

WILLIAM GREY NICHOLLS AND RIHITOTO MATAIA

Philip Hart

**Te Aroha Mining District Working Papers**

**No. 24**

**Revised on June 27, 2019**

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

ISSN: 2463-6266

© 2016 Philip Hart

Contact: [prhart1940@gmail.com](mailto:prhart1940@gmail.com)



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

## WILLIAM GREY NICHOLLS AND RIHITOTO MATAIA

**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,<sup>1</sup> was the younger son of William Nicholls and Hera Te Whakaawa.<sup>2</sup> He shared an ancestor, Te Kura, with Te Moananui Manao, of Ngai Te Rangi, and was a member of Ngati Haua.<sup>3</sup> Born at Coromandel in December 1853, he was educated at a missionary school for Maori conducted by the Rev. Benjamin Yates

---

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

<sup>2</sup> See paper on William Nicholls.

<sup>3</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28B, p. 125; *New Zealand Herald*, 12 August 1869, p. 4.

Ashwell,<sup>4</sup> at Taupiri.<sup>5</sup> He lived in Ohinemuri from 1865 onwards, where, in 1875, ‘according to Maori custom’, to quote his words, he married Rihitoto Mataia.<sup>6</sup>

### RIHITOTO MATAIA’S FAMILY

Rihitoto Mataia,<sup>7</sup> sometimes Te Rihitoto, was the only daughter of Mataia Te Ngahira.<sup>8</sup> According to George Thomas Wilkinson,<sup>9</sup> an experienced Native Agent who knew her well, she was ‘alias Titihuia Tarakura’, but this is the only reference to her having this alias.<sup>10</sup> Her mother, Ngawai, also known as Ngarangi and Ngarenga, was named Hariata when baptized.<sup>11</sup> Her father was of the Ngati Taharua hapu of Ngati Tamatera, as well as of Te Ngahiri, and her mother of Ngati Pinenga.<sup>12</sup> Mataia, a prominent rangatira, was willing to sell land to Pakeha and, in time, to permit the opening of Ohinemuri to mining.<sup>13</sup> He

---

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> For photograph, google under her name in [www.ohinemuri.org.nz/images](http://www.ohinemuri.org.nz/images).

<sup>8</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 10, p. 222.

<sup>9</sup> See paper on his Mereā Wikiriwhi.

<sup>10</sup> G.T. Wilkinson to Under-Secretary, Maori Affairs Department, 10 June 1890, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

<sup>11</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 22, p. 282; no. 29, p. 164.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> See *Daily Southern Cross*, 4 November 1867, p. 3, 12 March 1868, p. 3, 9 October 1868, p. 3, letter from C.O. Davis, 22 October 1868, p. 5, 22 February 1875, p. 3, 26 February 1875, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 26 October 1868, p. 6, 24 November 1868, p. 4, 31 May 1870, p. 4, 19 February 1872, p. 2, 4 May 1874, p. 3, 23 February 1875, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 30 April 1874, p. 3, 24 August 1874, p. 3, 3 December 1874, p. 3, 9 December 1874, p. 3, 18 January 1875, p. 3, 19 February 1875, p. 3, 26 February 1875, p. 3, 28 April 1875, p. 3, 7 October 1875, p. 3, 1 July 1876, p. 3, 19 October 1876, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 15

died in October 1876, in Paeroa, ‘after a long illness’; her mother died one year later.<sup>14</sup> An obituary described him as ‘well-known and respected’, no doubt because he had been a ‘staunch’ friend of Pakeha ‘from the beginning’.<sup>15</sup> But he did not agree with the ways of the Pakeha when his interests were affected, stopping the survey of a proposed road between Te Puke, at the junction of the Waihou and Ohinemuri rivers, to Paeroa because he feared his property would be taken to pay highway rates. In 1877, when Maori debated whether to permit the construction of this road, Rihitoto said ‘she was inclined to carry out her father’s wishes’. Others ‘might do what they liked with their own’, but ‘she would not allow the road now proposed to go through her land’. Later in the same meeting, she announced that ‘she would consent if satisfied that her father had consented before his death’.<sup>16</sup>

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’.<sup>17</sup>

In 1907 Rihitoto told the land court that she did not know in which year she was born, but in October 1879 she had been quite definite that she was then aged 25.<sup>18</sup> Others said that she was born at Koputauaki, a bay a short distance to the north of Coromandel township, in March 1854, a date that confirmed her 1879 statement. Wikiriwhi Hautonga<sup>19</sup> ‘knew this because he came from Napier to attend a great feast at Koputauaki, and she was born there’.<sup>20</sup> Rihitoto herself said she was born at Uriwai, a place

---

May 1874, p. 2, 8 June 1874, p. 2, 4 February 1875, p. 2, 18 February 1875, p. 2, 19 February 1875, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 24, p. 332; no. 29, p. 164; *Thames Advertiser*, 19 October 1876, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1876, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 17 April 1877, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 7 February 1873, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 56, p. 174; District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1879, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> See paper on the Te Aroha murder.

<sup>20</sup> 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; *Auckland Star*, 16 May 1935, p. 3.

not now traceable but presumably nearby, and only later lived at Koputauaki.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

In a later genealogy, she explained that Mataia was the son of Putahi and his second wife Mawhetu.<sup>23</sup> For another block of land, she had a different whakapapa:

Tauiru

Te Ihenga

Rangimoiwhare

Te Heru

Mawhatu,

Mataia

herself.<sup>24</sup>

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

Te Ruapokirangi, whose son

Tokanui married Rukutia, whose son

Tahuanui was succeeded by

---

<sup>21</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 56, pp. 162, 164.

<sup>22</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, p. 163.

<sup>24</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 25, p. 139.

Taiope

Te Ngaio

Te Heru

Mawhatu, a woman, who married Te Putahi

Mataia

herself.<sup>25</sup>

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’.<sup>26</sup>

### RIHITOTO’S MARRIAGES

According to John Wallonora Thorp, whose family had lived at Te Puke, near Paeroa, since the 1840s,<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> She did confirm that she came with her brother and others to Komata in 1863, but they had returned to Coromandel because of the Waikato War, not coming back to Ohinemuri for ‘some considerable time’ afterwards, possibly as late as 1865. ‘We resided at Opukeko’, the land upon which the township of Paeroa would later be sited, ‘when we first came back – it was an arrangement made by Mataia while he was at Waikawau’.<sup>29</sup> 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’.<sup>30</sup>

According to an obituary, in the ‘early seventies’ Rihitoto ‘married a local chief, Warana, who died shortly after the marriage’.<sup>31</sup> They had a daughter, Petiwai Warana, who would marry Tihitapu, son of Te Moananui,

---

<sup>25</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, p. 285.

<sup>26</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 56 [punctuation added].

<sup>27</sup> See paper on Maori in Hauraki in the nineteenth century.

<sup>28</sup> District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1879, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 22, pp. 308, 310, 312; no. 23, p. 226.

<sup>30</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book, no. 30, pp. 108, 109, 114.

<sup>31</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 May 1935, p. 11.

a leading rangatira in Ohinemuri, and have a daughter, Herumate (known as Herumate Te Moananui).<sup>32</sup> In 1911 she gifted her interest in land at Pukemokemoke, in the Waikato, to a nephew.<sup>33</sup> As Petiwai Mataia (a land agent certified that she was the same person despite the different name) Rihitoto had an interest in land at Moehau, on the Coromandel peninsula, in 1914, the year that she sold her interest (3 of 14 shares) in the Rotokohu No. 1 Block, near Paeroa.<sup>34</sup> Because of having married into the Te Moananui family, in 1898 the interests of Te Moananui's children in this block had been vested in her.<sup>35</sup> Her will of 1934 gifted much of her remaining land to Herumate and her whanau.<sup>36</sup>

On 19 October 1876, an Ohinemuri correspondent noted that Rihitoto 'was married a second time a few days in Shortland', Thames, just before her father's death.<sup>37</sup> He was 23 and she was four months younger.<sup>38</sup> Their only child was a son, George William, born in Paeroa on 18 June 1877.<sup>39</sup> Nicholls ensured that he 'received a good education, first at the local school, and then at the Queen's College, finishing at the Auckland Grammar School, and was looked upon as a high and reliable authority on most matters regarding native affairs'.<sup>40</sup> He was a licensed interpreter.<sup>41</sup> He was

---

<sup>32</sup> Will of Rihitoto Mataia Nikora, 21 February 1934, Lucia Jacobs Papers; Evidence of David Condon Williams (grandson of Herumate), given in 2002, Waitangi Tribunal, *The Marutuahu Claims*, Wai 811 B2, Wai 686 W21, p. 7 [online under 'Herumate Te Moananui'].

<sup>33</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, p. 164; Maori Affairs Department, Waikato-Maniapoto land alienation files, BACS 15355, box 129, WM 3134, ANZ-A.

<sup>34</sup> Maori Affairs Department, Waikato-Maniapoto land alienation files, BACS 15355, box 68, WM 6065, ANZ-A.

<sup>35</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 12 May 1913, p. 3; Lucia Jacobs to Philip Hart, 13 December 2018, email.

<sup>36</sup> Will of Rihitoto Mataia Nikora, 21 February 1934, Lucia Jacobs Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 19 October 1876, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books no. 30, p. 138, no. 56, p. 174; Death Certificate of William Grey Nicholls, 15 July 1915, 1915/278, BDM; District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1879, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Declaration of Rihitoto Mataia, 13 March 1918, Auckland High Court, Originating Summonses, BBAE 5522, box 26, item 281, ANZ-A; Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, p. 164.

<sup>40</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 31 March 1916, p. 2.

an owner of two claims in Ohinemuri in 1896 and of four at Karangahake in 1908.<sup>42</sup> and five years later passed an examination to be a licensed interpreter. Described in 1898 as being ‘modest and retiring’,<sup>43</sup> after his death in 1916, aged only 39, less than a year after his father,<sup>44</sup> the local newspaper stated that news of his death ‘cast a gloom all over the land in which he lived and breathed, for George was a well-known personality. He was a man of upright character, true and honest of purpose in all his extensive business connections and concerns’. Maori residents ‘respected and trusted him’. He was ‘somewhat reserved, but withal was pleasing in character that bore a kindly nature. An active Mason, he was also ‘a musician, and good company, despite his natural retiring disposition’.<sup>45</sup> 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’.<sup>46</sup> As Rititoto recorded, two years later, Nicholls ‘was on terms of intimacy and affection’ with his son’s three children, who lived on Rihitoto’s land at Paeroa close to her house, ‘and he named one of them after himself and also gave names to the other two’. They were named William Grey, Hera Mawhatu, and Vivian Tamatehura.<sup>47</sup> In the late 1920s they were living with her daughter Petiwai at Papaaroha, on Maori land near the Coromandel-Colville road, but after Petiwai died either in 1929 or earlier, Rihitoto protected the interests of her grandchildren who were ‘in my keeping’.<sup>48</sup> It is not known why they were not living with their mother, Heke Roera, also known as Heke Mataia Nicholls, who did not die until 1964, when she was 82.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Maori Affairs Department, Memoranda and Registered Files, ACIH 16036, 1913/3087, ANZ-W.

<sup>42</sup> Thames Warden’s Court, Thames Coromandel Mining Claims Plans, AAAE 15206, box 38, 46,8926; box 75, 51,9289, ANZ-A; Warden’s Court, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 February 1908, p. 3, 25 May 1908, p. 3, 5 June 1908, p. 2; *Auckland Star*, 6 March 1908, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Observer*, 22 January 1898, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Death Certificate of George William Nicholls, 30 March 1916, 1916/4116, BDM.

<sup>45</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 31 March 1916, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Paeroa Cemetery Records, Block B Row 29, microfische.

<sup>47</sup> Declaration of Rihitoto Mataia, 13 March 1918, Auckland High Court, Originating Summonses, BBAE 5522, box 26, item 281, ANZ-A.

<sup>48</sup> Rihitoto Mataia to Apirana Ngata, 22 July 1929, October 1929, Maori Affairs Department, MA 1, 1931/177, ANZ-W.

<sup>49</sup> Death Certificates of George William Nicholls, 30 March 1916, 1916/4116; Heke Mataia Nicholls, 1964/45339, BDM.



Nicholls fathered one other child, but not by Rihitoto. As she declared when his will was being considered in court in 1918, ‘the Charles or Charlie Nicholls referred to in the affidavit sworn and filed herein is an illegitimate son of my said husband ... by a European woman who was in my service as a general servant’. That she did not know the full particulars of the affair is clear from her comment that ‘as far as I recollect’ he was ‘born in about the year 1896 or 1897’. That the affair affected their relationship temporarily was made clear by her adding that Nicholls had lived with her ‘on terms of intimacy and affection up to the time of his death in a house and on a property owned by myself excepting during the term of intimacy with said servant’.<sup>50</sup> That Nicholls kept in touch with his illegitimate son is revealed by his will, drafted five days before his death, including provision for the payment from his life insurance of £500 ‘in trust for Charles or Charlie Nicholls of Morrinsville who is an illegitimate child’.<sup>51</sup> That was as close as he went to admitting paternity.

#### NICHOLLS’ EARLY LIFE

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.<sup>52</sup>

In September 1874, he was appointed a licensed interpreter,<sup>53</sup> 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

---

<sup>50</sup> Declaration of Rihitoto Mataia, 13 March 1918, Auckland High Court, Originating Summonses, BBAE 5522, box 26, item 281, ANZ-A.

<sup>51</sup> Will of William Grey Nicholls, 10 July 1915, Auckland High Court, Originating Summonses, BBAE 5522, box 26, item 281, ANZ-A.

<sup>52</sup> 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.

<sup>53</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 September 1874, p. 655.

£1,000 each to open Ohinemuri for mining.<sup>54</sup> He also became involved in land transactions, for instance in 1874 buying the Komata North block for a Christchurch man.<sup>55</sup> 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'.<sup>56</sup> An Ohinemuri settler accused him of obtaining £150 for assisting to purchase this block, upstream from Te Aroha, by obtaining the signatures of owners;<sup>57</sup> in fact he had obtained £100, without the government's knowledge.<sup>58</sup>

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 desisted his license as an interpreter would be forfeited.<sup>59</sup> His being charged in June 1878 with shooting game without a license received publicity because, being a half-caste, 'he pleaded that legally he was an aboriginal native' and therefore did not require a license.<sup>60</sup> 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' because he was an interpreter.<sup>61</sup> A constable based at Paeroa saw Nicholls with either George or Francis Lipsey<sup>62</sup> (his 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

---

<sup>54</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 19 February 1875, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 30, p. 136.

<sup>56</sup> *AJHR*, 1875, I-1, p. 46.

<sup>57</sup> 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.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Donald McLean to Sir George Grey, 25 May 1876, *AJHR*, 1876, C-3A, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Gerald O'Halloran to James Mackay, 21 November 1877, and subsequent memorandum, Maori Affairs Department, MA 1, 13/86, ANZ-W.

<sup>60</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 June 1878, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Magistrate's Court, *Thames Star*, 19 June 1878, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> See paper on George Lipsey.

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 had been 'previously convicted of similar things and had been let off with a nominal penalty', the magistrate fined him £5 and costs.<sup>63</sup>

Nicholls was becoming a person of some note in the community, in 1876 signing a 'memorial' by residents seeking a bridge at Karangahake.<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup> He enrolled in the Paeroa volunteer corps in March 1879,<sup>66</sup> and in December 1880 signed a petition to reduce the number of hotels in Paeroa.<sup>67</sup>

## MINING

Nicholls was first involved in goldmining during the Te Aroha rush, acquiring a miner's right on opening day.<sup>68</sup> Within two weeks he was a shareholder in a Tui claim principally owned by Maori, and within two

---

<sup>63</sup> Police Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 June 1878, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 1016/76, ANZ-A.

<sup>65</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1876, p. 2, 11 December 1876, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Thames No. 3 Scottish Rifle Volunteers, Capitation Roll to 31 December 1880, Army Department, ARM 41, 1882/10, ANZ-W.

<sup>67</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 24 December 1880, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 405, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1c, ANZ-A.

months held shares in two companies.<sup>69</sup> With Maori prospectors, he helped to peg out two more claims, but these were not registered.<sup>70</sup> 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 Aroha.<sup>71</sup> He acquired an interest in only one Waiorongomai claim, selling it nearly six months later for the same price as he had purchased it.<sup>72</sup>

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.<sup>73</sup> In 1891 he bought a one-twelfth interest in a Karangahake claim, selling it three weeks later.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> Three years later, during the mining boom, he owned shares in six

---

<sup>69</sup> 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.

<sup>70</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1880, nos. 74, 112, BBAV 11557/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>71</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1881, nos. 390, 310, BBAV 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

<sup>72</sup> 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.

<sup>73</sup> 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.

<sup>74</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1888-1892, folio 97, BACL 14355/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>75</sup> 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.

Karangahake companies.<sup>76</sup> In 1896 he held 500 shares in the English-owned New Zealand Crown Mines.<sup>77</sup>

At Waitekauri, he applied for a claim in January 1893, was granted it in April, and surrendered it in July.<sup>78</sup> In April he was granted another, but did not take out the license.<sup>79</sup> In September 1895 he applied for a special claim.<sup>80</sup> In 1896 he was granted a licensed holding that a year later was transferred to a company,<sup>81</sup> and was a director and guarantor of the Grace Darling Company.<sup>82</sup>

In September 1895 he applied for a special claim at Owharoa, which was granted but surrendered a year later.<sup>83</sup> He was a shareholder in one company there in 1895 and another in the following year.<sup>84</sup> Also in 1895 he was a shareholder in one Waihi company and in another the following year.<sup>85</sup> Also in September 1895 he applied for a special claim at the Wires, between Hikutaia and Whangamata, but withdrew the application.<sup>86</sup>

In 1896 he was a shareholder in a Komata company.<sup>87</sup> He applied for three special claims at Whangamata and was granted two, which were

---

<sup>76</sup> *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.

<sup>77</sup> 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.

<sup>78</sup> 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.

<sup>79</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1896-1900, folio 69, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>80</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 September 1895, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1896-1900, folio 49, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>82</sup> 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.

<sup>83</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 September 1895, p. 3; Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Special Claims 1895-1896, folio 195, ZAAP 13294/1b, ANZ-A.

<sup>84</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 17 October 1895, p. 1654, 23 July 1896, p. 1160.

<sup>85</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 26 September 1895, p. 1546, 23 July 1896, p. 1161.

<sup>86</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Applications for Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1887-1896, folio 172, BAAL 14376/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>87</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 11 June 1896, p. 942.

surrendered six months later.<sup>88</sup> In that year he applied for two water races, one near his Bank of New Zealand claim at Whangamata and the other at Puriri.<sup>89</sup> In July he applied for a special claim at Omahu, south of Thames, but withdrew his application in November.<sup>90</sup>

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’.<sup>91</sup> He also was on the committee to form a School of Mines at Paeroa.<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup> At Hikutaia, he bought a quarter interest in a claim in February 1897, but the claim was abandoned two months later.<sup>94</sup>

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.<sup>95</sup> At Waitekauri, in 1907 he had shares in one company.<sup>96</sup> The following year he applied for a dredging claim at Coromandel, but withdrew the request.<sup>97</sup> In 1912 he was a shareholder in a Tairua company,<sup>98</sup> the last mine in which any interest has been traced. Besides these investments, he assisted mining by being elected chairman

---

<sup>88</sup> 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.

<sup>89</sup> 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.

<sup>90</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 13 July 1896, p. 3, 27 November 1896, p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> *Observer*, 24 July 1915, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 September 1896, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 7 January 1897, p. 79; Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 November 1897, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Special Claims 1896-1897, folio 40, ZAAP 13294/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>95</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 July 1904, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 215 no. 1282, ANZ-A.

<sup>97</sup> Coromandel Warden’s Court, Registration of Applications for Special Quartz Claims 1887-1911, folio 52, ZAAN 1161/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>98</sup> Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 382 no. 2134, ANZ-A.

and treasurer of the Paeroa Coal and Mineral Prospecting Syndicate in 1906.<sup>99</sup>

### EARNING A LIVING

Nicholls did not do any mining himself, instead earning money in a variety of other ways, including as the agent for an auctioneer,<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> In May 1882, for unspecified reasons, his license as an interpreter was cancelled.<sup>102</sup> 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.<sup>103</sup> The following year he was reappointed an interpreter,<sup>104</sup> and remained one until his death. From the 1880s onwards he conducted cases for claimants or counter-claimants in the land court.<sup>105</sup>

In 1893 he was appointed as a land court agent.<sup>106</sup> 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'.<sup>107</sup> Later that year Nicholls told the court that he knew the

---

<sup>99</sup> *Thames Star*, 29 November 1906, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 13 December 1881, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> G.T. Wilkinson, diary, entries for 23, 27, 28 October 1881, University of Waikato Library.

<sup>102</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 May 1882, p. 3; the *New Zealand Gazette* did not record this cancellation.

<sup>103</sup> 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.

<sup>104</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 27 December 1888, p. 1425.

<sup>105</sup> For instance, Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 19, p. 146.

<sup>106</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 April 1893, p. 511.

<sup>107</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, p. 260.

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',<sup>108</sup> a reference to his father-in-law. He was 'connected with' the court for 40 years until a few years before his death.<sup>109</sup> His obituary in the *Te Aroha News* stated that 'in respect to furthering the European occupation of native lands he had accomplished a very great service'.<sup>110</sup>

In 1879, Nicholls was living and farming at Muru-o-Te-Ahi, near Paeroa.<sup>111</sup> 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.<sup>112</sup> In that year he was appointed to the Ohinemuri Agricultural Association, formed to destroy codlin moth and other pests, and was elected its treasurer.<sup>113</sup> Ten years later the local bank manager reported that he owned 'excellent swamp land near Paeroa well drained and in grass, fenced'.<sup>114</sup> 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.<sup>115</sup> Between 1910 and 1913 he ran a small flock of sheep.<sup>116</sup> During the early twentieth century he was patron of the Ohinemuri Agricultural and Horticultural Society.<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 31, p. 93.

<sup>109</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

<sup>110</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Thames Electoral Roll, 1879*, p. 60.

<sup>112</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 30 June 1885, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 May 1886, p. 7, 19 June 1886, p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> 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.

<sup>115</sup> 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.

<sup>116</sup> 'Annual Sheep Returns', *AJHR*, 1911, H-23, p. 11; 1912, H-23, p. 11; 1913, H-23, p. 11.

<sup>117</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 June 1907, p. 36, 2 July 1908, p. 36.

<sup>118</sup> 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



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.<sup>119</sup> In 1898 he was a member of a Paeroa syndicate that bought an interest in a sawmill and rimu bush at Mamaku; they had acquired 70 million feet of rimu, and expected to do big business.<sup>120</sup> When this syndicate formed the Mountain Rimu Timber Company he became a director, but sold all his interests by April 1903.<sup>121</sup>

### NICHOLLS' FINANCES

In March 1878 Nicholls filed as a bankrupt.<sup>122</sup> As the press was not sufficiently interested to publish any details to explain 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, which was granted immediately.<sup>123</sup> Through the various endeavours already noted, presumably combined with some profits from his mining investments, Nicholls' financial position after his bankruptcy became much stronger, as illustrated by his calling tenders in late 1888 for the erection of a seven-roomed house.<sup>124</sup> 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'.<sup>125</sup> 'Traveller' referred to his erecting 'a palatial residence'.<sup>126</sup> Seven years later, the local bank manager recorded that he was wealthy, 'of large means undoubted'.<sup>127</sup> In

---

1904, June 1906, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington; *Waikato Times*, 28 January 1890, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 64 no. 453, ANZ-A.

<sup>120</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 25 January 1898, p. 4.

<sup>121</sup> Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 145 no. 938, ANZ-A; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 798.

<sup>122</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 28 March 1878, p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 25 June 1879, p. 2, District Court, 1 August 1879, p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 31 October 1888, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1888, p. 2.

<sup>126</sup> 'Traveller', 'Observations', *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1888, p. 2.

<sup>127</sup> 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.

1897 he could afford a trip to Australia.<sup>128</sup> 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.<sup>129</sup> At the end of that year his assets had risen in value to £4,980, which after subtracting liabilities left £4,492.<sup>130</sup> 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’.<sup>131</sup> The following year the manager called him a ‘very upright, trustworthy man’.<sup>132</sup> His assets were estimated in 1911 to be worth over £12,000;<sup>133</sup> when he died, four years later, he left an estate valued at £10,461 10s 2d.<sup>134</sup>

### NICHOLLS’ LAND DEALINGS

One obituary noted that Nicholls 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’.<sup>135</sup> Two years previously it had described him as the largest landowner at Paeroa, with a reputation of being ‘an indulgent landlord’.<sup>136</sup> 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 1877 a Paeroa baker claimed £20 11s 7d from Nicholls for goods supplied; a ‘set-off of £15’ was filed. After Nicholls ‘deposed that Mataia procured the flour, sugar, and biscuits from plaintiff for his own use’, the plaintiff explained that Nicholls ‘came to him and asked him whether he

---

<sup>128</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 2 November 1897, p. 4.

<sup>129</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book to 30 September 1898, Advances, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>130</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book to 31 March 1899, Advances, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>131</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book to 31 March 1905, Report on Advances, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>132</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager’s Memoranda Book 1902-1914, p. 126, entry for June 1906, Bank of New Zealand Archives.

<sup>133</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager’s Memoranda Book 1902-1914, p. 126, entry for 18 May 1911, Bank of New Zealand Archives.

<sup>134</sup> Testamentary Registers 1917-1918, folio 48, BBCB 4208/11, ANZ-A.

<sup>135</sup> *Observer*, 24 July 1915, p. 4.

<sup>136</sup> *Observer*, 5 July 1913, p. 4.

wished to buy some land; witness said he would give a pound an acre; he also agreed to give defendant £15 commission if the land was bought through his intervention'. He employed Nicholls 'to complete the negotiations'. No money changed hands, but a document was drawn up which led to legal argument about its legality.<sup>137</sup> The suit was settled out of court.<sup>138</sup> In 1880, Muraoteahi No. 2, in Ohinemuri, was granted to Nicholls, his wife, and two others.<sup>139</sup> Also in that year he received £14 15s for his interest in the 2,700 acres of Ohinemuri No. 18, otherwise Waitawheta.<sup>140</sup> 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.<sup>141</sup> 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.<sup>142</sup> Also in 1882 he leased the Ikutaratera Block, in the Thames County.<sup>143</sup>

In 1893 Nicholls said that he had bought Komata North in 1874 for a Pakeha from all the owners except Tukurino. '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.<sup>144</sup> In September that year, Nicholls, his wife, and Mere Perinihi, joint owners of Mure-Te-Ahi No. 2 Block, transferred it to Nicholls alone, and 11 other Maori transferred Ngahinapouri B to him after he purchased their interests for £12 10s each.<sup>145</sup> The following January his

---

<sup>137</sup> Magistrate's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 September 1877, p. 3.

<sup>138</sup> Magistrate's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1877, p. 3.

<sup>139</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 12, p. 334.

<sup>140</sup> Register of Payments to Individuals for Purchase of Land 1873-1880, p. 223, Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 7/7, ANZ-W.

<sup>141</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 22 December 1881, p. 2.

<sup>142</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 14, p. 209.

<sup>143</sup> Ikutaratera Block, Maori Affairs Department, Auckland, MLC-A, box 11, 82/94, ANZ-A.

<sup>144</sup> 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.

<sup>145</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 35, p. 244; *New Zealand Gazette*, 17 November 1893, p. 1651.

wife and six other owners transferred Ngahinapouri A to him for £50 8s.<sup>146</sup> 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.<sup>147</sup> The following year he claimed that the railway had lowered the value of his Opateto land (meaning Paeroa township) 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.<sup>148</sup> A month later he bought Papaturua, just over 52 acres, from Tera Te Teira for £20; the latter retained an interest in Papaturua No. 1, but sold this to Nicholls the following year.<sup>149</sup> Also in that year, Nicholls' party was granted Awaiti No. 1, of 7,755 acres.<sup>150</sup>

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'.<sup>151</sup> 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'.<sup>152</sup> In 1913, with his brother and his sister Harete, he sought 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

---

<sup>146</sup> Correspondence to Judge H. Eyre Kenny 1894-1896, 1894 memorandum, BACL 14468/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 22 March 1894, p. 463.

<sup>147</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 39, p. 328.

<sup>148</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 44, pp. 239-240.

<sup>149</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books no. 44, p. 293; no. 48, p. 176.

<sup>150</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 49, p. 80.

<sup>151</sup> 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.

<sup>152</sup> 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.

reserve'.<sup>153</sup> If this was their intention, it failed, for a list of Ngati Rahiri owners was made and the block made permanently inalienable.<sup>154</sup>

When Nicholls died, an obituary referred to his 'considerable property' in the Matamata, Paeroa, and Coromandel districts.<sup>155</sup>

### RIHITOTO'S LAND DEALINGS

When her husband died, Rihitoto Mataia still 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.<sup>156</sup>

In 1877 she was registered as one of eight owners of the Ouekaharau block, sole owner of Te Puru o te Rangi No 1 and of Te Arero o Huatata No. 2, one of four owners of Te Puru o te Rangi No. 2, one of six owners of Wairere, all in Ohinemuri, and one of four owners of Te Koutu no, 1, one of 17 owners of Waihou West No. 1, one of four owners of Taiwakarerewakauri, and one of three owners of Tua o te Huia, all at Waihou.<sup>157</sup> She, along with 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.<sup>158</sup>

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.<sup>159</sup> (This block would be the site of the township of Paeroa.)<sup>160</sup> Also in that year she was registered as the sole owner of Muraoteahi, in Ohinemuri; two years later she shared the

---

<sup>153</sup> 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.

<sup>154</sup> 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.

<sup>155</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 8, p. 390; no. 10, p. 222.

<sup>157</sup> Lands and Survey Department, Certificates of Titles and Memorials of Ownership of Maori Land, ABWN 8910, W5278, 23/3404, 25/3600, 25/3604, 25/3605, 25/3624, 25/3625, 30/4088, 30/4136, 30/4120, ANZ-W.

<sup>158</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 10, p. 199.

<sup>159</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books, no. 10, pp. 222, 223; no. 11, p. 16.

<sup>160</sup> See, for instance, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 April 1875, p. 3.

ownership of Muraoteahi No. 2 with her husband and two others.<sup>161</sup> She was also registered in 1878 as sole owner of Koromatua No. 3A, Opatito, Hararahi No. 1, and Te Manuka No. 2, and as one of two owners of Momonatui, all in Ohinemuri, and one of nine owners of Te Paeroa No. 2, part of the Aroha Block, and one of 14 owners of Waihou West No. 2 and sole owner of Waihou West No. 3.<sup>162</sup>

When the 401-acre Hararahi Block was before the court in that year, 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,<sup>163</sup> 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’.<sup>164</sup> She gave considerable details about genealogy, settlements, battles and tribal movements to refute Ngati Hako claims.<sup>165</sup> She had had the block ‘surveyed at her own expense. She underwent a very long examination by the opposing claimants, whose tribe she endeavoured to prove had been serfs, her ancestors having placed them on the land’.<sup>166</sup> 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’.<sup>167</sup> Her arguments convinced the court, which granted Hararahi No. 1 for herself alone; at her suggestion Hararahi No. 2 went to two of Johnson’s children.<sup>168</sup>

In 1878, when applying for Parahamuti No. 1, at Waihou, she explained her claim. ‘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

---

<sup>161</sup> Lands and Survey Department, Certificates of Title and Memorials of Ownership of Maori Land, ABWN 8910, W5287, 24/3473, 24/3477, 24/3479, ANZ-W.

<sup>162</sup> Lands and Survey Department, Certificates of Title and Memorials of Ownership of Maori Land, ABWN 8910, W5278, 24/3527, 24/3533, 25/3566, 25/3570, 25/3571, 25/4085, 30/4097, 30/4098, ANZ-W.

<sup>163</sup> See paper on Lavinia and Henry Dunbar Johnson.

<sup>164</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 41.

<sup>165</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, pp. 52-57.

<sup>166</sup> Native Land Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 July 1878, p. 2.

<sup>167</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 56.

<sup>168</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 59.

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 was registered as sole owner of these 22 acres and 2 roods.<sup>169</sup>

In 1879 she sold 92 acres of Opatito for £266, and in 1880 another 7 acres for £60 as well as 91 acres sold to her husband for £40.<sup>170</sup> Also in 1880 she sold Parahamuti No. 2, just over 35 acres, to Nicholls for £15.<sup>171</sup> In that year 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.<sup>172</sup>

Also in 1880, she was registered as sole owner of Opatito No. 2, Owharoa No 4, Huepakari No. 1, and Takapuhapa No. 2, and as one of 16 owners of Taupuihurukahu, one of nine owners of Raratu No. 2, and one of ten owners of Paipakakohi, all in Ohinemuri, and of Parahamuti No. 2, in Waihou.<sup>173</sup> As well, she was listed among the Ngati Rahiri owners of Ohinemuri No. 18.<sup>174</sup>

After the Momomatui Block was subdivided between herself and Phillip Bennett of Paeroa,<sup>175</sup> this arrangement was later cancelled as being illegal.<sup>176</sup> After she was registered as an owner of Ohinemuri No. 2,<sup>177</sup> her husband conducted her case for Rawhitiroa. Again she explained who had cultivated the land, described the flight from Ngapuhi in the 1820s, and

---

<sup>169</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 11, p. 298; Lands and Survey Department, Certificates of Title and Memorials of Ownership of Maori Land, ABWN 8910, W5278, 25/3564, ANZ-W.

<sup>170</sup> Opatito Blocks, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, BACS A806, box 2, nos. 67-69, ANZ-A.

<sup>171</sup> Parahamuti No. 2 Block, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, BACS A806, box 2, no. 81, ANZ-A.

<sup>172</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 30, p. 143.

<sup>173</sup> Lands and Survey Department, Certificates of title and Memorials of Ownership of Maori Land, ABWN 8910, W5278, 24/3449, 3463, 3465, 24/3466, 24/3475,24/3478, 24/3481, 25/3579, ANZ-W.

<sup>174</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 42.

<sup>175</sup> See paper on Mereia Wikiriwhi and George Thomas Wilkinson.

<sup>176</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 12, p. 338.

<sup>177</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 160.

gave her claims based on her ancestry. 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.<sup>178</sup>

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.<sup>179</sup> She based her information on what 'Mataia & other old people' had told her.<sup>180</sup> 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'.<sup>181</sup> Asked why, knowing that Te Tuiiri 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'.<sup>182</sup> 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'.<sup>183</sup>

In 1881 with eight others, she sold Raratu No. 2 (185 acres, bordering the Ohinemuri River) for £90 and Te Puru-o-Terangi No. 1 (just over six acres, adjoining the Paeroa Block) for £295.<sup>184</sup> In that year she was registered as one of 12 owners of the Kaiamanawa block, in Waihou.<sup>185</sup> Also in 1881 she negotiated the sale of the Waihou West Nos. 2, 3 and 4, adjoining the Waihou River; she was sole owner of No. 3 (of 277 acres) and one of 14 owners of No. 2. Wilkinson, then the land purchase officer, reported his discussions with her about what price she wanted for No. 3 and her willingness to sign the Ohinemuri Gold Fields deed (her share in this

---

<sup>178</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 255.

<sup>179</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, pp. 255-256.

<sup>180</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 256.

<sup>181</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, pp. 256-257.

<sup>182</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 257.

<sup>183</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 13, p. 265.

<sup>184</sup> Raratu No. 2, Te Puru-o-Terangi No. 1 Blocks, Maori Affairs Department, Auckland, BABG A806, box 3, nos. 100, 103, ANZ-A.

<sup>185</sup> Lands and Survey Department, Certificates of Title and Memorials of Ownership of Maori Land, ABWN 8910, W4278, 16/2424, ANZ-W.



was 1,189 acres, valued at £287 5s). With her father she had obtained 'large advances' on the Ohinemuri, Waihou, Waihou East, and Waihou West blocks amounting to £1,569. She had already received £161 for Ohinemuri and that the balance (£1,408) had been received by Mataia for all the blocks. By arrangement with her, these payment had been charged to the Ohinemuri Gold Fields Block. She now wanted £277 (meaning £1 per acre) for Waihou West No. 3; once received, she would convey her interests both in it and the Gold Fields Block to the Crown.<sup>186</sup> The chief land purchase officer, Richard John Gill, considered the price to be fair: 'Let her receipt be clear so that no dispute arises afterwards'.<sup>187</sup> According to Nicholls, Rihitoto then wanted to let this deal 'stand over for a while as she would like to settle with the Government respecting her interests' in Taiuru plus the issue of miners' rights.<sup>188</sup> Wilkinson explained that she had acquired her interests in Taiuru from her father and brother, all descendants of Taiuru. These 20,900 acres, rrecorded as Ngatititaiuru, had not been adjudicated upon by the land court. From talking to Nicholls he was 'satisfied that the other question of Miners' Rights already received by Government, in reduction of Native debts, and the question of reserves would all be included as settled if any arrangement is come to regarding the purchase of the share in the Ngatititaiuru Block'. She had received an offer from a Pakeha of £2 10s per acre for Waihou West No. 3 but could not give him title because the block was under proclamation,<sup>189</sup> meaning only the Crown could purchase it.

Four months later, Wilkinson, as instructed, informed Nicholls 'that the Crown Grants for certain blocks of land that had been transferred from Rihitoto Mataia to himself would not be allowed to issue until such time as some satisfactory settlement respecting the advance of money made to her father Mataia on Thames lands be come to'. Nicholls told him that Rihitoto now wanted £350 for Waihou West No. 3, whereupon she would complete

---

<sup>186</sup> Report of G.T. Wilkinson for December 1880, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1/10, 1881/481, ANZ-W.

<sup>187</sup> R.J. Gill (Chief Land Purchase Officer) to G.T. Wilkinson, 30 March 1881, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1/10, 1881/481, ANZ-W.

<sup>188</sup> W.G. Nicholls to G.T. Wilkinson, 5 April 1881, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1/10, 1881/481, ANZ-W.

<sup>189</sup> G.T. Wilkinson to R.J. Gill, 21 April 1881, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1/10, 1881/481, ANZ-W.

the other arrangements as required.<sup>190</sup> Subsequently Rihitoto informed Wilkinson that she had received an offer of £1,400 from a Pakeha for Waihou West No. 3 if she could give him a 'clear title'. Accordingly, she stated that, if the proclamation on the block was removed, the £305 4s 6d owed by herself and Mataia to the government could be deducted from the purchase money.<sup>191</sup> She then made the same request directly to the Native Minister.<sup>192</sup> The under-secretary decided that the proclamation could be revoked only after the land court had resolved the Ohinemuri question and told Nicholls that he wanted the court to determine her interests.<sup>193</sup>

On 30 May 1882, when Gill met with Rihitoto and Nicholls to ascertain her interests, he 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 had totalled £260 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

---

<sup>190</sup> G.T. Wilkinson to R.J. Gill, 17 August 1881, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1/10, 1881/481, ANZ-W.

<sup>191</sup> Rihitoto Mataia to G.T. Wilkinson, 25 October 1881, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1/10, 1881/481, ANZ-W.

<sup>192</sup> Rihitoto Mataia to Native Minister, 9 November 1881, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1/10, 1881/481, ANZ-W.

<sup>193</sup> Memoranda by R.J. Gill, 21 November 1881, 31 January 1881, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1/10, 1881/481, ANZ-W.

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'.<sup>194</sup>

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,

---

<sup>194</sup> 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.

‘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’.<sup>195</sup>

Also in 1882 Rihitoto was listed as one of the owners of Moanakupiti, one of 12 owners of Moehau No. 4, on the Coromandel Peninsula, and sole owner of Rauotehuia No. 2, in Ohinemuri, and Pirau, at Thames.<sup>196</sup> She sold Mora-o-Te-Atu No. 2 and Te Rau o Te Huia No. 2, the latter for £30.<sup>197</sup> Two years later she was registered as one of four owners of Taiwhakarewakauri A, in Ohinemuri.<sup>198</sup> In the following year she was registered as sole owner of Ohinemuri No. 20 A 1 and one of six owners of Ohinemuri No. 20A.<sup>199</sup> Also in 1885 she sold Te Pirau, 97 acres bordering the Waihou River, for £134.<sup>200</sup> In 1886, with two other owners, she sold Huruhuru No. 2 for £30.<sup>201</sup>

In 1890 Rihitoto succeeded her father as an owner of Whangamata No. 6.<sup>202</sup> In mid-year, on her behalf her brother-in-law, Charles John Dearle,<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> 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.

<sup>196</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 14, p. 187; Lands and Survey Department, Certificates of Title and Memorials of Ownership of Maori Land, ABWN 8910, W5278, 16/2429, 17/2508, 25/3572, ANZ-W.

<sup>197</sup> 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.

<sup>198</sup> Lands and Survey Department, Certificates of title and Memorials of Ownership of Maori Land, ABWN 8910, W5278, 17/2544, ANZ-W.

<sup>199</sup> Lands and Survey Department, Certificates of Title and Memorials of Ownership of Maori Land, ABWN 8910, W5278, 17/2589, 17/2590, ANZ-W.

<sup>200</sup> Te Pirau Block, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, MLC-A, box 2, no. 88, ANZ-A.

<sup>201</sup> Huruhuru No. 2 Block, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, MLC-A, box 2, no. 37, ANZ-A.

<sup>202</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 24, p. 332.

<sup>203</sup> See paper on Alice Grey Dearle.

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.<sup>204</sup> Wilkinson, the Native Agent, reported that, although Nicholls had told him that Rihitoto did not wish to sell her interest until all the other owners had done so, subsequently said that she wanted to keep her interests; yet Nicholls did not want the matter to go before the court so that the land could be subdivided. 'He appeared from his manner to be trying, on behalf of his wife, to see if Govt would not give more for her interest now that she is the last but one of the owners of unsold shares'. Wilkinson cited the view of the magistrate, 'who knows Mr Dearle well', that the latter was trying to get more money for Rihitoto than the others received 'and also to obtain a commission for himself', an opinion he shared. It would be unfair to the other owners 'and prejudicial to future purchases' if she received a larger amount. 'It is likely to become known and will cause owners in blocks under purchase by [the] Crown to all want to be last in order to get the extra money paid to a last owner'. He dismissed Dearle's suggestion that she combine her interests because, should the issue be considered by the court, 'she will have quite enough to do to get 2 full shares, because her father ... was alive at the time the land went through the Court, but instead of going in the grant himself he allowed his son and daughter to do so in his place'. He wondered if they were entitled to one share; certainly they were not entitled to two, a view accepted by the under-secretary.<sup>205</sup> 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'.<sup>206</sup> He considered the land was not worth that amount as the government already had the right to mine it.<sup>207</sup> After continuing to try for the higher payment, she finally accepted 'the same amount that was paid to

---

<sup>204</sup> C.J. Dearle to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 10 June 1890, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

<sup>205</sup> G.T. Wilkinson to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 10 June 1890; memorandum by Under-Secretary, Native Department, 25 June 1890, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

<sup>206</sup> 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 Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

<sup>207</sup> H.W. Northcroft to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 17 September 1890 (telegram), Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

other owners rather than risk a contest in Court'.<sup>208</sup> Afterwards, Rihitoto and Nicholls told Wilkinson that the suggestion of seeking a higher payment was 'entirely' Dearle's suggestion; 'she therefore decided to let him try and do so'.<sup>209</sup>

Sole owner of Ohinemuri No. 20A since 1885, in June 1891 Rihitoto sold these 2,758 acres to the Crown for £1,241 2s.<sup>210</sup> Sole owner of Owharua No. 4, 25 acres, since June 1880, she sold it to the Crown in 1892 for £100.<sup>211</sup> Also in 1892 she said that Timotiu Te Hati had sold Muraoteahi No. 2 but that she had repurchased it: 'This was not a legal transaction'.<sup>212</sup> 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.<sup>213</sup> 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.<sup>214</sup>

Investigations by the land purchase office showed that between 1874 and 1893 she received £1,673 2s 6d for her interests in Ohinemuri.<sup>215</sup> In subsequent years she continued to earn considerable amounts of money through selling more land. 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'.<sup>216</sup> Later that

---

<sup>208</sup> Memorandum by Patrick Sheridan, 12 September 1890; Minister of Native Affairs to A.J. Cadman, 16 September 1890; G.T. Wilkinson to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 24 September 1890 (telegram), Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1, 1890/311, ANZ-W.

<sup>209</sup> G.T. Wilkinson to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 1 October 1890, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1, 1892/8, ANZ-W.

<sup>210</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28B, p. 150.

<sup>211</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28B, p. 51.

<sup>212</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28A, p. 95.

<sup>213</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 28A, p. 159.

<sup>214</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 29, pp. 92-93.

<sup>215</sup> Register of Payments to Individuals for Purchase of Land 1873-1880, Ohinemuri, entries for 5 November 1874, 12 November 1876, Maori Land Purchase 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.

<sup>216</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 31, p. 90.

year Komata South No. 1 was granted to her and Ngati Taiuru, and she became an owner of Te Korauae.<sup>217</sup>

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'.<sup>218</sup> In the following year she asked the Native Minister whether, under the new Act permitting the sale of land, she could sell to a private person because land proclaimed as being only for sale to the Crown meant a lower price. She had directed this question to the Commissioner of Crown Lands in Auckland but received no reply. 'I felt that he perhaps felt disinclined to do so or that he was ashamed because of the inconsistency of that Act, so then I apply to you to let me know what course is open whereby a proper price can be obtained for my land'.<sup>219</sup> She was sent a copy of the 1894 Act and referred to Part 3.<sup>220</sup>

In 1896 she sold a section at Opatito, by then part of Paeroa township, for £20.<sup>221</sup> 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.<sup>222</sup> Also in that year she gave a timber lease over Te Ahipukahu No. 2, of 174 acres, for £160 per acre.<sup>223</sup> In 1898 the land court granted most of the 1,000-acre Rotokohu Block to Rihitoto and her people and Keepa Raharuhi and his people.<sup>224</sup>

In 1907, she arranged the partition of Moehau No. 1 K with two other claimants.<sup>225</sup> In 1909 she and the other owners of Pirau West (39 acres) sold it for £58 10s; she held two of the ten shares and therefore received one fifth of this amount. When this sale was registered, her land holdings were tabulated (to ensure that she would not become landless). The total was recorded as 268 acres and 2 roods, made up of Pukemokemoke No. 1 B,

---

<sup>217</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 31, pp. 202, 204.

<sup>218</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 36, p. 279.

<sup>219</sup> Rihitoto Mataia to Native Minister, 9 February 1895, Justice Department, J1/533, 1895/190, ANZ-W.

<sup>220</sup> Memorandum of Under-Secretary, Justice Department, 19 February 1895, Justice Department, J1/533, 1895/190, ANZ-W.

<sup>221</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 37, p. 177.

<sup>222</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 April 1897, p. 2.

<sup>223</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 45, p. 219.

<sup>224</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 3 September 1898, p. 3.

<sup>225</sup> Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 55, p. 374.

Waiwha North, Waiwha Pa, Waikanae No. 4 B, and Rotokohu No. 1.<sup>226</sup> In fact she had many more interests in other land and so continued to sell many of these in future years.

In 1912, as sole owner of the 68-acre Ohinemuri North A19 and A20 blocks she sold this land for £65 and sections in Paeroa township (also part of Ohinemuri North) for a total of £85.<sup>227</sup> In the same year, for £400 she sold the Akurenga block of 134 acres to a farmer who had rented it from her for the previous 20 years; a 'tapu' of two acres was excluded from the sale.<sup>228</sup> As well, she and the other two owners sold Wairahaki No. IA and Otamaurungamu B for a total of £356 8s 2d.<sup>229</sup> Negotiations in 1913 and 1914 resulted in the sale of parts of Ahipakahu No. 2 to two farmers, to whom she had previously granted mortgages, for £950.<sup>230</sup> Also in 1914 she and four other owners offered to sell Moehau 4A (also known as Huruhuru No 2), of 770 acres, to the government for £1 5s per acre. As title to the land had not been issues yet and the land was quite unfit for farming, the government did not acquire it.<sup>231</sup>

In 1916 she sold three Paeroa sections for £100; previously she had mortgaged these to the purchaser at 10 per cent interest.<sup>232</sup> Two years later she and the other owner leased Waiwhau North, of six acres, for an annual

---

<sup>226</sup> Maori Land Court, Waikato-Maniapoto Single Number Alienation Files, BACS 15355, 1910/37, ANZ-A.

<sup>227</sup> Maori Land Court, Waikato-Maniapoto Single Number Alienation Files, BACS 15355, box 36, WM 3889; box 41, WM 4343, WM 4344, ANZ-A.

<sup>228</sup> Maori Land Court, Waikato-Maniapoto Single Number Alienation Files, BACS 15355, box 45, WM 4627, ANZ-A.

<sup>229</sup> Maori Land Court, Waikato-Maniapoto Single Number Alienation Files, BACS 15355, box 47, WM 4791, ANZ-A.

<sup>230</sup> Maori Land Court, Waikato-Maniapoto Single Number Alienation Files, BACS 15355, box 61, WM 5690, ANZ-A.

<sup>231</sup> Rihitoto Mataia and four others to the Native Minister, 14 May 1914; Registrar, Waikato-Maniapoto Native Land Court, to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 25 June 1914; Commissioner of Crown Lands to Under-Secretary, Lands Department, 30 March 1917, Maori Land Purchase Department, MA-MLP 1/147, 1914/82, ANZ-W.

<sup>232</sup> Maori Land Court, Waikato-Maniapoto Single Number Alienation Files, BACS 15355, box 104, WM 7960, ANZ-A.



rent of £3 5s.<sup>233</sup> In 1922, she still owned 29 acres at Upper Rotokohu, which was not farmed; she sold this block three years later.<sup>234</sup>

At the time of her death in 1935 she reportedly ‘controlled large areas of land’ in the Ohinemuri and Coromandel districts.<sup>235</sup> Her will, drawn up in February 1934, revealed that she had retained interests in Rotokohu No. 1B1, Otamaurunganui C, Kuraoteahi (on the ‘old track’ from Paeroa to Te Aroha, and including a stone house which was bequeathed to Herumate). In addition, ‘the five acres left [on the western side of the Ohinemuri River] to partition are for the ‘rauri’ [road?]<sup>236</sup> for the Whare Runanga [meeting house] and the Cemetery, my express wish is that this be a papa kainga [homestead] for my family and their descendants’. Other portions of land, unspecified, were bequeathed to named members of her whanau.<sup>237</sup>

### RIHITOTO’S FINANCES

Because of inheriting her father’s debts, in the late 1870s Rihitoto was in financial difficulties. In 1877 David Snodgrass, a Paeroa baker,<sup>238</sup> sued her for £19 18s 11d, being loans obtained by several Maori, including Rihitoto and her mother-in-law. Nicholls had asked Snodgrass to charge these to Rihitoto. He explained that he had been present when the balance of the purchase money for the Ruakhuia (the newspaper’s spelling) block was paid by Snodgrass to Rihitoto. An account for £5 14s 10d, part of Snodgrass’ demand, was allowed as being part of the purchase of the block which ‘was virtually paid by Rihitoto’. The latter explained that she had signed the deed of settlement on the understanding that ‘all her debts were done away with.... If she had thought that all her debts with the plaintiff had not been paid she would not have signed the deed. She did not get the loans’, which went to two other Maori. ‘She did owe the plaintiff something,

---

<sup>233</sup> Maori Land Court, Waikato-Maniapoto Single Number Alienation Files, BACS 15355, box 132, WM 9558, ANZ-A.

<sup>234</sup> R.B. Thorp, ‘Early Settlers of the Upper Rotokohu (South of Paeroa)’, *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, vol. 48 (September 2004), p. 8.

<sup>235</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 May 1935, p. 11.

<sup>236</sup> Tom Roa to Philip Hart, 12 February 2019, email.

<sup>237</sup> Will of Rihitoto Mataia Nikora, 21 February 1934, Lucia Jacobs Papers.

<sup>238</sup> See *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 March 1875, p. 7, 27 April 1895, p. 20; *Thames Advertiser*, 10 July 1876, p. 3, 22 August 1876, p. 3, 30 January 1878, p. 3, 29 July 1887, p. 2, 25 April 1895, p. 2.

but understood that was to go against a block of land adjoining plaintiff's that plaintiff wanted to buy'. Judgment was for Snodgrass, for £5 3s 1d;<sup>239</sup> he later obtained a judgment summons against her to enforce payment of £9 4s 1d.<sup>240</sup>

Two years later, John Thorp, a farmer, sued for £100.<sup>241</sup> This amount, a loan, was not the full debt, but the total was reduced to that figure to bring the claim within the jurisdiction of the district court. According to 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. 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.<sup>242</sup>

No financial difficulties were recorded after that date because she sold or rented land, and used the courts to obtain any rents due.<sup>243</sup> In an attempt to obtain more money from the government for the sale of iwi interests in the goldfields, in 1931 and 1935 she was one of the leaders of

---

<sup>239</sup> Magistrate's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 September 1877, p. 3.

<sup>240</sup> Thames Magistrate's Court, *Plaint Book 1875-1880*, 747/1877, BACL 13737/15b, ANZ-A.

<sup>241</sup> Thames Magistrate's Court, *Shortland Plaint Book 1870-1884*, 6/1879, BACL 13818/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>242</sup> District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1879, p. 3.

<sup>243</sup> Paeroa Magistrate's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 April 1880, p. 3.

the campaign for an enquiry into the ceding of land for mining.<sup>244</sup> Her will distributed her land amongst her whanau, along with ‘monies held in my name’, the total amount unspecified, but including £1,200 mortgaged to a Pakeha.<sup>245</sup>

### 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.<sup>246</sup> In November he was a member of a deputation to the Minister of Lands seeking the freehold for Paeroa residents.<sup>247</sup> 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.<sup>248</sup> 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.<sup>249</sup> (One of those included was Rapata Te Pokiha, despite his being dead.)<sup>250</sup> These accusations were never tested, and his election with equal-highest votes (33) for the Paeroa Riding was not challenged.<sup>251</sup>

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.<sup>252</sup> When he stood for re-election in 1887, he topped the poll for his riding with 43 votes.<sup>253</sup> An Ohinemuri correspondent

---

<sup>244</sup> ‘The Native Purposes Act, 1935’, *AJHR*, 1940, G-6A, pp. 1, 8-9.

<sup>245</sup> Will of Rihitoto Mataia Nikora, 21 February 1934, Lucia Jacobs Papers.

<sup>246</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 30 June 1885, p. 3.

<sup>247</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 14 November 1885, p. 7.

<sup>248</sup> *Diamond Jubilee of the Ohinemuri County, 1885-1945: Souvenir and historical record* (Paeroa, 1945), p. 11.

<sup>249</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 15 October 1885, p. 2.

<sup>250</sup> Letter from ‘A Respectable White Man’, *Thames Advertiser*, 11 November 1885, p. 3.

<sup>251</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 November 1885, p. 3.

<sup>252</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 27 November 1886, p. 2.

<sup>253</sup> *Waikato Times*, 17 November 1887, p. 2.

described him as ‘an old and tried councillor’ who would ‘probably be elected chairman’; he was, unanimously.<sup>254</sup> 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’.<sup>255</sup> After agreeing to stand once more, he was re-elected unanimously.<sup>256</sup> Addressing the new council he claimed to have hoped that someone else would have sought the position, ‘but they all seemed reluctant’.<sup>257</sup> In 1889, with two others he was appointed to a board of review to consider property tax valuations.<sup>258</sup> Later that year, when he declined to be chairman again, he received a unanimous vote of thanks.<sup>259</sup> 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’.<sup>260</sup> He was successful,<sup>261</sup> as he was whenever he stood for office. In his last year on the council he was unanimously re-elected chairman.<sup>262</sup>

Nicholls was prominent locally in a variety of other ways. In 1886, with another man he formed the Ohinemuri Rifle Volunteers.<sup>263</sup> In 1890 he was elected to the vestry of the Anglican church at Paeroa,<sup>264</sup> and six years later was appointed a justice of the peace.<sup>265</sup> 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.<sup>266</sup> He held high positions in the Ohinemuri Masonic Lodge, of

---

<sup>254</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 24 November 1887, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 26 November 1887, p. 2.

<sup>255</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1888, p. 2.

<sup>256</sup> Ohinemuri County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 1 December 1888, p. 2.

<sup>257</sup> Ohinemuri County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 4 December 1888, p. 2.

<sup>258</sup> *Waikato Times*, 16 February 1889, p. 2.

<sup>259</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 30 November 1889, p. 2.

<sup>260</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 7 November 1893, p. 2.

<sup>261</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 9 November 1893, p. 3.

<sup>262</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 December 1907, p. 22.

<sup>263</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 8 June 1886, p. 2.

<sup>264</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 February 1890, p. 2.

<sup>265</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 6 June 1896, p. 4.

<sup>266</sup> *Thames Star*, 11 March 1902, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 August 1906, p. 36.

which his son was also a leading member.<sup>267</sup> 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.<sup>268</sup>

Nicholls also encouraged and participated in social activities. In 1901 he was vice president of the Paeroa Choral Society,<sup>269</sup> 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.<sup>270</sup> His paddock was used for football matches, and in 1889 Paeroa's annual athletic sports were held on it.<sup>271</sup> Ten years later this paddock was the venue for the annual sports of the Thames Miners Union, attended by 2,000 people.<sup>272</sup> 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.<sup>273</sup>

As Nicholls became increasingly involved in national issues, his politics became increasingly conservative. In 1885 he supported a candidate for the Tauranga seat who backed the Vogel-Stout government.<sup>274</sup> Five years later he chaired the Paeroa meeting of the conservative candidate for the local electorate, and later became treasurer of his election committee.<sup>275</sup> In 1901 he was one of the sponsors of a meeting 'to consider the present Legislation of the Colony regarding Labour and Capital'.<sup>276</sup> In 1913, commenting on his being one of the six vice presidents of the new Reform

---

<sup>267</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 November 1907, p. 36; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

<sup>268</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 September 1906, p. 1.

<sup>269</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 17 May 1901, p. 29.

<sup>270</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 2 October 1886, p. 2, 18 September 1896, p. 2

<sup>271</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 17 October 1888, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 14 November 1889, p. 2.

<sup>272</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 9 March 1899, p. 2.

<sup>273</sup> *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.

<sup>274</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 July 1885, p. 3.

<sup>275</sup> *Waikato Times*, 25 November 1890, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 April 1891, p. 10.

<sup>276</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 23 August 1901, p. 3.

Party branch at Paeroa, the *Observer* referred to ‘Will Nicholls, MP?’<sup>277</sup> Instead of standing for the lower house, that year he was appointed one of ‘the new “Lords” ’,<sup>278</sup> 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’.<sup>279</sup> 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.<sup>280</sup>

When he died, the Paeroa newspaper claimed that ‘no member of the Dominion had a better knowledge of the natives’.<sup>281</sup> One South Island 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

---

<sup>277</sup> ‘They Say’, *Observer*, 26 April 1913, p. 7; *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 September 1913, p. 68.

<sup>278</sup> *Observer*, 5 July 1913, p. 4.

<sup>279</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 November 1886, p. 13.

<sup>280</sup> *Observer*, 5 July 1913, p. 4.

<sup>281</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

knew that man was weak. But, Sir, he had a great love for his people.<sup>282</sup>

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’.<sup>283</sup> Sir Joseph Ward recalled him as ‘anxious to do the best he could for his own race and for the country as a whole’.<sup>284</sup> 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.<sup>285</sup>

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 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,<sup>286</sup> and clearly he identified mostly with this half of his heritage.

---

<sup>282</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 364.

<sup>283</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 369.

<sup>284</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 369.

<sup>285</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 370.

<sup>286</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 14 November 1902, p. 2.

An obituary noted that ‘in respect to furthering the European occupation of native lands he had accomplished a very great service’.<sup>287</sup> 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’.<sup>288</sup>

### HIS REPUTATION

On 15 July 1915, Nicholls died in a Te Aroha hospital, aged 62, from stomach cancer.<sup>289</sup> The eulogies sounded sincere rather than the platitudes often mouthed on such occasions. 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’.<sup>290</sup> 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’.<sup>291</sup> Charles Houghton Mills, from Wellington, who felt his death ‘very deeply’, agreed he was ‘a manly man’ who had known for a year that he had not long to live.<sup>292</sup> 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

---

<sup>287</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

<sup>288</sup> *Observer*, 24 July 1915, p. 4.

<sup>289</sup> Death Certificate of William Grey Nicholls, 15 July 1915, 1915/278, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

<sup>290</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 363.

<sup>291</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, pp. 363-364.

<sup>292</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 364.



and amongst the Europeans, and he was universally loved'.<sup>293</sup> 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'.<sup>294</sup> 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" '.<sup>295</sup> 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 Nicholls, because he was a man who was always straight and upright.<sup>296</sup>

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.<sup>297</sup> The *Observer* agreed that he had 'a

---

<sup>293</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 364.

<sup>294</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 369.

<sup>295</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 369.

<sup>296</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 16 July 1915, p. 370.

<sup>297</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1915, p. 2.

good deal of administrative ability and his services to public bodies were many and excellent'.<sup>298</sup> According to the *Ohinemuri Gazette*, he was 'one of the oldest and most respected residents' and 'universally known and respected throughout the district'.<sup>299</sup> The same newspaper described him as 'somewhat reserved' in character.<sup>300</sup>

### 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.<sup>301</sup> 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.<sup>302</sup> His will left money to Alice Grey Dearle in trust for his illegitimate son.<sup>303</sup> Dearle's attempt to obtain a commission from helping to sell one of Rihitoto's land blocks has been noted above.

### RIHITOTO'S DEATH

Rihitoto Mataia lived until May 1935, when she died aged 93.<sup>304</sup> 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 Jubilee Medal. Her tangi attracted Maori 'from all parts of the province'.<sup>305</sup>

---

<sup>298</sup> *Observer*, 24 July 1915, p. 4.

<sup>299</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 16 July 1915, p. 3.

<sup>300</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 31 March 1916, p. 2.

<sup>301</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 12 November 1887, p. 2.

<sup>302</sup> Paeroa School, Admissions Register 1895-1899, nos. 8, 39, Primary School Archives, Paeroa; *Thames Star*, 20 August 1902, p. 2.

<sup>303</sup> Will of William Grey Nicholls, 10 July 1915, Auckland High Court, Originating Summonses, BBAE 5522, box 26, item 281, ANZ-A.

<sup>304</sup> Death Certificate of Rihitoto Mataia, 14 May 1935, 1935/25693, BDM.

<sup>305</sup> Paeroa Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 16 May 1935, p. 11.

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.<sup>306</sup>

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’.<sup>307</sup>

## 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 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’.

---

<sup>306</sup> *Hauraki Plains Gazette*, 15 May 1935, p. 2.

<sup>307</sup> *Hauraki Plains Gazette*, 26 May 1935, p. 2.

*Appendix*

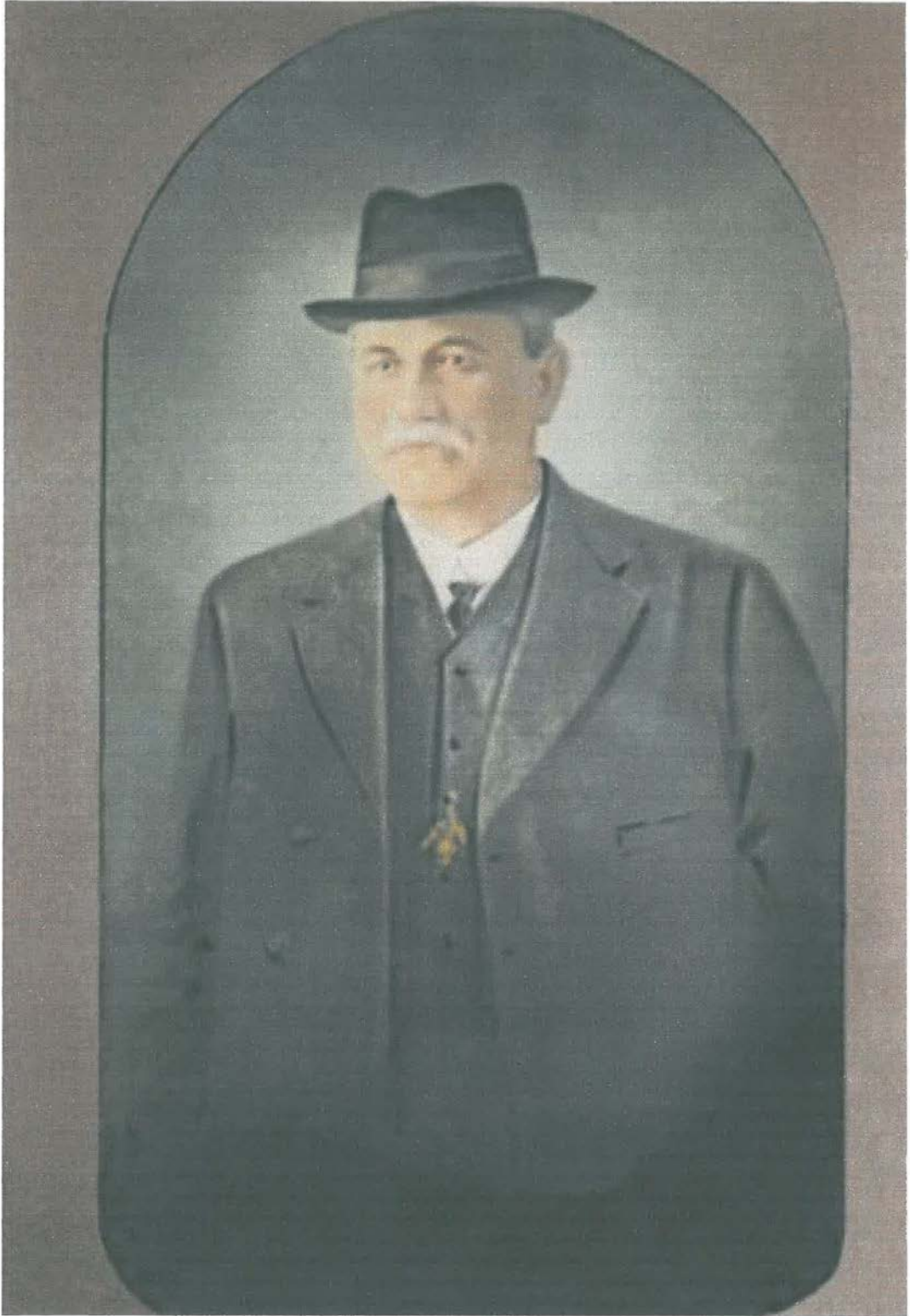
*Figure 1:* Photograph of William Grey Nicholls, n.d., Anita Manning Collection; used with permission.

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

*Figure 3:* Photograph of Rihitoto Mataia, n.d., Lucia Jacob Collection; used with permission.



*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.



*Figure 3:* Photograph of Rihitoto Mataia, n.d., Lucia Jacob Collection: used with permission.