

DESPATCHES

The New Zealand Tunnelling Company

Soldiers from the Hauraki Goldfields

A Waihi Heritage Vision Project

www.nzetc.co.nz

Despatches

Issue #5 September 2011

Descendants and Supporters Gather in Waihi



Descendants and Tunnelling Company supporters gathered for lunch in Waihi on 15 July. The group was addressed by His Worship the Mayor of Hauraki, Mr John Tregidga, who detailed his trip to Arras in 2009 (reported in *Despatches* #3). Mayor Tregidga showed slides of the wreath laying and his visits underground, and to the cemeteries where NZ Tunnellers are buried. Mayor Tregidga commented, 'It was great to meet so many people that are continuing to show an interest in the NZ Tunnelling Company, and I would encourage and support the ongoing contact between Waihi and Arras'.



left: Mike Roycroft, Dick Martin from Perth, and Mayor John Tregidga at the July 15 gathering held in Waihi.

above: Mayor Tregidga receives a VIP tour of Carriere Wellington during his trip to Arras.

Mike Roycroft also addressed the gathering. Mike, a New Zealand Tunnelling Company descendant, is one of the committee members planning a visit to Arras in early April 2012 to attend the ninety-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Arras. More details about this trip can be found in this issue.

Kit Wilson, operations manager for Waihi Heritage Vision provided details of the proposed New Zealand Tunnelling Company Memorial (see p.2 this issue).

Also in attendance were Hauraki District Council Waihi Ward members, representatives from Waihi Memorial RSA, Waihi Arts Centre and Museum and Waihi Heritage Vision.

Ted Brock recited the Ode, while Marj Tyson, our Tunnelling Company Chaplain, was on hand to say Grace. Dick Martin travelled all the way from Perth to be at the gathering. He reminded those present that functions like this are very important. 'More New Zealanders and Australians lost their lives on or under French battlefields than were ever lost in the Gallipoli campaign. We need to remember them'.

Eric Grainger and Valmai Ball, two of our eldest descendants, travelled from Auckland for the occasion. They both served in World War Two.

Tunnelling Company Memorial



We are on line



Our website went live on ANZAC Day, 25 April. You can find us on line at www.nzetc.co.nz

It is much easier (and cheaper) to get information out through the website, and after this issue we will move this publication to the website rather than having to print and post out each issue.

We know that some people do not have access to a computer. If an online version does not work for you, write and let us know. We will only be posting out copies to people who contact us.

Thanks for your help with this. Not having to spend time photocopying and stuffing envelopes will allow us to get on with other projects.

We are continuing to raise funds for a New Zealand Tunnelling Company Memorial to be sited in Waihi.

Last year when the town held a special gathering to remember the 29 men who lost their lives in the Pike River coal mine tragedy the Te Whangai Trust donated 29 kowhai trees to be planted in memory of the miners. These have been carefully looked after since that time.

Now, Vision Waihi Trust, Waihi Heritage Vision and Hauraki District Council have identified a site adjacent to Gilmour Lake where the trees can be planted. We plan to site the Tunnelling Company Memorial in the same area, and it is likely that a memorial to all the miners who have lost their lives in Waihi mines will also be sited in this area in the future. This area will become a Miners' Reflective Area. With easy access from two roads and good paths and plenty of open space it will provide a place for quiet contemplation as well as gatherings on special occasions.

We will keep you informed of progress. In the meantime, if you would like to contribute to the cost of the Tunnelling Company Memorial please contact us. Currently we have just over \$1200 which is being held on our behalf by Waihi Heritage Vision, an incorporated society with audited accounts.

First On, Last Off, First Death



As well as being the first unit on the Western Front and the last to return to New Zealand, the Tunnelling Company also recorded the first WF NZEF death.

Sapper Michael Tobin of the NZETC was a miner with the Public Works Department in Tauranga. While serving in France he was admitted to hospital on April 14 1916. He died the next day.

The Tunnelling Company Unit Diary records; *'Received word to-day of first death among members of Coy. No 4/1639 Sapper M. Tobin, who died in Hospital on 15th inst. of Broncho-Pneumonia and was buried at Lucheux Military Cemetery.'*

Read more about Tobin on our website www.nzetc.co.nz/text/tobin.html

Arras Visit, April 2012

ARRAS
APRIL 2012

N.Z. TUNNELLING COMPANY
COMMEMORATIONS

JOIN DESCENDANTS AND SUPPORTERS
IN ARRAS, FRANCE, APRIL 2012
FOR TRIP DETAILS CONTACT:

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We are planning a trip to Arras in the first two weeks of April 2012 to coincide with the commemorations of the ninety-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Arras. We are currently working on the itinerary and costs. We plan on arriving in Paris on April 3 and depart Paris, April 12. To help ensure the best possible deals, United Travel Waihi is assisting with our flight and accommodation bookings. A non-refundable fee of \$150 will secure an Air New Zealand group booking (minimum 10 people required).

We anticipate flight and accommodation to be tight around the time we plan to travel. We need to get in early.

If you would like to know more, please contact us. Information is also on the website.

We need your help

We have the opportunity to place a Tunnelling Company display on the interior wall of a popular café in Waihi. Postcards, copies of photos or other information that we can use would be much appreciated. Your local photo centre can make copies of your material so you do not need to worry about sending us originals.

People Behind the Scenes

Mike Roycroft

Mike's Grandfather James Lewis Roycroft, who was a miner in the Waihi Gold mines and joined the NZ Tun Coy 5th Reinforcements in 1916 as a Lance Corporal. He returned to Waihi after the war and continued working in the mines.

An ex Waihi boy, Mike was for 37 years a professional entertainer. In 1983 he was honored with New Zealand's Country music entertainer of the year and NZ male vocalist award. In 1987 Mike and his family moved to Australia and in 1992 was honored with Australia's highest country music accolade a Tamworth "Gold Guitar".

Mike and his wife Debs sold two thirds of their café business interests in 2009. Now that they are 'semi retired' they have time to help tell the NZ Tunnelling Company story and will lead a group of descendants and interested people on a trip to Arras in 2012.

Roger Meder

Roger's Great Grandfather, Adam Meder, arrived in Otago 1865 from Germany via Victorian goldfields where he established a bakery and coffee house in Owaka, serving the Otago goldfields. Two of Adam Meder's sons enlisted in the NZEF. David returned from the war and settled in Auckland, while his brother George was killed and is buried at Arras.

Grant Tobin

Grant is a New Zealander currently living in Belgium. He has a passion for New Zealand's involvement in World War One, and says that his 'self appointed task is to personally visit every single Great War NZEF grave and photograph each headstone and memorial and make it available to others'. www.nzef-ww1.com

Bob & Carol Pike

Bob and Carol are members of the Western Front Association (WFA) and The Gallipoli Association. Bob is a writer and researcher and author of 'The Victor Heroes' – Robert E Pike. Both Bob and Carol are now retired from teaching and are frequent visitors of the Western Front.

Colonel (Retired) Jeremy Towler and Anne Campbell Towler

Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) Colonel Jeremy Towler laid a wreath on behalf of the Royal British Legion on the occasion of the HDC mayoral visit to Arras in 2009. Both Jeremy and Anne are very active members in the Royal British Legion. Jeremy is Chairman of the Pas de Calais Branch while Anne is the Hon. Secretary. Their continued support, guidance and assistance to the NZETC is appreciated.

Sue Baker Wilson

A Tunnelling Company researcher and member of Waihi Heritage Vision. Other members of this group also assist in raising public awareness of the NZETC story. Sue is the only person on the above list currently resident in New Zealand.

Thanks to the many descendants & supporters who continue to provide ongoing assistance and information for research. We also acknowledge the ongoing support of Howard Chamberlain, Voluntary Curator of Linton Army Museum, the NZ Military & Historical Society, and the NZ Ministry of Culture & Heritage.

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