



# newsletter FRIENDS OF WAIUTA

PO Box 83, Reefton 7851 [www.waiuta.org.nz](http://www.waiuta.org.nz)

## May 2009

Greetings from the Wondrous West where a few frosts have already encrusted the Rec and the year's first newsletter is only just out. Never mind - we'll try to make it a goodie, in spite of some sad news later.

### CHRISTCHURCH GET-TOGETHER

On a dismal March day, 42 people enjoyed a cheery atmosphere, meeting again and swapping reminiscences in the Hornby Community Hall. A third of those present were new members, so the society still grows nearly a quarter of a century on.

Highlights included a live performance by Jim Wicken's dancing doll, accompanied by the original performer's nephew Harry Wicken on the banjo - a real thrill for those who had seen it decades ago or just read about it in the centennial book 'Our Own Fun'. Harry also had some great stories to go with many more that were heard around the hall.

Proceeds amounted to \$105, plus \$200 from the sale of souvenirs - all for further work in connection with Waiuta.

### NELSON GET-TOGETHER

Don't panic if you're from the top of the south and think you may have missed this event - it hasn't happened yet! But we think it's time we had one and there are people willing to help organise one - details in the next letter we hope.

### AROUND TOWN

Waiuta's been a busy place, quite apart from visits by the growing number of people who find out about it either from improved road signs, our upgraded website or regular newspaper articles.

Many members of the Chandler family were up there as part of their reunion in late March, followed by Dellacas at Easter. Before them, our March meeting brought a turn-out of 14 including three generations

of Stephenses and two of Mangans, so plenty of those well-remembered families are still represented.

There have also been numerous groups of Conservation Volunteers, people who have come from many parts of the world to care for our historic places and generally tidy up the town. At present they're tackling the school site where all three fireplaces and the steps up to the concrete play area are now clearly visible after decades under the overgrowth.

The Department of Conservation has its contractors on the biggest job in years - strengthening the mine chimney and flue to keep these important landmarks standing for a long time to come.

### OVERSEAS CONNECTIONS

It was great to hear from two of our more distant members, Syd and Liz Moyle, born in Cornwall and now in Rotherham in the U.K. Last year they were in Reefton where they found and refurbished the grave of Syd's uncle, Tommy Moyle, who worked at Waiuta and died in 1940. They also met Tim White, who remembered Tommy, and visited Waiuta. Syd has expressed the family's gratitude to Tommy's friends who apparently paid for the funeral, the headstone and a glass dome with china flowers that is still intact after 68 years. Any further information on Tommy Moyle would be welcomed by Syd, whose email address is [judo@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:judo@blueyonder.co.uk).

Greetings have also come from Derek Byrne, who was Oceana Gold Ltd's project manager at the start of the Prohibition re-opening bid in 2004. Derek now manages a uranium mine near Broken Hill in Australia.

### ANOTHER VIEW OF TOXIC WASTE

Lance Dean's reminiscence in the last newsletter of working in the Prohibition mill (now fenced off as a toxic site) stirred some memories for Jill Malloy (née Taylor). Jill suggests that while the workers up there might have been OK, as the fumes were funnelled away, it was



*Friends of Waiuta president Frances Hunter, right of centre, welcoming members at Christchurch. The event organiser, Alva Morgan, is at left with Bede Cordes, John and Jan Neale, Ina and Leslie Black and Alan Stephens among the others.*

not so good down in the town where they were directed. "Behind the hotel, right beside their water source, where all vegetation had been poisoned, could be found yellow sludge ponds," she recalls. "This was a favourite haunt, until Dad discovered us and gave a graphic illustration of what would happen, should we become embedded in the slime. To this day perhaps, I still bear the legacy of such exposure. At eight years I became gravely ill; the muscular and nervous system functions were affected." Jill recalls others of her generation who have died quite young and wonders if that was because they were in the line of fumes. It certainly would make you wonder.

## BEREAVEMENTS

Once again with regret we record the passing of former residents - Marie Williams (née McGuinness) and Bill Gidley. Marie went to Waiuta as a seven year old with her family when her father and brother had jobs in the mine. They were there just three or four years, enough to gather the experiences that were recounted to



*Above left: Marie Williams on her first day at Waiuta school, 1932. Right: Bill Gidley in his Red Hut, 1942. Note the battery of alarm clocks to ensure he wakes for work, and the photo of Reece on the shelf above him.*

*Top right: Young Marg nursing her injury soon after it happened.*

*Left: Former DoC and N.Z. Forest Service men who've had much to do with Waiuta were present at Ian Davidson's farewell. Back from left: Lindsay Barrow, Ian, Ronan Grew. Front from left: Clint Eves, Les Nichol. Lindsay built the appropriately themed 'set' where Ian sat during the farewell function.*



her daughter Lee to make a compelling chapter in 'Our Own Fun'. A battler all her life, Marie had pneumonia four times as a child and later had to cope with Huntingdon's disease that afflicted others in her family. Bill arrived as a young man, living at Dingbat Flat and then in the Red Huts, working underground before qualifying as a winding engine driver. He caught the eye of young Reece Gidley and their marriage, celebrated in the Anglican church, lasted more than 60 years. A Friends of Waiuta stalwart, Bill drove his car with the 'Waiuta' numberplate over to meetings almost to the time of his death at 91. He will be sadly missed as a friend and a wonderful source of information.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks are due to Grey Valley Lions for \$5000 towards the reprint of the Waiuta book (now under preparation) and \$750 from Oceana Gold Ltd to cover our website expenses.

## ACCIDENTS

'Get well' wishes have been in order for both Margaret Sadlers.



Young Marg came a cropper on her front path back in February, severely damaging her left arm, and her Mum had a fall at Easter that necessitated a half-hip replacement. The same surgeon operated on both, and as young Marg said: "I bet he's pleased there are only two of us!"

## RETIREMENT

Ian Davidson retired in March following a career with N.Z. Forest Service and Department of Conservation spanning no less than half a century. (He worked overseas for a period in the middle). Highlights were recalled in words and photos at a function at Reefton. Ian will continue his pastoral duties in town and his role as 'Jimmy Martin the prospector' at Waiuta.

## JOS DIVIS BOOK

Simon Nathan, who was largely responsible for the Jos Divis website ([www.nzhistory.org.nz](http://www.nzhistory.org.nz)) is well on the way to completing a book on the Waiuta photographer. He's particularly keen to get early (pre-1920s) postcards and other photos by Jos, so if you can help, let's know.

## NEXT MEETING

Our annual general meeting, Thursday 30th July 2009, at Hunters' residence, 31 Victory Street, Reefton, at the slightly earlier than usual time of 7pm. That's so we can begin with a special meeting to change the constitution so future AGMs can be held at a warmer time of year. Until then, best wishes for winter!