

GEORGE WILSON: INSPECTOR OF MINES AT TE AROHA

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Abstract: *A Scot who first mined on the Victorian goldfields, George Wilson then arrived in New Zealand to fight in the Waikato War. Once mining commenced at Thames, he moved there, and was involved in this industry for the rest of his life. He was also active in the Thames community. He held several official posts at Te Aroha after moving there in the early 1880s, the most important being as the mining inspector. Before acquiring these positions, he had invested in mines there. He did all he could to assist the development of the Te Aroha field, notably by encouraging miners to become more skilled.*

His efficiency led to his being appointed as the mining inspector for Hauraki and then the chief inspecting engineer for the Mines Department. Before official duties required him to leave Te Aroha, he had assisted the latter community in several ways, notably in developing and improving the hot springs domain. His wife kept a low profile but was equally popular, and they died esteemed and respected by all.

BEFORE OBTAINING OFFICIAL POSTS

George Wilson¹ was born in Banffshire, Scotland, in 1836 or 1837 to George, a carpenter, and Annie, whose maiden name was also Wilson.² He migrated to Victoria, Australia, in 1855, where 'he was engaged in mining pursuits until he volunteered at the outbreak of the Waikato War in 1863, and came to this Colony'.³ He enrolled in the First Waikato Regiment in Ballarat in September 1863, the regimental roll giving him the alarming height of six feet ten inches.⁴ From April 1864 until October 1867 he served

¹ For photograph of him, see *New Zealand Graphic*, 16 January 1897, p. 57; for sketches of him, see *Observer*, 11 April 1896, p. 12, 14 November 1896, p. 19.

² Marriage Certificate of George Wilson, 4 May 1882, 1882/1170, BDM; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 3, p. 894; Army Department, Nominal and Descriptive Roll, 1st Waikato Regiment, no. 1015, microfilm; Richard Stowers, *Forest Rangers* (Hamilton, 1996), p. 267.

³ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 3, p. 894.

⁴ Army Department, Nominal and Descriptive Roll, 1st Waikato Regiment, no. 1015, microfilm; L.L. Barton, *Australians in the Waikato Wars* (Sydney, 1979), p. 65.

in the Forest Rangers, and received the usual land grants.⁵ He was a member of the Thames Scottish Rifles during the 1870s.⁶

According to Wilson's entry in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, he arrived in Thames in 1868 and immediately 'engaged in mining'.⁷ As there was another George Wilson at Thames from the late 1860s until the late 1870s, who mined with his father Thomas,⁸ it is not always clear which one owned which claim; only in one case it is known that the George Wilson with an interest in the Royal Charter, at Karaka, was the other one.⁹ The first miner's right for a George Wilson was issued in mid-December 1867, and the second in August 1868.¹⁰ In June, one of them was one of eight owners of the Royal Standard claim at Tapu Creek, and the following month one of five owners of the Morning Bell, between Hape and Karaka Creeks; the interest in the former was sold within a week.¹¹ In November 1869, Wilson applied, unsuccessfully, for the Port of Thames claim at Tararu Creek.¹² He also bought a sixteenth interest in the Auckland Go-ahead at Waiotahi.¹³ A foreman in the Long Drive mine, in the following January he applied to register the Long Drive Miners' Prospecting Company's ground.¹⁴

⁵ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 3, p. 894; Stowers, p. 267; *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 19 February 1867, p. 42.

⁶ Thames Scottish Rifles, Nominal Roll, 1 April 1872, Army Department, ARM 41, 1882/1s; Nominal Roll, April 1878, Army Department, ARM 41, 1882/1y, ANZ-W.

⁷ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 3, p. 894.

⁸ See Thames Warden's Court, Warden's and Magistrate's Notebook October-December 1869, hearing of 18 October 1869, BACL 14457/1d, ANZ-A; Thames Electoral Roll, August 1873-September 1874, Auckland Provincial Papers, ACFL 8170, 3015/73, ANZ-W; *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1875*, p. 77; 1876, p. 82; 1877, p. 89; 1878, p. 88.

⁹ Thames Warden's Court, Claims Register 1868-1869, no. 625, BACL 14397/2a; Warden's and Magistrate's Notebook October-December 1869, hearing of 18 October 1869, BACL 14457/1d, ANZ-A.

¹⁰ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Thames Miners' Rights 1867-1868, no. 2855, BACL 14358/1a; Register of Thames Miners' Rights 1868, no. 9695, BACL 14358/2a, ANZ-A.

¹¹ Thames Warden's Court, Claims Register 1868, folio 335, BACL 14397/1a; Claims Register 1868-1869, no. 627, BACL 14397/2a, ANZ-A.

¹² *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 25 November 1869, p. 1624, 9 April 1870, p. 148.

¹³ Thames Warden's Court, Claims Register 1868-1869, no. 1180, BACL 14397/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 January 1870, p. 11; *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 8 January 1870, p. 17.

Four months later, he bought a quarter of one of the ten shares in the Third of May, at Upper Karaka, and a quarter share in the Lucky Hit.¹⁵ He was registered as one of 14 owners of the Leading Article, at Upper Karaka, in April 1871.¹⁶ In December 1871, his lease of a Tararu Creek, held with a partner, was revoked.¹⁷ In October 1872, he was one of three owners of Jessie's Dream, at Karaka Hill, which was worked until 1878.¹⁸

In 1875, Wilson purchased two-thirds of a share in the Lord Nelson, at Karaka Creek, which he worked with two partners.¹⁹ He bought an extra share in the following February but sold his entire interest four days later.²⁰ In September 1878, with one of these partners, with whom he had taken up ground nearby, he successfully tendered to run the Lord Nelson wire tramway, which they repaired and operated for three years.²¹

In September 1875, he was one of the shareholders in the Eldorado Company who called an extraordinary general meeting to replace the directors and arrange the erection of crushing machinery.²² The following year he was one of four owners of Van, at Tararu, which was worked until 1879.²³ In July 1878 he was co-owner of the Trafalgar, at Karaka Creek, which was certified as abandoned two and a half years later.²⁴

His only shareholdings outside Thames apart from at Te Aroha were taken up in Waitekauri in 1876 and 1877; he acquired shares in three

¹⁵ Thames Warden's Court, Shortland Claims Register 1870, no. 2170, BACL 14397/5a; Warden's and Magistrate's Notebook 1870-1871, hearing of 2 June 1870, BACL 14457/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶ Thames Warden's Court, Shortland Claims Register 1871-1872, no. 2480, BACL 14397/6a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷ *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 15 December 1871, p. 336.

¹⁸ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1872-1874, no. 42, BACL 14397/8a, ANZ-A.

¹⁹ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1872-1874, no. 139, BACL 14397/8a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 July 1875, p. 2.

²⁰ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1872-1875, folio 186, BACL 14397/7a, ANZ-A.

²¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 September 1878, p. 2.

²² *Thames Advertiser*, 27 September 1875, p. 2.

²³ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1872-1874, no. 166, BACL 14397/8a, ANZ-A.

²⁴ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Grahamstown Claims 1878-1880, no. 640, BACL 14397/12a, ANZ-A.

companies and was a director of one, the Energetic.²⁵ He must have quickly lost faith in its prospects, for in July 1877 he was warned that his 900 shares would be forfeited unless a call was paid.²⁶

Wilson was an active member of the Thames community, in 1869 being on the committee of the short-lived Miners' Association.²⁷ Later that year, he signed the requisition asking Daniel Pollen to stand for election as superintendent of the province.²⁸ Was he the George Wilson who was keeper of the Shortland public pound from 1868 until October 1871?²⁹ In 1875, the government purchased some of his land to extend the Shortland cemetery.³⁰ An obituary noted that 'he was an enthusiastic friendly society worker' and a founder of 'the juvenile court of the Thames'.³¹ He held leadership positions in the Court Pride of Parnell and was later a member of a Scottish Masonic lodge.³² In November 1877, he chaired a meeting of the committees of all the friendly societies to raise funds for the hospital.³³

In May 1879, the *Thames Advertiser* was 'pleased to learn' that Wilson, 'who bears a high character as a thoroughly practical miner', had been appointed as underviewer for the Thames goldfield. 'Those who know Mr Wilson will have every confidence in the future efficient inspection of the mines'.³⁴

INVESTMENTS IN TE AROHA MINING

One Thames miner commented in 1886 that there was 'no law to force a man to hold shares in his own name; if there was such, officials in this

²⁵ *New Zealand Gazette*, 7 September 1876, p. 633, 12 October 1876, p. 693, 23 November 1876, p. 810, 6 September 1876, p. 926; Company Files, BBAE 10286/40, ANZ-A.

²⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 July 1877, p. 2.

²⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 January 1869, p. 23.

²⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 September 1869, p. 2.

²⁹ *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 9 October 1871, pp. 260-261.

³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 September 1875, p. 2.

³¹ *Observer*, 11 November 1905, p. 5.

³² *Thames Advertiser*, 23 June 1877, p. 3, 24 December 1880, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 8 November 1905, p. 2.

³³ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 November 1877, p. 2.

³⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1879, p. 2.

and other goldfields would not make much money out of mining'.³⁵ After becoming underviewer, Wilson's investments can rarely be traced, making it uncertain whether this comment applied to him. He took out a miner's right on opening day at Te Aroha, when he had no official role, and at the beginning of December was one of the five owners of Our Boys, but the other partners removed him from the partnership in late January 1881.³⁶ After Hone Werahiko discovered his New Find mine at Waiorongomai, he was briefly a shareholder.³⁷ The last interest recorded in his name was in March 1882, when he purchased a share in the English Army for £8 10s.³⁸ Wilson did not marry until May 1882, but it is possible that he recommended that Agnes Burns, his future wife, acquire an interest in a Tui claim in December 1880.³⁹ Unlike others, he did not register interests in his wife's name.

OFFICIAL POSITIONS IN THE TE AROHA MINING DISTRICT

As from 1 October 1882, Wilson was clerk for the Te Aroha warden's and magistrate's courts, receiver of gold revenue, mining registrar, and mining inspector.⁴⁰ When these appointments were announced, the *Thames Star* described him as having 'the respect of all who are acquainted with him', being 'a thoroughly efficient officer' and 'well versed in the workings of the Warden's office'.⁴¹ In July 1886, the Minister of Mines asked Kenrick whether he would be suitable to replace James Monteith McLaren⁴² as the

³⁵ Letter from 'Miner', *Thames Advertiser*, 15 December 1886, p. 2; letter from 'Miner', *Thames Star*, 15 December 1886, p. 2.

³⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 379, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 167, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁷ Hone Werahiko to Harry Kenrick, 28 October 1881, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1881, BBAV 11582/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Transfers and Assignments 1882, no. 164, BBAV 11581/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 178, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 28 September 1882, p. 1347, 19 October 1882, p. 1499.

⁴¹ *Thames Star*, 28 September 1882, p. 2.

⁴² See paper on Harry Kenrick.

mining inspector for Hauraki.⁴³ Kenrick responded that Wilson was ‘thoroughly well adapted for the post – He makes an admirable Mining Inspector having both discretion and judgment’. He was a ‘practical miner’ who ‘thoroughly understands underground workings, and ventilation of mines’ in whom he had confidence, in contrast to his opinion of McLaren.⁴⁴ The *Te Aroha News* noted his reputation ‘for impartiality and probity’.⁴⁵

To encourage the development of the local mining industry, in 1885 he lectured about it to the Te Aroha Social Club and Debating Society. Members were encouraged to attend because he was an ‘experienced and practical miner who has had large opportunities of observation on various gold fields’.⁴⁶ When a visiting expert lectured later in the year on how to detect minerals, Wilson chaired his talks.⁴⁷ Shortly afterwards, on Kenrick’s suggestion he was appointed as a local representative on the provisional committee of the new Thames School of Mines.⁴⁸ A speech by Harry Whitaker,⁴⁹ in 1886, revealed that he gave cautious advice to investors. Wilson

was one of the first friends he made on the field, and he had never had occasion to alter the high opinion he formed of him in those early days; his only fault was that of being a Scotchman which prevented him from that free expression to his thoughts which he otherwise would, being very cautious. He used often to go down for a glass, and he would tell him to be careful, and to keep an eye here and keep an eye there ... [and] were it not for him I should probably have lost all I had.⁵⁰

⁴³ Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Harry Kenrick, 20 July 1886 (telegram), Mines Department, MD 1, 86/2182, ANZ-A.

⁴⁴ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 20 July 1886 (telegram), Mines Department, MD 1, 86/2182, ANZ-W.

⁴⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 9 February 1884, p. 2.

⁴⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 22 August 1885, p. 7.

⁴⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 5 December 1885, p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 12 December 1885, p. 2.

⁴⁹ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

⁵⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 22 May 1886, p. 2.

In August 1883, Wilson was appointed registrar of births, deaths, and marriages for Te Aroha.⁵¹ At the beginning of November, when he married his first couple, several people attended ‘out of curiosity to see how the acting Rev. George fulfilled his semi-sacredotal functions. All agreed that he came well out of the ordeal, and though an amateur, performed the interesting ceremony with all the solemnity of an archbishop’.⁵²

LATER OFFICIAL APPOINTMENTS

In June 1886, Wilson was appointed mining inspector for Hauraki,⁵³ to assist McLaren, who retained his post until retrenched in April 1888, when Wilson became the sole inspector.⁵⁴ In 1887 he had replaced McLaren as inspector of mines for Ohinemuri.⁵⁵ Although in March 1888 the *Te Aroha News* hoped his duties would not require him to leave Te Aroha for Thames, in May his ‘most comfortable dwelling house’ was sold and he left Te Aroha permanently.⁵⁶ In December 1889, he was sent to Puhipuhi, north of Whangarei, to inspect the newly discovered silver lodes; he quickly reported that nine out of ten reefs were worthless.⁵⁷ In 1890 his duties were increased to include inspecting coal mines.⁵⁸

In 1896, the *Thames Advertiser* described as ‘not altogether ... a surprise’ his appointment as Chief Inspecting Engineer for the Mines Department.⁵⁹ The *Observer* published a kindly cartoon of him to celebrate his promotion, and stated that he had ‘invariably been conscientious in the discharge of his duties’ and had ‘done much to foster and encourage the development of our goldfields’.⁶⁰ His new position required him to live in

⁵¹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 9 August 1883, p. 1133.

⁵² *Te Aroha News*, 3 November 1883, p. 2.

⁵³ *New Zealand Gazette*, 15 July 1886, p. 838.

⁵⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 11 April 1888, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Acting Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to George Wilson, 14 April 1887, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, General Correspondence 1887, BBAV 11584/3b, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 23 April 1887, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 31 March 1888, p. 2, 11 April 1888, p. 2, 2 May 1888, p. 2, 23 May 1888, p. 2.

⁵⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 4 December 1889, p. 2, 25 December 1889, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 October 1890, p. 1195.

⁵⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 4 November 1896, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Observer*, 14 November 1896, p. 19.

Wellington, and at a ‘valedictory gathering’ at Thames mine managers presented him with ‘a very handsome gold watch and chain and a surveyor’s aneroid’. The mayor, Thomas Radford, a leading mine manager,⁶¹ chaired the gathering, the local member of parliament attended, and ‘nearly every mine manager in and around’ Thames was present. Radford, who had known Wilson for 21 years, ‘said he had never known a person discharge public duties with such care and tact’. If he cautioned a manager ‘it could be taken for granted that he richly deserved such caution, and it could also be taken for granted it was done in the interests of the mining community generally’. The Thames community ‘felt proud that one with whom they had been associated’ would fill this ‘responsible position’. Wilson responded that Thames mine managers ‘were a class anyone could get on with – jolly, straightforward fellows – and, moreover, they were men who knew their work and did it properly’. In his new post he would assist ‘the interests of mining’.⁶² The warden, Harry Eyre Kenny,⁶³ regretted his departure because his ‘advice on practical mining questions was always useful’ and ‘he was also losing a valued friend’.⁶⁴ A spokesman for the legal profession referred to his ‘unassuming manner and impartiality’; he ‘had accomplished the difficult task of giving satisfaction all round, and had not left an enemy behind him’.⁶⁵

Wilson retained contact with Thames, for instance spending his 1896 Christmas holiday there.⁶⁶ After ‘failing eyesight’ forced him to retire in November 1899, he returned to live there.⁶⁷

INVOLVEMENT IN THE TE AROHA COMMUNITY

Wilson was very active in developing this new community. He often chaired meetings, for example one in 1885 chairing one about obtaining an improved railway timetable and, a week later, a dinner in honour of a

⁶¹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 861; *Thames Star*, 15 August 1907, p. 2.

⁶² *New Zealand Herald*, 9 November 1896, p. 3.

⁶³ See *Observer*, 28 September 1895, p. 3, 6 February 1897, p. 18, 4 March 1916, pp. 5, 17.

⁶⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 November 1896, p. 20.

⁶⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 November 1896, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 November 1896, p. 20.

⁶⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 December 1896, p. 2, 18 February 1897, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 July 1899, p. 1; *Observer*, 11 November 1905, p. 5; *Thames Star*, 8 November 1905, p. 2.

former leading citizen revisiting Te Aroha.⁶⁸ In December 1882, like other prominent residents, he acquired shares in the Te Aroha Public Hall and Reading Room Company.⁶⁹ A vice-president of the Social Club and Debating Society, he was the ‘indefatigable secretary’ of the queen’s jubilee celebration committee.⁷⁰ He was a vice-president of the tennis club, and a member of the committee establishing a roller skating rink.⁷¹ When there was disagreement over the valuation of township property, he was appointed to redo it, with the assistance of a civil engineer and architect.⁷²

During the 1880s he was secretary of the Presbyterian Church committee.⁷³ Despite being married in a Presbyterian ceremony in 1882, he chaired a concert at a Wesleyan Tea Meeting and Entertainment three years later and would have an Anglican funeral.⁷⁴ He held leading positions in the local Masonic society, Lodge Te Aroha.⁷⁵ In 1885 he gave a recitation at a Masonic Entertainment,⁷⁶ the only time he was recorded as giving a public performance.

In June 1883, Wilson convened a meeting to consider the best method of establishing a public library.⁷⁷ The meeting elected him as treasurer pro tem of the committee formed, and he was also its ‘indefatigable honorary secretary’.⁷⁸ During the remainder of the year he energetically collected subscriptions.⁷⁹ When the library opened, five months after the first meeting, the local newspaper reported that he had ‘acted most energetically’ as secretary, ‘and by pen, by circular, and private canvass actually set the scheme properly afloat’.⁸⁰ For its first four years he was its treasurer.⁸¹

⁶⁸ *Waikato Times*, 28 April 1885, p. 3, 9 May 1885, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 41 no. 259, ANZ-A.

⁷⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 15 August 1885, p. 2, 18 June 1887, p. 2.

⁷¹ *Te Aroha News*, 3 October 1885, p. 2, 27 June 1885, p. 2.

⁷² *Te Aroha News*, 10 March 1888, p. 2.

⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 26 April 1884, p. 7, 3 July 1889, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Marriage Certificate of George Wilson, 4 May 1882, 1882/1170, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 28 May 1887, p. 2; Death Certificate of George Wilson, 8 November 1905, 1905/6312, BDM.

⁷⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 17 May 1884, p. 7, 27 February 1886, p. 2, 31 December 1887, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 5 February 1887, p. 2.

⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 27 June 1885, p. 2.

⁷⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 9 June 1883, p. 3.

⁷⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 3, 30 June 1883, p. 2.

⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1883, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 3 November 1883, p. 2.

Not having children was not a bar to becoming a member of the school committee, to which he was elected, unopposed, in 1885.⁸² He was re-elected the following year.⁸³ In 1887, when the highest vote received was 46, he and James Marshall, the local Anglican clergyman,⁸⁴ both received 18 votes; as only one of them could be elected, Wilson gave his vote to Marshall. Until then, he had been its chairman.⁸⁵

In November 1884, Wilson was appointed to the new Hot Springs Domain Board, and his appointment was renewed in later years.⁸⁶ In December 1886, his resignation as chairman was received with regret.⁸⁷ The *Te Aroha News* wrote that the baths' popularity was 'in a great measure' due to Wilson, who had 'in a most unselfish manner devoted a great portion of his time, both before and after his office hours', in looking after the domain. It hoped he would not resign,⁸⁸ which he did not. According to John Ilott, the editor, he resigned as chairman because 'things' had 'been so frequently made unpleasant for' him.⁸⁹ Unpleasantness continued, a doctor noting in January 1888 that 'personal feelings and jealousy' handicapped the board, 'the members of which are notoriously at loggerheads with one another'.⁹⁰ Wilson continued to improve the domain; for instance, his 1887 suggestion that a Jubilee Avenue be planted was adopted.⁹¹ Two months later, he attended a meeting about establishing a sanatorium.⁹²

⁸¹ *Te Aroha News*, 3 February 1884, p. 7, 24 January 1885, p. 2, 30 January 1886, p. 2, 29 January 1887, p. 2.

⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 31 January 1885, p. 2.

⁸³ *Te Aroha News*, 1 May 1886, p. 2.

⁸⁴ See *Te Aroha News*, 21 March 1885, p. 2, 17 April 1886, p. 2, 20 February 1889, p. 2.

⁸⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 30 April 1887, p. 2.

⁸⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 22 November 1884, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 21 January 1886, p. 58.

⁸⁷ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 11 December 1886, p. 2, 18 December 1886, p. 2.

⁸⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 18 December 1886, p. 2.

⁸⁹ John Ilott to Minister of Lands, 21 February 1887, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

⁹⁰ Alfred Wright to Minister of Lands, 6 January 1888, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

⁹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 June 1887, p. 3.

⁹² *Te Aroha News*, 20 August 1887, p. 3.

In June 1888, after moving to Thames, he resigned from the board, and was thanked for his services.⁹³ Four months later, Warden Northcroft told the Mines Department that, although Wilson had asked to be replaced, as he had ‘always taken great interest in the Domain’ and his official duties ‘continually’ took him to Te Aroha, Northcroft had ‘asked him to remain’ to ‘assist in carrying out many improvements and see the money is not squandered’.⁹⁴ Consequently, the December board meeting received a letter from Wilson ‘applying to take his seat as an old member of the Board’. The chairman, Thomas Gavin,⁹⁵ said he had written to Wilson ‘requesting further information as to how he knew his resignation had not been accepted by the Government, and as Mr Wilson was present, he asked him to explain matters, and why he had not replied to the memo’. Wilson, who had ‘contemplated being present at the meeting’, explained that ‘some time’ after resigning he had asked Northcroft to accept nomination as a member. Northcroft declined, and asked Wilson whether, should his resignation not be accepted, he would ‘resume his position. He said he would not. Since then he had received a copy of a letter’ sent to Northcroft stating that Wilson was still a member, and felt ‘if there was no objection he would like to resume his position’. Gavin responded that he had ‘no wish to say anything discourteous’ to Wilson, who, ‘had this matter been brought about by direct communication with the Board, he would have been glad to welcome’ back, ‘as he had at all times proved himself a useful member’. However, Gavin detected the ‘underhand work of other members’, yet again, and that Northcroft ‘had been influenced. Had no wish to blame Mr Wilson. He thought it was due to the Board that the Government should communicate with them, and treat them courteously’. When he then asked Wilson ‘to refrain from taking part in the business’ until this had happened, Ilott interjected that if Wilson did not retain his seat, he would ‘go out also’. Gavin responded that another member, John Ilott, editor of the *Te Aroha News*, had caused all the trouble, and refused ‘to allow members in a minority to rule and humiliate the other members’.

Mr Wilson: I think you have just cause of complaint, and I trust you will believe me when I state that I know of nothing else than

⁹³ *Te Aroha News*, 6 June 1888, p. 2.

⁹⁴ H.W. Northcroft to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 11 October 1888, Thames Warden’s Court, Warden’s Letterbook 1886-1893, p. 235, BACL 14458/2b, ANZ-A.

⁹⁵ See paper on his life.

what I have informed you, viz, the conversation I had with Mr Northcroft after learning that my successor had not been appointed. I have no wish to create any discord.

Chairman: Your explanation is quite satisfactory to the Board, but the Government take no notice of us, though your resignation was accepted, and your successor suggested by a majority of the members.

When Gavin continued to squabble with Ilott, the latter taunted that Gavin spoke 'fairly now' to Wilson, 'very different from what you said about him in my office'. After Gavin told Wilson what he had said about him, he added, 'I had blamed Mr Wilson, but I now apologize, believing his explanation'. After more quarrelling, another member commented that there was 'no doubt' Wilson was a member and should keep his seat', for he had 'always been a useful member'. After yet more quarrelling, Wilson intervened: 'I would like the Board to return me my resignation, as I wish to retain my seat'. The debate ended with Gavin stating that they had 'no wish to ignore' him but thought they should write to the government about the matter, which was agreed to.⁹⁶ (Ilott's newspaper briefly reported that, when informed by Wilson that he had been asked to remain and had withdrawn his resignation, the board accepted him back.)⁹⁷

'John Bull', a critic of Ilott 'the Obstructionist', considered the 'yarn of G.W's about asking the Warden to be nominated, etc, is very much too thin to pass muster, there is something else behind it'.⁹⁸ Wilson did not attend a special board meeting held a week later to consider calling tenders to erect a library, Ilott asked whether he had been consulted; one member was 'sure' he 'would not object', being 'a large hearted man' who 'would not throw obstacles in the way'.⁹⁹ He continued to be a member until June 1891, when, after explaining that his duties as mining inspector were 'now seldom required' at Te Aroha, he resigned.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ *Aroha Gazette*, 7 December 1888, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

⁹⁷ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 4 December 1888, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Letter from 'John Bull', *Aroha Gazette*, 14 December 1888, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

⁹⁹ *Aroha Gazette*, 14 December 1888, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

¹⁰⁰ George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Lands Department, 15 June 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

LEAVING TE AROHA

In March 1888, the *Te Aroha News* hoped Wilson would not move to Thames, as he had always given ‘most valuable assistance’ to the development of both township and domain, and it was ‘chiefly through his exertions’ that a public library was established.¹⁰¹ When it was learnt that he would be leaving, a ‘semi-private farewell supper’ was hastily arranged. About 20 attended, and more would have if told in time. Wilson responded to speeches about his services to Te Aroha and his friends’ ‘warm’ regard for him that ‘he greatly regretted having to leave his many old and staunch friends, but wherever he went Te Aroha would always have a warm place in his heart’.¹⁰²

MARRIAGE

An obituary noted that it was ‘late in life’ before Wilson married.¹⁰³ He was 44 when he married Agnes Burns, a storekeeper who, according to their marriage certificate, was three years older than he was.¹⁰⁴ According to her death certificate, she was eight years older.¹⁰⁵ When aged 16, Agnes Leach, or Leitch, had married John Burns, then 29, in Glasgow, her home city; they would have three sons and two daughters.¹⁰⁶ Burns, a baker, after suffering from chronic bronchitis and heart disease for several years died in Thames in 1876.¹⁰⁷ Their son Robert, ‘esteemed and beloved by all’ for his ‘many sterling qualities’, died of tuberculosis in 1889, aged 20.¹⁰⁸ John died

¹⁰¹ *Te Aroha News*, 31 March 1888, p. 2.

¹⁰² *Te Aroha News*, 11 April 1888, p. 2.

¹⁰³ *Observer*, 11 November 1905, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Notices of Intentions to Marry, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/27, folio 255, ANZ-W; Marriage Certificate of Agnes Burns, 4 May 1882, 1882/1170, BDM.

¹⁰⁵ Death Certificate of Agnes Wilson, 3 August 1903, 1903/1061, BDM.

¹⁰⁶ *Thames Star*, 26 October 1889, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 November 1905, p. 32; Marriage Certificate of Agnes Burns, 4 May 1882, 1882/1170; Death Certificate of Agnes Wilson, 3 August 1903, 1903/1061, BDM.

¹⁰⁷ Death Certificate of John Burns, 27 September 1876, 1876/2529, BDM; Death Notice, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 September 1876, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *Thames Star*, 26 October 1889, p. 2.

in 1895.¹⁰⁹ The third son, Archibald, was a popular mayor of Thames at the time of Wilson's death.¹¹⁰

At Te Aroha, Agnes was a prominent but unpublicized member of the community. In 1887 she was chosen by public ballot to plant the 'Ladies of Te Aroha' tree during the Queen's Jubilee Celebrations.¹¹¹ The following year, at her husband's farewell supper, speeches mentioned 'the respect and regard' in which she was held; when she was toasted, the chairman referred to 'her kindly disposition and warm heart', which had 'endeared herself to a large circle of friends'.¹¹² The latter held a separate farewell social with supper, dancing, and card tables. 'Mrs Wilson is a general favourite', the *Te Aroha News* recorded.¹¹³ When farewelled by Thames friends on her departure for Wellington in 1897, a clergyman who had known her for about 20 years said that 'her influence had been quiet and sweet but powerful for good, and as a flower which throws its fragrance around it had permeated places little thought of'.¹¹⁴

DEATHS

Agnes Wilson died suddenly in August 1903, aged 73.¹¹⁵ Wilson died in Auckland in November 1905, aged 68, and was buried in Thames.¹¹⁶ When visiting Auckland, 'being taken seriously ill' he 'could not return. He gradually sank, and passed away'.¹¹⁷ He died of heart failure after suffering from back pains as well as loss of eyesight and senile decay.¹¹⁸

In 1882 Wilson owned property in Thames worth £75.¹¹⁹ Agnes left all her estate, value unrecorded, to him; his estate was valued at £3,769 18s 6d.¹²⁰

¹⁰⁹ Funeral Notice, *Thames Star*, 25 September 1895, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ *Thames Star*, 9 November 1905, p. 2.

¹¹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 June 1887, p. 3.

¹¹² *Te Aroha News*, 11 April 1888, p. 2.

¹¹³ *Te Aroha News*, 28 April 1888, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 February 1897, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Death Certificate of Agnes Wilson, 3 August 1903, 1903/1061, BDM.

¹¹⁶ Thames Burial Register 1894-1907, no. 428, Anglican Archives, Auckland.

¹¹⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 November 1905, p. 32.

¹¹⁸ Death Certificate of George Wilson, 8 November 1905, 1905/6312, BDM.

¹¹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 September 1875, p. 2; *A Return of the Freeholders of New Zealand...* (Wellington, 1884), p. W 61.

REPUTATION

In 1891, John McCombie stated that Wilson never asked ‘anything unreasonable at the hands of mine owners, managers, or miners’.¹²¹ As an indication of the respect in which he was held, in 1897 he was elected a member of the first executive council of the newly formed Institute of Mining Engineers.¹²² An example of his ability to clearly explain geology and methods of treating ore was his lecture to it in the following year about some of the distinguishing features of the Hauraki goldfields.¹²³ After his death, the *Observer* recalled him as ‘formerly one of the best known men in Thames’, where his ‘kindly disposition won him hosts of friends’.¹²⁴ The *Thames Star* believed that regret at his death would be ‘universal’. Both ‘as a private citizen and as an official he earned the esteem and respect of the country’.¹²⁵

CONCLUSION

Unlike his predecessor as the Hauraki mining inspector, not the slightest criticism of Wilson has been found in either Mines Department files or the press. He was in every sense ‘a pillar of the community’, working not only in the interests of the mining industry but also of the Thames and Te Aroha districts.

Appendix

Figure 1: ‘Mr Wilson, the new Government Mining Engineer’, Observer, 14 November 1896, p. 19.

¹²⁰ Probates, BBAE 1569, 4866/03; Testamentary Register 1903-1906, folio 180, BBCB 4208/5, ANZ-A.

¹²¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 August 1891, p. 3.

¹²² *Thames Advertiser*, 27 May 1897, p. 1; *New Zealand Graphic*, 5 June 1897, p. 697.

¹²³ George Wilson, ‘On Some Differences that Distinguish the Goldfields of the Hauraki Mining District, New Zealand’, *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute of Mining Engineers*, vol. 2 (1898), pp. 17-23.

¹²⁴ *Observer*, 11 November 1905, p. 5.

¹²⁵ *Thames Star*, 8 November 1905, p. 2.



**MR WILSON, THE NEW GOVERNMENT MINING
ENGINEER.**