn and her group were allowed to walk through. (After much lobbying from the tramping clubs independent walkers first crossed the track in 1966.)

Sourced from various sites describing the Milford Track plus information for "Independent Tramping Fiordland National Park. FNP May 1986" pamphlet which just survived the Milford 'heavy rainfall' in 1988.



## ■ Margaret Paine - Correcting an error in “The Story of Chelsea Sugar Works”

In the early 1980s when Birkenhead was a city, before any amalgamations, the late Margaret Hutchinson and I (Margaret Paine) decided to attend a public meeting at council about the future of land at Kauri Point, which the then Harbour Board was planning to subdivide. We knew from an old map that this same land in the 1880s had been given by Governor Jervois on behalf of the Crown to the people of Auckland to be used as a park. So how could this be allowed to fall into private hands?

From doing earlier research of Chelsea land, we knew where to look in government and council records and after we had spent much time in the city searching through the history of the park land, we had enough copies of land transactions to prove to the council that this land should not be so easily given away. Those were exciting times, most of the land was safely returned and it is now known as ‘Kauri Point Centennial Park’. The walks, views and beaches there are enjoyed by more local folk and visitors each year. About this time, the Birkenhead Librarian, who knew that Margaret and I both had connections to Chelsea and the sugar works, asked us if we could take some responsibility for the company archives, which had recently been donated to the library. This included following up and answering any queries that came in from the public and led to us being volunteers there for about 15 years,... known as ‘The two Margarets.’

With her background knowledge it is not surprising Margaret Paine contacted the Editor to express disappointment re an error in “The Story of Chelsea Sugar Works” poster prepared for the Auckland Heritage Festival display in Farrington house and published on the back of the Nov./Dec. 2022 issue.

**The error** wrongly identified the Chelsea Village cottages “were built on Hutton (Huka Road) before the refinery opened in September 1884.” In fact only tracks through the native bush occurred at that early time in Birkenhead settlement, all transport was from the harbour across to the city, or via a number of tracks, or up what is now Telephone Rd. to join the original Great North Road (later Hauraki then Hinemoa St.) which connected to Birkenhead Wharf. Neither Hutton (later Huka Rd.) or Colonial Rd existed at that period. It is interesting although as residents we know the present Chelsea Brick houses which replaced the original Wooden Cottage of 1884 are located on Colonial Rd. within the Colonial Refinery grounds – no books of our early Birkenhead history mention Colonial Rd.

With our President’s consent I set about sourcing the material used for the poster - the wording came directly from the Auckland Council Website – see below.....

### **Auckland Council Libraries**

B0086 Collection Name [Birkenhead Collection](#)

Title Chelsea workmen's cottages, Birkenhead. Photographer Unknown Date of Image 1884

Decade [1880-1889](#) Inscription Chelsea - Workmen’s Cottages - 1884.

**Description:** **Workmen's cottages built by the Colonial Sugar Company for refinery employees.**

**Historical note:** **These thirty-five wooden cottages were known as Chelsea Village and were built on Hutton (Huka) Road before the refinery opened in September 1884.** Over the next few years they also built an infant's school room, a reading room and a store, as well as St Peter's Anglican Church. The wooden housing structures were very damp and by 1905 they had been condemned and demolished.

**Source:** *Birkenhead: the way we were* / Kathy Haddon. - Birkenhead: Birkenhead Library North Shore City Council, 1993. p.29 Subjects Chelsea Estate; Hutton Road (Birkenhead); Sugar industry; Dwellings – Birkenhead Published In Haddon, Kathy. *Birkenhead: the way we were*. Birkenhead [N.Z.]:

Thank you to Margaret Paine for pointing out this error, and keeping us aware ‘if in doubt’ to recheck statements which appear contrary to current knowledge.