

# THE THAMES MINERS' UNION

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## THE THAMES MINERS' UNION

**Abstract:** *More of a friendly society than a class conscious workers' movement, the Thames Miners' Union was formed in 1890 as a branch of the Amalgamated Miners' Association of Australasia. The state of mining at this time in Australia and New Zealand discouraged militancy, and although the inaugural meeting agreed that miners must stand together to protect their rights, it was hoped to avoid strike action. Because of its focus on 'practical sympathy', meaning providing financial assistance to members in need, the new union had wide public support, as illustrated by non-miners joining as honorary members.*

*From the start, the union wished to assist its members by regulating hours and wages, and was willing to look beyond its confines to assist other unions' struggles. Accepting that capitalists were needed if mining was to develop, it would in time seek legislation to benefit the industry. Mini-biographies of the leading members of the new union and of some of its branches in outlying mining districts (including at Te Aroha) illustrate the moderate nature of these men. Some were mine managers, most were active within the wider community, and all were thoroughly respectable. Examples are included of harmonious relationships between miners and their managers.*

*Accident and health benefit payments were devised, and public concerts were held for the union's 'benevolent fund'. Miners' Union Demonstrations, held annually to mark the union's founding, included parades and sports meetings involving members' families. Miners' halls became the social centres of mining communities. Involvement in national politics commenced when a labour candidate, a clergyman, stood for the Thames electorate.*

*In the Te Aroha district, the first association was an accident relief fund, which involved non-miners. A branch of the union had only a brief life because of the rapid decline of mining there.*

*By the twentieth century there were demands for more militancy, especially at Waihi, where the policies of the Waihi Company provoked resistance amongst the workers. By then Hauraki miners were experiencing increased unemployment, with companies under-manning or not working some of their ground, all causes for complaint. In 1903 the Waihi branch would break away from the parent union, which steadily declined as mining declined. The Thames Miners' Union, which exalted the 'dignity of honest labour', gently faded away without ever calling a strike.*

## THE UNION BY 1902

The *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, in its 1902 volume about the former Auckland provincial area, included information about the Thames Miners' Union:

There are about 1700 miners belonging to the union, and branches have been established at Waihi, Karangahake, Golden Cross, Waitekauri and Coromandel. The registered office and meeting hall, in Queen Street, Thames, was erected at a cost of £850, and has accommodation for 500 persons. A reading-room, with newspapers and periodicals, is open four nights a week. Halls have also been erected at Waihi and Golden Cross at a cost of £250 each; a reading-room at Coromandel cost £150, and a similar one at Karangahake £100. Members contribute a subscription of 6d per week, and become entitled to an allowance of £1 per week for the first year, in case of accident, and to 10s per week during the rest of their lives. A sum of £50 is payable on the accidental death of a member, in addition to a levy of 6d on each member, which brings in about £35.<sup>1</sup>

This entry suggested an organization that was a friendly society rather than a militant expression of class-conscious trade unionism, an impression confirmed by an examination of its early years and of some of its leading members during that time.

## FORMATION OF THE UNION

The first attempt by some Thames miners to combine to defend their interests was in August 1870, when a meeting formed the Miners' Mutual Protection League and elected a provisional committee.<sup>2</sup> This seems to have been stillborn. The other organisation formed in the early 1870s was the Thames Miners' Accident Relief Fund Committee.<sup>3</sup> When the union was formed, in January 1890, the *Observer* commented that 'the miners of the Thames, who have been a long suffering people, have at length decided to form themselves into a branch' of the Amalgamated Miners' Association of

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<sup>1</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 473.

<sup>2</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 17 August 1870, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see *Thames Advertiser*, 10 February 1874, p. 2.

Australasia.<sup>4</sup> This wording suggested that they had had to be provoked to take this step, and indeed it resulted from the Cambria Company deducting sixpence each week from wages to cover the company's liabilities in case of accidents. When the miners resisted this imposition, they were asked to sign an agreement relieving the company of all responsibility; refusing this demand, instead they established the union.<sup>5</sup>

The Amalgamated Miners' Association of Australasia was by this stage Australia's largest, attracting members by 'generous accident and funeral and sickness benefits'. It was 'watchdog rather than bulldog', and 'rarely militant'.<sup>6</sup>

It knew that men who risked their savings in mining shares deserved a high reward, and begrudged no company its high dividends. It did not demand excessive wages, knowing that they might close useful mines or reduce the dividend in successful mines. There was no sharp rift between shareholders and wages miners. Thousands of miners themselves were shareholders, for goldmining was the one industry in which the humble employee was in the best position to speculate. If a new reef was found, underground miners often sent secret messages to a stockbroker in the town and bought shares before they rose dramatically. As the price of gold was fixed, the working miner could not be outwitted by city speculators who understood prices....

Goldminers did not use their trade union as a battering ram against company mining, because they still hoped to make a fortune. Most underground men did not think they were doomed to be wage-earners for the term of their working life.... The mildness of unionism reflected an industry where the humblest man was not yet divorced from excitement, hope, and profit.<sup>7</sup>

The features of this union were to be repeated in its Thames affiliate, as indicated at the meeting to consider forming a union that attracted between 400 and 500 men, according to one newspaper, or 500 and 600, according to another.<sup>8</sup> 'The greatest unanimity was displayed throughout', as when it was unanimously agreed that a local grocer, James McGowan,

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<sup>4</sup> *Observer*, 1 February 1890, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> William A. Kelly, *Thames: The first hundred years* (Thames, 1968), p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rush that Never Ended: A history of Australian mining* (Melbourne, 1964), p. 299.

<sup>7</sup> Blainey, *Rush that Never Ended*, pp. 299-300.

<sup>8</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1890, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

take the chair. McGowan, a member of the Liberal Party, was a future Member of Parliament for the district and from 1900 onwards Minister for Mines in the Seddon government.<sup>9</sup> After being ‘greeted with a most hearty reception’, he addressed them:

It afforded him great pleasure indeed to preside over a meeting of so many miners, he had never stood before so many before. He was sorry that the Mayor had been prevented from taking the position, but he would do his best to fill his place. Combination was no new thing, and if men were wisely banded together, good must result to themselves and their children. He would impress upon the meeting that very much depended upon the selection of managers who will be guided by prudence. All had a general knowledge of such combinations, the present was not a local affair as the Union embraced the whole of Australia. Such an organization was necessary to avoid evils which otherwise might creep in.<sup>10</sup>

‘With prudent men to guide it, the Union could not fail to be productive of much benefit to the working classes’.<sup>11</sup> When he asked Edwin Wass Lowe to explain the objects of the new body, Lowe said he ‘had never seen such a large meeting of miners’, one ‘far greater’ than ‘he had ever expected’.<sup>12</sup> Having long shared the ‘widespread feeling of the necessity for a Miners’ Association’, he had written in December the previous year to the secretary of the Creswick branch, in Victoria, of the Amalgamated Miners’ Association, to obtain a copy of the rules. The secretary offered assistance and provided copies of rules, by-laws, and reports for distribution. The reading of his letter ‘was received with prolonged applause’.<sup>13</sup> In mid-January, a ‘semi-private meeting’ decided to call this meeting and formed a provisional committee.<sup>14</sup>

The object was to secure the payment of a sum of money to every member who might be injured and in this respect he did not know of anything equal to the Association. In the case of fatal accident

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<sup>9</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 860; *New Zealand Parliamentary Record*, ed. Guy H. Scholefield (Wellington, 1950), pp. 41-42, 122.

<sup>10</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1890, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1890, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

the rules provide for the payment of £50 to the deceased, and in the case of injury incapacitating a member from working £1 per week would be paid to him weekly to the first 12 months and 10s per week subsequently so long as the branch shall exist. The scale of payment was fixed by the Creswick branch at 6d per week payable fortnightly. The provisional committee had fixed upon the rules of this branch for adoption as being best suited to their requirements.... The speaker here read the rules laying down that 8 hours shall be a day's work, and that the funds would be available for securing compensation in case of injury by neglect of Directors of Companies and other employers. They were not going to set the Thames on fire, he could see no cloud that should frighten anybody. They should be prepared to stand up for their rights, they had heard of strikes in other places but he sincerely hoped they would never see one at the Thames. They owed it to themselves to be in the same position as others in every large centre of Mining. It was actions alone that made the man, not money.<sup>15</sup>

Another account reported that Lowe 'did not think there was any cause for alarm, or that the Union was likely to give rise to any trouble, as unless the men had some grievance worth going into and requiring amendment, the Union would not of course do anything'.<sup>16</sup> He 'concluded with the words of the old song':

We can band together to assist one another as well as we can;  
It's the action, not the purse, that makes the man.

As the words of the couplet died away from the lips of the speaker, a hearty outburst of applause followed.<sup>17</sup>

Asked whether only miners could join, he replied that 'it included all branches of mining, and all trades', the rules 'providing that anyone could join and participate in the benefits'.<sup>18</sup> When the next speaker, Daniel Ennis O'Sullivan, proposed that a branch be formed, he raised the meeting 'to a state of great enthusiasm'.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1890, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

Having heard Mr Lowe's explanation they could not but accord him their hearty thanks for the information. He was a miner and had worked with them for years in all capacities. There were no particular abuses at present but they should be in a position to resist them if they were attempted. They must look abroad to England, Germany, and Belgium where struggles had taken place - it was might against right.<sup>20</sup>

Frederick Houghton White,<sup>21</sup> in seconding the motion, pointed out that they were not being 'asked to join a mere empty form, but a powerful Association consisting of 16,000 members, and having £17,000 to its credit after paying away as benefits to its members £33,553 last year. It would thus be seen that they started upon a sound basis. He urged those present to unite as one man'. Andrew Carnie<sup>22</sup> took up this theme, reminding them of 'the old story of the faggots which could not be broken while they were lashed together'. Referring to the recent strike at Broken Hill, he 'said it was time the miners of the Thames awoke and brought themselves into living contact with their friends across the sea. They were all Britons at heart, and should unite, not for aggression, but in order to be in a position to demand their rights, and accept no less. (Loud applause.)'. After more speeches, the motion was 'carried with the utmost enthusiasm, those present cheering and applauding to the echo'.<sup>23</sup> The meeting 'terminated with three cheers for the Miners' Association'.<sup>24</sup>

Another report described the meeting as being 'largely-attended and enthusiastic':

Several speakers spoke at some length, all of them stating that the present step had been taken owing to an often expressed wish amongst miners that they should combine and co-operate with other kindred labour organisations to carefully guard their interests. It was pointed out by each speaker that, in the past, other mining districts in this colony and elsewhere had shown their practical sympathy with their fellow-workmen when in distress or suffering from oppression by forwarding monetary aid, whereas nothing of the kind had ever been attempted at the Thames. It was thought, however, that the time had arrived when

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<sup>20</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1890, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> An obscure miner whose life has not been traced.

<sup>22</sup> See *Thames Star*, 27 October 1910, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1890, p. 3.

the miners here should co-operate in order to, if necessary, assist their fellows elsewhere, so that, should they themselves at any period in the future labour under injustice, then they in turn should also be assisted by outside Unions. It was stated that there was nothing existing at present with which the men could find fault, and it was merely in order to protect themselves in case of any emergency arising that the proposal to form a Union had been made.

The motion to form the union was ‘carried unanimously, amidst prolonged cheering’, the reporter describing the meeting as ‘one of the most successful and unanimous held here for many a year’ and proposal being taken up ‘in the heartiest possible manner’.<sup>25</sup> A later account recorded that, when it was announced that the resolution had been passed unanimously,

the enthusiasm of the vast assemblage knew no bounds. There was a simultaneous and deafening outburst of applause and cheers, the hats of the miners – many of them with their “billies” in their hands, having just ceased work for the night – were waved in the air, and such a feeling of unity displayed as could not have failed to have convinced even the most sceptical that the Union would be a success.<sup>26</sup>

As the assistance of the Australian union had been obtained, it commenced ‘on a sound financial footing’.<sup>27</sup> On the night it was formed, 235 miners joined.<sup>28</sup> On 1 February, a general meeting to adopt the by-laws and to elect a committee, attended by ‘fully 500 persons’,<sup>29</sup> was marked by ‘the utmost unanimity’. The chairman, Andrew Carnie, stressed the importance of placing ‘good and reliable men at the head of affairs, in order to ensure its judicious management and careful nurturing’. There were by then 490 ‘working members’ and 60 honorary ones.<sup>30</sup> Its objects were adopted at this meeting:

To maintain the privileges and customs at present appertaining to mining in this district, and to mutually assist our brethren in

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<sup>25</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 January 1890, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 January 1890, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 March 1891, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Thames Star*, 3 February 1890, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.



carrying out the objects defined and specified in the General Rules of the A.M.A., and in rendering pecuniary and other assistance in repelling any infringement that may be attempted against rights and privileges, and also to provide pecuniary assistance to their widows and children in the case of death of a member, arising from accident while pursuing his occupation.<sup>31</sup>

Members were not to 'accept less than wages under penalty' and not to work on Sundays unless on special duties. 'Any person employed in or about a mine' could join.<sup>32</sup> The preface to these rules proclaimed that 'when due attention and obedience' was paid to these 'wholesome and salutary orders, peace and concord arise, which animate the members to union and friendship'. By strict adherence to the rules, 'the cultivation of brotherly affection, and mutual regard for each other's welfare, cannot fail to be the result. And every good member of society will admire and respect the noble triumph you will have obtained by your united exertions and perseverance'.<sup>33</sup>

It cost 2s 6d to join, the annual subscription being 5s.<sup>34</sup> After further preliminaries, another meeting held on 8 March was informed that it had been accepted into affiliation as AMA branch no. 54.<sup>35</sup> By then there were nearly 700 members, a total which included honorary members.<sup>36</sup>

The first act of the new union was to end what miners considered to be 'the iniquitous payment of 1s per week per man to the New Zealand Accident Insurance Company', which was deducted from their wages.<sup>37</sup> It informed companies participating in this scheme that 'after a certain date Union men would not contribute to the mine fund, and as a results of such notice, the companies interested gracefully gave in'.<sup>38</sup> It provided rules for the letting of tributes because tributers complained that there were 'no rules for their guidance'.<sup>39</sup> In June, it was reported that the union intended

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<sup>31</sup> *Bye-Laws of the Thames Branch of the Amalgamated Miners' Association of Australasia* (Thames, 1890), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Bye-Laws*, pp. 3, 11, 13, 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Bye-Laws*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1890, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Thames Star*, 22 July 1890, p. 4, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 March 1890, p. 2; but note *Observer*, 14 June 1890, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> 'Thames Talk', *Observer*, 5 April 1890, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> *Thames Star*, 22 July 1890, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Thames Star*, 10 March 1890, p. 2.

‘issuing a manifesto that no miner shall work for less than £2 5s per week, and that none but Union men shall be employed in any mine’. The *Observer* considered these requests ‘not unreasonable, and should not give rise to any trouble’.<sup>40</sup> All mine managers were asked if they would abide by that rate of pay and to agree that the working week should commence at 1 a.m. on Monday and end at 8 p.m. on Saturday: by mid-July, all bar one had agreed. At that time, members unanimously agreed that they would ‘decline to work with non-Unionists’ who failed to join up within the next fortnight.<sup>41</sup>

At the first half-yearly meeting held on 21 July, the president reported a credit balance of £223 14s 8d.<sup>42</sup> Within a year of its formation, the accumulated funds were £550, and £157 had been paid to members who had suffered accidents, £150 to the maritime strikers, £20 to the Auckland Tailoresses’ Union in their dispute, and £10 in ‘benevolent gifts’. By then the membership comprised 750 working members and 70 honorary ones.<sup>43</sup> A Coromandel branch already had 99 members, and it was hoped that one would be formed at Ohinemuri.<sup>44</sup>

#### NEWSPAPER RESPONSES TO THE FORMATION OF THE UNION

The *Thames Advertiser’s* response to the advertisement calling a meeting to form the union was that it was a ‘matter for wonder’ that a branch had not already been established ‘considering the large number of men employed’. It did not share the fear of some employers that the miners would ‘take the bit in their teeth and demand more than their fair dues’:

We have sufficient confidence that the intelligence and common sense of the miners in the district will prevent their making any attempt to “kill the goose.” That which is to the interest of a company is to the interest of the individual miner, one or the other may be called upon to make a sacrifice temporarily, but if that sacrifice is asked on equitable grounds good will result from its having been submitted to. We hope that the branch will be formed, and that cool heads and a sense of justice will influence

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<sup>40</sup> *Observer*, 14 June 1890, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Thames Star*, 22 July 1890, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Thames Star*, 22 July 1890, p. 4.

their proceedings, if this be so good will result to all otherwise the contrary must be the case.<sup>45</sup>

Its editorial about this meeting emphasized the moderation of the speeches:

All the speakers were careful to convey that if the working miners had any grievances they were of a trifling nature, so that the combining together was not in any sense to be interpreted as being with the object of enforcing upon mine owners any material alterations in the terms which presently exist between them. The feeling was evidently that it was a duty they owed to themselves to be prepared to resist any injustice that might be attempted in the future. The benefit side of the question was given great prominence to and aside from any other advantages that may accrue this alone makes it worth while to form the Association.

It was confident that miners had 'too much good sense to demand from mine owners any terms which would be equivalent to "killing the goose" or even of plucking feathers from its body which would have the effect of weakening it unduly'. It was pleased that an organized body would be able 'to take political action on any matter affecting the mining interest'. The union could call meetings to discuss important questions, and its resolutions 'would carry weight, because they would have been prepared by men who thoroughly understood the question in all its bearings'. It was pleased that membership was not restricted to miners, and hoped that all 'living indirectly by mining' would join. Not only would this assist the new body's funds, but the participation of non-miners at important discussions 'would be calculated to cause a broader view to be taken' than usually happened when men dealt with questions that affected 'their pockets or privileges'. It concluded by seeing 'nothing to fear', for 'good will result from its existence, provided of course its actions are characterized by the same moderation as were the speeches'.<sup>46</sup>

In celebrating its first year of existence, this newspaper again stressed the significance of the objects of what was now known as the Thames Miners' Union:

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<sup>45</sup> Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

It is the Genius of Labour saying to the Genius of Capital, "Come, let us reason together," and giving, while saying so, various indications that, if might is to be regarded as right, then the giver of the invitation will probably be found to be not altogether destitute of that quality.

Oppress not, neither be opprest, is the sentiment lying at the core of the Union, which in a word, has two prime duties - to see that Labour receives its due share from its partner Capital, and to carry out the principle of brotherhood amongst the members and their families.<sup>47</sup>

The *Thames Star* was equally supportive, an editorial stating that the proposal to create a union had 'our hearty sympathy and approval'. It was 'a very desirable institution, and one that will be conducive to their best interests'. The newspaper expected it to support the present level of wages and oppose men working for less, and to form an accident fund. If it could break up 'the system whereby large areas of ground' were 'held for indefinite periods, though practically unmanned, and for merely speculative purposes' it would 'deserve the gratitude and hearty support of every well-wisher of the goldfield'.<sup>48</sup> Another editorial described its first meeting was described as 'one of the most remarkable, if not indeed the most memorable gathering ever held' at Thames. To see so many miners, 'the very bone and sinew of the field, and on whom the future prosperity of the district so largely depends', united in their desire to form a union was 'a happy augury for the future'. It congratulated the speakers and the meeting on the 'exceedingly moderate, calm, and dispassionate tone which characterized the proceedings' and gave 'such fair promise of success'. When it was stated, more than once, that there was no 'spirit of aggression towards any Company or individual' or any grievance of 'any great weight', the audience 'heartily endorsed' these statements. It was pleased that earlier talk of forming a union had led to nothing, for 'it would have been in all probability only a local affair, with its aims and benefits circumscribed, and its success would have been very problematical'. Now one was formed 'on a much firmer and broader basis, not a mere petty local Union, but backed by all the Mining Associations in New Zealand, Australia, and Great Britain'. The miners would receive aid from others, and 'have also the privilege of extending a helping hand to their brother-miners all over the world'. It was sure that all who took 'any real interest in the welfare' of the district would

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<sup>47</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Editorial, *Thames Star*, 17 January 1890, p. 2.

join in wishing that the union, 'formed under such favorable auspices', might 'under wise and judicious management become a permanent institution'.<sup>49</sup>

The *Coromandel News* also strongly advised miners in that district to form a union 'without further delay'. It suggested that they obtain copies of the rules and regulations from Thames, and pointed out that miners' associations existed at Reefton and almost every mining centre throughout Otago.<sup>50</sup>

Approving remarks were repeated in future years. For instance, in 1898 the publisher of the *Thames Star* assured British investors that miners recognized 'to the full that without the assistance of the capitalists it is impossible to develop quartz mining of the character of the New Zealand mines, and therefore every encouragement is given to the capitalist to induce him to invest his money'.<sup>51</sup>

#### BROADENING ITS OBJECTS

The organisation began with the respectable title of an association, but, as noted, almost immediately became known as the Thames Miners' Union, officially so in 1895.<sup>52</sup> Its official name in 1903 was 'The Thames Miners' Industrial Union of Workers'.<sup>53</sup> By 1910, when a new set of rules was registered, the objects were similar, but with additional concerns for the wider labour movement. Now it was willing to assist other unions when this was 'deemed necessary', meaning that it would 'render pecuniary and other assistance' to repel 'any infringement against their rights and privileges'.<sup>54</sup> That this was not a new concept was shown at the time of the maritime strike of 1890, when a meeting considered giving assistance. After listening to a delegate from the Seamen's Union, all who spoke 'expressed their strong sympathy with the strikers and their desire to render them

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<sup>49</sup> Editorial, *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Coromandel News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 21 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Special Commissioner, 'Interview with the Hon. William McCullough, MLC', *British Australasian*, 4 June 1896, p. 854.

<sup>52</sup> Bert Roth to Philip Hart, 19 June 1992.

<sup>53</sup> *Rules of the Thames Miners' Union* (Auckland, 1903), p. 5 [only known copy held at School of Mines Archives, Thames].

<sup>54</sup> 'Rules of the Thames Miners' Union' (1910), pp. 4-5, Labour Department, L 3, 2/203, ANZ-W.

assistance', and it was resolved to make an immediate levy of 2s 6d on each member with further levies of 6d per week for as long as the strike lasted.<sup>55</sup> In 1910, the union also explicitly sought assistance through political action: 'To obtain legislative enactments for the more efficient management of mines, whereby the lives and health of miners may be preserved'.<sup>56</sup>

### LEADING EARLY UNIONISTS

After serving for six months, the first president, Lowe, did not stand for re-election.<sup>57</sup> In 1896, he was elected unopposed as one of the two auditors, being re-elected unopposed the following year.<sup>58</sup> In the election for this position in 1899, he topped the poll.<sup>59</sup> When given an honorary life membership in 1896, the president said he was regarded as the founder of the union. 'When matters here were at a low ebb he had taken the initiative in its formation, and stuck to it throughout'.<sup>60</sup> An obituary referred to him as 'the moving spirit' in its establishment.<sup>61</sup>

Lowe provided the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* with the following account of his life:

Mr EDWIN WASS LOWE, Librarian of the Thames Public Library, was born in 1836 at Sherwood, Nottinghamshire, England. He spent a number of years in his early days on the Victorian goldfields, but returned to England in 1860. Three years later he came to Auckland by the ship "Tyburnia," with the Albertland settlers. For a time he was engaged in mining at Coromandel, and arrived at the Thames on the 4th of September, 1867. For twenty years Mr Lowe was well known in the Thames and Ohinemuri districts as a mine manager, and took his certificate in 1883, before the establishment of the School of Mines. He had to give up mining on account of ill-health, and was appointed librarian in April, 1892. Mr Lowe was one of the promoters of the Thames Miners' Union, having called the first meeting prior to its establishment, and was its first president. In

<sup>55</sup> *Thames Star*, 15 September 1890, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> 'Rules of the Thames Miners' Union' (1910), p. 4, Labour Department, L 3, 2/203, ANZ-W.

<sup>57</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 3 February 1890, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 23 July 1890, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 13 April 1896, p. 3, 13 July 1896, p. 3, 19 July 1897, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 9 August 1899, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 August 1899, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 27 July 1896, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 September 1904, p. 2.

1900 he was the Union's auditor. As an Oddfellow he has passed all the chairs in the Loyal Waikato Lodge; he is also a Freemason and a member of Lodge Sir Walter Scott, N.Z.C.<sup>62</sup>

His active involvement with lodges and friendly societies clearly was important for developing his ideas of what sort of union was needed. Shortly after it was established, he was in Auckland on business relating to friendly societies,<sup>63</sup> and on his death was recorded as being 'a hard worker in the ranks of the local Masons'.<sup>64</sup> The only indication of his politics was his support for a 'labour candidate' for the Thames seat in 1890.<sup>65</sup> His first miner's right for Thames was taken out on 11 November 1867,<sup>66</sup> and he remained a miner until forced to find a new occupation because of his health.<sup>67</sup> Although not granted a mine manager's service certificate until 1892,<sup>68</sup> the year of his retirement from mining, in 1872 he was first recorded as being in charge of a tribute.<sup>69</sup> During the 1870s he managed Dixon's No. 1, one of the famous mines of the early days,<sup>70</sup> as well as the Sons of Freedom and the New North Clunes companies.<sup>71</sup> At Waitekauri, in 1876 he managed first the United Kingdom and then the Welcome Company's mine.<sup>72</sup> His sole involvement with Waiorongomai was to manage the Arizona Company's mine from 1883 to 1884.<sup>73</sup> In April 1892, when he became the Thames librarian, he celebrated his appointment by presenting

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<sup>62</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 862.

<sup>63</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 March 1890, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 September 1904, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Thames Star*, 27 November 1890, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Miners' Rights Register 1867-1868, no. 1271, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>67</sup> For his early Thames years, see Thames Warden's Court, Register of Agreements 1868, folios 316-317, BACL 14417/2a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 21 September 1869, p. 516.

<sup>68</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 11 February 1892, p. 298.

<sup>69</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 December 1872, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 September 1904, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 5 May 1873, p. 2; 24 April 1874, p. 3; 11 December 1876, p. 3, 6 June 1878, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 8 September 1876, p. 3, 30 November 1876, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 24 February 1877, p. 17.

<sup>73</sup> *Thames Star*, 27 November 1883, p. 2; E.K. Cooper to Warden, 23 June 1884, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1884, BBAV 11289/10a, ANZ-A.

a 1601 copy of Pliny's *Natural History* to the library.<sup>74</sup> When he died in 1904, of a stroke at the age of 67,<sup>75</sup> the *Thames Star* recorded his death 'with sincere regret', and referred to him as 'our much respected librarian, who was well and favourably known to almost every resident'. As librarian, he showed 'unfailing courtesy and attention to duties, proving himself to be the right man in the right place', and 'took a prominent part in the various organizations formed at Thames'.<sup>76</sup>

Daniel Ennis O'Sullivan actively assisted the formation of the union. In January 1890 he was appointed to a two-man sub-committee to collect subscriptions from non-miners willing to become honorary members.<sup>77</sup> At no time did he have any other official post. Four years later, at a union meeting called to oppose the granting of a special claim to the May Queen Company, O'Sullivan spoke against the majority view, arguing that in this case the grant was justified, and the union's policy was 'suicidal to the best interests of the goldfield'. If its policy was carried out, and the May Queen was forced to shut down, 'it would be a calamity, for in such a case the people would have to take to the hills, and none knew better than himself what that meant'.<sup>78</sup> Three years before he died, he owned a special claim, but only for ten days.<sup>79</sup> He supported the Liberal candidate for the Thames seat in 1887, but in 1890 was the secretary of the Labour candidate's election committee and called on every worker to vote for him.<sup>80</sup>

In 1882, O'Sullivan recalled arriving in Thames in September 1867 and camping near the beach for four months.<sup>81</sup> He took out his first miner's right on 22 January 1868,<sup>82</sup> and for the remainder of his life was associated with many mines at Thames.<sup>83</sup> He was appointed manager of the Pinafore

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<sup>74</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 19 March 1892, p. 2, 4 April 1892, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Death Certificate of Edwin Wass Lowe, 13 September 1904, 1904/4622, BDM.

<sup>76</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 September 1904, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 23 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 13 April 1894, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 April 1894, p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1897-1899, folio 160, BACL 14355/6a, ANZ-A.

<sup>80</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 16 August 1887, p. 3, 18 November 1890, p. 2, 5 December 1890, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 28 August 1885, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Miners' Rights Register 1867-1868, no. 3516, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>83</sup> For examples from his early years in Thames, see Thames Warden's Court, Claims Register 1868, folios 22, 224, BACL 14397/1a; Claims Register 1868-1869, nos. 705, 715,



Company in November 1882 and of the Cambria in December the following year.<sup>84</sup> For reasons never made clear, but allegedly had nothing to do with his competence, he was ‘unceremoniously dismissed’ by both companies in October 1884; the fact that ‘he and the legal manager did not exactly agree’ may have been the cause.<sup>85</sup> ‘Local indignation’ was reportedly ‘intense’.<sup>86</sup> He subsequently became manager for the Kerry and, once again, the Pinafore companies.<sup>87</sup>

O’Sullivan was especially prominent locally through his involvement with the Volunteer movement and with music. In 1881, he was appointed a Lieutenant in the Hauraki Engineers Volunteers, and as Lieutenant Commanding Active Service Detachment went with his men to Parihaka.<sup>88</sup> Already bandmaster for the Engineers,<sup>89</sup> he successfully combined the work of ‘fust Leftinint’, a reference to his Irish birth, ‘boss of the band, and trumpet-major’.<sup>90</sup> O’Sullivan was an experienced musician, for instance in 1878 conducting the band at a dance held by the Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society,<sup>91</sup> a friendly society of which he was later the auditor.<sup>92</sup> He was secretary of the choral society for five years after its formation in 1884; on his retirement he was presented ‘with a silver watch and gold albert as a token of their esteem, and also appreciation of the many services he has rendered the society since its inauguration’.<sup>93</sup> In addition, he was secretary of the Thames Orchestral Society, and in 1890 was secretary of a committee that arranged a performance of *Messiah*.<sup>94</sup>

716, BACL 14397/2a; Claims Register 1868-1869, no. 1368, BACL 14397/3a, ANZ-A; *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 18 June 1869, p. 499, 23 August 1869, p. 774.

<sup>84</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 22 November 1882, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 17 December 1883, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> *Thames Star*, 25 October 1884, p. 2, 30 October 1884, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 November 1884, p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> Declaration by Inspector of Mines, 13 June 1887, Mines Department, MD 1, 87/531, ANZ-W.

<sup>88</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 12 May 1881, p. 535; *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1881, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Hauraki Engineers, Nominal Roll to 31 March 1880, Army Department, ARM 41, 1883/1as, ANZ-W; *Thames Advertiser*, 4 April 1879, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Thames Tittle Tattle’, *Observer*, 17 September 1881, p. 6.

<sup>91</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 5 September 1878, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 30 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> *Thames Star*, 18 October 1884, p. 2, 26 November 1889, p. 2; ‘Thames Letter’, *Observer*, 7 December 1889, p. 20.

<sup>94</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 April 1889, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 7 October 1890, p. 2.

Although he continued to mine throughout the 1890s,<sup>95</sup> in January 1899 he was in a critical condition because of an ‘acute attack of inflammation of the lungs’.<sup>96</sup> Three years later, he died at the age of 57 of miners’ complaint, despite making ‘a brave fight for life’. He had suffered from this condition for years.<sup>97</sup> An obituary remembered him as ‘well and favourably known’ as ‘a first class reliable prospector’ who had ‘managed some of the principal mines of Thames’.<sup>98</sup>

In July 1890, Alfred Richard Cornes, who had declined to stand in February, replaced Lowe as president,<sup>99</sup> and held this post for one year. With his brother Clement Augustus Cornes,<sup>100</sup> he had come to New Zealand in 1862 and had fought in the land wars.<sup>101</sup> Because of ‘employment being dull’ at Thames, from 1891 until the end of 1894 he worked at Broken Hill until returning to his family of ten children because of ill health. In subsequent years low-paying mining jobs in Te Aroha, Karangahake, and Coromandel created difficulties in providing for his family. ‘Domestic infelicity’ dogged his final years; in 1898 his wife left him and he became bankrupt, which he blamed on the extravagance of her and their five daughters.<sup>102</sup> In 1901 he attempted suicide because of both financial worries and opium poisoning.<sup>103</sup> Upon his death in 1904, the *Observer* wrote that Cornes, ‘though qualified by education and ability to fill much higher posts, spent most of his life underground’. The presidency of the union ‘was the only public office which his modesty allowed him to attain to’; the miners

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<sup>95</sup> For example, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 February 1894, p. 3, 7 October 1897, p. 3, 11 August 1898, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 5 January 1899, p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> Death Certificate of Daniel Ennis O’Sullivan, 23 March 1902, 1902/1292, BDM; *Thames Star*, 24 March 1902, p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> *Thames Star*, 24 March 1902, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> *Thames Star*, 3 February 1890, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 23 July 1890, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>101</sup> Land Grants for Immigrants, Register of Grantees 1862-1863, folio 117, Land Orders nos. 1110, 1111, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 4115/1b, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 29 May 1872, p. 349.

<sup>102</sup> *Thames Star*, 24 August 1898, p. 3; Police Court, *New Zealand Herald*, 14 April 1901, p. 3; *Observer*, 20 April 1901, p. 3; Death Certificate of Alfred Richard Cornes, 14 December 1904, 1904/6384, BDM.

<sup>103</sup> Police Court, *New Zealand Herald*, 15 April 1901, p. 3.

esteemed him 'as a prudent and far-seeing leader'.<sup>104</sup> Another obituary stated that he was 'highly esteemed for his many sterling qualities'.<sup>105</sup>

The third president, William Henry Potts, was such a respectable figure that in 1897 there was a rumour that he would be appointed to the Legislative Council.<sup>106</sup> Once he lost the presidency of the union to the much livelier Michael Dineen O'Keeffe,<sup>107</sup> Potts wrote a biography for the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* that made no mention of his holding this post from 1891 to 1893 and from 1894 to 1898. Instead, it emphasized that he had been a member of the harbour board to many years, was for six years a member of the borough council, and was Captain of the Thames Naval Volunteers. His mining experience had begun in Victoria in 1858, after which he moved first to the Otago and then the West Coast diggings, then becoming one of the pioneers of Thames and a mine manager for several years.<sup>108</sup> When offered the post of assistant mining inspector on the West Coast in 1897, he declined the offer.<sup>109</sup> In 1898, when seeking re-election to the borough council, the *Thames Star* wrote that his record spoke for itself: he had 'faithfully represented' his constituents, and his experience on it made him 'a worthy bearer of their suffrages'.<sup>110</sup> Potts told the Goldfields' Committee of the Auckland Chamber of Mines that 'he had been a tributer nearly all his life', and emphasized the cautious and non-militant behaviour of the union under himself and his predecessors. It 'had never been an aggressive body, but had always strived ... to assist the mining industry. Not one action could be pointed out where the Union had not acted in the best interests of the community'. Its object 'was to get as much capital into the country as possible, and they recognised that it was to the workers' interests to do so'.<sup>111</sup> When defeated in the 1898 election, the *Thames Star* praised his 'long and useful term' as president. He had been 'a tower of strength', and 'the weight of his experience both as a working miner and as a public man' had been 'of great practical aid to his colleagues; and the

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<sup>104</sup> Death Certificate of Alfred Richard Cornes, 14 December 1904, 1904/6384, BDM; *Observer*, 24 December 1904, p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> *Thames Star*, 15 December 1904, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Cartoon, *Observer*, 30 January 1897, p. 12.

<sup>107</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>108</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 865.

<sup>109</sup> *New Zealand Graphic*, 3 April 1897, p. 419.

<sup>110</sup> *Thames Star*, 26 August 1898, p. 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Thames Star*, 18 June 1898, p. 4.

influence of his counsel has always been thrown on the side of moderation and justice'.<sup>112</sup>

William Henry Lucas was president for two terms in the 1890s, and secretary from 1894 onwards. When he wrote his biographical note for the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* in 1902, he proudly stated these facts and that he was a justice of the peace, a member of the borough council, and a Volunteer for 17 years, which included being a lieutenant in the Hauraki Engineers and a captain in the Thames Rifle Rangers. Earlier a carpenter, builder, and architect, from the early 1880s he mined at Thames.<sup>113</sup> When promoted to captain in the Hauraki Rifles in 1902, he was noted as being one of the few officers who wore 'the long service medal and the volunteer officers' Imperial decoration'. In his new commission he was 'the right man in the right place', in the opinion of the *Thames Star*.<sup>114</sup> When he first stood for the borough council, 'in response to numerous requests', he was described as 'very popular amongst all classes' and 'a gentleman of ability and unimpeachable integrity'.<sup>115</sup> Like Cornes, he differed from the others by not being a mine manager.

The only nomination to be the first secretary was Adam Thomson, 'one of the prime movers in starting the Union'.<sup>116</sup> A miner who later became a mine manager, he was replaced by Lucas in November 1894.<sup>117</sup> The *Thames Advertiser* described his re-election for his ninth term as 'an honour meritoriously deserved, for we do not believe a more conscientious and energetic officer could be found among the ranks of the Union'.<sup>118</sup>

The careers of some members of the union committee who were briefly associated with mining at Waiorongomai are summarized:

Thomas Mangan, a Thames miner, visited Te Aroha during the 1880 rush, and was one of three owners of a Waiorongomai claim two years

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<sup>112</sup> *Thames Star*, 15 August 1898, p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 474, 867.

<sup>114</sup> *Thames Star*, 19 April 1902, p. 4.

<sup>115</sup> *Thames Star*, 12 August 1899, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> *Thames Star*, 3 February 1890, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, Thames County Council, 7 July 1892, p. 3, 12 August 1892, p. 2, 10 October 1893, p. 2, 9 November 1893, p. 3, 12 November 1894, p. 2, 11 May 1895, p. 2, 6 August 1896, p. 2, 8 August 1899, p. 3; *Observer*, 19 March 1931, p. 4; Kelly, p. 72.

<sup>118</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 15 January 1894, p. 2.

later.<sup>119</sup> One of the organizers of the prospecting committee of the union in 1892 and briefly on the committee in the following year,<sup>120</sup> he had ‘a very good character’ and was ‘a trustworthy man’, according to the mining inspector, who had known him for 15 years.<sup>121</sup> In 1891, after passing examinations he received a mine manager’s certificate, and during that decade managed several mines.<sup>122</sup> A supporter of the Liberal Party, he sat on the platform at an election address given by Alfred Jerome Cadman in 1890.<sup>123</sup> After a lifetime of mining, he died of miners’ complaint, his final illness lasting three years.<sup>124</sup>

Henry Goldsworthy<sup>125</sup> mined at Waiorongomai throughout its first ten years, managing both the Chance and the Hit and Miss.<sup>126</sup> In January 1892, when he had returned to Thames, he was elected to the union committee, but did not stand for re-election in August.<sup>127</sup> He had been present at the opening of the Thames field, and from the 1880s onwards managed mines on several fields,<sup>128</sup> and gained certificates as mine manager and battery superintendent.<sup>129</sup> As he proudly wrote in 1902, he held several ‘important and responsible positions’ before being appointed manager of the Talisman

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<sup>119</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 592, issued 1 December 1880, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1d; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 133, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

<sup>120</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 2 December 1892, p. 3, 7 February 1893, p. 2, 17 July 1893, p. 2, 25 October 1894, p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> Memorandum by George Wilson, 23 May 1890, Inspector of Mines, Letterbook 1888-1892, p. 291, YBAZ 1240/1, ANZ-A.

<sup>122</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 11 February 1891, p. 299; *Thames Advertiser*, 15 April 1890, p. 2, 27 March 1891, p. 2, 1 April 1891, p. 2, 1 August 1891, p. 2, 30 June 1897, p. 3.

<sup>123</sup> *Thames Star*, 17 November 1890, p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> Death Certificate of Thomas Mangan, 10 October 1918, 1918/7865, BDM.

<sup>125</sup> See paper on the Goldsworthy brothers.

<sup>126</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 1 September 1883, p. 2, 21 February 1885, p. 2, 13 February 1886, p. 7, 12 May 1888, p. 2, 2 February 1889, p. 2, 26 March 1890, p. 2; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 494.

<sup>127</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 23 January 1892, p. 3, 3 August 1892, p. 3.

<sup>128</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 24 February 1894, p. 2, 13 May 1899, p. 3; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 9 July 1902, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 2 December 1904, p. 2, 21 October 1905, p. 4; Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 244 no. 1433, ANZ-A.

<sup>129</sup> Mines Department, MD 1, 94/1819, ANZ-W; *New Zealand Mines Record*, 16 August 1904, pp. 44, 46.

Consolidated at Karangahake.<sup>130</sup> He was yet another man whose lifetime of mining brought him years of suffering from miners' complaint, his death at the age of 67 occurring suddenly as he was going by train to Thames hospital for treatment.<sup>131</sup>

After earlier unsuccessful attempts, John O'Shea was elected to the committee in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>132</sup> He had mined at Te Aroha and Waiorongomai in the early 1880s, owning interests in many mines.<sup>133</sup> In 1883, his mate in a Waiorongomai claim was Michael Dineen O'Keeffe, a future president of the union, at whose wedding in the following year he was a witness.<sup>134</sup> O'Shea stood for election when O'Keeffe was prominent in the union, and seconded one of his motions in 1900.<sup>135</sup> The only time he was recorded as being a mine manager was when supervising four men prospecting an unsuccessful claim at Neavesville for a few months in 1908 and 1909.<sup>136</sup> He was unusual in dying, of a stroke, at the age of 84 with no indication that his lungs had been affected by mining.<sup>137</sup>

Henry Brownlee, whose only involvement with Te Aroha mining was to own two special claims at Tui from 1909 to 1913 and to be a shareholder in a Waiorongomai company during the same years,<sup>138</sup> won the third highest

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<sup>130</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 494.

<sup>131</sup> Death Certificate of Henry Goldsworthy, 14 August 1918, 1918/5273, BDM; *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 1918, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 August 1899, p. 10, 18 July 1907, p. 36, 10 August 1911, p. 49; *Thames Star*, 6 August 1900, p. 2, 9 August 1900, p. 1, 12 August 1904, p. 4, 16 August 1906, p. 2, 7 August 1906, p. 2.

<sup>133</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 164, 288, 289, BBAV 11567/1a; Licensed Holdings Grant Book 1882-1886, claims 110, 134, 145, 146, BBAV 11549/1b; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 6, 8, 28, 65, 121, 150, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

<sup>134</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1883, p. 2; Marriage Certificate of Michael O'Keeffe, 2 November 1884, 1884/1749, BDM.

<sup>135</sup> *Thames Star*, 1 November 1900, p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Applications 1908, 354/1908, BACL 14350/58a, ANZ-A.

<sup>137</sup> Death Certificate of John O'Shea, 17 May 1942, 1942/19789, BDM.

<sup>138</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications, 129/1909, 20/1910, BBAV 11289/20a; Mining Applications 1913, 1/1913, BBAV 11289/22a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1909, folio 194, with attached letter of Henry Brownlee to Warden, 24 September 1912, BBAV 11500/8b; Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 244 no. 1431, ANZ-A.

number of votes in the 1900 election.<sup>139</sup> He was re-elected the following year.<sup>140</sup> In 1901, in his evidence on behalf of the union before the conciliation board and arbitration court, he argued for an increase in wages. He wanted a decrease in the hours of work in wet portions of mines, and calling for the abolition of contracts, which ‘introduced a system of sweating’.<sup>141</sup> By then he had mined for 20 years, and had managed a mine at Thames and ‘for a time’ at Puru.<sup>142</sup> His management of the Puru Consolidated was such that the mining inspector recommended he be granted a first-class mine manager’s certificate.<sup>143</sup> Soon after a man was killed in 1904 when he was underground boss in the Moanataiari, an accident for which he was cleared of responsibility,<sup>144</sup> he became a hotelkeeper. His willingness to have flexible, if illegal, opening hours and to provide beer to miners coming off the midnight shift no doubt increased his popularity.<sup>145</sup> Brownlee was prominent in the Thames Naval Brigade, participated in whaleboat racing, was a founder of the rugby club, and played football for several clubs over many years.<sup>146</sup> When first becoming a publican he was referred to as being ‘well-known’ throughout the district and ‘deservedly popular’.<sup>147</sup> This popularity was reflected in the regularity with which he appeared in the gossip columns of the *Observer* when he was a flirtatious youth, notably in 1883,<sup>148</sup> and by the recollections of those who

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<sup>139</sup> *Thames Star*, 6 August 1900, p. 2, 7 August 1900, p. 4, 9 August 1900, p. 1.

<sup>140</sup> *Thames Star*, 15 July 1901, p. 2, 14 September 1901, p. 4.

<sup>141</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 May 1901, p. 4, 13 September 1901, p. 2, 14 September 1901, pp. 2, 4.

<sup>142</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 May 1901, p. 4; ‘Obadiah’, ‘Shares and Mining’, *Observer*, 7 November 1896, p. 9; *Thames Advertiser*, 23 November 1896, p. 2, 3 February 1897, p. 3.

<sup>143</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 June 1897, p. 2, 15 April 1898, p. 3, 14 November 1898, p. 3; ‘Obadiah’, ‘Shares and Mining’, *Observer*, 16 October 1897, p. 9; Mines Department, MD 1, 98/1805, ANZ-W.

<sup>144</sup> Inquest on James Mann, Justice Department, J 46 COR, 1904/1035, ANZ-W; *Thames Star*, 12 December 1904, p.4.

<sup>145</sup> *Thames Star*, 3 May 1905, p. 2, 22 May 1905, p. 2, 1 June 1906, p. 2, 3 September 1906, p. 2, Licensing Committee, 7 September 1906, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> *Thames Star*, 3 January 1931, p. 5; see also *Thames Advertiser*, 5 June 1885, p. 2.

<sup>147</sup> *Thames Star*, 6 May 1905, p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> See ‘Thames Tittle Tattle’, *Observer*, 14 July 1883, p. 14, 21 July 1883, p. 7, 28 July 1883, p. 6, 18 August 1883, p. 16, 8 September 1883, p. 6, 22 September 1883, p. 16, 19 September 1883, p. 8, 13 October 1883, p. 16, 20 October 1883, p. 8, 3 November 1883, p. 16, 17 November 1883, p. 16, 29 December 1883, p. 7.

knew him.<sup>149</sup> His years as a miner gave him miners' complaint, of which he died, aged 65, after a final illness lasting six years.<sup>150</sup>

Charles David Lindsay McLean participated in the Te Aroha rush,<sup>151</sup> when he managed two small mines,<sup>152</sup> and was a director of the company formed to erect a battery.<sup>153</sup> He was active in the early days of Waiorongomai,<sup>154</sup> before returning to Thames. His entry in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* revealed the extent of his involvement both in mining and in other activities:

Mr CHARLES McLEAN, who is in charge of the Waihi Consolidated Goldmining Company's mine at Waihi, was born in Perthshire, Scotland, in 1850, and came to Melbourne with his parents in 1854. Educated at Creswick, he followed farming and afterwards mining pursuits, and, although very young, visited the principal goldfields of Victoria. In 1863 he came to New Zealand, and was engaged on the West Coast at the principal alluvial fields during 1866-7. Coming north in 1868, about nine months after the first Thames "rush," he has been at the opening of all the principal fields in the Peninsula, including Ohinemuri, Waihi, and Te Aroha. Mr McLean has had thirty years of valuable experience on the goldfields, having spent a good deal of time in prospecting. He is also a large shareholder in various companies and a director of many, and during the boom of 1895-6 was a promoter of several companies. He is also interested in a number of claims. As an athlete, Mr McLean, or "Charley," as he is familiarly called, is well known. In his younger days it was hard

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<sup>149</sup> A.F. Sawyer, handwritten recollections, n.d. [1940s], W.G. Hammond Papers, folder 34a; A.F. Sawyer, 'Notes on Early Thames', (1947), W.G. Hammond Papers, folder 34b; A.F. Sawyer, Notes, 'No. 1, Mines', (1946-1947), W.G. Hammond Papers, folder 34b, MS 134, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

<sup>150</sup> Death Certificate of Henry Brownlee, 2 January 1931, 1931/13184, BDM.

<sup>151</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 455, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1c, ANZ-A.

<sup>152</sup> *Thames Star*, 21 December 1880, p. 2, 21 February 1881, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1880, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 17 February 1881, p. 2; C.D.L. McLean to H.A. Gordon, 10 July 1891, Mines Department, MD 1, 91/625, ANZ-W.

<sup>153</sup> *Thames Star*, 8 January 1881, p. 2.

<sup>154</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folios 1-2, no. 3, folios 95-76, no. 10, folio 153, no. 33, BBAV 11505/3a; Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 33, 34, 46, 72, 77/1881; 12, 18, 35, 69/1882, BBAV 11547/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 13, 25, 30, 38, 39, 45, 53, 54, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.



to beat him at wrestling, and, as a footballer, he had a place in the representative team. Mr McLean is a powerfully built man of over six feet in height, and even now could hold his own in his own particular line of athletics.<sup>155</sup>

When promoting companies, he was credited with being one of those who initiated the principle that money subscribed should go to working the mines rather than to the promoters.<sup>156</sup> Despite being a shareholder, director, and company promoter, he was active in the early years of the union. At the demonstration celebrating its first year's existence, he ran in the mine managers' race, being then manager of the Orlando.<sup>157</sup> Twice in 1892 he stood for the committee, not being elected in his first attempt but succeeding in his second.<sup>158</sup> Like O'Sullivan, at a meeting two years later he opposed the union policy of opposing the granting of special claims, one of his opponents quoting him as shortly before being 'strongly against granting a special claim to the May Queen. (Laughter)'.<sup>159</sup> Three months later, he announced that he would stand as vice president; he gained only 64 votes, the two successful candidates receiving 107 and 105 respectively.<sup>160</sup>

As a manager, McLean had the reputation of being able to 'handle his men well'.<sup>161</sup> His involvement in sport, including Cumberland and Cornish wrestling,<sup>162</sup> would have increased his popularity. A member of the Thames Scottish Volunteers, he did well in shooting matches;<sup>163</sup> as Drum-Major, his kilt exposed his calves to advantage in the opinion of 'the ladies at Ellerslie' racecourse in Auckland, according to one item of gossip.<sup>164</sup> His appearance in gossip columns indicated that he was popular with women, and in his

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<sup>155</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 502.

<sup>156</sup> *Thames Star*, 26 June 1880, p. 2.

<sup>157</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 March 1891, p. 13.

<sup>158</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 23 January 1892, p. 3, 3 August 1892, p. 3.

<sup>159</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 13 April 1894, p. 2.

<sup>160</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 16 July 1894, p. 3, 15 August 1894, p. 3.

<sup>161</sup> Declaration of E.F. Adams, 26 October 1891, Mines Department, MD 1, 91/625, ANZ-A.

<sup>162</sup> For example, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 December 1893, p. 3, 29 December 1873, p. 3, 3 January 1874, p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 8 November 1872, p. 2, 23 November 1872, p. 2, 24 January 1873, p. 3, 10 February 1873, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> *Observer*, 13 November 1880, p. 69.

younger years flirtations were implied despite his being married.<sup>165</sup> He was 'as good as ever broke bread', in the view of a Waihi correspondent writing in 1895, when he was mining there.<sup>166</sup> The following year 'Yorick' of Waihi agreed he was 'a real good fellow' whose departure would be 'regretted by a great many' because of his 'genial personality'.<sup>167</sup> When he died, on a Western Australian goldfield in 1917, the *Observer* recalled him as 'a magnificent specimen of a man' who had 'entered heart and soul' into Thames life. He had been as 'greatly esteemed in Westralia as he was in New Zealand'.<sup>168</sup> McLean was 72 when he died; according to one Thames resident, he died of miners' complaint, but this was not the cause recorded on his death certificate.<sup>169</sup>

### THE OHINEMURI BRANCH AND ITS LEADERS

Four months after the union was formed at Thames, a meeting of miners at Karangahake agreed to establish an Ohinemuri branch. Once again, prominent local people assisted its founding. The chairman of this meeting, Charles Featherstone Mitchell, 'in an excellent speech referred to the great benefits of the trade union system. He also spoke more particularly of the advantages of the Association which they had met to join, of the great work it had already done, and what there was yet for it to do'.<sup>170</sup> This was Mitchell's only recorded involvement, although he had long been associated with the mining industry. He was issued with the second miner's right at Thames,<sup>171</sup> invested in many claims there and in other fields,<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *Observer*, 14 January 1882, p. 278, 9 June 1883, p. 182, 30 June 1883, p. 229, 21 March 1896, p. 10, 11 July 1896, p. 17, 6 February 1897, p. 3, 2 September 1899, p. 9.

<sup>166</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, Waihi Correspondent, 1 April 1895, p. 3; see also 26 January 1895, p. 3, 31 May 1895, p. 3, Paeroa Warden's Court, 5 June 1895, p. 2, 8 July 1895, p. 3.

<sup>167</sup> 'Yorick', 'Waihi Notes', *Thames Advertiser*, 3 August 1896, p. 3.

<sup>168</sup> *Observer*, 10 February 1917, p. 5.

<sup>169</sup> A.F. Sawyer, handwritten recollections, n.d. [1940s], W.G. Hammond Papers, folder 34a, MS 134, Library of the Auckland Institute and Museum; Deaths in Boulder District, 1917, no. 17, Western Australian BDM.

<sup>170</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 May 1890, p. 2.

<sup>171</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Miners' Rights Register 1867-1868, no. 2, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

and had the first miner's right issued for Ohinemuri in March 1875.<sup>173</sup> He was a director of a mining company only once, at Thames in 1869.<sup>174</sup>

After being on the staff of the *Manchester Guardian*, he was a pioneer journalist in Australia, and upon arriving in Auckland edited the *New Zealander* for some years.<sup>175</sup> In the mid-1860s, he established two Auckland newspapers specializing in political gossip, satire, and popular fiction which did not survive for long,<sup>176</sup> their failure to attract readers presumably being one reason for the bankruptcy of Mitchell and his partner in July 1867.<sup>177</sup> When the Thames field was opened, he was a special goldfields correspondent for the *Daily Southern Cross*.<sup>178</sup> In 1881, he started his last newspaper, the quirky *Hauraki Tribune*,<sup>179</sup> a weekly published in Paeroa.<sup>180</sup> He was a storekeeper in early Thames and then in Paeroa before the Ohinemuri goldfield opened, and a hotelkeeper for a short time in Paeroa.<sup>181</sup>

As a young man, Mitchell had been a Chartist,<sup>182</sup> and in June 1867 he wrote that 20 years or more ago he had 'acted as secretary to a commission for examining into the destitution of one of the great towns in England'.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>172</sup> For example, Thames Warden's Court, Claims Register 1868-1869, nos. 537, 749, BACL 14397/2a; Register of Coromandel Mining Claims 1868-1872, nos. 101, 103, 119, 180, 184, BACL 14396/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>173</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 28 April 1898, p. 5.

<sup>174</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 September 1869, p. 19.

<sup>175</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 November 1899, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup> The only copies to survive of the *Penny Journal* for 1866 and 1867 and the *Auckland Budget* for 1867 are held by the Auckland Public Library.,

<sup>177</sup> *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 23 July 1867, p. 314.

<sup>178</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 2 August 1879, p. 3, 20 October 1880, p. 3.

<sup>179</sup> Almost all copies of this newspaper have been lost, but for some extracts and comments about its style and content, see *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 2, 11 December 1886, p. 2, 29 October 1887, p. 2, 15 May 1895, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 15 November 1884, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 17 March 1888, p. 2, 27 April 1889, p. 2, 16 May 1895, p. 2, 8 October 1895, p. 2; *Waikato Argus*, 29 January 1898, p. 2; *Observer*, 3 May 1919, p. 16.

<sup>180</sup> *Coromandel Mail*, 29 October 1881, p. 4.

<sup>181</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 31 August 1867, p. 6, 19 October 1867, p. 7, 7 December 1867, p. 3, Thames Correspondent, 24 May 1873, p. 11, 20 February 1875, p. 8; *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 12 January 1872, p. 3, 10 February 1872, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 23 May 1873, p. 3.

<sup>182</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 November 1899, p. 2.

<sup>183</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 June 1867, p. 23.

In 1867, he was secretary and then president of the Northern Separation and Reform League, and unsuccessfully stood for the provincial council on a policy of manhood suffrage, opposition to the government, separation from the South Island, and granting land to the destitute.<sup>184</sup> He advocated the secret ballot and income and property taxes.<sup>185</sup> In 1871, he was a strong advocate of purchasing Maori land and thereby ‘crushing for ever the native difficulty’.<sup>186</sup> In his typically erratic and irascible way, the following year he accused the government and its agent James Mackay of robbing Maori landowners in Ohinemuri by purchasing their land at only 2s an acre, and opposed its sale. He proclaimed himself ‘a full and confident believer in the abstract doctrine of political science, that the lands of a country belong at all times, and for all time, to the people of the country’.<sup>187</sup> Shortly afterwards, his quarrel with Mackay at an end, Mitchell assisted the latter’s reihana policy by encouraging Maori landowners to purchase goods from his store and thereby become so indebted that they were forced to sell their land.<sup>188</sup> Europeans must show that they were the masters, he told a public meeting.<sup>189</sup>

In January 1869, standing at Thames for the provincial council, Mitchell described himself as ‘a radical and a democrat, and ... a thorough one’. Money should be spent on the needs of the goldfield, and he assured voters that ‘the interests of the miners would be his study, and they were equally important to himself. (Loud cheers)’.<sup>190</sup> He came bottom of the

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<sup>184</sup> For example, *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 April 1867, pp. 20-22, 27 April 1867, p. 11, 4 May 1867, pp. 7, 8, 10, 8 June 1867, pp. 20, 21, 15 June 1867, pp. 3, 21, 6 July 1867, p. 3, 13 July 1867, p. 10.

<sup>185</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 30 December 1875, pp. 3-4.

<sup>186</sup> *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 12 December 1871, p. 3.

<sup>187</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 18 September 1872, p. 3, 19 September 1872, p. 3; see also 28 September 1872, p. 3.

<sup>188</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 24 August 1874, p. 3, ‘Ohinemuri’, 14 December 1874, p. 3, ‘The Druid’, 6 February 1875, p. 3, 11 September 1878, p. 3; ‘Reports of Public Petitions Committee’, *AJHR*, 1881, I-1, p. 10; Memorandum by Under-Secretary, Land Purchase Department, 1882, concerning the 1875 Purchase of Ohinemuri, pp. 60, 62-64, Appendices H and J, Lands and Survey Department, LS 36/25a, ANZ-W; *Auckland Weekly News*, 8 July 1882, p. 23.

<sup>189</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 14 May 1873, p. 3.

<sup>190</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 January 1869, p. 18.

poll.<sup>191</sup> After winning a by-election in the following year, he was elected to the Provincial Executive as Goldfields Secretary.<sup>192</sup> He was so disruptive that he was asked to resign a month later, one executive member accusing him of having ‘an ungovernable temper’ and likening him to ‘a torpedo in the House’.<sup>193</sup> Although in the 1870s he oscillated between supporting Vogel’s policies and condemning Grey and occasionally praising the latter,<sup>194</sup> in 1879 he chaired the Paeroa meeting that formed a Liberal Association and was its first president.<sup>195</sup> His *Hauraki Tribune* was a strong supporter of the Liberal Party and Richard Seddon.<sup>196</sup>

Edwin Edwards, who had explained the constitution, fees, and advantages of the union at the inaugural meeting at Karangahake, was elected secretary and later that year was re-elected unopposed.<sup>197</sup> In 1892, he was accused of taking for his own use money obtained from a concert and dance to raise funds for the union, but had documentary proof of his innocence.<sup>198</sup> Any involvement with the union has not been traced beyond that date.

According to his own account, Edwards, ‘after a course of commercial life’ in London, went first to America and then to New Zealand. ‘After rambling through the South Island in various capacities, and doing many things from coal heaving to lecturing’, he settled in Paeroa. He claimed to be ‘a practical geologist’ and ‘well acquainted with the rocks and strata of the Ohinemuri goldfields. At one time he was part owner of the celebrated Waihi Mines, and held nineteen acres on the cap of the Martha Hill, Waihi, with his partners’.<sup>199</sup> During the 1880s, as a mining reporter he covered the Ohinemuri goldfields for the *New Zealand Herald*, the *Auckland Star*, the

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<sup>191</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 January 1869, p. 10.

<sup>192</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 October 1870, p. 11, 8 October 1870, p. 6, 10 December 1870, p. 10.

<sup>193</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 January 1871, p. 9, 4 February 1871, p. 6, 11 February 1871, p. 14.

<sup>194</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 30 December 1875, p. 3, 3 January 1876, p. 3, 14 September 1878, p. 3, 21 September 1878, p. 14, 15 January 1879, p. 3.

<sup>195</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 22 October 1879, p. 2, 30 October 1879, p. 3.

<sup>196</sup> *Diamond Jubilee of the Ohinemuri County, 1885-1945: Souvenir and historical record* (Paeroa, 1945), p. 95.

<sup>197</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 May 1890, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 7 November 1890, p. 2.

<sup>198</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 31 December 1892, p. 2, 4 January 1893, p. 2.

<sup>199</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 844.

*Thames Star*, the *Te Aroha News*, the *Waikato Times*, the *Bay of Plenty Times*, and other newspapers. He wrote articles on Hauraki mining for the *Year Book of New Zealand*, and claimed to have ‘traversed every inch of the district’.<sup>200</sup> An advocate of the needs of the industry, in 1896 he advocated additional government assistance and condemned ‘existing mining laws as cumbersome and unworkable’, wanting ‘consolidation and codification’. He favoured an ‘advisory mining board composed of experts, and Wardens being independent of Ministerial dictation’.<sup>201</sup>

Edwards was a prominent member of the Paeroa community, being a member of all the local bodies.<sup>202</sup> He was appointed the first clerk of the Ohinemuri County Council in 1885 and then elected to it in 1890, becoming its chairman in the following year, a post he held for two years.<sup>203</sup> In the late 1880s, he became an auctioneer.<sup>204</sup> He founded two Paeroa newspapers, the *Mining Journal* at an unknown date, and the *Ohinemuri Gazette* in 1891, and in 1896 established the short-lived *Te Aroha Times and Waiorongomai Gazette*.<sup>205</sup> He had no involvement, either as miner or investor, in mining until the boom of the 1890s, when he had shares in many claims in Ohinemuri,<sup>206</sup> and was director of seven companies.<sup>207</sup> In 1896, he abandoned his application for a special claim close to Te Aroha but did acquire one at Waiorongomai.<sup>208</sup> In the following decade, he was

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<sup>200</sup> Edwin Edwards to Minister of Mines, 11 June 1888, Mines Department, MD 1, 88/471, ANZ-W.

<sup>201</sup> *People*, 23 November 1896, p. 2.

<sup>202</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 2 June 1909, p. 2.

<sup>203</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 November 1890, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 26 November 1891, p. 2.

<sup>204</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 11 May 1887, p. 3.

<sup>205</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 844; Guy H. Scholefield, *Newspapers in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1958), p. 114; *Diamond Jubilee of the Ohinemuri County*, pp. 7, 11, 95.

<sup>206</sup> For example, Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1896, folios 77, 89, 194, 197-199, ZAAP 13293/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1896-1900, folios 3, 4, 24, 106, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>207</sup> Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 71 no. 487, box 83 no. 554, box 83 no. 556, box 95 no. 618, box 112 no. 724, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 17 September 1895, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 10 October 1895, p. 1604.

<sup>208</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Applications for Special Claims 1895-1899, 18, 27/1896, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-.

secretary and prime mover of an attempt to exploit the lead mines at Tui,<sup>209</sup> using the *Ohinemuri Gazette* to publicise it.<sup>210</sup> In 1895 he became a mining agent and sharebroker in Paeroa and then in Auckland,<sup>211</sup> and was almost certainly the ‘resident of Paeroa’ reported to have ‘cleared £1,000 in fortunate mining speculations and commissions in four weeks’.<sup>212</sup> Later that year, he created the Auckland Prospecting Association to send out prospectors to locate auriferous ground to be placed on the market.<sup>213</sup> Apart from his Tui venture, he was secretary for two Ohinemuri mining ventures.<sup>214</sup> According to the *Observer*, he ‘prospered exceedingly’ during the boom, and was ‘very liberal’ in dispensing some of this new wealth to the needy, being ‘always ready to dip into his pocket in order to assist in furthering any genuine venture in goldmining or anything else’. Prospectors would discuss their ‘doubts and difficulties’ with him and receive ‘sane counsel and where necessary and desirable, monetary assistance’.<sup>215</sup> In the first decade of the twentieth century, he was active as a mining, land, house, hotel, and general commission agent in Paeroa and Auckland, on occasions providing the *Ohinemuri Gazette* with information to drum up trade.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications, 25, 28/1901, BBAV 11582/4b; Plaints 1904, 1, 2, 9/1904, BBAV 11572/3a; Mining Applications, 7, 8, 22/1906, BBAV 11289/18a; Mining Applications, 5/1907, 20, 21, 28/1908, BBAV 11289/19a, ANZ-A; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 11 February 1903, p. 3, 18 February 1903, p. 3, 27 July 1906, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 28 February 1906, p. 2.

<sup>210</sup> For example, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 18 February 1903, p. 3, 9 March 1903, p. 2, 25 March 1903, p. 2, 5 April 1903, p. 2, 6 July 1903, p. 3.

<sup>211</sup> ‘Obadiah’, ‘Shares and Mining’, *Observer*, 7 September 1895, p. 17, 14 September 1895, p. 2, ‘Obadiah’, ‘Shares and Mining’, 30 May 1896, p. 7; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 September 1895, p. 6; *New Zealand Herald*, 20 August 1896, p. 5.

<sup>212</sup> *Observer*, 8 June 1895, p. 3; see also 5 June 1909, p. 5.

<sup>213</sup> ‘Obadiah’, ‘Shares and Mining’, *Observer*, 19 October 1895, p. 16; Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 72 no. 472, ANZ-A.

<sup>214</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 8 June 1898, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 29 November 1906, p. 2.

<sup>215</sup> *Observer*, 5 June 1909, p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> For example, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 10 December 1902, p. 2, 15 June 1903, p. 2, 14 November 1904, p. 2, advertisement, 16 November 1904, p. 3, 27 July 1906, p. 2, 3 August 1906, p. 2.

Edwards was an unusual choice as union secretary, for he consistently supported the conservative side in politics.<sup>217</sup> In 1896, he stood against Alfred Jerome Cadman, Seddon's Minister for Mines, for the Ohinemuri seat, losing in every polling place.<sup>218</sup> He was one of the sponsors and the chairman of a public meeting held in Paeroa in 1901 'to consider the present Legislation of the Colony regarding Labour and Capital' and to encourage class harmony not class conflict.<sup>219</sup> His sympathies for the bona fide miner and investor against the profiteer were reflected in an extract from his 'Vicious Verse on the Burst Boom', written in 1897:

...Then brass-plated companies, syndicates, trusts,  
 Brass-fronted and bell-topped men,  
 Making two sets of fools into two sets of rogues,  
 All leisurely wrought in their den.  
 They taught the fool miner the creed of wild cat,  
 And they taught the fool Fatman the same.  
 While the one he got jail and the other went bung,  
 And the syndicate lived on the game....<sup>220</sup>

Earlier that year, he had written another poem, 'When the Tin Pot Floats', about the salting of hopeless mines so they could be sold to foreigners.<sup>221</sup> His most popular poem (which became a song), 'Waitekauri! Every Time!', was written in praise of that mining township and mentioned, in a jovial way, some of its more notable inhabitants.<sup>222</sup> His sense of humour must have endeared him to many miners: an obituary described his temperament as 'congenial in the extreme', and provided an example of his 'abnormal propensity for practical joking':

At a time when the township of Paeroa was very much smaller than it is to-day, Mr Edwards procured a quantity of brass filings and surreptitiously scattered them about a gutter in which some men were at work. Presently, the workers came across the filings, and in five-eighths of a second all was excitement. In those days, all that glittered appeared to be gold to the gold-fever-stricken citizens of Ohinemuri. It is little wonder, therefore, that the news

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<sup>217</sup> For example, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 January 1891, p. 3, 22 November 1893, p. 3.

<sup>218</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 4 November 1896, p. 2, 5 December 1896, p. 4.

<sup>219</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 23 August 1901, p. 2, 26 August 1901, p. 2.

<sup>220</sup> *Observer*, 1 May 1897, p. 23.

<sup>221</sup> *Observer*, 13 March 1897, p. 14.

<sup>222</sup> *Observer*, 27 February 1897, p. 14.



quickly spread around that a rich auriferous patch had been struck at Paeroa. The inevitable rush took place, and before long the entire township had been pegged out into claims, and it was some time before the disappointed prospectors realized that they had been badly “sold.”<sup>223</sup>

## MINERS AND MANAGERS

Industrial harmony, encouraged by the union’s leaders, was usual, as illustrated by the many indications of good relationships between miners and their managers. Some examples have been mentioned elsewhere, such as Charles Henry Lawn’s friendly relations with his men at the Tui mines,<sup>224</sup> and mine managers and men living and working harmoniously together in the small mines of Waiorongomai. Other examples can be given of managers who worked in the Te Aroha district for a time being publicly thanked by their workers for how they were treated. When John Blennerhasset Beeche,<sup>225</sup> later to be a part owner of one Waiorongomai claim,<sup>226</sup> resigned as manager of the Crown Princess mine in Thames to move to the new Tairua goldfield, he was presented with ‘a handsome illuminated address’ by his miners:

Dear Sir,- On the occasion of your resigning the management of the Crown Princess Mines, we, the workmen employed therein, desire to express our regret that the connection which has existed between us should be terminated. In your intercourse with us we have always found that while your first care has been to see full justice done in the interests of the shareholders, yet, at the same time you have endeavoured to consult the comfort and safety of the men under your charge. All your orders have been given with a courtesy of manner that has rendering their fulfillment as much a pleasure as a duty. You have been ready when cases of emergency or distress called for your aid, and by your liberality and example have helped to alleviate the sufferings of many on this goldfield who have been laid low by sickness and accident. We sincerely hope that in your new position you may be prosperous beyond your most sanguine expectations.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> *Observer*, 5 June 1909, p. 5.

<sup>224</sup> See paper on the Tui district.

<sup>225</sup> See *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 April 1895, p 21.

<sup>226</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 41, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

<sup>227</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1875, p. 3.

Charles Henry Wilson, later to manage three mines at Waiorongomai,<sup>228</sup> on his retirement in 1877 as manager for the Waitekauri Company was ‘entertained at dinner’ by his miners ‘and other friends’. He was presented with an address from the ‘employees in the Waitekauri Company’s mine, storekeepers, and inhabitants generally of the district’ expressing their ‘considerable regret’ at his departure. They could not allow him to depart without expressing their ‘sense of the loss we shall all sustain’:

Apart from the skill which has characterised the extensive workings, which have absolutely no parallel in the whole colony, there is one special matter worthy of the highest commendation, and one for which not only the miners but the community at large, are in duty bound to feel grateful; we allude to the total absence of accidents, even of the most trivial character, during your term of management. We must, in conclusion, dear Sir, say that in leaving us you carry with you our admiration for your professional ability, and sincere respect for your integrity of character, and we trust that you yourself and family will enjoy the blessings of health and happiness in whatever part of the world Providence may direct your steps.<sup>229</sup>

Before he moved from Thames to Waiorongomai, he was described as a ‘popular manager’ who was ‘highly esteemed by all who know him’.<sup>230</sup> An obituary, written a few years later, described him as being ‘of a genial and kind disposition and highly respected’.<sup>231</sup>

When John Benney,<sup>232</sup> manager of the Canadian at Waiorongomai, left in 1885 to manage a Coromandel mine, his workers arranged a supper at a local hotel and collected a purse of sovereigns. Although he left on the morning of the gathering, this was held anyway, his health being drunk after another manger, Hugh McLiver,<sup>233</sup> ‘spoke in high terms’ about him.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 23 February 1882, p.2, 27 September 1882, p. 3.

<sup>229</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 29 October 1877, p. 3.

<sup>230</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 July 1880, p. 2, 30 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>231</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 4 August 1889, p. 2.

<sup>232</sup> See Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 4 April 1885, p. 7, *Thames Star*, 4 September 1907, p. 2.

<sup>233</sup> See papers on the New Find and Henry Hopper Adams.

<sup>234</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 25 July 1885, p. 2.

After being manager for the Komata Reefs Company for over three years, Benney received a 'beautiful gold-mounted walking cane and a magnificently illuminated address' from his workers because of his 'honest and fair dealings' with them.<sup>235</sup> When he left a Thames mine two years later, his former employees presented him with 'a handsome clock'. The underground manager regretted his departure because during his management 'the utmost good feeling prevailed between ourselves and you'. Benney responded that 'he had always endeavoured to do his duty both to his employers and to the men and he was very pleased to hear his efforts had been appreciated'.<sup>236</sup> When McLiver, for years manager of the New Find mine, ceased to manage a Whangamata mine in 1901, the miners presented him with 'a handsome gold albert [a chain for a pocket watch] and pendant, suitably inscribed, as a token of their goodwill and high esteem'.<sup>237</sup>

George Henry Arthur Purchas, earlier a mining surveyor at Waiorongomai,<sup>238</sup> in the late 1890s was a mine manager at Komata. Upon his resignation in 1898, he was presented with 'a handsome silver-plated coffee-pot' and a teapot inscribed with his initials. The overseer said that Purchas 'had secured the esteem of the workmen, principally because he had meted out to them fair play and generous consideration. An illuminated testimonial was to follow'.<sup>239</sup>

The last example of a popular mine manager is John McCombie,<sup>240</sup> who participated in the Te Aroha rush<sup>241</sup> and was later a mine manager in Waihi and Karangahake.<sup>242</sup> In 1898 he was presented with 'a beautiful chronometer stop-watch' by the workers of the Woodstock Company 'as a token of the good feeling that existed between the employees' and him.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 17 August 1898, p. 4.

<sup>236</sup> *Thames Star*, 4 September 1900, p. 4.

<sup>237</sup> *Thames Star*, 14 January 1901, p. 2.

<sup>238</sup> For example, Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 January 1882, p. 9; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7, p. 58.

<sup>239</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 May 1898, p. 18.

<sup>240</sup> See paper on Billy Nicholl.

<sup>241</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 173, 181, 192, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>242</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 471-472.

<sup>243</sup> *Thames Star*, 31 May 1898, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1898, p. 4; *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 June 1898, p. 18.

Obituaries agreed that he was 'highly respected' by miners and had been 'a very popular man, and every miner took a pride in working for him at Thames, Waitekauri, Waihi, Karangahake, and Coromandel'.<sup>244</sup>

Battery managers did not often win such plaudits, although John Howell,<sup>245</sup> who managed the Waiorongomai battery in the late 1880s, was particularly popular, one Waiorongomai correspondent writing that he had, 'by his keen, quiet, and affable demeanour won for himself the sincerest respect and admiration of all'.<sup>246</sup> When he departed, the *Te Aroha News* wished 'to place on record that by his courtesy, consideration, and gentlemanly bearing', Howell had 'won the respect and esteem of all', and his departure was 'greatly regretted'.<sup>247</sup> He further endeared himself to the suddenly unemployed miners by offering them jobs at a good rate of pay at Broken Hill.<sup>248</sup> Despite these comments, the interests of his employers, not his employees, were his primary concern. In 1892, as general manager of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company, he helped his directors win a great strike, thereby enabling it to reduce costs by imposing the contract system and so reduce the workforce from 3,501 to 2,520, cut wages by ten per cent, and increase working hours.<sup>249</sup> At a shareholders' meeting, Howell praised the government 'for the promptness and vigour with which violence had been repressed'. He claimed that 'all the miners themselves were quite satisfied with the new system of working, and were, for the most part, earning considerably more money than when they were working for daily wages'.<sup>250</sup> The miners who lost their jobs and those who had been imprisoned would have had a different opinion about the outcome, and those in work had been forced to mine as much in a day as two men did previously.<sup>251</sup>

One with a similarly hard-headed attitude to his workers was Edward Kersey Cooper, who, as noted, was popular with miners who worked for him

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<sup>244</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 1926, p. 12; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 6 September 1926, p. 6.

<sup>245</sup> See paper on the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company.

<sup>246</sup> Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 31 October 1889, p. 2.

<sup>247</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 9 November 1889, p. 7.

<sup>248</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>249</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rise of Broken Hill* (Melbourne, 1968), pp. 59-62.

<sup>250</sup> Half-yearly meeting of Broken Hill Proprietary Company, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 February 1893, p. 28.

<sup>251</sup> Blainey, *Rise of Broken Hill*, p. 62.

at Waiorongomai, Waitekauri, and Thames, and assisted in selecting the labour candidate for the 1890 election. However, ten years after he had ridden on horseback in the first union parade in Thames, he argued before the arbitration court that the industry could not afford the higher wages the union was seeking.<sup>252</sup>

That overseas ‘experts’ brought in to manage Hauraki mines during the mining boom of the 1890s were not viewed so favourably was illustrated by a *Waihi Chronicle* fulmination about two shift bosses refused employment:

No man with good British blood in his veins could be capable of such dastardly inhuman conduct as the alleged “expert” is undoubtedly capable of. The stamp of man who calls himself an “expert” in this case is the same stamp who drives helpless niggers through their continual slavery in the mines of Africa.... The alien “general manager” now so well known to the miners of the Thames goldfields by his continual efforts of despotism, is a living proof of the means always adopted by ambitious importations who bring their perfidious inherent qualities to bear, and to interfere with the independence of a well born British subject. Submission to their will is their creed, and when British pluck is shown they use means which any “white” would shrink at even contemplating, to crush the unfortunates who dare to oppose them.

Such men had been ‘pitchforked into positions which they have no right to hold, and who are living examples of Burns’ well known and immortal judgment:- “Man’s inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn”’.<sup>253</sup>

## UNION ACTIVITIES

A union whose leaders were mine managers and pillars of society had no plans to upset the existing order of things, although it did want fair treatment of miners and their industry. From the start, it was clear that it was formed ‘as a benefit and accident fund concern, rather than as a militant industrial union’.<sup>254</sup> When the various Thames organisations marched in the procession marking the coronation of Edward VII, the

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<sup>252</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 March 1891, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 21 September 1901, p. 1.

<sup>253</sup> *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 18 September 1899, p. 4.

<sup>254</sup> *Observer*, 19 May 1931, p. 4.

miners marched with the friendly societies.<sup>255</sup> In its first decade, it ‘disbursed large sums for benevolent purposes’, including payments to families whose breadwinner was suffering from miners’ complaint.<sup>256</sup> The first 12 months, for instance, saw £157 paid to members who had suffered accidents and £10 ‘in benevolent gifts’,<sup>257</sup> and in the first six months of 1893 several serious accidents caused the largest payment from the accident fund since its formation, £182 16s 8d. A doctor was employed to certify when injured members could work again and therefore cease receiving accident pay.<sup>258</sup> Concerts, socials, and dances were held at the Miners’ Union Hall ‘in aid of the Benevolent Fund’, and the public was urged by the local press to participate and thereby ‘relieve the sick and injured’.<sup>259</sup> Concerts were of the traditional type, with men and women singing, reciting, and playing musical instruments. All the items performed were typical of the time, with such gems as two women singing ‘Three Little Coons’, a man singing ‘the coon song “Hello, Ma Baby”’, and a man declaiming his poem on the death of a Thames jockey; nothing in any way ‘class conscious’ has been noted.<sup>260</sup> Whenever a member died, all unionists were urged to attend his funeral.<sup>261</sup>

As an example of benevolence extending beyond its own members, the annual meeting in 1897 considered a request to assist the father of one of those killed in the Brunner disaster on the West Coast to fight a case in the Appeal Court. ‘The President thought it was a case where the local Union should help’. When one member asked whether the dead man had been a member of the Union, Carnie ‘thought that question should not be considered, as where a brother was in distress it was their duty to stand by him’. Sums of £79 19s and £50 were proposed, but Potts, the president, had to point out that their rules permitted only a maximum of £20, although a further sum could be voted on another occasion. The unanimous support for granting the maximum permitted prompted Potts to declare it to be ‘an honor to belong to a Union carrying so noble a proposition’.<sup>262</sup> The *Thames Advertiser* commended their action ‘to the community as one worthy of a

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<sup>255</sup> *Thames Star*, 24 June 1902, p. 4, 11 August 1902, p. 4.

<sup>256</sup> *Thames Star*, 14 September 1901, p. 4.

<sup>257</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 March 1891, p. 13.

<sup>258</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 August 1893, p. 27.

<sup>259</sup> For example, *Thames Star*, 31 August 1901, p. 2, 4 March 1902, p. 3.

<sup>260</sup> These examples are taken from *Thames Star*, 4 March 1902, p. 3.

<sup>261</sup> For example, advertisement, *Thames Star*, 3 August 1901, p. 2.

<sup>262</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 2 August 1897, p. 3.

class of men who have earned a reputation for warm-heartedness towards their fellows generally'. As 'few if any' knew the people concerned, 'no personal feelings actuated the local miners in their noble decision'.<sup>263</sup>

One year after the formation of the union, the *Thames Advertiser* published an article applauding its anniversary celebration:

Having a Union like this the Thames District has something to be proud of, and it is well, too, that the Union, in addition to carrying out in a grave spirit the high duties [of its objects] ... should put itself pleasantly in evidence from time to time. Could this be done more fittingly than by celebrating its own anniversaries by means of pleasant outdoor sports? We certainly think it could not. The union in fact has decided upon this course, and in doing so it has obviously done the right thing.... The procession itself formed a most interesting sight. The members of the union marched four abreast and even at the outset they must have numbered some 600, while others kept joining pretty well all along the line of march. A finer body of men than the processionists it would be difficult to see anywhere. Their appearance no doubt gave rise to many reflections, amongst them being, "what fine mining properties there must be at the Thames to employ so many men; how well the mine owners must be served by such fine fellows, the majority of whom are obviously the possessors of healthy bodies and wholesome minds; and what an excellent thing it is for the community to have so many men steadily employed in a profitable and progressive industry."<sup>264</sup>

The *Thames Star* concurred, its editorial noting that, while unionism was spreading throughout the world, 'perhaps nowhere has greater enthusiasm been displayed' than at Thames. It was pleased that in its first year the union had 'avoided many of the unfortunate errors committed in other cities and towns, and it has been characterized by the exceedingly moderate and cautious manner in which its affairs have been conducted'. This 'careful policy' had brought benefits for its members:

A standard rate of wages has been fixed, the hours of labor slightly reduced, and, most important of all, the unfair and iniquitous system of compulsory insurance that was in force at some of the mines has been removed. These and other matters have been accomplished without any friction whatever between employers and employees, and as a result of the commendable

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<sup>263</sup> Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 7 August 1897, p. 2.

<sup>264</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 March 1891, p. 2.

conciliatory and moderate tone adopted by the officers, the utmost good feeling to-day prevails amongst all engaged in the mining industry.<sup>265</sup>

In an article on the anniversary celebrations, it noted that at first there had been doubts 'in the minds of many' about whether its leaders could achieve 'real well-being and betterment' for members, along with 'fear that the bounds of prudence should be overstepped, and disaster result to all concerned', but these doubts and fears were 'soon dispelled'.<sup>266</sup>

In connection with this first anniversary, a leading mining agent and legal manager, Roderick McDonald Scott,<sup>267</sup> whose actions on behalf of the Cambria Company had prompted the formation of the union,<sup>268</sup> offered a prize of a volume of Burns' poems along with a sovereign for the best poem about 'The Dignity of Honest Labour'. Nine were submitted, and the two judges, both Thames clergymen, awarded the prize to 'Worker', who turned out to be 'Miss Hudson, a well-known literary contributor'.<sup>269</sup> Her poem reflected the moral uplift the union was supposed to provide for its members:

When Adam into disobedience fell,  
And lost his happy state, the world was laid  
Under a dreadful curse. In toil and pain  
Men now must wrest those treasures from the ground  
Once yielded freely.

But behold the curse  
Turned to a blessing! From this bitter root  
Springs forth a goodly flower - the joy of Work -  
The keen delight of effort; hopes and fears;  
And then the glorious triumphs of success!  
If but to wish were to achieve, this life  
Were dull indeed, and aimless.

Happy those  
Who needs must work to live. Sweet is the bread,  
And sweet the rest by honest labour won.  
Who well and truly ply their daily tasks

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<sup>265</sup> Editorial, *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>266</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>267</sup> See *Observer*, 17 June 1905, p. 17.

<sup>268</sup> Kelly, p. 72.

<sup>269</sup> Either Sarah Elizabeth or Ellen?: *Thames Electoral Roll*, 1893, p. 30.



Derive a dignity from honest toil.  
 They're independent - bear themselves erect -  
 Look all men in the face, and cringe to none!  
 None liveth to himself,- we live to serve,  
 And so by serving live.

'Tis noble joy  
 To feel ourselves a part of one great whole,  
 Each serving all in truest brotherhood.  
 Not those who idly live on others' toil,  
 Wasting the precious years in selfish ease,  
 Are the true noblemen; but those whose lives  
 Are spent in efforts for the common good;  
 Large benefactors of the human race;  
 Who win strange secrets from the elements;  
 Wrest from the earth its treasures rich and rare;  
 Scale mountains; traverse unknown lands and seas;  
 Do battle with disease, and want and crime;  
 Voice forth those noble thoughts which can inspire  
 The world to noble deed. Lay down their lives  
 In the pursuit of knowledge; oft unknown,  
 Unhonoured by the men 'mong whom they lived;  
 Not remembered by a grateful world!  
 These are our heroes! honour to them all.  
 But not to them alone. For all who serve  
 From love of serving, with the pure desire  
 To aid their fellows, willing to be naught,  
 Become in their degree like unto Him  
 Who being King of Kings, and Lord of Lords,  
 Became among His friends as one who serves.<sup>270</sup>

Apart from this inspirational poem, the anniversary was marked by a Miners' Union Demonstration held in fulfillment of the by-law that 'the eighth day of March in each year' was to be 'a general holiday, as the anniversary of its introduction'.<sup>271</sup> The union's request that the day be made a public holiday was unanimously accepted by the borough council, and all mines and businesses closed. The procession, headed by union officials 'with the conventional blue and white rosette displayed on every breast', marched four-deep through Thames, headed by the Naval Artillery's brass band and 'the beautiful banner of the Auckland Eight Hour's Demonstration, which had been kindly lent for the occasion'. About 550 men marched, the route

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<sup>270</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 May 1891, p. 37.

<sup>271</sup> *Bye-Laws of the Thames Branch of the Amalgamated Miners' Association of Australasia* (Thames, 1890), p. 15.

being 'lined with spectators in holiday attire'; the sight 'was a most imposing one'. At the Parawai racecourse, athletic sports were arranged, and attracted the largest Thames gathering for many years. 'The action of the committee in reserving the grandstand exclusively for ladies met with great favour amongst the fair sex, and throughout the day the stand was crowded'. There were races for boys, girls, 'young ladies', married women, battery boys, miners, 'old buffers', mine managers, and committee-men, as well as for all-comers, 'bona fide amateurs', and other categories. It was 'an excellent day's sport', and 'all were well satisfied with the day's outing', according to one newspaper.<sup>272</sup> The *Thames Star* agreed, reporting the event in identical words: it was 'a most unqualified success', with over 2,000 people attending the sports.<sup>273</sup>

These celebrations and sports meetings were held every year on a Monday known as Miners' Union Day, which remained a public holiday.<sup>274</sup> They were popular occasions; for example, the one held at Paeroa in 1899 was attended by 2,000 people, who listened to the Thames Navals' band and participated in athletic sports of all varieties, including tugs of war between miners from different districts.<sup>275</sup> This style of celebration continued: photographs of Miners' Union Day at Thames in 1909, for instance, showed crowds listening to a band and participating in athletics.<sup>276</sup> These were always family occasions, with special races for children.<sup>277</sup>

Miners' halls, erected wherever branches had a sufficient number of members, became the social centres for their communities. The union encouraged these halls by meeting the cost of their erection. By hiring them out for social occasions, their erection became a profitable investment, as, for example, at Opitonui.<sup>278</sup> At Thames, evening parties for members were held fortnightly: one in June 1898, for instance, attracted about 80 couples, the songs, music, and other entertainments being devised by a committee comprising an equal number of men and women.<sup>279</sup> At that time, fortnightly

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<sup>272</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 March 1891, p. 13.

<sup>273</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>274</sup> For example, *Thames Star*, 26 February 1902, p. 2.

<sup>275</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 9 March 1899, p. 2.

<sup>276</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 March 1909, Supplement, pp. 14, 15.

<sup>277</sup> For example, *Thames Star*, 3 March 1902, p. 2.

<sup>278</sup> *Thames Star*, 16 May 1898, p. 2.

<sup>279</sup> *Thames Star*, 27 June 1898, p. 2.

dances were held by the ‘Miners’ Union Quadrille Assembly’.<sup>280</sup> Special events prompted special social occasions: for instance, in 1901, race day was marked by ‘a social and dance under the auspices of the union.’<sup>281</sup>

As the vice-president noted in 1901, not all members were miners, for the union accepted ‘all sorts of men who pay their fees, irrespective of occupation’.<sup>282</sup> At the meeting that voted to form a union, James McGowan had said that ‘every business man on the Thames, or anyone who was living indirectly from mining, should become honorary members. (Cheers.)’. He then handed in his subscription, ‘for which he was loudly applauded’.<sup>283</sup> By the end of its first year, it had 70 honorary members,<sup>284</sup> being local businessmen and others who supported its aims. The names of these honorary members are unknown, apart from McGowan, the first to enrol.<sup>285</sup> One must be assumed to have been John Leydon, a prominent auctioneer in the district and then at Auckland for many years,<sup>286</sup> who in 1897 presented ‘a beautiful oil painting’ as a prize for its Sports Day.<sup>287</sup> At the end of its first year, the *Thames Star* stated that the union had received ‘the hearty support and co-operation of the business people’ at Thames. Proof of ‘the cordiality of the relations’ between miners and businessmen was ‘the large number of handsome trophies’ provided by the latter for the sports competitions held on Miners’ Union Day.<sup>288</sup> Apart from the 1901 comment already noted, no reference to honorary members has been noted in later years, so this category may have faded away.

As well as its friendly society benefits, the union provided other services. In 1891, for example, it organized a series of lectures on unionism by a Edmund Harvey Taylor, local Church of Christ clergyman,<sup>289</sup> who had stood with the union’s backing for the Thames seat in the previous year. It encouraged mining developments that would provide work, for instance from 1891 onwards supporting a scheme to extend the Moanataiari

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<sup>280</sup> *Thames Star*, 2 July 1898, p. 2.

<sup>281</sup> *Thames Star*, 1 March 1901, p. 2.

<sup>282</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 May 1901, p. 2.

<sup>283</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 January 1890, p. 2.

<sup>284</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 March 1891, p. 13.

<sup>285</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 March 1891, p. 13.

<sup>286</sup> See *New Zealand Herald*, 22 February 1923, p. 4.

<sup>287</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 1 March 1897, p. 3.

<sup>288</sup> Editorial, *Thames Star*, 9 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>289</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 July 1891, p. 21.

tunnel.<sup>290</sup> The following year, it urged the government to purchase the freehold of those parts of the goldfield still owned by Ngati Maru because miners had to pay £1 annually for a miner's right on Maori land. 'A very large attendance of all classes of the community' was noted at a public meeting held to discuss this issue.<sup>291</sup> Later that year, a committee was formed to draw up a prospecting scheme for the 'back country' behind Thames.<sup>292</sup> In 1893 and 1894, two grants of £20 were made to aid prospecting.<sup>293</sup> It opposed protecting unworked mines and granting special claims which locked up large areas, despite being warned that this policy would scare away capital and deprive members of work.<sup>294</sup> Miners saw their union as a means to 'promote the best interests of this important industry',<sup>295</sup> and participated in meetings to find solutions to its problems.<sup>296</sup> In 1903, for instance, it supported a scheme of boring which it hoped would revive the rapidly declining Thames field.<sup>297</sup> All its activities were marked by caution, which was seen as a virtue; for instance, the retiring leaders trusted, in their report for the year to 30 June 1904, 'that the incoming Officers will continue to carry on the business of the Union in a spirit of moderation'.<sup>298</sup>

In 1899, the mayor praised the union for displaying its loyalty by presenting an address welcoming the Governor.<sup>299</sup> This address, 'prettily decorated' and with a 'very pretty fern border' and photographs of poppet heads and a pumping plant, offered 'a cordial welcome' and assured the Governor 'of our loyal devotion to Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, whom you represent, and of our attachment to the British

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<sup>290</sup> For example, *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 July 1891, p. 21, 3 February 1894, p. 20.

<sup>291</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 May 1892, p. 29, 14 May 1892, p. 14.

<sup>292</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 October 1892, p. 19.

<sup>293</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 August 1893, p. 27, 4 August 1894, p. 28.

<sup>294</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 September 1893, p. 30, 21 April 1894, pp. 27-28; 'Obadiah', 'Shares and Mining', *Observer*, 23 December 1893, p. 23.

<sup>295</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 August 1894, p. 28.

<sup>296</sup> For example, *Thames Star*, 22 August 1902, p. 4, 29 August 1902, p. 1.

<sup>297</sup> Thames Miners' Union, 'Officers' Report, for the year ending June 30, 1903', photocopy provided by Bert Roth.

<sup>298</sup> Thames Miners' Union, 'Officers' Report, for year ending June 30, 1904', photocopy provided by Bert Roth.

<sup>299</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 28 March 1899, p. 3.

Empire'.<sup>300</sup> Three years later, the union marched in the Coronation parade.<sup>301</sup>

The union was aware that it had some responsibilities to the wider movement. In its first year, it paid £150 to those involved in the maritime strike and gave £20 to the Auckland Tailoresses' Union.<sup>302</sup> In 1892, £300 was sent to the striking miners of Broken Hill in New South Wales.<sup>303</sup> Five years later a leading member gave moral backing to the Federated Seamen's Union when it battled Auckland employers before the Arbitration and Conciliation Commission.<sup>304</sup>

### INVOLVEMENT IN NATIONAL POLITICS

In 1890, a Church of Christ clergyman, Edmund Harvey Taylor,<sup>305</sup> supported the Maritime Strike, arguing 'Who ought to stand by the oppressed but Christian pastors? Who ought to speak words of warning to capitalists but Christian pastors?' Labour demanding its 'fair proportion of this world's wealth' was a 'righteous cause'. After quoting the Epistle of James attacking the rich, he argued that the latter had 'accumulated wealth at the expense and degradation of the *worker*'. He warned of 'the certainty of the miseries that shall come upon' the rich who underpaid the poor: Hellfire awaited them.<sup>306</sup> Evidence from around the world proved that the rich were getting richer while the poor were getting poorer, and he recommended that his critics study, amongst other books, one by the founder of the Marxist-orientated Social Democratic Federation in Britain.<sup>307</sup> The rich had the power to keep the destitute always poor: 'most monied men began life without much cash but good health and no conscience, and became rich by grinding the face of the workers'. Poor rates

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<sup>300</sup> *Thames Star*, 29 March 1899, p. 2.

<sup>301</sup> *Thames Star*, 24 June 1902, p. 3.

<sup>302</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 14 March 1891, p. 13.

<sup>303</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 October 1892, p. 19.

<sup>304</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 16 September 1897, p. 4.

<sup>305</sup> For aspects of his life before he became involved in politics, see *Thames Electoral Roll*, 1884, p. 20; *Waikato Times*, 5 April 1884, p. 2, 20 February 1886, p. 3, 2 November 1886, p. 2.

<sup>306</sup> Letter from E.H. Taylor, *Thames Star*, 13 September 1890, p. 4.

<sup>307</sup> Letters from E.H. Taylor, *Thames Star*, 27 September 1890, p. 4, 1 October 1890, p. 4, 6 October 1890, p. 4.

were required because the rich grasped the ‘national birthrights’ of land, minerals, and timber.<sup>308</sup> In 1898, he told a meeting that ‘ever since my boyhood days I have been interested in labor unions’.<sup>309</sup>

In October 1890, Taylor was proposed as a candidate for parliament, to the suspicion of some that he was being put up to split the workers’ vote.<sup>310</sup> A public meeting organized by the union unanimously agreed that ‘the working men of the Thames take steps to elect a man from among themselves to represent them’, and a committee was elected to find a candidate.<sup>311</sup> This included a mine manager, Edward Kersey Cooper, who had managed mines at Waiorongomai as well as being a sharebroker at Te Aroha in the early 1880s,<sup>312</sup> and had the reputation of being ‘a generous employer of labour, a gentleman in his demeanour, a friend and brother to those under him’.<sup>313</sup>

When a deputation asked Taylor to stand as a labour candidate, he responded that he would explain his principles to a public meeting to clarify ‘if they were in sympathy with those of the Committee’.<sup>314</sup> In it, he declared that labour candidates should represent the ‘claims and rights’ of the workers ‘if possible without friction’. Capital and labour should be ‘linked in the bonds of matrimony – not as a matter of convenience, but of necessity. Capital without labor must waste. Labor without capital must be a source of much energy misspent, and therefore unprofitable’. Labour should be equal to capital. He detailed his opinions on a variety of policies, those on mining reflecting the views of the union in making land near to goldfields available for settlement for older miners and those unable to work underground, introducing new gold-saving appliances, encouraging miners to become mine managers through experience as well as examination, opposing ground being undermanned or being held for speculative purposes, and opposing the floating of ‘bogus companies’.<sup>315</sup>

His second address was chaired by the mayor, who, after stating that ‘it had been said in some parts of the electorate that only the scum of the

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<sup>308</sup> Letter from E.H. Taylor, *Thames Star*, 16 October 1890, p. 4.

<sup>309</sup> *Thames Star*, 14 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>310</sup> *Thames Star*, 17 October 1890, p. 4, 18 October 1890, p. 4.

<sup>311</sup> *Thames Star*, 4 November 1890, pp. 2, 4.

<sup>312</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>313</sup> *Observer*, 28 June 1890, p. 18.

<sup>314</sup> *Thames Star*, 8 November 1890, p. 2.

<sup>315</sup> *Thames Star*, 14 November 1890, pp. 2, 4.

people' were supporting Taylor, declared that this meeting was 'a vast gathering of intelligent electors'. Taylor attempted to rebut criticisms that he was 'a gaspipe' and a preacher not a worker. His policies encompassed most of the issues facing the government, such as borrowing, retrenchment, and taxation, as well as wanting free and secular education and the abolition of the Legislative Council. All auriferous lands should be state property:

Personally, he would like to see all minerals, coal, timber, and gum, all the natural products of the earth in which labor has not been necessary for its creation, worked by a system of co-operation for the general weal. (Applause.) He was a firm believer in co-operation, and considered that it was going to settle lots of agricultural and mining questions, Union disputes, and business matters.

The mining industry should be assisted, and ground taken up 'should either be manned or worked legitimately' to obtain gold 'and not the scrip that was outside. (Applause.)'. He admitted to being a teetotaler, and, in response to a rumour that 'he was being "run" by English capital', stated that 'he was being "run" by the half crowns of the honest working man. (Loud applause.)'.<sup>316</sup> A future president of the union, Potts, moved the vote of support at the end of the meeting.<sup>317</sup> 'Old Hand', a supporter of Cadman, was not impressed, thinking it a joke that workers, having decided to be represented by one of their own class, then chose a parson. He attacked Taylor for alleged equivocation over the abolition of the gold duty, claiming that it was 'well known' that his chief backer was 'a determined opponent of the gold duty, a representative of the English plutocrats, who evidently knows his man'.<sup>318</sup> This was a clear reference to Cooper, who had helped select Taylor and was indeed a strong advocate of abolishing this duty.<sup>319</sup>

According to one correspondent, Taylor had a successful meeting at Coromandel and would 'have a large support' there. Another claimed he was 'hard pressed' by the president and secretary of the union branch there 'as to his claiming to be a nominee of the Thames branch of that organisation', and that his answers 'were considered very unsatisfactory – in fact, he

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<sup>316</sup> *Thames Star*, 27 November 1890, pp. 2, 3, 4.

<sup>317</sup> *Thames Star*, 27 November 1890, p. 4.

<sup>318</sup> Letter from 'Old Hand', *Thames Star*, 29 November 1890, p. 4.

<sup>319</sup> For example, see letter from E.K. Cooper, *Thames Star*, 23 August 1890, p. 4.

would not give a straightforward answer to any of the questions'.<sup>320</sup> Taylor's campaign must have been damaged when 30 Kuaotunu residents placed an advertisement in the *Thames Star* contradicting Taylor's account of what he had said there about abolishing the gold duty.<sup>321</sup> One letter to the editor pointed out that, far from Taylor having the backing of the union, 'a great number' of members preferred Cadman, some being on his election committee.<sup>322</sup>

The *Thames Star* clearly preferred Cadman, briefly referring to Taylor as 'an untried man, but this of course should be no disadvantage'.<sup>323</sup> In the same issue, a 'dialogue between Bill and Charlie', really a letter to the editor, showed the reasoning whereby two miners shifted their support from Taylor to Cadman.<sup>324</sup> In his final election speech, Taylor replied to the various 'scurrilous remarks' made against him during the campaign and claimed that criticism of him by the president of the Coromandel branch was 'discountenanced by the Union at that place. He maintained that he had never crawled around the Union for votes', and had only stood for election after 'strong pressure' was exerted. He denied making contradictory statements about the gold tax, and clarified his stance on all the issues. O'Sullivan and Potts moved the vote of support at the end of the meeting.<sup>325</sup>

Taylor obtained 878 votes to Cadman's 982.<sup>326</sup> The *Thames Advertiser* praised the union for the 'judgment and good sense' with which the campaign was conducted, and admired the miners for taking 'their defeat - by no means an overwhelming one - like men'.<sup>327</sup> Taylor went on to be 'an earnest minister of the gospel and a valiant worker for Prohibition', being appointed New Zealand Grand Chief Templar in 1897. 'For some time he travelled about the Dominion lecturing on the Prohibition question'.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Coromandel Correspondents, *Thames Star*, 1 December 1890, p. 2.

<sup>321</sup> Advertisement, *Thames Star*, 2 December 1890, p. 3.

<sup>322</sup> Letter from 'Elector', *Thames Star*, 4 December 1890, p. 2.

<sup>323</sup> Editorial, *Thames Star*, 4 December 1890, p. 2.

<sup>324</sup> 'Thames Election. Dialogue Between Bill and Charlie', *Thames Star*, 4 December 1890, p. 4.

<sup>325</sup> *Thames Star*, 5 December 1890, p. 2.

<sup>326</sup> 'General Election, 1890 - Returns in connection with', *AJHR*, 1891, Session 1, H-2, p. 1.

<sup>327</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 March 1891, p. 2.

<sup>328</sup> *Temperance and Prohibition in New Zealand*, ed. J. Cocker and J. Malton Murray (London, 1930), p. 256.



Three years later, when some members wanted another candidate to stand,<sup>329</sup> this proposal was not approved. Potts, then president, opposed the union becoming involved in politics; in 1896 he declared that individual members should take up issues with candidates.<sup>330</sup> (As noted in the paper on his successor, O’Keeffe, the latter had a contrary opinion.)

### TE AROHA MINERS’ ORGANISATIONS

By 1898, the membership was approximately 650 at Thames, 300 at Waihi, 300 at Coromandel, 30 at Cabbage Bay, 30 at Kuaotunu, 100 at Opitonui, 40 at Tapu, 100 at Karangahake, 100 at Waitekauri, and 50 at Waiorongomai.<sup>331</sup> The latter branch was not formed until after the president visited Te Aroha and Waiorongomai in 1896.<sup>332</sup> In the absence of a union, in 1883 miners established an Accident Relief Fund to provide friendly society benefits. In June that year, about 30 miners and others met and elected a committee of 11, with a publican, Thomas Lawless,<sup>333</sup> as secretary *pro tem*. The other members included four mine managers and Henry Hopper Adams, the battery manager,<sup>334</sup> who became president; Josiah Clifton Firth of the Battery Company was made the patron.<sup>335</sup> James Samson,<sup>336</sup> a miner who chaired this meeting, canvassed Waiorongomai and Te Aroha ‘for honorary and working members’, and the *Te Aroha News* reported, two months later, that the fund was ‘fully established’, the appeal for assistance having ‘been most liberally responded to’.<sup>337</sup> In February 1884, Adams was re-elected president; the two vice-presidents were a mine manager, Thomas Gavin,<sup>338</sup> and a blacksmith, George Taylor, who worked

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<sup>329</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 August 1893, p. 27.

<sup>330</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 2 November 1896, p. 3.

<sup>331</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 21 January 1898, p. 4.

<sup>332</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 27 July 1896, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 8 October 1896, p. 2.

<sup>333</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>334</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>335</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 June 1883, p. 2, 16 February 1884, p. 2.

<sup>336</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, 22 September 1873, p. 3, 23 September 1873, p. 3, 29 September 1873, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1884, p. 7.

<sup>337</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 June 1883, p. 2, 11 August 1883, p. 2.

<sup>338</sup> See paper on his life.

in the Waiorongomai battery;<sup>339</sup> a storekeeper was elected treasurer and a mining surveyor re-elected secretary. Lawless was a member of the committee, along with four mine managers, a tramway hand, an amalgamator in the battery, and a carpenter. A doctor then briefly resident in Te Aroha was appointed surgeon, being paid 5s per member per annum.<sup>340</sup>

In March 1885 the association collapsed because so many miners had departed.<sup>341</sup> Not until April 1888 was another one formed, with the same name, for employees of the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company. All members contributed 6d each week, but in December a majority decided to return the money in hand in proportion to the amount put in, over the opposition of those who wanted it retained as a nucleus for a new relief fund.<sup>342</sup> Controversy erupted over the meeting held to ratify this decision because it did not meet when expected, causing ‘ugly rumours’, with ‘lawyers’ letters and opinions spoken of. A Waiorongomai correspondent understood that Adams was ‘quite willing to hand over a cheque to the Treasurer but it must be in the presence of every Committee man’, the difficulty being to get the committee together.<sup>343</sup> When the meeting was held, after the due date, there were no reports from the committee or the auditor to present to the 40 people attending. As the books had only just been located, the chairman stated that ‘he had been hard at it’ doing the audit ‘for the previous hour and a half, and in the main they appeared to be correct’, apart from one item needing checking. As the old committee was defunct, a new one was elected; it included Samson and Taylor from the previous committee, plus two miners and a carpenter. It was instructed to submit new rules to a second meeting to be held to continue a fund. ‘The meeting, although on the whole fairly orderly, on two or three occasions became rather lively’.<sup>344</sup>

The second meeting, again attended by 40 people, confirmed the decision to retain the money as the nucleus for a new fund, and after

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<sup>339</sup> See *Te Aroha News*, 21 August 1886, p. 2, 22 January 1890, p. 2, 25 January 1890, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 4 February 1893, p. 2.

<sup>340</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 February 1884, p. 2.

<sup>341</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 6 June 1899, p. 3.

<sup>342</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 December 1888, p. 2.

<sup>343</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 January 1889, p. 2, Waiorongomai Correspondent, 6 February 1889, p. 2.

<sup>344</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1889, p. 2.

squabbles that prompted the chairman to walk out, the new rules were considered.<sup>345</sup> A third meeting made 'a few slight alterations' before these were approved.<sup>346</sup> The old committee was asked to hand over its money,<sup>347</sup> but, as one Waiorongomai correspondent wrote, the meeting of the members of the old fund was

a disgraceful failure, nobody turning up; the counter-attraction being the Tourist Minstrels performing in the Public Hall. It is very apparent that the old subscribers care very little what becomes of the money now lying useless in the Bank. This is the second time an attempt has been made to bring the members together, but the result in both instances has been nil, as all interest in this matter appears now to be at an end through the apathy and inertness shown by the subscribers. It rests with the old Committee to say what is to be done.<sup>348</sup>

Although this money was never handed over, from its dues the new committee was able to pay for injuries it considered were work-related.<sup>349</sup> A Waiorongomai correspondent praised the voluntary nature of the new fund:

That it is only right to point out the grand spirit of self help which our miners display, in that they are able, in these enlightened days, to look after their own business, goes without saying. In some mines at the Thames ... it is compulsory, perhaps rightly, that those working underground shall have deducted from their wages contributions towards an accident fund, but when it comes voluntarily from the men, and they band and bind themselves to a regular payment of 6d per week, they deserve all support, and as the fund is open to anyone to subscribe to, I venture to throw out the hint to your many readers.<sup>350</sup>

Whether any reader took the hint was not recorded. There was no further mention of this fund after March 1890 in the surviving newspapers, but its functions, had it lasted that long, would have been superceded when a union branch was established in 1897. The old fund finally was put to good use in 1899, when the trustees agreed to give it to the Thames

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<sup>345</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 27 February 1889, p. 2.

<sup>346</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1889, p. 2.

<sup>347</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 24 April 1889, p. 2, 1 May 1889, p. 2, 4 May 1889, p. 2.

<sup>348</sup> Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 22 May 1889, p. 2.

<sup>349</sup> *Te Aroha News*, Waiorongomai Correspondent, 29 June 1889, p. 2, 26 March 1890, p. 2.

<sup>350</sup> Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 February 1889, p. 3.

Hospital building fund. £45 had been placed in the bank in 1885, which with interest accruing meant the hospital received £81 10s 2d. The trustees were certain that, had they been able to consult all those ‘connected with the original fund’, they would agree with their decision. Nearly all lived within the goldfield, and could ‘appreciate the blessing your institution has been to many poor fellows who have been brought into it from all parts of the district’.<sup>351</sup>

The union’s president announced, in May 1897, that he had formed a branch at Waiorongomai and that he expected the membership to be ‘considerable’.<sup>352</sup> But with the collapse of the boom, there were no members two years later.<sup>353</sup> In 1909, the small number of men working for Waiorongomai Mines Ltd were members of the union, but others working for the Bendigo Company were not.<sup>354</sup> Not until 1911 was another attempt made to revive membership, when a representative from Waihi received ‘many promises of support’,<sup>355</sup> but the fading of mining meant very few men were employed, and a branch was not formed. During its existence at Te Aroha, the only time the union was involved in an industrial dispute was a brief strike prompted by Joseph Campbell’s attempt to impose restrictions on his workers’ behaviour.<sup>356</sup> The president ‘interviewed the Rev. Joseph, and convinced him of the errors of his ways’.<sup>357</sup>

#### INCREASING DIFFICULTIES, ESPECIALLY AT WAIHI

In September 1900, ‘A Miner’ wrote to the *Thames Star*:

I think it is high time that someone took up the pen and protested against the manner that our Thames Miners’ Union affairs are conducted, but it appears to me that no one wishes to, and no one cares. I say, Sir, that it is a downright disgrace to those at the head of the Union to have its affairs carried out like they are, and what is the consequence? Men are leaving the Union month after month, and as sure as there is a heart in our body, we will find in

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<sup>351</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 6 June 1899, p. 3.

<sup>352</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1897, p. 3.

<sup>353</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 31 July 1899, p. 3.

<sup>354</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 7 January 1909, p. 2.

<sup>355</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 September 1911, p. 2.

<sup>356</sup> See paper on Joseph Campbell.

<sup>357</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 16 October 1897, p. 4, 19 October 1897, p. 4.

a few years our Miners' Union going to the wall. What good is our Union, and what is it doing to benefit the working miners? If you ask the men why they are leaving the Union they will say: "the Union is doing us no good; what protection does it give us? Only a paltry £1 a week if you get hurt while working." As a matter of fact it is true. Look at the way that some of our mines are worked and the places that men have to risk their lives in, and it is a wonder that there are not more men killed than there are, and although there have been several men killed in one way or another in the various mines in the up-country district, the Miners' Union never even enquired as to how they were killed, or went to see. Is it any wonder that I say that our Union is no good.

After criticizing the leaders for agreeing to a reduction in the rates of pay for 'mullockers' at Waihi, he admitted that the defects were not confined to the leadership. 'What can we expect when our Union members will not take an interest in the affairs of the Union': out of 800 members only 182 had voted in the last election. He compared the union unfavourably with the one at Reefton, where they 'get what they want'.<sup>358</sup> Not only were many members uninvolved, only a minority of miners in some districts joined. At Waitekauri in 1897 a meeting of members was told that 'there ought to be 500 miners enrolled' there, but only 130 were on the roll.<sup>359</sup> A week later, the *Waihi Miner* referred to this problem in a paragraph about Sunday labour:

Working men are the first themselves to growl at overtime, and they are also the first to accept it when offered at increased, or even even rates.... Scores of miners neglect to join the Union, while the first to howl at its not taking steps to remedy their position. How can the Union champion the miner if three out of four miners decline joining it, while expecting it to fight their battles?<sup>360</sup>

The problems of Waihi were to become of increasing concern. In mid-1896, a Waihi correspondent reported that 'at the Silverton mine all wages men have been dismissed' and the contract system was 'in vogue there altogether', despite miners preferring to work for wages.<sup>361</sup> In 1897 one

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<sup>358</sup> Letter from 'A Miner', *Thames Star*, 21 September 1900, p. 2.

<sup>359</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 7 May 1897, p. 2.

<sup>360</sup> *Waihi Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 13 May 1897, p. 2.

<sup>361</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 2 June 1896, p. 2.

miner condemned Sunday labour as a 'shameful sweating system openly carried on in defiance of the laws both of God and man'. The Waihi Company kept the battery operating on Sunday, and the Silverton kept its mine going as well. Condemning this 'grinding out of their dividends from the hard labour of their workmen, and their deliberate theft of the miner's well-earned day of rest', he denied that miners would vote to retain Sunday labour. It was 'simply the fear of being displaced' which kept 'their noses to the grindstone'. Not only was the law against Sunday labour not being enforced, men working on that day were not even paid at a higher rate.<sup>362</sup>

At the subsequent annual meeting, the president, Potts, claimed the union had done all that was possible by contacting the authorities and asking the Minister of Mines to pass legislation to stop 'unnecessary' work on Sunday. 'They saw what was now taking place was the thin edge of the wedge for seven days' work for six days' pay. They certainly wanted to give the capitalist every encouragement, but they did not see that Sunday work was in favor of the industry'. After Max King (full name, Maximilian Day King),<sup>363</sup> the union's Coromandel steward, urged the lobbying of every Member of Parliament, the matter was adjourned 'to be further considered'.<sup>364</sup> In September, when the committee met 'in a sort of informal conference' with McGowan, now their local Member of Parliament, to discuss Sunday work, it wanted this prohibited 'excepting certain works of necessity' and also sought assistance in obtaining wages from defaulting no-liability companies. 'No definite line of action was decided on', but McGowan agreed to assist it 'in attaining these ends'.<sup>365</sup>

The union's quarterly meeting held in May 1898 agreed to Adam Thomson's proposal that surface sections of Thames mines unworked by companies should be let on tribute to benefit the large number of unemployed miners.<sup>366</sup> The press supported this proposal because of the rapid increase in unemployment caused by the decline in mining,<sup>367</sup> and a meeting of the president and secretary with the Auckland Chamber of

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<sup>362</sup> Letter from 'Obsta Principiis', *Thames Advertiser*, 15 June 1897, p. 3.

<sup>363</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, 15 August 1896, p. 2, 20 October 1896, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 2 November 1897, p. 3, 21 March 1901, p. 4, 4 April 1901, p. 4, 27 February 1905, p. 2, 21 May 1908, p. 2, 21 August 1908, p. 2.

<sup>364</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 2 August 1897, p. 3.

<sup>365</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 30 September 1897, p. 2.

<sup>366</sup> *Thames Star*, 2 May 1898, p. 2.

<sup>367</sup> For example, editorial, *Thames Star*, 7 June 1898, p. 2.

Mines was arranged.<sup>368</sup> By early June, Thames had about 300 unemployed miners, and a contract offered in one mine received tenders from 12 parties, a total of 72 men.<sup>369</sup> By mid-June, it was estimated that well over a quarter of the miners were unemployed.<sup>370</sup> Some believed that the union should have been more active,<sup>371</sup> ‘Weary Willy’ claiming that the only way to get results was a mass meeting of the unemployed instead of waiting for the ‘so-called’ miners’ union, which had ‘long ceased to be such’, instead being ‘but the gagged and bound political prisoner and tool of Seddon and Co, used to lull the miner into this state of indifference from which it appears starvation alone will thoroughly arouse him’.<sup>372</sup> This charge prompted an editorial rejoinder:

We wish it to be distinctly understood that we entirely disagree.... The Union has in the past done good work, and will, we are convinced, do even a greater amount of good in the future. How it can be said that it is “gagged and bound politically” passes our comprehension, and to our mind the statement is absolutely without foundation.<sup>373</sup>

The mayor was ‘reliably informed’ that the union had been working on the matter for the past month, and hoped that its meeting with the Chamber of Mines would be successful.<sup>374</sup> At a public meeting to consider ways of finding work the editor of the *Thames Star*, Henry James Greenslade,<sup>375</sup> stated that, in response to the union’s request for aid, the Minister of Mines was sending his under-secretary to discuss the matter with Lucas, its secretary. McGowan wanted the matter left to the union, which should insist that all ground be fully manned. One man whose views provoked laughter and dissent ended his contribution: ‘Talk about the miners’ organisation. It had been afraid to open its mouth for fear of being boycotted. (Ironical applause.)’. Taylor, called upon to speak, was ‘loudly cheered’. He agreed that the cause of unemployment was English capitalists

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<sup>368</sup> *Thames Star*, 8 June 1898, p. 2, 9 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>369</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>370</sup> Editorial, *Thames Star*, 15 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>371</sup> For example, letter from ‘A Worker’, *Thames Star*, 8 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>372</sup> Letter from ‘Weary Willy’, *Thames Star*, 9 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>373</sup> Editorial note appended to letter from ‘Weary Willy’, *Thames Star*, 9 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>374</sup> *Thames Star*, 10 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>375</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 863, 1021-1022.

locking up claims, and wanted political action to overcome this; the union had ‘men of backbone in their midst’, and were ‘quite capable of looking after your interests’. A motion that undermanned claims be let on tribute was passed unanimously.<sup>376</sup>

McGowan accompanied Potts and Lucas to their meeting with the Goldfields’ Committee of the Chamber of Mines, and supported them in their bid for the letting of more tributes. Representatives of English capital wanted to establish a system whereby tributers would be bought out upon discovery of good gold, and other investors were worried that letting tributes ‘would impair the sale of properties to English companies’:

Mr Potts replied that the general body of miners were a reliable set of men, and the companies could rest assured that the men would place no obstacle in the way of the introduction of capital. He pointed out that the Miners’ Union by their foresight had saved the present Thames-Hauraki property from being unduly attacked, and had worked in the best interests of the community. The Union were not an aggressive body, and not one action could be pointed out where they had acted other than reasonably and in the interests of the goldfield. However, it was not reasonable or fair that the companies should refuse to let tributes and not man their ground. The Miners’ Union were determined to oppose the locking up of ground and put its foot upon protection being granted when companies refused to let tributes.<sup>377</sup>

Eventually agreement was reached for the cancellation of tributes whenever a property was sold, the tributers being paid wages for the time they had worked plus an amount of compensation determined when the tribute agreement was drawn up. Potts and Lucas agreed to assist the companies to abolish the annual tax of 1s per cent on their nominal capital.<sup>378</sup> When they discussed finding work for unemployed miners with the under-secretary, he recommended employing additional men in constructing the railway line to Thames.<sup>379</sup>

## WAIHI BREAKS AWAY

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<sup>376</sup> *Thames Star*, 14 June 1898, p. 2.

<sup>377</sup> *Thames Star*, 17 June 1898, p. 3.

<sup>378</sup> *Thames Star*, 18 June 1898, p. 4.

<sup>379</sup> *Thames Star*, 18 June 1898, p. 2.



When O’Keeffe was president, as described in the chapter on his life, there were more active attempts in 1901 to obtain better wages and conditions from the Conciliation Board and then the Arbitration Court, but without the success anticipated.<sup>380</sup> Dissatisfaction with this result and with the Thames union generally caused the more militant Waihi branch to form its own organisation.<sup>381</sup> It had been dissatisfied for some years with the running of the union; for instance, in May 1898 the chairman of a quarterly meeting announced that its efforts ‘to get a better system of representation for all branches of the Union had again met with no success’. After ‘an animated discussion’, a resolution was carried unanimously that the branch demanded ‘fair representation in the management’ and would develop a scheme for consideration at a general meeting of all branches; the support of other branches was sought.<sup>382</sup> A Waihi delegate named Campbell moved, at the annual meeting of the union in July 1898, that each branch committee should ‘have management of all purely local matters, and power to expend funds up to £10 on Union business’. All proposals requiring a large expenditure should be put to the members. Speaking in support of his resolution, Campbell

pointed out a feeling prevailed amongst the Waihi members that their branch was not being dealt with fairly, inasmuch as they had not been asked to vote on such expenditures as the erection of the Thames and Waihi halls, the settlement of J[ohn] Hatton’s<sup>383</sup> case at Waihi (who was paid £50 for relinquishing all further claims to the Union’s funds on account of an accident he had sustained), and the purchase of a piano for the Waihi hall.

This spending was against the rule that all expenditure over £20 should be submitted to a ballot. In response, the president pointed out that the halls were erected as investments, and ‘the settlement of Hatton’s case was carried out on the recommendation of the Waihi committee itself.- Mr Campbell said that might be, but it was wrong all the same, and they

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<sup>380</sup> See *Thames Star*, 8 May 1901, p. 2, 9 May 1901, pp. 2, 4, 10 May 1901, pp. 2, 4, 11 May 1901, pp. 2-4, 12 June 1901, p. 2, 4 October 1901, p. 2, 5 October 1901, pp. 2-3, 21 October 1901, p. 4; *Observer*, 12 October 1901, p. 3.

<sup>381</sup> See *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 March 1901, p. 24; *Thames Star*, 21 October 1901, p. 4, 25 October 1901, p. 3, 21 February 1902, p. 1, 1 September 1902, p. 4, 29 July 1903, p. 2.

<sup>382</sup> *Thames Star*, 12 May 1898, p. 3.

<sup>383</sup> See *Thames Star*, 7 February 1898, p. 4.

desired to get at the root of the evil'. Campbell insisted that the Waihi branch must be granted 'fuller powers than it at present held in order that it might look after the interests of the Union as a whole better'. Between 250 and 300 miners there were not members of the union, and he implied they would join a branch having a stronger voice in its management. At the moment, 'too much apathy was shown in the conduct of the union's business. He complained that the meeting had determined to vote on his various amendments as one resolution, rather than dealing with each separately, fearing that 'by taking them all as one they would not be receiving fair play'. His anticipations were correct, for although there was some sympathy for his point of view, including from a future president, O'Keeffe, his motion was lost by 29 votes to 11.<sup>384</sup> In 1903 the Waihi branch did break away.<sup>385</sup>

## DECLINE

In 1901, the president announced there were about 2,000 members throughout the peninsula, out of about 3,500 miners.<sup>386</sup> To be precise, there were 1,744 members.<sup>387</sup> With the decline of mining at Thames, the membership there had declined to a third of the earlier total of 800.<sup>388</sup> In July 1902, the *Thames Star* noted that 'there was a small attendance at the annual meeting of members of the Miners' Union last night'. At Thames there was 'very little interest' taken in the union, whereas at Waihi there was 'much more activity'.<sup>389</sup> In that year, there were 1,651 members, but with the splitting away of the Waihi branch in 1903 membership plummeted to 575.<sup>390</sup> The 'great depression' in Thames mining in the early twentieth century meant continued loss of membership and financial

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<sup>384</sup> *Thames Star*, 1 August 1898, p. 4.

<sup>385</sup> H.E. Holland, 'Ballot Box', R.S. Ross, *The Tragic Story of the Waihi Strike* (Wellington, 1913), pp. 15-16.

<sup>386</sup> *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 4.

<sup>387</sup> ' "Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1900" – Return showing Number of Members in each Industrial Union registered under', *AJHR*, 1901, H-11A, p. 3.

<sup>388</sup> *Thames Star*, 4 September 1901, p. 2.

<sup>389</sup> *Thames Star*, 29 July 1902, p. 2.

<sup>390</sup> ' "Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1900" – Returns showing Number of Members in each Industrial Union registered under', *AJHR*, 1902, H-11A, p. 3; 1903, H-11A, p. 3.

disaster for the union, as its officers admitted.<sup>391</sup> There was some recovery in later years, giving a total of 839 members in all branches in 1910; by comparison, the Waihi Amalgamated Miners and Workers Union had 1,146.<sup>392</sup> By 1920 there were 269 members, ten years later there were 212; the number fell to 188 in 1940, and to 50 in 1950. In 1958, the last year before it ceased to be registered under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, it had 32.<sup>393</sup> When an application for cancellation of its registration was made in March 1959, it reported that out of 35 members, all but one had voted for cancellation: the other member could not be located.<sup>394</sup> The *Observer* noted that, during its first 40 years, it had never called a strike,<sup>395</sup> and its declining membership and financial resources meant that it did not do so in later years.

## CONCLUSION

More radical unions must have despised the Thames Miners' Union. In most Hauraki mines and in particular the Te Aroha-Waiorongomai-Tui ones, there were no calls to challenge the capitalist system or the prerogatives of management. There were only three strikes at Te Aroha; a serious one in January 1884 prompted by wages being cut,<sup>396</sup> a short one in 1897 when demands that an English company pay higher wages failed ('the greater part' of the strikers then left, being replaced by miners imported

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<sup>391</sup> Thames Miners' Union, 'Officers' Reports for the years ending June 20, 1903, 30 June 1904', photocopies provided by Bert Roth.

<sup>392</sup> 'Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1908 – Number of Members in each Industrial Union registered under the Act...', *AJHR*, 1910, H-11A, p. 4.

<sup>393</sup> 'Labour Department.– Report for the Year ended 31st March, 1920', *AJHR*, 1920, H-11, p. 14; 'Department of Labour, Annual Report for the Year ended 31st March, 1930', *AJHR*, 1930, H-11, p. 19; 'Department of Labour, Annual Report for the Year ended 31st March, 1940', *AJHR*, 1940, H-11, p. 29; 'Department of Labour and Employment.- Report for the year Ended 31 March, 1950', *AJHR*, 1950, H-11, p. 105; 'Department of Labour – Report for Year Ended 31 March 1958, *AJHR*, 1958, H-11, p. 75; 'Department of Labour – Report for Year Ended 31 March 1959, *AJHR*, 1959, H-11, p. 73.

<sup>394</sup> 'Application for Cancellation of Registration of Industrial Union', 25 March 1959, Labour Department, L 3, 2/203, ANZ-W.

<sup>395</sup> *Observer*, 19 March 1931, p. 4.

<sup>396</sup> See paper on the Te Aroha strike.

from elsewhere),<sup>397</sup> and an odd one when Joseph Campbell tried to control his workers' behaviour, as noted. The general mood was of harmony between miners and managers, who had combined to form the union. As miners saw their interests as being intertwined with their employers, they worked with the latter to defend the interests of their industry against rival industries and governments that did not provide the aid they sought. Over time some unionists became less passive, notably at Waihi, where a large overseas company increasingly acted against their interests, but apart from there no strikes were called.

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<sup>397</sup> 'Werahiko', 'Our Te Aroha Letter', *New Zealand Mining Standard*, 6 March 1897, p. 5.