

JAMES MILLS: A CARPENTER WHO BECAME TE AROHA'S FIRST MAYOR

Philip Hart

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Historical Research Unit
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

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Contact: prhart1940@gmail.com



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Abstract: *After being active in Liberal politics in England, James Mills, a carpenter, settled in Te Aroha in 1882. Although he constructed many houses, work was erratic and he never became wealthy. Investing in Waiorongomai mining, he was outspoken in criticizing the management of the tramway and the policies of the Battery Company, accusing them of ruining the field through their high charges. He also criticized the county council for providing insufficient aid for mining, and sought financial assistance from the government. He assisted to form prospecting parties, and was especially involved in mining during the boom of the 1890s, with the usual unrealistic expectations. In 1899, as these expectations had not been attained, he ceased investing in mining.*

For over 20 years Mills worked hard to benefit the district in every possible way, joining many committees, in particular the domain board, the county council, the town board, and the borough council. Having strong opinions, strongly expressed, his involvement resulted in many rows and strong criticism from those he opposed. He was not beyond misrepresenting those he quarrelled with, especially when he was trying, eventually unsuccessfully, to include Waiorongomai in a proposed borough. After becoming the first mayor of Te Aroha by the smallest of margins, he achieved much for the town.

In national politics, as a strong supporter of the Liberal Party he attempted to overcome local apathy about politics and squabbled with those holding different opinions. His quarrelsome personality may have been, at least in part, caused by ill health. In his old age he was respected for his achievements, if not loved for his personality.

BEFORE TE AROHA

According to his entry in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, James Mills¹ was born in 1833 near Rochdale (close to Manchester) and was 'brought up to the trade of a builder'.² According to his death certificate, his father was a farmer.³ When he married, at Rochdale in 1852, his occupation was

¹ For photograph of James and Annie Mills, see *Te Aroha News*, 8 May 1939, p. 3.

² *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 830.

³ Death Certificate of James Mills, 17 September 1910, 1910/4504, BDM.

recorded as ‘Jobber’, meaning a pieceworker.⁴ He was later a cotton carder and cotton waste dealer.⁵ An obituary described him as ‘a Lancashire man by birth and breeding’, who ‘was from his youth closely associated with the industrial activity of that great county’. In the mid-nineteenth century ‘he was one of the leading spirits in the work of organizing the first co-operative cotton-spinning enterprises’. He became ‘an active member of the Liberal party in the north of England, and could tell of many strenuous combats at election times. The Tory party was to him always the “stupid party”’.⁶ Another obituary stating that he participated in the Chartist riots, knew John Bright,⁷ was a friend of Charles Bradlaugh,⁸ and had taken an active part in the repeal of the Corn Laws.⁹ When standing for election as mayor of Te Aroha, he stated that ‘he had been connected with local bodies in Lancashire’ but provided no details apart from saying he had ‘a deal of experience’ in water supply schemes there.¹⁰ He told an 1885 meeting that, having been connected with co-operative societies ‘for years’, he ‘could speak from experience of the great benefit and success they had proved’.¹¹

Mills moved to New Zealand, he said, on account of his health.¹² According to his account, he arrived in Auckland in January 1880 aboard the ‘Ben Nevis’; according to the published list of passengers, he did not,¹³ and no record has been traced of his arrival. His entry in the *Cyclopedia* stated that he settled at ‘Tauranga’ before moving to Te Aroha two years later.¹⁴ The only James Mills traced in the Bay of Plenty acquired a farm in the Opotiki district (near Totara Creek), well to the south of Tauranga, in

⁴ Marriage Certificate of James Mills, 4 June 1852, copy provided by Barbara Cribb to Philip Hart, 15 March 2017, email; Dictionary.com.

⁵ Barbara Cribb, ‘Extract containing information of James Mills’, 1997 typescript, provided by Barbara Cribb to Philip Hart, 15 March 2017, email.

⁶ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 21 September 1910, p. 3.

⁷ See Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (London, 1979).

⁸ See *Champion of Liberty: Charles Bradlaugh*, ed. J.P. Gilmour (London, 1933).

⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 5 July 1898, p. 2.

¹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7.

¹² *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1943, p. 3.

¹³ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 830; *New Zealand Herald*, 12 January 1880, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 830; *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2, 20 September 1943, p. 3; Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folio 214 no. 305, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A.

July 1880, but he was another James Mills.¹⁵ In September 1881 a J. Mills attended a meeting of ratepayers of Tauranga County and in the following month this same man was in the audience at a political address delivered in Tauranga.¹⁶ If he was briefly in the ‘Tauranga’ district, news of the rapid growth of the new goldfield towns of Te Aroha and Waiorongomai attracted him to the other side of the Kaimai range. In the early 1880s he was living at Te Aroha West, across the river from Waiorongomai, and working as a carpenter,¹⁷ there being a great need for builders in the newly opened Te Aroha district.¹⁸

BUILDER AND CONTRACTOR

Mills ‘erected many dwellings in the Te Aroha district’, to cite his own account.¹⁹ The availability of work was erratic, and did not make him rich; for instance, in December 1886 he wrote that he would have ‘to go away some 30 miles to put up a house in the Course of a week, and having been idle the last 12 weeks, I cannot afford to lose any work’.²⁰ Sometimes his tenders were not accepted, as, for instance, for extensions to the Waiorongomai Hotel in 1883.²¹ By 1886 he was a partner as builder and contractor with Charles Henry Albert Tonge, a partnership that lasted for several years.²² Tonge, who invested in local mines,²³ was a prominent

¹⁵ *Wise and Co’s New Zealand Directory for 1880-1881* (Dunedin, 1881), p. 219; *Bay of Plenty Times*, 31 July 1880, p. 3, Opotiki Correspondent, 15 September 1881, p. 3, 7 April 1883, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Bay of Plenty Times*, 24 September 1881, p. 2, 20 October 1881, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Waikato Electoral Roll 1882-1884* (27 June 1884), p. 15.

¹⁸ See papers on the development of Te Aroha and Waiorongomai.

¹⁹ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 830.

²⁰ James Mills to Henry William Northcroft, 7 December 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 87/180, ANZ-W.

²¹ *Te Aroha News*, 3 November 1883, p. 2.

²² For example, *Te Aroha News*, 6 February 1886, p. 2, 13 February 1886, p. 7, 10 May 1890, p. 2.

²³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 312, 313, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 133, BBAV 11500/9a; Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 40/1881, 46/1883, 13/1889, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A; Warden’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1883, p. 3.

builder and contractor who had gone bankrupt in 1884;²⁴ he was also a violent drunk and wife beater.²⁵ Their partnership was sometimes known as James Mills and Company.²⁶ In 1888 he was a partner with John Currie in erecting offices at Waiorongomai for the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company.²⁷ Currie, a carpenter and contractor, also had a small number of investments in local mining.²⁸

As rivals undercut their tenders, Mills and his partners were often unsuccessful when seeking contracts. In 1886, for instance, their tender to erect a bridge and approaches at a large gully on the road between Waiorongomai and Shaftesbury was declined.²⁹ In February that year, their labour-only tender for erecting more baths on the domain was declined.³⁰ The following month, tenders were declined for erecting No. 6 bathhouse, an octagon over a drinking fountain, and 11 chains of picket fence, with gate, fronting Whitaker Street.³¹ They also failed to win the contract to erect a butcher's shop, erect an explosives magazine for a hardware merchant, and construct the Anglican church.³² Two years later, he unsuccessfully sought the contract for extensions to a Morrinsville hotel.³³ Perhaps there were some doubts about his craftsmanship, for although he offered the lowest tender, by £2, for erecting a store, he was unsuccessful.³⁴ Later that year,

²⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 September 1882, p. 20; *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1883, p. 2, Magistrate's Court, 29 September 1883, p. 2, 18 September 1889, p. 2, 23 April 1890, p. 2, Piako County Council, 19 February 1898, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 4 March 1898, p. 3; District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 June 1884, p. 3, 4 March 1885, p. 3.

²⁵ See paper on women's lives in the Te Aroha district.

²⁶ For example, *Te Aroha News*, 17 April 1886, p. 2, 25 June 1887, p. 2.

²⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 4 August 1888, p. 2.

²⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 128, 136, 139, BBAV 11500/9a; Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Old Age Pension Claim Register 1899-1909, no. 11, BBAV 11503/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 18 October 1883, p. 1518; *Te Aroha News*, 7 March 1885, p. 2, 11 July 1885, p. 2, 10 March 1888, p. 2, 24 April 1889, p. 2.

²⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1886, p. 7.

³⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 6 February 1886, p. 2.

³¹ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 13 March 1886, p. 2.

³² *Te Aroha News*, 27 February 1886, p. 2, 17 April 1886, p. 2.

³³ *Te Aroha News*, 18 February 1888, p. 2.

³⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 25 April 1888, p. 2.

Mills' tender with another builder to erect a cottage at Wairakau was declined.³⁵

In March 1889, the six-roomed house Mills erected for a farmer at Wairakau was described as 'well and substantially built'.³⁶ That month he won the labour-only contract to erect a flax mill at Gordon, £53 15s.³⁷ Later this year, Mills and Tonge successfully tendered £127 to extend a prosperous farmer's house.³⁸ In December, their tender to erect a new bathhouse was declined.³⁹ In 1896, Mills erected a platform and shelter shed for the railway at Mangaiti.⁴⁰

Mills sought other contracts. In 1885, with a partner he unsuccessfully tendered to erect seven bridges on a road in the Waitoa district.⁴¹ Bridges were one of his specialties, for in 1891 he unsuccessfully tendered to repair some on the Waiorongomai tramway and to erect bridges and repair roads at Gordon.⁴² In 1892, he unsuccessfully tendered to construct a bridge on the road between Te Aroha and Lichfield.⁴³ In that year, he was building a culvert on the railway line being constructed between Te Aroha and Paeroa.⁴⁴ Two years later, he had the contract for timber works on this line, and drove piles for bridges.⁴⁵

Because work was not constant and many of his tenders were unsuccessful, he was described by his Member of Parliament in 1907 as 'a poor man' worthy of a reduced rental on his residence sites in Bridge Street.⁴⁶ (The unsympathetic warden noted that he could have exchanged his former license for a new one; as he had refused to pay £3 instead of the

³⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 12 December 1888, p. 2.

³⁶ *Waikato Times*, 16 March 1889, p. 2.

³⁷ *Waikato Times*, 16 March 1889, p. 2.

³⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 31 August 1889, p. 2.

³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 December 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 January 1896, p. 6.

⁴¹ *Waikato Times*, 1 September 1885, p. 3.

⁴² Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 6 October 1891, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 8 October 1891, p. 2.

⁴³ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 5 July 1892, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; Piako District Council, *Waikato Times*, 9 July 1892, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 4 August 1892, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 April 1894, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Hugh Poland to Minister of Mines, 12 August 1907, Mines Department, MD 1, 6/14, Part 2, ANZ-W.

£1 he would have paid by exchanging the license, for the past two years he had really been ‘a trespasser paying no rent’.)⁴⁷ For the last six years of his life his wife was a bath attendant on the domain, as was he for at least a year.⁴⁸ He would leave an estate valued at £464 4s 10d, but an obituary commented that ‘if he had given to his own interests the whole of the energy and time he so generously devoted to the public interest he might have died a comparatively wealthy man’.⁴⁹

INVOLVEMENT IN MINING

Mills’ first investment in Waiorongomai mining was to purchase half of a share in the May Queen in July 1883 for £20. Four months later, his interest became 750 shares in the May Queen Company.⁵⁰ He chaired its first meeting and was elected chairman of directors.⁵¹ At the end of 1885, a shareholders meeting preferred his advice to that of a majority of directors and resolved to keep working the mine.⁵² A much briefer investment was in the Lancashire Lass: on 6 August 1885 he became its sole owner, on the following day he was granted two months’ protection, and he forfeited it on 21 September.⁵³

At a meeting held at Waiorongomai in February 1885, Mills moved a vote of thanks to those county councillors who had attempted to strike a rate to meet the costs of the tramway.⁵⁴ At a Te Aroha meeting, in objecting

⁴⁷ Warden to Minister of Mines, 28 August 1909, Mines Department, MD 1, 6/14, Part 2, ANZ-W.

⁴⁸ Staff at Te Aroha Domain, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1903/128/1, ANZ-W; *Te Aroha News*, 8 October 1910, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/64; Testamentary Register 1908-1911, folio 166, BBCB 4208/7, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 21 September 1910, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 28, BBAV 11500/9a; Certified Instruments 1883, no. 290, BBAV 11581/4a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 29 November 1883, p. 1704.

⁵¹ Company Files, BBAE 10286/13i, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 8 November 1884, p. 2.

⁵² *Te Aroha News*, 5 December 1885, p. 2.

⁵³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 324, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Applications 1883-1900, no. 27 of 1885, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

⁵⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 February 1885, p. 2.

to the Battery Company buying the Eureka and Colonist Companies cheaply, he

considered it was high time the outside public knew more about the freezing out process being pursued here with regard to the poor people. Those present knew the process the Eureka mine had been put through, and then bought by the Battery Company for a mere song. They all felt the great injustice that was being done to the field by the existing Battery Company, and they did not intend to stand it any longer without letting the general public know more of the way things were being worked, to the great injury of the field.⁵⁵

Repeating local gossip, he made a serious accusation against the tramway manager, Henry Hopper Adams.⁵⁶ 'He had heard it stated that contracts had been let by the chairman of the Tramway Committee', Josiah Clifton Firth,⁵⁷ 'to his servant', Adams, 'who it was stated, had made a very decent profit out of same. He could not say of his own knowledge if the report was true or not. If it was true, it was a very serious matter indeed'. He certainly believed that Firth 'had a good deal to do' with spending tramway funds. As the Minister of Mines, William Larnach, was soon to visit, 'it would be desirable some means should be adopted to lay before him our requirements'.⁵⁸ Mills was elected to a committee to prepare questions about the tramway that they wanted investigated and to a deputation to explain their mining needs to Larnach.⁵⁹

When Larnach visited in May, Mills complained about excessive crushing charges and wanted an end to the Battery Company's monopoly. He claimed that Adams, for whose appointment Firth was responsible, through 'inability', had spent far too much on the tramway. He asked for a diamond drill, a visit from Professor James Black,⁶⁰ and money for prospecting tracks.⁶¹ When Larnach promised to assist with making the

⁵⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 28 February 1885, p. 7.

⁵⁶ See paper on his life.

⁵⁷ See paper on the Battery Company.

⁵⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 28 February 1885, p. 7.

⁵⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 28 February 1885, pp. 2, 7.

⁶⁰ See paper on prospectors' and miners' skills in general and in the Te Aroha Mining District in particular.

⁶¹ *Waikato Times*, 28 May 1885, p. 2.

tramway to Peter Ferguson's battery,⁶² Mills warned against giving money directly to the council. Should that happen,

it might be a very long time ere the connection was made, and would suggest that Mr Ferguson ... should have the money and hold the tramway when completed until the County Council were in a position to take it over. With regard to Ferguson's battery, he felt satisfied it would save a very much larger percentage of the gold than was now being saved, but even if it failed in this, it would undoubtedly be the means of breaking down the monopoly that now existed and the charges for treating quartz would be reduced. The average return from all the mines per ton since the opening of the field was close to an ounce, and surely this ought to pay well, but owing to excessive battery charges it did not, and the result was that a great many of the mines had ceased working for the present, rather than continue paying prohibitive rates. As an instance of excessive charges he would mention the Colonist Goldmining Company. Work in the mine had recently been suspended. From December 6th, 1883, to December 20th, 1884, 4362 and two-thirds tons of quartz were treated at Firth and Clark's battery, for a yield of 3069oz retorted gold; the amount paid to the Battery Company for treatment amounting to £2934 18s 2d. This from one mine alone! The tailings from the above crushings were not treated, and would average about 12dwt per ton, and had passed into the possession of the Battery Company in payment of monies due. Another mine, the May Queen, had crushed various small parcels from August 1884 to May 1885, amounting to 57 trucks ... the yield from which amounted to 149oz 1dwt retorted gold; 16 trucks of the quartz have been taken out as it came from a five-foot reef. Notwithstanding the above satisfactory results the company did not care to do much whilst crushing charges were so high.

Mills stated that a public meeting had called for a government inquiry into

the construction of the tramway, which appeared to have cost an enormous sum of money. Evidence could be adduced that much blundering had occurred in carrying out the work. The party who had been entrusted with it was the present battery manager, and it was the general opinion that the tramway could have been constructed at far less cost.

⁶² See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

Mr Larnach said he did not think any good would be done by raking up the matter at this date, even though blunders had been made, the work was done and the thing past and gone.⁶³

The following month, Mills convened a public meeting ‘to consider the action of the Piako County Council, and other Public Matters’.⁶⁴ The first resolution, which he moved, stated that it expressed its ‘indignation’ at the council, and Firth in particular, for not taking ‘advantage of the generous offer’ by Larnach to contribute £1,000 towards Ferguson’s tramway. He pointed out that there was ‘no occasion for him to say much in order to show they had good grounds for feeling indignant’. Whereas the Thames County Council had immediately taken up Larnach’s offer of financial assistance, Piako councillors had been swayed by Firth, whom he did not name but described as ‘a prophet’ whose ‘latest prophecy’ was

that ere long the new battery would be buried by a slip; but this gentleman had prophesied before, and his prophecies proved false. A year or so ago he prophesied that the receipts from the tramway would in a short time be doubled. They might dismiss his prophecies as of no account. But what of the great Ohia [Josiah] who comes out of his way and interviews Mr Larnach, who promises to assist the work of making a connection to the new battery, and then is bare-faced enough to go and oppose the striking of a rate, thereby effectually preventing that very connection from being gone on with. Surely they could not believe such a course as this was pursued without a motive, viz, the determination to still have a monopoly. This same gentlemen, although acting in such a way as to effectually prevent the connection to the new battery being gone on with, nevertheless had no compunction to try and got the council to sanction the making of a track round by the Buck reef, and also seemed specially anxious for Mr. H.H. Adams, that great and noted (?) engineer, to have the expenditure of the money. Was such unblushing effrontery to be quietly submitted to? Was the track he was personally interested in to be made, and the connection to the new battery to be knocked on the head? One half of the depopulation and poverty of the district, he considered, was in consequence of the conduct pursued by this family; during the past twelve months over 100 families had left this district, and primarily through their actions in and out of the County Council. The cost of crushing at the existing battery had been reduced, but they all knew in what way. What was the good of striving and

⁶³ *Te Aroha News*, 30 May 1885, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 13 June 1885, p. 7.

working if all the results were to be absorbed by Mr Firth's battery.... He considered it was disgraceful on the part of the Council to absolutely take no steps, and make no effort whatever to have the connection to the second battery made, especially when such liberal assistance had been promised them by Government.⁶⁵

According to another version of this speech, Firth had 'made no scruple about asking the council to vote money for a branch road by which his own battery would be largely benefited'. His company's actions 'had all along been most adverse to the interests of the goldfield and had to a very large extent been the means of depopulating the district. He was prepared to prove that numbers of families had been forced to leave the place owing to the selfish course pursued by' Firth and his associates.⁶⁶

At a subsequent public meeting he had convened, Mills seconded a motion that the government should investigate the cost of constructing the tramway.⁶⁷ When Ferguson returned in July after obtaining government funding for his tramway, Mills chaired a celebratory dinner and lauded Ferguson's overcoming of his opponents.⁶⁸ Once again he blamed the Battery Company for holding back the goldfield. 'For myself I can say I have never lost faith in the district, believe there is a good future before it, and have made up my mind to stick to it'. He urged prospectors to look 'for other minerals as well as gold, for the discovery of such in large quantities might prove even greater value than gold'.⁶⁹ The following month, one reason for his urging the formation of a social club was the renewed interest in mining.

Perhaps they would be able to establish a branch mining school in a small way, and get some of the more simple appliances and apparatus, and information that would enable them to learn a little more than they now knew respecting the grand reefs about them. They had heard a great deal lately about the LaMonte process for treating precious ores,⁷⁰ but perhaps they had not heard so much respecting another method which had been long in

⁶⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 20 June 1885, p. 2.

⁶⁶ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Waikato Times*, 20 June 1885, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1885, p. 2.

⁶⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 July 1885, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 25 July 1885, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 2.

⁷⁰ See paper on mining in the Tui portion of the Te Aroha Mining District.

use in Swansea, South Wales, and by which all the minerals can be saved, and that at a moderate cost. He had seen in the paper the other day of another process now being brought into much notice in London, and by which it was said as much as a ton of stuff could be treated at a small cost. These were matters of great interest, and perhaps they would be able to erect a small furnace, and provide blowpipes, etc, so that they can experiment and test their quartz. If such had been here during the last few years, no doubt much valuable information would have resulted.⁷¹

As the government provided this information through the Thames School of Mines and travelling lecturers,⁷² he did not follow up this initiative.

At a public meeting at the end of 1887 he moved that a Te Aroha Prospecting Company be formed to prospect Waiorongomai by driving a tunnel towards the New Find ground. Mills, 'whose public spirit is always foremost in such matters', was elected to its provisional committee and became its secretary.⁷³ He told this meeting that he had checked with the council to discover how much goldfield revenue it had returned to the field.⁷⁴ A councillor himself, he wanted it to subsidize the association,⁷⁵ and at its first meeting for 1888 urged it to provide a subsidy, stating that 'if good gold was struck by the Association, the money would be refunded in the form of gold duty. Besides the Council's subsidy would carry an equal subsidy from Government', citing the Mining Act. When the chairman doubted whether it 'should or could assist', did not think driving a tunnel 'came under the definition of prospecting', and asked to see the clause in the Act, Mills 'said he had forgotten to bring the Act with him, but assured the Chairman it gave County Councils full power to do as suggested'. Only Mills and his seconder, Denis Murphy,⁷⁶ voted for his proposal.⁷⁷

⁷¹ *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7.

⁷² See paper on prospectors' and miners' skills in general and in the Te Aroha Mining District in particular.

⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 3 December 1887, p. 2, 17 December 1887, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 24 December 1887, p. 2.

⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 3 December 1887, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 24 December 1887, p. 2.

⁷⁶ See paper on his life.

⁷⁷ Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 21 January 1888, p. 2.

Later that year, Mills was ‘vice-chair’ at a Waiorongomai banquet honouring Adams for introducing Australian capital.⁷⁸ In proposing a toast to the Battery Company, he alluded to his earlier criticisms: ‘He was sorry he had not learnt a speech (made he believed by Mark Twain) that would suit for all occasions. It was customary on such an occasion ... to forget all unpleasantness and only remember the good done’. The Battery Company had done ‘a great deal for the mining industry, and all regretted their reward had not been equal to their deserts’. He hoped they would receive good profits from their one-fifth stake in the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company.⁷⁹ Shortly afterwards, he was on the committee organizing a banquet honouring Clem Cornes⁸⁰ for discovering gold at Tui,⁸¹ and was the ‘vice-chair’ at it.⁸²

Mills actively participated in the mining boom of the 1890s. In February 1895 he chaired the meeting that formed the Cadman Prospecting Committee, as it was then called, and was elected one of the three members of its financial committee.⁸³ He soon became chairman of the Cadman Prospecting Association,⁸⁴ and acted on its behalf in the warden’s court. Early in March, he sought the forfeiture of the Werahiko claim on the grounds of non-working; it was granted to him in June.⁸⁵ Also in June, he objected to a mining agent obtaining a special claim because it was too large.⁸⁶ At the end of this month he applied for the Cadman Licensed Holding.⁸⁷ In August, he sought six months’ protection for the Cadman, as ‘property in hands of agent for sale in England’.⁸⁸ Late in October, the

⁷⁸ See chapter on Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company.

⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 14 April 1888, p. 2.

⁸⁰ See paper on Clement Augustus Cornes.

⁸¹ *Te Aroha News*, 21 April 1888, p. 2.

⁸² *Waikato Times*, 15 May 1888, p. 3.

⁸³ *Te Aroha News*, 20 February 1895, p. 2.

⁸⁴ William Jeffrey to James Mills, 16 March 1895, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/1072, ANZ-W; *Te Aroha News*, 26 June 1895, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Plaints 1895, 14/95, BBAV 11572/2a, ANZ-A; Te Aroha Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 July 1895, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Warden’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 5 June 1895, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1895, 20/1895, BBAV 11289/14a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 74/1895, BBAV 11505/1a; Mining Applications 1895, 74/1895, BBAV 11289/14a, ANZ-A.

Seddon Special Claim was transferred to him.⁸⁹ Also in that month, a machine site was transferred to him, but he declined to take up the license because he had not anticipated that the rent, £10, 'would be so large'.⁹⁰

A particularly imaginative step was taken in August 1895, when he applied for a machine site at Gordon, along with a water race at the Wairere Falls and inquired about the price of a 20-stamp battery.⁹¹ Having 'pegged off the Falls', he would 'apply for the right to use the water to generate electricity to work a battery'.⁹² Although in November 1896 he applied for six months' protection for both water race and machine site,⁹³ this scheme did not eventuate.

In October 1895, James Russell, an Auckland lawyer with considerable experience in mining investments (he was the brother of Thomas Russell, of the Waihi Company),⁹⁴ sent to Henry Reynolds, an investor then based in London,⁹⁵ the 'letter of option offering you Mills and party's property Cadman and Seddon at Te Aroha for a fixed sum of money. I can easily see that some difficulty may arise in London ... for there is no mention made of any shares in it, for the very simple reason that Mills gets no shares', only cash. Russell would ask Mills for a power of attorney to give Reynolds 'absolute authority', but was 'afraid nothing will come of the business for Mills is asking an absurd price'.⁹⁶ Later that month Russell sent Mills the power of attorney, explaining that the deed of option he had signed placing the properties under offer to Reynolds

set out the consideration to which you are entitled. This will not of course be the only consideration Mr Reynolds will expect to

⁸⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1895, 22/1895, BBAV 11289/14a, ANZ-A.

⁹⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1895, 50/1895, BBAV 11289/14a, ANZ-A.

⁹¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1895, 51, 52/1895, BBAV 11289/14a, ANZ-A; John Watson to James Mills, 15 August 1895, Letterbook 1895-1897, p. 108, A. & G. Price Archives, Thames.

⁹² Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 27 August 1895, p. 6.

⁹³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 277, 278/1896, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

⁹⁴ See *Auckland Star*, 31 March 1905, p. 2.

⁹⁵ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 741; *Observer*, 24 October 1903, p. 4.

⁹⁶ James Russell to Henry Reynolds, 5 October 1895, Letterbook no. 60, p. 207, Jackson and Russell Papers, MS 360, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

receive from a London purchaser. If then he asks say double the amount shown in the deed some difficulty may be experienced in dealing with a purchaser. This Power of Attorney would give him a free hand as regards a purchaser, though of course he would still be bound to you on the other deed.⁹⁷

In January 1896, Russell sent an investor in these properties, William Steele,⁹⁸ a copy of Mills' letter objecting to Reynolds having more authority. Russell was 'afraid that with such an impractical man nothing can be done' and that it was unlikely Reynolds would be able to float the claims 'considering the document he has got and the peculiar state of the money market'.⁹⁹ When, after Steele signed a new power of attorney,¹⁰⁰ and it was signed by Mills and, along with a new agreement, was sent to Reynolds, Russell explained that when Mills was first asked to execute of power of attorney to give Reynolds 'a free hand he absolutely refused to do so', objecting to Reynolds 'obtaining anything beyond the stipulated price'. After 'some time', Mills proposed that if Reynolds obtained a higher price, he would be entitled to keep half the extra amount, which was included in the new agreement.¹⁰¹ All this was pointless manoeuvring, as nothing came of this attempt to float the two claims in London.¹⁰²

In June 1896, in an apparent reference to mining, Mills assured Richard John Seddon, the Premier, that there was 'every appearance of the advent of better times and more employment in the near future'.¹⁰³ The previous month, he had applied for six months' protection for the Seddon,

⁹⁷ Jackson and Russell to James Mills, 26 October 1895, Letterbook no. 60, p. 369, Jackson and Russell Papers, MS 360, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

⁹⁸ See *Waikato Times*, 22 September 1898, p. 2; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 752.

⁹⁹ James Russell to William Steele, 8 January 1896, Letterbook no. 61, p. 60, Jackson and Russell Papers, MS 360, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

¹⁰⁰ Jackson and Russell to James Mills, 6 February 1896, Letterbook no. 61, p. 328, Jackson and Russell Papers, MS 360, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

¹⁰¹ Jackson and Russell to Henry Reynolds, 22 February 1896, Letterbook no. 61, p. 450, Jackson and Russell Papers, MS 360, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

¹⁰² See paper on financing companies in general and at Te Aroha in particular.

¹⁰³ James Mills to R.J. Seddon, 2 June 1896, Te Aroha Rifles, Nominal Roll to 29 February 1896, Army Department, ARM 41, 1911/66r, ANZ-W.

which had not been worked since granted to him. 'Claim under offer to Anglo Continental G M Syndicate'. On the same date, he sought permission to work the Cadman with two instead of ten men for four months. Having been occupied in September 1895, it had been protected from late October to late April 1896 and was under offer to the same syndicate. Both requests were granted in early June.¹⁰⁴ In October, he obtained another machine site.¹⁰⁵ During 1897, Mills was permitted to work both the Cadman and Seddon with fewer men.¹⁰⁶ Early in January 1898, he surrendered both the Cadman and Seddon to enable him to have them granted as one title; he was granted the Cadman Special Claim in March.¹⁰⁷ In May, having done no work, he applied for six months' protection 'to give time to crush all now on the ground'.¹⁰⁸

In July 1898, after work on Aroha Gold Mines' low-level tunnel ceased,¹⁰⁹ at the request of 'a good many people' Mills asked the Minister of Mines to purchase the battery. 'I think it would pay well particularly' if the government appointed a suitably qualified manager 'who could experiment with the different ores'. He cited the Monowai Company, at Waiomu, successfully treating similar ore. Joseph Campbell, the latest self-advertised saviour of the field,¹¹⁰ 'some time since' having 'made a thorough personal examination of the Silver King lode' had told the Cadman Company that, 'taking the Whole of the Reef, it is worth £3-10-0 per ton, the Reef is 30 feet wide, and we know there are many other payable reefs on the Waiorongomai side of the Hill if only the stuff could be treated'. This company wanted to keep the battery going, and if purchased by the government new life would be infused into the field.

We shall shortly have to man the Cadman ground, and unless something of this sort is not done we shall simply be spending

¹⁰⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 38, 39/1896, BBAV 11505/1a; Mining Applications 1896, 38, 39/1896, BBAV 11289/14a, ANZ-A.

¹⁰⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Letterbook 1883-1900, p. 360, BBAV 11534/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁰⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 46, 80, 133/1897, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁰⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Letterbook 1883-1900, pp. 461, 463, BBAV 11534/1a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 13 January 1898, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Applications 1898, 27/1898, BBAV 11289/15a, ANZ-A.

¹⁰⁹ See paper on the New Zealand Exploration Company and Aroha Gold Mines Ltd.

¹¹⁰ See paper on Joseph Campbell and his thermo-hyperphoric process.

money to get out quartz to lie idle on the Hill, and it would pay us better if the Stuff could be treated, if it only paid expenses, and we should be satisfied with that until such time as experiments demonstrated a successful mode of treatment.¹¹¹

He later asked the government to convert it to a public crushing plant,¹¹² without success. In May 1899, when he surrendered the Cadman,¹¹³ his involvement in mining ended; he held no interests in the Cadman and Seddon companies formed in the early twentieth century.¹¹⁴

AGITATING FOR LOCAL NEEDS

Mills spent nearly 30 years agitating for the district's needs. In 1885, when he was toasted at a public dinner, he was described as being 'an acquisition to any community'.¹¹⁵ The previous September, at a meeting that discussed how the council should be elected, Mills argued that holding a miner's right should give the right to vote, thereby permitting as many as possible to participate.¹¹⁶ Three months later, he chaired a meeting to discuss the punt, the railway, and forming a borough.¹¹⁷

At an April 1885 meeting he seconded a motion requesting an improved railway timetable and was asked to confer with the traffic manager. Another meeting requested he ask the contractor making the railway bridge to provide a temporary approach on its western side.¹¹⁸ At a subsequent meeting he moved that it be declared open for public traffic, and temporary approaches made, subsequently leading a deputation asking that

¹¹¹ James Mills to Minister of Mines, 25 July 1898, Mines Department, MD 1A, 8/50, Part 1, ANZ-W.

¹¹² *New Zealand Mines Record*, 16 September 1898, p. 73; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 1 October 1898, p. 2.

¹¹³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 11/1899, BBAV 11505/1a; Applications 1899, 11/1899, BBAV 11289/15a, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁴ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 132 no. 849, box 244 no. 1431, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 27 September 1884, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 December 1884, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ *Waikato Times*, 28 April 1885, p. 3.

it be made available for horse traffic.¹¹⁹ When meeting the Minister of Mines he asked for temporary approaches.¹²⁰ These were constructed.¹²¹

In July, he convened a meeting of residents of the Te Aroha Riding at which he moved a motion opposing their being rated for Thames Harbour Board works. He noted that the Matamata Riding was not rated for this 'for fear of that great man', Firth, 'who owned the greater portion' of it.¹²² He considered the rate to be 'a shameful imposition'.¹²³ Two years later, at a meeting he moved that Te Aroha should no longer be tied in with the board.¹²⁴

In November 1884, at a meeting discussing the creation of a borough, Mills suggested forming 'a Vigilance or Progress Committee' which could deal with issues when there was insufficient time to call a meeting and 'attend to local requirements generally', but 'did not desire to press' his suggestion 'in any way'. Although the first vote was in favour, after pressure was exerted some people then voted against it and the idea was defeated.¹²⁵ The following July, when a Te Aroha Improvement Committee was formed, Mills was elected its chairman, and the following year was unanimously re-elected.¹²⁶ After a town board was formed, he convened a meeting in February 1887 'to receive the Report and Accept the Resignation of the Improvement Committee'.¹²⁷

In 1886, Mills called for the formation of a fire brigade along with other fire precautions.¹²⁸ He wanted a separate rate levied for road works and other needs.¹²⁹ The following year, he moved that Te Aroha sections be no longer held under goldfield title but become leases in perpetuity.¹³⁰ Later

¹¹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 2 May 1885, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 5 May 1885, p. 3.

¹²⁰ *Waikato Times*, 28 May 1885, p. 2.

¹²¹ *Waikato Times*, 4 July 1885, p. 3.

¹²² *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1885, p. 2; *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 July 1885, p. 3.

¹²³ *Waikato Times*, 14 July 1885, p. 3.

¹²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 15 October 1887, p. 2.

¹²⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 29 November 1884, p. 2.

¹²⁶ *Waikato Times*, 18 July 1885, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1885, p. 2, 15 May 1886, p. 2, 22 May 1886, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 6 February 1887, p. 3.

¹²⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 16 January 1886, p. 7.

¹²⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 8 May 1886, p. 7.

¹³⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 4 June 1887, p. 2.

that year he was elected to a committee to seek better tenure; by then, he wanted freehold title.¹³¹ In 1888, he moved at one meeting that the government be asked whether George Lipsey,¹³² who represented the Maori landowners, could grant leases in perpetuity. Opposing leaving this issue in the hands of the town board, he wanted further meetings to consider its actions; after members expressed offence at his implications, his motion was not seconded.¹³³

In 1893, he chaired a meeting of residents living on the Thames High School Endowment, at Waiorongomai,¹³⁴ who wanted it transferred to the control of the Crown, and urged them to lobby the Minister of Lands.¹³⁵ Two years later, he was elected one of Te Aroha's representatives on a committee to erect a hospital at Paeroa.¹³⁶ He was also aware of the needs of the wider district, for instance in 1895 being a leading proponent of completing Thompson's Track to the Bay of Plenty.¹³⁷

A MEMBER OF THE DOMAIN BOARD

The first time that Mills publicly mentioned the domain board was in August 1885, when at a meeting of the debating club he opposed it giving a local chemist, George Robson,¹³⁸ an excessively long lease of the overflow of water.¹³⁹ At a meeting about this issue, when discussion was invited, 'the majority of those present ... seemed too modest to express their views thus openly' until, 'at length', Mills spoke. 'There could be no more severe condemnation of the recent action of the Board than for a meeting of this kind to be held, and not a member of the Board appear to say a word in support' of their decision, apart from one member who 'apparently did not

¹³¹ *Te Aroha News*, 29 October 1887, p. 2.

¹³² See paper on his life.

¹³³ *Te Aroha News*, 5 September 1888, p. 2.

¹³⁴ See paper on this endowment.

¹³⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 March 1893, p. 2.

¹³⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 27 November 1895, p. 2.

¹³⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1895, p. 2.

¹³⁸ See *Waikato Argus*, 7 February 1912, p. 2.

¹³⁹ For details of this controversy, see *Waikato Times*, 20 August 1885, p. 3, 18 May 1886, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 21 August 1885, p. 3, *Te Aroha Correspondent*, 8 September 1885, p. 3, 20 October 1885, p. 3; Domain Board and editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 15 August 1885, p. 2, Domain Board, 15 May 1886, p. 2.

care what the result might be. It appeared as though the Board considered they were elected for life, and need care for nobody'. He agreed it deserved praise for improvements, but wanted legislation making all such boards elective. 'He considered the springs had been given for the use of the people. If the Board were elected as they should be, and had to meet their constituents annually, they would have thought twice before granting a monopoly for ten years'. Although not challenging the royalty charged, the lease should have been for only two or three years, and the board should be 'made responsible to public opinion. Prior to the recent action, in the matter before them, he had no fault to find with the Board, but it was too much jam, if true, that they were elected for life'.¹⁴⁰

In October the following year, Mills told John Ballance, the Minister of Lands, that the press had been excluded from a board meeting. 'Public opinion here is that they are trying by misrepresentation to induce you to sanction advertising in Baths'.¹⁴¹ The following month, one of his reasons for opposing the formation of a town board was that this would leave the domain board still able 'to urge the Governor to confirm the lease of the overflow of the drinking springs, which was granted without competition, and without being advertised, in a manner that by no stretch of imagination can be called above board'.¹⁴²

In November 1891, Mills, who supported the Liberal Party, asked William Fraser, the local Liberal Member of Parliament, to arrange for the *Te Aroha News* to publish government advertisements.¹⁴³ Three days later, Charles Ahier, another Liberal supporter,¹⁴⁴ asked Fraser to appoint 'our friend' Mills to replace Edward Wingfield Hanmer,¹⁴⁵ as Mills was a 'steadfast' Liberal; Hanmer, who had left the district,¹⁴⁶ was trying to get

¹⁴⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1885, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ James Mills to John Ballance (Minister of Lands), 9 October 1886 (telegram), Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

¹⁴² Letter from James Mills, *Waikato Times*, 23 November 1886, p. 3.

¹⁴³ James Mills to William Fraser, M.P., 22 November 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

¹⁴⁴ See paper on neighbourly and unneighbourly behaviour in the Te Aroha district.

¹⁴⁵ See *Ashburton Guardian*, 1 March 1901, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ *Waikato Times*, 10 October 1891, p. 3, 3 November 1891, p. 2, 21 November 1891, p. 2.

another opponent of the Liberals to replace him.¹⁴⁷ Mills told John McKenzie, Minister of Lands, that Hanmer had been appointed 'at the instance and in the interests of the old Clique; he never had any interest in the place; being simply Manager of an estate some 7 miles outside; for Messrs Miles and Co. of Christchurch; they sold off the stock some two months since'.¹⁴⁸ Seddon asked McKenzie to appoint Mills when there was a vacancy, as he was 'a good man reliable and firm friend to our party'.¹⁴⁹ Mills was concerned about how the baths were run, one month later complaining to McKenzie that they had always been run in a 'most unbusinesslike Character, the Concern has been run from the commencement for a benefit of a family, and in its interests, and that of a few families'.¹⁵⁰

In August 1892, when Hanmer was living in Ashburton, Mills was appointed to replace him, as Liberals had wanted.¹⁵¹ His appointment gave 'general satisfaction', according to one correspondent, because he was 'an earnest, painstaking, and hard-working man in everything he undertakes'.¹⁵² After immediately becoming chairman,¹⁵³ he wrote a long letter to McKenzie seeking help in improving both baths and offices. 'At the next meeting of the Board, the question of the more economical working' would 'be grappled with'. Whilst accepting that Te Aroha was 'the resort of the bulk of the working class', implying that other classes could afford to go

¹⁴⁷ Charles Ahier to William Fraser, 22 November 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96; Charles Ahier to William Fraser, 25 November 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

¹⁴⁸ James Mills to John McKenzie (Minister of Lands), 12 January 1892, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

¹⁴⁹ R.J. Seddon to John McKenzie, 2 December 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

¹⁵⁰ James Mills to John McKenzie, 12 January 1892, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

¹⁵¹ Charles Ahier to William Fraser, 8 August 1892; A. Barron to William Fraser, 9 August 1892, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W; *New Zealand Gazette*, 5 August 1892, p. 1123.

¹⁵² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 August 1892, p. 23.

¹⁵³ *New Zealand Herald*, 8 September 1892, p. 6.

to Rotorua, this was ‘not a valid reason why they should not have decent accommodation’.¹⁵⁴

At the end of the year, as part of a campaign to remove Edward Gallagher from the board,¹⁵⁵ it was claimed that Gallagher and Ahier had induced Mills to join it ‘to carry out certain schemes’ which Gallagher ‘knew could not be accomplished otherwise’.¹⁵⁶ Mills told Fraser that some people were trying to remove him from the board and he did not care if they succeeded, for he had been reluctant to join it. ‘You were present in Ahier’s office when he and Gallagher prevailed upon me to allow myself to be nominated and assist them. I am sorry I ever consented; I never before worked with such an invertebrate Crowd’. Gallagher and two of his critics were members of the Liberal Party; ‘you know what kind of Liberals the latter are’.¹⁵⁷ He informed the local newspaper that having joined the board at the request of these two men, they were not supporting his reform efforts, especially by cutting costs.¹⁵⁸

In July 1893, the board decided to appoint new caretakers, one male and one female, despite local opposition, as a correspondent noted:

The present caretakers, Messrs McKee and Stanley, have been employed by the Board for some years, and have given great satisfaction to both visitors and residents, and it is a matter of general regret that the Board has decided to dispense with their services. The employment of a woman caretaker will, however, be a very great advantage to lady-visitors.¹⁵⁹

The decision to dismiss the current caretakers was passed on Mills’ casting vote.¹⁶⁰ An ‘influential meeting’ held the following month, attended by ‘some 400 ladies and gentlemen’, protested at the lack of government

¹⁵⁴ James Mills to John McKenzie, 5 September 1892, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

¹⁵⁵ See paper on his life.

¹⁵⁶ John Bew, C.A. Cornes, J.W.R. Guilding, Robert Harris, and S.L. Hirst to Minister of Lands, 29 December 1892, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

¹⁵⁷ James Mills to William Fraser, 8 January 1893, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

¹⁵⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 7 December 1892, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 July 1893, p. 23.

¹⁶⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 September 1893, p. 23.

response to earlier protests and requests to make the board 'annually elective'. Those present were concerned that the caretakers, who had been employed ever since the baths opened, had been dismissed for no 'apparent cause', no charges having been made against them, and resolutions condemning the board's actions were passed unanimously.¹⁶¹ Some of those at the meeting then informed the Minister of Lands that those attending did not want Mills as a member of the board.¹⁶² After subsequent confusion over the legality of the dismissal of these 'deservedly popular' caretakers, the government transferred control of the domain to the town board.¹⁶³

In October, Mills' behaviour as chairman of the board resulted in his being bound over to keep the peace. The cause was his being 'instrumental' in getting the caretakers dismissed, which 'met with the disapproval of a large section of the ratepayers and residents'. Alfred Bossons, a farmer,¹⁶⁴ who applied to have him bound over, 'with others' had been prominent at meetings about Mills' 'public conduct, with the result in mid-September that the parties had come into collision' in the Working Men's Club.¹⁶⁵ In November the board appointed new caretakers, but popular sympathy for the discharged caretakers had 'in no way abated'.¹⁶⁶ Mills did not obtain sufficient support for his choice of two of the three caretakers. At this meeting he also 'upheld the making the tennis court an attraction to visitors. The Domain was not a local pleasure ground but a colonial one, and it was the duty as well as the interest of the Board to give a preference even to visitors'. He was the only dissident to a motion permitting board members to have free baths.¹⁶⁷ The eventual outcome was that, in March the following year, the board agreed to dismiss the new caretakers and reinstate the former ones.¹⁶⁸ A correspondent wrote that both residents and

¹⁶¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 September 1893, p. 10.

¹⁶² C.A. Cornes, Robert Harris, J.W.R. Guilding, and John Bew to John McKenzie, 28 August 1893, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

¹⁶³ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 September 1893, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 September 1893, p. 23.

¹⁶⁴ See paper on Augustus Lipsey.

¹⁶⁵ *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1893, p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 November 1893, p. 23.

¹⁶⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 November 1893, p. 29.

¹⁶⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 March 1894, p. 23.

visitors were pleased, as 'two more popular or suitable men could not be found'.¹⁶⁹

In 1898, at a banquet to celebrate the opening of the Cadman Bathhouse, Mills proposed a toast to the board, and praised its members for advancing the interests of Te Aroha. 'Being only human they were liable to err, but no good would be accomplished by abusing them publicly. If all criticism was tendered in a reasonable and temperate manner something beneficial might be accomplished'.¹⁷⁰ These words implied that he did not approve of many decisions; and in his various disputes he did not follow his advice that critics be 'reasonable and temperate'. An obituary recorded that, as chairman, he 'spoke out plainly about certain abuses, which was strongly resented at the time, but which he had the satisfaction of seeing removed'.¹⁷¹

A MEMBER OF OTHER LOCAL COMMITTEES

In January 1885, Mills was elected to the library committee, and was re-elected every year until at least 1890;¹⁷² the loss of the local newspaper for most of the subsequent decade means it is not known when he ceased to be a member.

In 1886, Mills, reputedly holding 'moderate views', was elected unopposed to the licensing committee.¹⁷³ He was not moderate about the request of Emily Jex, an unmarried woman who later married publican Arthur Downes,¹⁷⁴ to run the Club Hotel. 'He thought it an improper business for a woman, as the position was one of great temptation. He had no objection to the lady herself, and if he had he would not be so ungallant as to state it'. His opposition was over-ruled by the other members.¹⁷⁵ He

¹⁶⁹ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 19 May 1894, p. 20.

¹⁷⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 26 May 1898, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2.

¹⁷² *Te Aroha News*, 24 January 1885, p. 2, 30 January 1886, p. 2, 29 January 1887, p. 2, 4 February 1888, p. 2, 30 January 1889, p. 7, 8 February 1890, p. 2.

¹⁷³ *Waikato Times*, 16 February 1886, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ See section on publicans in paper on the drink problem in the Te Aroha district.

¹⁷⁵ Te Aroha Licensing Committee, *Waikato Times*, 8 June 1886, p. 3.

did not stand again in 1889.¹⁷⁶ In 1891, he was re-elected, receiving 41 votes, seven less than the highest vote.¹⁷⁷

In 1887, Mills received the second highest vote, 36, for the school committee, the top polling candidate receiving ten more.¹⁷⁸ He was elected once more in 1891.¹⁷⁹ The following year, upon re-election he became its chairman.¹⁸⁰ As he had 'greatly interested himself in the Arbor Day movement', on that day he gave the schoolchildren both an environmental and a moral message:

He reminded them that the object of Arbor Day was not only to give them another holiday, but to instil in them habits of unselfishness. They were to plant and care for the trees that they might have a part in the beautifying of their native place. It was a grand thing to teach children and grown-up people to think more of others and to forget themselves, and he thought that the planting and caring for these trees would tend to do that. He contrasted the school life of his youth with that of the present day, and spoke of the educational advantages possessed by the young of New Zealand. He hoped that the continued recognition of Arbor Day in the colony would have the effect of maintaining out glorious climate, so that we should not suffer as other countries had done from droughts caused by the destruction of the forest trees.¹⁸¹

Having been the only member who failed to be re-elected in 1895, he did not stand in 1898.¹⁸² In the latter year, at the committee's annual meeting he called for parents to be compelled to send their children to school more regularly. Absenteeism was 'an injustice to the children themselves; it hindered the progress of more advanced and regular attendants, and it deprived the school of a proper staff of teachers'.¹⁸³

Mills was a member of the committee to raise money for a memorial to Warden Harry Kenrick.¹⁸⁴ He was elected to the committee organizing a

¹⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1889, p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ *Waikato Times*, 30 May 1891, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 30 April 1887, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 May 1891, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 May 1892, p. 27.

¹⁸¹ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 August 1892, p. 37.

¹⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 24 April 1895, p. 2, 26 April 1898, p. 2.

¹⁸³ *Te Aroha News*, 28 April 1898, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 August 1886, p. 2.

regatta in 1886 to celebrate the Prince of Wales' birthday,¹⁸⁵ and was one of the three vice-presidents of the bowling club, formed in 1902.¹⁸⁶ A prominent supporter of horse racing, and especially the Jockey Club, in 1889 he was appointed clerk of scales for its summer meeting.¹⁸⁷ In 1893 he was appointed a trustee of the racecourse.¹⁸⁸ Two years later, he arranged for a special train to bring Paeroa residents to the races.¹⁸⁹ Ten months later, he was elected a steward and clerk of scales, being replaced as the latter in January 1897.¹⁹⁰ The following year he was a member of the committee.¹⁹¹ In 1899 he was patron of the Te Aroha West Hack Club Races.¹⁹²

A MEMBER OF THE PIAKO COUNTY COUNCIL

In a by-election for the Te Aroha Riding in 1884, immediately after being nominated Mills withdrew to enable his supporters to vote for James Lavery, a builder and timber merchant,¹⁹³ whose nomination he had seconded.¹⁹⁴ Despite his standing aside, Lavery was not successful.¹⁹⁵ In 1887, Mills was elected with 52 votes; the highest polling candidate received 64.¹⁹⁶ His involvement in the minutiae of council business has not been traced. In 1888, there was controversy over his decision, with fellow councillor Denis Murphy, to order the engineer to pay Bernard Montague, a contractor,¹⁹⁷ 8s a day rather than the usual 7s. As 'it was the duty of the Council to regulate the rate of wages and not that of its servants', he

¹⁸⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 23 October 1886, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 November 1902, p. 33.

¹⁸⁷ *Waikato Times*, 9 February 1889, p. 3.

¹⁸⁸ *New Zealand Gazette*, 10 November 1893, p. 1599.

¹⁸⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 9 March 1895, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 16 November 1895, p. 2; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 23 January 1897, p. 4.

¹⁹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 January 1898, p. 2.

¹⁹² *Waikato Argus*, 14 October 1899, p. 3.

¹⁹³ See *Thames Advertiser*, 15 January 1881, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 10 January 1885, p. 2, 28 January 1888, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 9 February 1888, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 15 July 1913, p. 5.

¹⁹⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 8 November 1884, p. 2, advertisement, p. 7.

¹⁹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 15 November 1884, p. 7.

¹⁹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 12 November 1887, p. 2, 19 November 1887, pp. 2, 3.

¹⁹⁷ See paper on his life.

seconded Murphy's move to establish this rate for the riding. As it was normally 6s, they were defeated.¹⁹⁸

The following year, when a Waiorongomai resident asked about repairing the road from Te Aroha, the chairman replied that, when this issue was raised, one member described the road as dangerous, having been 'cut up' by cartage for the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company. This unnamed member had said

that if the Council did not immediately set to work to put it in order, some accident was sure to happen, and the Council would be mulcted in damages in consequence. As it seemed to me that there was something in the manner or tone in which this was said, which looked like an attempt to intimidate the Council into doing the work, and as I did not choose to let it be thought that the Council was to be frightened into it,

he had pointed out that the council could sue for the cost of repairs, although this action 'was never seriously contemplated'. If such a proposal had been put forward, 'I think that even Crs Mills and Murphy could hardly have out-voted the other six "unanimous" members'.¹⁹⁹ Mills remained a member of the council until 1893, but his last years on it cannot be traced because of the loss of the local newspaper.

A MEMBER OF THE TOWN BOARD

In February 1887, in the first election for the new town board, two candidates, Alfred Henry Whitehouse²⁰⁰ and Daniel James Frazer,²⁰¹ nominated Mills, but as his nomination was not made in the correct form it was ruled to be informal.²⁰² When he chaired an election meeting, he declared that 'the party to which he belonged had identified themselves with four of the candidates in bringing them forward to represented the

¹⁹⁸ Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 16 May 1888, p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ W.P. Chepmell to Andrew Jamieson, 12 August 1889, printed in *Te Aroha News*, 24 August 1889, p. 2.

²⁰⁰ See paper on his life.

²⁰¹ See *Te Aroha News*, 13 September 1884, p. 2, 12 March 1887, p. 2; letter from D.J. Frazer, *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 June 1886, p. 22; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 February 1889, p. 2, 9 April 1889, p. 2.

²⁰² *Waikato Times*, 22 February 1887, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 26 February 1887, p. 2.

working man's interest'.²⁰³ After the election he was pleased that 'our opponents ... were simply nowhere having only received 82 votes' out of the 542 cast.²⁰⁴ In a by-election at the end of the year, Mills canvassed hard before withdrawing and concentrating his efforts on getting Whitehouse re-elected, but he came bottom of the poll.²⁰⁵ When Whitehouse left the district one year later, Mills chaired a farewell meeting.²⁰⁶

In 1888, Mills was nominated for the town board for the third time.²⁰⁷ As he wanted a borough established, the *Te Aroha News* opposed his candidature.²⁰⁸ In consequence, Mills wrote to the chairman concerning a rival candidate, John Ilott, editor of this newspaper.²⁰⁹ Its report was headlined dramatically: 'Proposed Easy Method of Earning £10. Mills Assumes the Role of Informer!' It noticed Whitehouse, Ahier, 'and other friends' of Mills arriving 'early in order to secure good seats, having no doubt been informed of the great event to come off, and probably anticipating a scene; in which they were, however, disappointed, as no one seemed very much affected'. It printed Mills' letter citing legislation preventing any contractor who was a member of a local body being paid for work done for it; if paid, the amount could be sued for. In addition, any local body knowingly allowing a member to be paid was liable to a fine.

I draw your attention to the above fully believing that none of your body excepting the offender (Mr John Ilott) were aware that the law was being broken in the matter. I should have drawn your attention to this matter earlier, but in consequence of the owners of the *Te Aroha News*, not having registered themselves as such as required by law, (for which act of omission they are also liable to prosecution and fine), I have been put to considerable trouble and expense in ascertaining who are the owners; my Lawyer now advises me that I have ample proof; and if the money so illegally paid by your body to the member mentioned be not refunded within fourteen days from this date, I intend to take immediate action. My object in writing is to prevent the other members of your body from making themselves liable by paying any further sums to the party mentioned. And to

²⁰³ *Waikato Times*, 8 March 1887, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ *Waikato Times*, 25 December 1888, p. 2.

²⁰⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 3 December 1887, p. 2, 10 December 1887, pp. 2, 3.

²⁰⁶ *Waikato Times*, 25 December 1888, p. 2.

²⁰⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 12 September 1888, p. 2.

²⁰⁸ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 8 September 1888, p. 2.

²⁰⁹ See paper on the temperance movement in the *Te Aroha* district.

make it clear that I have no desire to benefit by his misdeeds in no case would I appropriate the fine to my own use.²¹⁰

The newspaper, meaning Ilott, mocked Mills:

Mr Mills having so many bosom friends present, modestly remained away from the meeting himself. Poor old chap! How often we wonder has he laid awake in the still hours of the night, planning how to expend that £10 reward to be granted the informer, on conviction. But then he states he has no desire to benefit by the misdeeds of Mr Ilott, and would in no case appropriate the money (when he gets it). That sounds well, does it not, especially if there is a possibility of the £10 never coming to hand. And if he should get it, what will he do with it? Perhaps give a champagne supper; or better still, forward it to the Hospital with a request that it be placed out at interest to form the nucleus of a fund to establish a new ward, to be called "Mills' ward;" or to establish on a permanent basis a secret service corps, for prying into other peoples' business; or to erect a platform on some corner allotment, from whence to "spout." Seriously though, we were informed several months ago of the striking of this rich patch by those so anxious to get hold of something that they think would injure Mr Ilott's character. We are well aware of the little ring of avowed enemies he has, and whose deeply laid schemes have so frequently been upset, and the real object in view exposed. The delay in bringing the matter forward has no doubt been in order that the supposed offender against his country's laws might put his foot (we don't mean Mills' foot, the patch struck is far too small for that) into it a little further. Somebody had undoubtedly put their foot in it, who, will be seen by-and-bye. We quite believe Mr James Mills for years past has been fossicking and prospecting about trying to discover some point at which to attack Mr Ilott's character, finding all the personal abuse and slander hitherto heaped on him was taken so little notice of, neither Mr Ilott nor the proprietors of the NEWS deeming him worth going for!

Well, Mr Mills having at last pegged off his claim; we advise him to proceed with as little delay as possible to open up the supposed reef, and see how it pans off. In his eagerness to secure that £10, he may possibly have forgotten the old proverb still holds true "Don't count your chickens, etc." He will no doubt learn who the proprietors of the NEWS are soon enough. One thing is certain, they have nothing to fear from a man of Mills' stamp. Having stuck to Te Aroha through thick and thin for over five years,

²¹⁰ James Mills to Chairman, Te Aroha Town Board, 12 September 1888, printed in *Te Aroha News*, 15 September 1888, p. 2.

expending in the place during that time a large sum of money in wages, etc, and having done their utmost to promote the best interests of the goldfield and district generally, it will take a better man than James Mills, (aye were he even Mayor of Te Aroha and Waiorongomai at a salary of £100 a year) to shift them. Good-bye Mr Mills for the present, perhaps you will hear from us again by and bye, and possibly learn the wisdom of minding your own business, even though you may have *only intended* your letter as an electioneering dodge desiring to injure Mr Ilott's prospects of being again returned for the Town Board.²¹¹

When Mills' letter was considered at the next board meeting, the chairman considered that the issue should have been raised earlier, as the present members were about to complete their term of office. 'He suggested that the Board take no action in the matter, as Mr Mills had taken the initiative it rests with him to take any further steps'. As Mills had made 'rather a serious charge', Ilott did not want it passed over in this way: 'Mr Mills might like to make a "tenner" out of him if he thought he could do so, but his assertions were very broad. Mr Mills ought to have supported his allegations by defining in what manner the Act referred to had been infringed'. After some debate, none favourable to Mills, it was unanimously agreed that his letter simply be received.²¹²

In the election, Mills was elected with 73 votes; the top-scoring candidate, Edward Gallagher, received 97, and Ilott, with only 45, was defeated.²¹³ Mills' continued antagonism to Ilott meant that he wanted the board's advertising published only in a rival newspaper.²¹⁴ Most of his day-to-day activities on the board have not been traced, the loss of the *Te Aroha News* after mid-1890 making this impossible. In December 1888 he successfully proposed Ahier as its clerk.²¹⁵ In December 1889, as the attempt to levy a rate was a shambles, a special meeting was required, which Ilott stated was illegal because some members did not receive notice in time. Once again proceedings were muddled, Ahier and Gallagher in particular being uncertain how to proceed. Mills, after explaining what to do, gave notice of yet another special meeting. Others supported him in

²¹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 15 September 1888, p. 2.

²¹² Town Board, *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1888, p. 2.

²¹³ *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1888, p. 7.

²¹⁴ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 21 December 1889, p. 2.

²¹⁵ Town Board, *Te Aroha News*, 12 December 1888, p. 2.

having the notice of intention to strike the rate published in the *Te Aroha and Waiorongomai Times*, a rival newspaper - Ilott noted it was published in Cambridge. Mills again took a leading part in deciding procedure on other items.²¹⁶ At its April 1890 meeting, he took only a minor part in what Ilott described as 'extraordinary proceedings', sitting back while others argued technicalities, about which he appeared bored. During an argument about which days to hold meetings on, he pointed out that he had successfully moved in 1888 to fix the second Saturday of each month. When another commissioner said that this had been illegal, because no notice of motion had been given, Mills responded, '*Oh well, it's legal enough for us anyhow*', a statement which Ilott italicized.²¹⁷

Later in 1890, he received the lowest vote of the five candidates elected, with 36 votes compared with the highest result of 60.²¹⁸ Re-elected in 1892, he became its chairman.²¹⁹ He did not stand in 1894.²²⁰ Two years later, he stood again, but with 38 votes was at the bottom of the poll. The nearest candidate, who also failed to be elected, received 51; the highest vote was 81.²²¹

CAMPAIGNING FOR A BOROUGH

After the Te Aroha borough was established, Mills described himself as 'the leader of the movement in favour of the municipal form of government'.²²² The first person to raise this issue was Thomas Wells, a prominent merchant at Cambridge and Te Aroha,²²³ in meetings held in July 1883. Whereas Wells' recommendation that both Te Aroha and Waiorongomai be included in the borough was acceptable in the former

²¹⁶ Town Board, *Te Aroha News*, 1 January 1890, p. 2.

²¹⁷ Town Board, *Te Aroha News*, 26 April 1890, p. 2.

²¹⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 September 1890, p. 18.

²¹⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 September 1892, p. 23, 18 November 1893, p. 22.

²²⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 September 1894, p. 23.

²²¹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 19 September 1896, p. 4; *Thames Advertiser*, 19 September 1896, p. 2.

²²² *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 830.

²²³ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 767, 768; *Observer*, 18 February 1905, p. 5, 15 April 1905, p. 5, 26 August 1905, p. 4.

settlement, it caused considerable disquiet in the latter. Mills was not elected to the committee to obtain the required one hundred signatures.²²⁴

In October 1884 Mills was appointed to a committee of Te Aroha residents who were to seek support at Waiorongomai.²²⁵ At a meeting held there, he

spoke at some length, clearly showing that the only reason why the Te Aroha people were delaying steps to have the district formed into a Borough was hoping that the Government would do something towards the tramway, and so reduce the liability to be taken over. He could not understand why some persons spoke so bitterly respecting Te Aroha, why there should be any jealousy between the two places, certainly there was no such feeling at the meeting held at Te Aroha. They ought all combine in the general interests of the goldfield and the district generally.

Later, he 'stated on behalf of the Te Aroha residents that they were ready to go in for a Borough the moment they knew there was nothing to be gained in the form of a subsidy by waiting a little longer'.²²⁶ At another Waiorongomai meeting held one week later, Mills rejected the claim that Te Aroha was not ready to form a borough, and quoted the section of the Municipal Corporations Act requiring more than half the householders to sign a petition supporting a borough. He had been told that some people were seeking support for a borough consisting solely of Waiorongomai and the goldfield and were convincing people to sign by claiming that the post office would be removed from Waiorongomai if it were incorporated in a Te Aroha borough. 'I would fain hope that no one is so lost to all sense of self-respect as to try and obtain signatures by such unworthy means', for a borough was irrelevant to the number of post offices. He wanted the borough to include Te Aroha, the goldfield, 'and the Government land on the other side of the river, which Government land we should try by all fair means to get granted as an endowment. We are as much in earnest as any of you, and anxious to obtain the best form of local self-government'. Despite his urging, the meeting voted by 16 to nine against forming a borough.²²⁷

Later that month, Mills, the first speaker at a Te Aroha meeting, reported on the steps taken. A sufficient number of people had signed the

²²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1883, p. 2, 14 July 1883, p. 2.

²²⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 25 October 1884, p. 2.

²²⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 1 November 1884, p. 2.

²²⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 8 November 1884, p. 2.

petition, and a plan of the borough, to include Quartzville, had been prepared. His motion to form a committee to carry out the wish of the petition was carried unanimously, and he was elected to it.²²⁸ At one of the earliest meetings he chaired at Te Aroha, held in December, after dealing with problems over postal services and the need for the early completion of the railway line, there was 'a lively discussion' about forming a borough. Mills

could see no reason for any change of opinion on the subject. He was aware there was considerable opposition amongst the people of Waiorongomai to the present movement, as it was there believed that the object was premature, but he did not think that circumstances should deter those who were in favour of it from proceeding with the work which they had taken in hand, and which he would be glad to see carried out without further delay.

Others considered it 'unwise to disregard the wishes of so important a section of the community' as Waiorongomai, but 'a considerable majority' agreed with Mills that 'the task already begun should be proceeded with'.²²⁹ Two months later, at another meeting he moved that a borough comprising Te Aroha, Waiorongomai, and Quartzville should be established.²³⁰ As the man employed to obtain signatures for the petition had died in an accident, and as it was necessary to provide a declaration 'as regards all signatures, by the party who obtained them, it would be necessary for all that work to be gone over again'. He objected to Matamata Riding having two representatives on the council whereas Te Aroha, with almost half the population of the county, had only one. Some people thought Firth 'had so much power that he would be able to prevent a commission of enquiry being held as proposed, but if they formed into a borough and could not agree as to the amount of liability to be taken over, Government provided for a commission being appointed to decide the matter'.²³¹

In mid-March 1885, the petition to establish a borough was sent to the government.²³² Two months later, another was received from the council

²²⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 29 November 1884, p. 2.

²²⁹ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Waikato Times*, 16 December 1884, p. 3.

²³⁰ *Waikato Times*, 24 February 1885, p. 2.

²³¹ *Te Aroha News*, 28 February 1885, p. 7.

²³² Petition to establish a borough, 16 March 1885, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

opposing forming one until the tramway and other debts had been fairly allocated.²³³ When lobbying the Minister of Mines later in May, Mills mentioned the need for a borough.²³⁴ The following month, at a meeting criticizing the council's response to the offer of government assistance to Ferguson's tramway, he said that 'they can't let our meeting pass without having a fling at the proposed Borough. Those present were well aware that just now there were not the required number of householders, thanks to the policy that had been pursued' by the Battery Company, whose over-charging had forced 'over 100 families' to leave the district.

With regard to the payment and taking over of the liabilities – they had no desire to do otherwise than take over and pay their fair share, but no doubt they would not all see alike as to how much that was. They certainly would not be very willing to pay for the trestlework to Mr Firth's battery, and other work he could mention.²³⁵

After being informed that there were 112 resident householders at Te Aroha and 102 at Waiorongomai and Quartzville, in June the Colonial Secretary ruled against forming a borough because 250 resident householders were required.²³⁶

In August 1886, Mills was elected to a committee to determine the borough's boundaries.²³⁷ Early the following month, writing as chairman of the Improvement Committee he informed the Premier, Robert Stout, that he was preparing another petition but feared it might fail on the same grounds. As the new Act required a borough to contain property able to provide a rate of at least £250 at one shilling in the pound, the district contained 'ample annual value' and was therefore entitled to establish one. 'We are anxious to be incorporated as soon as possible', and were collecting signatures. 'I have personally Canvassed for the signatures, and asked all Householders indiscriminately until I got the required number, over one half of the entire Householders', and had had only two refusals. 'The place is

²³³ Petition of Piako County Council, 13 May 1885, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²³⁴ *Waikato Times*, 28 May 1885, p. 2.

²³⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 20 June 1885, p. 2.

²³⁶ Malcolm Robertson to Colonial Secretary, 25 May 1885; memorandum by Colonial Secretary, 10 June 1885, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²³⁷ *Waikato Times*, 3 August 1886, p. 2.

becoming widely known as a sanatorium and is also a Mining Centre, and the Inhabitants are very much dissatisfied with the Conduct of the Piako County Council in consequence of their neglect, the streets and roads are simply Bogs and a disgrace to any community'.²³⁸ At the end of the month, he told Stout that there was disagreement about whether there was an adequate rating base, but he was 'prepared to sign a declaration that we have the necessary property qualification'. He wanted to take advantage of the new Act as soon as it came into operation.²³⁹ A week later, Stout received a telegram: 'Committee anxiously awaiting advice respecting incorporation sorry to trouble again'.²⁴⁰ He continued to seek advice about rating, in mid-October asking Patrick Buckley, the Colonial Secretary, directly because of doubt about whether there was 'a sufficient valuation'. The council's valuation, made earlier in the year, 'reduced the value about 30 per Cent although much new property had been put up, and property had not receded in value', meaning there was insufficient valuation under the existing Act. It was two and a half years before another valuation would be made, and the council might once again devalue property to prevent the establishment of a borough. As the interests of Te Aroha were neglected despite it providing over half the council's revenue, he asked how they could take advantage of the new Act.²⁴¹ Although told about the rating requirements under the different Acts, he was told that Buckley could not provide advice, as he might have to decide on future action.²⁴²

By then, opinion was changing, with the *Te Aroha News* preferring a town district.²⁴³ The local parliamentarian, John Blair Whyte,²⁴⁴ believed that borough supporters would be happy to have a town district should the

²³⁸ James Mills to Robert Stout, 9 September 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²³⁹ James Mills to Robert Stout, 28 September 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²⁴⁰ James Mills to Robert Stout, 5 October 1886 (telegram), Internal Affairs Department IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²⁴¹ James Mills to Robert Stout, 16 October 1886 (telegram); James Mills to Patrick Buckley (Colonial Secretary), 16 October 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²⁴² Under-Secretary, Colonial Secretary's Department, to James Mills, 16 October 1886, 18 October 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²⁴³ For example, editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 16 October 1886, p. 2.

²⁴⁴ See *Waikato Argus*, 23 July 1914, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 24 July 1914, p. 8.

valuation be insufficient.²⁴⁵ At a meeting in late October convened by George Robson, several spoke in favour of having a town board. In response, Mills 'spoke at some length in favour of proceeding with the Borough petition, and characterized the actions of those who had altered their views on this matter as mean and cowardly'. He could see no reason why the government would treat Te Aroha worse than it had treated Thames, which had been granted both money and an endowment. 'In his own mind he had no doubt that if it was found they could not carry on as a Borough through lack of funds, Government would not see them stuck for money'. Of those who voted, a 'large majority' were in favour of his motion for another petition, but the *Te Aroha News* noted that 'a great many' did not vote and that the short notice of the meeting on a busy Saturday night had meant a small attendance and the absence of many businessmen.²⁴⁶

Buckley was advised that he had no power to make a new valuation, but could form a town district if a petition seeking one was received promptly.²⁴⁷ Pre-empting this possibility, Mills had send in his petition, signed by 120 householders, four days previously, on 6 November.²⁴⁸ On 13 November, he informed Buckley that he had been told of an 'opposition petition'.

It seems that a private meeting was held at the Hot Springs Hotel last night; of some half dozen persons, the majority of whom are interested in Certain Concessions made by the Domain Board but not yet sanctioned by His Excellency the Governor, and it is hoped that by delaying Incorporation the present Domain Board may retain power long enough to enable them to secure the required sanction; knowing well, that with local self government, they have not the slightest chance.

Both the Te Aroha and Waiorongomai Improvement Committees unanimously supported a borough; public meetings supported one by large majorities, one held three weeks previously by seven to one. He had stopped

²⁴⁵ John Blair Whyte M.P. to Patrick Buckley, 27 October 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²⁴⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 30 October 1886, p. 2.

²⁴⁷ Under-Secretary, Colonial Secretary's Department, to Patrick Buckley, 10 November 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²⁴⁸ James Mills to Patrick Buckley, 6 November 1886, enclosing petition dated 4 November 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

collecting signatures once the necessary number was collected, but was 'quite sure I could have got another 100': only about six people would have objected. His opponents claimed circumstances had changed, meaning a decline in revenue under the new Mining Act, which they had supported to get cheaper miner's rights. Several residents suspected Whyte was 'quietly working in opposition to us' and wanted a town district; all the opponents of the borough were his 'political friends'.²⁴⁹

When Buckley visited Te Aroha shortly afterwards, he interviewed several residents, not including Mills, about the best form of local government, and recommended a town board, as did Robson, a member of the deputation to him.²⁵⁰ Robson explained to the *Te Aroha News* that quick action was required to establish a board, as the Act under which one could be established would be abolished at the end of the following month.²⁵¹ The newspaper argued that changes in government policy concerning goldfields revenue meant a borough was less desirable, and was concerned about liabilities inherited from the council. It italicized Mills' statement that '*he felt sure*' that, should a borough be unable to 'get along for lack of funds, the Government *would not see us stuck* for money. How nice to have the general exchequer to fall back upon, in any difficulty would it not!' It claimed that many who had signed the petition had realized their mistake. 'A number of our leading business men' who met a week previously had decided it was 'quite premature' to form a borough, and wanted their names removed from the petition. Mills, hearing of this, 'without we believe calling the committee together' or consulting them, immediately posted the petition, despite having said he would hand it to Buckley upon his arrival at Te Aroha. After describing this 'very arbitrary' action, the editorial again recommended forming a town district, which required a petition signed by two-thirds of the resident householders and the endorsement of the council. Unlike a borough, it 'would start without the millstone of liability'.²⁵²

On 22 November, as chairman of the improvement committee Mills wrote a long letter to the Hamilton newspaper, admitting that asking it to publish his letter was 'somewhat unusual, inasmuch as it relates to a matter that has appeared in another journal', meaning the *Te Aroha News*.

²⁴⁹ James Mills to Patrick Buckley, 13 November 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 86/3934, ANZ-W.

²⁵⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1886, p. 2.

²⁵¹ Letter from George Robson, *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1886, p. 2.

²⁵² Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1886, p. 2.

The facts are simply these:- That at the latter end of the week just ended a meeting of some half-dozen persons elected themselves a committee to endeavour to get Te Aroha formed a town district (having previously elected themselves a committee to upset the petition re borough, and failed), and in the Aroha News of Saturday last we are informed that a petition is being prepared, and will be signed and presented to the Piako County Council for their sanction on Wednesday next, and your contemporary only appearing once a week I shall have no opportunity of correcting the false impression likely to be created by the statements made in that paper until it is too late to be of any use, as the council will then have come to its conclusion.

It was 'some three years since the first public meeting' was held to consider the question, and during that time every meeting had been 'overwhelmingly in favour of a borough as against every other form brought in opposition'. At the most recent meeting, three weeks previously, residents were encouraged to attend by Ilott, 'the principal promoter and advocate of town board'. Only four people voted for this, whereas 28 voted to forward the petition for a borough to the government. 'Moreover, a meeting of the joint improvement committees of Te Aroha and Waiorongomai was held prior to that, nearly every member of both committees being present, at which the area of the borough, its boundaries, and its division into wards was unanimously agreed upon'. A committee of four, including Mills, was elected 'to attend to all the details connected with the petition, including its speedy presentation'. He had wanted to present it to Buckley in person, but as there was 'no certainty as to when he would arrive', he forwarded it, and was 'quite satisfied to leave the public to judge as to my "arbitrariness" in so doing'. The real reason the *Te Aroha News* and others opposed a borough was because the recent reduction of miners' rights from £1 to 5s and the reduction in the rents of mining leases would 'so reduce the revenue that the goldfields will be a burden' to one. Yet a meeting 'consisting largely of persons interested in mining' had requested these reductions, believing 'that it would not materially injure the revenue, as no person would run the risk of mining without a right, when a right could be had for 5s, as it is well-known that scores have done at the higher price'. They also expected more leases would be taken up at the lower price and that there would be 'less injustice in compelling persons holding leases and not working the ground to relinquish or work it, in order to give others who may be willing to work it the opportunity'.

Now we are coolly asked to throw aside the best form of local government available, and take up the inferior, as by so doing we shall be able to take away the largest amount of revenue from the county, with the least burden in the shape of county roads to maintain and leave the county with the legacy of the tramway and county tracks to maintain, believing and averring that they will be a dead loss to the county. Anything more coolly mean and dishonourable than the policy advocated by the opponents of the borough it would be difficult to conceive.

He then quoted Ilott as saying he had refused to sign the petition.

I collected all the signatures of the borough petition and he certainly never refused me. In order that you may judge of his accuracy I may say that about a public meeting held on Monday last, re cemetery, he says "An amendment was proposed by Mr Mills, and seconded by Mr Whitehouse to the effect that the foregoing resolution should contain nothing which would be condemnatory re the conduct of the trustees originally appointed, but on being put only the mover and seconder and another voted for it." In the first place I did not move the amendment, nor did Mr Whitehouse second it, and in the next place it was never put to the meeting at all.

As for Ilott's claim that the goldfield revenue would be reduced by 6 to 1, Mills' estimate was 'not much over 2 to 1, but perhaps he has a special arithmetic. I should much like to see it'. He concluded by thanking the *Waikato Times* for its 'fairness' in reporting the meetings of the county council. 'Were it not for your reports we in this place should never know the worth of our representative. If he does anything that can by a perverse imagination be construed contrary to the supposed interests of Te Aroha, we always get to know that'.²⁵³

On 27 November, Mills wrote to Buckley about the petition Robson had organized seeking a town district:

After their interview with you, the opposition dropped their petition, and on Monday morning last went out with a petition for Town District. On Tuesday evening I asked Mr Robson if he would allow me to copy the names before it was sent away, having allowed them to copy the names attached to Borough petition; this he flatly refused. I asked this because I had reason

²⁵³ Letter from James Mills, *Waikato Times*, 23 November 1886, p. 3.

to think people were signing who were not entitled, as householders: from enquiries made I have reason to believe my suspicions to be correct. Mr D[aniel] J[ames] Frazer told me that he was asked to sign and refused, and when he got home Mrs [Louisa Jane] Frazer²⁵⁴ told him that some one had been to the house and asked her to sign, telling her that Mr Frazer had sent them, and that she had signed it. She is a married woman living with her husband in his house; I am told that Mrs [Mary] Faes,²⁵⁵ Mrs Moody, and Mrs Wilson have also signed the petition, and their cases are exactly the same as Mrs Frazer's; a gentleman who saw the petition says that the name of W[illiam] G[eorge] Devey²⁵⁶ was on the petition. I have seen Devey, and he says that he has neither signed, nor authorized anyone to sign his name. Then there is the case of an old man known as Old Jacky, but whose proper name I have not yet been able to get, who shakes down in a shanty rented by W[illiam] Lincoln;²⁵⁷ Mr J[ohn] P[hilip] Vause, the postmaster,²⁵⁸ signed the petition, as also did Mr O'Connor through misrepresentation of its object, and both of them said in the presence of myself and others that they would be glad to get it off, being sorry they have signed it. If you have any serious intention of considering this petition, or if it is possible that it may receive the assent of the Governor in preference to the Borough petition, I would ask you kindly to cause to be forwarded to my address a copy of the signatures to said Town Districts' petition, so that *my committee* may ascertain if they have the necessary two-thirds of the signatures of the *bona fide* householders in the district, and I promise you that I will with all possible despatch send you a correct list of all the householders in the district, also of the names of all persons who are improperly on the petition. I take it that a householder is a person either owning or occupying a house, or a person renting and occupying one, if I am wrong should esteem a correct definition a favour from you.

This portion of his letter was later published.²⁵⁹ The unpublished conclusion stated that no meeting had backed a town district.

²⁵⁴ See *Te Aroha News*, 16 April 1887, p. 3, 9 July 1887, p. 2, 15 October 1887, p. 2, 4 April 1888, p. 2.

²⁵⁵ See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 31 December 1896, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 12 June 1924, pp. 1, 5.

²⁵⁶ See paper on George Devey and his family.

²⁵⁷ See paper on physical and mental health in the Te Aroha district.

²⁵⁸ See paper on Chinese involvement in Te Aroha and its mining.

²⁵⁹ James Mills to Patrick Buckley, 27 November 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 87/180, printed in *Te Aroha News*, 25 December 1886, p. 2.

The Committee who are trying to carry a Town Dist are self elected; and have not one working man on their Committee; the Miners to a man are in favor of a Borough, the Committee is entirely composed of Tradesmen and Publicans, only one of the Four Publicans has been here more than three months, three of them are at the mercy of Brewers, and may have to go at a days notice as some of their predecessors have done and cannot be expected to have the same interest in the place that others who have their all sunk in property here; I have every reason to believe that J.B. Whyte is their principal adviser and Counsellor, and certainly the Committee to a man I should expect to support him in his forthcoming struggle for his seat.²⁶⁰

On 1 December, Robson sent Buckley the petition for a town district: 109 signatures had been obtained in less than two days, whereas the one for a borough had 119. He claimed the former was the ‘almost unanimous wish’ of Te Aroha residents; the council unanimously preferred it.²⁶¹ One week later, Henry William Northcroft, the magistrate, was asked to enquire into Mills’ charges.²⁶² Mills immediately asked him to provide the names on the town district petition to enable him to check whether all were householders and had really signed it. ‘This I think should facilitate matters’, for ‘I could ascertain who had been personated’, meaning impersonated, ‘and who had no rights to sign’.²⁶³ He was provided with the names, as requested.²⁶⁴

In mid-December, Northcroft held a public enquiry into the signatures to the town district petition, ‘so largely and influentially signed’ and ‘unanimously approved and confirmed by’ the council, as the *Te Aroha News* noted. On behalf of the petitioners, Robson asked Northcroft to reveal the

²⁶⁰ James Mills to Patrick Buckley, 27 November 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 87/180, ANZ-W.

²⁶¹ George Robson to Patrick Buckley, 1 December 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 87/180, ANZ-W.

²⁶² Under-Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Department, to Patrick Buckley, 7 December 1886; Patrick Buckley to Under-Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Department, 7 December 1886; Under-Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Department, to James Mills, 7 December 1886 (telegram), Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 87/180, ANZ-W.

²⁶³ James Mills to Henry William Northcroft (Resident Magistrate), 7 December 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 87/180, ANZ-W.

²⁶⁴ Memorandum by Henry William Northcroft, 16 December 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 87/180, ANZ-W.

contents of Mills' letter; he read most of it, omitting parts 'better left unread'. The last portion, the newspaper noted, was 'possibly something of the nature of a personal attack, or some more allegations. We may rest assured Mr Northcroft declined to make it public for some wise reason'. The under-secretary interpreted Mills' letter as designed to thwart the petition by delaying its proclamation, and he and Buckley made sure an immediate investigation was made. Northcroft went over the signatories with the postmaster, clerk of court, and sergeant of police to ensure a sufficient number of ratepayers had signed. About 40 names were queried, and Northcroft asked those who had circulated the petition to prove that they had a right to sign it. Robson said that he, Ilott, and Thomas Wood, a farmer,²⁶⁵ had obtained signatures only of resident householders. Northcroft

then proceeded to deal severally with the names that had been queried, which took some considerable time. In most instances those queried were shown as liable to be rated, and with respect to Mr Mills' objections *His Worship informed Mr Mills he had completely failed in every instance to prove the allegations he had made, and that his objections had been done away with altogether.*²⁶⁶

Northcroft informed Buckley that Mills had failed to prove that any signatory was not entitled to sign, apart from one tenant who had left the district. By checking with the mining registrar, postmaster, and police sergeant they found 15 people who should not have signed, although they had believed themselves eligible. Of 122 ratepayers, 95 had signed the petition for the town board, more than the number required.²⁶⁷ Mills immediately challenged Northcroft's judgment, telling who had included people who had been renting for 'a reasonable time', and provided Buckley with a list of those he claimed were entitled to vote and of the 147 who could have voted but did not.²⁶⁸ After his under-secretary informed him that he should accept Northcroft's figures rather than Mills', for the latter was 'an avowed partisan', although eight people wanted to withdraw their

²⁶⁵ See *Te Aroha News*, 13 March 1889, p. 2, 7 September 1921, p. 3.

²⁶⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 25 December 1886, p. 2.

²⁶⁷ Henry William Northcroft to Under-Secretary, Colonial Secretary's Department, 16 December 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 87/180, ANZ-W.

²⁶⁸ James Mills to Patrick Buckley, 18 December 1886, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1, 87/180, ANZ-W.

signatures Buckley accepted the report, and it was agreed to proclaim a town district.²⁶⁹

The *Te Aroha News* condemned some of the statements in Mills' letter as 'utterly false'. Robson, in taking his petition to Mrs Frazer, had not said that her husband had sent him; she and two of the other women named had 'signed of their own free will', and Mrs Moody had not signed it. Devey, who had signed in the presence of his father and uncle, told Robson 'that he never uttered such words' as Mills alleged. Vause also denied signing through misrepresentation, and O'Conner denied Mills' statement.

This is a nice specimen of the totally unjustifiable charges some times laid against others by those who are not over careful as to what they say, if thereby they can but gain the end they have in view, and Mr Mills's endeavour to upset the Town Board petition will be productive of good, if alone its being the means of this letter of his being made public. Our readers will form their own conclusions with respect to his conduct in dealing thus with other people's names.²⁷⁰

After a town board was formed, the borough question remained in abeyance for a while. The bad blood created between Mills and Ilott over this, and other, issues, remained, as illustrated when Mills chaired a meeting in November 1887 to protest at Ilott's criticisms of Edward Quinn, the former chairman of the board.²⁷¹

He stated that, unfortunately the present course was the only one that a large section of the community could adopt when they desired to make themselves heard, as the columns of the News were closed to them. He further drew their attention to the fact that invariably every cause advocated by the News was lost, and that hitherto every candidate in local politics who had secured the approbation of our journalist (?) had failed to secure a return.²⁷²

In February 1888, when the council refused to grant money to repair the Te Aroha to Waiorongomai road, Mills told it that this was 'another step

²⁶⁹ Under-Secretary, Colonial Secretary's Department, to Patrick Buckley, 23 December 1886; Patrick Buckley to Under-Secretary, Colonial Secretary's Department, 24 December 1886, IA 1, 87/180, ANZ-W.

²⁷⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 25 December 1886, p. 2.

²⁷¹ See paper on his life.

²⁷² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 24 November 1887, p. 3.

towards Te Aroha being formed into a Borough, and then we'll be clear of you. Te Aroha Riding does not owe you a penny'. Other councillors responded that the council was paying the debt created by the tramway and other developments, and when Mills stated that the council had received £750 in revenue during the past year the clerk showed that in the last six months only £260 had been received.²⁷³ In July, Mills addressed meetings at both settlements. The *Te Aroha News* described the Waiorongomai one as a 'public (so-called) meeting', because only 12 people, including Mills, attended, 'including some who came in when the proceedings were half over'. As chairman, Mills detailed the county finances in the year to 31 March, having 'no hesitation in stating' that more than half the revenue came from this riding, and explaining why in great detail. He claimed that half the expenses incurred in running the county 'would be ample to run a Borough, so that by separating from the county they would have a revenue of £1200 a year without levying any more rates than they had at present'. As nothing like this amount was spent in the riding, he 'went on to speak of how badly the Council had treated Te Aroha, etc'. In the subsequent discussion opinion was divided, several being unwilling to let his proposal proceed without a wider representation of the residents. Mills claimed 'the only reason' why the borough was not established two years previously was 'because some people at Te Aroha had some axes to grind', a statement he did not clarify. He insisted that Te Aroha residents wanted a borough. The meeting approved Waiorongomai joining a borough by four votes to two. After three men declined to serve on a committee 'to carry the matter through', three others were elected. One man then asked Mills again why, if Te Aroha ratepayers had been 'nearly all in favour' in 1886, a borough had not been established. The *Te Aroha News* italicized his reply and the subsequent meeting of the committee:

The Chairman: *The Te Aroha Town Board petition was carried by personation and forgery, and by names being on the petition that had no right to be there.*

The meeting then closed and the committee *representing Waiorongomai* at once met to transact business.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 25 February 1888, p. 2.

²⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1888, p. 2.

At Mills' Te Aroha meeting on the following night, attended by from 40 to 50 people, 'about half of whom took part in any voting', Mills made the only speech:

They were all aware that for the last four years they had been striving to get some form of local government. At the last meeting held in that hall for this purpose, it was decided by seven to one not to have a Town Board. He was now told by one of the Town Board members that four out of five of the Board were in favour of a Borough. Mr Mills next read over the county balance sheet, and his estimate of the proportion which accrued from Te Aroha Riding (giving same figures as on the previous evening at Waiorongomai, and stating as then, that by forming a Borough they would start with a revenue of £1200 a year, without levying any more rates than at present. But in addition he wished to state that he had that day received from Mr [Charles] Tuck, the County Clerk, a letter in reply to some particulars he had asked him for, stating that £520 was still owing for tramway haulage, *and this should be added to the* £1289 revenue he had already shown them existed, so that their position was really a great deal better than he thought it was.

[At this stage Mr Pat Dillon [a contractor]²⁷⁵ interposed and asked the speaker how he could state there was a revenue of £1200, including £497 from tramway, seeing that the tramway was leased for ten years at £100 a year?

Mr Mills: I am quite aware the tramway is leased as you state.]

Mr Mills: Whatever way you look at it, we must be the gainers by forming a Borough.

When Ohinemuri separated from Thames, the debts were 'apportioned in accordance with the rateable value and population. We are about one sixth of the rateable value of the county'. After covering a couple of points of fine financial detail, he reminded the meeting that at the last council meeting 'they had asked for a few pounds to make a small drain at Waiorongomai, and it was refused. The sooner they got separated from the County the better, and he therefore now proposed, That the necessary steps be taken to form Te Aroha and Waiorongomai into a Borough'.

After John Wood, a local butcher,²⁷⁶ asked him 'several times what amount was paid for slaughter house licenses', Mills finally responded, 'I refuse to answer you'. When Wood persisted, the chairman said 'that was not what they were there for, and he should not answer the question'. After

²⁷⁵ See *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7, 12 March 1887, p. 2, 4 June 1887, p. 2.

²⁷⁶ See paper on neighbourly and unneighbourly behaviour in the Te Aroha district.

John Guilding²⁷⁷ refused to second the resolution, Whitehouse did. Wood then stated that the attempt was 12 months 'before its time', and would mean taxes would be 'much heavier, laws more stringent, and you will simply drive people out of the place'. After Dillon and Wood moved an amendment that the matter stand adjourned for a year, Mills clarified the proposed boundaries, which excluding land across the river which had been included in previous plans, and adding 'more of the Tui, and also Ruakaka'. The amendment received only two votes, and 'a large majority' of the 20 or 25 who voted backed Mills. A committee of three was chosen, Mills discouraging a larger one, and he and his two recommended candidates, Whitehouse and Joseph Bailiff Heathcote, a carpenter,²⁷⁸ were elected.²⁷⁹

A *Te Aroha News* editorial stated that Mills' statement at Waiorongomai that a town board had been established by 'forgery and personation' was 'a deliberate falsehood as Mr Mills well knows, and such a statement is a gross insult to the people of Te Aroha'. His claims about the revenue a borough would receive were 'entirely misleading', and he had made no mention of the heavy liabilities that would have to be accepted. 'We are greatly mistaken with respect to the intelligence and public spirit of the people of Waiorongomai if they quietly submit to be thus led by the nose by Messrs Mills & Co'.²⁸⁰

At the next council meeting, one member, Charles Gould,²⁸¹ denied saying what Mills at Waiorongomai had claimed he had said. The clerk denied telling Mills that only £11 of the last general rate remained uncollected; furthermore, all money collected or derived from any riding was credited to it. Te Aroha riding was in debt by £7,289 14s 10d, and many rates in this part of the district remained unpaid.²⁸² The *Te Aroha News* then warned new residents that many who had signed the earlier petition supporting a borough had written to the improvement committee saying they wished to withdraw their names, but before their letter could be

²⁷⁷ See paper on his life.

²⁷⁸ See *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1883, p. 2; Magistrate's Court, *Thames Star*, 17 October 1884, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 17 January 1885, p. 2, 24 January 1885, p. 2, 28 February 1885, p. 2, 12 November 1887, p. 2, 3 December 1887, p. 2, 18 February 1888, p. 2.

²⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1888, p. 2.

²⁸⁰ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1888, p. 2.

²⁸¹ See paper on his life.

²⁸² Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 14 July 1888, p. 2.

presented Mills ‘popped the petition into the Post Office, so that this request could not be given effect to. The letter, largely signed, was however forwarded on to Wellington’. The newspaper reprinted its December 1886 article showing how Mills had made false statements and misquoted people in trying to defeat the petition for a town board.²⁸³

At the conclusion of an address at Waiorongomai on local government by William Archibald Murray in mid-July,²⁸⁴ Ilott was asked to provide the official figures on the riding’s indebtedness, but did not have the latest details. After stating that he was awaiting the official returns, he noted the presence of Mills, the ‘chief mover in this agitation for a Borough’ and commented that ‘surely he could give a statement of their indebtedness to’ the council.

Mr Mills then rose. He said he had no fresh figures to lay before them beyond those given at the meeting in Te Aroha. From the County Clerk, Mr Tuck, he had ascertained that the sum of £7200 had been charged against the Riding on account of the tramway. He thought this work had been done from selfish motives on the part of some of the councillors who had land in the neighbourhood, they knowing that it would increase the value of their property.

This slur was particularly aimed at Firth, who owned the battery as well as the Matamata estate; he did not note that, without the tramway, no mines could operate. Mills continued:

Because this tramway was not paying soon enough they wanted to charge the whole amount against the Riding. It appeared to him Piako County Council were inclined to enjoy the music while we pay the piper. In answer to some questions, Mr Mills said the last rate levied in the Te Aroha riding amounted to £277, of which there was only £66 owing.

Mr Ilott asked the amount of money spent on road work, etc, in Te Aroha Riding by the Piako County Council during the present year.

Mr Mills stated the amount to be £112.

Mr Ilott said it was not so, and produced figures copied from the books of the Piako County Council which showed that the money expended and authorized by them within the last couple of months amounted to over £190.

²⁸³ *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1888, p. 2.

²⁸⁴ See paper on his life.

A warm discussion then took place between Mr Ilott and Mr Mills with reference to the amount of debt the Borough would take over if formed. Mr Ilott pressed Mr Mills, as he was the chief mover for the formation of a Borough, to give an approximate estimate of the debt, which, in his opinion, would have to be taken over. Surely Mr Mills could give some sort of estimate, within a thousand or two anyhow. (Laughter.)

Mr Mills intimated that he could not bring forward any such statement at present.²⁸⁵

After James Munro,²⁸⁶ the chairman, also failed to provide these details, Ilott 'drew attention to the manner in which the last meeting at Waiorongomai had been conducted: which was tantamount to Messrs Mills and Munro electing themselves a committee on their own responsibility to act on behalf of the ratepayers' over fixing the boundaries and other matters. Mills had promised at a Te Aroha meeting to provide these details at a public meeting, but instead 'people were expected to sign first and to be told afterwards what they had signed'. Mills 'loudly interposed' that he and Munro 'had been properly elected at a public meeting'. When asked by Ilott to provide the council's outstanding liability, Mills 'replied all he knew of was the overdraft, some £2040'. Ilott insisted the council had spent much more in the riding than it received from it, and thought Mills and Munro should 'suspend the Borough agitation until they had made themselves better acquainted with the subject in all its bearings'. A majority of those present agreed that the issue should be 'more thoroughly ventilated before any definite step was taken' and by one vote agreed to hold it over for six months.²⁸⁷

Mills' statements provoked an editorial providing full details of the riding's liabilities, because Mills had only provided

estimates of a most grossly one-sided character, utterly unreliable, most misleading, which it is difficult to understand how any man (much less a member of the Piako County Council), assumed to be an authority with respect to the question under consideration, could deliberately put forward as trustworthy.

²⁸⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1888, p. 2.

²⁸⁶ See paper on John Squirrell.

²⁸⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1888, pp. 2, 7.

Mills appeared to be ‘terribly anxious, for some reason or other’, to establish a borough. At Waiorongomai, when he urged residents to leave the county because it was ‘receiving all and giving but little in return’, he was asked for the riding’s income and expenditure in the past financial year but under repeated questioning he ‘said he could not tell’, not even approximately, and his chief supporter was equally ignorant. ‘Both these gentlemen were also repeatedly pressed to give, ever so approximately, what *they* thought the liability that would attach to a Borough if formed would be, but they only reply that could be elicited was “They could not tell – had no idea, etc.” Verily nice would-be legislators!’ The editorial proved that the council had treated the riding most liberally, having spent in it a yearly average of £426 more than received from it for the past six years; indeed the riding had caused the council’s indebtedness.²⁸⁸

Another editorial, one week later, insisted that, despite Mills’ claims, a borough would have to compensate the council for the loss of the tramway in particular. Noting that Mills had gone to Waiorongomai ‘without being publicly invited’ and had chaired a small meeting that had resolved that it was the unanimous wish of the residents that a borough be formed, the newspaper suggested that Waiorongomai should be allowed to speak for itself.²⁸⁹ Just before the first election to the town board in September, without making specific reference to either Mills or Murphy an editorial warned against electing people who would prefer a borough.²⁹⁰

Early in July 1889, ‘Old Resident’ of Waiorongomai wrote that some Te Aroha residents were ‘very anxious that Waiorongomai should join in with them and go in for a Borough’, presumably because mining was reviving.

Mr James Mills has been spending a good deal of time out here, shewing a very fatherly concern for us poor ignorant people at Waiorongomai, telling us what we ought to do, and how to do it. It is very kind of him to go to so much trouble about us I am sure. But, Mr Editor, I am one of those kind of people who are very suspicious of the purity of the motives of those who go a lot out of their way about other people’s business. I want to know why it is on every occasion the proposal to form a Borough has been advocated, it is Mr Mills or someone else from Te Aroha who is at the bottom of it.

²⁸⁸ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1888, p. 2.

²⁸⁹ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 28 July 1888, p. 2.

²⁹⁰ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 8 September 1888, p. 2.

He objected to ‘outsiders’ giving unwanted advice. Mills ‘and his mates’ were arranging another meeting,

when we are to hear more about it. We are told that if we will only join Te Aroha we will have nothing to do, only step in and take possession of the goldfield, new bridge [at Murphy’s Landing] and all, and will have no debt on it at all, but tell the County to “go to pot.”... To me it seems mighty queer that amongst the whole of us out here we have to get a man from Te Aroha to lead us. Some of those I’ve been talking to out here seem to think we might be able to have a Borough of our own by and bye, if we want it, and be able to spend our own money without any assistance, and that we can rub along very well as we are a little longer. Why can’t they let us alone? We are asking neither money nor advice from them.²⁹¹

‘A Miner’, also of Waiorongomai, believed Mills and his associates wanted to include Waiorongomai and Quartzville in a borough so that they could pledge goldfields revenue as security for providing Te Aroha with water, drains, and lighting.²⁹² On the day of the meeting the *Te Aroha News* advertised it, in its own way:

Waiorongomai folk are to have a treat to-night in the form of a free lecture by Mr James Mills, the Te Aroha agitator, and some of his satellites, on the subject of Local Self-Government. Mr Mills is an exceedingly clever man (in his own estimation), and apparently anxious for a wider sphere to operate in than Te Aroha affords; and no doubt would be quite willing to bear a hand in the expenditure of the goldfields revenue, of course giving his services free of charge, just for the love of work and financing, like the Te Aroha Town Clerk [Charles Ahier].²⁹³ We should be greatly surprised, however, if the residents of Waiorongomai do not let Messrs Jas. Mills & Co. know, that very plainly too, that they do not require their very kind and disinterested (!) services; but are quite competent to manage their own affairs. We are pleased to know that both at Te Aroha and Waiorongomai, Messrs Mills & Co. have little chance of succeeding in their proposed scheme (although they have the parchment of the Borough petition already ordered). Beyond the shadow of a doubt the

²⁹¹ Letter from ‘Old Resident’, *Te Aroha News*, 6 July 1889, p. 2.

²⁹² Letter from ‘A Miner’, *Te Aroha News*, 10 July 1889, pp. 2, 7.

²⁹³ See paper on neighbourly and unneighbourly behaviour in the Te Aroha district.

proposed change is altogether premature and ill-advised at the present time.²⁹⁴

An advertisement printed in the same issue indicated that some at Waiorongomai did oppose Mills' proposal:

MEN OF WAIORONGOMAI
 ROLL UP by the score
 TO-NIGHT
 to the meeting in the Public Hall, and
 BEWARD OF A PACKED
 MEETING
 COME IN TIME
 AND
 APPOINT YOUR OWN CHAIRMAN
 SPEAK OUT with no uncertain voice, and let those who thus
 keep on Troubling You, and seek to involve you in burdensome
 TAXATION (in order to obtain their own selfish ends), KNOW
 ONCE AND FOR ALL YOU *want none of them*. ASSERT YOUR
 INDEPENDENCE to both THINK AND ACT for Yourselves.
 REFUSE TO BE DICTATED TO!²⁹⁵

At the meeting, after Bernard Montague, a contractor,²⁹⁶ a proponent of the borough, pointed out that it was 12 months since they had agreed to adjourn discussion on the proposal, Michael O'Keeffe, a miner,²⁹⁷ 'to test the meeting' moved that Waiorongomai form a borough with Te Aroha. Denis Murphy, a farmer and councillor whom Mills had tried to keep off the council in 1884,²⁹⁸ spoke in support, complaining that the council had done insufficient for the riding. Ilott challenged his financial claims, and detailed the sums it had provided.

The Council had also exerted its great influence to the utmost in obtaining Government grants and other assistance for opening up the goldfield, and the members of the Council in the past made themselves personally responsible for very large sums of money to develop the goldfield, and acted in a most generous, unselfish, and public-spirited manner towards the goldfield, and it was

²⁹⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 13 July 1889, p. 2.

²⁹⁵ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 13 July 1889, p. 7.

²⁹⁶ See paper on his life.

²⁹⁷ See paper on his life.

²⁹⁸ See paper on his life.

positively disgraceful, and enough to make one's blood boil with indignation to listen to the way they'd been spoken of and maligned that night, and on many other previous occasions by those who must well know they spoke falsely. (Cheers.)²⁹⁹

The *Te Aroha News* restricted its report to the speeches of Murphy and Ilott, but the *Waikato Times* reported that Mills, after Murphy spoke, estimated the size of the debt that a borough would inherit. He would 'far sooner', he stated, 'pay two rates than tramp over such streets as you have. It is hard to pay a three-farthings rate and get nothing for it. We are taunted with having axes to grind and positions to get. You have no position to offer, and we want none. What we want is to give up paying the three-farthings rate'.³⁰⁰ After Ilott's speech, 'a good many' left before a vote was taken. 'A satisfactory count could not be made as there was general confusion. Ultimately the Chairman announced (without stating any numbers), that "The Scrutineers stated that to the best of their belief there was a majority for the Borough"'.³⁰¹

This meeting provoked satirical comment. 'Rory O'More', of Waiorongomai, allegedly writing (in mock-Irish) on behalf of the majority who wanted a borough, suggested who would comprise 'our new administration'. Whilst allotting himself Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer, 'Jimmy' was

just the doetail for a rippin Minister of Publick Houses – no, I mane Public Works, and Woods and Forests. And thin, sure, there's our able friend – 'och, he's a broth of a boy at disputation, and for deputations to Willington, or, indade, there couldn't be a better chap to sent to London by and bye, to urge the Colonial Secretary to back our application to have the Piako absorbed in the Boro' of Waiorongomai. Just think of what a high ladder you'd be up thin, Jimmy. It just stroikes me moind, Himmy, as how the Battery Company 'ud be the first to recognize our able achievement, and for saving thim from being sued for damages to the Te Aroha road, to presint to you an' me a grand nugget each, as large as Moa's eggs, from the New Find, for skyarf pins – the prospect is enchanting.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 17 July 1889, p. 2.

³⁰⁰ *Waikato Times*, 16 July 1889, p. 3.

³⁰¹ *Te Aroha News*, 17 July 1889, p. 2.

³⁰² Letter from 'Rory O'More', *Te Aroha News*, 31 July 1889, p. 2.

The *Te Aroha News*, in the same issue, reported that Mills had been at Waihou the previous day for the Waitoa Road Board election. He was

proferring any amount of advice, to such of the electors as would listen to him, how to vote, etc; and offering between this that and the other one, that scarcely any of the old members would be returned. The Waitoa electors are a hard-headed lot though, and value *gas* at a very small sum per 1000 feet.... Now if the petition for a Borough does not succeed, really *gas* shares will drop still further in value locally.

Despite Mills' lobbying, board members were re-elected with large majorities.³⁰³

At the beginning of the following month, the *Te Aroha News* reported that the petition supporting a borough had not been sent to the government as more signatures were being sought. It had been informed that there was no mention of Waiorongomai, and that one of the chief justifications was Te Aroha's need of a water supply.

Evidently our Waiorongomai friends who have signed the petition have been cleverly (although unscrupulously) "had." What else could they expect from the promoters? How plausibly Waiorongomai folk were told at the recent public meeting out there, they would have the expending of their own revenue, etc; and how those who have been using that argument have been laughing all the time up their sleeve. Very little say Waiorongomai would have as to how money would be expended were a Borough formed (although no doubt they would be allowed the privilege of paying taxes), as Te Aroha would have the balance of voting power.³⁰⁴

In a long article about the maintenance of the road between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai it attacked Mills' views on the borough and his performance on the council. It was prompted by queries from Te Aroha residents about why the board was responsible for repairs within the town boundaries and their understanding that it had asked the council to hand over control. It had 'told those who have spoken to us on the matter this is not so; and explained to them how it was done. But as no doubt the same "yarn" has been pretty generally spread abroad (like many other false

³⁰³ *Te Aroha News*, 31 July 1889, p. 2.

³⁰⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 3 August 1889, p. 2.

reports and statements which have been spread *for a purpose*), it explained that the board had not asked the council to surrender control.

As a matter of *fact* Crs. Mills and Murphy agreed to the resolution in favour of the cost of maintenance being saddled on the Town Board, when it was first proposed. In fact the statement that the Town Board asked to be made liable for the cost of maintaining the main County road, is on a par with many other statements emanating from the same source, viz, utterly false.

It cited the council's meeting of March 1888 to prove it had unanimously decided to transfer control to the board and that Mills and Murphy had been present. 'One would have thought the representatives of Te Aroha Riding would have been the last persons in the world to allow such a proposal to be passed without protesting against it'. Although at the subsequent meeting they had asked that half the cost of maintaining the road be met by the council, that did 'not in any way excuse them for consenting to the arrangement when first proposed. Now what led up to the Council deciding to saddle the Te Aroha Town District with the whole cost of maintaining the road? No special reason was given at the time, but we believe it was the result of their being so continually pestered by the Te Aroha members to do absurd things'. An example was the long saga of 'Clarke's Drain',³⁰⁵ which was 'quite a pet scheme' of Mills. This, and another request to benefit a resident, were cited as 'examples of the petty annoyances by *unreasonable* requests. We believe it was to rid themselves as far as possible of this kind of thing' at least partly induced the council to pass the resolution, 'and every ratepayer within the Town District has had to suffer in consequence'. Mills and Murphy had 'not been a success in the Council, but quite the reverse'. As they had made false statements 'behind the Council's back' it was 'hard to expect the Council can respect them, or do other than receive statements they may make with a certain amount of caution'. Their votes had led to council meetings being held in Morrinsville. '

Was it from any good motive? Was it in the interests of this district to thus throw obstruction in the way of members of the Council visiting the place and the goldfield themselves as often as possible (as would be the case if they met near at hand)? Of course by adopting the course they did the Te Aroha members got their travelling expenses raised from 13s a meeting to 34s....

³⁰⁵ See paper on Robert and Elizabeth Mackie.

Truly a nice sample of legislators, who would like to have the management of the goldfield entrusted to them.³⁰⁶

William Philip Chepmell,³⁰⁷ the council's chairman, responded to Murphy's statement about how the council allocated goldfields revenue by producing the finance committee's report that showed he was quite incorrect. On checking the records, Chepmell was 'rather astonished to find' that Mills had moved the adoption of this report.³⁰⁸ An editorial directed 'particular attention' to his letter, stressing that, when Murphy made his statement, Mills

signified his concurrence. We have frequently been quite disgusted at the cowardly manner in which we have heard the Piako County Council maligned and *mis*-represented to the ratepayers of this district, by those who should know well they were speaking recklessly. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, any district, in any country, must inevitably suffer, and be placed at a great disadvantage, if represented by men who have no very great regard for the truth, or sense of honour.³⁰⁹

At the end of August, the newspaper, writing about the petition supporting a borough, implicitly criticized the 'very ambitious ideas' of the unnamed prime movers, one of whom it thought wanted to become mayor.

To these agitators the future prosperity of the district is a matter of very little consequence as compared with the chance of getting themselves pitchforked into positions they are totally unfitted to fill, which under ordinary circumstances they are never likely to attain except by a fluke, or through misrepresentation; and which, if attained, would be to the great detriment of the district.

They wanted to have 'the management (!) of the goldfield, the fingering of the goldfields revenue, large borrowing and rating powers, and the right to rule over the sister township'. It had challenged these 'agitators' to disprove its figures of the receipts and expenditure of the riding, 'and they know they can not', and suggested their motto was: 'Never mind the means so long as the end is gained'. It asked, 'If their motives were pure why

³⁰⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 3 August 1889, p. 2.

³⁰⁷ See *Auckland Star*, 20 October 1930, p. 21.

³⁰⁸ Letter from W.P. Chepmell, *Te Aroha News*, 7 August 1889, p. 2.

³⁰⁹ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 7 August 1889, p. 2.

should Waiorongomai need so many pressing invitations to join', and forecast that it and the goldfield would be exploited to meet Te Aroha's needs. It was pleased Waiorongomai residents were organizing a counter-petition seeking to be excluded.³¹⁰

In November that year, when Mills criticized Samuel Tozer Smardon, a Waiorongomai publican,³¹¹ for his pigs causing a 'nuisance', it was pointed out that others had pigs,³¹² and it was possible that Mills was criticizing him because of his active opposition to Waiorongomai becoming part of a borough.³¹³

Late in 1897, yet another petition was sent to Wellington asking for a borough.³¹⁴ With the revaluation of the district, Te Aroha was £36 over the amount required for one.³¹⁵ By then, the *Te Aroha News* saw it as the only way to obtain the larger borrowing powers required for public works, a point of view Seddon supported when he visited in April 1898. Mills was included in the deputation asking him for one,³¹⁶ which this time did not include the fast-fading Waiorongomai. It was gazetted in late April, an outcome for which Mills received the credit.³¹⁷ Before the first borough election, in July, he chaired a meeting about amending the roll of those entitled to vote, over which there was much dissatisfaction.³¹⁸

THE CONTEST TO BE THE FIRST MAYOR

The first mayoral election, in 1898, between Thomas Gavin³¹⁹ and Mills, would be recalled as being a 'fierce contest'.³²⁰ The *Te Aroha News* was in no doubt that Gavin was 'the most fit and proper person' for this post. 'That is pretty generally conceded. In fitness for this particular office,

³¹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 31 August 1889, p. 2.

³¹¹ See section on publicans in paper on the drink problem in the Te Aroha district.

³¹² Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 30 November 1889, p. 2.

³¹³ *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1888, p. 2, 21 July 1888, p. 2, 10 August 1889, p. 2, 23 October 1889, p. 2.

³¹⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 17 February 1898, p. 2.

³¹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 12 February 1898, p. 2.

³¹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 12 April 1898, p. 2.

³¹⁷ *New Zealand Gazette*, 28 April 1898, p. 686; *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2.

³¹⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1898, p. 2.

³¹⁹ See paper on his life.

³²⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2.

from nearly every point of view, he is head and shoulders above every other possible candidate'.³²¹ To strengthen his case for election, Mills called a meeting to refute 'certain charges brought against him' about an action four years previously when he was a member of the town board.³²² The public hall was 'completely packed'. Mills' choice as chairman, solicitor Peter Gilchrist, said 'he had no great pleasure in presiding'.

Mills had come forward to meet an "ancient charge," and no doubt a good deal of resurrection pie ['a dish made from remains']³²³ would be laid before them. They had all done those things which they ought not to have done, at least he (the chairman) had, and it was in that spirit he asked them to give Mr Mills a patient hearing.

Mills 'regretted the necessity of the meeting', but as 'certain charges had been made against him' in the *Te Aroha Times* (which have not survived through the loss of this newspaper), he explained 'at some length' his efforts to get Thompson's Track constructed. Because Tauranga was trying to divert the money 'to another purpose', *Te Aroha* sent representatives at a meeting there.

He was pressed to make one of the number, but was unwilling to do so. He certainly could not afford to go at his own expense, but was assured that all expenses would be paid. He went, accompanied by Mr Gavin and others, and as the weather was most inclement, he had suffered for it ever since, as the exposure brought on an old complaint, and a long period of sickness was the result.

At the town board meeting he had requested payment of their travelling expenses, but although members were willing to pay there was some uncertainty about whether this was legal. Mills considered that it could be paid as 'work done', and checked the relevant legislation.

³²¹ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 23 June 1898, p. 2.

³²² For the year, see 'Hotspur', 'The Electors' Welter Handicap. To be Run at Te Aroha on Tuesday, 5th inst.', (Paeroa, n.d. [July 1898]), *Te Aroha Warden's Court*, Newspaper Clippings 1895-1905, BBAV 11532/1a, ANZ-A.

³²³ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8 ed., ed. Paul Beale (London, 1984), p. 972.

He could not find it in the Act, but he made out a voucher, and handed it to the Clerk, Mr [Percy] Snewin,³²⁴ who gave a cheque for the amount. As it turned out, this was found to be improper, and the money was refunded, and the amount of the expenses subscribed for by a few of the ratepayers. He thought the matter was done with, till about a fortnight after the cheque was paid, the Clerk called a meeting of the Board, and stated that he had consulted his solicitors, who had advised him to do so, and explain matters. He (the speaker) wanted to know why the Clerk had made no objection at the time; and why he had written out the cheque. Had he raised an objection at the time the money would have been instantly refunded. The Government Auditor, who came up in connection with the matter, explained that the money could have been legitimately paid under "The Public Revenue Act," a fact of course concerning which they were ignorant. Mr Mills then entered into an explanation which tended to show that the Clerk, in opening up the matter again, had been actuated by a feeling of enmity towards him. In conclusion he admitted he had done wrong, he had made mistakes, but who was there who had not. No one had lost a penny by what had been done, and the Board had not even yet paid the money.

Snewin explained that Mills' voucher was made out to James Cornes 'for work done at Lipsey's Bridge, £5 19s', was certified by the board's engineer, and that Mills had signed it 'with the name "James Cornes" across the stamp in receipt'. Accordingly, he had consulted his solicitor. 'If the money was refunded no action could be taken by the Board, but as it was a forgery, any private individual could take action at any time. He objected to Mr Mills' reflection on his character', commenting that 'at any rate, he was not a forger'. In reply, Mills 'repudiated the idea of forgery. Before that could be done a real name had to be used, but James Cornes did not exist, and so no man was wronged'.³²⁵ Mills was technically correct: the local builder was John Cornes.³²⁶

Gavin, who spoke next, 'regretted the necessity for discussing this subject, especially at such a juncture, when two old friends like Mr Mills and himself were contesting for the honourable position' of mayor. He gave Mills 'every credit for having agitated' to form a borough 'long before' Gavin 'had ever thought of it'. He described Mills' explanation as 'quite correct up

³²⁴ See paper on Edward Gallagher.

³²⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 28 June 1898, p. 2.

³²⁶ See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 6 August 1902, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 18 February 1926, p.

to the point where he related what took place' at the board meeting. Mills 'deliberately told the Board that it was quite legal to vote the money for work done', and on the strength of this statement it unanimously approved the payment. Gavin had never seen the voucher, although Mills interjected that it had been placed on the table at the meeting. 'After the exposure, Mr Mills came to him and asked him to have the matter hushed up', saying 'he did not care for himself, and was prepared to take all consequences, but there was a third party implicated, and they ought to do all they could to screen him'. Gavin had agreed, which was 'why he had remained silent so long'.

After another former member confirmed that 'the fictitious voucher' was never seen by the board, Francis Pavitt, its engineer,³²⁷

explained that he was the third party referred to. He had signed the voucher and certified to the work being done. He had done wrong in doing so, and regretted it ever since. But he got nothing for it, and had not done it with any evil intention. He was asked to sign and did so, because he thought it was the only way to get the money for those men who, he thought, were entitled to it.

Henry Foulke Gotz, editor of the *Te Aroha Times*,³²⁸ and an opponent of the Liberal Party,³²⁹ said 'he was practically the accuser'. As editor he had 'the right to criticize any aspirant for public honors', and Mills had admitted presenting 'a falsified voucher'. Ratepayers would have to consider whether, if he was elected 'and they had a dishonorable Clerk and Engineer, what guarantee had they, that their money would be spent lawfully'. John Wood, the first Te Aroha butcher and now a prominent farmer,³³⁰ considered all board members were responsible because they had not looked at the vouchers, but 'the money was paid back and no one was the worse'. He considered both Gavin and Mills were 'two good men; a statement which was received with great applause'.

Clem Cornes argued that 'the forgery was not a willful one, otherwise the Government would have prosecuted long ago. He believed this present

³²⁷ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 825.

³²⁸ See paper on financial struggles and (rare) successes of miners in general and at Te Aroha in particular.

³²⁹ See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 26 August 1901, p. 2.

³³⁰ See paper on neighbourly and unneighbourly behaviour in general and in the Te Aroha district in particular.

trouble had been worked up by Mr Gavin and his supporters, and hoped that the contest would be fair and legitimate'. Thomas McIndoe, a saddler,³³¹ and a supporter of the Liberal Party,³³² did not believe that Gavin

had anything to do with working up this agitation. He was not a supporter of Mr Mills, but at the same time he thought it was only fair to bear in mind that Mr Mills had always had the welfare of the town at heart, and had never spared himself in his efforts to further its interest. He hoped that the contest between Mr Gavin and him would be fought on fair and legitimate charges, and not in connection with lines which ought to have been put aside years ago.

He seconded the motion, 'That this meeting, having heard the explanations, was of opinion that the matter should be left alone, and that it expresses its contempt at the manner in which it was brought forward'. This attack on Gotz's behaviour was 'carried without dissent'.

At the close of the meeting Mr Mills said that seeing they were all present, and that Mr Gavin was in the Hall, he thought it would be a good opportunity to give his views on Municipal matters, and as he was prepared to criticize the late administration, he hoped Mr Gavin would wait. Mr Gavin declined to do so, and protested most emphatically against Mr Mills making use of the meeting for such a purpose. Mr Mills had called the public together for a specific purpose, and he had no right to take advantage of that in order to introduce fresh matters. Mr Gavin left the Hall declaring that this action of Mr Mills [was] unfair, and was on a par with all his other actions since he had known him. At this point there was a general exodus from the Hall, and Mr Mills abandoned the idea of the proposed address on his municipal policy.³³³

Three days before the election, Mills 'addressed a mass meeting of electors, and also those considering themselves entitled to vote', including 'beside the sterner sex several ladies'. He began by responding to newspaper criticism of his capabilities.

³³¹ See paper on his life..

³³² *Thames Advertiser*, 28 November 1899, p. 4; *Te Aroha News*, 6 February 1895, p. 2, 8 October 1908, p. 2, 24 October 1908, p. 3.

³³³ *Te Aroha News*, 28 June 1898, p. 2.

He might say that he had been connected with local bodies in Lancashire, and had taken considerable interest in the numerous water-works and other big schemes carried out in different boroughs. As far as Te Aroha was concerned, he had been associated with it from the opening of the field, and at different times had been a member of the Piako County Council, Town Board, Domain Board, School Committee, etc, etc.

The first thing Te Aroha required was ‘a proper water-supply’, and ‘as he had had a deal of experience in such matters in Lancashire, where the most successful schemes’ operated, he hoped his knowledge ‘would prove useful’. It was ‘partly for this reason’ that he was standing. He wanted the town lit by either electricity or gas, insisted that no private company should have a monopoly, and ‘instanced cases in which private companies had secured these rights in other boroughs, showing the enormous amounts of capital required to buy back the right when it was found necessary to do so’. Instead, ratepayers should borrow the necessary capital. ‘A thorough system of drainage’ was required, starting in a small way with ‘more extensive works’ once finance permitted. The work of the last town board was criticized on many issues, especially the neglect of the ‘back streets’. Ratepayers had been asked to pay a 1s rate when 9d was adequate. ‘He was not in favor of a Mayor receiving an honorarium, as he did not think Te Aroha was in a position to give it’.³³⁴

The *Te Aroha News* urged electors ‘to exercise the utmost care’ when voting, as history showed that ‘the progress and prosperity of a community’ was ‘largely dependent on the wisdom displayed by its founders in framing its laws and shaping its policy’.

What we dread more than anything else is the possibility – and such a possibility exists at the present moment – of the council chamber of the young borough being turned into a cock-pit, or parading ground for private animosities. When Mr James Mills declined to allow himself to be nominated a candidate for the office of councillor, we venture to conjecture, he had the truth of this partly in view. He is quite patriotic enough to be influenced by that fear.

Gavin was ‘a capable and experienced administrator in whose hands nothing relating to the business of the borough will suffer’. Mills, despite ‘his great services and sterling qualities’, was ‘not at all suited for the

³³⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 2 July 1898, p. 2.

position, and the interests of the borough would not be served by his election. We take it that Mr Gavin's success is assured', indeed that he would win 'by a substantial majority'.³³⁵ On the day of the election, it considered that 'there was no room for hesitation' in predicting Gavin's victory, 'but many whose opinions we are accustomed to respect appear dubious. Mr Gavin at one period in the campaign had good reason to put up a petition to be saved from his friends', seemingly referring to the digging up of dirt over the forged voucher. It still expected and hoped that Gavin would win, for he was widely recognized as

the legitimate heir to the throne of our lately reconstructed little kingdom. The fixity of this idea was somewhat disturbed, however, by the untoward circumstances which occurred recently. If by any chance Mr Mills should upset our calculations and secure the verdict, our surprise will be tempered by the knowledge that it will be largely due to the advantages he gained over his opponent by reason of the unhappy tactics resorted to by some of that gentleman's supporters.

Gavin was 'heavily handicapped' by his years of service in local government, all 'sins of omission and commission' of the bodies on which he served being blamed on him, whereas Mills had 'just emerged from retirement clad in all the charm of novelty'.³³⁶

Mills had the nickname of 'Splodger'.³³⁷ Hopefully this was rhyming slang for codger, as in 'old codger', rather than meaning 'a lout, a rough countryman'.³³⁸ In a broadsheet published in Paeroa just before the election, 'Hotspur' called it the 'Electors' Welter Handicap' between 'Splodger' and 'Black Tom'.³³⁹

Splodger ... is an upstanding iron grey horse, showing plenty of bone. He stands well on his legs, but like all other Lancashire-bred horses he has a tremendous large hoof. He has a good neck and a large head, with small pricked ears, and is broad between the eyes, showing intelligence and determination. Splodger is a horse with plenty of backbone.

³³⁵ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 2 July 1898, p. 2.

³³⁶ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 5 July 1898, p. 2.

³³⁷ *Observer*, 27 July 1889, p. 17, 4 August 1894, p. 21.

³³⁸ Partridge, p. 1129; Jonathon Green, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang* (London, 1998), p. 1123.

³³⁹ See paper on Thomas Gavin for how he was portrayed.

In a race between them four years previously both horses had fallen at Lipsey's bridge, Splodger twisting 'his near hind hock, which has had the effect of making it very large'. In this allusion to Mills and the 'forged voucher', 'Hotspur' considered that 'this growth will not effect Splodger's galloping. His trainer told me that he was never fitter for a race since he left Lancashire'. The race with eight jumps in about two and a half miles was then described. For most of the distance Black Tom held the lead, but his horse took two attempts to get over the last jump, threw his rider, and Splodger was 'an easy winner by six lengths'.³⁴⁰ In reality, it was closer than that.

Election day was marked by 'the tameness of the proceedings', and marked by initial confusion about finding the polling station.

During the morning voters displayed no great anxiety to poll, and it was not until well into the afternoon that they began to roll up freely. Mr Mills, with characteristic thoroughness, had planted himself by the doorway of the public hall, a determination to see the struggle out to the bitter end written all over his strong anxious face. Later in the day, however, it was pleasant to observe the two opponents engaged, from time to time, in friendly conversation on political and general topics.

Mills, 'with his usual rugged independence, acted as his own polling clerk'. As the close of voting approached,

the excitement deepened, and all sorts of rumours went winging their way through the streets, Now it was Mr Mills who led, now Mr Gavin, but a strong accentuated impression seems to have got abroad after the poll was closed that the result, when it became known, would reveal how desperate the struggle between the two candidates had been. No one imagined, however, that such a slender majority would separate the victor from the vanquished.

For Mills had won, with 67 votes to 65.

When the poll was announced it was received with a spontaneous outburst of cheering from the successful candidate's numerous

³⁴⁰ 'Hotspur', 'The Electors' Welter Handicap. To be Run at Te Aroha on Tuesday, 5th inst.', (Paeroa, n.d. [July 1898]), Te Aroha Warden's Court, Newspaper Clippings 1895-1905, BBAV 11532/1a, ANZ-A.

friends and sympathisers; while, even his opponents, amongst whom this paper numbered itself amongst the most strenuous, could not withhold a meed of genuine admiration at the splendid fight the old politician had made of it. When the NEWS' special edition appeared, which it did within a few minutes of the result being known, the figures, in some quarters, were received with incredulity. All sorts of conjectures were hazarded as to the real reason of what many regarded as an unexpected reversal of public opinion; the consensus of belief being that some very powerful undercurrent of feeling must have been at work in the public mind to occasion the defeat of such a strong and acceptable candidate as Mr Thomas Gavin. Certainly the manner in which Mr Mills has conducted the campaign won him many friends, and now that the voice of the people has declared itself in his favour a general feeling of acquiescence in their decision is likely to result, an acquiescence in which all who have the true interests of the borough at heart must share.³⁴¹

The *Te Aroha News*' editorial had the 'duty to congratulate' Mills on his majority, 'albeit a small one', and to hope that his mayoralty would 'be accompanied with the blessings of an abundant prosperity. It would be unprofitable, nay more, it would be ungracious on our part to attempt to explain away the defeat our candidate sustained'. It was sure that Mills would extend 'the hand of sympathy' to Gavin.³⁴²

According to one observer, Mills' victory was 'a very popular one'.³⁴³ The voting did not reflect this statement, but, once elected, he did become more popular, and in November was re-elected unopposed.³⁴⁴

MAYOR

In January 1899 the *Thames Advertiser* predicted that Te Aroha would advance under Mills' leadership, for he was 'an enthusiast in municipal matters, and although he is an elderly man, he never seems happier than when in the midst of a pile of work'. As he would have a water supply operating in six months, 'with that energy for which he is so characteristic' he was planning to light the township using electric power.³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1898, p. 2.

³⁴² Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1898, p. 2.

³⁴³ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 30 July 1898, p. 21.

³⁴⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 November 1898, p. 2.

³⁴⁵ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 January 1899, p. 2.

Mills told Alfred Jerome Cadman, the Minister of Mines, that at the first two council meetings ‘we got through a lot of business in a most agreeable and harmonious manner, and I am satisfied that we have got the best local Body’ compared with its predecessor.³⁴⁶ This was just the honeymoon; ‘A Female Elector’ claimed that some standing in the election of councillors, four days after the mayoral contest, had ‘the avowed intention of being in opposition to the mayor’. She hoped that Mills, having won ‘in a fair fight’, would ‘get all reasonable support’.³⁴⁷ At the first council meeting, he made ‘a brief introductory speech’:

He said the Borough was now complete, and he was happy to meet them, much of the happiness and prosperity of the town would depend on their action, and he felt certain they would not neglect their duties. They should all recognise that their powers were equal, as no one (including the Mayor) had more power than another. They should consult with each other, before undertaking any work, or expending any money, and any one acting otherwise did so at his own responsibility. Of course there were certain exceptions, when prompt action to save property might be necessary, but on all ordinary occasions they should wait until their next meeting before taking action. If they observed this principle he had no doubt they would work harmoniously, and the town would prosper under their “aegis.”³⁴⁸

As feared, there were stormy scenes at some meetings. In 1933, it was recalled that David McLean Wallace, a blacksmith,³⁴⁹ had ‘vigorously thumped the table and said he didn’t care for Jimmy Mills, Mrs Mills or the whole Mills family’. Mills responded, ‘Tut, tut, tut, tut, Davy, don’t break the furniture!’³⁵⁰

With the loss of the local newspapers, full details of his work as mayor have not survived. During his term a water supply was provided for Te

³⁴⁶ James Mills to Minister of Mines, 25 July 1898, Mines Department, MD 1A, 8/50, Part 1, ANZ-W.

³⁴⁷ Letter from ‘A Female Elector’, *Te Aroha News*, 9 July 1898, p. 2.

³⁴⁸ Borough Council, *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1898, p. 2.

³⁴⁹ See paper on his life.

³⁵⁰ Recollection of F.W. Wild, *Te Aroha News*, 29 November 1933, p. 4; Wild mistakenly recalled this as having occurred on the town board, of which Wallace was never a member.

Aroha along with 'water power for Waiorongomai'.³⁵¹ Agreement to meet the cost of the water supply, estimated to cost £2,600, was carried by a majority of four.³⁵² Footpaths on the main street were tarred, a fire station and bell tower erected, and land for a borough endowment was secured on the western side of the river.³⁵³

At the end of 1899 Mills decided not to seek re-election as mayor, being unable to spare the time.³⁵⁴ His replacement, Edward Gallagher, at his first meeting moved that Mills be 'cordially thanked for the manner in which he had conducted affairs'.³⁵⁵ Mills remained on the council, and in January 1900 was involved in a squabble with Wallace after Gallagher recommended that the works committee become two committees, one for the waterworks and one for 'town purposes', each consisting of only one councillor.

Cr Mills: I consider to do that, it would be a risky procedure.

Cr Wallace: It is my opinion that one Councillor was quite sufficient, it was far better than have 2 or 3 as heretofore, as he considered the way the work had been carried out during the past 12 months was a disgrace, and no credit to the Council.... There had been a great deal of unnecessary messing and bungling, and said he considered Cr Mills was responsible for a lot of it. He considered the water-works –

Cr Mills here interjected a remark, and said he would like Cr Wallace to keep to the matter of electing the works committee, and not wander off talking of things in the past....

Cr Wallace: Object to two or three; because what was everybody's business was nobody's business.

Cr Mills took exception to these remarks, and said other boroughs had two or three on works committees, and he did not see why it should not work here.

Cr Wallace: It is your fault, Cr Mills, that things are mixed up as they are. If you had listened to me, and not snubbed people when they spoke, things would not be as they are now.

Cr Mills: Keep to the works committee.

³⁵¹ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2.

³⁵² *Thames Star*, 21 November 1898, p. 2; 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 17 December 1898, p. 22.

³⁵³ C.T. Harris, *Settlement and Development of the Upper Thames Valley, 1877-1937: Diamond Jubilee of the Piako County* (Te Aroha, 1937), p. 125.

³⁵⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 November 1899, p. 2.

³⁵⁵ Te Aroha Borough Council, Minutes of Meeting of 20 December 1899, Minute Book 1898-1911, p. 51, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

After only Gallagher and Wallace voted for the one-man committee, Mills was proposed for the committee, but instead moved an amendment with other names, including Wallace, who 'declined to act'. Mills commented that if Wallace refused 'to go on any of the Committees and do his share of the work he did not see why he should keep his seat on the Council'. After others criticized Wallace for not participating, he agreed to serve.³⁵⁶ Two months later, Mills voted against a proposal to extend the sewer from a swamp, where sewage created a health hazard, to the river.³⁵⁷

In 1902, Mills contested the mayoralty once more, against Samuel Luther Hirst, then an agent,³⁵⁸ who had just been elected mayor in place of his predecessor, who had resigned.³⁵⁹ Hirst, a councillor who opposed Mills politically,³⁶⁰ had stood for this post in the previous year.³⁶¹ A correspondent anticipated 'a good contest', with 'general opinion' expecting Hirst to win.³⁶² In fact, Mills was elected by 146 votes to 119.³⁶³ At his first meeting with the new council he said that 'owing to ill-health he had not been able to make a thorough study of the borough finances. He hoped to be able at next meeting to lay his views before his colleagues'.³⁶⁴ Once more, the destruction of the local newspaper for these years means that few details of his mayoralty have survived. That he was still quarrelsome was indicated in the minutes of the July meeting, when on the grounds that it was fresh business he refused to accept or to put a motion to establish a committee to define the duties of the clerk. The majority of councillors recorded their

³⁵⁶ Borough Council, *Te Aroha News*, 18 January 1900, p. 2.

³⁵⁷ Borough Council, *Te Aroha News*, 22 March 1900, p. 2.

³⁵⁸ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 828, 829; *New Zealand Herald*, 7 May 1934, p. 12.

³⁵⁹ *Thames Star*, 3 April 1902, p. 4, 18 April 1902, p. 2.

³⁶⁰ See Charles Ahier to William Fraser, 25 November 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

³⁶¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 April 1901, p. 34, 10 May 1901, p. 26.

³⁶² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 28 April 1902, p. 3.

³⁶³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 May 1902, p. 32.

³⁶⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 May 1902, p. 32.

protest against his 'obstruction of business'.³⁶⁵ Subsequently a special meeting had to be held to define these duties.³⁶⁶ In October, he

reported that he had collected the data necessary to enable the Council to consider the question of lighting the borough by electricity. In his opinion, if the business people would use it, electric light could be produced at a price within the use of all. There was ample water to provide the power needed.³⁶⁷

The following February, Mills convened a public meeting about reducing the number of councillors.

Compared with other boroughs, Te Aroha had an absurdly large number of councillors. It had nine councillors to a population of 900, whereas Auckland had 15 to a population of 40,000. On the Te Aroha basis Auckland should have a council of 400 members. Further, since the Domain had been taken over by the Government, the work to be done by councillors had been reduced by one-half.

On the motion of McIndoe, seconded by Gallagher, it was resolved to reduce the number to six.³⁶⁸ A meeting of townspeople agreed to this reduction, but when Mills moved to this effect in the council he suffered 'an overwhelming defeat'.³⁶⁹ In March illness prevented him chairing the monthly council meeting.³⁷⁰ In the April election, he did not stand as mayor, but was elected, unopposed, to the council.³⁷¹ At the first meeting of the new council, he welcomed his successor, and 'wished him a pleasant and prosperous term of office'; a unanimous and 'hearty vote of thanks' was then carried for his services of mayor.³⁷² Later that year, when a new election

³⁶⁵ Te Aroha Borough Council, Minutes of Meeting of 22 July 1902, Minute Book 1898-1911, p. 151, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

³⁶⁶ Te Aroha Borough Council, Minutes of Special Meeting of 29 July 1902, p. 151, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

³⁶⁷ Te Aroha Borough Council, *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 October 1902, p. 32.

³⁶⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 February 1903, p. 33.

³⁶⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 April 1903, p. 33.

³⁷⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 March 1903, p. 33.

³⁷¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 April 1903, p. 33.

³⁷² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 May 1903, p. 32.

was held because it had been decided to reduce the number of councillors, Mills did not stand.³⁷³

SUPPORTER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

Politics was one of Mills' main interests.³⁷⁴ An obituary noted that 'he brought the same beliefs and the same fighting qualities' he had displayed in English political conflicts 'out to New Zealand, and his career in Te Aroha was but a repetition, on a more restricted scale, of his earlier manhood'.³⁷⁵ As noted, he was a strong supporter of the Liberal Party and recognized as one of its most prominent advocates.³⁷⁶ In particular, he 'was a devoted admirer and supporter of Seddon'.³⁷⁷ He sought to raise the political consciousness of residents, as in the winter of 1885 when he urged the formation of a Social Club and Debating Society:

At the present time the only place that working men can afford for changing opinions and enjoying social chat is under some verandah, and certainly this mode is not very enjoyable in the present winter weather; and with many houses tenantless, it is only a matter of clubbing together and subscribing a few pence weekly to be able to meet and enjoy each others' society in comfort, and should the present hard times continue, the study of matters at present very much neglected, will be forced upon us with a pressure that will not be denied; for instance, the mode of raising and expending the public revenue. It is notorious that we are, or almost are, the most heavily taxed people in the world, and it is quite time the people, themselves, began to inquire why this is so. Also if the present mode of raising the taxes be either economical or fair, when a poor working man almost pays as much as a man with his thousands of acres of land; this, and many other questions might be debated, and conclusions on these matters arrived at and be enforced to our advantage. Whenever a general election come round, there are also many subjects of social importance, which might be debated with advantage; but if no other result accrued than the providing of a place for special

³⁷³ Te Aroha Borough Council, Minutes of Meeting of 29 July 1903, Minute Book 1909-1911, p. 187, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; *Waikato Times*, 15 July 1903, p. 2.

³⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1943, p. 3.

³⁷⁵ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 21 September 1910, p. 3.

³⁷⁶ For instance, *Te Aroha News*, 14 September 1905, p. 2.

³⁷⁷ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 21 September 1910, p. 3.

chat, and the passing comfortably of the tedious hours after tea, it would be worth the trouble. I shall be glad to take the names of all willing to join, and call a meeting if a sufficient number indicate their desire to join.³⁷⁸

Two weeks later, he convened a meeting to establish this club.³⁷⁹ He told the small number of interested men attending that it was 'very desirable' to form it

so that they could have some place to come together in the evenings to converse and discuss matters of interest, and were they so inclined could have a game of chess or draughts, see the local and provincial papers, and spend an hour or two comfortably, and in connection therewith it would be highly desirable to start a debating class.

They might 'be able to establish a branch mining school in a small way', and there were 'many questions it would be desirable to' debate.

Politics were now at a very low ebb. The question of taxation especially deserved consideration as it at present weighed very unjustly on some classes. He should be glad often times, if there was an opportunity afforded, of giving his own ideas on these matters, and for others to do the same. There were many other subjects requiring attention. Notably, the need of co-operation. The speaker here gave at length very interesting details of the rise, progress, and most remarkable success of Co-operative Societies in England, and gave statistics showing what a tremendous power they had become, to the special advantage of the consumers connected therewith. He had been connected with the societies for years in the old country, and could speak from experience of the great benefit and success they had proved, and they were remarkable examples of what could be done by associated effort.

He was elected to the committee to draw up the new club's rules.³⁸⁰ A member of the first committee,³⁸¹ he gave the first talk, on co-operation, which 'was listened to with great interest. The facts placed before the audience were most striking and of great importance, as showing what can

³⁷⁸ Letter from James Mills, *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1885, p. 7.

³⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 1 August 1885, p. 7.

³⁸⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7.

³⁸¹ *Te Aroha News*, 15 August 1885, p. 2.

be done by united action'. He promised to give the next talk, on taxation,³⁸² but the newspaper chose not to report it. He also used the club as a forum to criticize the domain board.³⁸³ There were no further reports of Mills speaking to it, and it soon faded away. A member of the Working Men's Club in the 1890s, he was vice-chairman at one of its dinners and socials.³⁸⁴ In 1894, ' "Plugging" or the "Mill Stream Dammed" by Splodger' was reportedly 'the latest addition' to this club's 'literature',³⁸⁵ clearly a broadsheet or similar that has not survived.

In 1886, when questioning the local Member of Parliament, he supported legislation establishing the eight-hour day and wanted taxation removed from 'the necessities of life' and replaced with a property tax.³⁸⁶ He actively canvassed for the Liberal candidate in the 1887 election.³⁸⁷ When an Irish delegate visited in 1889 to advocate Home Rule, Mills greeted him, was amongst those seated on the platform, and moved the vote of thanks.³⁸⁸

In 1891 he was active in getting William Fraser elected for the *Te Aroha* seat.³⁸⁹ He condemned all Fraser's opponents, considering that Sir William Buller's standing against another Liberal was 'cowardly from a comrade in arms'.³⁹⁰ His letter prompted responses that it was 'a hash of mis-statements and distorted facts' and a 'characteristic effusion, Mr Mills being a somewhat smaller edition of statesman of the Hon. Richard Seddon type'.³⁹¹ Mills continued to be cynical about why Buller would stoop to be a candidate, claiming he was not a sincere supporter of the government. Being a lawyer, Buller 'practiced with success to himself, and most likely to the tribe of land grabbers. I don't think the poor Maoris benefited much by

³⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 22 August 1885, p. 7.

³⁸³ *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1885, p. 7.

³⁸⁴ *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1893, p. 5; *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 June 1894, p. 22.

³⁸⁵ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 4 August 1894, p. 21.

³⁸⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 8 May 1886, p. 7.

³⁸⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 3 September 1887, p. 2.

³⁸⁸ *Waikato Times*, 12 November 1889, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1889, pp. 2, 7.

³⁸⁹ For example, *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 July 1891, p. 21.

³⁹⁰ Letter from James Mills, *Te Aroha News*, 4 July 1891, p. 2, press cutting in Sir William Buller Papers, MS-Papers-0048, folders 34-39, Micro 0686-06, Alexander Turnbull Library.

³⁹¹ Letters from 'Fairplay' and 'Independent Elector', *Te Aroha News*, 8 July 1891, p. 2, press cutting in Sir William Buller Papers, MS-Papers-0048, folders 34-39, Micro 0686-06, Alexander Turnbull Library.

his success, and no doubt they very often succeeded in losing both money and land'.³⁹² When chairing one of Fraser's meetings he made a 'bitter attack on the press throughout the colony as being worked in the interests of capitalists'.³⁹³ He chaired a subsequent banquet for Fraser.³⁹⁴ The following month, he asked Fraser to obtain government advertisements for the *Te Aroha News*, because Ilott's replacement was a Liberal supporter. In an apparent reference to party politics, he told Fraser that 'things' were 'awfully stagnant up here at present' and that he was trying to publicize the Liberal cause.³⁹⁵ Charles Ahier told Fraser that Mills, a 'steadfast' Liberal, had 'made a few enemies' amongst the local Tories through his 'disinterested devotion to the Liberal cause'.³⁹⁶ Seddon described him as 'a good man reliable and firm friend to our party'.³⁹⁷ At the end of this year he was asked to help Fraser and the engineer in charge to select workers for constructing the railway line to Paeroa.³⁹⁸ In 1892 he was appointed a justice of the peace.³⁹⁹

In 1893, according to a critic, Mills went around 'showing a letter from Mr Cadman, marked "strictly private," asking his advice as to what show he had for Waikato, and who elected himself a delegate' to a Liberal conference at Hamilton.⁴⁰⁰ Over the next couple of years he was involved in a controversy with William Herbert Herries, a political opponent,⁴⁰¹ about Thompson's Track. After providing Cadman with press clippings about local body actions, in May 1894 Mills provided the press with the copy of

³⁹² Letter from James Mills, *Te Aroha News*, 8 July 1891, p. 2, press cutting in Sir William Buller Papers, MS-Papers-0048, folders 34-39, Micro 0686-06, Alexander Turnbull Library.

³⁹³ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 October 1891, p. 2.

³⁹⁴ *Waikato Times*, 20 October 1891, p. 2.

³⁹⁵ James Mills to William Fraser, 22 November 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

³⁹⁶ Charles Ahier to William Fraser, 25 November 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

³⁹⁷ R.J. Seddon to John McKenzie (Minister of Lands), 2 December 1891 (telegram), Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

³⁹⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1891, p. 2.

³⁹⁹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 11 February 1892, p. 296.

⁴⁰⁰ A Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1893, p. 5.

⁴⁰¹ See R.S. and D.C. Herries, *Memoir of Sir William Herries K.C.M.G.* (London, 1925); for the period of his conflicts with Mills, see pp. 6-10.

Cadman's letter assuring him that the money was still available should they take appropriate action. Cadman also pointed out 'that while a squabble of this sort is going on, it is only natural to expect that the Minister of Lands will not do much in the matter'.⁴⁰² In March 1895 Herries claimed that the improved track would, 'for the present', be only eight feet wide, which would be useless, and went against Cadman's promise of a coach road. Mills, who had 'known all along' that it would only be this width, had informed Herries that it would be widened afterwards, a more expensive method, which Herries condemned as being a waste of public money.⁴⁰³ Cadman, when visiting Te Aroha, explained that there were insufficient funds to make a coach road and the narrower track would 'open through communication as speedily as possible'; he was confident that money to widen it would be obtained later.⁴⁰⁴ Herries repeated that the narrower track was a waste of money, and said that nobody at Te Aroha, apart from Mills and Gavin, knew it was to be made.⁴⁰⁵ The *Te Aroha News* regretted that Herries had 'overlooked' its report that Cadman was to spend £1,500 opening up the track 'by repairing and continuing the present formation, and widening as much as the money will do'.⁴⁰⁶ Mills denied having 'known all along, nor do I know now, that it was to be only 8ft wide. Perhaps Mr Herries will have the courtesy to give his authority for this tarradiddle'.⁴⁰⁷ Herries responded sardonically:

I should have thought that when Thompson's track was mentioned Mr Mills would hardly have dared show his face, however, as he had appeared and asked a question, I gladly answer it. My authority is J. Mills, Esq, J.P. Mr Mills may remember a conversation we had about the track at the Te Aroha races. He certainly spoke then as if he knew the track was only going to be made 8ft wide in the commencement. It appears, however, that he denies this now, and I must perforce accept his statement.

He noted that Cadman had told the *Te Aroha News* that it would be this width at first.

⁴⁰² *Bay of Plenty Times*, 18 May 1894, p. 4.

⁴⁰³ Letter from W.H. Herries, *Te Aroha News*, 23 March 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 27 March 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁵ Letter from W.H. Herries, *Te Aroha News*, 30 March 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁶ Editorial Note, *Te Aroha News*, 30 March 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁷ Letter from James Mills, *Te Aroha News*, 30 March 1895, p. 2.

Mr Mills, however, says he knew nothing about it. Mr Cadman, therefore, told your reporter a thing that he concealed from Mr Mills. Two alternatives present themselves. Either Mr Cadman is not straightforward, which I am loath to believe; or else Mr Mills is not quite so much in the confidence of the Government as he would have us believe.

Herries suggested that Mills' supporters 'subscribe his expenses', as they did for a 'former memorable trip', so that he could inspect the work and see how the government was wasting public money.⁴⁰⁸ (This 'memorable trip' was the occasion of the 'forged voucher'.) The issue of the newspaper containing Mills' reply has not survived. It included the claim that Herries had not answered a question, which Herries insisted he had and was 'quite prepared to leave the matter to the judgment' of the readers. He charged Mills with not answering his statements and with drawing 'a red herring across the scent' by referring to Herries' initial point about the track as first formed by the Tauranga County Council. Mills, he wrote, was 'the first, and I hope the last to find fault with a man for not giving away his land to the first comer that asks for it'. Mills 'does not act on this principle, but takes care that his services, such as they are, shall be well paid for, as the unsuspecting ratepayers nearly found to their cost. It is sickening to find a man posing as a patriot and sending in his bill in the end'. He concluded by describing the whole issue as a 'paltry electioneering dodge'.⁴⁰⁹ Mills responded that Herries' reply contained 'a lot of fudge and flapdoodle' about the government and the Liberal Party which had nothing to do with whether he had known about the width of the track. 'When I disputed his assertion to that effect, he accepted my denial, and then made another statement relative to a conversation on the Te Aroha racecourse, equally untruthful'. He denied expecting Herries to give his land away, and reminded him that 'mud slinging is not argument, and that my being a J.P. does not prove his statement to be true, any more than if he had stated that I had swallowed a baby'. As for Herries advocating the track in the council, 'he might have added and got paid for it. Of course a turnip grower has a right to get paid; but a carpenter, ah! that is an apple of another tree'. As for red herrings and paltry electioneering dodges, he understood that

⁴⁰⁸ Letter from W.H. Herries, *Te Aroha News*, 3 April 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁹ Letter from W.H. Herries, *Te Aroha News*, 10 April 1895, p. 2.

Herries intended contesting the Waikato seat for ‘the national ass’ and wished him ‘all the luck he deserves’.⁴¹⁰

Herries then asked why Mills’ friends did ‘not look after him better and prevent him from writing such hopelessly idiotic letters’. He asked Mills to disprove that the government was wasting money by constructing a track only eight feet wide, prove that it would be widened, and prove that Herries was paid for advocating the track in the council.⁴¹¹ Mills declined ‘to take notice of his silly challenges; they are no business of mine, any more than if he were to challenge me to prove that the moon is made of green cheese’. As for stating that Herries was ‘well paid’ for advocating the track in the council, ‘I did not say he was well paid, and he does not say he is not paid, when he does I will answer him’. He then implied that Herries, before being elected, had gone around to ‘booze up the electors’ and had warned those who refused to vote for him that he would use his position against them. Despite having promised to do his best for Te Aroha, he had proposed the reduction of the council subsidy to the town board; and ‘the road from the Wairakau gate to his own place’ was in ‘better condition’ than any other part of it. Finally, one (unspecified) action would mean ‘a goodly sum of money’ would not come to Te Aroha each year and would be ‘a serious loss to a good many hard working people’.⁴¹² Herries replied to this ‘intemperate letter’ that, as he was elected unopposed for a second term on the council, he did not care ‘twopence for what Mr Mills says or thinks about me’.⁴¹³ At this point, the editor decided that this exchange had gone on for quite long enough: ‘as no good purpose can possibly be served by further prolonging the matter it must now cease’.⁴¹⁴

On patriotic issues, Mills was thoroughly orthodox. In 1885, when chairing a public dinner, he proposed the first toast, to Queen Victoria. She ‘had proved herself a true mother of the people over whom she reigns, and whose best interests she had ever sought to promote, and nothing could ever be proved against her domestic virtues. She was deserving of the respect and affection of the people’.⁴¹⁵ During the Boer War, he was on the

⁴¹⁰ Letter from James Mills, *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1895, p. 2.

⁴¹¹ Letter from W.H. Herries, *Te Aroha News*, 17 April 1895, p. 2.

⁴¹² Letter from James Mills, *Te Aroha News*, 20 April 1895, p. 2.

⁴¹³ Letter from W.H. Herries, *Te Aroha News*, 24 April 1895, p. 2.

⁴¹⁴ Editorial Note, *Te Aroha News*, 24 April 1895, p. 2.

⁴¹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 2.

committee raising money for the Patriotic War Fund.⁴¹⁶ Shortly afterwards, at a meeting of the Transvaal War Fund, in the absence of the mayor he was elected to the chair.⁴¹⁷

The only time it was rumoured that Mills was to stand for parliament was in 1899.⁴¹⁸ Three months after this rumour was first reported, when 'a strong requisition waited on' him at Paeroa to ask him to be nominated he responded that he had 'not definitely decided' whether to contest the Ohinemuri seat.⁴¹⁹ A 'strong requisition' at Te Aroha asking him to stand was told he had not decided.⁴²⁰ In mid-November, he denied ever considering standing.⁴²¹ He chaired an election meeting of an independent Liberal,⁴²² which may have been a courtesy but also may have indicated discontent with some government policies. When Seddon visited in 1898, Mills, 'an old acquaintance', had been 'the first to welcome the distinguished visitor',⁴²³ but according to an obituary he had been a personal friend of Seddon 'but fell out ... owing to a misunderstanding in his latter days'.⁴²⁴

RELIGION

When his daughter Ellen married in 1886, the ceremony was held in the Te Aroha registry office.⁴²⁵ In the following year, when his 20-year-old daughter Mary Alice and a grandson were baptized into the Church of England, her sponsors were her father-in-law and mother-in-law, not her father and stepmother.⁴²⁶ When asked before giving evidence in court in 1893 'if he believed in an Almighty Being', Mills 'said he would prefer to make an affirmation' instead of swearing an oath on the Bible, and did

⁴¹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 11 January 1900, p. 2.

⁴¹⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 1 February 1900, p. 2.

⁴¹⁸ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 10 June 1899, p. 2; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 9 September 1899, p. 2.

⁴¹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 20 September 1899, p. 2.

⁴²⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 September 1899, p. 2.

⁴²¹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 15 November 1899, p. 2.

⁴²² *Auckland Weekly News*, 17 November 1899, p. 11.

⁴²³ *Te Aroha News*, 12 April 1898, p. 2.

⁴²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2.

⁴²⁵ Marriage Certificate of Ellen Mills, 30 March 1886, 1886/358, BDM.

⁴²⁶ Church of England, Hamilton East District, Register of Baptisms 1879-1908, nos. 109, 110, Anglican Diocesan Archives, Hamilton.

so.⁴²⁷ Two years later, when he was in the Thames hospital, no religion was recorded.⁴²⁸ He was given an Anglican funeral,⁴²⁹ probably reflecting his children's religious beliefs, not his own.

A QUARRELSOME PERSONALITY

An obituary noted that his life had been 'spent in strenuous fighting for the truth as he knew it'.⁴³⁰ Many examples of his sharp tongue and quickness to anger have been given. One particularly dramatic consequence already touched on was when, in 1893, after a controversy over his actions on the domain board, he was charged with using 'provoking and insulting language' to Alfred Bossons.⁴³¹ Once again, details of the rows that preceded this are not known because of the loss of the local newspaper, but, as the Hamilton newspaper noted, it was 'rather unique' for a justice of the peace to be so charged. In the course of an argument in the Working Men's Club, Mills had called Bossons a liar and 'was only saved from being assaulted by the interference of some persons present'. Bossons' counsel read out Mills' letters to the *Te Aroha News* 'in which he impugned defendant's respectability, and stated that he considered it a degradation to represent such a man'. Bossons was supported by four witnesses, one of them being Gotz, who later revived the scandal of the 'forged voucher' when Mills first stood for mayor. Mills' counsel stated that Mills had 'received great provocation from Mr Bossons, who was one of a set of local politicians who were bent on persecuting Mr Mills, and driving him from public life'. He cited Mills' letters to the newspaper 'to show that Mills' personalities had elicited replies equally offensive'. During the luncheon adjournment, counsel for both sides conferred, resulting in Mills, 'in view of his public position as a J.P.', consenting 'to being bound over, he having acted hastily. His Worship said he thought it was a very proper way to settle a most unpleasant business' and ordered that he keep the peace for three months, his recognizance being £10 with one surety for the same amount. He 'hoped it would be a lesson' to Mills, 'who, as a public man and a Justice of the

⁴²⁷ *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1893, p. 5.

⁴²⁸ Thames Hospital, Admissions Register 1884-1901, folio 67, YCAH 14075/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴²⁹ Death Certificate of James Mills, 17 September 1910, 1910/4504, BDM.

⁴³⁰ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 21 September 1910, p. 3.

⁴³¹ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 35/1893, BCDG 11220/1a, ANZ-A.

Peace, should set an example to others'. Costs were not sought against him because he 'had now expressed regret for what had happened. The case excited a large amount of interest, the court house being crowded during the hearing'.⁴³²

Mills' conflicts with Ilott have also been noted. One petty example was his opposing the payment of £5 7s 6d owed by the town board to the *Te Aroha News*. When this and other small payments were considered, he moved that 'only those items which the present Board had ordered be passed, and for the balance they could do as they liked – sue for it; by so doing they would then know if Mr Ilott, (who was a member of the Board when the debt was contracted) was a partner in the paper, and if so he could not claim it.' Gallagher, the chairman, 'thought they had better pass the account, and not stir up any bother of this kind'. Mills continued to protest, but it was agreed to, despite Mills' 'emphatic "No" when it was put to the meeting'.⁴³³

Despite his quickness to attack, he also helped those in need. For instance, in 1893 he assisted (unsuccessfully) a poor man's claim for a land grant.⁴³⁴ He was elected president when a chess club was formed in 1899;⁴³⁵ a better channel for his aggressive instincts?

HEALTH

One possible reason for his irascible temperament may have been ill health. He had left England because of his health;⁴³⁶ the precise nature of the problem was unstated, but an obituary stated that in his twenties 'he met with a severe accident, the consequences of which he bore all his long life'.⁴³⁷ In 1892, when returning from working on a culvert of the new railway line to Paeroa, he 'met with a painful accident. The road, or rather track from the line to the main road, was very rough indeed, and in driving along one of the wheels of the buggy got into a hole', resulting in his being 'thrown out, falling on his left shoulder. The top of the collarbone was

⁴³² *Waikato Times*, 19 October 1893, p. 5.

⁴³³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 14 February 1889, p. 2.

⁴³⁴ Applications for Land Grants, 1889-1892, no. 636, Lands and Survey Department, LS 66/7, ANZ-W.

⁴³⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 September 1899, p. 23.

⁴³⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1943, p. 3.

⁴³⁷ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 21 September 1910, p. 3.

broken and the shoulder dislocated'. The *Te Aroha News* was 'glad' to report that he would 'soon be able to be about again, and beyond being unable to do any work for about a couple of weeks or so, will be none the worse for the mishap'.⁴³⁸

When inspecting Thompson's Track in 1894, exposure 'brought on an old complaint, and a long period of sickness was the result'.⁴³⁹ The following year, he consulted a Thames doctor, having 'been in indifferent health for some time past'.⁴⁴⁰ He spent over a month in the Thames hospital recovering from dyspepsia.⁴⁴¹ The *Te Aroha News* was 'pleased to see' him 'once more in our midst', cured.⁴⁴² The cure turned out not to be permanent, for one year later he was afflicted with a 'deranged liver', and was admitted to the Waikato hospital 'suffering from the complaint for which he was treated at the Thames Hospital some time ago'.⁴⁴³ Three weeks later, he was discharged.⁴⁴⁴ His illness, and the ill humour it must have caused, may have been an important reason why he was not elected to the town board three weeks after his discharge.⁴⁴⁵ In his last years, he suffered from heart disease.⁴⁴⁶

PRIVATE LIFE

The incomplete information available about Mills' private life raises more questions than can be answered. In June 1852, when he was aged 18, he married Ellen Wilson in Rochdale. Also aged 18, she was unable to sign her name; and, curiously, Mills' father's name and occupation was not recorded.⁴⁴⁷ They were to have seven children between 1853 and 1867.⁴⁴⁸

⁴³⁸ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 4 August 1892, p. 2.

⁴³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 28 June 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 July 1895, p. 22.

⁴⁴¹ Thames Hospital, Admissions Register 1884-1901, folio 67, YCAH 14075/1a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 14 August 1895, p. 2, 17 August 1895, p. 2..

⁴⁴² *Te Aroha News*, 14 August 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁴³ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 8 August 1896, p. 4; *Waikato Times*, 8 August 1896, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁴ *Waikato Argus*, 1 September 1896, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁵ *Waikato Argus*, 17 September 1896, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁶ Death Certificate of James Mills, 17 September 1910, 1910/4504, BDM.

⁴⁴⁷ Marriage Certificate of James Mills, 4 June 1852, copy provided by Barbara Cribb to Philip Hart, 15 March 2017, email; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 830.

According to Mills' death certificate, after Ellen's death (at an unspecified date) and shortly before leaving for New Zealand in 1879, when aged 46 he married Annie Tilley, age unknown.⁴⁴⁹ But his first wife had not died, and would live on into the twentieth century.⁴⁵⁰ And did he remarry? No marriage was recorded in either England or New Zealand,⁴⁵¹ but what was recorded was that he had died in Lancashire in 1877. Further, far from Ellen having died, his 'widow', as she was recorded in the 1881 census, was then living with her son Abraham and her four youngest children in Oldham.⁴⁵² So a remarriage would have been bigamous; but in New Zealand his having a wife named Annie rather than Ellen meant nothing to fellow colonists and would not have caused legal complications. Once settled in Te Aroha with Annie (whose date of arrival in New Zealand, like that of Mills, has not been traced), Mills sent for his two youngest daughters.⁴⁵³ Along with their youngest brother Robert, they arrived in 1884 'on the maiden voyage of one of the early steam ships'.⁴⁵⁴ So did their mother really believe that Mills had died in 1877? Was it after the English census was taken in 1881 that she realized (or was told) that he was still alive? Why did she allow them to leave her and join their father on the other side of the world? The fact that they joined him is proof that he was indeed their father and most certainly had not died in 1877. But did she know that he was living with another woman and calling her his wife?

By coincidence, in July 1894 there were two deaths in New Zealand of males named Arthur Thomas Mills. In July, a baby with this name died after having lived for only 20 minutes.⁴⁵⁵ On 29 October, the second with this name drowned when the S.S. 'Wairarapa' was wrecked on Great Barrier Island with the loss of 126 passengers and crew.⁴⁵⁶ His death

⁴⁴⁸ Archway.co.uk; Barbara Cribb, 'Extract containing information of James Mills', 1997 typescript provided by Barbara Cribb to Philip Hart, 15 March 2017, email.

⁴⁴⁹ Death Certificate of James Mills, 17 September 1910, 1910/4504, BDM.

⁴⁵⁰ Ancestry.co.uk.

⁴⁵¹ Ancestry.co.uk; Marriage Indexes, BDM.

⁴⁵² Ancestry.co.uk.

⁴⁵³ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1943, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁴ Marriage Certificate of Charles Cribb and Ellen Mills, 30 March 1886, 1886/358, BDM; *New Zealand Herald*, 28 February 1884, p. 4; *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1943, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁵ Death Certificate of Arthur Thomas Mills, 15 July 1894, 1894/4576, BDM.

⁴⁵⁶ See Steve Locker-Lampson and Ian Francis, *Eight Minutes Past Midnight: The wreck of the s.s. Wairarapa* (Wellington, 1981).

certificate recorded nothing apart from his name, 'A. Mills', because the shipping company did not have any other details.⁴⁵⁷ A later description of 'bodies found and buried' included no. 41: 'Man, 24, very light hair, red moustache; rough tweed trousers, in brown squares, blue canvas suspenders, with white flowers worked in worsted; supposed to be Mills, of Te Aroha'.⁴⁵⁸ Annie Mills would identify him as Arthur Thomas Mills,⁴⁵⁹ who had lived in Te Aroha for an unknown length of time before having travelled to Sydney earlier in October en route for the Coolgardie goldfield but then making the fatal mistake of changing his mind and returning on the 'Wairarapa'. A Te Aroha correspondent, who gave Arthur's age as 20, described him as 'a most promising young man, and much liked by all who knew him'.⁴⁶⁰ His body was buried before his full details could be recorded on his death certificate; details that would have explained his parentage, for he was the only one of Mills' children whose birth was not recorded, either as Mills or as Tilley:⁴⁶¹ Tilley because that would have been his surname if he was Mills' and Annie Tilley's one and only illegitimate child. Born either in 1870 or 1874 (several years after the birth of Mills' last child by Ellen: does this indicate that their marital relations had ceased?), either Mills was his father or (much less likely) Mills had given his name a child by someone else. That Annie, not Mills, identified the body and that three years later she, not Mills, erected a tombstone on Great Barrier Island in his memory were the acts of a mother, not a stepmother; and indeed a newspaper report of its erection described her as Arthur's mother, not his stepmother.⁴⁶² The wording on the gravestone was mostly illegible when a crayon rubbing was made in 1959, and the only words that could be read were 'In affectionate remembrance' of 'Arthur Mills'.⁴⁶³ His existence must have been one very important reason why Mills decided to start a new life with a new 'wife' so far away from England (and most of his other children). It is not known when Arthur arrived in New Zealand; was he the A. Mills who landed in

⁴⁵⁷ Death Certificate of A. Mills, 29 October 1894, 1894/756, BDM.

⁴⁵⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 30 November 1894, p. 9.

⁴⁵⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 6 November 1894, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 6 November 1894, p. 6.

⁴⁶¹ Ancestry.co.uk.

⁴⁶² *Thames Advertiser*, 14 January 1897, p. 2.

⁴⁶³ Crayon rubbing of gravestone at Oneputu, Katherine Bay, Great Barrier Island, made on 1 September 1959, D-008-007, Alexander Turnbull Library.

Auckland from London in July 1886?⁴⁶⁴ One other unsolved and unsolvable question: when Mills brought his three youngest children to live with him in New Zealand, did they know that Arthur was their half-brother? And another question: what did they think about Mills pretending to be married to Annie Tilley?

When Mills died in 1910, it was recorded that he left four children, all by his first wife: two sons then aged 53 and 51 and two daughters aged 48 and 42.⁴⁶⁵ Of those who joined him in New Zealand, Robert's life has proved to be untraceable. In 1886, his daughter Ellen, aged 20, married Charles Cribb, a Waitoa labourer.⁴⁶⁶ They would have six sons, two of whom died when only a few months old.⁴⁶⁷ When Ellen died of pneumonia in 1895, leaving children aged from seven to two,⁴⁶⁸ a Waihou correspondent reported 'quite a gloom' being cast on this settlement.

The greatest sympathy has been expressed for Mr Cribb, who is left with four young children, and also with Mr and Mrs Mills in this fresh affliction. Fully two hundred settlers attended the funeral ... to show their respect for the departed. The Rev. Mr Evans officiated at the cemetery, and made feeling reference to the excellent qualities of the deceased, and to the fact that that day six months [ago] her brother had been lost on the Wairarapa.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 16 August 1886, Supplement, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁵ Death Certificate of James Mills, 17 September 1910, 1910/4504, BDM.

⁴⁶⁶ Marriage Certificate of Ellen Mills, 30 March 1886, 1886/358, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 3 April 1886, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁷ Church of England, Hamilton East District, Register of Baptisms 1879-1908, nos. 110, 172, 173, 252, 438, Anglican Diocesan Archives, Hamilton; Birth Certificates of Arthur Cribb, 27 December 1886, 1887/15027; Charles Harold Cribb, 17 February 1888, 1888/1555; Oswald Cribb, 29 June 1889, 1889/7981; Gerald Cribb, 1891/4102; James Cribb, 1892/1290; George William Cribb, 1894/12378; Death Certificates of Gerald Cribb, 5 June 1891, 1891/2332; George William Cribb, 1 January 1895, 1895/81; Arthur William Cribb, 1895/5878, BDM.

⁴⁶⁸ Death Certificate of Ellen Cribb, 27 April 1895, 1895/2775, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 1 May 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁹ Waihou Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 May 1895, p. 19.

Another daughter, Mary Alice, who had been born in July 1867, was married in Greymouth in 1888, when aged 21, to Thomas David Tierney,⁴⁷⁰ who had been a butcher at both Waiorongomai and Te Aroha.⁴⁷¹ According to her 1943 *Te Aroha News* obituary she had led a ‘retiring life’ but had a ‘keen interest in politics – the latter being in line with the main interests of her well-known father’.⁴⁷²

Like other fathers, Mills used his children as dummies for township sections: from 1883 onwards he was trustee for his daughters Ellen and Mary Alice and his son Robert when each leased a residence site.⁴⁷³

OLD AGE AND DEATH

Mills in old age was a respected figure. In 1908, the *Observer* asked ‘why so little news comes out of Te Aroha now-a-days? Nobody seems to have inherited the mana of Mills’.⁴⁷⁴ Just after his death, at a meeting of a committee organizing a celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the goldfield, McIndoe said that John Williams, a local merchant,⁴⁷⁵ had reminded him that they should recall ‘the death of their old friend’ Mills. ‘One of the pioneers’, he ‘had fought tooth and nail for Te Aroha and had spent his time and substance in the cause’. He was given credit for obtaining ‘the land of the borough as an endowment for the community. That work was the germ of the National Endowment Principle, with which they were now familiar, and Mr Mills was the author of it’.⁴⁷⁶

In late 1908 or early 1909, Mills recovered from an unspecified illness.⁴⁷⁷ He was in ‘failing health’ from then on, suffering from a heart

⁴⁷⁰ Marriage Certificate of Marie Alice Mills, 1888/1407; Death Certificate of Mary Alice Tierney, 12 September 1943, 1943/30824, BDM; Church of England, Hamilton East District, Register of Baptisms 1879-1908, no. 109.

⁴⁷¹ *Te Aroha News*, advertisement, 22 September 1883, p. 4, 8 December 1883, p. 3, advertisement, 15 December 1883, p. 8, 15 November 1884, p. 2, 20 December 1884, p. 2.

⁴⁷² *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1943, p. 3.

⁴⁷³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Gold Revenue Licenses 1882-1929, folios 65-66, BBAV 11495/1a, ANZ-A; Warden’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 20 March 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁴ *Observer*, 26 December 1908, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁵ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 831-832.

⁴⁷⁶ *Te Aroha Mail*, 29 October 1910, press cutting held in Te Aroha Library.

⁴⁷⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 18 February 1909, p. 2.

complaint.⁴⁷⁸ In September 1910, after being ‘in frail health for some considerable time’, he was ‘seized in a paralytic stroke’, then slightly improved before being sent to the Hamilton hospital, where he died ten days after the stroke, aged 76.⁴⁷⁹

The *Te Aroha News* recalled him as ‘a strenuous and remarkable character’, a ‘man of dogged determination and strength of character’, who worked day and night to attain his objectives, which were always for the public good.⁴⁸⁰ The chamber of commerce’s desire to erect a memorial presumably led to his tombstone being ‘erected by citizens of Te Aroha’.⁴⁸¹

His widow had been a bath attendant on the domain for six years until resigning to look after Mills shortly before his death; by then she was also in failing health.⁴⁸² In the following year she returned to England.⁴⁸³ She was one of the many women living in the district about whom almost nothing was recorded.

CONCLUSION

James Mills was one of the most noticeable members of the Te Aroha community; unavoidably so, for he expressed an opinion about and was actively involved in most local issues. His determined, even pugnacious, nature did not make him beloved by all, but he got things done, and by the narrowest of margins had the honour of being elected Te Aroha’s first mayor, and turned out to be a good one. But almost to the end he remained argumentative and not too subtle about the tactics he used to get his desired result.

APPENDIX

⁴⁷⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2; Death Certificate of James Mills, 17 September 1910, 1910/4504, BDM.

⁴⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 13 September 1910, p. 2, 15 September 1910, p. 2, 20 September 1910, p. 2; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 September 1910, p. 2; Death Certificate of James Mills, 17 September 1910, 1910/4504, BDM.

⁴⁸⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2.

⁴⁸¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 March 1911, p. 49; Tombstone of James Mills, Te Aroha Cemetery, Area A, Row 42.

⁴⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 8 October 1910, p. 2.

⁴⁸³ *Te Aroha News*, 13 May 1911, p. 2.

Figure 1: Photograph of James Mills in old age, n.d., Barbara Cribb Papers; used with permission.

