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Incorporating  
Hokianga Museum

## NEWSLETTER January 2017

A rather belated wish for a happy new year to all!

I started on a newsletter last November in the enthusiasm of our very excellent end-of-year lunch with speakers **Colin and Shaun Quincey**, but it somehow got wiped, half-way through. Other stuff then got in the way but I tried again in December - in the midst the Christmas rush, which is probably why it ceased to make sense, so scrapped that one. Now that the rush of visitors has died down a little and our various family groups are no longer monopolising time, I'll try again and with luck it might be 'third time lucky'

I guess the newsletter's December version really foundered because we had nothing in the way of holiday activities to advertise, a change from previous years when we've done our best to cater for the summer crowds. Last year the weather made such a fiasco of everything planned that the thought of the same thing happening again was quite off-putting. But of course as everyone knows the weather was quite different this year and there were many times when an evening cruise, or a local walk, would have been ideal. But too late!

However, it's a real pity about the first version because the intention had been to describe that Christmas lunch immediately after it had happened, for those who had wanted to attend on the 19th November but couldn't. It's too late to re-create that now, but definitely with our speakers Colin Quincey and his son Shaun it turned out to be the high point of the year. They are both accomplished speakers, Colin in particular has the actor's ability to re-enact the situations he's describing: he had everyone with him all the way. Shaun's experience was so much more recent and still fraught in his mind – so they were different, but each clearly had dug deep in their psyche to find what they were made of – truly, the stuff of heroes. And they described it so well! One thing that came through strongly was the enormous strides in technology between 1977, when Colin was more or less off the radar from Waitangi Day until his arrival on the Queensland coast 63 days later, and 2010, when Shaun was immediately in touch with the world and his sponsors almost every day from start to finish. Communications apart, consider the differences in food and water supply for each, the navigation devices, the boat design... But still, nothing of those things could affect the sea in all its moods or the amount of solid rowing that had to be done each day – or the basic reliance on self that was demanded. Altogether memorable!

The hotel did us proud with the meal and their Christmas decorations; our president's determination that we should have a preliminary 'mix-and-mingle' half-hour really worked - it had everyone making or renewing acquaintances much more easily than if finally seated, and the friendliness lasted through the whole afternoon. The raffle was finally drawn for Neville McMullien's lovely kauri bowl, and was won by long-term member

and previous museum volunteer, **Jim Fife**. A further innovation, a 'lucky seat' prize, went to **Primrose Summer**. All in all, it was a very successful event.

Following on from his talk, and as a reminder that on this Waitangi Day it will be **forty years** since Colin Quincey rowed out from Omapere to start on his solo journey to Australia, the museum has just mounted a **commemorative display**. Colin has given us a great deal of help in this, supplying a range of photographs and some of the charts he used or drew up himself, some with annotations made as he went and some numbered explanations here and there. Not since the Tasman Trespasser herself was our museum's centrepiece have we been able to show off our (or Hokianga's) part in his enterprise so well - although we did have a small display ten years ago for his 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This one will stay up for the duration of his journey's time-span, until **April 16<sup>th</sup>**. (The Tasman Trespasser is still on display, but in Auckland's Maritime Museum).

### **Recent visitors**

Our ever-active mentor, web-site manager and Brussels member **Ken Baker** visited us briefly last Friday during his annual family pilgrimage. He is still working on First World War material for us, but Grace (Wilkinson) is also preparing for a Maori Battalion exhibition to be mounted over April, and he had brought a poster which he had designed and produced for her covering its WW1 history. For publicity we thought it could well be reduced in size and duplicated to go out to schools as well as public notice-boards, maybe for sale as well. Besides the poster, he had brought a copy of the recent RSA (NZ) history *After the War* by Stephen Clarke, plus a reissue of James Cowan's *The Maori in the Great War* and a copy of the earlier *New Zealand: the first hundred years* - all for depositing in the museum collection. As we are still trying to find more on the early RSA in Hokianga I had hopes that the new RSA history might give some help, but it's a NZ-wide coverage so the North doesn't figure large. But thank you, Ken, you do so much for us and we are very much in your debt. 'Thank you' seems so inadequate.

On the same day there was a visit from **Sandra and Colin Baker** (no relation to Ken, as far as can be found), bearing quite a load of archival material belonging to **Taheke - ledgers and sales records from Robert Proctor** who had the Taheke Store from 1886 until about 1910. We haven't had time to look through it properly but it's fascinating stuff: he was meticulous in the records he kept but he also interspersed them with little diary entries on slack days. [*Oct 15 Mr Haskin, Ohaeawai: Paid old a/c 8/9d. I set a hen with 10 Indian Runner eggs... Mrs H. Bridge, ½ lb. Cream Tartar 1/- Oct.16 I posted to Smith & Caughey Auckland 8/11d*] That was in 1901 when the assisted settlement which the store serviced had settled down somewhat. Earlier ledgers give such useful information on the settlers' needs and diets, what they were able to produce for sale, the cost of items, those who were able to buy stuff regularly and those who rarely did ...there's a thesis there asking to be written! But their condition is not good: they've been stored badly and there's rodent / silverfish damage, damp, and naturally a lot of wear.

Then, less than a week later, there was a visit from **Loma Morrison nee Letts**, with a pair of **figurines** which had been in the family as long as she could remember but the next generation didn't want them. They had been brought out from Warwickshire by William Mather Letts and His wife Emily Minnie Letts in 1883, and came with them to Waiotemarama when they opened the well-known Letts store on the Gorge Road; some people remember seeing them on display in the Letts home.. One depicts a pair of gentlemen in Elizabethan dress playing what looks like chess; the other a further pair of

gentlemen in (my guess) mid-C17th dress, tossing dice possibly for money. We need the Antiques Roadshow to call I think.

It's not exactly recent any more, but back in November we had a visit from author and historian **Gary Clover**. He is currently researching material for a book on the early (pre-1840) Wesleyan Mission. He was very impressed with the archive which has helped him clarify a number of queries he had, commenting, "There is nothing like local knowledge."



As a finale, those who remember **Tom and Hilda Field** will be interested to hear that Hilda has begun to write about her own life. She recently sent us an account of her years in the WAACS as a Bombardier on Motutapu Island, which begins:

*As a 19 year old. when I joined the Army, all recruits were sent to Hamilton to register, have medical and dental examinations. I think back to those medical examinations, the women were told to strip naked and march before two male doctors: they were checking our body shapes to make sure we were women – no women doctors 75 years ago! Having passed the tests, we were sent on to Papakura Army Camp, then were taken to a tailor in Symonds Street to be measured for our serge uniforms (tailored jackets and skirts) Then six weeks of training which consisted of physical drill (pressups, route-marches) –physical fitness was an important aspect of retaining our roles...*

Because I would love to see her whole account published in the 'Memories' magazine for a wider readership, this is just a little taste. But it's also a challenge: Hilda was born in 1923, and here she is going on 94, writing her life-story and e-mailing away with the best of them – I bet she texts too!

As all volunteers at the museum have found, a wet day can make a big difference to the number of visitors we have! Without the beach to go to, there is not a lot of wet-weather activity available locally and we are at least under cover. At such times we've often thought we should have a programme worked out and waiting that really keeps kids occupied for more than ten minutes. To our shame we haven't, yet, but it's something to work towards this year. Not being right on the main highway does have an off-putting effect for some potential visitors, but there are signs of building preparations going on in the empty sections around and above us, so perhaps we'll become more centrified, if that's a word, in the future. Over the holidays we quite miss the school kids going past, although our hours don't coincide with theirs too well.

With luck I'll be in touch again soon, with more on those figurines, or at least a photograph of them.

Alexa Whaley