

# THE QUEENSTOWN COURIER

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**Julien Bourdeau on his Queenstown-Skippers Mailcart  
at Queenstown Wharf in the early 1900s**

*Reproduced courtesy of the Lakes District Museum (EL0637)*

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**Cover:** Julien Bourdeau on his Queenstown-Skippers Mailcart at Queenstown Wharf in the early 1900s.

Before Bob Cranfield started to work on this photo, it was a mystery where it was taken – NOT outside the Queenstown Post Office. Compare with our cover now.



## Julien Bourdeau – Decades on the Skippers Road

By Danny Knudson – An excerpt from *Skippers – Triumph and Tragedy*, pages 66-68

Julien Bourdeau, a French-Canadian, became one of the legendary carters living at Skippers. He was born in Montreal in 1829 and arrived in the Wakatipu in 1863 at the height of the gold rush, where he chose to pack stores to miners rather than prospect for gold. He opened a store at Maori Point, but when the rush to that locality evaporated, he relocated. For eight years he tried farming in the Upper Shotover at The Branches, but gave it up in 1876 when he lost most of his sheep in deep winter snow. He moved to Skippers where he concentrated his efforts on a general store, which he opened in his house at the top of what became the steep climb from Skippers Bridge. He sold provision to local families, zealously guarding what he believed to be his right to supply his regular customers. At times he'd wander into local cottages uninvited to inspect the pantry, thereby reassuring himself that families were not buying from other packers.

Being a skilled stonemason, he added a house and stables to the shearing sheds he'd built at Arthurs Point at the foot of Coronet Peak Road.

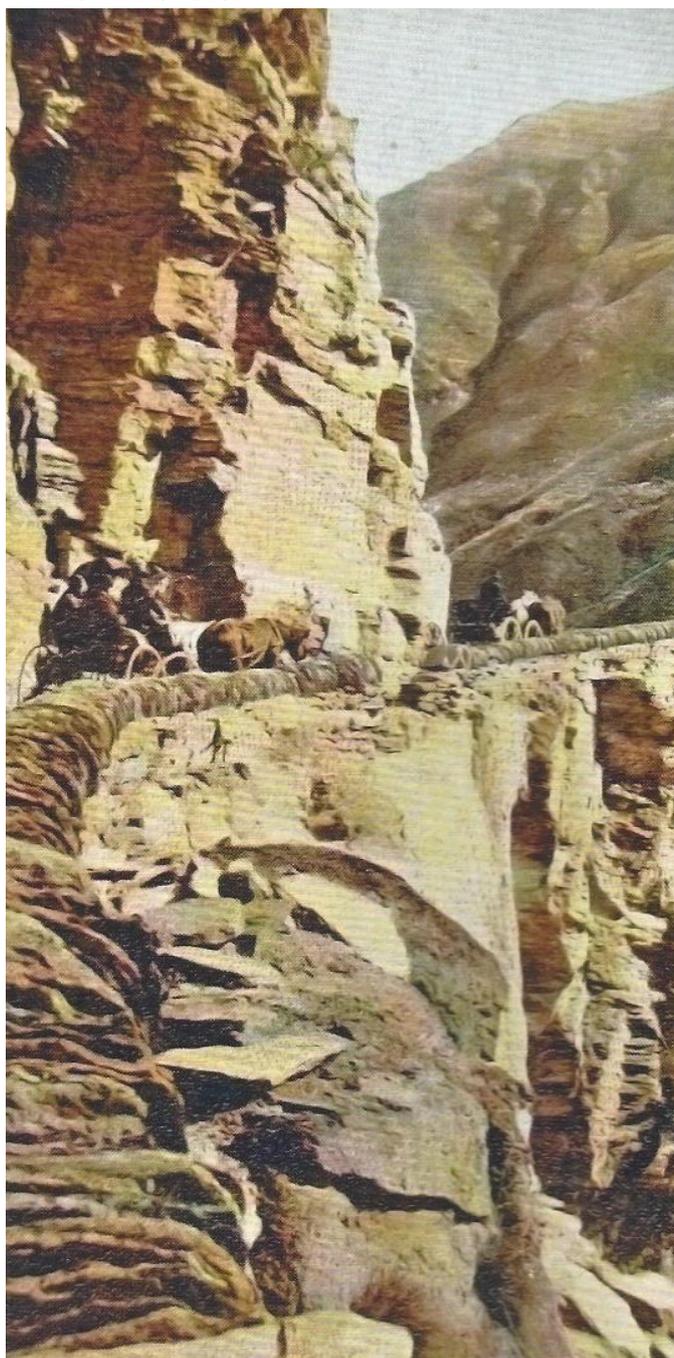


Bourdeau's Store, Arthurs Point, drawing by Audrey Bascand 1961

From 1876 this site suited his packing arrangements. He could travel from Skippers to Queenstown during one day, buy supplies, and return to his Arthurs Point house overnight. Next day he'd journey back to Skippers, often dozing off and relying on his horses to keep to the road, as much as it had been formed. The brakes on his buggy, fashioned from his old boots, inspired no great confidence in any passengers who chose to ride with him.

'Old Bidoo', as he was called by children and many adults at Skippers, was a colourful character. He was a popular identity, and residents often stopped to yarn with him and to hear what was happening in the outside world of Queenstown. Bourdeau spoke only broken English and when feeding his horse would say, 'Come I fat you, Geordie.' He was also a tough old bloke – he had to be to endure packing stores in all weathers. In

winter conditions, he didn't button up his shirt until icicles began hanging from his long white whiskers.



Julien Bourdeau on his cart leads a coachload of visitors around Pinchers Bluff, about 100 metres above the Shotover. (LDM EL1816)

For over half a century, Bourdeau negotiated Skippers Road, driving his four-wheeled buggy pulled by two horses, one black, one white. He carted all manner of provisions, and his passengers often sat with their feet on boxes of dynamite or even the odd coffin. For over 20 years he also provided the Royal Mail delivery service between Queenstown and Skippers. In 1897 his annual contract for two mail deliveries each week earned him £90 a year.

In some ways he was larger than life; stories of him still abound, some of which are probably not true. However, it's known that he was strong enough to lift one of the wheels of his gig when people were on board. Another authentic story is that he made so much blackcurrant jam from wild berries at Skippers that he kept some of it in a chamber pot.

A less convincing story was that he liked to listen to conversations on his party-line telephone. On one occasion when two men were talking, one warned, 'Mind what you say. Old Bidoo could be listening.' There was an immediate response through the phone, 'I am not, you lying buggers.'

A more reliable incident is that he wore a new suit to a ball at Skippers. It still had the price tags on. Next day, the suit was back in his store at the same price – and sell it did.

Bourdeau's chief road obstacle was at Blue Slip, about two miles from Skippers. The section of road at this point was only about 500 yards [450 metres] across, and the downward sloping rockface made for frequent subsidence of strata. Locals knew to spread the word whenever the Slip was 'down'. In 1912, for example, the Slip was down from 26 May until 24 July. 'The old pack track was so bad as to be impassable, and the contractor [Bourdeau] had to hold his team this [the Queenstown] side of the slip and carry the mail on foot for four or five

chains [about 90 metres] over a dangerous sidling to the packhorse in waiting at the other side of the slip.’ (From postmaster’s report, quoted in G.J. Griffiths, ‘Postal services’, *Queenstown Courier* no.37, 1986, p.8.) Occasionally Bourdeau needed help from men at Skippers to rescue his buggy when it was caught in a landslide at the Blue Slip.



With his horses at Blue Slip (*Lakes District Museum EP1862*)

Bourdeau never had any money. Even though he farmed at The Branches, owned a store at Maori Point, successfully tendered for road work, built John Aspinall’s house at Skippers, constructed a house, stables and shearing sheds at Arthurs Point, and was awarded the Skippers mail contract year after year, he was always broke. He was too generous as a businessman. He ‘grubstaked’ miners, the term for giving them credit if they could not pay cash. They promised to settle as soon as they made that elusive gold strike, but many never cleared their debts.

He continued packing stores to Skippers until he was 86 years old. On 8 September 1916 he admitted feeling unwell, but next day collected and delivered the mail as usual before his routine daily rest. On this occasion, though, he did not wake up. He died penniless and was buried in a pauper’s grave in Skippers Cemetery.

Years later, a sign labelled his home as ‘The pub with no beer,’ but in actuality it never was a hotel. In 1970, fire put an end to this landmark on the road to Skippers.

*Skippers – triumph and tragedy*, 2016, published by the Lakes District Museum, Queenstown & District Historical Society and Danny Knudson.

The book has been reprinted by the Museum and can be purchased there.

## Julien Bourdeau and the Skippers Road Installation Rejuvenated by Ed and Zandrie Elliott

Since 1990 the effigy of Julien Bourdeau has accosted travellers at the start of the Skippers Road, directing their attention to warnings about the road. The installation was created by owners of tourist businesses at Skippers whose buses stopped there.



Jerry Hohneck brings Julien to the site.  
Photo by Geoff Wilson who made the effigy.

In 2023 before restoration began. At some stage his clothes had been repainted blue-grey. But the rust never slept.



When the Society's committee realised how scruffy and disfigured he had become, it decided to restore him and the whole installation.

Ed and Zandrie Elliott undertook the task, starting with much rust removal, then repainting the effigy, signs and map, and replacing the photos on the side with new ones of the same locations.



Stages in the process are below.



Layering of the paintwork in process.



Detail showing the raised lines of solder outlining the edges.

11 November 2024: Restoration completed. Julien is fit for more many years on duty.

His head is carefully repainted using the photo on page 6.



## The Ubiquitous Vincent Pyke on the Otago Goldfields

Compiled by Marion Borrell

Wherever one reads about the Otago goldfields in the early days one finds Vincent Pyke either on the spot of major events or close by. As the Secretary of the Gold Fields Department and later a magistrate and a warden for the Dunstan and Tuapeka goldfields, he travelled far and wide.

Being aware that this was history in the making, he kept thorough journals 'setting down each event as it occurred'. He recorded many details, wrote official reports as part of his job, and collected unpublished material from other people. From these he wrote *History of the Early Gold Discoveries in Otago*, printed in 1887 by the Otago Daily Times and Witness Newspapers Company.

When the Historical Society held a meeting in May 2024 entitled 'Treasured Books', Fran O'Connor brought along a well-worn copy, apparently a first edition, which had been held in the reference section at Dunedin Public Library from 1948 until its retirement – a treasure indeed.

In his Preface Pyke refers to 'the stirring episodes of the eventful times when the golden mysteries of Nature were being forced; and brave men, armed with the pick and shovel of the prospector, went forth in search of fortune amidst the desolate solitudes of the almost unknown interior.'

**Vincent Pyke 1827 – 1894** Administrator, politician, journalist, writer

Main source: Entry by T. J. Hearn in the *Dictionary of NZ Biography* Volume 2.

When Vincent Pyke with his wife and family came from Victoria to Otago early in 1862, he already had the right CV for the distinguished career that followed. His life in England had included commerce as he was a linen draper in Bristol. He emigrated to Australia in 1851. On the goldfields there he began as a goldminer, then was a storekeeper. He became involved in politics, especially as an advocate for miners' rights and the ballot, and was elected to the Victorian Legislative Council and then the Legislative Assembly. He held senior administrative posts including as commissioner for public works and trades and customs. He also became a warden and magistrate.

Little wonder then that in Dunedin he was soon appointed by the Otago Provincial Government as a commissioner to organise the Goldfields Department. In this role he drafted a proposal for regulations of the Otago goldfields which later formed the basis of the regulations for all of New Zealand. He was Secretary of the Otago Gold Fields, which involved extensive travelling and trouble-shooting.

His knowledge of the early days of the Whakatipu goldfields was unsurpassed.



### The Discovery of Gold in the Arrow Gorge, 1862 (Page 82)

Vincent Pyke's authoritative account is given in the book (page 82). For some time there was dispute over who had made the discovery, with William Fox claiming the reward offered by the Otago Provincial Council for the finders of new goldfields. Fox and his party including John O'Callaghan arrived on 9 October. However, William Rees wrote to Pyke for inclusion in the book that John McGregor and Thomas Low's party was first, in late September. Fox did not receive the reward.

In fact, his claim was clearly without merit. Jack Tewa (aka Hatini Whiti, Anthony White, 'Maori Jack') had shown Rees some gold he had found in early August. Rees wrote, 'I then felt certain that it would be only a question of a few months before I should be surrounded by diggers.' Tewa had shown the gold to other people on the station too, and to Fox, as he himself acknowledged much later. In 2012 during the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery, Jack Tewa's status was recognised with the 'X Marks the Spot' sign beside the river at Arrowtown.

### Gold at Arthurs Point, November 1862 (Page 84)

When Thomas Arthur and Harry Redfern made their great find, they made no secret of it. Pyke was swiftly on the scene, visited Arthur, and wrote that 'he showed me and Mr Charles Worthington [the magistrate] a tin dish full of gold, which he had lying under his "stretcher" in a tent. ...The largest rush that ever occurred in Otago set in to the Wakatipu district. Owing to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the district, provisions were extremely scarce and dear.... I have known Mr Rees leave his bed at 3 o'clock in the morning when the flour-boat came in, and immediately proceed to serve out the flour to the hungry crowd.'

### A Dispute at Maori Point up the Shotover (Page 87)

'My first visit to Maori Point was necessitated by a complicate dispute, originating in the institution, by the warden, of imaginary boundaries in the flowing water. In the course of the hearing before Mr Nugent Wood and myself, a Maori waded into the river up to his armpits, and plunging a shovel into the rapid current, he succeeded after a few failures in bringing up a fine show of heavy gold on that implement....There was a deep crevice exactly in the disputed ground; and I am afraid to say how many thousands sterling it was sworn to be worth, in the estimate of the disputants. We had to decide the case however with only one acknowledged peg to start from, and I am happy to say that both parties – winners and losers – came up to the police hut, under the shadow of the rocks where we held the inquiry, to thank us for the manner in which we had dealt with it.'

### The Location of Queenstown, 1863

Pyke's skills in diplomacy were instrumental in resolving a dispute the outcome of which still affects all residents today – where the main township should be. Until this was decided, no one could erect permanent buildings, and Queenstown became the largest canvas town in Otago. In 1863 the Provincial Government decided that the administrative headquarters should be located at Frankton, and it was surveyed into sections. The *Otago Witness* newspaper wrote that 'with all its natural advantages

nothing can prevent Frankton being the chief township of the district.’ William Rees was contracted to construct buildings for the warden’s court and the gold receiver. (One of these became the first hospital.)

F.W.G. Miller’s account in *Golden Days of Lake County* (p.68) succinctly relates the consequences: ‘However, the people of Queenstown had other ideas and when the Government did remove all its buildings to Frankton there was an immediate outcry. A public meeting in June described the action of the Government as betraying “an ignorance of our mining and commercial pursuits unparalleled in the management of the goldfields.”

‘Deputations were sent to Dunedin to interview the Superintendent (Mr John Hyde Harris) and much irritation was caused on both sides. Ultimately the Secretary of the Goldfields (Mr Vincent Pyke) arrived in state, in company with Mr St. John Brannigan [Commissioner of Police], and a banquet was held in Mr Pyke’s honour. After some explanations it appeared that the whole thing was “purely a mistake” and in the convivial atmosphere of the banquet hall Mr Pyke promised to put the whole matter right to the complete satisfaction of the residents of Queenstown – a promise which was fulfilled without delay.’

#### Exploration of a Route to the West Coast, 1865

Pyke’s account of this is printed in full at the end of this article.

In the ensuing years, the tension between miners and settlers on the goldfields continued. In 1868 Pyke chaired an Otago Provincial Government commission to draw up new mining regulations. He became Warden initially for Dunstan and later for the Tuapeka goldfield.

#### Journalism, Politics and Writing 1873 to 1894

From *The Dictionary of National Biography Volume 2*, entry by T. J. Hearn.

Pyke returned to Dunedin from Central Otago in 1873 to follow a career in journalism, founding two newspapers. He was elected Member of the House of Representatives initially for Wakatipu, then Dunstan which he presented until 1890, then Tuapeka. In 1877, having contributed significantly to the Counties Act 1876, he was elected to represent the Kawarau Riding on the Vincent County Council, and served as chairman until 1882. The county is named in his honour. Pyke drew up the county seal whose motto, *in haec vincimus* (‘in these things we go forward’) expressed much of Pyke’s political philosophy and priorities.

He had ‘unbounded faith in the future of Central Otago’, according to his obituary in *Otago Witness*. He has been called ‘the father of the Otago Central railway’ as he was a persistent campaigner, and had the pleasure of turning the first sod at Wingatui near Mosgiel in 1879.

Never a party man, Pyke attached greater importance to his political independence and to provincial and national issues.

During his tenure as chair of Vincent County Council there was competition between Clyde and Cromwell over which should be designated the county town. Pyke’s failure to honour an alleged promise to Cromwell resulted in his effigy being hanged by the

Cromwellians and finally flung into the Clutha River to the accompaniment of 'a suitable dirge' from the town's brass band.

A portly man with a fondness for alcohol, he did not enjoy good health as he suffered for years from Bright's disease of the kidneys (now known as nephritis). He was a vigorous debater, lecturer and raconteur, and possessed of a formidable memory and an incisive wit.

Besides writing many goldfields reports and handbooks including on local government law (1882), and mining (1892), he produced two novels, *The Story of Wild Will Enderby* (1873) and *The Adventures of George Washington Pratt* (1874), and wrote stories, papers and articles for the *Otago Witness*.

Vincent Pyke died at Lawrence in 1894 aged 67, leaving an immense legacy of dedication to Otago's development.



**The Honourable Vincent Pyke, MHR.**

Panel sketch by William Mathew Hodgkins,  
March 1893.

Sketchbook E-495-q-04101

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ

Pyke's Account of his Exploration of a Route to the West Coast, 1865

From *History of the Early Gold Discoveries in Otago* p. 149.

In 1864 Dr Haast discovered the Pass which bears his name at the head of Lake Wanaka. In 1865 I was, at my own request, sent to investigate this route, with the view of ascertaining whether a practicable road could be built to connect Otago with the West Coast. The following terse account of my journey is extracted from 'The Handbook of New Zealand Mines' [hence the use of third person narration].

On 28<sup>th</sup> August 1865 Mr Vincent Pyke, Goldfields Secretary, accompanied by Mr Coates, Mining Surveyor, and three men, with two mules and two horses, started from the Dunstan [Clyde]. ... Two days afterwards they arrived at Newcastle [near Albert Town], where they met Hatini Whiti [Jack Tewa or Maori Jack], who was engaged to guide the expedition.



### The 1865 expedition through the Haast Pass

NOTE: Pyke Creek here is not to be confused with Pyke River which is a major tributary of the Hollyford River, named in honour of Vincent Pyke in 1863 by Patrick Caples who undertook a solo exploration of the Hollyford.

It rained incessantly for several days, and on one occasion the Haast River had to be forded 14 times during a day's travelling; whilst on another occasion the progress of the party was barred by an almost unbroken series of rocky gorges, through which the river foamed in a succession of cascades and rapids over huge piles of rock, which encumbered its channel for a distance of 10 to 12 miles. ... The party were unable to find a piece of level ground of sufficient extent to pitch their tents. They had to take shelter for the night under the projecting ledges of a huge mass of rock which had travelled from its original bed to within three feet on the edge of the river. Mr Pyke caught a chill through lying in a pool of water which had collected during the night, the consequence being that for three days he suffered from an acute attack of gout [an effect of kidney disease], under which he could only travel with difficulty and in great pain, more especially as he had to carry a heavy swag over the roughest possible ground.

Fording the Haast to the right bank above the junction of the Burke, the party came to an old camp, and found carved on a tree, 'Nugget Prospecting Party, Sep. 3, 1863.' Below the junction of the two rivers the Haast widened to a width of 50 yards, and the valley opened out, affording a magnificent view of the Grey and Moorhouse Ranges....

The party reached the sea coast on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 35 days after starting from the Dunstan, and remained three days, so as to enable the men to mend their clothing and prepare for the return journey. Their stock of provisions was reduced to 20 pannikins of flour and meal, and a little tea and sugar. They kept an anxious lookout for passing vessels, but none appeared in sight, and they were not aware until their return that the miners were at the time located at Jackson's Bay [to the south] and Bruce Bay [to the north].

The return journey commenced on 5th October, and two days afterwards the first entire fine day occurred since the 27<sup>th</sup> September; but the Haast River was much higher than on the downward journey. On the arrival of the party opposite the depot below the junction of the Clarke River, Mr Pyke sent two of the party across the river to fetch the stores that had been left there. Unfortunately, one of them when returning attempted to ford the Haast where water was deep and the current strong; he lost his footing, and was obliged to drop his load, swimming ashore with difficulty. The oatmeal, tea, sugar and flour were lost; but, luckily, 6lb of the latter was recovered on a sand-bar, and that, with a little brose-meal [oatmeal], was all that was left.

They hurried on till they reached the Burke, and took up the biscuits which were stored opposite the Wills River; then pressed on to the Makarora Valley, which they reached the following evening; but when they got to the Fish Stream they found it flooded by the incessant raid, foaming and roaring through its rocky channel in a torrent which it was impossible to ford. Tree after tree was felled in the vain effort to throw one over the chasm; and nothing but the fact that their last biscuit was consumed could have induced them to persevere in the midst of the steady downpour, which so chilled them as to induce a drowsy lethargy of the most painful description. At length they managed to cross by constructing a rude ladder of saplings reaching from a rock in the river to the top of the opposite cliff.



**The Haast River below the junction with the Burke, looking towards the Gray Mtns**

Watercolour by A.J. Austin, painted during the return journey.

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington NZ, Ref: A-108-001.

Restored by Bob Cranfield

On the 14<sup>th</sup> October the party arrived at the head of Lake Wanaka, and reached Clyde on the 19<sup>th</sup>, ten days short of two months from the time of their departure.

Auriferous indications were observed at various parts of the route, which Mr Pyke considered a practicable one to the West Coast from Lake Wanaka, the distance being estimated at about 60 miles.

Pyke comments in the book: ‘I may add to the above, that communication by this route is now (1887) easily accomplished; and I may also be permitted to express an opinion that it is the only practicable route for a railway connecting the East and West Coasts. Considering that the Pass itself...is only about 1,800 feet above sea level, and that this is the highest point on the entire route, no argument is required in support of this opinion.’

Sources

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## **Peter Tomanovich: The Croatian sailor who washed up at Gibbston**

Monologue prepared by Marion Borrell, based on an article by Malcolm Boote. Presented by Ivan Skorykh at 'People From Our Past' in April 2024.



*(Lakes District Museum EP132.2)*

*Note: Peter didn't leave any written material, so his personality has been created from the memories of those who knew him, including the Kinross children.*

Good afternoon. I'm Peter. My real name is Pietro, but Peter is easier for people and I'm used to it after all these years.

I was born in 1835 in Croatia, in the little seaport of Cataro near Dubrovnic, on the Adriatic coast. Croatia was part of the old Austrian Empire then. I went to sea at an early age, first training as a naval cadet in the great port of Trieste. Later I captained and part-owned a sloop, and traded around the Adriatic.

You may wonder why I left. But on the goldfields people never asked, and many people didn't want to tell. I leave you to guess what I was escaping from.

In 1868 I travelled to England and from there to the Victorian goldfields. At first, I couldn't speak a word of English. But the sailors on the ship taught me a lot of words. It turned out they were swear words. I should have expected that, shouldn't I.

In 1869 I came to New Zealand try my luck on the West Coast goldfields, then moved here to Gibbston, and stayed for the rest of my life. It's an odd place for a sailor to wash up – about as far from the sea as anywhere in the South Island. But I made myself at home.

I spent years alluvial mining on the other side of the river at Bakery Creek and other sites. Though I didn't have much success, a site near Deep Creek became known as Peter's Flat.

Every day Hugh Harvey and I crossed the river in the chair – a sort of flying fox – as the river is too dangerous to cross there. We worked the river as far as Nevis Bluff, but the river banks weren't stable enough to run water for sluicing, so we couldn't access the gold that must be in those banks.

The story goes, and I won't deny it, that I kept 200 ounces of gold hidden underneath a dead cow, over there. The cow will have rotted away now I guess, but the gold might still be there – if you get there first!

I built a small cottage of cob (which is mainly mud) on one acre between the river and the road at Gibbston.



The cottage and trees in 1994 (*Photo: Locations Realty*)

It was an ideal place for grapes, but not many people knew about growing them then. I planted a large orchard – apricots, figs, mulberry trees, apples, pears, cherries, almonds and walnuts. I could graft three varieties of apricots on one tree and have them ripening at different times. Many of the fruit trees I planted then are still there, I'm told. And others can still be seen along the Gibbston Back Road in the Perriams' orchard.

My honeybees became a business – at one stage I had about 80 hives. The bees pollinated the fruit trees, I sold the honey, and I made a powerful mead that was a very popular drink with the Gibbston residents. If any unwanted visitors came to my house, I would tip over one of the hives and see the people take to their heels. This was an old Croatian strategy to drive off bandits.

About the honey, there was a story going around that I strained the lovely dark golden honey through the legs of my long-johns. Urrg! I here deny that absolutely! As the

storekeeper, Mr Kinross could tell you, I bought fresh muslin every year to strain the honey.

The Queenstown Stock Inspector caused me some problems about the bees. He claimed that my hives were below standard – they were boxes with a tussock placed over the roof of each one. The inspector I should have patent or framed boxes so that the bees wouldn't be killed when the honey was collected. Well, I told him that I'd managed in my own way for years and my bees thrived. He didn't make me change.

I kept a nanny goat, and shared the cottage with my cat Jan, a beautiful black and white tom who came the went through his own trapdoor. At one stage Jan invited a female boarder, and soon we were overrun with kittens. I couldn't bring myself to dispose of them, but eventually they left to seek their own rabbits.

There were no other Slavic people living nearby, but I wrote letters to Vasilio Sefferovitch who lived at Moke Creek. You've probably heard of Seffertown. He was Russian and had been an army officer. After fighting against the British in Crimea, he came here in search of gold. He married an Irishwoman and had a large family.



Helen and Thomas Kinross & Family in 1891. Three more children were born later. (LDM EP0787)

The Kinross family were like a family for me. They owned the store, post office and gold office, and every Saturday afternoon I'd go there to deliver honey and collect my groceries and tobacco. Then I'd stay for the evening meal and a long chinwag with Mr Kinross. Mrs Kinross kept a good stock of health remedies and advice, and she always gave me a large slice of jammy sponge roll to take home.

I loved the Kinross children from the time they were babes in my arms – all eleven of them. I'd tell them stories about my home country, the way of life, the murders ... and the ghosts. They were delighted and scared.

Once two of the Kinross boys gave me a scare too – I found Andrew and Jim chasing my nanny goat and her kid along a narrow rocky ledge high above the river with a straight drop to the water. They were trying to capture the kid because I had told them that if they caught one, they could keep it. I would have bet on the goats surviving a fall, but not the children. I persuaded them to come back.

The children took a great interest in the bees too. I remember showing them how to catch a swarm that was hanging from a matagouri bush – just a tap and they fell into the box I'd put underneath. With the lid on quickly and a tussock on top, there was another hive.

I was a member of the school committee for 18 years. I lent a hand in practical ways, especially on Arbour Day helping the children plant trees. I liked to arrive early for events at the school and hoist the Union Jack – no one doubted my allegiance. When I was old, I became a British subject.

I kept on mining with Hugh Harvey until I was a good age. But the tobacco got me in the end. I smoked a 12-inch long pipe. When I took ill with acute bronchitis, the doctor said it was due to smoking. In 1920 I was taken to the Frankton Hospital where I died and was buried at the Frankton cemetery. I was aged 85 and had lived in Gibbston for 50 years. A good long life.

Everyone thought I was a poor old feller, but I proved them wrong. After I died, they found my savings, in tobacco tins of course, in the cottage. Some reports say there were 70 gold sovereigns, or was it 200 ounces of gold nuggets? And some say £200 in cash. What does it matter? I didn't need it.

Later, I'm told, my neighbour Gerald Enright, hung up a ghost of me inside the cottage to keep nosy people away. That suits me. My mining partner, Hughie Harvey, looked after the place.

I still haunt the cottage occasionally, but I don't disturb the people who have lived there since I left.

The little house still stands above the river, surrounded by my fruit trees – 'heritage trees', they're called. That will do for my legacy.

#### Sources:

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# The History of Threepwood Farm, Ladies Mile, Lake Hayes

## Part 2, 1912 to 1940: The Leo Lee Era

**Compiled by Marion Borrell with input from Rob Lee and Jennie Henderson**

The first part of the history was printed in *Queenstown Courier 110, Summer 2023* and can be found on our website. There are two articles covering from the 1860s to 1912. The second is written by Rob Lee about his great-grandfather Robert Lee, who died in 1911 just as his private irrigation scheme was completed.

Robert's son Leo took over the farm when aged about 23, and he reaped the benefit of the irrigation. As Rob Lee relates, with the irrigation in place, Leo successfully farmed there for 25 years or so. The combination of flat land, fertile soils, a hot summer and the addition of a reliable water supply, meant that the cropping potential of the land was excellent. He employed many workers, both full-time and casual. From the 1920s he also engaged a farm manager, first Bill McKay, then Bill's son Sandy from 1934 to 1940. The McKay families lived in the stone cottage until Leo and his family moved to Queenstown in 1934, after which the McKays lived in the homestead.

Leo and his brothers purchased more land, increasing the total acreage from about 800 to 1200 acres. This included Douglasvale across Ladies Mile where he planted 40 acres in walnut trees. He also planted most of the trees around the homestead, including an extensive fruit orchard. Many of those trees are still healthy and producing fruit today.

His mother, sister and aunt moved into Queenstown in 1913, and the following year Leo married Beatrice Coates, known as Kathie, a city girl. They had three children, Edith Kathleen, Robert Kinsley and John Allen. In this family photo Kathleen and Kinsley under the willow outside the homestead in about May 1929.



Leo Lee championed the cause of a much wider irrigation scheme, joining in the decades-long process of persuading the government to fund it. He welcomed people in authority at Threepwood to demonstrate to them the benefits of irrigation. The Arrow Irrigation Scheme was eventually begun in 1925 and was opened in 1930, at which point Threepwood joined it. (See the article about the history of the scheme in *Queenstown Courier* 105, 2021.)

Leo was very public-spirited and became a prominent member of the community, giving many hours of service.

He was a local body politician, serving on the Lake County Council for 24 years, including 10 years as chairman.

This was a demanding and highly responsible role, including matters of roading and other infrastructure.

The most significant undertaking he was involved with was the construction of the Kingston Road, opened in 1936 with Kathie cutting the ribbon.

He was president of the Lake County A & P Society from 1914 to 1933. This involved much more than organising the annual show, as he was a spokesman for the farming community and promoted new knowledge and initiatives. For example, he supported in the establishment of the Dairy Factory in Speargrass Flat Road in 1912 and was on its Board of Directors. He was to the fore in bringing agricultural experts to share their knowledge and new developments at an 'Arrowtown farm school' (rather like an educational conference) in 1926. He advocated for a hydroelectricity scheme in 1922, and was a proponent of a saleyards in the district in 1926, but this didn't happen. In such matters he continued his father's vision of improving farming in the district.

In 1934 Leo and Kathie shifted to Queenstown, leaving the farm in the hands of a manager until it was sold in 1940. Douglasvale was bought by Robert Jones and Threepwood by Eric and Mary Strain.



*Photo: Lakes District Museum EP3400*

### **Mary Findlay's Memories of Threepwood in about 1934**

Mary was a young Wellington woman who was hired by the farm manager and his wife to assist with the day-to-day running of the farm. She later recorded her experiences in her autobiography, *Tooth and Nail: The Story of a Daughter of the Depression*. Her recollections provide a useful insight into both the physical appearance of Threepwood and the nature of farm life during a period of considerable economic difficulty. Here are some of her observations selected by Jennie Henderson.

- She noted that the farms in the area ran only a few hundred sheep, with constant concerns that the flocks would be reduced as they were not economically viable with such low prices for wool and mutton.
- Threepwood was mostly self-sufficient: fruit was grown for the farm, including peaches, apricots, plums, apples and greengages. Walnuts were also grown for private use. Radishes, carrots, parsnips and anions were sown in the winter.
- A mobile mill would arrive once a year to thresh the wheat and oats.
- Only wood was used as fuel in the house as coal was too expensive. Willow and poplar were the most common woods used, but they burned too quickly to be very effective.

Rabbits were still a problem in the 1930s: *On the hills rabbits competed with sheep for every blade of grass and often won. Some few enclosures had rabbit-proof fences, but mostly farmers relied on poisoning in an attempt to control the pests. They grew carrots to which they added strychnine and baited the ground in the winter months.*

Irrigation was the lifeblood of the farm. The Arrow Irrigation Scheme was opened in 1930. *With Christmas approaching, there was already talk of ringing the 'raceman'. He was the man employed by the county council who operated the various controls which released so many head of was into the water races or irrigation channels. This scheme had raised farming in this area from the subsistence level.*

The farm was a small-scale endeavour in this period (50 cows), and the farming community remained close-knit through economic difficulty. The manager's wife, Mabel, describes the lifestyle to Mary when she arrives:

*'My husband Stan is a farm manager and I have to help him. We're just working for a salary. When crops have to be harvested or sheep shorn, we have to hire extra hands, and all those men have to be housed and fed. That's where you and I come in. I have to run the house and feed the fowls and help with the milking of the 50 cows and do the vegetable garden, so I want you to realise that there's a lot of hard work in it...Though we work hard, we do have a lot of fun. We're a small community, everybody knows one another and everybody helps one another...(I) don't want a servant...I want a helper and worker....We all work on the place and we're all paid for our work. There's no class distinction. You'll live in the house with my husband and myself and we all eat in the kitchen together.'*

We are fortunate to have Mary's physical descriptions of both the inside and the outside of the homestead in this period. As Mary and her employers approach the farm

for the first time, Mary saw *daffodils on a green sward running down to the lake edge. There was also a long verandah about which climbed an old established vine of wisteria. The large mauve blossoms hung down smothering the foliage.*

Once inside the house, Mary was surprised by her surroundings:

*... we entered the biggest kitchen I had ever seen. It was dominated by an enormous range, which stood in the centre of the room. Nearby was a vast table set for dinner, and on the back wall was a sideboard, fit mate for Westminster Abbey. In one corner was a couch which looked like a single bed (I later learnt it was called a colonial couch) while the remaining wall-space was taken up with doors. I counted five. ... Then I noticed the big black kettle and the huge black pots on the stove and concluded that at times there must be catering for large numbers.*

Her duties were ‘countrified’ compared to her previous jobs in Wellington, as Mabel explained: *‘We always have porridge, chops and potatoes.... The chops are in the safe outside and the potatoes in the washhouse’.... She took a small lamp from the sideboard, and led me to the safe outside, then showed me the washhouse. There was a sack of potatoes on the floor, onions strung from the ceiling and a copper and tubs. An outsized iron baby’s bath took my eye. ‘What’s that for?’ ‘That’s the bath. You’re in the country now. If you want a bath, you light the copper, heat the water and bale it into the bath. There’s no water laid on in the house. We depend on tanks. If you want a wash, you take this basin and get some hot water from the kettle and add cold from the tank.’*

One of the rooms in the house had belonged to the late daughter of the managers, and was decorated in the following manner:

*She led me through the kitchen and down a wide hall. Evidently my room was not to be the usual servant’s room off the kitchen. She opened a door and put the lamp on a kidney-shaped dressing-table....There was a frill of pink spotted muslin around the dressing-table and the same material for the curtains and bedspread. A wardrobe stood in one corner and an armchair in another. The floor-covering was linoleum but there was a big mat beside the bed...The sweet peas growing outside filled the room with their perfume.*

Sadly, due to the need for retrenchments in the tough economic climate, Mary was dismissed before she had spent a year on the farm. It had been by far the happiest place she had worked. But such was the insecure life of a ‘daughter of the Depression’.

Threepwood was sold in 1940 to Eric and Mary Strain whose family then owned it for the next 53 years.

#### Main sources:

**Henderson, Jennie** ‘History of Threepwood’, printed in 2005 in the Archaeological Assessment for Threepwood by P.G. Petchey of Southern Archaeology and in the Conservation Plan by Jackie Gillies. Used with permission of the author.

**Lee, Judith D.** *The Lees from Northumberland: Ten Generations of our Line*, 2006

**Findlay, Mary** *Tooth and Nail: The Story of a Daughter of the Depression* (A.H. and A.W. Reed, Wellington)

## Margaret Templeton née Ballard, 1912 – 2005 'a foot-in-the-door kind of person'

By Pauline Lawrence, delivered at 'People From Our Past', April 2024

Margaret's obituary in the *Otago Daily Times* began: 'Queenstown owes a lot to a little lady who, for almost fifty years, has been a bulwark against the forces of wholesale development. The town might have changed out of recognition in that time, but were it not for Margaret and relatively few others, the change would have been much more drastic. She was a pioneer in both the local environmental society and historical society and she led from the front in most of the large and expensive battles both groups have waged.'

In 1994 Margaret was made an Honorary Life Member of the Historical Society, recognising her long service, her role as Treasurer from 1973 to 1979, and as a committee member for 32 years. In the mid-1990's she became the first life member of the Wakatipu Environmental Society.

### Her Background

Who was Margaret, what was her background before she came to Queenstown in the late 1940's? I've discovered that Margaret's great-grandmother, Jane Harvey, was born in Somerset, and came to NZ with her parents and three siblings, arriving on the beach at Petone in 1842. Jane was 14 but had deliberately overstated her age as being 15, in order to qualify for a servant's fare. Just two years later at age 16 she married Solomon Levy, a Jewish orphan from London who had arrived at Petone in 1840. The couple had 13 children, including Miriam, born in 1859, who was Margaret's grandmother.

Later in life Miriam described her early memories of Wellington to other family members. She recalled seeing prisoners from Mt Cook jail chained together traipsing through Courtenay Place to build retaining walls around Oriental Bay. She remembered the Basin Reserve, which had been drained by an earthquake in 1855, being transformed into a cricket ground using similar prison labour. She also told how women were very wary when ships arrived, saying that sometimes the sailors must have been ravenous, because they raided shops and ate the meat raw. Wives and daughters were kept indoors when ships arrived. Three of Miriam's aunts signed the suffrage petition.

Miriam married James Ballard, a clerk for the Post and Telegraph. Both he and Miriam's father had been involved with defending the stockades during the land wars. In 1895 Miriam and James moved to Dunedin with their daughter and son, Leonard, who was Margaret's father. Their home was at 75 Union St and is now part of the university campus.



Margaret dressed as Mary Williams for the Historical Society in 1999



The house in Hallenstein Street today



The Templetons' hire boats (*Photo: Paul Hansen*)

Leonard qualified as a dentist and married Jessie Clack. The family lived in Opoho. Margaret too wanted to train as a dentist but her father felt that it was not appropriate for a woman. Margaret trained as a hairdresser and a dental technician.

### **Queenstown – Family and Business**

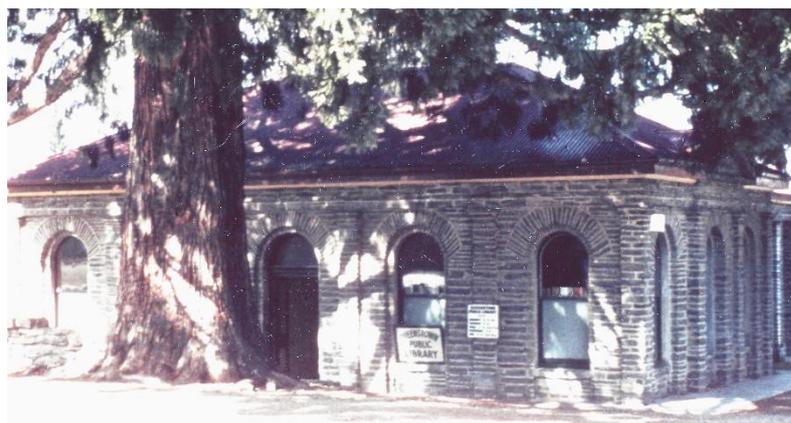
Margaret came to Queenstown in 1949 and the following year she married Irvine Templeton. Irvine was originally from Albert Town and had served in the RNZAF in the Pacific during WW2. They bought this house in Hallenstein Street where Margaret was to live until her death in 2005. Margaret's mother commented that the house 'would do for now' while Margaret thought it was a bit like a garage.

In 1954 the couple purchased a tourist venture - the rowing boat business which was run from a shed on the foreshore by the Steamer Wharf. They expanded the business to 12 clinker-built boats, plus two boats with engines for fishing trips. They had fishing rods for hire and Irvine took visitors fishing around the lake. They had the first bikes for hire in the area.

Irvine's ill health meant the business had to be sold in 1959. Margaret cared for her husband until his death in 1975. They adopted daughter Rosemary who died aged thirty in 1985.

### **First Campaign: The Old Library**

In 1965 the Queenstown Borough Council voted to demolish this building, the Queenstown Library and replace it with new council chambers and a new library. Margaret, Marygold Miller and others in the newly formed Historical Society fought their first major battle to save it. The council had decided it was beyond repair and it had to go.



The Library when it still was a library

The campaigners focused on informing the public and amassing evidence to show the building could be saved. It was a formidable campaign. They managed to get national news coverage -the *NZ Herald*, the *Auckland Weekly News* and the *Listener* gave support. Even during election week, the cause managed to make the front page of the *ODT* three days running. The *Evening Star* launched a financial campaign to support a society pitifully short of funds. The NZ Historic Places Trust finally lent support with a \$500 donation. A telegram of support came from Māori iwi of Dunedin. It is true that that the inside of the Library was a mess - cracks in the walls, grimy windows and shabby furniture made it an unpleasant place to be in. However, the group got an architect to produce sketches to show how the building could be integrated with new buildings around it. They found an engineer in Dunedin who was willing to explain to the council that the building was structurally sound. Apparently, he had the engines of his private plane warmed up while he waited at Momona Airport for word that the

council had finally agreed to meet him. The meeting was not genial - one councillor kept his back to the engineer the whole time and others muttered in the background. Finally, the council made a concession - a referendum of ratepayers would be held. It took place on Saturday 11 February 1967. It was a tense time. Many ratepayers lived outside the town, and the campaigners were worried about whether they would take the time to cast a postal vote or make the journey to vote. When all votes were counted 175 voted for destruction and 343 for preservation.

### **First Campaign for the Park Street Reserve**

Then came Margaret's first battle to prevent development on the Park St Reserve, the triangle of land bounded by the Gardens, Horne Creek and Park Street. In 1969 the Mount Cook Group announced it was planning to build a hotel on the land. Margaret was indignant that anyone would even think to build on a reserve. So off she went to council to learn as much as she could and as fast as she could about the planning process. She then made a submission opposing it.

To her horror Margaret found that only she and Ailsa Smeaton, a Park St resident, had made submissions. These two ladies - 'two old ladies in gym shoes', said Margaret - took on the Mt Cook Group almost single-handedly, and raised national awareness. They took a case to the Town and Country Appeal Authority (today's Environmental Court) and were successful.

The library battle and this one to protect a special piece of land in the centre of town were to be the start of a new part of Margaret's life, sparking a life-long passion for protecting Queenstown's precious places. It was to be all-consuming for the rest of her life. It was her sense of purpose, her doggedness, her tenacity that was to see her become involved in the community in so many ways.

### **Queenstown Borough Council Affairs**

Margaret had been a reporter for the *Central Otago News* in the early 'sixties and in her words she 'became hooked' on council meetings. She was no longer doing this job, but council meetings were finally opened to the public in 1968 and Marygold Miller encouraged her to attend. She did and she became a constant presence at council meetings for over thirty years. Margaret said some 'call me a watchdog, but I'm more of a foot-in-the-door kind of person. Sometimes I skim through the order paper and am amazed at what they're even contemplating. Council meetings are just as good as vaudeville. I like all the councillors ... you can't agree all the time.' As soon as she didn't like the sound of anything, she would find out more about it and would go 'zooming along' to the site to check it out.

At her funeral, former Mayor Clive Geddes noted that Margaret became intensely involved in council affairs because she had 'an absolute passion for the community, ensuring that councils behaved in the manner she expected, and if they didn't, she made it clear that they should have. She demanded probity in council but with good humour and wit, more like a good friend offering advice.'

Until recently, Margaret's portrait has hung in the council chambers, keeping a watchful eye over what our councillors are up to.

## **The Wakatipu Environmental Protection Society**

By the early seventies she and a group of women had realised that the town needed a ginger group to protect the very landscape that makes this area special, and so in 1972 the Wakatipu Environmental Society was born. In the mid-nineties Margaret became the first life member of the Environmental society.

## **Second and Third Campaigns for the Gardens**

To Margaret and Ailsa Smeaton's horror, in the 'seventies there was another proposal to put a hotel in the gardens, this time from the government's own Tourist Hotel Corporation (THC). The two women dusted off their files and lurched into action again. This time the hotel was stopped only by the intervention of the Minister of Tourism.

In the late seventies yet another attempt was made by THC to use the reserve. Margaret and Ailsa and the Guardians of the Reserve went into battle again and won again. A plaque on a rock in the preserved reserve marks their efforts.

## **Campaigning as a Way of Life**

Margaret realised that to protect the environment she needed to be constantly vigilant. As well as attending Council meetings she now began to read every single public notice in every issue of the *ODT*. Soon her kitchen table, which she called her office, disappeared under a collection of newspaper clippings and council agendas. She threw nothing away, and had a prodigious memory. She was so well-informed on council policies and practices that even council officers regularly rang her to check details. Margaret had her own particular chair in the council chambers. She was also given her own pigeonhole at the council. Greg Thompson recalled that at Environmental Society meetings the committee was not allowed to go home until all of that month's *ODT* clippings had been dealt with.

Margaret was one of those who also tried to save the Buckham's Malthouse building and the old stone Foresters' Lodge.

Another initiative that Margaret, Nancy Williams and Faye Thompson took was to volunteer to help tape reminiscences from the older people in the community so that historical memories were not lost.

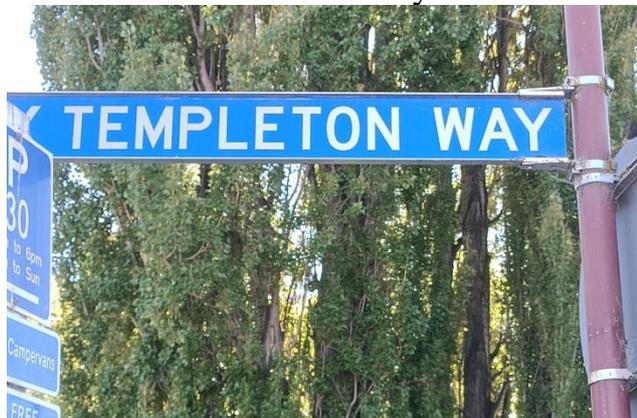


Margaret was responsible for the placement of this rock and plaque on her Hallenstein Street frontage. It marks the entry of a water race built around 1870 to supply water to the brewery in Marine parade. The water came from a spring on commonage ground, designated a water reserve, above Hallenstein St. The race was probably used until a piped supply from the One Mile was installed. In the 1950s the race still passed through a number

of properties, causing some flooding in heavy rain. The race was closed off and most people filled in their part of it. The Templetons preserved their 50-metre stretch, and applied for an Historic Places classification. If you push through trees and shrubs, you can see the plaque and look over a wooden boundary fence to see the exposed race.

In 1993 in a newspaper interview Margaret said that tourism worried her. She didn't think the Queenstown Promotion Board should be encouraging hordes of people to come from overseas until the town was better equipped. In her words: 'They proved in Europe that if you let people in in great numbers the ecosystem suffers.'

When asked by a reporter in 1993 why she hadn't stood for council herself, she said she was not a good speaker, and that major personal events had precluded it. Despite the personal hardships, the reporter commented 'she's an optimist with an excellent sense of humour' and that her sentences were often punctuated with 'So help me Bob'. When asked if she had other interests, she said she played bowls 'unless it's too hot - I wilt - or too cold - I lose my circulation.'



In 1999 the Council honoured Margaret by naming the lane from the Library to the Memorial Hall after her. She was surprised by the honour and admitted that council had for the first time finally got one past her. 'I usually know what's going on in council.'

Margaret's legacy lives on in other ways. After Rosemary's death Margaret created the 'Rosemary Templeton Award for Personal Effort and Achievement in Spite of Difficulties' which is awarded each year at Wakatipu High School. In addition, her estate now provides scholarships for local students who may find it financially difficult to go on to tertiary education. Each recipient receives \$5,000 a year for three years. Currently about 12 students are receiving the grant. From my time at the high school and now as a member of the Margaret Templeton Trust I've had the privilege to see many young people receive the awards. Without a doubt, Margaret would be proud of the tenacity, determination and abilities of the recipients. In so many ways they resemble Margaret herself.



Acknowledgements: Kirsty Sharpe, Greg Thompson, *Southland Times*, *Otago Daily Times* and past articles from *Queenstown Couriers*.

**Queenstown and District Historical Society Inc.**  
**Chairperson's Report for the Annual General Meeting**  
**November 2024**

For the year from 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024

By Marion Borrell

Written 15 October 2024

This 59<sup>th</sup> year of the Society has been a steady continuation of sharing, promoting and protecting our local history and organising activities for members.

Our membership numbers are stable at about 180 memberships and 250 individuals. Our financial position remains strong at about \$40,000. Our largest source of income is subscriptions and donations from members, while the largest expense is the printing and posting of the *Courier* magazines.

The creation of the new Constitution, as required by the Incorporated Societies Act 2022, was approved at a Special General Meeting in May. Our Purposes are unchanged. The full document can be accessed from the first page of the website.

**Promotion of Local History:**

**Publications**

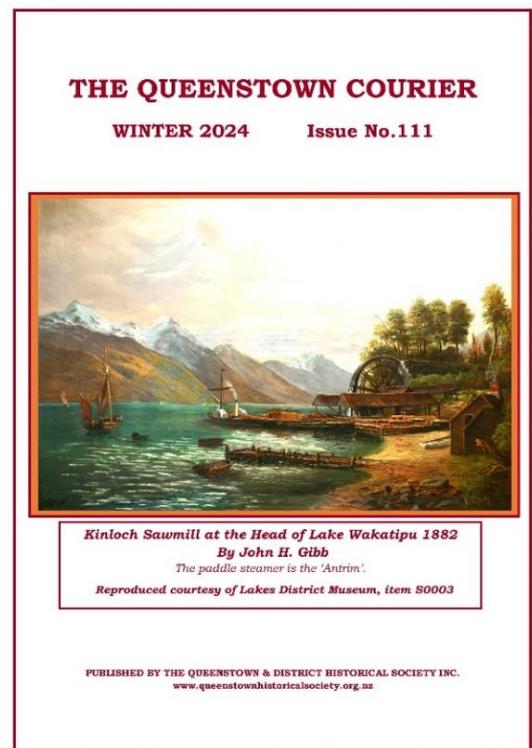
- *Queenstown Courier Issue 110* with articles by Jennie Henderson, Rob Lee, Marion Borrell and Tony Hanning.
- *Queenstown Courier Issue 111* with articles by Jo Boyd, Ray O'Callaghan, R.J. Meyer and Marion Borrell.
- The website is well used, especially the archive of *Couriers*, and generated a number of historical queries. We have increased the capacity of the website to accommodate our growing archive.
- The *Historic Places in Queenstown* brochure continues to be distributed free, paid for by QLDC.
- *Edith Cavell, a bridge and bravery* and *Courier 100, Stories of Wakatipu* by Danny Knudson continue to sell at the Museum.

**Historical Panels Project**

Since 2018 we have created eleven information panels in widespread locations, and several committee members are working on more. The restoration of the installation at the Skippers Road turnoff featuring Julien Bourdeau has been completed by Ed and Zandrie Elliott, as recorded in *Courier 112*.

**Activities and Events from September 2023 to May 2024**

In September we celebrated 'Making Music 1860 to 1914' with talks and/or performances. The items were 'On Rees's Station' by Marion Borrell, 'Gold-rush Music' by Colin Macnicol, 'From Tin whistle to Brass Bands' by Peter Doyle, and



‘Music Builds Community’ by Pauline Lawrence. Additional music was played by Cheryl Collie (piano) and Natasha Matla (violin).

In October we visited the Arrow Doctor’s Residence owned by Noel and Carolyn Beggs, and the Arrow Kilwinning Lodge with Chris Buckley.

At the AGM in November members reminisced by telling ‘Rabbit Tales’ to continue the theme from *Courier 109*.

In February we had an enlightening visit to Garston and Athol with local expert Richard Soper who was responsible for making the historical panel at the site of the Athol railway station.

At April’s ‘People from Our Past’, we encountered Rev Donald Ross (Rev Carlton Johnstone), Peter Tomanovich (Ivan Skorykh), Rosie Grant (Elaine Kirkland) and Margaret Templeton (Pauline Lawrence).

In May members brought along ‘Treasured Books’ from family Bibles to classics, documents about the goldfields, children’s books, ‘naughty’ pop-up books from the 1920s, and a notable collection of a father’s World War 2 diaries, photos and records.

All events were enjoyable and educational. Our thanks to the many members and friends who contributed and assisted.

### **Heritage Protection**

We continue to monitor Resource Consent Applications for any involving heritage matters and we keep an eye on heritage sites. The QDLC regulations and the planners require Heritage Assessment Reports for relevant applications.

In October 2023 we were concerned about the flood damage to part of the Queenstown cemetery, but appreciated the sensitive restoration carried out by the Council.

The classroom block from the old high school in Stanley St which we had submitted about has been saved by being shifted to Frankton to the Country Lane precinct.

### **Community Involvement**

- Lakes District Museum: The very close relationship continues: Pauline Lawrence is our representative on the Museum Board; archivist Jo Boyd, is a member of our committee; and Denise Heckler teaches in the Education programme.

- Whakatipu Heritage Trust – Marion Borrell is a trustee.

- QLDC’s new Arts, Culture and Heritage strategy came into being after consultations which we attended. One consequence is that representatives of all the district’s heritage groups will meet regularly to share ideas. Another consequence is that we are now in touch with the 3 Lakes Cultural Trust.

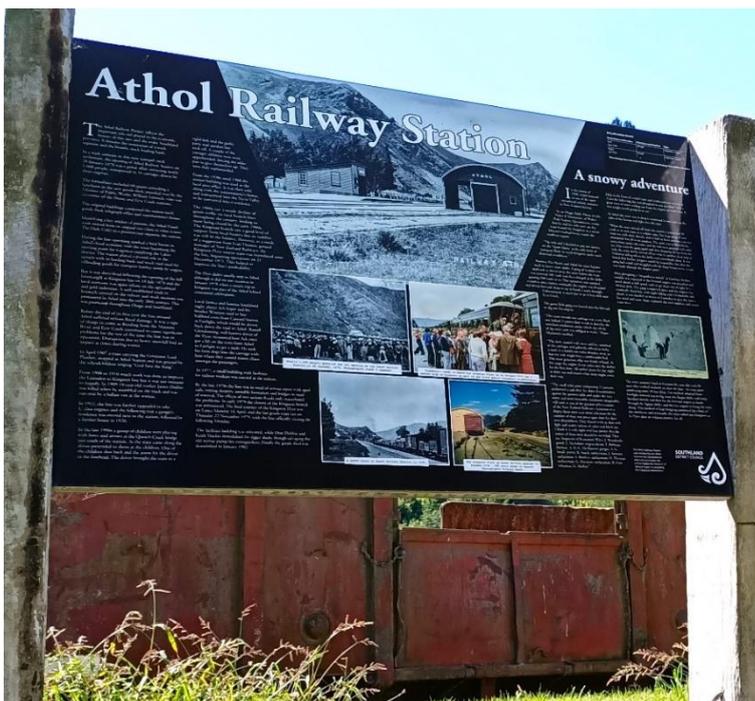
### **The Committee**

The committee members are Marion Borrell (chairperson), Denise Heckler (deputy-chairperson and secretary), Bev Cason (treasurer), Patrick Beehan, Shona Blair, Jo Boyd, Kerry Dunlop, Monika Fry, Pauline Lawrence, Colin Macnicol, Ray O’Callaghan and Fran O’Connor.

Patrick is retiring after four years, and we thank him for his contributions. Monika (our website manager) and Jo are not standing for the committee but will continue their valuable practical support. Marion will not be chairperson, after 12½ years in the role, but will remain as Immediate Past Chairperson.



Arrowtown Brass Band 1890 (*LDM EP0317*)



The panel at Athol on a street parallel to the main road – well worth a detour.

Rosie Grant, farmer, of Glenorchy, in 1994 aged 89, with one of her many cats.





# **Queenstown & District Historical Society Incorporated**

## ***Our Heritage Today – For Tomorrow***

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### MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

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Paid Life Membership            \$350

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