

DANIEL LEAHY: A PROMINENT HAURAKI PROSPECTOR
AND MINER

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Te Aroha Mining District Working Papers

No. 55

2016

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ISSN: 2463-6266

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

DANIEL LEAHY: A PROMINENT HAURAKI PROSPECTOR AND MINER

Abstract: *Dan Leahy's career was an example of a man devoting his life to prospecting. An Irishman, from 1862 onwards he prospected on several goldfields, first at Coromandel, where he may have been the first to detect gold in Driving Creek. After some years in Otago, he returned to the North Island to join the Thames rush in 1867, spending a couple of years mining there before returning to Coromandel. From mid-1869 onwards he prospected in Ohinemuri, despite the opposition of both the government and the Maori landowners. He may have been the first to discover gold at Waitekauri, and after Ohinemuri was opened to mining in 1875 he mined there for a couple of years.*

Like all true prospectors, he was always on the lookout for new fields to explore. After prospecting at Waihi in 1878, briefly, he was equally briefly involved in the Te Aroha rush before turning his attention to Karangahake. A later rumour of his attempting to prospect the King Country was false, and in 1890 he returned to Coromandel and prospected there almost until the end of his life, with little success and becoming regarded as a 'hatter'.

Unlike most other prospectors and miners, it is possible to obtain some impressions of his personality, mostly through his excessive drinking, the probable cause of his marriage breaking up. Whatever his personal faults, in the mining community he was much admired.

BEFORE THE OPENING OF THE THAMES GOLDFIELD

According to the age recorded when he married and when his children were born, Daniel Leahy¹ was born in County Clare, Ireland, either in 1839, 1840, or 1841.² According to the details recorded when he applied for an old age pension and upon his death, he was born in February 1833.³ He arrived

¹ For photograph of him at the Kapai Vermont mine in the 1890s, see R.A. Simpson, *This is Kuaotunu* (Thames, 1979), photograph no. 7 after p. 32.

² Notices of Intentions to Marry, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/21, p. 212, ANZ-W; Marriage Certificate of Daniel Leahy, 23 October 1876, 1876/2354; Birth Certificates of John Joseph Leahy, 29 December 1877, 1878/627; Herbert James Leahy, 19 June 1879, 1879/10152, BDM.

³ Coromandel Magistrate's Court, Old Age Pension Claims 1899-1902, folio 39, no. 80, ZAAAN 14137/1a, ANZ-A; Death Certificate of Daniel Leahy, 19 July 1918, 1918/4943,

in New Zealand in September 1861 from Australia,⁴ where presumably he had been a miner. According to his obituary, he mined at Coromandel in 1862,⁵ first at the Coolahan Diggings at Driving Creek';⁶ Hugh Coolahan⁷ had found a 'small stratum of quartz grit' near the surface in the early 1850s.⁸ In 1974, a Coromandel historian quoted a 'persistent rumour' about the first discovery of gold at Driving Creek: Leahy, 'an early adventurer' whose name he consistently misspelled, 'landed in Kikowhakarere and wandered inland'.⁹ (Kikowhakarere Bay was five kilometres north of the future Coromandel township, and from the 1840s onwards was the site of kauri milling and shipbuilding.)¹⁰

He found gold in a creek below the area where the Kapanga mine was later found and worked. Leahy worked a bag full of specimen stones. He was, however, being watched by the Maoris and could not get his find out undetected. So he buried his gold with the intention of returning for it later. He made several attempts but on each occasion was recognized and stopped from returning to

BDM; Inquests, Justice Department, J 46 COR, 1918/813, ANZ-W; *Coromandel County News*, 26 July 1918, p. 2.

⁴ Coromandel Magistrate's Court, Old Age Pension Claims 1899-1903, p. 39, no. 80, ZAAAN 14137/1a, ANZ-A; *Coromandel County News*, 26 July 1918, p. 2.

⁵ For plan of the Coromandel workings, see Figure 1.

⁶ *Coromandel County News*, 26 July 1918, p. 2.

⁷ See *New Zealand Herald*, 26 June 1872, p. 2, 19 October 1895, p. 1.

⁸ See correspondence in Internal Affairs Department, ACGO 8333, 1853/571, ANZ-A; *Daily Southern Cross*, 30 November 1852, p. 2, 3 December 1852, p. 2, 17 December 1852, p. 2, 21 December 1852, p. 2, 4 February 1853, p. 3; *New Zealander*, 22 December 1852, p. 2; William Swainson, *Auckland, the Capital of New Zealand, and the Country Adjacent: Including some account of the gold discovery in New Zealand* (London, 1853), pp. 105-108; Charles Heaphy [printed as Heapley], 'On the Coromandel Gold-Diggings in New Zealand', *Proceedings of the Geological Society*, 8 March 1854, in *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society*, vol. 10 part 3 no. 39 (1 August 1854), p. 322.

⁹ Sam Chapman, *Coromandel in the 'Golden' Days* (Hamilton, 1974), p. 17.

¹⁰ *In Search of the Rainbow: The Coromandel story* (Coromandel, 2002), pp. 18-21, 55-57; for the memoirs of a pioneer sawmiller and boatbuilder who lived there, see memoirs of John Callaway, as recorded by his grand-daughter: E.A. Carter, *Journal of the Auckland-Waikato Historical Societies*, no. 17 (September 1970), pp. 21-23.

his hidden treasure. Consequently the gold was never recovered or the reward claimed before [Charles] Ring's discovery.¹¹

In this area 'valuable erratics', meaning boulders deposited by glaciers, were found in the creek, but no lode was ever discovered.¹² In December 1862, 'Dan Leahy's party' was recorded as having extracted 5lb between August and November.¹³

Leahy spent some time on the Otago goldfields during 1863, being one of those listed in December as having unclaimed letters at the Mount Ida post office.¹⁴ After that date, his mining career has not been traced until after the Thames field opened.

MINING AT THAMES AND COROMANDEL, 1867-1869

Leahy obtained the forty-seventh miner's right to be issued at Thames, on 15 August 1867.¹⁵ On that day, his party obtained two weeks' protection for their 300 by 200 foot claim at Karaka, 'To procure tools for working the ground'.¹⁶ Between 23 and 28 September he took out three more miners' rights (for his partners to use), and on the 26th his party sought two weeks' protection for a 350 by 300 foot claim, also at Karaka.¹⁷ On 2 October he took out another miner's right.¹⁸ Late in March 1868, he briefly deposited £10 10s 5d 'By Assay Report' in the bank.¹⁹ The following month, he sold his

¹¹ Chapman, p. 17.

¹² Colin Fraser, 'Gold-Mining at Coromandel', *New Zealand Mines Record*, 17 February 1908, p. 293.

¹³ Coromandel Correspondent, *Daily Southern Cross*, 13 December 1862, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Otago Daily Times*, 15 January 1864, p. 6.

¹⁵ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miners' Rights 1867-1868, no. 47, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶ Thames Warden's Court, Registrations 1867, no. 5, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miner's Rights 1867-1868, nos. 374, 448, 499, BACL 14358/1a; Registrations 1867, no. 53, ANZ-A.

¹⁸ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miner's Rights 1867-1868, no. 601, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁹ Bank of New Zealand, Shortland Branch, Individual Accounts Ledger 1868, folio 184, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

sleeping half-share in the All Nations for £120.²⁰ He was an owner of the Great Republic at Waiotahi in early June, but sold his interest before it was registered.²¹ At the end of October he took out a miner's right for Karaka, transferring it to Coromandel early in April 1869 and then back to Karaka on 25 May.²² At the end of 1869, he had an eight interest in the Smith O'Brien, at Coromandel.²³

Within four months of arriving on the Thames field, he was elected along with 23 others to represent the miners at a conference with James Mackay, the Civil Commissioner, about changes to the mining regulations.²⁴

PROSPECTING OHINEMURI BEFORE IT OPENED

When Leahy married in October 1876, he gave Ohinemuri as his place of residence for the previous seven years.²⁵ His obituary stated that he 'was one of the prospectors responsible for the opening of the Upper Thames fields'.²⁶ His prospecting was illegal, for until 1875 Ohinemuri was closed to prospectors both by its owners and by the government. In September 1868, the magistrate for the Waikato district warned that he had 'reason to believe that if the gold fields at Ohinemuri and Te Aroha are thrown open to Europeans by the friendly Natives residing there, that serious disturbances, if not war', would result. As King Tawhiao and his supporters would treat the opening of a goldfield as a declaration of war, it would be 'impossible' to confine 'any disturbance' to Hauraki.²⁷ In July 1869 the Civil Commissioner for that district, James Mackay, in one of his many self-justifications, explained at some length how he had preserved the peace of Hauraki by resisting attempts to force the opening of Ohinemuri to mining.

²⁰ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Agreements and Licenses 1868-1870, folios 8-9, BACL 14417/1a, ANZ-A.

²¹ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1868, folio 80, BACL 14397/1a, ANZ-A.

²² Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miners' Rights 1868, no. 13384, BACL 14358/2a, ANZ-A.

²³ Coromandel Warden's Court, Instruments 1868-1878, 2027/191, AAAE 15180/4a, ANZ-A.

²⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 16 December 1867, p. 3.

²⁵ Notices of Intention to Marry, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/21, p. 212, ANZ-W.

²⁶ *Coromandel County News*, 26 July 1918, p. 2.

²⁷ 'Report on the State of the Waikato District for the Quarter ending 30th September 1868', 'Reports from Officers in Native Districts', *AJHR*, 1869, A-10, p. 8.

In early September 1867, when there was 'some excitement among the miners about the Ohinemuri District', he asked

Te Moananui what were the probabilities of obtaining the right to mine for gold over that country. As I expected, the answer was, that "Te Hira was a most obstinate man; that he had been most difficult to deal with in the arrangements for Coromandel, and there was not the slightest chance of his yielding in the case of Ohinemuri, as he and all the Hauhau portion of the tribe were opposed to either the sale or lease of any land to Europeans."²⁸

In the following month, because there had been no immediate returns from Thames claims, Mackay was not surprised 'that there was considerable discontent at the non-discovery of the alluvial gold', nor that there was 'anxiety about opening up the Ohinemuri District, where alluvial deposits were reported to exist in fabulous quantities'.²⁹ In November, a Thames meeting agreed to send a deputation to Ohinemuri seeking its opening.³⁰

Certain political agitators were not backward in fomenting the discontent which prevailed, and affairs assumed a serious aspect, as any attempt to take forcible possession of Ohinemuri would have brought on a collision with the Hauhaus, and endangered the peace of this portion of the Colony. Public meetings took place in front of the raupo whare used as a Court House, where I had to speak very plainly as to the course which would be pursued in the event of a rush to Ohinemuri being attempted.³¹

He claimed that most miners 'behaved well', accepting the arguments of himself and the Superintendent of the Auckland Province, John Williamson, 'of the extreme inadvisability of attempting to take forcible possession of Ohinemuri'. Mackay sent armed Maori policemen to stop prospectors intruding onto Maori land, and a deputation who intended to ask Te Hira 'to consent to open Ohinemuri, were also deterred from going there'.³² In December, some miners who arrived were treated by Maori in a

²⁸ 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay Relative to the Thames Goldfield', *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 6.

²⁹ 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay', p. 6.

³⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 November 1867, p. 7.

³¹ 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay', pp. 6-7.

³² 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay', p. 7.

friendly manner, only to be sent away after a messenger arrived with a letter from Mackay telling them not to let any diggers in.³³ John Wullanora Thorp,³⁴ who owned a farm and store at Opukeko, on the banks of the Waihou River near the site of the future township of Paeroa,³⁵ invited five miners to prospect his land, but they only stayed briefly, as it was not likely to contain gold. Rangatira wanted him to send away another prospecting party, but he refused.³⁶ In the following February, a party prospected from their base at 'Thorp's store'.³⁷ His ignoring Maori wishes prompted Ohinemuri rangatira to order Thorp to leave, which he 'quite disregarded'.³⁸

The opening of other portions of the peninsula for mining eased pressure on Ohinemuri,³⁹ but by September 1868 most of the 'restless spirits who pay fitful visits to every known and unknown gold region' were 'in a furore of excitement' over obtaining access to it. Reportedly they had 'not ventured to violate the prerogative of the Hauhau party to oppose their wish'.⁴⁰ 'As the miners had again become very excited about the opening of the country', Mackay again visited Ohinemuri and made 'some little advance in the question'. He complained that, on several occasions, deputations of miners had arrived seeking permission to mine and that others tried to buy land; 'the result of their injudicious interference was to complicate matters, and effectually upset all the proceedings which had been taken by me for their benefit'.⁴¹ The press urged miners to be patient, for any rush before an agreement was reached would 'end in disappointment' and retard the opening. In early October, there were only about 20 Pakeha in Ohinemuri, who remained there 'with the consent of all parties'.⁴² In mid-October, Maori armed with 'club and revolver' drove all Pakeha off the site of the future Paeroa.⁴³ 'Some diggers' were 'warned off

³³ *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 December 1867, p. 23.

³⁴ See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 19 December 1919, p. 2.

³⁵ See map, c. 1842, in Caroline Phillips, *Waihou Journeys: The archaeology of 400 years of Maori settlement* (Auckland, 2000), p. 93.

³⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 December 1867, p. 12.

³⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 February 1868, p. 12.

³⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 March 1868, p. 19.

³⁹ 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay', p. 9.

⁴⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 October 1868, p. 7.

⁴¹ 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay', p. 9.

⁴² *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 October 1868, p. 7.

⁴³ Letter from P.C., *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 October 1868, p. 2.

the supposed auriferous land, and brought back by an escort' of Maori to Thorp's farm. A Pakeha Maori was tried by a Hauhau chief on a charge of prospecting, but acquitted.⁴⁴ A deputation of 12 miners arrived, 'well furnished with grog and provisions', but despite providing ale, brandy and rum, they failed to convince rangatira to open their land, and 'several' prospectors were captured 'and locked up in a whare'.⁴⁵ John Williamson, who arrived in November, had no more success, but did receive an address from the 33 miners then at Ohinemuri thanking him for his efforts.⁴⁶

In December, 'a number of miners' camped on Thorp's farm 'anxiously awaiting tidings of the opening of the Ohinemuri District'. Mackay 'requested them either to remain quietly there, or to leave the place. They consented to go, but failed to perform their promise. They however behaved themselves very well while there, with the exception of ... a few individuals'.⁴⁷ Miners remained on Thorp's land in the following month, but even those Maori who wanted the district opened would not permit prospecting before the official opening.⁴⁸ These men received a letter from Ropata Te Pokiha, who supported opening the land,⁴⁹ telling them 'do not go on the hills' but 'stop quietly at the place you are living at'.⁵⁰ Te Hira, on being told that there were 370 miners at Thorp's, 102 in the hills, and 100 at Te Aroha (the latter figure being a massive exaggeration), ordered them to leave.⁵¹ In early February, after more meetings failed to convince the landowners, Mackay learnt 'from reliable sources that some persons had been tampering with and making treasonable overtures to the Hauhaus'. In response, on 7 February he travelled to Thorp's farm and suggested 'to a number of miners who were assembled there the desirability of removing from the district. To the credit of these men my request was almost unanimously assented to', and he arranged for a steamer to take them away.

⁴⁴ Special Correspondent of *Thames Advertiser*, reprinted in *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 October 1868, p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 31 October 1868, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 November 1868, p. 13.

⁴⁷ 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay', p. 10.

⁴⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 January 1869, p. 18.

⁴⁹ See paper on Maori land in Hauraki before 1879.

⁵⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 January 1869, p. 22.

⁵¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 January 1869, p. 10.

By the 12th February nearly all these men had left the district, but information was given that some persons had determined to remain out on the hills prospecting for gold in despite of my orders to the contrary. I therefore swore in thirty-five friendly Natives as armed special constables, who accompanied me on the 12th, 13th, and 14th, in search of the parties alluded to. The result was that all Europeans, excepting the actual settlers and their servants, were compelled to leave the district.⁵²

This task was concluded by late March.⁵³ The numbers expelled is uncertain. The captain of one river steamer later reported 'a great many West Coast, Ballarat, and Californian diggers' being there and estimated that 'from 800 to 1,000 experienced diggers, and men possessed of considerable capital', lived at Thorp's Landing 'some four or six months, forming quite a little canvas town'.⁵⁴ No indication of so many living there was given at the time.

This policy of discouraging prospecting continued after Mackay ceased to work for the government. In October 1869, Donald McLean, the Native Minister, asked Edward Walter Puckey, the native agent at Thames, to visit Ohinemuri at his 'earliest convenience' to encourage the landowners to open the district for mining and to assure them that the government was

determined, as far as lies in its power, to prevent any aggressions on the part of the Europeans.

You are, in the second place, to impress upon those Europeans, who, if the Government is rightly informed, are keeping alive a feeling of irritation in the minds of those Natives who are opposed to the opening up of the Ohinemuri District by hanging around the forbidden ground, that they thus protract for an indefinite period the negotiations already initiated by the Government. You will also indicate, without using any threat, that they are liable to a penalty under the fifth clause of "The Gold Fields Act, 1868;" and that it would be much better for their interest, and the interest of the diggers and public at large, to move away altogether from that part of the district for a time, so as to allow the disturbed feelings of the Natives to settle down, and give the

⁵² 'Report of Mr Commissioner Mackay', p. 10.

⁵³ *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 March 1869, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Letter from J.W. Pearse, *Auckland Weekly News*, 17 February 1872, p. 21.

Government a fair opportunity of carrying out its negotiations with success.⁵⁵

The following day, Rapata Te Pokiha⁵⁶ complained to McLean that Pakeha were ‘searching for gold in an unauthorized manner. I have no power to send them back, as I hold no authority from you to do so’. He wanted prospecting delayed ‘till the field is properly opened’, and asked for his words to be published ‘in order that our impatient friends in search of gold may see them’.⁵⁷

Te Hira asked Puckey ‘not only to send off the diggers encamped at the landing-place at Thorp’s and up the Ohinemuri Stream at Paeroa (within a mile of Te Hira’s house), but to spare no pains to drive off those who were prospecting for gold in the ranges’. Puckey explained that, ‘as no one knew where the diggers in the hills might be, it would be of no use my attempting to follow and find them out, but I would write a letter, and, if I could find any one to take it, would send it to them’. Warned that, if the prospectors did not leave, ‘the Hauhaus would take the matter into their own hands’, Puckey met a party of prospectors near Paeroa, ‘and, after a good deal of talking’, obtained their agreement to leave if those at Thorp’s also left. At a subsequent meeting with rangatira, the latter insisted that prospectors be removed.⁵⁸ Puckey asked if any of them knew where the latter were, as ‘it would be quite useless for me to go myself and search for them’. After a Queenite, meaning a supporter of the Crown, agreed ‘it would take three months at least to make a thorough search’, Puckey proposed sending two Maori, ‘one a Hauhau, the other a Queen Native’, to take a letter from him to the diggers. ‘The Natives said, if you send out so small a party as that it will effect no good whatever, as the diggers will pay no heed to them; it would be better to send out ten men’. Puckey agreed, and would pay them 5s per day. Because of mutual suspicion between Queenites and Hauhau, Puckey insisted that both be included in the party. Afterwards, he called a meeting of miners at Thorp’s farm, where ‘some few of them expressed a

⁵⁵ Donald McLean to E.W. Puckey, 27 October 1869, ‘Correspondence Relating to Ohinemuri, and Native Matters at the Thames’, *AJHR*, 1870, A-19, p. 5.

⁵⁶ See paper on Maori in Hauraki during the nineteenth century.

⁵⁷ Rapata Te Pokiha to Donald McLean, 28 October 1869, printed in *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 November 1869, p. 24.

⁵⁸ E.W. Puckey to Donald McLean, 4 November 1869, ‘Correspondence Relating to Ohinemuri, and Native Matters at the Thames’, *AJHR*, 1870, A-19, pp. 5-6.

determination not to leave under any circumstances'. Puckey explained that, unless they left, there was 'no prospect whatever of an early opening'. After 'a somewhat protracted interview', because the Paeroa party had agreed to leave they agreed to go, on condition that when McLean visited to try to open the district 'he would allow no diggers nor speculators to follow him, in order that all might have a fair and equal chance'.⁵⁹ Two Maori parties searched for prospectors. One returned after five days and the other after four, without having found anyone, although 'there were many traces of their having been there a short while before'.⁶⁰ McLean thought they should not search 'beyond three or four weeks'.⁶¹

Despite promises to leave and failures to find any prospectors in the hills, some did remain. In the following January, Te Hira's sister, Mere Kuru, told Puckey that prospectors claimed that a military force was coming to protect them; he 'told her it was not so'.⁶² In April, Thorp informed McLean that Te Hira wanted him to accompany Maori removing the approximately 100 diggers from the ranges so he could see that justice was done, but feared they would criticize him if McLean did not order him to comply. 'A number of the diggers now in the ranges are armed & may be fightable at least they say no Maori will bring them in'. Te Hira threatened that if they did not leave he would ask the Hauhau to remove them, but assured Thorp that they would be 'brought kindly' and nothing would be stolen.⁶³ The following month, he acted in a manner that surprised a Thames newspaper:

As our readers are aware, there has for some time been a good deal of prospecting on the hills, the prospectors having occasionally been brought in by parties of Maoris. Lately the Maoris have been determined to clear their sacred soil, and Te Hira himself has headed a strong party of native police. On

⁵⁹ E.W. Puckey to Donald McLean, 4 November 1869, 'Correspondence Relating to Ohinemuri, and Native Matters at the Thames', *AJHR*, 1870, A-19, p. 7.

⁶⁰ E.W. Puckey to Donald McLean, 15 November 1869, 'Correspondence Relating to Ohinemuri, and Native Matters at the Thames', *AJHR*, 1870, A-19, p. 8.

⁶¹ Donald McLean to E.W. Puckey, 19 November 1869, 'Correspondence Relating to Ohinemuri, and Native Matters at the Thames', *AJHR*, 1870, A-19, p. 8.

⁶² E.W. Puckey to Donald McLean, 20 January 1870, 'Correspondence Relating to Ohinemuri, and Native Matters at the Thames', *AJHR*, 1870, A-19, p. 15.

⁶³ J.W. Thorp to Donald McLean, 10 April 1870, Sir Donald McLean Papers, MS Copy Micro 0535, reel 94, Alexander Turnbull Library.

Wednesday last seven men were brought in from the [Karangahake] Gorge by a strong guard of armed natives. The pakehas were stolen upon at an unguarded moment, and before they could say a word a dozen double-barrelled guns were pointed at them. They had nothing for it but to surrender at discretion, and submit to be marched off the settlement. Before they set off, the natives marched the diggers off the road till they reached a sheltered and secluded spot amongst the scrub. At this, the diggers thought it was all over with them, and that they were to be at once executed according to Maori law. Not so, however, for the natives, first taking precaution against an attempt to escape, commenced a rather lengthened series of Hauhau prayers. After the prayers, the party were marched down to the settlement, and there quietly dismissed, nothing having been taken from them. On Thursday another party of diggers were pounced upon at the Waitekauri; the Maoris, in this case, being, it is said, led by Te Hira in person. The party consisted of four, of whom only two were captured, the others being at some distance off down the creek. The party had a tent, which the Maoris proceeded to ransack. From one of the men they took a revolver, and they ate up every atom of food which was in the tent. A keg of butter was swiftly disposed of, each Maori taking out a handful, which he placed on the newly-baked dampers, and then devoured with gusto. After gratifying their stomachs, the Maoris searched the men, and took from one of them about 1 1/2oz of West Coast gold in nuggets, which perhaps they lay claim to as having been taken from their ground. These men were also marched in and dismissed, minus their property.

After the other two prospectors returned on the following day to find their mates and possessions gone, 'a good deal of conversation took place amongst the diggers in the evening', for property had not been taken previously. Feeling that a few miners would be ignored, they decided to go *en masse* to ask Mere Kuru to return it, and about 50, led by an interpreter, marched to her settlement, causing 'apparently great consternation'. In response to their request, 'Mere Kuru said that articles had been taken three times, that was the fourth time, and that they would not be returned'. They were 'in a whare, in safe-keeping', and she asked the diggers why they had not brought officials to seek their return; knowing their prospecting was illegal, they replied that they did not want officials involved. 'They admitted they were wrong in going to the ground, but contended that the Maoris had no right to take the things'. After replying that she would ask

officials whether she should return them, Mere Kuru 'then commenced the Hauhau prayers, whirling about a spear with great vehemence'.⁶⁴

In August, a visitor was informed that there were 'a few parties out in the ranges who are washing and sluicing on a small scale, whose returns find them in tucker for the present, enabling them to await the future more patiently. Most of the diggers have left, a few only remaining, apparently to shepherd something they have found or know of'.⁶⁵ In mid-October, a Pakeha cited the fact that the landowners avoided 'any active interference with the men who are well known to them to be out prospecting on the ranges' as proof that they wished to remain at peace with the government.⁶⁶ Could this Pakeha have been Thorp, who in the following month informed McLean that 'some men are still working in the ranges & are getting a little gold which some say is alluvial gold'.⁶⁷

In February 1872, the captain of a river steamer wrote that two-thirds of the Thames miners were 'only hanging on' in anticipation of Ohinemuri and Te Aroha being opened for mining. 'They know very well what exists there – it is useless to keep the matter a secret – everybody knows there is gold there, and plenty of it too'. Pakeha living in Ohinemuri were showing miners where to find gold, and samples were being crushed at Thames.⁶⁸

Leahy, one of those who refused to leave when required, spent years dodging the occasional Maori party sent to expel him and his mates. The first time he was mentioned in the press as being involved in this prospecting was in February 1870, when at a meeting of Ohinemuri miners he seconded a motion that a deputation go to Auckland to seek the Superintendent's assistance to open the district.⁶⁹ In late November 1871 an Ohinemuri correspondent wrote that Leahy, the last of the original prospectors there, was leaving for Thames; 'Dan has hung on for two years and a half'.⁷⁰ The reason for his departure was not given: possibly he had

⁶⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, n.d., reprinted in *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 May 1870, p. 5.

⁶⁵ ZZZ, 'A Holiday in Ohinemuri', *Thames Advertiser*, 31 August 1870, p. 3.

⁶⁶ 'Kurapae', 'Ohinemuri and the Native Lands Court', *New Zealand Herald*, 15 October 1870, p. 3 [A kurapae is a beam: P.M. Ryan, *The New Dictionary of Modern Maori* (Auckland, 1973), p. 23].

⁶⁷ J.W. Thorp to Donald McLean, 11 November 1870, Sir Donald McLean Papers, MS Copy Micro 0535, reel 94, Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁶⁸ Letter from J.W. Pearse, *Auckland Weekly News*, 17 February 1872, p. 21.

⁶⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 February 1870, p. 22.

⁷⁰ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 November 1871, p. 6.

failed to find anything or had realized the landowners were not going to permit mining. Matthew Paul, later a mining inspector, who knew Leahy personally, wrote after his death that, as far as he could ascertain, he was the first person to find gold at Waitekauri.⁷¹ When the Waitekauri Company held a dinner in October 1876, Leahy and Charles Featherstone Mitchell,⁷² another early Ohinemuri settler,⁷³ were cheered as ‘the pioneers of the Waitekauri district’.⁷⁴ According to his brother-in-law, by using ‘the old Maori track leading from Paeroa to Waitekauri’, Leahy was able ‘to discover the well-known reefs’ at the latter.⁷⁵ In 1876, a correspondent recalled being, three years previously, with others ‘on the track of that indefatigable prospector, Dan Leahy, to whom Waitekauri owes its existence, and while they were on the track of Dan, the Maoris were on their track’.⁷⁶

In April 1873, Leahy and Mitchell convened a meeting to call for the opening of the district.⁷⁷ At this meeting, a leading Thames solicitor stated that Leahy ‘knew as much about Ohinemuri as any man in the district, having spent much of his time there’, and Mitchell announced that Wi Hopihana had given Leahy the right to prospect there for one year, on payment of £1.⁷⁸ Leahy showed his permit, which was really a receipt for this amount, witnessed by a Pakeha Maori living at Ohinemuri.⁷⁹ He seconded Mitchell’s resolution that the miners were delighted that Maori had opened the district, and would establish a vigilance committee to

⁷¹ Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 12 November 1919, Inspector of Mines, BBDO A902, MM35, ANZ-A.

⁷² See paper on the Thames Miners’ Union.

⁷³ See Thames Magistrate’s Court, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 May 1871, p. 20, 27 May 1871, p. 6; *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 12 January 1872, p. 3, advertisement, 10 February 1872, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1872, p. 3, Ohinemuri Correspondent, 7 April 1873, p. 3, 16 April 1873, p. 3, 23 May 1873, p. 3, letter from C.F. Mitchell, 24 May 1873, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 October 1876, p. 3.

⁷⁵ ‘Native’, ‘On the Maratoto Diggings’, *Thames Advertiser*, 10 October 1887, p. 2; ‘Aboriginal’, ‘Gold or Bullion. Tracks as an Aid to Prospecting’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 April 1893, p. 35.

⁷⁶ Own Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 31 August 1876, p. 2.

⁷⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 April 1873, p. 2.

⁷⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 April 1873, p. 3.

⁷⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 April 1873, p. 9.

maintain order and ensure that justice was done to them.⁸⁰ As Maori landowners still had no intention of opening Ohinemuri,⁸¹ this was another attempt to prompt the government to force its opening. As another indication of their resolve, an American prospector discovered prospecting near Waihi had to hide in a creek, dropping his satchel and swag, to avoid a group of Maori threatening to ‘tomahawk him’; Te Hira ordered his swag returned.⁸²

Early in May, after the murder by Maori of Timothy Sullivan, near Cambridge,⁸³ an editorial stated that there was

no hope now for the prospectors. Abandoned by their Maori friends, with their shelter destroyed, and hunted by native and European policemen, they would find that the task of prospecting is more than they can accomplish, and they may think themselves well off if they escape a prosecution for mining on native land without a permit signed by the Governor. Indeed, to speak frankly, we do not think prospectors are quite safe between Ohinemuri and Te Aroha at present.⁸⁴

Even Mitchell abandoned his Paeroa hotel and store, which he had owned for over two years,⁸⁵ for fear of being attacked.⁸⁶ Leahy also left the district, for in early September, when a rumour spread that the government had purchased the Aroha block, a steamer arrived at Paeroa from Thames ‘with a large party on board. Amongst the crowd were Dan Leahy and his mate, fully equipped and bound for the new El Dorado’.⁸⁷ When the rumour was proved to be false, Leahy returned to prospecting in Ohinemuri, in mid-December he and Mitchell informing John Williamson, still the Superintendent, that they had found gold ‘in payable quantity’ on a ‘leading spur’, the ore body being from six to nine feet wide and one mile long. They

⁸⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 April 1873, p. 13.

⁸¹ For example, *Thames Advertiser*, 18 April 1873, p. 2.

⁸² *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1873, p. 3, 15 April 1873, p. 2.

⁸³ See *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 May 1873, p. 11.

⁸⁴ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 May 1873, p. 2.

⁸⁵ See Thames Magistrate’s Court, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 May 1871, p. 20, 27 May 1871, p. 6; *Thames Guardian and Miner’s Record*, 12 January 1872, p. 3, advertisement, 10 February 1872, p. 2.

⁸⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 May 1873, p. 11.

⁸⁷ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 September 1873, p. 3.

sought both protection and the first right to use water to work it.⁸⁸ Williamson replied that ‘on acquiring the right to mine or on buying the land Government will be prepared, as far as possible, to protect your interests in the discovery’.⁸⁹ The following day, Leahy wrote that, ‘after very lengthened and laborious explorations’, he and fellow-pro prospector Michael Marrinan⁹⁰ had found gold in the ‘Wai-te-Kauri District’, near the earlier discovery by Mitchell and himself, and applied for protection.⁹¹ This time he was warned that, as the district was still Maori land, it was not yet possible to protect their discovery.⁹² When Ohinemuri was opened in March 1875, Leahy and Mitchell cited Williamson’s replies to argue that they had been promised a prospecting claim at Waitekauri.⁹³

At the beginning of February 1874, Leahy informed Williamson that ‘during a recent exploration’ he had discovered coal in Ohinemuri. ‘As I am very desirous of still further prosecuting my researches’, he asked for protection.⁹⁴ On the same day, Marrinan also sought protection for his coal find.⁹⁵ Five weeks later, Leahy wrote that since his previous letter ‘I have continued to prosecute my researches, and with I am glad to say the most successful results’, and requested protection and a lease under the Auckland

⁸⁸ C.F. Mitchell and Daniel Leahy to John Williamson, 18 December 1873, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 906/75, ANZ-W.

⁸⁹ John Williamson to C.F. Mitchell and Daniel Leahy, 18 December 1873, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 906/75, ANZ-W.

⁹⁰ See *Thames Advertiser*, Warden’s Court, 11 June 1875, p. 3, Upper Thames Correspondent, 20 October 1880, p. 3, Warden’s Court, 6 May 1887, p. 3; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 11 June 1892, p. 8, 18 June 1892, p. 6, 11 November 1899, p. 2, 19 February 1909, p. 2, 8 November 1909, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 28 May 1910, p. 8; *Thames Star*, 22 October 1913, p. 8; *Auckland Star*, 23 October 1913, p. 5; Death Certificate of Michael Marrinan, 22 October 1913, 1913/8249, BDM.

⁹¹ Daniel Leahy to John Williamson, 19 December 1873, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 906/75, ANZ-W.

⁹² John Williamson to Daniel Leahy, c. 19 December 1873, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 906/75, ANZ-W.

⁹³ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 March 1875, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Daniel Leahy to John Williamson, 3 February 1874, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 79/75, ANZ-W.

⁹⁵ Michael Marrinan to John Williamson, 3 February 1874, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 79/75, ANZ-W.

Mine Leases Act of 1871 when the land became the property of the Crown.⁹⁶ He was informed that neither permission to mine nor protection could be granted until the land was purchased.⁹⁷ At the beginning of 1875, his request to lease 640 acres containing his discovery was merely noted.⁹⁸ (After Ohinemuri was opened, Leahy would not be involved in any coal mining.)

PROSPECTING AND MINING IN WAITEKAURI AFTER THE OPENING

In January 1875, a mining correspondent visited Karangahake mountain to check on reports of gold having been found. 'Dan Leahy and other well-known prospectors who have been hanging around Ohinemuri for years, are also reported to have secured reefs in this locality, but what the prospects are no one seems to know, as Dan is reticent, and does not say whether he has gold or not'.⁹⁹ When the goldfield finally opened at the beginning of March, 'whilst the pegging mania was raging at Karangahake, a small party of men led by a prospector named Leahy might have been seen wending their way in the direction of Waitekauri, where they marked off several claims, which were subsequently amalgamated and formed what was known as the old Waitekauri Company's mine'.¹⁰⁰ One who participated in the rush to Waitekauri recalled that 'there was only a blazed trail all the way, and it was dark before we reached Dan Leahy's camp, where all hands were located for the time'.¹⁰¹ On the top of the range between Paeroa and

⁹⁶ Daniel Leahy to John Williamson, 13 March 1874, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 79/75, ANZ-W.

⁹⁷ Memorandum by John Williamson, 13 March 1874, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 79/75, ANZ-W.

⁹⁸ Daniel Leahy to John Williamson, 8 January 1875; memorandum by John Williamson, 11 January 1875, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 79/75, ANZ-W.

⁹⁹ Own Correspondent, 'A Tour Through the Ohinemuri District', *New Zealand Herald*, 26 January 1875, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ John McCombie, 'A Retrospective of Ohinemuri Goldfield', *New Zealand Mines Record*, 16 September 1897, p. 71.

¹⁰¹ 'Orphan', 'The Good Old Days of Yore', *Waihi Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 14 April 1899, p. 3.

Waitekauri, in November it was known as Leahyville Camp.¹⁰² Leahy town, as it became, still had a post office in 1882.¹⁰³

Leahy obtained the second miner's right, and was one of the owners of three Waitekauri claims, Dan Leahy, Bank of England, and Sir George Grey.¹⁰⁴ Along with Mitchell, he registered the first of these when the field opened, and immediately commenced driving on a spur to find the reef.¹⁰⁵ In May, a visiting reporter described 'Dan Leahy's claim' as 'situated on top of the spur, from which you can see several townships and harbors along the East Coast', and estimated its height as 'about 800 feet above the level of the flat'. The miners had 'cut not less than five well-defined reefs, all gold-bearing, and also several leaders carrying gold'.¹⁰⁶ Another correspondent, upon arriving at

Leahy and party's camp, we were heartily welcomed, and Dan soon had a billy of hot tea ready for us, with milk in it – a luxury that we certainly did not expect in such an out-of-the-way place. The party intends to make themselves as comfortable as possible, under the circumstances, and have imported a goat – and that accounts for the milk.... After having done full justice to the repast provided by our hospitable host, we started to have a look at the Dan Leahy and adjoining claims, and I have to acknowledge Mr Leahy's courtesy in acting as cicerone. In the Dan Leahy claim over 400 feet of driving has been done, and the reef has been proved in two levels. It is running a little east of north and west of south, and dips to the westward. In both levels it shows about 12 feet of quartz, and the lode is well defined. Good prospects can always be obtained by crushing stone from any part of the reef.

On their way back to Paeroa, the correspondent's party stopped 'again to trespass on Dan Leahy's hospitality'. In noting the poor state of the track, he stated that when Superintendent visited the district Leahy and Mitchell had 'asked that the money already promised should be spent on the Waitekauri track at once'.¹⁰⁷ In late June, after having done a 'large amount

¹⁰² Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 November 1875, p. 3.

¹⁰³ *New Zealand Gazette*, 31 August 1882, p. 195.

¹⁰⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Claims 1875, folios 15, 67, 99, BBAV 11568/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 11 March 1875, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 March 1875, p. 3, 16 March 1875, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 15 May 1875, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 22 May 1875, p. 3.

of driving', the Dan Leahy shareholders obtained protection.¹⁰⁸ Shortly afterwards, they met with the owners of the Golden Crown and Golden Point and agreed to amalgamate as the Waitekauri Gold Mining and Quartz Crushing Company to enable the erection of a battery.¹⁰⁹

His party was working the Bank of England in September.¹¹⁰ Two months later he and Mitchell were granted a water right, which they transferred to the Waitekauri Company in the following February.¹¹¹ When companies were formed, he held scrip shares in the Waitekauri, Bank of England, Diamond Gully, Herald, and Leahy, all at Waitekauri, and was a director of the last four.¹¹² He was both plaintiff and defendant in the usual challenges over surplus ground and non-working.¹¹³

After his first claims were turned into companies, he returned to prospecting. In mid-August 1876 it was reported that 'Dan Leahy, the prospector, is again on the trail, and, I hear, has come across some very good country', which at first he refused to identify.¹¹⁴ Subsequently it was reported that he had found a reef north of the Waitekauri Company's ground and was successfully prospecting in the Diamond Gully.¹¹⁵ The following month, he applied for four more claims, Ruby and Pearl, where his new find was located and which were immediately turned into a company with him as director, and Leahy's No. 1 and Leahy's No. 2.¹¹⁶ The mining inspector recorded that no work was done in Leahy's No. 1 between mid-October and mid-April the following year; in mid-May four men

¹⁰⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 30 June 1875, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 9 July 1875, p. 3, 12 July 1875, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 September 1875, p. 3.

¹¹¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Holdings 1875-1891, folio 3, BCDG 11292/1a, ANZ-A.

¹¹² *New Zealand Gazette*, 5 August 1875, p. 530, 10 February 1876, p. 122, 9 March 1876, p. 181, 5 October 1876, p. 682, 12 October 1876, pp. 692-693, 25 May 1877, p. 582; *Thames Advertiser*, 27 January 1876, p. 3, 14 August 1876, p. 3, 11 September 1876, p. 3, 20 September 1876, p. 2, 9 May 1877, p. 3.

¹¹³ Thames Warden's Court, Record of Warden's Decisions in Ohinemuri Warden's Court 1873-1876, 41, 54, 93, 158-170/1875, 12/1876, BACL 14565/1a, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 August 1876, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 August 1876, p. 3, 2 September 1876, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Thames Warden's Court, Mackaytown and Thames Letterbook 1876-1896, folios 84A, 97, BACL 14458/1b, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 8 September 1876, pp. 2, 3, 20 September 1876, p. 2, 21 September 1876, p. 2.

‘commencing drive’ but ceased work early in July, after which work ceased and was never resumed.¹¹⁷ No work was ever done in Leahy’s No. 2.¹¹⁸

Immediately after the field was opened, a Waitekauri meeting appointed him to a deputation to seek government money to make a road from Paeroa.¹¹⁹ As they were unsuccessful, in November he signed a memorial seeking a better road other than that via Mackaytown.¹²⁰ In February 1876 he called for it to be made or ‘they would be all starved out during the winter’.¹²¹

In October 1877, when mining at Waitekauri had slumped, he recommended that a prospecting party be formed, and was appointed to the committee to organize this.¹²² He was prospecting himself in the following April, when he called the Paeroa meeting that formed the Ohinemuri Mining Association; he was on its management committee.¹²³

WAIHI

In 1913, it was stated that Leahy was one of the first four prospectors of the Waihi field, but only stayed a few days; no date was given.¹²⁴ According to Billy Nicholl, who discovered the Martha lode, in about 1875 Leahy ‘sank a hole on the top of the reef and he didn’t get enough gold to stay with it. He thought in a buck’.¹²⁵ Nicholl may have got the date wrong, for in 1881 Leahy informed the warden that in March 1878 he had pegged out two claims, the Mataura, named after a bay on the coast near Waihi, and Tauranga No. 1. ‘The reason he had not worked the claims was because he could not get any capitalists to go in with him’, and only a little

¹¹⁷ Thames Warden’s Court, Report Book of Mining Inspector 1876-1878, folio 81, BACL 14451/1a, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁸ Thames Warden’s Court, Report Book of Mining Inspector 1876-1878, folio 82, BACL 14451/1a, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 March 1875, p. 3.

¹²⁰ Memorial, 15 April 1875, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 501/76, ANZ-W.

¹²¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 February 1876, p. 3.

¹²² *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1877, p. 3.

¹²³ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 April 1878, p. 3, 24 April 1878, p. 3, 20 September 1878, p. 3.

¹²⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 November 1913, p. 17.

¹²⁵ W.S.C. Nicholl, untitled memoirs, n.d. [c. 1935], MS 1713, Alexander Turnbull Library.

prospecting was done.¹²⁶ Not being registered, their exact sites are unknown. It was rumoured that he had prospected Waihi in 1879 with his brother-in-law, John McCombie, when they were both living at Waitekauri,¹²⁷ but although Leahy may have done more searching, McCombie's mate was Robert Lee.¹²⁸

In May 1881, McCombie challenged Leahy and others for possession of ground close to the Martha lode. McCombie 'believed Leahy's pegging had never been cancelled', and before prospecting had discovered his pegs. Leahy briefly stated that he knew the area 'well', had marked out these claims, and 'had not given notice of abandonment'. McCombie added that he knew the claim Leahy pegged out because 'he was a mate of Leahy's at the time'. McCombie's case failed.¹²⁹ When the mining inspector sought to forfeit Leahy's ground later in the year, the case 'was withdrawn, as defendant had abandoned it subsequent to the laying of the plaint'.¹³⁰

TE AROHA

At the end of September 1880, a Te Aroha correspondent wrote that the Waikato district had a 'veritable gold fever on just now, and the veritable Dan Leahy is being looked for'.¹³¹ Although an obituary stated he had prospected 'in pretty well all parts of the peninsula',¹³² at Te Aroha his only involvement was to become an owner of a Tui claim in December 1880, selling his interest five days later.¹³³ That he may have prospected south of Karangahake might be inferred by his signing an 1875 petition of old Thames settlers seeking land for farms between Ohinemuri and Te Aroha;¹³⁴ but probably he was just supporting miners seeking an

¹²⁶ Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 May 1881, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Special Reporter, 'A Visit to the Waihi Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1881, p. 3.

¹²⁸ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

¹²⁹ Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 5 May 1881, p. 2.

¹³⁰ Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 August 1881, p. 3.

¹³¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 September 1880, p. 3.

¹³² *Coromandel County News*, 26 July 1918, p. 2.

¹³³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 178, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹³⁴ Memorial, 15 April 1875, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFM 8180, 5251/75, ANZ-W.

alternative means of earning a living and knew little if anything of the area.

KARANGAHAKE

In mid-October 1881, he marked off one of the two claims at the new find at Taukani, across the Waitawheta River from Karangahake mountain.¹³⁵ On 2 November, Leahy, 'the well known prospector of Waitekauri and Waihi' showed the *Thames Star*

some good looking stone taken from a reef lately discovered by him in the Ohinemuri district. Mr Leahy thinks the reef in question is the main one running through the entire district, and where found by him is a large body of stone showing gold freely, and giving splendid mortar tests. The reef is on the spur dividing the Ohinemuri and Waitawheta streams. Mr Leahy, we trust, has dropped upon a good thing, for if any man deserves good luck in the Upper Country he is the man, for he has done more to prospect the country than any other man in the district. Mr Leahy first found the gold in the Waitekauri, and also in the Waihi, and at one time held a large interest in the Waitekauri Company. He is a most experienced miner, and his opinion is worth something in reefing matters. The claim he has taken up is called the Empress of India.¹³⁶

He became the sole owner of this ten-acre claim in January, but as it did not fulfil his predictions he forfeited it in January 1883.¹³⁷¹³⁸ In December 1881 he also became sole owner of four claims, all of about 25 acres, and all 'on the dividing range opposite Mackaytown'. These, the Victoria, Rose of Denmark, Gladstone, and City of Auckland, were all abandoned by July the following year.¹³⁹ In March 1884, with one of the first prospectors of Thames, after a good search he reportedly found gold at

¹³⁵ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1880-1882, claim 983, BACL 14397/13a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 31 October 1881, p. 3.

¹³⁶ *Thames Star*, 2 November 1881, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Applications for Licensed Holdings 1878-1886, folio 71, BACL 14452/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 9 January 1883, p. 3.

¹³⁸

¹³⁹ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1880-1882, claims 1001-1004, BACL 14397/13a, ANZ-A.

Rotokohu, on the slopes of Karangahake.¹⁴⁰ Two days later, his involvement was denied.¹⁴¹

THE KING COUNTRY

In February 1886, a Paeroa correspondent reported a rumour amongst local Maori ‘that a very old Ohinemuri prospector, whom they call “Pard Dan” (Daniel Leahy), has been taken prisoner by the King for prospecting in the neighbourhood of Tokangamutu without a permit’. (This village, near Te Kuiti, was Tawhiao’s main settlement.) ‘It appears that he was caught in the act of fossicking in a creek by some of the King natives, who ordered him to clear out, but instead of doing so he travelled by a circuitous route, returning to the same place, where he was again caught, and is now in durance vile’. The correspondent could not vouch for the truth of this rumour.¹⁴² While it is possible that Leahy, like others, was attracted by the reputed mineral wealth of this district, this was not recorded, and this story was never verified.

COROMANDEL

From 1890 onwards, Leahy lived at Coromandel, where he remained for the rest of his life.¹⁴³ In late 1895 and early 1896, accounts of wrestling matches suggest he was then at Kuaotunu, although the spelling of the name was not quite accurate and the reports suggest someone younger than a man aged over 55. ‘Two well known athletes of Kuaotunu – J. Tuohy and D. Leahy – have arranged a wrestling match for £50 a side’.¹⁴⁴ The second report stated that ‘Leehy’ was thrown over the head of his opponent after half a minute of their bout.¹⁴⁵ Leahy certainly visited Kuaotunu during this decade, being photographed outside the Kapai-Vermont mine.¹⁴⁶ In 1897, ‘a wrestling contest, Graeco Roman style, for £25, between Sam Matthews, lightweight champion of America and Dan Leahy, ex-champion of

¹⁴⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 March 1884, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 29 March 1884, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 March 1884, p. 2.

¹⁴² Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 February 1886, p. 2.

¹⁴³ *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1890*, p. 20, *1893*, p. 33, *1894*, p. 30, *1897*, p. 38, *1899*, p. 55.

¹⁴⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1895, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 March 1896, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ Simpson, photograph no. 7 after p. 32.

Australia', attracted a large audience at Coromandel;¹⁴⁷ the spelling was correct this time, but this Leahy was probably someone else.

Leahy had scrip shares in only one Coromandel company, in 1896: the Jersey Company, at Cabbage Bay.¹⁴⁸ He was registered as the owner of the Sir George Grey prospecting claim, one man's ground at Paul's Creek, in late 1895,¹⁴⁹ which was in or near the area he had prospected in 1862. Officially Little Paul's Creek, it was 'the main southerly branch of the Whaiwango, flowing into Koputauaki Bay. In the early days of the goldfield considerable quantities of highly auriferous vein-quartz were discovered in the *debris* of this stream'. Prospecting was 'both difficult and expensive', because alluvial terraces and gravel concealed much of the bed-rock.¹⁵⁰ Leahy was subsidized to prospect it in early 1898, but had to report in February that he had not struck anything payable.¹⁵¹ Two months later, he wrote to the county council 'announcing non success', but almost immediately applied for the ground again.¹⁵² In September the council agreed to aid his prospecting of it once more, and the government provided £18 for this unsuccessful work.¹⁵³ It was granted to him as an extended special quartz claim in 1899, the five acres being on the middle branch of Paul's Creek.¹⁵⁴ In applying for six months' protection in May 1906, he explained that he was suffering from ill health. 'I have worked continuously on the said claim since April 1899 and have had no return. Owing to advancing years I am unable to stand the severity of the winter and must move into Coromandel'.¹⁵⁵ He surrendered it in June 1907, but was granted

¹⁴⁷ *Auckland Star*, 8 April 1897, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 September 1896, p. 1499.

¹⁴⁹ Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1893-1895, 300/1895, ZAAAN 14037/7a; Thames Warden's Court, Coromandel Claims Register 1872, 1890-1899, folio 91, BACL 14396/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁰ Fraser, p. 293.

¹⁵¹ County Council, *Coromandel County News*, 9 February 1898, p. 3.

¹⁵² County Council, *Coromandel County News*, 6 April 1898, p. 3; Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1897-1899, folio 80, ZAAAN 14038/1b, ANZ-A.

¹⁵³ County Council, *Coromandel County News*, 7 September 1898, p. 3; Coromandel Magistrate's Court, Old Age Pension Claims 1899-1903, folio 39, ZAAAN 14137/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁴ Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Special Claims 1898-1908, folio 792, ZAAAN 14044/3b; Register of Applications 1897-1899, folios 126, 131, 133; Applications 1907, 116/1907, BACL 14391/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁵ Coromandel Warden's Court, Applications 1906, 54/1906, BACL 14391/39a, ANZ-A.

it again four months later.¹⁵⁶ In June 1908, when he applied for its protection once more, he explained that he had mined it continuously since the previous October. 'I have worked in it regularly and have done a lot of trenching and surface prospecting'. The claim was 'isolated in the bush and it is almost impracticable to continue operations during the wet season', but he intended to work it in 'drier weather'.¹⁵⁷ The warden was sympathetic, and he continued working when the weather improved, but again had to apply in July 1910 for the same reason. He stated that he had 'worked continuously' since the previous period of protection.¹⁵⁸ Leahy finally surrendered his Sir George Grey in June 1911.¹⁵⁹ Two months previously, he had pegged out 20 acres in Morepork Creek, near Paul's Creek, telling the warden that there was 'no claim within miles of this land. I have found reefs but no gold'.¹⁶⁰

In 1913, he obtained a prospector's license, and in the following year still described himself as a prospector.¹⁶¹ In 1915 he obtained another prospector's license for 20 acres on the left bank of Paul's Creek.¹⁶² His last years of prospecting were failures, as was noted after his death: 'During the later years of his life he resided at Paul's Creek, where he did a great amount of prospecting in an endeavour to locate the reef which shed rich specimens found in the creek workings by Hona and Geo. Stevens and others. This prize still awaits the advent of the lucky one who will find it'.¹⁶³ No other prospector succeeded in finding an ore vein.¹⁶⁴ Another account stated that although he 'trenched for hundreds of yards, he had no luck at all. The leaders were barren'.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁶ Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Special Claims 1898-1908, folios 792, 1032, ZAAN 14044/3b, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁷ Coromandel Warden's Court, Applications 1908, 64/1908, BACL 14391/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁸ Coromandel Warden's Court, Applications 1909-1910, 53/1910, BACL 14391/4a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁹ Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Special Claims 1898-1908, folio 1032, ZAAN 14044/3b, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁰ Coromandel Warden's Court, Applications 1911, 27/1911, BACL 14391/5a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 9 July 1913, p. 7; petition to Minister of Mines, 1 July 1914, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/52, Part 1, ANZ-W.

¹⁶² *New Zealand Herald*, 26 February 1915, p. 3.

¹⁶³ *Coromandel County News*, 26 July 1918, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Fraser, p. 293.

¹⁶⁵ Chapman, p. 17.

The memoirs of a Coromandel resident referred to the recluses known as ‘hatters’ working by themselves: ‘There was such a one prospecting in Paul’s creek for years, his name was Dan Leahy, a fine type of Irishman standing over six feet and built in proportion. Dan’s chimney probably stands today, besides chain upon chain of trenches, a monument to the years of toil with no rich reward’.¹⁶⁶

MARRIAGE

In October 1876, Leahy married a fellow Catholic, Mary Ann McCombie, in Thames; a servant aged 26, she was 11 years his junior.¹⁶⁷ Her parents were Alexander, a builder and farmer, and Ellen Schoolan, and her elder brother was John, a prominent mine manager.¹⁶⁸ They had two sons. The first, John Joseph, was born at his house at Thames in December 1877 and baptized in the local Catholic church.¹⁶⁹ Herbert James was born at Otahuhu in June 1879; his mother informed the registrar of his birth,¹⁷⁰ and this child was not baptized in Thames, nor was his birth reported in the Thames press, unlike that of their first son.¹⁷¹

The reason why the circumstances of the second birth were different may have been because the parents had separated, at least temporarily. They were together in December 1881, but when in April 1886 residents of the Auckland Province signed addresses honouring Sir George Grey’s seventy-fourth birthday, she signed but he did not; although this could suggest that they had separated, he might simply have been prospecting

¹⁶⁶ George Blithe (‘The Shepherd’), ‘Some of the Early History of the Coromandel Goldfields’ (typescript, 1952?), p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ Notices of Intentions to Marry, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/21, p. 212, ANZ-W; Marriage Certificate of Daniel Leahy, 23 October 1876, 1876/2354, BDM.

¹⁶⁸ Birth Certificates of John McCombie, 15 June 1849, 1849/2120; Mary Ann Leahy, 1850/1777; Death Certificates of Mary Ann Leahey [as recorded], 28 April 1927, 1927/2703; John McCombie, 3 July 1926, 1926/2980, BDM.

¹⁶⁹ Birth Certificate of John Joseph Leahy, 29 December 1877, 1778/627, BDM; *Thames Advertiser*, 31 December 1877, p. 2; Thames Baptism Register 1874-1886, entry for John Joseph Leahy, born 29 December 1877, Catholic Archives, Auckland.

¹⁷⁰ Birth Certificate of Herbert James Leahy, 19 June 1879, 1879/10152, BDM.

¹⁷¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 December 1877, p. 2.

away from Thames.¹⁷² The electoral rolls that included women from 1893 onwards reveal that during that decade there were not living together; he was at Coromandel, but she was not living in the Thames district.¹⁷³ His death certificate recorded that it was not known if he was married.¹⁷⁴ When admitted to the Avondale Asylum in May 1918, he was recorded as being married.¹⁷⁵ The doctor who gave evidence at his inquest two months later had some information about him, clearly not provided by his sons: 'He was a married man but we have no information about his relatives'. A Mrs O'Conner used to visit him,¹⁷⁶ but nothing is known of her; possibly he had been living with her during his last years, which were spent in Auckland.¹⁷⁷ The following year, Matthew Paul, the mining inspector, who had known Leahy, informed his superiors that he had been unmarried.¹⁷⁸ Despite nearly 50 years of separation, Mary Ann knew (or guessed?) that she was a widow when she died in Auckland in 1927, aged 76.¹⁷⁹

Why did the marriage collapse so soon? One possible reason is suggested by a jocular story relayed by the *Observer* Man in Thames in December 1881 about the election for the Thames seat. A unnamed 'newspaper man' trying to get electors to the polls went to one house to find 'a man who had been imbibing very freely at the shrine of Bacchus for some days previous, and who was in consequence confined to his bed'. This man was convinced to go and vote,

but at this juncture the wife interfered, and expressed herself determined not to allow her husband to leave the house, as he had a black eye. The journalist was equal to the occasion. Hastening to a neighbouring chemist's shop, he procured some pigment, with which he painted the injured optic so skillfully that

¹⁷² 'Thames Tittle Tattle', *Observer*, 31 December 1881, p. 244; 'Addresses Presented to Sir George Grey on his 74th Birthday, 14 April 1886, by European and Maori Residents of Auckland Province', p. 196, Grey New Zealand Papers, GNZ MS 275, Auckland Public Library.

¹⁷³ *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1893*, p. 33; *1894*, p. 30; *1897*, p. 38; *1899*, p. 55.

¹⁷⁴ Death Certificate of Daniel Leahy, 19 July 1918, 1918/4943, BDM.

¹⁷⁵ Avondale Asylum, Register of Admissions 1918-1928, p. 16, YCAA 1021/7, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁶ Inquests, Justice Department, J 46 COR, 1918/813, ANZ-W.

¹⁷⁷ Avondale Asylum, Register of Admissions 1918-1928, p. 16, YCAA 1021/7, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁸ Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 12 November 1919, Inspector of Mines, BBDO A902, MM 35, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁹ Death Certificate of Mary Ann Leahey [as recorded], 28 April 1927, 1927/2703, BDM.

the lady allowed her husband to leave for the polling place, and he was borne in triumph thereto by the wily scribe.¹⁸⁰

Over 30 years later, William McCullough, formerly of the *Thames Star*,¹⁸¹ revealed that he was the ‘newspaper man’ and Leahy was the drunk:

Bill McCullough’s chances were not looking too rosy, but if there was one who if he put in his pound would tilt the balance in favour of our William, that was Dan Leahy. Old Dan had one weakness ... and that was “too many spots and too often.” It is said that when he started on a bottle of whisky when at home he just stayed and finished it and another to boot; and he was not a lovely postcard those times.

When William called on Dan, Daniel had just come to judgment during a spree and had two lovely black eyes. Pleadings from Mac were no good – Dan would not face the public with those ornaments, and William felt that outside of Dan’s pride of beauty, it would not be policy to exhibit him in that state, but a happy thought struck him. Danby’s, the chemist, was opposite – William rushed across, got paint and soft brushes, and after an hour Dan stepped forth with as lovely a pink complexion as any girl could wish. William McCullough won his election, and he put it all down to his artistic abilities, but satisfied with his one effort he rested on his laurels.¹⁸²

McCullough had muddled the parliamentary election with his winning the mayoralty in 1878,¹⁸³ but otherwise had recalled the event accurately. It reveals that Mary Ann was, naturally enough, ashamed of her husband’s alcoholic excesses (and provided him with the black eye?). There were other excesses. In August 1876, two months before their marriage, when he was in Ohinemuri, a fellow Irishman lodged a ‘complaint’ against him, which did not end up in court.¹⁸⁴ In June the following year, when he was at Waitekauri, another Irishman accused him of assault with violence, a

¹⁸⁰ ‘Thames Tittle Tattle’, *Observer*, 31 December 1881, p. 244.

¹⁸¹ See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 22 October 1892, p. 2; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 96; *Observer*, 30 December 1899, p. 9, 1 August 1925, p. 4.

¹⁸² *Observer*, 26 July 1913, p. 4.

¹⁸³ *Thames Advertiser*, 29 November 1878, p. 2, 16 November 1881, p. 2, 28 November 1881, p. 3, 29 November 1881, p. 3, 1 December 1881, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 9 December 1881, p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ Mackaytown Police Station, Diary, entry for 24 August 1876, BAVA 4898/1a, ANZ-A.

charge not proceeded with because the parties settled the matter between themselves.¹⁸⁵ And in 1899, at Coromandel, he was charged with striking another man with his clenched fist. ‘Summons not served’, the clerk of the court recorded, either because the complainant did not wish the case to proceed or Leahy had made himself scarce.¹⁸⁶ No other accusations of violence were reported, but there may have been others, with alcohol as a probable cause. These occurrences may be sufficient to explain why the marriage lasted only a few years.

OLD AGE AND DEATH

Despite prospecting until at least 1911, in 1899, when aged 66, Leahy applied for an old age pension. A justice of the peace deposed that his character was ‘satisfactory’, and the magistrate was satisfied that his circumstances justified paying the full pension. He had no property, was living in a bush hut, had never been imprisoned, and his means were recorded as ‘nil’.¹⁸⁷ Two years later, although he earned £9 during the year, the full amount of £18 was renewed, an amount he continued to receive subsequently.¹⁸⁸

A Coromandel resident recalled that he ‘retired on a pension at the age of 66 and used to say, “God Bless Dick Seddon he made a rich man of me on 7/6 a week.” He finished his life at a ripe old age at the Upper township, respected by all’.¹⁸⁹ He may well have been respected: his obituary stated he was ‘widely known among the mining community and much respected for his integrity of character’;¹⁹⁰ but he did not die at Coromandel. Because of senile decay, he was admitted to the asylum in May 1918 ‘in a feeble

¹⁸⁵ Mackaytown Police Station, Diary, entries for 9 June 1877, 12 June 1877, BAVA 4898/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁶ Coromandel Magistrate’s Court, Record of Proceedings in Criminal Cases 1898-1904, folio 6, no. 9, BACL 13751/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁷ Coromandel Magistrate’s Court, Old Age Pension Claims 1899-1903, folio 39, ZAAN 14137/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁸ Coromandel Magistrate’s Court, Old Age Pension Claims 1899-1903, folios 101, 126, ZAAN 14137/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁹ Blithe, p. 20.

¹⁹⁰ *Coromandel County News*, 26 July 1918, p. 2.

state'.¹⁹¹ He died there, aged 85, two months later.¹⁹² Nearly nine years later, his widow died, aged 88, also in Auckland.¹⁹³

CONCLUSION

Dan Leahy was remembered fondly, and even his excessive drinking was recalled with humour, though it was not amusing for his wife and probably caused his marriage to collapse. He was an example of a man who spent most of his life prospecting, moving from area to area, and never making much money from his efforts. Even in old age he continued working, being regarded as a 'hatter' for his endless but futile explorations. But earlier in his life he was regarded as a prospector of integrity, for unlike some prospectors he never tried to trick others into putting money into a worthless discovery.

Appendix

Figure 1: Map showing location of old mines and stamper batteries in the Coromandel area, Phil Moore and Neville Ritchie, Coromandel Gold: A guide to the historic goldfields of the Coromandel Peninsular (Palmerston North, 1996), p. 72; used with permission.

¹⁹¹ Inquests, Justice Department, J 46 COR, 1918/813, ANZ-W.

¹⁹² Death Certificate of Daniel Leahy, 19 July 1918, 1918/4943, BDM.

¹⁹³ Death Certificate of Mary Ann Leahey [as recorded], 28 April 1827, 1927/2703, BDM.

