

THE OPENING DAY OF THE TE AROHA GOLDFIELD: 25

NOVEMBER 1880

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

## THE OPENING DAY OF THE TE AROHA GOLDFIELD: 25 NOVEMBER 1880

**Abstract:** *Possibly 800 people were present on the opening day of the new goldfield, most of who wanted to acquire mining claims or residence and business sites. The excitement meant they were up early in the morning, and, after struggling up the steep Prospectors' Spur, following the reading of the proclamation the shots to indicate that pegging out could commence were fired at 10.00. As several parties marked out the same ground or overlapped others' claims, Harry Kenrick and his officials readied themselves to resolve disputes. About 60 claims were pegged out, but Kenrick believed that, once these were surveyed, the real number of claims would be much less; his behaviour and recommendations were much praised. In the township rush, 54 sites were competed for, again with rival claims to ownership.*

*Compared with previous rushes, this opening day won accolades for its orderliness, and the new regulations required claims to be fully manned. The names chosen for claims revealed something about their owners, who, like everyone else, hoped for a prosperous field, for it had the potential to benefit the whole region.*

### READY FOR THE RUSH

According to a reporter who was present, Thursday, 25 November, was 'a red letter day in the annals of Te Aroha, for it saw the opening of a goldfield in that district which has every likelihood of becoming famous throughout the whole length and breadth of New Zealand'.<sup>1</sup> Another wrote that 'the arrangements previous to the opening were as complete as could be possibly made, so as to avoid confusion and prevent any one party obtaining undue advantage'. The anticipated difficulties 'were considerably increased by the fact that the township was necessarily thrown open at the same time as the goldfields, and consequently both business people and miners had to be attended to at the same time'. Early in the morning,

it was calculated that there were some eight hundred persons on the ground, and to these about five hundred and seven miners' rights, fifty-four quarterly, six half-yearly, and four yearly business licenses had been issued; and as the business licenses far exceeded the number of allotments available, while a large

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<sup>1</sup> Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

number of miners were anxious to secure a particular piece of ground, it was generally expected there would be a great scramble for, and no little excitement over, these favourite spots.<sup>2</sup>

Another correspondent believed that the number present ‘could not have been much less than a thousand, a great many of whom were merely visitors who arrived to see the show’.<sup>3</sup> Kenrick’s report of the opening stated that from 400 to 500 bona fide miners were present.<sup>4</sup> (‘Spectator’ responded that there were no more than 250 such miners.)<sup>5</sup> Many Thames ‘notabilities’ were present, and at Thames on the day of the rush ‘there were anxious inquiries for news from “the front,” but nothing of a definite nature arriving, people were obliged to possess their souls in patience until the return of the “specials” by the night boats’.<sup>6</sup>

John Dickson Wickham, a journalist working for the Auckland *Free Lance*,<sup>7</sup> was conspicuous when pegging out because he was ‘dressed in a brand-new suit, with high bell-topper hat’.<sup>8</sup> (He assisted to peg out a claim adjoining the Prospectors’ Claim, acquired an interest in the Free Lance No. 1, and became ‘interested in the working of several claims’.)<sup>9</sup> ‘There were a few Europeans so excited over meeting old faces on the new field that they forgot the chief business that brought them together, and did not peg out at all. [George] O’Halloran’s beer<sup>10</sup> seemed to have such an effect upon them that they were oblivious of everything else’.<sup>11</sup>

## EARLY MORNING

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<sup>2</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 29 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Thames Star*, 15 December 1880, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from ‘Spectator’, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> See *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 9; *Observer*, 16 July 1881, p. 489; *New Zealand Herald*, Police Court, 15 October 1883, p. 6, 9 October 1919, p. 8; *Free Lance*, 15 October 1919, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Thames Star*, plan of initial claims, 25 November 1880, p. 2, 29 November 1880, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 9 October 1919, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>11</sup> Special Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3.

The special reporter of the *Waikato Times* had spent the night before the opening across the river at the small settlement of Waihou:

On Thursday morning the weather was beautifully fine and warm, and everybody, as may be supposed, was early astir. Leaving [Edwin] Missen's hotel [at Waihou] (to which many of those crowded out of sleeping room on the field had retreated the previous night), at a little after 4 o'clock, our special proceeded towards the river. The air was fresh and pleasant, but, nevertheless, a four-mile walk is not to be thought lightly of, and the kind hospitality of Mr [Charles] Walnutt, who was found camped under the trees near the river, was a thing not to be rejected. Accordingly the straw packing in the case was disturbed, and something which sparkled brightly in the early sunlight produced and sampled.<sup>12</sup>

As Walnutt was a wine and spirit merchant in Hamilton,<sup>13</sup> what sparkled were bottles of his wares that men sampled before crossing the river by the punt. Walnutt did not take up shares in any claims. Missen<sup>14</sup> would acquire an interest in one claim and one company in 1881.<sup>15</sup>

Around and about here were a number of tents chiefly occupied by a contingent of Hamilton East people, who, so far as the mosquitoes would admit, were enjoying themselves thoroughly. Just close at hand was the punt landing, the ferryman being kept busily employed. On the other side the punt discharged its passengers directly under the bows of those ocean monsters [in fact puny river craft], the steamers Vivid and Memsahib, and a walk of three seconds brought travellers into what we suppose will be the main street of the town. Here, as early as 6 o'clock everybody was moving about, many had already disappeared in the bush, while the rest were busily preparing to follow. Here was a party just starting, one, it might be, carrying an axe, another a spade and tomahawk, while the rest followed bowed under the weight of huge bundles of "pegs," ready squared to the regulation size, and pointed.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Special Reporter, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Waikato Times*, 23 March 1880, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, 11 April 1882, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 228, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 9 June 1881, p. 744.

<sup>16</sup> Special Reporter, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

Another reporter described the early morning scene:

From early morn the canvas township styled Morgantown was the scene of unusual activity and excitement, no less than 600 or 700 people moving about in an excited manner, most of them with the implements necessary for pegging out in their hands and arms, and the remainder (who were to be the spectators) with their coats off all ready to start for the ranges behind the embryo township. The Warden's office was opened at half-past 5 a.m., and from that time until 9 o'clock, the hour fixed for the opening, Mr F[rederick] J[ames] Burgess, the indefatigable Receiver of Goldfields Revenue, was kept busily employed issuing miner's rights and forms of application for business and residence sites. The small weather-boarded building was literally rushed from 7 o'clock till 8.30, and Mr Burgess's energies were taxed to the utmost to supply the wants of the public. Over 500 miner's rights were issued by the hour of opening, including those issued by Mr A[lbert] J[ames] Allom at Grahamstown, more than half of which were taken out by Waikato and Auckland men.<sup>17</sup>

(Burgess would become a warden in the early twentieth century;<sup>18</sup> Allom was then the registrar of electors.)<sup>19</sup> Another reporter was 'informed by a good authority that no fewer than 500 miners' rights have been issued together with 80 business licenses so that the field has already given nearly £1000 of revenue'.<sup>20</sup> (The precise number of miners' rights issued at Te Aroha and Thames by nine o'clock was 507.)<sup>21</sup>

Some men coming from Thames arrived only just in time. 'One steamer, to have arrived a little after midnight, got stuck or delayed', and reached the settlement only at 8 o'clock, 'some of her passengers leaving her four miles down the river, and walking up to Te Aroha'.<sup>22</sup>

The first pigeongram sent to the *Thames Star* was written at Fraterville, below the Prospectors' Claim, at 7.30 in the morning:

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<sup>17</sup> Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> For example, *AJHR*, 1909, C-3, p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> See *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 2; Barrie Allom, *Dear Tyrant: An extraordinary colonial life* (Masterton, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Special Reporter, 'Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

This much talked of, much written about, and eagerly expected event, is to come off to-day, and already the whole of our population, which cannot be less than 800 or 900, are agog.... The scene before me just now as I am writing, I shall never forget. The plain resembles a large camp, the tents assuming a dazzling whiteness in the morning sun. Little wreaths of smoke show that many are preparing the morning meal, while those who have already breakfasted are evidently making preparations for the journey to the Prospectors'. Everyone appears in excellent humor, and so far as I can see, all traces of yesterday's discontent have departed. The supreme moment has arrived, and the people have no room in their thoughts for minor grievances - the great event of the day monopolising all their attention. I have just heard there is likely to be some excitement over the pegging out of township allotments, and that great numbers will remain on the flat to participate in that. Parties have been formed to prevent others from approaching the much prized corner sections. Every moment horsemen are seen dashing in from the Waikato, and as far as the eye can reach on the long straight road in front of me small clouds of dust betoken that others are on the way. Many familiar faces are to be seen.... But now I will have to lay aside my pen as the crowd are beginning to ascend the spur to the Prospectors' claim, and it will never do to miss the fun.<sup>23</sup>

#### CLIMBING THE PROSPECTORS' SPUR

Along with many others, the *Waikato Times* reporter struggled up to a point near the Prospectors' Claim:

By half past seven o'clock very few, except those intent on getting business sites, remained behind, and those latter were by no means idle; indeed the only passive spectators were a few dozen Maoris. On the slopes of the great mountain itself every sign of life and activity was discoverable, but little of this could be seen from below, the bush screening the operations from view. Up the tortuous bush paths, miners and would-be miners toiled incessantly, now along rudely cut lines, and now up through places where, probably, no human foot had hitherto trod, grasping for support to the trunks of young trees and the long tendrils of the supplejack, sometimes in spite of everything falling flat, and at all times exposed to the onslaughts of the most voracious of the mosquito tribe, which swarmed on all sides. By about eight ... the greater number of the men were in their places. Then was heard the musical sound of axes ringing through the woods and blending harmoniously with the songs of the birds, the

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<sup>23</sup> Special Reporter, 'Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

only interruption being an occasional coo-ee or halloo, and now and then some loudly spoken words in Maori from the direction of the Prospectors' claim. The time went on, slowly enough no doubt to those who were patiently waiting at the corners of claims ready to plunge their pegs in and to cut the directing trenches. A few moments before the momentous hour arrived there was a general hush through the forest; not a sound could be heard; even the birds ceased their warblings as if they too were anxiously awaiting the signal.<sup>24</sup>

A Thames reporter wrote that 'the climb up the spur is no laughing matter, and as the day was a bit warm everyone perspired freely, and were not sorry when the summit was reached. At half-past eight there were fully 300 persons on the hill, and the piles of pegs lying out clearly showed what was the object of the assemblage'.<sup>25</sup> The reporter for a new Auckland weekly, the *Observer*, who described the opening as 'a regular field day', was reminded much of a race meeting' in England,

with the tents, the excitement, the drinks, the horses and crowds, and the Maories, not a bad substitute for the roaming or gipsy tribe. I pegged, of course, I did somehow: I climbed up, with a party, the prospectors' spur, and thence tumbled up a creek, and put in a peg close to a bunga or punga tree. I put in a peg where I did because I was told that something would come of it. The peg had to be put in at the sound of a gun to be fired at 9 a.m. Where I stood the bush was dense, but through the openings of the trunks, branches, and leaves, I could see numbers of desperate looking individuals, each armed with a peg. I was surrounded with shark-headed fellows; they were as thick as what-d'ye-call-it leaves in autumn.<sup>26</sup>

### THE OFFICIALS ARRIVE

At 7.30, the warden, Harry Kenrick,<sup>27</sup> the native agent, George Thomas Wilkinson,<sup>28</sup> Mokena Hou, Alfred Francis Puckey, interpreter for

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<sup>24</sup> Special Reporter, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Special Reporter, 'Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Observer*, 18 December 1880, p. 126.

<sup>27</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>28</sup> See paper on Mereia Wikiriwhi and George Thomas Wilkinson.

the Thames magistrate's court,<sup>29</sup> James Monteith McLaren, the mining inspector,<sup>30</sup> and 'a number of constables' started to climb the spur. George Henry Arthur Purchas, a government surveyor, 'should have been with this party to point out the boundaries of the claim, but failed to put in an appearance until nearly 9 o'clock, and, consequently, the Warden had to trust to the men on the ground to point out the boundaries and corner pegs'.<sup>31</sup> (Purchas, who obtained a miner's right for the opening day,<sup>32</sup> would acquire interests in one claim at Te Aroha and six at Waiorongomai.<sup>33</sup> He resigned from the Survey Department at the end of 1881 to become a mining surveyor and engineer and later managed mines in several districts.)<sup>34</sup>

When the officials arrived at the Prospectors' Claim,

two men were placed at each corner of the ground, and instructed to watch the proceedings of those present, who were further told that if anyone attempted to use violence in any way whatever they were to immediately arrest such persons. The Warden then took up a commanding position on the upper line of the prospectors' claim, in view of the township and a large portion of the ground that so many were eager to secure for claims, and awaited the hour of opening the field. While thus waiting, a large crowd of persons, who had simply come up to watch the proceedings, assembled around the Warden.<sup>35</sup>

Those who intended to peg out were busy preparing:

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<sup>29</sup> See *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 35; *Auckland Star*, 10 February 1906, p. 6, 1 April 1936, p. 8; *Waikato Times*, 11 June 1906, p. 1, 15 June 1906, p. 2; *Wanganui Herald*, 23 July 1907, p. 5; *New Zealand Herald*, 27 March 1936, p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 867-868.

<sup>31</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 413, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1c, ANZ-A.

<sup>33</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 182, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 47, 53-55, 98, 119, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

<sup>34</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 13 October 1888, p. 2, 1 March 1898, p. 4; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7 (Christchurch, 1898), p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.



Between 8 and 9 the field was alive with men, and the gully below resounded with the sound of the axe of the digger busily engaged cutting down trees and fashioning them into pegs of the regulation size - viz, three inches square and not less than 2 1/2 feet in length. By twenty minutes to 9 every man was on the spot he intended to mark out, with pegs and mallet in hand, ready to peg out as soon as the guns were fired.<sup>36</sup>

## THE OPENING

Reporters described the scene on the hillside in great detail. The first account published was sent to the *Thames Star* in the second 'pigeongram', written at 9.30:

At six minutes to nine exactly, Mr Kenrick read the proclamation of the goldfield, with Geo. T. Wilkinson and old Mokena Hou (Morgan) with loaded guns standing beside him, their weapons at the "ready." During the reading of the verbose officially-worded document, the faces of the motley assemblage of hearers were studies for a painter. All were standing on the *qui vive* ['on the alert'],<sup>37</sup> with the strong excitement, under which they were laboring, plainly written across their features. As Mr Kenrick pronounced the words, "God save the Queen," at the end of the proclamation, Wilkinson and Morgan discharged their guns, and the field was open.<sup>38</sup>

When Kenrick began to read the proclamation, he 'so timed himself that the concluding words fell from his lips exactly at 9 o'clock'. Wilkinson and Mokena 'simultaneously fired the guns, and the pegs were at once driven into the ground, while a general cheer rose in all directions, and old Pineha raised a Union Jack flag'.<sup>39</sup> The latter was Piniha (sometimes Pineha) Marutuahu, of Ngati Maru,<sup>40</sup> who had been involved in opening Thames to mining.<sup>41</sup> Another account confirmed Kenrick's careful timing:

At five minutes to the appointed hour, Mr Warden Kenrick rose from his seat, and read the official notice.... By the time the

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<sup>36</sup> Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 5 ed. (Oxford, 1964), p. 1011.

<sup>38</sup> Special Reporter, 'Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> See *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Waikato Times*, 18 November 1890, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> See paper on Maori and mining.

reading of the proclamation was finished the watches showed nine o'clock, and at a signal from Mr Kenrick, Mr G.T. Wilkinson and Mokena Hou fired off two double-barrelled guns, the reports of which were heard all over the field. Immediately afterwards the air resounded with the sounds of pegging out and the cheering of the spectators, and the vicinity of the prospectors' claim presented an animated appearance, owing to those who had pegged out digging regulation trenches and driving their pegs further into the ground, and the numerous spectators rushing about from claim to claim to ascertain who had pegged them out, and whether any overlapped on each other.<sup>42</sup>

Miners in dense bush who could not see Kenrick had been waiting for the sound of the guns.

Nine o'clock; three sharp reports of a gun with innumerable reverberations, and the mountain seemed to have awakened from sleep. The sound which immediately followed the report of the firearms was a wild cheer, and then was heard the noise of timber smiting timber as the pegs were being driven into the ground, then the sound of the spade digging out the trenches, and then again the clink of the axe and tomahawk clearing the lines. Everybody now knew that the Aroha goldfield was opened, and, as one old digger remarked, nothing remained but to shovel out the precious metal itself. Excitement, such as that which took place at the opening of the field at Ohinemuri, there was none, because in this case there was no rushing and scrambling to be first on the ground; the miners' rights had been issued beforehand, and no quality except patience was called into requisition, nor were there any quarrels or rowdyism.<sup>43</sup>

The *Observer's* reporter attempted to be humorous about his pegging off:

The gun went off, and my peg went down into a small hole that I had cunningly made, and I waited to see what would come of it. I did not see any gold, but there was a loud hurrah and a yell from a crowd of natives that made me almost draw out my peg again, and stood ready to slay the first half-dozen that attempted to rush me; but it turned out to be a yell of joy, and then there was such a running and scrambling and shouting out Nos. of the miners'

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<sup>42</sup> Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Special Reporter, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

rights, and showing of pegs to Mr McLaren and other officers, as never was seen.<sup>44</sup>

A 1930 recollection described how members of a four-man party placed themselves at each corner of their proposed claim, 'which was overlapped in all directions. The gun went off at 9 a.m. and in went our pegs together with the pegs of about a dozen other claims; in fact our claim was a forest of pegs'.<sup>45</sup> A contemporary account recorded that

at each of the four corner pegs of the prospectors' claim, where the chief rush was, a policeman was stationed. Those pegging out five, six, and more stood quite close and friendly alongside, with pegs in hand, and as the guns fired down went the pick-heads and in went the pegs, so like a single movement that there could be no question of priority of application. The policemen then took the names of the several members of each party pegging out. In other parts of the range this method, of course, could not be adopted, and where the ground of one claim overlaps another hard swearing will have a show.<sup>46</sup>

The 9.30 pigeongram described the scene immediately after the proclamation:

Then the rush commenced, every man seizing a peg, and rushing off with it with all the speed he could muster, and if he was lucky enough, pegging out the piece of ground he had previously set his heart on. [William] Fraser,<sup>47</sup> [Adam] Porter,<sup>48</sup> and [John] McSweeney<sup>49</sup> stood along the line of the top corner of the Prospectors' Claim, while [Matthew] Vaughan and others took possession of the other corner pegs.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Observer*, 18 December 1880, p. 126.

<sup>45</sup> Extract from letter from C.J.W. Barton, 27 October 1930, printed in *Te Aroha and the Fortunate Valley: Pioneering in the Thames Valley 1867-1930*, ed. F.W. Wild (Te Aroha, 1930), p. 349.

<sup>46</sup> Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> See paper on Harry Kenrick.

<sup>48</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>49</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>50</sup> Special Reporter, 'Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

(Fraser, warden from 1872 until his dismissal in 1879,<sup>51</sup> was now a mining speculator.<sup>52</sup> He invested in six claims and two companies during the rush.<sup>53</sup> Vaughan, a Thames publican who later became a publican and storekeeper at Ohinemuri as well,<sup>54</sup> had invested in both districts.<sup>55</sup> In the late 1870s he was director of several Ohinemuri companies.<sup>56</sup> In this rush he became an owner of one claim and director of one company; he later held interests in nine claims and six companies at Waiorongomai.)<sup>57</sup>

At the favorite corner - the North-east - a number of parties had taken up a position to commence pegging, and it was here that the densest of the crush was. The relative positions of the claims pegged out are shown on the rough plan I send with this message.

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<sup>51</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 6 January 1872, p. 8; *AJHR*, 1879, Session 2, I-1, p. 1; 1881, I-1, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> For example, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 March 1881, p. 3, 10 October 1881, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 14 April 1881, p. 445, 18 August 1881, p. 1088, 3 November 1881, pp. 1442, 1443.

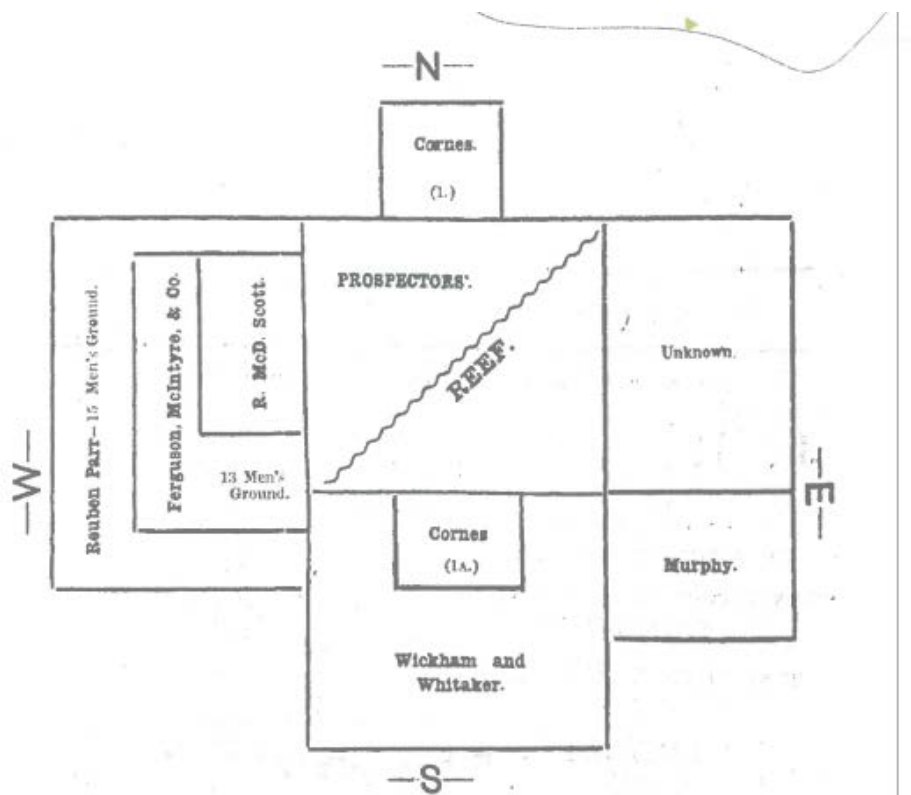
<sup>53</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 176, 192, 202, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Applications 1880-1882, folio 103, BBAV 11505/3a; Plaint Book 1880-1898, 2, 5/1880, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1797, 24 January 1881, p. 111.

<sup>54</sup> See *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 28 July 1869, p. 642; *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 19 December 1871, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 25 February 1875, p. 3, 11 March 1875, p. 3, 14 April 1875, p. 3, 18 August 1876, p. 3, 15 June 1878, p. 2, Police Court, 28 July 1880, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> For Thames, see for example Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868, folios 184, 231, 242, 279, BACL 14397/1a, ANZ-A; *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 6 July 1868, p. 326, 30 December 1868, p. 579; for Ohinemuri, see for example *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 September 1875, p. 616, 18 November 1875, p. 736.

<sup>56</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, 14 August 1876, p. 3, 29 August 1876, p. 3, 20 September 1876, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 153, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 3, 4, 6, 8, 14, 22, 25, 39, 156, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 7 December 1880, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 March 1882, p. 490, 22 June 1882, p. 895, 10 August 1882, p. 1101, 16 November 1882, p. 1732, 4 December 1882, p. 1885, 22 November 1883, p. 1675.



There never was a more orderly opening - no high words and no quarrelling, every man putting in his peg, without interfering with his neighbour. Immediately after reading the proclamation, the Warden had men placed at each corner of the Prospectors' claim to take notes. He himself was at one, McLaren at another, while [George] Wilson and [Albert] Russell occupies the third and fourth.<sup>58</sup>

McLaren did not take up any interests, at least not under his own name. Wilson, an early Thames miner who would succeed McLaren as mining inspector, was then an underviewer.<sup>59</sup> He became an owner of one claim at Te Aroha and two at Waiorongomai.<sup>60</sup> Sergeant Russell served as a policeman from 1868 to 1885.<sup>61</sup> He would take out a miner's right on 20

<sup>58</sup> Special Reporter, 'Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>60</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 167, BBAV 11567/1a; Hone Werahiko to Warden, 28 October 1881, Mining Applications 1881, BBAV 11591/1a; Transfers and Assignments 1882, no. 164, BBAV 11581/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>61</sup> Police Department, Descriptive Book, A.C. Force, no. 311, folio 89, no. 82, P 8/1, ANZ-W.

December, being the same day he obtained shares in two claims at Tui.<sup>62</sup> He later acquired interests in three Waiorongomai ones.<sup>63</sup> During 1881 and 1882, he invested in mines at Waihi and Waitekauri.<sup>64</sup> He would be removed from his post at Paeroa in 1883, on Kenrick's urging, because he was 'mixed up in mining speculations'.<sup>65</sup>

#### AFTER CLAIMS WERE PEGGED OUT

After pegging out each party had to show the men pegging out, and every man had to produce his miner's right. Mr Kenrick took down the names, and in case of any disputes will decide the claims of each.

I have just heard that gold was taken out of one of the claims this morning, and that [Duncan Martin] McIntyre<sup>66</sup> and party have got the cap of the reef in their ground, but it is impossible to tell who will get it yet.<sup>67</sup>

McIntyre would have shares in one claim and one company, but not find anything worthwhile, and in late January left for the new Tiki field in Coromandel.<sup>68</sup> The *Observer* reporter discovered that his party 'had pegged

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<sup>62</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 1617, issued 20 December 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880-1881, BBAV 11533/1g; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 20, 203, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

<sup>63</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 25, 47, 62, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

<sup>64</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1875-1882, folios 143, 161, 165, 182, BACL 14397/10a; Register of Thames Claims 1880-1882, claim 963, BACL 14397/13a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 18 August 1881, p. 1088, 3 November 1881, p. 1442, 20 July 1882, p. 988.

<sup>65</sup> Harry Kenrick to Native Minister, 6 February 1883; Harry Kenrick to Minister of Justice, 6 February 1883, Thames Warden's Court, Receiver of Gold Revenue Letterbook 1878-1892, folios 275-277, 279-280, ZAAN 14143/1b; Albert Russell to Kenrick, 30 March 1883, Thames Warden's Court, Inward Correspondence to Resident Magistrate and Warden, BACL 13388/1a, ANZ-A; Memorandum by Inspector Thomson, February 1883, Justice Department, J 1, 83/998, ANZ-W.

<sup>66</sup> See paper on rumours of gold at Te Aroha.

<sup>67</sup> Special Reporter, 'Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 217, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1881, p. 111; *Thames Star*, 19

right into the middle' of where McIntyre and John Frater, a sharebroker,<sup>69</sup> had found gold.<sup>70</sup> 'Over fifty men had pegged in the same place', which became known as the Bonanza claim once the parties merged.<sup>71</sup> 'McIntyre did not seem to like it at all, and got into a regular scott', meaning 'a display of irritability and bad temper'.<sup>72</sup> Frater and Peter Ferguson<sup>73</sup> 'didn't say much, but no doubt thought the more'.<sup>74</sup>

The last pigeongram to be published on opening day was written at noon:

[John] Dixon<sup>75</sup> took a party to peg out a claim, in which a reef was visible, some distance from the prospectors' claim, but could not show a color of gold, and the party whose expectations were high, have just returned here disgusted and crestfallen. From what I have heard during the last few minutes, I am led to believe that there is likely to be more trouble over the township allotments than the claims. Proposals have already been made to amalgamate the parties in several of the claims, and it is likely that companies will be formed at once. It is now said that the way the Warden proposed to deal with the claims is very fair, though it is probable there will be some fighting amongst those who have been disappointed in the pegging out.<sup>76</sup>

More pigeongrams was printed on the following day:

I must admit that I was somewhat disappointed that more discoveries did not see the light of day. However, I have hopes

January 1881, p. 2, 4 April 1881, p. 2, 26 May 1881, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1881, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, 9 August 1887, pp. 2-3; *New Zealand Herald*, 29 September 1927, p. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 254, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>71</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Observer*, 18 December 1880, p. 126; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folio 101, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A; *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 December 1880, p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8 ed., ed. Paul Beale (London, 1984), p. 1021.

<sup>73</sup> See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

<sup>74</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Observer*, 18 December 1880, p. 126.

<sup>75</sup> See paper on rumours of gold at Te Aroha.

<sup>76</sup> Special Reporter, 'Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

that during the next day or two a great deal more will be known. In Mr [James] Gribble's claim on the south side of the bald spur, a reef about 3 feet thick has been discovered from which a trial crushing yielded at the rate of half an ounce per ton. He pegged off fifteen men's ground, but someone else had got wind of his discovery, and pegged off about six men's ground right in the centre of his claim.<sup>77</sup>

Gribble was a principal shareholder in what became the United.<sup>78</sup> 'Charlie Jenkins and others pegged off a claim of 13 men's ground at some distance from the Prospectors' and I was told by one of the party that they have a reef showing gold'.<sup>79</sup> Jenkins, a miner,<sup>80</sup> was an owner of the Morning Star.<sup>81</sup> Thomas Fitzgerald, occupation unknown, headed a party that had 'a good show' in their Golden Hill claim on the western side of the Prospectors'.<sup>82</sup>

One correspondent estimated that 'about 60 claims were pegged off'. In one gully 'a party composed entirely of tradesmen from Hamilton, Cambridge, and Ngaruawahia' had a claim which they would call Tradesman's Gully. Many prospecting parties were 'paid and provisioned by the Waikato storekeepers who seem thoroughly determined to get a footing on the field'.<sup>83</sup> Fourteen claims adjoining the Prospectors' Claim, several near the bottom of that spur, and more on Whakapipi, or Bald Spur. Half a mile to the east of the township was 'Jimmy Acton's discovery';<sup>84</sup> Acton,

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<sup>77</sup> Special Reporter, 'Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 156, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>79</sup> Special Reporter, 'Additional Notes of the Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> See Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 April 1877, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 3 September 1880, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 153, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>82</sup> Special Reporter, 'Additional Notes of the Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 169, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>83</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Special Reporter, 'Additional Notes of the Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2.



formerly a Karangahake miner,<sup>85</sup> in fact had not discovered anything valuable in his Morning Star.<sup>86</sup> Other claims were ‘pegged off in various directions, and over a considerable area of ground’.<sup>87</sup> And there were many rival claimants to the same ground:

It would, indeed, have been strange had there been no disputes or complications, but these were with one consent left to the wisdom of the Warden to determine, no disposition being exhibited to settle matters according to the rules of the prize ring. That Mr Kenrick has got his hands full is certain; in the immediate vicinity of the Prospectors’ claim, some of the ground has been included in a very large number of claims, about a dozen we believe ... and in other parts of the field similarly eccentric problems will have to be worked out.... All the disputes about the boundaries will be settled by the Warden with as little delay as possible, and where practicable on the ground in dispute.

About 11 o’clock, Mr Warden Kenrick, who had been waiting on the ranges at the flag, addressed the miners who had been seeking particulars as to the precise nature of the disputes in existence, saying the whole matter would be investigated by him at the proper time, now they had arrived at the real questions of disputes as roughly shown on the hasty sketches made and submitted to him, and that the men who actually did peg off would be identified or not as the case may be by the constables stationed on the ground. And to facilitate the investigations he would strongly advise anyone interested to employ a surveyor, and get a proper plan prepared for reference, in order that the places overlapping might be distinctly shown, and borne out either by reference to the plan itself, or, if necessary, another inspection of the ground. This would narrow the whole matter, and the evidence would then have due consideration.

The anxious claimants seemed highly satisfied at this by the remarks expressed, and they then dispersed, Mr Kenrick making tracks in big jumps to his own claim, which he thought no man could dispute, viz, a much needed draught of the mountain stream. On arriving at the flat he found as much difficulty at

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<sup>85</sup> See Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Ohinemuri Claims 1875, folios 6, 22, BBAV 11568/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1875, p. 3, 10 June 1878, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 153, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 31 March 1881, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Special Reporter, ‘Additional Notes of the Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2.

obtaining an hour's respite for his hard worked clerks, who he said had not had anything to eat or drink since 4 p.m.<sup>88</sup>

Officials recorded the names of those who had pegged out, a task

of considerable difficulty, as the majority of the sections are situated in the gullies and the dense bush on either side of the burnt spur, and it was not until eleven o'clock that the officials succeeded in laying before the Warden the result of their labours. Mr Kenrick found on examining the rough sketches of the claims that many of those who had pegged out near the prospectors had marked off, as he had anticipated, the same piece of ground, in some cases no less than seven and eight different parties having pegged out the same sections, and he endeavoured there and then to settle the dispatches, but found them of such a complicated nature that he was compelled to give up the task, and allow them to be settled by survey. Mr Kenrick is of opinion that after the disputed claims have been surveyed, the disputes will be narrowed down considerably, as it will be found, he thinks, that many of the diggers have marked out less ground than they have applied for. Should this prove to be the case, he will hold a sitting of the Warden's Court, and hear and decide the claims of the several parties to the respective pieces of ground they have taken up. The survey will probably be made this week, in which case there is every likelihood of the disputes being settled by Monday or Tuesday. The expense of surveying will have to be borne by the miners interested.

Because of 'the density of the bush and the steepness of the hills', reporters had great difficulty locating claims and discovering the names of their owners.

On the previous evening a rumour was current on the flat that an attempt was to be made to "jump" the prospectors' claim on some legal technicality; but the report could not have had any foundation, for no steps in that direction were attempted to be taken. By the time the dinner hour arrived all excitement on the hills had subsided, and the next event of importance in the history of the young goldfield will be the decision of the Warden in regard to the disputed pieces of ground. The opening of the field was a very successful one. The anticipations of a large number of people that there would be "hot work" when the claims were being marked off, were happily not fulfilled, and the whole proceedings were most orderly, there being no quarrelling or high

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<sup>88</sup> Special Reporter, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

words, but, on the contrary, much joking on the part of those engaged in the work of pegging out, and the services of a posse of police stationed on the ground were not once required.<sup>89</sup>

It was expected that rival parties to ground on the south and west of the Prospectors' Claim would 'amalgamate and form one large claim'. On the northern side, it was probable that no decisions could be made 'until each party have their claim surveyed and drawn up on a plan, when it will be seen where they overlap each other, and also ascertained whether any party have pegged off more ground than they ought to have'. Most miners were 'doing their utmost to assist' Kenrick 'in every way possible', but 'a few' were 'making difficulties where none should exist, and amongst these are some who, from their position, ought to know better'. Kenrick's position was 'a very trying one, but his actions are such that they give general approval among all right-thinking people', according to an Auckland reporter.<sup>90</sup>

'After the excitement of the morning had a little subsided, a great many miners might have been seen for miles along the High School Reserve', the site of the future Waiorongomai settlement,

and on the principal spurs of the mountain evidently engaged in prospecting, as every man was armed with a pick, while not a few also carried tin dishes with which to pan off along the creeks. Others, however, engaged themselves in a totally different manner waiting about the township, and occasionally drinking at the hotel. Mr O'Halloran must have done an exceedingly good business. He has had his bar considerably lengthened, and the demand for refreshers kept four men hard at work. With all that there was but little drunkenness, and I only saw one scrimmage the whole day. Judging from the tenor of the general conversation everyone seemed satisfied that the opening was over with so few complications.<sup>91</sup>

Another correspondent agreed that O'Halloran 'did a roaring trade all day'.<sup>92</sup> Another confirmed that 'the best paying claim on the field that day'

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<sup>89</sup> Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Special Reporter, 'Additional Notes of the Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Special Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3.

was his hotel, where there was a great 'scramble for drinks' in the evening.<sup>93</sup>

In the afternoon the excitement had somewhat subsided; the diggers descended from the mountain and joined in the general discussion on the merits and demerits of the field. Now that the ground had actually been pegged out, there was little or none of that mystery apparent, which pervaded the very atmosphere but a few hours before. The direction of this and that claim was indicated freely, and reported indications were spoken of openly. Although the Prospectors' claim was the chief centre of attraction, that locality is by no means the only one which has been pegged in. It is believed that claims have been marked out miles away, and on the other side of the mountain....

Towards evening most of the visitors and many of the Waikato people interested left for home on horseback and in buggies.<sup>94</sup>

One correspondent wrote that the field had opened 'like the battle of Waterloo, with the sound of guns, but fortunately no blood followed' because Kenrick had warned that any man using violence would lose his claim. 'The consequence was that everything was quiet as it should be'. He then had to abandon his dispatch: 'The steamer is just whistling, as a signal for departure, so I must reluctantly close my letter, but the public may rest assured that other claims besides the prospectors are on payable gold'.<sup>95</sup>

William Corless Breakell, a civil engineer, specialized in draining Hauraki swamps, and shortly before the opening had been working near Waitoa.<sup>96</sup> In the rush, he obtained an interest in one claim.<sup>97</sup> He had 'gone a long distance over the ranges, was overtaken on his return by the dark shroud of night, and had to lay down in the wet bush until daylight. His friends were afraid that he had been lost, and a search party was about to

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<sup>93</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 29 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Special Reporter, *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 5 October 1880, p. 3; for examples of his work as a drainage engineer, see *Waikato Times*, 25 July 1882, p. 2, 6 September 1892, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 February 1881, p. 22, 13 August 1881, p. 11, 20 February 1908, p. 24, 23 April 1908, p. 22, 30 September 1909, p. 21, 22 December 1910, p. 36; *New Zealand Herald*, 22 February 1923, p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 182, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Observer*, 4 December 1880, p. 99.

start after him when he turned up'.<sup>98</sup> The *Observer* described how Breakell coped when left behind in the dark by the rest of his party. 'Caring not to proceed for fear of an accident, William cut a sufficiency of supplejacks, which he twined round the adjacent trees, and lay down'. Bitten on his brow by mosquitoes, he took off his shirt 'and wrapped it round his head', saving that portion of his anatomy at the expense of his body, which suffered acutely'. Heavy rain before morning drove the insects away. 'Strange that the mention of "supplejacks" should be so unpleasant to W.C.B.'.<sup>99</sup>

### THE TOWNSHIP RUSH

The most exciting rush was in the township, where 54 allotments had been surveyed.<sup>100</sup> Kenrick had stipulated that sites should be marked off at the same time as mining claims were pegged out. O'Halloran recalled the 'very lively scene', with groups of men 'scattered all over the flat' ready to be first to peg off the favourite lots'. Sometimes there were up to 'a dozen men at each corner of a lot' with 'pegs in hand ready to drop in when the guns went off. It was understood that where all pegged at the same time that there being two or more applicants for the same ground lots should be drawn'.<sup>101</sup> O'Halloran himself pegged out a business site but lost it to a rival, but four days later successfully applied for another two.<sup>102</sup>

Shortly before nine o'clock close on 100 people had assembled in the vicinity of the Warden's office, each bearing a three by three peg. As nine o'clock approached all were standing breathlessly waiting for the signal gun to declare that the field was open. Presently the loud report echoed through the air. The hitherto immobile mass of humanity became thoroughly animated, every man of them rushing wildly and putting in his peg. Of course the corner sections were the principal points of attack, and in some of them seven or eight persons put up their stakes.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 29 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Observer*, 4 December 1880, p. 99.

<sup>100</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> George Stewart O'Halloran, untitled memoirs (1894), pp. 121-122, MS 1345, Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>102</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folio 5, no. 11, folios 67-70, nos. 179, 181, BBAV A485/1, ANZ-A.

<sup>103</sup> Special Reporter, 'Additional Notes of the Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2.

‘The excitement in the township surpassed anything of the kind’ one Thames reporter had ever seen.

Every would-be-possessor of a business license was informed that it would be a case of “first come first satisfied,” always pending that the terms of the goldfields regulations affecting the process of marking off had been duly complied with. Long before the hour appointed for firing the guns on the hillside, men were to be seen in all descriptions of costumes heckling pieces of three by three, or hurrying frantically about in search of such material as would enable them to comply with the Act. The regulation timber was at a premium, and five shillings were freely given for four pieces of three feet by two and a-half feet, the vendor being looked upon as a benefactor to the new field. It was amusing to witness the eagerness which many evinced in their amateur efforts. There were some old hands at the work, and they were the centre of attraction, the focus of inquiry. The flat appeared to have just been taken possession of by a small army en dishabille, who were engaged in trenching and fortifying the ground. Then, as the hour of nine o’clock arrived, you could see increased bustle, furtive glances at pocket chronometers, frantic examinations of pegs, and corners, and angles, and then an apparent intention to stand their ground against the imaginary attack of an imaginary foe. Then attention was directed to a spot half-way up the mountain, in front denoted by a flag, and an anxious moment awaited. The flash of a gun and the curl of powder smoke indicated that the enemy was at hand. Some gave their pegs nearest them a few severe blows and hastened off to other corner pegs, without waiting for the second gun, which was really the signal intended. Others did the thing in orthodox way, and waited for the second gun before. Some only attended to one peg, leaving the rest to peg off the other corner, but at least there was a perfect phalanx of men all entirely engaged in driving, as if for dear life, a piece of regulation sized timber bearing certain initials or marks.<sup>104</sup>

After the rush, ‘an old and highly respected resident of Reefton’ described his experiences in a letter to a friend:

I arrived from Auckland on the day before and was fortunate enough to secure one of the best business sections in the township. Such a scramble for sections as there was in Te Aroha on the opening day and at the opening hour you never saw. To have stood on the hill side at the back of the newly surveyed

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<sup>104</sup> Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

township and overlooking the same, and have witnessed the eager expectancy of some scores of faces turned towards the hill from which the signal gun was to be fired, which should proclaim the field open, and when that signal was given at 9 a.m. to have seen the rush of men racing each round the allotment he had selected with pegs in hand, ready pointed, to facilitate their driving, must have been a spectacle not to be witnessed every day. But though I saw the peggers ready waiting at the corners of their allotments, and in some cases there were as many as 6 or 7 competitors for the same allotment, yet I saw nothing of the rush itself, for the moment the puff of smoke appeared, and not even waiting to hear the report of the gun, I was driving my first peg and went round the section to drive the other three, and being the first in the run, secured the section.<sup>105</sup>

When Te Aroha celebrated its jubilee in 1930, a story was published about the pegging out of the township:

Two well-known young bloods in search of a good corner section had decided on the site where the Palace Hotel now stands. This special section was the goal of a great many other prospectors, so that couple decided on a rather novel method to secure it. When the signal was given the young fellows, with many others, sprinted for the corner piece. Arrived there they immediately started a hot argument which rapidly developed into fisticuffs. Before any of the startled prospectors could commence pegging a wide ring had been cleared and many, forgetting the excitement of the day, started to barrack one or other of the contestants. The pugilists danced about to all intents in deadly earnest. When the ring was wide enough the two stopped their battle and quickly seizing peg and axe drove home their centre peg, thereby claiming the section before the surprised onlookers could collect their wits. Afterwards the joke was appreciated and the couple sold their claim at a handsome turnover.<sup>106</sup>

While it is a pity to spoil a good story, the corners were pegged, not the centre, and contemporary accounts did not mention any fights, mock or otherwise. As always, stories improved over time; for another instance, when William Henry Bunting of Paeroa died in 1933, his obituary stated that when in his twenties he had gone 'in search of gold in the Te Aroha district, and pegged the first claim after the field there had been thrown

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<sup>105</sup> Charles Brunn to James Grieve, n.d. [late December 1880], printed in *Inangahua Times*, 7 January 1881, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 August 1930, p. 4.

open to the public'.<sup>107</sup> Not only was there no contemporary mention of his being a prospector, he had no involvement in the opening, not even taking out a miner's right; but clearly he had told his family of his exploits and they, naturally, had believed him.

In 1936, a local historian stated that tradesmen 'paid men to claim a section for them, whilst they took part in the rush for gold'.<sup>108</sup> An example was Benjamin Rees, who was not a true businessman but was employed by speculators for this purpose, or so a merchant claimed.<sup>109</sup>

After the pegging out there was a rush to the warden's office to lodge applications. William Burton, a leading Thames publican, who had invested in many Hauraki mines,<sup>110</sup> was the first to reach it.

The closed door flew open with a crash before his frantic rush, and in another moment the small office was packed with excited applicants, each and every one bawling to Mr Burgess to receive their application. He, however, refused to do this until order was restored, and when the excitement had toned down a little he received the applications, numbering and endorsing each paper carefully. Mr Burgess deserves the greatest credit for the coolness he displayed during this trying period; the excitement and clamor would have quite incapacitated a more nervous man.<sup>111</sup>

Burton acquired an interest in only one claim, and his attempts to obtain business sites failed.<sup>112</sup> The *Thames Advertiser* gave additional details of the 'scene of the wildest excitement':

The pegging operations completed, a stampede for the Warden's office ensued, resembling the retreat of an army hotly pursued by a fast advancing foe. The door was closed, but the first-comer

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<sup>107</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 January 1933, p. 11.

<sup>108</sup> C.T. Harris, 'The Upper Thames Valley', *Te Aroha News*, 13 July 1936, p. 8.

<sup>109</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, nos. 26, 122, BBAV 11505/3a; Theodore Wood to Harry Kenrick, 29 November 1880, Mining Applications 1880, BBAV 11591/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>110</sup> See paper on Henry Hopper Adams.

<sup>111</sup> Special Reporter, 'Additional Notes on the Opening of Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 26 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 165, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Applications 1880-1882, nos. 18-20, 128, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 18 December 1880, p. 2.



speedily broke it open, “locks, bolts, and bars” flying asunder with magic celerity before his eager attack. He was soon joined by a number of others, who chased him from various directions, and in less than two minutes the interior of the office was a perfect pandemonium. The Receiver of Gold Revenue, Mr Burgess, and his assistant, Mr Craig, were the objects of their attack. Armed with pieces of paper representing forms of application, which had been prepared before-hand, they besought Mr Burgess to receive them, and he as persistently refused to do so until something like order was restored. Those in the rear ranks, in the excitement of the moment, mounted chairs and tables in their efforts to reach the papers over the shoulders of those in front. About twenty or thirty hands were reached forward and paper upon paper obtruded in front of the bewildered official, and the surging, frantic mob continued this excitement until their solicitude regarding the forms had been appeased. Many were literally thrown at the officers, who were quite powerless to receive and endorse them, so long as the scramble lasted. At one time the police were called for, but their interference was not necessary in the long run, even supposing they had been on the spot. The papers were all carefully numbered and retained in order that the numerous applications for the same lots might be investigated. For choice lots and corners, as many as six or seven applications were put it.

Applicants included businessmen from Auckland, Hamilton, Cambridge, and other Waikato towns, but most came from Thames, including some pioneers of that field. Two applications for water races and machine sites were lodged. ‘Only one application was lodged for a residence site, owing to arrangements not being perfected for laying off such a reserve’.<sup>113</sup> According to one report, because not all had been able to obtain a business site Kenrick ordered the surveying of another block in front of the Hot Springs Hotel.<sup>114</sup> Another account stated that ‘in some cases there were nine applicants for the same business allotment, while some allotments were not applied for at all’. As there were 52 applicants for half that number of sites, the extra survey was ordered.<sup>115</sup> Another report had all 54 sections surveyed taken up, the greatest number of claimants for one being 15.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.

<sup>115</sup> Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

<sup>116</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 November 1880, p. 2.

## AFTER THE DAY'S EXCITEMENTS

In the evening,

Beds could not be procured for love or money. All the tents were over-crowded, your correspondent having six in his 8 x 10, and a number of respected Thames citizens ... secured an uneasy resting place in the empty hold of a cutter that had brought up a cargo of timber, whilst a great many coiled up in the fern. Some wisely came in a party and brought a tent with them. During the night it rained heavily, and completed the discomforture of the unfortunates, who had been unable to find shelter.... After a storm there is a lull; and yesterday the excitement having subsided seemed dull, the majority of our visitors having, at early morn, taken their departure.<sup>117</sup>

A Hamilton correspondent expected that half of those present would leave within a fortnight, 'for a great many' were 'mere brokers on and speculators in business sites and shares'. Many miners would be 'quite unable to stand it out, having little or no means, and the development of the Te Aroha field, as any miner should see at a glance, means a large amount of labour and money'.<sup>118</sup>

## A QUIET OPENING

At Thames, there were fears 'of disturbances being likely to occur, but the receipt of pigeon messages set that matter at rest, and satisfaction took the place of anxiety when it became known that some of the scenes of former peggings out of claims had not sullied the opening of Te Aroha. There is some satisfaction in a peaceful beginning'.<sup>119</sup> A Hamilton Correspondent described the rush as a 'comparatively tame affair' compared with Ohinemuri in 1875. 'Although a very fair amount of drinking was going on, nothing could exceed the orderliness of the place. During the twenty-four hours I was there, and through all the excitement of the pegging out there was nothing approaching the appearance of a row, or even

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<sup>117</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 29 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

<sup>119</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

an individual fight',<sup>120</sup> which refuted the later tale of an orchestrated brawl when business sites were pegged out. The *Thames Advertiser* reported 'one or two Maori quarrels, but the services of the police were not called into requisition, and, indeed, it would have been difficult to know what to do with them if any arrests had been necessary', there being no lock-up.<sup>121</sup> As a later account of the notable events of 1880 expressed it, 'the whole proceedings were conducted in a most orderly manner, it being said to be the most quiet goldfield opening that ever took place in New Zealand'.<sup>122</sup> The *New Zealand Herald* agreed that 'the proceedings were characterised by the utmost good feeling among all concerned'.<sup>123</sup> Its editorial stated that

the whole of the arrangements have been completely successful. The pegging out has taken place without the semblance of a row, and so far as present appearances go, the field will soon settle down to work-a-day life. There need be no apprehension that the colony will be scandalised by such an affair as the Ohinemuri miners' rights swindle.<sup>124</sup>

It expected that the regulations would mean prospecting instead of shepherding for speculative purposes:

Ground taken up must be manned and worked at once. The object of this is to secure really effective and speedy prospecting. Under the former system an acute man could hold a claim for a considerable time, with a fortnight's protection to start with, and some days or weeks before he could be ejected by ordinary goldfields process.<sup>125</sup>

## NAMING CLAIMS

The names of the first 40 claims pegged out<sup>126</sup> revealed something about their owners. Some were named after the principal member of the

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<sup>120</sup> Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 December 1880, p. 11.

<sup>121</sup> Spccial Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> *Thames Directory for 1881* (Thames, 1881), p. 97.

<sup>123</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 4.

<sup>125</sup> Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 26 November 1880, p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1880-1881, BBAV 11557/1a, 11557/1b, ANZ-A.

partnership, as in the case of those called T. Quinn's, Clem Cornes, and Paltridge. Thomas Quinn,<sup>127</sup> an experienced miner, had obtained the third miner's right in the Thames rush of 1867.<sup>128</sup> The claim named after him was not registered, and he became an owner of only one claim.<sup>129</sup> Cornes was a prominent Hauraki miner who would discover the Tui mines.<sup>130</sup> Henry Paltridge, then a Thames ironworker, miner and director of a mining company, and later a mine manager,<sup>131</sup> not take up any interests. Although Akuhata Mokena<sup>132</sup> was the first man listed as a shareholder in Morgan's Claim, it is likely that it was named after his father, Mokena Hou.<sup>133</sup> Other names revealed the district from whence many or all of the shareholders came: Gisborne, Hamilton, Huntly, Puke-Paeroa (meaning the junction of the Waihou and Ohinemuri rivers), Belmont (the Thorp family's farm near Paeroa),<sup>134</sup> and Waitoa Prospecting Association. One, the Comstock, was named after a successful mine in the United States of America. Others revealed their location, such as Te Aroha No. 2 (indicating it was alongside the Prospectors' Claim), Te Aroha No. 2 South, and Fern Hill. Some had optimistic names: Early Dawn, Morning Light, Sunbeam, Morning Star, Queen of Beauty, and Bright Smile. Gold was often included, as in Golden Crown, Golden Hill, Golden Gate, Golden Gate No. 2, Golden Eagle, and Golden Eagle No. 2. Two were called United, one with 15 partners and the other with 13, because rival claimants had amalgamated. Nonpareil was possibly named after a successful Thames mine or just reflected its anticipated worth. All four (later five) owners of Our Boys were aged under 21.<sup>135</sup> Some were named after important people: Edison, Victoria, and the

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<sup>127</sup> See *Observer*, 25 January 1902, p. 4.

<sup>128</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 3, issued 8 August 1867, Register of Miners' Rights 1867-1868, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>129</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 192, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>130</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>131</sup> See *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 33; *New Zealand Herald*, 29 July 1880, p. 6, 22 August 1896, p. 5; advertisement, *Thames Advertiser*, 19 August 1880, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 25 January 1893, p. 2; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 21 October 1896, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>133</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>134</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 31 August 1870, p. 3; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 856.

<sup>135</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 1 February 1881, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 24 February 1881, p. 2.

Prince of Wales; was the Rose of Denmark a reference to the Princess of Wales? The significance of Waverley, Juno, and Downers are uncertain: could the last be a reference to drinking? Moana was presumably just meant to be romantic, for there were no lakes in the hills. Free Lance Nos. 1 and 2 were named after the weekly journal of the same name; Wickham, its leading journalist, was the first to be listed in No. 1.<sup>136</sup>

### A PROSPEROUS FUTURE FORECAST

Commenting on the implications created by the new field, a Thames newspaper believed it would

benefit all parties and localities within the range of communication with Te Aroha. The existence of gold in such a magnificent district means an increased population, and the cultivation of lands yet unproductive, and from this point of view all sections of the community should hail with satisfaction the advent of a fresh field of enterprise. It means a revival of business - at present to our steamboat proprietors, and others. The success of our local merchants and vendors, who can supply almost every requisite for the erection of a home and feeding the multitude, the making of roads, highways, and bridges, can not merely benefit local interests, but like as a pebble thrown into the water will increase its circle until it reaches the banks of the lake, so will money locally expended find its way to the right and to the left.<sup>137</sup>

### CONCLUSION

At last, the long wait was over, and the field was officially opened. After an exciting day noted for remarkable decorum, ground could be worked and a township established. The day ended with high hopes; would they be fulfilled?

#### *Appendix*

*Figure 1: 'View of Township from River Thames', in 'The Te Aroha Gold Field: Supplement to the Observer', Observer, 11 December 1880, p. 119.*

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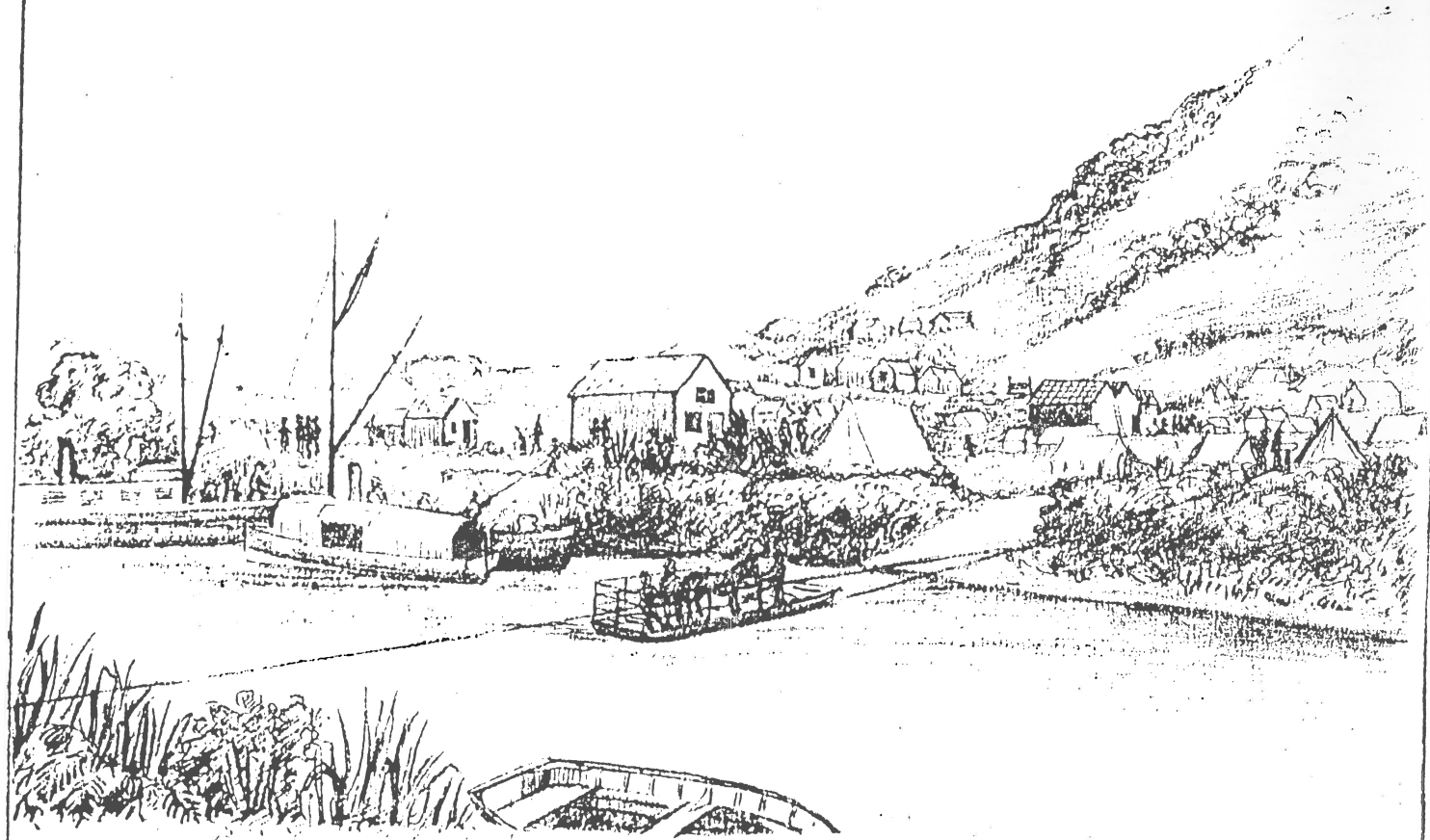
<sup>136</sup> *Thames Star*, 29 November 1880, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

*Figure 2:* ‘Squally weather under canvas’; ‘Hot blackwater baths. Prospectors’ trench oh hillside above’; ‘Native owner urging the £1000 compensation’; ‘Business site competitors waiting for signal at 9 a.m.’; ‘The rush at the Warden’s office’, in ‘The Te Aroha Gold Field: Supplement to the Observer’, *Observer*, 11 December 1880, p. 119.

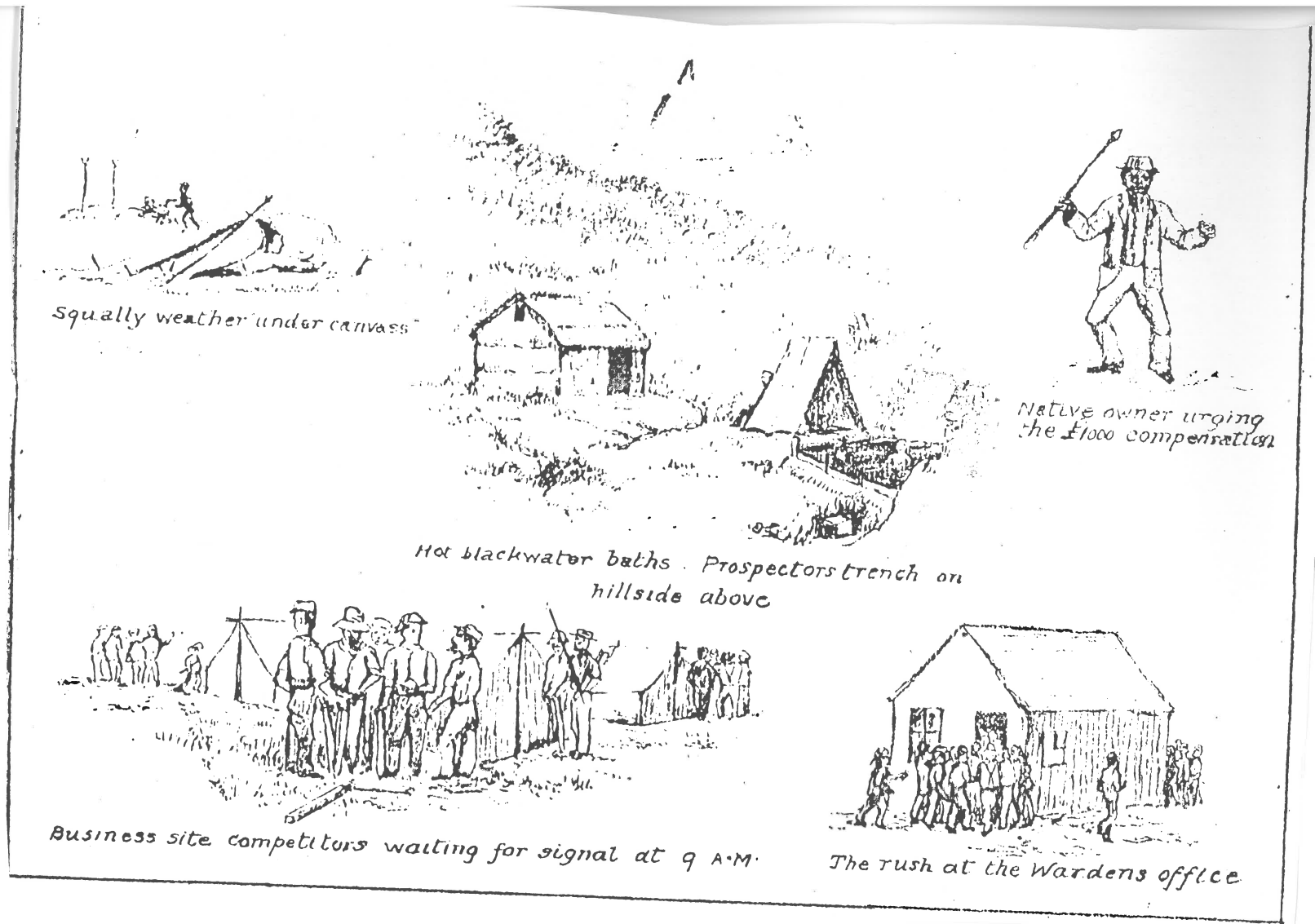
*Figure 3:* George Wilson, ‘Native names of Creeks at Te Aroha’, 29 November 1880, showing locations of George Lipsey’s house, George O’Halloran’s Hot Springs Hotel, the Warden’s Office, Fraterville, and berdan at outlet of Mangakahoka Stream, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/353, ANZ-W [Archives New Zealand The Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua]; used with permission.

THE TE AROHA GOLD FIELD  
SUPPLEMENT TO  
THE OBSERVER



*View of Township from River Thames*

**Figure 1:** 'View of Township from River Thames', in 'The Te Aroha Gold Field: Supplement to the Observer', Observer, 11 December 1880, p. 119.



**Figure 2:** 'Squally weather under canvass'; 'Hot blackwater baths. Prospectors' trench on hillside above'; 'Native owner urging the £1000 compensation'; 'Business site competitors waiting for signal at 9 a.m.'; 'The rush at the Warden's office', in 'The Te Aroha Gold Field: Supplement to the Observer', Observer, 11 December 1880, p. 119.



