

# JAMES GERRISH: TE AROHA'S FIRST BELLMAN

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

## JAMES GERRISH: TE AROHA'S FIRST BELLMAN

**Abstract:** *James Gerrish moved to Thames when the goldfield opened and then settled in Te Aroha during its gold rush. Like so many others, he took up a variety of occupations, none very profitable, for he left his widow and family in poverty. His most notable occupation, and the one for which he was famous, was as the local bellman. Blessed with a loud voice, he cried out the news of the day, along with advertisements for goods and services and public meetings. He was also noted for some disreputable behaviour, notably excessive drinking. Undoubtedly a 'character', he was recalled fondly long after his death.*

### FAMILY LIFE

A photograph taken at Te Aroha in the early 1880s showed a group of men outside the first shops including, at one end, holding up a bell, the local bellman.<sup>1</sup> His name was James Gerrish, then aged 43, who had been born in Bath, England, to Elizabeth and James, the latter being at various times a carman and a fruiterer (Gerrish's eldest son would be named James also).<sup>2</sup> He arrived in Auckland along with his parents and siblings in February 1857.<sup>3</sup> Three years later his future wife, Mary Jane Brothill (daughter of another Mary Jane), arrived in New Zealand, on her own.<sup>4</sup> Nearly a year older than Gerrish, she had been born in Norfolk before becoming a servant in Clerkenwell, London; they married in Auckland four months after her arrival.<sup>5</sup> They would have two sons and four daughters.<sup>6</sup> Their youngest son nearly drowned in 1881 after falling asleep when sitting on the edge of the Shortland wharf and tumbling into the deep water;

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<sup>1</sup> Photograph, Charles Kingsley-Smith, *This is Te Aroha* (Te Aroha, 1981), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Death Certificate of James Gerrish, 30 April 1895, 1895/3104; Birth Certificate of James John Gerrish, 1862/6310, BDM; ancestry.co.uk.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily Southern Cross*, 13 February 1857, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Southern Cross*, 23 March 1860, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Marriage Certificate of James Gerrish, 4 July 1860, 1860/2297; Death Certificate of Mary Jane Gerrish, 17 August 1915, 1915/5200, BDM; ancestry.co.uk.

<sup>6</sup> Birth Certificates of James John Gerrish, 1862/6310; Elizabeth Jane Gerrish, 1864/25242; Edith Sarah Gerrish, 1867/11950; George Alexander Gerrish, 21 November 1869, 1869/16986; Laura Mary Gerrish, 5 June 1873, 1873/22464; Ethel May Gerrish, 26 July 1876, 1876/15786.

fortunately he was rescued 'in an insensible state, and taken home immediately, where restoratives were applied, and he soon recovered'.<sup>7</sup> When aged 57, Gerrish died of angina; his widow would die 20 years later of bronchitis.<sup>8</sup>

A Thames newspaper described Gerrish as 'an old identity' who, despite being ailing, had worked until the week before his death. He 'arrived in the colony in the early days, and when the Thames goldfield was proclaimed he took up his residence here, but upon the opening of the Te Aroha field he removed there, only to wander back again to the Thames'.<sup>9</sup> When living in Auckland before the Thames goldfield opened, Gerrish was a 'dealer';<sup>10</sup> in Thames and Te Aroha he was a miner, storeman, newspaper agent, general dealer, and greengrocer.<sup>11</sup> At the time of his death he was a fish and oyster seller, possibly in partnership with his son.<sup>12</sup>

Because of the family's poverty, soon after his death a benefit concert was held to raise money for the family, for which his widow and youngest daughter were very grateful:

WE Desire to RETURN OUR MOST HEARTFELT THANKS to the Committee and Members of the Thames Burns' Club who so kindly got up the recent benefit on our behalf, those who took part in the Entertainment, and also the Public generally for their exceedingly liberal patronage.

MARY JANE GERRISH  
ETHEL MARY GERRISH<sup>13</sup>

After being widowed, Mary Jane was, briefly, a fruiterer.<sup>14</sup> Four years after his death, when living in Auckland and aged 62, she applied for

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<sup>7</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 17 February 1881, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Death Certificates of James Gerrish, 30 April 1895, 1895/3104; Mary Jane Gerrish, 17 August 1915, 1915/5200, BDM.

<sup>9</sup> *Thames Star*, 1 May 1895, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *New Zealander*, 19 December 1863, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 May 1868, p. 12; Birth Certificates of George Alexander Gerrish, 21 November 1869, 1869/16986; Laura Mary Gerrish, 5 June 1873, 1873/22464, BDM; *Waikato Times*, 6 November 1884, p. 2; 'Observer Agents', *Observer*, 13 March 1886, p. 9; M. Whitehead, in *Jubilee of Thames Goldfield: 1867-1917: Historical Record*, (Thames, 1917), pp. 21-22.

<sup>12</sup> Death Certificate of James Gerrish, 30 April 1895, 1895/3104, BDM.

<sup>13</sup> Advertisement, *Thames Star*, 1 June 1895, p. 2.

charitable aid because she had no occupation and ‘Can’t go to work’.<sup>15</sup> In the early twentieth century she received the old age pension.<sup>16</sup>

Of his four daughters, three were married at the time of his death, and one lived in Sydney, where her unmarried sister lived as well.<sup>17</sup> In March 1888, he applied for his oldest daughter to be admitted to the Hamilton hospital ‘as he had not the means to provide the necessary medical attendance for her, she having now been confined to her bed for five weeks’. As the hospital was overcrowded, she was not admitted.<sup>18</sup> Despite her illness, just over five weeks later she was married. The *Te Aroha* newspaper noted that it was ‘only a very few weeks since Miss Gerrish was lying at death’s door at her father’s house, probably it is not a month since she was only able to get out in a bath chair’.<sup>19</sup> Of the two sons, the eldest, James John, was a prominent Thames fisherman.<sup>20</sup> Like his father, he was a Volunteer, and in 1881 had gone with the Hauraki Engineers to arrest Te Whiti at Parihaka.<sup>21</sup> The younger son was, at the age of 24, admitted to the Avondale Lunatic Asylum, having been an idiot from birth. Although only four feet eleven inches high, his parents had him admitted because he was sometimes so violent that they could not control him.<sup>22</sup> His mother not only had to cope with him but at some stage she had had a terrible accident, the nature of which was unrecorded, which left her ‘blind in one eye and face

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<sup>14</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 15 March 1899, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Auckland Hospital and Charitable Aid Board, Applications for Relief 1894-1907, folio 209, no. 15568, 6 September 1899, YCAB 15245/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>16</sup> *Auckland Star*, 27 June 1901, p. 3, 26 June 1903, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Auckland Hospital and Charitable Aid Board, Applications for Relief 1894-1907, folio 209, no. 15568, 6 September 1899, YCAB 15245/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>18</sup> Waikato Charitable Aid Board, *Waikato Times*, 8 March 1888, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 18 April 1888, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Thames Star*, 10 November 1886, p. 2, 1 December 1887, p. 2, 14 December 1901, p. 2, letter from J.J. Gerrish, 27 May 1905, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> No. 3 Coy, Hauraki Rifle Volunteers, Nominal Roll to 2 November 1870, Army Department, ARM 41, 878/11; Thames No. 2 Scottish Rifle Volunteers: Capitation Roll, May 1880, ARM 41, 1882/1a; Hauraki Engineers, Nominal Roll to 31 December 1881, ARM 41, 1883/1au, ANZ-W; *Thames Advertiser*, 31 October 1881, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Avondale Asylum, Register of Admissions 1853-1884, YCAA 1021/2, 1048/6, p. 269, ANZ-A.

badly disfigured'.<sup>23</sup> Could this have been the accident described in 1863, when they were living in Albert Street, Auckland. She

was attending to the culinary department, which was on this occasion in an *al fresco* situation at the rear of the house, and whilst so engaged her dress ignited, enveloping her person in flames. Her screams speedily brought Mr Gerrish to the rescue, and through his prudence and presence of mind the inflammable dress was torn off, though not before both were seriously burnt. On enquiry we hear Mrs Gerrish was not dangerously burnt, and is doing well.<sup>24</sup>

If she was disfigured by this accident, it was curious that in October 1887 she attended the Bachelors' Ball at Te Aroha dressed as 'Flirtation'.<sup>25</sup>

### BELLMAN

A visitor to Te Aroha in 1881 wrote that 'Gerrish, the bellman, was ringing up a meeting, which was another reminiscence of the Thames in the early days'.<sup>26</sup> His name appeared in recollections of both Thames and Te Aroha, for instance in 1906, when the *Observer* recalled his Thames days:

Jimmy Gerrish, the Thames crier, was a notable man at the business. His stentorian shouting of the announcements of John Leydon's<sup>27</sup> or Thomas Wayth Gudgeon's<sup>28</sup> auctions, or the performance of some newly arrived theatrical company, was a feature of Thames street incidents well into the eighties.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Auckland Hospital and Charitable Aid Board, Applications for Relief, 1894-1907, folio 209, no. 15568, 6 September 1899, YCAB 15245/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>24</sup> *New Zealander*, 19 December 1863, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 October 1887, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> X.Y.Z., 'To Te Aroha by Waikato and Back by Thames', *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 March 1881, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> See *Observer*, 6 December 1902, p. 5, 7 April 1906, p. 5; *New Zealand Herald*, 8 April 1927, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> See Thomas Wayth Gudgeon, *The Defenders of New Zealand* (Auckland, 1887), pp. 480-482; Elsdon Craig, *Destiny Well Sown: A biography of Lt. Col. W.E. Gudgeon* (Whakatane, 1985), pp. 1-12, 16-27, 53.

<sup>29</sup> *Observer*, 26 May 1906, p. 5.

'His voice was great' recalled a Thames resident in the 1940s, when in his seventies.<sup>30</sup> As late as 1948, when the Te Aroha borough council sought information from pioneers about the early days, two respondents who had been children in the 1880s recalled his 'good strong voice' when he announced the arrival of boats.<sup>31</sup> His loud voice did not always make him popular; in March 1882, a report of the St Patrick's Day races at Paeroa noted that 'beyond a rowdy striking the local bellman (James Gerrish) in the mouth, everything passed off quietly'.<sup>32</sup>

He was prominent at Te Aroha by early December 1880:

The redoubtable Mr Gerrish, of Ohinemuri memory, professor of the melodious art of tintintabulum, is of course one of the, if not the most, celebrated personages at Te Aroha. Nearly every evening he rings out the news that a meeting is about to take place.<sup>33</sup>

At first the creek beside the Hot Springs Hotel was known as 'Bellman's Creek', clearly in his honour.<sup>34</sup> He was so popular that when he returned to Thames in June 1881, the residents 'presented him with a testimonial in recognition of his services'.<sup>35</sup> A correspondent described his behaviour on the following day:

This morning he was gracefully ringing himself out with great emotion, "ring out wild bells of the wild sky, and ring the newer bellman in." It is passing strange, the effect of a bit of dirty paper with several signatures scrawled upon it, upon a middle-aged man of limited ideas and unlimited conceit, Napoleon in all his glory or the inevitable old Louis Quatorze - parading the terraces of Versailles was never greater than this good old man and is in his estimation at the present month.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Recollections of A.F. Sawyer, n.d. [1940s], W.G. Hammond Papers, folder 34b, MS134, Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum Library.

<sup>31</sup> Annie Jones to Town Clerk, 27 March 1948, Elizabeth Weston to J. Excell, 19 April 1948, Te Aroha Borough Council, File of 1948 letters re early Te Aroha, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

<sup>32</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 March 1882, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Auckland Star*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 15 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 7 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 9 June 1881, p. 3.

When Te Aroha revived later that year with the discovery of the Waiorongomai field, he returned, and continued to be a notable local personality, as a correspondent indicated in June 1885: ‘This afternoon our quiet township was somewhat startled with the noise made by the well-known “Gerrish,” when, whilst engaged distributing your paper, [he] gave vent to his rejoicings on the “Fall of the Gladstone Ministry!” The shock was severe’.<sup>37</sup> Later that year, when a public meeting was held to discuss making a track to the new find at Tui, ‘the irrepressible Gerrish had succeeded in drawing a large number of those interested in the mines to attend’.<sup>38</sup> His skills were also used for sales and similar business news as well as announcing the arrival of boats and their cargoes.<sup>39</sup> When a miner’s cottage caught fire at one o’clock in the morning in January 1886, his cry of ‘Fire!’ and the ringing of his bell brought an immediate response.<sup>40</sup>

The most elaborate recollection, of a man who had helped build some of the first houses, was recorded in 1943; time had possibly embellished his recollection:

The most forcible character of the whole community, he declares to be Gerrish the town crier.

“You could hear him all over the town, and although nobody took a great deal of notice of him, and few worried about who paid him to do the job, he carried out his duties faithfully all the time I was there”....

Gerrish, a tall, lean figure of a man, invariably wore a cloth cap on winter nights, carried a lantern and was gifted with lungs of leather and a throat of brass. He could, declared Mr Dudson, throw his voice over an amazing distance. On one occasion, a group of mining prospectors from Auckland, had wandered too far up the slopes of the Bald Spur; and as it was known that they anticipated the next boat back to Auckland, mine host of the R & L [Robin Hood and Little John Hotel] called upon Gerrish to broadcast to the bush at large a timely reminder.

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<sup>37</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 June 1885, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 October 1885, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> For example, see recollections of Henry Jackson, *Te Aroha News*, 26 October 1927, p. 5, recollections of T.J. Maingay, *Te Aroha News*, 14 April 1930, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> X.Y.Z., ‘To Te Aroha by Waikato and Back by Thames’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 March 1881, p. 11; *Waikato Times*, 14 March 1885, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 October 1885, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 16 January 1886, p. 7.

Out stepped the ancestor of local loud-speakers, and after receiving the promise of a half-dozen handles of the best, proceeded to do his stuff. According to our informant, the fire siren with its banshee wail had nothing on the effect of the long-drawn gymnastics indulged in by this spreader of events. Sure enough, a few minutes after, down came the miners from the hills, puffing and blowing and demanding to know if the Russians had come.

Gerrish was nevertheless a widely respected, much sought after character. He had many influential friends ... for as one mine-owner said, Could he not make or mar an event by the mere inflection of his voice, or “accidental” omission of a vital preposition. It paid to be in his good books for one never knew, even as now, when one is likely to be in the news, or what was more important still, in what capacity. The town’s first dispenser of topics and notices was therefore humoured and cultivated as became his office....

One of the cruelest jibes has come to us from the supposed mouth of a burly critic whose sense of fairness was submerged by a biting gift of sarcasm. This miner was reputed to have remarked that “Gerrish was the only man in Te Aroha permitted by the Police to brawl in the public streets unhindered.” The rejoinder was worthy of its author, who announced in his next dissertation on facts of celebrities that “Foreman Black (Blue pencil) had unfortunately after a visit to the R & L run into a lamp-post in the main street and could now only see with one eye, which, however, would never impair his normal vision.”<sup>41</sup>

## DISREPUTABLE BEHAVIOUR

His prominence did not bring any high position in the community; when he stood in 1879 both for the committee of the Thames Liberal Association and its president, he was not elected to either position.<sup>42</sup> Possibly this was because his weaknesses were well known. For instance, in July 1880, along with a prominent Thames shopkeeper he was charged in Cambridge with ‘gambling by means of a certain instrument known as the equalisator’. His co-accused was discharged after stating that Gerrish was its owner: ‘Gerrish too was discharged on the understanding that he would leave Cambridge on Monday morning, the “equalisator” being confiscated’.<sup>43</sup> His particular weakness was a common one: over-fondness for drink. During

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<sup>41</sup> Recollections of J. Dudson, *Te Aroha News*, 9 June 1943, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 18 January 1879, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Cambridge Police Court, *Waikato Times*, 13 July 1880, p. 2.



his first 18 months in Thames he was convicted of drunkenness three times.<sup>44</sup> When he left Te Aroha in 1881, one correspondent wrote a jocular article about him:

Another of our well known characters, *Voxaed Praeterea Nihil* - our Stentor - the man of the mighty mouth and bell - is going. The people of the place tickled the departing hero of the bell gracefully and whispered sweet farewells to him that has vendored the papers of New Zealand so uproariously. Mr Gerrish, who was as much affected as usual, endeavoured to be eloquent, but finding his feelings in his liquor stronger than his eloquence, he wisely deferred the oratory to a more favourable opportunity.<sup>45</sup>

This was a clear hint that he was drunk. His wife was in trouble with the police in 1883 for obtaining beer from a Thames hotel on a Sunday;<sup>46</sup> as there was no evidence of her drinking to excess, she probably obtained it for her husband. In 1885, as a witness in a case of after-hours drinking he gave as an excuse for being on licensed premises that he needed 'to light my lantern which had gone out. Wanted to try and find a hat a man had lost, and also to find out the number of a gentleman's room who wanted to be called early, to leave by the steamer in the morning.... The man whose hat I was looking for "shouted" for us'.<sup>47</sup>

Others exploited his drinking, as in 1869, when he was employed to advertise a meeting to be held by a candidate standing as Superintendent of Auckland Province. One newspaper reported that bellmen were 'but human; and it being whispered that the Irish section of the community had purveyed refreshment to that official, who might possibly publish matter not in harmony with the views of his employers, he was carefully "shepherded" during the afternoon by a sub-committee'.<sup>48</sup> As a footnote to his drinking, his daughter Lizzie participated in the Te Aroha Band of Hope, a temperance movement, whereas his eldest son would be convicted in 1903 for being drunk in a public place.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> 'Criminal Sittings', *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 March 1869, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 9 June 1881, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 October 1883, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Magistrate's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 October 1869, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 May 1886, p. 7; Thames Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1900-1903, 26/1903, BA CL 13736/4a, ANZ-A.

## AT THAMES

Gerrish's involvement in mining began with his arrival in Thames from Auckland in September 1867; his miner's right was number 217, making him one of the earliest arrivals before the rush fully started.<sup>50</sup> With a varying number of other men, four at most, he owned the Friend in Need, variously described as being on Alma Hill or Pretty Jane Spur in the Karaka section of the field.<sup>51</sup> It does not seem to have been successful, and the last record of his involvement was his selling his one-fifth interest for £1 10s in May 1869.<sup>52</sup> In 1880 he owned the Manukau.<sup>53</sup>

He struggled financially. In May 1868 he sought three months' protection for the Friend in Need because of 'Want of funds'.<sup>54</sup> When he pegged out the Manukau claim, he had to sell the sleeping half of his share to a local storekeeper to pay for his miner's right.<sup>55</sup> When his daughter Lizzie was ill in 1888, he appealed to the Waikato Charitable Aid Board to admit her to hospital 'as he had not the means to provide the necessary medical attention'.<sup>56</sup> When admitted to Thames Hospital because of the heart attack from which he died, the cost of his one day in it was met by the charitable aid board.<sup>57</sup> Four years later his widow, unable to work, sought relief from the Auckland board; she had to prove that her children, some of whom had moved to Australia, were unable to support her.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Electoral Roll for City Board: West Ward, No. 2: 33, *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 23 May 1863, Supplement; Auckland Magistrate's Court, Criminal Depositions Book 1867, folio 175, BADW 5989/24a; Thames Warden's Court, Register of Thames Miners' Rights 1867-1868, no. 217, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>51</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Registrations 1868, no. 71B, BACL 14358/1a; Thames Claims Register 1868-1869, no. 1449, BACL 14397/3a; Register of Deeds, 1869 folio 176, BACL 14417/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>52</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Deeds 1869, folio 176, BACL 14417/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>53</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 14 June 1880, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Thames Warden Court, Registrations 1868, no. 71B, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>55</sup> Recollections of Henry Dunbar Johnson, *Te Aroha News*, 13 December 1910, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Charitable Aid Board, *Waikato Times*, 8 March 1888, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Thames Hospital, Register of Patients 1884-1901, folio 65, YCAH 14075/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>58</sup> Auckland Hospital and Charitable Aid Board, Applications for Relief 1894-1907, folio 209, no. 15568, 6 September 1899, YCAB 15245/2a, ANZ-A.

On the evening of 16 July 1872, 17 buildings were destroyed in Pollen Street. In his evidence at a relief fund meeting, Gerrish said that his ‘was the last house burned. Got some of the things out, but lost the rest. Had to get out quickly’. Another resident ‘was very kind, and took us in. One little boy, after he was got out of bed, went back again, and this so confused witness that he does not distinctly remember what occurred. Estimates his loss at between £20 and £30’. He then had four children; the son who returned to his bed was probably the mentally backward one.<sup>59</sup>

### FRAGMENTS OF HIS LIFE AT TE AROHA

Some small details can be discovered about his life at Te Aroha, where he was one its ‘earliest residents’.<sup>60</sup> His family of six children lived in a three-roomed house.<sup>61</sup> He had 75 shares in the May Queen Company, but forfeited them because his calls were not paid.<sup>62</sup> In 1886, when he was both ‘town crier and newsagent’, he unsuccessfully applied to advertise in the domain.<sup>63</sup> He sold ‘cards’ for betting at the races, attended meetings held to establish a medical club, ran in the old men’s race in the Waiorongomai Sports in 1888, signed the petition for a borough, and seconded a nomination to the school committee; but his application for the position of registrar of dogs was declined.<sup>64</sup>

### HIS PERSONALITY

Gerrish, commonly referred to as ‘the well-known town crier’,<sup>65</sup> clearly was a ‘character’. When in March 1869 he gave evidence in a robbery case, he himself being accused of stealing bacon, he ‘described himself as the “town-crier and bellringer of the Thames goldfields.” (Laughter). He is pretty generally known by the cognomen of “the Barber”’. (No explanation

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<sup>59</sup> *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 22 July 1872, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 2 January 1889, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Te Aroha Borough Council, Rate Book 1888, Section 2 Block LV111 [no pagination], Matamata-Piako District Council, Te Aroha.

<sup>62</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 June 1885, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 11 September 1886, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 27 February 1886, p. 2, 7 July 1887, p. 2, 26 September 1888, p. 2, 23 October 1889, p. 2, 30 April 1890, p. 2, 24 May 1890, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 17 February 1881, p. 2.

of this nickname has been found.) Despite living in the same tent as the other two accused, he was discharged. He admitted to three convictions for drunkenness, and stated that he sang in hotels for money. The Auckland press stated that his cross-examination was ‘most amusing’;<sup>66</sup> regrettably the Thames papers for that period have not survived to provide more details. As an indication of his standing in the community his funeral was ‘well attended’.<sup>67</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Gerrish’s ‘amusing’ personality fixed itself in the memory of many early settlers. More is known about Gerrish because of his quirky personality, which meant many people mentioned him in their recollections. Apart from his personality, he was typical of workingmen of that period in having to take whatever work would provide an income, being just a bellman not been financially viable. His mining investments were unlikely to have produced much profit for him, and the family seems always to have been poverty-stricken, probably in part because of his drinking.

### *Appendix*

*Figure 1:* Enlargement of portion of photograph of Te Aroha residents outside the Hot Springs Hotel and the post office, 1881, showing James Gerrish flourishing his bell, Te Aroha and District Museum; used with permission.

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<sup>66</sup> ‘Criminal Sittings’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 March 1869, p. 23.

<sup>67</sup> *Thames Star*, 1 May 1895, p. 2.

