

*** THE QUEENSTOWN COURIER ***

The Official Publication of the
QUEENSTOWN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY (INC.)

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The year since last September has been an active one for the Society.

A few members went along Chard Road to look at the Maori excavations dug by Mr Neville Ritchie and his helpers. Unfortunately, Mr Ritchie was missed by the group, but they had an enjoyable time in spite of that.

On January 21, the Society repeated a previously held trip to historical places in the neighbourhood. Mr Ian Daniel gave a most interesting commentary to a bus-full of people, mostly visitors. They went to Arrowtown via the Coronet Peak look-out, where a good view of the geological formation of the valley could be seen. An excellent tea was provided in Arrowtown before a visit to an old Flour Mill and back to Queenstown via Lake Hayes, seeing places of interest all the way around.

The Society organised a Talk on the District Scheme. This was held in the Borough Council rooms, and Mr Byers explained various aspects of the Scheme, the areas of historic interest being particularly relevant to members. This meeting was open to the public, and was well attended.

The highlight of the year was the Society's trip to the Alexandra district in April, when visits were made to the old Store at Matakanui, St Bathans, Otarehua Engineering Works and the Ophir Post Office. Mr Carline, President of the Alexandra Historical Society, gave much information throughout the tour and made it a trip to be remembered long by all.

In August, members of the Society, helped by the Council Works Department and School children, tidied up the Cemetery. Weeds were pulled up, gravel was spread around and the old Graves were smartened up.

On September 15, the Society made submissions to the Hearing on Planning. A total of six places were put on the protected list or altered, and only the inclusion of one house was disallowed. The Society supported the protection of about sixteen other constructions and twenty-five additional trees.

The Society will continue to protect buildings and places of historic interest, and keep a watch on future developments in the Wakatipu

district.

Further Outings in the area are being planned - in October, a boat trip to Bobs Cove and Cecil Peak Lime Kilns promises to be an interesting and popular one.

May I conclude by thanking all who have supported the Society during the past year, thus protecting our historical heritage.

Whites stone barn Lake Hayes by Keith Grant

ROMA McANDREW
PRESIDENT

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"THE LOOSE BOX" - the Peacock residence, Lake Hayes

The Queenstown & District Historical Society member, Mr Keith Grant, supplied this history, supporting the application to have this building registered as an Historical building. (This was disallowed).

The original stone barn was built by George White 100 years ago. Its design included wool shed, stable, feed storage, grain floor and part sleeping accommodation. It was built during the year 1881.

Of the builder himself, a brief history is worthy of mention. George White was born in Shetland in 1834, second eldest of a family of five. They were orphaned at an early age when their father, a sea going captain, was drowned at sea and their mother died shortly afterwards. The young family were cared for by relatives and friends.

Suffering a hard life at the hands of his foster parents, young George cleared out to sea at the age of 12 years. This was in 1846. He spent the next seven years on sailing ships visiting many countries throughout the world.

It was during 1853, while his ship was in an Australian port, that news of the Bendigo Gold Rush enticed George White and a fellow mate to desert. On shore, these two were taken into custody by shore police but a kindly Irish jailer turned their cell key and allowed them to escape. Brother James, the eldest of the family who had apprenticed as a ship builder was already on the goldfields at Bendigo. These two men with their first returns from gold mining, sent money back to Shetland to pay the passages for the three remaining members of the family to come out to Australia.

When news of the Otago Gold rush came through, George and James boarded the second boatload of miners and headed for the rush at Gabriels Gulch. Both men were to mine in all Otago and West Coast rushes.

James settled at Bald Hill Flat where he discovered the rich White's reef on the Obelisk Range, while George, after mining at Brackens and Macetown, settled at Lake Hayes. He took over a half-share from the partnership of two landowners by the names of Grey & Webster. Having bought Grey's share in 1869, he stayed in partnership with Webster for about 2 years. The holding at this stage was only a few acres of land on the flat. The only living abode they had was a small rock cave walled in at the front with a sloping shingle roof which had a hole where it met the rock face to let the smoke out.

White then bought out Webster's share, and took up more land extending from the front road line to the Kawarau River behind. By now he had quarried enough stone to build a stone house. This was completed in 1871.

Ten years later, he started to build his stone barn (the Loose Box). The stone was quarried from the same site which adjoined the cave. This whole project was completed in one year while still attending to his farm operations.

The foundations of this building are solid stone walls 3 feet thick which are based on solid rock, well below ground level, at a depth of 4 to 5 feet. From ground level upwards, the end gable walls reduce to two feet in width and the side walls to 1 ft. 8 ins. All construction is true dry walling until the end walls reach the height at which the gables start to reduce to the peak. Here, the final walling reduced to 1 ft. 6 ins. and mortar was used between the stones which were smaller in size.

The interior layout on the ground floor consisted of a 2 stall stable paved with large flag stones. This area connected to the lean-to portion which was chaff and feed storage. Its floor level was raised above that of the stable by about 18 ins. Originally it had a stone well below floor level for chaff bagging. The chaff cutter was located on a high stand outside the front window of the lean-to and was driven by a horse power unit located some distance out from the building.

The rear of the ground floor, also raised above stable level, was timber floored for wool shed and grating pens.

The top story is continuous over the length of the gable section and floored with baltic pine. The main support beam which runs the full length of the building, about 42 ft., measures approximately 10 ins. by 12 ins. and is all hand adzed. There are two portions to this beam the longest of which was recovered from the Kawarau River during the flood in 1871. It was beached on McBrides Flat, snigged up and stowed in another stone building for the next 9 years. The remaining part of the beam was adzed from the largest of the blue gums growing on the property at the time. The seeds for these trees had been brought from Australia by George White and propagated for use as mine props. The two sections of beam are joined by a long 3 ft. splice and heavily bolted. The beam is supported in part by a stone wall dividing the stable from wool shed and by solid adzed blue gum uprights.

All the stone in this building was quarried by hand and large pieces were brought down to size by rustic breaking, i.e. the stone was laid on an iron bar and napped on the opposite side over and along the line of the bar to half the depth of the stone. It was then snapped by jumping. This caused a breakaway or feather edge on the underside which was cross napped and trimmed by a dull-edged masons tool.

All door and window lintels are of full length solid stones, the most important one being that over the wide stable door. Its average thickness 6 to 7 inches, width 2 feet and measures over 6 feet in length. An important part of its installation was the method employed for dispersing all overhead weight from the centre of the stone. This was accomplished by placing a long, full-width header stone from each side above the doorway leaving a complete gap of about a foot over the centre of the lintel. In turn these two were arched by a further 1 ft. lintel stone. By this method, immediate overhead weight was thrust away from the centre of the lintel and onto the shoulder/walls of the doorway. A narrow finishing stone was placed in the outside of the gap only. On the inside, some coins were hidden behind a plastered stone, in a little cavity, but these were removed by one of the younger members of the family who wanted to attend a dance in Arrowtown. Unfortunately, a recent publication describing a brief history of the barn is accompanied by a sketch which depicts a cluster of loosely arranged stones acting as the lintel.

The top story had many uses. A stone chimney was built in with the stable end against the hill. What was known as the 'boys room' was partitioned off from the main floor at the fireplace end. The main

floor was used for grain storage and all off-loading from drays was from the top landing and ramped approach at the hill end. A built in wooden lined chute was incorporated through the side wall adjoining the lean-to. This enabled grain to be shot down to the lean-to below. Many swaggers were persuaded to sleep below this chute on the bottom floor - and bags of grain were surreptitiously spilt down onto the swaggies at midnight by occupants of the 'boys room'.

A square beam, known as the "Cat's Head" extends out from the front gable wall. The eye bolt attached to this was used for block and tackle hoisting of carcasses at killing time. The cat's head beam extends inside for some length and is bolted to two of the main cross ties of the gable principles.

When all the stone work was finished, pointing was applied with a lime mortar. This mortar, which has stood the test of time, was made from burnt lime-stone and mixed three parts to one of coarse lake sand. The limestone was obtained from deposits on the lower slopes of Morvern Hill. These chunks of stone were the result of many years of precipitation from calcite deposits in the schist rock above. A stone beehive kiln was built for burning the lime.

Sheep yards were constructed on each side of the barn from large flag stones. These were quarried from an exposed face above the original cave. Some of these flags weigh over half a ton, are 4 to 6 ins. thick, 4 to 5 ft. in width, and measure around 7 feet when out of the ground. Most are embedded 3 feet below ground level. Some are still in their original setting. A close examination of these originals, reveals a small neat hole penetrating right through the stone. These holes were the result of an experiment by young male members of the family who had been set the task of hand drilling holes to enable the stones to be snigged from the quarry. Hand drilling not only proved to be hard work, but also time consuming, so a 303 rifle with solid nosed bullets was substituted for hammer and drill. The result was a neat round hole on the aiming side with a larger hole on the break-out side.

While George White was building his stone work, he employed one other man to do all the carpentry, a first cousin and fellow Shetlander, John Mitchell. Mitchell was a ships carpenter by trade and a very fine tradesman. Before his arrival in New Zealand, he, like his cousin George had deserted ship in Australia to try his luck on the goldfields and along with a brother, Andrew, arrived on the New

Zealand fields some time after the main rush.

John Mitchell was later to leave his mark further down Central at Fruitlands, where he built his own stone cottage. This is now protected by inclusion in the Goldfields Park and known as "Mitchell Cottage".

George White was able to employ John Mitchell on wages and finance the purchase of materials for the "Loose Box" from money he received from the Lakes County for the contract he had for building the zig-zag road up to the Crown Terrace.

This descriptive history of the "Loose Box" is of the original barn before any alterations were carried out in 1957 and onwards.

In conclusion, there are very few historical buildings which have such detailed and accurate information available about them, or have been built of such lasting quality as this one.

This Society recommends strongly that this building be included in the list of treasured historical buildings of this district.

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Nellie Johnstone of Macetown

THE LATE MRS NELLIE JOHNSTONE OF MACETOWN

In an earlier issue of the Courier (Number 25) the late Mrs Nellie Johnstone related how she grew up at Macetown. The following is her description of life as a widow in Arrowtown, after the untimely death of her husband (who was a Carrier in the Wakatipu district in the early '20's).

"I had a young family to bring up, and things were pretty tough. I took in boarders, and the boys went to school in Arrowtown. We made ends meet - with a struggle. Boarders usually came to me from the Post Office and the Store or the Golden Arrow Mine. One was the Librarian. I usually charged twenty eight shillings a week. There wasn't much left over from that at the end of the week. I'd have to cook for them, do their washing and give them lunches to take to the Mine. I had two boarders in at one time. Apart from that income, there was a pension for the boys. I got that about two years after my husband died. It was about four pounds a month.

A loaf of bread then cost eight pence; a shin of beef was one and sixpence. We grew our own vegetables. As for clothing, it was very plain and rather rough. The boys wore boots rather than shoes and I made their clothes.

At that time there was no electricity in Arrowtown. We used candles or lamps. We cooked on a coal range, and washing was done in a cooper out the back. We had to cart the water by hand until it was eventually piped.

There were about two hundred people in Arrowtown then, I suppose. Apart from the mining, there was farming round about. A lot of the men worked in the mines at Macetown. They'd go up there on Monday morning and come back on Saturday.

Dr Thomson was at the Arrow hospital then; Mr and Mrs Gilland were the Wardsman and Matron. Miss Wall was the cook and Timmy Cosgrove was the working man. There have been a lot of changes in Arrowtown since then.

There was a Convent school opposite the lane from the Catholic Church to the town. When the High School closed, the building was used as a public Hall. Later, my mother-in-law bought it and it was sold to Shaws for a Garage.

Tobins' Track was still in use as well as the zig-zag off the Crown Terrace. My husband used to cart coal from Cardrona over the top of the Crown Range and down there.

The weather has changed too. Winters were more severe and the summers were hotter. 1918 was the most severe winter I can remember - snow up to the window ledges, and freezing. There were a lot more Maori Hens (wekas) round then, and tuis too. As well, there were goats up in the back of the hills - back of Bush Creek."

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THE TREASURER REPORTS --

126 Financial members as at end of September

4 Un-financial members

10 Associate members

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THE POWER BOARD WITH NO POWER

(Contributed by W.P. Saunders)

The Lake Wakatipu Electric Power Board was the only Electric Power Board in New Zealand to be duly gazetted as such and never functioned.

At the time the formation of a district Board was mooted, Queenstown had a small hydro generating plant of 65 KW in the One Mile creek. This first produced power in the spring of 1924. Prior to this, Queenstown had an acetylene gas plant (which blew up on June 23rd, 1923). Like "H.M.S. New Zealand" it was scrapped long before it was paid off.

The One Mile Plant and reticulation cost the Borough about \$48,000. This met the needs of Queenstown and actually showed a small profit. Lights and the Electric Iron were the usual electric mod. cons in the 1920s. This suited Queenstown, but the farming area and Arrowtown were without power.

This state of affairs went on until 1933, when a meeting was held in December. Appointees at the meeting were :- Queenstown Borough - W. Overton (Mayor), Frank Gavin and Charles Ingles, Lake County - John Reid and W. Thompson, Farmers' Union - W.P. Saunderson, Arrowtown - W. James. The finding of this meeting was that an expert opinion should be obtained.

A Mr Climie, a qualified Electrical Engineer, was engaged to prepare a report on the whole proposed set-up. He was paid \$140 for reporting and attending three meetings. The Board was formed and gazetted in December 1934 and W. James was appointed Chairman.

The Queenstown representatives took the view that in all this, Queenstown would be joining the Board to help Arrow and the rural area. Arrowtown, by virtue of being a Borough, was not required to find a guarantee; the rural areas were, by law.

Many meetings were all abortive, then the Wye Creek plant, which was owned by the Big Beach Dredging Company, came on the market for \$10,000 complete with transmission line. The line had blue gum poles, which had to be replaced.

Queenstown would not agree to the Board going ahead with the purchase. The Board suggested Queenstown buy it and sell the Board power, but the Board had no faith in Queenstown alone.

With their plant overloaded, Queenstown bought a second-hand diesel plant from a mining concern at Skippers, for \$26,000. It generated 50 KW and was used for peak loads. It cost about \$8 to run and the revenue from it came to \$3.50 per hour. It was a troublesome plant and, as Queenstown's load increased as the town grew, the diesel became a costly venture.

In the end, the rural and Arrowtown representatives on the Board, (who agreed in principle), decided that without Queenstown it was not a viable proposition to service the smaller area. All was solved when the diesel seized up, never to go again.

Queenstown then decided to buy the Wye Creek Plant and sell power to the Board, but they found the Power Board had the sole right to generate power in the area.

To solve it all, the Board went out of existence and the Otago Central Electric Power Board took over the area; the Queenstown plant and Arrowtown got power in 1939, after six years of hard bargaining, and the rural areas were eventually included in 1945 and even later.

Whites' house at old NicholasWHITES' HOUSE AT "OLD NICHOLAS"

(details taken from a letter from Miss Jessie Mackenzie, late of Walter Peak).

Several months ago, for two members of our Historical Society, childhood memories were refreshed when they visited the site of the Whites' homestead in the Von valley. Miss Jessie Mackenzie and her cousin, Mrs K. Baker, were driven from Mt Nicholas homestead over to Fernhill to the site of Nicholas Von Tunzleman's first dwelling (not the house built by his brother-in-law, Pickett, where John McGlashan School has the Adventure Camp). Only a chimney now marks the spot.

The Whites were established in the Von Valley a few months prior to the arrival in the Wakatipu of W.G. Rees and Nicholas von Tunzleman, which makes Mt Nicholas the oldest Station in the district.

The cousins were then driven to "Old Nicholas", where the two-roomed stone hut still stands, solid as a rock, now 121 years old. Miss Mackenzie and her cousin were able to point out where the original 13-roomed house had stood, slightly in front of the stone hut. This

house was pulled down by the Mackenzie family in 1909 and parts of it were incorporated in buildings at the Lake (Whites Bay).

The old stone hut is unfenced and cattle have free run of the place so it is all the more remarkable that magnificent trees still survive. There are large English oaks, ash, cedar and one or two huge Wellingtonias, lime trees, chesnuts, many aspen, a cork oak, cork elms, Queensland maples, relics of former glory when tennis court, lily pond, etc. added to the elegance of the setting.

A place like this is worthy of preservation - surely a challenge to a Society such as ours!

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A CHINAMAN BUYS A RADIO

Chinaman buys a radio - Ron Gordon

(Contributed by Ron Gordon)

In the year 1942, the only remaining Chinese on the goldfields were those employed by the Nokomri Gold Mining Company. The Sino-Japanese war had been going for a few years, and their homeland was being mercilessly bombed. The Second World War was nearing the end of the third year, and an Allied victory over the Axis Powers and, hopefully Japan too, was the only ray of hope for their homeland to which they must return.

One Bing Young, who was a race-keeper stationed on the farthest out length of Race, and lived on the north side of Mill Creek bush, had been to Dunedin and had arrived home with a Radio. Bing had heard the News each evening from Chung-King, so home he came, radio, batteries and all. The radio was a table cabinet model, six valve, with short wave band as well as broadcast. The batteries were two large dry-cells weighing about 50 pounds each, and one 17 plate 6 volt Car battery, weighing about 150 pounds.

Bing got it carted to within three miles of his hut then, with the set and dry batteries on one end of a pole and the big Car battery on the other end, he set off up the mountain for home. Halfway up he left his burden and walked up to the hut and had a meal, then came down and resumed the hill haul.

Bing erected an aerial and fixed an earth wire, then asked the writer to come and set it going.

I coupled up the batteries and got 4YA, Dunedin. The reception was good, but Bang! went a little 6 volt torch bulb inside the set. It seemed to be an important part of the business, because the set was dead without it.

Bing produced a card of 1 dozen torch bulbs, but they were only 4 volt. I said it would go for about half a minute until the bulb blew. "Put it on Wellington and try", said Bing. I got 2YA, Wellington but only for a short time, and the bulb went. Bing produced another bulb from the card, "try Auckland". I had 1YA and a good reception indeed when that bulb went.

Bing (with typical Chinese honesty) gave me a sheet of paper, an envelope and a stamp, to write to Beggs. While we had supper (port wine and cocoa) I managed to twist a label off a bag of rice behind me, and work it into my hip pocket. It had "Bing Young" written in Chinese on the back, and English on the front.

My letter to Chas. Begg & Co. went like this ...

Dear Sirs, Regarding the radio I purchased from you recently, I sorry to say it not go well. A torch bulb among the valves on the base of the set blew. It was six volt. I tried four volts, but of course it soon blew. One bulb get Dunedin, two bulb get Wellington, three bulb get Auckland, how many bulb it take to get Chung-King? I hope you send bulb that not blow. Yours faithfully, Bing Young.

This is where the tag off the rice bag came in. I copied the Chinese carefully, and so his signature was in two languages.

Beggs wrote back asking for the set to be sent in for testing. Bing loaded it all on the pole again - it was downhill this time, and away back the set went.

About a week later, the mine closed down for the duration of the War, so the set stayed in Dunedin. It would be safe to say Bing would be the only Chinese to have a radio on the goldfields in New Zealand!

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DISTRICT SCHEME ...

The following have been included in the list of important items registered as being of historical, scientific or special interest in the District Scheme

Trig Station, Mt Nicholas

Moranic Boulders at Kingston

Maori Camp sites at Dart River

Stone Wall, Queenstown cemetery

The Arrowtown Borough Council ...

Nine Miners' Cottages

Butcher's shop and old Baker's oven

Stone Wall, Arrow Lane

King Edward VII Memorial Lamp

In Garston ...

Two Houses

Culverts and Races, Nevis to Garston Road

Stables at Garston

Stone house and Well, Nokomai siding

Saw-pit at Mill Creek

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FUTURE PLANS FOR THE SOCIETY ...

... We hope to arrange one or two social evenings for all members, from February until the onset of winter, so look out old photos, old slides and bring old memories.

... A day trip to the historic sites in the Kingston-Fairlight area, this summer.

... During Queenstown's Summer Festival Week it is hoped to organise a conducted walk around places of historic interest in Queenstown. This proved very popular last year, with 56 joining in.

... A BUS TRIP through places of historic interest in the Wakatipu is also planned, during QUEENSTOWN SUMMER FESTIVAL WEEK.

Watch 'Mountain Scene' for details and dates

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