

DEVELOPING THE TE AROHA DISTRICT UNTIL c.1910

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Abstract: *When the Aroha Block was opened to Pakeha settlers, they found what to them was a wilderness with a great potential. Some of those seeking farms were miners, and as mining faded they encouraged the government to establish special farm settlements for them. But before the land's potential could be tapped, it had to be surveyed, purchased from the Crown (often using the deferred payment scheme, as at Te Aroha West), and drained, a process fraught with difficulties and, it was charged, incompetence. Some land speculators were attracted to the district because the new goldfield provided a market for produce. As it took years to construct good roads, the Waihou River was the main means of moving people and produce. Once the river was snagged and the swamps were drained, a new problem arose: silting, solved for a time by planting willows along its banks. Over time, bridges replaced punts, and in 1886 the railway arrived.*

After surviving harsh conditions when developing their land, farmers were able to provide a wide range of agricultural produce to local and regional markets. Kauri gum was dug, fleetingly, and the flax industry waxed and waned, but the arrival of dairying in the 1890s was an important step forward in the successful development of the district. In time, the first settlers could look back on their achievements and rejoice in the myth (and the reality) of the hardy pioneer.

TAMING THE WILDERNESS

In 1948, an early settler, who first arrived in the district as a boy in 1876, compared 'a dreary waste of almost impassable swamp and a few settlers clinging to the river-banks or small pieces of high ground' with its transformation 'into one of the most productive areas in New Zealand' with 'numerous dairy factories, good roads, smiling homesteads and progressive towns'.¹ Twelve years previously, the head teacher appointed to the Te Aroha school in 1899² had recalled the first time he climbed Bald Spur (Whakapipi to Maori) and looked down 'on a wilderness of tea-tree, raupo swamp and tussock, with here and there a patch of green where a farm had been established'.³ To Pakeha turning what they considered a wilderness

¹ Recollections of Frederick Marychurch Strange, *Te Aroha News*, 30 April 1948, p. 2.

² See paper on education.

³ Recollections of Alfred Fordyce Burton, *Te Aroha News*, 26 June 1936, p. 5.

into English-style farms was a triumph over both untamed Nature and Maori indolence.

From the beginning, the land around Te Aroha was seen as an asset to miners, just as the latter provided a valuable market for farmers. In 1878, the *Thames Advertiser* praised the quality of the land as ‘second to none in this colony’.

We have even greater faith in the productiveness of the soil from an agricultural and pastoral point of view than from its auriferous prospects. If there are any “piles” at Te Aroha, it is certain that the miner need not go far to find land on which to settle with his newly-acquired means, and which will amply repay the money and labour which may be bestowed upon them.⁴

A Hamilton journalist, writing shortly before goldfield opened, considered that ‘a populous’ one would ‘possess advantages that few goldfields have enjoyed’ by adjoining ‘one of the finest pastoral and agricultural countries it is possible to conceive’. Visitors described the land close to the ranges as ‘extraordinarily rich’.⁵ Shortly after the opening, a miner, John McCombie,⁶ described the Aroha Block and adjacent land as viewed from Prospectors’ Spur:

Immediately in front lie the numerous sections which have been cut up for disposal on the deferred-payment system. The greater portion of these have already been taken up, and the settlers are busily engaged getting their sections under cultivation, so as to comply with the requirements of the Act. To the south-west this block is bounded by the freehold properties of the Waitoa settlers, and in the distance can be seen their numerous homesteads dotting the plain in all directions, while still further away the famous Piako swamp is just discernible, with the top of the Maungatautari range rising a little on the left. Looking to the right of the deferred-payment block the visitor can see with one glance the whole of the lower portion of the Te Aroha swamp land stretching away to the west and north-west for several miles until it reaches the Thames Borough Endowment Reserve. It is this lower swamp land which the Government have made some attempt at draining.... Between the lower swamp land and the deferred-payment block runs the great highway from Te Aroha to Hamilton.... To the south and south-east of the deferred payment

⁴ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 February 1878, p. 2.

⁵ Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 November 1880, p. 9.

⁶ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

block lies the land recently purchased by Captain [William] Steele,⁷ on behalf of the Lincolnshire farmers,⁸ and beyond this again, away further eastward, lies the Waiharakeke block, and Mr [Josiah Clifton] Firth's Matamata estate⁹.... The land on [the west] side of the river is medium quality land only, and although it can very easily be brought under the plough, it will require a considerable amount of cultivation to bring it into first-class order. The natural herbage upon it is mostly fern and stunted heath, and, like the generality of this description of land, it will probably be found to be very sour at first, and consequently the first steps in commencing to cultivate it should be to get it into grass as quickly as possible, and that, too, without disturbing the soil too much. The land on the east bank of the river, comprising between 7000 and 8000 acres, is higher than that on the west bank, but much of this is also of a swampy character. That nearest the river is exactly similar to that on the opposite bank, but away from the river it falls in a gentle slope towards the hills, and after crossing a stretch of marshy ground, again rises rather quickly until it joins the steep sides of the mountain range. The land lying in the hollow, if it may so be called, between the high bank of the river and the hills, is mostly of good quality, and will be brought into cultivation without much trouble. Near the base of the hills there are several valleys of very rich land, judging from the natural vegetation.¹⁰

McCombie described the lands of the Thames High School Endowment at Waiorongomai,¹¹ and considered a Maori reserve between it and Te Aroha to be 'perhaps the best block of land in the district'. Nearly all its over 3,000 acres were 'of magnificent quality, and although nothing in the way of cultivation has been attempted, still much of it is covered with excellent pasture'.

Were it in the hands of some good settler, it would very soon be mostly under cultivation, and capable of carrying a large quantity of stock; but unless the natives are willing to lease it for a long

⁷ See *Descriptive Handbook to the Waikato* (Hamilton, 1880), pp. 26, 55-56; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 752; *Waikato Argus*, 22 September 1898, p. 2, 27 September 1898, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 September 1898, p. 10.

⁸ See paper on special settlements.

⁹ See paper on the Battery Company.

¹⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, 'Te Aroha District', *New Zealand Herald*, 1 December 1880, p. 6.

¹¹ See paper on this endowment.

term, it will very probably remain uncultivated, and in the end will be outstripped by the land of comparatively inferior quality which surrounds it, and remain a sad memorial of the folly of allowing the natives to select the cream of the land, and then permit them to treat it just as they think fit. There is one remark, which should have been made, and which to a more or less extent affects all the land on this the eastern bank of the Waihou, and that is the range of hills rises so high above the plain that in winter it is sometimes late in the day before the sun shines on the land at its base.

THE LOWER SWAMP LANDS

These are the lands which I have previously stated the Government have made some attempt at draining.... Although much of this land is swamp land, still it is of that class that, when drained, it will prove of excellent quality, and as there are several thousand acres of it, it should be looked upon as a valuable public estate....

PRIVATE LANDS

Besides the blocks of land which I have mentioned there are a number of smaller ones owned by private parties lying between Morgantown and Paeroa, on both sides of the river. Many of these are of good quality, and the owners are more or less taking steps towards bringing them under cultivation, so that in a few years the banks of the Waihou will be lined with green fields and meadows upon which numerous herds of cattle will be grazing.¹²

Further from Te Aroha, the land had been taken up by

hardy and energetic settlers, and although it is very doubtful if the soil is of any better quality, large tracts of land are laid down to grass, upon which herds of cattle can be seen everywhere grazing. The Waitoa and Piako settlers seem specially adapted for overcoming every kind of difficulty, and the natural result is, they are happy and prosperous. Following up the course of the Waihou river the visitor enters the magnificent estate owned by Mr J.C. Firth, of which so much has been written that it is needless to say more here. Beyond this again the Upper Thames valley stretches away in long reaches of excellent level land until it loses itself in the dim distance.¹³

¹² Te Aroha Correspondent, 'Te Aroha District', *New Zealand Herald*, 2 December 1880, p. 5.

¹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, 'The Te Aroha District', *New Zealand Herald*, 4 December 1880, p. 5.

Earlier reports of the first settlement emphasized the civilizing of a wasteland by Pakeha. In early 1877, a Hamilton correspondent travelled to the site of the future Te Aroha. At a farm near Waitoa he had 'a splendid view of a magnificent country', an 'immense plain' of 'first-class quality' land. 'Of course there are patches of second-class, as well as some of inferior quality, but the majority is really good, and must, no doubt, be some day a very populous district'.¹⁴ The following year, another reporter found that at Omahu a 'crude road' took him through land being 'extensively' cultivated.

I saw for the first time what energy and perseverance can do to drain and put under crop the low swampy lands of this extensive valley. For miles upon miles this road runs over what was till lately a wild, waste wilderness, where horses could not pass over, but which is now covered with green, blooming farms, knee-deep in grass and clover, with herds of cattle depasturing thereon. This trunk road will be carried on into the heart of Waikato, and may probably be the line of the future railway. I was recommended to visit Matamata, and, in doing so, rode over a new road cut by the settlers along the banks of the Waitoa River, a distance of about 12 miles. The whole of these lands are being put into cultivation by a class of wealthy and enterprising settlers.¹⁵

In mid-1879, an agricultural reporter described the first farms being established on the western side of the Waihou River:

It is a splendid district, with soil of excellent character. With the exception of the swamps, the land is mostly undulating, and some of this rolling land is covered with fine grass and clover, portions having been only surface-sown.... With proper treatment, it ought to produce good crops of either grain or roots; but at present beef, wool, and mutton are considered the most remunerative articles to produce. On some farms a great deal of work has been done, and much capital expended; others show signs of neglect or mismanagement.... It is of little use settling on these farms without plenty of capital, which, judiciously laid out, should in time pay good interest, the land being of a rich and fertile nature.

¹⁴ 'A Trip from Hamilton through Piako to the Thames Valley and Back Again', *Waikato Times*, 13 March 1877, p. 3.

¹⁵ A Correspondent, 'A Visit to the Waitoa', *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 May 1878, p. 16.

Some farms were amongst land still ‘in a wild state’, and one farmer had made the ‘great mistake’ of planting gorse for hedges.¹⁶ The best farm was owned by Joseph and Charles Gould.¹⁷ Between the Waitoa and Waihou Rivers a great deal of work had been done in the two years since settlement; contractors were clearing swamps, fences were being erected and grass sown, and some farmers were planting shelter belts. He described the Te Aroha Block, ‘about 50,000 acres’ and 15 miles long by five miles across. ‘A swamp runs through the entire length of it, probably 80 chains in width on an average. Each side is fern land, and one portion flax land. Not much bush is on the block’. He saw a surveying party of 22 men ‘laying the land off in blocks and roads’ in readiness for sale in lots of from 50 to 320 acres.

The block itself is regarded by those living in the vicinity as a splendid piece of country. It would, however, be greatly enhanced in value if, before it is offered for sale, a main drain were made through the centre of the swamp, and running the whole length of it. The stuff from the drain would make a road right through the block, and would drain a large portion of the swamp. Unless this is undertaken by the Government, if the land is about to be surveyed into small lots, it is difficult to see how it can be utilised by those who purchase, as small holders have not generally much capital to expend in draining. There is room on Te Aroha block for a large population, and I dare say, when it comes into the market, for some of the lots there will be keen competition. It is to be hoped that the greater portion of what may be offered will fall into the hands of *bona fide* settlers.¹⁸

Others agreed: a typical anticipation was that the district would, ‘at no distant day, be regarded amongst the fairest and wealthiest in New Zealand’.¹⁹ The first drains in Piako had revealed the qualities of the peat swamps, and many potential settlers preferred swamp to dry land.²⁰ Visitors in February 1880 heard ‘talk on all sides of people waiting to take up the available land on deferred payments’, and expected that within a few years ‘a large and thriving population’ would ‘transform the present

¹⁶ ‘Agricola’, ‘Ten Days in Waikato’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 June 1879, p. 13.

¹⁷ See paper on Charles Gould.

¹⁸ ‘Agricola’, ‘Ten Days in Waikato’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 June 1879, p. 13.

¹⁹ ‘The Opening of the Upper Thames’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 August 1879, p. 8.

²⁰ C.T. Harris, *Settlement and Development of the Upper Thames Valley, 1877-1937: Diamond Jubilee of the Piako County* (Te Aroha, 1937), p. 73.

wilderness into smiling homesteads'. Once improved it would be 'a grand country, and having such a splendid natural position would rapidly outstrip other more settled districts in importance and progress'.²¹

SELLING LAND FOR FARMS

In December 1878, after visiting the Aroha Block, Stephenson Percy Smith, the chief surveyor in Auckland, informed the Surveyor General that there was 'perhaps more dry land' on the eastern bank of the river but it was 'not extensive, the Native Reserves having taken up a large portion'. On the western bank the swamps were 'not bad - their average depth as far as I had an opportunity of observing being about 3 to 4 feet with a good clay or pumacious bottom'. As they needed to be drained to be suitable for small farms, he suggested the government dig main drains before selling the land.²² Laurence Cussen,²³ in charge of the detailed surveying of the block, told Smith that about three quarters of the land being surveyed on the western bank was 'swamp inaccessible in its present state for horses or cattle, and there being no natural outlets through the swamps, most of the sections it would be impossible for occupiers to drain, unless a general system of main outlet drains is adopted'. Eighteen miles of drains were needed.²⁴ Smith agreed, for increasing the value of the land by drainage meant a profit of at least £2,100. Government drains would let families of 'moderate circumstances' populate the area, whereas if sold undrained the land would 'in a great measure be taken up for speculative purposes, in large Blocks, or not sold at all'.²⁵

In January 1879, John Sheehan, the Native Minister, assured impatient Thames residents that the government planned to sell all the Aroha Block by mid-year. He would ask the Crown Lands Board to employ

²¹ 'A Trip from Tauranga to Te Aroha', *Bay of Plenty Times*, 14 February 1880, p. 3.

²² S. Percy Smith to Surveyor General, 13 December 1878, Te Aroha Block, Lands and Survey Department, LS 1/2344, ANZ-W.

²³ See *Auckland Star*, 15 December 1884, p. 4, letter from 'Argus', 6 August 1888, p. 2, 3 July 1901, p. 8; *Otago Daily Times*, 12 June 1895, p. 2; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 178, 1017.

²⁴ Laurence Cussen (District Surveyor) to S. Percy Smith, 26 May 1879, Te Aroha Block, Lands and Survey Department, LS 1/2344, ANZ-W.

²⁵ S. Percy Smith to Surveyor General, 12 June 1879, Te Aroha Block, Lands and Survey Department, LS 1/2344, ANZ-W.

additional staff 'to facilitate' surveying.²⁶ Three months later, the Thames morning paper early in April noted that the 30 surveyors at work meant the land would soon be ready for sale, but as the boundaries of the Maori reserves still had to be fixed', it feared these reserves might 'lock up the best of the land' because Maori were 'claiming nearly the entire river frontage, where, of course, the cream of the land is situated'. This would be 'unfair to the Government, and very much depreciate the value of the block'. With Maori reserves on the 'choicest' portion and £10,000-worth of land set aside to endow the high school, it feared 'a great deal of the land for public occupation will be of an inferior description'. If the government wanted a 'handsome' price, Maori should not be permitted to 'monopolise the very best part' and deprive the sections sold without a frontage to the river. It wanted an early sale, for there were 'numerous applicants'.²⁷

These worries were soon eased by news that Maori would not obtain all the best land.²⁸ Nearly four months later another editorial asked who was to blame for the land being 'still locked up'. For years Thames residents had been promised it would be open for selection shortly, 'until many of the inhabitants have been driven from the district' because they could not obtain land, and yet private persons had obtained title to sections near Te Aroha in months whereas the government could not despite years of negotiations.²⁹ In October, when private landowners were preparing to sell sections in their proposed townships of Ruakaka, near the future Te Aroha, and Waihou, across the river, the government had not even revealed the site of its proposed township, thereby 'keeping capital out of the district'.³⁰ Two months later, the Thames Land Association applied to the Waste Lands Board for 20,000 acres of the block for settlement under the deferred payment system.³¹

In November, the Te Aroha storekeeper and publican, George Stewart O'Halloran,³² noted the government's excuse for not opening the land was

²⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 January 1879, p. 3.

²⁷ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 April 1879, p. 2.

²⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1879, p. 3, 19 April 1879, p. 3.

²⁹ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 2 August 1879, p. 2.

³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 October 1879, p. 2, 9 October 1879, p. 2, Te Aroha Correspondent, 15 October 1879, p. 3.

³¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 December 1879, p. 2, 18 December 1879, p. 2, 22 December 1879, p. 2.

³² See paper on his life.

that it had to dig drains to ensure a better price. ‘Well, to my knowledge, the drains are laid off, and in most cases the levels taken. Why are tenders not called for? Labour is cheap, and I am sorry to say numbers of good men are knocking about looking for work’.³³ On 1 January 1880, the *Thames Advertiser* published O’Halloran’s report about the quiet Christmas holidays at Te Aroha; ‘we are looking forward anxiously to see the Thames people, who have for so long been asking for lands in this locality, gratified’, as the few pioneers were ‘languishing for mates’.³⁴ This languishing soon ended. In March 1878, there had been 447 Pakeha living in the Piako County, 190 of them in the Piako Riding.³⁵ By April 1881, 981 lived in the county, of whom 301 lived in the Piako and Waitoa districts.³⁶ There were 2,320 by 1886, 1,203 living in the Te Aroha Riding.³⁷ Population growth then slowed considerably: in 1891 2,517 lived within the boundaries of the county, 1,016 of whom were in Te Aroha Riding; five years later there were 1,049 in the riding, 377 in the country portion and 672 in the Te Aroha Township District.³⁸ (These figures do not reveal the development of agriculture because no details were given for areas smaller than the county, whose boundaries stretched from slightly to the north of Te Aroha almost to Cambridge and as far as the future town of Tokoroa, thereby including such large farms as Firth’s Matamata Estate.³⁹ Census figures, therefore, are not used for tracing the growth of farming.)

In January 1880 it was announced that the Aroha block would at last be sold.⁴⁰ In the middle of the month, a trip from Thames to Te Aroha for

³³ Upper Thames Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 November 1879, p. 2.

³⁴ Upper Thames Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 January 1880, p. 2.

³⁵ *Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand, taken for the night of the 3rd of March, 1878* (Wellington, 1880), pp. 23, 234.

³⁶ *Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand, taken for the night of the 3rd of April, 1881* (Wellington, 1882), pp. 11, 24.

³⁷ *Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand, taken for the night of the 28th March, 1886* (Wellington, 1887), Part 1: Population and Dwellings: Census Tables, p. 12.

³⁸ *Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand, taken for the night of 5th April, 1891* (Wellington, 1892), p. 12; *Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand, taken for the night of 12th April, 1896* (Wellington, 1897), p. 13.

³⁹ See map in C.W. Vennell, *Land of the Three Rivers: A centennial history of the Piako County Council* (Auckland, 1976), p. 84.

⁴⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 January 1880, p. 13.

‘intending settlers and speculators’ was arranged.⁴¹ Farms of from 10 to 320 acres were sold on conditions enabling ‘*bona fide* settlers and occupiers to take them up’. The first sections sold were from five to ten acres, ‘to meet the wants of ... settlers of limited means, who desire to acquire small homesteads’, plus some rural land averaging about 100 acres. Land would not be sold under the deferred payment system until new regulations came into effect. After so ‘much vexation and trouble and delay’, an Auckland newspaper hoped the sales would ‘contribute greatly to the prosperity’ of the valley and ‘aid in opening up other country’.⁴² O’Halloran reported ‘several parties’ investigating the land and ‘the unusually high flood’ preventing them visiting many of the best swamps. ‘Knowing the clamourness of the Thames people for land in this district, I cannot help wondering, now that a portion is so soon about to be sold, at the apparent apathy of the people, who, if they buy, must buy a pig in a poke, as few, if any, have as yet been to look at it’.⁴³ An unspecified number of Thames ‘excursionists’ did spend a few days there.⁴⁴

In the first sale, in late January, there were few buyers.⁴⁵ ‘All present were surprised at the fact that there was little or no competition for the vaunted lands’. Nobody from Thames attended, and ‘only a few suburban lots’ were sold, nobody bidding for the farm lost, ‘although it was described as being of high class quality’. It was believed intending purchasers were ‘waiting to have further sections thrown open for selection under the deferred payment system’.⁴⁶ The *New Zealand Herald* was unimpressed that after ‘the pressing demands’, especially at Thames, ‘and the outcry for lands for settlers of small means’, there were so ‘few bidders, and not a single Thames settler appeared as a purchaser’. The small suburban lots had been specially surveyed ‘to enable working men to acquire a small freehold, but they did not seek to avail themselves of the privilege’, and ‘farms varying from 130 acres to 240 acres, put up at £2 an acre, elicited no bid, although the land bordered on the river, and was of good quality’.⁴⁷ O’Halloran had predicted this outcome because of ‘great dissatisfaction’ at

⁴¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 January 1880, p. 3.

⁴² *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 January 1880, p. 13.

⁴³ Upper Thames Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 January 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 January 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 31 January 1880, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 27 January 1880, p. 4.

‘the smallness of the sections’ and the terms, which were ‘not considered liberal’. If the land were cut up into ‘from 100 to 500 acres, every inch would be sold at fair prices. The calling of these lands “suburban” is a farce, as the site of the town is not yet fixed’.⁴⁸ When the Waste Lands Board discussed the sale, its chairman stated that it ‘was alleged that the lands offered were inferior’ to what would be sold later, and another member claimed ‘the general public had been deterred from competing, believing that the Thames people, who had made such an outcry, would outbid them’. Another reason was an application to this meeting to sell 10,000 acres there under the deferred payment system; an association of 50 Thames people would not buy land elsewhere until they knew the response.⁴⁹ ‘Pioneer’, in attacking the board’s alleged mal-administration, claimed the sale failed because the upset price was too high and ‘the worst land in the whole block’ was being sold first. ‘As for the suburban land, it was on a par with other of their insane ideas’, being ‘simply suburbs of nowhere, and comprise the most inferior land you would care to see in a day’s ride’. When the sale failed, the board decided ‘to open a larger block on deferred payment of £2 per acre’, prompting ‘a large number of men to leave their employment to look at the block, which they naturally concluded would be opened eventually. Poor fools!’ The ‘red-tapers’ were delaying this sale while they sorted out the necessary legalities.⁵⁰

Interest in acquiring this land increased, as illustrated by the Christchurch Working Miners’ Association applying for a settlement there.⁵¹ In March, a letter from Te Aroha stated that, ‘judging from the number of persons seeking for land, and having conversations with many of them, every lot of the deferred payment land in that district will be applied for, and in some cases two or three deep’.⁵² William Rolleston, Minister of Lands, when visiting Ohinemuri and Te Aroha, was perplexed by being first ‘surrounded by a host of persons interested in extolling the excellence of the land’ and then told (at Paeroa) that it was not very good.⁵³ Despite these

⁴⁸ Upper Thames Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 January 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁹ ‘The Waste Lands Board and Te Aroha Sales’, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 January 1880, p. 3, 31 January 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Letter from ‘Pioneer’, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 February 1880, p. 3.

⁵¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 February 1880, p. 3.

⁵² Anonymous Te Aroha correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 18 March 1880, p. 2.

⁵³ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 March 1880, p. 3.

uncertainties about its quality, O'Halloran reported an 'influx of people' inspecting the land 'with a view to purchasing'.⁵⁴

At the second sale, on 13 April, 3,300 acres subdivided into 21 sections were offered. Only nine sections, totalling 1,426 acres, were applied for by 16 bidders, only four being from Thames. Offered at £2 per acre, the land sold for £2 2s.⁵⁵ Once again, it was claimed the suburban sections were in the wrong place and that regulations prevented acquiring adequately sized farms.⁵⁶

In May, O'Halloran reported 'several' new settlers taking possession of their land. 'They all seem satisfied with their selections. Thames people will yet regret' not having bought some of the land, for some South Island men unanimously considered it 'the best district they have seen for a long time'. Although some Canterbury men thought the soil was 'too light, still they all agree the position, proximity to markets, and all the natural advantages make up for the soil, some of which will no doubt require manure to enable it to produce heavy crops'. Most of the sections, especially in blocks 11 and 12, were sold, 'and even now, although the weather is not very propitious and the roads are not the best, the cry is still they come, some on foot and some on horseback, but the errand is always the same, looking for land'.⁵⁷ In July, he reported a steamer towing 'a punt loaded with the families and effects of two of the new settlers'.⁵⁸

The discovery of gold created increased interest, for a large mining population meant 'a ready market' for farmers' produce, and in early 1881 more settlers arrived.⁵⁹ Some miners were also interested in acquiring small sections: one who expected a payable goldfield wanted 'A Block of Land to Settle on'.⁶⁰ The April census revealed that 213,204 acres in the Piako County had been purchased.⁶¹ Most were in large estates in the

⁵⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 April 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 April 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Letter from 'St James', *New Zealand Herald*, 12 July 1880, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 May 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 July 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 21 December 1880, p. 2, 26 February 1881, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Charles McLean to Harry Kenrick (Warden), 7 April 1881; Harry Kenrick to Frederick Burgess, 13 April 1881, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1881, BBAV 11584/1b, ANZ-A.

⁶¹ *Census ... for the Night of the 3rd of April, 1881*, p. 287.

Piako, Waitoa, Morrinsville, and Matamata districts, which required large capital, whereas smaller holdings continued to be more common near Te Aroha.⁶² That most of 'the people's estate' was held by large landowners increased local discontent.⁶³

In June 1881, O'Halloran reported that 'every week someone comes into the township who had been "prospecting" for good land'.⁶⁴ When mining declined, miners demanded that the government provide land for them to purchase; for instance, a Waiorongomai meeting in July 1884 wanted Maori land made available.⁶⁵ The following month, one at Te Aroha passed a resolution 'that the prosperity of the district is very seriously retarded by the land being locked up in native and other reserves'. The mover, Charles Stanislaus Stafford, a prominent local farmer,⁶⁶ 'said that the future prosperity of the district did not depend upon the goldfield alone but to a large extent upon its lands. Gold was certainly the principal factor in its present advancement, but looking into the future the land was almost of equal importance'. Between Wairakau and the Rotokohu gorge were 'many thousands of acres of excellent land which would be rapidly taken up' if 'cut up into moderate sized blocks and the freehold obtainable'. Without the latter 'this land would be useless and unprofitable alike to Maoris and Europeans, for no person would care to expend large sums in improving property' that was not freehold. He suggested the government 'facilitate *bona fide* settlement' upon Maori reserves 'after settling apart such portions as absolutely required' for the Maori use. 'Provision should also be made to enable persons who could lease sections, as in the case of the Thames High School Endowment, to acquire the freehold'. Only by these measures would the land be 'occupied by a prosperous and contented population'. The meeting agreed, and decided to petition parliament.⁶⁷

Because mining continued to decline, in 1885 an association formed by Waiorongomai residents petitioned 'for permission to occupy a block of land in the King Country, and form a semi-military settlement'. They were informed that the government did not 'require the services of military settlers', had not acquired title to this land, and that 3,000 acres between

⁶² Harris, pp. 49-50, 64, 69-73, 88-89.

⁶³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 July 1885, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 June 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 12 July 1884, p. 2.

⁶⁶ See chapter on Harry and Charles.

⁶⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 16 August 1884, p. 2.

Te Aroha West and the Te Kawana landing were available.⁶⁸ Some Te Aroha residents considered settling at Waiharakeke, up-river from Waiorongomai.⁶⁹ Not till early 1886 were perpetual leases of suburban allotments on the western side of the river available, but 'very few' applicants lived at Te Aroha. Some of this land was 'of fair quality, but much' was 'very indifferent', and the sections were 'too small'.⁷⁰ After these suburban sections were not taken up, they were declared open for occupation on different conditions as a 'trial of the village settlements scheme'. The area involved was 'very small', sufficient for only four or five 55-acre farms.⁷¹

In 1887, a special settlement of approximately 1,000 acres between Waihou and Te Aroha was sought. This 'good swamp land' was partially drained and 'covered with tall tea-tree and flax', with plenty of firewood 'in the shape of roots of trees and logs'. As well, 'some 700 acres' of much superior land on the road to Waitoa could be cut up; it was 'perfectly level, and will grow anything'. The only drawbacks were having to make fences 'by ditch and bank and wattling' and having to sink wells. 'Timber can be bought reasonably at Te Aroha, and cartage is plentiful and low, and ploughing from 6s to 9s per acre'.⁷² Although this settlement did not eventuate, more land was taken up as drainage made the ten-acre and village sections on the western side of the river farmable.⁷³

In early 1889, 'many applications' were made by 'local residents and others' for small sections near Te Aroha and Waihou; 'a very large proportion of these applicants being of the right class; steady, industrious, hard-working, and persevering'.⁷⁴ At the beginning of 1891, 31 acres of swamp within Te Aroha were reclassified as suburban land and auctioned for small farms.⁷⁵ As demand for farmland continued, in 1896 petitions were 'sent round for signature praying that the Government will purchase

⁶⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 5 June 1885, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 June 1885, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 March 1886, p. 3.

⁷¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 22 July 1886, p. 2.

⁷² *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 March 1887, p. 23.

⁷³ See, for example, *Te Aroha News*, 11 February 1888, p. 2.

⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 23 March 1889, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Crown Lands Board, *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 December 1890, p. 10, 14 February 1891, p. 10.

the estates in this district which have been offered to them'.⁷⁶ Some larger farms were subdivided; in 1903 'several large estates' were being sold as small farms to 'settlers of a desirable class'.⁷⁷

In December 1893, at a Waiorongomai meeting that asked the government to buy the Wairakau Estate and open it as a special settlement, 30 people claimed to want to settle there. Much of the 3,000 acres was 'partly improved', and a local correspondent argued it would be 'splendid' if the government agreed, 'as the land is first-class, and settlers upon it would soon be in a prosperous condition'.⁷⁸ Although its beauty and fertility reminded the *Te Aroha News* of 'the fabled valley of Avalon', not till 1930 did the government buy it for closer settlement.⁷⁹ Twenty years later, the two houses there had been replaced by nearly 20.⁸⁰

Settlers with little capital struggled to pay for their land. Denis Murphy,⁸¹ for instance, in 1880 bought 76 acres at the future Te Aroha West for £251.⁸² Later, after struggling to pay the instalments,⁸³ he complained to parliament that he had been the only genuine applicant but bidding by three others had forced him to pay 'a premium of £105 on the upset price'. His plea to be permitted to buy it at the latter, £2 an acre, was twice declined.⁸⁴

SPECULATION IN LAND

Some purchasers were speculators, not farmers. Owners of farms at Waitoa and Piako, which varied in size from 200 to 20,000 acres, believed 'it was better to purchase large blacks when land was cheap than take up small ones and add to them in after years when land was sure to have increased in value'. When some large swamps were drained the land was found to be 'unusually rich', and accordingly

⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 26 June 1895, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 16 May 1896, p. 2.

⁷⁷ R.H. Griffin, *Te Aroha 1882-1982: A BNZ centenary* (Wellington, 1982), p. 13.

⁷⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 December 1893, p. 10.

⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 8 February 1912, p. 2, 24 September 1930, p. 1.

⁸⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 4 August 1953, p. 4.

⁸¹ See paper on his life.

⁸² *Thames Star*, 16 April 1880, p. 2, 22 June 1880, p. 3.

⁸³ Auckland Lands Board, Minute Book 1882-1884, p. 263, BAAZ 4019/1; Minute Books 1884-1887, pp. 10, 282, 294, BAAZ 4019/2, ANZ-A.

⁸⁴ 'Reports of the Waste Lands Committee', *AJHR*, 1886, I-4, p. 3; 1887, I-5, p. 1.

increased in value amazingly, and those who were fortunate enough to purchase their properties four or five years ago cannot but congratulate themselves at their good luck. As far as I could learn hardly one of the present owners of the farms in the Waitoa and Piako districts purchased their farms from the natives, the land having principally been obtained from speculators who had bought from the natives at a low figure, and almost immediately re-sold at a profit to those who wished to purchase for other than speculative purposes. As an instance of the rapid advance in land within the past two years I may mention that a gentleman from Canterbury who took up five thousand acres of swamp at Piako two years ago, and expended on it about £3750, was offered within the last month £3 7s 6d per acre for it, but declined to sell anywhere near that figure. He purchased the property at 15s per acre, and consequently he would have made nearly £9000 profit had he accepted the offer. Another gentleman with whom I became acquainted at Waitoa told me that he would not take double the amount he paid for his farm a little over a year ago. During the time he has had possession he has expended about a thousand pounds on it, which would still leave a profit of £6000 or £7000. The proprietors of a block of swamp land at Waitoa are now demanding £2 per acre for it, whilst only six months ago they were going about offering it at half that price.⁸⁵

Land in the district more than doubled in value when the Waihou was being cleared of snags.⁸⁶ With values increasing because of the discovery of gold, in December 1880 one settler who owned land within three miles of Te Aroha was offered £120 in cash for 12 acres he had bought for £24.⁸⁷ In early 1881, men who held large holdings near the goldfield, 'who had despaired of realising high prices' for them, 'suddenly became ecstatic, and imagined by putting their lands into the market that the promising character' of the goldfield 'would induce speculators to invest largely, and at fabulous prices, and so bring them a rich reward'. These hopes were 'to a great extent' dashed by the decline of the field.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Own Reporter, 'Tour in the Aroha, Waitoa, and Piako Districts', *Thames Advertiser*, 3 July 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 29 August 1879, p. 5.

⁸⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 December 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 April 1881, p. 2.

The attempt by English investors to establish a settlement at Shaftesbury⁸⁹ was seen by many as speculation. In May 1881 two Englishmen were granted 17,600 acres, on both sides of the river, for £29,920.⁹⁰ The farmers (and some non-farmers, such as John Squirrel),⁹¹ speedily developed this land, 44 families settling by September 1883.⁹² This speculation was unsuccessful for one founder, who despite selling part of the land for £23,500 in 1883, went bankrupt the following year.⁹³

The local newspaper in 1895 noted that 'land speculation near Te Aroha continues'.⁹⁴ Although speculation in Crown land was not officially condoned, it was common, as a 1914 application, reported under the headline 'Refreshing Candour', indicated:

The members of the Auckland Land Board appeared to be taken aback by a statement made on Tuesday by an applicant for a transfer. A young man, who said he was a "farmer and land salesman," asked for permission to take over two blocks in Te Aroha survey district from two separate owners. The commissioner ... said: "You are asking for two blocks. Is not one enough?" The applicant replied that he would not take one without the other, and when asked what he wanted the land for, his answer was: 'I intend to improve it and sell it.' After the members had recovered from their astonishment, the commissioner remarked: "It is certainly most refreshing to meet with such candour. We appreciate having a truthful man before us, but it is our duty to prevent speculation with regard to Crown lands. We want men on the land to live on their sections and make their living from farming. We cannot allow sections to fall into the hands of speculators to hold for a few months and sell at a big profit." The applicant then said he had been under the impression that if he put a man on the property he would be fulfilling the residence clause. "This is one of those peculiar cases when it is necessary to turn a man away because of his honesty," remarked [one] commissioner, [who said,] in a disappointed tone, when the applicant had left the room: "He had let the cat out of the bag in the last few minutes."⁹⁵

⁸⁹ See paper on special settlements.

⁹⁰ Harris, p. 76; *Labour* (Dunedin), 10 July 1884, p. 3.

⁹¹ See chapter on his life.

⁹² Harris, pp. 77-78.

⁹³ *Labour*, 10 July 1884, p. 3.

⁹⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 8 May 1895, p. 2.

⁹⁵ 'Refreshing Candour', *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 December 1914, p. 32.

DRAINING SWAMPS AND DEVELOPING FARMS

In April 1879, O'Halloran reported that 'a good amount' of land had been 'brought under cultivation by private individuals, and progress now appears to be the order of the day'. Steamers were 'bringing in machinery and implements' along with 'large consignments of red clover and cow grass' and 'fencing wire and rails. The cow grass is the favourite, inasmuch as it is a perennial, and will last for about eight or nine years'.⁹⁶ £3,125 was allocated for drainage during 1880, and an area below Omahu was drained and a drain dug from near the hot springs to the High School Endowment.⁹⁷ Swampers cut the peat with hay knives and took it out in blocks before removing the deeper soil with spades.⁹⁸ This work was described by former swampers, with understatement, as

by not means an easy task. To a depth of about three feet was a soft layer of fern root, then came the harder soil. The drains used to close in behind the old pioneers as they dug along, making it necessary for men to work on the banks and throw back the soil as it came out of the drains. In fact so soft and vast was the swamp that the men worked above their waists in water.... They came across enormous tree trunks, [and] ... these trunks and roots took many hours of hard toil to remove.⁹⁹

As drains lowered the surface,

the great fallen forest was exposed or brought nearer the surface, and in the dry weather there was no moisture left in the ground, nothing could grow through the thick layer of logs and stumps. There was tremendous labour for years to remove these obstacles to the plough. Dynamite was often used. I have seen areas with the surface covered by partly-submerged logs.¹⁰⁰

In 1881, Bernard Montague¹⁰¹ had a contract for drainage work at Waitoa. A reporter described the difficulties he had to overcome:

⁹⁶ Te Aroha Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 April 1879, p. 3.

⁹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 January 1880, p. 3, 2 November 1880, p. 3.

⁹⁸ 'Agricola', 'Ten Days in Waikato, No. 4', *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 May 1879, p. 13.

⁹⁹ Recollections of Miss J. Hayward, *Te Aroha News*, 5 April 1946, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Recollections of Miss J. Hayward, *Te Aroha News*, 12 April 1946, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ See paper on his life.

It is a long drain, and the quantity of water going down it is something surprising. On proceeding some distance along it, what may be called a natural phenomenon in the character of the country is met with, that is, a subsidence of a large area of swamp, not in a curved depression, but sunk in a body, and across this tract, which is full of underground timber, the drain runs. The timber, when the drain is opened out, is found to be a forest of the stumps of large trees, standing in *situ*, just as if the trunks had been felled about four feet from the ground, some of them so large that in one case a single stump filled up a drain 18 feet wide and ten feet deep. The astonishing character of the work can be imagined when such a drain is cut through wet country thus filled with underground timber. The dynamite blasts were going every five minutes, and water and timber being hurled into the air together.¹⁰²

Such work was dangerous as well as physically exhausting. In 1908, Montague's eldest son, aged 21, was deepening a drain on his father's land, using explosives to break up the timber, as he had been doing for the last three years. In an accident akin to mining ones, there was a misfire; on checking, he was killed by a delayed explosion.¹⁰³

If done badly, drainage created new problems. When the first main drains were dug in 1880, 'instead of carrying them with the natural fall of country' they were

cut at almost right angles to the river, and, if anything, against its fall. The consequence will be, that before long, it will be found that the bed of the river is higher than the drains, and that the thorough draining of the land will be an utter impossibility.... Even the merest tyro at draining would see that to drain this land properly it was necessary to open the drains into the river some miles below the present outfall, and that it was useless to attempt to drain the land against the fall of the river.¹⁰⁴

In January 1882 'some stupid person' cut a drain into the river, causing a large quantity of earth to be deposited in it and impede

¹⁰² Hamilton Correspondent, 'The Piako Railway and Swamp Works at Waitoa', *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 August 1881, p. 11.

¹⁰³ Inquest into the death of Bernard Montague, Justice Department J 46, COR, 1908/632, ANZ-W; *Te Aroha News*, 4 July 1908, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 15.

navigation.¹⁰⁵ Immediately afterwards, a ranger was appointed to prevent people cutting unauthorized drains into the river.¹⁰⁶ Whether authorized or not, drains inevitably caused siltation, as a 1913 study discovered:

Much of the marshy lands of the Hauraki Plain, especially above Te Aroha, where the rivers have entrenched themselves, is well above the drainage-level of the plain, and requires but small ditches to drain it. The pumiceous sands underlying the surface are so incoherent that, if there is much fall, a deep wide channel is soon cut. Near the Waihou River some of these ditches, which were originally 5ft drains, are now more than 20ft deep, over 2 chains wide, and many chains in length. All the material from these great excavations has found its way into the river. Moreover, these gulches must be expected to increase in size; and any drain similarly situated, cut in the future, must be expected to excavate a similar channel unless the outfall be specially protected.¹⁰⁷

Once drained, the swamp vegetation was burnt during summer. 'If the season is dry the fire, forming into a line, sweeps along furiously, reducing most of the vegetation to ashes. On these ashes, in some places very deep, grass seed, clover, rape, and turnips are sown, and do splendidly'.¹⁰⁸ By June 1880, the warm weather had enabled farmers 'to get on with their houses', and drainage was progressing well. 'Ploughing is being vigorously pushed forward for early spring sowing'.¹⁰⁹ This weather meant the grass was 'much burnt up' and the long drought was 'followed by a visitation of caterpillars'.¹¹⁰ In August, with new houses 'going up in every direction', the district was 'assuming quite a settled appearance. A year ago only three or four buildings were visible for miles around'.¹¹¹ Two months later, new buildings were 'going up rapidly. A large amount of waste land is being broken up for crops and pasture, and fresh inquiries are constantly being made for land by men from other districts and newcomers'.¹¹² The following

¹⁰⁵ *Waikato Times*, 17 January 1882, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 19 January 1882, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Henderson, p. 28.

¹⁰⁸ 'Agricola', 'Ten Days in Waikato, No. 4', *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 May 1879, p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 June 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ *Waikato Times*, 27 May 1880, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 August 1880, p. 3.

¹¹² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 19 October 1880, p. 3.

month, ‘scarcely a fortnight elapses without some settler making his appearance in the district, and signs of progress are everywhere apparent’.¹¹³ John McCombie was ‘most favourably impressed with’ the district’s ‘capabilities’ and believed that even ‘without the aid of the goldfield’ it would soon ‘be covered with green meadows and waving fields of golden corn, while hundreds of well-to-do families will find their homes there, happy in the knowledge that the land is their own’.¹¹⁴

In autumn 1881, a reporter visited farms owned by ‘the bog-trotting fraternity’ who were ‘fast filling up and reclaiming the thousands of acres of magnificent land’. On one Waitoa farm he saw about 500 acres of new grass and 30 acres of grain and root crops. Particularly impressive were the turnips, carrots, mangolds, and sugar beets: mangolds were ‘from 25 to 30lb a piece, and returning 45 to 60 tons per acre’. There were also fine cattle, sheep, and pigs.¹¹⁵ A month later, the plain above Te Aroha was ‘beginning to present a civilized appearance, being dotted over with substantial houses, attached to which are farms that are being quickly brought into cultivation. Most of the holdings are fenced, and on each cattle are running’.¹¹⁶ The first hams, bacon, and cheese sold in Thames in July were ‘pronounced to be of superior quality to the Canterbury importations’.¹¹⁷ Spring saw the settlers ‘as busy as bees, ploughing, sowing, planting, &c’.¹¹⁸ One Waitoa settler had grown cabbages weighing from four to 20 pounds ‘*without manure*’, but it had ‘cost £9 per acre to bring the ground to this state’.¹¹⁹ By 1882, 70 miles of drainage had been or was being done and plans were being prepared for another 50.¹²⁰ Draining continued throughout the 1880s to enable small settlers to develop their land. For instance, in 1887 Daniel James Frazer, an ironmonger at Te Aroha,¹²¹ and five other ‘Village Settlers’ complained

¹¹³ Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 15.

¹¹⁵ Our Travelling Reporter [S.E. Smith], ‘The Piako County’, *Waikato Times*, 3 May 1881, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 July 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 September 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 17 September 1881, p. 2.

¹²⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 February 1882, p. 17.

¹²¹ See *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1883, p. 3, 13 September 1884, p. 2, 4 June 1887, p. 2, 26 November 1887, p. 2, 14 April 1888, p. 7.

that they could not take up their land until the main drain was constructed.¹²²

Writing about the goldfield in December 1880, a newspaper commented that there was ‘no magician so potent as gold, for a wave of his hand converts desert places into smiling settlements’. All trades and professions found openings on a productive field, and in mining districts like Te Aroha with ‘much good and available agricultural land, industrial occupations of all kinds become permanently established’.¹²³ The initial optimism combined with the agricultural potential meant that, in 1882, £33,000 was spent on capital works and buildings: £10,000 on the Waiorongomai battery, £9,000 on the tramway, £3,500 on John Watson Walker’s hotel,¹²⁴ £3,000 on Thomas William Carr’s house and stores,¹²⁵ £2,500 on Edward Francis Roche’s house,¹²⁶ and £5,000 on other buildings.¹²⁷ The goldfield encouraged ‘speedy settlement of the surrounding country’.¹²⁸ Piako and Waikato settlers would benefit because it provided ‘a sufficiently large and convenient market’ to make developing ‘the wilderness’ economic.¹²⁹ By June 1882, about 1,000 people were living within a radius of a few miles.¹³⁰

In 1883, ‘several settlers’ sending sheep to Thames via Te Aroha ‘suffered serious loss, through their being worried by dogs. Through the same cause the butchers of the township find much difficulty in keeping a supply of sheep close at hand’.¹³¹ Dog attacks continued to be a problem.¹³²

¹²² Auckland Lands Board, Minute Book 1884-1887, p. 312, Meeting of 10 March 1887, BAAZ 4019/2, ANZ-A.

¹²³ *New Zealand Times*, n.d., cited in *Thames Advertiser*, 18 December 1880, p. 3.

¹²⁴ See paper on his life.

¹²⁵ See paper on his life.

¹²⁶ See *Te Aroha News*, 8 September 1883, p. 2, letter from John Squirrell, 1 May 1886, p. 7, letter from James Munro, 2 July 1887, p. 3, letter from Edward Francis Roche, 9 July 1887, p. 2, 1 June 1889, p. 2; letter from Edward Francis Roche, *New Zealand Herald*, 27 June 1887, p. 3.

¹²⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 10 June 1882, p. 3.

¹²⁸ *Waikato Times*, 3 June 1882, p. 2.

¹²⁹ *Waikato Times*, 17 February 1883, p. 3; see also ‘Progress in the Piako District’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 December 1883, p. 20.

¹³⁰ *Te Aroha Mail*, 3 June 1882, p. 2.

¹³¹ *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 2.

Land on the eastern side of the river was brought into production during the early 1880s. In 1882 a visitor described Shaftesbury:

Rather a pretty place – a strip of flat land between the river and the mountain ranges. The best of it swamp being reclaimed. Small settlers' houses dotted about in every direction. Some of them doing pretty well, and many of them very disappointed with the country. Not much feed, mostly new grass only sown last autumn. Have to give the horse a feed of oats in the mornings.

Most of one farm was 'good swamp, very well drained and nearly ready to burn off and sow, and a neighbour had 'a splendid bit of country', although his swamps were 'not yet rideable'. The swamp across the river was 'not half such good country'. Some members of the special settlement looked 'anything but "at home" in their new cabins and 3 acres of farm land each. Far happier in old England I think'.¹³³

The land between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai had in January 1885 'about a thousand acres of rich clover' growing 'to a considerable height, in defiance of the numerous herd of cattle grazing upon it. About half-a-dozen other large properties are in a similarly pleasing position' because settlers had accomplished 'a surprising amount of work'.¹³⁴ Two years later, a traveller from Paeroa was 'astonished' by the 'plentiful' signs of development 'within two or three miles of' Te Aroha. 'No matter in what direction my steps strayed, nice fields and delightful gardens met my gaze. I was astonished, for the soil is usually spoken of as being poor, light, and sandy'.¹³⁵

In December 1887, the *Te Aroha News* stated noted steady progress over the past year. 'A number of industrious settlers have taken up small holdings within easy reach of this township, and a far larger area in the immediate district is under crop than for several years past, and there is a

¹³² For example, *Te Aroha News*, 20 October 1883, p. 2, 21 June 1884, p. 2, 5 July 1884, p. 2, 15 March 1890, p. 2.

¹³³ Harry Bullock-Webster, 'Jottings in New Zealand – Sketches of Up Country Life' (diary, late 1882), vol. 6, pp. 143-166 of original, pp. 14-15 of typescript, Acc. 1970/347/5, Waikato Museum of Art and History Library.

¹³⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 January 1885, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Own Correspondent, 'Impressions of Te Aroha', *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1887, p. 8.

prospect of an abundant harvest'.¹³⁶ Settlers who took up ten-acre and village sections on the western side of the river in 1886 by early 1888 had made 'considerable progress' with 'a number of substantial houses' being erected, land fenced, grass sown, and fruit trees planted. 'Generally speaking, much energy and industry has been shown' by most farmers.¹³⁷ A 'great deal of work' continued and 'many improvements' were achieved.¹³⁸

In August 1890 a Te Aroha correspondent reported that for 'a considerable time' there had been 'much grumbling and ill-feeling between those who have taken up ten-acre sections near the western bank' because some farmers did not fence their sections. 'One man does his best to put his land in a good state of cultivation by laying down in grass and fruit trees, etc, and then suffers loss and annoyance from this neighbours' cattle coming round'. He hoped the 'Government land steward' would enforce the conditions under which land was taken up and make all settlers do their share of fencing.¹³⁹ Despite such disputes, most land was being successfully farmed, a visitor noting, in December 1892, that 'the country for many miles around gladdened one with waving cornfields, and large flocks of horned cattle and sheep'.¹⁴⁰

Drainage continued to worry small farmers. In 1895 settlers from the western side of the river explained this 'vexed question' to the visiting Minister of Mines, Alfred Jerome Cadman, who after inspecting the drains 'thoroughly sympathised' because of 'floods' on their farms caused by drainage from the larger estates, they being 'unable to undertake the large drains necessary'. He promised to deepen government drains 'to enable them to carry off the large amount of water' that prevented settlers 'from doing anything with their land'.¹⁴¹

AN EXAMPLE OF DRAINAGE PROBLEMS: THE DEFERRED PAYMENT SETTLERS OF TE AROHA WEST

¹³⁶ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 31 December 1887, p. 2.

¹³⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 11 February 1888, p. 2.

¹³⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 23 March 1889, p. 2.

¹³⁹ 'A correspondent from Te Aroha', *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 August 1890, p. 17.

¹⁴⁰ F.G. Ewington, 'Signs of Progress in and Around Auckland', *Auckland Weekly News*, 31 December 1892, p. 15.

¹⁴¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 January 1895, p. 5.

The early years for Te Aroha West settlers illustrated the difficulties of farming swamps. Sections in Blocks X1 and X11 of the Aroha Block were first sold in April 1880 under the deferred payment system:

The applicant was required to tender one-twentieth of the upset price of the land he wished to purchase, and the payments are to be in twenty equal instalments, payable, one each on the 1st of January, and 1st of July of each year, for 10 years. Thus if a man purchased a section for £200, he would pay £10 at the time of purchase, and £10 every half-year for 10 years, by which time all the money would have been paid. Regarding improvements, the selector must bring into cultivation not less than a twentieth of the area the first year, one-tenth the second, and within six years must have cultivated one-fifth, and effected permanent improvements to the value of £1 for every acre. The selector has the option at any time after the first three years of discharging all his obligations by paying up the balance of the purchase money in one payment, provided he has effected the necessary improvements. Residence on the land by the selector is compulsory for a period of six years from the issue of the license. No person is allowed to select more than 320 acres.¹⁴²

For these reasons holders of these sections were known to the locals as the 'Long Timers'.¹⁴³ In 1880, there were less than 20 of these settlers, owning in total about 2,000 acres. With one exception, all were starting to reclaim their sections and erect houses.

Several houses now dot the plain and give a civilised appearance to it. Owing to the necessarily heavy freight on goods from the Thames most of the settlers cannot afford to erect large houses just yet; but although small they are well built and comfortable.... The vegetation consists of fern, scrub, and titree, but is not thick and is easily cleared. The soil is black and is especially rich along the river.

One farmer, John Woodhead,¹⁴⁴ recently arrived from Yorkshire, was living with his family in a tent, not having had time to erect a house. He had purchased 124 acres for £248.

¹⁴² Own Reporter, 'Tour in the Aroha, Waitoa, and Piako Districts', *Thames Advertiser*, 22 June 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴³ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ His life has not been traced.

Both he and his wife are accustomed to farm work, and are confident that in time they will have a valuable well-cultivated homestead. Mr Woodhead arrived in Wellington a few months ago, and since then he has inspected a large extent of country in the North Island, but informs us that for price and natural advantages none of the land can be compared with that at the Aroha.¹⁴⁵

By April 1881, 'some fifteen comfortable homesteads' had been erected, a 'large amount' of grass sown, and several farmers were about to plant orchards.¹⁴⁶ One of the first settlers, Charles McKinley, found that the land could not be farmed successfully because it was 'mainly swamp' covered with manuka, flax, and scrub. Not until his second year could he 'get two horses on to his farm, but from the beginning he had cows', meaning he mainly produced butter.¹⁴⁷

From the beginning of settlement it was felt that farmers were not receiving adequate government assistance, and in December 1880 the *Te Aroha Mail* urged that 'to obtain that justice to which the people are entitled, and as long as Government are indifferent to their wants, we can only give the advice of a once famous English statesman who counselled his constituents, in order to obtain their demands, to "agitate! agitate! agitate!"'¹⁴⁸ As some settlers had not examined their land before purchase, they did not realize the drains were wrongly designed.¹⁴⁹ Before any land was sold, one future purchaser, who had investigated, complained that it was of inferior quality,¹⁵⁰ and there were many other complaints. In November 1880, the drainage works were said 'by those who ought to know to be almost useless, as they are water-courses rapidly developing into full grown streams, with strong currents'.¹⁵¹ The following March, Charles Gould complained to the Crown Lands Board that the drains were 'neither wide enough nor deep enough', a charge denied by the chief engineer, who added

¹⁴⁵ Own Reporter, 'Tour in the Aroha, Waitoa, and Piako Districts', *Thames Advertiser*, 22 June 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ 'Snooks', 'Jottings from the Upper Country', *Thames Star*, 14 April 1881, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ Obituary of Charles McKinley, *Te Aroha News*, 14 June 1926, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., cited in *Thames Advertiser*, 7 December 1880, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Harris, pp. 81-82.

¹⁵⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 February 1880, Supplement, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1880, p. 3.

that it had insufficient money to make the drains he requested.¹⁵² This response prompted a Thames correspondent to write that Gould's would be the first of many such letters, for the plan for draining Block X11 was

contrary to all engineering principles, and it is difficult to conceive how any engineer can say there is no cause for complaint. Before this block can be properly drained an entirely new system will have to be adopted, or else a considerable amount of valuable land will be sacrificed. If the land is to be well drained, the natural fall of the water must be followed, but in this instance an attempt has been made to drain the water right across the fall, and the result is that the water from the higher land is being drained on to the low-lying lands. Our engineers are men of skill, and of course cannot (?) go wrong. They might learn a lesson or two if they were to have a trial at farming on some of these sections which they profess to have partially drained.¹⁵³

At the beginning of 1882, 'in compliance with a pressing invitation' from the 'unfortunate' deferred payment settlers, a special reporter visited, accompanied by William Corless Breakell,¹⁵⁴ engineer to the Waitoa Roads Board.

There are twelve settlers affected by the existing state of things, representing, in all, 2769 acres. The land was taken up two years ago, and in accordance with the conditions of their tenure, a variety of efforts have been made for effecting improvements. These consist of ditching, fencing, and cropping.... The draining may yet be rendered of some practical value; but until the main drain or its outlets are improved, that cannot possibly be the case. The crops are a dead failure. The oats and potatoes in particular are perfect abortions. The former averages from three to six inches in height, and it is no exaggeration to say that they do not grow more than a straw to the square foot. The potatoes are equally bad, the net produce not being by a very long way equal to the amount of seed put in. The land is composed of a heavy black soil from eighteen inches to two feet deep, with a clay subsoil. Under ordinary conditions it ought to grow remarkably

¹⁵² Crown Lands Board, *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 March 1881, p. 21.

¹⁵³ Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 March 1881, p. 17.

¹⁵⁴ See *Thames Advertiser*, 5 October 1880, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 13 October 1881, pp. 2, 3, 31 January 1881, p. 2, 28 February 1882, p. 2, 25 July 1882, p. 2, 24 August 1882, p. 2, 6 September 1892, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 22 February 1923, p. 8; *Te Aroha News*, 18 May 1936, p. 3, 28 October 1936, p. 10.

good crops, but in its present saturated state it is useless to think of bringing anything to perfection.

A meeting of settlers asked Breakell to prepare 'a report as to the best and most expeditious means of remedying the evils complained of', for immediate steps were needed to make the land 'such as the settlers were led to expect' when they bought it, otherwise the 'next season would be lost to them which they computed would represent no less than £1000'. The reporter 'did not hear a single word' disparaging the settlers, whose 'small means' were sufficient to fulfill their requirements, but as the drainage problem was 'making serious inroad upon their available means', unless given immediate assistance they would 'be unable to meet their engagements to the Government and otherwise be crippled in their enterprise'.¹⁵⁵

According to another investigator, their difficulties were caused by the government's 'imperfect performance' in making the land 'fit for occupation. A considerable amount of public money was spent in draining the block which, for want of competent engineering, much of it appears to have been thrown away, and crops failed because of stagnant water. "The potatoes are an utter failure. The grain crops are not more than a foot in height, and with a return of less almost than the seed - not worth, in fact, the cost of harvesting'. Breakell had reported that the main outlet drain was 'against the "natural fall" '. The settlers' capital would 'be further frittered away in waiting for another season, and, if the government does not proceed quickly with their portion of the work, two seasons' might 'be lost to the unfortunate settlers. These men of moderate capital are exactly the class which should be encouraged in every possible way to take up the waste lands', and it would 'be very injurious to the welfare of the community' if they were forced off their land 'simply by the ineffective manner in which the conditions of tenure have been carried out by the Government'. In February 1882, when the settlers explained their plight to the Premier, John Hall, he responded that this matter was not his responsibility but that of the Minister of Lands, William Rolleston.¹⁵⁶ According to one settler, Thomas Taylor,¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Special Reporter, 'Te Aroha Block, Deferred Payment Settlers' Grievances', *Waikato Times*, 31 January 1882, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ Own Correspondent, 'The Te Aroha Deferred Payment Lands', *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 February 1882, p. 23.

Rolleston's brief visit meant he did not see the worst parts of the drainage scheme or the stunted crops, and he took no action to improve the drainage. Accordingly, Taylor told the Waste Lands Board that if the government did not act 'we shall be ruined'. Having 'full confidence that the Government would faithfully perform their part of the terms under which the land was offered for selection, by providing good outfall drains', and as the previous summer had been so dry that the swamp dried out, he 'burned off about 60 acres in the autumn and sowed with grass and clover, which came up well, but when the winter rains set in' the drains did not carry off the water, 'and the greater part of the grass has disappeared. Had the drains acted well, I should have had grass enough for 30 head of cattle', but as the water backed up in the branch drain he had 'not been able to put a beast on the land all summer', the land being wetter than before the drain was made.

I also planted over 1000 fruit trees, and as many shelter trees in nursery lines last winter, intending this season to trench land and transplant them into permanent places; but I find, in trenching on the highest part of the land, that I come to water where there is a slight depression in the ground, so I have to leave them till another season, in the hope that by that time I shall be able to thoroughly drain the land.

Taylor claimed that the Waitoa Highway Board was refusing to spend any of the £400 granted to assist the settlers, instead using it to deepen a drain 'abutting on a block of land owned by one of its members' and to improve the road alongside it, benefiting 'one or two individuals only'.¹⁵⁷ By May at least one deferred payment settler, the formerly optimistic John Woodhead, was reported to have abandoned his selection,¹⁵⁸ but when the board declared his land forfeited, it was asked to reconsider:

The case was a very distressing one. Mrs Woodhead and her four children resided on it, and if turned off they would be homeless. Mr Woodhead had gone to Panama as an engineer to earn money to cultivate the land. He was a sober, industrious man. They had

¹⁵⁷ See *Te Aroha Court*, Magistrate's Court, 8 March 1884, p. 2, advertisement, 3 August 1889, p. 7; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 823.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Thomas Taylor to Auckland Waste Lands Board, 30 May 1882, printed in *Thames Advertiser*, 2 June 1882, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ *Waikato Times*, 13 May 1882, p. 2.

not abandoned the land; on the contrary, Mrs Woodhead and her four children resided on it.

The board deferred any action.¹⁶⁰ In January 1883, an Auckland newspaper asked: 'Can nothing be done for the unfortunate settlers on the Te Aroha deferred payment block?' For want of the promised main outlet drain, last year their crops were 'a dead failure', and this year 'the same want has caused a cessation of cropping, except in small peculiarly favoured spots'. Appeals to politicians had failed to achieve action, yet providing drains and roads 'was part of the conditions under which the settlers took up the land'. These small 'working capitalists' were 'just the class that should be encouraged to settle on the waste lands, and for their sake and for that of the district' it hoped the government would act.¹⁶¹

Roads were another problem. In November 1883, a settler told the lands board that he, like others, had 'no means of access to the main road'.¹⁶² The lack of roads combined with unfenced drains could be costly, 'Old Settler' recalling in 1910 a farmer's first horse sinking when crossing a creek,

and, as the owner pithily remarks, he is still there. Nothing daunted, however, three weeks later, our bold pioneer bought him another; but misfortune was on his track. Number two got away to Manawaru and was bogged in a drain there. Philosophically submitting to the inevitable, our friend began to lay out money in the purchase of stock. He bought six heifers at £5 a head, and be it known that, in those days, £30 was a good round sum. A week or so later, he found four of the six lying dead on the river bank, drowned by the floods; but he still stuck to his farm, nor wavered for a moment - a fine example of the grit and determination that have made Britain what she is today - the nurse and mother of the hardy pioneer.¹⁶³

In July 1884, 'Taxpayer' wrote that 12 settlers were still waiting for drainage in an area that was 'a regular quagmire' in winter. Unable to farm profitably, farmers were compelled to apply for whatever scarce work was

¹⁶⁰ Crown Lands Board, *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 June 1882, p. 9.

¹⁶¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 January 1883, p. 21.

¹⁶² Auckland Land Board, Minute Book 1882-1884, Meeting of 22 November 1883, BAAZ 4019/1, p. 173, ANZ-A.

¹⁶³ 'Old Settler', 'The Beginnings of Te Aroha', *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1910, p. 2.

on offer,¹⁶⁴ taking up contracts to make drains, roads, and bridges. Five of them had ‘the original contract for forming the footpaths in Whitaker Street’ in Te Aroha:

This was only the first rough formation - the filling up of hollows and just making them passable. You may imagine that we did not use a theodolite, and the job looked pretty rugged when all was finished. But still the foundation was there and the work served its purpose. The same men formed the roads and put in the bridges.¹⁶⁵

In September 1884, ‘Fair Play’ complained about the lands board ‘continually annoying a few’ of the settlers ‘with official notices as soon as their instalments fall due’, while others never received any and made ‘no payments for the last two or three years’. Those ‘who say they will not pay make a boast of it, and even call the others who pay fools’ for paying until the government carry out their promised drainage scheme. These ‘poor, half-starved settlers ought to be angry’, because it had ‘cost them no small share of trouble to be able to meet those “red hot” official memos which they receive regularly. As ‘the poor unfortunate people’ had to earn money, nine of them had been ‘making a drain for the last ten months or so, away from their little houses, children and wives, only coming home on Saturday nights’.¹⁶⁶ ‘Another Old Man’ responded that ‘Fair Play’ appeared to be trying to incite the board to forfeit some sections so that he could obtain one ‘for himself or his relatives’; his statement that a settler who had not paid for two or three years called ‘others fools for doing so’ was intended to have him turned off. This man had not been sent a notice because his section could not be cultivated without a drain.¹⁶⁷

After settlers finally forced the chief engineer to admit the drainage was ‘practically useless’, £2,000 was granted to make a main drain; differences amongst settlers about the location of part of it would delay its completion.¹⁶⁸ ‘Old Settler’ recalled that, after waiting for six years for this contract to be let,

¹⁶⁴ Letter from ‘Taxpayer’, *Waikato Times*, 24 July 1884, p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Old Settler’, ‘The Beginnings of Te Aroha’, *Te Aroha News*, 29 November 1910, p. 2

¹⁶⁶ Letter from ‘Fair Play’, *New Zealand Herald*, 12 September 1884, p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ Letter from ‘Another Old Man’, *New Zealand Herald*, 1 October 1884, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ Harris, p. 82.

we fondly hoped that the millennium was about to begin. We received a rude shock, when, after the lapse of considerable time, we learned that the contract had been completed and the work passed. We looked in vain for evidence of the fact. Alas! the whole thing was a put up job and the completion existed on paper only. We were determined not to let the matter rest, and bringing all our forces to bear we at last brought the thing to a head.

The settlers took the local member of parliament, two engineers, and Rolleston 'to where the drain ought to be, and when they saw the swindle that had been perpetrated', Rolleston 'granted us £450 on the spot to get the work completed', and after seeing the state of the road at the Te Aroha West school he 'right away granted us a further sum of £400'.¹⁶⁹ If this story was correct, it must refer to the period before August 1884, when Rolleston ceased to be a minister;¹⁷⁰ or was Ballance meant?

The following November, when John Ballance, the Native Minister, visited, the Te Aroha West settlers told him that 'their land was not what it had been represented to be when they were induced to take it up; that too high a value had been put upon it', and that the drainage works 'were most defective'. Taylor's statement that currently 'the land was worthless to them, and unless government afforded relief in some way it would be impossible for them to fulfil the conditions on which their sections had been taken up', was confirmed by the others. Ballance listened patiently but 'could not hold out any hope' of reducing the price from £2 to £1 per acre. Similar requests elsewhere had been declined, and indeed the government could not make reductions without special legislation. He suggested ways to reduce payments, such as obtaining perpetual leases, which would halve the annual payment. Having 'evinced all through a strong desire to aid the settlers', he offered to help with drains on condition that settlers assisted to dig them.¹⁷¹

Despite claims that they would be unable to meet the conditions, after the ranger inspected in late 1886 11 settlers received Crown Grants because they had made all the payments required. Three were told to make these payments, and a decision on four was postponed awaiting the ranger's

¹⁶⁹ 'Old Settler', 'The Beginnings of Te Aroha', *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1910, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ *New Zealand Parliamentary Record 1840-1949*, ed. Guy H. Scholefield (Wellington, 1950), p. 38.

¹⁷¹ *Waikato Times*, 10 November 1885, p. 2.

report.¹⁷² As an example of continued dissatisfaction, in January 1887, when a farmer and contractor, Heber Caudwell,¹⁷³ told the board he would not pay any more instalments of the £510 purchase price until a drain was made, it decided to investigate his complaint.¹⁷⁴ In November 1887, 21 deferred payment settlers petitioned parliament because their land ‘was described to them by the Government as good, whereas it turns out to be barren and bad. They pray for relief’. The public petitions committee merely referred their petition to the government for consideration.¹⁷⁵ The *Te Aroha News* hoped it would succeed, as ‘without doubt’ they were ‘most deserving’ of receiving leniency.

Most of these settlers brought a few hundred pounds with them, all of which has been sunk long since in bringing the land into cultivation, erecting houses, fences, and general improvements. But in the great majority of cases the land is of the poorest possible description, and really not worth cultivating, much less paying rent for. Indeed, were it not for the frugal and industrious habits of the settlers, who have earned a little money by taking contracts, and by daily labour, many of them would have had to clear out long ago.¹⁷⁶

Writing during the 1910 celebrations of the founding of Te Aroha, ‘Old Settler’ lauded them:

Of these twenty-one pioneers everyone was a big man, and I don’t believe I ever saw a finer, sturdier, hardworking lot in all my life. They were brimful of self-reliance, every man of them, always ready to help one another. In the midst of the busier season, I have seen them up all night pulling a neighbour’s cattle out of the swamp and using every means to save the lives of the animals. Out of their number eight now lie in Te Aroha cemetery, but some of them are still left and the good stuff is there yet. These men are not here today and there tomorrow. They took up the land to make a living and a home and were sincere about it. In spite of adversity and difficulties that might have made the stoutest

¹⁷² Auckland Lands Board, Minute Book, Meeting of 2 December 1886, p. 282, BAAZ 4019/1, ANZ-A.

¹⁷³ See *Te Aroha News*, 31 August 1942, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Auckland Lands Board, Minute Book, Meeting of 13 January 1887, p. 293, BAAZ 4019/2. ANZ-A; Crown Lands Board, *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 January 1887, p. 9.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Report of Public Petitions, A to L, Committee’, *AJHR*, 1887, Session 2, I-1, p. 5.

¹⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 19 November 1887, p. 2.

flinch, they stuck to their farms, and after many years the reward of patient toil was theirs. By such men was Te Aroha launched on her pastoral career.... They gave their brains and muscles to the improvement of the land, and the smiling pastures of today are a record of their work.¹⁷⁷

DAIRYING

In 1928, Harawini Te Karawhiu,¹⁷⁸ estimated to be 103 years old, died at Waitoki, between Te Aroha and Paeroa, the *Observer* argued that a memorial should be erected to him because

he took the first calf up the Waihou river in a canoe. He did not know very much about feeding it or how to get tucker for it, but he hit on the idea of giving it flour and water. The colour deceived the calf, and the fluid was down before the animal had time to discover the imposition. It must have been a sturdy type for it survived. This pioneering effort led to the ultimate development of the dairying industry in the Waihou and about Te Aroha.¹⁷⁹

In the 1880s, Pakeha farmers developed dairying on a small scale, and when in 1890 a creamery was proposed this plan fell through because ‘a lot of settlers’ did not support it.¹⁸⁰ When Henry Reynolds, pioneer of creameries in the Waikato and of the butter export industry,¹⁸¹ visited two years later, he ‘met with great success’. Milk from 400 cows was promised, and it was believed there would be ‘little trouble in getting many others to join that will bring the number up to 500’, and only finding a site with a good water supply was delaying erecting a factory.¹⁸² According to ‘Old Settler’, writing in 1910, a local committee of those interested in dairying ‘went at least a dozen times to Hamilton’ to interview Reynolds. ‘After prolonged negotiation, on the strength of a promise of five hundred gallons

¹⁷⁷ ‘Old Settler’, ‘The Beginnings of Te Aroha’, *Te Aroha News*, 22 November 1910, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ See Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books no. 31, pp. 268-275, 300; no. 49, p. 99.

¹⁷⁹ *Waikato Times*, 8 December 1928, p. 8 [wrongly recorded as Hirawani Karawhui]; *Observer*, 12 December 1928, p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 August 1890, p. 23.

¹⁸¹ For details of the first creameries he established, see *New Zealand Herald*, 24 November 1887, p. 6.

¹⁸² *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 March 1892, p. 23: Te Aroha; see also *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 26 March 1892, p. 5.

a day he built at Waihou the first creamery in the district. Next year, with a like guarantee from Te Aroha West he erected a second' one there.¹⁸³ Both were operating by 1894.¹⁸⁴ 'Aeration of the ground by the continued ploughing, the consolidation of the swampy ground by the trampling of cattle, the application of manures both artificial and natural, [and] the improvement of the humus and lime content of the soil in the dry area' meant the land was well prepared for dairying.¹⁸⁵ In 1895 farmers were 'deriving a steady income from the creameries'.¹⁸⁶ How one small dairy farmer attained a modest prosperity was described:

There has been quite a furore amongst those settlers who have supplied the Waikato Creameries with milk on account of the small percentages of butterfat that were obtainable; yet notwithstanding this and other drawbacks they have had to contend with it is really remarkable how well they have been paid for their summer's labour. Let us give an instance of a small settler in our own immediate district who milked on an average only 17 cows for the season which yielded two and one-third gallons per head per day each. The milk was delivered at the Creamery daily (Sundays excepted), from the 1st of September to the 30th April, in all thirty weeks, for which he received a handsome return of £100. In addition to this he was able to make twelve lbs of butter per week from the Sunday's milk which was sold for 8d per lb to the local storekeeper, which totalled for the season £12. The cows being well-bred he was able to get good prices for calves of which he had 19, he sold 14 for £19 and is keeping 5 for his own use, which would be worth 15s each as they are younger than those sold, £33 15s. This was not all, he kept a few pigs which supplied the home with sufficient bacon for the winter use, beside which he obtained £6 from the sale of young ones. From the same cows this industrious settler was able to derive considerable revenue before the Creamery opened in the month of September, the actual amount being some £29. Thus the produce of the 17 cows for the one season reached the handsome amount of £169 15s. This is no exaggerated story, but one of actual fact. The figures do not represent all the product of the cows, the family was able to live, and live well, being supplied with butter and milk which has not been calculated. Two boys are sufficient to do the milking, and as a rule the work is all done by the family. This proves what can be done, despite all the adverse

¹⁸³ 'Old Settler', 'The Beginnings of Te Aroha', *Te Aroha News*, 29 November 1910, p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ Harris, p. 134.

¹⁸⁵ Harris, p. 134.

¹⁸⁶ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., cited in *Thames Advertiser*, 21 February 1895, p. 2.

circumstances against which the struggling settler has to contend.¹⁸⁷

There was much discussion during 1902 about forming a co-operative butter factory, and in December delegates from Te Aroha West, Waihou, and Mangaiti reported that a majority of their suppliers were in favour and 2,000 cows would provide milk.¹⁸⁸ In August 1903 a local correspondent enthusiastically reported the opening of the Te Aroha District Co-Operative Dairy Company's factory at Waihou:

Mention Te Aroha and the average man thinks of baths, soda-water, a mountain, and refractory ores - happy if he has bathed in the first, drunk the second, climbed the third, and avoided the last. In the good time coming he must enlarge his conception - he must, of course, always think of the health-giving waters, but besides these he must think of butter. Te Aroha, first-class butter - first-class butter, Te Aroha. And it may be that this butter will be of more value than many gold mines.

Speakers emphasized that it had the most modern machinery in New Zealand: 'it would be difficult in the factory to find anything to be done by hand'. Only milk suppliers were permitted to hold shares, each being required to have as many shares as the number of cows milked for the factory; the capital was 3,000 £2 shares, and it was expected 2,000 would be taken up during the first season.¹⁸⁹ One month later, the government-appointed grader certified the first shipment of butter as 'first-class'.¹⁹⁰

In its first year, the factory paid out 'some £11,000', but in the year 1912-13 it paid £63,000, which spoke 'volumes for the richness of the lands'. By then three other dairy companies were operating in the valley, producing nearly a quarter of a million pounds-worth of butter annually.¹⁹¹

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE

¹⁸⁷ 'Dairying at Te Aroha', *Te Aroha News*, 11 May 1895, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1902, p. 32.

¹⁸⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 17 August 1903, p. 7.

¹⁹⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 September 1903, p. 33.

¹⁹¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 13 November 1913, Supplement, p. 6; for a summary of the development of the industry and the dairy factories, see Harris, pp. 141-143.

In 1895 there was interest in establishing a sugar beet industry and even in drying fruit using an evaporator.¹⁹² The Te Aroha Horticultural Society's show in that year had many examples of produce, including apples, grapes, peaches, plums, melons, barley, mangolds, swedes, white and red field carrots, sugar beet, yellow and black maize, butter, and cheese.¹⁹³ In 1900, the Te Aroha Agricultural and Horticultural Society's show presented prizes for many more categories. Livestock now included pigs and sheep, and 'field produce' had additional awards for Aberdeen purple top, oats, black oats, and wheat. Farmers' wives produced varieties of butter (home-made, fresh, salt, and fancy) and clotted cream, and farmers provided fruit, including nectarines, pears, quinces, apricots, mulberries, and strawberries. Home-made wine was joined by home-cured ham and bacon, and dried apples and peaches were on display.¹⁹⁴ A tourist visiting the district in 1905 wrote that farming was 'chiefly confined to grazing and dairying', very few sheep being kept. 'The small settlers generally appear to be thriving and happy. They own their buggies, pianos, etc, and seem to be well contented'.¹⁹⁵

Farming had replaced mining as the main industry at Waiorongomai by the turn of the century, and as the land was steadily improved 'some of those milking for the creamery ... had a very good innings' in 1909.¹⁹⁶ In the early years of the twentieth century more land was drained and turned into dairy farms near both Te Aroha and Paeroa; improvements in dairying methods, especially in breeding cows, were noted.¹⁹⁷ By 1910, most cows were bred for dairying, not beef.¹⁹⁸ The first cheese factory in the district was erected at Te Aroha West in 1914.¹⁹⁹

WORKING CONDITIONS ON FARMS

¹⁹² *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1895, p. 2, 1 May 1895, p. 2, 27 November 1895, p. 2, 30 November 1895, p. 2, 7 December 1895, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 May 1895, p. 23; *Waikato Times*, 14 November 1895, p. 4.

¹⁹³ *Te Aroha News*, 9 March 1895, p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 30 January 1900, p. 2, 1 February 1900, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹⁵ J.W. Duffus, 'The Thames Valley', *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 March 1905, p. 16.

¹⁹⁶ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 1 July 1909, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 May 1912, p. 48, 18 July 1912, p. 49.

¹⁹⁸ Harris, p. 136.

¹⁹⁹ Harris, p. 173.

To bring land to a state where farming became profitable required much hard work. According to an account of farming in Piako County based on the recollections of early settlers, conditions before 1880 were extremely difficult, and life primitive:

The cattle strayed for miles; there were no fences; neighbours merely told each other where the animals were last seen; the scrub was higher than the children. Dairying was extremely difficult. The butter, golden from the young fern roots, found no market. The milk was used for feeding the pigs, and the dairy-fed bacon was extremely welcome to the great camps [of swampers]. After losing some cows, one would search a fortnight through fern, scrub and swamp, expecting daily to find them bogged. Finally one would discover them on a slope - dead; they had eaten tutu. Or suppose that one has only three weeks' food left. The Maoris go to Thames by way of the Waihou to get more. They are away seven weeks. One lives four weeks on flour alone.

One put all one's new provisions in a shed or tent outside the house. Heavy rain falls in the night. The river rises and washes all the food stores away; or the flour is wet - so four weeks' bread must be made right away to prevent the flour from becoming mouldy.²⁰⁰

Farming in the late nineteenth century

was of a general mixed nature. Sheep and cattle were reared; large crops of wheat, oats, maize and swedes were grown; and a certain area of pasture was cultivated. Of permanent pasture in the Valley there was indeed little. When the virgin land was broken up by the plough, it was left fallow throughout the winter months to be worked up for the spring sowing of cereals, root crops or pastures. Often seed were sown in the ashes after a "burn" and the resultant pasture was good the first and second years at least, but, by the end of the third or fourth season, the pasture was finished and the plough had to set to work once more. Thus a large part of the farmer's energies was devoted to ploughing that is to-day unnecessary. The small farmer in particular suffered severely, since he had only his own efforts to rely upon.

As soon as a reasonable pasture had been secured the fattening of cattle was immediately taken up.... Most of these cattle were for local consumption, for it was not until about 1890 that there was developed any export trade of consequence.... The cows that were bred were not generally great milk-producers....

²⁰⁰ Harris, p. 54.

The swede was the most important of the root crops, which were generally grown without the use of artificial manures, the chief varieties of which were then bonedust and superphosphate of lime. The bonedust was used with the turnips which were followed by oats or permanent pasture. Grass and the natural growth of weeds were used in conjunction with the turnips, which were first cropped by the special fattening stock....

The cultivation of cereals was a risky business, chiefly owing to the variability of the weather. In short, the climate was far more serviceable to the dairy-farmer than to the sheep-farmer and wheat-grower. Often indeed did the wheat rot in the ground.... Large quantities of oats were consumed on the farm of those days, when the horse was supreme. There were many draught animals which did the heavy labour....

[At first], the dairying industry was only a side-line like bee-farming, the rearing of poultry, pig fattening, or fruit-growing. Though the area of permanent pasture was increasing rapidly, many of the grasses sown proved entirely unsuited to the soil and climate. Inferior grasses - which yet helped to prevent the land from reverting to scrub and manuka - were cropped by the Hereford and Shorthorn milking herds, the endurance of which was matched by their low production.²⁰¹

As an example of hard work, in 1883 one settler was 'seen in black ashes and mud up to his waist, sowing grass seed'.²⁰² With the development of dairying, farmers discovered the need to improve their herds, grow supplementary fodder crops such as swedes, white and yellow turnips, and regularly top-dress; hay-making became 'a much more common practice'.²⁰³

KAURI GUM

Digging up kauri gum started in 1880 on Maori land 'at the back of the Aroha Mountain'. Only Maori seem to have dug, reportedly very profitably.²⁰⁴ Maori worked on another gumfield, in the ranges about 16 miles from Te Aroha, in 1884; being on Crown land, there was 'no obstacle in the way to prevent Europeans who may be on the look out for a job' digging gum also. The *Te Aroha News* was informed 'that as much a three-quarters of a hundredweight has been obtained by one man in a day' and

²⁰¹ Harris, pp. 130, 132-133.

²⁰² *Observer*, 10 March 1883, p. 412.

²⁰³ Harris, pp. 136-137.

²⁰⁴ *Waikato Times*, 20 March 1880, p. 2.

that gum was fetching high prices.²⁰⁵ This news inspired O'Halloran to start purchasing gum, which required 'a considerable outlay for Horse Saddles, Stores &c. The latter as is usual in the trade I had to give the natives Credit for, trusting to be paid in Gum, which I had to pack from their Camp in the bush'. Being 'unlucky, losing several Horses owing to the almost impassable state of the tracks, and the Natives not obtaining sufficient gum to pay me for Stores &c advanced', he was compelled to abandon this business.²⁰⁶ No further mention of gum digging was recorded in the local press until 1907, when it was noted as a growing industry.²⁰⁷

FLAX

Flax milling started in 1885 when John Gibbons, a financially struggling timber merchant,²⁰⁸ diversified by erecting a mill on the riverbank adjacent to his Te Aroha timber yard. The adjoining creek provided motive power and there was plenty of flax 'within an easy distance'.²⁰⁹ He applied to the council for permission to cut flax along the 66-foot-wide river reserve near the railway bridge, arguing that 'what was now lying useless would be profitably utilized' and provide employment. Permission was granted, councillors wanting to encourage the establishment of this industry.²¹⁰ The mill started work in October, but a drought meant that Gibbons could use his plant for only 'a few weeks', and at the beginning of the following year he filed as bankrupt.²¹¹ The mill had cost £150, but when it, the machinery, and the leasehold were sold to pay his debts, only £35 was received.²¹² By 1887, it had been removed to Ohinemuri.²¹³

²⁰⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 15 March 1884, p. 2.

²⁰⁶ George Stewart O'Halloran, untitled handwritten memoir (1894), p. 125, MS 1345, Alexander Turnbull Library.

²⁰⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 23 May 1907, p. 3.

²⁰⁸ See *Thames Advertiser*, 7 April 1884, p. 2, 28 April 1884, p. 2, 20 February 1886, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 April 1885, p. 2.

²¹⁰ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 30 May 1885, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 June 1885, p. 3.

²¹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 31 October 1885, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1886, p. 2, 20 February 1886, p. 3.

²¹² *Thames Advertiser*, 20 February 1886, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 3 April 1886, p. 2.

²¹³ *Te Aroha News*, 8 January 1887, p. 2.

In 1889, five mills were erected between Te Aroha and Firth's Stanley Landing, near Matamata. The Te Aroha one was on the west bank, close to the railway bridge; the nearest mill was half-way along the road to Waiorongomai.²¹⁴ In January that year, the Te Aroha one burnt down. Its owner 'had had many difficulties to contend with, but in a most persevering and plucky manner surmounted them all, and was for some time prior to the disaster putting through a large quantity of flax weekly'. As the 'recent rise in the price of the dressed article made the outlook ... very encouraging', this mill, which had employed 'a large number of hands', was rebuilt.²¹⁵ In June the *Observer* reported, in its usual style, that the industry was 'the general "go" in this district, and the flax hands are playing greatly on the hearts of the young ladies'.²¹⁶

The boom was followed within less than a year by a 'serious decline'.²¹⁷ In April 1890 the Wairakau mill closed because of the low price of flax.²¹⁸ The Te Aroha mill also closed during the year, although the *Te Aroha News* hoped it would soon reopen;²¹⁹ in December a new mill did start work.²²⁰ After closing temporarily because of the maritime strike, it before closed in November the following year because of low prices.²²¹ In June 1892 it was 'in decay, all as silent as the grave, recalling the time of the recent flax boom'.²²² It restarted in October after being 'idle for many months'.²²³ Two mills were operating in 1893, their heavy loads damaging roads during the wet winter.²²⁴

There was another small flax boom in 1898 when prices rose to £17 a ton. Instead of the old mills reopening, a new one was started at Manawaru. The local newspaper, always seeking ways to spread good news about the

²¹⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 8 May 1889, p. 2.

²¹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 2 January 1889, p. 2; see also 26 January 1889, p. 2, 16 February 1889, p.2, 8 May 1889, p. 2.

²¹⁶ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 1 June 1889, p. 18.

²¹⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 12 March 1890, p. 2.

²¹⁸ *Waikato Times*, 17 April 1890, p. 2.

²¹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., cited in *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 October 1890, p. 17.

²²⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 December 1890, p. 23.

²²¹ *Waikato Times*, 30 October 1890, p. 2, 21 November 1891, p. 2.

²²² Letter from N.E.B., *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 June 1892, p. 7.

²²³ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 September 1892, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 October 1892, p. 23.

²²⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 July 1893, p. 23.

district, reported that an Auckland firm stated that Te Aroha flax 'was second to none for quality in this colony'. A good year for flax meant employment and immediately created 'a general air of prosperity'. The Manawaru mill would employ 'at least forty hands immediately, and we anticipate a period has probably been put to local stagnation in business'.²²⁵ Other mills would be erected, but were profitable only periodically; in 1904, for example, a Mangaiti flaxmill became bankrupt.²²⁶ By the beginning of 1911, the industry was reportedly not 'petering out', despite the latest drop in prices, and a new mill was being erected in the Hungahunga Swamp to process its large flax crops.²²⁷

PROBLEMS OF ACCESS

In 1930 it was recalled that for the district 'the problem of transport was fundamental', using the analogy of 'highways by land and water' being arteries suffering 'from sluggish circulation.

Its roads meandered along the margins of its swamps or wandered upstream in search of a crossing. The earliest pioneer drove his team across country by the best route he could find: his wheel-tracks were the roadway for the man who followed. Highway Boards, drawing rates from settlers with empty purses, couldn't be expected to have full ones. A deep excavation and a high embankment were costly: a deviation and a few fascines must serve. Surveyors of roads, so the story runs, were paid by the angle, at rates known and sanctioned: one such is remembered as Mr Angular Blank.²²⁸

An early settler stated 'that by following the windings of river-banks and ridges, seeking suitable spots for fording the streams, and laying fascines on the boggy places', it was possible to drive a wagon between the first settlements. 'One always carried axe and spade, effecting repairs, or grading a declivity or filling a chasm as might be required. The real trouble began when the settlers fenced their holdings', compelling travelers 'to follow the surveyed highway, instead of wandering at will over the

²²⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1898, p. 2.

²²⁶ *New Zealand Gazette*, 1 September 1904, p. 2137.

²²⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 February 1911, p. 49.

²²⁸ *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, ed. F.W. Wild (Te Aroha, 1930), p. 333.

countryside or following the old Maori tracks'.²²⁹ For years minor roads were in poor condition, one, for instance, in 1880 being 'totally impassable, and several horses have lately been submerged in the mud'.²³⁰ A son of one of the first settlers recalled that in 1880 'the only wheeled vehicle in Te Aroha West' was one farmer's dray; 'all other farmers used sledges for farmwork and for travelling to and from Te Aroha'.²³¹ In 1884, a settler recalled the first roads as being so bad that it took 'a day to walk a few miles'.²³² A later recollection described the first roads:

It was many years before the settlers were able to travel about on good roads. They lived very isolated and lonely lives, perhaps not seeing their nearest neighbour for days. In the very early days settlers would have to push their flat-bottomed punts up streams and through swamps and lagoons to get to their farms on the higher-lying land. The first roads, running along the banks of the main drains, were made from spoil. In the wet weather these roads became quagmires and it was safer for the settlers to stay at home, for the buggies and gigs sank axle-deep in the mud. Sometimes after being stuck our mother had to wade through the mud to the nearest bush and cut branches to ram under the wheels to enable the horse to pull the vehicle out. A few of the roads were fascined, that is, bundles of tea-tree were laid across them. One road was fascined to a depth of three feet. It was 10 years before the roads could take heavy traffic, and it took them many more years to have them metalled.²³³

James McCormick, a farmer who arrived in the district in 1878,²³⁴ in 1930 recalled

that by following the windings of river-banks and ridges, seeking suitable spots for fording the streams, and laying fascines on the boggy places, it was possible to drive a wagon from one to another of the settlements then established in Piako County. One always carried axe and spade, effecting repairs or grading a declivity or filling a chasm as might be required. The real trouble began when the settlers fenced their holdings, compelling the teams to follow the surveyed highway, instead of wandering at will over the

²²⁹ *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, p. 335.

²³⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 24 May 1880, p. 3.

²³¹ Recollections of George Mace, *Te Aroha News*, 26 October 1927, p. 5.

²³² Recollections of James Lavery, *Waikato Times*, 26 April 1884, p. 2.

²³³ Recollection of Miss J. Hayward, *Te Aroha News*, 12 April 1946, p. 7.

²³⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 26 October 1927, p. 5.

countryside or following the old Maori tracks. In the early days of the goldfields, long before continuous roads were constructed, cattle were regularly driven along the stock route from Waikato to Thames by way of Cambridge, Matamata and the Waihou River. The western bank was used as far as Mangaiti where there was a practicable ford, thence the eastern bank. In places it might be necessary to make a detour, but in general the track was along the river-bank, or across firm country near to it.²³⁵

The state of the first roads had one benefit for a local plumber and tinsmith, John Benjamin Johnson.²³⁶

The awful state of the roads led to his doing a wonderfully brisk business in the manufacture of lanterns. Blind creeks, lagoons, and swampy patches impeded progress in every direction between the mountain and the river. Take a false step at night, and you might find yourself up to your middle in slush. To ensure a safe passage among the bogs, everyone bought one of Johnson's lanterns.²³⁷

Attempts to improve roads sometimes increased the hazards, as experienced by a reporter who visited Waitekauri in 1897:

From Earl's Hill to Waitekauri not much of the road could be seen, as the darkness came on apace, but it could be felt most distinctly, especially a short bit of corduroy – *i.e.*, tree trunks laid across the way. And wild, vindictive stuff it was, too. On meeting a log you are shot up with such force as to incline you to the belief that horses and vehicle must part company. You only have time for one short gasp when you return on the other side at about double the pace of the ascent, and with a jar that seems to loosen every bolt and screw in the chaise. What the horses suffer it would be hard to tell. After parting from the corduroy we fell in with a stretch of "spalls." A road laid in spalls is, in plain English, a road metalled with boulders the size of a large pumpkin. This stretch finished the churning process to perfection.²³⁸

USING THE RIVER FOR ACCESS

²³⁵ Recollections of James McCormick, *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, pp. 335, 337.

²³⁶ See *Te Aroha News*, 11 January 1940, p. 5.

²³⁷ Recollections of John Benjamin Johnson, *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, p. 343.

²³⁸ 'An Excursion on the Gold-Fields', *New Zealand Herald*, 6 March 1897, Supplement, p.

When the goldfield opened, as it was not possible to drive a coach to Thames because of 'the difficulty and costliness of constructing a passable road across the Mananui swamp, south of Paeroa, and by disputes with the Maori owners of lands on the route', the river was 'invaluable'.²³⁹ As Hamilton merchants hoped goods would be sent via their town, a Hamilton correspondent warned of 'the miseries' of travelling up the river.²⁴⁰ A month later, he repeated that 'no one who could possibly avoid it would encounter the miseries of the river steamers, and the risk of detention on a snag or sand bar'. The voyage from Auckland to Thames took 'about the same time' as going by railway from Auckland to Hamilton, and the latter was 'certainly the more expensive', but after then 'the difference comes in'.²⁴¹ This was not just special pleading: in January 1886, for instance, a trip up the river by paddle steamer took 14 hours, 'a very long and dreary experience'.²⁴² One young man who rode from Thames on horseback while his parents travelled by boat arrived four or five hours ahead of them.²⁴³

Regular steamer traffic became possible only after snags were removed by Josiah Clifton Firth, whose 'indomitable perseverance' was praised by a newspaper which regretted 'we have not more of such men in our midst'.²⁴⁴ Firth was not being altruistic: he was seeking a cheap route to the Auckland market for his Matamata produce. Having failed to get the government to clear the river, he spent seven years, 'except for the time when excitement amongst the natives made it risky for the peace of the country to continue the work', clearing it as far as Stanley Landing at a cost (by March 1880) of £7,442 4s 5d, making it navigable for steamers drawing not more than three feet.²⁴⁵ Three steamers were used, one fitted with a steam winch, along with punts, to dynamite obstructions and dredge shallows.²⁴⁶ At the banquet to celebrate the clearing of the river, he

²³⁹ *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, p. 339.

²⁴⁰ Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 9.

²⁴¹ Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 December 1880, p. 9.

²⁴² *Waikato Times*, 16 January 1886, p. 2.

²⁴³ Recollections of H. Jackson, *Te Aroha News*, 26 October 1927, p. 5.

²⁴⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 February 1883, p. 20.

²⁴⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 March 1880, p. 17; see depiction of the snagging in R.P. Hargreaves and T.J. Hearn, *Colonial New Zealand: Engravings of the Victorian period* (Dunedin, 1980), illustration 99.

²⁴⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 February 1880, p. 3.

responded to the Premier's praise of his 'self-reliance' by commenting that, while glad that the work would benefit all, 'no doubt I had hoped to reap individual benefit'.²⁴⁷ In October 1880, he told the Waste Lands Board that he had spent £10,000 on the work and that 'it was true that he had done so for his own convenience and profit', but not adding that borrowed money had covered the cost.²⁴⁸ The effort involved was illustrated by the first detailed report, in June 1878:

Mr Firth's steamer, the 'Tui', some time ago penetrated within a few miles of the head of the navigation, blowing up by means of dynamite, as she went up the stream, the more important snags and rapids which were met with. Since reaching the head of the navigation, she has been for some time at work clearing a channel down stream 40 feet wide. Some of the snags taken out were 120 feet long by 4 feet diameter at the butt, stretching in some instances almost across the river. During the last four months two of the worst rapids have been removed, and 228 large snags have been entirely destroyed. In places where not more than 18 inches of water existed formerly, there now is a depth of from four to five feet during the dry season.

One of Firth's skippers believed the work would create 'an even channel, nowhere less than four feet deep, from the head of the navigation down to Ohinemuri, a distance of about 70 miles'.

The operation of removing the snags must be a sight well worth seeing. A charge of dynamite having been placed under a large mass of timber lying across the river, and the fuse lighted, all hands beat a hasty retreat. The fuse quietly smoulders on the surface of the water, and in a minute or two thereafter a tremendous explosion takes place. A dome-shaped volume of water suddenly rises from the river, out of which there shoots up a column of water 150 feet in height, like a gigantic fountain, and when the commotion has subsided the snag is found to have disappeared, broken into fragments, some of which are frequently discovered 100 feet away. Some of the pieces float down the river, and the larger and more dangerous portions are anchored by fencing wires to trees on shore to prevent their getting into the fairway.

²⁴⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 March 1880, Supplement, p. 1.

²⁴⁸ Waste Lands Board, *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 October 1880, p. 19; Russell Stone, *Makers of Fortune: A colonial business community and its fall* (Auckland, 1973), pp. 144-146.

The disposal of the rocks which form the rapid is a work of greater magnitude and difficulty. In one instance, a body of rock stretched nearly across the river, affording a passage for canoes only. About eighteen inches of water flowed over the rock, forming one of the most difficult and dangerous rapids on the river. About 100lb of dynamite was placed on this rock in a narrow bag, about forty feet long. The preparation being completed and the fuse lighted, the working party went to a safe distance. The explosion was most terrific. Amidst the deafening roar of rending rocks the water was seen for an instant heaped up for the whole breadth of the river, and the current for a second or two was up-stream instead of down. Meantime, a large mass of water, nearly the width of the river, rose to the height of about 150 feet, falling backward with the noise of a vast cataract. When the commotion had subsided, it was found that there was a channel right through the rocky barrier 40 feet wide and 5 feet deep.²⁴⁹

This was the destruction of 'the worst impediment to navigation', the rapids known as Te Au-o-Tonga, which Firth later explained 'was supposed to have been mainly caused by the great quartz reef' later discovered by Hone Werahiko 'in the Te Aroha mountain, from which it descended to the plain, crossing the river at this point'.²⁵⁰ He later described this explosion:

Never did I hear such a terrific roar, or behold so grand, so sublime a spectacle. With a wondrous majesty, the whole breadth of the river seemed to mount upwards, diminishing in breadth as it rose, and then, for an instant, there was projected against the background of the purple mountains a column of translucent water, adorned with a hundred radiant pinnacles rising higher and higher, and terminating in a final pinnacle five hundred feet above the river. Illumined by the setting sun, a thousand tiny rainbows dazzled us for one instant, and then, the gorgeous spectacle dissolved, and slowly fell back a shapeless mass of water, into the river,

An unsubstantial pageant faded.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ 'Snagging the Thames River', *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 June 1878, p. 16.

²⁵⁰ Josiah Clifton Firth, *Nation Making: A story of New Zealand: savagism v. civilization* (London, 1890), pp. 230-232; *Thames Advertiser*, 14 October 1881, p. 3, confirmed this was the reef Firth dynamited.

²⁵¹ Firth, p. 231.

It took a week to destroy Te Au-o-Tonga.²⁵² This extension of the main Waiorongomai reef was later traced across the flat to the river, and in the late 1880s the Alameda shaft was sunk to strike it.²⁵³

In August 1878, the 'Tui' reached Firth's land, 40 miles past Omaha, the first steamer to get so far up river.²⁵⁴ The 'native difficulty' continued to delay completing the work. Ngati Kahu, some 20 people, who lived beside the Waihou about 15 miles above its junction with the Ohinemuri, in 1879 requested £100 as compensation for removing five eel weirs, but Firth declined, having already paid money to snag above Omaha.²⁵⁵ Not waiting until this claim was settled, snagging on this section commenced in April, paid for by the county council after protests at their inaction despite damage done to three steamers in the preceding six months.²⁵⁶ In August, Firth's new steamer, the 'Kotuku', 82 feet long and with a 20-foot beam and a draught of three feet, capable of carrying 35 tons in summer and 50 during winter, delivered a cargo to Pakopako, the Matamata landing, later called Stanley, and loaded wheat to be delivered to Auckland at 'far less cost' than a railway would charge.²⁵⁷

Not all the hazards been removed before settlement of the Aroha Block commenced.²⁵⁸ In June 1880, the small launch 'Riro Riro' went upriver from Omaha with a settler's family and furniture and effects:

From Omaha upwards the current is strong but very shallow, and our little craft, although of very light draught, several times scraped the bottom. Great care requires to be exercised by masters of steamers in piloting their vessels up the river as they are liable to ground on a sand-bar or snag and remain there until a fresh sets in and enables them to float off.

²⁵² Firth, p. 232.

²⁵³ *Waikato Times*, 29 November 1888, p. 2.

²⁵⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 August 1878, p. 2.

²⁵⁵ Letter from C.F. Mitchell, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 March 1879, p. 3; Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 April 1879, p. 3.

²⁵⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, letter from C.F. Mitchell, 6 March 1879, p. 3, 31 March 1879, p. 2, 7 April 1879, p. 3.

²⁵⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 August 1879, p. 8; *Thames Advertiser*, 27 February 1880, p. 3.

²⁵⁸ For example, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 February 1880, p. 3.

As there were 'a number of very dangerous snags' above Omahu, even Firth's 'specially-built steamer', the 'Kotuku', struck sandbars and snags 'frequently'.²⁵⁹ The need to transport heavy machinery to his Waiorongomai battery encouraged Firth to do further work, as explained in April 1882:

Hitherto these efforts have mainly been confined to removing snags and boulders from the bed of the stream, and but little was done towards deepening the channel, which in some places was so choked with sandbanks as to seriously impede the traffic. A few weeks ago ... these sandbanks and shoals were further increased by the unfortunate cutting of a drain through the river bank by one of Grant and Foster's settlers [at Shaftesbury], the result being that some thousands of tons of earth and sand were swept into the river, lodging, of course, where previous shoals had existed. So great had the evil grown that traffic was suspended, and but for the unusually wet season we have had would possibly have been stopped altogether. During the last few weeks Mr Firth has, with his usual public spirit, done something towards removing these hindrances to the navigation of the Waihou. On the last trip of the "Kotuku," Captain [William] Sullivan²⁶⁰ was instructed to erect groynes at various points for the purpose of narrowing the river, and so deepened the channel. He was supplied with a quantity of 2-inch iron piping. With these, and willow branches, and long tea-tree faggots, he has constructed three groynes in the worst shallows.... No. 1 is 150 feet long, No. 2 84 feet, and No. 3 126 feet. The effect upon the river was immediately perceptible, for while previous to the groynes being constructed the river steamers invariably stuck fast at these places, there is now any quantity of water.... All the groynes have been erected below the township at Te Aroha.²⁶¹

These improvements did not solve all the problems; in the following month the 'Kotuku', when carrying machinery for the battery, stuck on a sandbar a few miles above Paeroa.²⁶² Silting continued to be a problem, worsened by humans. In February 1889 the *Te Aroha News* was informed of the local flaxmill's 'most repulsive practice' of 'disposing of all waste tow, etc, by bundling it up and throwing it into the river'. This must stop,

²⁵⁹ Own Correspondent, 'Tour in the Aroha, Waitoa, and Piako Districts', *Thames Advertiser*, 22 June 1880, p. 3.

²⁶⁰ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 447; *AJHR*, 1910, C-14, pp. 79-83; *New Zealand Herald*, 15 June 1925, p. 10.

²⁶¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 April 1882, p. 9.

²⁶² *Thames Advertiser*, 30 May 1882, p. 3.

because the waste 'would prove most mischievous' by creating 'sand banks and accumulations' and perhaps fouling 'the screws of boats'.²⁶³ Three months later a deputation informed the Minister of Public Works that the Waihou above Paeroa was becoming 'more and more difficult for navigation every year' and 'larger steamers could not get up'.²⁶⁴

Firth's answer to silting was to plant willows. In 1880 he planted 10,000 at every sandy bend between Omaha and Stanley Landing to protect banks 'likely to be affected by freshets, or the wash of steamers'. One newspaper considered that, 'apart from the great value of this measure as a conservator of the river banks, it will greatly conduce to the beauty of the scene'.²⁶⁵ The romantically inclined were no doubt delighted that these willows were grown from 'scions brought in 1839 from the tomb of Napoleon at Longwood, St Helena, by the captain of a vessel who stopped there on his passage to Maoriland'.²⁶⁶ Seven years later, a visitor was pleased to see the trees 'doing well', and considered that, 'besides assisting to keep open the navigation', they would become 'an element of beauty on this really beautiful river'.²⁶⁷

Soon opinions changed because of the predictable result. By 1898 navigation between Te Aroha and Paeroa was 'in danger of being blocked' by the willows' 'exuberant growth'.²⁶⁸ In 1908 the Northern Steamship Company asked the Ohinemuri County Council to clear them because, 'with much difficulty and risk', the company provided a river service, and clearance started the following year.²⁶⁹

Before then, and despite the snagging, river trips could still be slow and difficult. One early settler recalled travelling on the 'Vivid' 'when she was so overladen with goods that she refused to answer the helm at the corners with the result that she dived into the bank time and again. The vessel had to be hauled clear by a line taken to the opposite bank'. Another settler remembered a trip from Thames to Te Aroha lasting thirteen and a

²⁶³ *Te Aroha News*, 16 February 1889, p. 2.

²⁶⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 4 May 1889, p. 2.

²⁶⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 October 1880, p. 16.

²⁶⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 September 1899, p. 2.

²⁶⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 July 1887, p. 8.

²⁶⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 12 April 1898, p. 2.

²⁶⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 31 December 1908, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, Te Aroha Correspondent, 27 May 1909, p. 36, 20 February 1913, p. 48.

half hours.²⁷⁰ There were occasional grumbles about the quality of the service provided,²⁷¹ but in general it seems to have been satisfactory, and for a time services extended up-river beyond Te Aroha.²⁷² In 1884 six steamers²⁷³ operated between Thames and Waiorongomai, ‘calling at the intermediate settlements, and occasionally going up as far as Matamata’.²⁷⁴ Rival shipping companies meant reduced fares in the 1890s; by then, larger vessels did not go further up-river than Paeroa, cargo then being barged upstream.²⁷⁵ Completing the railway to Thames in 1898 largely ended river transport to Te Aroha.

THE ROAD TO PAEROA

‘Long before continuous roads were constructed’, cattle were driven from Waikato to Thames along the western bank of the river from Matamata to the ford at Mangaiti and then along the eastern bank. According to a 1930 recollection, ‘in places it might be necessary to make a detour, but in general the track was along the river-bank, or across firm country near to it’. It was relatively easy to control the cattle, for ‘the river was the fence on the one side, the almost continuous swamps on the other. A bit of fascining here and there, or hauling a beast out of a bog, was all in the day’s work’.²⁷⁶ A contemporary account of taking stock from Te Aroha to Paeroa in January 1882 indicated that this recollection was rose-coloured. The drovers stayed overnight in a Te Aroha hotel:

That night was fearfully warm and we had a very tiny bedroom with 2 beds in it and it was so hot and stuffy that we hardly slept

²⁷⁰ C.T. Harris, ‘The Romance of the Upper Thames Valley: A Study in New Zealand Colonisation’, *Te Aroha News*, 19 October 1936, p. 8.

²⁷¹ For example, Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1881, p. 3.

²⁷² For instance, in 1883 the ‘Huia’ started a fortnightly run from Thames to Shaftesbury: *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1883, p. 2.

²⁷³ For photographs of the ‘Kotuku’, ‘Te Aroha’, ‘Pataki’, ‘Ruby’, and ‘Waimarie’, see Cliff Furness, *Servants of the North: Adventures on the coastal trade with the Northern Steamship Company* (Wellington, 1977), pp. 34, 42, 45, and facing p. 36.

²⁷⁴ Travelling Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha and Waiorongomai’, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 17 November 1883, p. 2.

²⁷⁵ Harris, ‘Upper Thames Valley’, *Te Aroha News*, 21 October 1936, p. 8.

²⁷⁶ *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, pp. 335, 337.

at all and had to be up at 4 the next morning, catch the horse and off. One of the Newstead stockmen came up to help us get the cattle over the river. We got them to the river easily enough but had such a job to get them in to the water, and when we did get them in they wouldn't cross but kept going round and round. We had to get a man in a boat to come and help us and after an hour's hard work we got them over and swam the horses after then – arrived on the other side they got among some swampy land covered with flax and tea-tree bush and we had an awful job to get them out of it. The stockman in getting round them came to utter grief. I was near him but couldn't see him thro' the bush. I heard a deep tone big big d and then a plaintive voice saying "I say you fellows my horse is out of sight" and on getting to the spot we found him covered with mud standing on the bank of a swampy creek with his horse down in it and just his head sticking out of the mud and water. We had no time to pull him out then so I held the brute's head up while the stockman took my horse (as he knew the country) and went on with Hunt to get the cattle on the trail. I had a lovely time of it holding the horse's head up – and so did the mosquitoes, only they had the best of it, and the advantage of me as I had no hands to keep them off, both being engaged on the horse. The men came back and after a lot of struggling we got the poor horse out – very weak. The stockman went home with him and we went on.

Got on very well till we came to the [Rotokohu] pass or gorge over the mountain thro' the bush. Here the cattle kept breaking away into the bush giving us endless trouble and when we did get them thro' it and we counted them we found that one was missing. Hunt went back to look for him and I took the rest on and stopped them at a place where there was feed and waited for him. He came back in about an hour having found the lost beast but couldn't drive him on so we had to drive back 2 others to encourage him. Had to go back about 3 miles and after a lot of scrimmaging in the bush we got him back to the mob and then went on and arrived at Paeroa a village at 6 o'clock having been 14 hours in the saddle.

After the 'dirtiest' meal he had ever had in a 'very mean pub', he rose at 4 o'clock in the morning 'and got stuck in a bog, nearly lost my horse. About 10 o'clock it began to rain and poured all day' before they reached Thames, wet through.²⁷⁷ In June that year, 'a drove of bullocks intended for the Thames market' had to be returned to the Waikato because stockmen could not 'persuade them to cross the Waihou. The heavy current carried

²⁷⁷ Harry Bullock-Webster (January 1882), pp. 16-24 of original, typescript, p. 2, Acc. 1970/347/1, vol. 2, Waikato Museum of Art and History Library.

them down the river, and caused them to return to the banks from whence they were driven, until the attempt was relinquished'.²⁷⁸

The original 15-mile road to Paeroa had swamps at both ends and the Rotokohu gorge contained 15 bridges, some of which were washed away during winter.²⁷⁹ The man who carried the mail on horseback between Te Aroha and Paeroa in the early 1880s later recalled crossing the Mananui swamp, near Paeroa:

The swamp road was not alluring: a drain, wide and deep, lay beside it. After heavy rain the whole area became a lake, and it was not easy to distinguish the road from the drain. He had many a miserable ride, splashing along, wet through, muddied from head to foot, chilled to the bone. On one occasion he had to leave his horse, hopelessly bogged in the drain, and slosh afoot through the mire to Paeroa.²⁸⁰

In February 1879, this road was in a 'bad state' and trees had fallen across it 'in many places in the Rotokohu bush'.²⁸¹ In June, sections between the gorge and Te Aroha were 'positively dangerous to man and beast'.²⁸² By April 1880, fascines laid in the gorge had rotted, making the road impassible in wet weather,²⁸³ and a Thames resident drew the council's attention to 'the dangerous state of the Omahu swamp'.²⁸⁴ The horse-track from Paeroa did not reach the river at Te Aroha, and in May 1880 this unmade section was 'totally impassable, and several horses have lately been submerged in the mud'.²⁸⁵ Appeals to local and central governments resulted in temporary improvements, as in March 1881 when the first light four-wheeled carriages used it and one woman took less than two and a half hours for the journey, a record time.²⁸⁶ The following month, the council

²⁷⁸ *Te Aroha Mail*, 10 June 1882, p. 2.

²⁷⁹ Harris, 'Upper Thames Valley', *Te Aroha News*, 19 October 1936, p. 8.

²⁸⁰ Recollections of Fred Devey, *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, p. 339.

²⁸¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 February 1879, p. 8.

²⁸² Ohinemuri Goldfield Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 June 1879, p. 3.

²⁸³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 April 1880, p. 3.

²⁸⁴ *Thames Star*, 8 April 1880, p. 2.

²⁸⁵ *Thames Star*, 24 May 1880, p. 3.

²⁸⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

finished making the 'Swamp Road' (the present route), reducing the time to about two hours.²⁸⁷

When George O'Halloran managed to extract a small sum from the council to make a road over the swamps to enable people to ride to the springs and his hotel, he supervised its construction free of charge.²⁸⁸ In May 1881, a correspondent referred to 'loud as well as deep' complaints by Te Aroha residents about 'the utter want of roads' on the eastern bank of the river. He saw 'all hands, including the manager', of one mining claim 'working hard last week to make themselves a road along what is supposed to be the main road line. They have made and laid down four culverts and two bridges, and with the value of the time given must have gone to an expense of over £20'.²⁸⁹ Although the government did grant subsidies for repairs,²⁹⁰ problems continued. Coaches driving from Te Aroha to Paeroa in 1882 carried axes to remove trees that fell across the road at night.²⁹¹ Rain in April 1883 meant the coach to Thames stopped running until after winter.²⁹² One horse being ridden along the swamp road in June was staked in the chest.²⁹³ By late 1884, when daily coaches ran to Thames to connect with steamers for Auckland, the journey took 'under six hours, the roads being now in splendid order'.²⁹⁴ Only in dry weather was the road easy to travel on, and there were regular requests for repairs and improvements.²⁹⁵

THE ROAD TO HAMILTON

When Frederick Strange's family first traveled from Hamilton to their farm, the Rangiatea estate in the Waitoa district, in 1876, their wagon followed 'a route that twisted and turned, keeping to firm country and skirting the hills to avoid the swamps'. After passing through Tauwhare they went 'easterly and northerly' to a store on the Piako River near the

²⁸⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 9 April 1881, p. 2.

²⁸⁸ O'Halloran, pp. 116-117.

²⁸⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 17 May 1881, p. 2.

²⁹⁰ For example, *Waikato Times*, 16 August 1881, p. 3.

²⁹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1882, p. 3.

²⁹² *Waikato Times*, 17 April 1883, p. 2.

²⁹³ *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 2.

²⁹⁴ Travelling Correspondent, 'Te Aroha and Waiorongomai', *Bay of Plenty Times*, 17 November 1883, p. 2.

²⁹⁵ For example, Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 8 November 1894, p. 6.

later site of Morrinsville. They then ‘struck southward, quite away from their real line of advance, and skirted the higher ground at Kereone, whence, turning northward, they made for the Waitoa River’. After crossing this, ‘the road continued circuitously, following the river-bank a little way southward again, then wriggling and squirming past the marches of the Piraunui and the Waihekaui to the journey’s end’.²⁹⁶

In that year, £1,000 was granted to make a road from Hamilton to Omahu, ‘obviating the necessity of going round by Matamata, and saving a distance of 40 miles’.²⁹⁷ It was formed from spoil from a large drain.²⁹⁸ By February 1880 it was ‘a fine, broad dray road’.²⁹⁹ In July, a reporter found ‘as good a piece of road as could be found in the colony’ running from Omahu to Morrinsville. For five miles it went through swampy land at Waitoa, the surveyor ‘having carried it for three parts of the distance in almost a straight line in spite of all difficulties, and even in the depth of winter carriages and waggons use it with ease, so well has it been formed’. It was not damaged by heavy traffic because of being ‘composed of a light sandy soil, which becomes very compact when hardened by the sun and used a little’, compared with roads made of clay or black soil.³⁰⁰ But in December the Hamilton newspaper reported was receiving ‘great complaints’ about its bad state.³⁰¹ The first wheeled vehicle to travel from Hamilton to Thames via Te Aroha carried a party of parliamentarians in January 1882.³⁰² The road ‘served very well’ in summer; ‘in winter it didn’t’.³⁰³ During the winter of 1882 the ‘Te Aroha coachman’ reported ‘the road beyond Morrinsville as all but impassable’, especially where contractors were deepening the roadside drain.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁶ *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley*, pp. 333, 335.

²⁹⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 October 1876, p. 13, 11 November 1876, p. 5.

²⁹⁸ Recollections of Frederick Marychurch Strange, 1948, MU 356A, Mobile Unit of New Zealand Broadcasting Council, RadioNZ Archives.

²⁹⁹ *Waikato Times*, 17 February 1880, p. 2.

³⁰⁰ Own Reporter, ‘Tour in the Aroha, Waitoa, and Piako Districts’, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 July 1880, p. 3.

³⁰¹ *Waikato Times*, 21 December 1880, p. 2.

³⁰² *Waikato Times*, 10 January 1882, p. 2.

³⁰³ *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley: pioneering in the Thames Valley 1867-1930*, ed. F.W. Wild (Te Aroha, 1930), p. 339.

³⁰⁴ *Waikato Times*, 6 June 1882, p. 2.

The following year, a horse pulling a coach ‘dropped dead when within a few yards of the stables at Te Aroha’ because of ‘the bad state of the roads, and the consequent increased demand upon the endurance of the horses’.³⁰⁵ In time, roads improved as more metal and less clay and soil was used in making them. In November 1894, when the council was macadamising the Hamilton road and clearing the drains, it was anticipated that summer traffic would ‘thoroughly harden’ it before winter.³⁰⁶

ACCESS TO THE BAY OF PLENTY

Another road vital for farmers followed an old Maori trail over the ranges to the port of Tauranga. In February 1880, the police officer in charge of the Tauranga district strongly recommended forming a road from Te Aroha to Katikati.³⁰⁷ The rough existing track across the range took nearly a whole day to ride; the new trail, for which the government allocated £3,500, was expected to reduce that to a few hours.³⁰⁸ The existing Maori track from Wairakau to the foot of the range was the Te Aroha end of the new road, which would run for about ten miles to end at Te Rereatukahia on the Tauranga side.³⁰⁹ Building the Tuahu bridle track, as it became known, took over two years, and, once completed, it soon needed repairs; in March 1885 the government gave £400 to clear slips and considered widening it for wheeled traffic.³¹⁰ By September, although ‘very unsatisfactory’ because of slips, horsemen could get through. Katikati residents convinced the government to turn the Maori trail known, in honour of Wiremu Tamihana, as Thompson’s Track, into a road; as its summit was 450 feet lower than the Tuahu it would be cheaper to construct.³¹¹ After being kept in repair whilst Thompson’s Track was

³⁰⁵ *Waikato Times*, 2 October 1883, p. 2.

³⁰⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 8 November 1894, p. 6.

³⁰⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 February 1880, p. 3.

³⁰⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 April 1880, p. 3.

³⁰⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 July 1880, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 August 1880, p. 8; for a description of the track and its suitability as a coach road, see Travelling Correspondent, ‘Te Aroha and Waiorongomai’, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 17 November 1883, p. 2.

³¹⁰ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 1 July 1882, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, letter from ‘Traveller’, 31 January 1885, p. 7, 28 March 1885, p. 2.

³¹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 5 September 1885, p. 2, 31 October 1885, p. 2.

built,³¹² the Tuahu was left to the elements. On the new track, which was not finally completed until 1895,³¹³ slips regularly creating problems and expense. (In 1935, in response to plans to convert Thompson's Track into 'a motor highway', Katikati residents countered with a proposal to restore the Tuahu track because it was three miles shorter and, 'throughout its length, of a much easier gradient'.)³¹⁴

PUNTS

In January 1879, O'Halloran convinced the council that a ferry was needed at Omahu and offered to operate it free of charge.³¹⁵ In return for the council making a road to the river, he obtained a punt 'capable of carrying men and horses'. He did not charge for its use, for it brought custom to his hotel. 'It was self-acting, that is, a person on the bank had only to push it into the river and the action of the current would take it over to the other side'.³¹⁶ It was operating by April.³¹⁷ O'Halloran seems to have expected the council to improve this basic punt, for in June he stated it had 'proved a great boon to travellers and others' but 'in its present unfinished state its usefulness' was 'much restricted'.³¹⁸ Two months later he asked the council to rectify the bad state of the approaches, which was 'absolutely necessary to prevent loss of life to man or beast. The punt has never yet been properly finished and the road, for the want of a few pounds expenditure, is almost impassable'.³¹⁹ An October report noted that, owing to the fine weather, the roads were in good order, and the punt had been 'repaired and put in good order by Mr O'Halloran, who will no doubt be happy to ferry you over'.³²⁰ Four months later, O'Halloran described the road to the punt as 'very bad' and the punt as having been in a 'bad state of repair' for 'a long time'.

³¹² *Te Aroha News*, 15 April 1886, p. 2.

³¹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 January 1895, p. 5.

³¹⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 19 September 1935, p. 12.

³¹⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1879, p. 3.

³¹⁶ O'Halloran, memoirs, p. 117.

³¹⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 April 1879, p. 3, 18 April 1879, p. 3.

³¹⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 June 1879, p. 3.

³¹⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 11 August 1879, p. 3.

³²⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 October 1879, p. 3.

I have often pointed out the necessity of something being done, as travellers run great risks both to themselves and animals as things are at present. Your correspondent has from time to time patched things up at his own expense, but nothing short of a £20 note will now be of any use if the road is to be kept open. Three hundred sheep crossed here last week, but several were nearly drowned, owing to there being no rail around the punt.³²¹

A punt near the hot springs was operating in time for the 1880 rush.³²² In July 1881 the Te Kawana punt was removed down river to Waitoki, where, according to O'Halloran, it was 'of no use to anyone except the road contractors and their men to enable them to cross the river pig hunting'.³²³ There was even rumoured the bridge would be erected there instead of at Te Aroha.³²⁴ At the end of 1881, a new Te Aroha punt, large enough to carry coaches, was built.³²⁵ It could not be worked 'during a heavy flood, which backed up the water for a fortnight' in 1884, and coach passengers had to be conveyed across by boat while the horses swum across.³²⁶

BRIDGING THE RIVER

In October 1879, the council inspected possible sites for a bridge at Te Aroha,³²⁷ but nothing was decided. In February 1880, O'Halloran wrote that 'the sooner the bridge is agitated for the better, or travelling will soon be impossible'.³²⁸ In February 1881, some Te Aroha and Waitoa residents offered to build one on condition they could charge tolls for two years.³²⁹ When this was not approved, a public meeting urged the government to build one.³³⁰ When the worst flood for nearly three years covered the

³²¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 February 1880, p. 3.

³²² See paper on Te Aroha during the rush.

³²³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 19 July 1881, p. 3.

³²⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 14 June 1881, p. 3.

³²⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 January 1882, p. 3; for its builder, Charles Everett, see papers on Te Aroha from 1880 to 1889.

³²⁶ Recollections of Nathaniel Ferguson, in *Ohinemuri County Diamond Jubilee 1885-1945 Souvenir and Historical Record* (Paeroa, 1945), p. 61.

³²⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 October 1879, p. 8.

³²⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 February 1880, p. 3.

³²⁹ *Thames Star*, 23 February 1881, p. 2.

³³⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 28 May 1881, p. 2.

approaches in January 1882, O'Halloran repeated that a bridge was needed.³³¹ A meeting held at Waitoa in July urged the government to erect one at Morgantown 'for the convenience of the settlers getting their stock to Te Aroha and Thames'.³³² A bridge was not erected until the railway from Hamilton reached Te Aroha.

ROADS TO WAIORONGOMAI AND BEYOND

The development of mining and farming at Waiorongomai and of farming at Shaftesbury meant that the road along the eastern side of the river was vital for both settlements. In May 1883, the swampy sections were in a 'frightful state'.³³³ A visitor to Shaftesbury that autumn had a two-mile walk in the dark between two houses.

A pitch dark night. Had to cross a deep broad drain running out of swamp into the river. Found the bridge had been washed away so we had to walk in the swamp up this drain to try and find a place narrow enough to jump over. Such a walk, mud and slush – often up to our waists. The drain was full of water 4 or 5 feet high and running like a mad mill stream – to get in meant an awful ducking and a good chance of drowning. At last we found a place [to cross].³³⁴

In June, a small bridge was erected over Stoney Creek, the only creek on the road between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai, 'so drivers of vehicles will no longer run the risk of breaking their springs every time they cross it', the *Te Aroha News* reported when commenting on 'the scandalous condition of some parts' of this road.

A valued member of our staff having nearly come to serious grief on Thursday night whilst making the passage on horseback from the latter place. The stead he was on was somewhat diminutive and by no means of a fiery disposition; indeed, the rider had to very freely use a sharp pair of spurs to reach Waiorongomai. On the return journey in struggling through one of the mud chasms the horse sank up to his girth, and at once gave it up as a bad job,

³³¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 24 January 1882, p. 3.

³³² *Waikato Times*, 29 June 1882, p. 3, 4 July 1882, p. 2.

³³³ *Waikato Times*, 8 May 1883, p. 2.

³³⁴ Bullock-Webster (1883), vol 7, p. 92 of original, p. 10 of typescript, Acc. 1970/347/7, Waikato Museum of Art and History Library.

being as fast as a fly in a glue pot. The rider very unwillingly had to dismount, not a very difficult operation, as his feet were on the mud already, and, after wading to dry land with no little difficulty, towed his animal to shore likewise. The half dry clay was in the tenacious state that it is rendered before being formed into bricks for baking, and we may anticipate, after this experience, that some day or other bogged animals, human and equine, will be dotted along the lines of road in the Piako and Thames districts, sorrowful evidences of the care that the respective County Councils bestow upon them.³³⁵

In July Firth told the council that the road was ‘nearly impassable’ near Waiorongomai, and people being unable to use the official line of the road ‘very largely enhanced the cost of the battery and tramway’.³³⁶ Shortly afterwards, a storm washed from one to one and a half feet of ‘adhesive dark mud’ off it.³³⁷ The following April, the *Te Aroha News* criticized a contractor for putting ‘loam and surface-earth mixed, with a few boulders’, on part of the road.³³⁸

In 1883, there was discussion about connecting Te Aroha and Waiorongomai by a tramway, which the local newspaper supported because it would stop the road being wrecked by heavy wagons. Although costing a little over £4,000, possibly it could be built by a private company.³³⁹ In 1884, a Waiorongomai meeting suggested that the railway to Te Aroha be extended to there and then linked to the Rotorua line,³⁴⁰ but no more was heard of either tramway or railway.

Despite regular maintenance, badly done by contractors according to some ratepayers, the road continued to become almost impassable, with large dangerous holes.³⁴¹ A special loan of £1,650 was raised in 1887 to remake the road as far as Shaftesbury.³⁴² The revival in mining in the late 1880s combined with the new flax industry damaged it further, the county engineer reporting, in July 1889, that it was in a ‘very bad state’ with ‘upwards of 14 tons of material being carted’ over it each day; ‘already there

³³⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 23 June 1883, p. 2.

³³⁶ Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1883, p. 2.

³³⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 4 August 1883, p. 2.

³³⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 19 April 1884, p. 2.

³³⁹ Editorials, *Te Aroha News*, 4 August 1883, p. 2, 17 November 1883, p. 2.

³⁴⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 12 July 1884, p. 2.

³⁴¹ For example, *Te Aroha News*, 30 July 1887, p. 2.

³⁴² *Te Aroha News*, 20 August 1887, p. 3.

were some holes two feet deep in it'. The council again voted money to repair it from Stoney Creek to the battery.³⁴³ In 1893, the Stoney Creek bridge was swept away in a storm, preventing wheeled traffic using the road.³⁴⁴ In the summer of 1897 a Taranaki visitor described the roads between the two settlements as 'bone shakers'.³⁴⁵

As an alternative to taking heavy waggon through Te Aroha and across the swamp past Stoney Creek, there was support for linking Waiorongomai with the Waiorongomai Landing, although this was not an ideal solution, the river being too low during summer for boats to reach it.³⁴⁶ One suggestion, to connect a branch tramway from a proposed Te Aroha-Waiorongomai tramway with the landing,³⁴⁷ was stillborn. After Denis Murphy³⁴⁸ provided a punt there, in January 1885 the council agreed to make a road to it.³⁴⁹ When the punt became payable for its private owners, they threatened to close it, prompting the council to provide a subsidy of two shillings a day.³⁵⁰ By 1888, the road from the landing through Wilson's paddock was used by all coaches and carters, but it had not consolidated and two months after Waiorongomai residents petitioned for its metalling it had 'not a stone of metal on it' and was 'in a frightful state'.³⁵¹ In that year, Murphy asked the council to replace the punt with a bridge, for the operator 'would remove it unless there were some prospect of the bridge being built shortly'.³⁵² As a bridge would be cheaper and more convenient for Te Aroha West farmers, a petition for its construction gained 113 signatures, but the council at first declined to build it because of the

³⁴³ *Te Aroha News*, Piako County Council, 10 July 1889, p. 2, 3 August 1889, p. 2.

³⁴⁴ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Thames Star*, 24 February 1893, p. 2.

³⁴⁵ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 9 January 1897, p. 7.

³⁴⁶ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 4 August 1883, p. 2.

³⁴⁷ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 17 November 1883, p. 2.

³⁴⁸ See paper on his life.

³⁴⁹ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 17 January 1885, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 14 March 1885, p. 2.

³⁵⁰ *Waikato Times*, 16 January 1886, p. 2.

³⁵¹ Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 21 April 1888, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 14 June 1888, p. 2.

³⁵² Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 12 May 1888, p. 2.

cost.³⁵³ Only after continued pressure from farmers was the bridge built, opening in October 1889.³⁵⁴

That farmers would use this bridge and road may have swayed the council, believed by many to be dominated by farming interests. A report of its March 1888 meeting noted, under the sub-heading 'Scant Justice for Te Aroha', that the councillors for the Te Aroha Riding had succeeded 'in obtaining a few paltry amounts' to repair the roads 'that have to bear goldfields traffic, although a goldfields revenue of nearly £800 sterling was received by the County during the past financial year'. Ratepayers who attended the meeting believed councillors representing other parts of the district had agreed 'that not one penny of general revenue would be spent on goldfields requirements, and that the prejudice which formerly existed in the mind of the agriculturalist against the miner, has not yet altogether disappeared'.³⁵⁵

THE RAILWAY

There had long been calls for a railway, and one land speculator early in 1880 even erected what he described as 'a large hotel at Te Aroha on the strength of the railway being made at once'.³⁵⁶ When the line was surveyed in January 1880 the station was meant to be at the proposed township on the western side of the river,³⁵⁷ but the discovery of gold moved both settlement and station to the eastern side. Although the line was not opened until 1 March 1886, after the railway bridge was completed in the previous year stock and other road traffic were permitted to use it.³⁵⁸ This could be dangerous, as when a horse 'stumbled on the railway line' while crossing it, causing the rider to fall and break his collarbone.³⁵⁹

A continuation of the line to Thames was delayed by an 1880 report that the river made a railway 'unnecessary'. Not till Richard John Seddon

³⁵³ *Te Aroha News*, Piako County Council, 21 April 1888, p. 2, Piako County Council, 16 June 1888, p. 2, 4 December 1888, p. 7, Piako County Council, 22 December 1888, p. 2.

³⁵⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 9 October 1889, p. 2.

³⁵⁵ Piako County Council, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 March 1888, p. 2.

³⁵⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 April 1880, p. 3.

³⁵⁷ *Waikato Times*, 17 January 1880, p. 2.

³⁵⁸ *Waikato Times*, 5 May 1885, p. 3, 2 June 1885, p. 3, 4 July 1885, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 2 March 1886, p. 2.

³⁵⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 23 November 1895, p. 3.

became Minister of Public Works in 1892 did construction speed up, and the line to Paeroa was opened in 1895 and its continuation to Thames in 1898.³⁶⁰

PROPHECY, RECOLLECTION, AND COMMENTARY

By way of conclusion, a prophecy followed by a recollection and commentary. In 1887 another special reporter stood on the higher part of the domain observing the surroundings:

It needs no prophetic mantle to predict that in a generation the dun brown expanse of fern will be replaced by pastures of emerald green, and instead of a scattered handful of settlers that the noble valley will be dotted with populous townships, with their varied and thriving industries, and settled by a numerous, contented, and prosperous yeomanry.³⁶¹

The recollection and commentary came in the form of a *Te Aroha News* article in 1910 about the men of the ‘good old days’ (the women and children who helped them were not mentioned):

These men were of the right type, sturdy, independent, filled with the spirit of self-help and self-reliance, but nonetheless helping one another in all the difficulties and dangers that beset them. In those days, to give assistance was a greater privilege than to receive it. Common hardship formed a bond that bound these old pioneers together in a sturdy brotherhood of mutual help and endurance. As, in the soft evening light, we stand on the mountainside and look over the wide expanse of plains stretching to the far off hills showing purple on the dim horizon, and note the farms and homesteads spread over its surface, and see the cattle grazing safe and unmolested in the fields, we can hardly conceive that, not thirty years ago, here was nothing but barren earth.... The inhospitable plains and forbidding hills might well have deterred the boldest, but our sturdy pioneers took up their holdings, and in spite of checks and reverses subdued the stubborn soil. The drainage of the flats worked a miracle and the sour bog land of the past has become the smiling pasture of today. Such are the men who have made New Zealand, such are the salt of the land. They stuck to their farms and did not hold merely to sell at a profit. They loved the soil, they put the best years of their

³⁶⁰ *Ohinemuri County Diamond Jubilee*, p. 65.

³⁶¹ Special Reporter, ‘A Trip to Te Aroha’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 July 1887, p. 29.

lives into it, and they held it with a tenacious grip. These were days that tested men. There was no room for the weakling or the sluggard. Pioneering was essentially the work of the virile, the bold, and courageous. Those of us that live today in the comfortable atmosphere of prosperity often think that we have much to be thankful for in the improved conditions of life, in that we have been spared the hardships of our fathers. If we still retained the manly vigour of the parent stock this would perhaps be a blessing; for that vigour would find other outlets tending to development, patriotism, and progress. But one is inclined to doubt whether such is the case. The easier conditions and more sheltered life of today seem to tend to softness of character and loss of virility. Conflict with nature and her harsher and larger aspects seem to count for much in the making of a man. It gives insight and sympathy as well as strength. In the younger generation there is a loss of that resolute firmness that could not conceive of defeat, that tenacity of purpose that, directed to a single goal, carried the pioneer to victory over a thousand obstacles. There is a growing tendency to compromise, to get round a difficulty rather than surmount it. In the old days, the pioneer must conquer or go under; today his son may compromise and live. The work of those earlier settlers was made to last; it was not for a day or a generation only. "Permanency and stability" was their motto. Many of them have now passed away, but their work remains and will remain for all time, a monument more enduring than marble or bronze.³⁶²

Appendix

Figure 1: Map of the Te Aroha district, in John Henderson, assisted by John Arthur Bartrum, *The Geology of the Aroha Subdivision, Hauraki, Auckland: Geological Survey Bulletin No. 16* (Wellington, 1913), in portfolio at end.

³⁶² 'Goldfields Anniversary', *Te Aroha News*, 10 November 1910, p. 2.

