

MINING AT TE AROHA BEFORE THE MURDER IN FEBRUARY
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Abstract: *Mining was slow to restart after the Christmas holidays on a goldfield whose value was still unknown. Some miners did not return, but other men, mostly with mining experience, replaced them. As was pointed out, more testing was required to justify the cautious optimism, and more explorations did not discover any payable ore or a reef of any sort. More capital was needed to fund adequate development, and the lack of a battery held back the field.*

Some searched the nearby countryside, fruitlessly, but at Tui the mostly Maori miners working there seemed to be having better results. Unskilled miners who drove incompetent and even dangerous adits wasted their efforts, while others were accused of shepherding their ground. Two companies formed during January attracted many small investors, but experienced miners started leaving for newer finds, and non-miners abandoned their attempts at mining after discovering that gold was not easy to find. But others remained hopeful, and waited for the erection of a local battery to prove the value of what they had found.

PROSPECTS ASSESSED

As the *Waikato Times* noted at the beginning of 1881, the value of the goldfield was unknown. The ‘tardiness which has been exhibited has operated to its disadvantage, but this state of things might be speedily altered, if, as we have reason to believe, work will be renewed in earnest after the holidays’.¹ But work was slow to resume, some Waikato gold-seekers having an extended holiday. When they returned there was ‘an absence of that excitement which was so rampant a couple of months ago’.² Men from Hamilton and the Waikato appeared ‘to think more of the field than the Thames people’, and were ‘determined to try their luck’.³ Cambridge men returned in a very positive frame of mind: ‘All seemed

¹ Editorial, *Waikato Times*, 2 January 1881, p. 2.

² ‘Waikato Jottings’, *Observer*, 8 January 1881, p. 162, 15 January 1881, p. 170.

³ *Thames Star*, 5 January 1881, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 January 1881, p. 3.

hopeful at their prospects and think by another fortnight something tangible will be opened up'.⁴

By 5 January, numbers were 'daily increasing' but 'a considerable accession' was required to reach 'the total mustered before the holidays'.⁵ 'Nearly all the old faces' were 'to be seen about [George] O'Halloran's' hotel,⁶ but were 'not indulging so much as before'.⁷ About 200 had returned, but work was slow to restart because, although protection had expired,

the usual twenty-four hours grace was taken advantage of by almost everybody.... A number - probably thirty or forty - of those who were here before Christmas, left not to return, being disappointed at finding that the precious metal could only be obtained by industry and perseverance; but all those who have come back have done so with a determination to thoroughly test the field before giving it a bad name, which the few I have just referred to will no doubt do, if one can judge from the impressions of opinion which fell from several of their lips previous to their departure. It is satisfactory to find that there are so many who still possess faith in the field.⁸

And some new people arrived: less than two weeks into the new year, 73 miner's rights were issued, mostly to miners.⁹

Opinions about the value of the field differed from region to region. At Thames, even before mining resumed it was seen as poor. The *Te Aroha Miner* commented that Thames residents took

everything written about it *cum grano* [with a grain (of salt)], and won't be convinced that we are anything else but a nest of deceivers. The fact of the matter is, that a lot of fellows came here with a pick on their shoulders, and a few shillings in their pocket, got drunk the first day, eaten up by mosquitoes the next, went prospecting the third, and cleared out on the fourth, breathing curses both loud and deep against the field and all connected with it.¹⁰

⁴ *Waikato Times*, 4 January 1881, p. 2.

⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 January 1881, p. 3.

⁶ See paper on his life.

⁷ *Thames Star*, 7 January 1881, p. 2.

⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 7 January 1881, p. 3.

⁹ *Thames Star*, 13 January 1881, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 3 January 1881, p. 3.

One Te Aroha correspondent, writing of proposals to form a battery company, felt that ‘nothing’ was to be expected from Thames. Businessmen there were ‘jealous of the establishment of a prosperous gold field’ whose trade would go mostly to Hamilton, and some lost no opportunity ‘to decry the prospects of the field and prevent capital being invested’.¹¹ Thames residents denied the allegation, claiming that Aucklanders provided the wet blanket, though admitting ‘extreme cautiousness engendered by frequent disappointments’.¹²

MINING RESUMES

With mining restarting, regulations requiring ground to be fully manned and worked were to be enforced, which reportedly had the approval of all at Te Aroha.¹³ However, in the opinion of ‘Native’, rigorously enforcing the law would be unwise:

I hear it mooted that it is the intention of the authorities to compel the proprietors of five acre leases to place a force on the ground equal to three men per acre. Such an enforcement of labour might judiciously be made when the mines are thoroughly opened up, and crushing power available, but in existing circumstances it would be nothing short of sheer madness to enforce restrictions, which will undoubtedly, if carried into effect, be the means of driving legitimate mining enterprise and capital out of the field. Besides, it will foster the curse of all new goldfields - shepherding, of which we had an abundance in the early days in the Thames goldfield. The croakers will say, How will it foster shepherding? Because every practical quartz miner knows that the general course of reefs and leaders is north and south, and that to open up an area of 5 acres, one tunnel driven from east to west, or vice versa, is quite sufficient; and it is also a well known fact that not more than three shifts of hands - six men - can be profitably employed in the prosecution of such work, hence the absurdity of paying 15 men to do the work of six. Even now, at Te Aroha there are some claims upon which the full number of men are at work, and their system of operations remind one of an old clucking hen scratching a little here and a little there, hoping thereby to unearth a stray grain now and again. When these men learn the truth of that old adage “The rolling stone gathers no moss,” they will work their mines

¹¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 6 January 1881, p. 2.

¹² *Thames Advertiser*, 10 January 1881, p. 3.

¹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 6 January 1881, p. 2.

systematically from the very first, and reap the just reward of their labours. Any work, prospecting or otherwise, performed in other than a systematic manner, had better be left undone as being utterly worthless for all practical purposes.¹⁴

When he first visited the field, the mining inspector was ‘satisfied with the amount of work done since the opening’.¹⁵ The growing belief that the little work done had revealed nothing of value could only be refuted by more work and significant discoveries. As before, newspapers reported optimistically, especially the *Te Aroha Miner*. In its issue of 8 January, reporting on only three claims, the following phrases were used: ‘this will be one of the leading mines before long’, ‘several large reefs in the grounds’, ‘has a good show’, ‘low grade quartz should pay well’, ‘large reef cut in the All Nations with favourable prospects’, and ‘the lode maintains its size and quality’.¹⁶ Three days later it reported that a share in one of these claims had been sold for £70 and a half share for £30.¹⁷

John McCombie,¹⁸ a miner and mining reporter for the Auckland press,¹⁹ was cautiously positive in mid-January:

From the fact that as yet, excepting in the single instance of the prospectors’ claim, no rich stone has been found, one is led to infer that there are no rich pockets of gold near the surface similar to those found at the Thames in the early days of the field. The absence of rich specimens, or even ordinary golden stone in the creeks, would apparently prove that the above inference is correct. As yet, however, it is early to speak very positively on this matter, notwithstanding that so much ground has been run over without yielding any good results, and it is possible that any day a new and rich lode may be discovered. That the district is fully supplied with lodes is very evident, for they have been found in numerous localities scattered all over the mountain, and in every variety of size. Judging from the experience gained since the field was opened, it would appear that its future prosperity will greatly depend upon whether these lodes, or a sufficient number of them, will yield gold in such average quantities all through the quartz as will leave a fair margin of profit after

¹⁴ Letter from ‘Native’, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 January 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 January 1881, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Te Aroha Miner*, 8 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 8 January 1881, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Te Aroha Miner*, 11 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 12 January 1881, p. 2.

¹⁸ See chapter on Billy Nicholl.

¹⁹ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 471.

working and crushing expenses are paid. If such should prove to be the case, then there is a good field in which capital could be profitably invested, and a large amount of labour employed to good effect. The results of the various trial crushings sent to the Thames, although some of them were very good and encouraging, can scarcely be said to offer sufficient inducement to any private individual to go to the expense of erecting even a moderate-sized crushing plant, and yet such a plant is greatly needed.²⁰

Four days later, he gave another careful assessment of the likely future:

Previous to the opening of the district for goldmining purposes several parties were out prospecting in the Te Aroha ranges, and the fact that nearly all the men belonging to these parties were anxious on the day of opening to secure ground near the prospectors' claim must be accepted as a proof that very little gold was discovered elsewhere. The truth was, notwithstanding what may have been said to the contrary, no specimens had been found except in the intermediate vicinity of the prospectors' claim.... Since the opening of the field, the country for some distance around the prospectors' claim has been prospected, and although numerous lodes have been discovered, many of which give good dish prospects, while some have produced stone showing a little gold; still, as yet, no specimens have been found. Judging by the results of the work which has been done, it would seem that it is unlikely rich specimens will be found near the surface, and hence it follows that the field is not a suitable one for the poor man. To enable a poor man to exist on a new reefing goldfield it is almost necessary that specimens should be found in abundance, so that he would be able to meet his outlay by having frequent specimen crushings, or else readily dispose of his claim to the capitalist at a good figure. On the other hand, however, no matter whether the new goldfield prove a rich or poor one, the poor man is the true prospector, and therefore it follows that for some time to come everything within reason should be adopted to induce the poor man to remain as long as possible on the Te Aroha field. (In the above remarks, the phrase "poor man" is not intended to mean those who are literally without money, but rather the man of limited means as compared with the capitalist.) Because the Te Aroha goldfield has not yet produced a quantity of rich specimens is no reason why it should be condemned as a duffer. The fact is, there is much to encourage one to expect that in the future there will be a large mining population located here. Apparently, however, the ground will not be successfully worked in small

²⁰ 'Te Aroha (Grahamstown, Saturday)', *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 January 1881, p. 9.

claims or areas, and it will only be when it is held in large areas by strong companies supported by abundance of capital and possessed of powerful batteries supplied with the very best of appliances for saving gold that anything like good results may [be] looked for. On the Thames such has been the improvements made in the crushing and gold-saving machinery of late that quartz which at one time was thrown away as worthless can now be made to yield a good margin of profit. Te Aroha seems to be possessed of a large number of lodes which will yield fair average grade quartz, and there is no reason why, with machinery similar to that now in use at the Thames, these lodes should not be worked to good effect, but this cannot be done with small claims. It ought not to be a question of how many square feet there should be in one man's ground, or how many men's ground in one claim, but rather let each company hold some 20 or 30 acres of ground. Of course anything of this kind would scarcely do in the immediate future, but if Te Aroha is to be a successful goldfield apparently that is what it must come to in the end. There is very little doubt that many who have visited the Aroha ... have given expression to an opinion with regard to the goldfield more favourable than present results would warrant, and some, having accepted this opinion in good faith, will possibly be disappointed that the progress of the district is not more rapid. Time, however, will remedy any evil arising from this source, and, as has been said above, there are good grounds for coming to the conclusion that some day the Aroha will support a considerable mining population.²¹

WANTED: A BATTERY

The pressing need was a local battery, which it had been hoped private enterprise would have provided by now.²² 'Many miners' complained in mid-January that they were 'working in the dark, without local facilities to test the stuff'. A battery would inspire men to keep going 'who could not afford to continue working without obtaining some returns for the gold they feel sure they have in their general stuff'.²³ A start was made to raise capital early in January, and in the middle of that month a meeting of those with interests near Lipsey's Creek, on the western edge of the township, discussed erecting a ten-stamp one. As the warden, Harry Kenrick,²⁴ had already refused a

²¹ 'Te Aroha (Grahamstown, Wednesday)', *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 January 1881, p. 9.

²² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 6 January 1881, p. 2.

²³ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1881, p. 3.

²⁴ See paper on his life.

water right for this creek because clean water was required for domestic purposes, the meeting asked him to reconsider, because even if half an ounce per ton was obtainable 'it would be unpayable to bring the quartz to the flat' for treatment.²⁵ 'A wealthy Auckland shareholder' who visited the Smile of Fortune was 'so pleased with its prospects that he expressed his willingness to erect a small battery' if the other shareholders would guarantee him half the cost.²⁶ Nothing came of either proposal, but the formation of a company to erect one revived confidence.²⁷ Whereas in the previous week confidence had 'appeared to be languishing', miners were now extracting quartz.²⁸ Delay in erecting the battery meant some claims were forced to cease work; in the Lucky Hit, for instance, the shareholders were 'chiefly Katikati and Tauranga men' who were required to be 'at home for a few weeks'.²⁹

MORE HOPES, MORE WORK, BUT NO PAYABLE FINDS

'Increased confidence' continued to be reported as 'encouraging' ore was found in many claims.³⁰ The manager of the All Nations responded to an Auckland statement that little or no work had been done in his claim by insisting that it would 'compare favourably with any claim at the opening of the Thames. We have 94 feet of driving, a 12 by 6 chamber, besides surface trenches, and 40 feet of small prospecting drives on the surface'. Gold was seen freely, and he was about to drive a 600-foot low level.³¹ On 20 January, it was estimated that there were 52 'bona fide claims'.³² There were also reports of discoveries in what would become the Waiorongomai field.³³

There were rumours of alluvial gold being found.³⁴ In late January 'a stranger' was seen with a pickle bottle 'full of alluvial gold, which rumour

²⁵ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 15 January 1881, p. 2.

²⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

²⁷ See paper on the Te Aroha battery.

²⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 15 January 1881, p. 2.

²⁹ *Te Aroha Miner*, 3 February 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 3 February 1881, p. 2.

³⁰ For example, Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 22 January 1881, p. 2.

³¹ *Thames Star*, 19 January 1881, p. 2.

³² *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1881, p. 3.

³³ For example, *Te Aroha Miner*, 20 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 21 January 1881, p. 2.

³⁴ *Thames Star*, 22 January 1881, p. 3.

sayeth was obtained somewhere south of Te Aroha. But, unfortunately for the truth of the above, no one seems to know where, or from whom, this rumour emanated'.³⁵ Such stories caused 'not a few' to deduce 'from the quantity of free gold to be found in the mullocky leaders and the casings of other leaders, that alluvial washings may be discovered'. The 'double-box shaft' in the Early Dawn when sunk 40 feet had gone through 'boulder country' into 'favourable and likely-looking country'.³⁶ This claim ran down the spur to the flat, where this shaft was sunk: when down 18 feet it showed 'loose colours of gold the whole way down'. In McCombie's opinion, 'the formation of the ground encountered' did not 'warrant the theory that alluvial deposits of gold will yet be found on the flats surrounding Te Aroha ranges, notwithstanding the opinions of a good number to the contrary'.³⁷ No alluvial gold would be found, nor in the Tui and Waiorongomai Streams as expected by a Hamilton correspondent.³⁸

On 27 January, when the local correspondent of the *Thames Star* visited the Prospectors, Bonanza, No. 1 South, and Waikato, he 'saw no change of importance'. Miners had 'done a vast amount of work' coping with 'the many difficulties they have had to contend with, which are concomitant with mining in a new country'.³⁹ Unlike others, he failed to note that a payable reef was yet to be struck. Others published information implying mining was not going well. In the United, although much work had been done, conflict between Auckland and Hamilton shareholders disrupted developments for so long that one reporter suggested that it should be called the Disunited.⁴⁰ On 29 January, the *Te Aroha Miner*, which had 'every confidence in the field', reported that the Prince of Wales shareholders were willing to send a parcel of quartz to Thames for crushing provided 'the public' met 'the cost of conveyance and crushing'. They could send from 30 to 50 tons and had 'the greatest confidence that it would shape in a manner

³⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 January 1881, p. 9.

³⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 February 1881, p. 9.

³⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 January 1881, p. 9.

³⁸ Hamilton Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 February 1881, p. 9.

³⁹ Pigeongrams, *Thames Star*, 27 January 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁰ George Edgecumbe (secretary for Hamilton shareholders) to Harry Kenrick, 24 January 1881, Te Aroha Warden's Court, General Correspondence 1881, BBAV 11584/1b, ANZ-A; Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1881, p. 3, 28 January 1881, p. 3, 25 February 1881, p. 3.

that would restore confidence in the field'.⁴¹ The same issue recorded four claims being pegged out,⁴² indicating that others remained confident. Another correspondent, in reporting that gold had been found in Our Boys, wrote that a rich find 'would restore confidence in the field by outsiders' and attract capital. He considered there were 'most favourable indications' in the Bonanza and Waikato, and that the 'substantial way' in which some mines were being worked should 'satisfy the most sceptical' that both managers and directors had 'every confidence' in their future success.⁴³

Experienced miners were genuinely impressed with the ground. McCombie, who did know his mineralogy and did not have to resort to the 'brown quartz'-style of reporting, described the Bonanza's lode as 'magnificent', being 'thickly impregnated with excellent mineral indications, including copper, antimony, iron pyrites and mundic'. The manager, John Goldsworthy,⁴⁴ told him that, 'during his long and varied experience as a quartz miner, he had never encountered a more promising lode than that of the Bonanza, and that it would be no surprise to him to meet with a rich shot of gold at any moment'.⁴⁵ This expressed enthusiasm was not reflected by his holding shares in this claim or the company formed to work it, although he was a shareholder in two other mining companies and later in the battery company.⁴⁶

Others had to be convinced, for no 'rich shot' had been found. When a company was about to erect the battery, the *Te Aroha Miner* recommended that it should first crush ore with 'the best chance of giving a payable return', for 'if we want support from outside we must show how many payable claims we have, and not how many duffers'.⁴⁷

Occasional good finds encouraged optimism. For instance, in early February there was 'considerable excitement' over 'a large stone' taken from the Morning Star which 'showed gold freely'.⁴⁸ Because of this discovery, described two days later as a 'few pieces of stone showing gold freely',

⁴¹ *Te Aroha Miner*, 29 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 1 February 1881, p. 2.

⁴² *Te Aroha Miner*, 29 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 1 February 1881, p. 2.

⁴³ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Waikato Times*, 29 January 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁴ See paper on the Goldsworthy brothers.

⁴⁵ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 January 1881, p. 9.

⁴⁶ *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1796, 24 February 1881, p. 258, 28 April 1881, p. 476.

⁴⁷ *Te Aroha Miner*, 3 February 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 3 February 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Thames Star*, 5 February 1881, p. 2.

residents were 'more hopeful than a week or so back', believing that 'several of the first crushings' would be payable.⁴⁹ McCombie, who continued to detect 'very favourable aspects' in the prospecting, wrote that

an extensive quartz field has already been opened up here, and the reefs already to hand varying from 2 feet to 20 feet in thickness have every indication of permanence; and should even a small proportion of them prove to be payable there is enough quartz in sight to keep 500 head of stampers continually running. All hands are waiting patiently for the completion of the battery, which ... will soon settle the question as to whether these reefs contain gold in payable quantities or otherwise.

He warned that although well-defined reefs contained 'all the necessary mineral indications', it was unlikely that any claims, apart from the Prospectors, had 'rich gold near to the surface'. Therefore 'the surface workings upon many of these reefs' were 'utterly worthless for all practical purposes'.⁵⁰

GOLD NEARBY?

Some men sought gold further afield. Early in January there was a report of a rush 'some dozen miles up the river', and that for some days smoke had been seen

in the bush at Tamahinarua, about the point where the road to Tauranga crosses the range by the Te Rereatukahia pass [now the Tuahu track]. Good prospects, it is said, have been found there, and a considerable number of men, it now turns out, have been prospecting in the neighbourhood for a fortnight past. It is said by those who best know the country that the richest portion of the field will be the other side of the main range to that on which the present workings lie, but that without a road over to the eastern side, the difficulty of working them will be very great, if not insuperable.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Thames Star*, 7 February 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 February 1881, p. 9.

⁵¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 January 1881, p. 9.

Neither area ever produced gold, and prospecting there soon ceased. Nor did the explorations by experienced prospectors in the range opposite and above Matamata produce any finds.⁵²

THE TUI DISTRICT

Reports about Tui continued to be positive. At the end of December, a ton of quartz from the Tui claim was crushed. It had been expected to produce from 10 to 12dwt of gold, and the shareholders believed that their eight-foot thick reef would keep a 30-stamper battery at work for months.⁵³ The result was not published, probably indicating a poor result. No more was heard of mining in that district until 15 January, when the *Te Aroha Miner* announced that the Homeward Bound had struck the Tui reef 'with gold showing'. The 'show' was 'said to be the best yet met with' in that district.⁵⁴ Four days later, details were given of the Tui claim, whose shareholders were

determined to give their claim a thorough prospecting as soon as possible. They are working night and day, and the whole fifteen are employed. Four tunnels are going into the side of the spur, at the foot of which runs the Ruakaka Creek. In three of them the reef has been cut, and in the fourth it is expected to be in hand by Thursday or Friday. It is a splendid body of stone, being over fifteen feet thick, and having a first-class appearance. No gold has been seen in the solid up to the present; but very good dish prospects are obtainable from it, especially from the portions in the new drives. It is probable that the proprietors will make a start next week to break out a large parcel of stuff for crushing. Should any gentleman have enterprise enough to erect a battery in the locality there is no doubt that the shareholders will make a small pile for themselves out of the claim, as the reef is so large that half-an-ounce to the ton would pay well.⁵⁵

McCombie gave a careful account of his visit:

There are about 150 miners here, by far the greater majority being Maoris. In the Tui claim, of which Catran Brothers and

⁵² *Thames Advertiser*, 12 January 1881, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 19 January 1881, p. 2.

⁵³ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 December 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *Te Aroha Miner*, 15 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 15 January 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 19 January 1881, p. 3.

party are the proprietors, a reef 25 feet in thickness has been intersected by a tunnel driven at right-angles to its general course, which is north and south, with a westerly underlie. This reef is partly composed of solid stone and partly of decomposed quartz, intermixed with seams of clay. At the request of the shareholders, I broke out from the footwall of the reef a dish of stuff, which, when panned off, gave up a fair amount of gold. It was my intention to test the lode in divers places, but, owing to the mosquitoes being so bad, I was obliged to relinquish the idea. It would be premature to offer an opinion as to the absolute value and extent of this lode until after it has been tested at lower levels, which are now being done as fast as circumstances will permit. This party are determined to thoroughly test their mine before endeavouring to enlist capital with a view of securing a suitable crushing plant.

South of the Tui, and but a short distance off, is the Homeward Bound Claim. On Friday evening last the prospectors (Nicholls and party) of this claim tapped, in a tunnel some thirty feet in length, a reef similar in character and formation to that of the Tui, and is undoubtedly a continuation of the same lode. At the time of my visit, they had not cut into it sufficiently to ascertain its exact size and value, but so far as it has been treated favourable prospects are obtainable. This section of the field embraces all the elements necessary to success, there being an abundance of timber and water for battery purposes in its immediate neighbourhood.⁵⁶

James Ponui Nicholls, son of William Nicholls and Hera Te Whakaawa,⁵⁷ was the head of this party.⁵⁸ He had earlier attempted to work ground in the middle of the United claim at Te Aroha, and was an owner of the Who'd Have Thought It.⁵⁹ A considerable amount of work was being done at Tui because owners expected positive results, one example of hope triumphing over difficulty being in the Tui claim. When nearly 60 feet had been driven in the intermediate level, 'a slide made its appearance, and threw the lode about a bit', but it was 'now nearly cut through'. It was expected that the reef would 'be as good, if not better, behind than before it'. In the low level of the Homeward Bound, a reporter (McCombie?)

⁵⁶ Te Aroha Correspondents (Monday), *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1881, p. 21.

⁵⁷ See paper on William Nicholls.

⁵⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 201, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁵⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1880, p. 3; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 163, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

broke out a dishful of stuff and panned it off in the creek below, with the result that a splendid prospect was obtained, fully half-a-pennyweight of gold being left in the pan. The prospect was really the best I have seen on the field, and should all the reef yield like the small portion I washed it ought to yield two or three ounces to the ton.⁶⁰

At the end of January, in the Tui claim the main reef was cut in another drive and there were plans to construct 'a plant with which to sluice the loose stuff'.⁶¹ Early in February, the Goldfield shareholders were 'jubilant' because 'an excellent prospect was washed from the reef'.⁶² An Auckland capitalist was negotiating to provide a small plant to treat ore from these claims.⁶³ By that time, between 50 and 60 Pakeha were mining in a camp unofficially named 'Catranville'.⁶⁴

INCOMPETENT MINING

After the first visit of the mining inspector, James Monteith McLaren,⁶⁵ early in January, the *Te Aroha Miner* published the following story:

Rumor has it that a day or two ago our worthy Inspector of Mines visited a claim worked entirely by Hamiltonians. By virtue of the powers of his office, he pointed out that a set of timber was unsafe. "What the blank does a reporter know about a set of timber?" ejaculated an irate grower of turnips. "Mac" explained who he was, and great was the tribulation of the Hamiltonians.⁶⁶

McLaren came across

many instances of parties of men working without the slightest practical knowledge of mining, several parties being entirely

⁶⁰ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 26 January 1881, p. 3.

⁶¹ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1881, p. 3.

⁶² Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 4 February 1881, p. 2; see also *Thames Star*, 3 February 1881, p. 2, 5 February 1881, p. 2.

⁶³ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 February 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Own Correspondent, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 February 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁵ See paper on Harry Kenrick.

⁶⁶ *Te Aroha Miner*, 11 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 12 January 1881, p. 2.

composed of men who never handled a pick in their lives before. In no less than four instances he had to stop parties such as we have described, in consequence of the treacherous nature of the ground, until they obtained the services of some one having practical experience to direct their operations. In one case the men were literally digging their own graves, and when informed of the danger they were in, obeyed his instructions with an alacrity which showed they had only just realized the risk they ran.⁶⁷

A week after McLaren ordered work to stop in an un-timbered drive in the Clunes, it collapsed, 'and 96 feet of tunnelling has been thrown away'.⁶⁸ Another example of inexperience was a drive in the Cambridge:

Soon after taking it up the shareholders, who are all Waikato men, drove a tunnel a distance of 30 or 40 feet through loose country, and intersected a nice-looking leader, from which they obtained fair prospects. Although the ground was rather shaky they did not think the drive required timbering up, and they left for the holidays without securing it, the consequence being that, when they returned to work 10 days after, they found it had fallen in. An attempt was made to clear the stuff without success, and the shareholders then started to drive about 30 feet lower down the spur.⁶⁹

Inexperience did not always create danger, but it commonly meant wasted effort. For example, in the Lucky Hit the claimholders were

doing a lot of surface work of no permanent value. The only feasible method of working the promising looking lode uncovered in their ground is through the Prince of Wales, indeed, the shareholders of the latter claim are at present driving a tunnel not far from the boundary which could be utilised by both the claims. It is a pity that so much time and work should be thrown away when half the number of men at present employed could be more beneficially employed in the manner we have indicated.⁷⁰

On the day that this was published, Samuel Middlebrook, a shareholder in the Lucky Hit, applied to tunnel from the Prince of Wales

⁶⁷ *Te Aroha Miner*, 15 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 15 January 1881, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1881, p. 3.

⁶⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 January 1881, p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Te Aroha Miner*, 27 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 27 January 1881, p. 2.

and to use 100 square feet of its ground for stacking quartz. As the Prince of Wales shareholders objected, Kenrick, asked to adjudicate, suggested a longer alternative tunnel.⁷¹ (Middlebrook was a butcher at Katikati with no previous mining experience.⁷² Mining at Te Aroha may have led to his leading role in the development of the Eliza mine, near Katikati, in the early twentieth century.)⁷³

Lack of skill caused the Cambridge shareholders in the Don to unwittingly commence their lower drive inside the Hot Springs Reserve. Kenrick was sympathetic, and gave them retrospective permission to use 100 square feet of it.⁷⁴ Fifteen years later, one of the early miners, Thomas Gavin,⁷⁵ told the Minister of Mines that he knew ‘from Experience that in the Early Days of this field the Miners in one Case were Driven from their tunnel owing to their having Cut a hot spring’.⁷⁶ Two stories revealed further incompetence by men who had never mined previously:

A good story, showing how new chum claimholders may strike gold and not know it, was related to us the other day. Two recent arrivals from the Emerald Isle [Ireland] were working a claim not far from the Prospectors’, when they broke out a lump of auriferous quartz. One, who appeared to be possessed of more common sense than the other, was elated at the discovery, believing that the stone contained the precious metal, but the other asserted, in a beautifully rich brogue, that such was not the case, that the metal was mundic, and he ordered his companion to “throw away the dirt, and not have people laughing at us.” The other maintained the “dirt” was a specimen, and the argument waxing warm, the two were about to try conclusions on the mullock heap, when a well-known Thames youth hove in sight, and prevented a sanguinary affray from taking place. He was appealed to as to whether the metal was gold or not, and wishing

⁷¹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Applications for Permission to Tunnel on Occupied or Unoccupied Ground 1881, 17/1881, BBAV 11289/8a, ANZ-A.

⁷² See Marriage Certificate of Samuel Middlebrook, 23 May 1882, 1882/990, BDM; *A Return of the Freeholders of New Zealand ... 1882* (Wellington, 1884), p. M 37; Arthur J. Gray, *An Ulster Plantation: The story of the Katikati Settlement*, 2 ed. (Wellington, 1950), pp. 12, 41, 114.

⁷³ See *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 1906, p. 3; Gray, p. 114.

⁷⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1881, p. 3.

⁷⁵ See paper on his life.

⁷⁶ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 12 October 1896, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/520, ANZ-A.

to have a bit of fun he gave an answer in the negative, much to the surprise of one and the delight of the other. This set the matter at rest. A man from the Thames could not be deceived about gold, they thought, and they resumed work with renewed energy, determined to quarrel no more about the precious metal. The young spark from below collared the specimen as soon as the Tipperary boys were out of sight, and after relating to his friends the manner in which he obtained it, returned it to the owners with the advice never to throw away stone which they were doubtful about.

The way some new chums set about to seek for gold is a caution to snakes. One started on Monday last to bore for alluvial with a large augur strapped to a long pole. He worked for a couple of hours, and then returned to his tent, convinced that there was no alluvial gold in this part of the country. Another worthy endeavoured to scrape up loose stuff from a creek bed, with a pannikin attached to a 4ft pole. He slipped from a large boulder into the water, and went home in quite a hurry, leaving his scooping apparatus behind him.⁷⁷

Lack of experience may have been the cause of the first recorded accident, when a man attempted to blast the face of a drive:

The fuse went out after burning for a short time, and B----- then commenced to lay a new fuse, but had hardly inserted one end before the powder, which had hung fire, exploded, and sent several pieces of stone flying about his ears. Fortunately, none struck him, but one of his arms was very severely scorched by the explosion.⁷⁸

In the second recorded accident, when dynamite was fired in a drive a piece of earth 'struck a coat hanging on a tree in front of the drive, breaking a meerschaum pipe and completely dismembering a valuable silver lever hunting watch'.⁷⁹

SHEPHERDING, AND COMPETING FOR GROUND

In mid-January, the manager of the All Nations stated that 'very little work has been done' in some claims because there was 'too much

⁷⁷ 'Odds and Ends', *Thames Advertiser*, 27 January 1881, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

⁷⁹ *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 1 February 1881, p. 2.

protection'.⁸⁰ According to one correspondent, a 'considerable number of men' had taken up ground 'in the hope that their neighbours would strike something good, which would enable them to sell their shares. These men never worked their claim beyond fossicking and scratching on the surface'.⁸¹ Such shepherding was common on all goldfields, but often those who did no work were sued for non-working, usually resulting in claims being granted to the plaintiffs. There were always men ready to peg out unworked ground, although the cost may have discouraged the over-ambitious. It was reported on 15 January that one miner had 'paid £11 per week since the field opened in fees for pegging out claims', and an account was published of rival pegging-out, with names disguised:

A curious pegging out story reached us in connection with the Hunkum Bunkum Claim. A man named Snooks some days ago pegged out a piece of ground, and on proceeding to the Warden's office to file his notice of marking out, found that he had been forestalled. Finding he had failed in his first intention, he proceeded to do what he considered the next best thing - namely, peg out a piece of ground adjoining. Another journey to the hills, and then back to the Warden's Court, when judge to his surprise when he found his second claim had been pegged by some one else an hour or so before. Beaten temporarily, he resolved to wait and after a lapse of ten days finding that the shareholders of the Hunkum Bunkum had neglected to register, he renewed his application for the ground. He yesterday discovered that something having prevented the shareholders from registering within the prescribed time they had assured their rights by re-pegging.⁸²

After one young man was persuaded to buy one man's ground for £18, the seller promptly left the district:

The purchaser has since discovered that the claim is in dispute, the seller having pegged out illegally. Indeed we understand he admitted that in marking out he had only inserted one peg, thinking that that was all that was required for one man's ground. It is probable that on finding his mistake he got out of his bad bargain,

⁸⁰ *Thames Star*, 19 January 1881, p. 2.

⁸¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 27 January 1881, p. 2.

⁸² *Te Aroha Miner*, 15 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 15 January 1881, p. 2.

at the buyer's expense.⁸³ This was not brought before Kenrick, but he had to consider many applications to forfeit claims for non-working. In the case of the *Rose of Denmark*, for example, only two of the defendants appeared in court; 'the others had practically abandoned the claim, having taken up ground elsewhere'. The two defendants claimed they had worked since Christmas, although the applicant stated that only one had. Kenrick's solution was to award the ground to the plaintiff, with the two defendants who had appeared before him retaining shares but having to pay the court costs.⁸⁴ This was his usual practice. For example, when one man sought forfeiture, nine of the 14 partners proved that it was the other five who abandoned the ground and were awarded the claim, along with the man who had brought the plaint.⁸⁵ Sometimes defendants charged with non-working did not bother to appear and the only evidence presented was by the complainant, who therefore won his case.⁸⁶ In one case a Maori partner sued a Pakeha who had failed to work his share and it was awarded to him.⁸⁷

TWO MORE COMPANIES

The only companies to apply for registration in January were the *Morning Star* and the *Te Aroha No. 1 South*. The first shared 12,000 scrip shares amongst the original 16 shareholders according to their interests. They were allotted 415, 625, or 830 shares; 1,000 were kept in trust for the company. Eight shareholders lived in Thames, seven in *Te Aroha*, and one in Hamilton: they comprised 12 miners, two hotelkeepers, one storekeeper, and one farmer.⁸⁸ Its directors⁸⁹ were a miner, Adam Porter,⁹⁰ Charles

⁸³ *Te Aroha Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 7 January 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Te Aroha Miner*, 11 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 12 January 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁵ *Sherrington v. Morton*, *Te Aroha Miner*, 17 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 27 January 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁶ For example, *Graham v. Messenger*, *Te Aroha Miner*, 27 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 27 January 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁷ *Morewa v. Ricketts*, *Te Aroha Miner*, 27 January 1881, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 27 January 1881, p. 2.

⁸⁸ *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1881, p. 111.

⁸⁹ *Thames Star*, 5 January 1881, p. 2.

⁹⁰ See paper on his life.

Stanislaus Stafford, a landowner at Wairakau,⁹¹ William Henry Pearce, a Hamilton hotelkeeper,⁹² James Smyth, a Thames miner,⁹³ and local miner John McSweeney.⁹⁴ When the Te Aroha No. 1 South sought capital only 12,000 of its 15,000 shares were subscribed, a total including 372 held in trust for the company. There were 48 shareholders, with 21 of them holding 342 shares each; the smallest holding was 71. The largest number of shareholders, 27, were living at Te Aroha; 12 lived at Thames, six at Paeroa, two at Waitekauri, and one at Auckland.⁹⁵ The largest number, 34, were miners, a temporary job for many; six were Maori.⁹⁶ The directors⁹⁷ were McCombie, Porter, Allen Christie (or Christey),⁹⁸ and Thomas Scanlan,⁹⁹ miners normally resident at Thames, James McGuire, a contractor living at Paeroa,¹⁰⁰ William Grey Nicholls, a 'half-caste' landowner in Ohinemuri,¹⁰¹ and Lindsay Jackson, a surveyor then working at Te Aroha.¹⁰² There were some changes to the directorate within a couple of months, Nicholls retiring 'through not possessing the necessary qualification', meaning the required shareholding, and Henry Ernest Whitaker¹⁰³ was elected chairman.¹⁰⁴

Those anticipating a profitable goldfield showed their faith by purchasing shares. Referring to the list of shareholders in the Te Aroha No.

⁹¹ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

⁹² *Observer*, 16 July 1881, p. 489; Waikato, 11 January 1902, p. 4; *Waikato Times*, 23 July 1881, p. 2.

⁹³ See James Smyth to Superintendent, Auckland Province, 8 January 1874, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFL 8170, 906/1875, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1875, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 12 August 1913, p. 4.

⁹⁴ See paper on his life.

⁹⁵ *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

⁹⁶ *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

⁹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 2.

⁹⁸ See District Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 June 1880, p. 3; *Observer*, 3 January 1903, p. 4.

⁹⁹ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

¹⁰⁰ See paper on Joseph Campbell and his hyperphoric process.

¹⁰¹ See paper on his life.

¹⁰² See *Waikato Times*, 10 April 1888, p. 2; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 12 November 1892, p. 7.

¹⁰³ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

¹⁰⁴ *Waikato Times*, 24 February 1881, p. 2.

1 South Company, the *Thames Star* commented that 'Te Arohans' were 'by far the most enterprising - a fact which should of itself testify to the confidence felt in the field - by Te Arohans at all events'.¹⁰⁵ Hamilton residents who wanted to purchase shares had their interest heightened by being shown specimens: late in January, a hotel displayed quartz from eight claims.¹⁰⁶

As an illustration of the lack of working capital of the companies, the Waikato, formed in December, in late January had a call of 3d per share.¹⁰⁷

MINERS DRIFT AWAY

Not all miners returned after the Christmas holidays, some preferring to try their luck at other goldfields where prospects seemed better.¹⁰⁸ From mid-January onwards, there were regular reports of men leaving after failing to find anything worthwhile. Commenting on the first news of the discovery of the Martha lode at Waihi, a Thames newspaper expected it would be given 'a fair trial' because 'numbers' were 'dissatisfied with the prospects of Te Aroha, and anxious for something more attractive to turn up'.¹⁰⁹ 'A number of men' had 'cleared out for Owcharoa', believing they would 'do better there'.¹¹⁰ In the week before 21 January, 'about a dozen' or 'quite a number' left, mostly for Owcharoa, Waitekauri, and Waihi.¹¹¹ When a correspondent for the *Te Aroha Miner* visited Owcharoa and found only about 30 miners there, he wrote that despite all that had been said about 'the exodus from Te Aroha', he 'only noticed about three Te Arohans in the crowd. Most of them have been prospecting at the Aroha for months'. He warned against leaving for Owcharoa 'until something more has been found'.¹¹² On 28 January, after gold had been found at the Tiki, near Coromandel township, a Te Aroha correspondent reported that

¹⁰⁵ *Thames Star*, 31 January 1881, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Waikato Times*, 25 January 1881, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Waikato Times*, 22 January 1881, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 6 January 1881, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 15 January 1881, p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, Own Reporter, 'Te Aroha Goldfield', 21 January 1881, p. 3, 22 January 1881, p. 3.

¹¹² *Te Aroha Miner* Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 27 January 1881, p. 3.

Our population is gradually dwindling away, and should the exit continue at a similar rate for the next month, there will be very few people left.... Twenty men left by the coach and steamer this morning, and nine or ten Thamesites will follow suit tomorrow. As far as I can learn more than half of those who have gone this week are bound for the new gold field at the Tiki, believing that they can do better there than here.¹¹³

Three days later, he reported nine or ten leaving that day ‘not to return’, seven claims being abandoned in the past week, and ‘many’ claims ‘working short handed’.¹¹⁴ By then Peter Ferguson and David McIntyre, ‘two of the pioneer prospectors of the Aroha district’,¹¹⁵ were ‘seen in the ranges in the vicinity of Castle Rock, overlooking the Tiki claims’.¹¹⁶

Despite this trend, this correspondent believed that a near-total abandonment of the field was unlikely. Most who had left were ‘men who could not have held on any longer’, whilst most remaining would ‘stay for at least three or four months longer, by which time the field will have received a thorough trial’.¹¹⁷ Another reporter in late January estimated the number of people at Te Aroha at around 700 compared with 800 at its highest, proving ‘that the talk of people clearing out every day’ was ‘far from being true’. As another way of assessing the extent of the decline, he calculated the amount of bread sold. The first baker never produced more than about 400 loaves a day; now there were two or three other bakers, but the original baker still produced well over 300 loaves daily.¹¹⁸

Although the extent of the exodus during January may have been exaggerated, it continued, including those formerly most enthusiastic, men from the Waikato. At the beginning of February, a Waikato correspondent wrote that

Te Aroha air must be decidedly medicinal. Several parties have returned from there lately looking uncommonly “blue,” and not half so “feverish” as before. There is some talk of forming a Te Aroha dramatic company, which will be a strong one. The first

¹¹³ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 January 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ See paper on the discovery of gold at Te Aroha and its consequences.

¹¹⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1881, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 January 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ *Thames Star*, 25 January 1881, p. 2.

performance will be the well-known piece “All is not gold that glitters.”¹¹⁹

These departures provoked the scorn of one correspondent. After stating that the exodus had ceased and that those who remained were ‘determined to give the field a thorough good trial before taking their departure’, he wrote that

the majority of those who have left are Waikatoites, who soon became disgusted at not making fortunes, as they had expected, merely by putting a pick into the hills and taking out masses of gold. These are not the sort of men required on a new field, and it is, perhaps, just as well they have gone.¹²⁰

A local correspondent expressed similar sentiments about those who left. On 8 February, he noted that the township was

very quiet. During the day very few people are visible, the whole of the miners here now being busily engaged in prospecting their ground. The drones appear to have all cleared out, only the bees are left, and consequently work is progressing more satisfactorily; and there is an absence of any sensational news as to alleged rich discoveries, which were so prevalent a short time back, and which did so much to destroy confidence in the field.¹²¹

This correspondent had earlier criticised such reports when revealing the falsity of a rumour that four tons from the Prosperity had produced 1oz 16dwt to the ton, for the ‘crushing turned out so bad’ that the return was not revealed. This result had

made a somewhat depressing effect upon the field, and several men have cleared out in consequence. I must warn your readers not to place any reliance upon reports as to the poorness of the ground from men who have left the field at this early stage of its development. A large number of men have been here who have had no experience whatever in quartz reefing, some of whom entertained the most absurd expectations, but when they found that capital, hard work and experience were required to test the

¹¹⁹ ‘Waikato Whisperings’, *Observer*, 5 February 1881, p. 210.

¹²⁰ Own Reporter, ‘Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 February 1881, p. 3.

¹²¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 8 February 1881, p. 2.

ground, their hearts failed them, and they left disappointed men, and of course denounced the field.

He claimed that many were shepherding their claims, hoping to sell once others found payable gold. 'They were content to await the development of the field by the enterprise and energy of others. These were the men who were the authors of all the false reports about extraordinary finds and other rumours, which have done much to retard the progress of the field by causing a want of confidence'. He was afraid that 'bad accounts' might prevent investment, but argued that in mining communities these were 'well known' and no attention was paid to them. 'None of the really practical men' were leaving, instead being 'steadily engaged in opening up their mines'. People were urged to await the erection of the battery before judging the field, for not until then would it be possible to form a 'fairly accurate idea of the value of the ground'.¹²²

CONCLUSION

Many still hoped that the mines would make their fortunes. As an example, 'gold fanatics' at Alexandra (later Pirongia) 'had a full meeting the other day as some of the capitalists had just returned from Te Aroha with splendid specimens for bait'.¹²³ But the hopes of developing and testing the field and attracting investors to it would be disrupted by the murder of a Maori miner.¹²⁴

¹²² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 27 January 1881, p. 2.

¹²³ 'Waikato Whisperings', *Observer*, 5 February 1881, p. 210.

¹²⁴ See paper on 'Revolted Murder in Te Aroha in 1881'.