



# DESPATCHES

Newsletter of the Queen's Redoubt Trust

ISSN 2324-5271

## FORLORN HOPE

Research to write the following article on Henry Mercer revealed a publication by his brother, Major Arthur H H Mercer (89th Regt) which suggested that his younger brother had been deliberately sacrificed at Rangiriri. This will be the subject of an article in the next newsletter. The key is on the Mercer family memorial at Lisburn Cathedral in Northern Ireland where we find a memorial plaque with the following words:-

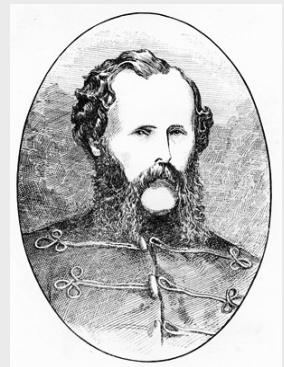
*"Sacred to the Memory also of Captain Henry Mercer, Royal Artillery, Youngest son of Colonel Edward Smyth Mercer, who fell in action at Rangiriri, New Zealand on the 20th Nov., 1868, while leading in forlorn hope his escort of Artillerymen".*

The term 'forlorn hope' was used in the British army, particularly during the Peninsula wars,

and referred to the first wave of soldiers attacking a breach in defences during a siege. Most members of the *forlorn hope* would be killed or wounded and it was usually composed of volunteers, led by a junior officer. Those who survived expected to benefit in the form of promotions, cash gifts and glory. The commanding officer was almost guaranteed both a promotion and a long-term boost to his career prospects.

In N Z Wars, Vol. 1, Cowan records that late in the afternoon of the battle, after large numbers of the 14th and 65th had stormed the pa and been repulsed, "General Cameron issued the most extraordinary order of the day." Captain Mercer and 36 of his artillerymen were to make a final attempt. After the repulse of Captain Mercer's small group Cameron then selected the Navy to

provide 90 sailors, led by Captain Mayne of HMS Eclipse, for the second *forlorn hope*.



**Captain Henry Mercer**  
(From Gudgeon "Defenders of New Zealand")

## THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN HENRY MERCER (Royal Artillery)

Captain Mercer was the senior R.A officer in New Zealand, arriving here, with his family, early in 1861. He was born in 1831 and joined the Royal Artillery being promoted to Captain and serving in the Crimean war. The family lived in a house in Symonds Street and took an active part in the life of early Auckland. They were members of the Congregational Church and Captain Mercer was a member of the W.M.C.A. and the Auckland Bible Society.

Henry Mercer was mortally wounded at Rangiriri, dying five days later in the hospital at Queen's Redoubt. On hearing that her husband was wounded, Mrs Mercer, accompanied by her companion Elizabeth Chrisp, Lieutenant Rait, R A and the wife of Colonel Gamble, set out by coach for Queen's Redoubt. Many years later Miss Chrisp recalled that they had been assisted by Bishop Selwyn who helped them across the high footbridge over the trench of the redoubt. They then stayed with Captain Mercer until his passing. Shot through the jaw and tongue, Mercer could not speak but was quite cheerful and wrote notes to his wife.

Following his death, on the morning of 26 November, Captain Mercer's body was taken by ambulance cart back to his home in Auckland and he was buried in the Symonds

Street cemetery beside Captain Phelps (14th Regt), also killed at Rangiriri.

Details of the funeral procession were carried by the New Zealander of 28 November. Unlike NCO's and other ranks, who were buried at the Pokeno cemetery, the burials of officers were grand affairs. Captains Mercer and Phelps were carried on gun carriages each pulled by six horses and were accompanied by a firing party of 100 men from four regiments, the joint bands of the 14th & 65th Regts and HMS Curacoa, detachments from several units including Transport Corps, Otahuhu Cavalry, seamen from HMS Esk, officers of local militia units, ministers from various churches, members of the General Assembly, high ranking army and navy officers and the Governor, Sir George Grey. In keeping with the customs of the time Captain Mercer's wife was not part of the funeral procession but her three small sons, all under 12 years, with Lieutenant Rait R.A. were the chief mourners.

In his will ( held at Archives NZ, Auckland) Henry Mercer left all his possessions to his wife Charlotte Amelia who later returned to England. The township of Mercer is named for Henry Mercer.

Refs: N Zder 28/ 11/ 1863; Akld Star 4/ 4/ 1916

## NEW ZEALAND WARS MEMORIAL, POKENO

Located on the corner of Helenslee and Munroe Roads, 1.6 km NW of Queen's Redoubt. was the first cemetery in Pokeno. There appears to be no record of how and why it was established but it was described in the Daily Southern Cross (DSC) on 10 October, 1863 "as a plot of ground about a mile and a half from the camp".

It was here that, during the Waikato War, lower ranks who died in and around the redoubt were buried. Within 10 years of the end of the Waikato War, this soldiers' burial ground at Pokeno had become neglected. A letter from Bishop Selwyn to the Superintendent of the Auckland Province in January 1873 described the damage done to headboards by a fire and that the fence also needed repairing. In 1881 there were complaints about damage being done by cattle and pigs and in 1882, Sergeant Joshua Foster of the Armed Constabulary was sent to investigate. He found that the 2-acre (0.8 ha) burial ground was covered in briars and fern and because the graves were widely scattered, the size could not be reduced to make it more manageable. Ebenezer Hamlin, the Member of Parliament for Franklin South, was also complaining to the Under-Secretary of Defence about the 'disgraceful state' of the weed-covered Pokeno burial ground. An upgrade was soon approved. Tenders for fencing the site were sought in April 1884; the work being completed in June.

The memorial (photo -top right) was first proposed in 1898. On 10 October Frederic Lang, the MHR for Waikato, asked the House if a 'memorial tablet' could be erected at the burial ground.

A problem was that the identities of those buried were difficult to confirm as many of the headboards had rotted or were now illegible. The site was cleared by May 1899 and about 70 graves were found but, only those marked with headstones could be identified. A memorial cairn, costing £100 and designed and built by the stonemason John Bouskill, was erected at the burial ground in late 1902. Over the next 100 years several repairs and modifications were made, culminating in the place-

ment of the new granite panels in 1999.

In contrast to the somewhat grand funerals given to officers, a soldier's burial was a much simpler affair. A few reports carried by the DSC tell us that usually a soldier was accompanied to his grave by members of his regiment currently at Queen's Redoubt, who often comprised a firing party; sometimes men from other regiments; and a regimental band (if in camp). The minimal service would be like that of Pvt O'Rourke (18th Regt) who was accompanied to his grave by a "few of his companions". The burial of Pvt Watkins (3rd Waikatos) was taken by Bishop Selwyn, presumably because he was at Queen's Redoubt that day.

It seems that headboards for the soldiers, reported upon by the DSC, must have been wooden so did not survive; and apparently there were no other records of these burials. So the names of the following, recorded by the DSC, are not on the granite slabs (photographs below). They are:-

Private Kierney, 12th Regt, Oct 1863;  
Sgt Johnson, 40th Regt, Oct 1863;  
Gunner E Gabbitas R A, Oct 1863;  
Richard Gould, Auckland Militia Feb 1864;  
Col Sgt John Hawsby 18th Rgt Feb 64;  
William O'Rourke 18th Rgt Feb 1864;  
John Doyle, 70th Rgt, May 1864;



Right: West facing memorial plaque.



Memorial to soldiers of the British Army who died at Queen's Redoubt

Pvt C Ferguson 3rd Waik Rgt, May 1864;  
Kennet, Royal Artillery Oct 1864.

In 1899 here were reportedly 70 graves in the cemetery. While some may be those of early settlers, there are probably more soldiers than are listed above or on the memorial. It is suggested that further research be done to determine if there are other names. When enough to fill a third panel have been authenticated then a panel should be engraved and placed on one of the two vacant side

Refs: Various issues of DSC. Letter from Bishop Selwyn, Jan 1873. Archives NZ. Pokeno NZ Wars Memorial, WWW.nzhistory.net.nz



Left: East facing memorial plaque

# Friends of Queen's Redoubt

Early in 2013 the Trust resolved to formally set up a group to be known as the "Friends of Queen's Redoubt". A membership database is being set up and anyone with an interest in the work of the Trust is invited to join.

Current membership fees are \$20 for individuals and \$30 for families. We are currently reviewing membership grades for organizations and when these are known it will be announced in the newsletter. At present it is suggested that any organizations that wish to join, register at the same rate (\$30) as Family members.

Please post a completed application form with a cheque for the appropriate amount to:

**I Barton, 40 Isabella Drive, Pukekohe 2120**

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

**Given Name:**

**Surname:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**

**Email address:**

**Membership Category:**

**Individual \$20**

**Family \$30**

**Organization \$30**

## The new building at Queen's Redoubt

It had been hoped that, by this issue of the newsletter, building would have commenced. Despite having funding in place for the project, design completed by Dave Pearson Architects and contract let to Harrison Lane, we are being held up by the slow consenting processes of the Waikato District Council. Hopefully they will have given us the go ahead before the end of the year!

Once construction is complete it will be all hands to the pump because we will have to do the interior decorating and the erection of the display cases and shelving which will be required. So if anyone has skills in this area we would be very pleased to hear from you



**Cutting the firestep into west wall. The building is to be erected where the truck is parked.**

***The Trust always needs more active members, so please contact Ian Barton:- 09 239 2049, if you have an interest in the project.***

**CONTACT DETAILS**

**Chairman:** Dr Neville Ritchie  
Dept , of Conservation  
Private Bag 30-72  
HAMILTON

Teleph. 07 858 1000  
Email. nritchie@doc.govt.nz

**Sec/Treasurer  
& Newsletter**

**Editor :** Ian Barton  
40 Isabella Drive  
PUKEKOHE 2120

Teleph. 0-9 239 2049  
Email. ibtrees@wc.net.nz

**WEB-SITE:** [www.queensredoubt.co.nz/](http://www.queensredoubt.co.nz/)

**PURPOSE OF THE TRUST**

The Queen's Redoubt Trust was established in February 1999 with the intention of acquiring this nationally significant historic place and ensuring its protection; with the long term vision to restore and develop the site into a nationally recognised visitor attraction and education centre. In February 2001 the Trust completed the first major phase of the project, raising the funds to acquire the property in Pokeno which contains much of the site of the Queen's Redoubt.

**OBJECTIVES of the TRUST**

1. To acquire the Queen's Redoubt site at Pokeno to preserve it for future generations.
2. To make Queen's Redoubt accessible to the public by development and interpretation of the site as appropriate.
3. To restore the massive earthwork 'ditch and bank' walls of the fort (they were leveled after the war) as a key interpretive feature.
4. To promote education about the Queen's Redoubt and all the New Zealand Wars between Maori and European.
5. To establish a premier visitor and educational facility on the Queen's Redoubt site. This will be carried out in conjunction with an archaeological excavation programme to maximise knowledge of the site for future exhibition and interpretation purposes, and to promote public participation in the project. At the same time, historical research will continue into Queen's Redoubt itself, the Pokeno district, the Waikato Campaign of 1863-64 and the New Zealand Wars as a whole.

## 150th Commemorations of the Invasion of the Waikato

These commenced with a ceremony to mark the crossing of the Mangatawhiri River on 12 July 1863; followed by a two day event about the attack on the Pukekohe East Church stockade on 14 September 1863. There was a function at Alexandra Redoubt, Tuakau on October 13th, and one at Mangatangi on 17th November -the day after the departure of the Thames expedition in November 1863, which led to the erection of the chain of redoubts from Miranda to Queen's Redoubt. On Wednesday 20 November, Rangiriri was the scene of a comprehensive commemoration of that battle, which opened the way into the Waikato region.

There will be more anniversaries to follow -Orakau, Gate Pa; but something else is beginning to happen. This is an increasing understanding by many people -Maori and Pakeha- that because 150 years have passed since these battles, not only has the time come to recognize the pivotal role they played in the history of New Zealand but also that it is now time to put aside the perceived hurt, bitterness and hubris of the past and work together for the future of New Zealand. One of the roles of the Queen's Redoubt Trust will be preparing for an important purpose

of our Trust, which is to erect a memorial in remembrance of the New Zealand Wars. It is currently intended that this be in the form of a whakamaharatanga, a memorial to commemorate those who fell in the New Zealand wars between 1845 and 1872. It will differ from other memorials of this event in that the names of all who fell, Maori and Pakeha, will be recorded in some way.



**One the commemorative pou erected at Rangiriri. They will be very visible from the new motorway beside the Waikato River.**