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# Waihi Ward Reflections

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## Monumental tribute to our diggers

### “We will remember them.”

Familiar words, but the World War I New Zealand Engineers Tunnelling Company – which included a large number of miners from Waihi and Karangahake and was the New Zealand unit “first on and last off” the Western Front – has no memorial in its own country.

A Waihi Heritage Vision project is about to remedy that, with a 7.5 metre high iron memorial in Gilmour Lake Reserve that the Council supported in principle last year and has now approved.

The T-shaped structure to be installed as part of a miners' reflective area has been designed to integrate with the natural surroundings – including an avenue of 29 kowhai trees planted in remembrance of the 29 miners who died in the Pike River Mine explosion in 2010 – and to be durable, climbing and graffiti-resistant, and require minimal maintenance. Its architect, blacksmith Nicholas Brumder of Waihi Metal Studio, also crafted the miners' memorial bench in the reserve, dedicated last October.

Most of the \$124,000 design and construction cost of the tunnellers' memorial has been raised through grants from the Lotteries Commission World War I fund, Veterans' Affairs and the First Sovereign Trust. To fast-track the project, a \$10,000 shortfall has been interim-financed from Waihi Heritage Vision funds.

In preparation for the 1917 Battle of Arras in northern France, the New Zealand Tunnellers dug an extensive system of tunnels under enemy lines. So the symbolic laying of the foundation stone for the tunnellers memorial is planned for when a mayoral delegation

from Arras visits Waihi next April, en route to Anzac Day celebrations and the opening of the National War Memorial Park in Wellington.

Meanwhile, fundraising has begun for the estimated \$60,000 second stage of the project: a memorial wall, soldier sculpture, seating in the same style as the miners' bench, footpath, and associated landscaping. Waihi Heritage Vision will report the final costings to Council early in 2015, and may seek a Council contribution toward completing the funding. Like the tunnellers' memorial, the stage two features would be constructed next year in time for an official dedication of the miners' reflective area in March 2016 – exactly a century after the Tunnelling Company's arrival in France. An interpretive panel sponsored by IPENZ, the Institute of Professional Engineers, will be sited next to the memorial.

The aim is to provide a place of quiet reflection for a community where mining has been an integral part of life since 1878. So Gilmour Lake, dug by the Waihi Mining Company in the late 1980s, is a fitting location.

“Waihi owes its existence to gold miners who have lived and worked and died here. They helped build and sustain this community,” says Waihi Heritage Vision chairman Kit Wilson. “In the First World War, Waihi provided the largest number of men outside of Auckland for the newly formed New Zealand Tunnelling Company. These men were part of New Zealand's first unit on the Western Front, and the last to return. Some did not make it back home.”

Kit says the miners' reflective area wouldn't have been possible without community support, especially the in-kind assistance of Hauraki District Council and Newmont Waihi Gold.



An artist's impression of the tunnellers' memorial

“The project was kick-started with a significant donation from the Waihi Lions Club, which funded the miners' bench from money it raised at the 2010 Martha Mine open day. Since then, local councillors, Council staff, our MP Scott Simpson, and even the Minister of Energy the Hon. Simon Bridges have provided their support, interest, and encouragement. We have also had significant encouragement from Tunnelling Company descendants throughout New Zealand and overseas.”

## Old library goes on the market

FOR SALE signs are to go up on the old Waihi Public Library – after expressions of interest recently invited from prospective tenants or owners users drew two good ideas for use of the heritage building, but no clearly identified group who would operate them.

One suggestion was for the Seddon Street landmark to remain in Council ownership, and transformed into a service base for the Hauraki Rail Trail, providing facilities such as showers, lockers, secure cycle storage, and a laundromat. The other proposal, also with the Council retaining ownership, was to establish a market with permanent stalls for local craftspeople.

However, both concepts would involve Council input and potential funding, and cost is a key factor. With annual maintenance and servicing costs likely to be in the order of \$15,000, we would need to get market rental or lease price. Otherwise, ratepayers would effectively be subsidising the asset by any shortfall amount.

Given the limited interest expressed in using the building, despite plenty of earlier informal inquiries even before the new library was constructed in Rosemont Road, the Council has decided to put the property up for sale through a local real estate agency at current valuation price.



This would appear to be the best option financially. If it's sold, the money could be used toward paying off debt, potentially saving the Council up to \$20,000 per year in interest charges.

Whatever the future of the building that began life as a bank, one part of the property is likely to stay in community hands. Subdividing part of the back section would allow for public car parking for the adjacent Memorial Hall – as the existing hall parking is on library land.

## Beach access is shipshape again

The distance from the Whiritoa Surf Club to the sea may only be short, but towing an inflatable rescue boat between the two has been a challenge since July – when several days of high winds and huge high tides took so much sand out to sea that a two-metre vertical drop was left in front of the club.

One hundred cubic metres of replacement sand was trucked from where the wind had dumped it over the Fishermans Bend carpark. However the very fine texture of this sand, originally from the Lagoon area, still hindered lifeguard service vehicles.

So a pathway of chained timber slats has been constructed, with the sand as fill. This has reinstated access to the water, says Council Parks and Reserves Manager Steve Clark.



## Make it a library Christmas

### Are you up for a challenge?

That's the name of the fun school holiday programme on offer at the Waihi Library, and the District's other libraries, from December 22 to January 23.

Reading and craft challenges are aimed for 5 to 15-year-olds, with plenty of resources at the library to fuel your imagination, but no need to be at the library at specific times.

Everyone who completes the programme will go into the draw for major spot prize. Call into the library to discover what it is!

You will need to be a library member, however there's no cost to join. Numbers are limited, so get in early when registrations open on December 15. Our Waihi library holiday programmes this year have been extremely popular.

## Need to chill out?

- It's officially summer! - that is, at our community swimming pool at Waihi College.
- The heated pool has just opened to the public. Lane swimming and leisure swimming are available daily until March 22 (except Christmas Day and New Year's Day); and during weekends and school holidays one of our three different whopper inflatable toys is usually an added attraction for kids and grown-up kids. These floating playgrounds, complete with slides, obstacles, and even palm trees, are rotated around the three District pools to provide variety and different levels of challenge.
- Casual pool entry is just \$2 for swimmers aged 5 and over, reduced to \$1 per swimmer during the month of January. There's no charge for preschoolers, though all children under 8 need to be actively supervised by a responsible person over the age of 16 years. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to dress babies and infants in 'Little Swimmers' – which can be purchased on-site – so nobody has to worry about accidents. For information about opening times, swimming lessons, and other pool services, pop into the pool or visit the Council website.

