

WILLIAM GREY NICHOLLS AND RIHITOTO MATAIA

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Abstract: *The son of a Pakeha Maori, Nicholls had an illustrious ancestry on his mother's side, and his wife Rihitoto Mataia also had a distinguished whakapapa. From the 1870s Nicholls farmed in Ohinemuri, and as a licensed interpreter played an important role in land transactions at the same time as he was becoming prominent in the Pakeha community. For over 30 years he invested in mining, starting at Te Aroha in 1880. He also invested in a variety of other enterprises, becoming prosperous through these investments, his farming, and in particular by acquiring and selling land. Over a 40-year period, Nicholls conducted many cases in the land court, and assisted Pakeha to acquire Maori land, and also acquired a considerable amount of land for himself and Rihitoto, who inherited many blocks from her father (but had to pay off his massive debts).*

Whereas Rihitoto was a prominent leader in the Maori community of Hauraki, Nicholls had the same role in Pakeha society. Active in a variety of initiatives to benefit the Ohinemuri community, he was a popular member and chairman of the Ohinemuri County Council, and late in life was elevated to the Legislative Council. Reputedly he assisted Maori in various ways, but clearly he identified rather more with his Pakeha ancestry. His career was a remarkably successful one, and his wife was also successful in maximizing the benefits that could be derived from her ancestry.

NICHOLLS' FAMILY

William Grey Nicholls, commonly known to Maori as Wiremu Kerei Nikora or Wi Nikora or sometimes Te Wi Nikora,¹ was the younger son of William Nicholls and Hera Te Whakaawa.² He shared an ancestor, Te Kura, with Te Moananui Manao, of Ngai Te Rangi, and was a member of Ngati Haua; he would name his daughter Moananui.³ Born at Coromandel in December 1853, he was educated at a missionary school for Maori

¹ *New Zealand Parliamentary Record* (Wellington, 1913), p. 53; Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 19, p. 146.

² See paper on William Nicholls.

³ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28B, p. 125; *New Zealand Herald*, 12 August 1869, p. 4; *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

conducted by the Rev. Benjamin Yates Ashwell,⁴ at Taupiri.⁵ He lived in Ohinemuri from 1865 onwards, where, in 1875, ‘according to Maori custom’, to quote his words, he married Rihitoto Mataia.⁶

RIHITOTO MATAIA

Rihitoto Mataia,⁷ sometimes Te Rihitoto, was the only daughter of Mataia Te Ngahira.⁸ Her mother, Ngawai, also known as Ngarangi and Ngarenga, was named Hariata when baptized.⁹ Her father was of the Ngati Taharua hapu of Ngati Tamatera, as well as of Te Ngahiri, and her mother of Ngati Pinenga.¹⁰ When her brother, Hoani Mataia, died in January 1873 after a tree fell on him, it was reported that he ‘belonged to the Ngatitamatera tribe, and was a man of consideration on account of his birth and as a landowner in the Ohinemuri district’.¹¹ Her father died in October 1876, in Ohinemuri, where her mother died one year later.¹²

In 1907 Rihitoto told the land court that she did not know in which year she was born.¹³ Others said that she was born at Koputauaki, a bay a short distance to the north of Coromandel township, in March 1854. Wikiriwhi Hautonga¹⁴ ‘knew this because he came from Napier to attend a

⁴ See *Auckland Star*, 6 October 1883, p. 6; *New Zealand Herald*, 24 February 1930, p. 8; J.M. Barrington and T.H. Beaglehole, *Maori Schools in a Changing Society* (Wellington, 1974), pp. 51, 63, 81.

⁵ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

⁶ Evidence by W.G. Nicholls, ‘Goldfields and Mines Committee: Reports on Petitions Relating to the Silting of the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers’, *AJHR*, 1907, I-4A, p. 1; Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 30, pp. 138, 156; District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1879, p. 3.

⁷ For photograph, google under her name in www.ohinemuri.org.nz/images.

⁸ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 10, p. 222.

⁹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 22, p. 282; no. 29, p. 164.

¹⁰ Death Certificate of Rihitoto Mataia, 14 May 1935, 1935/25693, BDM; Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 10, p. 199; no. 11, p. 57.

¹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 February 1873, p. 3.

¹² Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 24, p. 332; no. 29, p. 164.

¹³ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 56, p. 174.

¹⁴ See paper on the Te Aroha murder.

great feast at Koputauwaki, and she was born there'.¹⁵ Rihitoto herself said she was born at Uriwai and only later lived at Koputauaki.¹⁶ In 1878 she gave her whakapapa:

Hako
 Ruamehia who married Tamatera
 Taharua
 Kurereke
 Tupakekau
 Tapu, who had two wives, Parekanui and Waiokura
 Te Putahi
 Mataia
 herself.¹⁷

In a later genealogy, she explained that Mataia was the son of Putahi and his second wife Mawhetu.¹⁸ For another block of land, she had a different whakapapa:

Tauiru
 Te Ihenga
 Rangimoiwhare
 Te Heru
 Mawhatu,
 Mataia
 herself.¹⁹

She could also trace her descent from Tokanui:

Tokanui
 Ngamarama
 Koroua
 Tuatae
 Mokohuruhuru

These were all men, but then the descent came through his daughter Tarawa, who married Hako;
 their daughter Te Nira
 Tukiwaho, whose gender was not indicated; neither was that of

¹⁵ District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1879, p. 3; see also Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 22, p. 308; no. 30, p. 108.

¹⁶ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 56, pp. 162, 164.

¹⁷ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 52.

¹⁸ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, p. 163.

¹⁹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 25, p. 139.

Te Ruapokirangi, whose son
 Tokanui married Rukutia, whose son
 Tahuaniu was succeeded by
 Taiope
 Te Ngaio
 Te Heru
 Mawhatu, a woman, who married Te Putahi
 Mataia
 herself.²⁰

Before the Waikato War, according to her account, she ‘was living at Moehau with my Mother she belonged to the people living at that place. My elder relatives were living at Ohinemuri’.²¹

MARRIAGES

According to John Wallonora Thorp, whose family had lived at Te Puke, near Paeroa, since the 1840s,²² Rihitoto’s father met him there in 1863 and promised her to him in marriage. ‘She was then nearly a full grown woman. She was about 14 years of age’. Rihitoto responded that Thorp lied.²³ She did confirm that she came with her brother and others to Komata in 1863, but they returned to Coromandel because of the Waikato War, returning ‘some considerable time’ afterwards, possibly as late as 1865. ‘We resided at Opukeko when we first came back – it was an arrangement made by Mataia while he was at Waikawau’.²⁴ She later deposed that she came to Komata ‘first previous to the war at Taranaki (1860). We brought some dead persons, Paora Te Putu and others’. She did not remain, ‘but returned to the Coast. It was in 1863 I came here to live permanently and I have resided here ever since’. When they went to Opukeko in that year ‘my brother Hoani and Tukukino leased Komata to Mr Thorp as did Wikiriwhi’.²⁵

²⁰ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, p. 285.

²¹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 56 [punctuation added].

²² See paper on Maori in Hauraki in the nineteenth century.

²³ District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1879, p. 3.

²⁴ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 22, pp. 308, 310, 312; no. 23, p. 226.

²⁵ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book, no. 30, pp. 108, 109, 114.

According to her obituary, in the ‘early seventies’ she ‘married a local chief, Warana, who died shortly after the marriage’.²⁶ In 1893, Nicholls stated that he and Rihitoto were married in 1875, but his death certificate indicated a date of December 1876, when he was 23 and she was five years older.²⁷ However, according to one Maori rangatira, she was four months younger than him.²⁸ According to an obituary of Rihitoto, she had a daughter, Te Moananui, to Warana,²⁹ but this appears to be incorrect. According to land court evidence, the first child of Nicholls and Rihitoto was a daughter, Petiwai Warana, otherwise Moananui, and their second child was a son.³⁰ The latter, George William, was described in 1898 as being ‘modest and retiring’;³¹ he did not achieve much prominence, though he did own one mine at Karangahake in 1908.³² After his death in 1916 when aged only 39 his tombstone described him as ‘a man of integrity in his profession as a native interpreter’ and ‘much loved by his people, Maori and Pakeha’.³³ He had lived less than one year longer than his father. Nicholls’ daughter had predeceased him, according to his death certificate, but obituaries listed ‘Miss Moananui’ as being still alive in 1935.³⁴ Presumably she was the Mikaera, otherwise Sarah, Te Moananui, born in 1877, of whom he was recorded as a guardian when she attended the Paeroa School despite being an adult.³⁵

NICHOLLS’ EARLY LIFE

²⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 16 May 1935, p. 11.

²⁷ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 30, p. 138; Death Certificate of William Grey Nicholls, 15 July 1915, 1915/278, BDM.

²⁸ District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 19 October 1879, p. 3.

²⁹ *Hauraki Plains Gazette*, 15 May 1935, p. 2.

³⁰ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, p. 164.

³¹ *Observer*, 22 January 1898, p. 6.

³² Warden’s Court, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 June 1908, p. 2.

³³ Death Certificate of George William Nicholls, 1916/4116, BDM; Paeroa Cemetery Records, Block B Row 29, microfische.

³⁴ Death Certificate of William Grey Nicholls, 15 July 1915, 1915/278, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2; *Hauraki Plains Gazette*, 15 May 1935, p. 2.

³⁵ Paeroa School, Admissions Register 1895-1898, no. 236; Admissions Register 1899-1907, no. 666, Primary School Archives, Paeroa.

According to his evidence to a 1907 committee investigating the silting of the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers, Nicholls had farmed at Ohinemuri since 1865. The effect of the Ohinemuri River being designated as a sludge channel was that an area beside it that he had lived on and cultivated was by 1907 covered in silt. He referred to a ledge of rock a few chains below the Paeroa traffic bridge: 'I used to go there and undress on it and dive into the river from it'. In later years he used to keep an 'oil-launch ... drawing 2ft 6in' at 'my own place at Paeroa just above the bridge' on the road to Te Aroha.³⁶

In September 1874, he was appointed a licensed interpreter,³⁷ and as such attended important meetings. For instance, at a large Maori gathering near Paeroa in the following February Tukukino quoted 'young Nicholls' as informing him that the government had given Te Moananui and Te Hira £1,000 each to open Ohinemuri for mining.³⁸ He also became involved in land transactions, for instance in 1874 buying the Komata North block for a Christchurch man.³⁹ James Mackay in 1875 referred to Pakeha dealing with Maori 'for the purchase of part of the Hungahunga Block, through the agency of a half-caste named William Nicholls'.⁴⁰ An Ohinemuri settler accused him of obtaining £150 for assisting to purchase this block, upstream from Te Aroha, by obtaining the signatures of owners;⁴¹ in fact he had obtained £100, without the government's knowledge.⁴²

In November 1877 he was negotiating for the sale of the Wairakau block, near Te Aroha, to a private individual, against government policy, which permitted sales only to the Crown; he was warned that unless he

³⁶ Goldfields and Mines Committee, 'Reports on Petitions Relating to the Silting of the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers...', *AJHR*, 1907, I-4A, pp. 1-2, 8.

³⁷ *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 September 1874, p. 655.

³⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 February 1875, p. 3.

³⁹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 30, p. 136.

⁴⁰ *AJHR*, 1875, I-1, p. 46.

⁴¹ Sir George Grey to Sir Donald McLean, 20 May 1876; Sir Donald McLean to Sir George Grey, 25 May 1876; Sir George Grey to Sir Donald McLean, 2 June 1876, *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 10 June 1876, p. 235; 'Index to Portions of Te Aroha and Adjoining Survey Districts', November 1880, Te Aroha Block, folio 4, Lands and Survey Department, LS 1/2344, ANZ-W; editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 May 1876, p. 2.

⁴² Sir Donald McLean to Sir George Grey, 25 May 1876, *AJHR*, 1876, C-3A, p. 10.

desisted his license as an interpreter would be forfeited.⁴³ The following March he filed as a bankrupt.⁴⁴ As the press was not sufficiently interested to publish the extent of his indebtedness and its causes, and the bankruptcy files have been destroyed, no details have survived. He applied for discharge three months after filing, and it was granted immediately.⁴⁵ His being charged in June with shooting game without a license did receive publicity, for being a half-caste 'he pleaded that legally he was an aboriginal native' and therefore did not require a license.⁴⁶ His counsel also objected to the summons on the ground that, 'being entitled to the privileges of an aboriginal Native', he 'had not been summoned in the Maori language', which the police prosecutor considered 'frivolous' seeing he was an interpreter.⁴⁷ A constable based at Paeroa saw Nicholls with either George or Francis Lipsey⁴⁸ (the first name was not given) cross the river near Paeroa with guns and a dog.

I followed them across the river, and before I came up to them I heard several shots fired. When I got up to them I asked defendant for his licence. He said he was on his own property, and had no licence. He was then in the paddock adjoining Wainoni, owned by a native woman named Emma. I asked him if he had permission to shoot over Emma's paddock, and he said he had no permission. He was then 50 years behind Lipsey. Lipsey said he was going to shoot ducks, but the defendant said nothing about shooting ducks. Defendant said he did not know a native required a licence. I then turned, went away and he followed after and joined Lipsey. I did not see defendant fire, but heard three shots in succession. Lipsey had the licence with him. Defendant said he was on his own land.

Nicholls said he had 'a claim over the land. I was shooting on land under native title', and nobody was 'in occupation' of it. After noting that he

⁴³ Gerald O'Halloran to James Mackay, 21 November 1877, and subsequent memorandum, Maori Affairs Department, MA 1, 13/86, ANZ-W.

⁴⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 March 1878, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 June 1879, p. 2, District Court, 1 August 1879, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 12 June 1878, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Magistrate's Court, *Thames Star*, 19 June 1878, p. 2.

⁴⁸ See paper on George Lipsey.

had been ‘previously convicted of similar things and had been let off with a nominal penalty’, the magistrate fined him £5 and costs.⁴⁹

Nicholls was becoming a person of some note in the community, in 1876 signing a ‘memorial’ by residents seeking a bridge at Karangahake.⁵⁰ In December a Thames meeting elected him to the Ohinemuri Sports committee, but he declined to be involved because of the meeting’s ‘discourteous action’, unspecified.⁵¹ He enrolled in the Paeroa volunteer corps in March 1879,⁵² and in December 1880 signed a petition to reduce the number of hotels in Paeroa.⁵³

MINING

Nicholls was first involved in goldmining during the Te Aroha rush, acquiring a miner’s right on opening day.⁵⁴ Within two weeks he was a shareholder in a Tui claim principally owned by Maori, and within two months held shares in two companies.⁵⁵ With Maori prospectors, he helped to peg out two more claims, but these were not registered.⁵⁶ In November 1881, after the discovery of the Waiorongomai field revived interest in mining, with his father, brother, and others he pegged out two claims at Te

⁴⁹ Police Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 June 1878, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 1016/76, ANZ-A.

⁵¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1876, p. 2, 11 December 1876, p. 2.

⁵² Thames No. 3 Scottish Rifle Volunteers, Capitation Roll to 31 December 1880, Army Department, ARM 41, 1882/10, ANZ-W.

⁵³ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 December 1880, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 405, issued 25 November 1880, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1c, ANZ-A.

⁵⁵ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 177, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1880, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1881, p. 110, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

⁵⁶ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1880, nos. 74, 112, BBAV 11557/1a, ANZ-A.

Aroha.⁵⁷ He acquired an interest in only one Waiorongomai claim, selling it nearly six months later for the same price as he had purchased it.⁵⁸

His only interest in Ohinemuri mining in the 1880s was at Karangahake. In mid-1887 with two partners he acquired the Mammoth, his wife shortly afterwards buying one of the 40 shares; it was forfeited in early 1889.⁵⁹ In 1891 he bought a one-twelfth interest in a Karangahake claim, selling it three weeks later.⁶⁰ The following year he had one-twelfth of the interests in a claim there that was forfeited exactly a year later, was granted another, and applied for a third but withdrew the application.⁶¹ Three years later, during the mining boom, he owned shares in six Karangahake companies.⁶² In 1896 he held 500 shares in the English-owned New Zealand Crown Mines.⁶³

At Waitekauri, he applied for a claim in January 1893, was granted it in April, and surrendered it in July.⁶⁴ In April he was granted another, but

⁵⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, nos. 390, 310, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

⁵⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1882-1887, folio 55, BBAV 11500/9a; Transfers and Assignments 1882, no. 32A, BBAV 11581/1a; no. 490, BBAV 11581/2a, ANZ-A.

⁵⁹ Thames Warden's Court, Nominal Register of Applications 1887-1889, folio 13, BACL 14354/1a; Applications for Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1887-1896, folio 2, BACL 14376/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1885-1886, folio 74, BACL 14397/16a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1891, folio 180, BACL 14355/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, Warden's Court, 1 July 1887, p. 2, 9 July 1887, p. 2, 6 March 1889, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 30 March 1889, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1888-1892, folio 97, BACL 14355/2a, ANZ-A.

⁶¹ Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Mining Applications 1892-1895, folios 56, 66, 80, 82, 86, 88, 94, ZAAP 13692/3a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1896-1900, folio 63, ZAAP 13293/1a; Thames Warden's Court, Register of Applications for Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1887-1896, folio 96, BACL 14376/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶² *New Zealand Gazette*, 14 February 1895, p. 322, 28 February 1895, p. 433, 1 August 1895, p. 1200, 12 September 1895, p. 1443, 26 September 1895, p. 1544, 17 October 1895, p. 1652.

⁶³ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book to 30 September 1896, Agent's Half-Yearly Report, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

⁶⁴ Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1896-1900, folio 68, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 January 1893, p. 3.

did not take out the license.⁶⁵ In September 1895 he applied for a special claim.⁶⁶ In 1896 he was granted a licensed holding that a year later was transferred to a company,⁶⁷ and was a director and guarantor of the Grace Darling Company.⁶⁸

In September 1895 he applied for a special claim at Owharua, which was granted but surrendered a year later.⁶⁹ He was a shareholder in one company there in 1895 and another in the following year.⁷⁰ Also in 1895 he was a shareholder in one Waihi company and in another the following year.⁷¹ Also in September 1895 he applied for a special claim at the Wires, between Hikutaia and Whangamata, but withdrew the application.⁷²

In 1896 he was a shareholder in a Komata company.⁷³ He applied for three special claims at Whangamata and was granted two, which were surrendered six months later.⁷⁴ In that year he applied for two water races, one near his Bank of New Zealand claim at Whangamata and the other at

⁶⁵ Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1896-1900, folio 69, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁶ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 September 1895, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1896-1900, folio 49, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁸ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Balance Book for Half-Year to 30 September 1895, Agent's Half-Yearly Report, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington; G.E. Alderton, *Auckland Goldfields Maps and Investors' Guide* (Auckland, 1896), p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 September 1895, p. 3; Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Special Claims 1895-1896, folio 195, ZAAP 13294/1b, ANZ-A.

⁷⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 17 October 1895, p. 1654, 23 July 1896, p. 1160.

⁷¹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 26 September 1895, p. 1546, 23 July 1896, p. 1161.

⁷² Thames Warden's Court, Register of Applications for Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1887-1896, folio 172, BACL 14376/1a, ANZ-A.

⁷³ *New Zealand Gazette*, 11 June 1896, p. 942.

⁷⁴ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1896-1897, folios 19, 60, BACL 14355/4a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 April 1896, p. 4, 29 June 1896, p. 4, Warden's Court, 2 October 1896, p. 4, Warden's Court, 13 November 1896, p. 4.

Puriri.⁷⁵ In July he applied for a special claim at Omahu, south of Thames, but withdrew his application in November.⁷⁶

According to an obituary, when ‘most people with eighteen pence to splash out went mad’ during the boom, he ‘kept his head and refused to dig for gold in the kahikatea swamps’.⁷⁷ He also was on the committee to form a School of Mines at Paeroa.⁷⁸ In 1897, after the boom had collapsed, he was a shareholder in a Kuaotunu company and applied for and then withdrew his application for a water race at Puriri Creek, to the south of Thames.⁷⁹ At Hikutaia, he bought a quarter interest in a claim in February 1897, but the claim was abandoned two months later.⁸⁰

He continued to acquire interests in the early twentieth century, in 1904 purchasing some of the property of one abandoned mine, presumably for use in another.⁸¹ At Waitekauri, in 1907 he had shares in one company.⁸² The following year he applied for a dredging claim at Coromandel, but withdrew the request.⁸³ In 1912 he was a shareholder in a Tairua company,⁸⁴ the last mine in which any interest has been traced. Besides these investments, he assisted mining by being elected chairman and treasurer of the Paeroa Coal and Mineral Prospecting Syndicate in 1906.⁸⁵

EARNING A LIVING

⁷⁵ Thames Warden’s Court, Numerical Register of Applications 1890-1896, folios 224, 251, BACL 14354/2a; Numerical Register of Applications 1896-1897, folios 35, 65, BACL 14354/3a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 July 1896, p. 3, 27 November 1896, p. 1.

⁷⁷ *Observer*, 24 July 1915, p. 4.

⁷⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 September 1896, p. 2.

⁷⁹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 7 January 1897, p. 79; Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 November 1897, p. 4.

⁸⁰ Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Special Claims 1896-1897, folio 40, ZAAP 13294/2a, ANZ-A.

⁸¹ *Thames Star*, 9 July 1904, p. 3.

⁸² Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 215 no. 1282, ANZ-A.

⁸³ Coromandel Warden’s Court, Registration of Applications for Special Quartz Claims 1887-1911, folio 52, ZAAAN 1161/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁴ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 382 no. 2134, ANZ-A.

⁸⁵ *Thames Star*, 29 November 1906, p. 2.

Nicholls did not do any mining himself, instead earning money in a variety of other ways, including as the agent for an auctioneer,⁸⁶ but especially through interpreting, facilitating the purchase of Maori land, and farming. In late 1881 he assisted in ensuring that all Maori in Ohinemuri were vaccinated against smallpox, and also helped sub-divide the Wairakau Reserve amongst Ngati Rahiri.⁸⁷ In May 1882, for unspecified reasons, his license as an interpreter was cancelled.⁸⁸ This seemed to have been caused by a disagreement over payment, for in 1887 the magistrate told the clerk of the Paeroa court to offer him a guinea a day or, at most, two guineas. Nicholls was willing to accept the latter, but nothing less, because interpreting meant he lost a day's work.⁸⁹ The following year he was reappointed an interpreter,⁹⁰ and remained one until his death. From the 1880s onwards he conducted cases for claimants or counter-claimants in the land court.⁹¹

In 1893 he was appointed as a land court agent.⁹² As an example of this role, three years later one claimant said 'that in consequence of the illness of Mr W. G. Nicholls who is assisting him in the conduct of his case by looking up and making notes from evidence in previous cases, he is unable as directed by the Court yesterday to question Haora and to refer to these cases'.⁹³ Later that year Nicholls told the court that he knew the history of one block being considered: 'I was the man who arranged matters for the lands all round it and I heard from Mataia the history',⁹⁴ a reference to his father-in-law. He was 'connected with' the court for 40 years until a few years before his death.⁹⁵ His obituary in the *Te Aroha News* stated that

⁸⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 December 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁷ G.T. Wilkinson, diary, entries for 23, 27, 28 October 1881, University of Waikato Library.

⁸⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 May 1882, p. 3; the *New Zealand Gazette* did not record this cancellation.

⁸⁹ H.A. Stratford to A.J. Mitchell, 5 July 1887; W.G. Nicholls to A.J. Mitchell, 8 July 1887, Inward Correspondence to Resident Magistrate and Warden 1879-1892, BACL 13388/1a, ANZ-A.

⁹⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 27 December 1888, p. 1425.

⁹¹ For instance, Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 19, p. 146.

⁹² *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 April 1893, p. 511.

⁹³ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, p. 260.

⁹⁴ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 31, p. 93.

⁹⁵ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

‘in respect to furthering the European occupation of native lands he had accomplished a very great service’.⁹⁶

In 1879, Nicholls was living and farming at Muru-o-Te-Ahi, near Paeroa.⁹⁷ His land, less than two miles from Paeroa on the road to Te Aroha, in 1886 was partly under cultivation and partly in English grasses.⁹⁸ In that year he was appointed to the Ohinemuri Agricultural Association, formed to destroy codlin moth and other pests, and was elected its treasurer.⁹⁹ Ten years later the local bank manager reported that he owned ‘excellent swamp land near Paeroa well drained and in grass, fenced’.¹⁰⁰ In 1907 he and his wife complained that some of this land was now under silt because of the Ohinemuri River becoming a sludge channel in 1895. His Waihou West block, of 277 acres, had been cleared and fenced but was now flooded.¹⁰¹ Between 1910 and 1913 he ran a small flock of sheep.¹⁰² During the early twentieth century he was patron of the Ohinemuri Agricultural and Horticultural Society.¹⁰³ In 1890 he participated in a brief flaxmilling boom, and 14 years later was director and the ‘most active partner’ of the Paeroa Flaxmill Company, a private company with only two other shareholders, paying £500 as his share to purchase the mill.¹⁰⁴

In December 1891 he was elected a director of the newly formed Ohinemuri Newspaper Company, later buying more shares but then selling all his interest.¹⁰⁵ In 1898 he was a member of a Paeroa syndicate that bought an interest in a sawmill and rimu bush at Mamaku; they had

⁹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

⁹⁷ *Thames Electoral Roll, 1879*, p. 60.

⁹⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 June 1885, p. 3.

⁹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 12 May 1886, p. 7, 19 June 1886, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book to 30 September 1896, Agent’s Half-Yearly Report, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

¹⁰¹ Goldfields and Mines Committee, ‘Reports on Petitions Relating to the Silting of the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers...’, *AJHR*, 1907, I-4A, pp. 2, 11; Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 56, p. 187.

¹⁰² ‘Annual Sheep Returns’, *AJHR*, 1911, H-23, p. 11; 1912, H-23, p. 11; 1913, H-23, p. 11.

¹⁰³ *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 June 1907, p. 36, 2 July 1908, p. 36.

¹⁰⁴ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 189, no. 1147, ANZ-A; Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager’s Memoranda Book 1902-1914, p. 126, entries for 11, 20, 22, 28 July 1904, June 1906, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington; *Waikato Times*, 28 January 1890, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 64 no. 453, ANZ-A.

acquired 70 million feet of rimu, and expected to do big business.¹⁰⁶ When this syndicate formed the Mountain Rimu Timber Company he became a director, but sold all his interests by April 1903.¹⁰⁷

FINANCES

Through these various endeavours, presumably combined with some profits from his mining investments, his financial position after his bankruptcy was strong, as illustrated by his calling tenders in late 1888 for the erection of a seven-roomed house.¹⁰⁸ This 'large new dwelling house' was adjacent to his existing residence. 'The rooms will be large and lofty, a spacious verandah will run round two sides, with French casements opening on to same; whilst a large bay window will afford a fine view on the Waihou river side'. It would look 'exceedingly well when completed'.¹⁰⁹ 'Traveller' referred to his erecting 'a palatial residence'.¹¹⁰ Seven years later, the local bank manager recorded that he was wealthy, 'of large means undoubted'.¹¹¹ In 1897 he could afford a trip to Australia.¹¹² The following year, when he had an overdraft of £302, his assets had a total value of £3,264, including shares in New Zealand Crown Mines with a market value of £375, and rural land worth £600.¹¹³ At the end of that year his assets had risen in value to £4,980, which after subtracting liabilities left £4,492.¹¹⁴ By March 1905, when he had an overdraft of £382, his bank manager described him as 'a very reliable man, who has a good deal of influence here'.¹¹⁵ The following

¹⁰⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 January 1898, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 145 no. 938, ANZ-A; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 798.

¹⁰⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 31 October 1888, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1888, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ 'Traveller', 'Observations', *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1888, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book to 30 September 1895, Agent's Half-Yearly Report, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

¹¹² *Thames Advertiser*, 2 November 1897, p. 4.

¹¹³ Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book to 30 September 1898, Advances, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

¹¹⁴ Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book to 31 March 1899, Advances, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

¹¹⁵ Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book to 31 March 1905, Report on Advances, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

year the manager called him a ‘very upright, trustworthy man’.¹¹⁶ His assets were estimated in 1911 to be worth over £12,000.¹¹⁷ When he died four years later he left an estate of £10,461 10s 2d.¹¹⁸

LAND

One obituary noted that he had ‘an acute perception of the value of land and held enough in Ohinemuri, Coromandel and elsewhere to stave off all possibility of poverty to himself or to those he left behind’.¹¹⁹ Two years previously it had described him as the largest landowner at Paeroa, with a reputation of being ‘an indulgent landlord’.¹²⁰ All his land was acquired either through his mother’s or, especially, his wife’s inheritance of land or by purchasing it, usually from Maori. In 1880, for instance, Muraoteahi No. 2 was granted to Nicholls, his wife, and two others.¹²¹ In that year he received £14 15s for his interest in the 2,700 acres of Ohinemuri No. 18, otherwise Waitawheta.¹²² In 1881, along with 11 other owners, he wanted to sell the Kaimanawa Block, just over 957 acres at Hikutaia, contained kauri and other good timber, for £3 an acre.¹²³ The following year, when he was granted Pukerimu No. 1, just over 23 acres, Timiuha Taiwhakaea objected because Nicholls had no ancestral claim. ‘I wish to know who are the owners that have agreed for one name only to go in’. After discussion outside court, the grant was confirmed.¹²⁴ Also in 1882 he leased the Ikutaratera Block, in the Thames County.¹²⁵

In September 1893, Nicholls, his wife, and Mere Perinihi, joint owners of Mure-Te-Ahi No. 2 Block, transferred it to Nicholls alone, and 11 other

¹¹⁶ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager’s Memoranda Book 1902-1914, p. 126, entry for June 1906, Bank of New Zealand Archives.

¹¹⁷ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager’s Memoranda Book 1902-1914, p. 126, entry for 18 May 1911, Bank of New Zealand Archives.

¹¹⁸ Testamentary Registers 1917-1918, folio 48, BBCB 4208/11, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁹ *Observer*, 24 July 1915, p. 4.

¹²⁰ *Observer*, 5 July 1913, p. 4.

¹²¹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 12, p. 334.

¹²² Register of Payments to Individuals for Purchase of Land 1873-1880, p. 223, Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 7/7, ANZ-W.

¹²³ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 December 1881, p. 2.

¹²⁴ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 14, p. 209.

¹²⁵ Ikutaratera Block, Maori Affairs Department, Auckland, MLC-A, box 11, 82/94, ANZ-A.

Maori transferred Ngahinapouri B to him after he purchased their interests for £12 10s each.¹²⁶ The following January his wife and six other owners transferred Ngahinapouri A to him for £50 8s.¹²⁷ In 1896 he sold Taiwhakarewekauri D, just over 146 acres and half a mile from the Paeroa post office, for £200; it was a portion of the 463 acres he had purchased from the Bank of New Zealand Estates Company.¹²⁸ The following year he claimed that the railway had lowered the value of his Opateto land because the station had made access difficult, although he had sold all his sections. At the time the railway was constructed he 'had some of it cut up for sale, and sold a lot of Sections at £45, £50, £30-per Section of 1/8 acre'. The land had been drained in 1878 by a man 'who paid me 10/- an acre' in rent.¹²⁹ A month later he bought Papaturoa, just over 52 acres, from Tera Te Teira for £20; the latter retained an interest in Papaturoa No. 1, but sold this to Nicholls the following year.¹³⁰ Also in that year, Nicholls' party was granted Awaiti No. 1, of 7,755 acres.¹³¹

In 1907 he told a committee enquiring into silting of the Waihou and Ohinemuri Rivers that he owned six acres at the junction, which a neighbour wanted to rent for £1 an acre. After a flood in January deposited silt from the Waikino battery, killing the grass, the potential tenant 'did not care for it, in fact he would not have it now at any price'. Just before this flood Nicholls had sold a block of unimproved land at Awaiti for £5 an acre. He had been offered £3 10s an acre for other land there, 'and now I do not think you could get 10s an acre for the land if it were put up at auction'.¹³² He owned several blocks alongside the Waihou River; one, Waihou West, of 277 acres, 'belonged first of all to my wife's people – she inherited it from her ancestors'.¹³³ In 1913, with his brother and his sister Harete, he sought

¹²⁶ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 35, p. 244; *New Zealand Gazette*, 17 November 1893, p. 1651.

¹²⁷ Correspondence to Judge H. Eyre Kenny 1894-1896, 1894 memorandum, BACL 14468/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 22 March 1894, p. 463.

¹²⁸ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 39, p. 328.

¹²⁹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 44, pp. 239-240.

¹³⁰ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books no. 44, p. 293; no. 48, p. 176.

¹³¹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 49, p. 80.

¹³² Evidence of W.G. Nicholls, Goldfields and Mines Committee, 'Reports on Petitions Relating to the Silting of the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers...', *AJHR*, 1907, I-4A, p. 3.

¹³³ Evidence of W.G. Nicholls, Goldfields and Mines Committee, 'Reports on Petitions Relating to the Silting of the Ohinemuri and Waihou Rivers...', *AJHR*, 1907, I-4A, p. 11.

an investigation of the title of Tui Pa at Te Aroha. The chief surveyor considered that they probably intended to sell it 'and thus defeat the obvious intention of the Crown when gazetting the block as a permanent reserve'.¹³⁴ If this was their intention, it failed, for a list of Ngati Rahiri owners was made and the land made permanently inalienable.¹³⁵

When Nicholls died, an obituary referred to his 'considerable property' in the Matamata, Paeroa, and Coromandel districts.¹³⁶ Rihitoto Mataia already owned a considerable area of land, and during her 20-year widowhood added to it, either through inheritance or purchase. In 1875 she was made the only successor of her brother (who had left no children) and two years later of her father.¹³⁷ In 1877 she and others of the Ngati Taharua hapu ordered the survey of Waihou West No. 1 (1,716 acres 2 roods 8 perches); she headed the list of owners.¹³⁸ In 1878 she succeeded her father in Waihi No. 1 and her brother in Hikutaia No. 4, and was awarded the sole ownership of Opatito, 189 acres 2 roods, on which she was living.¹³⁹ The following year, she sold 92 acres of this for £266, and in 1880 another 7 acres for £60 as well as 91 acres sold to her husband for £40.¹⁴⁰ The following year she sold Parahamuti No. 2, just over 35 acres, to him for £15.¹⁴¹ When the 401-acre Hararahi Block was before the court in 1878, Rihitoto was the first to give evidence on behalf of Ngati Taharua. 'This is part of the block called Taiwhakarewakauri. I had this piece surveyed by itself for the purpose of paying the Survey of our land', which was done. Opatito to the south of the block was part of the same claim. She claimed through ancestry. Her father had placed Henry Dunbar Johnson on it,¹⁴²

¹³⁴ Chief Surveyor to Under-Secretary, Lands and Survey Department, 9 August 1913, Block IX Section 31 Aroha S.D., 20/589, Land Information New Zealand, Hamilton.

¹³⁵ Minister of Lands to Native Land Court, 30 June 1916; memoranda re actions of Judge Holland, 28 February 1917, 26 March 1917, Block IX Section 31 Aroha S.D., 20/589, Land Information New Zealand, Hamilton.

¹³⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 8, p. 390; no. 10, p. 222.

¹³⁸ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 10, p. 199.

¹³⁹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 10, pp. 222, 223; no. 11, p. 16.

¹⁴⁰ Opatito Blocks, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, BACS A806, box 2, nos. 67-69, ANZ-A.

¹⁴¹ Parahamuti No. 2 Block, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, BACS A806, box 2, no. 81, ANZ-A.

¹⁴² See paper on Lavinia and Henry Dunbar Johnson.

and he had built a house. 'Every one knew it was my father who placed him there, he is simply squatting there. I am the sole owner'.¹⁴³ She gave considerable details about genealogy, settlements, battles and tribal movements to refute Ngati Hako claims.¹⁴⁴ Referring to Opukeko, she claimed it had been sold to a Pakeha 'by stealth – the land was bought back by the tribes and afterwards I repaid them the purchase money'.¹⁴⁵ Granted Hararahi No. 1 for herself alone, at her suggestion Hararahi No. 2 went to two of Johnson's children.¹⁴⁶ Two months later she applied for Parahamuti. 'The pa Wheturua is on this land, my father and I lived in this pa and cultivated the land. My uncle Hakaraia died and was buried in this pa. I ordered the Survey to be made, my father mother and myself are the only ones who cultivated there'. On the basis of her evidence, she alone received these 22 acres 2 roods.¹⁴⁷

In 1893 Nicholls said that he had bought Komata North in 1874 for a Pakeha from all the owners except Tukukino. 'The purchase money was spent on flour and given to the cooks who had acted as such at the tangi for Hoani Mataia', who had died in February the previous year, so he had mistaken the date.¹⁴⁸ In 1880 Rihitoto 'proposed to give up all her interests in Taharua's lands', meaning all the lands she had an interest in as his descendent, 'in payment for her father's debts which amounted to more than £1000'. The government agent 'would not agree as it was not sufficient', but in 1882 the arrangement was accepted, and Tukukino let a Pakeha lease Taumaharua, part of Ohinemuri No. 20, for £20 each.¹⁴⁹ On 30 May that year the chief land purchase officer, Richard John Gill, met with her and Nicholls to ascertain her interests in land. Gill first noted that the estate Rihitoto acquired from her father 'was necessarily saddled with his indebtedness at the time of his decease' and asked for documentation 'in order to come to a satisfactory arrangement'. Rihitoto 'in reply to a question from her husband' produced details of her father's debt and to which blocks it was charged. In September 1876 she and her father's debts totalled £260

¹⁴³ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 41.

¹⁴⁴ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, pp. 52-57.

¹⁴⁵ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 56.

¹⁴⁶ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 59.

¹⁴⁷ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 298.

¹⁴⁸ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 30, pp. 136, 138; for date of Hoani Mataia's death, see *Thames Advertiser*, 7 February 1873, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 30, p. 143.

4s 6d. Mataia had left an additional debt of £350 charged to Waihou East and West, which Gill would not agree should be paid out of the lease of the goldfield.

Upon reference to Rihitoto[’s] interests in the Gold Field she was awarded by the Court shares in 5 Blocks exclusive of a small piece known as Owharoa No 4 (Mackaytown South) Ohinemuri Nos 1, 2, 8, 17 & 19 containing individual acres amounting to 1179, which at 5/- per acre would be £297: 10: 5 – deducting this from the amount of £45 paid to her would leave £252: 10: 0. Mr Gill, now what I propose to do is this. For Rihitoto to sign the deed making over all her interests to the Govt. in the Ohinemuri Gold Field for the amount of admitted debt of £260: 11: 6, and the amount of £350 on the Waihou East & West would be forgiven her, the proclamation over the Waihou West No. 3 Block would be at once removed, and also the Memorials of Transfer from herself to her husband would then be released by him, these Memorials had been held back by him acting under legal authority, pending the settlement of Rihitoto & her deceased father’s (Mataia’s) debts to the Government, but everything would be free, provided that Rihitoto signed the Ohinemuri deed, and both her own and Mataia’s debts on all Blocks would be wiped off or done away with.

The next section of the minutes of the meeting was crossed out, clearly because their statements were retracted. Nicholls had been recorded as saying that ‘the offer was a very generous one’ and ‘satisfactory to both parties’, and Rihitoto ‘also agreed’ and was ‘now willing to sign the deed’ the following morning. Gill said that now that this was ‘settled, let us talk about the question of Reserves. If Rihitoto had not agreed to this offer she would not have been entitled to participate in the Reserves but as it was everything was agreed upon’ - these last four words being crossed out, confirming that agreement had not been reached - ‘certain reserves should be made’. These were not to be sold, but could be leased with the government’s approval. Gill then asked them ‘to assist him and inform the natives upon these matters so as to settle all outstanding difficulties’, and told them that the reserves to be granted ‘should not in any way interfere with the existing mines and agricultural Leases’. Should any gold be found on them, the owners would receive the revenue but must not interfere with

existing leases and he asked them 'to explain this to all Natives connected with them'.¹⁵⁰

Two months later, Gill reported on the final arrangement:

It was a case that could only be settled on the ground. The father of this woman was a Chief of rank among his people. He had received from Mr Mackay large advances on his lands, Moehau, Waikawau, Waihou East and West, and also on Ohinemuri prior to the Lease, but for some reason had not received any money on the sale of the land. The man died before the Native Land Court investigated the title to the Gold Fields Block, and his daughter Rihitoto was made a grantee as Successor to his estate.

Her father was paid £566 1s 8d, 'and as the lands on which this money had been advanced are mostly absorbed in other blocks, I wished, if possible, to recover from Rihitoto such monies as might fairly be charged against her as succeeding to her father's estate'. She had received only £49, 'and this she declared was taken for a debt which she herself afterwards had to pay'. She produced documents proving that £400 was to be charged to Waikawau and Moehau, and that the debts of her father and herself amounted to £269 4s 6d. Her interest in the goldfield blocks was 1,190 acres, valued at £297 10s. 'I agreed that if Rihitoto would sign the Deed of Sale of all her interest to the Crown, I would accept that as a settlement of any claim the Government might have against her, or over the lands on which her father Mataia had received advances of Government money'.¹⁵¹ Investigation showed that between 1874 and 1893 she received £1,673 2s 6d for her interests in Ohinemuri.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Ohinemuri Goldfields, Notes and Memos by R.J. Gill, Paeroa, May-June 1882, pp. 55-58, Maori Affairs Department, MA 1, 13/54b, ANZ-W.

¹⁵¹ R.J. Gill to Native Minister, 29 July 1882, printed in 'Maori Petitions on Hauraki Goldfield, 1935-1939: Statement of the Facts and Circumstances Affecting the Ohinemuri Block', p. 42, Lands and Survey Department, LS 36/25a, ANZ-W.

¹⁵² Register of Payments to Individuals for Purchase of Land 1873-1880, Ohinemuri, entries for 5 November 1874, 12 November 1876, Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 7/7; 'Maori Petitions on Hauraki Goldfield, 1935-1939: Statement of the Facts and Circumstances Affecting the Ohinemuri Block', Appendices G, H, 1, Lands and Survey Department, LS 36/25a, ANZ-W.

In 1880, the Momomatui Block was subdivided between Rihitoto and Phillip Bennett of Paeroa,¹⁵³ but this arrangement was later cancelled as illegal.¹⁵⁴ Next month, after she was registered as an owner of Ohinemuri No. 2,¹⁵⁵ her husband conducted her case for Rawhitiroa. Again she explained who had cultivated the land, the flight from Ngapuhi in the 1820s, and the ancestral claims. There was a 'quarrel' when 'Ngatitawhaki came to burn my fence. They said my fence was on Manuiti land'. She insisted it was 'on the boundary between the land of Kurireko & Manuiti this fence was in the right place but they burnt it'. This led to a rununga at which whakapapa and histories were compared.¹⁵⁶

I had something to say to the County Council about the road. They spoke first to [Rapata] Te Pokiha about the road and the bridge he would not agree to either and then they came to me and I made an arrangement with them. It was I who made the fence on both sides of the Public Road as far as the bridge,

the council meeting the cost.¹⁵⁷ She based her information on what 'Mataia & other old people' had told her.¹⁵⁸ Asked why she and her father had not occupied the land, she replied: 'We could not occupy all the land we own. I live quite close to it'.¹⁵⁹ Asked why, knowing that Te Tuiriri and Pokiha claimed the land, she had not lived on it, she responded: 'We did not wish to cause a fight and their party was stronger than ours'.¹⁶⁰ Faced with a dispute over the boundary, the case was dismissed because there was 'no evidence to enable the Court to arrive at a decision'.¹⁶¹

Also in 1880, she was listed amongst the Ngati Rahiri owners of Ohinemuri No. 18.¹⁶² The following year, with eight others, she sold Raratu No. 2 (185 acres, bordering the Ohinemuri River) for £90 and Te Puru-o-

¹⁵³ See paper on Merea Wikiriwhi and George Thomas Wilkinson.

¹⁵⁴ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 12, p. 338.

¹⁵⁵ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 160.

¹⁵⁶ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 255.

¹⁵⁷ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, pp. 255-256.

¹⁵⁸ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 256.

¹⁵⁹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, pp. 256-257.

¹⁶⁰ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 257.

¹⁶¹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 265.

¹⁶² Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 42.

Terangi No. 1 (just over six acres, adjoining the Paeroa Block) for £295.¹⁶³ In 1882 she was listed as one of the owners of Moanakapiti, and sold Mora-o-Te-Atu No. 2 and Te Rau o Te Huia No. 2, the latter for £30.¹⁶⁴ In 1885 she sold Te Pirau, 97 acres bordering the Waihou River, for £134,¹⁶⁵ and in the following year, with two others, sold Huruhuru No. 2 for £30.¹⁶⁶

In 1890 Rihitoto succeeded her father as an owner of Whangamata No. 6.¹⁶⁷ In mid-year, on her behalf her brother-in-law, Charles John Dearle,¹⁶⁸ offered to purchase her shares in Hikutaia No. 4 for the government for 10s per acre, 2s 6d more than other owners had been paid.¹⁶⁹ Both the magistrate and the native agent believed Dearle was motivated by an attempt to obtain a commission for himself.¹⁷⁰ In September, the magistrate reported that she wanted '£200 for her two Shares, £42..19..6 more than you offer. I think she will take less if you are firm and authorize me to decline definitely. She and Nicholls will not care to incur expense of Survey etc'.¹⁷¹ After continuing to try for the higher payment, she finally accepted 'the same amount that was paid to other owners rather than risk a contest in Court'.¹⁷² Afterwards, Rihitoto and Nicholls told the native agent that the

¹⁶³ Raratu No. 2, Te Puru-o-Terangi No. 1 Blocks, Maori Affairs Department, Auckland, BABG A806, box 3, nos. 100, 103, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁴ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 14, p. 187; Mora-o-te-patu No. 2 Block, Maori Affairs Department, Auckland, BABG A52, box 13, 82/135; Te Rau o te Huia No. 2 Block, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, MLC-A, box 3, no. 105, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁵ Te Pirau Block, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, MLC-A, box 2, no. 88, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁶ Huruhuru No. 2 Block, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, MLC-A, box 2, no. 37, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁷ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 24, p. 332.

¹⁶⁸ See paper on Alice Grey Dearle.

¹⁶⁹ C.J. Dearle to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 10 June 1890, Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

¹⁷⁰ G.T. Wilkinson to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 16 June 1890 (telegram); G.T. Wilkinson to Under-Secretary, Native Department, n.d. [June 1890], Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

¹⁷¹ H.W. Northcroft (Resident Magistrate) to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 10 September 1890, Letterbook, p. 613, H.W. Northcroft Papers, ARC 2159, Te Awamutu Museum; also in Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

¹⁷² H.W. Northcroft to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 17 September 1890 (telegram); G.T. Wilkinson to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 24 September 1890 (telegram), Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

suggestion of seeking a higher payment was ‘entirely’ Dearle’s suggestion; ‘she therefore decided to let him try and do so’.¹⁷³

Sole owner of Ohinemuri No. 20A since 1885, in June 1891 Rihitoto sold these 2,758 acres to the Crown for £1,241 2s.¹⁷⁴ Sole owner of Owharua No. 4, 25 acres, since June 1880, she sold it to the Crown in 1892 for £100.¹⁷⁵ That year she said that Timotiu Te Hati had sold Muraoteahi No. 2 but that she had repurchased it: ‘This was not a legal transaction’.¹⁷⁶ In that year one of the claimants for Te Ahipukahu No. 1 (374 acres) was her 16-year-old son, with his mother as trustee; she was granted Te Ahipukahu No. 2, of 176 acres.¹⁷⁷ Late that year she provided the court with a list of owners (and their other lands) when she sought the removal of restrictions from Ngahinapouri B to enable them to lease it; the court was agreeable.¹⁷⁸ In 1893, referring to Taiwhakarewakauri, she explained that ‘the reason this piece was left out was because we thought we could save this, the other was for sale to pay for surveys’.¹⁷⁹ Later that year Komata South No. 1 was granted to her and Ngati Taiuru, and she became an owner of Te Korauae.¹⁸⁰

In 1894, when 400 acres of the Ohinemuri Block was gifted to the Tuhourangi tribe because they had been driven from their land by the Tarawera eruption of 1886, she said that ‘she does not take part in the gift, but will not object so long as her share is not affected’.¹⁸¹ Two years later she sold a section at Opatito, by then part of Paeroa township, for £20.¹⁸² In 1897, when the Railway Department took nearly three of her 90 acres at Paeroa for the railway station, the court assessed its value at £400 per acre.¹⁸³ Also in that year she gave a timber lease over Te Ahipukahu No. 2,

¹⁷³ G.T. Wilkinson to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 1 October 1890, Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 1, 1892/8, ANZ-W.

¹⁷⁴ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28B, p. 150.

¹⁷⁵ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28B, p. 51.

¹⁷⁶ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28A, p. 95.

¹⁷⁷ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28A, p. 159.

¹⁷⁸ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, pp. 92-93.

¹⁷⁹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 31, p. 90.

¹⁸⁰ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 31, pp. 202, 204.

¹⁸¹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 36, p. 279.

¹⁸² Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 37, p. 177.

¹⁸³ *Thames Advertiser*, 12 April 1897, p. 2.

of 174 acres, for £160 per acre.¹⁸⁴ In 1898 the court granted most of the 1,000-acre Rotokohu Block to Rihitoto and her people and Keepa Raharuhi and his people.¹⁸⁵ In 1907, she arranged the partition of Moehau No. 1 K with two other claimants.¹⁸⁶ In 1922, she owned 29 acres at Upper Rotokohu, which was not farmed, and sold this block three years later.¹⁸⁷ At the time of her death in 1935 she ‘controlled large areas of land’ in the Ohinemuri and Coromandel districts.¹⁸⁸

RIHITOTO’S FINANCES

Because of inheriting her father’s debts, Rihitoto had financial difficulties in the late 1870s. In 1877 a shoemaker obtained a judgment summons against her to enforce the payment of £9 4s 1d, and two years later a settler sued for £100.¹⁸⁹ The latter, a loan, was not the full debt, but the amount was reduced to that figure to bring the claim within the jurisdiction of the district court. According to the plaintiff, John Thorp, Rihitoto had signed the document after her brother died ‘and she came into his property and agreed to pay his debts. Since then she had sold land to his brother, and obtained money. She had also received rent from her brother’s estate. She had paid several of the debts incurred by him’. The document requested James Mackay ‘to pay her brother’s debt, and charge it against the land at Ohinemuri’, but Mackay had ‘declined to pay it’. Thorp ‘swore positively that she was 22 years of age’ when she signed, which his brother confirmed.

Rihitoto Mataia (the defendant) deposed that she was now 25 years of age. She signed the order; but was intimidated into so doing. When she signed it Thorp said that if Mackay did not pay the amount it did not matter. She recollected getting £10 for signing a deed. She would swear that she only signed one order.

¹⁸⁴ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 45, p. 219.

¹⁸⁵ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 3 September 1898, p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 55, p. 374.

¹⁸⁷ R.B. Thorp, ‘Early Settlers of the Upper Rotokohu (South of Paeroa)’, *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, vol. 48 (September 2004), p. 8.

¹⁸⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 16 May 1935, p. 11.

¹⁸⁹ Thames Magistrate’s Court, *Plaint Book 1875-1880*, 747/1877, BACL 13737/15b; *Shortland Plaint Book 1870-1884*, 6/1879, BACL 13818/1a, ANZ-A.

Thorp purchased the Tawa block from her; but she did not know at what price per acre.

Nicholls gave evidence that Thorp had offered her 'a sum of money and the cancelling of the order before the court if she would give up her interests in the Tawa block. She did so, and received £10; but not the order, as Thorp hadn't it to hand'. As the judge considered that she had been of age when she signed, he gave judgment against her.¹⁹⁰ No financial difficulties were recorded after that date. In an attempt to obtain more money from the government for the sale of their interests in the goldfields, in 1931 and 1935 she was one of the leaders of the campaign for an enquiry into the ceding of land for mining.¹⁹¹

NICHOLLS AS A PUBLIC FIGURE

While Rihitoto was a leader in the Maori community, her husband was a leader in the Pakeha one. In 1885 he was elected to a Paeroa committee that opposed Paeroa being rated to develop the Thames harbour.¹⁹² In November he was a member of a deputation to the Minister of Lands seeking the freehold for Paeroa residents.¹⁹³ In that month he was elected to the newly-constituted Ohinemuri County Council, of which he remained a member until 1890, and then rejoined from 1893 to 1896 and from 1905 to 1908. He was its chairman from 1887 to 1889 and 1905 to 1908.¹⁹⁴ The first time he was elected there was controversy over Pakeha allegedly being left off the roll while from 30 to 40 Maori and many Pakeha ineligible to vote were added to it to swamp the legitimate voters in the interests of Nicholls and two other candidates.¹⁹⁵ (One of those included was Rapata Te Pokiha, despite his being dead.)¹⁹⁶ These accusations were never tested, and his

¹⁹⁰ District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1879, p. 3.

¹⁹¹ 'The Native Purposes Act, 1935', *AJHR*, 1940, G-6A, pp. 1, 8-9.

¹⁹² *Thames Advertiser*, 30 June 1885, p. 3.

¹⁹³ *Te Aroha News*, 14 November 1885, p. 7.

¹⁹⁴ *Diamond Jubilee of the Ohinemuri County, 1885-1945: Souvenir and historical record* (Paeroa, 1945), p. 11.

¹⁹⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 October 1885, p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from 'A Respectable White Man', *Thames Advertiser*, 11 November 1885, p. 3.

election with equal-highest votes (33) for the Paeroa Riding was not challenged.¹⁹⁷

The details of his career in local government have not been researched, but he was both popular and successful. A year after being first elected, he was appointed as the council's representative on the Thames Hospital and Charitable Aid Board.¹⁹⁸ When he stood for re-election in 1887, he topped the poll for his riding with 43 votes.¹⁹⁹ An Ohinemuri correspondent described him as 'an old and tried councillor' who would 'probably be elected chairman'; he was, unanimously.²⁰⁰ The following year he stated his unwillingness to be chairman for another year, prompting another correspondent to write that he had earned 'golden opinions from all sorts of people' and that 'it would be impossible to find a better chairman. He has attended the office nearly every day'.²⁰¹ After agreeing to stand once more, he was re-elected unanimously.²⁰² Addressing the new council he claimed to have hoped that someone else would have sought the position, 'but they all seemed reluctant'.²⁰³ In 1889, with two others he was appointed to a board of review to consider property tax valuations.²⁰⁴ Later that year, when he declined to be chairman again, he received a unanimous vote of thanks.²⁰⁵ When standing again in 1893 he stated that he had not contested the previous election 'in order that the honors might go round, and it was only at the earnest solicitation of many friends that he had now consented to be nominated'.²⁰⁶ He was successful,²⁰⁷ as he was whenever he stood for office. In his last year on the council he was unanimously re-elected chairman.²⁰⁸

¹⁹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 12 November 1885, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 27 November 1886, p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ *Waikato Times*, 17 November 1887, p. 2.

²⁰⁰ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 24 November 1887, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 26 November 1887, p. 2.

²⁰¹ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1888, p. 2.

²⁰² Ohinemuri County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 1 December 1888, p. 2.

²⁰³ Ohinemuri County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 4 December 1888, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ *Waikato Times*, 16 February 1889, p. 2.

²⁰⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 30 November 1889, p. 2.

²⁰⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 November 1893, p. 2.

²⁰⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 November 1893, p. 3.

²⁰⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 December 1907, p. 22.

Nicholls was prominent locally in a variety of other ways. In 1886, with another man he formed the Ohinemuri Rifle Volunteers.²⁰⁹ In 1890 he was elected to the vestry of the Anglican church at Paeroa,²¹⁰ and six years later was appointed a justice of the peace.²¹¹ In 1902 he was a leader of efforts to establish a hospital at Waikino, and four years later was elected president of the newly formed Paeroa branch of the St John's Ambulance Association.²¹² He held high positions in the Ohinemuri Masonic Lodge, of which his son was also a leading member.²¹³ In 1906 he chaired a meeting to discuss constructing a railway line between Paeroa and Pokeno which formed the Auckland-Paeroa East Coast Railway League.²¹⁴

Nicholls also encouraged and participated in social activities. In 1901 he was vice president of the Paeroa Choral Society,²¹⁵ but whether he participated in cultural life in other ways has not been traced. He was especially active in sport and horse racing. In 1886 he was elected as the first president of the Ohinemuri Cricket Club, of which he became patron in 1896.²¹⁶ His paddock was used for football matches, and in 1889 Paeroa's annual athletic sports were held on it.²¹⁷ Ten years later this paddock was the venue for the annual sports of the Thames Miners Union, attended by 2,000 people.²¹⁸ In 1889 he was re-elected president of the Ohinemuri Jockey Club, in 1896 was a vice president, two years later 'gave every satisfaction' when acting as a judge at the Paeroa races, and continued to be active into the twentieth century.²¹⁹

As Nicholls became increasingly involved in national issues, his politics became increasingly conservative. In 1885 he supported a candidate

²⁰⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 June 1886, p. 2.

²¹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 8 February 1890, p. 2.

²¹¹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 6 June 1896, p. 4.

²¹² *Thames Star*, 11 March 1902, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 August 1906, p. 36.

²¹³ *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 November 1907, p. 36; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

²¹⁴ *Thames Star*, 13 September 1906, p. 1.

²¹⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 17 May 1901, p. 29.

²¹⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 October 1886, p. 2, 18 September 1896, p. 2

²¹⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 17 October 1888, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 14 November 1889, p. 2.

²¹⁸ *Waikato Argus*, 9 March 1899, p. 2.

²¹⁹ *Waikato Times*, 24 January 1889, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1896, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 19 March 1898, p. 2; photograph, *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 April 1901, Supplement, p. 6.

for the Tauranga seat who backed the Vogel-Stout government.²²⁰ Five years later he chaired the Paeroa meeting of the conservative candidate for the local electorate, and later became treasurer of his election committee.²²¹ In 1901 he was one of the sponsors of a meeting ‘to consider the present Legislation of the Colony regarding Labour and Capital’.²²² In 1913, commenting on his being one of the six vice presidents of the new Reform Party branch at Paeroa, the *Observer* referred to ‘Will Nicholls, MP?’²²³ Instead of standing for the lower house, that year he was appointed one of ‘the new “Lords” ’,²²⁴ meaning a member of the Legislative Council. His career in the upper house has not been researched.

A MAORI LEADER

In 1886 Nicholls was asked by ‘a number of influential natives’ to stand for the Western Maori seat. A newspaper considered it was ‘not probable’ he would stand ‘until the general election when, owing to his popularity amongst both natives and Europeans’, he stood ‘a good chance of success’.²²⁵ There were no other recorded mentions of his standing for a Maori seat, but he was recognised as a leader amongst Maori. When elevated to the Legislative Council, the *Observer* briefly sketched him:

A stout, good-natured, smiling man, characteristically Maori in appearance, but not suggestive of the brown flotsam that raises an atmosphere of such largeness at the Waitemata [Hotel] corner. Mr Nicholls is indeed one of the enlightened body of Maori gentlemen on whom the race must depend for its future existence as a people.²²⁶

When he died, the Paeroa newspaper claimed that ‘no member of the Dominion had a better knowledge of the natives’.²²⁷ One South Island

²²⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 July 1885, p. 3.

²²¹ *Waikato Times*, 25 November 1890, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 April 1891, p. 10.

²²² *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 23 August 1901, p. 3.

²²³ ‘They Say’, *Observer*, 26 April 1913, p. 7; *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 September 1913, p. 68.

²²⁴ *Observer*, 5 July 1913, p. 4.

²²⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1886, p. 13.

²²⁶ *Observer*, 5 July 1913, p. 4.

²²⁷ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

member of the Legislative Council, Charles Albert Creery Hardy, said that he knew ‘a good deal about his inner life’ and ideals, and spoke of Nicholls as a Maori:

He was always out in the interests of his race, and striving by any means in his power to raise them. He spoke to me about the Europeans, and about the good they had done in coming to the country. He also spoke to me about the weaknesses which many of the Natives had copied from the Europeans. In speaking in that way he used to always speak in a respectful manner, because he knew that man was weak. But, Sir, he had a great love for his people.²²⁸

Prime Minister William Massey claimed that Nicholls ‘possessed the confidence of both races’ and was ‘one of the best representatives of the Native race’ to have sat in parliament’.²²⁹ Sir Joseph Ward recalled him as ‘anxious to do the best he could for his own race and for the country as a whole’.²³⁰ Hugh Poland, who held the Ohinemuri seat, said Nicholls ‘took a special interest’ in the welfare of Maori. ‘I know of many instances where his services have been of the greatest value to the Natives of the Ohinemuri district, and I feel sure that his death is an irreparable loss to the Natives of the Hauraki district’. Thomas William Rhodes eulogized him in a way that would upset later sensibilities:

In his relations with his own people his conduct was such as to make every member of the various tribes respect him, because he was always trying to uplift and do them good, and never bore any enmity to any of those who were opposed to him. I can only conclude by saying that he was a “white man” in the fullest sense of the word.²³¹

As an example of Nicholls’ leadership role amongst Maori, he spoke in Maori at a Paeroa meeting in November 1902, urging Maori to ignore the ruling of Mahuta, the Maori King, over land dealings:

Something ought to be done, as no one could at the present time lease or sell Native land. This district was locked up in a box and

²²⁸ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 364.

²²⁹ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 369.

²³⁰ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 369.

²³¹ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 370.

Mahuta had the key. He would advise the Natives of the Hauraki District to appoint a Committee of all the tribes to consider the question, and report to a future meeting. It was a very important and should not be further delayed.

The meeting unanimously agreed, and elected him as its chairman. In reporting this meeting, the *Ohinemuri Gazette* referred to him as a European,²³² and clearly he identified mostly with this half of his heritage. An obituary noted that 'in respect to furthering the European occupation of native lands he had accomplished a very great service'.²³³ Whilst he helped Maori in some ways, he and his wife were careful to ensure that they acquired as much land as possible, which they treated as personal not communal land. After his death, the *Observer* correctly noted that he had 'an acute perception of the value of land and held enough in Ohinemuri, Coromandel and elsewhere to stave off all possibility of poverty to himself or to those he left behind. In him were allied the soft persuasiveness of the Maori with the business acumen of the pakeha'.²³⁴

HIS REPUTATION

On 15 July 1915, Nicholls died in a Te Aroha hospital, aged 62, from stomach cancer.²³⁵ The eulogies sounded sincere rather than formalities. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Sir Francis Bell, moved a motion extending the Legislative Council's sympathy to his family and made flattering references to his career. On the council he 'had proved himself to us all to be a capable administrator and a very careful attendant to his legislative duties, except when he was prevented by the illness which unfortunately he suffered from during the whole time, and which has now ended in his premature death'.²³⁶ Hardy claimed him as a friend, 'a man amongst men, for he was one of Nature's gentlemen. He was a man whom I learned a great deal from'.²³⁷ Charles Houghton Mills, from Wellington, who felt his

²³² *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 14 November 1902, p. 2.

²³³ *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

²³⁴ *Observer*, 24 July 1915, p. 4.

²³⁵ Death Certificate of William Grey Nicholls, 15 July 1915, 1915/278, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

²³⁶ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 363.

²³⁷ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, pp. 363-364.

death ‘very deeply’, agreed he was ‘a manly man’ who had known for a year that he had not long to live.²³⁸ William Beehan, from Auckland, told councillors that the deaths of some of his own friends had ‘not affected me so much’. He described Nicholls as ‘an excellent man in every respect – gentle and kind, and, withal, very able. He did an immense amount of good in the district in which he lived, both amongst his own race and amongst the Europeans, and he was universally loved’.²³⁹ Once again he was seen as a Maori.

In the Lower House, Sir Joseph Ward recalled him as ‘a quiet unassuming man’, and John Anstey also referred to his ‘unassuming character’ and ‘diligent attention to his duties’. William Herbert Herries, the Native Minister, who had known Nicholls for 30 years, stated that ‘he was respected and loved right throughout the district in which he lived’.²⁴⁰ Maui Wiremu Piti Naera Pomare, ‘Member of the Executive Council representing the Native Race’, described Nicholls as ‘a very sympathetic adviser to his Maori people, a counsellor in the halls of legislation, and a friend to those in affliction. The intimacy of a friendship of many years, Sir, makes me say that he was “the noblest Roman of them all” ’.²⁴¹ Hugh Poland, who had known him for 21 years and had worked with him on ‘various local bodies’, recalled him as ‘a man of broad mind and sound judgment, and of a great gentleness of disposition, which endeared him to every one who came in contact with him, and which resulted in his making many lifelong friends and no enemies’. Albert Edward Glover of Auckland, who had known him ‘in his boyhood days in the Coromandel district’, described him as ‘characteristic of that race from which he sprung’ by being ‘kind-hearted and genial to a degree’. Rhodes, who held the Thames seat and had known him for about 30 years, stated he was ‘universally esteemed from one end of the Hauraki Peninsula to the other, alike by Maori and European’.

In his business relations he was esteemed to the very utmost. At one time he carried on a very extensive Native business. That is usually a business which brings a man more or less into disrepute with some section of the community; not so with the late Mr

²³⁸ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 364.

²³⁹ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 364.

²⁴⁰ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 369.

²⁴¹ *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 369.

Nicholls, because he was a man who was always straight and upright.²⁴²

The *Te Aroha News* wrote that he 'had long been acknowledged as a leading public man' who had advanced the district, and had been a 'useful' member of the Legislative Council.²⁴³ The *Observer* agreed that he had 'a good deal of administrative ability and his services to public bodies were many and excellent'.²⁴⁴ According to the *Ohinemuri Gazette*, he was 'one of the oldest and most respected residents' and 'universally known and respected throughout the district'.²⁴⁵

CLOSENESS TO THE DEARLE FAMILY

Nicholls was particularly close to his brother-in-law Charles John Dearle and his family, for instance nominating Dearle for the Paeroa Riding of the county council in 1887.²⁴⁶ He was the guardian to two of his daughters when they were admitted to the Paeroa school, and after Dearle's death he gave one away at her wedding.²⁴⁷

RIHITOTO'S DEATH

Rihitoto Mataia lived until May 1935, when she died aged 93.²⁴⁸ A Paeroa correspondent described her as a 'well-known Maori chieftainess' who was 'a prominent leader' of Ngati Maru and Ngati Tamatera. She left 'several grandchildren and great grandchildren'. For the past 30 years she had 'always taken a leading part in furthering the interests of the Maori people. A few years ago she gave the site and contributed £300 toward the cost of erection of the Maori Anglican church in Paeroa, which she maintained', and in the month of her death received the King's Silver

²⁴² *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 370.

²⁴³ *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

²⁴⁴ *Observer*, 24 July 1915, p. 4.

²⁴⁵ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

²⁴⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 12 November 1887, p. 2.

²⁴⁷ Paeroa School, Admissions Register 1895-1899, nos. 8, 39, Primary School Archives, Paeroa; *Thames Star*, 20 August 1902, p. 2.

²⁴⁸ Death Certificate of Rihitoto Mataia, 14 May 1935, 1935/25693, BDM.

Jubilee Medal. Her tangi attracted Maori 'from all parts of the province'.²⁴⁹ A Paeroa newspaper described her as 'the leader of the Maori race' in that district and 'a paramount chief', in honour of whom flags were flown at half-mast on the local government offices.

She was of a quiet retiring nature and among the white people, and her people, she was very highly respected, not on account of her rank alone, or her wealth, but more for her splendid character and Native dignity. She was very generous, particularly at the time of the Great War, and she gave land and £300 for the Maori Church which was erected at Paeroa a short time ago. In this connection she stated at the opening of the church that when her father left Coromandel he was having a church built at Kopuatauaki but it was never completed and for seventy years she felt the urge to complete it. However she decided that a church at Paeroa would be more useful.

Her good influence among the Maori people was recognized with the bestowal of a King's Silver Jubilee Medal, but it is possible that the excitement brought about her death for it was the night following receipt of the intimation that she had a stroke and did not recover consciousness.²⁵⁰

The funeral service was conducted by five Anglican clergy, four of them Maori. The church 'did not have the capacity to hold half of those who attended'. There were two pall bearers 'representing the Maori race' and one representing the Church of England, one the county council, and one the Masonic lodge. 'The cortege was probably the longest seen in Paeroa for very many years, there being almost 80 cars'.²⁵¹

CONCLUSION

Both Nicholls and his wife were prominent in both the Maori and Pakeha communities, with Rihitoto being a leader in the former and Nicholls in the latter. Through Rihitoto's ancestry and Nicholls' understanding of the land court system they obtained a great deal of land and were able to live in comfortable circumstances. Nicholls was also a farmer and investor, who was notably popular in local government, and his

²⁴⁹ Paeroa Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 16 May 1935, p. 11.

²⁵⁰ *Hauraki Plains Gazette*, 15 May 1935, p. 2.

²⁵¹ *Hauraki Plains Gazette*, 26 May 1935, p. 2.

elevation to be a legislative councillor marked the pinnacle of a remarkable career for a man who to Pakeha started out in life as an obscure 'half-caste'.

Appendix

Figure 1: Photograph of William Grey Nicholls, n.d., Anita Manning Collection; used with permission.

Figure 2: Painting of Wiremu Nikora, n.d., Anita Manning Collection; used with permission.



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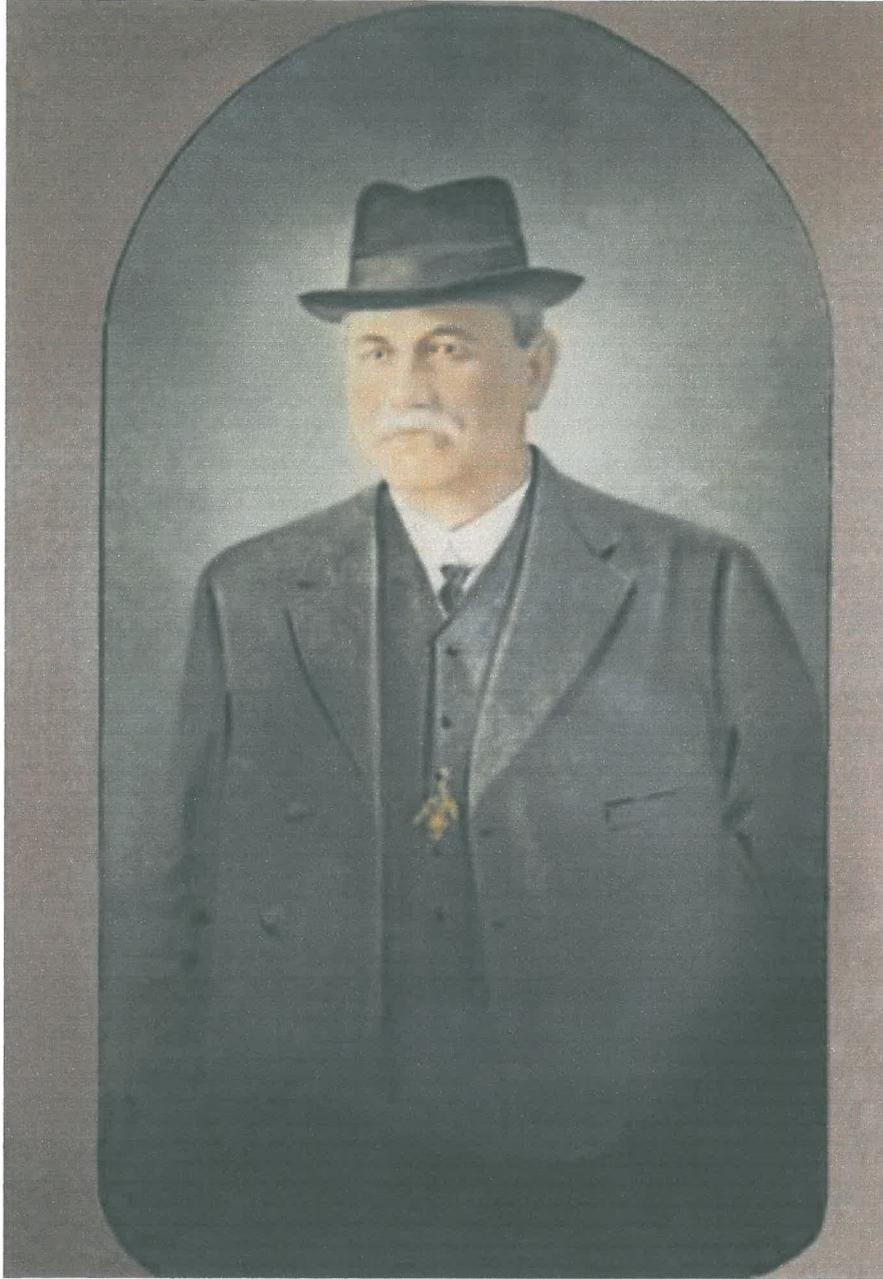


Figure 2: Painting of Wiremu Nikora, n.d., Anita Manning Collection; used with permission.