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Greetings to all our readers

Brrr! In the last month I've been cold in Melbourne, Sydney and Papakura, especially Papakura. The night we landed back in Māngere, they had to hose ice off the windscreen. And it's not over yet. Meanwhile on the other side of the world they're fighting blazing fires and trying to keep cool. I think I prefer winter.

This is a big month for PDHS. AGM is on Thursday 27 August at 1pm, and it will be a rollicking occasion, with election of officers, and what promises to be a fascinating talk, with Josie Laird speaking on Miss Bumby's mission, and the first honey bee hives in the country. Be there, if at all possible, to celebrate the year that was and help prepare for the new.

People are very complimentary of the two current exhibitions. Make sure you see them. (See page 2)

We farewelled Kara from the Museum staff last Wednesday, but not from PDHS. She has been a very important part of the team for years, and has made a huge contribution. Best wishes Kara.

This issue, Wendy Deeming introduces us to a mechanical bank from our collection (I wonder if you could talk to it without a 20 minute wait) and a netball player from Papakura who played in the Silver Ferns. And we are treated to some original research by Neville, Iain and Alan in two articles on the building of the Great South Road and the mystery of the mile posts. The 19 mile post (distance from Auckland) was at the northern limit of Papakura and the 20 mile post near the Beach Road intersection. It also signalled 2 miles to Drury where the mile Posts ended. Why were they built and who built them?

May the reading road ahead be enjoyable and rewarding.

Rob (ed)

PAPAKURA & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Website: <https://papakurahistoricalsociety.org.nz>
 Monthly Members' Meetings: 4th Thurs, 1pm – 3pm
 Regular heritage Trips to places of interest

PAPAKURA MUSEUM

Open: Mon, Tues, Thurs, Friday, 10am—4.30pm,
 Wed 10am—6pm, Sat 10am—3pm
 Accent Point Building, 209 Great South Road; 09 2982003
 Ph.: (09) 298 2003 www.papakuramuseum.org.nz

Digest of Society News and Events.

Recent talks:

Thurs 25 June: Cleone Campbell—History of the Auckland Botanical Gardens

Thurs 23 July: Alan Knowles—South Auckland digital heritage aviation trail

Forthcoming PDHS meetings:

(Held in Library Meeting Room at 1 pm, followed by afternoon tea—anyone welcome. \$2 towards afternoon tea)

Thurs 27 August: Annual General Meeting. Speaker Josie Laird—Miss Bumby's mission

The AGM is a celebration of the last year and provides insight into the Society and ideas for the year ahead.

Thurs 24 Sept: Brent Catchpole—Opaheke Park

Thurs 22 October: James Duncan—Auckland trams, Part 3.

Forthcoming Museum talk in Papakura Museum:

Sat 19 September at 11 am: Brendan O'Carroll—Long range desert group. Brendan is recognized as the authority on this NZ action in North Africa in World War 2.

Recent Trips:

Thurs 6 August: Pioneer Cottage, Roulston Park and Archives in Pukekohe Library, organized by Edna Carson

Forthcoming Trips:

Thurs 17 Sept: Secret Museum tour at Auckland Museum. \$27 for members, or \$30.

Museum: Exhibitions

New Zealand's Forgotten War—Boer War, 1899-1902

What she wore—Dena Gilmore's look at fashion, including clothing by Papakura's Juliette Hogan.

For more detailed and current information on events, please check:

***Staying in touch* monthly newsletter**

PDHS Website: www.papakurahistoricalsociety.org.nz

The screen outside the Papakura Museum

Object of the month

Wendy Deeming

‘Little Joe’ Cast Iron Mechanical Bank

Money boxes, money safes, and mechanical banks have a long history, dating back to ancient times. The concept of money boxes can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome, where they were used to store coins and other small valuables. In the Middle Ages, money boxes became more common, often taking the form of ceramic or wooden vessels with a slot or hole for inserting coins. In the 18th and 19th centuries, metal money boxes became popular, often shaped like animals or other whimsical objects.

Mechanical banks, which are designed to accept coins and then perform some sort of action, were first introduced in the 19th century. Some of the earliest examples were simple boxes with a lever that would trigger a mechanism to move a figure or English object. As technology advanced, mechanical banks became more elaborate, featuring intricate designs and moving parts. They were often designed to appeal to children, and many featured popular characters from literature or pop culture.



This Golliwog money box produced by John Harper Ltd, England c1910 is a vintage cast-iron coin bank featuring the character popularized in the late 19th century. The character was created by author Florence Upton in the 1890s and was widely adapted into toys and money boxes. They typically depict a deep-set black face, exaggerated red lips, frizzy hair. These items are recognized as highly controversial, racially charged caricatures. Consequently, modern production has largely ceased, and they are now primarily found as historical antiques or collectible relics. Many vintage cast-iron versions featured a lever mechanism. When a coin was placed on the hand and the lever pressed, the figure would ‘eat’ the coin by flipping it into the box.

Accession number 2738

HERSTORY

Papakura and district has had many women, who over time have contributed to the society and structure of the town, the district, or the nation. Their involvement ranges from politics, to sport, to education, to the arts and to the social fabric. Over the coming months we will be featuring different women who have made life in Papakura more interesting, from its beginning to the present.

Katrina Grant



Katrina Rore (née Grant) was born in Papakura on 6 May 1987 and grew up in Beachlands. Living in close proximity to legendary running coach Arthur Lydiard further shaped her athletic mind-set; she would visit his house to use his rowing machine, during which he shared tips on training and perseverance, despite her never pursuing running herself. She attended Howick College and completed her schooling at Auckland Girls Grammar School before attending the University of Otago.

By her mid-teens she had begun to compete at representative levels, earning national recognition with her inclusion in the Silver Ferns squad in 2004 at the age of 17, as well as selection for New Zealand U21 teams from 2003 to 2005 and the A team in 2004. She contributed to New Zealand's gold medal at the 2004 World Youth Netball Championship.

In domestic netball, she played for the Canterbury Flames in the National Bank Cup in 2005, before moving south for a two-year stint with the Otago Rebels (2006–07) while studying for a management degree at the University of Otago. In the ANZ Championship, she played for the Southern Steel in 2008 and 2009, before signing with the Central Pulse (2010–2020). She was captain of the Central Pulse from 2011–2021 when the team won the ANZ Premiership in 2019 and 2020 and were runners up in 2017 and 2018. In 2019, Katrina signed a short-term contract with the New South Wales Swifts in Australia's Suncorp Super Netball league. She was named the 2018 ANZ Premiership Player of the Year.

In international netball, Katrina represented the Silver Ferns from 2005 to 2022, first selected in 2005 and making her on-court debut in 2008, accumulating 139 test caps and captaining the side from 2016 to 2019. She competed in the 2011, 2015 and 2019 Netball World Cups, securing a silver medal in 2015 and winning gold in 2019. At the Commonwealth Games, she earned gold in 2010, silver in 2014 and fourth place in 2018, contributing to New Zealand's success across multiple formats like the World Netball Series (gold in 2009 and silver in 2011) and Fast5 Netball World Series (gold in 2013 and 2018).

In December 2022 she announced her official retirement from international netball. Katrina is only one of five Silver Ferns to become a centurion with 139 caps to her name. Following her retirement, Katrina transitioned into broadcasting as a commentator for Fox Sports Australia covering Suncorp Super Netball broadcasts as of 2024.

Katrina married Joel Rore in 2018 and since 2024 has lived in Queensland, Australia.

Sources: Wikipedia, Grokipedia

BEFORE GOOGLE MAPS

The Great South Road and Its Forgotten Military Mile Posts

Neville Williams, Iain Wakefield, Alan Knowles

Long before satellite navigation, smartphones and Google maps, travellers relied on something much simpler to find their way. Standing beside roads throughout the British Empire were mile posts—humble markers that measured distance and guided travellers from one destination to the next. They helped coach drivers calculate their journeys, farmers transport produce to market, postal services keep to schedule, and government officials navigate an expanding province. Along Auckland's Great South Road, however, these simple wooden posts became something much more. They witnessed the transformation of a rough colonial track into one of New Zealand's most important military highways, guided soldiers marching south during the Waikato War, marked the movement of vast supply convoys, and stood silently as the landscape around them was reshaped by engineering, settlement and conflict.

Today only a handful survive, and most motorists pass them without a second glance. Yet these weathered roadside markers are among the oldest surviving pieces of transport infrastructure in northern New Zealand. Their story reaches far beyond measuring miles. It is a story of ambition and engineering, of Māori and European labour, of military planning and colonial expansion, and of the changing relationship between people and the landscape. To understand the mile posts, however, we must first understand the remarkable road they were built to serve.

Building the Great South Road

The Great South Road was one of the earliest and most ambitious public works projects undertaken by the colonial government after Auckland became New Zealand's capital. Its objective was straightforward: to create a dependable overland route linking Auckland with the fertile agricultural districts to the south. Achieving that goal, however, required engineers and labourers to overcome rivers, swamps, dense forests and rugged volcanic terrain, making the project one of the colony's greatest engineering challenges.

Newspapers of the day carried complaints from settlers frustrated that land was being sold without proper roads to reach it. Others criticised the colonial administration for using prison labour on public works, arguing that convicts appeared to be receiving favourable treatment while free settlers struggled to establish themselves. These public debates reveal just how important the proposed road had already become. Auckland's future growth depended upon reliable transport, and many recognised that prosperity would be limited until a permanent southern road existed. Surveying the route proved equally challenging. As engineers searched for the most practical alignment, they discovered that the ideal route frequently crossed privately owned land. In response, legislation passed in 1844 enabled road lines to be altered where necessary, even when this required acquisition of private property. It was an early example of public infrastructure taking precedence over individual land ownership in the interests of the growing province.

In 1845, the Auckland Provincial Government awarded its first major construction contract for the section extending towards Papakura. Planned to occupy a legal width of one chain, or sixty-six feet, the project represented one of the largest civil engineering undertakings yet attempted in New Zealand.

Construction depended upon a surprisingly diverse workforce. Government records show that Māori were engaged as paid workers. By 1848, tenders were even being called to provide food specifically for Māori employed on road construction, recognising their significant contribution. This often-overlooked aspect of the story reminds us that the Great South Road was not built solely by European settlers. Māori labour played an important role in creating the transport corridor that would eventually connect Auckland with the Waikato.

A Road Takes Shape



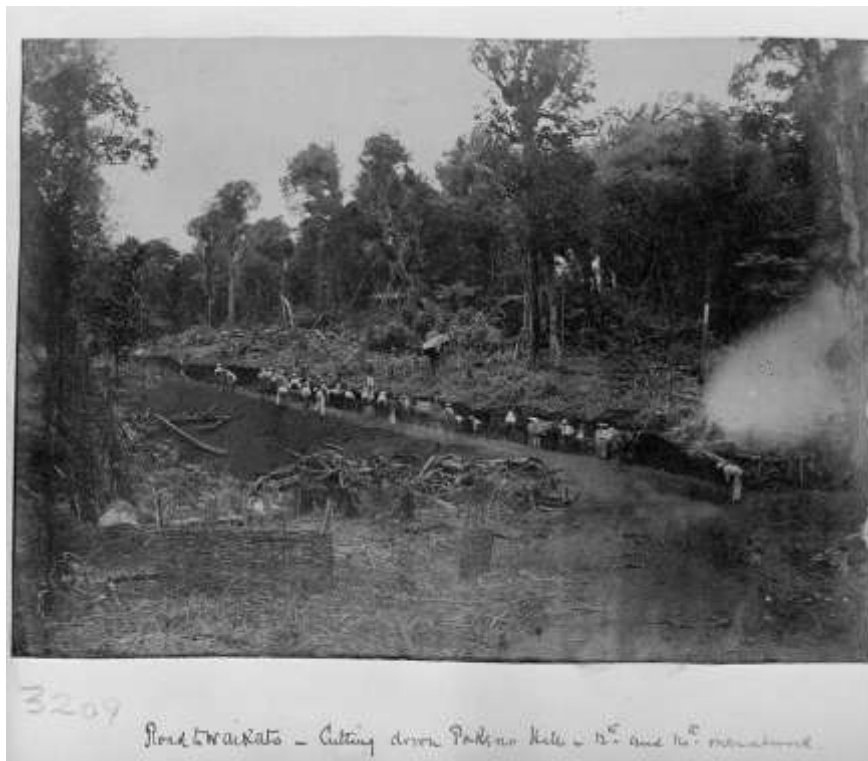
Great South Road Papakura, 1863- 1867. Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, E-209-q-2-108-2.

Work continued steadily throughout the early 1850s. By 1854 the road had reached Papakura, and by October of that year it extended as far south as Ramarama, opening increasing areas of land for farming and settlement. Despite these advances, travelling the Great South Road remained an arduous undertaking. Heavy rain transformed long stretches into deep mud, horses struggled on steep gradients, and heavily laden wagons frequently became bogged. A journey south from Auckland could still occupy an entire day or more, depending on weather and road conditions. Even so, the Great South Road rapidly became the principal southern transport corridor. Farmers drove livestock along it to market, mail coaches connected growing settlements, and surveyors, traders, missionaries and government officials all relied upon it. As Auckland expanded, so too did the importance of the road.

It is equally important to remember that the Great South Road did not carve an entirely new path through an untouched landscape. Long before European settlement, extensive networks of *ara hiko* linked communities throughout Tāmaki Makaurau and the Waikato. These well-established pathways followed ridgelines, waterways and natural corridors shaped by generations of environmental knowledge. Colonial engineers frequently adapted these existing routes to meet European transport needs, meaning that the Great South Road represented both continuity and transformation. Ancient pathways remained, but their purpose and meaning were increasingly reshaped within a colonial transport network.

Towards the Waikato

By 1858 attention turned to extending the road further south towards the Mangatawhiri Stream, a place that would soon assume enormous historical significance as the northern boundary of the Waikato. The contract required contractors to **fell the bush across a full chain-wide corridor (66 feet or approximately 20 metres)**, creating the legal road reserve through the dense forest. However, only the **central 16 feet (about 5 metres)** was to be **'stubbed'**—a process that involved digging out tree stumps and roots to create a passable surface for horses, drays, and carts. The remaining width of the cleared corridor was left with stumps in place until future improvements could be made. This staged approach reflected the practical realities of early colonial road building, allowing the Provincial Government to establish a usable transport route quickly while leaving the road wide enough to be expanded and improved as settlement and traffic increased.



Temple, William, 1833-1919. Construction of a road to Waikato, Pokeno Hill. Urquhart album. Ref: PA1-q-250-52. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [/records/23044970](#)

Around the same time, settler John Martyn noted that dense forest began approximately three and a half miles beyond Drury, highlighting the formidable engineering challenges that still lay ahead.

By 1859 the route had become sufficiently established to acquire the name by which it is still known today—the Great South Road. As construction progressed, traffic steadily increased and the road began to assume an increasingly important role in daily life. Newspapers that same year reported what is believed to be one of the earliest recorded incidents of 'road rage' in South Auckland, involving two horse-drawn carts near the Ranges. Although minor by modern standards, the incident illustrates how quickly the route was becoming an essential artery of movement.

Yet events were moving more quickly than the surveyors could have imagined. The late 1850s witnessed growing political tension between the Crown and the emerging Kīngitanga movement under Pōtatau Te Wherowhero. As Māori increasingly sought to preserve authority over their lands and political independence, colonial officials became increasingly concerned about the possibility of conflict. Military planners recognised that any campaign south of Auckland would depend upon one vi-

tal element: a reliable road capable of carrying troops, supplies and artillery into the Waikato.

The Great South Road was therefore about to assume an entirely different purpose. What had begun as a public works project intended to promote settlement and commerce would soon become one of the most important military highways in New Zealand's history.



Temple, William, 1833-1919. Deviation on the road to Waikato, made by the Royal Artillery, through Williamson's Clearing [Bombay]. Urquhart album. Ref: PA1-q-250-48. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [/records/22678558](#)

Preparing for War

By the beginning of the 1860s, the Great South Road had become far more than a route linking Auckland with the farming districts to the south. As relations between the Crown and the Kīngi-tanga movement deteriorated, colonial officials increasingly viewed the Waikato as the centre of Māori resistance to further land sales. Military planners understood that if conflict came, success would depend not simply upon soldiers or weapons, but upon logistics. An army could advance only as quickly as its supplies, and every sack of flour, box of ammunition, field hospital, horse, artillery piece and wagon would have to travel along a single road. Almost overnight, the Great South Road became one of Auckland's most strategically important assets.

Recognising its military significance, responsibility for improving the road south of Drury passed from the Auckland Provincial Government to the British military in 1861. What had begun as an ambitious public works project was transformed into one of the largest civil and military engineering enterprises undertaken in colonial New Zealand. Speed became the overriding priority, and work that might previously have taken years was now expected to be completed in months.

To support this immense undertaking, construction camps were established at Drury, Kerr's Farm

(Ramarama), Baird's Farm (northern Bombay), Austen's Farm (northern Pokeno). As a point of interest Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Wilson Austen was a third cousin of Jane Austen, the novelist. From these bases, soldiers, engineers, contractors and labourers worked to extend and improve the road towards the Mangatawhiri Stream. This small waterway marked far more than a geographical feature. It was widely regarded as the northern boundary of the Waikato, and beyond it lay territory that British authorities increasingly believed they would soon need to enter by force.



William Temple (1833–1919), *Camp of the 65th Regiment near Drury, Auckland*, c. 1861–1865. Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington. Reference: PA1-q-250-45.

Unlike most nineteenth-century public works, the improvements to the Great South Road were driven not by commercial opportunity but by military necessity. Every culvert completed, every bridge strengthened and every mile of metalled roadway brought the army one step closer to being able to move rapidly into the Waikato. The road was becoming an essential component of Britain's military preparations rather than simply a means of connecting settlements.

An Extraordinary Workforce

The scale of the work demanded an equally remarkable workforce. Royal Engineers supervised much of the technical planning, but the project relied upon hundreds of civilian contractors, labourers, sawyers, blacksmiths, quarrymen, teamsters and bullock drivers. Soldiers worked alongside civilian employees in what was, for its time, one of the largest engineering projects undertaken.

An often-overlooked aspect of this workforce was the continued involvement of Māori labour. In December 1861, the government publicly advertised for three hundred Māori labourers, offering wages of half a crown per day to assist with road construction. This was not an isolated initiative but a continuation of Māori participation that stretched back to the earliest stages of the construction of the roads.

The involvement of Māori workers highlights the complexity of the Great South Road's history. It is one of the great ironies of New Zealand's colonial history that infrastructure built through the combined efforts of Māori and European workers would soon play such a central role in the conflict that followed.

Building a Military Highway

The engineering achievement that followed was extraordinary. Working with remarkable urgency, an average of 1,700 men laboured on the road each day, an astonishing workforce as the European population remained comparatively small. Within just five and a half months, the Great South Road had been extended and improved as far as the Mangatawhiri Stream, creating a reliable military supply route where previously only difficult tracks and partially formed roads had existed. The reconstructed roadway reflected contemporary British engineering standards. The bush was cleared to thirty feet wide, generally metalled to a width of between twelve and eighteen feet, resting on a foundation approximately nine inches deep. Numerous bridges, culverts and drainage works were completed to ensure that wagons, artillery and mounted troops could travel throughout much of the year, regardless of weather conditions.

For those overseeing the project, this was not simply road building—it was military engineering on a grand scale. The Great South Road had evolved from a colonial highway into one of the finest engineered roads in nineteenth-century New Zealand, designed specifically to support the movement of an army.

New Roads, New Rules

As construction progressed, traffic along the Great South Road increased dramatically. Bullock drays loaded with timber and stone shared the roadway with horse-drawn wagons, military carts, coaches, mounted officers and pedestrians. Managing such a diverse flow of traffic became increasingly important as Auckland continued to grow.

Reflecting these changing conditions, the Auckland Municipal Police Act of 1862 introduced a regulation requiring vehicles to keep to the left-hand side of the road. Today this rule is so familiar that it scarcely attracts attention, yet in the early 1860s it represented an important step towards regulating traffic on roads that were becoming progressively busier and more sophisticated. It also serves as a reminder that the Great South Road was evolving not only as a military highway but as the backbone of everyday transport.

War Comes to the Great South Road

When the Waikato invasion began in July 1863, the Great South Road immediately fulfilled the role for which it had been prepared. It became the principal military supply line into the Waikato, carrying the men, equipment and provisions needed to sustain one of the largest military campaigns fought in nineteenth-century New Zealand.

Almost every day, long columns of wagons travelled south carrying flour, salted meat, ammunition, tents, engineering equipment, timber, fodder and medical supplies. Infantry regiments marched along the roadway, mounted soldiers rode between camps carrying dispatches, and artillery teams hauled heavy guns towards the frontier. The road itself became as vital to the campaign as the soldiers who travelled upon it. Military requirements soon demanded further improvements. Dense forest provided ideal cover for ambushes, and military commanders wanted clear lines of sight that would reduce the risk of attack on supply convoys. The road clearance through

the bush was widened from approximately thirty feet to a total width of twenty-one chains, (just over 1300 feet).

The scale of this transformation was immense. Contemporary reports suggest that approximately one thousand acres of forest were felled within only seven weeks. Travellers who had once moved through dense native bush now found themselves passing along a broad corridor carved through the landscape. By the height of the campaign, virtually every movement between Auckland and the Waikato depended upon this remarkable road. Yet amidst the endless procession of wagons, soldiers and horses stood one of the smallest—and ultimately most enduring—features of the entire enterprise. At regular intervals along the roadside were sturdy wooden mile posts that measured every stage of the journey. To the casual traveller they appeared unremarkable, but to engineers, transport officers and military commanders they were indispensable. They provided fixed reference points which allowed progress to be measured, organised logistics and helped transform an ordinary road into an efficient military supply system.



Reproduced from 'The Military Mileposts on the Great South Road', *Historical Journal* (Auckland–Waikato), No. 22 (1973)

It is these seemingly modest markers, standing beside one of New Zealand's most historic roads, that have generated one of the most intriguing questions in the story of the Great South Road:
Who actually installed the Military Mile Posts?

Part 2: The Mystery of the Mile Posts

By the early 1860s, anyone travelling the Great South Road would have become familiar with a series of sturdy wooden posts placed at regular intervals beside the roadway. To the weary soldier marching south, each post marked another mile completed. To the driver of a heavily laden bullock wagon, they provided a measure of progress. For surveyors, engineers and road contractors they served as precise reference points from which distances could be measured and maintenance organised.

Today these roadside markers are almost universally known as the Military Mile Posts, a name that appears straightforward enough. Their close association with the Waikato invasion has led generations of writers to assume that they were erected by the British Army during its preparations for the invasion of the Waikato. Yet, like many aspects of New Zealand's colonial history, the

reality is far more complex.

Surprisingly little documentary evidence survives to explain exactly who commissioned or erected the mile posts. Over the past century researchers have offered differing interpretations, each supported by fragments of historical evidence. Rather than providing a simple answer, the surviving records reveal a story in which military necessity, provincial administration and public infrastructure became closely intertwined.

A Tradition Much Older Than New Zealand

Although the Great South Road mile posts are firmly associated with nineteenth-century Auckland, the idea behind them stretches back almost two thousand years. Throughout the Roman Empire, engineers erected stone milestones—known as *miliaria*—along major roads extending across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. These markers recorded distances from important administrative centres and reinforced the authority of Rome by demonstrating the reach of its road network.

The British Empire inherited many of these traditions. By the nineteenth century, milestones had become familiar features throughout Britain and many of its colonies, reflecting an administrative culture that valued surveying, measurement and order. Roads were carefully mapped, distances measured and journeys calculated with increasing precision. The humble milestone was therefore much more than a navigational aid; it was a symbol of an empire that sought to understand, organise and govern the landscapes under its control.

The Great South Road mile posts formed part of this long tradition. Although constructed from timber rather than stone, they embodied the same philosophy. Every measured mile represented another step in transforming a landscape into something that could be surveyed, administered and connected to the wider colonial transport network.

Measuring from the Heart of Auckland



Historic Milepost Great South Road, 1957. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, Footprints 07052

The Great South Road mile posts measured distance from a single fixed point within the new colonial capital. That point was Somerville's Corner, the intersection of Queen Street and Shortland Street, then regarded as the commercial and administrative heart of Auckland. From there the numbered posts extended south. The first stood near the Church of England cemetery on Symonds Street before the sequence continued through Khyber Pass, Newmarket, Ōtāhuhu, Papatoetoe, Manurewa and Papakura and at Drury where the twenty-second mile post was located.

The posts themselves were distinctive. Constructed from durable tōtara, each was formed with a triangular cross-section and projected a little over one metre above the ground. Two of the three faces carried carved inscriptions. One displayed the distance from Auckland, while the opposite face showed the distance back from Drury.

This seemingly simple arrangement reveals something important about the role of Drury in the early 1860s. By this time, it was no longer simply another rural settlement. It had become a major military depot and transport hub from

which supplies, personnel and equipment were organised before moving further south. Measuring distance in both directions acknowledged Drury's growing importance within the settlements transport system.

The Military Theory

For many years the accepted explanation was that the British Army erected the mile posts during preparations for the Waikato campaign. This interpretation is certainly understandable, as military records clearly demonstrate the importance of accurate distance measurement during the construction and operation of the Great South Road.

Assistant Commissary-General James Bailey, who was responsible for organising military transport between Penrose and Drury, faced a practical problem. Drivers transporting military supplies frequently complained that they had no reliable way of judging how far they had travelled or estimating how much of the journey remained. In response, Bailey introduced a system of numbered mile posts beginning south of the Penrose Commissariat Depot.



Left: Photographer unknown. *A commissariat convoy on their way to the front, Great South Road, New Zealand, c. 1863.* Ref: PH-ALB-510-p5-1. Right: *Māori protesting the survey of the Great South Road at Pokeno, c. 1861–1863.* Photograph by William Temple. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Urquhart Album, Ref. **PA1-q-250-27-2.**

Interestingly, the first military reference point was marked 'No. 8', reflecting its position eight miles from Auckland. From there, the numbering continued south towards Drury, allowing transport officers to organise supply convoys with far greater efficiency. Orders could specify precise locations, contractors could identify exact sections requiring maintenance, and engineers could record repairs with remarkable accuracy.

For an army responsible for moving thousands of soldiers and vast quantities of food, ammunition and equipment, the value of such a system was obvious. The mile posts became an indispensable part of military logistics, and it is easy to understand why many historians concluded that the British Army must therefore have been responsible for building them.

A Different Story Emerges

Closer examination of provincial records presents a different picture.

Documents dating from early March 1863 indicate that the Auckland Provincial Council was erect-

ing mileage posts along provincial roads. Only days later, on 26 March 1863, the Provincial Council passed the Highways Amendment Act, making it an offence to damage mile posts or other mileage markers.

This legislation raises an intriguing question. If the mile posts were purely a purely military undertaking, why was the Auckland Provincial Council passing laws to protect them?

Instead, the evidence suggests they were regarded as part of the public road infrastructure, much like bridges, culverts and other permanent improvements maintained by the provincial government. The legislation implies that the mile posts would serve civilian travellers every bit as much as they served the army.

Military historian Maurice Lennard, who carefully examined surviving military records, reached a similar conclusion. Despite the widespread belief that soldiers erected the mile posts, he found no definitive military documentation proving that this had occurred. Lennard also noted another curious detail. If the British Army had established the entire system, why did the numbered sequence terminate at Drury? Beyond Drury, responsibility for road construction had already passed to the military under General Duncan Cameron, yet no continuation of the numbered system was recorded at this time.

This suggests that the original mile posts reflected the administrative responsibilities of the Auckland Provincial Council rather than the operational requirements of the British Army. However, there are mileposts that are reported south of Drury, although the scope of this article treats Drury as the final milepost in the original sequence.

More Than Measuring Miles

The practical purpose of the mile posts was obvious. They measured distance, helped travellers judge their progress and provided fixed reference points for road maintenance and military logistics. Yet they also changed the way people understood the landscape itself.

For the first time, the Great South Road became a sequence of numbered places, with every mile possessing its own identity. After the conflict, contractors tendering for road repairs could be instructed to use mile posts as a reference point. Surveyors were then able to record locations accurately, government officials could identify precise sections of roadway, and newspaper advertisements could direct travellers to a property or business by referring to a particular mile marker. In many respects, the posts effectively functioned like modern street numbers or highway markers, creating a common language of location.

Beyond their practical value, however, the mile posts reflected a broader colonial philosophy. Measuring the landscape was also a means of organising it. Roads were surveyed, rivers mapped, land divided and distances carefully recorded. The countryside became something that could be administered, regulated and controlled. In this sense, the mile posts represented more than simple navigation aids. They symbolised the extension of colonial authority across the landscape, reinforcing a new way of seeing and managing the land.

Drury: The Ends of the Earth

Today, Drury is one of Auckland's fastest-growing communities, its surrounding countryside rapidly giving way to housing developments, commercial centres and new transport infrastructure. It is difficult to imagine that, in the early 1860s, this quiet settlement marked the southern edge of organised colonial settlement.

For the British Army, Drury became the principal staging point for the Waikato campaign. Thousands of soldiers gathered there before marching south. Supply depots overflowed with food, ammunition and equipment. Horses, bullock wagons, engineers and transport columns crowded the settlement as preparations for war reached their peak.

Standing nearby was the twenty-second mile post. For ordinary travellers, it marked twenty-two miles from Auckland. For military planners, however, it represented something far more significant. It marked the point where the well-established provincial road ended and where military operations beyond the settled frontier began. Beyond Drury lay the Mangatāwhiri Stream and, beyond that, the Waikato.

The Disappearing Mile Posts

After the Waikato War, the Great South Road gradually returned to its original civilian purpose. Military traffic declined, and the road once again carried farmers, merchants, mail coaches and settlers travelling between Auckland and the growing communities of South Auckland. For decades, the mile posts continued to guide travellers and remained important reference points for road maintenance and public administration.

As the twentieth century progressed, however, their usefulness steadily diminished. Motor vehicles replaced horse-drawn transport, roads were widened and realigned, and many of the original tōtara posts disappeared during road improvements or simply decayed after decades of exposure to the weather. Others were removed without any appreciation of their historical importance. By the middle of the twentieth century, an entire network that had once stretched twenty-two miles had been reduced to only a handful of surviving examples. What had once been an everyday feature of the Great South Road was rapidly becoming a forgotten relic of Auckland's colonial past.

Preserving a Forgotten Legacy

Fortunately, not everyone overlooked their significance. In 1928, members of the (then) Great South Road Beautifying Society recognised that the surviving mile posts represented an increasingly rare link with Auckland's early transport history. They began efforts to preserve the remaining examples before continuing development removed them altogether. Their work was followed in 1936 by the Auckland Automobile Association, which restored surviving posts, erected replacement markers where originals had been lost and installed interpretation panels explaining their history.

Although some of the historical interpretations presented at that time reflected the knowledge available during the 1930s—particularly the belief that all of the mile posts had been erected by the British military—the preservation work itself proved invaluable. Without those early conservation efforts, many of the surviving mile posts would almost certainly have disappeared during road widening and suburban development.



Drury military milepost before refurbishment. Papakura Museum
Papakura Museum collection



What remains of the original 12th milepost on display at Papatoetoe Museum. *Alan Knowles Collection*



More recent restoration projects, including work undertaken at the Drury Mile Post in 2017, have helped preserve these important historic landmarks. In 2026, the Drury Military Mile Post underwent further refurbishment to restore its appearance as closely as possible to its original nineteenth-century form. The work aimed to conserve one of the few surviving examples of Great South Road infrastructure while enabling visitors to better appreciate how these distinctive mile posts would have appeared to those travelling the road during the nineteenth century. These refurbishments were made possible through the generosity of the Papakura Local Board and the invaluable assistance of historian Iain Wakefield who clarified what the original mile post would have looked like for the 2026 work.

The newly refurbished Drury Mile Post. This was installed in the 1930s to replace the deteriorated original and now resembles the appearance of the original post. *Papakura Museum Collection*

Why the Mile Posts Still Matter

At first glance, the Great South Road mile posts appear to be little more than weathered roadside markers. Yet few surviving artefacts tell such a rich and complex story. They speak of the construction of Auckland's first great highway, of Māori and European labour working side by side, of engineering ingenuity and colonial ambition, of military logistics and the Waikato War, and of changing ideas about how landscapes should be organised and understood.

They also remind us that history is often hidden in plain sight. Grand monuments naturally attract attention, but some of the most revealing objects are the ones people pass every day without noticing. A simple timber post beside a busy road can tell us as much about nineteenth-century New Zealand as a fortification, a government building or a battlefield.

For museums, the mile posts offer an exceptional opportunity to connect visitors with many different aspects of New Zealand's past. Through a single object it is possible to explore transport history, engineering, surveying, military logistics, Māori history, colonial administration, settlement and heritage conservation.

Every day, thousands of vehicles travel the Great South Road, most of their drivers unaware that a small number of weathered mile posts still stand beside the modern highway. These modest markers have witnessed almost two centuries of change. They watched prisoners, paid Māori labourers, contractors and surveyors build one of Auckland's earliest roads. They saw that road transformed into the principal military highway of the Waikato campaign before returning once again to serve peaceful settlement and commerce.

Before Google Maps, before GPS and before modern road signs, these simple timber posts gave travellers certainty in an unfamiliar landscape. Yet they measured far more than distance. They measured the growth of Auckland, the expansion of colonial government, the movement of armies and the transformation of a landscape already rich with centuries of Māori history.

Today they remain quiet witnesses to one of New Zealand's most significant transport corridors. Standing beside the road they have occupied for generations, they remind us that history does not survive only in museums or monumental buildings. Sometimes it survives in the most unassuming places, waiting for someone to pause, look a little closer and discover that even the simplest objects can tell extraordinary stories.

Special thanks to Papatoetoe Museum.

Appendix: Known Surviving Great South Road Mile Posts (Bruce Ringer, 2009)

By 2009, only a small number of the 22-mile posts along the Great South Road are believed to have survived. The following locations were identified as containing extant posts or remnant:

- **12-mile post** — outside 500 Great South Road, Papatoetoe (original remnants held by Papatoetoe Museum as well as the later replacement)
- **14-mile post** — opposite Kerr's Road, Wiri (1936 replacement)
- **15-mile post** — outside 88 Great South Road, Manurewa (1936 replacement)
- **16-mile post** — outside 272 Great South Road, Manurewa (Original remnants on display at Nathan Homestead)
- **17-mile post** — Great South Road, approximately 40 metres north of Manuia Road, Takanini (1936 replacement)
- **18-mile post** — Great South Road, approximately 150 metres north of Walters Road, Papakura (1936 replacement)
- **20-mile post** — Great South Road, south of the Liverpool Street junction, Papakura (1936 replacement. The milepost disappeared in the last 6 years.)
- * **22-mile post** — outside Drury School, Drury (1936 replacement)

References—As the article filled all available pages, the references will be in the next issue of *Sentinel*.
Apologies, Ed.

Volunteering for the Museum: If you are interested in becoming a volunteer for the Museum, drop in and ask Kay or Alan for an application form. New volunteers will be encouraged to complete a Service IQ Museum Practice Course or a Front of House 'Visitor Savvy Award'.

The Papakura Sentinel is a bimonthly magazine of the Papakura & District Historical Society. Your contributions of research or memories (by word or image) are welcome. Please send Word document directly to editor Rob Finlay by email: sentinel@papakuramuseum.org.nz. Any opinions expressed are those of the authors, not of the PDHS. All written material, unless otherwise stated, is the copyright of PDHS Inc.

Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month in the Library Meeting Room opposite the Museum, the talk first at 1pm, then business and afternoon tea provided by PDHS members (\$2 coin please). PDHS members arrange interesting speakers. Additionally, **Museum Talks** are held periodically on Saturday afternoons.

Trips are held monthly except in winter. Transport arrangements and cost are notified in advance. (Cost is \$5 more for non-members, but anyone welcome on first-come, first paid basis.) Please register early and advise if unable to attend as numbers may be limited. To register, please **ring Dave (09) 2984507**.

Events are advertised here, in the *Staying in touch* newsletter, on the screen in the Museum foyer, and on the PDHS Website: www.papakurahistoricalsociety.org.nz

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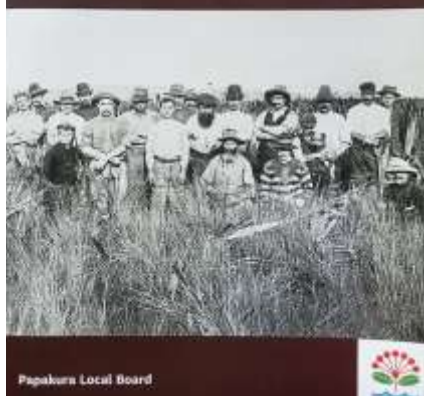


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Monthly meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of every month (from February to November) at 1pm in the Community Meeting Room (next to the Papakura Library).

You will receive our bi-monthly publication *The Papakura Sentinel*, the monthly PDHS newsletter *Staying in Touch* and other communications via email. Thank you for your support.

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