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Beneath the Golden Façade
A History of the Early Years on the Thames Goldfields

A thesis
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of the requirements for the degree
of
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Abstract

The story of Thames has been told and retold by many authors since the area was proclaimed a goldfield in 1867. These histories often glamourise the prosperity and wealth that gold brought to the town and its people. This thesis argues that this was not the case. In fact, the goldfields struggled for many years because the area lacked the necessary equipment to extract the gold. By 1870, machinery was steadily introduced and implemented, leading to short period of prosperity in the town, but it was temporary. Throughout the late 1860s and 1870s, locals experienced many financial hardships, which have been neglected by historians in favour of more positive portrayals of life on the goldfields. This thesis explores the economic situation of the town during this period, highlighting the experiences of those that failed to strike it rich on the goldfields. By examining their stories, it is clear that the romantic portrayal of life in early Thames was in the most part fiction compared to the harsh realities of those actually living on the goldfields.

Additionally, this thesis examines the role that the community played in improving the economic situation in Thames. The efforts of locals helped to develop and foster a diverse array of industries, which lessened the town's reliance on the success of the goldfields. These improvements came at a time when Thames was suffering considerable economic pressures, thanks in large part to the decline in gold production after 1871.

This thesis utilises a range of primary and secondary sources to investigate the economic situation of Thames during this early period. It makes thorough use of newspaper articles, which highlight what information was readily available to local and external observers pertaining to the condition of the town. Government reports are used to show the role that officials played in the development of Thames and what actions they took to improve the local economy. This thesis also examines personal accounts from residents, which illustrate the harsh realities of life on the goldfields.

Preface and Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Nēpia Mahuika for his help throughout the course of this study. Nēpia's insight and knowledge has helped me progress as both an historian and a writer. I sincerely thank him for reading the numerous drafts that were submitted throughout this process.

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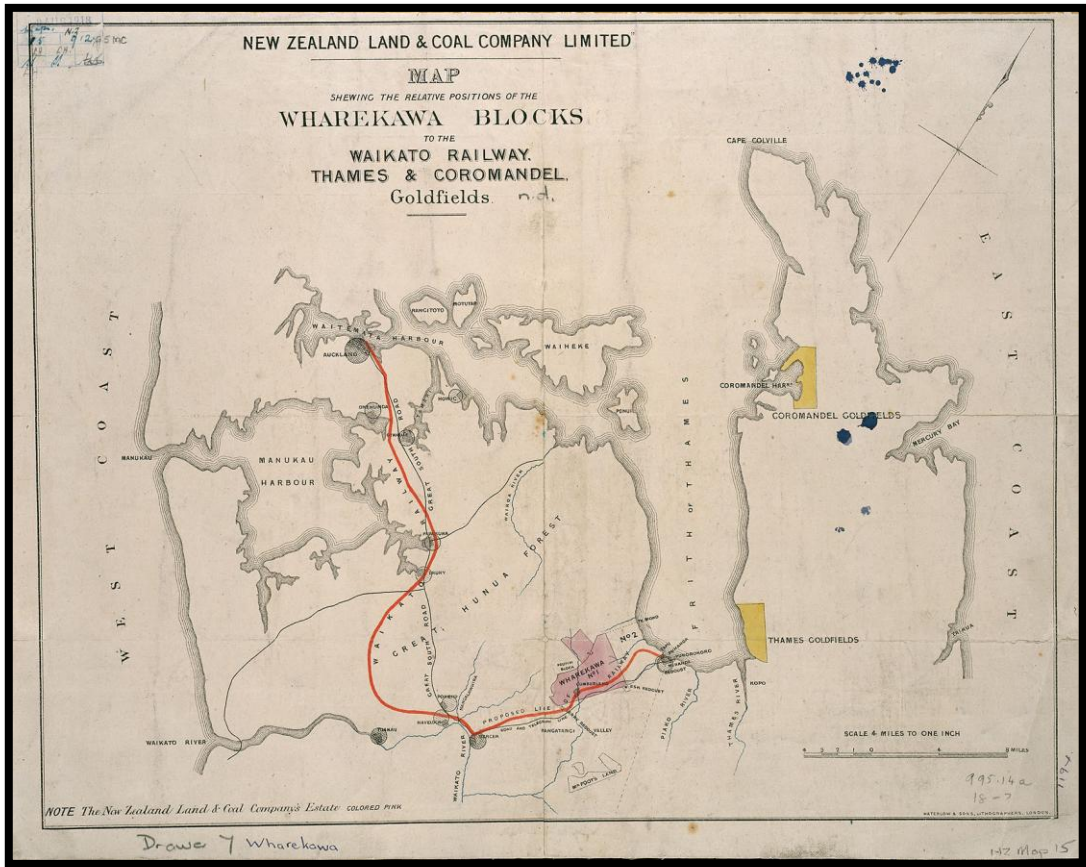


Figure 1: Auckland Railway Map, showing the position of the Thames Goldfields in relation to Auckland.¹

¹ 'Map Showing the Relative Positions of the Wharekawa Blocks to the Waikato Railway. Thames & Coromandel Goldfields', Sir George Grey Special Collections, NZ Map 15, Auckland Libraries.

An Introduction to the Histories of Thames

I was brought up in the Thames area, raised with memories and histories relevant to our family stretching back to their arrival in the ‘gold rush’ era.² The golden years, and particularly their celebratory refrains, are well rehearsed and maintained in the memory of the Thames township. Whether it is the numerous signposts indicating historical landmarks or the buildings that have survived, the remnants of the town’s celebratory history are still showcased today. But as a local, and more recently as a student of history, these romantic narratives of the town’s establishment and identity has led me to reconsider the boom and ‘period of prosperity’ that has dominated the landscape of historical writing in the district.³ This thesis then is not simply a reconsideration of the economic history of the area. Rather it has personal relevance in that it offers a more nuanced reflection of the initiatives and actions of local residents. It tells the stories of those who struggled through the supposed golden age in the late 1860s and 1870s. These are accounts of not only the Thames township, but those who lived and worked alongside my own family as settlers, entrepreneurs, and contributors of a history much more rounded than a simplistic narrow romanticism that misses the hardship and realities of those who fought through the town’s downturns. These stories may not be as enthralling to readers as the vivid tales of prosperity and success, but they are an integral part of the town’s historical realities and deserve to be remembered.

Located on the North Island of New Zealand, the early Thames region became a place of national and international importance in 1867, when the area was proclaimed a goldfield.⁴ Prior to this, Thames was only lightly populated. The discovery of gold

² Alistair Isdale notes that the gold rush at Thames began in 1867, with the population of the town peaking in 1868.

A. M. Isdale, *History of the River Thames* (Thames: A. M. Isdale, 1967), pp. 34-35.

³ R. A. Loughan, *The First Gold Discoveries in New Zealand* (Wellington: John Mackay, Government Printer, 1906), p. 96.

⁴ Fred W. Weston, *Thames Goldfields: A History from Pre-Proclamation Times to 1927* (Thames: Thames Star, 1927), p. 31.

led to rapid changes with people flocking to the area. Almost overnight, the settlement became a bustling commercial hub. The population reached its peak within a few years; most estimates place it at around 18,000 residents, with local inhabitants spread across a number of suburbs, such as Shortland, Grahamstown and Tararu (Appendix 5, p. 123).⁵ In this study, Thames is used to refer to the township as a whole, although the suburbs of Grahamstown and Shortland were classified as separate towns, until they merged in 1873.⁶ Histories of Thames have tended to emphasise the period from 1867 to the mid 1870s as a time of growth and prosperity. John Grainger, for instance, has accentuated the importance of Thames' history in regard to New Zealand as a whole, arguing that 'the dazzling wealth won at the Thames startled the world and did more to establish the name of this country overseas than any other one thing.'⁷ Narrow positivistic accounts like these have failed to represent the desperate financial state that many within the early settlement found themselves in. This thesis addresses this concern by looking beneath the golden façade of vast wealth and prosperity perpetuated in the histories of the Thames goldfields, and examines the precarious nature of the local economy. In doing so, it highlights the local initiatives that took place during the 1870s to improve the situation. Thus, it questions the assertion from historians that Thames experienced widespread prosperity during its "golden years."

The historical literature on Thames is dominated by accounts of extraordinary gold production. These narratives recount the initial success and optimism that the goldfields were believed to have generated in the region. This is evident in the many celebratory booklets that have been produced to commemorate the town's settlement. Fred Weston's *Thames Goldfields: A History from Pre-Proclamation Times to 1927*, for instance, was published to coincide with the town's Diamond Jubilee, and paid specific attention to gold mining and the impact it had on the township. In his summary of the initial years of the goldfields, he quotes extensively from the words

⁵ *Thames Gold Fields Miner's Guide: 1868* (Auckland: W. C. Wilson, 1868), p. 70.

⁶ Peter James Quinn, 'Grahamstown: Legacy of the Thames Goldfield', *New Zealand Geographic*, 81 (September-October 2006), p. 100.

⁷ John Grainger, *The Amazing Thames* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1951), p. 9.

of James Mackay, a Government agent in Thames during the formation of the town.⁸ In doing so, Weston showed that the “suffering and privations endured at this time were extreme.”⁹ Rather than elaborating on Mackay’s observations, he only briefly considered the negative aspects present in Thames during its early period. Weston’s account concentrated on documenting ‘the fascinating stories of the famous runs of gold found on the field’ and noting the ‘remarkably wide general productiveness of the Thames in the first years of its history.’¹⁰ Later in the book, Weston argues that progress was slowed due to the lack of crushing machinery. Here, his primary analysis focuses on tables that detailed the vast gold dividends that were accrued from the goldfields.¹¹ The sudden decline of gold production is noted in his work, with Weston contending that the peak of the goldfield had passed by 1873 when a number of gold companies were wound up.¹²

Although he recognised the declines and failures that occurred in Thames, Weston’s history nevertheless neglects the efforts made by residents to improve the town’s future economic position. Indeed, despite a consideration of the number of theatres and hotels present within the township during its early peak years, he failed to sufficiently account for those who were making their livings in non-mining related ventures.¹³ This issue was also ignored by William Kelly in, *Thames: The First 100 Years*, written to celebrate Thames’ centennial celebration in 1967.¹⁴ Instead of revising Weston’s work, the publication merely reproduced his earlier findings with the majority of the book focused on documenting the later period in Thames’ history. These histories with their focus on prosperity and celebration have generally failed to represent the financial hardship that many early residents experienced. Subsequently, narratives of the Thames township have neglected the nuanced realities that shaped

⁸ ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*, 1869, A-17.

⁹ Weston, p. 45.

¹⁰ Weston, p. 61.

¹¹ Weston, pp. 63-69.

¹² Weston, p. 71.

¹³ Weston, pp. 53-59.

¹⁴ William Kelly, *Thames: The First 100 Years* (Thames: Thames Star, 1967).

its identity. In contrast, this thesis, then, draws attention to the struggle that locals encountered while forging a life in Thames.

The celebratory tone in the literature on the history of Thames is regurgitated by local historian John Grainger in *The Amazing Thames*. Published in 1951, Grainger encouraged fellow residents to remember the town's 'terrific and amazing past.'¹⁵ He claimed that the discovery of gold at the Thames saved Auckland, which he argues was 'truly on the way to becoming a deserted village.'¹⁶ Grainger further contended that it was Thames, rather than Auckland that drove international interest in the colony during the 1870s-80s. Although he noted that this relationship changed in later decades, Grainger argued that Thames' place as 'New Zealand's most romantic goldmining town' was etched into the country's history.¹⁷ In his work, Grainger emphasised the immense allure of gold and its ability to attract over 20,000 people to the area in only a few short years.¹⁸ The swift development of the township and its wooden buildings was also accentuated in Grainger's work, where he noted the extensive efforts that were required to complete the job.¹⁹ While Weston contended that Thames experienced a decline after 1873, Grainger argued that by this stage the town had grown into one of New Zealand's most important cities.²⁰ Grainger asserted that 'if the number of licensed houses in a town can be taken as an indication of the prosperity of its inhabitants, the Thames at that time must have indeed been wealthy.'²¹ Thus, in conclusion, Grainger's history offered a plea to residents and the broader national community to 'take pride in the achievements of the past' and for the rest of New Zealand to remember the debt it owes the Thames 'for it brought in an era of prosperity at a time when the country sorely needed it.'²²

¹⁵ Grainger, p. 11.

¹⁶ Grainger, p. 9.

¹⁷ Grainger, p. 13.

¹⁸ Grainger, p. 14.

¹⁹ Grainger, p. 22.

²⁰ Grainger, p. 64.

²¹ Grainger, p. 64.

²² Grainger, p. 138.

Writing fifty years later, Peter James Quinn's *Grahamstown: Legacy of the Thames* (2006) continues this self congratulatory refrain.²³ Like Grainger and Weston, Quinn reasserts a narrative of influence, stressing that 'the Thames bonanza strikes of 1869-1871 startled the world.'²⁴ These strikes, Quinn claims, 'were broadcast to investors around the globe, putting the Thames goldfield prominently on the world map.'²⁵ He contends that the affluence enjoyed in the township was substantial and 'for a time in the 1870s, it must have seemed as if the golden days of the Thames would never end.'²⁶ Like previous scholars, Quinn chooses not to explore the decline of the goldfields, writing instead that it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the 'reefs of gold were largely exhausted.'²⁷ This view differs markedly from Fred Weston's history, which argues the goldfields experienced a significant decline in production during the 1870s.²⁸

In 1994, a more extensive study of the Thames area was undertaken by John and Zelma Williams entitled *Thames and the Coromandel Peninsula: 2000 years*.²⁹ The book examines the region over an extended period, with particular focus on the gold rush era. It surveys the early and unplanned development of the township, highlighting the 'small huts hastily erected to house the men caused the town to sprawl in a haphazard fashion.'³⁰ According to the authors, this was the result of a huge population increase, when an 'invasion of hopefuls who crammed the paddle steamers' to crossed the firth from Auckland.³¹ During those initial years the town continued to grow, and as John and Zelma Williams write 'the stories of the fortunes waiting to be found on the Thames fired the imagination and attracted hundreds more

²³ Quinn, pp. 86-101.

²⁴ Quinn, p. 94.

²⁵ Quinn, p. 99.

²⁶ Quinn, p. 99.

²⁷ Quinn, p. 99.

²⁸ Weston, p. 71.

²⁹ John and Zelma Williams, *Thames and the Coromandel Peninsula: 2000 years* (Thames: Williams Publishers, 1994).

³⁰ John and Zelma Williams, p. 70.

³¹ John and Zelma Williams, p. 71.

to the area.’ This period of growth, they suggest, put increasing strain on the region’s resources as the demand for ‘shelter, food and timber reached new heights.’³²

The fickleness of wealth in Thames, as John and Zelma Williams have argued, was evident in that some miners were experiencing success, while others in the town were forced to sell their possessions ‘for a pence in order to eat.’³³ Unlike the earlier histories, their account noted that the hardships experienced on the goldfields were worthy of documentation. The authors argued that it was individual ‘persistence and efforts over the years that [were important and] their descendants [should] remember them and enjoy, with personal pride and satisfaction, the wonderful heritage they left behind.’³⁴ This sentiment is weaved throughout the book. However, the authors tended to over-emphasise the role that gold played in the local economy and failed to expand on the other economic opportunities that were available to residents. Most notably, the book neglected the role that the public played in the improvement of Thames’ various industries during the 1870s.

Another substantial history of the Thames has also been produced by local historian, David Arbury in numerous booklets published from 1997 to 2004. Arbury analyses local newspaper articles and arranges his findings within themes that include ‘A Part from Mining’ and ‘The Thames Miner.’³⁵ Despite the scope of Arbury’s studies, the brevity of the pamphlets severely limits the scope of the history, leaving the work lacking a much needed wider contextualisation. Arbury’s writing summarises historical events in the Thames area, and merely encourages readers to investigate the topic further. Of the economic opportunities present in the region, Arbury highlights businesses like Koefoed’s Sauce Factory and the shipyard at Shortland.³⁶ Although these short accounts provide the reader with some understanding of the alternate local

³² John and Zelma Williams, p. 75.

³³ John and Zelma Williams, p. 95.

³⁴ John and Zelma Williams, p. 92.

³⁵ David Arbury, *Apart from Mining*, Thames Goldfield Information Series, No. 19 (Thames: Metallum Research, 2001).

David Arbury, *The Thames Miner*, Thames Goldfield Information Series, No. 10 (Thames: Metallum Research, 1999).

³⁶ David Arbury, *Apart from Mining*.

industries, they do not consider the development of these ventures within a wider economic climate. In this way, Arbury's work fails to address the combined efforts undertaken to improve the settlement's future.

Alistair Isdale, perhaps the preeminent historian on the Thames, has produced several publications on the history of the town and the goldfield. Of particular note is Isdale's *History of "The River Thames" N.Z.*, which was published in conjunction with the town's centenary celebration in 1967. Here he focuses on the role that mining played in the development of the township, but acknowledged that the initial years were tough as 'it was some time before much gold actually came out of Thames.'³⁷ Isdale notes the increased activity that the goldfields brought to the region because there was always 'lights, and action, and movement, in the new town that had arisen so quickly on the shores of the Firth of Thames.'³⁸ Similarly, he highlights the optimism that surrounded the settlement during those early years, contending that 'as the population of the Thames field grew, there were even some who said it would become the centre and Auckland a fishing village.'³⁹ Isdale documents the swift change that occurred in the way the goldfields were mined. He points out that early on, miners sought alluvial gold, but as this became unobtainable, machinery took on a much more prominent role.⁴⁰ Isdale contends that within a few years 'Thames was a place of smoke and noise, no longer a gold rush camp, but the home of a powerful industry.'⁴¹ Further on in the book, he argues that the decline in gold production after 1871 caused recessions 'but [nevertheless] the town recovered from that and succeeding setbacks and carried on.'⁴² Like most other writers, Isdale failed to go into detail about how the settlement overcame these economic pressures, but claimed that the town 'built between 1868 and 1871 was in general sufficient for needs, till the time of World War I.'⁴³

³⁷ Isdale, *The River Thames*, p. 31.

³⁸ Isdale, *The River Thames*, p. 38.

³⁹ Isdale, *The River Thames*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Isdale, *The River Thames*, p. 36.

⁴¹ Isdale, *The River Thames*, p. 36.

⁴² Isdale, *The River Thames*, p. 36.

⁴³ Isdale, *The River Thames*, p. 36.

Writing in another article entitled ‘The Kauaeranga River’, Isdale addressed other economic opportunities that were available to locals, notably in the timber industry.⁴⁴ He contends that the timber activity in the Kauaeranga Valley was prospering due in part to the large population in Thames, which required lumber for buildings.⁴⁵ Unlike other industries, timber appeared immune to gold fluctuations because after the gold mining decrease in 1872 ‘buildings in Thames carried on during that year on hopes of revival and its own momentum.’⁴⁶ The industry’s resilience from the flagging goldfields, he argues, was evident in the following years, during which the Kauaeranga Valley became a ‘hive of industry’ as public works, such as water races, were commissioned by the Provincial Government.⁴⁷ Isdale argues that timber flowed into the township in 1874, helping the local sawmills provide ample work for locals. Not only did these businesses use timber for the construction of buildings, but a ship building industry also developed.⁴⁸ The opportunity for alternate employment, he asserts, helped locals to survive the decline of the goldfields. Furthermore, Isdale writes that ‘many men who would otherwise have been hopelessly unemployed, and their families suffering hardship, were earning a reasonable and sometimes good living gum-digging.’⁴⁹ The success of the timber industry continued throughout the 1870s. In 1879, Isdale notes that local sawmills were receiving orders from New Zealand and Australia.⁵⁰ This article, with its focus on the activity in the Kauaeranga Valley, failed to explore the experiences of hardship that were occurring in the Thames township. Nevertheless, Isdale showed that the region was home to economic activity, other than gold mining.

On a slightly different track is *A Souvenir of Thames* published in 1911 by J.A. Shand, which investigated the problems that had afflicted the Thames goldfields,

⁴⁴ A. M. Isdale, *The Kauaeranga River*, Unpublished Material.

⁴⁵ The Kauaeranga Valley is located a short distance to the east of Thames.
Isdale, *The Kauaeranga River*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Isdale, *The Kauaeranga River*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Isdale, *The Kauaeranga River*, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Isdale, *The Kauaeranga River*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Isdale, *The Kauaeranga River*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Isdale, *The Kauaeranga River*, p. 10.

from their proclamation up to the early twentieth century.⁵¹ Shand undertook the study to draw attention to the declining state of the goldfields, with the hope that it would lead to a revival in activity.⁵² In order to inspire action, he highlighted the success Thames had enjoyed in its founding years, noting that ‘in the Caledonian mine the gold was so thick that it clogged the stampers in their boxes and the precious metal had to be chiselled out.’⁵³ Shand argued that this level of production was not sustainable and ‘after a period of unexampled prosperity the yields [from the goldfields] commenced to decrease.’⁵⁴ He claimed that the failure to maintain prosperity at Thames was due to the mismanagement of the goldfields, asserting that ‘blind prospecting’ in search of bonanza strikes led many claims to be abandoned before they had been thoroughly examined, contending that many of these mines could have produced steady earnings.⁵⁵ Although Shand suggested that Thames could still achieve prosperity from the goldfields in 1911, he advocated that more industries should be developed, such as fishing and fruit growing.⁵⁶ This thesis argues that this theme of diversifying the local economy had already occurred before the turn of the century, with initiatives undertaken in the 1870s. Shand’s positivistic account of the prosperity found at Thames during its early years continued the celebratory narratives reproduced in a number of histories of the area.⁵⁷

Much of the literature on the Thames explores the prosperity that was achieved in its early years. This theme of “success” is reflected in numerous biographies written about prominent local businessmen and their enterprises. One such individual, whose life has been well documented in histories of Thames is Robert Graham, an influential figure in the development of the township. Graham’s exploits are chronicled in *Robert Graham 1820-1885: An Auckland Pioneer*, published in 1940 by

⁵¹ J. A. Shand, *A Souvenir of Thames: The Thames District Past and Present* (Thames: Thames Star, 1911).

⁵² Shand, p. 2.

⁵³ Shand, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Shand, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Shand, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Shand, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Shand, p. 3.

George Cruickshank.⁵⁸ Cruickshank details Graham's efforts to establish the districts of Grahamstown and Tararu in the late 1860s.⁵⁹ During this period, Grahamstown became the focal point of economic activity in the town because of its close proximity to local mining operations. His efforts to develop the Tararu district were less fruitful. Cruickshank points out that this was because of factors outside of Graham's control, such as the severe weather storms that hit the area in 1874.⁶⁰ Graham's success and failure in Thames highlights the chance-ridden nature of wealth on the goldfields. In the end, he left the area, as Cruickshank notes, after disappointment at Tararu.⁶¹

Another pair of Thames businessmen whose achievements have been well documented are the Price brothers, Alfred and George, who founded A & G Prices Foundry Ltd in 1871.⁶² *Men of Metal: The Story of A. & G. Price Ltd, 1868-1968* is recounted by C. W. Vennell, who contends that the Prices established their business in Thames, with the hope of capitalising on the growing need for mechanical services.⁶³ Upon arrival, he writes the brothers ensured that they located themselves as close to the majority of mining activity as possible.⁶⁴ In 1983 historian Bob Scott wrote *Prices of Thames*. Scott agreed with Vennell that the brothers moved to Thames in the early 1870s because of the growing demand for industrial equipment.⁶⁵ Both Scott and Vennell claim that a central factor in the foundry's success was the owner's foresight in acknowledging that the mining industry was too inconsistent to base a business around. The brothers diversified their operations by becoming

⁵⁸ George Cruickshank, *Robert Graham, 1820-1885: An Auckland Pioneer* (Wellington: Reed Publishers, 1940).

⁵⁹ Cruickshank, pp. 125-126.

⁶⁰ Cruickshank, p. 126.

⁶¹ Cruickshank, pp. 126-127.

⁶² C. W. Vennell, *Men of Metal: The Story of A. & G. Price Ltd, 1868-1968* (Auckland: Wilson & Horton Ltd, 1968), p. 9.

⁶³ Vennell, p. 10.

⁶⁴ Vennell, p. 10.

⁶⁵ Bob Scott, *Prices of Thames* (Dunedin: Southern Press Ltd, 1983), p. 7.

involved in the flax and timber industries.⁶⁶ This allowed them to maintain steady profits while production from the goldfields fluctuated inconsistently.

Beyond the businesses that flourished due to gold mining, others made a living by providing services to locals, notably those that supplied alcohol and entertainment. These drinking establishments have garnered significant attention from historians. *Taverns in the Town* written by James McNeish in 1957 explored the central role that these businesses had in the development of the country. McNeish asserted that ‘the pub came first, giving birth to live theatre in this land, to libraries, militias, Masonic lodges, elections, even parliaments.’⁶⁷ The establishment of these ventures are essential when examining the Thames because of the significant number of pubs in the settlement. McNeish claimed that at the town’s peak, ‘Auckland boasted only 111 hotels. [While] Thames had 112.’⁶⁸ Local brewers helped to supply these vendors, most notably Louis Ehrenfried. Ehrenfried’s accomplishments, including his involvement in Thames, are documented in *The Myers*, a family history written by Paul Goldsmith and Michael Bassett in 2007.⁶⁹ Goldsmith and Bassett focus on the establishment of the local Phoenix Brewery and the reputation that Ehrenfried gained within the community. During the 1870s Ehrenfried’s operation became highly successful. Goldsmith and Bassett point out that as his ‘profits grew he leased, or bought hotels, or built them on sites he’d purchased.’⁷⁰ They argue that Ehrenfried had come to the conclusion that ‘the profits from retailing beer could well exceed that from production.’⁷¹ Ehrenfried’s business success granted him considerable acclaim in Thames society. In 1874 locals elected him as a member of the first borough council.⁷² When the economy declined in the late 1870s, Ehrenfried felt the full obligation that his success had burdened him with because locals ‘looked to him to

⁶⁶ Scott, pp. 11-13.
Vennell, p. 10.

⁶⁷ James McNeish, *Taverns in the Town* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1984), p. 9.

⁶⁸ McNeish, p. 92.

⁶⁹ Paul Goldsmith and Michael Bassett, *The Myers* (Auckland: David Ling Publishing Limited, 2007).

⁷⁰ Goldsmith and Bassett, p. 20.

⁷¹ Goldsmith and Bassett, p. 20.

⁷² Goldsmith and Bassett, p. 24.

restore Thames' fortunes.'⁷³ His efforts to improve the economic situation of the town were not successful. By 1880, as Goldsmith and Bassett write, 'both the Borough and the Harbour Board had borrowed heavily in more affluent times' and were in a substantial amount of debt.⁷⁴ Realising that the Thames would not rebound financially, Ehrenfried began the process of shifting his operations to Auckland in 1884.⁷⁵ A fire that destroyed the Thames brewery in 1887 severed his ties to the town for good.⁷⁶

The smaller businesses that occupied the commercial district in Thames are often neglected by historians, who tend to favour narratives of success found on the goldfields. This has meant that the diverse local economy has largely been overlooked. *The Thames: A Metropolis* written by local historian, Russell Skeet, in 2008 has attempted to highlight the various smaller businesses that resided in the settlement during the gold rush era. Skeet argues that 'Thames, especially from 1868 through to the late 1870's, was a metropolis, a centre rich in business and industrial diversity.'⁷⁷ He explains that the town was home to numerous, non-mining related businesses, including factories, theatres, restaurants and orchards.⁷⁸ Skeet mentions further that Thames experienced periods of financial hardship, which is largely attributed to the inconsistency of gold production. However, he suggests that these declines were temporary and that the town frequently rebounded from these setbacks.⁷⁹ This thesis differs from Skeet's work, in that it argues that the prosperity experienced from the goldfields was brief, and that the period is better reflected by examining the economic struggle that occurred over time, rather than the spells of temporary success.

The celebratory tone taken by the majority of Thames' historians has been scrutinised in Tania Mace's 1998 thesis, 'Eking out an Existence: Poverty in Thames 1895-

⁷³ Goldsmith and Bassett, p. 30.

⁷⁴ Goldsmith and Bassett, p. 31.

⁷⁵ Goldsmith and Bassett, p. 36.

⁷⁶ Goldsmith and Bassett, p. 37.

⁷⁷ Russell Skeet, *The Thames: A Metropolis* (Thames: 2008), p. 2.

⁷⁸ Skeet, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Skeet, pp. 12-14.

1925.’⁸⁰ Mace criticises this exaggerated portrayal of the town, arguing that ‘there is a tradition within Thames history writing which represents the town in an overwhelmingly positive light with the pioneer era taking centre stage.’⁸¹ Mace argues further that ‘this nostalgic view of the past provides a very limited picture and ignores the people who failed to share the prosperity of the rest.’⁸² Rather than emphasise the affluence that is common in other historical accounts, Mace sought to prove that ‘poverty did exist in small towns like Thames.’⁸³ Despite this, she does not provide details about issues that were present in the early years of the township, merely stating that ‘miners rushed to the field and [that] the settlement rapidly took shape.’⁸⁴ Mace’s work shows that poverty existed in Thames and that in order to overcome these hardships ‘the poor of Thames employed a range of strategies to eke out an existence. Family, neighbours, friends, the state and institutions variously had their roles to play.’⁸⁵

Looking back on previous scholarship, Mace is highly critical of the work of John Grainger, and argues that ‘Grainger’s work exemplifies the traditional view of Thames history’ and is ‘written to pay tribute to the pioneers and to teach later generations lessons from them.’⁸⁶ She also criticises the booklet produced for the town’s 50th anniversary, noting that it ‘reads more like a brochure promoting the settlement at Thames than the “historical record” it purports to be.’⁸⁷ The romantic characteristic of local histories is explored by Claudia Bell in ‘The “Real” New Zealand: Rural Mythologies Perpetuated and Commodified.’⁸⁸ Bell argues that overly positive accounts of the colonial period have dominated the historical writing of many rural towns in New Zealand. She claims that ‘these works [have] almost

⁸⁰ Tania Mace, ‘Eking out an Existence: Poverty in Thames 1895-1925’ (Auckland: University of Auckland, 1998).

⁸¹ Mace, p. 2.

⁸² Mace, p. 15.

⁸³ Mace, p. 113.

⁸⁴ Mace, p. 17.

⁸⁵ Mace, p. 114.

⁸⁶ Mace, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Mace, p. 5.

⁸⁸ Claudia Bell, ‘The “Real” New Zealand: Rural Mythologies Perpetuated and Commodified’, *The Social Science Journal*, 34, 2 (1997), pp. 145-158.

inevitably romanticise[d] the struggle for success – always success – as new settlers tamed the wilderness to a bountiful Eden.’⁸⁹ Bell also notes that these historical accounts were ‘often written by enthusiastic local amateur historians’, and compiled as ‘entertaining narratives of selected facts.’⁹⁰ In spite of the issues arising from these romantic portrayals, Mace asserts that there is further opportunities to study the area, and notes that ‘though there has been some rejection of the predominant view of Thames history, the field remains largely open for new histories of Thames.’⁹¹

This thesis focuses on the initial limitations of the Thames economy and the efforts made to improve it. Thus, it explores the local discussions that took place within the community through public meetings and newspaper articles. However, by approaching the study from this perspective, it means that the experiences of those on the periphery are largely ignored, notably Māori perspectives. The impact that the goldfields had on the Māori community is explored to some extent by Paul Monin in *Hauraki Contested: 1769-1875*. Monin’s history focuses on the exchanges that took place in Hauraki between European settlers and Māori from 1769 to 1875.⁹² He argues that ‘the growth of Thames was meteoric’ but that this had severe negative effects on local Māori.⁹³ He also suggests that ‘the Thames gold rush ranks among the greatest European intrusions upon indigenous peoples in the Pacific’, and comes to this conclusion by arguing that gold had a ‘capacity to arouse in Europeans a craving that would settle for no boundaries.’⁹⁴ The intrusion of Europeans on Māori society was evident by constant calls to open more land for prospecting. In the case of the Waiotahi, which had originally been excluded from the goldfields, two of the

⁸⁹ Bell, p. 147.

⁹⁰ Bell, p. 146.

⁹¹ Mace, p. 2.

⁹² Paul Monin, *Hauraki Contested: 1769-1875* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001).

⁹³ Monin, *Hauraki Contested*, p. 214.

⁹⁴ Monin, *Hauraki Contested*, p. 222.

Monin, *Hauraki Contested*, p. 211.

local chief's sons were arrested for assaulting a trespassing miner.⁹⁵ In order to secure their release, the chiefs were required to open up their lands for mining.⁹⁶

Monin contends that the amounts Māori received through miners' rights were significant, but should not be exaggerated. He estimates the returns to be 'about £50 per person' compared to a miner's income of 'about £100 per annum.'⁹⁷ This short-term wealth came at the expense of their independence. Monin argues that the once productive Māori economy of the early 1850s, 'quickly gave way to one substantially dependent upon non-work-related income' during the 1860s and 1870s.⁹⁸ When the Thames goldfields' production fell, so did demand for land and 'after a period of only three years, the new income of Thames Maori was in steep decline. Boom had given way to bust.'⁹⁹

This idea of Māori forgoing their own independent economies in favour of non-work-related income was previously explored by Monin in a 1995 journal article entitled 'The Maori Economy of Hauraki 1840-1880.'¹⁰⁰ In this essay he argued that a fundamental economic change occurred in the 1860s with the increasing need for capital backing. Monin claimed 'in a less capitalized economic environment they had enjoyed the initiative and competed on equal terms with Europeans' but 'now found themselves very much at a disadvantage and steadily relegated to a subject labour force.'¹⁰¹ Adding to the pressures facing the Māori economy were the social changes that were occurring in their communities. Of this issue, Monin contends that 'the transition from investment to consumption spending and the decline in work, having

⁹⁵ The Waiotahi is situated in the hills of Thames

⁹⁶ Monin, *Hauraki Contested*, p. 211.

⁹⁷ Monin, *Hauraki Contested*, p. 223.

⁹⁸ Monin, *Hauraki Contested*, p. 228.

⁹⁹ Monin, *Hauraki Contested*, p. 228.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Monin, 'The Maori Economy of Hauraki 1840-1880', *The New Zealand Journal of History*, 29, 2 (1995), pp. 197-210.

¹⁰¹ Monin, *The Maori Economy of Hauraki*, p. 205.

already taken place at Coromandel, spread to Thames.’¹⁰² This, he suggests, became ‘socially disruptive’ as well as ‘claiming most of its resources.’¹⁰³

These views are supported by Judith Walsh’s thesis ‘Let the Story be Told: The Iwi of Marutuahu and the Discovery of Gold 1850 to 1880’ in 2006.¹⁰⁴ Walsh argues that ‘non-work derived wealth, interaction between some European and Māori set in motion internal processes which were extremely disruptive to Hauraki society.’¹⁰⁵ She notes that financial disaster for Māori was partially the result of ‘incurring heavy expenses from their participation in two worlds and inevitably some hapu were living beyond their means.’¹⁰⁶ However, Walsh does not agree with Monin’s reasoning behind the decline of the local Māori economy. She points out that Monin suggested ‘that outcomes for Māori were still influenced by their decisions and by continuities in their culture.’¹⁰⁷ Whereas Walsh asserts that ‘it was due to circumstances beyond their control that Hauraki Māori failed to achieve the promised financial benefits from goldmining.’¹⁰⁸ She also writes that ‘the Crown played a major role in the economic disempowerment of Hauraki Māori by creating conditions which hastened the sale of land and by stifling any opportunity Māori had to enjoy economic success.’¹⁰⁹ In contrast, John and Zelma Williams take an opposing view on the experiences of Māori. They contend that the revenue from miners’ rights and land sales brought unimagined prosperity to those communities.¹¹⁰ The Williams’ account of Māori experiences in the Thames area exemplifies the extent to which hardships on the goldfields have been overlooked in other histories of the town and region.

Beyond the predominant narrative of the town’s settlement and development, there have been efforts to explore other facets of Thames’ history, rather than a

¹⁰² Monin, *The Maori Economy of Hauraki*, p. 206.

¹⁰³ Monin, *The Maori Economy of Hauraki*, p. 210.

¹⁰⁴ Judith Margaret-Mary Walsh, ‘Let it Story be Told: The Iwi of Marutuahu and the Discovery of Gold 1850 to 1880’ (Albany: Massey University, 2006).

¹⁰⁵ Walsh, p. 85.

¹⁰⁶ Walsh, p. 85.

¹⁰⁷ Walsh, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰⁸ Walsh, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ Walsh, p. 12.

¹¹⁰ John and Zelma Williams, p. 83.

preoccupation with mining. These include *Racing for Gold* by Johnny Williams in 1987, which detailed the importance of horse racing in the region.¹¹¹ This history paints a vivid portrait of Thames society, arguing that it was a centre of business and entertainment.¹¹² Williams notes that ‘in the evenings, you could now see the field come alive with thousands of flickering candles and campfires’ and ‘on the streets the sidewalks were crowded with miners seeking relief from the constant, desperate search for the elusive gold.’¹¹³ While the story of horse racing and other entertainment is central to his work, Williams does document the impact that gold had on the local community. Of the Caledonian strike in 1871, for instance, Williams claimed that ‘gold was everywhere to be seen and in great quantities.’¹¹⁴ Differing from other accounts, he argued that this success continued for many years noting that ‘Thames remained in a state of euphoria from the end of 1874 and into 1875.’¹¹⁵ The optimism persisted, he suggested, because ‘there was wild excitement abroad in Thames with news of the great gold strikes of 1877.’¹¹⁶

Another aspect of Thames’ history has been addressed by Rosemary Killip, who examined the experiences of women in *To Find a Fortune: Women of the Thames Goldfield, 1867 – 1893*, published in 1995.¹¹⁷ Killip explored the roles that women played in society and reveals that not only were they active in traditional gender roles, but that ‘women were involved in many different aspects of the commercial life of Thames.’¹¹⁸ Additionally, she notes that ‘the considerable amounts of income generated’ by women in ‘home-based activities’ should not be neglected.¹¹⁹ The accomplishments of women, Killip argues, were not always appreciated by society because there was a ‘popular belief that these women were more cunning and money-

¹¹¹ Johnny Williams, *Racing for Gold* (Thames: Williams Publishers, 1987).

¹¹² Williams, p. 19.

¹¹³ Williams, p. 15.

¹¹⁴ Williams, p. 33.

¹¹⁵ Williams, p. 42.

¹¹⁶ Williams, p. 45.

¹¹⁷ Rosemary Killip, *To Find a Fortune: Women of the Thames Goldfield, 1867 – 1893* (Wellington: Victoria University, 1995).

¹¹⁸ Killip, p. 65.

¹¹⁹ Killip, p. 61.

hungry than those who conformed to the ideal image of nurturing motherhood.’¹²⁰ Women, she points out, were also central figures in humanitarian movements, which were formed in the town to aid those that were suffering from financial hardships.¹²¹ These societies became crucial because ‘as Thames grew and prospered into a developed community, disparity between the poor and the “well-to-do” became more obvious.’¹²²

Broader studies that are relevant to this thesis include the histories of other New Zealand and Australia gold mining towns. E. P. Neale, for instance, has closely examined gold mining in ‘The New Zealand Gold Rushes’, with an emphasis on the Otago goldfields and the character that the town developed due to various migrations to the area.¹²³ He notes that the local population ‘rose from 12,691 at the end of 1860 to 30,269 at the end of 1861.’¹²⁴ Neale’s conclusions address the importance of gold mining to the colony, and point out that prior to gold mining the Government sold large estates in order to open up the interior of the country. These blocks of land, he notes, were used for pastoral pursuits, which had low returns.¹²⁵ Neale argues further that ‘had it not been for mining New Zealand would, in all probability, have much longer continued to be a purely pastoral country.’¹²⁶ The development of New Zealand towns in the nineteenth century has also been explored by David Hamer in ‘Towns in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand.’¹²⁷ Hamer argues that townships often ran into difficulties if they relied too heavily on timber and gold, because when those resources were exhausted there was little to sustain the settlement.¹²⁸ This, he asserts, frequently led to a difficult adaptation period when they ran out. Hamer compares this problem with those faced by settlements that had been formed to hold military garrisons, and argues that once ‘the Maoris had been “pacified”, many small towns,

¹²⁰ Killip, p. 18.

¹²¹ Killip, p. 19.

¹²² Killip, p. 19.

¹²³ E. P. Neale, ‘The New Zealand Gold Rushes’, *The Economic Record*, 23, 2 (1947), pp. 250-263.

¹²⁴ Neale, p. 252.

¹²⁵ Neale, p. 261.

¹²⁶ Neale, p. 261.

¹²⁷ David Hamer, ‘Towns in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 13, 1 (1979), pp. 5-24.

¹²⁸ Hamer, pp. 7-8.

some created specifically for military purposes, went through a lengthy period poised on the brink of extinction.¹²⁹ Hamer contended that factors such as the presence of churches, schools, post offices, court houses and council buildings could improve the likelihood of a town surviving.¹³⁰ This is important in a study of Thames because the establishment of these central services occurred very early on in the settlement's developmental period.

Another study relevant to this thesis is S.H.M. Salmon's *A History of Gold Mining in New Zealand*, published in 1963.¹³¹ Salmon explores the histories of various gold fields, and he offers various insights regarding the Thames area. For instance, he argues that the town was originally founded due to the economic depression that Auckland was experiencing in the 1860s.¹³² Similarly, in his book, *Makers of Fortune: A Colonial Business Community and its Fall*, written in 1973, historian R.C.J. Stone agreed that the desperate state of Auckland was a prevailing factor in people moving to Thames after it was declared a goldfield.¹³³ Stone suggests that the optimism surrounding the new township helped to alleviate Auckland of not only its unemployed citizens, but also allowed it to sell its excessive stock.¹³⁴ He argues that the boom at the Thames saved Auckland from its economic depression. Salmon shared a similar opinion, noting that the proximity to such a large population centre, allowed the settlement to form a much larger commercial district than what was present at other gold mining areas.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Hamer, p. 8.

The New Zealand Wars were a series of conflicts that took place over several decades in the nineteenth century, predominately the 1860s.

Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 210-224.

¹³⁰ Hamer, p. 8.

¹³¹ S.H.M. Salmon, *A History of Gold Mining in New Zealand* (Wellington: R. E. Owen, Government Printer, 1963).

¹³² Salmon, p. 182.

¹³³ R.C.J. Stone, *Makers of Fortune: A Colonial Business Community and its Fall* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1973), p. 10.

¹³⁴ G. C. Dunstall, *Colonial Merchant* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1970), cited in R.C.J. Stone, *Makers of Fortune: A Colonial Business Community and its Fall* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1973), p. 10.

¹³⁵ Salmon, p. 191.

The swift development that the Thames township experienced, thanks to the goldfields, is placed within a wider context by Geoffrey Blainey in ‘The Momentous Gold Rushes’, published in 2010.¹³⁶ In his work, Blainey examines the role that the numerous gold rushes played in the progression of Australia and New Zealand, arguing that they were transformational events for both countries. In 1851 Australia experienced its first gold rush, and New Zealand soon followed in 1861.¹³⁷ The discovery of gold, Blainey writes, catapulted the colonies into an economic boom that brought increased business activity and migration. During this period, the two countries forged strong social and economic links. Blainey argues that in 1866 ‘at least half of the miners working in New Zealand were former Victorians.’¹³⁸ New Zealanders, he notes, also travelled to Australia to mine in the 1870s and 1880s. Australia’s gold rush caused the colony’s population to treble in just over a decade, with a similar effect occurring in New Zealand later.¹³⁹ Blainey contends further that the gold rushes were not only beneficial to the colonies, but also to Britain, who was required to supply the areas with materials and supplies, until they could support themselves. He explains that in 1853 Australia ‘purchased 15 per cent of the goods exported from Britain.’¹⁴⁰ This need for consumer resources contributed to alternate revenue stream to gold mining because ‘most of the individual fortunes on the early Australian goldfields – and they were moderate rather than large fortunes – were won by those who supplied goods and services.’¹⁴¹

The literature available on the Thames is varied and widespread. Most produced on the initial years of the goldfields and the town’s successful individuals have emphasised a powerful narrative of success and commemorative celebration. However, less prevalent in this historiography are the experiences of locals during the numerous ups and downs associated with gold mining. The majority of historians

¹³⁶ Geoffrey Blainey, ‘The Momentous Gold Rushes’, *Australian Economic History Review*, 50, 2 (July 2010), pp. 209-216.

¹³⁷ Blainey, p. 209.

¹³⁸ Blainey, p. 214.

¹³⁹ Blainey, p. 209.

¹⁴⁰ Blainey, p. 210.

¹⁴¹ Blainey, p. 210.

have emphasised the vast prosperity and increased activity that the area experienced after 1867. This has meant that the limitations and failures of the local economy have been largely neglected. There is, for instance, no substantial study on the struggle that individuals faced when gold production declined in the 1870s and national attention drifted to other areas of the colony. This thesis addresses this gap by re-examining the years following the proclamation of gold in Thames. It argues that the initial phases of the Thames settlement were fraught with financial peril, thus the town did not achieve immediate success. Indeed, the local economy teetered on the edge of collapse, and financial catastrophe was only allayed due to the efforts of individuals who endured and developed a more diverse economic base.

This study examines a wide variety of sources, but it draws particularly from contemporary newspaper articles. An investigation of the local newspapers highlights the extent to which the local economic situation was publically discussed and rigorously debated. Those sentiments expressed through the newspapers offer a specific perspective, albeit somewhat edited, of the experiences of locals and it reveals the information that was readily available to both internal and external observers at the time. Additionally, journal and diary entries are used in this study to showcase the individual experiences of those living in the settlement. The combination of these sources brings to light the struggles that locals endured in the face of financial uncertainty. They work together to underline the bold economic initiatives to improve Thames' economy during the 1870s and the community's central role in this process. Government reports add to this analysis, showing the extent to which the economic pressures facing the township were understood by officials and what actions were taken to relieve the settlement of these burdens.

This thesis begins by detailing the initial proclamation of the Thames as a goldfield. Chapter One examines the township's swift development while emphasising the false expectations that afflicted the region. In doing so, it highlights the contrasting accounts of the goldfields success, as locals experienced various financial hardships, while external observers boasted about the grandiose buildings and economic

prosperity that was immediately present. These comparisons illustrate that financial success at the Thames was chance-ridden and by no means assured. This shows that the goldfields did not bring immediate prosperity to the region and that the early years of the township are better represented by their limitations, rather than the small triumphs that occurred there.

The differing accounts of the town's prosperity are explored further in Chapter Two, with a focus on local complaints about the media's misrepresentation of the town's financial situation. Chapter Two considers the temporary prosperity that the Thames experienced after the magnificent gold production from the Caledonian mine in 1871. After this breakthrough, optimism about the sustainability of the goldfields increased. Local businesses benefited as a thriving commercial district developed. However, the optimism surrounding the town soon disappeared. The limitations of the economy became apparent and the area was once again afflicted by periodic recessions. This illustrates that although the goldfields eventually brought prosperity to Thames, it was fleeting and short-lived.

Chapter Three examines the economic pressures that were afflicting the Thames during the late 1870s. These problems included a lack of employment opportunities, isolationism and government debt. It was at this time that Thames drifted out of the national spotlight, as interest shifted to other goldfields and more fruitful economic regions. This resulted in the local population experiencing sharp declines for much of the 1870s. People were leaving the settlement in search of better work opportunities. As the local economy continued to deteriorate, residents were dissatisfied with the Government's attempts to stop the decline in Thames. With this in mind, individuals took it upon themselves to improve the local economy. During this time numerous new industries were developed and fostered. These ventures complimented the existing mining industry, helping Thames to diversify its economic opportunities. Examining these initiatives highlights the struggles that locals went through to improve the town's financial situation.

These chapters offer a deeper understanding of the economic situation that occurred in Thames from the late 1860s to the early 1880s. Together, they stress the financial uncertainty and hardship that was experienced by locals. Thus, this thesis reveals that Thames was much more than simply the grand success and prosperous settlement that the majority of authors have professed. It shows that individuals played a central role in discussing and implementing economic initiatives that helped the town to overcome many of its financial issues, essentially driving the town's survival through some of its most turbulent years.

Chapter One

The Discovery of Gold and the Failure to Extract it

When gold was struck at Thames in 1867, there was a flurry of excitement generated across the colony. Historians of the period have focused on an idyllic narrative of rapid progress, in which the town sprung to life almost overnight. For instance, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the goldfields in 1917, the *Thames Star* published a recollection of the settlement's prior achievements. The author noted 'the marvellous riches of the various finds of precious metal attracted a large number of goldseekers.'¹⁴² Another historian, Tony Nolan claimed that almost immediately Thames was a 'booming, rumbustious township that was threatening to rival Auckland in size ... [and] was fast becoming one of the most famous gold towns on earth.'¹⁴³ However, this chapter casts its eye back over the events and economic realities that occurred from 1867 onwards. It highlights the experiences from local and broader contemporary observers who detail the various economic struggles that afflicted the town. These problems include the unrealistic expectations that were placed on the goldfields, because many observers saw Thames as the saviour to Auckland's economic woes. For a short period of time, the town gained acclaim across the colony and abroad. The wealth of the goldfields was boasted about in England and Australia, through newspapers, encouraging more people to make the trip to New Zealand.¹⁴⁴ The Government proclaimed that Thames was spreading affluence throughout the country.¹⁴⁵ This chapter disputes these claims of prosperity by arguing that the success of Thames was by no means assured.

This chapter notes that much of Thames' financial problems revolved around the lack of easily retrievable alluvial gold. Instead of this prized possession, prospectors found

¹⁴² *Thames Star (TS)*, Diamond Jubilee Supplement, 1 August 1917, pp. 1-4.

¹⁴³ Tony Nolan, *Historic Gold Trails of the Coromandel* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1977), p. 22.

¹⁴⁴ *The Illustrated London News (ILN)*, 18 September 1869, p. 272.

¹⁴⁵ 'Speech to the House of Representatives', *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 September 1869, pp. 457-458.

quartz gold, which required machinery to crush and extract the minerals within the rock. This changed the nature of mining in Thames, because individuals were unable to afford the large costs involved in obtaining and maintaining the equipment required. Throughout the initial years, workers formed mining companies to combat these expenses, but many still lacked the ability to access enough capital.¹⁴⁶ This issue slowed the progress of Thames considerably, because although wealth was tantalisingly close, most were unable to extract it. Most significantly, this chapter problematises the idea that the goldfields brought vast prosperity to Thames during its initial years. In doing so, it details the various issues and factors that stunted the growth of the goldfields and the township.

A Brief Historical Background of Thames

Before European contact, the Thames area was inhabited by tribes of the Marutūahu Confederation, principally Ngāti Maru, who operated a sustainable lifestyle through smaller hapu or community units.¹⁴⁷ Following the increase in European colonisation toward the mid nineteenth century, Thames experienced a steady increase in settler activity. Despite this growth, it was not until Auckland's financial crisis in the mid-1860s that Thames was seen as a viable area to develop. James Mackay, the Civil Commissioner for the Hauraki District, argued that Auckland was suffering from a commercial depression due to the 'withdrawal of Imperial troops and the removal of the seat of Government to Wellington.'¹⁴⁸ Mackay noted that 'numbers of labouring men were starving for want of employment.'¹⁴⁹ The depressed state of Auckland's economy increased the importance that Mackay be successful in his negotiations with Māori in the Thames region.¹⁵⁰ In the long term, the Government hoped that the

¹⁴⁶ William Kelly, *Thames: The First 100 Years* (Thames: Thames Star, 1968), p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ Taimoana Turoa, *Te Takoto o Te Whenua O Hauraki: Hauraki Landmarks*, ed. by Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal (Auckland: Reed Publishing (NZ) Ltd, 2000), p. 59.

¹⁴⁸ 'Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields', *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*, 1869, A-17, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ 'Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields', *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ Fred W. Weston, *Thames Goldfields: A History from Pre-Proclamation Times to 1927* (Thames: Thames Star, 1927), pp. 27-29.

discovery of gold there would spark economic activity in the area and thus help relieve Auckland of some of its unemployed. During 1864, Mackay met frequently with local iwi leaders in an attempt to gain the necessary support to begin prospecting.¹⁵¹ Early on, Mackay found that it was tough to persuade chiefs to open up their land for gold mining. He persisted, and eventually gained the support of Te Hotereni Taipari, a local Ngāti Maru leader. Taipari helped Mackay begin his search for gold by allowing prospectors on to tribal land.¹⁵² The alliance between the two men proved to be crucial, with other chiefs soon giving their consent for Mackay to begin mining. The exact details of the negotiation caused significant delay, because Māori were aware that they had considerable bargaining power.¹⁵³ Eventually, both parties agreed that Māori would be ‘paid £1 (\$2) for each miner’s right issued.’¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, the area where the township would be located was to be leased from Māori, with the Government claiming the right to any minerals beneath the site.¹⁵⁵

On 30 July 1867, with the negotiations complete, Auckland Deputy-Superintendent, Daniel Pollen, proclaimed the goldfields open, encouraging official mining in Thames.¹⁵⁶ The initial stages of mining were tentative because the quantity and quality of gold in the area was still largely unknown. Many prospectors failed, because they searched for alluvial, rather than quartz gold. Hopes were diminishing that Thames was the answer to Auckland’s financial woes. However, a breakthrough occurred when a claim was struck at what became known as the Shotover mine. The find was made by William Hunt and his colleagues, and although the quality was questioned, the quantity was not.¹⁵⁷ This was the first tangible evidence that the Thames goldfields housed valuable reserves.

¹⁵¹ ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 4.

¹⁵² ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 4.

¹⁵³ David Arbury, *In the Beginning: James Mackay recalls the opening of the Thames Goldfield*, Thames Goldfield information series, No. 29 (Thames: Metallum Research, 2002).

¹⁵⁴ David Arbury, *In the Beginning*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ David Arbury, *In the Beginning*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Weston, p. 31.

¹⁵⁷ Weston, p. 35.

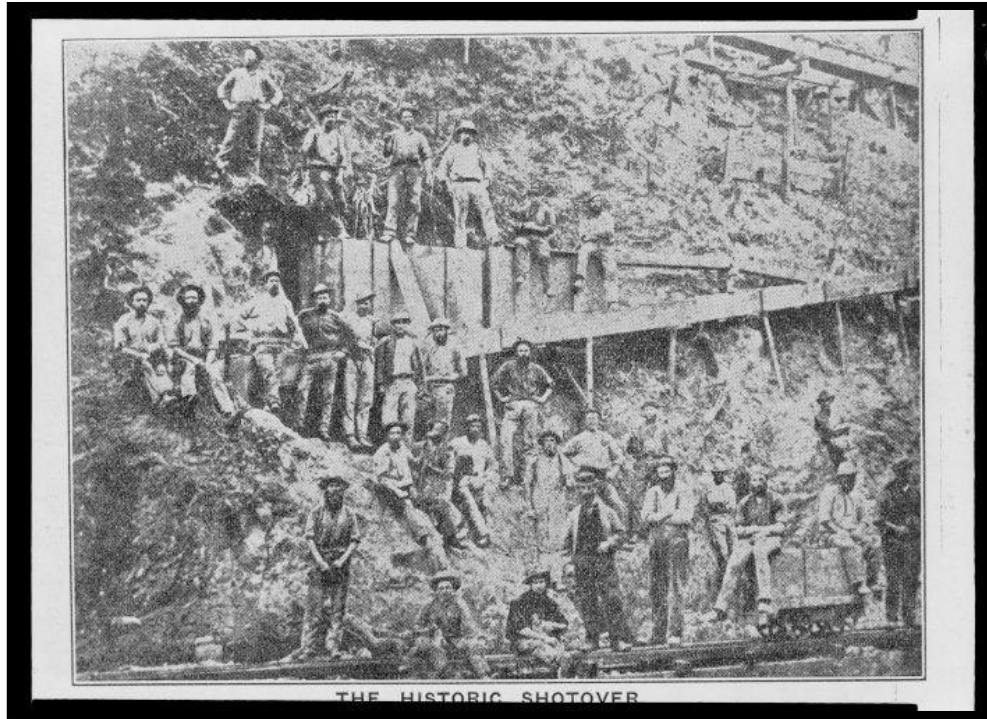


Figure 2: *Gold Miners at the Shotover Mine, Thames, circa 1870.*¹⁵⁸

The Initial Rush and Early Problems Involving Investment

William Hunt's find sparked interest in the Thames from potential prospectors. Soon the area was flooded with miners, each of whom took out a miner's right to prospect on various plots of land. Many were hopeful that gold could help generate great wealth. Mrs J. E. Macdonald, the wife of the second Mayor of Thames, explained that she had moved to the area with her husband, assuming 'we were going to make our fortune, and go back to England to see my mother. My spirits soared.'¹⁵⁹

In an article published by the *Thames Star* in 1917, Matthias Whitehead described his experience of arriving at Thames in 1868.¹⁶⁰ Whitehead noted that 'the small townships of Shortland and Grahamstown were only dimly lighted by the few

¹⁵⁸ 'The Historic Shotover', Alexander Turnbull Library Collection, ½-019700-F, Alexander Turnbull Library.

¹⁵⁹ J. E. Macdonald, *Thames Reminiscences* (Auckland: Observer Printing Works, 1926), p. 11.

¹⁶⁰ *TS*, 1 August 1917, p. 2.

shanties and tents, giving one the impression of a small fishing village.’¹⁶¹ He claimed that ‘in those days everything was all thoroughly primitive’ and that ‘it was a considerable time before you could journey from Shortland to Grahamstown without getting wet feet, as there was not footpaths.’¹⁶² Still, hopes were high, as Whitehead explained: ‘every man owning a share in a mine [he writes] had great expectations, and honestly believed he was going to make a rise.’¹⁶³

With the arrival of prospectors, others saw business opportunities beyond gold mining, with some establishing banks, hotels and trade services. In these early years, the town revolved around the goldfields, to the extent that the centre of business often gravitated to where the most profitable mines were situated.¹⁶⁴ Mr W. G. (Toss) Hammond, a local born in 1869, recalled how ‘the first-comers rented small sections from the Maoris, erected tents, and then built small two-roomed timber houses with shingle roofs, adding more rooms as time went on.’¹⁶⁵ Thames’ swift development was comparable to that experienced on the country’s West Coast goldfields.¹⁶⁶ The discovery of gold there in 1864 resulted in the founding of the township of Hokitika, with a diverse array of people flocking to the region a year later.¹⁶⁷ Similar to Thames, the town lacked adequate accommodation during its initial period, with most people staying in canvas tents until dwellings were built.¹⁶⁸

The planned progression of Thames took place within a few years following the proclamation of gold. Initially, the town was designed into three distinct districts.

¹⁶¹ *TS*, 1 August 1917, p. 2.

¹⁶² *TS*, 1 August 1917, p. 2.

¹⁶³ *TS*, 1 August 1917, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Macdonald, p. 12.

¹⁶⁵ W. G. (Toss) Hammond, A Boy on the Thames Goldfields, in *The Long Up-Hill Climb, New Zealand 1876-1891* (Wellington: R. E. Owen, 1966), p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ The West Coast goldfields were located on the West Coast of New Zealand’s South Island. When gold was discovered in the area surrounding Hokitika in 1864, the region was under the jurisdiction of the Canterbury Province.

Simon Nathan. ‘West Coast places - Hokitika’, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 3-Mar-09, <<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/west-coast-places/12>>[accessed November 5 2012].

¹⁶⁷ G.O. Preshaw, *Banking Under Difficulties or Life on the Goldfields* (Christchurch: Capper Press, 1971), p. 175.

Simon Nathan. ‘West Coast places - Hokitika’, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 3-Mar-09, <<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/west-coast-places/12>>[accessed November 5 2012].

¹⁶⁸ Preshaw, pp. 174-175.

James Mackay began this process by laying out street plans for the township of Shortland in 1867.¹⁶⁹ By 1869, Robert Graham, an Auckland property developer, had added the districts of Grahamstown and Tararu.¹⁷⁰ The establishment of a permanent township helped to soothe the tense relationship between prospectors and Māori. Mackay noted that the reason behind the swift formation of the settlement was to ensure that the two parties did not encroach on each other.¹⁷¹ Although the Thames experienced a substantial increase in economic activity and national interest, the early years were tough, with most of the land left undeveloped. The poor state of Thames and its infrastructure was described in a letter to the editor of the *Empire*, a Sydney based newspaper, by Lancelot Smith.¹⁷² In reference to his expectations of an ‘Eldorado’ type settlement, Smith expressed that Thames was portrayed in the media as a place where people could make their fortune.¹⁷³ What he found in actuality was much different. The lack of progress in Thames was worrying to Smith. He paid particular attention to the state of the roads, noting that ‘the streets are about three feet deep in solid puddle’ and that it was common ‘to see horses and drays stuck every hour in the day.’¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 21 November 1867, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Cruickshank, p. 125.

¹⁷¹ ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 5.

¹⁷² *The Empire (TE)*, 10 September 1868, p. 3.

¹⁷³ *TE*, 10 September 1868, p. 3.

Lancelot Smith’s reference to Thames being El Dorado, the mythic Lost City of Gold

¹⁷⁴ *TE*, 10 September 1868, p. 3.



Figure 3: *View of Pollen Street dated early 1870s, illustrating the poor state of the town's roads.*¹⁷⁵

The poor state of the town's roads was also noted by Mrs J. E. Macdonald, who complained that 'it was very muddy everywhere, and we had either to go through it or stay at home. There were no paths, but planks were placed across the worst places.'¹⁷⁶ Smith also reported on the volatility of the gold mining industry, arguing that 'for one good claim there are a hundred bad ones.'¹⁷⁷ The poor condition of the goldfields was partly attributed to a lack of mining expertise, with Smith noting that the men working the field 'look[ed] to know more about a rifle than any tools connected with

¹⁷⁵ 'View of Pollen Street', American Photographic Company, Views of the Thames Gold Fields, O.031355, Reproduced Courtesy of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

¹⁷⁶ Macdonald, p. 16.

¹⁷⁷ *TE*, 10 September 1868, p. 3.

mining.¹⁷⁸ Matthias Whitehead, a local boot maker, agreed that the unemployed from Auckland that moved to Thames in search of fortune, were men who ‘mostly knew nothing whatever about manual labour, such as using a pick and shovel.’¹⁷⁹ Smith hoped that his experience would serve as a warning, preventing others ‘from going on a foolish errand’ in search of wealth at Thames.¹⁸⁰

Accounts like Lancelot Smith’s that revealed the unorganised nature realities in Thames did not adversely affect the optimism surrounding the area, because at the same time, multiple stories were being printed describing the prosperity of the goldfields, especially in Australia. Several articles were run in New South Wales, extolling the situation in Thames with optimism and hope. In mid-1867 it was reported by the *Queanbeyan Age* that the goldfields had opened and would soon be able to relieve Auckland of a couple hundred of its unemployed.¹⁸¹ It was thought that the discovery of gold would be of ‘great benefit to the province’ and that it would lead to the creation of numerous jobs.¹⁸² In the following weeks, Sydney newspapers were running advertisements for steamers to Auckland, with the idea being that they would eventually reach Thames. These advertisements enthused at ‘the great rush to the Thames goldfields’ and ‘the encouraging character’ that was present in the area.¹⁸³

The optimism surrounding the goldfields was reported on month after month.¹⁸⁴ A correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* documented that Sydney was already expecting over a thousand ounces of gold and that there were bonanza strikes in Thames, notably Hunt’s claim. The article claimed that vast wealth could be found in the region, stating that ‘nothing like the Thames goldfields have yet been discovered elsewhere’ and that the surrounding hills were a flood of activity.¹⁸⁵ However, the

¹⁷⁸ *TE*, 10 September 1868, p. 3.

¹⁷⁹ *TS*, 1 August 1917, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ *TE*, 10 September 1868, p. 3.

¹⁸¹ *Queanbeyan Age (QA)*, 15 August 1867, p. 3.

¹⁸² *QA*, 15 August 1867, p. 3.

¹⁸³ *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 6 September 1867, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ *SMH*, 9 November 1867, p. 7.

¹⁸⁵ *SMH*, 9 November 1867, p. 7.

correspondent was troubled by the lack of development in the township, describing it as little more than a ‘rabbit warren.’¹⁸⁶ Regarding the progress of the goldfields, it was noted that the town needed more machinery, and that this equipment was being brought into the area. Nevertheless, some pessimism remained as to how effective it would be due to the inaccessibility of some of the claims.¹⁸⁷

Without machinery Thames miners were left to blindly prospect the area, hoping to stumble upon a rich claim. The correspondent noted ‘there is even more than the usual character of a lottery about the field at the Thames. Some, perhaps many, will make a great deal of money there, but there cannot fail to be many who are disappointed.’¹⁸⁸ This acknowledgement that Thames would not provide consistent gold would have caused some potential prospectors to pause about whether or not to move to the area or even if it was worth the risk of investing there. However, the paper noted that the situation would become clearer over the coming months and they had little doubt that the results would prove satisfactory.¹⁸⁹ Confidence in the future of the goldfields featured in most contemporary newspapers. This optimism may have been maintained by assurances that new land would be made available for mining. Indeed, speculation was fuelled by newspapers, which frequently reported that dealings with the Māori were going well and that land was slowly being purchased with the possibility that ‘the whole valley will be open by the end of the year.’¹⁹⁰

Gold mining, especially when it required deep-level drilling, was considered a risky proposition in the period. Thames was no different, with concerns over the precarious nature of the goldfields voiced less than a year after their opening. Criticism and concern was raised by both Lancelot Smith and Matthias Whitehead, who questioned the expertise of local miners. Despite these critiques, many still regarded Thames with optimism. For those that remained confident, it was still hoped that the area could become prosperous and that the issues constraining growth had been

¹⁸⁶ *SMH*, 9 November 1867, p. 7.

¹⁸⁷ *SMH*, 9 November 1867, p. 7.

¹⁸⁸ *SMH*, 9 November 1867, p. 7.

¹⁸⁹ *SMH*, 9 November 1867, p. 7.

¹⁹⁰ *SMH*, 9 November 1867, p. 7.

discovered and were being resolved. These early accounts of struggling development have often been overlooked by historians, with most emphasising that by this time Thames had won acclaim as a site of booming financial potential.¹⁹¹ In reality, the township was hardly a picture of latent economic possibilities. The goldfields had provided wealth for some, but it had also inflated expectations to a point where they could not be achieved. This duality between optimistic expectations and harsh reality is described in both local and broader contemporary accounts, which show both perspectives were alive and kicking in popular public discourse amongst Thames residents.

Contrasting the Differing Opinions of Thames

Regarding the polarity in opinion, one early report emphasised the economic hardship that followed the opening of the goldfields. At the beginning of 1868, an overseas observer complained that the initial yields had ‘proved less than was hoped.’¹⁹² This report gave an unflattering description of the men who had been working the area, stating they were better suited for ‘hay making or as workmen on the roads.’¹⁹³ This correlates with Lancelot Smith’s argument that progress on the goldfields was stunted by a lack of skilled workers.¹⁹⁴ Instead of a prosperous and thriving community, the town, according to a range of contemporary commentators, appeared to be in a minor state of depression. However, some observers, both local and broader, thought that the issues that had afflicted the goldfields were temporary setbacks. For these optimists, the upcoming rush would resolve these inconveniences. A month later, hopes that the Thames goldfields would become more economically stable were reiterated.¹⁹⁵ Local accounts acknowledged that the early period had more failures than success stories. However, the growing optimism among officials and prospectors

¹⁹¹ Phil Moore and Neville Ritchie, *Coromandel Gold: A Guide to the Historical Goldfields of Coromandel Peninsula* (Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press Ltd, 1996), p. 51.

¹⁹² *Gippsland Times (GT)*, 21 January 1868, p. 3.

¹⁹³ *GT*, 21 January 1868, p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ *TE*, 10 September 1868, p. 3.

¹⁹⁵ *The Mercury (TM)*, 22 February 1868, p. 2.

looked to the coming year as an opportunity to revive the mining industry. This stimulation would be sparked by investment in machinery, enabling more quartz rock to be crushed, and the possibility that more land would be opened up for mining, helping to create a more stable environment.¹⁹⁶ By May 1868, there were boasts that a breakthrough had occurred, one optimistic writer stated that ‘at the Thames there seems to be almost universal prosperity’ and that ‘there never probably was a gold-field in which there were so many prizes.’¹⁹⁷ It was hoped that this success would continue into the future as more districts opened, such as the neighbouring Ohinemuri area.¹⁹⁸ This report was disputed by other commentators who argued that the finds at Thames had so far been inconsistent. These critiques also noted that ‘the number of men on the ground is quite inadequate to prospect it fairly, and claims of ascertained richness are lying unworked for want of occupation.’¹⁹⁹

Whether optimistic or cautious, progress in the initial years of the Thames township was exceptionally slow going. The main reason for this glacial movement was an almost complete lack of technology to assist with underground mining, thus activity only took place on the surface. This problem was documented by newspapers in the middle of 1868, with one observer blaming the low amounts of gold being extracted on the ‘absence of machinery.’²⁰⁰ Combine this with the fact that many of the men had not had much experience mining, it is unsurprising that people questioned the miners’ ability to work the fields effectively.

The recollections of John Warren, a miner in Thames until 1870, exemplify the limited experience many prospectors had. Warren noted that he and his friends ‘worked hard, but without knowledge.’²⁰¹ His first claim was so disastrous that he had to mortgage his home in Auckland for £200. Warren explained that with that

¹⁹⁶ *TM*, 22 February 1868, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ *TM*, 11 May 1868, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ The Ohinemuri district was a large area of land near Thames. The townships of Paeroa, Waihi and Te Aroha were developed in the years following the region being opened as a goldfield.

¹⁹⁹ *The Argus (AR)*, 13 July 1868, p. 6.

²⁰⁰ *AR*, 22 August 1868, p. 6.

²⁰¹ John Warren, ‘The Story of My Life at the End of 72 Years’, compiled by Lynly Lessels Yates, New Zealand, updated 22 May 2011, < <http://www.lynly.gen.nz/index.htm> > [accessed 23 January 2013], p. 9.

money he settled ‘debts incurred in the two months mining.’²⁰² Ultimately, his prospecting efforts were not successful. Warren tried multiple times to earn a fortune on the goldfields, but with all his money gone, he found work with a local construction company, helping to build the Imperial and Pacific Hotels.²⁰³ In 1870, Warren moved back to Auckland, still left with the financial burdens from his time at Thames.²⁰⁴ This would be a scenario repeated by many during this period.

These accounts reveal Thames, not as a thriving metropolis, but a struggling albeit hopeful township. Development had not occurred overnight as Historians like Tony Nolan have suggested. Rather, there were significant trials and tribulations well before adequate machinery was purchased. At first, the town lacked planning and the suitable infrastructure needed to support the large population influx. Nevertheless, through the hard times, people within the area maintained hope that the situation in Thames would improve, sooner rather than later.

Improved Prospects

By the end of 1868, the much needed improvements in Thames appeared to materialise. According to a report run by the *Argus* towards the end of 1868, prosperity and activity was steadily growing in the town. It stated that the settlement was progressing and that ‘many of the buildings rival those of Auckland.’²⁰⁵ This was a remarkable achievement, because the goldfields had only been open for one year. Thames also experienced a population rise at this time, with people arriving in the area. Indeed, one observer noted this growing migration, writing that ‘a fleet of eight steamers plies almost daily between this place and Auckland.’²⁰⁶ No firm demographic figures are available on this early period, but the *Thames Gold Fields Miner’s Guide* estimated that there ‘cannot be less than 18,000 [people]’ in the area

²⁰² Warren, p. 9.

²⁰³ Warren, p. 9.

²⁰⁴ Warren, p. 10.

²⁰⁵ *AR*, 31 December 1868, p. 7.

²⁰⁶ *AR*, 31 December 1868, p. 7.

by 1868.²⁰⁷ The first official population statistics for Thames are recorded in the 1871 *New Zealand Census*, which indicates, for instance, that 5,792 people lived in the districts of Shortland and Grahamstown.²⁰⁸

The swift development of the town was noted by James Mackay in a report to the central Government in 1869.²⁰⁹ He points out that Thames was surprisingly rich by 1868 and that the tents that had accommodated the residents in the past were quickly disappearing.²¹⁰ In his opinion, the town had overcome its initial struggle for survival and was now a permanent fixture in the colony. Mackay argued that the newfound prosperity of Thames would be felt for many years, because the town would be able to provide stable employment into the foreseeable future. The only barrier that he could see was the poor state of the local roads. However, Mackay retained an optimistic outlook that the issue would be resolved in time.²¹¹

Although the Thames had emerged as a township, residents still faced various economic and social hardships. These difficulties were documented by Theophilus Cooper following his arrival in late 1867. He was initially disappointed that businesses were still operating on Sundays, opining that ‘there is very little respect paid to the sanctity of the Sabbath, at least among the store-keepers and hotel-keepers.’²¹² Cooper also argued that while some men were succeeding and living in relative comfort, others were living in tents ‘which lets in as much water as it keeps out.’²¹³ He argued that the life of the digger was not luxurious, lamenting that ‘of all the miserable wretches, the wet, half-drowned, dirty, disconsolate, disappointed digger is the most pitiable.’²¹⁴ Cooper’s account highlights the fact that the men working the goldfields were experiencing a much different life than the idyllic “golden years” presumed. He explained that during these early years, miners were

²⁰⁷ *Thames Gold Fields Miner’s Guide: 1868* (Auckland: W. C. Wilson, 1868), p. 70.

²⁰⁸ *New Zealand Census*, 1871, Table III, p. 4.

²⁰⁹ ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17.

²¹⁰ ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 11.

²¹¹ ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 11.

²¹² Theophilus Cooper, *A Digger’s Diary at the Thames* (1867), p. 7.

²¹³ Cooper, p. 14.

²¹⁴ Cooper, p. 14.

reliant on local bakers for sustenance. This dependence meant that miners felt betrayed and angry whenever the bakers raised their bread prices; often resulting in protests and bread being restored to its original price.²¹⁵ He argued that this problem would be alleviated when more bakers arrived from Auckland to try their luck in Thames; thus, forcing the need for more competitive bread prices.²¹⁶ Cooper and other commentators reveal that the romantic histories that portray Thames as a prosperous township were not necessarily the reality of those who lived there.

Much of the town's economic activity centred around the local stock exchange, which was established in 1869.²¹⁷ The premises were located at the corner of Albert and Brown Streets, and at its peak, trading frequently occurred on the footpath outside the main building.²¹⁸ The area came to be known simply as 'Scrip Corner', named after the paper on which stock was printed.²¹⁹ During its existence, most businesses in Thames floated their stock, but investors generally preferred to trade for shares in the mines. The locals often spent what little they had left on gold shares, hoping to strike a bonanza.²²⁰ Potential investors would travel the town, visiting bars and other meeting places, in the hope of hearing the next big tip. However, the information that was gathered was not always genuine because those that already had shares often tried to inflate their prices.²²¹ There were share broking firms that attempted to advise residents on what stock to buy, but it is unlikely that they could have reliably predicted which claims would be prosperous.²²²

The gambling on gold shares enthralled locals, including many businessmen. In *Behind the Dispensing Screen*, Murray Frost details the experiences of many early

²¹⁵ Cooper, p. 17.

²¹⁶ Cooper, p. 19.

²¹⁷ *Daily Southern Cross (DSC)*, 17 July 1869, p. 4.

²¹⁸ David Arbury, *Scrip Corner: Thames Stock Exchange*, Thames Goldfield information series, No. 2 (Thames: Metallum Research, 1997), p. 1.

²¹⁹ David Arbury, *Scrip Corner*, p. 1.

²²⁰ Rosemary Killip, *To Find a Fortune: Women of the Thames Goldfield, 1867 – 1893* (Wellington: Victoria University, 1995), p. 67.

²²¹ David Arbury, *Scrip Corner*, p. 5.

²²² David Arbury, *Scrip Corner*, p. 3.

New Zealand pharmacists, one of which is John William Hall.²²³ Through a contemporary letter included in Frost's work, dated 1905, Hall revealed that with business 'almost at a standstill in Auckland', he and a partner moved to Thames in 1867.²²⁴ He described in detail the 'shanty' they initially lived in, and made mention that 'naturally, things were pretty rough at first.'²²⁵ Hall struggled on, claiming that his 'business prospered, though much of the profit was lost in "keeping up the goldfields" by contributing to prospecting parties and testing duffer claims.'²²⁶ His experience shows that everyday businessmen involved themselves in the events of the goldfields, hoping to be a part of future success. Unfortunately, the buying of shares in gold mines led to the area becoming even more reliant on consistent gold yields. 'Scrip Corner' came to exemplify the fickle nature of wealth in Thames, because depending on the result, it 'could bring fortune or ruin.'²²⁷ At the height of trading activity, the stock exchange had a drastic negative effect on the town's ability to entice investment. This problem was investigated by the *Cornwall Chronicle* in 1870.²²⁸ They argued that the stock exchange was rife with false reporting and speculation, which instead of increasing interest in the area, had caused a widespread decline in commercial confidence. It was their opinion that the blame for this artificial wealth lay with 'the sudden and fictitious appearance of prosperity' in Thames.²²⁹ According to their research, there were numerous cases where people had bought shares in multiple mining claims, and had then neglected their own trades, preferring to gamble on the scrip.²³⁰

The limited investment in Thames hurt the mining industry, because miners were unable to purchase the necessary equipment. A reporter noted that investors were not impressed with the organisation of the goldfields, especially the poor management

²²³ Murray R. Frost, *Behind the Dispensing Screen: Early New Zealand Pharmacists* (Hamilton: Murray R Frost, 2004).

²²⁴ Frost, p. 93.

²²⁵ Frost, p. 93.

²²⁶ Frost, p. 94.

²²⁷ Killip, p. 67.

²²⁸ *The Cornwall Chronicle (TCC)*, 10 September 1870, pp. 14-15.

²²⁹ *TCC*, 10 September 1870, pp. 14-15.

²³⁰ *TCC*, 10 September 1870, pp. 14-15.

displayed by individual mines.²³¹ The correspondent also argued that investment had been slow due to the prolonged process of quartz mining, which meant that results of claims were not immediately known.²³² Issues surrounding the lack of investment in machinery meant that individual miners suffered, as many had prosperous claims within their grasp, but were unable to extract the minerals.²³³ Throughout this period, there were constant calls for a greater emphasis on technology and investment. Although intended to resolve the problem, this public discussion actually made people more cautious to invest. Throughout this dialogue, the negative effects associated with the local stock exchange and the lack of skilled workers became prominent talking points.

These contemporary commentaries and reports highlight the fact that prosperity in Thames was much more uncertain than has previously been recorded. Moreover, they cast doubt on the celebratory representations of the gold mining era. Historians like John Grainger described the area as prosperous and an ideal place of opportunity.²³⁴ However, as the newspaper reports and commentaries above show, mining at Thames was not stable. In most instances, it was a lottery where most failed. The experiences of a large array of locals reveal that the initial economic boom that Thames experienced has been over-emphasised in historical scholarship. It was not until the large scale implementation of machinery in the early 1870s that the goldfields began producing steady returns. The depressing local descriptions of the economic situation in Thames were not shared by overseas publications. Overseas accounts highlight the town as a hub of economic activity, especially in London, where the prosperity of the goldfields was boasted about in local media outlets. *The Times* reported early in 1869 that the area was ‘making progress, and during the current year increased accommodation will be afforded to miners by the erection of quartz-crushing machinery.’²³⁵ On a different note, the issues with Māori over land were raised, but it

²³¹ *TCC*, 27 November 1869, p. 4.

²³² ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 6.

²³³ ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 6.

²³⁴ John Grainger, *The Amazing Thames* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1951), p. 14.

²³⁵ *The Times*, 27 March 1869, p. 4.

was suggested that this problem would sort itself out in due time.²³⁶ The *Illustrated London News* was much more positive, reporting the ‘extraordinary richness of the goldfields in Auckland.’²³⁷ In contrast to Theophilus Cooper’s local, rather cautionary, observations, described earlier in this chapter, overseas readers and speculators were sold a tale of success.



Figure 4: A sketch published in 1869 by the *Illustrated London News*, portraying the Thames goldfields as a well developed settlement.²³⁸

News of the supposed prosperity in Thames not only spread optimism throughout New Zealand, but around the globe. Discussions were taking place in Tasmania regarding whether or not they should renew their own prospecting efforts.²³⁹ The

²³⁶ *TT*, 27 March 1869, p. 4.

²³⁷ *ILN*, 18 September 1869, p. 272.

²³⁸ ‘Scenes in New Zealand’, *Illustrated London News*, 25 Sep 1869, p. 304.

²³⁹ *TCC*, 19 May 1869, p. 2.

swift development of the Thames encouraged external observers that gold mining could lead to a surge in economic activity within a very short amount of time. Within fourteen months of operation, Thames became home to fifty-six mining and quartz crushing companies.²⁴⁰ In 1869, it was believed that at Thames ‘the results as a whole are sometimes marvellous’, and that it should inspire other prospectors with ‘fresh courage.’²⁴¹

These accounts show that by the middle of 1869, Thames had begun to gain recognition from national and overseas observers. In a few short years the town had evolved from a region of little public significance, with the principal occupants the native Māori, to a thriving centre of business that housed thousands of people from diverse backgrounds. Success at Thames was beginning to translate into growth in other areas of New Zealand. In August 1869, there were calls for a mint to be established in Auckland.²⁴² It was thought that the accomplishments of the goldfields had led to the need for the colony to have its own mint, rather than exporting the produce to other areas. It was hoped that the provision of this service would also increase the standing of New Zealand, and lead to an increase of interest in the goldfields. Nevertheless, beneath the façade of a vibrant and booming economy, the reality of living and succeeding in Thames betrayed the luring endorsements proliferated overseas. Thames, as much as it had transformed rapidly, was in fact a fragile and precarious experiment. The actuality of this tenuous fabrication would become only all too real in just a few short years.

²⁴⁰ *TCC*, 19 May 1869, p. 2.

²⁴¹ *TCC*, 19 May 1869, p. 2.

²⁴² *TE*, 9 August 1869, p. 3.

Government Assurances

Thames was now occupying discussion in local, provincial and central Government meetings. The extent of which the goldfields were seen to be benefiting the rest of the country was explained by Governor George Bowen, who noted the newfound optimism in New Zealand, in a speech made to the House of Representatives in 1869:

I heartily congratulate you on the wonderful progress of the Auckland Gold Fields, and entirely concur in the sense which you have shown of their importance. I am confident that national tranquillity and increased population are all that are requisite to secure a great and general extension of the Gold Fields in that and other parts of this auriferous country.²⁴³

Bowen continued by suggesting that ‘nothing will promote peace and immigration more than the development of Gold Fields.’²⁴⁴ Bowen’s speech shows just how much interest Thames was generating in National affairs. It was hoped that the local township would continue to thrive, and that this in turn, would translate to the spread of economic prosperity to the surrounding areas. In a cautionary tone, Bowen also noted that mining should not be the only industry that the area should focus on. Instead, he advised that they continue diversifying their economic opportunities, and was very pleased with the progress being made in the flax industry:

I am glad that you have not neglected another obvious source of wealth which is to be found on its surface in the native flax, and that you have directed inquiries to be made during the recess which may lead to the further advancement of the growing trade in this valuable material.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ ‘Speech to the House of Representatives’, *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 September 1869, p. 458.

²⁴⁴ ‘Speech to the House of Representatives’, *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 September 1869, p. 458.

²⁴⁵ ‘Speech to the House of Representatives’, *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 September 1869, p. 458.

Despite his optimism, Bowen acknowledged that the past few years had been hard on the colony, remarking that it was a ‘period of great depression.’²⁴⁶ He, in part, blamed the state of affairs on the unrest and rebellion that had gripped the colony, but was hopeful that the new colonial regiments would be able to keep the peace in the future, and that settlers were now able to resume their industrial pursuits.

With all the optimism from government and other countries about the situation in Thames, it would seem that the town was thriving. However, local contemporary accounts show that the picture was not as glowing as external observers or historians have stressed. Instead of “prosperity”, regular discussion was had about the depressed state of the goldfields and how the situation might be improved. By the end of 1869, the goldfields appeared to be in a permanent state of depression. Residents called for a deputation meeting with the Governor to discuss solutions that could revive the area’s economy. In an article published on 22 December 1869 some of the issues that were envisioned to arise at the meeting were previewed, including the need for more agricultural work to take place in the region.²⁴⁷ The report noted that the land between the Shortland district and the northern boundaries needed to be made available. Indeed, frustration was expressed in regard to the lack of work that had been done on the land, and the central Government criticised for its failure to acquire the land as the reason miners were being ‘deprived of the opportunity to find a home for himself and family.’²⁴⁸

The following day, the results of the meeting was reported in the *Daily Southern Cross*, with three main reasons given for the current state of decline in Thames. Blame was laid at the feet of the central Government for its neglect regarding leasing arrangements.²⁴⁹ Under the law, men could claim land, but did not have to work it for fourteen months. This had resulted in vast amounts of land that could have supported the economy left entirely un-worked. It was believed by many that these types of

²⁴⁶ ‘Speech to the House of Representatives’, *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 September 1869, p. 458.

²⁴⁷ *DSC*, 22 December 1869, p. 3.

²⁴⁸ *DSC*, 22 December 1869, p. 3.

²⁴⁹ *DSC*, 23 December 1869, p. 4.

lease arrangements only served to ‘check enterprise.’²⁵⁰ Furthermore, it was argued that the lease arrangements had stifled immigration and had ‘fatally checked the influx of population, and of the capital which always follows in the wake of an influx of population.’²⁵¹ According to the report, the other two causes for the depression in Thames related directly to the mining industry. One being the ‘exaggerated and fictitious value placed upon the mines, and the manner in which companies have been formed and conducted upon this field.’²⁵² The other was the mismanagement of the goldfields and the lack of strong laws. The meeting ended with those attending making several proposals about how to rectify the situation. First, a mining board needed to be appointed so that mining issues could be quickly resolved. Secondly, a ‘Court of Mines’ was suggested so that people could have their grievances heard.²⁵³ Finally, the lease issues needed to be dealt with, beginning with a freeze on new leases until previous entitlements had been processed.²⁵⁴

Although in 1870, the goldfields had progressed to the stage that they were extracting gold in large quantities, there were still concerns being raised about the viability of the industry. The *Auckland Star* reported that these fears were under discussion at a local ‘Provincial Council’ meeting.²⁵⁵ At the meeting, Superintendent Thomas Gillies argued that Thames was still suffering the effects of the areas past economic failures, but the resumption of regular activity was improving the situation.²⁵⁶ He maintained the belief that the goldfields had made remarkable progress since being officially opened and that there was still reason to believe that it could prove to be a permanent thriving industry.²⁵⁷ The only hindrance seen standing in the way of future progress was the objections by local Māori to lease more land for mining. It was

²⁵⁰ *DSC*, 23 December 1869, p. 4.

²⁵¹ *DSC*, 23 December 1869, p. 4.

²⁵² *DSC*, 23 December 1869, p. 4.

²⁵³ *DSC*, 23 December 1869, p. 4.

²⁵⁴ *DSC*, 23 December 1869, p. 4.

²⁵⁵ *Auckland Star (AS)*, 26 October 1870, p. 2.

²⁵⁶ *AS*, 26 October 1870, p. 2.

²⁵⁷ *AS*, 26 October 1870, p. 2.

hoped that over time, some progress could be made in these negotiations, with the ultimate goal being the purchase of the Ohinemuri block.²⁵⁸

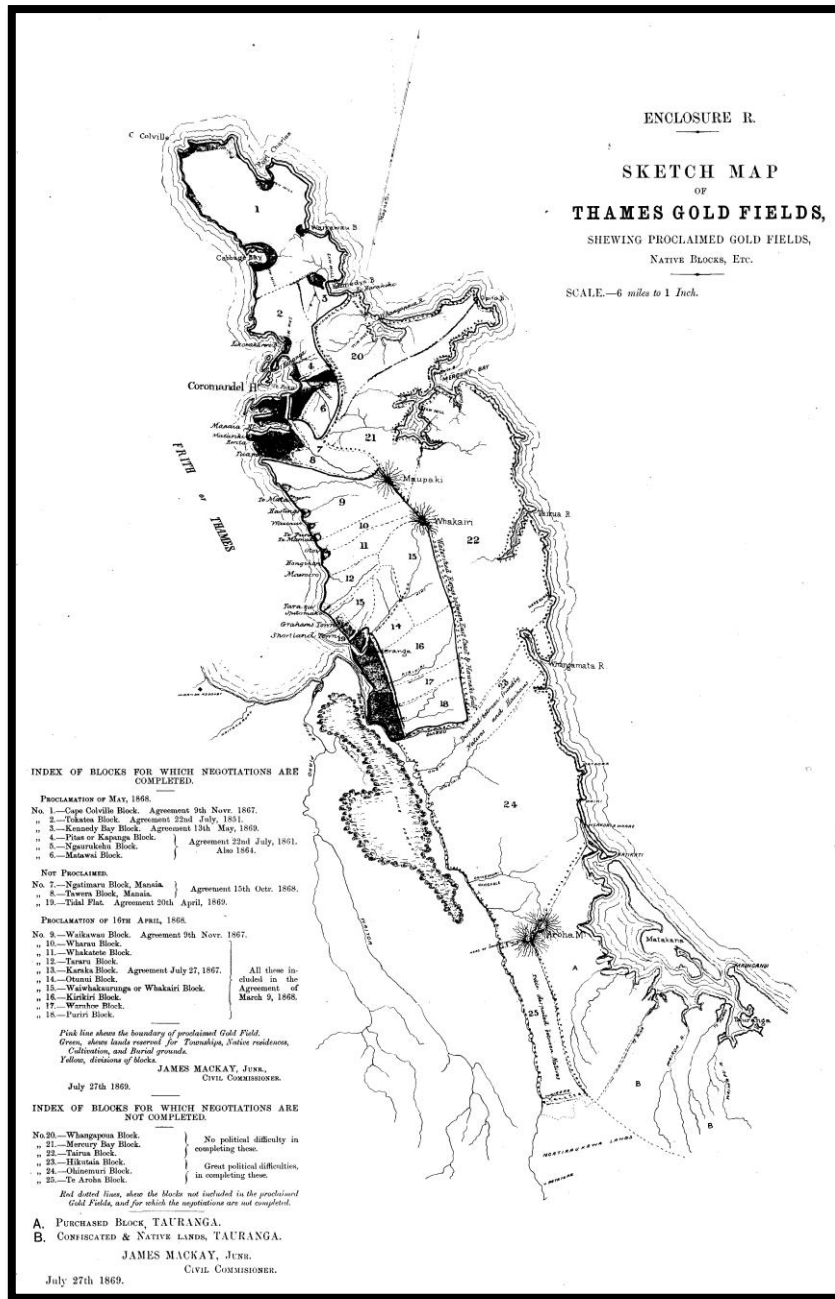


Figure 5: Map of the Thames Goldfields, showing the surrounding area, Ohinemuri is designated as Block 24.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ AS, 26 October 1870, p. 2.

This report failed to elaborate on the extent of the depression in Thames, instead a newspaper article from early 1870, provided by an on-site reporter F. H. Troup, highlighted the alarming state of the town. Troup drew attention to ‘the present cry for help from the Thames district.’²⁶⁰ He highlighted that action is urgently needed because ‘there are a large number of persons almost starving at the Thames.’²⁶¹ In his report, Troup appealed for more government funding to be made available to the goldfields, in the hope of initiating a revival in the local economy. He acknowledged that large amounts of resources had already been provided to Thames, but that these had been wasted with little dividends to show for the locals’ efforts.²⁶² These previous spending attempts had been focused on the mining industry, but had failed to provide a consistent stream of revenue and employment. For future projects, the writer advocated that the unemployed in Thames be sent to other areas around the country to provide labour for public projects, specifically a new railway at Kaipara. He argued that the project would cost £30,000 and would give employment to ‘a large number of the Thames unemployed for at least eighteen months.’²⁶³ By using these men for the labour required, costs could be kept to a minimum, while also relieving Thames of its unemployed until its local economy could accommodate a larger population.

The hardships experienced on the goldfields were elaborated on by Thames resident Ellen Fox in a series of letters written to her family back in England. Fox explained in 1869 that it was ‘very difficult to do the mere housekeeping on £3 per week. Things are so dear – Last week I spent 16/5 at the grocer’s for what I am sure at home could have been got for 5/-.’²⁶⁴ These high prices were not helped by her husband’s volatile income. Even though he was a doctor, she claimed that one week he earned ‘£1.19.6’,

²⁵⁹ Sketch Map of Thames Goldfields’, in ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 37.

²⁶⁰ *DSC*, 22 February 1870, p. 5.

²⁶¹ *DSC*, 22 February 1870, p. 5.

²⁶² *DSC*, 22 February 1870, p. 5.

²⁶³ *DSC*, 22 February 1870, p. 5.

²⁶⁴ Ellen Fox, Letters written by Ellen Fox, wife of Doctor Fox of Shortland, Thames to her Father and Sister in England, 1867-1887 (Auckland Public Library: Transcribed by Miss Solly, Christchurch), p. 23.

the next he made ‘£6.2.6.’²⁶⁵ Fox argued that uncertainty on the goldfields was to blame and that ‘they were not to be depended on for more than about a week together.’²⁶⁶

The fluctuating population due to mining activity was the topic of an article in the *Daily Southern Cross* in mid 1869.²⁶⁷ Here, the author argued that the mining community of New Zealand was too concerned with alluvial gold and the quick wealth that it could generate. The article noted that miners often heard rumours and speculation about bonanza finds, causing them to give up profitable claims in the hope of striking it rich with one find. In addition it was argued that this may be successful for some, but for ‘every individual who succeeds in securing a rich claim, ninety-nine fail to obtain ordinary wages.’²⁶⁸ Instead of blind prospecting, the author advocated the use of capital machinery and settling in an area for a prolonged time. If this more methodical approach was taken, the author argues, the profitable nature and allure of the Thames would be showcased as ‘one of the richest goldbearing districts in the world.’²⁶⁹

The issues of poverty and starvation appear to have resolved themselves by October 1870, with the *South Australian Advertiser* reporting on the new optimism that was gripping Thames. The newspaper acknowledged that the results from the goldfields were lower than anticipated, but the future was looking much better. The level of financial hardship had improved, with one reporter conveying that ‘there were none begging for work to keep themselves and families from starving, and, to judge from the returns, all are doing well.’²⁷⁰ According to the newspaper reports, although conditions eventually progressed, there was an initial period where people struggled just to make a living in Thames. This financial toil and uncertainty has been rarely

²⁶⁵ Fox, p. 21.

²⁶⁶ Fox, p. 21.

²⁶⁷ *DSC*, 15 June 1869, p. 4.

²⁶⁸ *DSC*, 15 June 1869, p. 4.

²⁶⁹ *DSC*, 15 June 1869, p. 4.

²⁷⁰ *South Australian Advertiser*, 31 October 1870, p. 4.

highlighted by authors like Peter James Quinn, who prefer to document the attention Thames was garnering on the world stage.²⁷¹

A Government report by Thomas Gillies in 1870 chronicled the past failures of the Thames goldfields, stating that the region had suffered from the lack of skilled and experienced men to work the mines. These people, Gillies claimed, came to the area in the pursuit of alluvial gold, but this search had ceased, with the miners now focused on quartz mining.²⁷² The report also concluded that the gold production achieved at Thames was astonishing and that success could be managed at a smaller labour cost than the fields in Australia and California.²⁷³ However, the progress had been stalled due to the lack of adequate machinery. The high financial costs involved in this investment caused many to work together and form companies. When these companies floated their stock, there was a '*furor* in speculation, amounting almost to positive insanity.'²⁷⁴ Those that did not partake in the actual physical activity of gold mining were now able to gamble at the local stock exchange. This was noted as a severe problem in Thames, because 'the proper work of mining was neglected for the more tempting bait of profits on the sale of scrip.'²⁷⁵ The result was a depression in the township, which it only emerged from in 1870.²⁷⁶

At the beginning of 1870, the *Daily Southern Cross* ran a column detailing the operations of the Thames goldfields over the previous year. It applauded the growth that Thames had experienced, noting that 'the number of payable mines has greatly increased, and the field itself has extended greatly.'²⁷⁷ The fields were also home to 'some of the most efficient – although not the largest – crushing machines in the world.'²⁷⁸ These machines were crucial to extracting gold from the quartz rock, so it is noteworthy that there continued to be investment in that area. The depression was

²⁷¹ Peter James Quinn, 'Grahamstown: Legacy of the Thames Goldfield', *New Zealand Geographic*, 81 (September-October 2006), p. 94.

²⁷² 'Report on the Gold Fields of Westland and Auckland', *AJHR*, 1870, D-40, p. 19.

²⁷³ 'Report on the Gold Fields of Westland and Auckland', *AJHR*, 1870, D-40, p. 19.

²⁷⁴ 'Report on the Gold Fields of Westland and Auckland', *AJHR*, 1870, D-40, p. 19.

²⁷⁵ 'Report on the Gold Fields of Westland and Auckland', *AJHR*, 1870, D-40, p. 19.

²⁷⁶ 'Report on the Gold Fields of Westland and Auckland', *AJHR*, 1870, D-40, p. 19.

²⁷⁷ *DSC*, 3 January 1870, p. 4.

²⁷⁸ *DSC*, 3 January 1870, p. 4.

also acknowledged, but it was viewed as a temporary problem that had occurred in every other goldfield in the past, and that fluctuations were always present in the industry.²⁷⁹ The predominant problem that was gathering public attention and reaction were the issues surrounding the leasing of land. It was noted that ‘the system of leasing that has been lately carried on has had a most deleterious effect on the progress on the field.’²⁸⁰ Furthermore, ‘prospecting has been retarded by the indiscriminate manner on which the ground has been locked up from the working miner.’²⁸¹ The negatives associated with the mass leasing of land were acknowledged to provide other, more expansive positives, such as the opening and development of other areas. The lack of available land in Thames, it was noted, helped spark renewed interest and activity in places such as Coromandel and Tararu.²⁸²

Summary

Once the area was proclaimed a goldfield in 1867, Thames grew amid the generous advertisements encouraging people to migrate to the area. During this period, early successes, like William Hunt’s bonanza strike at the Shotover mine, created excitement, but not necessarily widespread wealth amongst miners. Instead of prosperity, people struggled with the financial commitment that was necessary to work the goldfields. Much of the problems were a result of goldfields needing machinery to extract the gold from the quartz-rock. This required a substantial investment in mining equipment, which many individuals were unable to afford.

Contemporary accounts frequently raised their concerns over the lack of machinery available to the gold industry. Although there was a clear need for more equipment, financiers were hesitant to invest in the region. This reluctance stemmed from the fictitious and speculative activity that occurred at the local stock exchange. At Scrip Corner, shares in individual mining claims were bought and sold. This activity

²⁷⁹ *DSC*, 3 January 1870, p. 4.

²⁸⁰ *DSC*, 3 January 1870, p. 4.

²⁸¹ *DSC*, 3 January 1870, p. 4.

²⁸² *DSC*, 3 January 1870, p. 4.

resulted in some people accumulating vast amounts of wealth. However, it also led to a preference to trade stock, rather than actually working the goldfields. Consequently, the state of the gold industry deteriorated and investors were less inclined to supply the area with resources. These issues slowed the progress in Thames, but through these uncertain times, locals remained optimistic about the town's economic future. This hopefulness centred around the steady introduction of machinery by the turn of the decade. Furthermore, many had gained experience and skills that could be put to use in the future. Subsequently, although the goldfields suffered through various problems and failures, they served as a learning tool and a reminder of what to avoid.

This chapter has contrasted differing accounts, especially those between local and broader perspectives. Locals described the frequent economic depressions that afflicted the region, noting the multiple failures to operate the goldfields effectively. Accounts beyond the local context tended to portray Thames as an area full of economic prosperity and opportunity. These commentators accepted that initial expectations may have been overblown. However, they argued that in time, the area would achieve major success. This chapter has cast doubt on the level of prosperity that the town experienced immediately after the proclamation as a goldfield in 1867. The following chapter continues this exploration regarding the supposed success of the gold industry. It details the development of the town's vast commercial district, but it also examines Thames' eventual economic collapse and the reasons behind it.

Chapter Two

False Expectations and the Development of Thames

During a celebratory town reunion in 1913, a commemorative piece was published in the *Waikato Times* describing the affluence that the town experienced during its initial years. It remembered the population rush to the area and the ‘period of unexampled prosperity’ that followed.²⁸³ Rather than a period of growth and confidence, this study has argued thus far that Thames was rife with hardship, and that the mining industry teetered on the edge of collapse due to the lack of machinery. Although locals experienced varying levels of financial hardship, many remained optimistic that the local economy would improve. This misplaced confidence was fuelled by Government assurances and propaganda printed by various newspapers. This chapter begins with an analysis of the negative effects media misrepresentation of Thames had on the financial situation locally. In an examination of this issue, it emphasises that the general public was indeed aware that reports of the goldfield’s prosperity were exaggerated and notes that locals were actively petitioning the Government to rectify the problems that this had created.

This chapter also considers the affluence that Thames experienced around 1871, when the goldfields peaked in production. During this time, businesses flourished as a vast and diverse commercial district was formed. Individuals made fortunes that would later be heralded in the town’s history, most notably figures like the local brewer Louis Ehrenfried and the Price brothers, who established the local foundry. Historians have detailed the exploits of these two businesses, but most accounts have failed to highlight the numerous, smaller businesses that also occupied the town. The combined efforts of large and small scale businesses rejuvenated the settlement with optimism. However, this chapter notes that this period of prosperity was short lived. It analyses the initial decline in Thames by examining the natural disasters that struck

²⁸³ Thames Re-Union: Celebration – Souvenir (Hamilton: Waikato Times Printing Works, 1913), p. 11.

the town and the effect that the Ohinemuri district had on the local economy. Indeed, the opening of the Ohinemuri district goldfield in 1875 diverted attention away from Thames.²⁸⁴ During this time people left the area to try their luck at the newly opened goldfields. The population exodus and decline in economic activity led to a decline within the town, as peoples living standards diminished and food prices rose. This chapter explores these points and shows that the problems that hindered the progression of Thames were a combination of past failures and new challenges that arose during the early and mid-1870s.

Misrepresentation

In its initial years, claims of success in Thames had been declared through various newspapers and Government reports. James Mackay stated that the goldfields ‘had demonstrated their richness to be almost beyond the wildest hopes of the most imaginative.’²⁸⁵ In part, these tales of prosperity were supposed to infuse potential prospectors and investors with confidence in the newly founded goldfields. This optimism would hopefully encourage people to move to the area or at the very least invest in the various business opportunities available in the district. However, these inflated stories of wealth were not entirely accurate. Some miners had found great veins of gold, but generally progress had been sluggish because of the lack of machinery required to extract the mineral from the quartz.²⁸⁶ The township was developing rapidly; however, it still lacked basic infrastructure, such as adequate roads.²⁸⁷ By 1870, Thames’ residents began to realise that the tales of success and prosperity were more fabrication than fact. Disgruntled locals argued that the media’s misrepresentation of the goldfields had helped to contribute to the depression the town was currently experiencing by creating false hope.²⁸⁸ This had led many to

²⁸⁴ J. B. McAra, *Gold Mining at Waihi: 1878-1952* (Waihi: Waihi Historical Society, 1978), p. 28.

²⁸⁵ ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’ *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*, 1869, A-17, p. 19.

²⁸⁶ *New Zealand Herald (NZH)*, 4 October 1867, p. 3.

²⁸⁷ ‘Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields’, *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 19.

²⁸⁸ *Evening Post (EP)*, 18 October 1870, p. 2.

migrate to the area, expecting to gain employment upon arrival. However, the township could not employ its current population, let alone find work for new immigrants.

This awakening to the realities in the Thames economy became a recurrent theme in 1870, with numerous unhappy locals voicing their concerns through local and national newspapers. One resident, for instance, reported that public meetings had taken place in Auckland and Thames to try and solve the misrepresentation of the area.²⁸⁹ During these assemblies, some accepted that the financial situation on the goldfields was much worse than what had been reported. They expressed their regret that it took so long, but were thankful that this realisation had occurred, because if false reporting had continued, it would have ‘resulted in a most disastrous rush’ to Thames.²⁹⁰

The amount of gold being extracted was also called into question, with a correspondent accusing local officials of using pre-purchased minerals to boost numbers. He argued that much of the supposed gold obtained from the area was actually purchased in Westland, evidencing the customs log and other shipping documents.²⁹¹ Another account of the misreporting occurring in Thames related to the number of bankruptcies in the town. It argued that instead of paying the legal fee and preparing the documents for insolvency, business owners were abandoning their premises.²⁹² This gave Thames the appearance of being home to a thriving commercial district, but many of these stores may have been unattended. Moreover, these were not isolated reports. Complaints were common in local and national newspapers throughout the following years. One observer, for instance, noted in 1874 that there was a wilful intent to mislead the public about the prosperity of the Thames goldfields.²⁹³ He argued that the local dividend listings included one mine that had not paid shareholders for over two years and 17 others that had not done so that

²⁸⁹ *Otago Witness (OW)*, 1 January 1870, p. 3.

²⁹⁰ *OW*, 1 January 1870, p. 3.

²⁹¹ *OW*, 1 January 1870, p. 3.

²⁹² *EP*, 18 October 1870, p. 2.

²⁹³ *Evening Star (ES)*, 3 August 1874, p. 2.

year.²⁹⁴ It was his opinion that this misrepresentation only caused harm to the town, and that outsiders must think of the current situation as laughable. The uncertainty surrounding the economic situation of the goldfields negatively impacted on the confidence that potential investors had in the region. These complaints show that, according to locals, prosperity in Thames was being misreported in the media, because it was not experiencing the level of affluence that had been reported. Many struggled to earn a living because the lack of machinery resulted in the mining industry producing inconsistent returns. With little other employment opportunities, the town suffered fluctuating unemployment levels. These hardships were amplified when new arrivals came to the area expecting to find work in the supposed prosperous region. Overtime, these problems were resolved, but their initial presence in Thames casts doubt on the notion that the proclamation of the goldfields in 1867 immediately fuelled a period of prosperity in the region.

Government officials were aware of the problems arising from the media's distortion of Thames and were actively trying to resolve them. Early in 1870, a delegation, led by Premier William Fox, visited the town to discuss the many issues at hand. Fox had hoped to see a more developed settlement, but was not entirely disappointed with the current situation.²⁹⁵ It was his firm belief that over time, the introduction of machinery and technology would help Thames flourish. When local residents questioned what he planned to do to resolve their present crisis, Fox replied that it was a problem that needed to be brought up with the Provincial Government, not his office.²⁹⁶ This was met with public outcry, with locals demanding to know why more could not be done to find work for the 4000-5000 unemployed in Thames, and questioning why men were not being put to work on creating a road to Taupo. Fox quickly rejected this notion, claiming that those jobs were already taken by Māori who would otherwise be displaced by the development.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ *ES*, 3 August 1874, p. 2.

²⁹⁵ *Daily Southern Cross (DSC)*, 21 February 1870, p. 5.

²⁹⁶ *DSC*, 21 February 1870, p. 5.

²⁹⁷ *DSC*, 21 February 1870, p. 5.

Māori and Bankruptcies in Thames

By 1870, Māori in Thames were more regularly seen working in the numerous industries on the goldfields, with it being noted that they were more than capable of succeeding in any field.²⁹⁸ Toss Hammond recalled that in the late 1860s, Māori ‘would camp on the seafront, plaiting flax baskets to hawk the peaches round for sale, and cooking their meals in a big iron pot or perhaps a *hangi*.’²⁹⁹ However, by 1876 the state of the local Māori economy was described as poor and undeveloped by Mr E. W. Puckey, the Government’s Native Agent.³⁰⁰ Puckey argued that ‘they grow food barely sufficient for a scanty subsistence, and trust to Providence and the chance of duping some unlucky pakeha for what else may be required.’³⁰¹ Accounts of Māori working within the local economy are scarce in histories of Thames. Instead, most have focused on prominent chiefs like Te Hotereni Taipari, highlighting the role that they played in negotiating the sale of, or donating, much of the land on the goldfields.³⁰² But by focusing on the actions of these influential figures, the activities of other Māori, who worked in the district, have been neglected. Some historians have investigated the social and economic impact that the goldfields had on Māori communities. Paul Monin, for instance has argued that Māori were displaced by the swift development of the area and struggled to transition from simpler pre-1860 economic structures to the more complex arrangement that dominated the later decades.³⁰³ This new system, he claimed, created problems for Māori as it stressed individualism and competition. During this phase, iwi relied on rent payments from land to sustain their lifestyles, often preferring to spend lavishly on consumer goods, rather than investing in economic ventures.³⁰⁴ Eventually, when the gold mining industry struggled, Māori were left with land that no one wanted to rent and a huge

²⁹⁸ *The Times*, 25 March 1870, p. 4.

²⁹⁹ W. G. (Toss) Hammond, A Boy on the Thames Goldfields, in *The Long Up-Hill Climb, New Zealand 1876-1891* (Wellington: R. E. Owen, 1966), p. 3.

³⁰⁰ ‘Reports From Officers in Native Districts’, *AJHR*, 1876, G-1, No. 26, p 21.

³⁰¹ ‘Reports From Officers in Native Districts’, *AJHR*, 1876, G-1, No. 26, p 21.

³⁰² John and Zelma Williams, *Thames and the Coromandel Peninsula: 2000 years* (Thames: Williams Publishers, 1994), pp. 70-71.

³⁰³ Paul Monin, The Māori Economy of Hauraki 1840-1880, *The New Zealand Journal of History*, 29, 2, (1995), p. 210.

³⁰⁴ Monin, p. 206.

debt that required them to sell their land outright.³⁰⁵ These hardships extended to the highest reaches of Māori society, with Te Hōtereni Taipari's son, Wirope, being 'adjudged a bankrupt' in 1870.³⁰⁶

Interaction between Māori and settlers, then, appears to have been limited. Nevertheless, settlers often targeted Māori in the press for their unwillingness to open up more land for new mining ventures and public projects. In Thames, locals often blamed the Government for failing to negotiate for more land. In response, the Government argued that they had to take into account all of New Zealand, and that they could not devote all their attention to the Thames area. This stance extended to public works. People within the town often questioned why the profits from the goldfields appeared to be supporting national schemes, rather than solely local endeavours.³⁰⁷ The overall decline of the national economy had meant that the Government had to allocate resources to other areas, leaving Thames to look after itself. A report on the state of the New Zealand economy in 1870, shows that there were more bankruptcies annually in the colony than in larger countries like Scotland.³⁰⁸ These accounts revealed that 'hotel keepers and publicans, storekeepers, farmers, and miners, [were] drawn over three-eighths of the entire number of persons who [had] become bankrupt during the last two years.'³⁰⁹

Despite these criticisms, the Government preached patience and perseverance, and in 1870, it finally came to fruition. A correspondent reported that although not entirely prosperous, the Thames economy was beginning to rebound from its past failures. According to an Australian newspaper report in 1870 by the *Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, the town had a population of over 22,000 with roughly 3,000 of those currently unemployed.³¹⁰ The population number used in this calculation was most likely exaggerated, with the 1871 *New Zealand Census*

³⁰⁵ Monin, p. 209.

³⁰⁶ *DSC*, 13 September 1870, p. 1.

³⁰⁷ *NZH*, 29 July 1873, p. 6.

³⁰⁸ 'Second Annual Report of Inspector in Bankruptcy', *New Zealand Gazette*, August 1870, p. 382.

³⁰⁹ 'Second Annual Report of Inspector in Bankruptcy', *New Zealand Gazette*, August 1870, p. 382.

³¹⁰ *The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser (MMHRGA)*, 5 April 1870, p. 2.

recording that 5,792 people were living within the township. Although it is likely that many individuals were staying in the suburbs just outside of the settlement, or were not counted as permanent residents.³¹¹ Nevertheless, the reported unemployment rate does show a decrease from only a few months prior. Correspondents in the newspapers still firmly believed that the goldfield was excellent, and that its prosperity would only increase when it was fully worked. Others argued that the newly built Bank of New Zealand in Grahamstown was too grand for the town, and symbolised the over-confidence that had hindered the goldfields initial growth.³¹²

These reports indicate that Thames was still struggling because of the failures encountered during the early years of the goldfields. The economic expectations for the area had been too ambitious, leaving many people financially over extended. Initially, the township had been developed with the misguided view that it would replace Auckland as the main population and business centre of New Zealand. Instead, the inconsistent gold yields and the failure to sustain a steady working population had hurt the financial viability of Thames. Those within the town worked the area because they had no choice but to stay. Many who could leave did so for greener pastures and talk of greater gold prospects elsewhere.³¹³ The initial prosperity that the settlement supposedly experienced was in many respects exceptionally overemphasised, or at the very least, that affluence was only enjoyed by a lucky few. Still, it was a remarkable that the development of Thames had been so swift, especially in the face of the many problems that had afflicted the town during its initial years.

³¹¹ *New Zealand Census*, 1871, Table III, p. 4.

³¹² *MMHRGA*, 5 April 1870, p. 2.

³¹³ *ES*, 18 December 1875, p. 2.

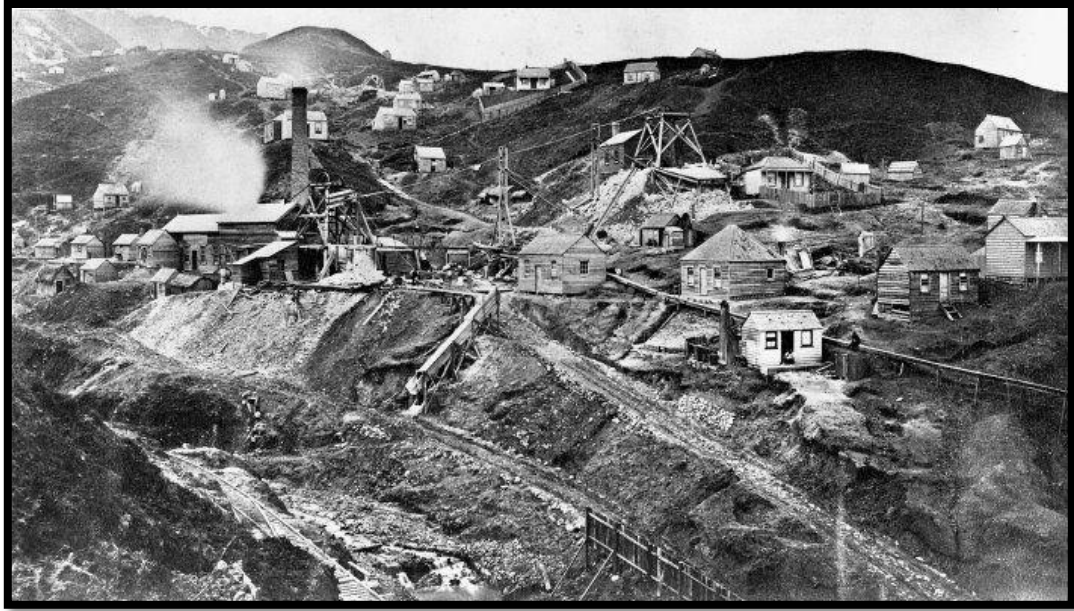


Figure 6: *The Caledonian Mine, circa 1870s.*³¹⁴

Gold Finally Sparks Prosperity in Thames

In 1871, a turning point occurred in the Thames' financial situation, when a vast amount of gold was struck at the Caledonian mine.³¹⁵ The mine had previously offered steady returns; however, the large quantities of specimens that were being extracted by early 1871 were helping to facilitate wealth throughout the township. Increased activity was seen at the local stock exchange. Shares in the Caledonian claim were £85 in March, but quickly rose to over £185 by July.³¹⁶ The increased production from the entire goldfield was partially helped by the machinery and technology that was steadily introduced over the previous years. By 1874, pumps were installed, which allowed miners to access deep-level mines that would have otherwise been full of water.³¹⁷ Locals observed that this breakthrough was

³¹⁴ 'Showing the Caledonian Mine', Sir George Grey Special Collections, 4-8719, Auckland Libraries.

³¹⁵ David Arbury, *How Rich Were Some of the Thames Gold mines?*, Thames Goldfield information series, No. 3 (Thames: Metallum Research, 1997), pp. 2-3.

³¹⁶ *Auckland Star (AS)*, 4 March 1871, p. 2.

AS, 27 July 1871, p. 2.

³¹⁷ *ES*, 29 April 1874, p. 2.

significant to the area, as prior mining attempts had merely scratched the surface of the goldfields potential.³¹⁸ This contributed to the period of prosperity that Thames experienced in the early 1870s. Another factor in the resurgence of the goldfields was the improvement in human capital. In previous years, many of the men working the region lacked adequate knowledge and skills to achieve success, but by 1872, mining operations were entrusted to men of experience and ability.³¹⁹ The Mining Inspector for South Hauraki, Henry Goldsmith, noted that this change had contributed to the town's new emphasis on machinery, with leading men ensuring that only the best equipment was installed and implemented on the goldfields.³²⁰

This remarkable progress at Thames was discussed at length by various newspaper accounts. One observer noted that the settlement was once known as the 'pigs nest', especially the area that housed the local miners.³²¹ However, by 1871 the character of the township was as credible as other older settlements, thanks to the efforts of 'a number of energetic lucky Thames miners.'³²² The swift development of Thames, though not without its problems, was recognised by Reverend Father Nivard in his farewell speech in 1873.³²³ Nivard recalled that upon his arrival to Thames many years before, he saw an undeveloped area that only had four buildings. As he left, Nivard proclaimed that the place had grown into two successful townships, Shortland and Grahamstown, and that the future would be bright for those that stayed.³²⁴

³¹⁸ *ES*, 29 April 1874, p. 2.

³¹⁹ 'Report on the South Hauraki Gold Mining District of Thames from 1 July 1871 to 31 March 1872', *AJHR*, 1872, G-4A, p. 4.

³²⁰ 'Report on the South Hauraki Gold Mining District of Thames from 1 July 1871 to 31 March 1872', *AJHR*, 1872, G-4A, p. 4.

³²¹ *DSC*, 21 March 1871, p. 3.

³²² *DSC*, 21 March 1871, p. 3.

³²³ *New Zealand Tablet (NZT)*, 12 July 1873, p. 12.

³²⁴ *NZT*, 12 July 1873, p. 12.



Figure 7: *Thames Township in the late 1860s, the suburb of Shortland is in the distance, where Grahamstown is the nearly vacant area in the foreground.*³²⁵

This rapid development can be seen by contrasting photographs of the town from different periods. By the late 1860s, the town had progressed substantially, especially since the area had only been proclaimed a goldfield in 1867. By this stage, Thames already had a number of wooden buildings, mainly situated in the Shortland district. However, the area that would become Grahamstown was relatively vacant, with little housing or developed roads.

³²⁵ 'Looking south from Irishtown, over Shortland (Thames)', R.H. Bartlett, Sir George Grey Special Collections, 7-A16669, Auckland Libraries.

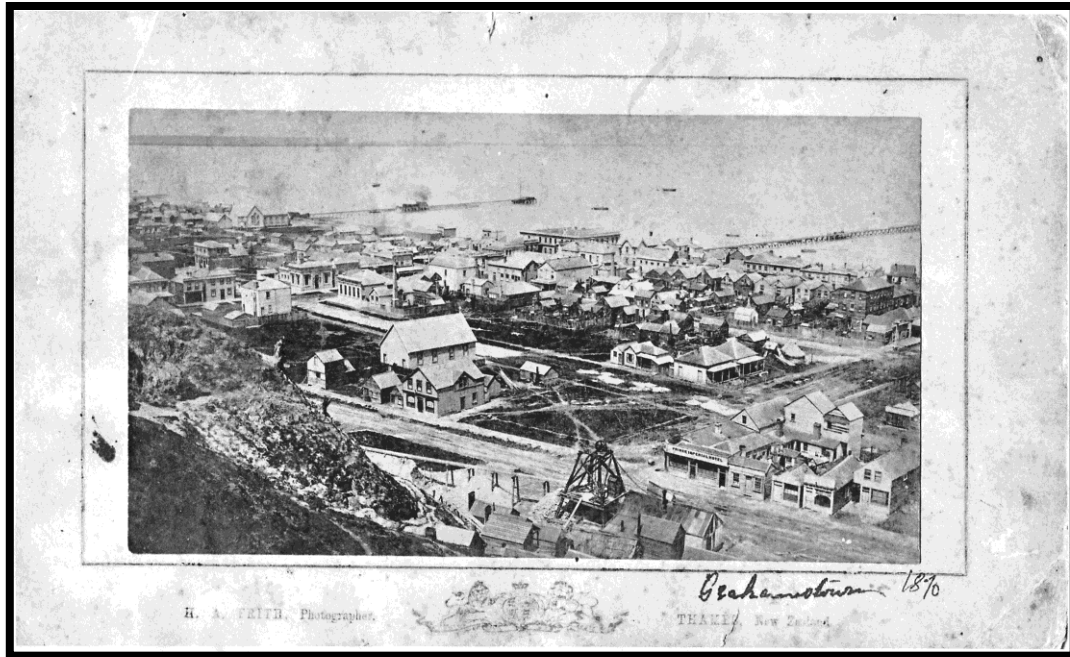


Figure 8: *Grahamstown Township in 1870.*³²⁶

By 1870, the progress is significant and immediately visible. The image above shows just how developed Thames had become in only three years. In this time, the district of Grahamstown had evolved from an empty section of land, to a thriving business centre. By this time, the town also had multiple wharfs in operation, including the two that are visible at the top of Figure 8.

Another detailed, and intriguing, report on the progress of Thames in 1873 was produced by a traveller from Australia, who noted that the buildings present in the town were far superior to what he had seen at the New South Wales goldfields.³²⁷ Impressed by the amount of stores, banks, hotels and houses within the settlement, he also emphasised how the town had developed around the gold mines, documenting that Grahamstown was far more prosperous than Shortland, with the latter only

³²⁶ 'Grahamstown 1870', H. A. Frith, Merv Cunningham Collection, 128, The Coromandel Heritage Trust, Thames.

³²⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 3 January 1873, p. 2.

receiving business from the incoming passenger steamers.³²⁸ His observations revealed that the area was still dependent on the goldfields, with most businesses preferring to be located as close as possible to the mining activity and the wharf traffic.

Thames' Commercial Sector

Since the goldfields' struggle for survival from 1867, Thames had radically transformed into a hub of commercial activity by the early 1870s. The town now possessed the necessary infrastructure to make mining profitable. Nevertheless, times were still tough due to the inconsistency of gold finds, but progress had been made towards establishing some stability in the local economy. However, miners were not the only people working in the settlement, the importance of the business sector should not be overlooked. Indeed, individuals occupied themselves by working in the numerous shops that had been established over the previous years. In 1870, the commercial directory stated the town had 816 registered businesses, and likely there were many more that were not listed.³²⁹ Over the next two years this number dropped to 537, but this still shows that Thames was home to a vast commercial district (Appendix Four, p. 122).³³⁰ These figures are in contrast to the Coromandel goldfield, which only had 75 official listings in 1872.³³¹ Although the time periods of the two gold rushes do not equate exactly, the difference between the number of registered businesses in each township is revealing.³³² It reveals that Thames experienced a much more prominent increase in population and commercial interest. This could be attributed to the fact that Auckland was suffering its worst depression in 1867, and desperately needed an economic boost. Historian R.C.J. Stone argued that the Thames gold rush saved Auckland. In his opinion, the depression in Auckland helped

³²⁸ *SMH*, 3 January 1873, p. 2.

³²⁹ *The Thames Directory* (Auckland: O'Leary & Oakley, 1870-71), pp. 1-81.

³³⁰ *Wise's New Zealand Commercial Directory* (Dunedin: Henry Wise, 1872-73), pp. 26-64.

³³¹ *Wise's New Zealand Commercial Directory* (Dunedin: Henry Wise, 1872-73), pp. 65-66.

³³² Because the Coromandel was declared a goldfield in 1862 compared to Thames in 1867. In 1872 Coromandel had 75 business listings compared to Thames' 536.

to fuel the optimism surrounding the new goldfields, soon resulting in the cities soup kitchens being emptied as the unemployed flocked to Thames.³³³ Auckland became resurgent through the establishment of the new commercial markets, as it allowed merchant houses to clear stock that they had been unable to sell for years.³³⁴

Both Thames and Coromandel shared a similar struggle to encourage investment on the goldfields, with the mines at the latter said to be undeveloped and the town lacking in crushing machinery by 1870.³³⁵ Eventually, this problem was partially solved in Thames, which helped to increase gold production there. But it appears that Coromandel had a harder time in gaining interest. A Government report investigating the state of machinery on the two goldfields, concluded that Thames had 1,283 steam engines working across 45 mines, whereas Coromandel only had 220 over eight mines.³³⁶ To some extent, the fact that these gold rushes occurred at different times, may account for the reason why Thames enjoyed a significant increase in activity while Coromandel did not. When the Coromandel was proclaimed a goldfield, national interest was very much focused on the escalating land wars between the colonists and local Māori.³³⁷ Whereas, by Thames' proclamation in 1867, the wars were winding down, local economies were failing, and people were seeking a fresh start. The extraordinary claims of vast gold that surrounded the initial years of the Thames goldfields were also in many respects detrimental to Coromandel, and it was reported by Government officials that the field was almost abandoned after 1867, only being revived in 1869 after a prosperous find.³³⁸

The opening of the Ohinemuri goldfields in 1875 led to the development of numerous settlements in close proximity to Thames. These new population centres, which

³³³ R.C.J. Stone, *Makers of Fortune: A Colonial Business Community and its Fall* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1973), p. 10.

³³⁴ G. C. Dunstall, *Colonial Merchant*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1970), cited in R.C.J. Stone, *Makers of Fortune: A Colonial Business Community and its Fall* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1973), p. 10.

³³⁵ 'Report on the Gold Fields of Westland and Auckland', *AJHR*, 1870, D-40, pp. 19-20.

³³⁶ 'Boiler Accident at the Kurunui Battery, Thames Gold Field', *AJHR*, 1874, H-6.

³³⁷ 'Report by Mr Mackay on the Thames Goldfields', *AJHR*, 1869, A-17, p. 3.

³³⁸ 'Report on the North Hauraki Gold Mining District, Coromandel for the Year Ending 31 March, 1872', *AJHR*, 1872, G-4A, p. 9.

included Waihi, Paeroa and Te Aroha, were spread across the district.³³⁹ This differed from the Thames goldfields, where people were concentrated in one central area. The dispersion of activity at Ohinemuri is clear by the figures in the official business directories. In 1885 Paeroa had 111 listings.³⁴⁰ Even this number is somewhat inflated by there being 43 registered farmers, leaving fewer businesses comprising their commercial district.³⁴¹ Information on Waihi during this period is scarce. The town does not have an official business directory until 1896, when it reports 84 listings.³⁴² Nevertheless, these figures indicate that the proclamations of the two goldfields had different implications for their respective regions. Mining on the Ohinemuri was spread over a larger area, resulting in multiple, but smaller economic centres being developed. In Thames, mines were clustered closer together, which contributed to the area becoming a large population and economic hub.

These comparisons to other neighbouring goldfields indicate that the impact gold had on Thames was distinct (Appendix Three, p. 121). The colony's economic situation in 1867 and the region's proximity to Auckland had contributed to the rapid development of the township. Thames quickly became a hive of economic activity. It was also home to a diverse and extensive commercial district, which was not present at the other goldfields mentioned above. The settlement was not without faults, evidenced in its many economic problems experienced since its founding. To a large extent, these issues arose because of the lack of machinery available to the gold industry. This had hindered the development of the town and had created considerable financial strain on the area. However, the steady implementation of machinery paid dividends when gold production peaked in 1871. Although this event led to a period of prosperity, it occurred after years of economic instability and was only a temporary success.

³³⁹ Laurie Barber, *No Easy Riches: A History of Ohinemuri County, Paeroa and Waihi: 1885-1985* (Auckland: Ray Richards Publisher, 1985), p. 15.

³⁴⁰ The New Zealand Post Office Directory (Dunedin: Wise, Caffin & Co. Publishers, 1885-86), p. 267.

³⁴¹ The New Zealand Post Office Directory (Dunedin: Wise, Caffin & Co. Publishers, 1885-86), p. 267.

³⁴² The New Zealand Post Office Directory (Dunedin: H. Wise & Co. Publishers, 1896-97), p. 685.

The nature of business in Thames also differed from its close neighbours. Where Paeroa had a number of agricultural businesses, while over a quarter of listings at Thames were mining related.³⁴³ Thus, the town's prosperity was very much reliant on the goldfields. Despite this, there were many other opportunities to make a living. Trades such as boot makers feature frequently, with 31 listings in 1873.³⁴⁴ The swift development of Thames also meant that there was a large demand for builders to erect the various buildings that were sprouting up around town. In 1870, when activity would have been at its peak, there were 80 registered builders, and likely many more who were either part-time or unlisted.³⁴⁵

Hotels appeared to be doing a roaring trade during this period with 102 listed in 1870, but this number declined to 73 by 1873. Although it appears that Thames had far too many pubs for its size, when contrasting it to the almost 200 occupying Hokitika, the number pales in comparison.³⁴⁶ However, both figures show that gold mining was thirsty work and that residents on the goldfields were able and willing to spend their disposable income at local drinking establishments. These pubs were supplied by the town's brewers like Louis Ehrenfried. Ehrenfried moved to Thames in 1868 with his brother Bernhard. The brothers came to the region to capitalise on the increased consumer demand that the settlements initial population boom had caused.³⁴⁷ Bernhard died soon after arrival, but Louis continued on and soon gained popularity by providing thirsty locals with high-quality beverages from his Phoenix Brewery. He became so renowned that he sat on multiple town committees, became the Mayor, and was often sought out to solve the town's financial problems.³⁴⁸ Ehrenfried succeeded personally, in part, because he spread the risks of his businesses. Not only did he supply alcohol, but he was also a retailer who owned many of the local pubs. In addition, he capitalised on the resurgence of activity in

³⁴³ Wise's New Zealand Commercial Directory (Dunedin: Henry Wise, 1872-73), pp. 26-64.

³⁴⁴ Wise's New Zealand Commercial Directory (Dunedin: Henry Wise, 1872-73), pp. 26-64.

³⁴⁵ The Thames Directory (Auckland: O'Leary & Oakley, 1870-71), pp. 1-81.

³⁴⁶ G.O. Preshaw, *Banking Under Difficulties or Life on the Goldfields* (Christchurch: Capper Press, 1971), p. 174.

³⁴⁷ Paul Goldsmith and Michael Bassett, *The Myers* (Auckland: David Ling Publishing Limited, 2007), pp. 17-19.

³⁴⁸ Goldsmith and Bassett, pp. 30-31.

Auckland, because he shifted his assets from Thames to there just as the goldfields were declining.³⁴⁹

Another large employer at this time was A. & G. Price Limited, who provided the goldfields with mining equipment and repair services. The foundry was established relatively late at Thames, with brothers Alfred and George Price only moving to the area around 1871.³⁵⁰ Historians have addressed the operations of the Price brothers and their reasons for coming to Thames, noting that it was to enjoy the economic opportunities that the newly founded settlement provided.³⁵¹ Prices' Foundry would become one of the most iconic businesses in Thames, and although under different ownership, it is still in operation today. The foundry's success came because it did not rely on the goldfields to be profitable. Its managers realised that it was too risky to base such a large operation on the production of the gold industry, which was so inconsistent. Therefore, the foundry diversified itself by working in the local timber, flax and gum industries.³⁵² In later years they had great success in the railway industry.

The rise and exploits of the large businesses mentioned above have been well rehearsed by historians.³⁵³ However, Thames was also home to smaller businesses of all varieties, the extent to which has largely been ignored. The town had general stores, grocers and clothing shops. These provided the essentials to the local residents, as well being able to provide consumers with the ability to buy luxury goods in Thames, rather than having to travel to Auckland. Employment opportunities were diverse for those residents who had better educations because they could find professional work in the various stock broking firms or law offices.³⁵⁴ In 1870, there were also eleven listings for teachers in Thames.³⁵⁵ The settlement also

³⁴⁹ Goldsmith and Bassett, p. 35.

³⁵⁰ Bob Scott, *Prices of Thames* (Dunedin: Southern Press Ltd, 1983), p. 6.

³⁵¹ C. W. Vennell, *Men of Metal: The Story of A. & G. Price Ltd, 1868-1968* (Auckland: Wilson & Horton Ltd, 1968), p. 8.

³⁵² Vennell, p. 10.

³⁵³ Goldsmith and Basset, Scott, and Vennell.

³⁵⁴ The Thames Directory (Auckland: O'Leary & Oakley, 1870-71), pp. 1-81.

³⁵⁵ The Thames Directory (Auckland: O'Leary & Oakley, 1870-71), p. 1-81.

had a hospital that employed medical practitioners to cope with the growing number of health problems in the town, notably those caused by mining related activities.³⁵⁶

Although these industries were dominated by male workers, women, nevertheless, played an important role in this commercial activity. Frequently, the wives of miners supplemented the family income by working themselves, either from home or in one of the town's businesses. Their efforts helped to maintain some stability of income for the household, especially if their husband suffered an accident on the goldfields. Although the predominant occupation for women was as a housekeeper, many found work in a variety of occupations during this period. These included one Catherine Coolahan, who worked as a baker, and Emmaetta Blomfield who found work as a dressmaker.³⁵⁷ Women also found work at the numerous drinking establishments, becoming either barmaids or publicans. Rosemary Killip, an historian of women's experiences on the Thames goldfields, has suggested that the efforts by female publicans helped to break down employment barriers and led a number of women to feel more comfortable working in that industry.³⁵⁸ This increased to the point where local observers commented that publicans were merely employing women so that men would be freer with their money.³⁵⁹

Thanks to the success of the Caledonian claim, Thames experienced a short period of prosperity, but it was nevertheless temporary because that level of gold production could not be sustained. As early as 1872, the local economy began showing the signs of decline. According to Ellen Fox, 'bankruptcies [were] getting all the fashion again and will probably remain so until all the speculators have gone through court.'³⁶⁰ Fox was not particularly concerned with this development, reasoning that 'this at least is

³⁵⁶ *Thames Star*, 1 August 1917, p. 2.

³⁵⁷ Chapman's Auckland Directory (Auckland: G. T. Chapman, 1873).

³⁵⁸ Rosemary Killip, *To Find a Fortune: Women of the Thames Goldfield, 1867 – 1893* (Wellington: Victoria University, 1995), p. 71.

³⁵⁹ Killip, p. 71.

³⁶⁰ Ellen Fox, *Letters written by Ellen Fox, wife of Doctor Fox of Shortland, Thames to her Father and Sister in England, 1867-1887* (Auckland Public Library: Transcribed by Miss Solly, Christchurch), Fox, p. 32.

the universal history of gold mining towns.³⁶¹ She also explained that smaller businesses were suffering, with her local butcher requesting she pay her debt a week before it was due because ‘they are so badly pressed for money.’³⁶² Fox expected the hardships to continue until the goldfields produced another large find like the Caledonian.³⁶³

Opening the Ohinemuri District

By examining the numerous business opportunities in Thames, it is clear that the town could provide employment for a wide-range of skill sets. Although there was a diverse range of opportunities in Thames, its success still relied on constant returns from the goldfields. When production declined, locals often clamoured for the opening of more land for prospecting, especially the Ohinemuri district. Throughout the 1870s, numerous approaches had been made by the Government to acquire the land for gold mining purposes; notably by Donald McLean and T.B. Gillies. McLean was the Government’s Native agent for the district and had been in communication with local iwi since 1870. He urged all discussions to be as friendly as possible, while still reminding Māori that it was the Government’s intention to open a new goldfield in the region.³⁶⁴ In the same year Gillies, who was also the Defence Minister, came to the conclusion that some of the chiefs were willing to agree to the leasing of their lands.³⁶⁵ However, the chiefs in question demanded that an advanced payment of £5,000 be given to them before they would support them publically. Government officials had no problem with the amount they were asking for, but they did question whether the chiefs would be able to gain the necessary agreement of their tribes in order to make the transaction worthwhile.³⁶⁶ By late 1874, these discussions were still

³⁶¹ Fox, p. 32.

³⁶² Fox, pp. 37-38.

³⁶³ Fox, pp. 37-38.

³⁶⁴ ‘Correspondence Relative to Ohinemuri, and Native Matters at The Thames’, *AJHR*, 1870, A-19, p. 5.

³⁶⁵ ‘Correspondence Relative to Ohinemuri, and Native Matters at The Thames’, *AJHR*, 1870, A-19, pp. 15-16.

³⁶⁶ ‘Correspondence Relative to Ohinemuri, and Native Matters at The Thames’, *AJHR*, 1870, A-19, pp. 15-16.

taking place. Talks had progressed to the point where it was becoming more of a question of when, not if, Ohinemuri would become open for prospecting. A breakthrough appeared to have occurred after a delegation led by McLean met with local chiefs Te Hira and Te Moananui.³⁶⁷ It appears that a handshake agreement had been reached, with a short delay needed for the chiefs to gain the support of their tribe. This expansion of the goldfields would have vast implications in Thames, both for good and bad.

The distraction of opening up more land had caused mining speculation in Thames to be at a standstill by 1875.³⁶⁸ The majority of local miners were no longer interested in struggling to earn a living. Instead, they were fixated on learning the results from Ohinemuri, in the small hope that early reports would reveal the discovery of alluvial gold. This obsession had led many men on the goldfields to stop working entirely because the recent hardships had robbed the miners of their speculative spirit.³⁶⁹ It was thought that this distraction may only be temporary, and that Thames would actually benefit from Ohinemuri being officially opened for mining. However, the current strain that the uncertainty was placing upon the town was severe. Shareholders within Thames were no longer paying the upkeep on their mines, resulting in many companies being unable to afford their operating costs, thus they had to be shutdown.³⁷⁰ The stock market was also reflective of the poor state of activity, with there being almost no market for shares. Again, the public were urged to ride out the bad times like they had done repeatedly in earlier years. There was a prevailing hope that this depression was similar to those that had previously afflicted the town and that there was no reason to despair.³⁷¹ The optimism here is one that has become interconnected with Thames' history. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, it was hoped that prosperity was just around the corner.

³⁶⁷ *ES*, 22 December 1874, p. 2.

³⁶⁸ *Waikato Times (WT)*, 20 February 1875, p. 5.

³⁶⁹ *NZH*, 21 January 1875, p. 4.

³⁷⁰ *WT*, 20 February 1875, p. 5.

³⁷¹ *WT*, 20 February 1875, p. 5.

However, people eventually grew tired of these constant promises of future wealth, with the population declining by several thousands over the coming years.³⁷²

It is at this point in the town's history that it becomes clear that Thames would never reach its lofty aspirations. The opening of Ohinemuri had not brought great prosperity to the region. Instead, it had served as a distraction that deterred local miners from working their current claims. The inconsistency of the goldfields led disgruntled locals to argue for more stable employment opportunities. This contributed to a change in the town's economic future, as new developments would emphasise a shift away from the gold industry, towards a more diverse array of businesses.

Increasing Economic Pressures

The economy of Thames was also affected by two events that were out of the control of locals. In 1872 the district of Shortland was severely damaged by a fire that burnt down a large majority of the buildings in Pollen Street: the business sector of that area.³⁷³ In an oral interview conducted in 1967, Toss Hammond recalled 'I was only a small child at the time and my father took me along to witness the great conflagration.'³⁷⁴ Hammond remembered:

When the fire was at its greatest the whole of the Thames seemed lighted up, all of Block 27, Irishtown, the Moanataiari, all those hills stood out in contrast just as in daytime, the shipping in the harbour you could see those outlined against the black background.³⁷⁵

He stated that locals rushed to help calm the blaze and the 'unfortunate people in the early hours of the morning carried their personal effects across to the opposite side of

³⁷² *Thames Gold Fields Miner's Guide: 1868* (Auckland: W. C. Wilson, 1868), p. 70.

New Zealand Census, 1881, Table XIV, p. 8.

³⁷³ *NZH*, 17 July 1872, p. 3.

³⁷⁴ *Stories of James Mackay and Others with Toss Hammond*, 15 April 2010. Interviewed by Ernie Slaney, p. 11. CD held at The Coromandel Heritage Trust.

³⁷⁵ *Stories of James Mackay and Others with Toss Hammond*, p. 12.

the street.³⁷⁶ Toss remembers that the fire blazed uncontrollably, until men pulled down a butcher's shop, which created a gap that 'stayed the fire.'³⁷⁷ According to Hammond, 'seventeen houses, shops and houses were destroyed in that one fire', and that business in that part of town suffered because 'for many, many years that block remained vacant.'³⁷⁸ In the aftermath of this devastating event, Thames' community spirit was showcased, with Hammond recalling that 'a fair amount of money was raised to relieve the sufferings of those who had lost all by the fire.'³⁷⁹

Aside from the fire, Thames also suffered at the mercies of bad weather, with one of the worst storms hitting the region in 1874. This downpour disrupted the entire settlement, but affected the Tararu suburb the worst. At Tararu the storm had been so bad that the region's deep-sea wharf was utterly destroyed.³⁸⁰ This destruction crippled an already declining settlement and played a part in influencing property developer Robert Graham to leave the town entirely.³⁸¹ The loss of such a valuable wharf hurt the commercial sectors of Thames, leaving a strain on the area's other wharves.³⁸² Multiple public meetings were held in the ensuing weeks to discuss the desperate need to replace this asset. However, most assemblies concluded without a clear direction being agreed upon.³⁸³ The Tararu suburb continued on, albeit in a reduced capacity. It became symbolic of the false expectations in Thames. Robert Graham had been buoyed by the success that he achieved in planning and selling plots of land in Grahamstown and sought to extend these profits by developing Tararu.

³⁷⁶ Stories of James Mackay and Others with Toss Hammond, p. 11.

³⁷⁷ Stories of James Mackay and Others with Toss Hammond, p. 12.

³⁷⁸ Stories of James Mackay and Others with Toss Hammond, p. 12.

³⁷⁹ Stories of James Mackay and Others with Toss Hammond, p. 12.

³⁸⁰ *ES*, 2 June 1874, p. 2.

³⁸¹ George Cruickshank, *Robert Graham, 1820-1885: An Auckland Pioneer* (Wellington: Reed Publishers, 1940), pp. 126-127.

³⁸² *ES*, 2 June 1874, p. 2.

³⁸³ *ES*, 4 June 1874, p. 2.

ES, 8 June 1874, p. 2.

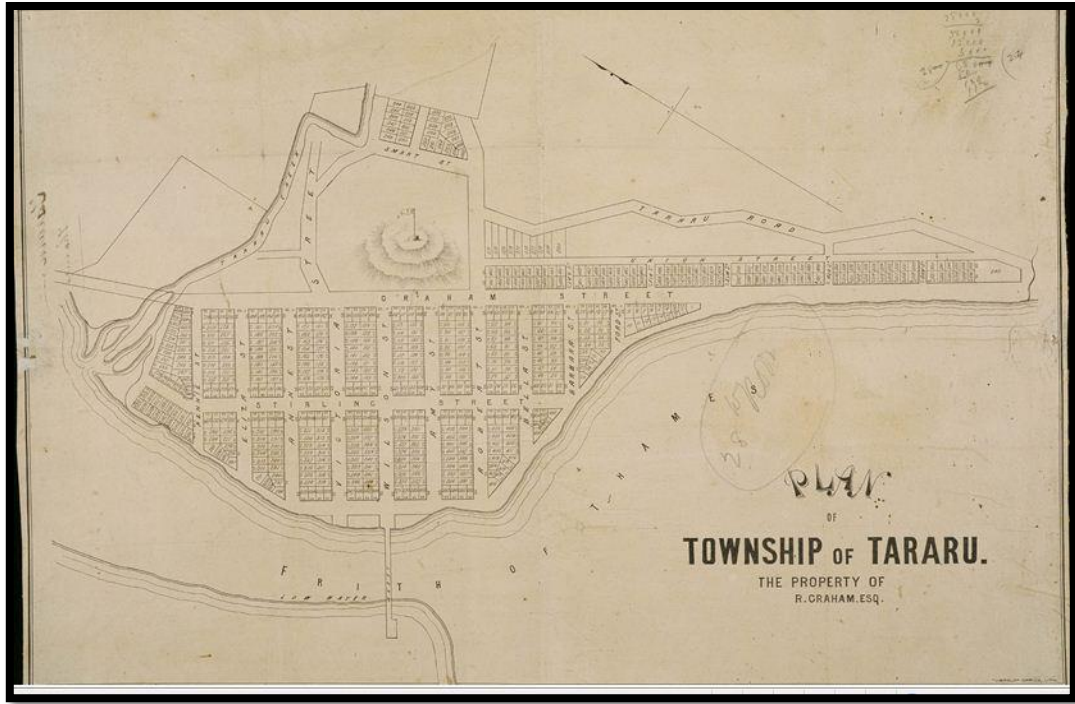


Figure 9: Robert Graham's plan for Tararu, 1868.³⁸⁴

The initial sketches of his vision for Tararu (Figure 9) indicate that he expected the strong demand for property to continue. His layout contains ample room for commercial and residential development, with the centrepiece being a vast section of public gardens. However, this dream for Tararu never eventuated. Nevertheless, the district did provide Thames with further entertainment opportunities, with the gardens becoming a popular area for residents. The garden complex included tea rooms and summer houses.³⁸⁵ Locals would often visit the area and indulge in strawberries and cream. Tararu was also home to a racetrack, which enabled race meetings to be held at Christmas.³⁸⁶ But, an overall lack of interest, and an untimely storm, dashed Graham's hopes for development in this region.

³⁸⁴ 'Plan of Township of Tararu', Sir George Grey Collections, NZ Map 4498-11, Auckland Libraries.

³⁸⁵ Cruickshank, p. 126.

³⁸⁶ Cruickshank, p. 126.

Responsibility for the repairs of the wharf fell to the Government appointed Superintendent. However, there were calls from the general public to have these powers transferred to the newly established Thames Borough Council.³⁸⁷ At its first meeting in 1874, the Council imposed taxes on local residents to generate the funds to develop the area. Its responsibilities included the provision of roads, drainage and other small projects, but the council was having financial difficulties because its only revenue stream was taxation.³⁸⁸ Locally, it was hoped that if the town council was given more control over the area's natural resources, the issue would be resolved. Thus, it was anticipated that a permanent solution to Thames' harbour accommodation would be found.³⁸⁹

From its inception, the council made the development of the settlement its top priority. At its first meeting, William Davies was elected mayor and quickly assured residents that he would take the necessary steps to improving Thames.³⁹⁰ It was his opinion that to develop the area, there needed to be an emphasis placed on the completion of previous projects. He suggested that a committee be formed to meet with the Highway Board in order to ensure their contracts were completed.³⁹¹ The funding for these initiatives would be supplied through a loan that had been taken out from the Bank of New Zealand. The reason behind taking on debt was that it was believed that future generations should have to burden some of the costs of improving the town.³⁹² This incursion of debt created a constant strain on the finances of the area, as the council struggled with its growing responsibilities over the following years. The burden was extended when in 1876 the Provincial Government System was abolished.³⁹³ This left the borough council to take over financial responsibility of

³⁸⁷ *NZH*, 16 April 1874, p. 3.

³⁸⁸ *ES*, 6 June 1874, p. 2.

³⁸⁹ *ES*, 6 June 1874, p. 2.

³⁹⁰ *DSC*, 16 April 1874, p. 3.

³⁹¹ *DSC*, 16 April 1874, p. 3.

³⁹² *DSC*, 16 April 1874, p. 3.

³⁹³ 'Abolition of the Provinces', from *An Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, edited by A. H. McLintock, originally published in 1966. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 22-Apr-09 <<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/provinces-and-provincial-districts/4>> [accessed 13 August 2012].

the various pumps in town, notably the 'Big Pump.'³⁹⁴ The 'Big Pump' would be shutdown and reopened numerous times in the next few years, as the council struggled to run the operation in the face of declining mining profits.³⁹⁵ A similar case of water pump closure occurred in 1875 at the Bright Smile pump.³⁹⁶ When this site stopped extracting the water beneath the ground, many of the local mines had to be closed due to flooding. Over 200 miners were left jobless. The sudden loss of work was seen locally as a great calamity that affected the entire township.³⁹⁷ Over the coming years, the number of those made redundant would increase, leaving local officials no choice but to attempt to resolve the issue.

The change in Government systems had meant that Thames could no longer rely on a central body to prop them up in times of depression. Instead, the community had to take greater responsibility to improve the financial viability of the area. This would not be an easy task, and by 1875 financial situation in Thames had deteriorated to drastic levels. In 1875, T. Brighthouse wrote to the editor of the *Evening Star*, complaining that if the current situation was not rectified, individuals in the town would suffer. It was Brighthouse's opinion that the cost of goods in Thames were far too high, and that this price was by no means adjusted due to a lack of supply.³⁹⁸ Brighthouse complained that residents were unable to purchase goods directly from producers, and opined that this injustice is 'proof of the evils of such monopoly to this district.'³⁹⁹ Brighthouse presented evidence that retailers would rather send unsold goods back to Auckland 'rather than sell such goods on the Thames at Auckland Prices.'⁴⁰⁰

This inflation of general goods was evidenced by Brighthouse, who researched the price of milk within Thames and in the surrounding area. He wrote that milk within

³⁹⁴ David Wilton, 'The Big Pump Site', 2012, <<http://www.thetreasury.org.nz/BigPump/pump.htm>> [accessed 11 April 2012].

³⁹⁵ Wilton, 'The Big Pump Site', 2012.

³⁹⁶ *ES*, 11 October 1875, p. 2.

³⁹⁷ *ES*, 11 October 1875, p. 2.

³⁹⁸ *ES*, 18 December 1875, p. 2.

³⁹⁹ *ES*, 18 December 1875, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁰ *ES*, 18 December 1875, p. 2.

town was sold 8d per quart, where it could be purchased for only 3d a short distance away.⁴⁰¹ In his opinion, this created hardships for locals, to such an extent that many were on the verge of starvation. To improve the situation, Brighthouse demanded that the Government open the surrounding countryside up for farming. This, he argued, would allow settlers to gain more stable employment and be less reliant on the monopolies that were believed to be forming in town. In addition, Brighthouse asserted that the Government had stood idly by for too long, shown by the large number of people that had left the area due to an inability to secure land for their own.⁴⁰² In his opinion, there was no better time to intervene but now, as it would grant the township better employment opportunities and a more self-sustaining economy.

Summary

The representation of the Thames township in the national media between 1867-1870 was often misleading, with most reports fabricating tales of vast and immediate success. These stories were intended to boost investment and interest in the region. Instead, they ended up increasing the pressures on the settlement by creating unrealistic expectations. Rather than a climate of supposed prosperity, the local economy struggled under the weight of unemployment and mine closures. The public were active in identifying and resolving these issues of misrepresentation. Regular meetings were called to highlight the problem, and to discuss possible solutions. However, before action could be taken, the goldfields yielded a huge peak in production. In 1871, large bonanza finds were struck that helped to reinvigorate the settlement with optimism. A vast and diverse commercial district was developed during this period, substantially increasing the economic activity in the region. The array of stores and businesses allowed locals the chance to make their living selling goods and providing services, rather than by prospecting for gold themselves. However, this internal economy was still reliant on the goldfields to survive, and

⁴⁰¹ *ES*, 18 December 1875, p. 2.

⁴⁰² *ES*, 18 December 1875, p. 2.

when periods of inactivity and poor returns turned into depressions, the township suffered.

Through these hardships, the people of Thames often kept an optimistic outlook, with many believing that the good times would return once the Ohinemuri block had been opened up for mining. It was thought by local miners and government officials that Ohinemuri could spark a revival in the Thames mining industry. However, the elongated process of establishing the new goldfield created detrimental effects on the existing one. Miners in Thames lost their speculative spirit and often left their mines un-worked, preferring to save their energy and resources for future ventures at Ohinemuri. As the local economy petered out, dramatic changes were occurring to the governance structure within the entire colony. New Zealand was moving away from the provincial system that had placed Thames under Auckland's jurisdiction. Without the financial backing of its larger neighbour, Thames was left to fend for itself. During this time the local council struggled to constantly run the numerous mining pumps in the town. This resulted in periodic closures, which further weakened the economy. The natural disasters that struck Thames further isolated the settlement by damaging its harbours. This isolation would essentially be detrimental to the local economy in the following years.

This chapter closed by noting that there was an increasing local realisation through newspaper entries that the mining industry could not sustain the township on its own. Reliance on gold had meant that any downturn in production would result in hardship within the settlement. By 1875, there was a growing movement towards the establishment of other industries in Thames. This transition signalled an effort to create a more balanced and diverse economy that could provide a more stable lifestyle for struggling locals. Thus, although the dreams of a new "El Dorado" and unmatched prosperity had faded as swiftly as it arrived, Thames residents were still fighting to realise this potential as grand as its expectations may have been. The following chapter explores the town's efforts to establish new industries, which came about as an attempt to improve the economic stability of the region.

Chapter Three

New Opportunities and Stabilisation

During the early 1870s an increased production from the goldfields led to a period of prosperity in Thames (Appendix One, p. 119). The town became home to a thriving commercial district, which allowed the local economy some measure of diversity. Store owners and service providers found ample opportunities to sell their products. However, this prosperity was only temporary. When the gold yields diminished after 1871, the cracks in the economy became apparent, with the area sustaining periods of financial hardship. This chapter explores this period of decline, particularly as a turning point in the town's history, in which residents realised the need to further diversify the local economy. Historians have over emphasised the "golden-years" of Thames, with little being written about the town's transition away from gold mining. Local historians, John and Zelma Williams, have written about the financial hardships residents experienced on the goldfields. They noted that 'although some of the miners struck it lucky, there were great numbers of both settlers and transients who found life incredibly difficult.'⁴⁰³ However, the lengths in which some locals went in order to improve the area's economic opportunities have not been elaborated on in any great detail. The absence of a more robust history of the town's financial shortcomings neglects the substantial struggle that residents made in their attempt to stabilise the local economy. The efforts of these individuals were prominent throughout the 1870s and helped to establish strong agricultural and manufacturing sectors in the area, which complimented the mining industry.

The development of a more diverse economy did not occur immediately, because the town faced mounting financial pressure from a lack of employment opportunities and a declining interest in the area nationally. This contributed to a substantial population

⁴⁰³ John and Zelma Williams, *Thames and the Coromandel Peninsula: 2000 years* (Thames: Williams Publishers, 1994), p. 92.

exodus. In 1871 the *New Zealand Census* reports that the population of the township was 5,792, a stark contrast to the estimates of 18,000 in 1868.⁴⁰⁴ This figure would continue to fall in the following years reaching 4,435 by 1881.⁴⁰⁵ These statistics suggest that the decline experienced in Thames was much more sudden and extreme than most accounts have described. This chapter examines what was done locally to prevent Thames from becoming a gold mining ghost town. In doing so, it explores the role that local and central officials played in determining the direction that the town took in planning its economic future. It also considers the individual-led business developments that fostered local optimism regarding the Thames' economy.

Relocating the Unemployed

In Chapter Two, redundancy was noted as a common occurrence in the Thames mining industry during late the 1860s and the early 1870s (Thesis, p. 75). The stoppage of the Bright Smile pumps in 1875 led to the closure of the City of London mine, with one observer noting that others 'must sooner or later follow suit.'⁴⁰⁶ Closures like these led to growing unemployment and often left miners with little other work opportunities. In late 1875, preliminary meetings were held to discuss possible solutions to the town's unemployment problem. Initially, these were not well attended. Leading organisers appealed to residents that this was a social issue that demanded their attention and support.⁴⁰⁷

By early 1876, this notion seems to have been acknowledged by locals, with the next meeting well-supported at the Theatre Royal, a local hall.⁴⁰⁸ Discussion at the gathering focused on what work could be found for the jobless in Thames. Those in attendance were alarmed that the financial state of the settlement had deteriorated so far so quickly, with most arguing that the wealth of the goldfields was not being put

⁴⁰⁴ *New Zealand Census*, 1871, Table III, p. 4.

Thames Gold Fields Miner's Guide: 1868 (Auckland: W. C. Wilson, 1868), p. 70.

⁴⁰⁵ *New Zealand Census*, 1881, Table XIV, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁶ *Evening Star (ES)*, 11 October 1875, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁷ *ES*, 23 October 1875, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁸ *Daily Southern Cross (DSC)*, 24 January 1876, p. 2.

back into the area, but was being exported to other regions.⁴⁰⁹ It was hoped that the Government would rectify this by introducing a vast public works scheme. Disgruntled locals wanted a road to be completed that connected Thames and Ohinemuri.⁴¹⁰ Linking the Thames settlement to other areas and markets became a central theme throughout the decline period of the town. Indeed, as this chapter will show, the isolation that Thames faced was detrimental to its economy.

Improving unemployment levels depended on the approval of public projects. However, few projects had been granted by the mid 1870s. Job opportunities in Thames were hard to come by. The settlement had been founded on the success of the goldfields and lacked the diverse array of industries that could provide alternative employment. Faced with mounting unemployment, town officials decided that men needed to be relocated to other regions. In 1876, some inquiries were made to employment agents in Otago, but no immediate work was found.⁴¹¹ Although further attempts were made to relocate some of the local jobless, residents hoped that the Government would intervene and stop this mass migration from Thames by providing more jobs locally.⁴¹² A few months later the local economy was showing little improvement, with 200 men volunteering to move to Wellington to work the Masterton railway.⁴¹³ This proposal was accepted and steamers were to be sent from Auckland to transport the men to where they were needed. Disgruntled locals were not impressed with the continuing fall in the population of Thames, complaining about the lack of support they were receiving from the Government.⁴¹⁴ Concerns over a potential population exodus were further justified only a few days later.

A petition asking for free passage to the southern ports of New Zealand was presented to Daniel Pollen, the Superintendent in Auckland.⁴¹⁵ It was signed by 96 men who had been intrigued by the opportunities of work that Sir Julius Vogel had

⁴⁰⁹ *DSC*, 24 January 1876, p. 2.

⁴¹⁰ *DSC*, 24 January 1876, p. 2.

⁴¹¹ *DSC*, 11 February 1876, p. 2.

⁴¹² *DSC*, 11 February 1876, p. 2.

⁴¹³ *DSC*, 14 March 1876, p. 2.

⁴¹⁴ *DSC*, 14 March 1876, p. 2.

⁴¹⁵ *Thames Advertiser (TA)*, 17 March 1876, p. 3.

promised in an earlier meeting. Vogel told them that there was plenty to be done in the colony and that the Government would help relocate people to these regions. However, Pollen's response to this petition was less than welcoming; his only comment being that he had already provided £4,000 for Thames to conduct local public works.⁴¹⁶ In regards to the request for free passage to other regions, Pollen argued that it did not 'seem at present "necessary" that the Colonial Government should interfere or give aid in the manner proposed.'⁴¹⁷ Through this communication, the Government showed an unwillingness to resolve the economic pressures that faced Thames. In the past, when the goldfields produced spectacular yields, the town had drawn the nation's interest.⁴¹⁸ But those times were a fading memory. The failure to generate steady gold returns left Thames' overall production much lower than some of New Zealand's other goldfields (Appendix Two, p. 120). Therefore, the survival of the town depended on the efforts of locals to develop economic alternatives.

Thames Community Spirit

The poor economic state proved too much for some residents to handle. Many left the area in search of a more secure economic future. Most were attracted to other settlements, like Auckland or the Ohinemuri district, which offered the lure of a new beginning.⁴¹⁹ The result was an extreme population drop, where within a few years, the town shrunk by half its populace.⁴²⁰ Although this transition was dramatic, many remained committed to improving the financial situation in Thames. It is important to understand why these people stayed in the area. For many, it is likely that had become entrenched and attached to a variety of strong locally based social networks. These

⁴¹⁶ TA, 17 March 1876, p. 3.

⁴¹⁷ TA, 17 March 1876, p. 3.

⁴¹⁸ John Grainger, *The Amazing Thames* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1951), p. 9.

⁴¹⁹ C. G. Sleeman, 'Gold Town: The Influence of Goldmining Upon Waihi, 1890-1953' (Auckland: University of Auckland, 1958), p. 8.

⁴²⁰ *New Zealand Census, 1871*, Table III, p. 4.
Thames Gold Fields Miner's Guide: 1868, p. 70.

networks were shaped around many commonalities, some shared similar ancestry, while other relationships were founded on a shared cultural and even spiritual interests and hobbies. These community support groups were particularly crucial in Thames, particularly for those residents that had immigrated to the area from overseas. In 1878, the *Thames Advertiser* noted that many ‘Cornishmen’ were arriving in New Zealand, ‘many of whom have friends at the Thames, where they will no doubt find their way.’⁴²¹ These bonds were especially strong in the various religious communities within Thames. In some parts of town, members various churches lived in close proximity to one another, particularly Irishtown, which housed much of the town’s Catholic and Orangemen population.⁴²² Religious practice was an important part of life for many in Thames, with various congregations gathering regularly to meet the needs of locals. They also hosted prominent individuals from churches in other regions, helping to build relationships with like-minded people in other areas.⁴²³

Social activities also helped to create a crucial community spirit. In the early 1870s, the town frequently held concerts and hosted theatre companies. It was during this time that over 100 pubs operated in Thames.⁴²⁴ These provided locals with the opportunity to mix and mingle with each other, as well as providing invaluable employment. Eventually, the number of drinking establishments in the town decreased, in part because of poor returns and legislative changes brought about by the town’s temperance movement.⁴²⁵ This may have resulted in a quieter nightlife, but people also entertained themselves by forming groups around common hobbies. Some of these groups held exhibitions to show case their work to the community, such as the local horticultural society. The horticultural group was established in the early 1870s and frequently held shows in an attempt to increase the public’s interest

⁴²¹ *TA*, 30 December 1878, p. 3.

Cornishmen are immigrants from Cornwall, a county in the South-West of England.

⁴²² Vicesimus Lush, *The Thames Journals of Vicesimus Lush, 1868-82*, ed. by Alison Drummond (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1975), pp. 30-31.

⁴²³ *DSC*, 11 January 1871, p. 2.

⁴²⁴ James McNeish, *Taverns in the Town* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1984), p. 92.

⁴²⁵ McNeish, p. 97.

in their projects. These efforts appear to have been successful, as a correspondent from the *New Zealand Herald* reported in 1873 that the society was now producing higher quality products that were being well-received by the public.⁴²⁶

Others formed sporting associations, such as the cricket club, which enabled men to take part in group activities. Thames hosted tournaments between local teams and clubs from other nearby towns, like Coromandel.⁴²⁷ Sometimes these matches took place in conjunction with a holiday, enabling other events to be planned around it. At other times they were played just for the love of the game. Playing for a sports club also afforded members the opportunity to travel around the colony, with the Thames cricket club often playing in Auckland.⁴²⁸ These trips developed stronger friendships, community spirit, and essentially strengthened a sense of local identity. Further attempts to keep the Thames community together were showcased by a letter to the editor of the *Thames Advertiser* in 1879.⁴²⁹ In it the author wrote that the limited entertainment opportunities in town were leading many locals to travel to Auckland, especially around Christmas.⁴³⁰ This period was especially busy, largely because of the annual horse races and New Year events. The author noted it was hoped that officials in Thames would follow this example and provide more local entertainment, beginning with preparations to hold their own race meetings.⁴³¹

Thames' strong community spirit was evident throughout the hardships experienced on the goldfields and the resulting decline in the local population. Many miners suffered injuries that left them unable to provide for themselves or their families. In response, samaritans and benevolent groups banded together and formed friendly societies and lodges. These organisations offered both financial and emotional support to residents and mining families. The assistance provided by these societies

⁴²⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 December 1873, p. 3.

⁴²⁷ *TA*, 18 March 1878, p. 2.

⁴²⁸ *Auckland Star (AS)*, 22 February 1871, p. 2.

⁴²⁹ *TA*, 10 September 1879, p. 3.

⁴³⁰ *TA*, 10 September 1879, p. 3.

⁴³¹ *TA*, 10 September 1879, p. 3.

became a central part of local life, with numerous shows and benefit concerts held to raise funds for their humanitarian activities.⁴³²

Especially active in helping the unfortunate in Thames was the Ladies Benevolent Society. Although they frequently struggled to always obtain monetary backing, they still managed to help women who had either lost, or been abandoned by their husbands.⁴³³ The level of their activity is reflected in the fact that they successfully worked 164 cases over a twelve month period from 1870-1871.⁴³⁴ The society often rallied the support of the townsfolk by gathering funds to relocate widows to regions where their relatives were living. In the case of some women, the society managed to gather sufficient funding to allow them to return to Europe.⁴³⁵ In 1926 Mrs J. E. Macdonald, a notable figure in the community, recalled the efforts made to support the less fortunate during Thames' initial years.⁴³⁶ Macdonald explained that it was due to the 'distress and accidents among the miners' that charitable societies were established in the area.⁴³⁷ She frequently visited individuals in their homes to offer them comfort and support, noting that this was not an easy task because of the steep and muddy roads.⁴³⁸ In one particular case, Macdonald recalled that 'the mud was so deep that my leg went in so far that it was impossible for me to get it out, and I was forced to wait patiently as might be, until a miner came along and rendered the necessary assistance.'⁴³⁹

Not only did the community band together to help citizens that had fallen on hard times, but they also attempted to organise aid for other townships. In 1879, an accident at Kaitangata minefields left many families desolate.⁴⁴⁰ An unknown author

⁴³² AS, 29 November 1872, p. 3.

⁴³³ *Poverty Bay Herald*, 1 May 1879, p. 2.

⁴³⁴ *DSC*, 1 May 1871, p. 3.

⁴³⁵ *ES*, 16 May 1874, p. 2.

⁴³⁶ J. E. Macdonald, *Thames Reminiscences* (Auckland: Observer Printing Works, 1926), p. 15.

⁴³⁷ Macdonald, p. 15.

⁴³⁸ Macdonald, p. 15.

⁴³⁹ Macdonald, p. 15.

⁴⁴⁰ *ES*, 28 February 1879, p. 2.

Kaitangata is situated in the South Island of New Zealand, to the South of Dunedin.

'KAITANGATA', edited by A. H. McLintock, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 22-Apr-09, < <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/kaitangata>> [accessed January 15 2012].

wrote to the editor of the *Evening Star*, appalled that ‘in a mining community like the Thames no public effort’ had been made to ‘raise funds for the many families left desolate by the terrible accident.’⁴⁴¹ The author argued that an extension of support ‘would show that our sympathies are with the bereaved’, and ‘if a public meeting were called, the people would respond.’⁴⁴² Historians have argued that success on the goldfields had facilitated wealth in the township. However, these accounts show that this affluence was temporary and confined to short a period. The town did experience a short spell of prosperity when gold production spiked in 1871, but this event could not sustain the settlement for a prolonged period of time (Appendix One, p. 119). Thereafter, the inability to provide employment opportunities and the ultimate relocation of many men highlighted the extent to which Thames’ population had declined by the mid 1870s. Even though the population decreased dramatically during this period, some stayed because they had established meaningful social connections with others in the town. These relationships may have begun out of a sense of religious duty or a desire to stay involved with the various activities on offer; most often they served to develop a shared community spirit. In time, individuals became active in providing support to other residents, rallying them, in time, to help other less fortunate people in the community. Most significantly, these groups helped to strengthen and build the town’s identity during its most testing economic pressures.

This prevailing strength in the Thames’ community was apparent during a celebratory reunion held in 1913. The Mayor, Henry Lowe, offered a speech welcoming those that were in attendance, and impressing on them the view that ‘both [the] early and the late residents of Thames ... were all actuated by the one motive and desire – the betterment, improvement and advancement of the good old town.’⁴⁴³ After Lowe’s greeting, Mr W. Blomfield gave a brief account of the special community that was created in Thames. Blomfield argued that many people returned to the town because ‘the breath of Thames was in their lungs, which had given them life, honesty and

⁴⁴¹ *ES*, 28 February 1879, p. 2.

⁴⁴² *ES*, 28 February 1879, p. 2.

⁴⁴³ Thames Re-Union: Celebration – Souvenir (Hamilton: Waikato Times Printing Works, 1913), p. 2.

strength of purpose.’⁴⁴⁴ Later, Mr C. J. Parr claimed that former residents ‘wherever they might roam, in whatever sphere they might be, or what office they might occupy, their hearts went back to the village under the hills.’⁴⁴⁵ Although the population had declined significantly by the early 1870s, many stayed buoyed by a growing community spirit that fostered a continued belief in the future of the town. Those who looked back in earnest offered testimony to this prevailing sense of a meaningful local identity, and to a large extent it was indeed a key factor in the stabilisation that occurred: enabling in the process future progress albeit through the diversification of local business.

Increasing Responsibility Locally

The abolishment of the Provincial Government in 1876 was a central factor in the decline of Thames.⁴⁴⁶ After this change, the town was no longer assisted by the financial backing in Auckland. The increased economic burdens of maintaining the township were too much for the local Borough Council to manage. By 1877, Thames had incurred an overdraft that local officials were unable of paying back. Fortunately for locals, the central Government provided financial relief by spending £6,743 to clear the town’s debt.⁴⁴⁷ The legality of this process was brought into question by some in Parliament, to the extent that the Mayor of Thames, J. E. Macdonald was summoned to Wellington to participate in an examination of the situation. During the select committee stage of the process, it was decided that the debt had been incurred because of large financial burdens that the gold industry had bequeathed to Thames; notably the need to maintain adequate roads.⁴⁴⁸ This was a large expense for the township because these networks needed constant maintenance. In the council’s financial report for 1877-1878, the total cost of providing roads and other public

⁴⁴⁴ Thames Re-Union, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁵ Thames Re-Union, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁶ Alistair Isdale, *History of the River Thames* (Thames: A. M. Isdale, 1967), p. 42.

⁴⁴⁷ ‘Report of the Select Committee on Public Accounts’, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*, 1877, I-10, p. 22.

⁴⁴⁸ ‘Report of the Select Committee on Public Accounts’, *AJHR*, 1877, I-10, p. 5.

works was £9,050.⁴⁴⁹ The strain this placed on the Thames economy was evident when compared with the revenue expected from gold only totalling £8,415. Eventually, the examiners concluded that due to their efforts to maintain the goldfields, the Government had acted justly in relieving the town of its debt issue.⁴⁵⁰

Although this solved the Council's immediate debt crisis, the financial situation in Thames was still concerning. The town lacked employment opportunities, forcing the Council to discuss what could be offered to those people that wanted to stay and work in the local area. It was decided that something needed to be done, but the only obvious employment opportunity available was road work. This job offered extremely low wages, and councillors openly questioned whether or not it was the correct direction to take because workers would earn next to nothing.⁴⁵¹ Nevertheless, it was thought that it should at least be offered to the public. When it was, 66 people accepted the offer, but some noted they would only do it until something better became available.⁴⁵²

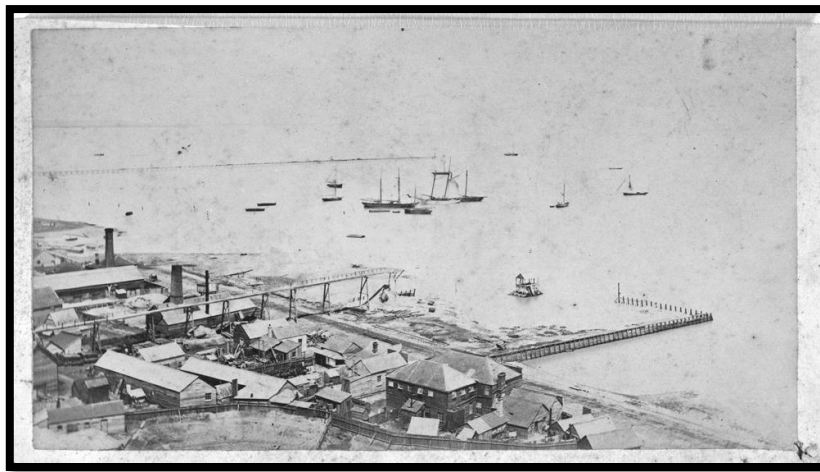


Figure 10: *The Goods Wharf at Thames, 1870s.*⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ 'Thames County Estimate for Rate for Twelve Months Ending 31st March, 1878', Thames County Council Minute Book, 1877-1882, R2037410, Archives New Zealand, Auckland.

⁴⁵⁰ 'Report of the Select Committee on Public Accounts', *AJHR*, 1877, I-10, p. 1.

⁴⁵¹ *ES*, 14 September 1878, p. 2.

⁴⁵² *ES*, 14 September 1878, p. 2.

⁴⁵³ 'Thames Gold Field: Showing the Thames Goods Wharf with the Moanataiari Flume in the Middle', H. A. Frith, Sir George Grey Special Collections, 7-A11453, Auckland Libraries.

Unable to find permanent work for Thames' locals, the council appealed to the Harbour Board for assistance.⁴⁵⁴ The settlement had numerous wharves, but many had fallen into disarray and required improvements to make them serviceable again. The maintenance of these sites was paramount to the success of the township, because they connected Thames to other markets in New Zealand and abroad. It was hoped that the two governing bodies could reach some agreement regarding potential work opportunities. The Harbour Board acknowledged that the wharves could use some upgrades, but at the present time they lacked the funds to pay labourers. Still, the council was desperate, and needed to reduce unemployment. Thus, a compromise was struck: work would begin on the Goods Wharf, with the council paying the men's wages.⁴⁵⁵ This sum was considered a loan and that over time would be repaid.

These events highlight the efforts made by local officials to halt the local financial decline and to actively improve the town's economy. Initially, local leadership had sought assistance from the central Government to alleviate their debts, but once those advances failed, they had no option but to take the task upon themselves. At this point, residents looked inwards for answers as well, calling town meetings to discuss possible solutions. During these discussions, it became apparent that Thames could no longer support its population. The resulting resolution to relocate people to other regions helped to reduce the financial strain on the settlement. However, this did not solve the problem. Despite these initiatives, the township lacked employment for those that stayed. Through this adversity, Thames locals fought to improve the town's self-reliance by acknowledging an economy based on the gold industry was too suspect to mining fluctuations. To remedy this, there was widespread agreement that the region needed to develop more industries and broaden its commercial opportunities.

⁴⁵⁴ Thames Harbour Board Minute Book, 1877-1888, R1341903, Archives New Zealand, Auckland, p. 53.

⁴⁵⁵ *TA*, 26 September 1878, p. 3.

New Industries

A discussion of new industries was met with significant optimism in Thames. Locals agreed that the benefits would be profound, allowing them to diversify their local economy, essentially supplementing the mining industry.⁴⁵⁶ The development of a strong agricultural sector had long been a hope of residents, who believed that it could provide for a more self-reliant and sustainable settlement. In the past this proposition had always been rejected due to the inability to acquire land easily.⁴⁵⁷ However, it was believed that the problems of leasing land had been resolved and that they would not hinder land acquisition in the future. It was noted that this economic transition would not occur over night, but the region had no lack of resources, so in time, the settlement, many believed, would flourish once again.⁴⁵⁸ The poor state of the area's economy was apparent to the local council, who were still plagued by high unemployment levels in 1879.⁴⁵⁹ This problem was seen to be caused by the limited employment prospects available to the next generation. It was noted in the *Thames Advertiser* that 'the banks and Government offices are crowded with applications; the applications for apprenticeships in the various trades are more numerous than the openings available, and the work for labourers is scarce.'⁴⁶⁰ Nevertheless, 'the Government continue to introduce thousands of immigrants annually.'⁴⁶¹ The writer argued that this practice must stop because it is 'useless filling the colony with an immigrant population unless plenty of employment at fair wages is obtainable.'⁴⁶² Furthermore, the development of new industries, especially a manufacturing sector, needed to be performed quickly because 'all cannot be farmers or miners.'⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁶ *TA*, 9 October 1880, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁷ *TA*, 9 October 1880, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁸ *TA*, 9 October 1880, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁹ *TA*, 1 May 1879, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁰ *TA*, 1 May 1879, p. 2.

⁴⁶¹ *TA*, 1 May 1879, p. 2.

⁴⁶² *TA*, 1 May 1879, p. 2.

⁴⁶³ *TA*, 1 May 1879, p. 2.

Famed New Zealand geologist, James Hector described the flaws of the Thames goldfields in a series of letters to Sir George Grey from 1864 to 1880.⁴⁶⁴ In 1880, Hector reminded Grey that ‘my conviction was that it would be unwise to encourage any extensive migrations’ to the region.⁴⁶⁵ He argued that miners in Thames face considerable obstacles to success, due to the gold reefs being horizontal, not vertical. This, Hector suggested would cause ‘great irregularities in the value of claims.’⁴⁶⁶ He argued further that the ‘risk of investing capital [would be] greatly increased.’⁴⁶⁷ Hector reasoned that this combined with other issues, created an uncertain business environment, which limited the potential of the Thames goldfields.

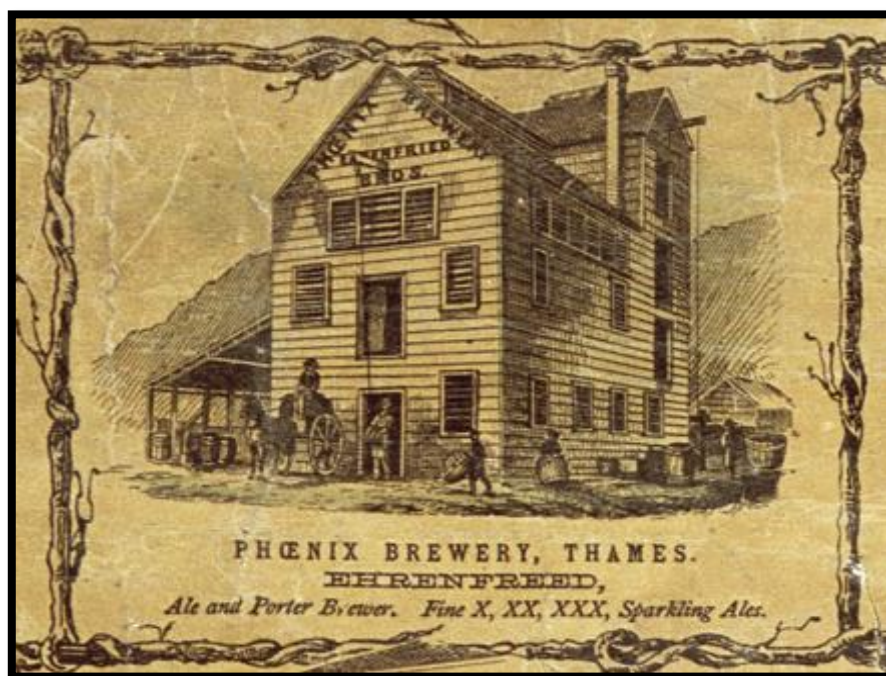


Figure 11: *The Phoenix Brewery, 1869.*⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ R. K. Dell, 'Hector, James - Hector, James', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30-Oct-2012, <<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/1h15/hector-james>>[accessed January 15 2012].

⁴⁶⁵ James Hector to Sir George Grey, 26 July 1880, *Grey New Zealand Letters* (Auckland: Auckland City Library).

⁴⁶⁶ James Hector to Sir George Grey, 26 July 1880, *Grey New Zealand Letters* (Auckland: Auckland City Library).

⁴⁶⁷ James Hector to Sir George Grey, 26 July 1880, *Grey New Zealand Letters* (Auckland: Auckland City Library).

⁴⁶⁸ 'The Phoenix Brewery', Sir George Grey Special Collections, NZ Map 4531, Auckland Libraries.

Although there was a lack of diversity in Thames, it would be wrong to assume that the local economy at the time was solely reliant on gold production. There were some businesses, other than those associated with the gold industry, that were thriving, such as Ehrenfried's Phoenix Brewery. The success of this operation was seen to be a guiding light for locals to aspire to.⁴⁶⁹ It had started as a small enterprise, but by 1875 had become one of the most productive in the colony. Prior to the brewery's success, Thames was reliant on imports from Auckland to supply its multiple drinking establishments. However, a news correspondent from the *Thames Advertiser* explained that by 1875 this importation had almost ceased entirely.⁴⁷⁰ The venture had become so successful that beer was now being exported from Thames to Auckland. The correspondent argued that although the goldfields had been limited in their past commercial operations, a corner had been turned and the settlement was home to an ever-increasing entrepreneurial spirit.⁴⁷¹

This spirit and optimism was apparent throughout the numerous proposals for new industries. Residents within Thames had been fostering the hope for new economic opportunities for much of the town's existence. Earlier in 1871, there were arguments from locals that the prosperity of the region depended on the development of local industries, and then consumer support of those businesses.⁴⁷² Some of these proposals were successful, but others were not so fortunate. For example, a whale station was thought to be assured of success in Thames, as some entrepreneurs saw this as a national resource that was being squandered due to a lack of activity.⁴⁷³ It was believed that the capital necessary to begin the business would be readily available, because 'money will flow in that direction where it is considered most likely to be reproductive.'⁴⁷⁴ However, the optimism was unfounded, and a whale station was subsequently not established in Thames. The only mention of the industry arose when

⁴⁶⁹ *TA*, 25 May 1875, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁰ *TA*, 25 May 1875, p. 2.

⁴⁷¹ *TA*, 25 May 1875, p. 2.

⁴⁷² *DSC*, 30 June 1871, p. 2.

⁴⁷³ *DSC*, 30 June 1871, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁴ *DSC*, 30 June 1871, p. 2.

the occasional whale beached itself and was 'reduced to oil at the boiling-down works attached to the Parawai Slaughterhouse.'⁴⁷⁵

Another potential enterprise was reported in 1878, after a meeting had taken place at the Governor Bowen Hotel. Local 'gentlemen' had gathered there to discuss the possibility of establishing a flour mill.⁴⁷⁶ It was argued that Thames had a large population, but was still reliant on Auckland to supply them with food. Continuing this practice in the future was considered unreliable, because the supplies in Auckland were already imported from overseas. Those in attendance agreed that it would be beneficial to the community if the town could become more self-sustaining.⁴⁷⁷ Therefore, it was consented that an existing site would be suitable to begin operations.⁴⁷⁸ The location chosen needed upgrading and additional capital to get it up and running. However, the flour mill was never established. Later in 1879 the community was informed that the venture had failed because it could not come up with the required funds from investors.⁴⁷⁹ The poor result was blamed on the uncertainty of the mining operations and the lack of gold finds in recent years. These factors were said to have scared potential investors away from the area, but it was hoped that in the near future the proposal could be attempted again.⁴⁸⁰

Isolation and Lack of Infrastructure

The location of Thames was also regarded as detrimental to financial success, as shown by the failure of the local fishing industry. It was believed that Thames fishermen were at a severe disadvantage because they could not readily access the Auckland markets. Although it was within close proximity, shipments to Auckland had to be delayed until they were of sufficient quantity.⁴⁸¹ This delay often led to fish

⁴⁷⁵ TA, 19 June 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁷⁶ ES, 12 June 1878, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁷ ES, 12 June 1878, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁸ ES, 12 June 1878, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁹ ES, 22 April 1879, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁰ ES, 22 April 1879, p. 3.

⁴⁸¹ ES, 13 March 1888, p. 2.

going off and needing to be disposed of. Attempts were made to implement the use of preservatives to stop them from perishing.⁴⁸² These attempts were still continuing in 1888, but the Thames fishing industry was still far from developed. Nevertheless, hope remained because it was thought that a fishing sector could still be profitable and beneficial to Thames.⁴⁸³

Isolation was also a central theme in both the decline and development of the township. The area lacked a substantial road or railway network to link Thames with the surrounding settlements. Thus, it relied on its wharves to interact with the national and international community. As previously noted these docks had deteriorated over the years (Thesis, p. 72). Some had been destroyed entirely, notably the wharf located at Tararu.⁴⁸⁴ Therefore, the decline of sea faring exports/imports in Thames and the lack of suitable alternatives had further isolated the town from outsiders. These hardships made the settlements relationship with Auckland crucial to the sustainability of the local economy. This relationship was an important factor in the town's financial success and failure. Initially, this good rapport allowed the new settlement access to valuable resources and knowledge. It opened up markets that those within the Thames could use to both import and export goods.⁴⁸⁵ However, when the goldfields began to decline by the mid-1870s, business within the township also diminished. Aspiring entrepreneurs left Thames with the hope of success in Auckland. Industries that had been part of the backbone of Thames' commercial endeavours shifted their operations to Auckland, most notably Ehrenfried's Phoenix Brewery.⁴⁸⁶ Indeed, interest in the area had decreased markedly from the previous years, to the extent that businesses were leaving the township in search of more profitable markets.

⁴⁸² *ES*, 13 March 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁸³ *ES*, 13 March 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁴ *ES*, 2 June 1874, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁵ S.H.M. Salmon, *A History of Gold Mining in New Zealand*, (Wellington: R. E. Owen, Government Printer, 1963), p. 191.

⁴⁸⁶ Paul Goldsmith and Michael Bassett, *The Myers*, (Auckland: David Ling Publishing Limited, 2007), p. 37.

Opening up the Thames region was a constant issue. The lack of a railway in the area gained national attention in 1876, when it was debated by New Zealand Government officials. The project had been agreed upon in 1873, but no steps had been taken to complete any of the planned recommendations.⁴⁸⁷ Some believed that the lack of progress was hampering the region's economy because produce from the Waikato had to travel via Auckland in order to reach Thames. The benefits of a shorter route through the Ohinemuri district were obvious, especially since that area had experienced considerable development from their local goldfields.⁴⁸⁸ Although there were prolonged delays at the beginning of the project, with officials suggesting that the project be undertaken by a private enterprise, the order for the project finally appeared on the Government's books in 1879.⁴⁸⁹ Work began on the railway in 1878.⁴⁹⁰ However, progress was painstakingly slow. In 1880, the *Waikato Times* reported that the work had ceased entirely.⁴⁹¹ It was hoped that a combined public effort could result in the project being resumed. The feeble state of the local roads was also noted, with it being said that Thames was home to the worse roads in the colony.⁴⁹² The failure of local officials to link the town with other settlements, essentially limited the economic opportunities that were available to the area. One of the key reasons for the delay of the Thames-Waikato railway was the resistance maintained by Māori. Their opposition to the project was clear when Mr D Simpson attempted to survey the route in 1873.⁴⁹³ Simpson reported his findings, stating that although he had completed his task, he was met with considerable resistance from the Ohinemuri tribes and their chief Te Hira. He advised the Government against

⁴⁸⁷ 'Railway between Thames and Waikato', *AJHR*, 1876, J-2.

⁴⁸⁸ 'Railway between Thames and Waikato', *AJHR*, 1876, J-2.

⁴⁸⁹ 'Railway between Thames and Waikato', *AJHR*, 1876, J-2.

'The Waikato-Thames Railway', *AJHR*, 1879, E-3.

⁴⁹⁰ R. Brett Green & Trevor J. Lees, *The Thames Line 1898-1990* (Auckland: Railway Enthusiasts' Society, 1990), p. 9.

⁴⁹¹ *Waikato Times* (*WT*), 17 April 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁹² *WT*, 17 April 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁹³ *New Zealand Herald* (*NZH*), 3 April 1873, p. 2.

confronting Te Hira and instead recommended that resources be used to improve the navigation of the Thames River.⁴⁹⁴

Disgruntled residents complained that the isolation they had, and were still experiencing, was an injustice. The Government's inability to complete the railway in a timely fashion was particularly upsetting, especially since the district had been previously represented by two cabinet ministers.⁴⁹⁵ Later, a public meeting was covered by a reporter from the *Evening Star* where residents offered suggestions on how to improve the situation. Those present argued that Thames had such a large revenue and population base that the Government would quickly remedy their concerns.⁴⁹⁶ This hope was unfounded, and it was not until 1898 that the railway was finally completed.⁴⁹⁷

Individual-led Businesses

Discussion over past economic failures in Thames also resurfaced in the mid 1870s when the talk of new industries became prevalent. One disgruntled local wrote to the *Thames Advertiser*, disagreeing that the town had lacked diversity, instead blaming the numerous commercial depressions on the lack of support that existing businesses had received.⁴⁹⁸ This observer advocated the promotion of local ventures, claiming that 'even a small industry tends to foster trade, and gives rise to the necessity for other employment.'⁴⁹⁹ The author contended that at the present time 'it is an undeniable fact that as a community we fail to accord the support we ought to in encouraging any and every effort made to supply the requirements of the district.'⁵⁰⁰ The disgruntled local cited cases in which Thames women would not purchase

⁴⁹⁴ *NZH*, 3 April 1873, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁵ *WT*, 17 April 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁶ *ES*, 20 April 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁷ 'Public Works Statement', *AJHR*, 1899, D-1, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁸ *TA*, 14 September 1881, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁹ *TA*, 14 September 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁰ *TA*, 14 September 1881, p. 2.

consumer goods locally, instead preferring to shop during their trips to Auckland.⁵⁰¹ The writer argued that this practised needed to stop because when an item ‘could be purchased for the same money here, or less, [it] is wrong in principle and injurious to the best interests of the Thames.’⁵⁰²

One commercial retailer that overcame this obstacle and achieved success in Thames was Hetherington’s Drapery Store. Hetherington’s was established in 1874, and specialised in men’s and women’s clothing, haberdashery, and materials.⁵⁰³ Initially, the store was situated in a large building with wide windows, which enabled it to showcase its stock. Over time, the business grew larger, eventually becoming a two-storied building, where sales were conducted on the ground floor, while seamstresses worked upstairs on personalised products.⁵⁰⁴ The quality of customer service, coupled with the ability to import goods from England, allowed the business to compete against retailers in other areas, especially Auckland. By 1902, Hetherington’s had expanded its operations with stores present in Te Aroha and Waihi. This helped them reach their vast customer base, which in the past, had been supplied by courier parcels.⁵⁰⁵ Overall, the business showed that, although economic activity in Thames had declined by the mid 1870s, there were still opportunities for retailers to succeed on a commercial level.

These accounts of economic initiative and failure highlight that success on the goldfields was a volatile affair. Locals became accustomed to ventures failing. Although some observers were disheartened by this randomness, others battled on, establishing businesses that found great prosperity. The success of these individuals helped to increase the level of optimism in the town. For much of its founding years, Thames had struggled through various depressions. However, the future appeared to be brighter, or at the very least, people would strive for it to be better. The success

⁵⁰¹ TA, 14 September 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁰² TA, 14 September 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁰³ Chris Austin, *The Descendants of Samuel Hetherington: From Ireland to New Zealand* (New Zealand: C. Austin, 2008), p. 15.

⁵⁰⁴ Austin, p. 15.

⁵⁰⁵ Austin, pp. 15-16.

stories that follow share some similarities and were often the result of locals learning from the mistakes of the past, notably the importance of machinery. This was apparent in the case of the local bread and biscuit factory. Founded in 1875 by Messrs Mennie and Dey, the business soon flourished.⁵⁰⁶ Their technology facilitated the factory with the ability to produce at levels to supply both local retailers and external markets.⁵⁰⁷ It was said that they could use 25 to 30 tons of flour a week, turning this into a variety of bread and biscuit products. Some of the machinery that was used in this process was supplied locally from Prices' Foundry, notably its biscuit mixer.⁵⁰⁸ The construction and preparation of the original site was undertaken by many different local contractors, so even the opening of new businesses provided work for others. The business found success with their quality products that they were able to produce in sufficient quantities. This translated to a new sense of optimism in the local community, with residents boasting that the spirit of enterprise at the Thames was not dead yet.⁵⁰⁹

Others used this as an example of the success that could still be found in the region. Soon a large fruit growing venture was developing in the area. This sector had been a constant in Thames, but now its scale of production had increased dramatically. Growers learned the art of preserving fruits, allowing them to ship their goods overseas. In Thames, a report in 1878 by the *Thames Star* revealed that this practice was advocated by Mr H. A. Severn during his stay in the region. His account suggested that the implementation of preservatives had enabled people to 'enjoy the fruit all the year around at very little expense and trouble.'⁵¹⁰ The report documented a letter from a London resident who claimed that Thames peaches were available at his local grocer and 'as for sweetness and flavor they were unsurpassed.'⁵¹¹ The article does not name the supplier of the fruit, but in 1880 the *Thames Star* investigated the progress of the industry. They noted that 'no less than three'

⁵⁰⁶ *ES*, 21 August 1875, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁷ *TA*, 14 December 1877, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁸ *ES*, 2 November 1875, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁹ *ES*, 21 August 1875, p. 2.

⁵¹⁰ *ES*, 19 July 1878, p. 2.

⁵¹¹ *ES*, 19 July 1878, p. 2.

businesses have been ‘engaged during the past season in preserving peaches for the interprovincial and foreign markets.’⁵¹² The success that was achieved in the industry had convinced Messrs Cooper and Son in the following year to ‘embark in peach preserving on a much larger scale.’⁵¹³ The article claimed that ‘the Thames fruit is in every way superior to that preserved in California.’⁵¹⁴

As individual success stories occurred in Thames, the town became a hub of new ideas, with people theorising about other potential opportunities. These examples show that the local economy was diversifying and new opportunities were being established in the area. The optimism that the town experienced from the new developments was aided further by the prosperity that Koefoed’s Sauce Factory achieved.⁵¹⁵ Established by Mr H Koefoed in 1879, the operation found immediate success, leading to its expansion only a year later. The business was moved from a small block of land to the former Prince Arthur Hotel.⁵¹⁶ By 1880, it was supplying locals with tomato sauce. It also exported 150 dozen bottles to Auckland. The factory had ample machinery, which gave it the ability to produce over 7,000 bottles of sauce a week. When interviewed about his business, Koefoed was optimistic about its future, with his only reservation being whether or not he could acquire enough tomatoes to maintain the current production levels.⁵¹⁷

These developing businesses show the extent to which individuals were adapting to a new, more competitive business environment in Thames. The *Thames Advertiser* reported in 1879 that ‘a number of gentlemen interested in the welfare of the district intend to establish a Railway Waggon Factory at the Thames.’⁵¹⁸ This industry was considered profitable because the resources required could all be supplied locally. However, before the project went ahead, those in charge sought assurances from the New Zealand Government that they would order 100 wagons for a total sum of

⁵¹² *ES*, 3 May 1880, p. 2.

⁵¹³ *ES*, 3 May 1880, p. 2.

⁵¹⁴ *ES*, 3 May 1880, p. 2.

⁵¹⁵ *TA*, 18 February 1880, p. 3.

⁵¹⁶ *TA*, 18 February 1880, p. 3.

⁵¹⁷ *TA*, 18 February 1880, p. 3.

⁵¹⁸ *TA*, 19 July 1879, p. 4.

£10,000.⁵¹⁹ This was not thought of as an excessive demand, as the money earned would be put back into the industry, which could become even more profitable if the Thames was ever granted a railway of its own. It was also pointed out that the Government had already ordered 400 wagons from a Dunedin factory, so the amount that they were seeking was not excessive.⁵²⁰ The writer noted the importance of this venture being successful, because ‘a few such industries would soon place us in a position of greater independence, and render us less likely to be affected by the occasional depression of our staple industry.’⁵²¹ Examples like these, of established and growing ventures, show that residents were focused on creating new industries to strengthen the local economy. Previously, the town had depended on the goldfields to provide employment and economic optimism for the region. However, that approach had failed, resulting in high unemployment when gold production diminished after 1871. Subsequently, Thames experienced significant changes. In the following years, the lack of work opportunities within the town and the allure of success in other regions caused the local population to diminish greatly. This decline contributed to a growing local perspective that emphasised the need for a more diverse economy with the development of strong agricultural and manufacturing sectors. The transition away from the goldfields and the development of new industries had begun as an individual driven movement, but it would soon include Government support to bolster the strength of the initiative.

Government Intervention

The attempt to foster local industries reached national proportions in 1880, when the central Government formed the Colonial Industries Commission, giving it the task of examining the various economic activities around the country. One of the functions of the Commission was to determine whether the Government should intervene and aid

⁵¹⁹ TA, 19 July 1879, p. 4.

⁵²⁰ TA, 19 July 1879, p. 4.

⁵²¹ TA, 19 July 1879, p. 4.

these ventures.⁵²² It was hoped that this Commission would ascertain the problem areas in the New Zealand economy and open up new opportunities that could be capitalised on in the future. The state of the nation's industries was underdeveloped, understandably, with the country still in its infancy. Nevertheless, news of this initiative was received with great optimism in Thames, with many believing that if Government assistance was given during the formative years of new businesses, they would have a better chance of becoming firmly established. Therefore, local residents believed they would have created a strong base for future industries to prosper.⁵²³ This was similar to prior discussions regarding protectionism and its necessity to foster new local developments.

After the Commission had travelled around the country, their findings were reported, in which they admitted that they had merely scratched the surface of the country's industries. They stated that although their delegates lacked the necessary time to fully understand the economy, there were opportunities to improve industries in New Zealand.⁵²⁴ The Commission found it hard to determine the problems in the economy, largely due to the businessmen they spoke to being more interested in making a profit themselves, than helping the nation as a whole.⁵²⁵ This led to conflicting reports, with some advocating for more protective policies, while others preferred the increased competition and possibility for exporting their goods. Overall, the Commission concluded that tariffs and other taxes should be a last resort, and even then they should only be implemented on new industries. In regards to protecting established businesses, the Commission believed that the true key to continued success lay with the individuals in charge of them, and whether or not they had the required ambition to become successful.⁵²⁶ The Commission's findings revealed the difference in

⁵²² 'Report of the Colonial Industries Commission appointed to inquire into the State of Industries in the colony', *AJHR*, 1880, H-22, p. 1.

⁵²³ *ES*, 14 October 1880, p. 2.

⁵²⁴ Report of the Colonial Industries Commission appointed to inquire into the State of Industries in the colony', *AJHR*, 1880, H-22, pp. 3-4.

⁵²⁵ Report of the Colonial Industries Commission appointed to inquire into the State of Industries in the colony', *AJHR*, 1880, H-22, p. 4.

⁵²⁶ Report of the Colonial Industries Commission appointed to inquire into the State of Industries in the colony', *AJHR*, 1880, H-22, p. 4.

opinion regarding how best to foster new industries. The discussion on this subject was not specific to this period, but had been a topic of debate in Thames for several years prior to the Commission's visit. In 1879, locals argued that tariffs were necessary on some products to allow those sectors the support needed to compete.⁵²⁷ They emphasised that if import duties were removed from timber, the region would suffer financially. It was believed that the removal of these taxes would allow American timber to flood the market, which could be bought at a lower price and held a similar quality to the local product.⁵²⁸ Residents agreed that the Government needed to tread carefully on this subject, concluding that tariffs had to balance the generation of revenue and encouragement of local industries to become internationally competitive.⁵²⁹

The level of encouragement given to local industry became a sticking point within local debates. It was believed that taxation was necessary to stop foreign imports from dominating the markets.⁵³⁰ However, the level to which these taxes would be placed was less certain. Members of the public agreed that the past had shown them that excessive taxation was not of any use to anyone, as it only prevented competition and retarded the growth of local industries.⁵³¹ It appeared that the ideal situation was that taxes would be used initially, but would slowly be reduced once local industries had become competitive. Locals were optimistic that improvements could be made to the economy, alluding to the coal industry. At one point all the coal used in New Zealand was imported, but by 1880 the mineral was sourced locally. They believed that this could be the case for many other businesses in the colony, but concluded that the success of future ventures depended on the willingness of residents to purchase local products.⁵³²

⁵²⁷ *TA*, 29 April 1879, p. 2.

⁵²⁸ *TA*, 29 April 1879, p. 2.

⁵²⁹ *TA*, 29 April 1879, p. 2.

⁵³⁰ *TA*, 23 April 1880, p. 2.

⁵³¹ *TA*, 23 April 1880, p. 2.

⁵³² *TA*, 23 April 1880, p. 2.

The movement to improve and develop local industries had a profound effect on the Thames economy. For much of the town's history, gold mining had been the sole focus of financial endeavours. This had played a role in the settlements decline, as locals failed to develop alternative economic opportunities until it was too late. At its peak, the town was rumoured to have had a population of approximately 18,000, but by 1886 it stood at 4,444.⁵³³ This sudden decline was a result of the failing gold industry and interest shifting from Thames to other regions around New Zealand. The resulting decrease in economic activity within the township highlighted the flaws in centring the local economy on the goldfields. The realisation that the area could not solely depend on mining helped Thames to transform itself into a more diverse economic region that became home to strong agricultural and manufacturing sectors.

Summary

During the 1870s, Thames underwent a dramatic transition after the production from the goldfields diminished. A lack of alternate employment other than mining had left the local economy in a perilous state. High unemployment and commercial depressions overcame the town. By the mid-1870s, the affluence that the gold industry created had almost disappeared entirely. Activity in the town had diminished greatly as a result of a serious decline in the local population. Over the following years, this figure continued to fall as residents migrated to areas that provided more attractive employment opportunities.

National interest in Thames waned over this period, as its poor infrastructure and declining transportation network further isolated the settlement from the rest of the colony. Progress was made towards connecting the town with new, emerging, markets. The construction of a railroad and the renovations of the local wharves helped in this regard, but both projects were completed too late to alleviate Thames of its financial troubles. The new industries that were developed during this period

⁵³³ *Thames Gold Fields Miner's Guide: 1868*, p. 70.
New Zealand Census, 1886, Table XVII, p. 18.

struggled against the isolation that surrounded the region and the poor economic climate that the inconsistency of the gold industry had created. Many ventures failed, but some succeeded and in doing so, contributed to a growing sense of optimism within the town.

These industries were a result of a combined effort by officials and aspiring individuals to create new economic opportunities within the colony. In Thames, these initiatives allowed the town to establish stronger agricultural and manufacturing sectors, which in turn, lessened local reliance on the goldfields. The effort to improve the local economy after the decline of Thames has not featured in historiography on the Thames region. This chapter has shown that there was a large social movement within the settlement that fought for the survival of Thames and that there was more to the region's economic activity than gold mining. Understanding the efforts made by these individuals is central to the discussion of how the town survived its extreme decline during the early 1870s. Even though the goldfields continued to produce into the twentieth century, the region's finances stabilised, thanks in large part, to the new economic opportunities that were fostered during this period.

Conclusion

Most histories of the Thames have contended that the town experienced a significant period of prosperity shortly after the area was proclaimed a goldfield in 1867. However, this thesis has argued that the local economy during these formative years was fragile and frequently teetered on the edge of collapse. Many arrived at the goldfields in search of wealth and riches, but most were left disappointed. The uncertainty and financial hardship that most experienced during the period 1867 to 1880 has been largely neglected by historians of the Thames. Authors like John Grainger, Fred Weston and Peter James Quinn have preferred to perpetuate the romantic tale of the town's early success. In doing so, they overlooked the considerable struggle that individuals endured in their attempt to improve the settlement's future economic outlook, which was a crucial aspect in the founding of Thames towards the late nineteenth century. As an historian and a local, I have contended in this study that these experiences require stronger and deliberate expression because the histories of Thames have been too limited. Thus a more nuanced history offers a more balanced representation of the development of the town during its initial years.

Chapter One highlighted the romanticised contemporary depictions of Thames that featured in an array of national and international newspapers, and contrasted them with the harsh realities described in local accounts of life on the goldfields. Positive reports asserted that vast wealth was readily available in the region, encouraging many to move to Thames. Instead of widespread affluence and a township assured of success, the chapter showed that settlers predominantly encountered failure, and endured significant hardships. The accounts of visitors and locals such as Mrs J. E. Macdonald, Lancelot Smith and Theophilus Cooper highlight the problems faced by residents and workers during these initial years. According to their descriptions, the town lacked adequate infrastructure, with dirt tracks substituting for appropriate roads (Thesis, pp. 30-31). Despite these stories, the romantic portrayal of the thriving

settlement in Thames has prevailed, with historians preferring to focus on the town's supposed success, rather than elaborate on the multiple realities of those who occupied the growing township in its founding years. This chapter has rejected the notion that Thames experienced immediate prosperity after being proclaimed a goldfield in 1867. In doing so, it emphasised the hardships that many within the settlement endured during Thames' founding years.

As the Thames township struggled to develop, prospectors on the goldfields experienced considerable adversity. Many miners had come to the area expecting their stay to be short and profitable. Unfortunately, the gold was encased in quartz-rock which required expensive machinery and considerable expertise to extract the minerals within. Thus, prospectors were forced to work together, most forming companies to share the costs of mining operations. Although this combined effort enabled early miners to purchase and run the necessary equipment, further shareholders were required. Chapter One revealed that the initial failure to attract investors essentially stunted the growth of the goldfields, because miners could only work the surface of their claims (Thesis, p. 26). This slow and uncertain progress continued until 1870, when, at last, the necessary equipment was introduced at Thames.

The inexperience of prospectors was also cited in this study as a major factor in the slower than expected progress of the goldfields. This problem was elaborated on by a local miner, John Warren, who resided in the region from 1867 to 1870. Warren recalled that he and his friends arrived in the area with no previous experience, but became active in numerous mining claims, although none came to financial fruition. In fact, when he left the area in 1870, he was burdened with the debts that he incurred in his attempt to find fortune (Thesis, pp. 35-36). Warren's case not only illustrated the lack of expertise on the goldfields, but also that success at Thames was chance-ridden and definitely not guaranteed.

The misrepresentation of the Thames' economic situation was then explored in Chapter Two of this study, with particular attention given to the various portrayals

that appeared in local, national, and even international newspapers. Chapter Two showed that by 1870, locals were well aware of these exaggerated reports, particularly those that accentuated the supposedly vast wealth the goldfields were apparently producing. In meetings with Government officials, locals argued that these false reports were adding to the financial pressures on the town, and inevitably served to decrease investor confidence in the area. However, before any actions could be taken to remedy the situation, the township was suddenly buoyed through a period of prosperity when the Caledonian Mine struck a rich vein of gold in 1871. This led to a significant increase in gold production in the region. Optimism that had waned through inconsistent finds in the previous years was thus restored by the breakthrough. Nevertheless, this prosperity was only temporary, and merely distracted locals from the town's glaring economic issues. Events such as the Shortland fire in 1872 and the severe weather storms in 1874 reiterated these problems, contributing to a severe decline in commercial activity in Thames during the mid-1870s. According to the recollections of Toss Hammond, the Shortland block that was most affected by the 1872 blaze remained vacant for many years after the fire (Thesis, pp. 71-71). The production from the goldfields also decreased steadily after 1871. In addition to this decline, Thames drifted out of the national spotlight. The prolonged negotiations to open the nearby Ohinemuri district for mining were finally completed in 1875, which led to intense speculation in that area. Miners in Thames stopped working their claims as they waited to hear news from the new goldfields, with the hope that alluvial gold would be found there. Numerous local mines had to be closed because shareholders were no longer paying their upkeep (Thesis, p. 70). Chapter Two has shown that Thames' temporary prosperity was unsustainable, and when gold production declined after 1871, the economic outlook for the town declined significantly.

The financial pressure and hardships that occurred in Thames was then addressed in more detail in Chapter Three, which examined the struggles of various entrepreneurs in the mid to late 1870s. The extent of the town's financial issues motivated residents to begin initiatives that would shift the local economy away from a fixed and narrow

reliance on the goldfields, toward a more diversified local economy. The decline in gold production after 1871 had contributed to numerous economic downturns, which resulted in extreme financial hardships for most locals. The growing number of unemployed men in the following years dominated local discussions. Residents voiced their concerns in local newspapers, arguing that Thames lacked a diverse array of employment opportunities. In response, the council attempted to resolve the issue by providing work on public works projects. Although this supplied some residents with jobs, others were still left unemployed. With no other opportunities presenting themselves, the council explored the option of relocating some to areas in the colony that had better employment prospects (Thesis, p. 80).

Adding to the pressure was the fact that Thames remained precariously isolated from other economic markets and population centres. At the goldfield's peak, the town had relied on its wharves to connect it with the rest of New Zealand. However, the storms that struck the region in 1874 had destroyed the wharf at Tararu. Over the same period, the other wharves located in Grahamstown and Shortland had fallen into disrepair and needed to be fixed. With the abolishment of the Provincial Government system in 1876, the responsibility of these repairs fell to the Thames Borough Council. The council attempted to employ locals to complete the refurbishments, but these efforts lacked the necessary funding to provide for a large number of jobs. The difficulties that were faced in maintaining maritime access to the town was thought to be solved when the New Zealand Government announced plans for a railway network which would link Thames with the Waikato. However, the progress of this project was incredibly slow, the scheme had been agreed upon in 1873, but was not completed until 1898 (Thesis, pp. 94-95). This Chapter, then, has argued that the failure of local officials to link the town with other settlements limited the economic opportunities that were available to the area, which increased the financial pressures that Thames faced when gold production declined.

Despite the potential for severe economic disaster, a number of residents resolved to improve the economic situation, and worked hard in the coming years to address the

problem. Locals, beyond simply the lure of gold, had, as this thesis has pointed out, formed a strong affinity to Thames and its emerging sense of identity and community. Since the town's founding, various settlers had banded together to form groups and clubs based on common interests. These associations, as Chapter Three highlighted, were central in developing and maintaining a distinctive Thames identity, which was frequently referred to during various reunions held in later years (Thesis, pp. 85-86). Indeed, local benevolent societies played a vital role in supporting those in the community that suffered emotional and financial hardships. These groups helped provide aid to individuals and families, especially those that were affected by accidents on the goldfields. In some cases, these societies worked with the local community to raise funds to send the widows of miners back to their families in other regions, with some women provided financial assistance to help them travel as far as Europe (Thesis, p. 84).

The ongoing local effort to improve the financial situation in Thames was also highlighted in multiple initiatives to develop a more diverse economy. As Chapter Three showed, these business proposals were frequently discussed in local newspapers, in which the community was urged to support new and upcoming industries. Often, what appeared in the newspapers emphasised the accomplishments of prominent local businessmen like Louis Ehrenfried. Residents, as Chapter Three revealed, were encouraged by these entrepreneurial efforts, with many new industries subsequently established during the 1870s, including a biscuit factory, a tomato sauce plant and a fruit preserving sector. The peach industry, for instance, opened up local produce, as the local newspapers reported, to international markets (Thesis, p. 97-98). Development of new industries like these began in Thames as individually led projects to improve the area's economic opportunities. Later, these efforts were aided by central Government initiatives to develop and foster new business ventures across the country. This diversity of the Thames economy during the 1870s has, as Chapter Three asserts, been neglected by historians. Instead, most authors have chosen to focus on the productivity of the goldfields, and have thus overlooked the significant

contribution that these smaller industries had on the development and survival of the Thames township.

This thesis has argued that the current historical literature on Thames has focused on the success and prosperity of the goldfields. These histories have devoted little time to the hardships and adversities faced by early residents, but have highlighted the swift development of the township and the attention that Thames was garnering on the world stage. The aim of this study, then, sought to reveal that beneath this golden façade, the early years on the goldfields were harsh, and success was by no means assured. It emphasised the economic issues that hindered the growth of the town and the impact that these problems had on the lives of locals. Furthermore, it pointed out that the community was engaged in early discussions concerning how to develop and foster the local economy. Indeed, the thesis has demonstrated that the financial hardships that many endured, contributed to the formation of a resurgent Thames identity, one which residents have recalled regularly over succeeding generations. Additionally, by emphasising the financial perils and harsh economic realities that faced both Government officials and everyday residents, this study has rebuffed the romantic portrayal of success at the Thames goldfields, and to a lesser extent New Zealand, towards the end of the nineteenth century. This thesis then has given a fresh perspective on the founding of a colonial gold mining town, illustrating that those that endured financial hardships contributed to the development of a more robust local economy. Thus their experiences play an instrumental and vital role in the histories of Thames. Indeed, this study has shown that beneath the golden façade, there is a deeper history waiting to be explored.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Table of Thames Gold Returns (Yields from 1867 to 1924)

Year	OZ	Year	OZ
1867	6,637	1897	11,367
1868	52,611	1898	13,482
1869	132,454	1899	18,003
1870	85,534	1900	25,554
1871	330,326	1900*	17,274
1872	143,036	1901	16,314
1873	119,449	1902	23,389
1874	110,216	1903	10,764
1875	98,937	1904	10,692
1876	95,600	1905	37,153
1877	123,534	1906	92,872
1878	107,979	1907	62,695
1879	57,207	1908	12,256
1880	59,576	1909	7,777
1881	53,154	1910	6,370
1882	45,803	1911	4,338
1883	43,311	1912	3,839
1884	54,878	1913	4,194
1885	37,705	1914	7,052
1886	61,540	1915	6,015
1887	38,142	1916	13,675
1888	35,949	1917	4,213
1889	35,796	1918	507
1890	33,817	1919	4,525
1891	38,113	1920	747
1892	45,735	1921	332
1893	31,336	1922	1,976
1894	34,637	1923	423
1895+	22,810	1924	362
1896	22,751		

+From 1895 include returns from Cyanide treatment

*April to December

Source: William Kelly, *Thames: The first 100 years* (Thames: Thames Star, 1868), p 60

It was also noted that there were some discrepancies in the figures for some years.

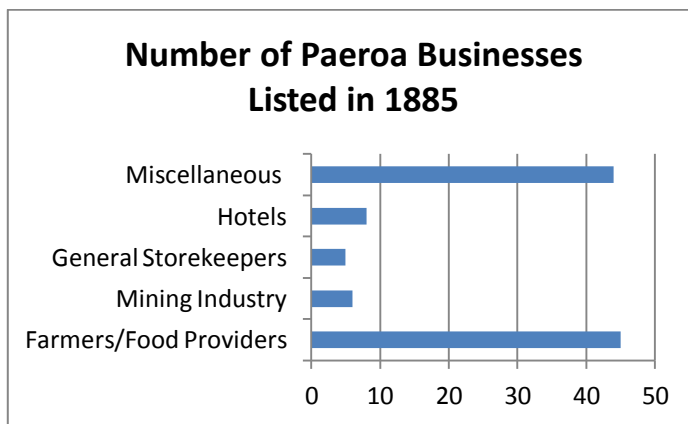
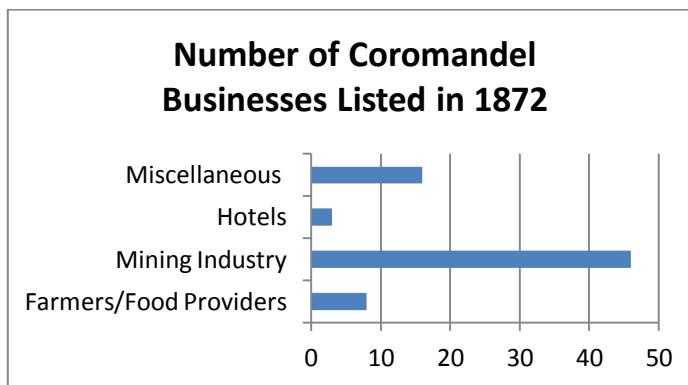
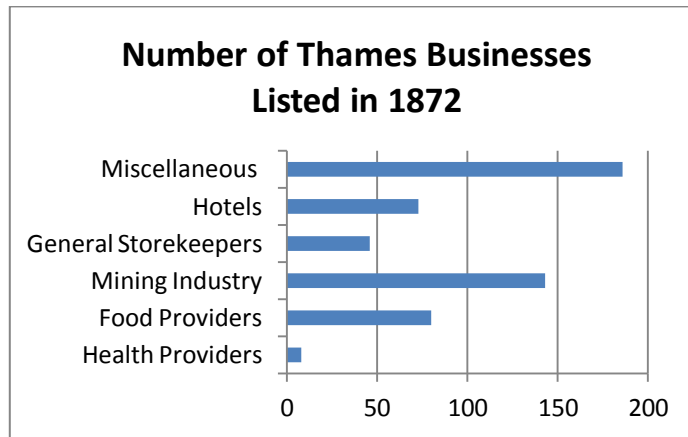
**Appendix Two: Return of the Quantity and Value of Gold Entered
for Duty for Exportation from New Zealand, from 1/4/1857 to
31/3/1882**

RETURN of the QUANTITY and VALUE of GOLD ENTERED for DUTY for EXPORTATION from NEW ZEALAND, from 1st APRIL, 1857, to 31st MARCH, 1882.							
ENTERED FOR DUTY AT	PRODUCE OF THE GOLD FIELDS IN	DURING THE QUARTER ENDED 31st MARCH, 1882.		ENTERED FOR EXPORTATION TO THE 31st DECEMBER, 1881.		TOTAL ENTERED FOR EXPORTATION FROM NEW ZEALAND TO THE 31st MARCH, 1882.	
		Quantity.	Value.	Quantity.	Value.	Quantity.	Value.
Auckland	Auckland	Oz.	£	Oz.	£	Oz.	£
Wellington	Wellington	8,218	32,123	1,327,340	4,885,657	1,335,558	4,917,780
Picton	Marlborough	4	14	30	120	34	134
		29	112	49,768	191,911	49,797	192,023
Nelson	Nelson	971	3,627	1,629,262	6,467,971	1,630,233	6,471,593
Nelson	} West Coast	471	1,823				
Westport		3,741	14,965				
Greymouth		24,411	97,643				
Hokitika		9,599	38,392				
		38,222	152,823	2,694,800	10,541,179	2,733,022	10,694,002
Dunedin	} Otago	22,824	91,097				
Invercargill		3,041	12,166				
		25,865	103,263	4,094,757	16,123,225	4,120,622	16,226,488
Totals	...	73,309	291,962	9,795,957	33,210,063	9,869,266	38,502,025

Customs Department,
Wellington, 24th April, 1882.
WILLIAM SEED,
Secretary and Inspector of Customs.

Source: 'Return of the Quantity and Value of Gold Entered for Duty for Exportation from New Zealand, from 1st April, 1857, to 31st March, 1882', *New Zealand Gazette*, 27 April 1882, p. 637.

Appendix Three: Graphs of Business Listings for Thames (1872), Coromandel (1872) and Paeroa (1885)



The business listings were grouped into main categories. Types of businesses classified as miscellaneous include Boot makers, Carpenters, Newspapers and Teachers, amongst many others.

Source: Wises Directory of New Zealand 1872 and 1885.

Appendix Four: Breakdown of the businesses in Thames, 1872

Architects	2	Hotels	73
Assayers	2	Iron Founders and Mongers	7
Auctioneers	8	Land Agent	1
Bakers & Confectioners	11	Lapidary	1
Banks	4	Merchants	6
Barristers & Solicitors	6	Milliners	7
Blacksmiths & Wheelwrights	7	Mining Companies	112
Boardinghouses	3	Mining Agents	29
Booksellers & Stationers	3	Newspapers	3
Boot makers	31	Painters	8
Brewers	2	Pawn Brokers	2
Butchers	16	Plumbers	5
Carpenters	7	Printers	5
Cabinetmakers	6	Photographers	2
Chemists & Druggists	3	Produce Dealers	5
China Dealers	2	Sail & Tentmaker	2
Cordial Manufacturers	2	Saddlers	3
Civil Engineers & Surveyors	7	Stock & Share brokers	4
Coal & Wood Yards	5	Seeds man	1
Commission Agents	8	Storekeepers	20
Dentist	1	Surgeons	4
Drapers	10	Tailors	7
Dyer	1	Teachers	4
Fancy Goods	3	Timber Merchants	4
Furniture Dealers	5	Tobacconists	7
Fruiterers	10	Undertaker	1
Grocers	39	Watchmaker/Jewelers	6
Hairdressers	4		

Source: The New Zealand Post Office Directory, 1872.

Appendix Five: Cleave's Streets Map of the Thames and Suburbs, circa 1910s

This 1910s street map illustrates the layout of the Thames township. It shows the town's various suburbs and their relative position to one another, most notably, Grahamstown and Shortland.



Source: Sir George Grey Special Collections, NZ map 3577, Auckland Libraries.

Glossary

Alluvial: Gold that can be found in soil and sediment deposits. Often found around rivers or streams

Machinery: Included the Stamper Batteries needed to crush the ore

Pumps: Used to remove water from the underground mines

Quartz: A hard dense form of silica, commonly occurring as veins in country rock

Reef: A prominent quartz vein

Stampers: Heavy iron shafts, each Stamper Battery consisted of stamps that were used to crush the ore