

CLEMENT AUGUSTUS CORNES: THE DISCOVERER OF THE TUI MINES

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Te Aroha Mining District Working Papers

No. 108

Revised on August 25, 2016

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ISSN: 2463-6266

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

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Abstract: *Clem Cornes was one of the most prominent Hauraki miners from the start of mining there until his death in 1906. He was also notable for a complicated, if unpublicized, private life resulting from his wife's bigamy (or trigamy?). He prospected and mined on most Hauraki fields and was regarded as a highly competent mine manager. At Te Aroha, he was involved in the initial rush, and became famous for discovering the Champion lode in the Tui portion of that district, which never became as successful as hoped because a method of treating its complex ores profitably had not been discovered.*

To support his family, Cornes was also a contractor and, for many years, a farmer, but despite all his efforts he was never financially secure. He was prominent in the community throughout his life, being elected to various local bodies and even standing for parliament, briefly (he was a lifelong Liberal). He stood up for the interests of the mining industry, and also protected his own interests; like many other miners, he tried to acquire others' claims on questionable grounds.

As Cornes was famous for his sense of humour, it is possible to detect more of his personality than for most miners of his day.

INTRODUCTION

In 1895, a journalist visiting Paeroa met his 'old friend Clem Cornes. Dear old drawly Clem, a real specimen of the old Thames joker, and as honest as they make 'em. If anyone [has] doubts that the Thames peninsula is not chock full of payable reefs, five minutes of Clem Cornes will entirely remove them'.¹ An 'indefatigable prospector and able mine manager', his name was 'instantly recognized by every "nipper" on the Peninsula from Waiorongomai to Kuaotunu'.² As the first quote indicated, Cornes shared the excessively sanguine attitude of so many prospectors. Nearly 30 years later, another journalist regretted that he, like the other Thames pioneers, had not left any first-hand narrative of his career, for this information would never be recovered.³ While this lack of reminiscences is indeed a

¹ 'A Tramp, Esq', 'Casual Ramblings', *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 May 1895, p. 37.

² 'A Tramp, Esq', 'Casual Ramblings', *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 May 1895, p. 38.

³ Fred W. Weston, 'Thames Reminiscences', *New Zealand Herald*, 23 January 1923, p. 9.

great loss, it is possible to discover many details of his career and personality.

EARLY YEARS IN NEW ZEALAND

Cornes was born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1844, the youngest of four sons of Major John Cornes, who fought in India and the Crimea and last served in the Second Battalion of the 18th Royal Irish Regiment.⁴ His mother, Margaret, was the daughter, wife, mother, and sister of soldiers.⁵ Cornes arrived in Auckland on the 'Ida Zeigler' on 22 August 1861, when aged 17, along with Alfred Richard, then aged 20, who would also become a miner.⁶ Alfred and another brother, Edmund Cephalus, who arrived in the colony in 1870 when aged 32, would live in Hauraki with him, Edmund becoming a clerk and schoolteacher at Thames.⁷ As an indication of the closeness of the family, Cornes' second son was named after his elder brother Alfred Richard.⁸ His other brother, John Edwin, had remained in England to marry and pursue his military career.⁹

⁴ Death Certificate of John Cornes, 24 February 1863; Will of John Cornes, 7 May 1862; Will of Margaret Cornes, 5 February 1891, copies provided by Althea Barker, of Thames; Birth Certificate of Edmund Morrin Cornes, 22 June 1879, 1879/14646, BDM; *New Zealand Herald*, 10 September 1906, p. 9.

⁵ Obituary of Margaret Cornes, 'A Real Old Veteran', *New Zealand Herald*, 2 February 1895, Supplement, p. 1 .

⁶ Death Certificates of Alfred Richard Cornes, 14 December 1904, 1904/6384; Clement Augustus Cornes, 10 August 1906, 1906/814, BDM; *Daily Southern Cross*, 23 August 1861, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 17 November 1881, p. 3, 27 August 1898, p. 4; Marriage Notice of Margaret Frances Cornes, *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 July 1883, p. 1.

⁷ Family tree devised by L.W. McGregor, in private possession; Althea Barker, 'Descendants of Clement Augustus Cornes'; Auckland Hospital, Register of Admissions 1870-1885, folio 75, no. 560, ZAAP 15287/2a; Thames Hospital Board, Fees Register 1907-1910, folios 9, 61, 64, YCAH A431/74, ANZ-A; Death Certificate of Edmund Cephalus Cornes, 8 September 1908, 1908/9151, BDM.

⁸ Baptism of Alfred Richard Cornes, Thames Register of Baptisms 1868-1874, no. 173, Anglican Archives, Auckland.

⁹ Information with appended documents provided by Althea Barker, 15 December 2014, email.

Cornes went to the Coromandel goldfield very soon after arriving in New Zealand; Thomas Scanlan, an early Coromandel miner,¹⁰ stated in December 1875 that he ‘had known him for fourteen years at Coromandel and the Thames’.¹¹ He also fought with Major Jackson’s Forest Rangers from August to November 1863, participating in the battle at Rangiaohia and ‘several other engagements’.¹² His elder brother also fought in the Colonial Defence Force.¹³

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

On 29 May 1864, Cornes’ first child, William John, was born but not registered.¹⁴ His mother was Barbara Ellen Morrin (one of several spellings of her surname), who had been born on 5 June 1844 in Paisley, Scotland, to Archibald Morren, an army dispenser, and Susan McDougall.¹⁵ She had come to New Zealand in 1847, when aged three.¹⁶ When married, on 30 September 1857, she gave her age as 16;¹⁷ it would have been embarrassing to admit to being 13 when her husband, Charles Henry Hart, a house carpenter, was aged 29. Because of her youth, her mother had to give her consent to the marriage, in the Catholic Church at Howick. Barbara signed the register with a cross, indicating that she was illiterate, which helps explain the varying spelling of her surname, recorded as Moran on the marriage certificate but Morren on the application to marry (and her

¹⁰ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

¹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 December 1875, p. 3.

¹² Applications for Land Grants 1889-1892, no. 149, Lands and Survey Department, LS 66/2, ANZ-W; Naval and Military Land Claims, *AJHR*, 1892, H-36, p. 1; *Thames Advertiser*, 1 August 1891, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 August 1906, p. 24.

¹³ *New Zealand Gazette*, 29 May 1872, p. 349.

¹⁴ Baptism of William John Cornes, Thames Register of Baptisms 1868-1874, no. 124, Anglican Archives, Auckland.

¹⁵ Birth Certificate of Barbara Morren, 5 June 1844, ancestry.co.uk; Death Certificate of Barbara Ellen Cornes, 26 June 1911, 1911/4012, BDM.

¹⁶ Notices of Intention to Marry 1857, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/2, folio 31, no. 328, ANZ-W; Death Certificate of Barbara Ellen Cornes, 26 June 1911, 1911/4012, BDM.

¹⁷ Marriage Certificate of Barbara Ellen Moran, 30 September 1857, 1857/1332, BDM.

mother was Sarah according to the latter).¹⁸ When her child Ellen Elizabeth died in 1878, Barbara's maiden name was recorded as Moran.¹⁹

Her mother, Susan McDougall, had been married twice; first to Archibald Morren (as Barbara's birth certificate had it) or Moran (as her death certificate had it), and after his death to Samuel Timmins, in March 1848.²⁰ Timmins, a labourer, died in Auckland in 1861 aged 57.²¹ Susan Timmins was still at Coromandel in mid-1867, when she hit Lawrence Murphy on the back of the head with a smoothing iron because he said 'it was well known what she was' and may also have said that she 'kept a bad house',²² meaning a brothel. She moved to Thames in August 1868,²³ and took in washing and milked goats for a living, becoming notorious for her quarrelsome nature and living the life of a periodically drunken vagrant.²⁴ When she died in 1884 from the effects of a fractured thigh and her 'generally debilitated state', the *Thames Advertiser* printed a frank obituary about this 'well-known' character:

Deceased was an eccentric character, and has lived in this district almost from the opening of the goldfield. Her relatives, who reside elsewhere, have always been prepared to support her in

¹⁸ Marriage Certificate of Barbara Ellen Moran, 30 September 1857, 1857/1332, BDM; Notices of Intention to Marry 1857, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/2, folio 31, no. 328, ANZ-W.

¹⁹ Death Certificate of Ellen Elizabeth Cornes, 24 November 1878, 1878/3102, BDM.

²⁰ Marriage Certificate of Samuel Timmons, 19 March 1848, 1848/88; Death Certificate of Susan Timmons, 15 February 1884, 1884/3883, BDM.

²¹ Auckland Hospital, Admission and Discharge Book 1859-1869, folio 22 no. 169, folio 24 no. 216, ZAAP 15287/1a, ANZ-A; Death Certificate of Samuel Timmons, 14 December 1862, 1862/535, BDM.

²² Coromandel Magistrate's Court, Criminal Cases Notebook 1863-1868, hearings of 26 July 1867, 9 August 1867, BACL 14442/1b, ANZ-A.

²³ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miners' Rights 1868, no. 9184, BACL 14358/2a, ANZ-A.

²⁴ Recollections of A.F. Sawyer [1940s], W.G. Hammond Papers, folio 34a, MS 134, Library of the Auckland Institute and Museum; *Thames Advertiser*, Police Court, 19 October 1872, p. 3, Police Court, 17 July 1879, pp. 2, 3, Police Court, 24 November 1879, p. 3, Police Court, 7 June 1881, p. 3, Police Court, 15 June 1881, p. 3, 30 September 1881, p. 3, Police Court, 1 April 1882, p. 3.

comfortable circumstances, but she has preferred remaining here and subsisting in miserable fashion upon Borough rations.²⁵

She was aged 67, leaving two daughters aged 38 and 40. Born in Ireland, she was a member of the Church of England,²⁶ as were her children.

Barbara's sister was Margaret Denison Morrin, according to her death certificate, or Margaret Moran according to her marriage certificate and the death certificate of her son, Thomas Herbert Biggs.²⁷ Margaret was born at Paisley in Scotland in 1846.²⁸ In March 1862, in the Coromandel Registrar's office she married a shoemaker, Thomas Herbert Biggs, aged 32; the registrar spelt her name as Margret Maran.²⁹ Earlier he had spent 15 years in the 58th Regiment.³⁰ In 1887, when aged 59 according to his death certificate, he committed suicide after being depressed over 'money matters' for some time. His widow, recorded as Margaret Denison Biggs, said he had been 'very melancholic' but normally 'was a cheerful, kindly man, with a smile for everyone'.³¹ His widow would die in 1918.³² But curiously, in another example of the confusion in the marital affairs of the Moran/Morrin/Morren family, earlier in September 1857, the same month that Barbara married, her mother gave approval for Margaret to marry John Felix Trayner, a 24-year-old bullock driver, in the Anglican church at Howick. She was recorded as being a 15-year-old servant, making her 1846

²⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 February 1884, p. 2.

²⁶ Death Certificate of Susan Timmins, 15 February 1884, 1884/3883, BDM.

²⁷ Death Certificate of Margaret Denison Biggs, 5 September 1918, 1918/5079, BDM; Marriage Certificate of Margaret Moran, 31 March 1862, 1862/2231; Death Certificate of Thomas Herbert Biggs, 22 February 1913, 1913/420, BDM. [Her birth was not traced by ancestry.co.uk].

²⁸ Death Certificate of Susan Timmins, 15 February 1884, 1884/3883; Marriage Certificate of Margaret Maran, 31 March 1862, 1862/2231, BDM.

²⁹ Marriage Certificate of Margaret Maran, 31 March 1862, 1862/2231, BDM; for her age, see Death Certificate of Margaret Denison Biggs, 5 September 1918, 1918/5079, BDM; Notices of Intention to Marry 1862, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/7, folio 61, ANZ-W.

³⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 16 August 1887, p. 6.

³¹ Death Certificate of Thomas Herbert Biggs, 14 August 1887, 1887/3136, BDM; *New Zealand Herald*, 15 August 1887, p. 5, 16 August 1887, p. 6.

³² Death Certificate of Margaret Denison Cornes, 5 September 1918, 1918/5079, BDM.

birth date highly unlikely (hopefully).³³ No details have survived about them after their marriage; presumably Trayner left New Zealand, leaving Margaret free to remarry, if bigamously.

The sisters kept in close contact; for instance, one of Barbara's daughters died in 1878 at Margaret's house in Auckland.³⁴

Hart had been born in Rhode Island, in the United States of America, in about 1828, to Benjamin and Delia Hart.³⁵ He had no children with Barbara. In August 1863, when aged 36 (and separated from his wife), he had enrolled (as Charles Hart, no place of birth being recorded) in the Second Waikato Militia, but was discharged three months later because of disability.³⁶ It is not known when he left New Zealand, but on 4 August 1873, in Dartmouth, USA, she married Eva Long; he was still a carpenter and still, according to the marriage certificate, a bachelor.³⁷ Thus both his and Barbara's remarriages were bigamous.

When William John Cornes was baptized in Thames in 1869 as Cornes' first child, his date of birth was recorded as 29 May 1864.³⁸ According to a *Waihi* newspaper, he was born at Thames,³⁹ but Thames did not exist then. In fact he was born on 2 June 1864, in Newtown, Auckland, the birth certificate recording his father as James Flynn, a labourer, and his mother as 'Barbara Ellen Flynn, formerly Morrin', who once again signed her name with a cross.⁴⁰ There had not been a marriage, and nothing has been traced about Flynn; and Barbara soon transferring her affections to Cornes. Their first daughter, Margaret Frances, was born at Kapanga, Coromandel, on 26 July 1865; when she was registered (as Margrett or Margaretta Francis), both parents' names were given, the mother's as Ellen Marrion, and her illegitimacy was not recorded.⁴¹ Alfred Richard was born at Kapanga on 20

³³ Notices of Intentions to Marry 1857, BDM 20/2, p. 31, no. 323, ANZ-W; Marriage Certificate of Margaret Moran, 5 September 1857, 1857/1311, BDM.

³⁴ Death Certificate of Ellen Elizabeth Cornes, 24 November 1878, 1878/3012, BDM.

³⁵ Althea Barker to Philip Hart, 3 July 2011, email; information based on ancestry.co.us.

³⁶ Nominal and Descriptive Roll, 2nd Regiment, 1863-1866, p. 14, no. 265, p. 133, Army Department, AD 72/2, ANZ-W.

³⁷ Althea Barker to Philip Hart, 3 July 2011, email; information based on ancestry.co.us.

³⁸ Thames Register of Baptisms 1868-1874, no. 171, Anglican Archives, Auckland.

³⁹ *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 17 October 1929, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Birth Certificate of William John Flynn, 2 June 1864, 1864/23926, BDM; I am indebted to Althea Barker for spotting this certificate.

⁴¹ Birth Certificate of Margaretta Francis Morriion, 26 July 1865, 1865/4863, BDM.

January 1867; his mother (signing her name Barbarella Marion Morrin) was the informant when the birth was registered. Both parents were listed, but this time the illegitimacy was noted.⁴²

At Coromandel, it was unlikely that it was known they were not legally married. For example, on 19 April 1866, when Donald McPhee, a storekeeper, sued Cornes for £9 15s 7d, the balance of an account, he stated that ‘most of these goods were supplied to his “missus” and some to himself’. Goods had been supplied on credit, Cornes sending ‘the little girl that used to come for things what she required’. When Cornes was summonsed, he

told me that he would keep me out of it as long as he could - the reason he gave for this reply was that I had summonsed his “Missus” while he was away.... Had I not been authorized I should not have furnished goods to the little girl or the “Missus” - I have had very little dealings with this “missus” she usually paid in cash.

Cornes denied getting anything on credit, or authorizing others to do so. ‘I deny receiving any of these things, set forth - on that bill of particulars.... I never bought a blanket from you for my “missus” before she was confined’. On that evidence the plaintiff was non-suited.⁴³ Two days later, McPhee produced witnesses who proved that Cornes had received credit on his own authorization, although he happened to be away when the goods were delivered, and therefore won the case despite Cornes’ continued denials.⁴⁴

But who was the ‘little girl’? In the second hearing, McPhee stated that Cornes had ordered goods for her to collect, adding that ‘I delivered some of these goods with the little girl myself’ while Cornes was away. A witness recalled her collecting items like flour, and a man who worked in the shop said he had ‘issued goods to a little girl she used to come for Defts things’.⁴⁵ Clearly this was not a servant, but must have been a child from Barbara’s first marriage whose birth was not registered and who has not been traced.

⁴² Birth Certificate of Alfred Richard Maran, 20 January 1867, 1867/10416, BDM.

⁴³ Coromandel Magistrate’s Court, Civil Cases Notebook 1863-1868, Hearing of 19 April 1866, BACL 14442/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁴ Coromandel Magistrate’s Court, Civil Cases Notebook 1863-1868, Hearing of 21 April 1866, BACL 14442/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁵ Coromandel Magistrate’s Court, Civil Cases Notebook 1863-1868, Hearing of 21 April 1866, BACL 14442/1a, ANZ-A.

On 21 October 1867, Cornes took out his first miner's right for the new Thames goldfield.⁴⁶ In early August 1868 he gave notice to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages at Coromandel that he intended to marry Barbara Marran or Morrison, the two versions of her name recorded.⁴⁷ The marriage took place in the Registrar's Office at Thames on 21 August,⁴⁸ despite both being members of the Church of England.⁴⁹ In the family Bible the date is recorded as 1863.⁵⁰ On 2 October, at their home at Moanataiari, Thames, their son Clement Augustus was born, although he was not registered until the following year; the birth date in the family Bible appears to be 1869,⁵¹ thereby avoiding embarrassment. He was to be known as Gus, to distinguish him from his father, who was commonly known as Clem. Gus and his three older siblings were baptized into the Church of England on the same date.⁵² All subsequent children were baptized soon after birth. Clara Henrietta was born in 1870, Edmund Morrin in 1872, Clara Agatha in 1874, Ellen Elizabeth (Elisbeth in the family Bible) in 1877, a second Edmund Morrin in 1879, John MacDougall (McDugle in the family Bible) in 1880, Harry Graham in 1882, Nellie Selina in 1884, and Sylvia May in 1885. For some unknown reason, the births of Harry Graham and Sylvia May were not registered, although they were recorded in the family Bible.⁵³

⁴⁶ Thames Warden's Court, Miners' Rights Register 1867-1868, no. 1340, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁷ Notices of Intention to Marry 1868-1873, entry for 8 August 1868, Coromandel Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages, AAAE 15169/1a, ANZ-A; Notices of Intention to Marry, Births Deaths and Marriages 1868, BDM, 20/13, folio 165, ANZ-W.

⁴⁸ Marriage Certificate of Clement Augustus Cornes, 21 August 1868, 1868/5783, BDM.

⁴⁹ Death Certificates of Clement Augustus Cornes, 10 August 1906, 1906/814; Barbara Ellen Cornes, 26 June 1911, 1911/4012, BDM.

⁵⁰ Record of Marriages, Cornes Family Bible, in private possession.

⁵¹ Birth Certificate of Clement Augustus Cornes, 2 October 1868, 1868/1987, BDM; List of Births, Cornes' Family Bible, in private possession.

⁵² Thames Register of Baptisms 1868-1874, nos. 171-174, Anglican Archives, Auckland.

⁵³ Birth Certificates of Clara Henrietta Cornes, 31 July 1870, 1870/3147; Edmund Cornes, 27 October 1872, 1872/2998; Clara Agatha Cornes, 7 July 1874, 1874/3134; Ellen Elizabeth Cornes, 2 February 1877, 1877/16208; Edmund Morrin Cornes, 22 June 1879, 1879/14646; John MacDougall Cornes, 27 October 1880, 1880/19690; Nellie Selina Cornes, 22 February 1884, 1884/1256, BDM; Thames Register of Baptisms 1868-1874, nos. 291, 639, 945; Thames Register of Baptisms 1874-1880, no. 630, Anglican Archives,

Five children died before their parents: Clara Henrietta, who died of whooping cough aged three on 3 August 1873, nine-month-old Edmund Morrin of bronchitis eight days later, one-year-old Ellen Elizabeth (Elisibitt in the family Bible) in November 1878 of diarrhoea and exhaustion after being afflicted with worms for three months, Nellie Selina in March 1884 of convulsions after only 14 days of life, and Harry Graham in January 1905.⁵⁴ The latter had fought in the Boer War before living on the Gold Coast of Africa with his brother Ted (Edmund); after being taken ill, he died in London in January 1905.⁵⁵

MINING AT THAMES, COROMANDEL, AND OHINEMURI

Between October 1867 and April 1870, Cornes prospected and mined at Karaka (Thames), then at Tararu on the northern boundary of Thames, Karaka, Coromandel, Kennedy Bay, Karaka yet again, and finally at Karaka South.⁵⁶ According to Fred Preece, one of the earlier Coromandel miners, he and Cornes pegged out the Just in Time claim.⁵⁷ This was at Moanataiari Creek, in the Karaka Block, and when registered on 13 June 1868 Cornes was one of ten owners but Preece was not. There were seven shares, Cornes selling half his half-share on 29 July.⁵⁸ In November, he was

Auckland; Katikati Register of Baptisms 1879-1944, nos. 41, 42, 116, Anglican Diocesan Archives, Hamilton. List of Births in family Bible includes Henry Graham Cornes, 14 November 1882, Sylvia May Cornes, 23 April 1885, Cornes' Family Bible, in private possession.

⁵⁴ Death Certificates of Clara Henrietta Cornes, 3 August 1873, 1873/796; Edmund Morrin Cornes, 10 August 1873, 1873/797; Ellen Elizabeth Cornes, 24 November 1878, 1878/3012; Nellie Selina Cornes, 7 March 1884, 1884/3946, BDM; *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 August 1873, p. 23, 16 August 1873, p. 23, 30 November 1878, p. 1; *Thames Star*, 25 January 1905, p. 1; List of Deaths, Cornes Family Bible, in private possession.

⁵⁵ *Thames Star*, 25 January 1905, p. 1; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 January 1905, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miners' Rights 1867-1868, no. 1340, BACL 14358/1a; Register of Miners' Rights 1868, nos. 13136, 13536, BACL 14358/2a; Register of Miners' Rights 1868-1869, nos. 5625, 6804, 8791, BACL 14358/3a, ANZ-A.

⁵⁷ Letter from Fred Preece, *Observer*, 20 March 1915, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868, folio 157, BACL 14397/1a; Register of Agreements 1868, folios 163-164, BACL 14417/2a, ANZ-A.

one of seven owners in the *Pride of Scotland* at Wiseman's Gully.⁵⁹ From August to October 1869, he was an owner of five claims in the new rush to Tokatea, at Coromandel.⁶⁰ He lived on the *Just in Time* claim at Moanataiari Creek from July 1870 to July 1874.⁶¹ In October 1870, he became one of 18 owners of the *Rocky Bar*, at Karaka Creek, with one of the 15 shares.⁶² He invested in the *American Eagle Company* but lost his 100 shares through failing to pay a call.⁶³ He may have invested in other companies as well, but in the absence of company records this is impossible to trace. He had 'Corney's Tribute' in the *Manukau Company's* mine in 1872.⁶⁴

Corney managed Kelly's tribute in the *Albion* mine in the early 1870s, working it 'with great success for several years' until abandoning it because the tribute terms were too high; he took it up once more in 1875.⁶⁵ In April 1873 he became manager for a company, the *Central Italy*, for the first time.⁶⁶ One year later, Henry Goldsmith, the mining inspector,⁶⁷ described him as an 'exceedingly careful man', and the *Thames Advertiser* wrote that his 'care and attention in regard to the prevention of accidents by adopting all necessary precautions has always been great'.⁶⁸ At a shareholders' meeting he was unanimously congratulated for the manner in which he had managed the mine.⁶⁹ When he became manager of the *Exchange* in August 1874, the same newspaper considered that a better appointment could not have been made.

⁵⁹ Thames Warden's Court, Thames Claims Register 1868-1869, no. 1257, BACL 14397/3a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁰ Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Mining Claims 1868-1872, nos. 76, 100, 104, 116, 164, BACL 14396/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶¹ Thames Register of Baptisms 1868-1874, nos. 291, 639, 945, Anglican Archives, Auckland.

⁶² Thames Warden's Court, Shortland Claims Register 1870, no. 2311, BACL 14397/5a, ANZ-A.

⁶³ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 October 1872, p. 2, 21 May 1873, p. 2, 24 February 1876, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 September 1872, p. 8.

⁶⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 August 1874, p. 3, 30 March 1875, p. 3, 18 June 1875, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 April 1873, p. 3.

⁶⁷ See *Thames Advertiser*, Warden's Court, 9 September 1874, p. 3, 17 March 1875, p. 3, 5 November 1878, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 6 November 1878, p. 2.

⁶⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 4 May 1874, p. 3.

⁶⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 29 May 1874, p. 3.

Although he was supposed to be the nominee of a clique, from our personal knowledge of Mr Cornes, we can say that he is not a man who would do a dirty or dishonest action in the working of a mine or rigging of a market to please any patron or set of patrons under the sun. Mr Cornes has a hard won and well earned reputation as an experienced and successful miner.

He had ‘knowledge and fore thought’, and had done more than all previous managers to make the Central Italy a success.⁷⁰ A correspondent noted that his appointment had ‘given rise to some comment, but I do not think the directors could have made a better selection’.⁷¹

In early 1875, there was a rush to the new Ohinemuri goldfield. Cornes had abandoned his position in the Exchange mine before then, and attended a meeting of miners at Ohinemuri before opening day.⁷² He was recalled as a ‘leading light amongst the Ohinemuri pioneers’,⁷³ and was amongst the first to work at Karangahake, managing the Hauraki prospectors’ claim.⁷⁴ This became the Karangahake Company’s ground in June 1875, with Cornes as its first manager, although he did not own any shares.⁷⁵ Still the manager in March 1876, he left its employ before September with a reference from the company.⁷⁶ Apart from a share in the Christmas Eve claim at Owharoa, appropriately registered on 24 December 1875,⁷⁷ surviving records do not show him having interests in any other Ohinemuri claims in that year.

In June 1875, in addition to mining at Karangahake he took over the upper portions of Kelly’s Tribute in the Albion mine at Thames, at 25 per cent. A mining reporter noted that although the ground was well fossicked, Cornes appeared ‘confident’ that there were ‘some blocks intact’ which would ‘pay him good wages at least’. As he was ‘certainly intimately

⁷⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 4 August 1874, p. 3.

⁷¹ Thames Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 August 1874, p. 15.

⁷² *Thames Advertiser*, 20 February 1875, p. 3.

⁷³ *Observer*, 21 February 1903, p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 July 1887, p. 14.

⁷⁵ *New Zealand Gazette*, 10 June 1875, p. 401;

⁷⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 March 1876, p. 3; Memorandum by director of Karangahake Gold Mining Company, 7 September 1876, Mines Department, MD 1, 87/782, ANZ-W.

⁷⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Ohinemuri Claims 1875, folio 119, BBAV 11568/1a, ANZ-A.

acquainted with the ground', he was likely to make it pay.⁷⁸ Cornes was still tributing in this mine with one other man in September 1876.⁷⁹ At the start of that year, he had offered 30 per cent to be permitted to tribute in the Alburnia, but when refused he demanded an end to locking up ground in this manner.⁸⁰ His experiences as a tributer in the Kuranui made him aware of the defects of the system under which tributes were granted. He told Sir George Grey that, 'in consequence of having to pay to companies from 15 to 25 per cent of all the gold they obtained, they were obliged to throw away thousands of tons of stuff which they could crush if the ground was their own'.⁸¹

INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

It was as a spokesman for the rights of the ordinary miner that Cornes became a public figure. In February 1874, he was added to the executive committee of the Thames Miners' Accident Relief Fund Committee.⁸² In October 1875, with others he raised money to send a fellow miner to be with relatives in Australia after his wife killed his two children with an axe.⁸³ Two months later, he announced that he would stand for the Thames parliamentary seat. 'I am a working miner myself, and shall do my utmost to represent the working class'. His programme included government aid for prospectors, construction of goldfield tracks, an end to land monopoly, and land for settlement by miners.⁸⁴ One local man responded that he was 'honest in purpose, but without abilities to advocate the principles he professes'.⁸⁵ Nominated by his friend of 14 years, Thomas Scanlan, in his election speech Cornes stated that he stood as an independent who 'went in to break up cliques.... When gold was there he was in the thick of it if possible. (Cheers). He did not pretend to any great ability, but he had common sense'.⁸⁶ However, within a week of standing, he retired in favour

⁷⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 June 1875, p. 3.

⁷⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 September 1876, p. 3.

⁸⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1876, p. 3.

⁸¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 February 1876, p. 3.

⁸² *Thames Advertiser*, 10 February 1874, p. 2.

⁸³ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 October 1875, p. 3.

⁸⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 29 December 1875, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Letter from John F. Smith, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 December 1875, p. 3.

⁸⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 December 1875, p. 3.

of Sir George Grey; as his name remained on the ballot paper, he received 20 votes.⁸⁷ In June 1876, he was ‘understood to be feeling his way as to his chances of being returned in the event of his contesting the seat’ in a by-election caused by Grey’s resignation,⁸⁸ but did not stand.

Immediately after his only attempt to stand for parliament, he was elected in mid-January 1876 to a Progress Committee whose task was to find public works for unemployed Thames miners, to be funded by the government.⁸⁹ Later that month, he called for the formation of a miners’ association to put pressure on the government to provide this money.⁹⁰ He convened a meeting to form one, stating it would unite the miners and not permit their views to be misrepresented by others.⁹¹ At the meeting, he said that ‘he was not the promoter of this movement. A number of miners who had been in miners’ unions at home had spoken to him on the subject’. Although elected to the committee of 12 that drew up the rules of the Miners’ Association,⁹² he took no further part in its work. In February 1890, the Thames Miners’ Union was formed,⁹³ and in July his brother Alfred Richard, who had been mining at Thames since that goldfield began, became its second president.⁹⁴ In May that year, his eldest son was elected treasurer of the newly formed Karangahake branch of the Amalgamated Miner’s Union of Australasia; Cornes was not recorded as being a founder, but may have been an ordinary member.⁹⁵

MINING AND FARMING IN OHINEMURI

In 1876, Cornes moved to Ohinemuri, and did not ever again live permanently at Thames, although in 1877 and 1878 he still had a house

⁸⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 January 1876, p. 2, 12 January 1876, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 June 1876, p. 2.

⁸⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1876, p. 3; *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 15 March 1876, p. 97.

⁹⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 January 1876, p. 3.

⁹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 January 1876, p. 3.

⁹² *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1876, p. 3.

⁹³ See paper on the Thames Miners Union.

⁹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1890, p. 3, 3 February 1890, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 23 July 1890, p. 4; for obituaries of Alfred Richard Cornes, see *Thames Star*, 15 December 1904, p. 2, *Observer*, 24 December 1904, p. 5.

⁹⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 May 1890, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 21 May 1890, p. 2.

and garden on the Golden Calf, at Moanataiari Creek.⁹⁶ In mid-1877, he was in a party that prospected Te Puru Creek, and, according to his account, found good gold;⁹⁷ if that was the case, why did he not register a claim? In August 1878, he was the manager of the Phoenix, at Tairua, but within a month work was suspended for lack of funds, and he left the district.⁹⁸

Like many miners, Cornes wanted to become a farmer, either to supplement or to replace income earned from mining. On 12 May 1862, he had received an Immigrant Land Grant of 40 acres in the district of Karangahape; his brother Alfred also received the same amount.⁹⁹ His section was allotment 51 at Karangahape in the Waitakerei Survey District, and he retained it until at least 1871,¹⁰⁰ but clearly did little or nothing with it because of living first at Coromandel and then at Thames. In January 1875, his name was listed amongst those seeking to join a special settlement that the Auckland Provincial Government was urged to establish on part of the Piako Block.¹⁰¹ He attended a meeting in Thames in July that called for the settlement of the Waihou valley.¹⁰² After the opening of Ohinemuri, he applied for an agricultural lease of 50 acres in April 1876, which was granted once the survey was completed.¹⁰³ This land, near Mackaytown, remained in his possession until he transferred it to his eldest son in August 1884.¹⁰⁴

CONTINUED PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

⁹⁶ *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1877*, p. 16; *1878*, p. 16.

⁹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 4 April 1878, p. 3.

⁹⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 12 August 1878, p. 3, 13 September 1878, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Land Grants for Immigrant, Register of Grantees 1862-1863, folio 117, Land Order nos. 1110, 1111, BAAZ 4115/63, ANZ-A.

¹⁰⁰ *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 20 June 1862, p. 68, 3 August 1864, p. 153, 27 December 1865, p. 323, 11 April 1867, p. 102, 26 September 1871, p. 258; Crown Grants Record Book (Waste Lands Act), 1870-1873, no. 26, BAAZ 1142/17, ANZ-A.

¹⁰¹ Robert Comer and others to Superintendent, Auckland Province, 28 January 1875, Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFL 8170, 1332/75, ANZ-A.

¹⁰² *Thames Advertiser*, 20 July 1875, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Thames Warden's Court, Mackaytown and Thames Letterbook 1876-1896, p. 15, BACL 14458/1b, ANZ-A.

¹⁰⁴ Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Agricultural Leases at Ohinemuri 1875-1892, folio 62, ZAAP 13784/1a, ANZ-A.

Cornes continued to agitate for land for settlement, calling a meeting to consider this (amongst other issues) in March 1878. At this meeting, he described the sale of land near Te Aroha to an Englishman, John Broomhall,¹⁰⁵ for a settlement of British farmers¹⁰⁶ as ‘illegal’; it should have been granted to miners. In response to the argument that this settlement would bring in British capital, he said that ‘they had heard much of foreign capital, but he had been one of the first on the field, and precious little foreign capital had done for him’.¹⁰⁷ As a member of a deputation to a politician concerning this settlement, he said that ‘in the opinion of many persons “Broomhall” meant Auckland speculators’.¹⁰⁸ He told a Paeroa meeting two months later that he wanted land to settle his family on;¹⁰⁹ clearly he considered his 50 acres of undeveloped land inadequate. In March 1880, he asked the Minister of Lands, William Rolleston, whether there would be any government money to assist prospecting in Ohinemuri. ‘The majority of the residents under the agricultural leases were old Thames miners, who had been induced to settle in the district upon the expectation that gold existed’.¹¹⁰ Rolleston was puzzled by conflicting statements about land near Te Aroha made available for settlement: ‘he had heard several men state the lands were very good, and now Mr Cornes would lead him to believe they were very bad’.¹¹¹

Cornes’ main concern was the needs of miners. In 1876, when a member of a deputation of miners to Sir George Grey about unemployed miners, he detailed how companies did not work their ground, which should be made available for miners.

There had been a lot of swindling carried on at the Thames. Companies had been floated for selling script instead of working the ground. They would get in a call of 3d or 6d, the half of which was eaten up by the expense of collection and legal management. Then they would go to work for a month until their money was run out, and afterwards lock up the ground for six or eight

¹⁰⁵ See *AJHR*, 1878, D-8.

¹⁰⁶ See paper on special settlements in the Te Aroha district.

¹⁰⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 March 1878, p. 2, 26 March 1878, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 April 1878, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 May 1875, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ *Thames Star*, 22 March 1880, p. 2.

¹¹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 March 1880, p. 3.

months. Then, when they started again, they found the work which had been previously done destroyed, and then had to do it over again. If they could not afford to work the ground, they ought to throw it open. Their object was not to jump companies out of their ground, but to give them a fair chance, and if they could not work it themselves, to let others who were willing have a chance.

There were hundreds of idle men at Thames ‘who would not cadge on the Government for employment, but who would, if they had the chance, develop the field as they did at first’. When the depression in mining had started, ‘men went over the field prospecting, but could not put a pick in any ground which did not belong to some company’. The miners ‘objected to having two laws, one for the capitalist and the other for the miner’.¹¹² Two years later, he called a meeting to demand the abolition of the gold duty.¹¹³ In 1880, he supported having goldfields revenue handled by a Mining Board instead of local councils.¹¹⁴ In August that year, he was elected to a committee to investigate whether Maori landowners were receiving excessive revenue from miners’ rights and obtaining other benefits at the expense of miners. He considered that Maori were getting 50 per cent more than James Mackay, then the Civil Commissioner for Hauraki,¹¹⁵ had intended when he reached an agreement with them in 1867.¹¹⁶ His motion, that it was ‘illegal to compel men to pay a tax when they have no interest in the field, and that each miner contribute a shilling towards a fund to be expended in testing the question’, lapsed for want of a seconder.¹¹⁷

After settling at Mackaytown South,¹¹⁸ he quickly became prominent in local issues, in May 1876 being elected to the first Ohinemuri School Committee.¹¹⁹ Wanting Ohinemuri to have its own county council, in 1878 he was one of those who called a meeting at Paeroa to consider forming one.¹²⁰ Believing that county and borough funds were being wastefully spent, in 1878 he checked the books of the Thames County Council for

¹¹² *Thames Advertiser*, 24 February 1876, p. 3.

¹¹³ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 March 1878, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 August 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ See paper on Maori land in Hauraki.

¹¹⁶ *Thames Star*, 30 August 1880, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 August 1880, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 May 1876, p. 3.

¹²⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 May 1876, p. 3, 22 May 1878, p. 2.

evidence;¹²¹ the ensuing silence suggests that he could not find any. In 1879, he demanded telegraph and road works.¹²² In 1880, he was re-elected to the school committee with the third highest vote, 50; the highest polling candidates received 136 and 63.¹²³

A VOLUNTEER

Cornes was actively involved in the Volunteer movement, first enrolling in the Thames Scottish Rifles in August 1874 but having to cease his involvement when he went to Karangahake in the following year.¹²⁴ In March 1879 he enrolled in the new Paeroa corps, the Thames No. 3 Scottish Rifle Volunteers.¹²⁵ In August 1880, when in Thames for some weeks, he ‘displayed his enthusiasm’ one Saturday ‘by marching from Shortland to Paeroa through all the mud and rain, in order to be present at the inspection parade on that evening’.¹²⁶

A CONTRACTOR

In 1879, Cornes became a road-making contractor, but was not very successful. In February, he tendered unsuccessfully for various road works in Ohinemuri.¹²⁷ Later that year, he did obtain a contract to make a road near Paeroa, but this ended in dramatic fashion at the end of August when the surveyor’s assistant, ‘Daldy’ MacWilliams,¹²⁸ was shot by members of a hapu protesting at a land sale.¹²⁹ He helped to carry MacWilliams into Paeroa, and then ‘went ahead for the purpose of detaining the steamer’ that was about to leave for Thames.¹³⁰ In 1882, with his partner in that contract,

¹²¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 March 1878, p. 2, 15 May 1878, p. 2.

¹²² *Thames Advertiser*, 1 September 1879, p. 3.

¹²³ *Thames Star*, 27 January 1880, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 28 January 1880, p. 3.

¹²⁴ Thames Scottish Rifles, Nominal Roll, June 1875, Army Department, ARM41, 1882/1v, ANZ-W.

¹²⁵ Thames No. 3 Scottish Rifle Volunteers, Capitation to 31 December 1880, Army Department, ARM41, 1882/1o, ANZ-W.

¹²⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 August 1880, p. 3.

¹²⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 February 1879, p. 2.

¹²⁸ See *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 20 January 1931, p. 2.

¹²⁹ See paper on the ‘Daldy’ McWilliams ‘outrage’.

¹³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 September 1879, p. 3.

Edward Quinn, another miner,¹³¹ he petitioned parliament for relief. ‘On account of a survey party having been fired on by the Natives the Native Minister directed them to desist from further work; that the work was stopped for nearly four months at a great loss to themselves’. The Public Petitions Committee did not consider that they were entitled to any relief.¹³² In May 1880, he twice tendered unsuccessfully to form part of the road from Paeroa to Katikati.¹³³ In September, he unsuccessfully tendered for three contracts on the main road to Te Aroha; the following month his tender for drainage on this road was accepted.¹³⁴

PARTICIPATING IN THE TE AROHA RUSH

Cornes went to Te Aroha one month before opening day, attending a meeting of prospectors held there on 25 October at which he ‘moved that it was not yet proved that this was a payable goldfield’.¹³⁵ At the miners’ meeting held on the day prior to the opening, he ‘spoke strongly’ against the methods the warden, Harry Kenrick,¹³⁶ proposed to deal with conflicts over pegging off.¹³⁷ He seconded the motion opposing preference being given to the early prospectors.¹³⁸ He participated in the rush,¹³⁹ but was not a shareholder in any of the initial claims. In January 1881, he was appointed mine manager of the Goldfield claim on the Tui section of the ground, all the miners under his direction being Maori.¹⁴⁰ One correspondent, in reporting his appointment, referred to him as ‘the well-known Ohinemuri prospector’.¹⁴¹

¹³¹ See paper on his life.

¹³² Reports of Public Petitions Committee, *AJHR*, 1882, I-1, p. 6; Minute Book of Public Petitions Committee, Petition 86, Meetings held on 20 June 1882, 23 June 1882, and evidence given by John Sheehan, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1882/7, ANZ-W.

¹³³ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 May 1880, p. 3, 25 May 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁴ *Thames Star*, 6 September 1880, p. 2, 27 September 1880, p. 2, 7 October 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁶ See paper on his life.

¹³⁷ *Thames Star*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

¹³⁹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 325, issued 25 November 1880, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁴⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1881, p. 3, 26 January 1881, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 February 1881, p. 3.

No other involvement in mining was recorded, for he became a bait and livery stable proprietor at the new settlement. On 9 December 1880, he advertised 'Horse Feed, 1s 6d - Paddocks, 3s per week'.¹⁴² These paddocks were on the road to Paeroa,¹⁴³ and he also erected a livery stable on the opposite side of the river.¹⁴⁴ He also did some carting, for instance transporting one ton of quartz to a river steamer for the Golden Eagle claim at half the usual rates.¹⁴⁵ In February 1881, a nephew, Archibald Biggs, was working in his stables.¹⁴⁶ When the rush collapsed, so did this business, leaving him 'broke'.¹⁴⁷

MINING IN OHINEMURI AGAIN

In October 1881 Cornes became one of the three owners of the Just-in-Time, at Waitekauri, with 23 of the 25 shares.¹⁴⁸ He had to defend himself against two miners, William Snodgrass¹⁴⁹ and John McWilliams,¹⁵⁰ who wanted their names inserted in the license. Snodgrass stated that in May, when he started prospecting, 'Cornes had told him and his mate to let him know if there was a prospect of getting anything good. Some little time afterwards he sent a message to Cornes at Paeroa to come up, and he did so', and they pegged out the ground together in August. Previously, the three men 'had a conversation in a house at Waitekauri, and it was then decided that anything they got would be divided between them'. Snodgrass was not present when the ground was re-pegged shortly afterwards, and 'afterwards heard that Cornes was trying to deprive them of their interest'. When the three men met in Paeroa, 'Cornes wanted to give them a full share each (1-24th interest in the ground) in settlement of their claims, but they did not agree to this. In consequence of what he heard at Waitekauri',

¹⁴² Advertisement, *Thames Star*, 9 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁴³ *Waikato Times*, 15 February 1881, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Thames Star*, 10 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ *Thames Star*, 18 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Waikato Times*, 15 February 1881, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 12 May 1888, p. 2.

¹⁴⁸ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1875-1882, folio 181, BACL 14397/10a, ANZ-A.

¹⁴⁹ See *Thames Star*, 3 December 1880, p. 2, Warden's Court, 14 October 1881, p. 2, 28 October 1881, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 23 June 1887, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ See advertisements, *Thames Star*, 31 July 1885, p. 3, 21 August 1895, p. 2.

Snodgrass and McWilliams 'lodged an objection to the granting of the license. Cornes had never denied to him that they were mates, nor had he ever received any money from him for all the work he had done'. He cited Cornes saying: 'Anything we get, boys, we'll go whacks' [meaning to take shares]¹⁵¹. Asked about the working of the claim, he said 'Cornes did very little work on the ground; he simply opened up the reef', a task he estimated took about an hour. 'He had made no application to Cornes for a full interest in the claim before the gold was found, but trusted to his honesty'.

McWilliams confirmed the agreement to go 'whacks'. After hearing that Cornes 'was trying to deprive them of their interest' he had gone 'to see him about it, when he said they would receive their interests'. The three men had done 'very little work' after the gold was found. In his evidence, Cornes denied any agreement to go 'whacks'. 'No one helped him to peg out the ground on the first occasion. He did it himself, but only used two pegs. He never received a message from them asking him to go to Waitekauri. He had promised them a share in the Just-in-Time claim in consideration for a share in some other claim, and not because they had any right to it'.¹⁵² The warden ordered that the defendants each receive a share.¹⁵³ Having found a good lode, Cornes sold three shares at the beginning of November.¹⁵⁴

At the end of October he applied for the Canadian.¹⁵⁵ That this claim showed promise was revealed by others seeking either to have their names added as owners or to force him to forfeit it.¹⁵⁶ Later that month he obtained the Ohaupo Boys from another miner who was not working it.¹⁵⁷ In December, he had shares in the Caledonia Company and applied for the Last Shot.¹⁵⁸ At the beginning of 1882, he became mine manager for the Just in Time Company,¹⁵⁹ holding 1,500 of its 15,000 shares.¹⁶⁰ In that year,

¹⁵¹ Jonathon Green, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang* (London, 1998), p. 526.

¹⁵² Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 20 October 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵³ *Thames Star*, 21 October 1881, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 October 1881, p. 9; *Thames Advertiser*, 7 November 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Applications for Agricultural Leases and Licensed Holdings 1878-1886, folio 71, BACL 14452/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁶ *Thames Star*, Warden's Court, 14 October 1881, p. 2, 31 October 1881, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ *New Zealand Gazette*, 1 December 1881, p. 1601; *Thames Star*, 21 December 1881, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 6 February 1882, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 19 January 1882, p. 93.

when he was variously reported as being a miner living at Mackaytown and Ohinemuri and as a mine manager living at Waitekauri, he held shares in three other Waitekauri companies.¹⁶¹ In mid-year he had a tribute in the Waitekauri Company's mine, and expected a good return.¹⁶² Other mines were unsuccessful, and he forfeited the Canadian in August 1882 and the Last Shot in January 1883.¹⁶³ There was no other published report of his being involved in mining at Ohinemuri during 1883 or 1884 apart from his becoming a shareholder in the Sir Walter Scott Company, at Karangahake.¹⁶⁴

TE AROHA AGAIN

Cornes returned to Te Aroha in January 1883 and obtained a license to cut timber.¹⁶⁵ In July, the local newspaper carried the following advertisement: 'C.A. Cornes, adjoining the race-course, Has always on sale - Firewood, House Blocks, Puriri Blocks, etc, etc.... General Carting Done'.¹⁶⁶ He owned land on the flat below the future Tui mines, the steeplechase for the Ruakaka horse races traversing some his Cornes' 'enclosed' land.¹⁶⁷ Early in September he created brief excitement by reporting having found gold near the top of Bald Spur. 'The ground was marked out during the first rush to Te Aroha, and only a very small amount of prospecting was done at that time. A little gold was known to exist in one reef', but the new find exceeded 'anything previously discovered'.¹⁶⁸ The *Te Aroha News*, reporting the rush to peg out the ground, deprecated

anything like an excitement being worked up and shares sold at big figures, the vendors bagging large sums of money for themselves, leaving nothing for prospecting the field. Great credit is due to Mr Clem Cornes for his perseverance in making the

¹⁶¹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 19 January 1882, pp. 90, 91, 20 July 1882, p. 988.

¹⁶² *Thames Advertiser*, 24 June 1882, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 6 July 1882, p. 2; see also *Thames Star*, 31 October 1882, p. 2.

¹⁶³ *Thames Star*, 12 August 1882, p. 3, 9 January 1883, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ *New Zealand Gazette*, 28 August 1884, p. 1318.

¹⁶⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 8/1883, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁶ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 14 July 1883, p. 3.

¹⁶⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1883, p. 2; see also 3 November 1883, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ *Waikato Times*, 6 September 1883, p. 2.

discovery, and when found for the judicious and careful manner in which he tried to prevent anything like exaggerated reports getting about.¹⁶⁹

In October he registered the Dunstan Nos. 1 and 2, Surprise, and Who'd Have Thought It claims, all near the township. He was the sole owner of the latter two, and had an equal partnership with a mining agent, John Richard Randerson,¹⁷⁰ in the Dunstan claims.¹⁷¹ None were of any value, the mining inspector reporting in April 1883 that 'a large reef was opened up on the western side of the mountain, and a considerable amount of prospecting carried on', without finding anything payable.¹⁷² Cornes later said that this second experience of mining at Te Aroha had left him 'broke' once more.¹⁷³

FARMING AGAIN

During 1884, Cornes concentrated on trying to make a success of his small farm near Mackaytown, on which he and his sons reared cattle.¹⁷⁴ As he was sometimes absent prospecting or managing a mine, his wife periodically had to run the farm, as indicated by her advertisement in October 1885 for 'a Smart Strong Boy, about 14 years of age, able to milk and assist on Farm; to go to Karangahake. Comfortable home, 10s per week'.¹⁷⁵ The four-roomed house was valued in 1885 at £80; the outhouses were valued at £25, there were 65 chains of fencing, 20 of the 50 acres were in grass, and just over an acre was in cultivation. The total value of the improvements was £232.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 8 September 1883, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ See *Observer*, 4 August 1883, p. 15; *Waikato Times*, 9 February 1884, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Claims 1881-1887, folios 147-150, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷² George Wilson to Harry Kenrick, 8 April 1884, *AJHR*, 1884, H-9, p. 20.

¹⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 12 May 1888, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ See Paeroa Magistrate's Court, Notes of Evidence 1884-1892, *J. Barrett v. C.A. Cornes*, 24 November 1884, ZAAP 13790/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁵ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 31 October 1885, p. 7.

¹⁷⁶ J.A. Cheal (Government Surveyor) to S. Percy Smith (Assistant Surveyor-General, Auckland), 15 January 1885, Ohinemuri Agricultural Leases, Section 199, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1888/128, ANZ-W.

That Cornes found it difficult to make a living from his farm was indicated in an 1890 report that these leases were on bad land and that after years of work many farms remained covered in teatree and fern, estimated, according to Cornes, 'to sustain life at the rate of two grasshoppers to the acre'.¹⁷⁷ This quip was repeated in later years, a variant recorded in 1888 and 1897 being that 'for many years [he] had done his best to rear a large family upon an agricultural allotment which would carry, as he himself states, ten grasshoppers to the acre'.¹⁷⁸ Clearly his family's hard work had increased the carrying capacity. That he was in straitened financial circumstances in the early 1880s was shown when a storekeeper successfully sued him in June 1884 for £7 18s 1d, for the magistrate allowed him to pay at the rate of £2 a month.¹⁷⁹

That the Cornes family was not the only one that struggled to make a living on this land and needed to find other sources of income was indicated by an 1885 report by the government surveyor in Thames:

The settlers as a body have come to the conclusion that the land is worthless and it does not even pay its annual rental. They have spent their "all" upon it and every penny earned goes into the soil and the best years of their lives have been wasted on it, they have their homesteads, wives and families, and would on that account prefer remaining where they are and letting their few stock have the run of the bush, while the head of the family provides food by working on the roads or in the mines.¹⁸⁰

MORE PROSPECTING

In 1885, his prospecting of the Tui district at Te Aroha led to his discovery of the Champion lode¹⁸¹. He also prospected at Karangahake and Waihi during that year, in August applying for the Silver King at the

¹⁷⁷ Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 March 1890, p. 3.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas M. Humphreys, *Handbook of the Auckland Goldfields, New Zealand* (Auckland, 1888), p. 24; reprinted without acknowledgment in New Zealand Publishing Company, *Mining Directory and Hand Book* (Auckland, 1897), p. 85.

¹⁷⁹ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Civil Record Book 1881-1884, 124/1884, BCDG 11221/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁰ J.A. Cheal to S. Percy Smith, 15 January 1885, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1888/128, ANZ-W.

¹⁸¹ For details, see paper on the Tui mines: a portion of the Te Aroha Mining District.

former.¹⁸² At Waihi, in August and September, along with a sleeping partner, John Edward Banks,¹⁸³ he applied for the Mina and Minister of Mines claims and for the Just in Time in his own name.¹⁸⁴ He had used 'Just in Time' since his early mining days, presumably because he hoped it would bring luck; he obtained this one after obtaining its forfeiture for non-working. When a miner sued for forfeiture of the Minister of Mines for the same reason, Cornes 'deposed that he had been misled in marking out the claim owing to the manager of the Martha Extended shewing him wrong boundary pegs, the latter then pegged five men's ground out over his, and hence' he 'did not work the ground. As the plaintiff did not have a miner's right, he was nonsuited.'¹⁸⁵ In October, with Banks he purchased interests in the Nil Desperandum claim.¹⁸⁶

His attempt to obtain the Silverton at Waihi led to controversy. This was pegged off on 12 August by another miner, John McCombie,¹⁸⁷ but Cornes laid a plaint against him on 29 August. His justification was that two of the pegs were neither three inches in diameter nor three inches square, as required by the regulations, instead being two and a half inches on one side, although at least three and a half on the other.¹⁸⁸ At the hearing, Kenrick held that the defect in the size of the pegs was only technical and that McCombie, 'as the holder of a miner's right, had the right to be upon the land for exploration purposes', although he had no legal title on the technicality of the size of the pegs, not having marked out the claim 'in the manner proscribed by the Act'. As McCombie was 'in legal occupation, but had no legal title to exclusive occupation', he should be

¹⁸² Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Applications for Agricultural Leases and Licensed Holdings 1878-1886, folio 125, BACL 14452/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 21 August 1885, p. 2.

¹⁸³ See *Thames Advertiser*, 23 January 1874, p. 3, 15 November 1892, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 1 May 1925, p. 10.

¹⁸⁴ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Applications for Agricultural Leases and Licensed Holdings 1878-1886, folios 129, 133, BACL 14452/1a; Register of Thames Claims 1884-1886, no. 1365, BACL 14397/15a, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 September 1885, p. 2, 24 September 1885, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 11 September 1885, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1885-1886, folio 9, BACL 14397/16a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁷ See paper on Billy Nicholl.

¹⁸⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 12 September 1885, p. 5, Supreme Court, 22 October 1885, p. 3.

allowed to make his title good, and refused to grant the claim to Cornes, who had to pay costs.¹⁸⁹ Kenrick noted that Cornes 'did not take any steps for several days after a lease had been applied for' by McCombie, and did not have a better claim. 'The ground would therefore be open for occupation, and if it came to a tie between the parties as to who was first for the matter of half an hour or so he would let defendant's pegging go, as he had the best claim in equity'.¹⁹⁰

Kenrick's decision led to a race to peg out the ground again. McCombie engaged Arthur Charles Gilman, who operated mail coaches,¹⁹¹ and Cornes his son Gus. Both Cornes and McCombie waited at Paeroa for news of the verdict, and Cornes, who 'had the advantage in being instructed by his solicitor as to the probable outcome of the case, wired to his son to go out at once and mark the ground'. As Gilman spent three quarters of an hour obtaining a horse, Gus Cornes won the race, although another man had pegged off the claim already.¹⁹² When Cornes appealed to the Supreme Court against Kenrick's decision, the judge confirmed it because 'there was a substantial compliance with the Act, the pegs being of a greater surface than 2 x 3. To him it appeared to be very sharp practice on the part of the appellant', against whom costs were awarded.¹⁹³

Kenrick's decision had caused controversy, some miners being heard to proclaim 'they never had heard a decision so rotten'. 'Nemo', of the *Thames Star*, responded that the verdict should 'commend itself to the commonsense of most' and would

have the complete sympathy of all right-minded persons. Not to put too fine a point on the matter, an attempt at jumping was frustrated.... There can be no doubt as to the equity of the decision. A person who prowls about with a foot rule in his hand, trying to discover a fault, however slight, in the pegs of persons whom he has known for years does not stand upon a pinnacle of honor, for sharp practice, although sometimes profitable, does not

¹⁸⁹ Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 11 September 1885, p. 2; Supreme Court, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 October 1885, p. 3.

¹⁹⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 12 September 1885, p. 5.

¹⁹¹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 936-937.

¹⁹² *New Zealand Herald*, 12 September 1885, p. 5; Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 September 1885, p. 2.

¹⁹³ Supreme Court, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 October 1885, p. 3.

conduce to that feeling of friendship and respect which persons who love their fellow men seek to cultivate.¹⁹⁴

In July 1887, when prospecting at Stoney Creek, between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai, Cornes created 'some little excitement' by reporting 'a valuable find':

Cornes and party have taken up some ground at the old Morning Star claim and are getting prospects of loose gold and small pieces of quartz containing gold from the surface. They have not yet discovered the leader from which the gold has been shed, but are in hopes soon to pick it up. The party are cleaning out an old drive, and intend driving a cross cut to prospect the country, they are also sinking a shaft at the place where the best prospects are obtained, but as there is a considerable quantity of loose surface, it will take some time to get down to the solid formation.

Several other parties prospected alongside them,¹⁹⁵ but this was another find of which nothing further was heard.

LOCAL POLITICS

Cornes continued to be active in local politics as an advocate of the rights of miners. For instance, in October 1881 he described George Vesey Stewart's¹⁹⁶ purchase of land at Te Puke for an average of £1 6s 3d an acre and then selling it for £3 an acre as 'robbing the settler'.¹⁹⁷ At an Owharoa meeting, he and Adam Porter, another miner,¹⁹⁸ gave Stewart 'a severe cross-examination', and were accused by him of 'having followed him round from place to place with a view to create disturbance at his meetings', a charge they denied. Stewart's 'amanuensis' interposed, 'and a sharp passage of arms ensued between that gentleman and Mr Cornes'.¹⁹⁹ Within a week of this meeting Cornes announced his candidature for the Ohinemuri Riding of the Thames County Council. He sought a 'radical change' in the current system of undertaking council work, which may have reflected his inability

¹⁹⁴ 'Nemo', 'At the Corner', *Thames Star*, 12 September 1885, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 30 July 1887, p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 929.

¹⁹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 October 1881, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ See paper on his life.

¹⁹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 October 1881, p. 3.

to win many contracts. The *Thames Advertiser* noted that he was ‘an old pioneer in the gold field, and if an intimate acquaintance with the wants of the district’ was a qualification, he had that ‘to the fullest extent imaginable’.²⁰⁰ His advertisement set out his policies:

I will endeavour to have a fair share of the revenue of the county expended in the Ohinemuri district, and special attention paid to the construction of the main or trunk lines of road - a matter of the greatest importance to the rate payers.

I am in favour of the gold duty being expended in the district that produces the gold from which it is received.

I am in favour of having all works done by bona fide contractors, and all over-lookers and bosses discharged.

I am in favour of the Engineering being tendered for and paid by commission, and if assistance is required, the engineer in charge to pay such.

I also pledge myself to use my best endeavours, if returned, to give all the pioneer settlers assistance in having roads made; the first to come should be the first to be served.

My interest in matters agricultural and mining are identical with your own, and if I am returned my best services are at your disposal.²⁰¹

Cornes came bottom of the poll with six votes,²⁰² one of them his own. The two successful candidates received 77 and 67 votes.²⁰³ When he tried again in 1884 he came last once more, despite gaining 24 votes; the other candidates obtained 93, 87, 62, and 58.²⁰⁴

When William Larnach, the Minister of Mines, visited Paeroa in May 1885, Cornes urged him to reduce mining fees. He also asked that the regulation requiring a survey for a new claim identical with an old survey be dropped, whereupon Kenrick said that a new survey was not required. Cornes responded that he was ‘thankful to Mr Kenrick for enlightening me upon the subject because the miners of this region have been trampled upon by the surveyors, who had always insisted that nothing short of a new survey would meet the requirements’.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 November 1881, p. 2.

²⁰¹ Advertisement, *Thames Advertiser*, 7 November 1881, p. 1.

²⁰² *Thames Star*, 17 November 1881, p. 2.

²⁰³ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 November 1881, p. 3.

²⁰⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 May 1885, p. 3.

²⁰⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 May 1885, p. 3.

In July, Cornes again called for Ohinemuri to become a separate county, with Crown lands thrown open for settlement under the Homestead Act and blocks of land ‘set apart for occupation by old colonists and their sons’, a category that would have included himself. He also wanted an elected Upper House.²⁰⁶ He was an ‘active member of the Ohinemuri Separation Committee’,²⁰⁷ and when the Ohinemuri County Council was established and the first election held, in November 1885, he stood for the Karangahake Riding. He had unsuccessfully tried to postpone this election, moving a motion to this effect at a Karangahake meeting. He argued that ‘in that very meeting there were possessors of miners’ rights which had been purchased for and given to them by others for a purpose’, the latter not stated but clearly implying that people would vote appropriately. He was ‘not in favour of any person being able to purchase the right to vote for himself and others by simply paying twenty shillings’.²⁰⁸ His advertisement in the campaign stated that, if returned, ‘I will do my best to forward the Mining Industry, as it is by mining I live’.²⁰⁹ He came third, with 18 votes; the successful candidate obtained 35 and the runner-up 23.²¹⁰ His petition against the election of the winner failed.²¹¹ He had more success in Te Aroha, where, after seconding the establishment of a Te Aroha Improvements Committee, he was elected a member;²¹² this was small compensation for not being elected to a body with real power.

THE TUI MINES

Such was the man who, as Warden Stratford informed Larnach, in 1885 found two separate lodes at the head of the Tui Stream ‘after a year’s diligent search in an almost inaccessible Country, and the endurance of much privation and suffering’.²¹³ A reporter who interviewed Cornes in

²⁰⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 July 1885, p. 3.

²⁰⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 July 1885, p. 3.

²⁰⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 24 October 1885, p. 7.

²⁰⁹ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 24 October 1885, p. 7.

²¹⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 November 1885, p. 3.

²¹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 November 1885, p. 2, 4 December 1885, p. 3.

²¹² *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1885, p. 2.

²¹³ H.A. Stratford to Minister of Mines, 2 February 1887, Thames Warden’s Court, Letterbook 1886-1893, BACL 14458/2b, ANZ-A; printed, slightly rephrased, in *The Handbook of New Zealand Mines* (Wellington, 1887), p. 321.

March 1886 discovered that about two years previously he had first prospected 'along the range, and unearthed the present Champion lode. The operations were then carried on under extreme difficulties, owing to the absence of a passable road'. As not much gold was found in the reef, he had 'no particular inducement to remain' and 'allowed the ground to remain idle' until the importance of silver was brought to the attention of miners by Professor James Black.²¹⁴ From attending Black's lecture at Karangahake he realized that the reef he had discovered had similar stone to the argentiferous ores displayed by Black,²¹⁵ and 'hastened to secure the ground which his own industry had discovered'.²¹⁶ When he first pegged off, believing the ground was outside the Te Aroha Mining District he marked out larger areas than were permitted. 'As soon as the mistake was found out the pegging was altered to the five acres allowed', and his three claims were registered.²¹⁷

Cornes, in the words of a reporter who met him at the beginning of March 1886, 'manfully stuck to the district, and with the aid of the members of his family and of wages men, carried out all the work'.²¹⁸ Francis Pavitt, a Te Aroha civil engineer,²¹⁹ at a banquet in his honour in 1885 referred to his sons' assistance.²²⁰ His eldest son, William John, when aged 16 had been one of the four owners of Our Boys claim, registered at Te Aroha in December 1880 by men all aged under 21.²²¹ He had come from Mackaytown with his friend 'Daldy' McWilliams, another owner.²²² With the collapse of the Te Aroha rush, he helped his father work the Just in Time at Waitekauri.²²³ At Tui, on 10 November 1885, he became one of the owners of Keep It Dark.²²⁴ He pegged out one or two claims on the line of

²¹⁴ Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 March 1886, p. 3.

²¹⁵ Humphreys, p. 24.

²¹⁶ Special Reporter, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 March 1886, p. 3.

²¹⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 September 1885, p. 3.

²¹⁸ 'Special Reporter at Tui', *Thames Advertiser*, 4 March 1886, p. 3.

²¹⁹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 825.

²²⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 12 May 1888, p. 2.

²²¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 167, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

²²² *Thames Advertiser*, 18 August 1880, p. 3, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

²²³ Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1881, p. 3.

²²⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 193, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

the Surprise reef in February 1886,²²⁵ but did not register them. His involvement was not reported again until May 1888, when he prospected the Tui area and 'brought down some stone of excellent quality'.²²⁶ Later that year and during the following one, he tendered for mining contracts in the Champion mine, obtaining two.²²⁷ He was also involved in testing the ore.²²⁸ In addition to Cornes' eldest son, it may be assumed that his second and third sons, Alfred Richard and Clement Augustus, also assisted their father in 1885 and later. His namesake was a shift manager, mining contractor, and blacksmith at Tui from 1885 to 1890, and was a miner and underground manager in other districts until he becoming a farmer at Waihou in the twentieth century.²²⁹

Cornes' skilful work as manager for the Champion syndicate and company is dealt with in the paper on mining at Tui. A journalist, after being shown over the mine by him, wrote that his 'experience in the Upper Thames country' was 'second to none' and that he was 'an indefatigable prospector, and a cautious and careful manager'.²³⁰ That this was the common view was indicated by a large meeting at Te Aroha agreeing that he deserved a banquet for what the convenor described as 'the plucky and persevering manner in which he had stuck to Te Aroha Goldfield, and assisted to further its progress'. On Cornes' suggestion, it was delayed until members of the Champion syndicate could attend.²³¹ 'Considerably over a hundred guests were present' at the banquet on 10 May, amongst them John Chambers²³² and Adam Porter of the syndicate, Alexander Parkes, whose process was to be used in treating the ore,²³³ and William Thornton

²²⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 March 1886, p. 3.

²²⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 2 May 1888, p. 2.

²²⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1888, p. 2, 12 January 1889, p. 2, 30 January 1889, p. 2, 3 March 1889, p. 2, 14 April 1889, p. 2.

²²⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 October 1888, p. 37.

²²⁹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 495; J.F. Downey, *Gold Mines of the Hauraki District, New Zealand* (Wellington, 1935), p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1889, p. 2, 23 December 1918, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 23 September 1901, p. 7; Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/1048, ANZ-A.

²³⁰ 'A Tramp, Esq', 'Casual Ramblings', *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 May 1888, p. 7.

²³¹ *Te Aroha News*, 21 April 1888, p. 2.

²³² See paper on the Tui mines.

²³³ See paper on the Tui mines.

Firth,²³⁴ son of Josiah Clifton Firth.²³⁵ Pavitt, the chairman, said that Cornes' 'pluck has been proved by the manner in which he and his sons at the first tried and searched to see if gold was to be found' at Tui. 'His patience had been demonstrated by the long time he waited before he could get money put in to test the reefs'. Cornes replied:

I am the oldest miner on this peninsula and have worked in all parts of it, from Coromandel right along the reefs to Te Aroha and Waiorongomai. I twice started on the Te Aroha goldfield and got broke on both occasions, this time I held on and backed up my opinion with the assistance of Mr J. Chambers, who has stuck to me all along. I told him what I thought of the Tui reef and that I considered it the best reef I had ever worked on.

He described Parkes as 'one of the greatest scientific men of our day', and forecast that in three years Te Aroha and Waiorongomai would comprise the 'richest mining district on the Peninsula. Without doubt, though, different machinery from what we now possess will have to be brought to bear'. Miners had been 'working in the dark as regards the best means of treating the ore when broken out'.²³⁶

An illustration of Cornes' importance as being the mine manager was provided by an accident in March 1889. He was riding his horse to Te Aroha,

leading his second horse, having the rope of the lead horse's halter twisted around his wrist. The lead horse stopped suddenly and backed, dragging Mr Cornes out of the saddle, and causing him to fall very heavily to the ground head first. Recovering from the shock Mr Cornes proceeded on his journey, and was present at the Te Aroha races the same afternoon. On returning home, however, the result of the fall began to manifest themselves, and Dr Cooper was sent for. From the symptoms, the doctor feared the kidneys had been injured.²³⁷

²³⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 12 May 1888, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 15 May 1888, p. 3.

²³⁵ See 'A Visit to Matamata', *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 August 1881, p. 22, 18 February 1882, p. 14; *Waikato Times*, 12 January 1889, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 24 July 1935, p. 14.

²³⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 12 May 1888, p. 2.

²³⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 13 March 1889, p. 2.

This fear that he had ruptured his kidneys was without foundation, but ‘at the present development of the Tui mining’ he could ‘ill be even temporarily spared’.²³⁸ Ten days later he was recovering, and ‘although severely bruised’ had ‘been able to attend to his duties’.²³⁹ At that time he was living in, and presumably renting, a farmer’s house at Waitoa.²⁴⁰ While this enabled his family to do some farming, possibly with his assistance on occasions, its distance from the mines would have meant that he had to stay close to the mines for most of the week, returning home on weekends. A manager’s house was built early in the year,²⁴¹ in or near Te Aroha township.

Cornes remained publicly sanguine about the mining prospects. For example, in November 1889, as chairman at a farewell to a mining investor, Charles Gallagher,²⁴² he declared that he ‘had every confidence in the future of this field’.²⁴³ However, the processes did not cope with the ore, and when the Champion Company ceased operation in 1893 Cornes ceased his involvement with the Tui mines. He was recalled as having been an excellent manager. In 1897, the Te Aroha Correspondent for the *Mining Standard* wrote that ‘the well known (among mining men) Mr Clem Cornes’ opened up the mine in a way that ‘rebounds to his credit’, and, ‘tradition asserts’, got good stone in the winzes he sunk on levels 1, 2, and 4.²⁴⁴ A later recollection was of ‘that old veteran Clem Cornes’ assisting the council to lay off a track from the Tui Saddle to the Thames Lead and Silver Company’s mine on the eastern side of the ridge.²⁴⁵ As Cornes helped John James Broadbent²⁴⁶ to establish this company,²⁴⁷ he may have obtained a vendor’s shares, but no further involvement was recorded.

CONTINUING INVOLVEMENT WITH TE AROHA MINING

²³⁸ *Waikato Times*, 12 March 1889, p. 2.

²³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 23 March 1889, p. 2.

²⁴⁰ *Waikato Times*, 14 May 1889, p. 2.

²⁴¹ *Te Aroha News*, 23 January 1889, p. 2.

²⁴² See paper on his life.

²⁴³ *Waikato Times*, 9 November 1889, p. 2.

²⁴⁴ ‘Werahiko’, ‘Our Te Aroha Letter’, *Mining Standard*, 20 February 1897, p. 10.

²⁴⁵ Edwin Edwards, ‘Our Despised Mineral Resources’, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 28 July 1902, p. 2.

²⁴⁶ See paper on the Tui mines.

²⁴⁷ H.A. Gordon to Minister of Mines, 8 June 1893, *AJHR*, 1893, C-3, p. 71.

Cornes continued to be associated with mining at Te Aroha for the remainder of his life. He always encouraged prospecting, for example at a meeting in December 1887 seconding a motion that a prospecting association be formed and moving and seconding nominations for its provisional committee, although he did not become a member himself. He optimistically suggested that Auckland speculators would provide half the funds it needed.²⁴⁸ In January 1893, he was a member of the revived prospecting association,²⁴⁹ at the time of his brief career as a mining agent.²⁵⁰ He was last recorded as one in July 1896.²⁵¹ In the same month, after an address in which Joseph Campbell claimed that his process would revolutionise the treatment of Tui ore,²⁵² Cornes proposed a 'hearty vote of thanks' for his 'very able and instructive lecture' after first making 'a few remarks regarding the bright outlook for Te Aroha'.²⁵³ Later that year, either he or his namesake son were in dispute with his eldest son over the number of shares the latter should have in the Plutus, near Te Aroha, which they resolved privately.²⁵⁴ In October 1902, the 'old veteran' travelled to Wellington to seek support for introducing the Payne and Carmichael-Bradford processes for the treatment of Te Aroha's silver-lead-copper ores.²⁵⁵

In February 1903, Cornes and two other miners, Thomas Ritchie,²⁵⁶ and Hugh Butler,²⁵⁷ sought assistance from the council to prospect between the Mangakino Valley and Waihi, following the line of the main Waiorongomai reef. They described themselves as '3 old prospectors of many

²⁴⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 3 December 1887, p. 2.

²⁴⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 January 1893, p. 2.

²⁵⁰ *Cleave's Auckland City, Suburban, Provincial, Commercial, Municipal and General Directory, 1893* (Auckland, 1893), p. 273; *Cleave's Auckland Directory, 1894* (Auckland, 1894), p. 283.

²⁵¹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 9 July 1896, p. 1096.

²⁵² See paper on Joseph Campbell and his hyperphoric process.

²⁵³ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 4 July 1896, p. 5.

²⁵⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, *Plaint Book 1880-1898*, 5/1896, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁵⁵ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 6 October 1902, p. 2.

²⁵⁶ See *Thames Advertiser*, 13 August 1887, p. 3, 26 February 1894, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 21 October 1889, p. 2.

²⁵⁷ See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 August 1900, p. 2, 12 July 1907, p. 2.

years experience in this portion of the goldfield'.²⁵⁸ His mates were both long-time miners at Ohinemuri, Ritchie having no previous involvement with Te Aroha, whilst Butler had attended the opening day in 1880 and taken out a share in one claim and in one company.²⁵⁹ Their letter claimed that, 'so far as we have gone, without assistance, we have splendid indications of loose stone etc in the various creeks'.²⁶⁰ As this party did not use the money granted, in June Cornes teamed up with another experienced miner, James Gordon,²⁶¹ to prospect the area. The Mines Department and the council agreed to provide subsidies, the County Clerk describing Cornes as 'an old Prospector of considerable experience', and they each received £1 per week for nine months.²⁶² Their prospecting of the Mangakino Valley did not result in any payable discoveries.²⁶³ It is not known whether the report of mining in the Kia Ora Lead and Silver Mines at Tui in 1903 being 'under the able management of Mr C.A. Cornes'²⁶⁴ referred to the father or the son, but this work was on the same side of the range as this prospecting.

Cornes ceased to be involved in the Tui area after the Champion mine closed, although his eldest son and a grandson later mined there. William tributed in the Champion with two others in the year to 31 March 1894,²⁶⁵ and in December 1928 obtained the forfeiture of the Peter Maxwell Special Quartz Claim, almost at the top of the mountain, and was granted a

²⁵⁸ C.A. Cornes, Thomas Ritchie, and Hugh Butler to Ohinemuri County Council, 6 February 1903, Mines Department, MD 1, 05/652, ANZ-W.

²⁵⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 416, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1c; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 170, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

²⁶⁰ C.A. Cornes, Thomas Ritchie, and Hugh Butler to Ohinemuri County Council, 8 February 1903, Mines Department, MD 1, 05/652, ANZ-W.

²⁶¹ See paper on his life.

²⁶² Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Ohinemuri County Council, 15 April 1903; C.A. Cornes and James Gordon to Ohinemuri County Council, 10 June 1903; County Clerk to Minister of Mines, 9 July 1903; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 27 July 1903; County Clerk to Minister of Mines, 12 December 1903, Mines Department, MD 1, 05/652, ANZ-W; *New Zealand Mines Record*, 14 April 1903, p. 395.

²⁶³ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 4 December 1903, p. 2, 23 December 1903, p. 3.

²⁶⁴ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 8 January 1904, p. 2.

²⁶⁵ George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 7 May 1894, *AJHR*, 1894, C-3A, p.14.

prospecting subsidy.²⁶⁶ He described himself as ‘one of the oldest prospectors in the Hauraki Goldfield having followed mining all my life’.²⁶⁷ He died in October 1929, aged 65,²⁶⁸ before he could do much prospecting. Immediately afterwards, his son, John Julian Stephen Cornes, with two of his brothers attempted to prospect the same area during their summer holidays, with some encouraging results.²⁶⁹ Cornes’ grandson inspected the work of the Auckland Smelting Company²⁷⁰ in the old Champion mines in 1951, and revisited the mines once more in 1964, when aged 72.²⁷¹

MINING ELSEWHERE

In August 1894, Cornes unsuccessfully applied to work the Grace Darling mine at Waitekauri on tribute, offering the company 30 per cent of all gold won, he to keep six men employed and to have complete control of mine and battery for 12 months.²⁷² In October, the *Thames Advertiser* understood that a syndicate was being formed in Paeroa to send him to Coolgardie, Western Australia,²⁷³ but his only involvement with this new goldfield was to chair an 1896 farewell by old Thames miners to a prospector going there.²⁷⁴ He had an interest in the Golconda at Ohinemuri, but it is not known if he worked in it; he sold his interest for £10 in April

²⁶⁶ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, *Plaint Book 1899-1947*, Hearings held on 20 December 1928, 14 February 1929, BBAV 11551/1a, ANZ-A; *AJHR*, 1930, C-2, p.18.

²⁶⁷ W.J. Cornes to Minister of Mines, 13 April 1929, Mines Department, MD 1, 23/1/20, Part 1, ANZ-W.

²⁶⁸ Death Certificate of William John Cornes, 15 October 1929, 1929/8085, BDM.

²⁶⁹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, *Mining Applications 1930*, 3/1930, BCDG 11289/2a, ANZ-A; Mining Registrar, Te Aroha, to Manager, Bank of New Zealand, Thames, 18 February 1930, Thames Branch, Loose Sheets from Gold Register, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington; Inspector of Mines, Huntly, BBDO A902, MM 48, ANZ-A.

²⁷⁰ See paper on this company.

²⁷¹ J.J.S. Cornes to Dominion Analyst, 30 January 1951, Mines Department, MD 1, 23/2/1218, ANZ-W; two letters of J.J.S. Cornes to J.B. McAra, n.d. [October 1964], 28 October 1964, Inspector of Mines, Huntly, BBDO A900, box 58, file 5, ANZ-A; Church of England, Register of Baptisms in Hamilton East District 1879-1908, no. 280, 17.01, Anglican Diocesan Archives, Hamilton.

²⁷² *Hauraki Tribune*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 18 August 1894, p. 3.

²⁷³ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 October 1894, p. 2.

²⁷⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 May 1896, p. 10.

1895.²⁷⁵ In the same month, he sold the Emerald, also at Ohinemuri.²⁷⁶ Later that year he applied for both the Clem Cornes Waihi Special Claim and a Waitekauri claim, the Heroic, which his eldest son may worked, as he was given seven of the eight shares in 1898.²⁷⁷ He also acquired the Heroine in October 1896, the same month that he obtained six month's protection for the claim named after himself.²⁷⁸ He was mine manager for his syndicate in the Waitekauri King.²⁷⁹ A shareholder in the Sovereign at Waitekauri, there were some sharp words at a meeting when he opposed selling it to overseas interests without first obtaining a deposit.²⁸⁰ During the mining boom of the mid-1890s, he had shares in seven Ohinemuri companies and one at Coromandel, and his wife had shares 'in trust' in one of these.²⁸¹ In June 1896, he was supervising the Kauri Mountain claim at Whangarei Heads for an Auckland syndicate.²⁸²

In April 1904, with another very experienced miner, William Hollis,²⁸³ he bought the Kapanga at Coromandel for £100.²⁸⁴ At the end of the year, the two men, who were living at Driving Creek, requested aid to drive 200 feet on the reef.²⁸⁵ The mining inspector reported that they had 'done very good work in sinking and driving on the Kapanga reef' and were 'seeing a little gold'. As their workings were 'at the creek level', they could not go much deeper 'without a pump or something to raise the water', and he recommended a subsidy.²⁸⁶ The full amount requested, £30, was granted,

²⁷⁵ Paeroa Warden's Court, Transfers 1895, 73/1895, ZAAP 13757/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁷⁶ Paeroa Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 April 1895, p. 2.

²⁷⁷ Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1896, folio 191, ZAAP 13293/1a, ANZ-A; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 September 1895, p. 2;

²⁷⁸ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 3 October 1896, p. 3, 21 October 1896, p. 2.

²⁷⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 January 1896, p. 3.

²⁸⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 April 1896, p. 4.

²⁸¹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 25 April 1895, p. 727, 12 September 1895, p. 1400, 10 October 1895, p. 1599, 6 February 1896, p. 260, 5 March 1896, p. 428, 9 July 1896, pp. 1094, 1096-1097.

²⁸² *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 27 June 1896, p. 4.

²⁸³ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 508.

²⁸⁴ Coromandel Warden's Court, Instruments 1905, 57/1905, AAAE 15181/2a, ANZ-A.

²⁸⁵ C.A. Cornes and William Hollis to Chairman, Coromandel County Council, 16 December 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 05/1555, ANZ-W.

²⁸⁶ James Coutts to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 8 January 1906, Mines Department, MD 1, 05/1555, ANZ-W.

although they only received half of it before selling their mine on 2 May 1906 for £2,000, three months before Cornes' death.²⁸⁷ They had 'got rich specimens, some of them being half gold. In one instance 20lb of selected specimens were valued at £250'.²⁸⁸

FARMING

While he tried to make a living by mining, his family continued to farm, probably with periodic assistance from Cornes. In July 1891, his agricultural lease near Karangahake was transferred to his eldest son.²⁸⁹ In December 1892, he was granted another 57 acres in the same area.²⁹⁰ He petitioned parliament in 1902 because he had 'erected buildings, fenced the land, cultivated the soil, and became entitled to acquire the freehold' of his lease, but a fire in Wellington had destroyed the deed. The committee considered that he should either receive the freehold or, if that was not possible, 'a long lease with right of renewal and compensation for his improvements'.²⁹¹ The outcome is not known, nor whether he obtained the 20-acre lease of Crown land he applied for in July 1904.²⁹² In June 1903 he was granted 100 acres in Ohinemuri at a rental of £5 per annum.²⁹³

In 1892, he had received permission to occupy 100 acres at Tui Creek for agricultural purposes; the Champion aerial tramway crossed one boundary.²⁹⁴ Nothing further was heard of this farm. From 1887, his wife leased section 102 block X1 of the Aroha Survey District, just over 43 acres,

²⁸⁷ Memoranda of 17 January 1906, 14 March 1906, Mines Department, MD 1, 05/1555, ANZ-W; Coromandel Warden's Court, Instruments 1906, Transfer dated 2 May 1906, AAAE 15201/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁸⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 October 1908, p. 18.

²⁸⁹ Thames Warden's Court, Letterbook 1886-1893, p. 486, BACL 14458/2b, ANZ-A.

²⁹⁰ Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Agricultural Leases at Ohinemuri 1875-1892, folio 190, ZAAP 13784/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁹¹ Goldfields and Mines Committee, *AJHR*, 1902, I-4, p. 3.

²⁹² *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 July 1904, p. 3.

²⁹³ Auckland Land Board Minutes 1894-1903, p. 745, Meeting of 26 June 1903, BAAZ 4019/5, ANZ-A.

²⁹⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 9/1892, BBAV 11505/1a; General Correspondence 1892, BBAV 11584/4c, ANZ-A.

near Waihou.²⁹⁵ In 1905, she was recorded as occupying two sections of Crown land, this one having a rateable value of £437 and the other, of over 44 acres, with a value of £256.²⁹⁶ That she managed the farm was indicated by the fact that she was charged when two cattle strayed onto the railway line,²⁹⁷ and, on another occasion, for possession of a cow.²⁹⁸ As well, she, not her husband, had 16 shares in the Te Aroha District Co-operative Dairy Company when it was formed in 1903; her occupation was given as farmer.²⁹⁹

FINANCES

After losing steady employment with the Champion Company, Cornes' financial situation was insecure. Any legacy from his mother's estate was shared with his brothers.³⁰⁰ He may have taken the precaution, as many others did, of having some assets placed in his wife's name to protect himself from creditors: several blocks of land at Te Apata, in the Tauranga County, were in her name.³⁰¹ It is not known whether the £50 that was her first deposit at the Ohinemuri branch of the Bank of New Zealand in 1896 was money that she had earned from farming or was given to her by her

²⁹⁵ Waste Lands Board, Ledger of Leases 1887-1893, p. 133, BAAZ 1134/1, ANZ-A; Lands and Survey Department, Registers of Leases, vol. 59 folio 148, vol. 82 folio 150, Land Information New Zealand, Hamilton.

²⁹⁶ Piako County Council, Rate Book 1905-1906, Waitoa Riding, Section 102 Block XI Aroha S.D., Section 4 Block X1 Aroha S.D., no pagination, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

²⁹⁷ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1896-1907, 6/1898, BCDG 11220/1b, ANZ-A.

²⁹⁸ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Plaintiff Book 1893-1918, 5, 9/1900, BCDG 11224/1b, ANZ-A.

²⁹⁹ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 176 no. 1085, ANZ-A.

³⁰⁰ Will of Margaret Cornes, 5 February 1891, copy provided by Althea Barker, Thames.

³⁰¹ Jackson and Russell to B.E. Cornes, 25 June 1895, 15 July 1895, Letterbook no. 59, pp. 193, 321, Jackson and Russell Papers, MS 360, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

husband.³⁰² By March 1899 this account was closed because the funds were exhausted.³⁰³

In 1897, Thomas Rowe, a storekeeper and farmer at Waihou and Waitoa,³⁰⁴ sued Cornes for £6 17s 9d, for grazing and goods supplied. He could not pay immediately, and after being served with a judgment summons paid in two instalments spread over two months.³⁰⁵ Three months later, the Receiver of Gold Revenue took out a distress warrant against him to enforce payment of £21 19s.³⁰⁶ By January 1898, the debt to Rowe, which through additional legal fees had risen to £8 3s 9d, had still not been paid. When another judgment summons was taken out, 'Defendant pleaded inability to pay, as he was earning no money, and His Worship having heard the evidence declined to make an order'.³⁰⁷ In July, Cornes publicly announced that he would not be responsible for any debts contracted in his name unless authorized by his written order,³⁰⁸ a repetition of his refusal to pay in the 1860s. His wife was threatened with legal action in November unless she paid £12 10s, one and a quarter years' interest owing on a loan.³⁰⁹ As there were no further suits, his finances must have improved in his last years. Although on 1 April 1890 it was reported that he had been

³⁰² Bank of New Zealand, Balance Book of Ohinemuri Branch for Half-year to 31 March 1896: Accounts Opened, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁰³ Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Balance Book to 31 March 1899, Accounts Closed, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁰⁴ See *Waikato Times*, Waitoa Correspondent, 3 June 1882, p. 2, 11 April 1899, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, advertisement, 29 September 1883, p. 1, 27 October 1888, p. 2, 23 January 1895, p. 2.

³⁰⁵ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Civil Record Book 1896-1907, 22/1897, Hearing of 10 May 1897, and Judgment Summons, Hearing of 14 June 1897, BCDG 11221/2a, ANZ-A; Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, *Waikato Argus*, 17 June 1897, p. 3.

³⁰⁶ Paeroa Magistrate's Court, Home Warrant Book 1881-1928, folio 66, BACL 13748/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁰⁷ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Civil Record Book 1896-1907, Hearing of 10 January 1898, BCDG 11221/2a, ANZ-A; Magistrate's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 13 January 1898, p. 2.

³⁰⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 16 July 1898, p. 2.

³⁰⁹ Jackson and Russell to Barbara E. Cornes, 22 November 1898, Letterbook no. 71, p. 80, Jackson and Russell Papers, MS 360, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

discharged as a bankrupt,³¹⁰ the date of publication was relevant, for he was never bankrupted. The only member of his family to be forced into bankruptcy was Alfred Richard Cornes, when mining at Coromandel in 1898.³¹¹

Financial and other losses came from fires. In May 1889, the large farmhouse he was renting near Waitoa was destroyed by fire at night, the sleeping family being saved from death only because Gus Cornes arrived shortly after it broke out and was able to alert them. 'Efforts were then made to save what it was possible to reach, but with the exception of two chests of drawers, a sewing machine and some smaller things', everything was destroyed. There was no insurance. From what a correspondent could discover, Cornes was 'a heavy loser, having lost, as he remarked, the careful gatherings of twenty-four years'.³¹² In December 1897, fire totally destroyed his wife's six-roomed house at Te Aroha. 'Nothing was saved except two boxes', but, having learnt from the previous fire, the house and contents were insured for £200.³¹³ In 1903, an unoccupied cottage he owned at Te Aroha West burnt down; it was insured for £70.³¹⁴ Finally, a house he owned and lived in at Mackaytown burnt down in August 1905; the house was insured for £150, and the contents for £50.³¹⁵

NATIONAL POLITICS

Cornes, a prominent supporter of the Liberal Party, was elected in 1879 to the committee of the Paeroa Liberal Association.³¹⁶ Two years later he was on the stage at a Thames meeting to support the election campaign of the Liberal candidate, John Sheehan.³¹⁷ In 1889, he was referred to as a supporter of this party when he attended a meeting held by William Kelly, MHR. Of the 17 questions, 14 were asked by Cornes. He wanted to know whether Kelly had been able to obtain any government money for the Hot

³¹⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 April 1890, p. 2.

³¹¹ *Index to Bankruptcies in New Zealand, 1881-1940*, p. 151 [microfische].

³¹² Own Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 14 May 1889, p. 2; see also *Te Aroha News*, 15 March 1889, p. 2.

³¹³ *Waikato Argus*, 18 December 1897, p. 2.

³¹⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 March 1903, p. 32.

³¹⁵ *Thames Star*, 22 August 1905, p. 2.

³¹⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 October 1879, p. 3.

³¹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 December 1881, p. 3.

Springs Domain or for goldfield roads and works; the answer was 'no' in each case. When Kelly said that he had not been asked to apply for any, Cornes responded that 'a Member I think is generally to go in and secure some of the plunder going, for the district he represents'. He complained that, by allowing 'the South Island to get the lion's share', Kelly had neglected his electorate. He also complained that, although about £250 in goldfields revenue had been paid to the council, only £10 had been granted to assist the Tui mines because they belonged 'to the tail end of Ohinemuri'. He considered that revenue derived from the Riding should be spent within it. Asking Kelly to vote to abolish the Property Tax he declared that it was 'very hard that people who bring in money for the purpose of experimenting and erecting new processes for treating our ores should be taxed on all they do'. He understood that the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company had 'already paid £500 as Property Tax. Would you do all you can to have mining machinery and such like exempted?' Kelly would. He also gave an affirmative answer to Cornes' last question, whether he supported a government 'bonus of say £10,000, £20,000, or £30,000, to the first people who introduce machinery that will save from 10 to 50 per cent of gold more than can be saved by the ordinary process?'³¹⁸

After William Shepherd Allen,³¹⁹ a conservative, gave an election address in Te Aroha in April 1890, Cornes

mounted the platform, stating that he had some questions to ask. First of all, seeing Mr Allen is a new and an untried man, will he tell us what claim he has on the mining portion of this community to represent them in parliament?... They should be on the look out for the best men so far as the mining interests were concerned,

giving the names of some of these. His second question asked whether Allen would try to obtain 'a Government reduction works, or a bonus to the first company that starts reduction works in a central position'. He demanded a 'yes/no' answer, which Allen could not give because of his lack of knowledge. When asked whether he favoured replacing the property tax with a land tax, Allen proposed leaving this to the electors to decide, prompting Cornes to repeat the question. Allen then said that he needed to know what sort of tax Cornes proposed, but was not told. Asked whether he

³¹⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 12 June 1889, p. 7.

³¹⁹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 37.

was in favour of secular or denominational education, Allen's support for the former received no comment, suggesting that Cornes agreed. Cornes then announced that he 'was going to put a number of other questions, but after the very able speech Mr Allen has made, I'll forgo the balance'. There being no further questions, Cornes seconded the vote of thanks, stating that he 'had much pleasure in listening to him'.³²⁰

Cornes attended a meeting in Te Aroha in June that decided to form a Reform League,³²¹ which appears to have had only a fleeting existence. The prominent local politician and first mayor, James Mills,³²² commented cryptically, in a letter to a Liberal Member of Parliament, William Fraser, that Cornes was a Liberal: 'you know what kind of Liberal'.³²³ Cornes, in a letter to the Minister of Lands later this year asking that the domain board be elected, described himself as an active Liberal.³²⁴ At a meeting protesting over the board's sacking of the caretakers, he moved a motion against the government's delay in rectifying the problem and asking that the board be elected annually. Cornes explained

that he had no personal grievance against any of the members, but came simply in the public interest. The caretakers had been dismissed without any charge being brought against them, and he thought it the duty of the public to defend them, as they had no chance to defend themselves; moreover, these men had been caretakers from the commencement of the baths being opened, and they had certainly been the means of making the Domain what it was at the present time.³²⁵

At Fraser's meeting at Te Aroha in March, Cornes proposed a motion supporting him and the Ballance government.³²⁶ When Fraser held another meeting in October, Cornes moved, 'That this meeting desire to express its approval of the general policy of the Government, and would suggest that

³²⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 19 April 1890, p. 7.

³²¹ *Waikato Times*, 3 June 1890, p. 2.

³²² See paper on his life.

³²³ James Mills to William Fraser, 8 January 1893, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

³²⁴ C.A. Cornes to Minister of Lands, 24 July 1893, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

³²⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 September 1893, p. 10.

³²⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 March 1893, p. 3.

sufficient members be added to the Legislative Council to ensure the passing of their policy Bills'. He then made a 'bitter attack on the press throughout the colony as being worked in the interests of capitalists'. Turning to the needs of prospectors, he wanted them granted 20 acres without being required to spend money on 'surveys and leases, until the prospects were sufficient to warrant such expenditure - the object being to give *bona fide* prospectors absolute protection, until it had been discovered whether such ground ... was payable'.³²⁷

At a meeting with the Minister of Mines in 1895, Cornes asked that the government purchase the Ruakaka Block, below Tui Creek, from its Maori owners, and also accused two local Justices of the Peace of being guilty of forgery and urging their dismissal.³²⁸ His belligerence was repeated when an Independent Liberal stood against the Liberal candidate in 1899: Cornes attempted to ask critical questions at his meeting at Karangahake, but was howled down.³²⁹

A MOTHER DEFENDS HER CHILD

The only time that Cornes' wife received any publicity was in 1903, when she charged the head teacher of the Waihou School with assault for unduly punishing her ten-year-old son Harry.³³⁰ The magistrate rebuffed her charge, considering his being caned for throwing dirt at girls was 'imperative' for preserving discipline.³³¹

DEATH

On 10 August 1906, when staying in a hotel in Auckland, Cornes died, aged 62. His occupation was recorded as 'mining proprietor'.³³² Because he had been discovered unconscious, an inquest was held, which found that the liver, lungs, and kidneys showed signs of chronic disease. 'There was nothing presented by the Postmortem which would warrant the assumption

³²⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 October 1891, p. 2.

³²⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 6 February 1895, p. 2.

³²⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 December 1899, p. 1.

³³⁰ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 16/1893, BCDG 11220/1a, ANZ-A.

³³¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 July 1893, p. 2.

³³² Death Certificate of Clement Augustus Cornes, 10 August 1906, 1906/814, BDM.

that alcohol had in any means accelerated the death'.³³³ It was common practice to check whether alcohol had been a cause of death; and the fact that his wife had sought a prohibition order against him in June 1898 indicated that he had a drinking problem then, if not at other times. Her application was withdrawn when Cornes undertook to keep out of hotels for the next 12 months.³³⁴ Perhaps drink was the cause of his unexplained charge of assault made in November the previous year against Thomas Herbert Biggs, a Karangahake miner,³³⁵ who was either his brother-in-law or his nephew.³³⁶ The alleged assault took place at Te Aroha, but, as Cornes did not attend the hearing, the case was 'dismissed for want of evidence'.³³⁷ There had been no earlier indication of chronic disease, the only time he was recorded as being in hospital being in 1895, when he had 32 days in Auckland hospital because of a leg ulcer.³³⁸

The *Te Aroha News* noted a large attendance at his funeral at Waihou, and wrote that he was 'for many years a prominent figure in the mining world, and spent his last years in Waihou, where he was held in great respect by all'.³³⁹ An Auckland newspaper wrote that he 'had been identified with the mining industry in various parts of the Auckland district for a great many years. He was one of the oldest and best known prospectors of the Hauraki Peninsula'.³⁴⁰

A SENSE OF HUMOUR

Cornes was also well known for his stories and humour. Two years before his death, the *Observer* wrote that there were 'some names that suggest good stories', and that his was 'one of these, and when he goes

³³³ Inquest on C.A. Cornes, Justice Department, J 46, 1906/611, ANZ-W.

³³⁴ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1896-1907, 10/1898, BCDG 11220/1b, ANZ-A.

³³⁵ See *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1897*, p. 5.

³³⁶ Death Certificate of Thomas Herbert Biggs, 22 February 1913, 1913/420, BDM; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 July 1911, p. 43.

³³⁷ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1896-1907, 43/1897, BCDG 11220/1b, ANZ-A; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 20 November 1897, p. 2.

³³⁸ Auckland Hospital, Admissions Register 1893-1899, folio 86, no. 8670, ZAAP 15288/3a, ANZ-A.

³³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 15 August 1906, p. 2.

³⁴⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 August 1906, p. 24.

anywhere people started to reminisce'.³⁴¹ In 1881, at an election meeting when 'there was some doubt as to the show of hands for thanks or confidence', Cornes, 'one of the proposers, pulled out a half-crown, and offered to toss the candidate, whether it should be confidence or thanks, amidst the laughter of the audience'.³⁴² In the 1887 election campaign, which the *Observer* wrongly dated as 1891,³⁴³ an eccentric named Dr Broome seat held a meeting at Te Aroha:

Up stood Clem, and in his well-known drawl asked if the candidate would be in favour of reserving the summit of Te Aroha Mount as a cemetery? To this Dr Broome immediately replied, "Certainly, by all means." Then, as an afterthought, he asked if the gentleman who put the question would give some valid reason for such a strange request. "Well, you see," said Clem, "when the angel Gabriel sounds the last trump at the resurrection, at an altitude of a thousand feet over those fellows on the flat, we would have a big start in getting to heaven."³⁴⁴

This jest had already been published in the *Observer* in 1899, without naming Cornes as its author. Indeed, as is the way of oral transmission, it appeared to be by someone else, and the punch line was quite different. Even the setting was different, an election meeting in Ohinemuri:

A long, gaunt individual - a resident of Paeroa, and well known for his antipathy towards Te Arohans, whom he sets down as a blanketly lazy lot - asked the question, "Sir, if you are returned to Parliament, would you be in favour of getting the summit of the Te Aroha mountain made into a cemetery reserve?" "Well," replied the candidate, "I don't know; what is your reason?" "Well," explained the questioner, "it's for those lazy Te Arohaites I'm asking. If yer doan't give 'em a real good start on the Judgment Day they'll all be left."³⁴⁵

The *Observer's* obituary gave another variant, and included another of his witticisms:

³⁴¹ *Observer*, 12 March 1904, p. 17.

³⁴² *Thames Advertiser*, 17 December 1881, p. 3.

³⁴³ See *Waikato Times*, 23 April 1891, p. 2.

³⁴⁴ *Observer*, 12 March 1904, p. 17.

³⁴⁵ *Observer*, 24 June 1899, p. 5.

The death of Clem Cornes removes from the Upper Thames goldfields one of the most picturesque and interesting of its types of character. Nearly everyone knew Clem Cornes, and to say in the neighbourhood of Paeroa or Waihi that you did not know Clem was to declare yourself unknown. A prospector of the old school, he was one of the few survivors of a class of men who understood thoroughly the geological peculiarities of the Upper Country, and who could be depended upon to find reefs where gold existed without the help of divining rods or geological experts. Clem was a great character in his way, genial, good-hearted and original, and the Upper Thames will miss him.

Many good stories might be told of Clem Cornes and his ready wit. Here is one. Some years ago, the election for the Upper Thames seat was contested by a Dr Broome, and, when the time came for questions at his first meeting at Te Aroha, Clem slowly up-ended himself and dryly asked whether the Doctor was in favour of setting apart the top of the mountain at Te Aroha as a cemetery reserve. Somewhat surprised at the question, but eager to please the meeting, the Doctor said he would be quite in favour of the proposal if the gentleman who had spoken could show him any good reason in its favour.

"Well," proceeded Clem, "I can. As you all know, angels are very beautiful creatures; and we all want to be angels. Now, I was thinking that if we put our cemetery on the top of Te Aroha mountain the people of this town would have 2000 feet start on everyone else towards Heaven. And," looking round reflectively, "from appearances and what I know of them, I am bound to say they want all that start if they ever hope to become angels."...

When the late Hon. Mr [William] Larnach visited the Karangahake district as Minister of Mines, Clem Cornes headed a deputation to him from the claim-owners of the neighbourhood. The list of requests for road works, and prospecting grants, and so forth, which he put forward, was rather appalling considering that it came from a camp of only twenty or thirty miners. The Minister listened patiently, and with the face of a sphinx, till the sheaf of demands had been exhausted, and then asked if there was anything else the deputation would like to suggest. "Well, honoured sir," replied Clem, with his characteristic drawl, "I don't know that there is, except that if you have any of the money with you we might make a start now." Mr Larnach's face relaxed. "Landlord," he called to the host over his shoulder, "bring in the glasses."³⁴⁶

Clearly he was fun to know, with a ready wit; perhaps he made up all these variants of the cemetery reserve joke himself. One obituary stated

³⁴⁶ *Observer*, 18 August 1906, p. 4.

that ‘Clem could and did tell many a yarn of the good old time, and when he was in a yarning humour he was always well worth listening to. Possibly he coloured the stories a bit highly at times, but at the same time, they were founded on fact’.³⁴⁷ Twenty years after his death, one journalist recalled how, at Te Aroha, Reuben Parr³⁴⁸ and ‘his old crony, Clem Cornes, kept the township in merry humour with their many witty ways and sayings’.³⁴⁹

His being elected a vice-president of the Te Aroha football club reflected his sociability;³⁵⁰ likewise, he called a meeting in in 1898 to organize a ‘Grand Sports Carnival’ for the Queen’s Birthday holiday.³⁵¹ In 1882 he owned the racehorse ‘Totara’,³⁵² at a time when race meetings were of considerable social importance.

CONCLUSION

As so often, the romanticizing of the skills of the old-time prospector failed to recognize that only rarely did they find anything payable, and that they lacked the geological knowledge of their successors, who were trained in Schools of Mines. For example, at a meeting of the Portsea Company in 1894, the directors regretted to have to report that chrome had been mistaken for gold in their mine. In justification for having made this mistake, the mine manager said that several ‘well-known men’, including Cornes, had visited the mine and ‘had no doubt about the find being gold’.³⁵³ Typically, he was ‘sanguine’ of success in all his mining efforts. He was also typical by trying to make a living by contracting and farming in addition to mining. Less typically, in his prospecting he made a genuine find, but one that turned out to be (eventually) the Norpac base metal mine,³⁵⁴ not the gold mine he thought he had found.

Appendix

³⁴⁷ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 17 August 1906, p. 2.

³⁴⁸ See *Te Aroha News*, 30 December 1925, p. 1; *Observer*, 9 January 1926, p. 4.

³⁴⁹ *Observer*, 16 January 1926, p. 5.

³⁵⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 27 March 1889, p. 2.

³⁵¹ *Te Aroha News*, 5 April 1898, p. 2, 12 April 1898, p. 2.

³⁵² *Thames Advertiser*, 27 January 1882, p. 3.

³⁵³ *New Zealand Herald*, 3 August 1894, p. 6.

³⁵⁴ See paper on pollution and Norpac: a chronology to 1980.

Figure 1: Almost certainly a photograph of Clement Augustus Cornes, n.d. (1860s), Althea Barker Collection; used with permission.

Figure 2: Barbara Ellen Cornes with her grandson, Aubrey Eric Burke Cornes (born 1903), Althea Barker Collection; used with permission.

Figure 3: Plan of Clement Augustus Cornes' Agricultural License near the Tui aerial tramway, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miscellaneous Applications 1900, 13/1900, BBAV 11289/16a, ANZ-A [Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Auckland Regional Office]; used with permission.



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Figure 2: Barbara Ellen Cornes with her grandson, Aubrey Eric Burke Cornes (born 1903), Althea Barker Collection; used with permission.

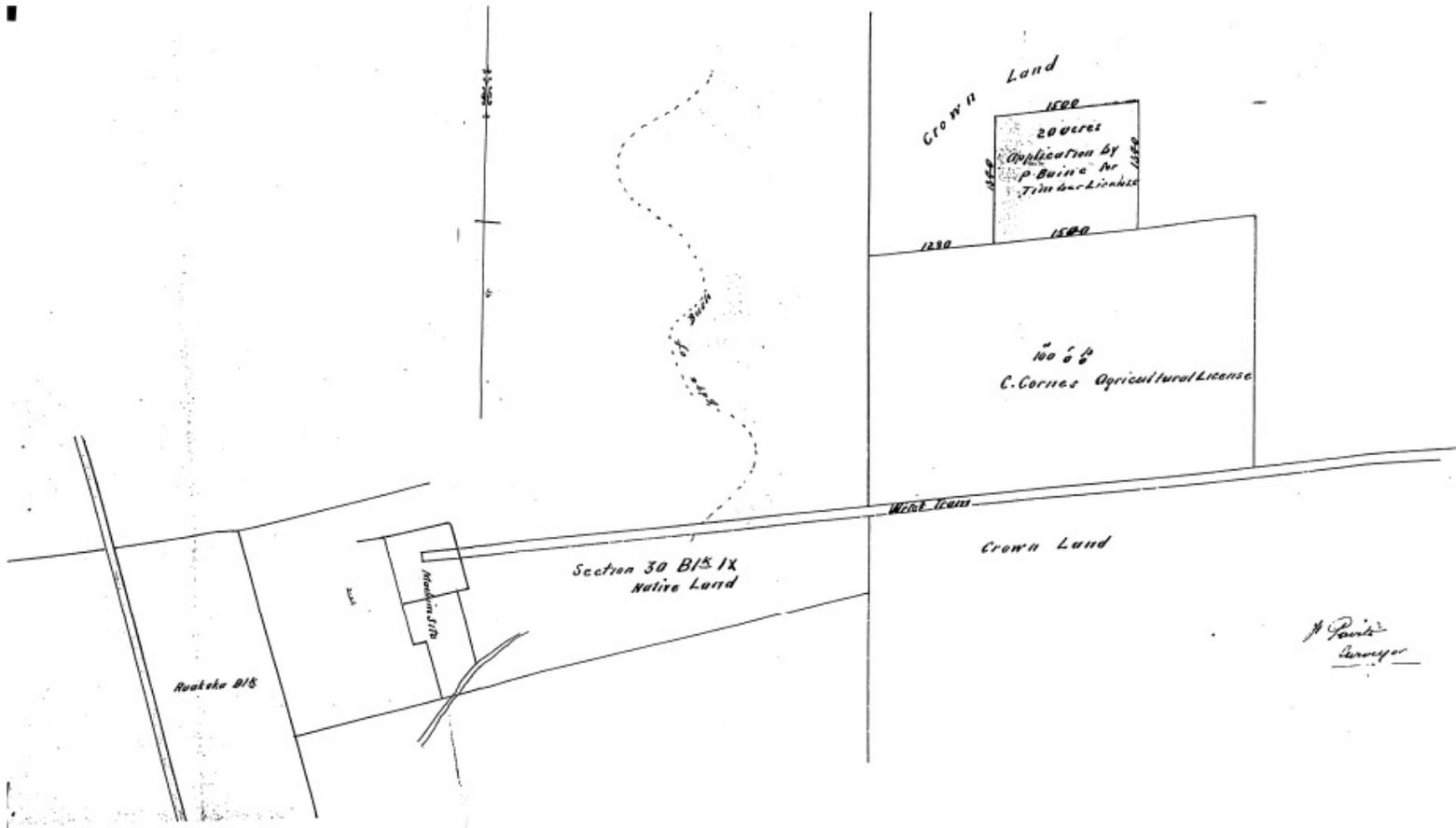


Figure 3: Plan of Clement Augustus Cornes' Agricultural License near the Tui aerial tramway, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miscellaneous Applications 1900, 13/1900, BBAV 11289/16a, ANZ-A [Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Auckland Regional Office]; used with permission.