

NEIGHBOURLY AND UNNEIGHBOURLY BEHAVIOUR IN THE
TE AROHA DISTRICT

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Abstract: *As is to be expected, many examples could be found of neighbourly and unneighbourly behaviour. Because of the nature of their work, miners and indeed settlers generally had to help each other, and 'fair play' was a desired ideal. Residents mingled at weddings, funerals, farewells, and patriotic socials. When people were in need, assistance was given and money was raised by special events, and when fires broke out, everyone did their best to save both life and property.*

Despite such neighbourly acts, there were plenty of examples of quarrelsome residents and rude behaviour. In small settlements, prying and gossiping were endemic. Disliked residents were mocked, some practical jokes were malicious, and some libels were spread. In particular, local government politics provoked much bitterness over minor matters, and rivalry between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai could be friendly in sport but unfriendly on some issues. A detailed example of one prominent resident, Charles Ahier, is provided to illustrate how a pillar of the community was vilified and how he vilified his critics. Newspapers sometimes provided biased reporting, fanning the flames of petty disputes. But overall, squabbles were outweighed by positive interactions.

MUTUAL AID BY FINE FELLOWS

Henry Ernest Whitaker,¹ when revisiting Te Aroha in 1886, told a banquet held in his honour that 'he could safely say he had never met better fellows in his life, than those he had met at Te Aroha'.² And writing in 1910, 'Old Settler' eulogized the pioneering farmers:

I don't believe I ever saw a finer, sturdier, hardworking lot in all my life. They were brimful of self-reliance, every man of them, always ready to help one another. In the midst of the busiest season, I have seen them up all night pulling a neighbour's cattle out of the swamp and using every means to save the lives of the animals.³

¹ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

² *Te Aroha News*, 22 May 1886, p. 2.

³ 'Old Settler', 'The Beginnings of Te Aroha', *Te Aroha News*, 22 November 1910, p. 2.

The nature of their work meant that miners working a contract or an underground shift had to help each other, using a form of ‘buddy system’.⁴ Yet they were not united in other ways. Eric Coppard, who mined at Tui in the 1960s and 1970s, recalled men who drank after work with the mine manager getting better contracts at the expense of those who did not socialize in this way. Some stole other miners’ gumboots, made a shift boss change a tyre on a jeep while they watched and jeered, and refused to help a ‘billy boy’ to extract a vehicle from a ditch.⁵

According to the *Observer*, ‘miners, as a class’, were ‘always ready to insist upon fair play’.⁶ Both miners and bushmen would ‘go through fire and water to assist an unfortunate or injured chum’.⁷ As an example of miners helping their mates outside working hours, in 1897 Edmund Cookson,⁸ formerly of Waiorongomai but then mining at Waitekauri, wanted his money back from a notable fraud, ‘Hermann the Healer’,⁹ as the *Observer* explained in typical style:

Ned Cookson is a large-boned Waitekauri miner, and when he called upon us on Thursday he was in rare fighting trim, and just thirsting for the gore of Hermann the Healer. He carried with him a printed paper containing an undertaking by the Pacific Coast Magnetic Institute to give five magnetic treatments and all internal medicines necessary for a two months’ course in return for the small fee of ten guineas, of which £5 had been paid down on the nail on the syndicate which runs Hermann, and the balance when it was required. Ned’s better half, if seems, suffers from deafness, and had already received three out of the five “magnetic treatments,” and was just as deaf as ever, when her warlike spouse heard that Hermann and his syndicate were packing up for departure.

⁴ Interview with Eric Coppard, 8 December 1885, at Waihi, pp. 52, 53 of transcript.

⁵ Interview with Eric Coppard, 4 August 1885, at Waihi, pp. 26, 91, 97-98 of transcript; interview of 8 December 1885, at Waihi, pp. 21, 34, 62-63 of transcript.

⁶ *Observer*, 19 December 1903, p. 5.

⁷ *Observer*, 15 August 1885, p. 13.

⁸ See paper on the Piako County tramway at Waiorongomai.

⁹ See *New Zealand Herald*, advertisement, 7 December 1896, p. 6, 9 December 1896, p. 5, 15 February 1897, p. 5, 20 February 1897, p. 5, 3 March 1897, p. 5; editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 March 1897, p. 2; letter from Albert Martin, *Dominion*, 3 March 1909, p. 8.

Accompanied by 20 'stalwart Waitekauri boys', Cookson went to the Auckland wharf to stop him, and invited the *Observer* to 'see the fun' and 'see him demolish the Healer'.¹⁰ The *Observer* did take up the invitation, but wondered whether the fraud was beaten up.¹¹ Hermann managed to get to Wellington and coin more money from the gullible there, but the journal did not comment on whether he had escaped Cookson unscathed.¹²

In another example of miners assisting a person whom they felt had been unfairly treated, John Benney, later a mine manager at Waiorongomai,¹³ in 1876 was prominent amongst those trying to help a man they considered had been wrongly convicted of indecent exposure.¹⁴

ATTITUDES TO VISITORS

Miners' friendly welcome to visitors to their mines was illustrated when a party, after struggling through the Waiorongomai bush in January 1882, partook of 'the kind hospitality of the Diamond Gully miners, who made tea for us'.¹⁵ But the following January, when two Mormon elders arrived at Te Aroha at six o'clock in the evening and 'commenced to plead and beg for food and lodgings', six people refused to help them. One elder recorded that 'the people will not feed us, therefore, we cannot stop and preach to them', and they departed for Cambridge.¹⁶ Once there, they complained of having walked all the way from Thames and 'been refused at many places on the way the slightest morsel to eat', which the *Waikato Times* considered was either 'a gross slander, or it reveals a state of things in the highest degree discreditable to some of our settlers'.¹⁷ In 1897, a visitor from Taranaki recorded the

great jealousy evinced by Te Arohites towards strangers, whom they really ought to welcome with open arms, for it is to strangers

¹⁰ *Observer*, 9 January 1897, p. 19.

¹¹ *Observer*, 9 January 1897, p. 19, 23 January 1897, p. 18.

¹² *Observer*, 6 February 1897, p. 18.

¹³ See *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1876, p. 2.

¹⁵ 'On the Aroha Mountain', *Waikato Times*, 31 January 1882, p. 3.

¹⁶ Alma Greenwood, unpublished diary, entry for 27 January 1883, MS 4292, folder 16, Alexander Turnbull Library.

¹⁷ *Waikato Times*, 8 February 1883, p. 2.

(with capital, of course) that your townspeople will have to look for new ideas and new life in business and other enterprises, or they will everlastingly stick in their old groove.¹⁸

ABSENCE OF 'NATIONAL ANTIPATHIES'?

On the day the Te Aroha goldfield was proclaimed, the Hamilton newspaper wrote that the opening was not expected to have the 'scenes of violence' experienced in early Thames and from which the opening of Ohinemuri in 1875 'was not entirely free'. The reason was because there was 'nothing left now of those old national antipathies that used to divide the Thames miners in the early days. Long association with one another has rubbed off many of the corners against which their prejudices used at one time to run'. By 1880, 'new chums' no longer caused strife.¹⁹ And indeed there were no scenes of violence,²⁰ but whether this meant all nationalistic sentiment had vanished was questionable.

FORMAL SOCIAL EVENTS

In January 1898, James William Rennick, head teacher at the Waiorongomai school, aged 29, married the 20-year-old daughter of William McLean, a miner.²¹ At the end of morning classes on the first day of the school year, in 'a pleasing ceremony' he was 'the recipient of a very handsome testimonial of the esteem in which he is held by his scholars, in the shape of an address and clock'. The address, which showed every sign of being drafted by an adult, was signed on behalf of all the children by a senior boy and girl, and read out by the latter:

Dear Mr Rennick, - Being aware and pleased that since our school broke up for the Christmas holidays, you have been married, to a young lady of this district, who is well known and respected, we, the girls and boys of your school, do therefore humbly request that we be allowed to offer you our hearty congratulations, and that you may be pleased to accept this small gift: this clock to commemorate that happy event. As also to show our gratitude to you for your never failing zeal for our welfare. We offer you this

¹⁸ 'Letter from a recent visitor to Te Aroha', *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 9 January 1897, p. 7.

¹⁹ *Waikato Times*, 25 November 1880, p. 2.

²⁰ See paper on the opening day of the Te Aroha goldfield: 25 November 1880.

²¹ Marriage Certificate of James William Rennick, 19 January 1898, 1898/217, BDM.

small gift with right hearty good will, and ask you to accept it in the same spirit. Then, take this clock into your home, and let it ever be a token of the high esteem we hold for you, which ever will remain unbroken. That the choicest blessings of God may always rest on you and Mrs Rennick is the prayer of us all.

Rennick, 'who expressed his surprise and gratification at receiving such a handsome gift, replied thanking the children in feeling terms. A half-holiday was granted in honour of the occasion'.²²

Farewell socials for leading members of the community were common. For instance, when Rennick, 'the popular headmaster', was farewelled by the residents in 1902, 'a large attendance' testified to 'the esteem' in which he was held. 'With songs and dancing the evening was pleasantly passed', and 'a splendid supper was provided, and served by the ladies'. When presenting Rennick with 'a handsome Gladstone bag, and a set of gold sleeve-links and studs', the chairman of the school committee spoke of his

eight years of service as having been marked by careful work and good results; the relations between teacher, committee, and parents had always been cordial; they were all sorry to lose such a good teacher, but they rejoiced at his promotion. Mr Rennick thanked the donors for their valuable gifts, and testified to the many kindnesses he had received during his residence at Waiorongomai.

Also at this event, members of the Church of England presented 'a pretty gold brooch' to their organist, who was moving to Te Aroha; she 'feelingly responded'.²³

Some farewells did not receive wide support, as for example, when 'Churchman' of Te Aroha wrote to the *Observer* in 1883 complaining about a poor response when a clergyman was leaving. Instead of publishing his letter, the journal replied that it did not 'undertake religious puzzles. Perhaps they had a spree with the spouse, or the audience only put pieces of quartz or buttons in the offertory. The usual devise under such circumstances is to present a clergyman with a nickel-plated tea and coffee service'.²⁴

²² *Te Aroha News*, 8 February 1898, p. 2.

²³ 'Te Aroha', *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 March 1902, p. 33.

²⁴ 'To Correspondents', *Observer*, 25 August 1883, p. 15.

'Tin canning' was a traditional way of celebrating a marriage. For instance, when another Waiorongomai schoolteacher, David Alexander Burnie Allison,²⁵ and his bride returned from their honeymoon in 1911, 'all the young fellows turned out with tins cans, guns, etc', to welcome him home. 'They were invited inside and treated to all sorts of good things'. After a resident 'made a nice little speech', Allison 'suitably replied', and then three men sang. On Friday evening, at 'a pleasant little social' the couple 'were presented with a beautiful clock suitably inscribed', which had been purchased by 'their many Waiorongomai friends'. After the chairman of the school committee presented it with 'a few well-chosen words', Allison 'returned grateful thanks'. During the evening two men sang, another man 'danced a hornpipe in excellent style', and three residents played musical instruments. 'A nice supper was handed round about 11 o'clock and heartily partaken of. Dancing was kept going with spirit until 1.30, when the evening wound up with Auld Lang Syne. Thanks are due to the ladies who so willingly helped with supper'.²⁶

This was a typical social event. Of the many similar ones, four years later a Waiorongomai couple who had married elsewhere were welcomed home by a large gathering and presented with 'a cream jug, sterling silver sugar basin and silver inkstand, and a Morocco bound book of Shakespeare's works'. Dancing 'was indulged in throughout the evening', and 'a dainty supper, supplied by the ladies, was handed round, and a most sociable function concluded at about 1 a.m.'²⁷

PATRIOTIC SOCIALS

During the First World War, 'patriotic socials' were held both to farewell soldiers and to welcome them home again. For instance, when one 'popular resident' of Waiorongomai was farewelled in 1916, 'a good number' attended 'and all appeared to thoroughly enjoy themselves'. During the evening, it was announced

that the proceeds from this and other socials would be devoted to obtain presents for all the Waiorongomai boys on active service,

²⁵ Marriage Certificate of David Alexander Burnie Allison, 1911/879, BDM; *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 June 1911, p. 2133.

²⁶ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 31 January 1911, p. 2.

²⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 26 April 1915, p. 2.

including those who had already joined the forces. (Applause.) They could not let it be said that Waiorongomai folk did not appreciate the action of their district boys in fighting for the Empire.²⁸

Welcomes for returning soldiers were used to strengthen patriotic feeling, as in 1915:

A Welcome-Home Social was tendered to Private McSweeney [son of John]²⁹ on Friday evening last and was a pronounced success. Quite 50 gathered together to do honour to our local hero. Private McSweeney's entrance into the room was the sign for a hearty round of applause. The first part of the programme was occupied by speeches. After the National Anthem had been sung, Mr Rust, who was in the chair, welcomed home the returned trooper on behalf of the residents of Waiorongomai. A dance was then announced, after which the mayor of Te Aroha, Mr Norrell, explained the Unification Scheme. Mr Hanna, who was the next speaker, explained the Pension Fund; and Councillor Morrison gave his own personal ideas about those whose duty it was to enlist. The Chairman then expressed his great pleasure that these gentlemen had journeyed out from Te Aroha and thanked them on behalf of the residents. The latter half of the programme was taken up with dancing and musical items, and Messrs Hanna, Glover, Norrell and Rust rendered the vocal items. Much praise is due to Mrs Glover who not only played the dance music free, but also lent her piano for the occasion; to Mr Bath who spent time and energy in organizing, and to the ladies who supplied the provisions. A collection was taken up and this is to go towards the Queen of the East Fund.³⁰

HELPING OTHERS

Many examples could be given of assistance, emotional and financial, given to those in need. For instance, on several fields Henry Hopper Adams assisted injured miners and, in the case of deaths, their widows.³¹ In 1888, a Waiorongomai shopkeeper, Thomas Henry Whitmore Yate, when suffering from stress because of financial difficulties,³² disappeared from his

²⁸ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 17 November 1916, p. 2.

²⁹ See paper on John McSweeney.

³⁰ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1915, p. 3.

³¹ See paper on his life.

³² See paper on financial struggles in the Te Aroha district.

house one afternoon, leaving a note stating that ‘he was tired of this life and intended to go and lie down and die’. Immediately after it was discovered this note search parties were ‘out in all directions’, the ‘greatest sympathy’ being ‘expressed on every hand’ for his wife.³³ Three days later, after he returned to his home, his friends thanked ‘those who, in such large numbers (many to the neglect of their own business), so untiringly went in search of the missing one, fearing some accident had happened to him’.³⁴ His wife expressed her thanks through an advertisement:

THANKS

To the inhabitants of Te Aroha, Waiorongomai, and surrounding districts. I, the undersigned, take this means of returning my heartfelt thanks to all – whom I have not been able personally to thank – who so willingly, generously, and untiringly assisted in the search for my husband, during his recent temporary and unexpected absence from his home. I am truly grateful for all the kindness shown on every hand, at the time referred to, and since....

I am, etc,

Sarah Jane Yate.³⁵

One Thames miner recalled that when a miner was injured, other miners usually gave ‘1 day’s pay of what they could to help’ his family.³⁶ In 1888, when one Te Aroha resident failed to support his wife and children, drank to excess, refused to work, robbed his wife’s garden, and threatened her life, her neighbours kept the family from starving.³⁷ A woman with two children, whose husband had gone to Auckland, was ‘for some time’ supported by her neighbours before she sought charitable aid.³⁸ When a 50-year-old unemployed former schoolteacher was found drowned in the river in 1886, it was reported that, whilst living at Te Aroha during the previous two weeks, he had ‘received some assistance from several residents’. As he was a Mason, this body arranged his funeral.³⁹ At a meeting of the library

³³ *Te Aroha News*, 11 February 1888, p. 2.

³⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 18 February 1888, p. 2.

³⁵ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 25 February 1888, p. 3.

³⁶ A.F. Sawyer, ‘Notes on Early Thames’, n.d. [c. 1946-1947], W.B. Hammond Papers, folder 34b, MS 134, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

³⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 September 1888, p. 2.

³⁸ Waikato Hospital and Charitable Aid Board, *Waikato Times*, 7 September 1893, p. 2.

³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 September 1886, p. 2.

committee in 1889, when it was reported that the librarian, John Dare, was paralyzed in his right arm, Adam Menzies, the local bailiff and secretary to the committee,⁴⁰ offered to be librarian but keep Dare on to do the work.⁴¹

When a Waiorongomai miner died in 1888, leaving a widow and three children aged between five and eight, a subscription ‘opened on their behalf’ quickly raised £35. ‘As showing the hearty response made to the call, we may state that between four and six o’clock on Saturday, no less than £27 was raised’.⁴² In 1895, a falling tree killed a man working on Thompson’s track, across the Kaimai range south of Te Aroha. ‘His fellow labourers, knowing that his widow and family were left totally unprovided for’, immediately ‘clubbed together for the purpose of raising funds to assist them in their distress’. Te Aroha residents were invited to contribute to the subscription list held at a local shop.⁴³

In July 1881, when a miner ‘living in utter destitution’ was struck down with scarlet fever for several weeks, a storekeeper had provided some food ‘and a working woman had charitably nursed him’.⁴⁴ When James Hobbs, an old man who had mined in the district in the early 1880s,⁴⁵ either ‘through want of work, or inability to perform it’, had ‘fallen into a state of destitution, bordering on starvation’, in 1889, his nearest neighbour ‘interested himself in the man’s position, and provided him with food, etc’.⁴⁶ Because he was sick and destitute, subsequently he was sent to Hamilton to receive ‘out-door relief’ and then admitted to the ‘Refuge’.⁴⁷ He would die in the Old Man’s Home there in 1914, aged 89.⁴⁸

In 1909, two men discovered a man lying in manuka scrub alongside the road near the Waiorongomai hotel. ‘The man, when found, was in a

⁴⁰ See *Te Aroha News*, 24 January 1885, p. 2, 30 January 1886, p. 2, 29 January 1887, p. 2, 5 March 1887, p. 2, 4 February 1888, p. 2, 30 January 1889, p. 7, 8 February 1890, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 9 February 1891, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Te Aroha News*, 16 February 1889, p. 2.

⁴² *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1888, p. 2.

⁴³ *Te Aroha News*, 5 October 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 July 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 279, 293, BBAV 11500/9a; Notices of Marking Out Claims 1883, no. 36, BBAV 11557/2b, ANZ-A.

⁴⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 April 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 8 May 1889, p. 2; Waikato Hospital and Charitable Aid Board, *Waikato Times*, 6 June 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Death Certificate of James Hobbs, 2 March 1914, 1914/712, BDM.

semi-unconscious state, and in a very emaciated condition, being only skin and bone'. After being carried into a discoverer's house, he was taken to a Te Aroha hotel, where a doctor 'considered the poor fellow was in a dying condition, and prescribed for him'. After spending the evening at the hotel, the publican and his wife doing 'all they could to make him comfortable', the following day he was taken by ambulance to the railway station to be conducted to the Thames hospital by a policeman. He remembered eating a banana three days before being found, 'but everything since is a blank. Had he put in another night in the open, the chances are he would have died'.⁴⁹ A bushman aged 60, he was transferred to the old men's home after spending 23 days in hospital.⁵⁰

Many examples could be given of men and women caring for the dying and showing their respect by attending their funerals. Over three weeks in 1889, William Henry Andrew, a Waiorongomai miner, suffered from acute bronchitis coupled with heart disease, 'gradually getting worse and worse' before dying 'in great agony'. Throughout this time 'he was tended by his brother miners, who did all they could to allay his sufferings'.⁵¹ When Charles Ernest Balcke, a hairdresser, newsagent, and stationer,⁵² died in 1892, his funeral 'was one of the most largely attended ever seen in the district, everyone who could possibly attend being present to pay their last respects'.⁵³ Six years later, an advertisement thanked 'all those kind friends who helped and sympathized with our dear departed son, through his illness and at his funeral'.⁵⁴

After a carter and labourer, William Gooding, died of 'exposure accelerated by drink' in 1911 at the age of 63,⁵⁵ another labourer, Harry Cook, told the coroner that he had taken Gooding home when he was weak from drink and 'put him to bed without undressing or taking off his boots as he requested it, saying he wished to go to Auckland next day. He got into bed himself, but I had to help him both ways in going and coming from

⁴⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 19 January 1909, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Thames Hospital, Fees Register 1907-1910, folio 89, YCAH A431/74, ANZ-A.

⁵¹ Death Certificate of William Henry Andrew, 20 June 1889, 1889/1878, BDM; Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 22 June 1889, p. 2.

⁵² See advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 14 July 1883, p. 1.

⁵³ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 April 1892, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 9 July 1898, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Death Certificate of William Gooding, 26 June 1911, 1911/5942, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 29 June 1911, p. 2.

[George] Russell's', where he had had some soup. When Cook went at dinnertime the following day 'to bring him to have something to eat', he was dead. Russell, another labourer, who lived nearby, had been Gooding's friend for five years. The last time he saw him alive, he had sent Cook to bring him 'have some thing to eat because I knew the man had been suffering for some weeks from drink'.⁵⁶

In contrast, an uncaring attitude was criticized at an inquest into a suicide who drowned himself in 1888. The jurors added a rider expressing 'their indignation at the inhuman indifference displayed by the persons at work at the adjacent flaxmill, in neither ceasing to work or going to render assistance to rescue deceased'. This rider 'specially referred to the foreman in charge of the mill at the time'.⁵⁷

Benefit concerts assisted a variety of worthy causes. For instance, at one held in 1888 a departing spinster who had been organist for the Anglican church and the Wesleyan Sunday School was presented with a bag of sovereigns.⁵⁸ In 1895, a benefit concert and dance was held at Te Aroha for a Gordon farmer who had 'been invalided for some considerable time'.⁵⁹ Two years later, the Te Aroha hall was packed for the 'deserving cause' of a benefit concert for a newly widowed Waiorongomai woman, the singers and instrumentalists not charging for their services.⁶⁰

SAVED BY A DREAM

In 1888, a seven-year-old boy, George Cornes, nearly drowned in the river when swimming with some other boys, but was saved when a newspaperman heard their shouts, dived in, and brought the unconscious boy to the bank.⁶¹ The rescuer was Frederick Charles Rowton Smithyman, proprietor of the short-lived *Aroha Gazette*, who was awarded a certificate

⁵⁶ Inquest into death of William Gooding, Justice Department, J 46 COR, 1911/707, ANZ-W.

⁵⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 1 December 1888, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 14 April 1888, p. 2, 21 April 1888, p. 2.

⁵⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 29 June 1895, p. 2, 10 July 1895, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 23 January 1897, p. 4.

⁶¹ *Te Aroha News*, 18 February 1888, p. 2.

from the Royal Humane Society for his action.⁶² Thirty-six years later, Smithyman revisited Te Aroha, and shared his recollections of the township in 1888 with the *Te Aroha News*, including one particular incident:

One night he had a vivid dream in which he saw, at a spot on the river, a boy well-known to him, named George Cornes, drowning. His dream made such an impression upon him that he visited the river the next day. He could see no signs of life and after walking about for a time decided to return home. Just as he was leaving he met a number of boys who were off to the river for a bathe and among them was the boy Cornes. Mr Smithyman went back to watch the boys, and a second time started to leave when the cry was raised that a boy was drowning. Rushing back only the boy's arm could be seen as he floated down stream. Mr Smithyman dived in and with some difficulty got the boy but owing to the high banks of the river he had to float down stream some distance before landing. When the boy was taken out of the water his appearance was just as it had been to Mr Smithyman in his dream. The body was stiffened, the face blue, and there seemed little hope of restoring life, but after a good deal of effort he revived and was taken home. He completely recovered.... Singularly enough the hour at which the accident happened corresponded with the hour at which Mr Smithyman awoke from his dream.⁶³

'THE UNGRATEFUL GUEST'

This was the headline to the report of a Supreme Court case in 1901, which was an example of kindness not being repaid. An elderly man named John Smith was charged with causing Joseph Wilson, formerly a miner but then a labourer at Te Aroha,⁶⁴ actual bodily harm. Wilson told the court he had met Smith 'one night and had a drink or two with him', and as Smith 'did not seem to have anywhere to go', he was invited to stay the night. When Smith 'got noisy', Wilson 'remonstrated with him, and finally put him out, whereupon prisoner picked up a spade and struck' him on the arm. The doctor described the wound as 'extensive and painful'. Although the

⁶² Marriage Certificate of Frederick Charles Rowton Smithyman, 1894/1948, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 22 August 1888, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 30 August 1888, p. 2.

⁶³ Recollections of F.C. Smithyman, *Te Aroha News*, 8 November 1924, p. 5.

⁶⁴ See *Thames Star*, 25 September 1882, p. 2; Armed Constabulary Force, Return of Charges taken at Te Aroha Lock-Up 1880-1903, 16/1888, in private possession.

constable considered Smith was not drunk, Smith insisted he had been 'and remembered absolutely nothing about the affair'. When found guilty, Smith stated 'it was only right that he should explain that he was under "electric influence." He did not think it was right that his senses should be taken away from him in the street. He knew all this was going to happen'. After the judge was informed that Smith 'had been convicted of different offences 20 times since April, 1897', he 'called Wilson, and enlightened him as to the manner of man he had been entertaining. It had been said that in entertaining strangers people might be entertaining angels unaware, but, remarked His Honor, this was a very different case'. Smith was sentenced to three years in prison.⁶⁵

HELPING WHEN FIRES BROKE OUT

As until the twentieth century Te Aroha did not have a fire brigade, when fires broke out everyone rallied around. For instance, in May 1883 a fire broke out in the Hot Springs Hotel and spread to an adjoining building. When residents became aware of the fire, at 3.20 a.m., they 'quickly gathered and assisted' the publican to remove 'a considerable quantity of furniture', but could not save the effects of several of the guests. 'The ladies belonging to the family' were invited by a rival publican to stay at his hotel. Although the adjacent shop could not be saved, all the stock was removed

to a place of safety before the flames got much hold. The building used as the Post and Telegraph Office was in great danger, and it was found advisable to remove the whole of the books, papers, letters, telegraph instruments, and furniture. The valuable papers, etc, were conveyed to the Warden's office for security, however, by dint of hard work, by a steady application of water, and covering the roof with wet blankets, the building was saved. Everyone present worked with a will,

and two men were identified as having 'stuck to the work of throwing water on the Post Office building, and chiefly by their exertions, with other assistance, the fire was prevented from catching hold on the rest'.⁶⁶

In 1888, Robert Harris' store⁶⁷ burnt down early one Sunday morning. When the school bell rang the alarm, 'speedily a large crowd collected' and,

⁶⁵ Supreme Court, *New Zealand Herald*, 19 November 1901, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 19 May 1883, p. 2.

realizing that neither store nor contents could be saved 'attention was directed towards preventing the flames from spreading to the adjoining shop'. The owners along with 'a number of willing helpers displayed great energy and by means of wet blankets, etc, prevented this building from taking fire, although it was much scorched'. There was 'much sympathy' felt for Harris, who would not be able to trade for a time.⁶⁸ Harris thanked those who had helped and promised to reopen 'as early as possible, when he hopes to receive liberal support to assist him in his misfortune'.⁶⁹

Another example of such assistance was in 1897, when a two-storey Waiorongomai house occupied by a woman, two young children, a six-month-old baby, and a neighbour's 'young girl' burnt down at 5.30 a.m. While the mother got everyone outside, 'the unusual glare attracted the attention' of a publican, a miner, and a carpenter, 'who all hurried to the scene of the fire to render assistance, but it was found impossible to save either the building or its contents. The only thing saved from the flames was a drawer containing papers of value and a few articles of clothing, and these were got out at great peril' by the carpenter. The family was taken to the hotel, 'where they received every kindness'.⁷⁰

Chimney fires were quite common, and with prompt action could be extinguished. When the lower part of one in a Waiorongomai cottage caught fire in 1889, 'a few of the neighbours immediately rushed over and extinguished the flames, which otherwise might have resulted in a serious fire'.⁷¹

Usually fires did not cause any loss of life, but in 1888 what the newspaper described as a 'sad occurrence' and 'a lamentable affair' at Waiorongomai killed Patrick Casey, 'a fine little boy' aged two-and-a-half. The son of Thomas, a miner,⁷² he had been left alone with his 11-month-old sibling while their mother collected some milk from a neighbour, not being away for more than five minutes.

⁶⁷ See *Te Aroha News*, 7 February 1885, p. 2, advertisement, 10 July 1886, p. 3, advertisement, 14 August 1886, p. 1, 18 December 1886, p. 2, advertisement, 2 April 1887, p. 3, 10 March 1888, p. 2.

⁶⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 10 March 1888, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 10 March 1888, p. 3.

⁷⁰ 'Te Aroha Notes', *Waikato Argus*, 5 June 1897, p. 3.

⁷¹ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1889, p. 2.

⁷² For his *Te Aroha* years, see *Te Aroha News*, 4 December 1888, p. 2, 1 March 1890, p. 2.

On her return, however, a sad sight had met her view – the little boy’s clothes being all on fire, and the poor child in a state of great terror. The mother quickly extinguished the fire, and applied soothing remedies to allay the pain, a work in which many kind neighbours rendered willing assistance.⁷³

Whilst the mother tried to put out the flames with her hands, a surveyor rushed up, found some blankets, and extinguished the fire with these. With Maria Mace, wife of John, a carpenter who also ran a ‘temperance house’,⁷⁴ he took Patrick’s clothes off and rubbed him with ‘sweet oil and flour’.⁷⁵ There being no doctor ‘within reach’, a Te Aroha chemist came and ‘dressed the wound, and was most attentive to the poor little sufferer up to the time of his decease, doing everything he could to allay the pain’.⁷⁶ Maria Mace and two other mothers were with the parents when their son died.⁷⁷

Some fires were deliberately lit. In the summer of 1889, ‘several assertions’ were made at Waiorongomai about the person who lit the fire that nearly destroyed the water race to the battery. ‘One thing is certain the originator well deserves most severe punishment, thousands of pounds worth of property having been more or less endangered’.⁷⁸ The fire burned for several days, destroying two houses in the bush near Fern Spur, one belonging to William Darby, a miner and blacksmith,⁷⁹ who ‘was away at the time, and with the exception of a sewing machine and some wearing apparel, nearly everything in the house was burnt’.⁸⁰ A Waiorongomai correspondent gave details of the loss and of how others came to their aid:

Mrs Darby only succeeded in saving a very few things, and many valuables were lost. Such as a good collection of books which cost £20, also a silver cornet valued at £8, many articles being such as

⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 22 August 1888, p. 2.

⁷⁴ See *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1888, p. 2, 27 June 1888, p. 2, 1 September 1888, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 September 1888, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Inquest into death of Patrick Casey, Justice Department, J 46 COR, 1888/512, ANZ-W.

⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 22 August 1888, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Inquest into death of Patrick Casey, Justice Department, J 46, COR, 1888/152, ANZ-W.

⁷⁸ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1889, p. 2.

⁷⁹ See *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1884, p. 7, 25 December 1886, p. 2, 25 June 1887, p. 2, 22 May 1889, p. 2, 1 January 1890, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 30 January 1889, p. 2.

cannot be easily replaced. For Mr and Mrs Darby widespread sympathy is expressed on all sides, and I hear that the ladies of Waiorongomai are arranging a sewing bee for the purpose of assisting them; as even the children's clothing was nearly all burnt.

Two other houses in the same area 'were also in great danger from the bush fire, but with the kind assistance of neighbours and friends from the flat, by constant watching were saved'. Neighbours assisted others whose houses were threatened by watching their thatched roofs for sparks and removing all their contents.⁸¹

Darby immediately started to re-erect his house.⁸² Employees of the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company assisted him, and he and his wife thanked 'the inhabitants of the Hill and Waiorongomai' for their aid.⁸³ The following month, the treasurers of the fund collecting money for the Darby family thanked all those who had contributed a total of £16 8s.⁸⁴

Three years later, after another fire, a fancy-goods seller moved her goods into a room attached to a drapery shop which the draper had 'kindly placed at her disposal'. The local newspaper wrote that it 'would be impossible to speak in terms of too high praise of the manner in which a number of friends and neighbours came to the assistance of those whose premises were in flames, and worked hard for several hours in moving out the furniture, stock, etc'.⁸⁵ In 1896, after a large fire destroyed nine out of the ten buildings in one Te Aroha block,⁸⁶ townsfolk were soon 'laughing merrily' at a tradesman whose shop was destroyed:

When he arrived on the scene the morning after the fire, he took vigorous exception to the action of some of his fellow townsmen in bursting into his place and saving what they could of his stock-in-trade, urging that the lot was well enough insured, the place was old, and that they had been too officious. When an inquiry was made, it transpired, much to the amusement of those who had

⁸¹ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 2 February 1889, p. 2.

⁸² Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 6 February 1889, p. 2.

⁸³ *Te Aroha News*, Waiorongomai Correspondent, 13 February 1889, p. 2, advertisement, 16 February 1889, p. 7.

⁸⁴ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1889, p. 7.

⁸⁵ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Waikato News*, 10 November 1892, p. 2.

⁸⁶ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 January 1896, p. 6.

been blamed for interfering, that not only had the policy lapsed, but such had been the position of affairs for the last five years.⁸⁷

Another feature of this conflagration was that ‘a good many things saved at the fire were afterwards stolen’.⁸⁸

GIFTS

In 1898, Patrick O’Meagher, a publican,⁸⁹ provided ‘a set of caps for the senior fifteen’ rugby team, and the owners of the *Te Aroha Times* presented medals for awarding to the best players.⁹⁰ A rival publican, William Henry Knock,⁹¹ presented the Te Aroha Rifles with two prizes for shooting, a gold medal and the Knock Belt.⁹² Knock, an officer in the Piako Mounted Rifles, ‘took a keen interest in the welfare of the Company, and considered nothing too great a sacrifice that was for the betterment of the corps’.⁹³

James Craig, Jr, was an agent and auctioneer at Auckland, Thames, and Te Aroha.⁹⁴ During the 1880s, although living at Thames, he regularly presented books, periodicals, and newspapers to the Te Aroha library, and in 1885 gave a visitors’ book to the domain board.⁹⁵ The newspapers were from ‘Home’, meaning England, and his donations were greatly appreciated.⁹⁶

⁸⁷ *Observer*, 22 February 1896, p. 11.

⁸⁸ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 15 February 1896, p. 21.

⁸⁹ See section on publicans in paper on the drink problem in the Te Aroha district.

⁹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 28 April 1898, p. 2.

⁹¹ See section on publicans in paper on the drink problem in the Te Aroha district.

⁹² *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 March 1896, p. 23, 28 May 1898, p. 36; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 8 May 1897, p. 5; *Te Aroha News*, 24 May 1898, p. 2.

⁹³ *Thames Star*, 5 December 1901, p. 4.

⁹⁴ See *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 14 September 1865, p. 223, 25 March 1870, p. 122; *Thames Exchange, Miners and Merchants’ Directory*, 12 December 1874, p. 4; *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1880, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 22 September 1881, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 16 April 1885, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, advertisement, 21 April 1888, p. 7, 25 April 1888, p. 2, 28 April 1888, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 11 November 1895, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 June 1885, p. 3.

⁹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 1 March 1884, p. 2, 11 October 1884, p. 2, 24 January 1885, p. 2, 29 January 1887, p. 2.

QUARRELSOME BEHAVIOUR

Particularly good examples are included in the papers on Bernard Montague, James Mills, and Robert Mackie. There were petty conflicts over the use of the Te Aroha hall. In 1892 the O.M. reported ‘a Harris ing scene’ (a reference to Robert Harris) during a dance after the school concert: Harris, the secretary, had arrived and put out all the lights. ‘I would advise him to be a bit more civil in the future’.⁹⁷ There were other examples of rudeness. For instance, a letter from the leader of the visiting Southern Cross Comedy Company explained that when he arrived in Te Aroha he was warned that he ‘should find the hall agent a queer fish, and my informant was not far wrong. Politeness is very cheap, a little common “ceevility” acts like grease to a wheel axle’, but little W. sadly needs that essential to political popularity to wit – tact’.⁹⁸ In 1910, a saddler, Thomas McIndoe,⁹⁹ offended Waitoa people by criticizing all the Christians attending a meeting. After declaring he was born a Christian, had remained one all his life, and was proud of it, he suggested that he alone was perfect: the others were ‘hypocrites, backbiters’, and ‘discord-breeders’.¹⁰⁰

Elections brought out the worst in some residents. In 1898, the O.M. commented: ‘Plenty of mud-slinging going on in the elections’.¹⁰¹ And so did some social occasions, as an 1882 report suggested: ‘E. denies that she used cayenne pepper to drive the ladies out of the room’.¹⁰² And a variety of petty squabbles disturbed local harmony. For example, in 1885 ‘the promoters of the bankruptcy ball’ were urged to ‘call on the secretary and pay for the hall’.¹⁰³ A letter from ‘Sufferer, Waiorongomai’, to an Auckland newspaper received a rebuff:

Your letter is not published, because it partook of a private than a public character. Mistakes occur with all classes of tradesmen every week, and if every person who had any grievance against the tradesmen they dealt with were to rush to the newspapers

⁹⁷ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 2 April 1892, p. 17.

⁹⁸ Letter from J.W. Barlow, *Te Aroha News*, 2 July 1887, p. 3.

⁹⁹ See paper on his life.

¹⁰⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 3 June 1910, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 30 July 1898, p. 21.

¹⁰² ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 29 July 1882, p. 313.

¹⁰³ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 7 March 1885, p. 10.

with a complaint, the world would be a little more queer than it is even at present. There is no doubt a great deal may be said for you, on account of the disappointment you experienced in not getting your wish carried out, and the firm you name was probably equally vexed as yourself on knowing that the arrangements they had made to give effect to your wishes had not been carried out, through the neglect of someone else. However, according to your own admission, as soon as they had an opportunity of knowing that a miscarriage had taken place, they, like honourable business men, returned you the money you had paid, probably putting up with the whole loss and disappointment, rather than have a stain upon their integrity. Under such circumstances we fail to see the necessity of publishing a letter expressive of strong feeling on the matter, more especially as you seem to have accepted the refund of the money you advanced. As a sensible person, we have no doubt that, on calm reconsideration of the matter, you will think the best course has been pursued.¹⁰⁴

A similar mistake had led to 'An Explanation' being published as an advertisement in two years previously. A firm of carters regretted 'that through a misunderstanding' a mine manager 'was put to so much inconvenience, as we never intended for matters to be carried to the extreme, and we are very sorry indeed to have caused him so much trouble and annoyance'.¹⁰⁵

THE DAY JOHN WOOD LOST HIS TEMPER

John Wood was a pioneer of Te Aroha and a pillar of the district who, after unintentionally wounding a man in a bar scuffle, tried to help him. Born in Nottingham, England, in 1837, he was apprenticed as a butcher. With other relatives, all Nonconformists, he came to Auckland in 1863, and two years later he settled in Hamilton with his unmarried brother Thomas. There he remained until 1877, when he erected the Nottingham Castle Hotel in the new settlement of Morrinsville.¹⁰⁶ Despite initial doubts by some, he 'ably carried on' his profitable investment until selling it in early

¹⁰⁴ 'Answers to Correspondents', *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 December 1892, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 3 August 1889, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 7 September 1921, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 May 1877, p. 8.

1880.¹⁰⁷ His next enterprise was a livery and bait stables, providing buggies and saddle horses.¹⁰⁸

When gold was discovered at Te Aroha, Wood was preparing to open a general store and butcher's shop at the river landing.¹⁰⁹ Shortly before the goldfield's proclamation, he opened the first butcher's shop in the new settlement, another sound investment, as there was then 'no regular supply of meat obtainable'.¹¹⁰ In 1885, a 'considerable addition' was made to his butchery.¹¹¹ Even though his premises burnt down in 1896, he continued the butchery, having a 'good trade'.¹¹² In January 1881 a 'large' livery and bait stable was erected for him.¹¹³ Also in that month, he announced he would 'erect a large family hotel in the centre of the township'.¹¹⁴ This was in partnership with his brother-in-law, John Allwood,¹¹⁵ who would be the publican, Wood not being 'called upon to take any active part'; they would share equally in the cost of buying stock and furniture and in the profits.¹¹⁶ 'Considerable alterations' were made to the former Rina Morgan Hotel, named after Mokena Hou's wife,¹¹⁷ which they renamed the Robin Hood and Little John, a Nottingham touch. Enlarged to 14 rooms, they converted 'an

¹⁰⁷ *Waikato Times*, 15 December 1877, p. 2, 23 March 1880, p. 2, 20 May 1880, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 24 February 1879, p. 3, 26 May 1880, p. 3; *Descriptive Handbook to the Waikato* (Hamilton, 1880), pp. 33, 66; *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 July 1880, p. 15, 'X.Y.Z.', 'To Te Aroha by Waikato and Back by Thames', 5 March 1881, p. 11; *Te Aroha News*, 3 June 1936, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ *Waikato Times*, 3 June 1880, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 October 1880, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 November 1880, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3, 30 November 1880, p. 3, 2 December 1880, p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 11 July 1885, p. 2.

¹¹² *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 February 1896, p. 15; Piako County Council, *Waikato Argus*, 16 January 1897, p. 2, 19 June 1897, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 21 August 1889, p. 2, Piako County Council, 21 January 1898, p. 2, 1 February 1898, p. 2, 7 September 1921, p. 3.

¹¹³ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 22 January 1881, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ See section on publicans in paper on the drink problem in the Te Aroha district.

¹¹⁶ Articles of Partnership between John Wood and John Allwood, 23 March 1881, Hesketh and Richmond Papers, box 3, MS 440, Auckland Public Library.

¹¹⁷ See paper on Mokena Hou.

old shanty into a really first-class hotel'.¹¹⁸ Seven months after being formed, their partnership was dissolved, Wood assigning his interest to Allwood for £170.¹¹⁹ He later sued Allwood for £50 held in trust by Wood's deceased wife for Allwood's son, and supported Allwood's wife when she accused him of drunkenness.¹²⁰ Despite this family unpleasantness, Wood in his will of 1921 left £200 to Allwood, by then a labourer.¹²¹

When Wood invested in local several mines he described himself variously as a miner, farmer, settler, and gentleman.¹²² His main occupation soon became farming. In 1882, he owned 27 freehold acres in the Piako district valued at £150, 25 acres in Waikato worth £300, plus sections within Hamilton township valued at £300.¹²³ He sold the latter the following year, presumably for a good profit, as they included 'some very valuable sites, either as business positions or for villa residences'.¹²⁴ In 1885 he purchased what he later called 'Woodville Park', at Te Aroha West,¹²⁵ adding an additional adjoining 48 acres in 1886.¹²⁶ His total acreage was just over 78 acres, with a rateable value of £584 in 1905.¹²⁷ Although its swamps required draining, it was very fertile, for example producing large amounts of hay.¹²⁸ From 1885 until 1912 he ran a small flock of sheep.¹²⁹

¹¹⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 February 1881, p. 3; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 25 June 1881, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Dissolution of Partnership between John Wood and John Allwood, 20 October 1881, Hesketh and Richmond Papers, box 3, MS 440, Auckland Public Library.

¹²⁰ *Te Aroha News*, Magistrate's Court, 12 January 1884, p. 7, Police Court, 4 April 1884, p. 2.

¹²¹ Probate of John Wood, Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/1454, ANZ-A.

¹²² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 201, 295, 325, BBAV 11567/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 25, 55, 64, 84, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 28 April 1881, p. 476, 23 March 1882, p. 490, 17 August 1882, p. 1131, 16 November 1882, p. 1732, 31 May 1883, p. 722.

¹²³ *A Return of the Freeholders of New Zealand...*, p. W 72.

¹²⁴ *Waikato Times*, 6 October 1883, p. 3, 25 October 1883, p. 2.

¹²⁵ *Te Aroha News*, Magistrate's Court, 6 February 1886, p. 2, 1 February 1898, p. 2.

¹²⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 10 April 1886, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Piako County Council, Rate Book 1905-1906, Waitoa Riding, Sections 12, 21/3, 32/7, Block IX, Aroha S.D., Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹²⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 9 February 1884, p. 2, 3 April 1886, p. 7, 10 April 1886, p. 2, 31 July 1895, p. 2.

He also sold 'well-bred' pigs.¹³⁰ In 1887, he erected a seven-roomed house,¹³¹ a large one for only two people, himself and Thomas, who worked on the farm for the rest of his life.¹³² Wood continued to farm until 'failing health' forced him to sell the farm in 1919, two years before his death, and move to Te Aroha.¹³³ He would leave an estate of £6,328 9s 8d.¹³⁴

Wood encouraged public use of his land. On New Year's Day, 1890, he entertained from 400 to 500 people from as far away as Paeroa at a 'school treat' on his 'recreation ground'.¹³⁵ He had long been involved with horse racing, being a steward for the Piako Races at Morrinsville in 1880.¹³⁶ When clerk of the course and a steward for the first Te Aroha race meeting in January 1881, he was described as 'our sporting patron' and a 'well-known sporting character'.¹³⁷ In later years, he continued to assist local meetings.¹³⁸ In January 1889, his offer to let one of his paddocks to the

¹²⁹ 'Annual Sheep Returns', *AJHR*, 1886, H-8, p. 9; 1887, H-15, p. 9; 1888, H-13, p. 21; 1892, H-30, p. 24; 1893, H-32, p. 25; 1894, H-17A, p. 25; 1895, H-23, p. 25; 1896, H-23, p. 26; 1897, H-23, p. 27; 1898, H-23, p. 25; 1899, H-23, p. 25; 1900, H-23, p. 26; 1901, H-23, p. 25; 1902, H-23, p. 24; 1903, H-23, p. 26; 1904, H-23, p. 25; 1905, H-23, p. 26; 1906, H-23, p. 25; 1907, H-23, p. 26; 1908, H-23, p. 27; 1909, H-23, p. 29; 1910, H-23, p. 29; 1911, H-23, p. 15; 1912, H-23, p. 15; *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 November 1888, p. 1220, 5 December 1889, Supplement, p. 1246, 11 November 1890, p. 1246.

¹³⁰ *Te Aroha News*, advertisement, 23 May 1885, p. 7, Magistrate's Court, 29 December 1895, p. 2.

¹³¹ *Te Aroha News*, 11 June 1887, p. 3, 17 September 1887, p. 2, 8 October 1887, p. 2.

¹³² *Waikato Times*, 13 February 1883, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 13 March 1889, p. 2, 7 September 1921, p. 3.

¹³³ *Te Aroha News*, 5 September 1921, p. 2, 7 September 1921, p. 3.

¹³⁴ Probate of John Wood, Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/1454; Testamentary Register 1920-1921, folio 833, BBCB 4208/12, ANZ-A.

¹³⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 4 January 1890, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 7 January 1890, p. 2.

¹³⁶ *Waikato Times*, 20 March 1880, p. 2.

¹³⁷ *Thames Star*, 26 January 1881, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1881, p. 3, 3 February 1881, p. 2.

¹³⁸ For example, *Te Aroha News*, 23 January 1889, p. 2; *Waikato Argus*, 14 October 1899, p. 3.

Jockey Club was accepted because the existing course was too rough.¹³⁹ As his course ‘proved very suitable’, it remained the venue for race meetings.¹⁴⁰

Wood was involved in other local activities. He captained the first cricket team in 1881.¹⁴¹ He assisted campaigns for improvements in local government and nominated friends for local bodies.¹⁴² Having at first wanted a borough, by 1888 he opposed this as premature because taxes would be ‘much heavier, laws more stringent’, and residents would be driven out.¹⁴³ He lent horses and equipment to improve the cemetery.¹⁴⁴

Because of his public-spiritedness, he was a popular member of the community, as indicated in an account of his being conned during the Christmas holidays in 1881:

The latest dodge for getting a cheap drink, was exercised on Mr Wood, a popular resident of this place, while in Auckland spending Christmas. Mr W. was meandering down Queen-street, when he was accosted by a man he had never seen before. “Hulloa, Mr Wood,” said the stranger, “How are you?” “I don’t know you,” ejaculated the astonished Wood. “Oh, yes you do! It was a long time ago, and I owe you some money.” “Do you,” said Wood, softening. “Come and have a drink.” So they went over to the “Cos” [Cosmopolitan Hotel], the Aroha man shouting seven liquors for his new acquaintance. “I’ll meet you at ten o’clock tomorrow at Morrin’s Corner with that little debt. Good day.” This was the last that Wood saw of the man to whom he had opened his heart.¹⁴⁵

The following year, ‘Passenger’ praised his kindness in lending his boat to those wanting to cross the river at a more convenient point than the punt; his brother rowed them across.¹⁴⁶ In 1892, the *Observer* Man recorded ‘our respected butcher’ saying he didn’t ‘want to make money; he would

¹³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 23 January 1889, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Waikato Times*, 12 March 1889, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 22 March 1890, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 March 1892, p. 23.

¹⁴¹ *Waikato Times*, 8 February 1881, p. 2.

¹⁴² *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1886, p. 2, 15 October 1887, p. 2, 12 November 1887, p. 2, 18 February 1888, p. 2, 13 February 1889, p. 2.

¹⁴³ *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1883, p. 2, 7 July 1888, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1886, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 8 January 1881, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ Letter from ‘Passenger’, *Te Aroha Mail*, 10 June 1882, p. 3.

rather shoot hen pheasants'.¹⁴⁷ Five years later, he shot a record bag of wild pigeons,¹⁴⁸ a popular sport. By then, and probably for years previously, he was known as 'Genial John'.¹⁴⁹ When he died, he was recalled as an 'old and respected' member of the community.¹⁵⁰

Wood could be sharp-tongued when provoked, as when suing for possession of two business sites occupied by a rival butcher. He told the court that 'defendant had paid no rent, that he won't pay rent and won't go out, saying that it is his property as well as anyone else's. Could have sold the property two or three times'. In reply to defendant's lawyer asking how much he had paid for the sites, he rejoined, 'That's my business, how much did you pay for the suit of clothes you are wearing?' He did, however, provide the information when asked by the magistrate.¹⁵¹

In 1886, his winning a case against the most belligerent person in Te Aroha, Robert Mackie,¹⁵² for possession of a dog,¹⁵³ led to Mackie's letter to the editor, to which he did not respond:

The subject of the action (a black collie bitch) came into my possession about the middle of April last, having then been about Te Aroha for some time apparently without any owner, and, along with a lot more dogs, had become a great nuisance about the back yard of one of our hotels, from whence one of my boys was asked to take her, which he did, and she was kept by and followed him until the 3rd of May, when Mr John Wood claimed her. Not being satisfied with his statement I went to the registrar and finding that no female dog or the name of Wood appeared in the book I registered and put the collar on her. Mr Wood then summonsed me, and in the meantime I learned that she had been sent to him months ago, and because it was a female dog he would not take her, telling the coachman who brought her here to do what he liked with it. I did not think the ownership worth testing, and therefore sent the bitch to him, together with cost of summons, trusting thus to end the matter, but so far from that he went to court, and on oath in the witness-box stated that he had her

¹⁴⁷ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 13 August 1892, p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ *Observer*, 15 May 1897, p. 7.

¹⁴⁹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 June 1897, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 7 September 1921, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, *Waikato Times*, 10 August 1889, p. 2.

¹⁵² See paper on Robert and Elizabeth Mackie.

¹⁵³ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Civil Record Book 1884-1889, 20/1886, BCDG 11221/1b, ANZ-A; Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, *Waikato Times*, 13 May 1886, p. 2.

registered before she came into my possession, whereas the following now appears on the register:- P. Mackie, black female cattle dog; May 5th, J. Wood, black female sheep dog, aged one year, the result being as reported by you, upon which I refrain from passing any comment.¹⁵⁴

Shortly afterwards, Wood's dog was poisoned.¹⁵⁵ In another malicious act, in 1910, his horse, valued at 160 guineas, was 'wilfully injured' by 'the larrikin push'.¹⁵⁶ As the horse died, he offered a reward for information that would convict those responsible.¹⁵⁷

An assault that Wood instantly regretted took place in February 1889, when at the age of 51 he was arrested for 'Assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm'.¹⁵⁸ The *Te Aroha News* expressed its 'regret' at having 'to record that a sad affair took place' between Wood and Frederick Hyde, 'a young man who recently came to Te Aroha from Huntly'.¹⁵⁹ Hyde, a bushman and contractor, was aged 33.¹⁶⁰ At about six o'clock one evening,

Wood, Hyde, and some others were standing at the bar of the Hot Springs Hotel having some drinks, and that Wood and Hyde bet "drinks" about some trivial matter. Hyde states that he won the bet, and that Wood disputed this and refused to "shout." Be that as it may, some warm words passed and Hyde making use of some offensive term, Wood suddenly rushed at him and with great force, stabbed him with great violence in the face with a small tea-tree stick he was carrying. The end of the stick, which was about the thickness of a man's small finger, penetrated Hyde's face just below the eye, and close to the nose. It appears to have missed the eyeball, and passed upwards behind the nose, to a depth of between two and three inches, and breaking off, remained in the wound, from whence it was extracted with considerable difficulty, leaving a terrible wounds which bled profusely for some time. After the wound had been stitched by Dr Cooper, bleeding from the nose continued for some considerable

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Robert Mackie, *Waikato Times*, 27 May 1886, p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ *Waikato Times*, 19 June 1886, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 17 September 1910, p. 2, 20 September 1910, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 1 October 1910, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Armed Constabulary Force, Return of Charges taken at Te Aroha Lock-Up 1880-1903, 9/1889, in private possession.

¹⁵⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1889, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Auckland Hospital, Register of Patients 1885-1890, folio 104, ZAAP 15288/2a, ANZ-A; *Waikato Times*, 16 February 1889, p. 2.

time, but this was eventually stopped by means of “plugging.” As may be supposed the injured man suffered intense agony, and passed a bad night, but managed to go to sleep for a short time yesterday forenoon, on awakening however, he was very restless from the severity of the pain.... The injured man is lying at the Hot Springs Hotel, and latest report last night was that he was a little easier. He was desirous of being conveyed to the Hospital, but it is deemed risky to move him about for fear of bringing on bleeding again.¹⁶¹

It was later explained that Hyde had been lodged in the hotel until on the following day, following Cooper’s advice was taken that he needed ‘perfect quiet’, he was moved into the former post and telegraph office, adjacent to and owned by the hotel.¹⁶² A couple of days later, Thomas Wood took Hyde to the Hamilton hospital, where as he continued to be in pain blood poisoning was feared.¹⁶³ The doctor in charge of the hospital ‘pronounced the case a very critical one. There is no probing the wound further, as it reaches the base of the brain, and if the extreme end of the tea tree stick is still there its removal might cause instant death’. Hyde was ‘suffering acute pain across the forehead and in the back of the neck’.¹⁶⁴

Before leaving Te Aroha, Hyde admitted to the police ‘having kicked at’ Wood as the latter was going out the door, but it was ‘doubtful whether he kicked Wood’s person or merely his coat tail’.¹⁶⁵ Once Hyde was released from hospital, the case was heard over two days. Hyde was the first to give evidence:

I am a labourer, and have been in Hamilton Hospital for the past five weeks. I know the accused. I remember seeing Wood at the Hot Springs Hotel on the 11th February last. He came into the hotel in company with two others, one of whom was an old man. Accused wanted the old man to “shout” which he declined to do. Accused then said we’ll shake for drinks, and the old man said no, I came in to get a drink, and I don’t think I am justified in “shouting.” I was in the bar when accused entered the hotel, but when I saw them I went into the passage. The old man referred to

¹⁶¹ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1889, p. 2.

¹⁶² Letter from Charles Ahier, *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 February 1889, p. 20.

¹⁶³ *Waikato Times*, 16 February 1889, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 16 February 1889, p. 2, 20 February 1889, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 February 1889, p. 20.

¹⁶⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 February 1889, p. 20.

me when he said he would not “shout,” and I replied I would not be imposed on. Wood asked me what it had to do with me. I replied it had nothing to do with me, certainly not. Wood said I have seen the likes of you before, I said no, you have never seen me before without it was during the last day or two since I came to Te Aroha. Wood said I’ll bet you drinks I know where you come from. I said I’ll bet you drinks you do not, when accused replied you came from your mother, and I have won the bet, I replied no, I came from my father first, and I consider you have lost the bet. I referred to the persons present who agreed Wood had lost the bet. I asked Wood if he was going to pay for the drinks, and he replied No. I said to Wood “You are the essence of a s**t.” I then lifted my foot with contempt and said, “you are not worth that,” but did not kick him. I also placed my hand around his shoulder to attract his attention. Wood was passing me at the time. When he got to the door he turned round and viciously stabbed me in the fact with a ti-tree stick that he held in his hand. The blow was not accidental but was done willfully and maliciously. Never saw Wood before that day. I still feel very far from well. My nerves are all shattered. I could not work if I tried, in fact I could not walk far. I suffered frightful pain from the effect of the injury. I cannot see much with the right eye now. My eyesight was good previous to this but now I can only see very imperfectly with my right eye. I suffer pain at the back of it and cannot discern with it.

The Bench over-ruled a question asking if he ‘had been asked to settle this matter by any person’. In reply to Wood’s counsel, Thomas Cotter,¹⁶⁶ Hyde denied using ‘any offensive language’ to George Lipsey,¹⁶⁷ ‘nor did I call anyone a loafer. I am certain I did not call a young man a loafer for allowing the old man to “shout”’. To ‘the best of my knowledge’ he had not called Lipsey a loafer, and he had not stood in Wood’s way to prevent him leaving the hotel. He had not kicked Wood but merely lifted his foot ‘to show him the contempt I felt for him. Will swear positively I did nothing to Wood, beyond putting my hand on his shoulder’, and did not catch him by the collar. ‘It was not until Wood refused to pay for the drinks’ that he became annoyed ‘at the mention of my mother’s name. I did not hear the accused say after he had stabbed me “My God, Charlie I did not mean to do that,” or words to that effect’. His ‘sole reason’ for becoming annoyed with Wood ‘was because he brought my mother into the question, in the manner he did’.

¹⁶⁶ See paper on Hoera Te Mimiha.

¹⁶⁷ See paper on his life.

The doctor in charge of the hospital described the wound and his concern about the poisonous nature of the manuka stick. It was not possible to know whether Hyde would recover his eyesight, but his 'bodily health' was nearly restored, though 'on account of the shock to the nervous system' it would take 'at least a month to set him up fit for work, even with good living. The eye may be more or less permanently injured'. He considered 'it would require a fair blow with the stick to inflict the wound', and considered Hyde's life was 'in danger' during his first week in hospital.

James Don, the publican,¹⁶⁸ explained that Hyde had been in the bar while Wood, Lipsey, and two other locals were drinking in the lobby. Hyde went up to them

and asked Lipsey for a pipe of tobacco. Lipsey replied I do not smoke, when Hyde said "Why you are smoking now." Lipsey was smoking at this time. When Lipsey was going out Hyde called him a loafer. Accused asked if he knew what he was saying, and said the man that's just gone out is a gentleman.

Wood and Hyde then had 'a few words', and when Wood's companions considered he had lost his bet, he refused to pay for the drinks.

Hyde then lifted his foot and touched accused's coat-tail lightly, and put a hand on his collar. Accused then went to the door, turned round, and pushed the stick he had in his hand into Hyde's face. Hyde attempted to follow accused, but only got as far as the door when he dropped on his knees, and cried out for some one to pull the stick out of his eye.

Don considered 'the stab was not given accidentally', but had never known Wood 'to lift his hand to anyone previous to this'. He had heard Hyde say 'you are no man' but not 'use any foul expression. I am sure accused went to the front door, turned, and came back before he stabbed Hyde in the face, but could not say how many paces he came back. The blow was a downward one'. Wood appeared to aim deliberately at Hyde's face, but Don could not swear he 'intended to deliberately and wilfully wound Hyde in the face. Did not hear Hyde call accused a loafer'. Hyde had made no attempt to ward off the blow, probably because the sun was in his eyes. Both men were sober.

¹⁶⁸ See paper on private lives in the Te Aroha district.

Henry Hughes, a miner living at Quartzville,¹⁶⁹ had observed the dispute. Hyde had placed his hand on Wood's shoulder 'and lifted his right foot sideways and touched him lightly on the lower part of his body, in a contemptuous manner'; he could not swear the foot had touched him.

Wood turned round, and with a little stick he had in his hand he (Wood) struck at Hyde, and poked the stick in his face, the stick breaking off short.... Wood appeared to aim at Hyde's face, and I think used considerable force with the blow by the way it was given. The stab was done wilfully, I could not call it an accident. I heard accused say "I would rather than a thousand pounds that it had not occurred."

Under Cotter's questioning, he 'could not say if Wood was sorry for what he had done. A man may be more sorry for the consequences that are to follow than he is for the deed committed'. He considered the blow was intentional.

Another miner living at Quartzville, Charles Gordon,¹⁷⁰ had heard Lipsey complaining about being called 'a loafer'. He saw Hyde take hold of Wood's collar 'and attempt to kick him. After he had done so Wood turned round and thrust at Hyde with a stick. Hyde may have gripped Wood by the collar for all I know. I could not say whether his boot struck him or not'. He confirmed that the blow with the stick was not an accident; 'I should call it a thrust not a stab'.

Hyde shifted his position towards the door, and placed his hand across the doorway. So far as I can tell Wood was going quietly out of the hotel until prevented by Hyde. This was when he (Hyde) mentioned about the drinks and caught him by the collar. Wood's action appeared to be in retaliation for what Hyde had done to him.... Wood, when he said "oh, Charlie, I never meant this," appeared to be very penitent, after seeing what he had done.

John William Bew, the local brickmaker,¹⁷¹ described the bet, with Hyde asking for a glass of beer after he considered that Wood had lost. He had not witnessed the assault, but had extracted the stick 'with some force'.

¹⁶⁹ See *Te Aroha News*, 2 June 1888, p. 2, 9 June 1888, p. 2, 4 November 1888, p. 2, 16 March 1889, p. 2, 23 October 1889, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ See Magistrate's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 2.

¹⁷¹ See *Te Aroha News*, 23 April 1887, p. 2, 9 May 1917, p. 3, 8 April 1940, p. 5.

When the police sergeant told Wood that, as the injury appeared to be serious, he would have to lock him up, Wood responded, 'You need not, I am not going to run away', and said 'he was very sorry it had happened'. He had always considered Wood to be 'a quiet peaceable citizen'. That concluded the case for the prosecution.

Cotter 'dwelt on the gross insult and provocation given Wood by Hyde, both by word of mouth, with his foot, and by barring his progress'. He argued that Wood 'would not know' that Hyde 'would follow it up by striking him'. Wood had 'struck at Hyde in self defence, never intending to injure him', and had the stick 'struck him anywhere else than it did, the injury would have been of a trivial nature'. His address 'was a very able one, and occupied a considerable time'. Asked if he had any statement to make, Wood reserved his defense.¹⁷² He was remanded for trial on the charge of malicious wounding.¹⁷³ He was bailed, Lipsey and Charles Ahier¹⁷⁴ providing sureties of £100 and Wood £200. 'Very great interest was evinced in the proceedings, a great number of local residents being in the Court House the greater part of the time'.¹⁷⁵

Three months later, Wood pleaded guilty in the Supreme Court. His counsel told the court that 'it was on his advice the plea was put in, and he applied that the matter might be allowed to be settled by compromise'. Hyde's counsel agreed, for 'the law was not put in motion by Mr Hyde', and the Crown Prosecutor concurred, 'as there was no intention to inflict the injury'. The judge considered 'a civil remedy' was the appropriate step for Hyde to take, as the blow 'was little more than accidental', and ordered Wood 'to enter into his own recognizances of £100 to come up for sentence when called upon'.¹⁷⁶ As the judge considered that 'the matter really partook mainly of the character of a personal injury rather than a public wrong', he made this 'very unusual' decision, which meant Wood would not be called upon if the compromise was reached.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Police Court, *Te Aroha News*, 16 March 1889, p. 2.

¹⁷³ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 12/1889, BCDG 11220/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁴ His life is outlined later in this paper.

¹⁷⁵ Police Court, *Te Aroha News*, 16 March 1889, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Supreme Court, *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 June 1889, p. 20.

¹⁷⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 June 1889, pp. 21-22.

Hyde had earlier commenced a civil action for £500 damages.¹⁷⁸ When this was heard a week after the criminal hearing, his counsel ‘by consent’ obtained an adjournment, correctly stating ‘that probably His Honor would not be troubled with it’; Hyde had accepted Wood’s offer to settle out of court by paying £200 and costs.¹⁷⁹ Immediately after the wounding, Hughes had collected £6 on Hyde’s behalf.¹⁸⁰ When Wood discovered, a week after their squabble, that Hyde ‘was without means, and not sufficiently recovered to go to work’, he ‘very promptly and considerately made arrangements’ with a hotelkeeper ‘to board and lodge Hyde as his (Wood’s) expense, for some little time to come, that he should have that complete rest, desirable for his restoration’.¹⁸¹

By mid-year, Hyde had lost sight in one eye and it was feared he might lose it in the other.¹⁸² At that time he also had his head cut open, his collarbone broken, and received some internal injuries when a wagon he was riding on in Auckland was hit by a train, resulting in his spending three weeks in hospital.¹⁸³

PRYING INTO OTHER PEOPLE’S LIVES

In 1893, the *Observer* described Te Aroha as

a great place for honey-mooning. And it is astonishing what an interest the local residents appear to take in Edwin and Angelina. The happy pair are the observed of all observers, and when they take their walks abroad the people nudge each other and wink and make faces at each other. But there is so little to do at Te Aroha, and such lots of time to do it in.¹⁸⁴

Gossip was rife, as indicated by the reports of love affairs outlined in the chapter on private lives. Neither Te Aroha nor Waiorongomai were

¹⁷⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 June 1889, p. 21.

¹⁷⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 19 June 1889, p. 5; Supreme Court, *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 June 1889, p. 20.

¹⁸⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 20 March 1889, p. 2.

¹⁸¹ *Te Aroha News*, 23 March 1889, p. 2.

¹⁸² *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 June 1889, p. 21.

¹⁸³ *Te Aroha News*, 19 June 1889, p. 5; Auckland Hospital, Register of Patients 1885-1890, folio 104, ZAAP 15288/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁴ *Observer*, 23 December 1893, p. 11.

inhabited by people with few links with each other; there was constant interaction and people spent a great deal of time observing each other's behaviour and minding other people's business. This is particularly revealed in the gossip columns of the *Observer*, which recorded details of the behaviour and foibles of residents as provided by the *Observer Man*, commonly referred to as the O.M., who might have been several men and/or women. Some gossip was humorous, some malicious, and some prurient. In January 1894 a visitor recorded the embarrassment of a newly married couple:

There was a young married couple stopping at the hotel. I fancy they came from Auckland. I don't think they had been married more than a day or two. Poor young things, how I pitied them. Whenever they made their appearance in the dining-room the guests would nudge each other under the table and whisper "There they are!" and giggle. It was the same thing when they went out. Everybody in the place knew they were just married as soon as they saw them, and everybody turned round to look at them, and make remarks.¹⁸⁵

A decade later, at least some newly-weds refused to be embarrassed by gossips:

In the days of our youth it was the aim of newly-married couples to hie themselves bashfully to some secluded locality, direction unknown even to their friends, there to blush away the first few embarrassing days of the honeymoon. To-day, it is the usual thing to ask the newspapers not only to advertise the place of retreat, but to describe the bride's costume, lest she should fail to be identified. And a Whangarei couple, who have patronised the side of Mount Te Aroha, have improved even upon this, by placading at one of their spooning grottos the fact and purpose of their visit, with interesting particulars of the picnic breakfast they had there. Times have changed.¹⁸⁶

The *Observer* was referring to a letter found in a 'natural fern-bedecked rotunda' close to the summit: 'Mr and Mrs _____, of Whangarei. Honeymoon trip. 8 a.m., 9-2-03. Stout and sandwich, xxx for breakfast. I

¹⁸⁵ C.A. Wilkins, 'In Hot Water: A Little Holiday Jaunt', *Observer*, 13 January 1894, p. 19.

¹⁸⁶ *Observer*, 7 March 1903, p. 16.

hope the one that finds this will have a jolly time as we are having. Ta Ta!’¹⁸⁷

Sometimes those who listened to others’ conversations did not like what they heard. The O.M. considered it ‘a very childish trick to throw sand through the window, but ladies should be careful when they speak’.¹⁸⁸

MOCKERY

In 1883 the organizer of the Waiorongomai Quadrille Assembly’s weekly dance did ‘his best to please every one’, but ‘one larrikin fastened a good size pigtail to his coat, which made him the laughing-stock for all the evening, poor fellow!’¹⁸⁹ In 1899, Te Aroha was ‘on the broad grin because a certain well-known citizen, who is said to be of the hard-headed and close-fisted persuasion, has been taken in and done for by an artless stranger’. The shopkeeper was told by this stranger that he had lost £13 ‘and wanted to get a placard announcing his loss written in big characters and placed in the shop window of the leading business place in the borough. Of course the stranger was received with open arms’, especially after he said he had arrived to take charge of a mine. After placing the poster in his window, they walked around the town inquiring about the missing money, ‘and, of course, a little stimulus was required now and again to help them in the search. Finally, the stranger gently touched the citizen for a loan of half a sovereign [10s] before parting to seek his hotel for luncheon’. In the afternoon, the stranger told his story to others and ‘raked in quite a goodly store of half crown [2s 6d] and five bob [5s] advances, just to keep him going until he took charge of the mine’. But when the constable ‘went in search of the millionaire who could afford to lose £13’, he recognized an old offender who was wanted by the law. ‘The principal mourner was the hard-headed and close-fisted citizen’, who ‘repairs to his business now by a new and rather circuitous route in order to avoid the chaffing of his acquaintances. He has had to take in so much chaff lately that his digestion is awfully impaired’.¹⁹⁰

PRACTICAL JOKES

¹⁸⁷ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 11 February 1903, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 19 January 1889, p. 17.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Waiorongomai’, *Observer*, 1 September 1883, p. 12.

¹⁹⁰ *Observer*, 18 November 1899, p. 7.

Practical jokes played could be either light-hearted or malicious. An example of the former was perpetrated in 1900, prompted by a bubonic plague scare that caused widespread killing of rats. ‘People going to the Te Aroha post office the other day were scared by noticing in the middle of the road a dead mouse, close to the prostrate form of which was fixed a 12 x 8in flag bearing the words, “Beware of the Plague” ’.¹⁹¹ Others were less kind. One, considered by the *Te Aroha News* to be ‘rather amusing’, was carried out in a hotel in 1883:

The perpetrators procured a broom, which they dressed up into a very good dummy figure of a woman, with nightcap and nightgown duly befrilled and adorned. They then placed it in the bed of a well-known confirmed old bachelor lodger, arranging it in such a manner as to make it an excellent representation of a female. The legitimate occupant of the room went up to bed at his usual time, but on catching sight of the recumbent form, his modesty was so overcome that he at once posted downstairs to the landlord and insisted on his ejecting the fair one. The latter, who was quite innocent of the joke, assured him that he was mistaken, and invited his irate boarder to come up with him to satisfy himself. This, however, was indignantly declined till “the woman” was turned out, and he waited downstairs till that operation had been performed. The laugh that followed the discovery of the real nature of the trespasser may be well imagined. The ejection was soon and peaceably effected, and calm then succeeded the threatened storm.¹⁹²

The pretensions of a local musician provoked another practical joke:

If musical Auckland has a “professor” of the tuneful art, at a salary of £100 a year, why should not other “centres of population” enjoy the same privilege? Te Aroha has asserted her claim, and other cities may be expected to follow suit. It was during the visit of the Minister of Education that the Te Aroha people awoke to the consciousness that they required a Professor of Music. An informal meeting was held in a room of the principal hotel, and a popular musician of the district was present. In fact, the only persons present were said musician and a certain wag from Auckland. The latter called for drinks, and with the insidious liquor he poured a glowing tale into the ears of the eager musician. He told him the Government were going in for

¹⁹¹ *Observer*, 19 May 1900, p. 15.

¹⁹² *Te Aroha News*, 3 November 1883, p. 2.

higher education, and were appointing Professors of Music all over the colony; that the favourite musicians in each place were sure of getting £100 per year, and that “the man from Galway,” or rather Te Aroha, was clearly the individual who was being addressed. “If I were you,” went on the wag, “I’d go to the Minister at once; he is living in this hotel, and will be delighted to see you.” Swelling with importance, and feeling that £100 a year already within his grasp, the musician took another “nobbler” and went off to interview the Hon. George Fisher. The minister received him graciously, listened gravely to his statement, and proceeded to inquire into the fitness of the candidate for the professorship. The musician proceeded to “dash off a little composition” in proof of his powers, and the great man having promised to consider the application, dismissed the candidate with that suavity which characterizes every Cabinet Minister when he is *en tour*. A merry twinkle in the eye of the Honourable George gave place to an uncontrollable outburst of laughter as soon as the would-be professor was out of hearing. The explanation of this ebullition is that Mr Fisher’s room being next that in which the wag and musician had been holding their “confab,” he unwittingly overheard the conversation, and was therefore prepared to receive the interviewer. That he was able to carry through the meeting without breaking down speaks volumes for Mr Fisher’s histrionic powers. As for the musician, he is immortally enshrined as “The Professor” at Te Aroha, albeit “without diploma,” but it is anticipated that he will experience some difficulty in collecting a salary.¹⁹³

The reference to ‘the man from Galway’ indicated that the butt of this joke was an Irishman; and the only resident who gave his occupation as ‘musician’ in three electoral rolls was indeed Irish, James O’Connor.¹⁹⁴

Was this a practical joke or just being unhelpful?: ‘Who were the young couple that went for a sail, and ran their boat into the bank, and had to wait an hour and a-half before they could get anyone to come and help them off’.¹⁹⁵

NOT PARTICIPATING OR NOT PAYING

¹⁹³ ‘Zamiel’, ‘Random Shots’, *Auckland Star*, 21 April 1888, Supplement, p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ *Waikato Electoral Roll, June 1884*, p. 16; *Tauranga Electoral Roll, August 1887*, p. 19; *Te Aroha Electoral Roll, June 1891*, p. 19.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Te Aroha Twists’, *Observer*, 16 April 1887, p. 18.

In early 1889, admission to the Te Aroha Quadrille Assembly dances cost 2s for men but were free for women.¹⁹⁶ The first dance ‘was fairly attended by the fair sex, but very poorly by the sterner sex, and to their discredit, they appeared to do their best to throw cold water on the affair’.¹⁹⁷ Some people wanted to participate without having to pay. In June 1883, ‘whilst Professor Sample was delivering his lecture to his pupils at Te Aroha, a few noted characters tried to obtain a glimpse on the cheap. They were detected in their hiding-place and hunted out, but not before abusing the Professor’.¹⁹⁸

LIBELS

Moses Hotchin, who owned a temperance boarding house and dining rooms,¹⁹⁹ was described in 1898 as ‘one of our oldest and most popular residents’.²⁰⁰ For some years a member of the town board, standing in his first election campaign as a ‘working man’s candidate’, his particular enthusiasm was beautifying the township by planting trees.²⁰¹ When an excursion train brought 1,200 passengers from Auckland in 1885, the town board provided tea and refreshments, and ‘“Te Aroha’s own Moses” was in great glee handing round the tea and biscuits to the young ones from town. Well done, M., some of our young men could take a lesson from you’.²⁰² Despite his popularity, he had at least one enemy, who used one of his sons to attack him. The reason was a series of unsolved thefts.

In May 1889 there was a ‘daring burglary’ from the store of Albert Berger, a watchmaker and jeweller.²⁰³ Berger informed the police that he went to his shop on Sunday afternoon ‘to wind up several watches being regulated, and on entering at the front door, he found the back door wide

¹⁹⁶ Advertisements, *Te Aroha News*, 3 April 1889, p. 7, 17 April 1889, p. 7.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 4 May 1889, p. 17.

¹⁹⁸ *Observer*, 9 June 1883, p. 180.

¹⁹⁹ See advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 3; advertisement, *Waikato Times*, 14 September 1886, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 March 1906, p. 37.

²⁰⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 3 March 1898, p. 2.

²⁰¹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 March 1887, pp. 2, 3, 7 December 1945, p. 5.

²⁰² ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 25 May 1895, p. 21.

²⁰³ See *Auckland Star*, Police Court, 18 June 1886, p. 2, advertisement, 2 October 1886, p. 7; advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 3 September 1887, p. 3.

open and that a robbery had been committed'. Fifteen watches 'left for repairs, hanging on a board near the front window' had been stolen.

The burglar had evidently first entered the NEWS Office yard, and scaling the fence dividing the back yards broke a small pane of glass in the door leading into a back room, and withdrawing the bolt, the door not having been locked, had no further obstacles to prevent his obtaining the booty he was after, as this small room opened directly into the shop. A number of wax matches were found dropped on the floor, and the glass of a large table lamp which stood in the front window was lying broken; and it is believed the noise necessarily caused by the breaking of this lamp glass decided the thief to shorten his visit (fearing the noise might have attracted attention), as a silver watch and chain, hanging up on the wall, and a number of articles of jewellery, both in the window and in some drawers were left behind. Strange to say Mr [Alexander Watson] Edwards,²⁰⁴ who was sleeping in his own room at the rear of his drapery store adjoining, with only the wooden walls between him and Berger's back room, was not awakened, and knew nothing of the occurrence till discovered by Berger.

Constable [Frederick John] Wild, after making all possible enquiries, went off on Monday morning on the track of a party who had been seen loitering about the township for some days previously, but although we understand the party suspected has been overtaken and searched nothing was found on him whereby to connect him with the robbery; and so far no direct clue has been obtained.²⁰⁵

According to a correspondent, the suspect stranger during his 'two or three days' at Te Aroha had 'exhibited eccentricities in character'.²⁰⁶

At the end of that month, Charles Ernest Balcke, a hairdresser, newsagent, stationer, agent, tobacconist, and 'fancy goods' seller,²⁰⁷ and Hotchin's son-in-law,²⁰⁸ was also robbed of jewellery worth £25, and a parcel

²⁰⁴ See paper on Ani Jane Lipsey and Alexander Watson Edwards.

²⁰⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 15 May 1889, p. 2.

²⁰⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 14 May 1889, p. 2.

²⁰⁷ See 'Thames Tittle Tattle', *Observer*, 17 June 1882, p. 218; *Te Aroha News*, advertisement, 14 July 1883, p. 1, 29 September 1883, p. 3, advertisement, 1 December 1883, p. 1, 6 December 1884, p. 7; *Waikato Times*, 10 June 1886, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 April 1892, p. 23, 16 April 1892, p. 30; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 831.

²⁰⁸ Marriage Certificate of Charles Ernest Balcke, 1 September 1887, 1887/322, BDM.

was placed on the front step of Hotchin's boarding house containing some of the goods taken in the first robbery. 'A few lines were scribbled on a piece of brown paper, advising Mr Hotchin not to talk quite so fast respecting the robbery at Mr Balcke's (his son in law), and signed Colonial Boy and Jack the Ripper'.²⁰⁹ The note was later described in detail:

On one side "Be ware Bank My Next Job. The Wild Colonial Boy, Late Jack the Ripper," and on the reverse side "M Hotching, Dry up you old B***** if not I'll Poison Your Horses." The jewellery returned included a Waterbury watch, and was of very little value. It would appear Mr Hotchin had been talking very freely with respect to this robbery from his son-in-law, Mr Balcke's, and mentioned persons' names as probably connected therewith, and it would seem it was with reference to this that the writer tells him to "dry up."²¹⁰

Balcke offered a reward of £5 for information about who had broken into his shop,²¹¹ but Berger reacted more savagely, in November charging Hotchin's son, Frank, aged 15,²¹² with stealing a silver watch chain from him in May. Berger 'swore definitely that the chain referred to, which the accused was wearing' when he entered his shop in October, was one of the items stolen. 'The chain was of a most peculiar pattern and during witnesses thirty year's experience in the trade he had only seen the one of that pattern'. After Berger reminded the magistrate that some of the jewellery had been placed on Hotchin's doorstep, three men gave evidence that similar chains had been purchased from Berger.

For the defence, the accused and his father and mother were examined, and swore the chain produced had been in their possession for about two years, having been purchased together with a silver watch and greenstone ornament, by Hotchin senior for £1 from a man who lodged at his house and was hard up, on the understanding he might redeem it within two months if he could. Not redeeming it, the lad's mother gave the chain to the accused to wear, and he had been wearing it for about a year and nine months.

²⁰⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 1 June 1889, p. 2.

²¹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 5 June 1889, p. 2.

²¹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 24 July 1889, p. 7.

²¹² Birth Certificate of Frank Hotchin, 1874/15978, BDM; Te Aroha Goldfields School, Class List, November 1882, folio 56, YCAF 4135/7a, ANZ-A.

John F[rederick] Cocks [draper and upholsterer]²¹³ gave evidence to the effect that he heard Berger, in the course of conversation, complain bitterly of the reports that had been spread about him, particularly some remarks he understood Hotchin senior had made, and he intimated if ever he had an opportunity of bringing evidence, he would “go” for some of those who so freely made use of his name.

At the conclusion of the evidence, His Worship at once dismissed the case.²¹⁴

Another report of this trial described Frank as ‘a bright intelligent looking lad’. His counsel described the charge as ‘a most serious’ one, ‘unsupported by any evidence, against a boy of unimpeachable character, a son of one of the most respectable and well to do’ residents. The prosecution was ‘of a most infamous character, and he could bring half of the residents of Te Aroha to refute the charge’, which was dismissed before hearing the ‘troop of other witnesses for the defence who were not called’.²¹⁵ It seems that Hotchin (and others) did not believe there had been a robbery from Berger’s shop, instead believing Berger had stolen from Balcke. The reappearance of some of Berger’s goods could indicate that he had had them all the time. Berger later left the district.²¹⁶

At the beginning of May 1898, a doctor announced that he had a vacancy in his home for patients who needed nursing.²¹⁷ Nearly three weeks later, he felt obliged to write to the newspaper

to contradict a report which some very wise person has spread in this township, to the effect that in consequence of my having been called in to attend the late Mrs Macnicol during her illness, I am debarred from attending certain cases for a period of three months. Now, sir, this report is absolutely untrue and without foundation, and I believe that those who have spread it have rendered themselves liable for damages upon my proving that I have lost patients through their interference. Everyone knows that in every township there are always to be found certain people who know “everything about everything,” and who are never backward in giving others the benefit of their vast and

²¹³ See advertisement, *Waikato Times*, 8 February 1881, p. 4; *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 3, 23 June 1883, p. 3, 5 June 1886, p. 2, 13 July 1889, p. 2.

²¹⁴ Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1889, p. 2.

²¹⁵ Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, *Waikato Times*, 14 November 1889, p. 2.

²¹⁶ See *Rodney and Otamatea, Waitemata and Kaipara Gazette*, 22 April 1914, p. 5.

²¹⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 3 May 1898, p. 2.

varied experience. I believe such people have been termed by someone “meddlesome busybodies,” and it is certain that the harm they do is often incalculable.²¹⁸

There was malicious gossip about others: for instance, in 1900, ‘Mac’, identity unknown, was ‘still looking for the “bloke” who started that yarn’.²¹⁹

SQUABBLES OVER LOCAL ISSUES

Thirty-six years after leaving Te Aroha, a former journalist recalled feeling on ‘public affairs’ running high, with ‘some very truculent meetings at which a plainness of speech was used that would not be permissible today’.²²⁰ Over many years there were many controversies over small issues. As an example of one of these storms in a teacup, in 1898 there was ‘a considerable amount of friction simmering’ over the closing hours of the baths on the domain and their ‘alleged untidy state’, with some people unfairly blaming the attendants for the untidiness.²²¹ In 1906, the pound keeper resigned because it was ‘difficult to carry out his duties without incurring ill-feeling and abuse’.²²² The following year, ‘the sulphurous air of Te Aroha was more than usually sulphurous last week. Fire brigade affairs, in spite of the hose, were pretty inflammable’.²²³

In 1902 the local chemist, George Robson,²²⁴ wrote a backhanded compliment to ‘The Mayor and Councillors’:

Would you please allow me to apologize to your August Body for leaving the Council Chamber last evening without thanking you for the courtesy extended to Mr [Thomas] McIndoe²²⁵ and myself while expressing our views in respect to Whitaker Street Pipe Drain Versus concrete water-table. I can simply plead that the

²¹⁸ Letter from Dr Gilbert T. Smith, *Te Aroha News*, 19 May 1898, p. 2.

²¹⁹ ‘Night Whisperings, by the Owl’, *Te Aroha News*, 31 March 1900, p. 3.

²²⁰ Recollections of F.C. Smithyman, *Te Aroha News*, 8 November 1924, p. 5.

²²¹ Letter from ‘A Casual Visitor’, *Te Aroha News*, 28 April 1898, p. 2.

²²² *Thames Star*, 27 July 1906, p. 2.

²²³ *Observer*, 7 September 1907, p. 7.

²²⁴ See *Waikato Times*, 10 August 1882, p. 2; *Waikato Argus*, 7 February 1912, p. 2.

²²⁵ See paper on his life.

words of wisdom breathed by Councillor [Samuel Luther] Hirst²²⁶ and others so upset my equilibrium as to cause the hurried exit.²²⁷

Four years later, the *Observer* described the harsh and unfair words used in a mayoral contest. 'Little Te Aroha was stirred to the depths of its most vigorous mineral spring' during the fight between Ralph Lake Somers, licensee of the Hot Springs Hotel,²²⁸ and John Benjamin Johnson, a plumber, tinsmith, and ironmonger.²²⁹

Of course, the prohibitionist people worked their hardest, and plied the muck-rake for all they were worth to keep the dreaded liquor-seller out of office. Mr Somers's good standing in the eyes of his fellow citizens, however, secured him a victory by 91 votes. And now the people who were aspersing his personal character, and representing him as a man with no stake in the town worth speaking of, are wondering where they come in.²³⁰

The loss of the local newspaper means the details of this contest are lost, but it sounds like a repeat of the harsh words used in the elections fought by James Mills.²³¹

That it was possible to have discussions and local government elections without major ructions was illustrated by the first town board election, which

excited a good deal of interest. From an early hour the friends of the two parties were busy brining voters to the poll, and their exertions were continued throughout the day. The proceedings were conducted in a fair and satisfactory manner by both sides, and, with the exception of one or two slight ebullitions of feelings by the more zealous of the partisans, nothing occurred to disturb the general harmony.

²²⁶ See *Observer*, 17 January 1925, p. 4; *New Zealand Herald*, 7 May 1934, p. 12.

²²⁷ George Robson to Mayor and Councillors, 20 February 1902, Te Aroha Borough Council, Correspondence File, 1902, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

²²⁸ See section on publicans in paper on the drink problem in the Te Aroha district.

²²⁹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 282, 831; *Te Aroha News*, 23 July 1898, p. 3, 17 October 1917, p. 2, 11 January 1940, p. 5.

²³⁰ *Observer*, 5 May 1906, p. 5.

²³¹ See paper on his life.

The poll resulted in four out of five seats being won by ‘those who, for distinction’s sake, were styled the working man’s candidates’. The announcement of the result to the ‘considerable crowd’ caused ‘much cheering by the friends of those who had been returned’.²³²

In the borough council elections of 1898, by comparison, there was ‘plenty of mud-throwing’, and ‘our popular clerk’, Percy Snewin,²³³ had ‘not escaped – very unjustly, too’.²³⁴ In July the following year, ‘there was a warm time at the Council last week, and there’s more to follow’.²³⁵ Again, the loss of the *Te Aroha News* for this year means that the cause of this warmth is not known, but that relations between town board and later borough councillors could be fraught was illustrated by a story recounted by Frederick William Wild, a former town clerk, in 1933. When David McLean Wallace, a prominent blacksmith and machine maker,²³⁶ was a member of the town board and Mills its chairman, there were ‘some stormy meetings’:

There was the time when Davy Wallace confronting the chairman vigorously thumped the table and said he didn’t care for Jimmy Mills, Mrs Mills or the whole Mills family. The chairman intervened smartly with – “Tut, tut, tut, tut, Davy, don’t break the furniture!”²³⁷

In September 1886, a public meeting was held in Te Aroha ‘to discuss’, meaning to criticize, recent actions of the domain board. ‘From the very start a determined attempt to obstruct the meeting and generally block the proceedings was made, by several who were apparently champions and defenders of the board.

One party, (who only the other day figured as defendant in an assault case), moved that the meeting pronounce the Chairman both mad and drunk; another (who was certainly not accountable for what he said, having imbibed too freely), tried to keep the floor during nearly the whole time, and to “talk down” all business.

²³² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 12 March 1887, p. 2.

²³³ For details of this controversy, see chapter on Edward Gallagher.

²³⁴ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 30 July 1898, p. 21.

²³⁵ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 8 July 1899, p. 22.

²³⁶ See paper on his life.

²³⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 29 November 1933, p. 4.

The *Te Aroha News* chose not to name names, but considered that if the board's actions were 'to be defended by such bullying, rowdies, and grossly insulting personal remarks ... they may well cry "save me from my friends." We are glad to know some who took part in this obstruction, have since expressed themselves as being heartily ashamed of their conduct'. The chairman did not want to 'create a scene' by calling on the police to eject the 'obstructionists', instead choosing 'to abruptly close the proceedings'.²³⁸

In 1892 a county councillor referred to Waiorongomai as being 'a pretty good place for cliques'.²³⁹ As an example of competing cliques, the 1885 election of the school committee caused 'considerable excitement'.²⁴⁰ Its first meeting elected Samuel Tozer Smardon, landlord of the Premier Hotel,²⁴¹ as its chairman, but his 'appointment by no means gave universal satisfaction, and efforts will be made to unseat that gentleman'. There had been two rival candidates, Smardon, proposed by Henry Hopper Adams and George Robert Beeson,²⁴² who both worked for the Battery Company, and Peter Ferguson,²⁴³ proposed by two critics of the company, Bernard Montague²⁴⁴ and Edward Gallagher.²⁴⁵

When it came to deciding the question by vote, Mr Ferguson (suddenly exhibiting an amount of modesty that startled even his own supporters, and nearest and dearest friends, to such an extent that they were completely nonplussed for the rest of the evening), considering it would be an indelicate thing to vote for himself, declined to do so. No such scruples touched Mr Smardon, however, or if so he quickly smothered them.

As equal votes for each candidate produced a tie, James Munro²⁴⁶ backing Ferguson, Beeson 'was now appointed temporary chairman on the suggestion of Mr Adams. Mr Beeson gave his casting vote in favour of Mr Smardon, who was declared duly elected'. The *Te Aroha News* reported

²³⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 18 September 1886, p. 2.

²³⁹ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 26 November 1892, p. 2.

²⁴⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 31 January 1885, p. 2.

²⁴¹ See section on publicans in paper on the drink problem in the Te Aroha district.

²⁴² See *Observer*, 5 June 1909, p. 5.

²⁴³ See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

²⁴⁴ See paper on his life.

²⁴⁵ See paper on his life.

²⁴⁶ See paper on John Squirrell.

‘Great astonishment at Waiorongomai’ over Ferguson refusing to vote for himself. ‘Probable result? An appeal to the Board of Education: perhaps a dissolution, and fresh appeal to the country, all of which would have been avoided had Mr Ferguson been a little more canny. The view held by the *other party*: “Possession is nine parts of the law” ’.²⁴⁷ A correspondent reported ‘a feud’ amongst the committee members with ‘disorder’ beginning ‘to characterize their proceedings’. While there was disagreement over the legality of Smardon’s election, this deadlock put

a stop to all business. It argues badly for the usefulness of the Committee during its term of office that dissension should have crept in among the members even at their first meeting. It is doubtful whether the antipathies that are supposed to exist among them will ever permit much harmony to prevail, and it is the opinion of some that it would be better (if the course is allowable) for the whole to resign in order that an entirely new Committee can be elected.²⁴⁸

At the first meeting and before the minutes were read, Munro and Montague contended that Smardon’s election ‘was invalid, and that the electing of a temporary chairman to decide the question of this, was altogether wrong. A long discussion ensued without satisfactory result’, and once Smardon, Adams, and Beeson confirmed the minutes, Ferguson, Munro, and Montague ‘arose and left, protesting that the proceedings were altogether irregular’. Later they returned with Gallagher, ‘and held a separate meeting in the school-house’. Before the issue was resolved by the Board of Education ‘all business must come to a deadlock’. Even if Smardon’s election was confirmed, ‘whilst the present feeling exists’ the chairman’s casting vote meant ‘it would still be a case of ties, four against four’.²⁴⁹

‘Outsider’, of Waiorongomai, told the *Auckland Weekly News* that those opposed to Smardon considered ‘he had no right to vote for himself, and that in consequence the proceedings were illegal’. The newspaper responded that the chairman had the ‘right to give his deliberative vote if he were so inclined, and when a tie was thus caused, he had no help but to give his

²⁴⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 7 February 1885, p. 2.

²⁴⁸ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Waikato Times*, 5 February 1885, p. 3.

²⁴⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 7 February 1885, p. 2.

casting vote. If the statement given above be the whole truth and nothing but the truth', it seemed that the cause of the problem was that not all

had done their duty, that is, rendered their vote. As one declined to vote, the Chairman could only take cognizance of the votes actually recorded. This he appears to have done, and though he might have suspected how the person who had a right to vote but did not would have exercised it, he would take no notice of that, as he had only to deal with facts. The person who refused to vote appears to have acted in a very foolish manner, and thus has been the means of bringing about a result not intended. If so, he, and not the Chairman, is to blame for the result.²⁵⁰

At the subsequent meeting, Smardon 'was early on the scene, and lost no time in taking possession of the disputed seat, and never gave "the opposition" the slightest chance of "jumping" his claim'. When the minutes of the previous meeting were read, his opponents 'refused to sanction their adoption'.

Thus all business came to a dead-lock at the start, and although the meeting continued for some hours, no business was transacted whatever. A majority of members called upon Mr Smardon to resign, but that gentleman apparently "didn't quite see it" and stoutly refused to accede to their request.

Some members 'advised all resigning and a fresh election. But others objected, and declined to do so'.²⁵¹ As the majority had voted for Ferguson to become chairman, but Smardon refused to resign,²⁵² the matter was decided by the Board of Education, which told the committee that, 'from the facts placed before them', Ferguson 'was the legally elected chairman, and they should recognize him as such'.²⁵³

Smardon remained on the committee until 1890, when he came bottom of the poll. The *Te Aroha News* considered it 'only justice' to explain that Smardon had told several residents who asked him to stand 'that he did not wish to be on the committee, and if anyone nominated him, and he were elected, he should resign. This being known to a great number will account

²⁵⁰ 'Answers to Correspondents', *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 February 1885, p. 15.

²⁵¹ *Te Aroha News*, 7 March 1884, p. 2.

²⁵² Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 4 March 1885, p. 3.

²⁵³ *Te Aroha News*, 18 April 1885, p. 7.

for so few votes being accorded in his favour, although some of his friends insisted on nominating him'.²⁵⁴

As a footnote to Smardon's behaviour, in 1888 he competed with an assayer in 'a foot-race of a somewhat novel character'. It was for £5 a side, Smardon being required to run 100 yards whilst his younger opponent had to run half that distance but carrying someone on his back. When Smardon was beaten by about 15 yards, he 'informed the stake-holder that he objected to him handing over the money' because 'the conditions had not been complied with, viz, that the person being carried should have been naked. There was nothing specified in the agreement that the person being carried should be naked, and the action of the old gentleman in respect to this matter is generally condemned.'²⁵⁵ Shortly afterwards, 'the Heavy Weight', a reference to Smardon's size, was induced to drop his protest.²⁵⁶ He was not really old, being only 51.²⁵⁷

RIVALRY BETWEEN TE AROHA AND WAIORONGOMAI

Sporting rivalry between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai was illustrated by a Waiorongomai correspondent's report in 1889:

The victory of the Waiorongomai football team on Saturday last at Te Aroha, was very popular. The team on their return was most enthusiastically cheered; some of those who had most distinguished themselves in the game were carried shoulder-high from the bus into the Waiorongomai Hotel, and made the "welkin ring."²⁵⁸

This rivalry was relatively friendly, for on occasions the two settlements produced combined teams to challenge outsiders. Possibly rivalry between the townships was the reason for Te Aroha's O.M. asking, in October 1891, why 'the Waiorongomai people did not patronize the late fancy dress ball? It shows very bad taste on their part, and should be remembered by the Te Aroha folks the next time they (Waiorongomai) get

²⁵⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 17 May 1890, p. 2.

²⁵⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 7 June 1888, p. 2.

²⁵⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 14 June 1888, p. 2.

²⁵⁷ Death Certificate of Samuel Tozer Smardon, 22 January 1899, 1899/612, BDM.

²⁵⁸ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 24 April 1889, p. 2.

up a concert or dance of any sort'.²⁵⁹ In contrast, when the first social of the 1898 season was held at Waiorongomai, a 'very large number' of people from Te Aroha attended. The *Te Aroha News* considered it 'very pleasing indeed to note the way in which Te Aroha and Waiorongomai people patronize each others' amusements. The jealousy which is so very common in almost all neighbouring country districts seems to be conspicuous by its absence here'.²⁶⁰

There was much less harmony over plans for improved local government. In late 1884, a correspondent reported disagreements over whether Waiorongomai and Quartzville should combine with Te Aroha into a borough or be a separate district. 'The acrimonious spirit and the petty jealousies which are so frequently the bane of small rival communities' seemed 'to be exceptionally rife in one corner of this district'.²⁶¹ Two years later these 'jealousies' had 'almost disappeared', for both townships now wanted a municipality combining them both.²⁶² That this was an incorrect assessment was revealed in subsequent squabbles on this issue, as described in the paper on James Mills, the leading proponent of a borough. In July 1889, a meeting at Waiorongomai about forming a borough with Te Aroha 'concluded in a somewhat noisy manner, the day being "moighty adjacent" to the celebration of the Battle of the Boyne', but 'there were no heads broken',²⁶³ an implication that Irishmen were responsible for the row. Subsequently 'Joe Softly' of Waiorongomai, who satirized the pretensions of those urging its residents to support a borough,²⁶⁴ claimed his wife had, before they went to sleep that night, had said 'something about certain people' wanting a borough 'to feather their own nests'.

I dream't, yes, we got our Borough Stork. Advertisement in the "Te Aroha Terror": "Wanted, a Town Clerk for the Borough of Mudville; salary, £150 per annum. *Duties*: To keep the Borough books *correctly*, that they may show where all the ratepayers' money does *not* go; to carry tales and gossip and intriguing clap trap to the ready ears of the Council, to be as well read up in all Municipal Acts of Parliament as a third class policeman, so as to

²⁵⁹ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 10 October 1891, p. 18.

²⁶⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 29 March 1898, p. 2.

²⁶¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 4 November 1884, p. 2.

²⁶² *Waikato Times*, 17 June 1886, p. 3.

²⁶³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 July 1889, p. 3.

²⁶⁴ For all his long letter, see paper on Waiorongomai.

filter that information into the minds of the Council, to run with the hare and the hounds, and lastly, never refuse a good “tip” for whatever purpose offered. Office hours: All hours.” Seventy-five applicants for billet – the dream burst up by “Touch the cradle Joe.”²⁶⁵

Three days later, the *Observer* satirized this meeting:

A Borough Meeting.
Fun at Waiorongomai.

A Waiorongomai correspondent writes:- We had a borough question meeting here, and a spectator might have thought it was a tug of war or football under new rules; but it is simply the Waiorongomai style of voting. It was so amusing and exhilarating that some local [Edgar Allen] Poe has perpetrated the following

POE-TRY.

Up here we had a meeting, so that all might go there treating
The Waiorongomai-ites to a feast of legal lore;
Splodger²⁶⁶ as our leader (and also as a reader)
Read the Acts and Statutes and Laws, all by the score;
His acumen in these matters he could glibly then outpour –
Give them gas, if nothing more!

So the ad. was in the *News*, of antagonistic views –
A paper run by Lord John,²⁶⁷ who great opposition bore,
And who swore to spoil the game, else he was not the same,
Or else was far more tame than he had been of yore,
Or else he must have ratted from the side he took before –
To go back nevermore!

Then arrived the night of battle, when each of them did prattle
Of all the rights and wrongs which they conjured by the score;
In the hall was quite a crowd, who were talking very loud,
And some among them “rowed” and even cursed and swore;
And the row they made was plainly heard inside the Battery door
Oh, the fun it was *galore*!

And Lord John was there, and Splodger, and many an artful
dodger,
And Dinny too,²⁶⁸ and Barney,²⁶⁹ who their fervour did outpour;

²⁶⁵ Letter from ‘Joe Softly’, *Te Aroha News*, 24 July 1889, p. 2.

²⁶⁶ James Mills.

²⁶⁷ John Ilott.

And altho' it might seem curious, the fun great fast and furious –
 I'm afraid it was injurious to the sight, if nothing more;
 If there was no apprehension of the meeting spilling gore,
 For there was such uproar.

Oh! the roads they were so muddy, and the faces were so ruddy.
 For the noses were all – gory, and the yelling loud, oh lor!
 And the row there was notorious, and the voting there was
 glorious,
 'Twas worse than Whigs and Tories beyant on Shannon's shore;
 Like Home Rule and Parnell, on Erin's verdant shore.
 It was there, *asthore*?

And now then, as a moral, who's deserving of the laurel
 As a patriot – who his township's weal upon his bosom bore?
 You have caused a lot of bickering, old sparks of hatred flickering,
 And beyond a little liquoring, quite as bad as 'twas before;
 And the borough's just the same as it was in days of yore –
 Shall we have it evermore?²⁷⁰

Others were amused by the pretensions of those pushing for Waiorongomai's inclusion in a borough. 'Rory O'More', a pseudonym of someone who was not Irish, and referred to one of the leaders of the Irish rebellion of 1641, started his letter with a reference to Hamlet's most famous soliloquy.

Whether 'tis wiser to be content with the fair measure of treatment afforded up to now by the Piako County Council, or by girding up our loins, and going in for a Borough, soar to that glorious state of independence which has been marked out for us by Destiny. (This is *not* my language, a chap is larning me). I feel so indignant at the thought of us being kept under any longer, like so many worms under a cart wheel, that I am tempted to kiss my mother-in-law out of sheer vexation. Of course, we may say to the P.C.C. as Mark Anthony said of Brutus – Yes, they are "honourable min;" but if we ran a show of our own we would of course grant everybody everything, and so all be happy for evermore, and entitle yourselves to be regarded the saviours of our people. There's people who were at our recent public meeting who cannot count how many beans make foive, and they were mysteryised by the wonderful and beautifully clear way in which a speaker illustrated, by means of the men who had different

²⁶⁸ Denis Murphy.

²⁶⁹ Bernard Montague.

²⁷⁰ 'A Borough Meeting: Fun at Waiorongomai', *Observer*, 27 July 1889, p. 17.

farms of ground, and spent £2 an acre each on their land, the little man with only ten acres – maneing Te Aroha and Waiorongomai – having the pay the piper for the lot. They talk of the Governor taking the gold field out of the limits of the Borough, as we mean thim to be, “faugh om oallagh,” phew! You can just lave that to me and [Governor] Onslow! Well, now seeing as we are shure we have a tundering majority of names on our petition (no matter that some of thim are given loike they do to the thravelling book agents), we may, I think, quietly lave the Respectable Minority (as our opponents call themselves), to stew in their own gravy, an’ we can proceed to sketch our new administration, Well, first and foremost, there’s miself for the billet of Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer (that sounds better nor Colonial Treasurer anyhow) and yourself, Jimmy [Mills], are just the doetail for a rippin Minister of Publick Houses – no, I mane Public Works, and Woods and Forests. And thin, sure, there’s our able frind – ’och, he’s a broth of a boy at disputation, and for deputations to Willington, or, indade, there couldn’t be a better chap to send to London by and bye, to urge the Colonial Secretary to back our application to have the Piako absorbed in the Boro’ of Waiorongomai holus bolus. Just think of what a high ladder you’d be up thin, Jimmy. It just stroikes me moind, Jimmy, as how the Battery Company ’ud be the first to recognize our able achievement, and for saving thim from being sued to damages to the Te Aroha road, to presint to you an’ me a grand nugget each, as large as Moa’s eggs, from the New Find, for skyarf pins – the prospect is enchanting. But to go on with our new billets – no! stop a bit; oime just going across to the corner beyant the Post Office, to see our learned frind, our Secretary * * * * * By the Powers, Jimmy, we’re in trouble already with our boys. Shure, and they are all crying out for some billet or other, and they say what’s the good of Home Rule in Waiorongomai if they “don’t get a show;” and they want us to do away with work by *tinder* – an’ oime thinking there’s one or two would loike to do away with work altogether, and live on the Boro’ taxes (but that’s mane of thim), and some wants to put extra tax on every sinner of the Respectable Minority, but I say No to that, for the craturs are dead, so to speak, and let them lie still to get their “wind.” Thin there’s a few want the jail shifted out here, to save being taken in to Te Aroha every pay-day – or the day after I should say. I was suggesting something more useful, an’ that is to build a Gas works here, when faix, a spalpeen passing at the toime said to a chum in a loud whisper – “no need of gas works when *he* is about” – (begorra, oid loike to know that chap). Well, again, there is the Inspector of Nuisances (that’s the pigs you know, poor deserving brutes, oime sorry for thim), and Poundkeeper. Well *you* might chuck that billet to some of our Te Aroha supporters, for oime sure there’s no one here would loike the job of restricting the

innocent liberties of the poor cows and horses. Who'll collect the taxes? Ah, well; sure I moight take that troifle on me own shoulders. Inspector of Roads, and Ditches: Well, that's as good as promised, an' a cleverer chap, or one who knows the greatest number of – well, never moind – anyway, he's got a head on him longer than many a horse. Someone just told me we would have to find sureties – or something, but that needn't trouble you or me, for I'll stand bail for you and you'll stand bail for me – that's fair? We'll talk about our Municipal Buildings when we meet again, but I was thinking that a bould edifice nearly forninst the Post Office [the hotel?] might be suitable, if the present tennant would consent to eviction for say £50 or £100 for the remainder of his lease. The ideas for our new business are chasing each other that fast through my head that I can hardly catch them long enough to string them on paper for you (I must have a private secretary, I feel that – *you* can have that one too). My concluding notion on this occasion is that Gladstone and Parnell will be sending to us for a copy of our Constitution, as a model for the new Home Rule Government in the Ould Country.²⁷¹

The squabbling continued until Mills' aggressive campaign for a borough (and equally aggressive response) resulted in its formation, but with Waiorongomai excluded.

CHARLES AHIER: A PILLAR OF THE COMMUNITY AND HIS CRITICS

A notable example of the quarrelsome behaviour common in local government was Charles Ahier's experiences. Born in Jersey, to a banker, in 1846,²⁷² Ahier came to New Zealand in December 1863 and fought in the Waikato War before settling in Thames, where he was a storeman, general produce merchant, and accountant.²⁷³ He invested in one Thames mine and

²⁷¹ Letter from 'Rory O'More', *Te Aroha News*, 31 July 1889, pp. 2, 7.

²⁷² 1851 Census, ancestry.co.uk; Notices of Intentions to Marry 1876, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/21, folio 204, ANZ-W; Marriage Certificate of Charles Ahier, 13 May 1876, 1876/708, BDM; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 June 1876, p. 2.

²⁷³ 'Addresses Presented to Sir George Grey on his 74th Birthday, 14 April 1886, by European and Maori Residents of the Auckland Province', p. 191, Grey New Zealand MS 275, Auckland Public Library; *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 1; *Thames Directory for 1881* (Thames, 1881), p. 99; Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 38 no. 240, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 12 October 1905, p. 2; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 6 (Wellington, 1908), p. 115.

one mining company.²⁷⁴ In December he was one of those calling a meeting to discuss forcing the opening of Ohinemuri to mining,²⁷⁵ but no investment in this field has been traced. When the Thames Newspaper and Printing Company was formed in 1882 to take over the *Thames Advertiser*, he was a director.²⁷⁶ At the end of that year, he was appointed a public auditor.²⁷⁷

Ahier was prominent in Thames. He joined the Thames Scottish Rifles;²⁷⁸ presumably his girth then was less than in 1882, when a Thames gossip writer made an apparent reference to his plans to climb Te Aroha. ‘Charlie Ahier contemplates making an excursion to the summit of Mount Gentle Annie, but I’m afraid he’ll not reach that without the aid of a steam winch and a ship’s cable. However, there’s nothing like trying’.²⁷⁹ In 1872, he was elected permanent secretary of the Grahamstown fire brigade.²⁸⁰ Eight years later, he became secretary of the Shortland brigade also, and was re-elected just before moving to Te Aroha.²⁸¹ An ‘ardent Prohibitionist’, he was elected to one of the Thames licensing committees.²⁸² He assisted a variety of charitable causes, in 1876 for instance assisting to collect money for the hospital.²⁸³ In 1880 he was a member of the hospital board, and two years later was elected to its committee of subscribers.²⁸⁴ In 1881, he assisted the Primitive Methodists’ bazaar.²⁸⁵

²⁷⁴ Thames Warden’s Court, Claims Register 1868-1869, no. 1265, BACL 14397/3a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 10 May 1877, p. 522.

²⁷⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 December 1874, p. 2.

²⁷⁶ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 38 no. 240, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 18 March 1882, p. 2.

²⁷⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 December 1882, p. 15.

²⁷⁸ Thames Scottish Rifles, No. 1 Coy, Nominal Roll, February 1882, Army Department, ARM 41, 1882/1ac, ANZ-W.

²⁷⁹ Sketch, *Observer*, 16 February 1895, p. 23; photograph, *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 6, p. 115; ‘Thames Tittle Tattle’, *Observer*, 8 April 1882, p. 54.

²⁸⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 April 1873, p. 2.

²⁸¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 July 1880, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 25 August 1883, p. 2..

²⁸² *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 6, p. 115; *New Zealand Gazette*, 15 March 1883, p. 320.

²⁸³ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 August 1876, p. 2.

²⁸⁴ *Thames Star*, 2 September 1880, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 April 1882, p. 3.

²⁸⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1881, p. 3.

Ahier was secretary of several Masonic lodges.²⁸⁶ In 1879, the *Thames Advertiser* was 'pleased to hear' that Ahier, then also Worshipful Master of the Loyal Orange order, was 'likely to be raised to the office of Deputy Grand Master of the Thames District. Mr Ahier has been for many years a popular and important member of most of the Friendly Societies' at Thames, 'having filled with much ability the responsible office of financial secretary to nearly all the lodges with which he has been connected'.²⁸⁷ This appointment was not made, but the following year he was elected District Delegate of the Court Pride of Parnell.²⁸⁸

In 1876, at the age of 30, Ahier married Jane Margaret Amy, aged 29; she had also been born in Jersey.²⁸⁹ Early in 1892, when they were living at Te Aroha, Jane was admitted to hospital suffering from Addison's Disease, a debilitating wasting disease.²⁹⁰ In May a Te Aroha correspondent reported 'general regret' at the news of her serious illness. 'She is very highly respected by all who know her, both here and at the Thames, and she has every sympathy from them all in her trying illness'.²⁹¹ The following year, she died at her brother's home at Thames 'after a long and painful illness'.²⁹² She was only 50.²⁹³ They had had been one child: nine months after the wedding Charles Francis had been born, but he died eight months later from pneumonia.²⁹⁴

Although he had made 'many friends' in Thames,²⁹⁵ Ahier moved to Te Aroha in 1883, and in May that year was managing Thomas Veale's grocery

²⁸⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 September 1872, p. 2, 11 April 1874, p. 2, 14 July 1875, p. 2, 11 December 1875, p. 2; *Thames Directory for 1881* (Thames, 1881), p. 77; *Thames Star*, 19 October 1883, p. 2; H.L. Donnelly, *Lodge of Light No. 454, Irish Constitution: Thames – New Zealand: 1870-1970: Centenary Celebrations* (Thames, 1970), p. 9.

²⁸⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 February 1879, p. 5.

²⁸⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 December 1880, p. 2.

²⁸⁹ Marriage Certificate of Charles Ahier, 13 May 1876, 1876/708; Death Certificate of Jane Margaret Ahier, 30 April 1893, 1893/2362, BDM.

²⁹⁰ Thames Hospital, Admissions Register 1884-1901, folio 43, YCAH 14075/1a, ANZ-A; *Black's Medical Dictionary*, 36 ed., ed. C.W.H. Havard (London, 1990), p. 13.

²⁹¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 May 1892, p. 22.

²⁹² *Thames Advertiser*, 1 May 1893, p. 2.

²⁹³ Death Certificate of Jane Margaret Ahier, 30 April 1893, 1893/2362, BDM.

²⁹⁴ Birth Certificate of Charles Francis Ahier, 12 February 1877, 1877/715; Death Certificate of Charles Francis Ahier, 29 September 1877, 1877/1677, BDM.

²⁹⁵ *Thames Star*, 12 October 1905, p. 2.

store and bakery,²⁹⁶ but in December he arranged its sale.²⁹⁷ Until 1885, he was a commission agent with James Lavery,²⁹⁸ a builder and timber merchant.²⁹⁹ He was the Te Aroha agent of John Gibbons and Son,³⁰⁰ a firm of timber merchants who bought the Aroha Steam Saw and Planing Mills in December 1883.³⁰¹ His partnership with Lavery as agents for the Thames River Steam Navigation Company ended on the first day of 1885, with Ahier continuing as the agent.³⁰² Three years later, he bought Lavery's business and property.³⁰³ In 1885, he was appointed deputy official assignee for all bankruptcies in the Thames and Te Aroha districts,³⁰⁴ and the following year was appointed the New Zealand Insurance Company's agent.³⁰⁵ In late 1887 he applied to be collector of wharfage dues, but the harbour board considered that a collector was not needed at Te Aroha.³⁰⁶ During the early 1890s he was a 'house agent'.³⁰⁷ His plan to buy a river steamer came to nothing.³⁰⁸

In November 1884, Edward Peel, a Te Aroha cordial and soda water manufacturer,³⁰⁹ mortgaged the land on which his plant had been erected to

²⁹⁶ For Thomas Veale's career, see *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 6, pp. 112, 124.

²⁹⁷ *Waikato Times*, 19 May 1883, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1883, p. 3, 1 December 1883, p. 3.

²⁹⁸ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 10 January 1885, p. 7.

²⁹⁹ See *Descriptive Handbook to the Waikato* (Hamilton, 1880), p. 66; *Te Aroha News*, editorial, 8 November 1884, p. 2, 28 January 1888, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 9 February 1888, p. 2.

³⁰⁰ For John Gibbons, see *Thames Advertiser*, 30 December 1875, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 29 January 1900, p. 3; *Observer*, 13 December 1902, p. 4, 7 July 1906, p. 4.

³⁰¹ *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1883, p. 3.

³⁰² *Te Aroha News*, 10 January 1885, p. 2, 16 February 1889, p. 2.

³⁰³ *Te Aroha News*, 21 January 1888, p. 2.

³⁰⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 29 January 1885, p. 2.

³⁰⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 9 January 1886, p. 7.

³⁰⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 October 1887, p. 2.

³⁰⁷ Hesketh and Richmond Papers, box 26, 1051/C, MS 440, Auckland Public Library; Jackson and Russell to Charles Ahier, 7 December 1891, Letterbook no. 47, p. 433A, Jackson and Russell Papers, MS 360, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum Library; *Wise's New Zealand Directory*, 1892, p. 352, 1894, p. 620.

³⁰⁸ A. & G. Price Letterbook 1889-1891, p. 423A, A. & G. Price Archives, Thames.

³⁰⁹ See *Te Aroha News*, advertisement, 8 December 1883, p. 8, 15 March 1884, p. 2, 29 March 1884, p. 2, 5 April 1884, Magistrate's Court, 14 June 1884, p. 2.

Ahier for £200.³¹⁰ The following April, Peel, then bankrupt, owed Ahier £208 6s 8d.³¹¹ Two months later, Ahier purchased this business by ‘satisfying’ the bill of sale agreed to in November.³¹² Peel agreed to teach Ahier and Augustus Frederick James, a storekeeper,³¹³ ‘the business of a Soda Water and Cordial Manufacturer’ and to provide recipes for lemonade and suchlike. On penalty of paying £200, Peel agreed not to manufacture these produces within 20 miles of Te Aroha, and Ahier and James promised to help him purchase, for £120, a soda water plant further away within 12 months.³¹⁴ The following month, a chemist, George Robson,³¹⁵ a close friend of Ahier,³¹⁶ joined them in a ten-year partnership, each partner having a third of the interests. They traded under the name G. Robson and Co., Robson having the sole right to the overflow water from the hot springs.³¹⁷

The latter arrangement caused a controversy. In August, the domain board agreed to grant this water for ten years, on payment of a royalty, after Robson explained the ‘considerable time and money’ he had spent testing the waters and his plans to bottle it and advertise its benefits.³¹⁸ At the end of the month, a special meeting of the board was called at the request of Ahier, its secretary, because he had told the previous meeting that Peel had withdrawn his application to use this water, which Peel had subsequently denied. When Ahier said he had received a verbal request from Peel to withdraw his application, Peel denied this, stating that two conversations had been ‘jumbled up here’, and that Ahier and James wanted him to transfer his right to the water to them. James confirmed

³¹⁰ Mortgage of Edward Peel to Charles Ahier, mortgage dated 11 November 1884, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Certified Instruments 1884, BBAV 11581/5a, ANZ-A;

³¹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1885, p. 3.

³¹² *Weekly Advertiser and Commercial Gazette*, 13 June 1885, p. 378; *Mercantile and Bankruptcy Gazette of New Zealand*, 13 June 1885, p. 195; *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 2.

³¹³ See *Te Aroha News*, 28 January 1888, p. 2.

³¹⁴ Agreement between Edward Peel, Charles Ahier, and Augustus Frederick James, 18 July 1885, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Certified Instruments 1885, BBAV 11581/6a, ANZ-A.

³¹⁵ See *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Waikato Argus*, 7 February 1912, p. 2.

³¹⁶ See *Te Aroha News*, 17 July 1886, p. 2.

³¹⁷ Agreement between Charles Ahier, A.F. James, and George Robson, 8 October 1885, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Certified Instruments 1885, BBAV 11581/6a, ANZ-A.

³¹⁸ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 15 August 1885, p. 2

Ahier's account, denying anything was said about transferring the right, which Peel again denied. Thomas Gavin, a board member,³¹⁹ commented that Peel had said his withdrawal was not in writing and that Ahier 'had worked a point [‘a too smart trick’]³²⁰ on him'. After considering the conflicting evidence, the board decided that Peel had indeed given Ahier authority to withdraw his application.³²¹ At the same time, the board's granting the water to Robson was criticized at a meeting of the debating club. Ahier did not speak, apart from complaining that one participant had 'burlesqued' the board's case.³²² 'Justice' wondered why, if Robson had tested the water for such a long time, he had not applied for the overflow 'until after Mr Peel's bankruptcy and the purchase of his mineral water factory by Mr Ahier'.³²³ Others were concerned that tenders had not been called to use this water.³²⁴

At the May 1886 meeting of the board, Edward Quinn³²⁵ noted that Peel still claimed he was 'hood winked out of' the water, but now blamed Robson.³²⁶ Three months later, on the motion of another member Robson was granted the exclusive use of the overflow for ten years.³²⁷ The board's reasoning was that, if he went to the expense of establishing a bottling plant, it was only fair that he should have the sole right for this period.³²⁸ 'Ratepayer' criticized an unspecified member of the board who had taken over Peel's factory and was bottling the overflow denied to Peel, who had had to leave the district.³²⁹

³¹⁹ See paper on his life.

³²⁰ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8 ed., ed. Paul Beale (London, 1984), p. 903.

³²¹ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1885, p. 2.

³²² *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1885, p. 7.

³²³ Letter from 'Justice', *Te Aroha News*, 12 September 1885, p. 2.

³²⁴ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 15 August 1885, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 20 August 1885, p. 3.

³²⁵ See paper on his life.

³²⁶ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 15 May 1886, p. 2.

³²⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 11 September 1886, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

³²⁸ George Robson to Chairman, Domain Board, 16 February 1887; Thomas Gavin to Minister of Lands, February 1887, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

³²⁹ Letter from 'Ratepayer', *Te Aroha News*, 25 September 1886, p. 2.

John Ilott³³⁰ was then the editor of the *Te Aroha News*, having been appointed by Henry Brett,³³¹ its second owner.³³² An Irishman ‘of strong principles’, according to his grandson,³³³ in February 1887 he protested to John Ballance, Minister of Lands, about the arrangement. He claimed residents were upset at Robson obtaining the water without any tenders being called ‘and in the face of a previous application’. He asked Ballance not to confirm the lease, noting that, although Robson and his company wanted the water, it was ‘at the mineral water factory of the Secretary’, Robson’s nephew, that the water had been and still was being bottled. Ilott was unaware of any payment to the board or any check on the quantity taken.³³⁴ Despite this plea, the lease was confirmed, on condition that half the water must be used every month.³³⁵

In December 1887, because James was leaving for Australia his partnership with Ahier was dissolved.³³⁶ Their business was sold to Samuel Luther Hirst because the price James offered to Ahier was not ‘considered satisfactory’.³³⁷ The following April, the buildings and land were sold to Hirst for £300.³³⁸ In December, all Ahier’s remaining shares in Robson’s *Te Aroha Soda and Mineral Water Company* were sold to Robson.³³⁹

Ahier had only limited involvement in Waiorongomai mining. In August 1883, he purchased 13 1/2 shares in a worthless claim from a

³³⁰ As no investment in mining has been discovered, despite the statement in Jack Ilott, *The Ilott Story* (Wellington, 1993), p. 18, his career has not been examined; Ilott, pp. 17-19, provides a brief outline.

³³¹ See *New Zealand Herald*, 31 January 1927, p. 10.

³³² *Thames Star*, 9 November 1883, p. 2; *Observer*, 21 April 1906, p. 4; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 828.

³³³ Ilott, p. 19.

³³⁴ John Ilott to John Balance (Minister of Lands), 21 February 1887, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

³³⁵ John Ballance to Under-Secretary, Lands Department, 10 August 1887 (telegram), Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

³³⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 19 November 1887, p. 2, 3 December 1887, p. 2, 10 December 1887, p. 2, 14 January 1888, p. 3.

³³⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 17 December 1887, p. 2.

³³⁸ Agreement between Charles Ahier, A.F. James, Harry Kirby, and S.L. Hirst, 20 April 1888, *Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Certified Instruments 1888*, BBAV 11581/9a, ANZ-A.

³³⁹ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 52 no. 344, ANZ-A.

bankrupt estate for £10, within a week selling 11 of these for £29.³⁴⁰ His remaining shares were transferred to the Lady Ferguson Company, in which he held 1,250 shares.³⁴¹ He later acquired an unknown number of shares in the Waiorongomai Company, in December 1884 his 178 shares being liable to forfeiture because he had not paid a call.³⁴² At the same time, he was appointed as liquidator of the Canterbury Company.³⁴³ In 1891 he was a surety for an applicant to operate the tramway.³⁴⁴

All these various methods of earning income meant that his financial circumstances were secure. In 1882, he owned freehold property in Thames valued at £180 and in Hamilton worth £50.³⁴⁵ He was able to lend money to Te Aroha residents, obtaining mortgages over their property as security.³⁴⁶ His house, erected on an acre, had seven rooms,³⁴⁷ much larger than the norm for just two people to occupy. When it was bought for the Wesleyan minister in 1890, it was described as ‘a desirable property, in good repair’, with outbuildings.³⁴⁸ He then lived in the Bank of New Zealand premises in the main street.³⁴⁹

In July 1883, shortly after his arrival, with three others he called a meeting to form an Oddfellows lodge; he was secretary of this meeting.³⁵⁰ He was elected secretary when this lodge was formed, and remained secretary and treasurer until he left Te Aroha.³⁵¹ At the beginning of 1885,

³⁴⁰ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 98, BBAV 11500/9a; Certified Instruments 1883, nos. 386-389, BBAV 11581/4a, ANZ-A.

³⁴¹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 22 November 1883, p. 1675.

³⁴² *Te Aroha News*, 20 December 1884, p. 7.

³⁴³ *Te Aroha News*, 20 December 1884, p. 7.

³⁴⁴ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 22 December 1891, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

³⁴⁵ *A Return of the Freeholders of New Zealand ...* (Wellington, 1884), p. A 6.

³⁴⁶ For example, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, mortgage over D.T. McDougall’s property, 26 May 1886, Certified Instruments 1886, BBAV 11581/7a; mortgage over C.E. Balcke’s property, 10 January 1890, Certified Instruments 1890, BBAV 11581/11a, ANZ-A.

³⁴⁷ Te Aroha Town Board, Rate Book 1888, Sections 83-86 Lipsey’s Block, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

³⁴⁸ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 2 October 1890, p. 2.

³⁴⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 January 1893, p. 2, 30 January 1893, p. 2.

³⁵⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1883, p. 3, 4 August 1883, p. 2.

³⁵¹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 January 1884, p. 7, 17 May 1884, p. 7; *Thames Advertiser*, 17 December 1891, p. 2.

he was installed as senior warden.³⁵² The following year he was elected as Architect, and in 1889 as substitute master, a role previously held by James.³⁵³

Ahier was a pillar of the Anglican Church. From 1886 to 1893, he was the peoples' churchwarden.³⁵⁴ In 1889, he attended the Waikato Archidiaconal Conference, held at Te Aroha.³⁵⁵ When he resigned as warden in late 1893 because he was planning to leave Te Aroha, the vestry unanimously resolved that his resignation

be accepted with sincere regret, and that the hearty thanks of the vestry be conveyed to him for his self-denying services as churchwarden for the past eight years, for the able manner in which he has carried out the many duties of his office, and also for his regular attendance at the services of the church and assiduous attention to the visitors and other members of the congregation.³⁵⁶

For several years, Ahier reported on Te Aroha for the *Thames Advertiser*, informing a Waiorongomai meeting in 1885 that 'so long as he continued to write for the Press he should seek to do so for the good of the district'.³⁵⁷ Actively involved in all aspects of local affairs, he participated in many public meetings. He successfully moved, in October 1884, that in time Te Aroha and Waiorongomai should combine to form a borough, and was appointed to the Te Aroha committee that was to seek support from the other settlement.³⁵⁸ In April 1885 he actively supported the need for an improved railway timetable.³⁵⁹ Two months later, he chaired a meeting protesting at the council's opposition to the New Era tramway and against

³⁵² *Thames Advertiser*, 13 January 1885, p. 2.

³⁵³ *Waikato Times*, 5 February 1886, p. 2, 23 February 1886, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 25 December 1889, p. 2.

³⁵⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 24 April 1886, p. 2, 15 January 1887, p. 3, 4 February 1888, p. 2, 23 January 1889, p. 2, 25 January 1890, p. 2; *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 November 1893, p. 23.

³⁵⁵ *Church Gazette*, April 1889, p. 41.

³⁵⁶ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 November 1893, p. 23.

³⁵⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 2.

³⁵⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 25 October 1884, p. 2.

³⁵⁹ *Waikato Times*, 28 April 1885, p. 3.

the machinations of the Battery Company.³⁶⁰ The following month, he was elected to the Te Aroha Improvements Committee, and re-elected the subsequent year.³⁶¹ When the Colonial Secretary visited in late 1886, he was a member of the deputation that discussed with him the best form of local government for Te Aroha.³⁶² The following year, he attended a meeting that discussed establishing a sanatorium.³⁶³ He publicly supported and nominated candidates for the new town board,³⁶⁴ but did not stand for election himself.

At the beginning of 1884, he was appointed auditor of the school committee and then elected a member with 50 votes; the highest candidate received 117. He was immediately chosen as secretary.³⁶⁵ He decided not to stand for re-election in the following year, but became a member again in 1886.³⁶⁶ He failed to be elected in 1887.³⁶⁷ In 1889, he gained the second highest vote, 60, compared with the top scoring candidate's 85. He was defeated when nominated as chairman.³⁶⁸ The following year, he received exactly the same number of votes, making him the second highest scoring candidate behind Ilott, who received 129.³⁶⁹ Elected again in 1891, in the following year he failed to be re-elected.³⁷⁰

He was first elected to the library committee in January 1885, and re-elected in subsequent years.³⁷¹ In 1885, he was a member of the committee that drew up the rules for the new social club and debating society, of which he was elected treasurer.³⁷² As another indication of his standing in the

³⁶⁰ *Waikato Times*, 20 June 1885, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 June 1885, p. 3..

³⁶¹ *Waikato Times*, 14 July 1885, p. 3, 18 May 1886, p. 3.

³⁶² *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1886, p. 2.

³⁶³ *Te Aroha News*, 20 August 1887, p. 3.

³⁶⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 3 December 1887, p. 2, 10 December 1887, p. 2, 12 September 1888, p. 2.

³⁶⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 12 January 1884, p. 2, 2 February 1884, p. 7.

³⁶⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 24 January 1885, p. 2, 1 May 1886, p. 2.

³⁶⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 30 April 1887, p. 2.

³⁶⁸ *Waikato Times*, 30 April 1889, p. 2.

³⁶⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 30 April 1890, p. 2.

³⁷⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 May 1891, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 May 1892, p. 27.

³⁷¹ *Te Aroha News*, 24 January 1885, p. 2, 30 January 1886, p. 2, 29 January 1887, p. 2, 8 February 1890, p. 2.

³⁷² *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7, 15 August 1885, p. 2.

community, in the following year he was elected to the committee of the Kenrick memorial fund.³⁷³

In 1889, when it was rumoured he might stand for the licensing committee, a correspondent noted that, 'although holding pronounced opinions on the liquor traffic there is no doubt he would make a very useful member'.³⁷⁴ His nomination was invalid because his proposer was not on the ratepayers' roll.³⁷⁵ In 1891, he was elected, with 45 votes; the highest-scoring candidate received three more.³⁷⁶

From late 1884 onwards, Ahier was a government appointee on the domain board.³⁷⁷ His initial colleagues were George Lipsey,³⁷⁸ George Wilson,³⁷⁹ Thomas Gavin, and Edward Quinn, who was replaced by Ilott at the end of 1887.³⁸⁰ As its secretary, he had a stormy relationship with some members, largely caused by his casual attitude to some of the requirements of his position. In December 1885, his partner Augustus Frederick James was appointed as secretary, for £10 a year.³⁸¹ At the May 1886 meeting, Quinn complained about Ahier leaving before it had ended; noting that James was assisting Ahier, he commented that 'one man had the title, the other the work'.³⁸² At the following meeting, Quinn asked that the minutes be recorded more fully, resolutions to be included (even if no seconder), and mover and seconder recorded. On his motion, members agreed that 'in future the minutes be taken down in the minute book as the business progressed, and read over at the close of each meeting'. Quinn and Gavin stated that James 'was merely appointed to assist in the clerical work. It was never intended he should assume the duties of secretary', and at Quinn's request Ahier immediately took the minutes instead of James. During a 'considerable discussion' on the duties of secretary, both the chairman and Ahier said there was a 'great deal of work' involved; it was

³⁷³ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 August 1886, p. 2.

³⁷⁴ *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Waikato Times*, 12 February 1889, p. 2.

³⁷⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 26 February 1890, p. 2.

³⁷⁶ *Waikato Times*, 30 May 1891, p. 2.

³⁷⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 22 November 1884, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 21 January 1886, p. 58.

³⁷⁸ See paper on his life.

³⁷⁹ See paper on his life.

³⁸⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 29 December 1887, p. 1560.

³⁸¹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 December 1885, p. 7.

³⁸² Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 15 May 1886, p. 7.

agreed to hold a special meeting to consider ‘the position of secretary’.³⁸³ The outcome was that Ahier was retained to deal with the board’s finances, while Henry Crump, a local architect and civil engineer,³⁸⁴ became clerk and general manager.³⁸⁵ Ahier took the minutes, but, as with his minutes for the school committee, they were in the ‘briefest style possible’, not recording differences of opinion but simply, ‘Resolved, so and so’, no mover and seconder being noted.³⁸⁶

At the annual general meeting in January 1887, the chairman protested at Ahier not providing a balance sheet. Ahier’s defence was that it had not been audited and he did not know it was needed; the previous year’s balance sheet had been done ‘for his own satisfaction’ alone. When Wilson stated that one was required, Ahier responded that ‘the thought never struck me such was necessary’. When Lipsey said he had never attended an annual meeting without one before, Ahier ‘said he did not like such remarks. It was a perfect piece of nonsense to present a balance sheet unless it had been audited, and he had been expecting to get a printed form from the Government auditor’. The annual meeting was adjourned to give time for a balance sheet to be prepared. Later, during the ordinary meeting, when asked to have the bank book made up to date and laid before the meeting, Ahier replied that ‘he had not got it from the bank yet; at which announcement some of the members appeared surprised and annoyed’. Quinn complained that there was ‘more trouble about this bank book than any other bank book I ever saw; meeting after meeting here, we do not know where we stand’.³⁸⁷ When Ahier produced a balance sheet but not a statement of assets and liabilities, Gavin and Wilson complained that his figures suggested a credit balance when in fact the board was from £50 to £60 in debt.³⁸⁸

The following month, Ilott published an openly critical account of Ahier in the report of the next board meeting, commencing with a minor squabble with Quinn:

³⁸³ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 12 June 1886, p. 3.

³⁸⁴ See ‘Thames Gossip’, *Observer*, 1 September 1894, p. 23.

³⁸⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 31 July 1886, p. 2.

³⁸⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 2 October 1886, p. 2.

³⁸⁷ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 15 January 1887, p. 2.

³⁸⁸ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 22 January 1887, p. 2.

How the Tickets are Kept. – Mr Ahier said he would not be responsible for the tickets in the cupboard in the Board's office, as it could not be locked, and any one could get access to them.

Mr Quinn: Why? Isn't it locked up?

Mr Ahier: If you had a lot of gold (in trust) in a cupboard that could not be fastened securely, would you like to be held responsible for it?

Mr Quinn: Certainly I would. I think as you have the key you are the one we have to look to for their safety.

A brief discussion on providing mirrors was followed by a paragraph headed

What the Secretary has Done (!) – Mr Ahier said that there was a large amount of work to be done in connection with the books of the Board, and he had spent night after night for the benefit of the Board. To do so he had had to neglect his own business, and he was not going to do so any longer; and thought they ought to get an assistant clerk. *Although he said it himself, he had done more for the Board than any other member*, and thought it was time he was relieved of some of the work.

Referring to 'the absent member of the board', unnamed, but meaning Lipsey, Quinn 'quite agreed with' Ahier, for this member 'had done all he could to make things unpleasant for Mr Ahier by talking about him at street corners. It would be more gentlemanly for him to come to the meetings of the Board and make his complaint'. In discussing appointing an assistant clerk, Quinn said they 'had better be cautious or else we will have the Press down on us again'. Ahier recommended that the work involved merited paying £1 a week.

Working for Nothing: Protest of the Secretary: That Absent Member Again. – Mr Ahier made a statement, in the course of which he said: I have not been treated well at the hands of the members of the Board during the month and have been jumped on most shamefully; and do not intend to do the work for nothing any more. I have tried to get the outstanding accounts in, but cannot get people to make them out, and do not see why I should have been treated in the way I have. One member has abused me to people in the street, until my friends have begun to talk about it; and it is not good enough.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁹ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 12 February 1887, p. 2.

One week later, Ilott asked Ballance to make changes to the board, claiming its running was ‘principally in the hands of’ Ahier, Gavin, and Quinn.³⁹⁰

In January 1888, the local doctor told Ballance’s successor as Minister of Lands that the members were ‘notoriously at loggerheads with one another, and mentioned ‘the personal feeling and jealousy which holds sway’ in the board, ‘which may truly be described as “a house divided against itself” ’.³⁹¹ As another illustration of these petty squabbles, in December 1888 the board held what the *Aroha Gazette* described as ‘A Lively Meeting’, prompted by Wilson renewing his membership, which others viewed as a conspiracy orchestrated by Ilott. The debate included a bitter exchange between Ahier, Ilott, and Gavin, the chairman:

Mr Ahier – Who nominated you, Mr Ilott?

Mr Ilott – I am not going to answer that. I have not yet seen the telegram which I asked for, I would not ask again, and play second fiddle to you.

The Chairman: You would be playing for once at any rate to an honest man.

Mr Ahier – I think there is no doubt Mr Wilson is a member, and should keep his seat, but the Chairman naturally feels that he should have been communicated with; and he would only have been too glad to welcome Mr Wilson, who has always been a useful member.

Mr Ilott – No trouble would have ensued between the Chairman and I except through the influence of a third party.

Mr Ahier – If you inference refers to me, you are telling a lie.

Chairman – And crediting me with not having sufficient sense to form my own opinion.³⁹²

None of this was recorded in Ilott’s account of the meeting.³⁹³ ‘Another Lively Meeting’ was held a fortnight later, to consider tenders for developing one of the baths:

³⁹⁰ John Ilott to John Ballance, 21 February 1887, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

³⁹¹ Alfred Wright to Edwin Mitchelson (Minister of Lands), 6 January 1888, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

³⁹² *Aroha Gazette*, 7 December 1888, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

³⁹³ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 5 December 1888, p. 2.

Mr Ilott objected to the tenders, as plans had not been submitted.
 Chairman – The matter of urgency appears nothing, but formality seems more imperative.

Mr Ilott – I certainly will not consent to this being accepted.

Chairman – Yes, it will give you an opportunity to be an obstruction to the Board. I certainly thought the whole matter was left in my hands.

Mr Ahier – So it was, Mr Chairman, and I don't think we should delay the business because Mr Ilott obstructs, but should proceed and ignore his obstruction.

Chairman – I have had several trips to try and urge the matter forward, and the other member is not satisfied. I will not take any further action in the matter, and move, that the tenders be returned – Carried.

Later in the meeting, Ahier and Lipsey moved that tenders be called to erect a library. Ilott, concerned about the cost and considering there were 'several more works more necessary', refused to 'sign security' until these were completed and asked if Wilson had been consulted.

Mr Lipsey – I am sure Mr Wilson would not object to the resolution, as he is a large hearted man, and would not throw obstacles in the way.

Chairman – I have no doubt that the necessary funds can be obtained with less than the signatures of all the members. But I regret that we should need to try, as I have always understood that after a full discussion upon any subject the minority gave way, and co-operated with the majority to bring the matter to a successful issue.

Mr Ahier said that he had offered to supply the timber at cost price, and would see that the Board would have it on liberal terms.

Mr Ilott – I think there would be as much danger in being in your hands as there would be in having a credit at the bank.

Mr Ahier – Thank you; I am not a money lender, and have no wish to take any advantage of the Board.

Mr Ilott – I would be willing to sign security to borrow money to complete works, but not for library building, and would move the following amendment, - "That no action be taken, as other works are necessary and funds are not available."

Mr Ahier – That amendment is manufactured just for publication, there being no seconder, as all our works are completed or in the course of completion.

Mr Lipsey – The amendment gives a most unfair inference, namely, that some proposed works would be neglected. Come now, Mr Ilott, be a good boy, you have had your say. Now do be good and don't make any more trouble about it.

On the resolution being put, the Chairman, Messrs Lipsey and Ahier voted for, and Mr Ilott against it. It was therefore carried.³⁹⁴

According to Ilott's account, he stated that tenders should not be accepted until plans and specifications were received, and wanted another special meeting to deal with the matter.

The Chairman said he would neither convene nor attend any special meeting for that purpose. He considered Mr Ilott had "sat upon" him [repressed, humiliated' him]³⁹⁵ in this matter, and it could stop now until the monthly meeting as far as he was concerned.

Mr Ahier: If we like to go on and do our business, let us ignore his obstruction altogether. I don't see why we should stop the business for Mr Ilott.

The issue was deferred to the next meeting. Later, when Ilott pointed out that Wilson had not been consulted about building a library, Ahier retorted 'We don't care about Mr Wilson'. Ilott's amendment declining to erect it, both on financial grounds and because there were more urgent works to be done, was not seconded.³⁹⁶

The following year, another board meeting saw Ahier under attack once more. When he suggested that one bathroom be used for a sulphur bath, he was rebuked by Lipsey because it had been reserved for Maori. Upon Ahier stating he was unaware of this, Gavin exclaimed:

My goodness, I don't know how it could have escaped your memory, Mr Ahier; it's been reserved for the natives for years.

Mr Ahier: Oh, I didn't know.

Later in the meeting, when he said he could not remember writing to thank Josiah Firth for his gift of flowers, Lipsey interjected, 'If you did not deliver the letter to Mr Firth, you ought to apologize to him, Mr Ahier, for not doing so'.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ *Aroha Gazette*, 14 December 1888, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

³⁹⁵ Partridge, p. 1012.

³⁹⁶ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 15 December 1888, p. 2.

³⁹⁷ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 11 December 1889, p. 2.

In 1891, Ahier, a supporter of the Liberal Party, asked the local Liberal Member of Parliament to appoint 'our friend' James Mills, a 'steadfast' Liberal, to the board in place of a retired member of the opposite persuasion.³⁹⁸ On Ahier's prompting, Mills agreed to join,³⁹⁹ and became chairman. When Mills complained to the board in December 1892 that Ahier and Gallagher, who, without telling their colleagues, had wanted him to join it to make reforms, would not now back him in cutting costs and making other changes, Ahier denied having asked him to join. Gavin noted that at the last meeting he had asked that changes in the management should be delayed until Ahier was present. 'For years past Mr Ahier had been doing all in his power to have a change made, but he never has had the courage to propose it himself. He has tried to induce other members of the Board to do so', and was now trying to use Mills. After Ahier's denial, Gavin responded that he 'would rather believe' Mills. To Ahier's complaint that these statements were untrue and he was being 'very unfairly treated', Gavin commented 'that in his opinion Mr Mills had treated him as he deserved'.⁴⁰⁰ At a subsequent public meeting about board policy, Mills' explanation was cited against Ahier, who was accused of getting Mills on the board for purposes unknown to other members.⁴⁰¹ The meeting unanimously condemned Ahier for having 'conspired' with Gallagher to induce Mills to become a member 'to carry out certain schemes which he knew could not be accomplished otherwise', and asked for Ahier's removal.⁴⁰² Mills later commented that the longest serving members of the board prevented retrenchment being achieved, and that 'personalities ad lib meant that 'the Kilkenny Cats were a happy family' compared with it.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ Charles Ahier to William Fraser M.P., 25 November 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

³⁹⁹ James Mills to William Fraser M.P., 8 January 1893, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

⁴⁰⁰ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 7 December 1892, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

⁴⁰¹ *Te Aroha News*, 24 December 1892, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

⁴⁰² John Bew, C.A. Cornes, J.W.R. Guilding, Robert Harris, S.L. Hirst to Minister of Lands, 29 December 1892, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

⁴⁰³ James Mills to R.J. Seddon (Minister of Mines), 16 April 1893, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

Despite these squabbles on the domain board, in 1890 the government appointed Ahier a trustee of the cemetery.⁴⁰⁴ The following year he became a member of the public domain board, which looked after two other parcels of land.⁴⁰⁵

Even greater conflicts arose over his secretarial work for the town board. Ahier supported Mills in many political squabbles,⁴⁰⁶ and in December 1888 Mills informed the board that ‘in a conversation’ Ahier ‘had offered to act as Clerk and Collector free of all charge on condition that the Town Board office was transferred to’ Ahier’s house. On Mills’ motion, this offer was accepted.⁴⁰⁷ Another version of his offer was that he would provide an office ‘gratuitously for the time being’.⁴⁰⁸

The following March, when the magistrate, Henry Northcroft, as judge of the assessment court, opened a sitting, nobody appeared on behalf of the board. After Ahier was sent for several times, it was adjourned until the afternoon. Northcroft expressed ‘great surprise at no one being present to represent the Board, and stating with all his experience he had never known such a thing before’. When Ahier appeared at the adjourned sitting and said a valuation roll had not been prepared, Northcroft appointed another clerk to prepare it.⁴⁰⁹ The *Te Aroha News* complained about Ahier’s performance, noting that, while failing to prepare an annual list, he had been ‘very assiduous’ in suing for arrears of rates. Collecting rates earned him a five per cent commission, and although there was no reward for preparing the valuation he was required to carry out all his duties ‘thoroughly’.⁴¹⁰ Ahier told Northcroft that a valuation roll had not been done the previous year either.⁴¹¹ In April, another editorial noted Ahier’s statement to the latest meeting that Northcroft had ‘told him that seeing the Town Board made a similar mistake last year, he thought they would have known better this year’. Ahier had ‘gravely stated’ that ‘he found when looking up the books that he was not appointed Clerk until January 20th, 1889, and as a consequence it was the duty of the late Clerk to have seen

⁴⁰⁴ *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 November 1890, p. 1341.

⁴⁰⁵ *New Zealand Gazette*, 19 March 1891, pp. 365-366.

⁴⁰⁶ For example, *Te Aroha News*, 15 September 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁷ Town Board, *Te Aroha News*, 12 December 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁸ *Waikato Times*, 15 December 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁹ Assessment Court, *Te Aroha News*, 20 March 1889, p. 2.

⁴¹⁰ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 23 March 1889, p. 2.

⁴¹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 3 April 1889, p. 7.

the Valuation Roll was attended to'. The editorial cited a witness telling the last meeting of the magistrate's court 'I have not a bad memory, but sometimes I forget things'. It hoped Ahier did 'not suffer from a similar failing, as it would be specially objectionable in a Town Clerk', and also hoped that if the minutes 'really do show that he was appointed Clerk on the 20th January, 1889, that this is an exceptional one and the rest more accurate'. From the newspaper's files, it was clear that the resignation of a former clerk was accepted on 14 November 1888, tenders for a replacement were received before, on 19 November, the board decided not to appoint a salaried clerk, a member offering to do the work for free. Nineteen days later, he resigned, and Ahier was appointed, and at the subsequent meeting, on 12 January, reported on the rates he had collected and the amount outstanding.

Now he states on "looking up the books" he finds he was not appointed until January 20th, 1889. Sounds funny doesn't it? What valuable and reliable records these books would be for future reference; and what right had Mr Ahier to collect rates and act as Town Clerk prior to January 20th if only appointed then. So much then for Mr Ahier's attempt to saddle others with the neglect of seeing that the Valuation Lists were prepared, and by stating – with such admirable precision – that he was not appointed Clerk till January 20th, just five days after the Lists should have been completed. And shall we be asked to suppose that he was then unexpectedly pitchforked into the position of Clerk? Strange if so, that the preceding meetings of the Board, *appear* to so prepare the way for the appointment, as if all had been pre-arranged for some time.

The newspaper had no recollection of Northcroft making a statement in open court about the previous year's lists, and insisted that the previous board 'did *not* make any mistake, or exhibit any neglect' and had completed the lists, as it proved by printing details of the previous valuations.

So far as Mr Ahier himself is concerned we see no objection to his being appointed Town Clerk, if he has a hankering for the position, and if the Board approve him and see that he carries out all the duties of the office satisfactorily. But we do strongly object to Mr Ahier, or anyone else, being appointed Clerk unless paid a salary for his services, no matter how small.... The result of appointing a Clerk at no salary, beyond five per cent for collecting rates ... is that, the unfortunate few who happen to be a few shillings in arrears on their rates have a remarkable amount of

attention bestowed upon them, but such important matters as the preparation of the Annual Valuation List ... is allowed to “slide.” We are strongly of the opinion the Board have no right to appoint any man (unless one of their members elect to do the work) as Town Clerk, over whom they cannot exercise more control than can be possible in the case of a man doing the work for nothing, and who, not being paid, is practically an irresponsible servant.... It is an unheard of thing to have the whole of the books and records of a Town Board carried off and shut up in a man’s private house; yet we find this is one of the first things done after the present Clerk takes office.... We do not believe in “free clerking.” It is against human nature, for a man to do a lot of work for a public body for nothing, or unless there is some prospect of return in some form or other at some time. Some men, however, can see a long way further in advance than others.

Proof of this was Ahier being clerk of the domain board for years at no charge until, ‘when it suited him’, he declined to continue. As evidence of Ahier seeking rewards for his ‘free clerking’, he was a principal shareholder in the Te Aroha Soda and Mineral Water Company, which obtained the sole use of the overflow water. He had also voted in favour of an ‘attempted piece of vandalism’ whereby advertising would be attached to the walls of the bathhouses.⁴¹²

At its December meeting, the board failed to fix a new rate.⁴¹³ Another editorial pointed out the error of Ahier’s ‘luminous judgment’ that rates did not have to be advertised and urged him to check the Act, for he did ‘not appear to have affected that particular class of literature’. It printed the relevant clause, and told Ahier that, ‘unless he is extremely dense’, he would discover further requirements of which he was unaware.⁴¹⁴ A second attempt to levy a rate was made in a subsequent special meeting that struggled with the technicalities, and was, according to Ilott, illegal. Ahier advised that notice be given that previous rating resolutions would be rescinded and rates would be fixed at a future meeting, and prodded Gallagher to chair the meeting correctly.⁴¹⁵ A very public squabble between Ahier and Ilott occurred at the end of the February 1890 meeting:

⁴¹² Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 6 April 1889, p. 2.

⁴¹³ *Te Aroha News*, 21 December 1889, p. 2.

⁴¹⁴ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 21 December 1889, p. 2.

⁴¹⁵ Town Board, *Te Aroha News*, 1 January 1890, p. 2.

Mr Ilott, by consent of the chairman, obtained possession of the minute-book, and proceeded to take notes therefrom. The meeting was very suddenly (perhaps on account of the heat of the room) declared at an end, and all left the room with the exception of Mr Ilott and Mr Ahier, the clerk, the former continuing taking notes from the minute-book. It soon became apparent that a livelier meeting than the one closed was taking place between these two gentlemen, a warm discussion having arisen about the possession of the minute-book in the first place, and the question of the office hours of the Board, of which Mr Ahier refused to give any information. Amongst other choice expressions made use of by Mr Ahier were, "Who are you?" "You chuckle-headed fool, you," "I will not answer any of your impertinent questions," and other naughty expressions. Were it not the fact that both gentlemen are strict teetotallers, a stranger might easily have been misled on that point, as they continued their angry warfare at the front door of the Palace Hotel.⁴¹⁶

The next outburst involving Ahier occurred two months later, headlined as 'Extraordinary Proceedings'. This squabble was provoked by Mills' motion that its office be removed from Ahier's house to the office of Edward Gallagher, its chairman. Robert Harris moved an amendment that a public office be provided, as required by the Town Districts Act, for Gallagher's office was 'no more a public office than Mr Ahier's house'. Lipsey agreed, whereupon Gallagher pointed out that their meetings could be held in his office.

Clerk (Innocently!): It's that office you don't use, isn't it Mr Chairman?

Chairman: Yes.

Mr Lipsey: I fail to see why we are not to have an office we can call our own.

Chairman: All those in favour of the proposition hold up their right hands.

Clerk: You should put the amendment first Mr Chairman.

Chairman: No the proposition.

Clerk: No, sir, the amendment first always.

Chairman: No, the proposition first.

As nobody supported Ahier, they voted for the proposition, which was passed on Gallagher's casting vote. When Lipsey repeated that he wanted an office that residents could visit easily, Ahier stated that only 'one or two

⁴¹⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 11 February 1890, p. 2.

ratepayers' had come to the office during the past 15 months. Harris then gave notice of a motion to rescind the existing meeting dates, and asked what times had been fixed for the existing office to be open to the public.

Chairman to Clerk: Tell Mr Harris Mr Ahier.

Clerk to Mr Harris: I am not as fluent of speech as you are, but if you commence "jabbing" at me I'll not speak at all. I'm not going to be "bounced." The Board's office is open from 10 a.m. to 12 noon on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Harris pointed out that these were different to the times fixed in December 1887.

When were these resolutions rescinded and by whose authority?

Clerk: I don't know.

Mr Harris then asked to see the Notice of Motion Book which on being handed to him, he exclaimed, with respect to certain notices of motion appearing therein but written several pages ahead in the book from the other notices of motion. When were these entries written in? – I carefully looked through this Notice of Motion book on 11th March last, and at that time I saw no such entries as those now there, written several pages away from the other entries of notices of motion.

Clerk: I cannot help your not having seen them.

Later, Harris complained that incorrect names had been placed against a particular motion at the February meeting.

Clerk: It's a mere clerical error Mr Chairman. Its evident to me in filling in the names I have substituted the names in the wrong place. You remember Mr Chairman, Mr Harris insisted on having the names recorded with respect to the voting.

Mr Harris: I was writing out an amendment at the time the entry was made, and therefore did not observe how it was done till subsequently.

The Clerk here said he considered it *cowardly* of Mr Harris to draw attention to the way Minutes were kept in the public manner he had done. If he had drawn his attention to the matter privately he could understand it.

Clerk: Shall I alter the entry in the Minutes Mr Chairman (!?)

Mr Harris: Having drawn attention to the matter Mr Chairman I certainly object to any alterations being now made in the Minutes, seeing they were confirmed and signed by you at last monthly meeting.

After that last thrust, Ahier was left in peace.⁴¹⁷

A Te Aroha correspondent in July 1891 congratulated the board for re-appointing Ahier as clerk and rate collector because ‘his smiling face and those two fierce-looking bulldogs of his are enough to draw the money out of any ratepayer’.⁴¹⁸ Two years previously, he had applied to be clerk of the Thames Borough Council; he was the last to be dropped from the short list.⁴¹⁹ Perhaps its members were aware of the complaints about his performance.

When Ahier was appointed as a Justice of the Peace in 1894,⁴²⁰ after both he and Ilott had left Te Aroha, the *Thames Advertiser* considered this to be ‘one of the best appointments the Government have made’, and revealed an aspect of their squabbles Ahier hinted at once before:⁴²¹

Mr Ahier will make a painstaking, clear-headed, and considerate dispenser of justice. There will be this advantage in Mr Ahier’s hesitancy of speech that he will not burden his judgments with elaborate reasons. The bare sentence on evil-doers will take long enough to utter without needing any further embellishment. What would we have given to have heard that celebrated quarrel between Charles and a former editor of the *Te Aroha News* who suffered from a similar infirmity – only worse, if anything! The favoured audience of this noted encounter say that the scene was excruciatingly comical. The battle was not *fast* but furious, and after lasting from early morn to dewy eve was eventually drawn.⁴²²

Little is known about Ahier’s life in Te Aroha after mid-1890 because of the loss of the local newspaper. In the following year, the *Observer* printed one of its typically cryptic comments: ‘Jersey Charlie had got himself into hot water with the butcher. *Wood* you think so?’⁴²³ The reference, now indecipherable, was to John Wood. In December 1893, nearly

⁴¹⁷ Town Board, *Te Aroha News*, 26 April 1890, p. 2.

⁴¹⁸ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 4 July 1891, p. 18.

⁴¹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 August 1889, p. 2.

⁴²⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 December 1894, p. 1926.

⁴²¹ Town Board, *Te Aroha News*, 26 April 1890, p. 2.

⁴²² *Thames Advertiser*, 10 January 1895, p. 2.

⁴²³ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 14 February 1891, p. 18.

eight months after the death of his wife, Ahier moved to New Plymouth.⁴²⁴ Announcing his departure, a local correspondent referred to his 'active interest in local affairs'.⁴²⁵

Ahier's entry in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* outlined his career until 1908. 'After very successful operations, on the Upper and Lower Thames, he bought a share in the old-established business of Henry Brown and Co', sawmillers, timber merchants and sash and door makers, of New Plymouth, in 1893. 'Although his time is chiefly taken up in looking after his large business, he devotes much attention to local affairs'.⁴²⁶ He became a partner in this company, the largest timber firm in Taranaki, in 1894.⁴²⁷ That he was fondly remembered in Te Aroha was indicated by a correspondent's comment on seeing his sketch in the *Observer*. 'It seemed like old times' seeing its portrayal of 'the new jay pay for New Plymouth. He seems to thrive in his new home'.⁴²⁸ Ahier revisited Te Aroha and Thames in 1898,⁴²⁹ and when visiting Thames in 1905 'met with a cordial reception from his many friends'. He was reportedly 'prospering'.⁴³⁰ In the following year he was a director of an oil exploration company in Taranaki.⁴³¹ For 25 years he was mainly prominent in the timber trade, retiring two years before his death in 1919, when he left an estate estimated to be worth £10,500.⁴³²

NEWSPAPER BIAS AND RIVALRY

When John Ilott left for Wellington in July 1890, he and his wife, both pillars of the Wesleyan Sunday School, received fond farewells.⁴³³

⁴²⁴ Charles Ahier to Hesketh and Richmond, 6 December 1893, Hesketh and Richmond Papers, box 26, 1051/C, MS 440, Auckland Public Library.

⁴²⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 December 1893, p. 22.

⁴²⁶ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 6, p. 115.

⁴²⁷ J.S. Tullett, *The Industrious Heart: A history of New Plymouth* (New Plymouth, 1981), pp. 58-59.

⁴²⁸ *Observer*, sketch, 16 February 1895, p. 23, 'Te Aroha', 2 March 1895, p. 21.

⁴²⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 21 March 1898, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 24 March 1898, p. 2.

⁴³⁰ *Thames Star*, 12 October 1905, p. 2.

⁴³¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 June 1906, p. 24.

⁴³² New Plymouth Probates, ABAJ 21954, W4079, 29/2475, ANZ-W; *Evening Post*, 27 December 1916, p. 8, 22 January 1919, p. 8.

⁴³³ *Te Aroha News*, 23 July 1890, p. 2.

Correspondents described Ilott as an ‘exceedingly popular editor’ and stated that their departure was ‘much regretted by the public’.⁴³⁴ However, one of them reported, one month later, that the new editor’s ‘courteous disposition’ was ‘already apparent’ in the newspaper. ‘This new era in the history of the News had given unqualified satisfaction to the great majority of the settlers in this district, who were long ago disgusted with the carping querulous tone of the paper in the past’.⁴³⁵ As the new man’s editions were lost in a fire,⁴³⁶ it is not possible to examine his handling of these petty squabbles, but it is clear that he avoided the emotional involvement that marked Ilott’s coverage. In 1891 Ahier considering buying it ‘at a price’, to the anticipated benefit of the Liberal Party,⁴³⁷ but nothing came of this idea. Ilott had gone to work on the *New Zealand Times*, owned by his brother-in-law, but within two years ‘the two men had a major row’, and Ilott left, first to become managing agent in Wellington for Henry Brett,⁴³⁸ his former partner in the *Te Aroha News*. Without knowing any details about this ‘major row’, somehow it does not seem surprising. An obituary described his life as being ‘marked by quiet, unostentatious charity and good works.... His keen sense of humour and his high principle marked his business life’.⁴³⁹ He may well have had all these attributes, but other aspects of his character had been revealed at Te Aroha.

Ahier was not the only person to complain about biased reporting. In 1886, the newspaper asked ‘Alpha’ not to be

angry seeing we decline to gratify you by publishing your very impertinent letter; written with such evident malicious intent. We are fully aware of your antipathy, and desire to injure this journal. Fortunately, however, your power in that direction is in keeping with many of your actions, decidedly small. If you cannot, no doubt some of your friends will succeed in getting this *last* (!)

⁴³⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 8 July 1890, p. 2; ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 2 August 1890, p. 18.

⁴³⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 7 August 1890, p. 3.

⁴³⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 8 May 1939, p. 3.

⁴³⁷ James Mills to William Fraser M.P., 22 November 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

⁴³⁸ Jack Ilott, *Creating Customers: The story of Ilott Advertising New Zealand: 1892-1982* (Auckland, 1985), p. 17.

⁴³⁹ *New Zealand Times*, 5 June 1919, in Newspaper Clippings, folder 16, Ilott Papers, MS-Papers-1068, Alexander Turnbull Library.

effusion published elsewhere. If declined over the *nom de plum* of “Alpha,” why not have “Tui” *saddled* again! Rest assured we shall treat it with the silent contempt it deserves.⁴⁴⁰

This letter, published by the Hamilton newspaper, told the editor that people had ‘remarked that during all the trouble re the domain board management’ nothing in their defense had appeared in his paper. ‘It has also been asserted as a reason, and I firmly believe it to be a true one, that no subject receives justice at your hands unless it agrees with your own views’. To prove this ‘serious assertion’, ‘Alpha’ referred to the newspaper imputing person motives to a farmer and investor, William Archibald Murray,⁴⁴¹ when he raised the nature of land tenure. Even though the paper later had to admit that Murray was right, it refused to publish his reply to its personal attack. Another example was the recent suppression of all police court news ‘and the following week, to vent your spleen, refer to one of the defendants in a cowardly manner’. If he suppressed ‘anything and everything which does not coincide with your notions’, where was ‘the boasted freedom of the untrammelled Press?’ ‘Alpha’ disapproved of recent domain board decisions about the use of the overflow water, an appointment, and advertising, but believed Illott’s opposition was motivated by fear of losing money through rival advertising. If all the actions of the board were reported, rather than just those that concerned Illott, they could be ‘discussed in a fair and impartial manner’.⁴⁴²

After Alfred Henry Whitehouse, a *Te Aroha* storekeeper,⁴⁴³ sent a follow-up letter to the *Te Aroha News* which, after being ‘declined with thanks’,⁴⁴⁴ was published in the *Waikato Times*:

The inferences and insinuations contained in your refusal to publish “Alpha’s” letter compel me in justice to myself to risk a second refusal, and to state that “Alpha’s” letter was the “first effusion” I have penned ever since the *Aroha News* had an existence and that I claim the paternity of the article without any assistance from “friends.” I am quite content to leave it to the public to judge wherein exists that “impertinence” or who betrays the more “malice,” me in stating undeniable facts or you in your

⁴⁴⁰ ‘Notice to Correspondents’, *Te Aroha News*, 16 October 1886, p. 2.

⁴⁴¹ See paper on his life.

⁴⁴² Letter from ‘Alpha’, *Waikato Times*, 21 October 1886, p. 3.

⁴⁴³ See paper on his life.

⁴⁴⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 30 October 1886, p. 2.

unwarranted inferences; and further that I am quite willing to remain “small and uniform” rather than be so ungainly and out of proportion as to be so lopsided in my views. Of course your manner is excessively funny (excuse the irony) wherein you try to let the public know who “alpha” is, particularly as the public know how well the humorous vein becomes you. Had you, sir been content to give simple refusal I would not now be troubling your columns, but when from behind the bulwark of proprietary you throw out inferences when (to put it mildly) you had no reason to believe there was any shadow of truth to back them up, and thus evincing the courage of a literary giant, I claim the right of reply in self-defence.⁴⁴⁵

The following April, after Whitehouse was appointed as town clerk, the newspaper argued that the town board had

not commenced well by making their first public announcement with closed doors, and by appointing a man at fourteen shillings a week as Town Clerk, when another, having at least the recommendation of education and experience in the keeping of books, offered to do the work at eight shillings per week. To be sure it is commonly reported that certain parties had promised to appoint Mr Whitehouse in the event of their being themselves elected, but it is rather rough on the ratepayers to practically have to provide Mr Whitehouse with a pension to the extent of six shillings a week, although he may have worked hard in the interests of some of those returned. If the matter was pre-arranged, it would have been far more manly to have appointed him without going through the farce of inviting tenders. Several persons, knowing the position of affairs refrained from tendering at all.⁴⁴⁶

In October, Illott reprinted an *Observer* paragraph about his editorial policy:

The “We” of the Te Aroha paper has been getting into hot water lately. Somebody wrote him a letter signed “Fair Play,” which, instead of going into “your valuable columns,” went into the waste basket. Thereupon sundry residents called an indignation meeting, at which a party by the name of Whitehouse was the moving spirit. A letter from the much abused editor was read at the meeting. Amongst other hard things set off by the scribe was: - “Allow me to inform you that I have not the slightest intention

⁴⁴⁵ Letter from A.H. Whitehouse, *Waikato Times*, 6 November 1886, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 2 April 1887, p. 2.

of being present at your meeting tonight, and can only attribute your attempt to interfere with the management of this journal to either gross ignorance or consummate impudence.” No wonder they passed a resolution of an uncomplimentary nature to the “We.”⁴⁴⁷

Ilott chose not to report this public meeting attacking his editorial policy. The following year, when Whitehouse’s wife died suddenly, the newspaper reported sensitively on his loss, describing her as ‘highly respected’ and having, ‘by her kindly nature’, made ‘many friends’.⁴⁴⁸ Six months later, he failed to report Whitehouse’s departure. In contrast, a correspondent for the Hamilton newspaper described him as ‘one of our most useful members for the advancement of the affairs of Te Aroha’ and provided a detailed report of his public farewell, citing Ilott’s enemies Mills and Ahier praising him; the latter stated that ‘a straighter man he could not conceive’.⁴⁴⁹

As an example of Ilott flaying some of the local politicians, his editorial at the end of 1889 responded to the town board’s decision, moved by Mills and Gallagher, that a new rate be advertised only in ‘a paper called the Te Aroha-Waiorongomai Times (printed in Cambridge)’ instead of in the *Te Aroha News*. After citing the ancient custom of choosing the wisest members of the community to make the laws, it commented that the board’s decisions proved this custom had ‘indeed passed away’. This ‘sapient body’ proved Shakespeare’s point that man ‘dressed in a little brief authority plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep’. Neither its clerk nor its members understood the legislation under which they fixed and advertised rates.

It is a pitiful thing to have thrust upon us the necessity of teaching our Town Commissioners what their duties are and calling their attention to prescribed rules for the performance of those duties, which are such that the merest schoolboy might readily understand. The ignorance or gross carelessness of those members of the Town Board who are responsible for this senseless muddling of public business is the more unpardonable because the road was practically cleared for their feet,

⁴⁴⁷ *Observer*, n.d., reprinted in *Te Aroha News*, 15 October 1887, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 20 June 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 25 December 1888, p. 2.

a reference to the previous board following correct procedures, not following which meaning the rate was illegal and need not be paid. While he did not credit the board ‘with very profound wisdom’, he could ‘scarcely imagine’ its members trying to collect a rate which was ‘really only a rate in their distorted imagination’. To avoid them ‘making themselves ridiculous on some future occasion’, he explained more of their duties as required by legislation. ‘To outsiders, who do not know the nature of some of the present Town Commissioners, it must almost seem incredible’ that they

should have started such a wild and reckless system of local legislation as that which we are now compelled in the interests of the public to expose and condemn. They have the minute books and the records of the past for their guidance, and with these alone should have been able to steer clear of the bogs into which they have blindly floundered. It most certainly is a matter for congratulation that their power to mix things up, and cause administrative chaos in our midst, and exhibit personal spleen, has not been widened by the creation of this district (with or without the Goldfield) into a Borough. If that misfortune had happened, and a greatly increased field for premature taxation and “patent, self-acting, instantaneous, law making” had been afforded, what a display of general incapacity we might have had by this time!⁴⁵⁰

There were several challenges to the *Te Aroha News*’ monopoly over the years, none lasting very long. In 1909, the launching of the latest venture, the *Te Aroha Mail*, caused ‘the journalistic atmosphere’ to be ‘more redolent of gore and sulphur than of milk’.⁴⁵¹ After a year, tensions remained high:

The *Te Aroha “Mail”* still wars with its reptile contemporary, the *Te Aroha “News.”* In the latest issue of the “*Mail*,” the editor of that paper, referring to some statements alleged to have been made by the manager of the opposition sheet, placidly remarks: “Since the time of the lamented Uriah Heep, we have run up against no such delightful sample of snivelling, lying, spiteful hypocrisy.”⁴⁵²

CONCLUSION

⁴⁵⁰ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 21 December 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁵¹ *Observer*, 27 March 1909, p. 5, 8 May 1909, p. 7.

⁴⁵² *Observer*, 9 July 1910, p. 17.

These examples of neighbourly and unneighbourly behaviour illustrate the tensions natural to small town life. Residents were quick to assist those in need, but also quick to squabble over matters that were sometimes of no great significance in the wider scheme of things. Bad temper was a feature of much of the work of the local bodies, with personalities intruding into policy making; very petty squabbles usually, but sometimes points of principle were involved, and always these conflicts were of great significance to those involved. In general, though, neighbourliness was more prevalent than the reverse. In all these ways the district was similar to all others.

Appendix

Figure 1: M.C., 'Mr C. Ahier, J.P., A New Plymouth Identity', *Observer*, 16 February 1895, p. 23.

