

**'PAKEHA BILL': WILLIAM JOHN McCLEAR, A PAKEHA WHO
LIVED AT TE AROHA**

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‘PAKEHA BILL’: WILLIAM JOHN McCLEAR, A PAKEHA WHO LIVED AT TE AROHA

Abstract: *Born in Ireland to a Scottish soldier named McAleer, McClear, as he would re-name himself, was uncertain of his age, his birthplace, and the spelling of his name – for, like his parents, he was illiterate. After his drunken father, who abandoned his wife and family, sold him to unknown Maori at an unknown date, he was educated in a Maori school and was unable to speak English until the early 1870s, when he was living with Ngati Rahiri at Omaha pa, at Te Aroha. When Pakeha visitors first met him in 1877, he was a popular resident there and known as Pakeha Bill (or Pakeha William).*

Possibly involved in mining before the Te Aroha rush, he both invested in and mined in several claims there from 1880 onwards, and at the end of that decade was one of a small group of Waiorongomai miners who took up a claim at Thames. When not mining, he took whatever jobs were available, struggling financially, in part because of a fondness for drink. As, unlike other Pakeha Maori, there was no evidence of his forming a close relationship with any Maori women, he did not benefit from a Maori wife’s landholdings, and he died in poverty.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

After a six months’ illness, William John McClear, a 68-year-old labourer, died in March 1914 of carcinoma of the rectum. His death certificate recorded his birthplace as Kilkenny, Ireland, his age as 68, his time in New Zealand as 67 years, and that he was unmarried and a Catholic.¹ In its obituary, the *Te Aroha News* gave an alternate spelling of his name, and hinted that he had been a Pakeha Maori:

Another old pioneer of this district in the person of William McLearn has crossed over to the great majority. Deceased had been ailing for many months, and died at the Hamilton Hospital. “Pakeha Bill” as he was known by the Maoris – being a well-known Maori linguist – was one of the first white men to arrive in Te Aroha.²

¹ Death Certificate of William John McClear, 17 March 1914, 1914/715 BDM.

² *Te Aroha News*, 20 March 1914, p. 2.

One year previously, when applying for an old age pension, he gave his name as William McAlleer but said he was now called McLearn. Although he could not prove his age, he gave it as 68. His younger brothers and sisters had been born in Onehunga, but he had been born before his parents reached New Zealand.³ When he went to hospital in August 1885 he gave his age as 40 and his place of birth as ‘unknown’;⁴ in January 1889 he told the police that he was aged 40 and had been born in New Zealand.⁵

Why the confusion over his name and uncertainty over his age and whether he had been born in New Zealand? To start with his family background, Charles McAleer had arrived in New Zealand from Armagh, Ireland, aboard the ‘Oriental Queen’ in September 1849 with his wife Ellen, née Burke, and their child, William John,⁶ the future Pakeha Bill. McAleer, a Scotsman who had served for 18 years in the 83rd Regiment, ten of them in England’s North American colonies, had been discharged from the army after an attack of paralysis, and came to the colony as an Onehunga fencible (also described as pensioners).⁷ As he was a member of the Church of England,⁸ his wife must have been responsible for her son becoming a Catholic. In December 1850, when their daughter Mary Jane was born at Onehunga, her birth certificate revealed that he was illiterate;⁹ Ellen was likewise.¹⁰ In August 1852, Joseph Alier was born, and then Samuel McAleel in October 1854, by which time Charles was a labourer;¹¹ the variant spellings reflecting their parents’ illiteracy. Another daughter, Helena, was born at

³ Registrar of Old Age Pensions, Paeroa, to Registrar of Births, Onehunga, 31 March 1913, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Applications 1913, BBAV 11572/3a, ANZ-A.

⁴ Thames Hospital, Register of Patients 1884-1901, folio 8, YCAH 14075/1a, ANZ-A.

⁵ Armed Constabulary Force, Return of Charges taken at Te Aroha Lock-Up 1880-1903, 3/1889, in private possession.

⁶ Passenger List, ‘Oriental Queen’, Internal Affairs Department, IA 1/82, 49/2131, ANZ-W; *The Royal New Zealand Fencibles 1847-1852* (Auckland, 1997), p. 155.

⁷ Auckland Hospital, Case Book 1859, folio 5, ZAAP 15291/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸ Auckland Hospital, Admission and Discharge Book 1859-1869, folio 1 no. 4, ZAAP 15287/1a, ANZ-A.

⁹ Birth Certificate of Mary Jane McAleer, 6 December 1850, 1850/1174, BDM.

¹⁰ Onehunga Magistrate’s Court, Notebook of Criminal Cases 1850-1854, folios 166-167, BADW 10585/1a, ANZ-A.

¹¹ Birth Certificates of Joseph McAlier, 26 August 1852, 1852/1880; Samuel McAleel, 27 October 1854, 1854/2164, BDM.

Onehunga; her birth was not registered, and when her death was registered in 1860 her age was not recorded.¹²

In mid-1859, when aged 45, Charles, still a labourer at Onehunga, was admitted to Auckland Hospital with an ulcerated leg.¹³ It had been hit by a falling cask, which may have caused the ulcers to develop. His ‘constitution’ was recorded as ‘probably scrofulous’ and he was ‘addicted to drinking’.¹⁴ Scrofula is a ‘morbid constitutional condition with glandular swellings and tendency to consumption’.¹⁵ Readmitted on 19 May 1863, he died on 22 June, of dyspepsia according to the hospital, of cancer of the gullet and stomach according to his death certificate.¹⁶

In July 1852, Ellen McAleer was charged by William Leather with using ‘obscene and demoralizing language towards Complainant’. After she pleaded not guilty, the evidence revealed that she and one of her sons had chased Leather’s calf on the road; when Leather threatened to knock the dog’s head, Ellen thought he meant her son and swore at him. A witness heard both using ‘a great deal of indecent language’. Ellen, who said she was getting some potatoes when her son set the dog on the calf, was ordered to pay the costs of the case.¹⁷ Three years later, she was charged with using threatening and abusive language against Hannah Wykes, again pleading not guilty. The complainant deposed that she ‘came opposite my door dancing and singing and then called to me and said “Mother Wykes you are a dirty factory Whore” – She said she would sacrifice me and “By G— I will have your life’. She claimed Ellen was ‘often abusing me’. In reply, Ellen admitted the abuse, ‘and had been provoked to do so by Complainant’s husband – frequently abusing her’. She was cautioned to keep the peace and

¹² Samuel McLearn to W.J. McClear, October [1912], Te Aroha Warden’s Court, General Correspondence 1913, BBAV 11584/7a, ANZ-A; Death Certificate of Helena McAleer, 1860/173, BDM.

¹³ Auckland Hospital, Admission and Discharge Book 1859-1869, folio 1, no. 4, ZAAP 15287/1a, ANZ-A; Magistrate’s Court, *Daily Southern Cross*, 23 December 1859, p. 3.

¹⁴ Auckland Hospital, Case Book 1859, folio 5, ZAAP 15291/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 5 ed. (Oxford, 1964), p. 1135.

¹⁶ Auckland Hospital, Admission and Discharge Book 1859-1869, folio 46, no. 150, ZAAP 15287/1a, ANZ-A; Death Certificate of Charles McAleer, 22 June 1863, 1863/7126, BDM.

¹⁷ Onehunga Magistrate’s Court, Notebook of Criminal Cases 1850-1854, folios 166-167, BADW 10585/1a, ANZ-A.

once more ordered to pay the costs.¹⁸ She was never mentioned in the press again, nor was her death recorded; perhaps she left New Zealand after her husband's death.

AN ABANDONED CHILD

In July 1859, when McAleer was charged with deserting his wife and six (correctly five)¹⁹ children, the case was dismissed,²⁰ presumably because he had returned home. But soon after arriving in New Zealand he had abandoned his eldest son, permanently. When a correspondent for the *Waikato Times* visited Te Aroha in February 1877, he met 'Pakeha William' at a Waitoa farm:

This man's history is somewhat a mystery. All he knows of himself and his relations is that, when an infant, his father, in a semi-drunken state, brought him to natives, and sold him for half-a-crown. His purchasers took great care of him, reared him, sent him to native school, &c. Three years ago William could not talk English, but now he speaks it fluently. He can read and write the native language, but not the English.²¹

In October 1873, William John McLearn or McClear (both spellings were used) was charged with removing a double-barrelled gun from Thames without a license, an offence under the Arms Act of 1860,²² devised to prevent Maori obtaining weapons. Despite the correspondent's later account, he could speak English. He was then living in the Piako district, and 'had lived with Hoanui [Te Heikei] since he (the witness) was a little bit of a boy. Hoanui brought him up'. He also said that Whakahu had also brought him up 'since he was a child, and would speak of him as such'.²³ As

¹⁸ Onehunga Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1854-1857, p. 107 (hearing of 10 October 1855), BADW 10585/3b, ANZ-A.

¹⁹ Samuel McLearn to 'My Dear Brother' [W.J. McClear], October [1912], Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1913, BBAV 11584/7a, ANZ-A.

²⁰ Magistrate's Court, *Daily Southern Cross*, 5 July 1859, p. 3.

²¹ 'A Trip from Hamilton through Piako to the Thames Valley and Back Again', *Waikato Times*, 27 February 1877, p. 2.

²² *Thames Advertiser*, Police Court, 13 October 1873, p. 3, 15 October 1873, p. 3.

²³ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 October 1873, p. 3.

no evidence was produced, he was discharged. The press reported that he was living amongst Hauhau, who had reared him.²⁴

FROM 1869 TO 1879

In 1875, William McLear accused a man of tipping refuse from a fowl house over vacant land at the back of his fence in Albert Street, Thames.²⁵ If this was the same man, he was living in the Piako district in 1873²⁶ and 1877. In the latter year, the guide of a Hamilton party attempting to reach Te Aroha across the Piako swamps wanted to travel on foot, and ‘to prevent our being delayed in consequence’, he provided another guide, ‘Pakeha William’, whom they praised. ‘We found William an obliging, respectful, and intelligent guide, free from the usual Pakeha Maori bounce and gas [‘bombast, humbug’].²⁷ He did not get drunk when he was with us, although he had abundance of opportunity. He was full of information regarding tracks, roads and routes’.²⁸ When they reached Omahu pa, ‘our guide appeared to be well known and respected by the natives here, for one and all greeted him with a hearty welcome’. That evening,

we asked several times for our guide, and were told each time, “William gone to the bluff,” from which we concluded William was gone to some point down river. When we wished to retire, we were shown to our apartments, which were a little distance outside the pah. On entering, we found William busily engaged playing cards, with about fourteen or fifteen natives. To “the bluff” meant the name of the game they were playing.

The game went on all night. When they returned across the Waihou River, the party found their horses had gone.

We were in a fix; at last our guide kindly offered to ride on, and search the swamp, whilst my friend and I went back to the river for our saddles, which we found all right. On our return (the distance of about a mile), we were delighted to find William had

²⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 October 1873, p. 3.

²⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 August 1875, p. 3.

²⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 October 1873, p. 3.

²⁷ Jonathon Green, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang* (London, 1998), p. 468.

²⁸ ‘A Trip from Hamilton through Piako to the Thames Valley and Back Again’, *Waikato Times*, 27 February 1877, p. 2.

also returned, bringing our missing steeds, which, it appears, had gone to the new road, and not being able to cross the ditch, had gone away into the swamp.²⁹

MINING

It is possible that, when in his early twenties, McClear had been involved with Thames mining, for in May 1869 William McCleary obtained a miner's right, and in August the same man (who was illiterate) sold a quarter share in a mine for £25.³⁰ William McClean was an owner of a claim in June.³¹

In early 1880, William McLearn obtained a miner's right for Ohinemuri.³² His first right for the new Te Aroha field was obtained on 8 January 1881.³³ Can he have been the miner named Charles McClean who, late in the previous December, had owned 236 shares in the Bonanza Company?³⁴ (Sometimes the handwriting of the legal managers defeated the compositors,³⁵ and his illiteracy hindered accurate record-keeping.) In mid-January 1881 he assisted to peg out two claims at Waiorongomai, and in July was one of eight owners of a Te Aroha claim they abandoned one

²⁹ 'A Trip from Hamilton through Piako to the Thames Valley and Back Again', *Waikato Times*, 8 March 1877, p. 2.

³⁰ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miners' Rights, 1868, no. 5616, BACL 14358/2a; Register of Deeds 1869, folio 498, BACL 14417/3a, ANZ-A.

³¹ Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1869, no. 1602, BACL 14397/4a, ANZ-A.

³² Thames Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Miners' Rights 1876-1892, 488/1880, BACL 14441/2a, ANZ-A.

³³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 1703, issued 8 January 1881, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1881, BACL 11533/1h, ANZ-A.

³⁴ *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1881, p. 111.

³⁵ For examples, see *New Zealand Gazette*, 28 April 1881, p. 476, where E. Moore became 'Moors'; 23 March 1882, p. 490, where John Abbott loses a 't' and Frederick Whitaker and his son both gain one; 1 June 1882, p. 800, where M.W.D. O'Keeffe loses his first two initials; 22 June 1822, p. 895, when W.C. Breakell becomes 'Brakehill'; 15 September 1882, p. 1264, when C.M.C. Joy became 'Toy'; 14 December 1882, when Heber Caudwell became 'Helen Candwell'; and 31 May 1882, when Francis Pavitt became 'Pairtt'.

month later.³⁶ During the Waiorongomai rush, in December 1881 he applied for the forfeiture of one claim for non-working but then withdrew his suit.³⁷ At the same time, his Comstock was forfeited for this reason.³⁸ In March he marked out three claims and another three in May: he was able to sign his name, as William McClear.³⁹ In mid-year he lost one of these for non-working, but retained the Last Find, as 'Non-working not proved'.⁴⁰ 'The complaint was practically admitted' by him in the first case, but in the second the plaint had been laid on the first day after protection expired and two days before he applied for a license.⁴¹ He held 16 of the 32 shares, selling one to his sole partner before abandoning it in May 1883.⁴² He bought and sold shares in six claims during 1882 and 1883,⁴³ was sole owner of two more,⁴⁴ and held scrip in two companies, managing to sell most of his shares in one.⁴⁵

In February 1882 he was the manager of the Hero,⁴⁶ despite the fact that his mining experience appears to have been minimal. In November he sued the Hero Company for £35, wages owing: after £38 16s was paid into court, the case was withdrawn.⁴⁷ At the beginning of 1884 he sued the Canterbury Company for wages, and when it failed to pay as ordered took a

³⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims, January 1881, nos. 159, 160, BBAV 11557/1b; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 224, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Plaint Book 1880-1898, 88/1881, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Plaint Book 1880-1898, 90/1881, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1882, nos. 42-44, 103, 110, 111, BBAV 11557/2a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Plaint Book 1880-1898, 50, 51/1882, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴¹ *Te Aroha Mail*, 10 June 1882, p. 2.

⁴² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 84, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁴³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1882-1887, folios 1, 10, 25, 49, 56, 64, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 242, 243, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁵ *New Zealand Gazette*, 1 June 1882, p. 800, 31 May 1883, p. 722; *Te Aroha News*, 20 December 1884, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Waikato Times*, 28 February 1882, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Plaint Book 1880-1898, 94/1882, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

distress warrant to obtain £10 6s, to discover it had no funds.⁴⁸ Accordingly, late in the year he successfully petitioned to wind it up.⁴⁹ In 1886 he sued a sleeping partner for wages owing, £9 16s 3d. Although giving his occupation as a labourer, he had been employed to manage a claim⁵⁰ and had worked from 22 January to 28 February, for which he had received only £8; judgment was given in his favour.⁵¹

In mid-1889, with three other Te Aroha residents he applied for the Sailor's Home, at Tararu, at the northern end of Thames, and a month later, with four other Te Aroha men, was granted the Imperial Treasury at Upper Tararu.⁵² In December a valuable find in the latter was reported, but in June 1890 he obtained protection to work the latter with two men (which suggests he was in charge of the party) and within a month he forfeited it.⁵³

When mining revived in 1896, he applied for the Gipsy King, 99 acres close to Te Aroha township,⁵⁴ and a tramway down Boundary Street to a machine site on the river bank.⁵⁵ As the battery was on a public street and he intended to stack quartz alongside, the town board objected because it would block the entrance to the pound and saleyards. He withdrew this application a month after transferring the claim to Arthur Edward

⁴⁸ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Home Warrant Book 1883-1928, 202/1884, BBAV 11498/1a; Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 12/1884, BBAV 11220/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁹ District Court of Waikato and Thames, Plaintiff Book 1884-1887, hearings of 4 October 1884, 4 December 1884, BCDG 11282/1a; Company Files, BBAE 10286/13k, ANZ-A; District Court, *Thames Star*, 4 November 1884, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Name unreadable because of Warden Harry Kenrick's handwriting.

⁵¹ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Plaintiff Book 1881-1893, 6/1886, BCDG 11224/1a; Civil Record Book 1884-1889, 6/1886, BCDG 11221/1b; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1888-1892, folio 31, BBAV 11505/7a, ANZ-A.

⁵² Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1888-1892, folio 24, BACL 14355/2a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 May 1889, p. 2, Warden's Court, 14 June 1889, p. 2.

⁵³ *Waikato Times*, 10 December 1889, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 14 December 1889, p. 2; Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 June 1890, p. 2; Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 10 July 1890, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Applications for Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1895-1897, 14/1896, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

⁵⁵ 'Plan of Machine Site and Tramway Reserve, Town to Te Aroha, 1 August 1896', Te Aroha Museum.

Langley,⁵⁶ a Kawhia storekeeper and grazier who at that time was a mining agent.⁵⁷ Four days after this transfer, he declared that it was in rough country and contained low-grade ore. As 'low level tunnels of very great length will have to be put in for the purpose of systematically working the claim', he was arranging, presumably with Langley, to expend 'a large amount of capital'.⁵⁸ (This did not happen.) In November that year he gave evidence in a case for the forfeiture of another claim near Te Aroha. 'He knew the ground thoroughly, passed it morning and night', and knew that it was unoccupied and had not been worked for 12 months. Under cross-examination, he admitted only having passed it when going to and fro from his work in another mine and that 'prospecting work might possibly be done without his actually seeing it being carried on'.⁵⁹ This was the last record of his doing any mining.

OTHER WAYS OF EARNING A LIVING

Being a labourer,⁶⁰ when mining was depressed he took whatever work was available. In April 1886 he successfully sued a farmer for £9 16s 3d, being wages owed.⁶¹ In 1887 he worked on a grass seed contract at Waitoa for a nurseryman and greengrocer who went bankrupt, owing him £9 15s 3d.⁶² Two years later, he published an advertisement:

FERRY FOR THE RACES. WANTED KNOWN – W. McCLEAR

⁵⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Transfers and Assignments 1896-1899, 86, 97/1896, BBAV 11581/15a; Applications for Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1895-1897, 14/1896, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

⁵⁷ See *Waikato Times*, 9 January 1890, p. 2, 1 December 1891, p. 2, 13 October 1892, p. 2, 24 March 1894, p. 10, 2 July 1924, p. 7; *New Zealand Gazette*, 19 September 1895, p. 1487, 17 October 1895, p. 1665, 31 October 1895, p. 1741, 7 November 1895, p. 1770; *Mercantile and Bankruptcy Gazette of New Zealand*, 11 March 1897, p. 132.

⁵⁸ Declaration of William McLearn, 7 September 1896, Mines Department, MD 1, 98/1897, ANZ-W.

⁵⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 November 1896, p. 20.

⁶⁰ For example, *Cleave's Auckland Directory, 1893* (Auckland, 1893), p. 274.

⁶¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 15 April 1886, p. 2.

⁶² *Te Aroha News*, 4 December 1886, p. 2, 12 February 1887, p. 2, 19 February 1887, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 10 February 1887, p. 2.

(better known as Pakeha Bill)
will RUN a FERRY BOAT across to the
Races THIS DAY, SATURDAY.⁶³

Between 1890 and early 1894 he was paid 9s, £1 19s, 14s, £3 11s, 18s for working on the county council's roads.⁶⁴ For similar work, the town board paid him 6s in 1890 and the Waitoa Road Board two payments of 12s in the following year.⁶⁵ In January 1891, he successfully sued Henry Hopper Adams⁶⁶ for £1 12s, being wages owing for working in his flax mill.⁶⁷ In 1894, he offered his allotment on the corner of Bridge and Whitaker streets, a 'grand building site', for sale.⁶⁸ In the following year, he applied for half an acre in Morgantown 'for grazing purposes'.⁶⁹ Three years later, with another man he unsuccessfully tendered to move the domain's boundary fence.⁷⁰ In 1907 he was given a temporary appointment as 'Attendant in Charge of the Swimming Bath' on the domain, but the doctor in charge then reported that, although 'at first' he had considered him 'suitable for the position', he was not, 'being unable to either read or write'.⁷¹

FINANCES

At first, McClear lived in a one-roomed house on an eighth of an acre, with a ratable value of £5, but by 1906 had a possibly larger dwelling on

⁶³ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 9 March 1889, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting held on 14 June 1890, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 17 April 1890, p. 2, 17 June 1890, p. 2, 8 October 1891, p. 2, 5 May 1892, p. 2, 8 February 1894, p. 2.

⁶⁵ *Waikato Times*, 1 April 1890, p. 2, 2 April 1891, p. 2, 5 November 1891, p. 2.

⁶⁶ See paper on his life.

⁶⁷ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Plaintiff Book 1881-1893, 2/1891, BCDG 11224/1a; Civil Record Book 1889-1896, 2/1891, BCDG 11221/1c, ANZ-A.

⁶⁸ Advertisement, *Waikato Times*, 6 December 1894, p. 10.

⁶⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Transfers and Assignments 1893-1895, 45/1895, BBAV 11581/14a, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 30 November 1895, p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 22 January 1898, p. 2.

⁷¹ George Kenny to General Manager, Tourist and Health Resorts Department, Wellington, 1 February 1907, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1903/28/1, ANZ-W.

another section, ratable value £6.⁷² He had sold the first house and allotment for £120 in 1897.⁷³ An indication of its nature was given in an 1896 case over a theft of money from an unlocked box beside his 'bunk' in his 'whare' or 'hut'.⁷⁴ This case also revealed that he had been looking after another man's money and that he had given the thief a shilling 'at the Railway station & another on the road' because he 'told me he had no money'.⁷⁵

This was generous, for McClear was never comfortable financially. In 1897 he was sued by a storekeeper for £6 16s 6d, but the £3 10s 11d he paid into court was accepted in settlement.⁷⁶ When he spent four months in the Thames hospital in the year before his death he was unable to pay the fees, £18 6s, which were paid by his brother Samuel.⁷⁷ The latter was a miner in Western Australia; possibly because he paid his hospital fees, he received all McClear's estate, which was valued at under £100.⁷⁸ In reality, it comprised 'a small property' worth £19 13s 10d.⁷⁹ It is not known if he had any renewed contact with his other siblings.

DRINK

One possible reason for such a small estate was that, for a time at least, he had a drink problem. In both January 1889 and 1890 he was placed in the Te Aroha lock-up for being drunk, being convicted and

⁷² Te Aroha Borough Council, Rate Books, 1888, 1893-1894, 1906-1907 [no pagination], Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

⁷³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Assignment from William McClear to Patrick and Ellen Fogarty, 9 April 1897, Transfers and Assignments 1896-1899, BBAV 11581/15a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁴ Conolly J, Criminal Notebook 1895-1897, pp. 78, 79, Supreme Court, Judges' Notebooks, BBAE A304/124, ANZ-A; Supreme Court, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 June 1896, p. 3.

⁷⁵ Conolly J, Criminal Notebook 1895-1897, p. 78, Supreme Court, Judges' Notebooks, BBAE A304/124, ANZ-A.

⁷⁶ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Civil Record Book 1896-1907, 45/1897, BCDG 1221/2a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁷ Thames Hospital, Fees Register 1912-1914, entries for 28 March 1913, 21 July 1913, YCAH A431/75, ANZ-A.

⁷⁸ Probate of William McClear, Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/772, ANZ-A.

⁷⁹ Declaration of Peter Gilchrist, 24 August 1917, Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/772; Testamentary Registers 1917-1918, folio 227, BBCB 4208/11, ANZ-A.

cautioned on both occasions.⁸⁰ In 1892 he accused another man of insulting behaviour, but the case was dismissed.⁸¹ In the absence of the local newspaper, this petty squabble cannot be explained, but drink may have played a part.

Apart from his final illness, the only other indication of his state of health was that in 1885 he spent three months in the Thames hospital suffering from acute rheumatism.⁸² When he could not prove his age to support his application for an old age pension,⁸³ in October 1912 his brother Samuel McLear wrote to him providing both his age and the names of all his siblings. Samuel was 'sorry to hear you are still unwell', and recommended that balsam, 'better known as the poison weed', would cure him, although he was unable to send any more because of the long drought.⁸⁴ Clearly, somehow Samuel had managed to trace him.

CONCLUSION

Once Te Aroha was established, McClear, who had been abandoned by his Scottish father and brought up by Maori, re-integrated himself into Pakeha ways and ceased to be a Pakeha Maori. There is no evidence for any continued contact with Maori after 1880, but judging by his earlier close association with those living at Omahu pa, this was likely. He never learnt to read and write in English, which meant that he remained a labourer and an occasional miner, unable to earn more than a basic standard of living. Unlike other Pakeha Maori in the district, he had not profited financially from his association with Maori; but then the others had married women with interests in land. Although what has been uncovered is mostly a skeleton of his life, with only a smattering of indications of his personality,

⁸⁰ Armed Constabulary Force, Return of Charges taken at Te Aroha Lock-Up 1880-1903, 3/1889, no. 3 of 1890, in private possession; Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 3/1889, BCDG 11220/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸¹ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 11/1892, BCDG 11220/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸² Thames Hospital, Register of Patients 1884-1901, folio 8, YCAH 14075/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸³ Registrar of Old Age Pensions, Paeroa, to Registrar of Births, Onehunga, 13 March 1913, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1913, BBAV 11584/7a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁴ Samuel McLear to 'My Dear Brother' [W.J. McClear], October [1912], Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1913, BBAV 11584/7a, ANZ-A.

it is an illustration of how much can sometimes be discovered about a very obscure person.