Robert Reyburn
of
Scotland and New Zealand
1810-1892
Eminent Citizen of Whangarei, New Zealand
By
John Henderson of Stirling, Scotland

Reyburn House

His Great Great Great Grandchildren
Margaret, Heather and Kevin Nicol
2nd Cousins once removed of John Henderson of Stirling, Scotland
Robert Reyburn was born in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, Scotland, on the 4th of January 1810, sixth child [of nine] to Jean Thomson and her husband, John Reyburn - Bonnet-Maker of Kilmarnock and Coal Mine Share-holder in Hurlford, Ayr.

Robert Reyburn of Kilmarnock


3. Phyllis May Keyte was born on 20 Apr 1903 in Whangarei, New Zealand. She died in Whangarei, New Zealand.

Robert Reyburn Snr. quickly decided to move north from Auckland, and on the 29th of April 1859 he bought land at Whangarei from J. G. Petingale.

Robert Reyburn married Hannah Rathbone at Prestbury, near Macclesfield, Cheshire, on the 4th of August 1834, and they had three sons: James Thomson Reyburn, Robert Reyburn and John Gee Reyburn. Little is known of Robert’s his life up to 1859, except that he was involved in shipping and woollen-milling ventures in Glasgow. With Hannah and their two younger sons, Robert and John, he emigrated to New Zealand in 1859, and arrived in Auckland on the 'John Scott' on 7 March of that year.

Then, on 3 May, 1859, he also bought 226 acres at Maungakaramea near Whangarei with land order scrip. Reyburn acquired other allotments in the village and several larger blocks in the adjoining Whareora district. He continued the exporting of fruit and dairy produce which Petingale had begun. With his sons (James Reyburn had arrived in 1867) he also engaged in farming and shipping, and held shares in the ship ‘Argyle’, which provided a steamer service between Whangarei and Auckland.

(2009 Report)
Introduction

The New Zealand Police are building a new police station in Whangarei at 88 Cameron Street, on the corner of Cameron and Walton Streets (Lots 2–4 DP149559) (Figure 1). This is the site of the former Settlers Hotel, dating to 1865. Stephen French of Davis Langdon Ltd, acting on behalf of the Police, engaged a Heritage Ltd to prepare an archaeological assessment of the Hotel (Campbell 2007) and to prepare an application to the New Zealand Historic Places Trust to destroy the archaeological remnant of the hotel under section 11 of the Historic Places Act 1993. Because of the tight time frames involved and the fact that the hotel site was covered over by an asphalt car park the assessment was limited to a desktop appraisal – it was not possible to assess the condition of the site prior to the investigation. The site was recorded as Q371281 on the New Zealand Archaeological Association site file. The excavation was carried out between 21 and 26 November 2007 under HPT authority 2008/0127.

Historical background

Advisory Sitcombe

In 1839 William Carruth from Scotland became the first European settler to take up permanent residence on two properties of 150 and 36 acres respectively for the sum of £200 (B14/5, LINZ Auckland).

Petitgale settled on his waterfront property that included the future site of the Settlers Hotel and in 1849, in a letter to relatives in Auckland, he states that "at Whangarei (now) he had got an excellent home, a profitable herd of cattle and had established an orchard of four acres planted with a variety of choice fruit – oranges, lemons, limes, pomegranates, passionfruit guavas, strawberries, currants, apples, pears, mulberries, plums, gooseberries, figs, grapes and peaches." He also had flowering shrubs, hops, bees and pigs (Mossong in Pickmere 1986).

Petitgale was reported as making a considerable income by exporting fruit to Auckland. He was also credited with being the founder of commercial fruit growing in Whangarei, an industry that thrived to such an extent that, some years later, Whangarei was to become known as "the garden of Auckland" (Pickmere 1986).

From a plan of the Parahaki Block drawn in 1857 (SO 784, Figure 5) Petitgale’s orchard appears to lie to the west in Whangarei. Local Maori under Iwihahi of Parahaki built him a whare on the shoreline near where the bridge crosses the Hatea River today. In 1846 his brothers Robert and John arrived and in 1844 a 9685 acre Crown Grant was purchased by William Carruth of Otuwhu, farmer, and Robert Carruth of Adelaide, settler (B110, LINZ Auckland). The extent of the claim can be seen in Figure 2. It included the future site of the Settlers Hotel as well as much of the present commercial centre of Whangarei.

The brothers brought with them tools, implements, household articles and everything necessary to carry out farming operations including seed wheat from Scotland. At the time the land where Whangarei now stands was covered in bracken, tea tree scrub and the poisonous 'tutu' (upukirihia) and, with no timber available in the vicinity, a ramp whare was built for the new arrivals. The brothers then set about farming operations and by 1842 they had about 50 acres under cultivation in wheat, maize and potatoes (Pickmere 1986). An article in the New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator, 30 April 1842, reports that wheat stacks were present on the Carruth property.

The Carruth brothers subdivided and began selling their land within two years of the date of purchase. In 1844 John George Pettingale of Auckland, merchant, purchased of Walton St although it is not altogether clear whether or not it included the future Settlers Hotel site to the east.

Robert Reyburn arrived in Whangarei in 1859 and purchased 42 acres and 26 perches of Pettingale’s property (including the Settlers Hotel site) for the sum of £2300 (B17/17, LINZ Auckland).

Reyburn’s occupation on the Certificate of Title was given as "gentleman." He also advertised in the Daily Southern Cross, 18 February 1862: 1, as the Whangarei agent for Emma Eliza, a schooner of 23 tons making weekly runs between Auckland and Whangarei.

Reyburn continued to maintain Pettingale’s orchard and ran a dairy herd as well. He then had some of his property surveyed into sections with streets on a grid pattern, that he named after members of his family. This subdivision was to form the nucleus of the present commercial centre of Whangarei.

The Settlers Hotel

A sketch plan of Whangarei (Figure 4) indicates that there is already a small building on the corner of Cameron and Walton Sts, National Archives Whangarei Museum.

Figure 4. A sketch plan of Whangarei town made during Reyburn’s tenure (1859–1869). A small building labelled ‘Hotel’ can be seen near the corner of Cameron and Walton Sts, National Archives Whangarei Museum.
Robert Snr. became closely involved with the Presbyterian Church and community in Whangarei. By June 1859 he was present at the meeting of Presbyterian settlers when it was resolved to build a church. He was one of four elders and a member of the committee. A year later the congregation set up a day school, of which Reyburn was superintendent for a year. He also ran a library from his own premises, and was librarian and vice chairman of the Whangarei Literary Institute.

Then, in 1862, he became a justice of the peace. Reyburn was a strong advocate for the interests of Whangarei in local politics. He supported the movement for separation from Auckland, and pushed for proper representation on highways boards for each district in the Whangarei area. He was a highway trustee for the Whangarei District in 1864, and for both the Whareora and Whangarei Districts in 1868, remaining in the latter position for a number of years.

In 1866 the Auckland Provincial Council responded to a financial crisis by cutting much of its funding to schools. An Act of 1867 provided for the funding of education by levying rates on land and property, and charged the highways boards with administering the levy. Reyburn strongly opposed these moves. He was appointed one of two members of the Board of Health for the Port of Whangarei. Apparently reluctant to offer himself for provincial government, he was nevertheless member for Marsden from 1869 to 1873, and was the first chairman of the Whangarei High School Board in 1879. The Reyburn estate, 'Eglinton', comprising 42 acres of what was originally Whangarei Mains, later became the business centre of Whangarei. Along with Henry Walton and Dr Augustus Perston, Reyburn initiated the development of the city. All three are commemorated in the names of city streets.

Hannah Reyburn died in 1878 and in 1880 Reyburn travelled to Macclesfield where he married Hannah's sister, Mary Anne Lane, a widow, on the 14th of September 1880. He lived in Macclesfield for eight years before returning to New Zealand alone.

A man of integrity, direct and often uncompromising - he called himself a moderationist. After many years in local affairs, he died at Whangarei on the 21st of October 1892 and was buried in the old mission ground cemetery, Whangarei.
Historic Reyburn House

Reyburn House is the oldest existing settlers’ home on Whangarei’s Hatea River. Originally built as a home for Robert Reyburn of Kilmarnock, who arrived in Whangarei in March 1859 from Glasgow, the first part of the house was built between 1865 and 1875. It began as a small cottage that was later expanded into a villa with verandas. The house was constructed from lapped kauri weatherboards topped by a corrugated galvanized iron roof, internal walls were framed using rough sawn kauri scrim board, tongue and groove kauri and ceilings of board and batten. The attic space was originally used for bedrooms and finished with tongue and groove match lining. Additions were made on the western side of the house in about 1894. A new gable-ended roof was erected over part of the building at that time.

In about 1895, a veranda with a concave roof was added to the north side of the house to give protection from the sun. This was painted (in the fashion of the day) with red and white stripes. The final major addition to the house was built in 1900 when the house was extended on the eastern side with two more rooms and a central hall with an ornate arch. The veranda was also extended at the same time. The rooms became formal spaces with coffered ceilings.

The house was originally sited between the Hatea River overbridge which brings traffic from Riverside Drive into the city, and the present Regional Council building. A large pohutukawa beside the busy intersection stands near the house’s original site.

When the Reyburns moved to Auckland in 1910, the life of the house changed. In the early 1900s, the area around Reyburn House evolved from residential to light industrial, and a street along the waterfront immediately in front of the house became a principal traffic route. In September 1932, a building line condition on the frontage of the water was imposed and in 1950, the property lost still more land to road widening.

In the period from 1910 to the early 1960s, the house had a chequered history, it was divided into two flats and rented by a variety of tenants over many years. The Harbour Board acquired the property under the Public Works Act in the early 1960s, and in December 1964, stated that the site was needed for harbour improvements. In 1966 after negotiations with the Northland Society of Arts, the Harbour Board agreed to lend Reyburn House to the Society as a place for its activities. A Widening of the traffic route in 1976 resulted in the first relocation some 10 meters back on its site. In 1984, the Society was asked to buy the house form the Harbour Board for the nominal sum of $10.00. It was moved to its present site in 1986 â€“ its third and final resting place.

In 1985, the New Zealand Historic Places Trust declared Reyburn House a Category II historic building. In 1998, an extensive restoration and renovation project was begun with funding from the lotteries Commission. Extensive work on the gardens surrounding Reyburn House, including many planting in keeping with the era in which the house was built, was also done at this time.

Grants received in 1999 from the Whangarei District Council and in May 2000 from the ASB Charitable Trust have enabled the completion of the major restoration of Reyburn House. Approximately $400,000 and hundreds of volunteer hours have been spent restoring Reyburn House and its surrounds. Recently the Society has put in sprinklers into the building, the original bedrooms upstairs will become a museum housing memorabilia and photographs of the development of Whangarei’s Town Basin, Reyburn House and the many people who have lived and worked in the area.

More Ancestors of Kathleen Reyburn – Great Great Grand-Daughter of Robert Reyburn (1810-1892)