

LARRIKINS IN THE TE AROHA DISTRICT, MOSTLY IN THE  
NINETEENTH CENTURY

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## LARRIKINS IN THE TE AROHA DISTRICT, MOSTLY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

**Abstract:** *Larrikinism was offensive to the respectable, who worried about its causes and what was to be done to curtail it. Examples are given of the wide variety of petty but annoying behaviour indulged in by young men, at all kinds of events. Even entertainments and church services were not immune. Characteristics included bad language, loafing, noise, abuse, vulgarity, furious riding, playing football in a manner than endangered others, vandalism, and being affected by alcohol.*

*Examples are given of the remarkable number of times that larrikins disrupted church services and meetings, along with temperance gatherings. A variety of social events were affected, and even the reading room in the library was not immune. In particular, larrikins infested the domain and its hot baths, potentially threatening the tourist trade. Annoying women was common, and New Year's Eve provided another opportunity for making trouble. Vandalism of both public and private property caused on-going concern. And some vandals came from elsewhere to annoy the locals.*

*To cope with larrikinism, some solutions such as special clubs for the young were suggested, but had little success, as the problem never went away. Perhaps the problem was exaggerated, for although it never went away, normally larrikinism did not lead to a life of crime. 'Youthful high spirits', perhaps, but irritating none the less.*

### DEFINING LARRIKINS

In 1890, the *Observer Man* (otherwise the O.M.) at Te Aroha reported that the settlement was 'about to be further stirred up by the Salvationists', meaning the Salvation Army, 'who are about to make a raid on the place. Wonder is they have left us quiet so long. There are some notable characters want looking after'.<sup>1</sup> That 'notable characters' were a constant irritant to the more respectable was illustrated by the description of 'The Hoodlum: A Creature of Queer Habits', contributed to the *Te Aroha News* by 'Tui Pa' in 1926:

Species: The hoodlum is a species of human biped, generally male, although not always confined to this sex. In appearance it

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<sup>1</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 8 February 1890, p. 15.

represents the ordinary biped of the “genus homo,” that is distinguished by an almost total lack of brains or common sense, his mentality being exceedingly low.

Habits: It is mainly of nocturnal habits, though it has frequently been seen during the day. Its object in life would appear to be to make itself as objectionable as possible to its fellow creatures, and it delights in creating nocturnal disturbances of a noisy and violent nature. It is fond of making a din and will go to any length to accomplish this object. It is frequently held up as an example of the proverb, “Empty vessels make most sound.” It is possessed of a high, strained voice, always in use, and has been observed to break into an inane cackle without any apparent provocation.

Food: It subsists chiefly upon a diet of beer and whiskey, but so weak is its head that it has been observed to be completely overwhelmed with a mere effluvia of a cork.

Uses: Nil.

Habitat: It is chiefly found in cities and small towns, and generally wherever there is a crowd.

If steps are taken on the first appearance of this pest it can usually be eradicated without much trouble, but when neglected it is apt to become a public nuisance.<sup>2</sup>

Larrikins were usually young males, as an 1890 comment illustrates: ‘Some of our young coach-drivers are coming to the fore with larrikinism’.<sup>3</sup> ‘Female larrikins’ did exist, but were a very minor problem compared to their male equivalent; for instance, in 1889, ‘the three village maidens were evidently much amused by the lecture on Wednesday evening. We would advise them not to make their remarks quite so audible’.<sup>4</sup> Although the ages of larrikins ranged from teenagers to men of mature age, the types of behaviour varied little.

### CAUSES OF LARRIKINISM

In 1892, the O.M. considered that ‘Big Willie should close the Monte Carlo, as it is a bad thing for young fellows’.<sup>5</sup> The temptations of gambling continued to be of concern, as a resident wrote in 1901:

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Tui Pa’, ‘The Hoodlum: A Creature of Queer Habits’, *Te Aroha News*, 22 January 1926, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 8 November 1890, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 27 July 1889, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 20 August 1892, p. 19.

I hear a strange story of a man in this town who by some means or other has gained an influence over some lads and induces them to resort to his house. Whilst there card playing is indulged in, the stakes being – matches. This mild species of gambling is carried on nearly every night till near eleven o'clock. The frequenters are mere boys, and one of them informed me that swearing was permitted. Now, sir, this seems to me to be a terrible thing going on in our midst. Boys are only too ready to learn evil, without having an opportunity for deliberately learning it placed in their way by a man old enough to know better. The stakes may only be matches at present, but it can easily be imagined that they will soon play for something higher. Is there no law or by-law to prevent this corruption of our youths going on in our midst?<sup>6</sup>

Eleven years later, a resident called on the Anglican vicar to

take a hand in exterminating the gambling den in this town, which it is alleged has existed for years. Card playing for money is said to continue from about mid-day on Saturday till well into Sunday night, and it would perhaps be an eye-opener to the Vicar to see the number of young lads that go in and out of this place during these two days.<sup>7</sup>

Strong drink was another cause of larrikinism. Harry Kenrick, the resident magistrate for Hauraki in the first half of the 1880s,<sup>8</sup> commented that 'he was constantly receiving letters relative to their sons, whom they said were enticed into hotels by the licensees, and thus led into bad ways'.<sup>9</sup> While he was referring to Thames, it is highly likely that similar encouragement to increase publicans' profits existed in the Te Aroha district.

### EXAMPLES OF LARRIKINISM

In September 1883, 'A Resident' of Te Aroha wrote about 'the way the larrikin element is spreading in our township':

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from unknown resident to *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 13 March 1901, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from 'Observer', *Te Aroha News*, 20 August 1912, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>9</sup> *Thames Star*, 23 November 1883, p. 2.

On Wednesday evening last (as well as on many previous occasions) several youths amused themselves by throwing stones at the house of an inoffensive woman, who, I am sure, does no one any harm, if left alone, and they take a delight in continually tormenting her. It is also the practice of these larrikins of an evening to knock at people's doors and then run away, also to remove signboards and play a variety of other larrikin tricks.<sup>10</sup>

On the same date, a gossip writer reported what had happened to the man in charge of a Waiorongomai dance: 'One larrikin fastened a good size pigtail to his coat, which made him the laughing-stock for all the evening, poor fellow!'<sup>11</sup> The following month, a *Te Aroha News* editorial gave details of several forms of larrikinism:

It would hardly be supposed, in a quiet country place like Te Aroha, where the community is so small, that larrikinism should have taken root and flourished beyond all reasonable limit. Unfortunately such is the case, and it has now assumed such proportions that it will be absolutely necessary to take some active steps to check the evil before it attains a greater hold, both for the sake of the public and even for the good of the offenders themselves. There are in the township a body of lads of from about fourteen to nineteen or twenty years of age, whose conduct is neither more or less than disgraceful and infamous on every occasion when it is possible to misconduct themselves. The baths, for instance, is one very favourite resort for them to congregate, and their behaviour is frequently scandalous. It is their especial delight to frequent the baths when females are visiting them, and the language is at times both vile and obscene. So bad has this become that a great many ladies are afraid to use the baths, and the larrikins have it all their own way entirely. Some young blackguards are also in the habit of climbing on the roof, throwing stones on it, and indeed their ingenuity in annoyance is extraordinary. The Domain Board, we are glad to say, are about to take active steps to put a stop to the nuisance, and some of the youths, if they persist in their ill-conduct, will find themselves unpleasantly introduced to the Bench very shortly. At public entertainments of all kinds the larrikins take full possession, and it is to be hoped that the conductors in future will eject those disturbing order without hesitation or distinction of persons.... On Sunday nights when services are held in the Hall they have a specially high time of it, laughing, talking, running about outside the building, in addition to smoking and striking matches. One

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from 'A Resident', *Te Aroha News*, 1 September 1883, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> 'Waiorongomai', *Observer*, 1 September 1883, p. 12.

more than one occasion congregations have been greatly annoyed and disgusted, and several times Sergeant Emerson has had to disperse the transgressors. Altogether, the evil has got to such a pitch that something must be done to stop it, and it becomes the duty of the police to interfere, as the offence is now so rampant. Unfortunately, a very large proportion of the lads are the sons of most respectable parents in the town, and it is surprising that for a moment they allow them to run wild as they do. What the results will be when these youths grow up can be readily guessed, and fruits of present neglect or indifference will not only be disastrous to the prospects of the boys themselves, but will bring bitter and unknown trouble to their negligent parents.<sup>12</sup>

In 1886, a parent protested at the 'furious riding' of many of the errand boys. 'Only a day or two since I saw a nurse girl nearly run over' on a street corner, 'it being a miracle how she and the baby escaped; the only answer she received being a sneering, "Why don't you look out," or something to that effect'.<sup>13</sup> Four days later, three young men were caught furiously riding horses in Whitaker Street, and were each fined 10s; if not paid, they would be imprisoned for three days.<sup>14</sup> Two of the offenders, aged 18 and 19,<sup>15</sup> were the sons of Clem Cornes, a leading miner manager,<sup>16</sup> and the third, aged 25,<sup>17</sup> was the son of George Devey, a cabinetmaker and a prominent Wesleyan.<sup>18</sup> In 1889, a 'gang of young larrikins' mobbed a rider whose frightened horse threw him; he was taken, unconscious, to the Hamilton hospital.<sup>19</sup>

Noisy and rude behaviour was disliked. For instance, the O.M. asked, in 1888, 'Who were those boys that made such a noise coming home from the ball'.<sup>20</sup> Some 'boys' were even sticklers for correct etiquette: 'Who was

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<sup>12</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 27 October 1883, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from 'Parent', *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1886, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 58-60/1886, BCDG 11220/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>15</sup> Baptismal Record of Alfred Richard Cornes, born 20 January 1867, Thames Register of Baptisms 1868-1874, no. 173, Anglican Archives, Auckland; Birth Certificate of Clement Augustus Cornes, 2 October 1868, 1868/15659, BDM.

<sup>16</sup> See paper on Clement Augustus Cornes.

<sup>17</sup> Marriage Certificate of William George Devey, 2 January 1884, 1884/248, BDM.

<sup>18</sup> See paper on George Devey and his family.

<sup>19</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 October 1889, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 1 December 1888, p. 17.

the unmannerly dude that the boys were abusing for keeping his hat on at the concert?’<sup>21</sup> In 1890, *Te Aroha’s O.M.*, criticized ‘loafers’: ‘In every town there is a place where the genus loafer congregates. *Te Aroha* is no exception; by the Hot Springs Hotel there is a bridge and the rails of this are always occupied by a lot of disreputable characters who perch there like hens on a roost, criticizing the passers by in very audible tones’.<sup>22</sup> In 1900, ‘Order’ complained about ‘the way the lads roam about our streets and in the Domain, passing insulting remarks to passers-by, etc’; such behaviour was ‘really getting unbearable’.<sup>23</sup>

Playing football in the main street caused fears *Te Aroha* would ‘soon lose our good name for order and good behaviour’:

It beats me hollow why our local constable does not put this down with a strong hand. Some day a very serious accident will be the consequence if this dangerous practice is allowed. On Wednesday evening a gentleman returning from Waiorongomai in his buggy, whilst passing Ellis’ coach factory had an unpleasant experience, and might have been very serious. Fortunately the horse he was driving is a quiet one. The football play was in full swing at Roberts corner. The ball was deliberately kicked over the horse and the return kick landed it into the buggy.<sup>24</sup>

Some spectators at sporting events indulged in larrikin behaviour, as the *Te Aroha News* lamented in 1899:

Many of the associations of athletics, more especially of football and of the ordinary sports meeting, are vulgar, cheap and nasty. No other form of sport, except horse-racing, draws together the riff-raff, rag-tag and hob-tail of a place as do these two. Where else can such another set of hoodlums be seen as that which barracks on the outskirts of the football field?<sup>25</sup>

The previous year, when reporting plans to develop the domain’s sporting facilities, it wanted care ‘taken to exclude the disorderly elements so frequently associated with our sports and pastimes, as the gates would be

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<sup>21</sup> ‘*Te Aroha*’, *Observer*, 19 July 1890, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> ‘*Te Aroha*’, *Observer*, 8 February 1890, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from ‘Order’, *Te Aroha News*, 8 March 1900, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from ‘Remedy’, *Te Aroha News*, 1 August 1903, *Te Aroha Warden’s Court*, Newspaper Clippings 1895-1905, BBAV 11532/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>25</sup> *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Observer*, 11 November 1899, p. 4.

under the control of the municipal authorities'.<sup>26</sup> In 1903, after a rugby match against Waihou, there was 'likely to be a sequel to the unseemly conduct of a squad of youths at the close of the match'.<sup>27</sup>

A visitor wrote to the *Te Aroha News* in early January 1911 'to focus attention on an intensely disagreeable feature of this little town, with the hope that the authorities will be sufficiently stimulated to put it down'. The 'hooligan element', with its usual 'intense vulgarity', considered 'the passerby as a fair butt for its ribaldry. It is an element of the worst kind of provincialism, bad enough in children, but deplorable when indulged in by creatures who, while men in appearance, so evidence the ape-ishness of their minds'.<sup>28</sup> An editorial in the *Te Aroha Mail* in late January was headed 'The Hoodlums Again:

Is it a sort of aftermath of the Christmas holidays, or what? Just about this time of the year there always seems to be a recrudescence of the disgusting larrikin nuisance that is fast making Te Aroha a by-word to visitors and doing the place incalculable mischief. If we could think that the manifestations were merely effervescence of youth, it would not be so bad, but the evidences are those of low blackguardism, and the cause will have to be eradicated. On Saturday night, somewhere about midnight, the Hooligans removed a dozen or so of the enamelled warning notices from the domain gardens and arranged them along Whitaker Street. This is humour. Sometime during the week the same gang visited the showground, wantonly destroyed a number of pipes and did other damage; on Sunday a posse of the same kidney, if not the same, were detected in the act of shooting Mr [Thomas] Gavin's turkeys.<sup>29</sup> These things are bad enough, but they pale into insignificance by the light of the foul exhibitions of language and conduct that blight certain street corners of the town on Saturday nights, and, indeed, on almost any night.<sup>30</sup>

'A Twenty-years Parent' applauded these comments, and deplored the 'off-shoot of society' which was 'daily growing', with 'the "loafing" element' congregating on street corners, 'smoking, expectorating, and using the vilest

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<sup>26</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 31 May 1898, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 11 August 1903, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from 'Another Visitor', *Te Aroha News*, 10 January 1911, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>30</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha Mail*, 24 January 1911, Press Cutting Book, Government Spa, Te Aroha Hot Pools, held in Te Aroha Library.



of language'. The *Auckland Star* had 'a strong comment' about this behaviour, 'and when outsiders comment on such a business it is time for those responsible to nip the trouble in the bud'.<sup>31</sup> The following month, the rival newspaper reported 'hoodlum gangs' going 'around at night howling, screeching and yelling, putting rotten fruit into shops, banging windows and doors, throwing missiles on roofs', and killing a valuable horse. As well, they let dogs out onto the roads, cut bicycle tyres, and damaged windows.<sup>32</sup>

Sexual immorality was rarely mentioned. As an example of possible sexual misbehaviour, much more discreet than the rowdy carrying on in the streets, in 1917 a correspondent suggested that the domain gates should be closed by a certain time at night. The writer had 'seen quite young girls accompanied by young men emerging from the grounds at a late hour', a practice which parents should forbid, and the police should prompt these 'night birds' to go home to bed.<sup>33</sup>

#### DISTURBING RELIGIOUS SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

In December 1882, the *Observer* reproved some local men:

If those individuals at Te Aroha who make a practice of waiting outside the church every Sunday evening call themselves gentlemen, it is a great pity they so degrade themselves as to be a source of annoyance to both the clergyman and the congregation by their coarse jokes and disgraceful behaviour under the windows of the church, especially that young "knight of the theodolite."<sup>34</sup>

This 'knight' was a surveyor, indicating that larrikins were not restricted to the unskilled or under-employed.

When the Methodists held a Home Mission meeting in the Waiorongomai Public Hall in November 1888, they were disrupted by noises off, for which parents were blamed: 'A few youngsters outside made things rather lively in their own style by playing "marches" on tin whistles and kerosene drums, and setting some dogs on pigs, driving them under the

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<sup>31</sup> Letter from 'A Twenty-years Parent', *Te Aroha Mail*, 31 January 1911, Press Cutting Book, Government Spa, Te Aroha Hot Pools, held in Te Aroha Library.

<sup>32</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 February 1911, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from 'a correspondent', *Te Aroha News*, 12 September 1917, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Observer*, 30 December 1882, p. 249.

Hall, with an average amount of barking and squealing'.<sup>35</sup> The following August, 'a few choice spirits' of 'hoodlums and larrikins' attended a service in the Te Aroha hall one Sunday night: 'Their conduct throughout the service was most reprehensible'.<sup>36</sup> The following May, when an entertainment organized by all the Protestant denominations was held at Waiorongomai to raise funds for the Sunday School, a visiting Wesleyan minister 'administered a well merited reproof to some lads who had not kept quiet as requested by the Chairman, and reminded them of the verse which says: "A word to the wise is sufficient for them," and asked them – that being the case – what must those be who required to be spoken to more than once? One lad answered up – fools'.<sup>37</sup> When a Salvation Army contingent from Paeroa held its usual weekly service in the main street of Te Aroha on a Wednesday night in 1900, 'a party of hoodlums ... interjected remarks of a kind, showing to what degree of larrikinism they are capable of sinking. Their conduct was more like that indulged in at times by a city guttersnipe'.<sup>38</sup>

#### DISRUPTING TEMPERANCE MEETINGS

Meetings of the Band of Hope, a temperance movement aimed at young people, were constantly targeted, as, for instance, in October 1883:

The proceedings were very much disturbed by a number of young fellows outside, who by throwing open the door, climbing up at the window, and calling out in a most rude manner succeeded in causing great annoyance.... Some of the ringleaders are known, and prompt and strong measures will be taken to stop the budding larrikinism.<sup>39</sup>

Such 'strong measures' were regularly threatened, but appear either not to have been taken or, if taken, not to have succeeded, for the problem continued. The first regular meeting of the Waiorongomai Band of Hope, held in the schoolroom in January 1884, 'was enlivened by the larrikin

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<sup>35</sup> *New Zealand Methodist*, 17 November 1888, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 24 August 1889, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 10 May 1890, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 30 June 1900, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 27 October 1883, p. 2.

element, the roof being made a receptacle for general sundries'.<sup>40</sup> When they held a magic lantern show in July 1885, the speaker's attempts to explain them

were unsuccessful, owing to the noisy and ungentlemanly conduct of some young men present.... Their conduct and language was certainly shameful in the extreme, such as deserves severe punishment, and we are informed if repeated, it is intended to hand the offenders over to the police in future. The ringleaders are well known.<sup>41</sup>

An entertainment by the Te Aroha Band of Hope in June 1887 was 'greatly marred by the unseemly conduct of a small number of youths, whose noisy demonstrations were a source of much annoyance, and called forth a sharp rebuke from the Rev. Chairman'.<sup>42</sup> A meeting of the Waiorongomai body in April 1889 prompted another newspaper condemnation:

A number of young lads who hung around the Hall and in the porch occasioned considerable annoyance to both those taking part and the audience, by shouting, whistling, stamping, etc. They were remonstrated with several times in a kindly manner, but persisted in their conduct, until at last the Chairman had to speak out and said such conduct was simply most disgraceful. It is to be hoped that Waiorongomai will not gain a name for "larrikinism." Should this sort of conduct be persisted in, stringent measures will have to be adopted to have it put a stop to.<sup>43</sup>

At another Waiorongomai meeting, in August 1889, 'one or two ignorant young fellows' hid in the porch 'and in sundry ways made themselves a nuisance'.<sup>44</sup> A local correspondent provided more details and again threatened to expose the perpetrators:

During the proceedings the harmony was much marred by several youths at the door, who were shouting and gesticulating much to the annoyance of the performers. These youths should certainly

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<sup>40</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 January 1884, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1885, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Waikato Times*, 16 June 1887, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1889, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 10 August 1889, p. 2.

have known better, and should they on another occasion of this sort be troublesome, I shall ask you to publish their names.<sup>45</sup>

In September 1890, Te Aroha's O.M. criticized those who disrupted 'a most successful meeting of the Band of Hope' and threatened to publicly shame them:

A very interesting programme was gone through, and all present appeared to enjoy themselves immensely. It is a great pity that the lads (I won't say hoodlums) cannot manage to behave themselves better at these meetings, as the way they carried on was something disgraceful. The next time they carry on, I will send you their names in full, so that you can put them in your paper.<sup>46</sup>

A report on a very successful Band of Hope meeting in 1894, which attracted an overflowing audience, noted that 'the meeting was the most orderly one held here for a long time',<sup>47</sup> indicating that disruption was common at such gatherings.

Prohibition advocates were very unpopular with some residents, as illustrated in 1911. An Auckland clergyman was constantly interrupted in a rowdy August meeting.<sup>48</sup> Two months later, a no-license speaker tried to give 'an electioneering oration in Whitaker Street on Saturday evening but his remarks failed to be appreciated by the crowd that surrounded him. The audience indeed was so hostile that the orator at one time was so roughly handled that police protection had to be sought'.<sup>49</sup> The following year, the Tourist Department prohibited public meetings in the domain to avoid breaches of the peace; before the previous election and no-license poll, often 'the proceedings became very rowdy and a good deal of horseplay was indulged in'.<sup>50</sup>

## DISTURBING SOCIAL EVENTS

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<sup>45</sup> Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 14 August 1889, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 6 September 1890, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 19 July 1894, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1911, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 October 1911, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Secretary, Tourist Department, to Minister of Tourism, 22 May 1912, Tourist Department, TO 1, 12/431, ANZ-W.

At a concert held to raise money for the Church of England in July 1883, the local newspaper regretted 'to say that the larrikin element was strongly developed amongst some of the juveniles, and the noise they made greatly marred the enjoyment of many in some of the best pieces'. In future, 'provision should be made for the expulsion of ill-mannered lads, no matter who they may be',<sup>51</sup> a hint that the sons of some respectable people had been involved.

In June 1887, a local correspondent, in complaining about a Band of Hope meeting being disturbed by 'noisy demonstrations' by some youths, noted that the problem was widespread. 'This species of larrikinism, which is encouraged by a few whose more mature years should have taught them better manners, is becoming a such frequent occurrence at most of our entertainments as to be regarded as a standing nuisance, and some means of repressing it is much required'.<sup>52</sup> The O.M. had to reprove the noisy yet again in September 1890: 'It was very rude of those two larrikins at the back to make such a noise at the concert. I suppose they were too thick-headed to appreciate good music and singing'.<sup>53</sup> Two months later, he asked: 'Who were the young men that were enjoying the refreshing weed in the back seats of the hall on Saturday night?'<sup>54</sup> When reporting on a concert and dance put on by the Volunteers in 1893, it was 'once again' the O.M.'s 'duty to draw the attention of the constable to the larrikin element, who seems to go to these entertainments for the purpose of annoying other people'.<sup>55</sup> Four years later, at the Volunteers' moonlight parade some bystanders 'made themselves conspicuous by issuing orders themselves while the men were on the march, causing great annoyance to the officers in charge. Such unseemly conduct did not reflect any credit on the parties who so far forgot themselves'.<sup>56</sup>

Disruptive and even dangerous behaviour continued, as for instance in 1907:

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<sup>51</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1883, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 16 June 1887, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 6 September 1890, p. 18.

<sup>54</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 22 November 1890, p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 10 June 1893, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup> 'Twinkler', 'Te Aroha Notes', *Thames Advertiser*, 17 August 1897, p. 3.

Complaints have been made about a lot of overgrown boys hanging round the doorway of the Public Hall when socials are on, who pass remarks on the people inside. We think it is about time the door was closed, and those sort kept outside. Last night one blackguard threw a piece of crockery up the middle of the hall and it was only by good luck that a lady was not struck.<sup>57</sup>

Two years later, residents were wondering how to control

the larrikin element at our local entertainments. As things are at present the larrikin comes between performer and public in the most outrageous effrontery, with all kinds of interruptions. This abuse is so serious that it is scarcely safe for people not in good health to attend our public entertainments on account of the uproar created by these probably not ill meaning, but altogether unthinking youths, who intend, apparently, that no one may hear what is being rendered.<sup>58</sup>

The following year, 'Disgusted' described the behaviour of some young men at a performance by the Dramatic Company as 'anything but pleasant'. They were 'none too sober' upon arrival, and 'as the evening wore on they produced sundry bottles of beer', to the annoyance of all, and were so noisy that 'portions of the play could not be heard'. At least one of them 'was a son of a respectable resident'.<sup>59</sup>

After an entertainment in 1912, 'Annoyed' complained about hooligans crushing peanuts with their boots and shuffling their feet during musical items,<sup>60</sup> and 'Indignant' wrote that the 'band of hobble-de-hoys and hoodlums' in 'their vulgar efforts to assume the role of humorists, succeeded only in creating a nuisance of the most disgusting character'. The 'ape-like conduct' and 'apparently inexhaustible capacity for consuming peanuts displayed by these clowns, brought before my mind a vision of Darwin, soaring triumphant above a cloud of scepticism and adverse criticism'.<sup>61</sup>

## MISBEHAVING IN THE DOMAIN AND THE HOT POOLS

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<sup>57</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 18 July 1907, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 February 1909, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from 'Disgusted', *Te Aroha News*, 18 August 1910, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from 'Annoyed', *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1912, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from 'Indignant', *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1912, p. 3.

In June 1884, the local newspaper briefly mentioned ‘A Disgraceful Nuisance’:

We regret to have to draw attention to the fact that some low-minded individuals, whom we cannot class as members of the community, have been betraying their filthy nature by committing nuisances in the immediate vicinity of the public baths. We do not wish to refer at any length to the matter, but hope that a mere mention of the fact will be effectual in terminating an exercise of such a low filthy disposition.<sup>62</sup>

A similarly vague but clearly insanitary offence occurred four years later, when, after considering a complaint from the caretakers ‘against a certain youth of misconduct’, the domain board barred him from the baths for six months.<sup>63</sup> The board revisited this decision at its next meeting, it having been suggested that another ‘lad’ was guilty of this ‘gross misdemeanour’. One member ‘was of opinion the man who committed the offence should be most severely punished, and every possible effort made to suppress such conduct, but if there was any doubt about who the culprit was, the person accused should be afforded every opportunity of clearing his character’. After he and the secretary ‘spoke in the highest terms of the boy’s general character’, it was agreed to allow him to produce evidence proving he was not the offender, and, when he did, he was cleared.<sup>64</sup> The youth responsible was never traced, and, fortunately for the baths’ reputation for promoting health, no such ‘misdemeanour’ recurred.

In June 1884, several men forced their way into a bathhouse.<sup>65</sup> The man appointed to administer a new system of paying for baths recalled, in 1910, that he ‘opened up about 6.30 a.m., and found that Dick Brenan, Charlie Peters, and several others, were already in possession of No. 2 and enjoying their dips. Dick can give the sequel to this!’<sup>66</sup> Brenan may well have, but the relevant newspaper has been lost. The sequel was that a caretaker was appointed to prevent this and other abuses. The domain board was ‘determined to put a stop to the larrikinism, which has at times

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<sup>62</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 9 June 1883, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 24 November 1888, p. 2; 15 December 1888, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 21 June 1884, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> *Te Aroha Mail*, 3 November 1910, Press Cutting Book, Government Spa, Te Aroha Hot Pools, held in Te Aroha library.

made a visit to the springs the reverse of agreeable, especially to ladies. An information has been laid against certain individuals for making a forcible entry into one of the buildings'. A correspondent hoped the penalty would be sufficiently severe 'to put a stop at once to the rowdyism which has been so prevalent in the past'.<sup>67</sup> Brenan, Peters, and Thomas Hinton were charged with causing damage amounting to 5s, but as no evidence of damage could be produced the case was dismissed.<sup>68</sup>

Hinton's life is summarized in the paper on crime. Charles Peters was a miner at Waitekauri and Waiorongomai.<sup>69</sup> Brenan, a bootmaker,<sup>70</sup> was 29.<sup>71</sup> He would become a prominent and respected member of the community;<sup>72</sup> so well-known that a letter from an Australian who had forgotten his surname was delivered without delay despite being addressed to 'Dick, Te Aroha, New Zealand' with a sketch showing where his shop was.<sup>73</sup> Brenan was noted for his quick wit. In 1892, he said 'he'll have all the women to shoe yet, and all the men to boot'.<sup>74</sup> In 1931, it was recalled that a manager of the Bank of New Zealand's branch kept a donkey for his children.

One day a visitor from Auckland was talking to Dick Brenan when loud and long rang out the brays of the donkey. "Good gracious! What on earth is that?" ejaculated the man. "Another overdraft," replied Dick, with a merry twinkle in his eye. So soon it was known far and wide that up in Te Aroha the bank manager had a donkey which brayed every time a customer visited the bank about his overdraft.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 21 June 1884, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 51/1884, BCDG 11220/1a, ANZ-A; Magistrate's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 28 June 1884, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> See *Tauranga Electoral Rolls, 1882*, p. 21, 1885, p. 22; advertisement, *Thames Star*, 9 July 1883, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1884, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> See *Descriptive Handbook to the Waikato: Its condition and resources* (Hamilton, 1880), p. 20; *Te Aroha News*, 21 December 1914, p. 3, 13 September 1935, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Birth Certificate of Kate Frances Brenan, 24 July 1885, 1885/10197, BDM.

<sup>72</sup> For example, *Te Aroha News*, 30 October 1886, p. 2, 23 January 1889, p. 2, 13 April 1889, p. 2, 5 October 1895, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 September 1935, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 13 August 1892, p. 19.

<sup>75</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 4 May 1931, p. 3.



In 1890, the board was told that ‘several visitors had complained of young fellow using the Octagon for sitting about smoking in’. The police had already been instructed to stop this behaviour because this ‘larrikinism’ caused ‘a good deal of annoyance’.<sup>76</sup> Another visitor complained, five years later, about how the library in the domain was infested with undesirables:

Owing to ill-health I have had occasionally to visit Te Aroha for the benefit of its baths and rest. Your Library in the Park is one you should be proud of, but I have experienced on several Saturdays and Sundays instead of it being a place for quiet retreat it is a seat of larrikinism and noise. Troops of children over-run the Reading room, turning over the books, many too young to read but to look at the pictures. I have seen the pages of some books deliberately torn and bindings injured, on week days after school I have seen mobs of children troop in with greasy hands from their lunch, and you can imagine the effect upon the books they handle. On Sunday last there were some young men evidently illiterate and half drunk who could not read, they asked questions from the children, the language they used was vile. I think that the police should watch for these larrikins. Ladies had to retire.

The writer wanted more control over the books, ‘children of tender years’ banned from the reading room, where silence should be enforced, and the police to visit on weekends and ‘arrest any person using obscene language such as I have heard’.<sup>77</sup>

The Octagon continued to attract larrikins. In January 1898, ‘the nuisance, about which so many visitors complain, of the assemblage of a number of noisy youths in the Octagon on Sunday night still continues. We have more than once appealed to the better feelings of these lads’, to no avail, and the police might have to be asked to act for fear their behaviour would scare away visitors.<sup>78</sup> Four months later, ‘Octagon’ called on the domain board to end larrikinism, citing a recent example:

It was only a few weeks back that one of our citizens, after having his dip, was standing on the edge of the bath – dressed – when one of the bystanders, evidently for a joke, pushed him into the bath ... clothes and all. Now, this is the kind of business that will

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<sup>76</sup> Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 5 March 1890, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from ‘Visitor’, *Te Aroha News*, 13 March 1895, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 13 January 1898, p. 2.

tend to bring our baths into disrepute, and one which the Board should put down with a high hand.<sup>79</sup>

In the next issue, 'A Casual Visitor' wrote that 'at times hoodlums get into the baths who disport themselves in such a manner that they splash the water over the whole shop, making matters uncomfortable for less hilarious bathers and entailing a deal of extra labour on the caretakers'.<sup>80</sup> Another visitor complained of graffiti on seats, trees, and buildings.<sup>81</sup> In 1904, an 'acrobatic exhibition' by some young men provoked several complaints from those seeking medicinal cures.<sup>82</sup> Two years later, more attempts to stop rowdiness in the baths were reported.<sup>83</sup>

In 1907, the *Te Aroha News* lamented that the visitors' book held at the domain office was 'degenerating' into a record of

the promiscuous and not always polite remarks of Tom, Dick and Harry. When larrikins are allowed to make such entries such as "billy plu plu, Timbuckto, fairy pig's elbow," it is time to keep [it] where it will be properly used. It is no honour for the Governor or any other prominent visitor to be asked to make an entry amongst such a collection of vulgarisms.<sup>84</sup>

### ANNOYING WOMEN

In March 1881, a Thames newspaper published 'an amusing incident' at Te Aroha:

A man and his wife, who were staying in one of the hotels, were overheard by two or three young sparks planning a bathe in the hot springs behind the police camp. The youthful spirits resolved to have a bit of fun, so secreting themselves near the springs they awaited the arrival of the couple. Presently they appeared, and entered the baths, and gambolled in the warm water for about half an hour. The lady especially was extremely pleased with the dip, and on leaving the bath exclaimed, "That's kapai" [good].<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Letter from 'Octagon', *Te Aroha News*, 23 April 1898, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from 'A Casual Visitor', *Te Aroha News*, 26 April 1898, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from 'A Visitor', *Te Aroha News*, 3 May 1898, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 13 May 1904, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 24 May 1906, reprinted in *Te Aroha News*, 31 March 1978, p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 19 March 1907, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> David McGill, *The Reed Dictionary of New Zealand Slang* (Auckland, 2003), p. 119.

This remark so tickled the young men that they made tracks to the hotel, where they spread the joke about, and when Mr J\_\_\_\_ and his wife entered they were greatly surprised and annoyed to hear everyone exclaiming “That’s kapai; that’s kapai.” The mischievous young men of the town do not lose an opportunity when they see the poor woman close at hand to reiterate her unfortunate remark, and she is almost driven crazy in consequence.<sup>86</sup>

The *Observer* Man issued a warning in 1887 about similar eavesdropping:

Young ladies, when sitting down on the seats in the Domain should take care where they sit, for it seems to be a pastime for the Te Aroha hoodlums, including some who are old enough to know better, to get under the seats and listen to what the girls have to say, and meet at different corners and laugh to themselves at what they have heard.<sup>87</sup>

A wedding at the registrar’s office in 1884 was intended to be a private affair, ‘but the precocious youths of the township, seeing a young lady in bridal array wending her way to the Court House, quickly spread the news that there was “something on,” and the building was soon taken possession of by a number of people’. After the ceremony, ‘the larrikins with very audible chirps reminded the happy bridegroom that it was now his duty and privilege to salute his fair partner, and to his credit be it said he quickly acted upon the suggestion’.<sup>88</sup>

The rails of the Whitaker Street bridge crossing the stream beside the Hot Springs Hotel were a favourite place for men to ‘perch’ and ‘gaze at the ladies as they pass along’.<sup>89</sup> In 1890, the domain board was informed that ‘some lady visitors had complained to the Caretaker of being much annoyed by remarks from young men, lounging about in the Octagon’.<sup>90</sup> Two years later, a visitor described the unroofed private baths at the hot pools as ‘a

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<sup>86</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 31 March 1881, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Te Aroha Twists’, *Observer*, 30 April 1887, p. 18.

<sup>88</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 March 1884, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 1 March 1890, p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 5 March 1890, p. 2.

disgraceful Misnomer, a lady is expected to go into one of these boxes with perhaps a larrikin admiring her over the wall'.<sup>91</sup>

In 1896, the *Te Aroha Times* reported more complaints about such behaviour:

A great many complaints have reached us from lady visitors and residents who have been in the habit of using No. 2 bath, of boys and youths taking advantage of the unprotected windows and looking in, and otherwise annoying the fair bathers. It is quite a common thing, for boys to amuse themselves by throwing stones on the iron roof of No. 1 bath-house, which is anything but a pleasant experience for lady invalids suffering from weak nerves.<sup>92</sup>

In mid-July 1898, 'the young lady who met with an accident' one evening 'while trying to avoid a couple of drunken wayfarers who apparently desired to monopolize the footpath' was 'rapidly recovering from the effects of her fall'.<sup>93</sup> At the end of this month, the O.M. asked: 'Who were the larrikins that molested a certain young lady in Whitaker-street the other night? And where were all our gallant pugilists?'<sup>94</sup>

What was claimed, after the event, to be a practical joke got a miner into trouble in April 1884, when a woman accused him of stealing her hat, valued at 30s. He made no plea, and the case was 'dismissed on merits'.<sup>95</sup> The *Te Aroha News* published the story as an example of 'the danger of carrying a practical joke too far', for 'a gay and festive youth from the mountain', meaning a Quartzville miner,

had a narrow escape from getting into serious trouble. This playful individual, after waltzing around for a while at the Premier Hotel one day recently, managed to lose trace of his head-gear, and fearing the effect of the sun's rays upon his delicate countenance, he for the nonce unthinkingly appropriated a duck of a bonnet which happened to be at hand. Failing to

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<sup>91</sup> Arthur Dillon Bell, Comment in Visitors' Book, Te Aroha Domain, September 1892, cited in James Mills to Minister of Lands, 5 September 1892, Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-A.

<sup>92</sup> *Te Aroha Times*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 12 October 1896, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 14 July 1898, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 30 July 1898, p. 21.

<sup>95</sup> Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 64/1884, BCDG 11220/1a, ANZ-A.

recover his own, he betook himself to the hill under shelter of his gaudy covering, the owner of which was naturally somewhat wroth at being thus unceremoniously deprived of her property. The aid of the law was invoked, and our worthy sergeant was despatched in hot haste to hunt up the culprit in his mountain retreat, and if possible, to recover the missing treasure. The practical joker was found, and had perforce to appear before his Worship, who, on being informed that the affair was a mere lark, and that the abstracted property had been returned, took a lenient view of the matter, and dismissed the case with a caution to the offending one, who was, however, mulched in costs to the tune of 21s.<sup>96</sup>

### NEW YEAR'S EVE

New Year's Eve in 1884 resulted in court proceedings, with one youth charged by a draper with 'riotous and disorderly behaviour' causing 'a breach of the peace'.

The evidence of the prosecutor was to the effect that on New Year's morning he was awakened by some person hammering at his door. He opened the door and found 10 or 20 persons on his verandah. They ran off, but he caught defendant. He was then surrounded by some men who jostled him. The picket fence was damaged, and the flower-beds trampled on. Defendant left quietly when witness ordered him. Fined 5s, and costs 7s.

Four other 'lads' who damaged another shopkeeper's house were all fined 5s and ordered to pay the damage, £4, and costs, 'or in default 14 days imprisonment'.<sup>97</sup>

At midnight on the first day of 1885, 'the customary demonstration' consisting of 'a short tin-kettle serenade by the youthful revellers' was 'of a less boisterous kind than is common at such a time'.<sup>98</sup> Behaviour at later festivities remained more peaceful, perhaps because of police supervision. However, New Year's Eve in 1900 was much more lively:

One individual, desirous of celebrating the event in a manner to be remembered, thrust his hand through two windows of a local boarding-house; then sallied up to the fire-bell, and mounting the

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<sup>96</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 April 1884, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Magistrate's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 12 January 1884, p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> *Te Aroha Correspondent*, *Waikato Times*. 6 January 1885, p. 2.

scaffold, rang out the alarm. As he descended from his elevated position he was met by the man in blue, who proceeded to place him under arrest, but the offender, seemingly of the acrobatic persuasion, eluded the constable's grasp, turned one or two somersaults, and seized the constable by the legs threw him heavily to the ground and disappeared into the darkness.<sup>99</sup>

### BAD LANGUAGE

Regular complaints were made about bad language, although without examples it is uncertain how truly bad it was. An example of the disgust of the respectable is provided by a 1903 letter:

On Saturday evenings especially, there are groups of men and boys who are allowed to congregate round the shop doors, greatly to the annoyance of ladies and others. The language used and remarks passed by these fellows is too strong to print here. It is the duty of our local guardian of the peace to see these individuals are made to move on.<sup>100</sup>

By 1905, it was noted that 'the fair sex' was 'conspicuous by their absence at the football matches nowadays; too much bad language has brought about this undesirable change'.<sup>101</sup> Sometimes individuals were identified in hopes of modifying their language, as, for instance, in 1885: 'That punt boy should be more polite in his language in the street of a Sunday morning'.<sup>102</sup>

Drink often led to foul language, according to a resident who, in 1912, described the local hooligans as 'wasters':

The sweet crowd who are doubtless well and, most certainly, unfavourably known to most residents of Te Aroha, make their appearance mostly in a semi-intoxicated state at a late hour, and if they can think of nothing better to do, make the night hideous with their filthy and obscene language. On Monday night this lovely crew paraded the town howling as loudly as their semi-drunken condition would let them.... Last night they were again

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<sup>99</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 6 January 1900, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Letter from 'Remedy', *Te Aroha News*, 1 August 1903, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Newspaper Clippings 1895-1905, BBAV 11532/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>101</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 July 1905, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 28 February 1885, p. 10.

in evidence and their language at the corner between the hall and the school was absolutely disgusting.<sup>103</sup>

Later generations of larrikins continued to offend the ears of the sensitive, as illustrated by a 1926 letter from ‘an East Coast resident’ to the president of the local branch of the Justices of the Peace Association:

May I suggest that you assist the police in stopping the obscene foul language indulged in every night on the footpath on the main street. It is worse than the waterfront in either Auckland or Wellington. There appears to be a gang that holds the respectable people of Te Aroha in open contempt. I’ve had numerous complaints from visitors that Te Aroha is no place for a woman to visit, and I’ve sat on a verandah and heard for over half an hour the filthiest language I’ve ever listened to.<sup>104</sup>

The local newspaper agreed that ‘for the good reputation of Te Aroha’ steps should be taken to end this behaviour.

The number of those who indulge in obscenities or coarse language in the streets is very small, and the offences are confined almost wholly to youths between the ages of 16 and 21 who, having thrown off the shackles of parental control, loiter in groups about the streets at night and find a kind of amusement in making themselves objectionable to all who pass by. The behaviour of these youths has often come under our own observation, and it is particularly noticeable on a Sunday night, when six or eight of them may be seen blocking the footpath and proclaiming the emptiness of their minds by their noisy senseless conversation. To young girls they are very offensive.<sup>105</sup>

## VANDALISM

Vandalism was a constant problem. For example, in July 1883 a resident discovered that larrikins had overturned and burnt the tripod at the trig station on the top of the mountain and asked them not to repeat this act.<sup>106</sup> During the 1883-1884 Christmas and New Year holidays, a

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<sup>103</sup> Letter from ‘Anti-Waster’, *Te Aroha News*, 28 August 1912, p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> Letter from an East Coast resident to A.J. Burrows, n.d., printed in *Te Aroha News*, 13 January 1926, p. 8.

<sup>105</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 15 January 1926, p. 4.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from ‘Kai Kuri’, *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1883, p. 3.

‘small section’ behaved like larrikins, with youths ‘pulling down tradesmen’s shutters and kindred sports’; three youths were fined and required to pay the value of the goods destroyed.<sup>107</sup> In 1885, larrikins smashed windows in unoccupied houses at Waiorongomai,<sup>108</sup> which did not usually suffer from vandalism. In October the following year, the domain board asked the police to patrol the domain at night ‘in order to prevent the destruction of trees and shrubs’, which had become common.<sup>109</sup>

In 1895, ‘some ill-disposed person started a fire amongst the fallen timber’ on Fern Spur at Waiorongomai ‘which rapidly spread and for some time the trestle work on the tramway bridge was in danger of destruction’.<sup>110</sup> In 1900, someone sawed through a post supporting a shopkeeper’s trestle-work.<sup>111</sup> In 1906, ‘as a result of larrikinism, the halyards of the Domain flagstaff were found to be unreeved, therefore it was impossible to hoist the flag for Empire Day’.<sup>112</sup> Two years later, ‘the ornamental drinking fountain, newly erected in the centre of the lawns’ in the domain, during the night was ‘wantonly broken beyond repair by some miserable miscreant’.<sup>113</sup> In 1912, in a ‘senseless act of vandalism’, several ‘calico notices in the Domain, setting forth the rules of the grounds, were so slashed with a knife as to become utterly disfigured’.<sup>114</sup>

Some Te Aroha vandals may have caused damage nearby. In September 1910, the *Te Aroha News* was asked to draw attention, once more,

to the “push” [gang]<sup>115</sup> of larrikins who have been making themselves a public nuisance of late at Waihou. On Friday evening, these rowdies pulled down the tent erected as a gentlemen’s cloakroom, removed the lamp bodily and decamped with a bag containing Col. Bell’s dress suit and 14 hats belonging

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<sup>107</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 January 1884, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 31 October 1885, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> *Waikato Times*, 5 October 1886, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 29 December 1895, p. 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 January 1900, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 24 May 1906, reprinted in *Te Aroha News*, 31 March 1978, p. 7.

<sup>113</sup> G. Kenny to General Manager, Tourist Department, 2 March 1908, Tourist Department, TO 1, 01/121/26, ANZ-W.

<sup>114</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 30 April 1912, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8 ed., ed. Paul Beale (London, 1984), p. 937.



to others of the party. It is not long since the same larrikins docked the tail of Mr H[enry] O[smond] Cooper's<sup>116</sup> horse when it was standing outside the same place, and Mr [William] Abbey<sup>117</sup> had a favourite dog shot in his own yard when it was on the chain.

As their names were known, it wanted the police to make a raid and stop 'this disgraceful hoodlumism'.<sup>118</sup> One month later, the newspaper was 'pleased to hear' that a Mangaiti creamery manager had 'recovered the part of the tramway' which some larrikins had pushed into the river.<sup>119</sup>

In February 1911, 'the hoodlum element' one evening 'tried to be funny by plastering' a shopkeeper's windows 'with stale fruit'.<sup>120</sup> Eight months later, the *Te Aroha Mail* reported more vandalism:

The local gang of larrikins, who have been busily engaged of late in acts of destruction, particularly distinguished themselves on Thursday night, when they made mince-meat of a number of pipes, etc, belonging to the Borough and intended for the street improvement contract. Something will have to be done to suppress this pest and that speedily.<sup>121</sup>

The damage was not caused by larrikins but a drunk, who pleaded 'extenuating circumstances'. He had bumped into one of the pipes in the dark, 'and in a fit of anger smashed a number of them'. The prosecutor stated he 'appeared to have been imbibing a little, for in addition to the pipes he broke one of the street lamps'.<sup>122</sup> The following year, some drunken larrikins took a deckchair from the verandah of a boarding house 'and smashed it to pieces'.<sup>123</sup> Later that year, some people amused themselves by

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<sup>116</sup> See *Tauranga Electoral Roll, 1908*, p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> See *New Zealand Herald*, advertisement, 20 August 1896, p. 1, 26 August 1896, p. 5; *Waikato Argus*, advertisement, 18 April 1905, p. 3, 2 July 1907, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 25 March 1907, p. 2; *Tauranga Electoral Roll, 1908*, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1910, p. 2.

<sup>119</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 22 October 1910, p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 18 February 1911, p. 2.

<sup>121</sup> *Te Aroha Mail*, 14 October 1911, Press Cutting Book, Government Spa, Te Aroha Hot Springs, held in Te Aroha Library.

<sup>122</sup> *Te Aroha Mail*, 26 October 1911, Press Cutting Book, Government Spa, Te Aroha Hot Springs, held in Te Aroha Library.

<sup>123</sup> Letter from 'Anti-Waster', *Te Aroha News*, 28 August 1912, p. 2.

breaking bottles on the top of Bald Spur.<sup>124</sup> Occasional vandalism continued throughout the twentieth century.<sup>125</sup>

### LARRIKINS FROM OUT OF TOWN

On occasions Te Aroha was disturbed by larrikins from elsewhere. The local newspaper complained, in February 1903, of ‘hoodlums’ who had come for the races. Some had remained afterwards,

fairly taking charge of the town, insulting householders, invalids, shopkeepers.... One resident was forced to eject a squad of these useless vultures from his premises the other evening at the point of a revolver – loaded with blank cartridges – several shots were fired, and the intruders disappeared in double quick time, scaling the adjoining fences as fast as they were able.

After using No. 6 bath, five naked men walked 50 yards in broad daylight to No. 2, afterwards returning in the same state. The newspaper wanted another, young, policeman, especially at race time. ‘Some of those present in Te Aroha during the last week might truthfully be classed as the lowest of the low’.<sup>126</sup> In February 1911, two young men from Ohinemuri, a no-license area, admitted being drunk and disorderly, using obscene language, and breaking a hotel window. ‘They had come up to Te Aroha on a jaunt and bought a bottle of whisky to while away the tedium of the return journey, had missed the train, and amused themselves in the way described’.<sup>127</sup> In September, referring to another complaint about larrikinism in the domain, the local Tourist Agent, George Frederick McGirr, told his department that neither the attendants nor the police had seen ‘any of the larrikin element’ there on the night in question. ‘The Domain staff and Bath Attendants have strict instructions from me to put down and report instances of larrikinism etc coming under their notice’. He repeated an earlier desire for ‘more Police supervision – especially during the season – as at times the larrikin element is pretty bad in the town, and occasionally finds an outlet in the Domain despite all that we can do’. As

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<sup>124</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 14 October 1912, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> For a 1941 example, see *Te Aroha News*, 9 October 1941, p. 1; for 1963 examples, see *Te Aroha News*, 5 March 1963, p. 1, 30 April 1963, p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 February 1903, p. 2.

<sup>127</sup> Police Court, *Te Aroha News*, 9 February 1911, p. 2.

larrikins usually caused trouble on Saturday and Sunday nights, it was assumed 'that the offenders are "week-enders" who have drifted in from the mines etc in the vicinity'.<sup>128</sup> Proving his point, the following month 'a party of hooligan visitors made their presence most objectionable at No. 2 bath'.<sup>129</sup>

Young farm labourers were responsible for some of the larrikinism. In 1905, for instance, there were complaints that larrikinism at Manawaru, a farming district up-river from Waiorongomai, was

growing almost beyond control. It is on Sunday that the nuisance is at its highest, when these larrikins hang around the bridge smoking, and making themselves generally disagreeable in many ways, frightening and almost obstructing horses of harmless people who happen to be passing, and if these same people display any concern for their own or their horses' safety they are greeted with roars of derisive laughter and most uncalled-for remarks. But this is not all; when there is any entertainment or church service being held, the same larrikins loaf around outside and carry out their malicious ideas on people's horses, turning saddles, loosing girths, or altering bridles, which, especially in the case of a lady's horses, might easily be the cause of a serious accident.<sup>130</sup>

It is highly likely that these larrikins, bored with annoying the same people at the same place, brought some variety into their lives by doing much the same in the townships.

### EXAGGERATING LARRIKINISM?

In 1895, a Waiorongomai resident responded to regular reports by the local correspondent of the *Te Aroha News* of bad behaviour there by boys:

I think it hardly fair that your correspondent persists in making general charges of stealing, and other offences, against the young boys here, the majority of whom are as honest as will be found elsewhere. But a few of the "bright" youths here are more or less addicted to petty thievery, and impolite expressions.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> G.F. McGirr (Tourist Agent) to Director, Tourism Department, 8 September 1911, Press Cutting Book, Government Spa, Te Aroha Hot Springs, held in Te Aroha Library.

<sup>129</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 October 1911, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1905, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> Letter from 'Resident', *Te Aroha News*, 20 February 1895, p. 2.

R.M.C. complained about noisy young people in No. 6 bath house, in 1911:

As a frequent visitor to your beautiful town and sanatorium, will you permit me to utter just a little growl? I and mine are fond of our evening walk in the domain, but the charm is too often broken by the outrageous noise proceeding from No. 6. Cannot the authorities give the bath-keepers plenary powers to suppress this nuisance?<sup>132</sup>

McGirr was unsympathetic, for reasons he explained to his department:

No. 6 is the only warm pleasure bath we have. It is principally patronized by boys and youths and when a dozen or so healthy youngsters gather in the bath of an evening for a swim and a splash about, it is impossible to expect no noise, and a certain amount of latitude must be allowed. Otherwise the lads will go and bathe in the river....

No larrikinism or bad language is permitted, and the Attendant has been instructed to keep the boys within bounds and to prevent undue noise or disturbance. On the quiet evening air the noise issuing from the Bath would no doubt sound greater than it actually was.

I think "RMC" must have a "liver."

I have again cautioned the Bath Attendant to check the youngsters.<sup>133</sup>

The following month, responding to more press reports about larrikins, 'Velox' wrote in their defence:

The hoodlum element is to be found in every community. It is only a question of degree, and I venture to say that in this respect Te Aroha compares favourably with any time of similar size. True, the local youth do sometimes make themselves a nuisance at public entertainments, but we must confess that there is often good reason for it, as there is often a toss-up which is the most objectionable, the performer on the stage, or the hoodlum in the

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<sup>132</sup> Letter from R.M.C., *Te Aroha Mail*, 11 January 1911, Press Cutting Book, Government Spa, Te Aroha Hot Springs, held in Te Aroha Library.

<sup>133</sup> G.F. McGirr to Director, Tourism Department, 17 January 1911, Press Cutting Book, Government Spa, Te Aroha Hot Springs, held in Te Aroha Library.

body of the hall. The genius who at a country performance a week or two ago advised a singer to “cheese it, and give us the woodpecker” about expressed the popular sentiment although most of us could have done without even the woodpecker.<sup>134</sup> The voice of the hoodlum is often the *vox populi*, and even where it is not, it is usually merely the overflow of super abundant spirits. He occasionally sharpens his wit on passers by, but only where he knows he can get home. Treat him like a gentleman and he will generally act like one, but suggest by your attitude that he is a brute, and, unwilling to disappoint you, he gives you full measure and running over. Foul language within the hearing of reputable citizens or even disreputable ones is not one of his indiscretions. He may occasionally give vent to a mild oath, but this form of relief is not confined to the hoodlum. One admits he does not employ the most profitable method of employing his time, but in this direction he is merely following the example of his elders. As a rule he prefers the bustle of the street corners to the cathedral gloom that pervades the meetings of the Debating Society. He is too long sighted to waste his time in discussing matters of merely academic value, and besides, there are too many schoolmasters there, and the memory of a sore cuticle is not easily effaced. After all he is not a bad fellow if you treat him as such, and very often will develop into a useful citizen and later on employ his super abundant energy in channels generally regarded as praiseworthy or at least legitimate.<sup>135</sup>

### SOLVING THE LARRIKIN PROBLEM

In mid-1883, youthful noise and vigour prompted the *Te Aroha News* to recommend one way of curbing the bad behaviour of young workers:

The juvenile working portion of our population being now considerably large the time, we think, has arrived when the matter of starting a night school, should receive the earnest consideration of the local School Committee.... At present a large number of boys after doing their day’s work spend the remainder of their day in promoting the happiness of their parents and neighbours by setting off crackers, and indulging in other such innocent recreations, thus not only losing every particle of useful knowledge which they may have acquired when at school, but also growing up in ignorance and mischief.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> According to Partridge, p. 1349, a woodpecker was ‘an accomplice betting to encourage novices or fools’, which does not seem an appropriate meaning.

<sup>135</sup> Letter from ‘Velox’, *Te Aroha News*, 2 February 1911, p. 3.

<sup>136</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 16 June 1883, p. 2.

Eleven years later, a visiting Wesleyan minister gave a lecture entitled 'A Little Child', which a correspondent considered to be

most interesting and instructive, and all the parents of the district would have done well to have heard it. It emphasized the responsibility of parents and guardians of children, showing how open the minds of children are for all kinds of impressions, and that if good ideas are not implanted in a child's mind, evil ones most assuredly would be. Such truths as these are, unhappily, too often forgotten by parents, and the want of remembering them in the training of children is the fruitful source of larrikinism and other evils.<sup>137</sup>

In 1898, a clergyman organized a meeting to form a Young Men's Society to give the local youth somewhere to go and something to do in the evenings.<sup>138</sup> Resulting from his initiative the Te Aroha Literary and Recreation Society was formed, a self-improvement body run by Protestant clergy.<sup>139</sup> In 1912, a 14-year-old doctor's son had another solution for aimless boys having nothing to do. 'Te Aroha is in much need of Boy Scouts.... Te Aroha boys have plenty of time to spare, indeed, far too much. Right up to ten o'clock at night many boys are found hanging about the street and making themselves a nuisance'.<sup>140</sup> There is no evidence that such worthy organizations either attracted or reformed any larrikins; but they may well have influenced a few.

In 1883, 'A Resident' wanted the police to act, very forcefully, against larrikins. 'If it were not for the respect I hold for some of their parents, I should not hesitate in publishing their names. A good sound whipping with a birch rod would, I feel certain, do them no harm'.<sup>141</sup> The local newspaper agreed that a police flogging would be the solution,<sup>142</sup> and developed this idea in a subsequent editorial:

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<sup>137</sup> Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 June 1894, p. 22.

<sup>138</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 29 January 1898, p. 3.

<sup>139</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 17 March 1898, p. 2.

<sup>140</sup> *Burrator Weekly News*, 27 July 1912, printed in Ted Axford, *A Childhood in Te Aroha, 1907-1913* (Wellington, 1992), p. 51.

<sup>141</sup> Letter from 'A Resident', *Te Aroha News*, 1 September 1883, p. 3.

<sup>142</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 1 September 1883, p. 2.

At the last meeting of the Band of Hope a bevy of lads did all they could to interrupt and annoy those attending. In a case like that it is a pity that some of the elders do not turn out and give the disturbers a thoroughly sound thrashing, One or two experiences of the kind would quite satisfy them.

It was disappointed that even ‘most respectable parents’ permitted their teenage sons to ‘run wild’, accusing them of being ‘negligent’, and considered it their ‘bounden duty’ to check misbehaviour ‘with a firm hand, failing which it becomes an imperative obligation on the police to take stringent steps’ to protect residents and preserve ‘public decency and order’.<sup>143</sup>

In 1911, an editorial asked ‘if it be not possible to form a committee out of the decent young fellows of the town that will put down this nuisance, by moral suasion if possible, but put it down in any case?’<sup>144</sup> The following year, ‘Indignant’ had the solution to those whose ape-like behaviour offended ‘respectable citizens’ who attended ‘a musical treat’ with their wives and daughters:

I would advocate that these irresponsibles – in the event of a repetition of this behaviour – be hailed forth by our constable, on the end of a pitchfork (to obviate the risk of personal contamination), and subjected to a thorough hosing at the hands of our local fire brigade, thence driven to the pound, and drafted out judiciously by the pound-keeper. The least dangerous could then be liberated in the bush – there to develop tails, and consume nuts to their hearts’ content; but, at all hazards, prevented from entering the society of respectable people. The incurable could be handed over to the children on Guy Fawkes’ day, dressed so as to be of some resemblance to human beings, to adorn the bonfires with. I would not suggest the river as I do not believe in the pollution of waters in any form.<sup>145</sup>

Occasionally private individuals did take action along these lines. Two months previously, ‘two or three of those who interfered with an inoffensive citizen received some much needed, but not too gentle correction’.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 27 October 1883, p. 2.

<sup>144</sup> Editorial, *Te Aroha Mail*, 24 January 1911, Press Cutting Book, Government Spa, Te Aroha Hot Springs, held in Te Aroha Library.

<sup>145</sup> Letter from ‘Indignant’, *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1912, p. 3.

<sup>146</sup> Letter from ‘Anti-Waster’, *Te Aroha News*, 28 August 1912, p. 2.

## CONCLUSION

Every generation suffered the irritation of larrikin behaviour, which usually did not lead into a life of crime. The respectable, or just those who wanted a quiet night's sleep, fumed, but in time the larrikins grew up and put their 'youthful high spirits' behind them. But there were always more larrikins appearing to replace those who had matured and become working men with family responsibilities. It was mentioned on several occasions that 'good' families could produce such beings, and no amount of lecturing seems to have had much effect: but over time the young dropped their larrikin ways, to be replaced by another generation of lively youngsters with a warped idea of fun.