

INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICAL ISSUES BY PEOPLE LIVING IN THE TE AROHA DISTRICT

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Abstract: *As only a minority of residents were enthusiastically interested in national political issues, efforts to encourage debates about these issues by forming clubs largely failed. There was much more interest in local politics, where many of the conflicts were personal rather than political.*

Many illustrations are given of the fervent patriotism of residents and of their loyalty to queen and empire, which included support for all the empire's wars. Both the Boer War and the First World War provoked much patriotic fervour, with those who did not fight doing their best to assist the cause of empire by fund-raising for the troops. In the former war, disapproval of 'pro-Boers' was common, but the right of 'non-Britishers' to dissent was supported by some residents. When the Dreyfus affair was at its height, Te Aroha achieved considerable notoriety for its method of supporting this unjustly accused man. Concerning Ireland, many supported the downtrodden Irish by contributing funds to assist evicted peasants.

Examples are given of those who supported the liberal and conservative sides in national politics. Some of those involved in the mining industry stood for parliament before withdrawing in favour of more prominent politicians, and 13 investors became Members of Parliament.

COMBATting POLITICAL APATHY

Many, perhaps most, residents had only a passing interest in national politics, which was much less important than the day-to-day necessities of work and family life. Perhaps this was why the local newspaper commented, in 1900, that 'in this electorate, as in others, there is a large number of people incapable of thinking for themselves'.¹ During the 1884 election, a correspondent noted the local apathy, with only one meeting being held at Waiorongomai.² Later, he admitted that, 'in a community largely composed of old Thames residents', most of these people were more concerned about that electorate rather than the local one.³

Some residents interested in both local and national politics tried to enthuse others to discuss political issues. In July 1885, James Mills, later the first mayor and always a strong supporter of the Liberal Party,⁴ suggested forming a Social Club and Debating

¹ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Observer*, 6 January 1900, p. 3.

² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 19 July 1884, p. 2.

³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 July 1994, p. 3.

⁴ See paper on his life.

Society because working men needed a place to discuss government expenditure and taxation, for the latter was unfair on the poor. 'Many other questions might be debated, and conclusions on these matters arrived at and be enforced to our advantage' and elections and 'subjects of social importance' could be discussed in 'a place for special chat'.⁵ The warden and magistrate, Harry Kenrick,⁶ responded by offering the use of the courtroom for one night each week.⁷ In early August, 12 men, most of whom would later support the Liberal Party, met to establish this society. Mills, the convener, stated that 'politics were now at a very low ebb' and noted mining issues that should be considered; in particular, he wanted taxation discussed because it 'weighed very unjustly on some classes'. One 'notable' subject was 'the need for co-operation', about which he spoke at length, based on his English experience of this movement.⁸ People from Waiorongomai and Waitoa attended the subsequent meeting, which approved its rules and agreed to keep the fees low to encourage all to join. Talks and discussions, to be held every Wednesday evening, would include 'lectures and mutual assistance in useful knowledge such as Mechanics, Mineralogy, Chemistry and other sciences'.⁹ A 'large attendance' heard Mills lecture on co-operation, 'showing what can be done by united action', after which the mining inspector promised to speak later about the state of the mining industry.¹⁰ The absence of reports of any more talks suggests that this society had a brief life.

When a Piako landowner, William Archibald Murray,¹¹ attempted to form a Reform League in 1890, although out of the 70 attending his meeting no one opposed his idea and four supported it, nobody was interested in his resolutions nor was willing to serve on a committee.¹² The reasons for this lack of response was a feeling that Murray was moving too fast without consulting the community,¹³ probably combined with distrust of Murray's individualistic political stance. Despite that debacle, in the early 1890s a Working Man's Club was formed, 'which provides a very pleasant reading room, with papers, periodicals, etc, for its members'. In 1894 it was 'in a highly satisfactory condition' and was 'very much appreciated by the many who make use of

⁵ Letter from James Mills, *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1885, p. 7.

⁶ See paper on his life.

⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 7.

⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7.

⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 15 August 1885, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 22 August 1885, pp. 2, 7.

¹¹ See paper on his life.

¹² *Waikato Times*, 3 June 1890, p. 2.

¹³ *Te Aroha News*, 4 June 1890, p. 2.

it'.¹⁴ In mid-year about 30 members and friends held a dinner and social occasion chaired by Francis Pavitt,¹⁵ a Liberal, with Mills as vice-chairman. 'The usual toasts were drunk, and a very enjoyable evening was spent with songs and music'.¹⁶ At that time, a Young Men's Club, a religious organization,¹⁷ decided to form 'a Union Parliament on the lines of the one in Auckland' to make it 'much more attractive and useful' and 'prepare some of our young men for active interest in real politics a little later on'.¹⁸ It was hoped 'that other prominent citizens might join the Union, so that good debates upon important political subjects might be enjoyed'.¹⁹ Like most such initiatives, it soon faded, but in 1901 two prominent Liberals, Thomas Gavin²⁰ and Thomas McIndoe,²¹ convened a meeting 'to consider the advisability of forming some association, educational, etc'. Gavin, the chairman, spoke 'of the need of such a society, not only for gaining instruction, but also for learning to express their thoughts, so as to enable them to take an intelligent interest in everything that was going on'. He wanted members to discuss much wider issues than municipal ones. After several of those present 'showed how such a society could be made a great influence for good amongst those who took no interest in public matters, and very little interest in literature, or in anything else', a Citizens' Association was formed;²² it soon faded as well.

LOCAL POLITICS

Residents were more interested in local politics, although often focusing more on the personal than the political. In 1884, in a by-election for the Aroha Riding of the Piako County Council,²³ 'a few placards' bearing slogans were seen, 'and here and there a caricature' of some of the candidates. The *Te Aroha News* noted that 'the utmost good humour prevailed throughout, and no disturbance of any kind took place. The absence of any excessive drinking was also very apparent'.²⁴ Because of controversy over voting rights, with suspicion that 'a certain clique' (unspecified but consisting of

¹⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 May 1894, p. 22.

¹⁵ See *Star* (Christchurch), 23 December 1909, p. 1.

¹⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 June 1894, p. 22.

¹⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 May 1894, p. 22.

¹⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 June 1894, p. 22.

¹⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 June 1894, p. 22.

²⁰ See paper on his life.

²¹ See paper on financial struggles of miners in general and at Te Aroha in particular.

²² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 May 1901, p. 31.

²³ See papers on Denis Murphy and Edward Kersey Cooper.

²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 30 August 1884, p. 2.

Josiah Clifton Firth and his allies)²⁵ was attempting to control the local government,²⁶ there was much discussion about amending the Counties Act to give all holders of a miner's right a vote.²⁷ In 1887, in the first Te Aroha Town Board election about 50 people attending a meeting held by some of the candidates unanimously carried a motion that the five men standing 'as the working men's candidates be heartily supported'.²⁸ 'Much interest was taken in the election, and during the day a number of persons were busily employed in looking up voters and trying to influence them'. A large crowd attended the declaration of the poll, which returned four of these five candidates. 'The result was received with great cheers by those assembled', and when one candidate attempted 'to return thanks' he 'was cut short by some of his friends taking hold of him and carrying him off shoulder high through the township. Later on the Te Aroha Brass Band mustered together, and marching to the Domain played a selection of airs in celebration of the occasion'.²⁹ In the following year, all those standing on a 'Borough ticket' were elected.³⁰ A former local journalist later recalled that in those two years feeling on local affairs ran high and that there were 'some very truculent meetings at which a plainness of speech was used that would not be permissible to-day'.³¹ The careers in local government of James Mills and Denis Murphy were good examples of this 'plainness of speech'.³²

In 1890, the *Te Aroha News* criticized the majority of the members of the town board:

If they have any qualifications fitting themselves for the position they hold, they would surely have evinced them before now, seeing they have been in office for over a year and a half. The mistake no doubt was in returning such men to office. But now they are there, just let them to have rope enough and – the old adage will once more come true.³³

Concerns about who was elected continued to be raised in subsequent years; in 1896, for instance, 'great interest was taken in' the town board election.³⁴ Two years

²⁵ See papers on Josiah Clifton Firth, the Battery Company, and Henry Hopper Adams.

²⁶ For example, letter from 'Shareholder', *New Zealand Herald*, 15 October 1884, p. 6.

²⁷ *Waikato Times*, 25 September 1884, p. 2.

²⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 12 March 1887, p. 2.

²⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 March 1887, p. 3.

³⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1888, p. 2.

³¹ Recollections of F.C. Smithyman, *Te Aroha News*, 8 November 1924, p. 5.

³² See papers on their lives.

³³ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 25 January 1890, p. 2.

³⁴ *Waikato Argus*, 17 September 1896, p. 2.

later, ‘plenty of mud-throwing going on’ during the election campaign.³⁵ In 1895, one person noted how ‘the personal element ... always seems to crop up’ in local politics.³⁶ Despite this, as the first town clerk recalled, passions could be overcome:

The wordy conflicts at those meetings made them really worthwhile. There was a strange thing that though most of the councillors were politically in one camp, at the Town Board meetings they were sworn enemies, and the epithets that were hurled across the room by members were really unprintable.

Nevertheless, ‘if there was anything which was to Te Aroha’s benefit, then they could all be depended upon’ to work together.³⁷ At the board’s valedictory meeting before it was replaced by a borough council, its chairman, Thomas Gavin, noted that ‘there had frequently been heated discussions but he was pleased to say their differences had never been carried outside’.³⁸

Sometimes national politics intruded into local politics. For instance, in 1890 the magistrate recommended that a farmer, Edward Wingfield Hanmer,³⁹ be appointed to the domain board because he was ‘a farmer having a large interest in the District and a thoroughly good business man’.⁴⁰ Mills, however, believed that Hanmer was appointed ‘at the instance, and in the interests of the old Clique; he never had any interest in the place; being simply Manager of an estate some 7 miles outside’ the town.⁴¹ When Hanmer left the district a year later, another Liberal supporter warned the local Liberal Member of Parliament that Hanmer was trying to get himself replaced by Samuel Luther Hirst, ‘who was chairman of Buller’s election Committee’,⁴² a reference to the anti-Liberal candidate Sir William Buller. Hirst, an amalgamator who became a cordial manufacturer, agent, and, when living in Auckland after leaving the district, a land developer,⁴³ was not a Liberal, the probable reason why he did not replace Hanmer.

³⁵ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 30 July 1898, p. 21.

³⁶ Letter from ‘Thistledown’, *Te Aroha News*, 2 February 1895, p. 2.

³⁷ Recollections of William Hill, *Te Aroha News*, 17 March 1937, p. 5.

³⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 9 July 1898, p. 2.

³⁹ See *Waikato Times*, 30 August 1881, p. 2, 9 October 1884, p. 2, 13 April 1886, p. 2, 18 November 1890, p. 2, 10 October 1891, p. 3.

⁴⁰ H.W. Northcroft to Under-Secretary, Lands and Survey Department, 9 October 1890, Thames Warden’s Court, Letterbook 1886-1893, p. 385, BACL 14458/2b, ANZ-A.

⁴¹ James Mills to Minister of Land, 12 January 1892, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

⁴² Charles Ahier to William Fraser, 25 November 1891, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

⁴³ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 828, 829; *New Zealand Herald*, 7 May 1934, p. 12.

PATRIOTISM

Residents of all political persuasions were unquestioningly loyal to Queen and Country, which for many meant England as much as or even more than New Zealand. In 1895, L.S. (untraced) wrote a poem ‘especially for’ the *Te Aroha News* entitled: ‘On a Sky-Lark’s Song in New Zealand’:

I rode, an alien in an alien land, so far away
 It seemed as if I could not be the same as yesterday.
 The mountains stood around me fold on fold, tier on tier,
 I seemed encompassed by a mystery of awe and fear.
 The trees, the grass, the flax on either side like phantoms seemed
 And I, a phantom among phantoms rode, as one who dreamed
 The one thing real seemed the rushing by of rifted air,
 And the rude wind that caught and cuffed my cheeks and stirred my hair.
 The one thing real seemed the pulsing throbs of hooves that sped,
 And bore onward through a haunted world like one who fled;
 Then suddenly there drifted down to earth a rippling song.
 It thrilled my heart to sudden ecstasy, I rode along
 No longer dream-like, in a dream-like world, possest⁴⁴
 I was in England, ’mid my native corn, I was at rest.
 I raised my eyes and far above my head one speck there hung,
 That quivered high against the blue of space and quivering sung;
 It rained down music from its dewy wings, it sang of home,
 It drew me back unto my former self no more to roam.
 Past, present, future in one happy song it seemed to blend:
 I was no longer isolate, alone, I’d found a friend;
 So through a happy mist of falling tears, I rode content,
 My brown-winged emigrant was singing still his strength unspent.⁴⁵

After the speeches at the concert celebrating the 1883 opening of the Te Aroha school had been delivered, the chairman ‘suggested that “God Save the Queen” should be sung, for although 16,000 miles away they were still British subjects. This was done with great heartiness’.⁴⁶

When the goldfield was only a month old, after the Sunday evening service ended ‘the miners wound up with “God Save the Queen”’.⁴⁷ Meetings of the temperance Band of Hope also concluded with the national anthem.⁴⁸ At the end of one of the Wesleyan Sunday School’s annual treats the children ‘gathered at the church door, and

⁴⁴ The poet’s spelling.

⁴⁵ L.S., ‘On a Sky-Lark’s Song in New Zealand’, *Te Aroha News*, 6 November 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1883, p. 2.

⁴⁷ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 1 January 1881, p. 150.

⁴⁸ For example, *Te Aroha News*, 19 April 1884, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 August 1890, p. 29.

at the request of the circuit minister, sang the National Anthem'.⁴⁹ Only on one recorded occasion, at a concert held at Waiorongomai to raise money for the Church of England, was 'God Defend New Zealand' sung at the end of the first half with 'God Save the Queen' being sung at the conclusion.⁵⁰ At a Waiorongomai banquet held five months later, the first toasts were to 'The Queen', 'The Prince of Wales and Royal Family', and 'The Governor'.⁵¹ When Waiorongomai's public hall was opened in 1884 it was decorated with Union Jacks in honour of the Prince of Wales' birthday.⁵² To celebrate the arrival of the railway line in 1886, a large triumphal arch erected across Te Aroha's main street was adorned with flags and bunting, 'whilst proudly floating above the whole was the Union Jack of Old England'.⁵³ Even less formal occasions often ended in a loyal way: in 1918, for instance, a social held for a couple returning from their honeymoon concluded with the national anthem.⁵⁴

The Queen's Golden Jubilee, a highlight of 1887, was anticipated in the final tableau vivant of that New Year's Eve entertainment, which 'disclosed the members of the company grouped on stage' behind her portrait before they sang the national anthem.⁵⁵ In May, appropriate festivities marked a fancy-dress ball. At midnight,

an immense rich cake, beautifully iced, and termed the Queen's Cake, was cut, when the whole company stood up and ushered in the Queen's Birthday, by singing in real hearty style the National Anthem, thus demonstrating the loyalty, love and respect with which Her Majesty is regarded by her subjects at Waiorongomai.⁵⁶

The following month, residents 'determined that Te Aroha shall not lag behind other towns' in 'fittingly celebrating the approaching Jubilee'. They planned to march 'to some convenient spot' where 'a series of athletic sports and other pastimes' would be 'indulged in' during the morning, after which they would residents march to the domain for the principal event, planting 50 trees in a Jubilee Avenue. This avenue would be planted by 'all the principal persons connected in any way with the district and all the public bodies', either in person 'or by deputy, and opportunities will be afforded for appropriate speeches by all who are inclined to address the assemblage.

⁴⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 March 1882, p. 3.

⁵⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 12 November 1887, p. 2.

⁵¹ *Te Aroha News*, 14 April 1888, p. 2.

⁵² *Te Aroha News*, 15 November 1884, p. 2.

⁵³ *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1886, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 18 September 1918, p. 3.

⁵⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 8 January 1887, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 28 May 1887, p. 2.

Time permitting, there will afterwards be a return to the sports', and in the evening a 'miscellaneous entertainment' would be followed by a dance. 'An important feature of the day's doings will be the reciting of a Jubilee ode, and to procure a suitable composition it has been decided to offer a small premium, to be competed for by all who aspire to poetic fame. A committee will select one from the number sent in, all of which will be under a *nom de plume*'.⁵⁷

Shortly before Jubilee Day, the Southern Cross Comedy Company, a troupe of 'juveniles' from Thames, concluded their *Te Aroha* performance with a Jubilee tableau using limelight effects 'emblematic of Britannia, Erin and Caledonia, supported by representatives of the army and navy'.⁵⁸ Although the Jubilee Celebration Committee had hoped for 'Queen's weather', there was heavy rain on the day, but nevertheless the celebrations proceeded.⁵⁹ To encourage participation, a special edition of the *Te Aroha News* had been published. Before giving a history of her life, its editorial praised both queen and empire:

To-day is a red-letter day in the history of the British Empire, and marks indeed the completion of a distinctive epoch in the records of modern civilisation. A few more revolutions of the minute hand of the clock and the fiftieth year of the reign of our most gracious sovereign, Queen Victoria, will be numbered for the past. To-day, over all the wide dominion that owns her sway – the greatest, most wealthy, and the most nearly cosmopolitan empire that the world has ever known – heartfelt thanks have ascended to the Lord of the Universe that He has been pleased to spare a wise ruler to hold the regnant sceptre for half a century, and that at an age approaching the "allotted span" of human life our beloved Queen does not display any diminution of physical or mental vigour....

Under her benignant rule the British Empire has attained a position amongst the nations of the earth that she has never previously enjoyed, and the record of the last half century is the most marvellous record of national progress that the world has ever witnessed.... In a word, during her reign the empire has reached its zenith, and the epoch now drawing to a close may well be styled the "golden age of the Anglo-Saxon race."

Gauge it by whichever standard we like, turn whichever way we will, the same gratifying tokens of national progress on the road to true greatness catch the eye. In education, religion, social condition, literature, science, art, manufacture, and commerce there has been an advance, and it is with personal feelings of gratified national pride, as well as with loyal love for our Sovereign that we celebrate this – to Britons – the most pleasing commemoration of the century.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Te Aroha* Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 4 June 1887, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 18 June 1887, p. 2.

⁵⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 18 June 1887, p. 2, 25 June 1887, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Te Aroha News*, The Queen's Jubilee: Special Edition, 21 June 1887, p. 2.

The celebrations commenced shortly after one o'clock in the afternoon, with a procession starting from the school. First came the brass band, then the pupils led by their teachers, followed by about 25 freemasons in full regalia, members of the domain and town boards, clergy, justices of the peace, police, postal and railway officials, and concluding with the public.⁶¹ 'The greater part of the residents' participated.⁶² This procession ended in the domain, where 'Jubilee Avenue', leading 'from the flat to number one drinking fountain', was planted. 'This part of the programme was no doubt got through with more expedition than it otherwise would, owing to the heavy rainfall which prevailed, and speech making was indulged in by but very few, and was of the briefest description'. Because of the bad weather the maypole dance was moved to the public hall, where about 40 little girls danced several times, 'all most gaily attired in costumes specially prepared for the occasion'. The band played 'several selections', and Samuel Lawry, the Wesleyan minister,⁶³ read his Jubilee Ode, which from the dozen submitted had won the prize of £1 1s. After he read it 'in good style' he was 'most vociferously applauded; the sentiments given expression to in the Ode being unmistakably in accord with the feelings of those assembled'. Several of those who had planted trees accepted an invitation 'to say a few words', and 'could our Queen have been present ... she could not but have been highly gratified at the many heartfelt utterances of loyalty and affection'. After the children consumed 'an abundance of light refreshments', they sang the National Anthem, accompanied by the band, 'the whole assembly rising en masse, and joining in most heartily; at the conclusion of which many cheers were given for the Queen and Royal family'.⁶⁴

Lawry's ode consisted of 20 stanzas of fervent devotion to queen and empire, with Te Aroha receiving a special mention:

14.

Though far removed from England's shore,
Yet know we that one spirit moves
Our kindred in the good old land,
And those who call New Zealand home.
We love our Queen as true as they,
We, too, are loyal to her throne,
And gladly hail the festive day.

15.

Beneath Te Aroha's lofty peaks
We celebrate the Jubilee

⁶¹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 June 1887, p. 2.

⁶² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 23 June 1887, p. 2.

⁶³ See paper on religion in the Te Aroha district.

⁶⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 25 June 1887, p. 2.

Of Queen Victoria's glorious reign;
 We vie with England's citizens
 In loyal deeds and hearty cheer,
 Though far away from where the throne
 Lends splendour to surrounding things.

16.

Where Nature hath her wonders wrought,
 And thermal springs invite the sick
 To baths and prove their healing power,
 Our public men are asked to plant an avenue of stately trees
 In honour of our noble Queen,
 And call them trees of "Jubilee."

17.

And when our children ask of us
 "What meaneth this? What Jubilee
 Is celebrated by these lines
 Of stately trees – the avenue."
 We'll answer make, "These trees declare
 That Queen Victoria wisely reigned
 O'er loyal subjects fifty years."⁶⁵

'In the evening the hall was again crowded to overflowing at the entertainment' provided by 'local amateurs, and the warm applause which followed the efforts of the various singers testified to the pleasure of the audience'. After Lawry had repeated his ode and the children had reprised their maypole dance the adults danced for several hours. 'Altogether the day's proceedings, in spite of the vileness of the weather, were of a most enjoyable kind; and gave ample evidence of the loyalty and spirit of the inhabitants'.⁶⁶

In contrast, on at least one subsequent occasion, some residents did not display appropriate enthusiasm for their monarch. In 1895, the *Te Aroha News* felt obliged to chide 'several' businessmen for being 'not very loyal subjects, as was evidenced by their not observing the holiday in honor of Her Majesty's Birthday, like other citizens. Perhaps the reason may be that they are more devoted to the "almighty dollar" than to their Queen'.⁶⁷

Three years later, on the same royal occasion the newspaper published another panegyric:

⁶⁵ Rev. Samuel Lawry, 'An Ode, To Celebrate the Jubilee of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria', *Waikato Times*, 25 June 1887, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 23 June 1887, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *Te Aroha News*. 25 May 1895, p. 2.

Within the last few years as every succeeding twenty-fourth of May rolled by, the fear has crept again and again into our hearts that it might be the last on which the sun of an English spring would brighten the scene of quiet rejoicing annually held at Windsor in celebration of the natal day of the best woman that ever sat upon the English Throne. Elizabeth, of glorious memory, with her pale, strong face, thin lips, red wisps of hair escaping under a heavily embroidered hood, jewelled stomacher, enormous ruffles and all, fills a large space in our pride, as a people; but, Victoria, the Widow of Windsor, by her goodness of heart and devotion, has all our affections. Throughout the vast Empire over which she reigns the wish of her people ever is to mark the twenty-fourth – especially in the colonies is this so – by an event that will not be readily forgotten. Here in Te Aroha, by common consent, it was determined that one of the landmarks in our history – the opening of our splendid new bath-house – should be set up on that auspicious day.⁶⁸

When the Governor, Lord Ranfurly, visited one year later, he was met by ‘a large number’ of residents. After inspecting the guard of honour provided by the Te Aroha Rifles, he processed from the railway station to the domain to the sound of ‘several selections’ provided by the Te Aroha Band. At the domain, the mayor ‘extended a cordial welcome to the representative of Her Majesty’ in front of ‘settlers from all parts of the district’ and the pupils of all the local schools. An address welcomed him to New Zealand’s newest borough and expressed ‘our loyalty to Her Majesty Queen Victoria’. The formalities ended with the school children singing a song, written by a Thames man, entitled ‘My Own New Zealand Home’,⁶⁹ indicating that the colony was felt to be the home of these loyal citizens despite England being, to many, ‘Home’.

SUPPORT FOR THE EMPIRE’S WARS

Loyalty to the British Empire meant unconditional support for its wars. In 1885, a carpenter, John Cornes,⁷⁰ wrote a poem in response to news that New South Wales was sending a contingent to fight in the Sudan; it was sung to an unknown tune at a concert raising funds for the library:

Old England, she’s in trouble
With the Mahdi and the Czar,
And if they keep provoking her
They are sure to get ajar;
The Bear [Russia] she grasps at India,
And grasp she may in vain.

⁶⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 26 May 1898, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 10 May 1899, p. 6.

⁷⁰ See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 6 August 1902, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 18 February 1926, p. 10.

But they'll ne'er dethrone our Empress
 While a Briton does remain.
 Yet all our ardour dwindles,
 And our loyalty it pales,
 Before that great continent
 Of our sister, New South Wales.

Our noble General Gordon,
 Britannia's greatest man,
 To quell those treacherous Arabs,
 How bravely he did stand;
 How well he fought for Egypt,
 The poor he clothed and fed,
 And for such grand heroic deeds,
 His great life's blood was shed.
 But whilst we mourn his tragic fate,
 They're on the Arabs trail,
 That gallant little battery,
 The sons of New South Wales.

We'll mark their deeds of bravery,
 Their actions tell with pride,
 And fain we would be with them
 All fighting side by side,
 Lord Wolesley⁷¹ he may well be proud
 Of such a gallant lot,
 With truer hearts of braver men
 I'm sure he never fought;
 And General Graham at Suakim,
 With pride the army hails,
 The gallant little battery
 Of our sister, New South Wales.

How we envy our big sister
 In her patriotic deed,
 She showed all other colonies
 The way to take the lead;
 They'll soon subdue the Arabs,
 And the Prophet Mahdi's tricks,
 They'll avenge the Gordon murder,
 And the massacre of Hicks.
 Then home they'll come with glory,
 And Heaven guide the gales
 That brings those heroes back again,
 The sons of New South Wales.⁷²

⁷¹ The poet's spelling.

⁷² John Cornes, 'New South Wales Contingent', *Te Aroha News*, 11 April 1885, p. 7.

Although nobody from Te Aroha could fight in the Sudan, they could display their loyalty with speeches and loyal toasts. At a public dinner honouring Peter Ferguson for providing Waiorongomai with a second battery,⁷³ the chairman, James Mills, proposed the first toast:

It was customary in every part of the British possessions, on public occasions such as the present, to first propose the health of Her Majesty Queen Victoria and rightly too, for she had proved herself a true mother of the people over whom she reigns, and whose best interests she had ever sought to promote, and nothing could ever be proved against her domestic virtues. She was deserving of the respect and affection of her people.

The vice-chairman

was glad to see the enthusiasm with which the toast had been received. We British colonists in these distant parts were as true and loyal to our Sovereign as those at home [England]. An instance proving this had lately occurred when New South Wales came forward with both men and money to assist her at the seat of war, and had it been required New Zealand would, he believed, have without doubt have followed the example set by New South Wales.⁷⁴

In 1898, the *Te Aroha News* commented that if ‘the wondering world’ asked what England had ‘to support her in her present solitary attitude of defiance’ it would not have ‘long to wait for an answer, for even to us, in Te Aroha, the firm, resonant reply of Britannia aroused comes “ringing over the seas – her colonies” ’.⁷⁵ In the following year, a visit by the Governor prompted plans to celebrate both the Empire and New Zealand: ‘On the arrival of the train the Volunteers would form a guard of honor, and the band play suitable selections. His Lordship would then proceed to the Sanatorium grounds, where the Town Clerk will read the address, and the children from the various schools unite in singing the National Anthem and “My own New Zealand Home” ’.⁷⁶

THE BOER WAR

The Boer War prompted an outpouring of patriotic fervour. At the beginning of 1900 a committee devised ways to raise money for a Transvaal War Fund. The first festivity was ‘an open-air *fete* in the Domain’ with massed choirs of children and adults.

⁷³ See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 2.

⁷⁵ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., cited in *Observer*, 5 February 1898, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 19 April 1899, p. 4.

All school committees in the district were contacted to obtain 'their co-operation in canvassing' for funds. After reading the report of the first committee meeting, 'a lady correspondent' issued a challenge:

At the late patriotic meeting a committee was appointed, but contrary to the custom elsewhere no money (according to the report) was promised in the room. A promenade concert was proposed, but in a matter of this sort, the blood of the best of the land is worthy of something different from that. If the eight gentlemen who were elected as the Committee will each give £5, I will give £10, making £50 in all as the contribution from Te Aroha.⁷⁷

(There were no reports of this offer being taken up.) Before the patriotic concert was held and declared to be 'a great success', the band and the Te Aroha Rifles marched to the domain.

The Domain ground was beautifully decorated, at the foot of the new bathhouse a stage was erected in the form of a triumphal arch, profusely decorated with ferns and coloured art muslin, flowers, etc, hundreds of Chinese lanterns were hung on the trees, flags waves from all points of vantage on the new bathhouse, the whole appearance of the Domain appeared like fairyland.

The 'lengthy and appropriate' programme, which 'comprised some really choice items, was gone through in a most creditable manner'. Included was a tableau entitled 'Britannia', personified by the daughter of the man who directed the tableaux. 'She was raised on a dais, holding in her hand the usual trident, and was enshrouded in the flags of the nation, while on her left was a very fine specimen of the British lion', and two members of the Te Aroha Rifles 'with bayonets fixed looked as if they meant business, and on their left was a small cannon ... the whole forming an imposing picture'. After several patriotic songs were sung, the collection 'was handsomely responded to'. Next was 'a pathetic tableaux, "Ordered to the Front," ' with the first scene showing 'a soldier bidding good-bye to his wife and child, which evoked loud applause; the second scene depicted the wife and child alone in their grief'. As well as the usual songs and recitations, 'several items were given by the Edison Kinematograph Company', meaning 'moving pictures'.

Two clergymen then made 'eloquent speeches'. The first, by Joseph Campbell,⁷⁸

referred to the noble efforts of the colonies on behalf of the Motherland and touched a responsive chord in the breasts of his hearers when he declared that in the present contest, as in many another, the British Empire stood for

⁷⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 13 January 1900, p. 2.

⁷⁸ See paper on Joseph Campbell and his thermo-hyperphoric process.

the principles of justice and righteousness. The ardent spirit of loyalty that breathed in his words communicated itself to the vast audience, which he succeeded in rousing to a high pitch of enthusiasm.

The Presbyterian minister, Thomas Walls,⁷⁹

brought before the minds of his hearers the great principles for which the British arms are contending. His words were instinct with a lofty patriotism that appealed to the thoughtful among his hearers, as he spoke of the noble ancestry of Britons and Boers alike. We should conquer these men, he said, not in the spirit of hatred, but in the spirit of love.⁸⁰

Subsequent patriotic festivities raised more funds.⁸¹ Not much effort was required to enthuse the young, as was illustrated in March 1900: ‘Overheard in the local Post Office – Boys clamouring for letters. – P.M. The Boers couldn’t behave worse than you. Small boy: They won’t after the War’s over’.⁸² After one Boer general surrendered in the previous month,⁸³ the Premier, Richard Seddon, gave all schoolchildren a holiday, and when they arrived at school his cable was read out at assembly. The children were ‘evidently impressed – more especially with the part of the message that referred to the holiday. A verse of “God Save the Queen” was sung; cheers were given for the soldiers fighting in South Africa, and the British Empire; and the children patriotically went home’.⁸⁴ Waiorongomai held a more spontaneous celebration by both children and adults. After imparting the news of the holiday,

the teacher called for three hearty cheers for Lord Roberts and the British forces in South Africa. The National Anthem was then sung and the children dispersed for a holiday. A number of girls went home and made flags and then went around the township spreading the news. In different places groups of people could be seen and the sole topic of conversation was the latest war news.⁸⁵

When the relief of Mafeking was announced, shortly afterwards, the Waiorongomai schoolchildren

⁷⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 March 1893, p. 4; *Woodville Examiner*, 28 April 1893, p. 2, 26 May 1893, p. 2, 7 March 1910, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1900, p. 2.

⁸¹ For example, *Te Aroha News*, advertisement, 13 February 1900, p. 2, 15 February 1900, p. 2.

⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 8 March 1900, p. 2.

⁸³ See Eversley Belfield, *The Boer War* (London, 1925), p. 88.

⁸⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 1 March 1900, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 1 March 1900, p. 2.

at once proceeded to show their feelings with loud applause, cheers were given for Lord Roberts, General Buller, and the British forces in South Africa. As they were granted a half-holiday, they one and all made tracks homewards and soon returned to the school grounds armed with flags of all colours. They next formed two deep and marched through the streets of Waiorongomai singing patriotic songs and cheering.

A coach driver took them to Te Aroha, 'where they again gave vent to their feelings in singing and cheering. They were driven back as far as Stoney Creek', only about a short distance along the way between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai, 'from which place they wandered home in skirmishing order'.⁸⁶ Almost two months later, a 'school concert on patriotic lines' held at Te Aroha was opened by the chairman of the school committee stating that he 'came of a fighting line, his ancestors having fought in the Peninsula war [against Napoleon] and the news of the relief of Mafeking set his blood tingling'. Sir George O'Rorke, parliament's speaker, in giving a short speech glorifying 'the colonies' response to the Empire's call', was 'loudly applauded when he expressed the hope that Colonel Baden-Powell would soon be General Baden-Powell, a sentiment which found great favour with the audience, and led an enthusiast to call for "Three cheers for Baden-Powell," the response being given with great gusto'. As well as patriotic songs and addresses, £8 13s was raised 'towards supplying the school with a flagstaff and flag'.⁸⁷ The *Sydney Bulletin* mocked the news that 'Te Aroha proudly claims that the first telegram of congratulation received in Mafeking by Barnum⁸⁸ Powell was from "the Mayor and Councillors of Te Aroha" '.⁸⁹

To keep children's patriotic fervour high, special ceremonies were held, as illustrated by a Waiorongomai example:

The ceremony of unfurling the flag at Waiorongomai school took place on Friday afternoon, in the presence of a large gathering of parents and friends. A feature of the event was the presence of the Te Aroha Naval Cadets, a squad of scholars attending Te Aroha school. The boys are clothed in a naval uniform, and, being armed with wooden guns, and well drilled, presented a very effective appearance. They marched all the way from Te Aroha to Waiorongomai and back, no small undertaking for some of the youthful warriors.

⁸⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1900, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 June 1900, pp. 38-39.

⁸⁸ Phineas Taylor Barnum was the creator of Barnum and Bailey's circus, the 'Greatest Show on Earth', and a great self-promoter: see Wikipedia.

⁸⁹ *Bulletin*, n.d., reprinted in *Observer*, 19 April 1902, p. 3.

After the chairman of the school committee ‘opened the proceedings with a short speech’ he called on the Anglican vicar ‘to perform the ceremony of unfurling the flag’. Before doing so, the latter ‘made a patriotic speech, in which he traced the history of the flag, and dwelt on the glory and pride with which every Britisher ought to regard it’. He ‘then pulled the cord, and the flag, released from its folds, floated out amidst the cheers of the assemblage. The cadets then gave a military salute’, after which the head teacher ‘marched the boys belonging to the school past the staff, where they saluted the flag. The National Anthem was then sung by the children’. A Volunteer officer ‘made a short speech, in which he contrasted the liberty and freedom enjoyed by those of the British Empire as compared with people in certain European countries’.⁹⁰

In the following month, a similar event was advertised at Te Aroha:

Te Aroha Public School
Unfurling the Flag
By the Mayor, E[dward] Gallagher, Esq.⁹¹
Thursday, October 11th, 1900, at 2.30 p.m.
Speeches by several Leading Gentlemen.
Mounted Infantry in attendance, and Cadets in uniform; also Band.
Patriotic Songs by the Children.⁹²

By July 1900, as it was anticipated that the war would soon be over, a Peace Celebration Committee approved the purchase of material for ‘a triumphal arch, [a] large banner to be carried at the head of the procession, and streamers to be hung across the streets’.⁹³ This enthusiastic preparation was echoed in May 1902, when a Te Aroha correspondent reported ‘a premature assemblage’:

There was great excitement here on Thursday when the news got about the town that peace had been declared, and that it was time to hold high carnival. The explanation is that the Postmaster received a message to be ready (in accordance with a decision already arrived at by the Government) to hoist the flag when peace was proclaimed. This message was conveyed to the Mayor and the latter thought it meant that peace had been declared. He intimated the residents of the fact, so that when the flag at the Post Office was unfurled the community could loyally celebrate the occasion. The school children were dismissed from school in order to join in the jubilation on the arrival of the long-looked-for news that peace had been proclaimed. Everything was got in readiness, flags arranged, the local volunteers were ready to fire a volley, and a man was standing grasping the fire-bell ropes in

⁹⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 25 September 1900, p. 5; for photograph of this ceremony, see *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 October 1900, Supplement, p. 7.

⁹¹ See paper on his life.

⁹² Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 9 October 1900, p. 3.

⁹³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 July 1900, p. 31.

order to proclaim the glad tidings throughout the borough. For the space of an hour great excitement prevailed, and the flagstaff at the Post Office was eagerly watched by numbers of visitors and townsfolk in order that they might get the first glimpse of the Union Jack as it ascended. The children, at the very thought of peace – or the fact of their being liberated from school – armed themselves with all sorts of noise-producing instruments, whistles, cow bells, and tin cans, and paraded the street, making a noise which beggars description. The townsfolk began to throng the main street, but after waiting for several hours, and no news being received, began to disperse, thinking after all there was some mistake. In the meantime, the children had been pacified by a supply of sweets, and they also departed homewards towards dusk.⁹⁴

When peace was finally announced, the children had another chance to use their ‘musical’ instruments:

The announcement of the declaration of peace had been eagerly awaited by the people of Te Aroha and was received with every demonstration of joy. All the bells in the borough were set ringing. A squad of the Piako Mounted Rifles turned out and fired numerous volleys. Then they cheered the King, and, on the call of Canon MacMurray, our brave lads at the front and our gallant foes who have surrendered. The Te Aroha Brass Band paraded Whitaker-street, playing patriotic and national airs. The school committee granted a holiday to the children, who organized a band, in which was to be seen and heard every instrument of noise, from a cowbell to a kerosene tin. Houses, shops, and public buildings displayed every stitch of available bunting.

The mayor had called a public meeting to discuss arrangements to celebrate both peace and the coronation. ‘Guns are still banging and bells ringing at intervals’.⁹⁵ Shortly afterwards, a veterans’ association was formed by local ex-servicemen.⁹⁶ A patriotic fund established in the early stages of the war had raised ‘something over £50’, which would go towards the relief of these troopers.⁹⁷ When the governor spoke during his visit in May 1903, he

referred to the growth of the imperialistic spirit linking the colonies to the Motherland, and in this matter warmly congratulated Te Aroha with its surrounding districts, which held the enviable record of having, in proportion to the numbers available, sent more men to South Africa than any other place in the colony.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 28 May 1902, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 June 1902, p. 38.

⁹⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 June 1902, p. 30.

⁹⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 February 1903, p. 33.

⁹⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 May 1903, p. 38.

In late March 1902 two brothers living in Te Aroha showed great enthusiasm to enlist:

They presented themselves at Te Aroha with a request to be enrolled as members of the Piako Mounted Rifles, at the same time stating that a certain officer of the company recommended them. They were sworn in and duly entered in the books. A few days after the officer mentioned denied the reputed recommendation; it was then seen the would-be contingenters had worked a point for themselves. However, on the day appointed for selecting the Tenth the brothers were informed that the selection would not take place till some days later. During the day they learned that the Tenth were being chosen at Thames. The couple, seeing all outward trains had departed, decided to walk the 30 odd-miles and arrived in time to be included among the accepted men.⁹⁹

DISAGREEMENTS OVER THE BOER WAR

That not everyone supported the war was indicated by a *Te Aroha News* editorial in February 1900 calling for a good turnout for a patriotic concert. After noting that the money collected would aid all those affected by the war, it added that 'whatever opinions we may have on the necessity for the war may be laid aside for the present'.¹⁰⁰ Two days previously, it had published a letter from 'A True Britisher':

A Boer, and a very decided one, living not fifty miles away from our township, comes in regularly to dispose of his produce, which is purchased by many of the British residents in our midst, presumably not being aware what class of man they are dealing with. I write these few lines hoping those who have been helping to fill his purse will in future leave him severely alone, and let him return to his countrymen, whom he makes no secret of stating are fighting against us for what they are justly entitled to.¹⁰¹

'Free-speech' viewed this letter as

evidence of the mean, narrow-minded, and arbitrary spirit, to which a thoughtless and unreasonable man, saturated with the present wave of Anglo mania, will descend. One would think we were living in the dominions of the Sultan, where independence of thought and speech must forthwith be gagged, instead of in a country where every man has an absolute and perfect right to express his opinions.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 7 April 1902, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 10 February 1900, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Letter from 'A True Britisher', *Te Aroha News*, 8 February 1900, p. 3.

¹⁰² Letter from 'Free-speech', *Te Aroha News*, 10 February 1900, p. 2.

E.M. wrote that, on reading ‘A True Britisher’s’ letter, he ‘experienced an acute attack of “that tired feeling” which is supposed to assail one most frequently in the early morning when vitality is low’. These feelings should not be too frequently indulged in.

“A True Britisher” should keep an extra powerful “tired feeling” in stock, and at the first symptom of Boer exterminating mania should inhale the “feeling” until he is thoroughly under its influence. Thus his malignant pen would be stayed, his patriotism remain unquestioned, and his self-interest be still unknown. “A True Britisher” wishes us to understand that he is not a Boer. Doubtless the Boers would indignantly repudiate all relationship with him. Still, after studying his boorish epistle, I fear that “a True Britisher” seeks to disown his ancestry. For the mean, intolerant spirit is so plainly in evidence that it at once proclaims “A True Britisher” to be of undoubted kin to the – boars. “A True Britisher” is evidently one of a new race of Britishers whose existence has hitherto been undreamed of, and as their number cannot be exceedingly numerous, I would suggest that they be at once captured and exchanged for a big yellow dog, and that the animal be set up for Sergeant [James] Maingay [a member of the Te Aroha Rifles and a local printer]¹⁰³ to shoot at.¹⁰⁴

In the same edition, ‘Quiz’, a columnist, also responded to ‘A True Britisher’. ‘If the sentiments expressed in that letter are truly British, let all who can, thank God that they are not Britons’. He asked whether the sentiments were ‘truly British? Is the term British synonymous with all that is mean and sordid? Does it include everything that a generous man loathes?’ The British believed in fair play, loved justice, and saw freedom of speech as ‘an inalienable right’. He asked whether a true Briton was ‘actuated by motives that would fill with abhorrence the soul of a third-rate Hottentot’, or was he ‘brave and true, unmoved by defeat, temperate in the hour of victory, generous in his dealings even with an enemy?’ ‘True Britisher’s’ ‘precious letter’ had suggested ‘that the people of Te Aroha should boycott a man because he is a Boer! Is it a crime to be born a Boer? And is it not natural that a Boer should sympathise with his own people?’, just as a Briton living in France would support his country in a conflict with the French. ‘Quiz’ believed it was ‘for the good of the greatest number that Great Britain should be paramount in South Africa’ and hoped for ‘the early and complete success of the British armies’. Yet it was

¹⁰³ See Te Aroha Rifle Volunteers, Nominal, Descriptive and Capitation Roll and Musketry Returns for the above Corps for the 14 months ending Feby 28th 1895, Army Department, ARM 41, 1911/66q, ANZ-A; *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1899*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from E.M., *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1900, p. 2.

a piece of fatuous folly to assume that the enemy has no case, and to treat him as an abandoned scoundrel. The Boer, from his point of view, can make out a good case – a case that nine out of ten men, if put in his place, would think good enough to defend to the last extremity. We consider that our case is still better, and we intend to thrash him. But for our credit's sake, let us administer the thrashing with dignity and magnanimity.

There can be no doubt that the proposal to boycott a Boer, because he is a Boer, will meet with scant favour in Te Aroha. The natural good feeling and good sense of the people will lead them to regard the idea with the contempt it deserves. Not only will they decline to boycott, but they – or at any rate the great majority of them – will freely admit that he is quite right to sympathise with his kinsfolk; in fact, that he ought to be kicked if he didn't.

So long as this Boer did not 'subvert the constitution of his adopted country' he should 'enjoy all the privileges of a British citizen'. But he should 'have the decency not to force his views upon an unwilling listener, nor to speak intemperately' when debating the war with Britishers.¹⁰⁵ 'Lyddite' responded:

Of course, any true Britisher believes in fair play, and this is one thing denied the British in the present struggle at the Cape. Before the war started Uitlanders [British settlers] were treated and ignored in boerdom like so many slaves, but it was impossible for this state of things to last. Now the struggle is raging, our enemies fail even to recognise the rules of war, even a half-breed Zulu has been known to recognise the flag of truce. Enough, I will just have my say over this proposed boycott of the Boer (or at least he is supposed to be) in our midst. He has a very nasty way of speaking of the Britons and parades his language in unmistakable terms before those who will listen to him. It is my opinion he will end up getting ducked in the Waihou or boiled down in No. 2 [bathhouse]. On one occasion he was asked to support the Patriotic Fund, and replied, saying, he was assisting the other side. I heard the matter of boycott put very tersely the other day. I was asked: "Is it right for this man to come into Te Aroha, receive cash from a certain store for his wares – the owner of which store has a son fighting in the Transvaal – to send the money to the Cape to carry on the war against her son."¹⁰⁶

George Lovegrove, a former painter who claimed to be a descendant of the Earl of Derwentwater and a daughter of Charles II,¹⁰⁷ did not believe that a Boer was living in the district. 'We have, I believe, a Swede and a Dane. One of them might be a pro-Boer, but not a Boer, or even a Dutchman'; if there had been a Boer, Lovegrove would have shown him 'that justice is on the British side'.¹⁰⁸ Two days later, Charles Brunn, a

¹⁰⁵ 'Quiz', 'Olla Podrida', *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1900, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from 'Lyddite', *Te Aroha News*, 15 February 1900, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Waikato Times*, 17 October 1882, p. 2, 19 October 1882, p. 2, 18 November 1882, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from George Lovegrove, Sen., *Te Aroha News*, 15 February 1900, p. 2.

Te Aroha West farmer and a member of the school committee there,¹⁰⁹ responded to ‘Lyddite’ because he believed that he was the Boer being referred to and that the letter was a ‘mean and unworthy attempt to produce enmity between’ the shopkeeper, Mrs Harriet McLean,¹¹⁰ wife of William,¹¹¹ and himself. Mrs McLean feared this controversy might injure her shop and that some ‘of the unthinking or unthoughtful of the community’ might even boycott her.

Now, I should be exceedingly sorry to have been the cause of anything of the kind, or to have been the means, though unwittingly, of injuring in any way a hardworking respectable woman, who is doing her utmost to earn an honest living and to bring up her large family in a respectable manner, and for her’s and her children’s sake, I hope such a thing will not be thought of. I may say that in all our business transactions since the earliest days of Te Aroha till now, I have found Mrs McLean ... as honest, straightforward and honourable a woman as I have ever had any business dealings with. We have always been the best of friends, each fully trusting to and relying on the other’s honesty and fairness in our transactions and I have no fear but that we shall remain so. As for Mrs McLean’s son, who, to use Lyddite’s words, is now fighting in the Transvaal, “Charlie” and myself were always excellent friends and are so now, and I sincerely trust he may be permitted to return to New Zealand safe and well.

Brunn intended to write further ‘regarding myself’, being content for the moment ‘with having defined my position in my previous letter over the signature of “Free Speech” ’.¹¹² His subsequent letter explained that he was not a Boer and had never lived in South Africa. ‘Born in a British colony I went with my parents when quite young to reside in Denmark’, and as he had lived there for 20 years, he usually claimed Denmark as his native land. Having spent years roaming through Australia, Canada, the USA, England, France, and Denmark, he claimed: ‘to be a cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world, looking upon all men, of all nations, as my kin’. Never before had there been any attempt ‘to throttle speech’, giving as an example his living in Denmark during the Crimean and Danish German wars when all foreigners were permitted to express their views freely. If ‘A True Britisher’ and ‘Lyddite’ were typical of New Zealand he would leave, but ‘happily’ true New Zealanders were ‘of a very different stamp, ready to do unto others as they would be done by’. As for his being charged with subscribing to a fund for sick and wounded Boers, ‘what a terrible indictment. I would ask: Is

¹⁰⁹ See *Waikato Electoral Roll, 1893*, p. 5; *Auckland Star*, 29 April 1895, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 11 May 1900, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ See Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 18 June 1887, p. 2, 2 April 1898, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 8 December 1888, p. 2.

¹¹¹ See paper on the Piako County tramway at Waiorongomai.

¹¹² Letter from Charles Brunn, *Te Aroha News*, 17 February 1900, p. 2.

subscribing for a charitable object a crime? What right has any man to presume to dictate to another, in what manner he is to dispose of his gifts of charity?’ As it had struck him ‘that in all probability but comparatively few would be found to subscribe’ to the appeal for the Boers, ‘I resolved to have the privilege of being one of the few and sent a subscription of 10s’. He thanked those who had written in support of him, ‘also those who by their hearty handshake and spontaneous words of approval, have signified their appreciation of my endeavour to uphold free speech’.¹¹³ This letter ended the controversy, at least in the press. One month later, perhaps as a comment on it, a *Te Aroha News* editorial approvingly quoted the view of an Adelaide newspaper on pro-Boers: ‘The Empire’s politics may not always right, but being into a war there is no room in the Empire for disloyalists’, who should leave it.¹¹⁴ And in 1902, the *Sydney Bulletin* heard of what residents thought of people labelled as pro-Boers: ‘Diminutive Te Aroha’ had ‘burned Campbell-Bannerman [a prominent English Liberal politician] in effigy with riotous enthusiasm lately, owing to his anti-war opinions’.¹¹⁵ (This dramatic event was not recorded in New Zealand newspapers: did it really happen?)

THE GREAT WAR

Immediately after the outbreak of war in 1914 the *Te Aroha News* reported residents becoming hyper-patriotic.

Anything German is getting a very bad run in Te Aroha at present. Last week Messrs Hedge and Smith stopped the manufacture of German Sausage and a better article was substituted, manufactured to the same shape and highly coloured called “British Sausage.” It is certainly pleasing to see such evidences of loyalty in Te Aroha.¹¹⁶

Their fervour amused a Paeroa newspaper:

Te Aroha is a great place for wild rumours. Last Sunday word was received in that quiet little township, just when people were going home from church, that the German navy had been practically destroyed. Five hundred Te Aroha Loyalists joyfully sang “God Save the King,” but, alas, when they came down town next morning they discovered that the news was just a little premature – the German fleet was still in existence.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Letter from Charles Brunn, *Te Aroha News*, 20 February 1900, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 24 March 1900, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ *Bulletin* (Sydney), n.d., reprinted in *Observer*, 15 March 1902, p. 17.

¹¹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 10 August 1914, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 12 August 1914, p. 2.

A Patriotic Fund was established, contributors having their names, and the amounts of money given, published.¹¹⁸

Very shortly after the start of hostilities, a Te Aroha contingent left for Europe.¹¹⁹ Continual efforts were made to raise money for the war effort. As an example of the methods adopted, at the end of August 1914 fancy-dress football and hockey matches were held, a procession was 'headed by the Te Aroha Brass Band playing patriotic airs', and a collection was made for the Patriotic Fund.¹²⁰ By early 1915, there were four local recruiting officers.¹²¹ Those who heeded the call to arms were given a public farewell, as when one was farewelled at a 'patriotic social' at Waiorongomai in late 1916. 'Proceeds of this and other socials would be devoted to obtain presents for all the Waiorongomai boys on active service'. As a spokesman for the local committee expressed it, 'they could not let it be said that Waiorongomai folk did not appreciate the action of their district's boys in fighting for the Empire'.¹²² Volunteers marched through the streets on their way to the railway station.¹²³

Soldiers returning from the war were suitably welcomed. For instance, in late 1915 the 'Welcome-Home Social' at Waiorongomai in honour of Private Jeremiah Harold McSweeney,¹²⁴ son of John, who had assisted Hone Werahiko¹²⁵ after gold was found,¹²⁶ was declared to be 'a pronounced success. Quite fifty 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'. As well as speeches, including ones by the mayor of Te Aroha and a councillor, welcoming him home and urging people to enlist and to support the war effort financially, there were musical items, dancing, and a collection.¹²⁷

THE DREYFUS CASE

¹¹⁸ For example, *Te Aroha News*, 14 August 1914, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 August 1914, p. 2.

¹²⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 September 1914, p. 19.

¹²¹ *Te Aroha News*, 28 May 1915, p. 2.

¹²² Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 17 November 1916, p. 2.

¹²³ For instance, *Te Aroha News*, 18 August 1915, p. 3.

¹²⁴ Originally Jeremiah Harold: see Birth Certificate of Jeremiah Harold McSweeney, 24 November 1888, 1888/17449; Marriage Certificate of Harold Jeremiah McSweeney, 17 June 1916, 1916/5655, BDM.

¹²⁵ See paper on his life.

¹²⁶ See paper on John McSweeney.

¹²⁷ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1915, p. 3.

Condemnation of the sentencing of Alfred Dreyfus to ten years' imprisonment for alleged espionage on behalf of Germany was common in New Zealand,¹²⁸ as elsewhere. Te Aroha's condemnation was widely reported (the local newspaper's reports were destroyed in a 1912 fire).¹²⁹ A Thames newspaper reported that on the evening of 17 September 1899, when there were world-wide protests at Dreyfus again being found guilty at a retrial, the French flag was burned at Te Aroha 'in the presence of the whole of the residents. The proceedings began by the singing of "God Save the Queen," after which the leaders soaked the tricolor in kerosene and set it ablaze. Cries and groans for France were lustily given'.¹³⁰ The policeman's son, Frederick William Wild, later Te Aroha's town clerk, many years later recalled 'a lot of anti-French feeling' on account both of this case and because France was still transporting convicts to New Caledonia. He remembered 'hearing cheering, and jeering' in the middle of town.

"Then there were yells of 'To Hell with France!', with a lot of rich flavouring from the mob as they endorsed it.

"I rushed down the road!" he said. "It was just getting dark, and I met the procession headed by a well-known character, holding aloft a French flag and telling the world what he was going to do with it.

At the corner, to a tremendous outburst of boos, he then struck a match and applied it to the flag before the mob, who were actually in complete favour, for they cheered as it burnt."¹³¹

Peter Gilchrist, a local solicitor, recalled the burning causing 'a great row'. When the Governor visited in 1903, he asked the mayor 'who had burnt the flag and said it had been the cause of a great number of cable messages between France and Britain. Lord Ranfurly told him that the next time the people of Te Aroha wanted to burn a flag to burn some other flag – the British if they pleased'.¹³²

At the time, a Paeroa newspaper was amused:

Why Dreyfus Was Released

Notwithstanding the Pope's encyclical letter, the clamour of a monster meeting in Hyde Park, and the threatened boycott of the Paris Exhibition, Dreyfus was still imprisoned. The German Emperor sent a calm yet dignified remonstrance, and the press of the whole civilized world proclaimed the injustice of the sentence, yet the unfortunate victim still suffered martyrdom. It remained for Te Aroha to put the climax on the job by burning the French flag. As soon as the news reached Paris a Council

¹²⁸ For example, editorial, *Waikato Argus*, 12 July 1899, p. 2.

¹²⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 8 May 1939, p. 3.

¹³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 September 1899, p. 4.

¹³¹ Charles Kingsley-Smith, 'Remembering the Past', *Te Aroha News*, 23 September 1980, p. 2.

¹³² Recollections of Peter Gilchrist, *Te Aroha News*, 5 December 1930, p. 5.

was held, and the immediate release of the prisoner ordered. By way of reprisal the French nation intends boycotting the Te Aroha Sanatorium.¹³³

On the same day, the *Observer* declared that ‘the Te Arohans’ had ‘gone one better than the Gaiety Company’, which had only torn ‘their passion and the French flag to tatters’.¹³⁴ It disapproved of the action:

The recent flag-burning business at Te Aroha as a sign of disapprobation of the sentence passed upon Dreyfus appears to be a piece of hysterical idiocy more worthy of a theatrical company than to be the act of presumably sane people. Who first proposed the idea we are unable to say, but it is just probable that the local publican had a hand in it, as hysteria of that kind is usually conducive to drink. Now, if the meeting had passed a set of resolutions condoling with Madame Dreyfus and collected enough money from the crowd to post them to France, there might have been some sense in it. But the contrast between the insignificance of Te Aroha and the magnitude of the Dreyfus case renders the incident more amusing than anything else. It is as if three or four opium-excited Celestials in some remote fastness of Mongolia made lamp-wicks on the Union Jack and is of about as much importance to the public generally.¹³⁵

Its next edition mocked Te Aroha’s residents:

BY TELEGRAPH. – SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER. – COPYRIGHT.
Paris, 25th Sept, 1899 – The announcement in the London papers of the burning of the French flag at Te Aroha has caused a tremendous sensation. President Loubet wept like a Frenchman and embraced a statue of Liberty in the Garden of the Tuilleries, exclaiming vehemently, “Oh, Liberty, Liberty, how many crimes are committed in thy name!” He had never heard of Te Aroha before, and had not the slightest idea where it was situated, but he was none the less affected by the incident.

LATER.

Marchand has located Te Aroha, which at first he erroneously supposed to be in Central Africa.¹³⁶

President Loubet has boycotted Te Aroha. Any French Naval officer calling at a New Zealand port who extends his patronage to Te Aroha will be mercilessly Dreyfussed. Waiwera, Rotorua, Whakarewarewa or Okoroire¹³⁷ are not prohibited places within the meaning of the President.

LATEST.

¹³³ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 23 September 1899, p. 2.

¹³⁴ *Observer*, 23 September 1899, p. 3.

¹³⁵ *Observer*, 23 September 1899, p. 5.

¹³⁶ In 1898 Captain Jean-Baptiste Marchand led a French expedition to occupy the fort at Fashoda, in the Nile Valley, before being ordered to remove his garrison at the insistence of the British: D.W. Brogan, *The Development of Modern France (1870-1939)* (London, 1940), pp. 322-325.

¹³⁷ All these places, like Te Aroha, had hot pools.

President Loubet's mind has undergone a complete change.

He says that a sense of justice, amounting almost to a British love of fair play, compels him at the last moment to accept the judgments and strictures of contemporary states. France must bow beneath the rod and rise regenerate.¹³⁸

An *Observer* cartoon showed preparations for burning the French flag outside a 'gum country pub' gave an Irish publican's justification for this action:

There's a poor divil called Drayfuss been chained to a niland in the Paycific by them hounds av Frinchmen, for doin' nothin', and now they've brought him home to France to thry him, and found him guilty bekase he's innercent, and so all throe blooded Inglishmin like meself are burnin' the Frinch flag to wipe out their counthry.¹³⁹

(As no reports blamed the Irish for the Te Aroha excitements, this was another case of stereotyping by the cartoonist.) Two months later, in December, the *Observer* claimed that Dreyfus refused to come to New Zealand because it was 'the capital of Te Aroha' and he refused to go where the French flag was burned.¹⁴⁰ One month later, it recalled this incident in its comment that it was 'now up to Te Aroha to burn the Boer flag, as that township up to the present time doesn't seem to have done very much in the way of subscriptions to the Patriotic Fund'.¹⁴¹ Two weeks later, it returned to the attack:

Te Aroha has always had the reputation of being a sort of North Island Sleepy Hollow and runs Nelson pretty close for the palm of being the home of "that tired feeling." Occasionally, however its inhabitants wake up, and by way of advertising the township, get up some sort of a sensation as in the case of the burning of the French flag.¹⁴²

News of the flag burning reached the *Sydney Bulletin*, which reportedly commented that 'Te Aroha was probably the most bumptious little town in the Empire'.¹⁴³ In early 1902 it referred to 'diminutive Te Aroha, an almost imperceptible fly speck on the map of Northern M.L.' [Maoriland], having burned an effigy of a leading British opponent of the Boer War. 'The same town, which is wonderfully indignant for its size, violently threatened France over the Dreyfus case'.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ *Observer*, 30 September 1899, p. 5.

¹³⁹ 'Blo' [William Blomfield], 'Giving France a Nasty Knock', *Observer*, 30 September 1899, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ 'They Say', *Observer*, 23 December 1899, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ *Observer*, 20 January 1900, p. 3.

¹⁴² *Observer*, 3 February 1900, p. 15.

¹⁴³ Charles Kingsley-Smith, 'Remembering the Past', *Te Aroha News*, 23 September 1980, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Bulletin* (Sydney), n.d., reprinted in *Observer*, 15 March 1902, p. 17.

IRELAND

At the beginning of 1889, a lecturer presented 'An Evening with Robert Emmett, the Irish Patriot and Martyr of 1803' at both Te Aroha and Waiorongomai, and also sang Irish ballads.¹⁴⁵ In November, Sir Thomas Esmonde, Member of Parliament for South Dublin and a Home Rule advocate, addressed a large audience at Te Aroha, including some prominent locals.¹⁴⁶ At its conclusion, when a committee of three was established to collect subscriptions to support evicted Irish tenants, 'a number of the audience rose and left the Hall'.¹⁴⁷ Their departure was not because of stinginess, as a Te Aroha correspondent noted.

Unanimity on the subject is not to be expected, as there are some eminent, but yet unfledged, politicians both at Waiorongomai and in this quiet little place, who, were they in the Old Country, would unquestionably, on this subject alone, be entitled to Conservative seats in the House of Commons, whilst on the other hand a few might probably be accommodated in another place [prison] for six months for the expression of their views on this burning question.¹⁴⁸

'Many' people asked why Esmonde had not permitted questions being asked.¹⁴⁹ One year later, 'Elector' claimed that two-thirds of the electors in Te Aroha were 'Home Rulers, and Home Rulers of an advanced type as compared with the Old Country'; he supported a land tax rather than giving Ireland freedom.¹⁵⁰

In 1911, because there were more Irish residents in the district than in many other parts of New Zealand, a meeting raised £50 to meet the cost of a visit from Home Rule delegates, a larger amount than Hamilton had provided at first.¹⁵¹ Although £80 in all was raised, the attendance was disappointing.¹⁵²

LIBERALS

¹⁴⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 19 January 1889, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1889, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1889, p. 7.

¹⁴⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent. *Waikato Times*, 9 November 1889, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 20 November 1889, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from 'Elector', *Thames Star*, 21 November 1890, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ *Te Aroha News*, 25 May 1911, p. 3.

¹⁵² *Te Aroha News*, 8 June 1911, p. 2.

Liberalism, in both a general and a party sense, was common in this district. The *Te Aroha News*, in its inaugural editorial, proclaimed its support for ‘small l’ liberalism. ‘Large questions will crop up; important interests will have to be considered and discussed, our position politically and socially advanced and assertive’.¹⁵³ Notable supporters of the Liberal Party were Thomas Gavin, James Mills, and Clement Augustus Cornes, as described in chapters on their lives. Another prominent Liberal was Francis Pavitt. A civil engineer,¹⁵⁴ he was also a Mason, an Anglican, a musician, a Volunteer officer, and active in sport and the debating society.¹⁵⁵ Another prominent Liberal, John Williams, was a prosperous shopkeeper.¹⁵⁶ In the early twentieth century, he wrote letters praising the Liberal Party.¹⁵⁷ He wrote on other themes as well, in particular supporting compulsory military training and wanting protection against foreign goods.¹⁵⁸ In the 1860s, when on the West Coast diggings, he had become a friend of Richard Seddon.¹⁵⁹ According to his obituary Seddon ‘never visited Te Aroha without looking up his former comrade’.¹⁶⁰ As noted, some of these men attempted to encourage political debate on their views by forming clubs for working-men (there was no indication of women being invited to participate).

Liberal policies (both large and small ‘l’) were popular with most electors in the late nineteenth century. As examples, in 1885 Sir George Grey was applauded for his

¹⁵³ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 9 June 1883, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 825; *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 July 1908, pp. 26, 36.

¹⁵⁵ For example, *Te Aroha Rifles*, Parade Register 1892-1902, Register No. 1, MS 2000/69, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum; *Te Aroha News*, 17 May 1884, p. 7, 15 August 1885, p. 2, 28 January 1895, p. 2, 16 October 1895, p. 2, 27 November 1895, p. 2, 11 January 1900, p. 2, 22 July 1905, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 27 February 1883, p. 2, 25 March 1884, p. 2, 5 February 1887, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 14 June 1892, pp. 2, 3, 12 May 1897, p. 2, 2 December 1897, p. 3 *Waikato Argus*, 29 October 1898, p. 2; *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 July 1892, p. 27, 17 July 1902, p. 34; ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 21 November 1891, p. 17.

¹⁵⁶ See Testamentary Register 1917-1918, folio 342, BBCB 4208/11, ANZ-A; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 831-832; *Thames Star*, 4 November 1901, p. 4; *Te Aroha News*, 13 June 1888, p. 2, 17 October 1917, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ For example, letters from John Williams, *Te Aroha News*, 10 November 1908, p. 3, 6 April 1909, p. 3, 16 May 1911, p. 3, 18 November 1914, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ For example, letters from John Williams, *Te Aroha News*, 19 October 1909, p. 3, 7 October 1912, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1905, p. 2, 28 September 1905, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 17 October 1917, p. 2.

efforts to defeat land sharks.¹⁶¹ In June 1892, Seddon held a public meeting at Te Aroha which strongly supported the government.¹⁶² A large meeting held in March 1893 and addressed by Liberal candidate William Fraser unanimously voted to support him in the coming election.¹⁶³ When this election was held late in the year, Alfred Jerome Cadman, the Liberal candidate for Waikato, did well at both Te Aroha and Waiorongomai.¹⁶⁴

Local Liberals were not slavish followers of their party. In November 1899, for instance, 17 Liberals, including the most prominent members, unanimously resolved to dissolve the local branch of the Liberal Federation League because the government had selected a candidate before they had chosen one.¹⁶⁵ That many local Liberals did not accept the party's selection was shown in 1902, when the official Liberal candidate received 214 votes at Te Aroha whereas an independent Liberal received 54; at Waiorongomai, the official candidate received nine votes but the independent received 29.¹⁶⁶

In 1906, a branch of the Liberal and Labour Federation was formed, with Gavin as its president.¹⁶⁷ The Labour part of this combination became increasingly prominent, especially by the 1930s. In 1933, for instance, Charles Findlay Allan,¹⁶⁸ secretary of the local Relief Workers' Union, spoke at a 'mass protest meeting' and received 'the best applause of the evening'. He described how the unemployed lost self-respect, their wives suffered from depression and their children sometimes depended on charity. After rejecting the Prime Minister's statement that it was not possible to starve in New Zealand, he 'said he would not introduce the political side of the question but he would welcome any change that would better help the country and get it out of the "mess it was in"'.¹⁶⁹ This was a hint to vote Labour, which the district later did; the mayor, Robert Coulter, was Labour MP for Waikato from 1935 to 1938 and for Raglan from 1943 until his death in 1945.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶¹ Malcolm Robertson (Secretary, Gordon Special Settlement Association) to Sir George Grey, 7 November 1885, Grey New Zealand Letters, vol. 27, p. 48, Auckland Public Library.

¹⁶² *Thames Advertiser*, 14 June 1892, p. 2.

¹⁶³ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 March 1893, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ *Observer*, 9 December 1893, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 November 1899, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 26 November 1902, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 February 1906, p. 16; *Te Aroha News*, 15 June 1907, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ See paper on prospectors and investors in the Te Aroha Mining District in the 1930s.

¹⁶⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 15 April 1933, p. 5.

¹⁷⁰ J.O. Wilson, *New Zealand Parliamentary Record 1840-1984* (Wellington, 1985), p. 191.

CONSERVATIVES

Some prominent locals supported the conservative side in politics. One was Richard Brenan, a bootmaker;¹⁷¹ in 1892 it was noted that ‘the boot shop is still a great meeting place for the Te Aroha politicians’.¹⁷² Fifteen years later, he convened a public meeting to form a branch of the New Zealand Political Reform League.¹⁷³ The election held in the following year gave its candidate, William Herries, a convincing victory in the district, where the only Liberal majority, of 21 votes to 18, was at Gordon; Herries won Te Aroha by 353 to 158 and Waiorongomai 33 to 28.¹⁷⁴ In 1911, he won 405 votes at Te Aroha to his opponent’s 177.¹⁷⁵ In later elections, Waiorongomai voted by small majorities for the Liberal candidate.¹⁷⁶

SEEKING PERSONAL BENEFITS

Some men with personal connections with politicians tried to use these for their own benefit. For example, George Robert Beeson, a carpenter and farmer,¹⁷⁷ was an active supporter of the Liberals, in 1893 being accused by a political opponent, John Squirrell,¹⁷⁸ of ‘using every effort to make every Gordon Settler vote one way’, which apart from him they did.¹⁷⁹ Three years previously, when required to pay arrears of rent on his Gordon farm, he asked: ‘Dear Cadman’, his local MP, to help him. ‘You know pretty well how I am situated I was obliged to leave home to look for employment’ and was currently working at Waihi to support his family of nine. Having spent over £40 on improving his farm, to lose it would be a ‘serious loss’, and he asked Cadman to get the Minister of Lands to stay the proceedings against him; if this were done, ‘you would

¹⁷¹ See *Te Aroha News*, 9 December 1934, p. 1, 13 September 1935, p. 4.

¹⁷² ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 13 August 1892, p. 19.

¹⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 28 May 1907, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 19 November 1908, p. 3, 21 November 1908, p. 2, 15 August 1911, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 9 December 1911, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 22 December 1919, p. 1, 9 December 1922, p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ See *Te Aroha News*, 27 May 1909, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ See paper on his life.

¹⁷⁹ John Squirrell to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, 1 December 1893, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

greatly oblige for old acquaintance sake'.¹⁸⁰ As the department could not stop legal moves to recover rent,¹⁸¹ Cadman did not act as requested.

Over 40 years later, James Donald Cumming, a prospector,¹⁸² and a founder of the Labour Party branch at Te Aroha,¹⁸³ had a similar outcome to a request. In 1937, he asked Paddy Webb, the Minister of Mines, to inspect the ground he and his partners were prospecting, arguing that if Webb visited, he would 'rise in the opinion of the local and surrounding district for a practical demonstration of your party's personal interest in matters directly influencing and having a direct bearing on our local and national progress.... We cannot accept a "No" to our request'.¹⁸⁴ Despite this insistence, Webb declined, partly because his department had advised him that Cumming's party did not have a legal title to the ground they were prospecting.¹⁸⁵

STANDING FOR PARLIAMENT

Twenty-four investors in Te Aroha mining claims stood for parliament, unsuccessfully, of whom nine (including two Maori) lived for a time in the district. Of the latter, the candidatures of Clement Augustus Cornes, George Devey, Adam Porter, Patrick Quinlan, Reha Aperahama, and Henry Dunbar Johnson are dealt with in the papers on their lives. Of the remainder, Henry Elmes Campbell was a solicitor who invested heavily in both mines and land after settling in Te Aroha in the early 1880s.¹⁸⁶ In 1876 he stood for the Thames electorate, but being relatively unknown he soon stood down in favour of Sir George Grey.¹⁸⁷ John Gibbons, a timber merchant,¹⁸⁸ also stood

¹⁸⁰ G.R. Beeson to A.J. Cadman, 12 January 1890, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/102a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸¹ Memorandum on G.R. Beeson to A.J. Cadman, 12 January 1890, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/102a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸² See paper on prospectors and investors in the Te Aroha Mining District in the 1930s.

¹⁸³ James Thorn (M.P. for Thames) to Minister of Lands, 17 October 1944, Lands and Survey Department, LS 1, 22/4673, ANZ-W.

¹⁸⁴ J.D. Cumming to P.C. Webb (Minister of Mines), 7 May 1937, Mines Department, MD 1, 10/9/50, ANZ-W.

¹⁸⁵ P.C. Webb to J.D. Cumming, 20 May 1937, Mines Department, MD 1, 10/9/50, ANZ-W.

¹⁸⁶ For his life at Te Aroha, see *Thames Advertiser*, 13 November 1880, p. 3, 15 January 1883, p. 2, 5 May 1883, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1883, p. 3, 25 August 1883, p. 3, 1 September 1883, p. 2, 24 November 1883, pp. 2, 3, 8 December 1883, p. 2, 27 December 1884, p. 2, 14 February 1885, p. 2, 6 February 1886, p. 7, 27 February 1886, p. 2.

¹⁸⁷ H.E. Campbell to John Sheehan (Minister of Justice), 26 June 1879, Justice Department, J 1, 80/5071, ANZ-W; *Thames Advertiser*, 30 December 1875, p. 3, 1 January 1876, p. 3, 4 January 1876, p. 2.

in that contest before withdrawing in favour of Sir Julius Vogel.¹⁸⁹ Hutana Karapuha stood in the 1914 election.¹⁹⁰ One Auckland candidate with a strong financial connection with the district was James McCosh Clark, a partner in the first Waiorongomai battery.¹⁹¹

Thirteen investors became members of parliament, of whom two lived near Te Aroha: William Archibald Murray on the outskirts of Morrinsville and William Grey Nicholls at Paeroa.¹⁹² The others were William Crowther, a coach proprietor and a mayor of Auckland;¹⁹³ Josiah Clifton Firth, of the Battery Company and numerous other enterprises;¹⁹⁴ William Fraser, Harry Kenrick's predecessor as warden;¹⁹⁵ Henry James Greenslade, a journalist and, for a time, a farmer;¹⁹⁶ Hugh Hart Lusk, a solicitor;¹⁹⁷ William McCullough, a Thames journalist who became an Auckland printer before being appointed to the Legislative Council by the Liberals;¹⁹⁸ Thomas Macffarlane, a lawyer who became the official assignee in bankruptcy in Auckland;¹⁹⁹

¹⁸⁸ For his life in general, see *Thames Star*, 5 September 1889, p. 2, 29 January 1900, p. 3; *Observer*, 13 December 1902, p. 4, 7 July 1906, p. 4; for his years in Te Aroha, see *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1883, p. 3, 12 January 1884, p. 2, 5 April 1884, p. 2, 19 April 1884, p. 2, 3 May 1884, p. 2, 4 October 1884, p. 2, 8 November 1884, pp. 2, 7, 29 November 1884, pp. 2, 7, 6 December 1884, p. 2, 13 December 1884, p. 7, 10 January 1885, p. 2, 24 January 1885, p. 2, 31 January 1885, p. 2, 28 February 1885, p. 2, 25 April 1885, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 June 1885, p. 3, 20 February 1886, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 29 November 1875, p. 2, 24 December 1875, p. 2, 30 December 1875, p. 3, 5 January 1876, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 27 May 1914, p. 2.

¹⁹¹ See paper on the Battery Company.

¹⁹² See papers on their lives.

¹⁹³ See *Observer*, 21 November 1891, p. 7, 24 March 1900, p. 14; *New Zealand Herald*, 16 March 1900, p. 5.

¹⁹⁴ See paper on this company.

¹⁹⁵ See *Observer*, 3 August 1901, p. 6; *Thames Star*, 17 September 1901, p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 784, 863, 1021-1022; *Observer*, 30 August 1902, p. 5, 25 November 1911, p. 12, 10 February 1912, p. 5.

¹⁹⁷ See *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 April 1878, p. 19, 7 April 1894, p. 30; *New Zealand Herald*, 29 May 1885, p. 3, 9 September 1926, p. 10; *Observer*, 31 March 1894, p. 3, 30 March 1895, p. 2, 23 February 1901, p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 96; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 22 October 1892, p. 3; *Observer*, 30 December 1899, p. 9, 1 August 1925, p. 4; *Thames Star*, 22 July 1925, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ See *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 June 1867, p. 21; *New Zealand Herald*, 11 May 1885, p. 5.

Edwin Mitchelson, a gum merchant who became a leading conservative politician;²⁰⁰ Edward George Britton Moss, another lawyer;²⁰¹ Joseph Newman, a merchant and advocate of prohibition;²⁰² and Frederick Alexander Whitaker, another lawyer and a land speculator.²⁰³

CONCLUSION

According to an Australian historian, referring to New South Wales miners in the 1850s, ‘of all workingmen, diggers were the least likely to take an interest in broad political issues. They were preoccupied with making a fortune’.²⁰⁴ Whilst this preoccupation existed in the Te Aroha district, there was certainly interest in national politics, especially its impact on the financial success of the mining industry, and local government was a focus for many conflicts, both personal and political. None of which was unexpected, and could be duplicated in other mining areas, in particular the preference for liberal policies.

Appendix

Figure 1: ‘Blo’ [William Blomfield], ‘Giving France a Nasty Knock’, Observer, 30 September 1899, p. 3.

Figure 2: ‘The Paeroa and Te Aroha Members of the New Zealand Contingent at the Te Aroha Railway Station’, Auckland Weekly News, 13 October 1899, Supplement, p. 3, AWNS 18991013-3-1, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries; used with permission.

²⁰⁰ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 1 (Wellington, 1897), pp. 81-82; *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 June 1883, Supplement, p. 3; *Observer*, 15 January 1909, p. 5, 8 April 1916, p. 16, 11 June 1921, p. 7; Janice C. Mogford, ‘Edwin Mitchelson’, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 2 (Wellington, 1993), p. 331.

²⁰¹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 846; *Observer*, 18 November 1905, p. 3, 2 December 1905, p. 3, 7 March 1908, p. 5, 14 March 1908, p. 5, 22 March 1913, p. 5, 18 February 1916, p. 4; *New Zealand Herald*, 11 March 1916, p. 9.

²⁰² See *New Zealand Herald*, 29 January 1892, p. 4; *Observer*, 9 January 1892, p. 7.

²⁰³ See *Waikato Times*, 23 December 1880, p. 2, 5 October 1886, p. 2, 11 June 1887, p. 2; *Observer*, 29 October 1881, p. 104; *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 January 1884, Supplement, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, editorial, 13 June 1884, p. 4, 17 June 1884, p. 3, 23 June 1887, p. 5; *Te Aroha News*, 18 June 1887, Supplement, p. 8.

²⁰⁴ John Hirst, *Freedom on the Fatal Shore: Australia’s first colony* (Melbourne, 2008), p. 289.



Giving France a Nasty Knock.

TI-TREE JACK: What's this, Paddy—a bonfire? It's not Guy Fawkes' Day yet!

PADDY O'FLYNN (proprietor of the 'Shamrock' gum country pub): Guy Fawkes? No, be jabers! You 'avent read none of the papers lately; there's a poor devil called Drayfuss been chained to a niland in the Paycific by them hounds av Frinchmen, fer doin' nothin', and now they've brought him home to France to thry him, and found him guilty bekase he's innocent, and so all thrue blooded Englishmin like meself are burnin' the Frinch flag to wipe out their country.

Figure 1: 'Blo' [William Blomfield], 'Giving France a Nasty Knock', *Observer*, 30 September 1899, p. 3.

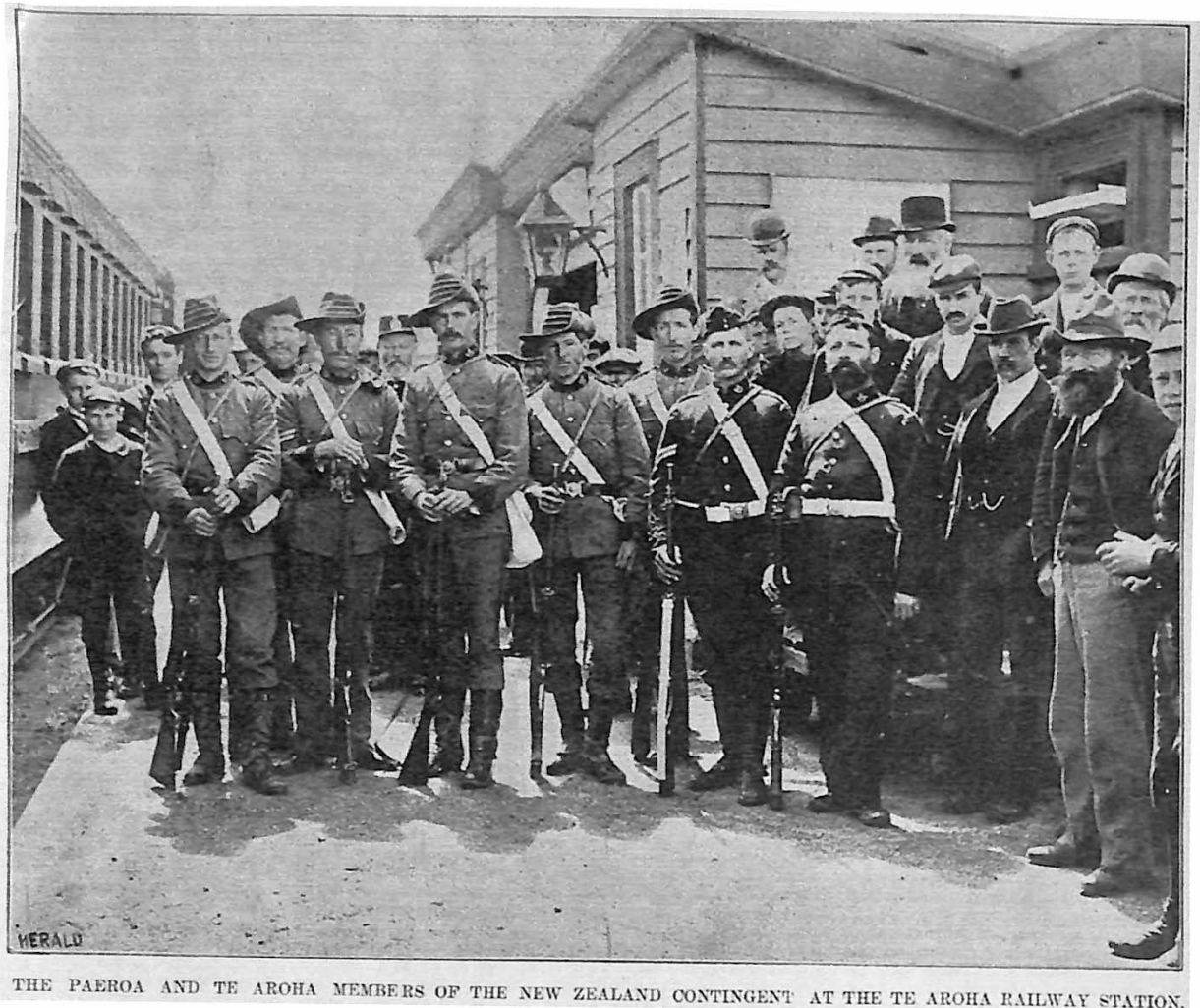


Figure 2: 'The Paeroa and Te Aroha Members of the New Zealand Contingent at the Te Aroha Railway Station', Auckland Weekly News, 13 October 1899, Supplement, p. 3, AWNS 18991013-3-1, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries; used with permission.