



BLOCKHOUSE BAY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
INCORPORATED

# NEWSLETTER

## JUNE 2025. Number 124

### NEXT MEETING -

The Blockhouse Bay Historical Society next meeting is on Wednesday 6TH June at 1.15 pm. in the Blockhouse Bay Community Centre.

**Guest Speaker** - Greg Moyle. Greg retired as a Major in the NZ Army after 37 years' service. He is the Chairman of the NZ War Memorial Trust and heavily involved with NZ War Memorial Museum in Le Quesnoy, France. The Museum opened to celebrate the 100th centenary of the liberation of Le Quesnoy by NZ troops.

Like many, he has visited the fields of battle on the Western Front and seen the monuments that mark New Zealand's service during 32 months of bloody conflict in World War I.

"Given the visual evidence of numerous war cemeteries becomes in itself an emotional journey, linked with feelings of sorrow for a generation gone before their time." (rescheduled from April meeting).

### Society News

Armanasco House was open on 26 April - a Saturday morning. We were delighted at the number of visitors - thankfully the rain held off in the morning.



A special ANZAC display was on show, with ANZAC biscuits and Herbs on sale, raising funds for the Society.

A wreath was placed on the Memorial on behalf of the Society.

*See back page for more society news.*

Krystene Vickers; [krys@ekiwi.com](mailto:krys@ekiwi.com)  
Mary Marshall; [marymarshall55@gmail.com](mailto:marymarshall55@gmail.com)  
Anne Bell; 627 8619  
Tony Joyce; 626 6445 [tony.joyce@xtra.co.nz](mailto:tony.joyce@xtra.co.nz)

Life Members;  
Eileen Rusden, Yvonne Dabb, Alan Cole & Brian Goodwin  
Visit our website;  
[www.blockhousebayhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.blockhousebayhistoricalsociety.com)

# Blockhouse Bay: An Historical Snapshot

## 2023 Census

Blockhouse Bay had a population of 13,107, an increase of 267 people (2.1%) since the 2018 census, and an increase of 1,527 people (13.2%) since the 2013 census. There were 6,537 males, 6,525 females and 45 people of other genders in 4,119 dwellings. 3.3% of people identified as LGBTIQ+. The median age was 38.6 years (compared with 38.1 years nationally). There were 2,208 people (16.8%) aged under 15 years, 2,625 (20.0%) aged 15 to 29, 6,135 (46.8%) aged 30 to 64, and 2,136 (16.3%) aged 65 or older.

People could identify as more than one ethnicity. The results were 33.5% European; 6.1% Māori; 10.9% Pasifika; 55.8% Asian; 2.8% Middle Eastern, Latin American and African New Zealanders (MELAA); and 1.6% other, which includes people giving their ethnicity as "New Zealander".

English was spoken by 90.8%, Māori language by 1.0%, Samoan by 3.2%, and other languages by 42.4%. No language could be spoken by 1.9% (e.g. too young to talk). New Zealand Sign Language was known by 0.4%. The percentage of people born overseas was 53.1, compared with 28.8% nationally.

A far cry from 200 years ago.

## Early History

Blockhouse Bay, in pre-European times, was a significant location for Māori, notably as a portage route between the Waitematā and Manukā harbours. Te Whau Point, the headland at the bay, served as a fortified pā and was a strategic location for Māori travel and resource gathering. The area also held importance as a stopover due to the proximity to the portage and the sheltered nature of the village.

The earliest European known to have trekked through, and followed the coastline of the Manukau Harbour in an endeavour to find if there was a waterway connecting the two harbours, was the Rev. Samuel Marsden in 1820. Two missionaries who had arrived in New Zealand on 30 December 1834, William Colenso and R. Wade, walked through the Whau South area in 1838 hoping to find a Māori settlement, but the pā site on Te Whau point had been abandoned some time before. They remarked that the area was "open and barren heaths, dreary, sterile and wild."

Portage Road is the location of Te Tōanga Waka, one of the overland routes between the two harbours (and thus the Pacific Ocean and the Tasman Sea), where Māori would

beach their waka and drag them overland to the other coast, thus avoiding having to paddle around North Cape. This made the area of immense strategic importance in both pre-European times and during the early years of European occupation.

## Blockhouse

A wooden blockhouse was constructed over Te Whau Bay 1860, at a cost of £435, 13 shillings and 11 pence. At this time the first land war in Taranaki was escalating and there were fears it would spread north and so a defence system for Auckland was actioned. A 12-acre site was chosen, bordered by Esplanade (Endeavour Street), Gilfillan Street, Wynyard Road (Blockhouse Bay Road) and Boylan Street (Wade Street). The actual Whau Blockhouse was located on what is now No. 8 Gilfillan Street.

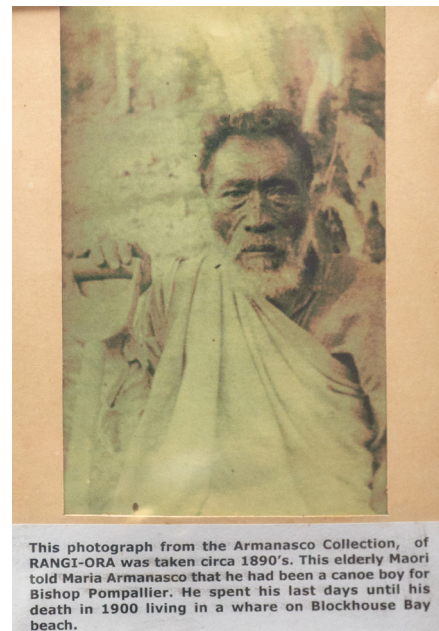
The site was chosen for two reasons:

- The elevated cleared 12-acre (49,000 m<sup>2</sup>) site provided an unobstructed view towards the Manukau Heads, the source of possible attack from southern Māori tribes.
- It was close to the Whau Portage which was the route favoured by northern Māori tribes.

Colonel Thomas Mould of the Royal Engineers was charged with planning the location and type of defence system needed. A blockhouse is a purpose-built building with walls thick enough to stop musket ball penetration, with slits in the walls for defensive musket fire, a fence or stockade surrounding the building, with a trench beyond that

The blockhouse was manned by the 57th (West Middlesex) Regiment of Foot and the 65th (2nd Yorkshire, North Riding) Regiment of Foot until 1863.

The Te Whau Blockhouse was issued with a stand of 200 arms, comprising infantry muskets, cavalry carbines, revolvers, swords and bayonets. It was manned by military regiments and later by







local militia, but no shot was ever fired in battle. The prime duty of the soldiers was to keep a constant watch towards the Manukau Harbour heads for sign of any warring waka approaching from the west so that an early warning could be given.

Never seeing military action, the blockhouse was rented out to a tenant in the 1880s and was gutted in a fire. It was subsequently demolished in October 1886. The trenches were apparently still visible in the 1940s but have since been obscured.

Gum diggers were the next to pass through this area, leaving very little signs of their occupation, just shallow pits where they had been digging and small piles of kauri gum flakes from where they sat at night, cleaning and scraping the gum to get a more marketable product.

## Development

The district was slowly settled, the first industry was the Francis Gittos Tannery in 1884, and in 1906 the first strawberry crop was harvested, and the Bay became a major supplier for the Auckland market. Small farms, orchards, flower growing, all provided income for the early settlers.

The beaches at both Sandy Bay and Blockhouse Bay were a major attraction for city folk who camped all summer, enjoying wonderful swimming, fishing, and abundant shell fish, with many city families building holiday homes at the Bay. In those early years, the beach was the focal point for community activities, with carnivals and picnics and was the only available ground for the local sports clubs to play on. Carnivals are still held as those who enjoyed the Blues at Blockhouse Bay this summer can confirm. *See photo above.*

Today, access to the Bay with good roading is no distance at all from the city, but in 1860 supplies had to come by boat from Onehunga and were landed on the beach at high water for the soldiers to carry up the hill to the Blockhouse.



**BLOCKHOUSE BAY BEACH**  
**MARCH 1943** Ken Abercrombie Collection





For many years, circa 1878, there were discussions and plans for building a canal which would follow the line of the old Maori Portage, (now known as Portage Road), joining the Manukau and Waitemata Harbours. This plan was never followed up; it was vetoed by the business people at Onehunga who felt they would lose trade as boats would go straight through the canal to Auckland.

In the 1950s, after World War II, the big blocks of land began to be subdivided, and Blockhouse Bay went from being a sleepy country area to the thriving suburb it is today. The majority of residential housing was built from 1960-1969. When Lynfield College opened in 1958 it had a roll of 90. Ten years later the roll was about 1300.

The photo of the early bus service is far cry from the 195 and 24B buses that constantly motor along BHB Rd Shopping Centre.



## Society News Continued

The winner of the Army Jigsaw draw was Peter Kerr – see *photo above*.

Thanks again to Olwyn and Peter Over who acted as guides.

If you can help on any of the other Saturdays please contact Mary Marshall [marshall55@gmail.com](mailto:marshall55@gmail.com)

5 July 12 July 27 September 4 October 3 January 2026

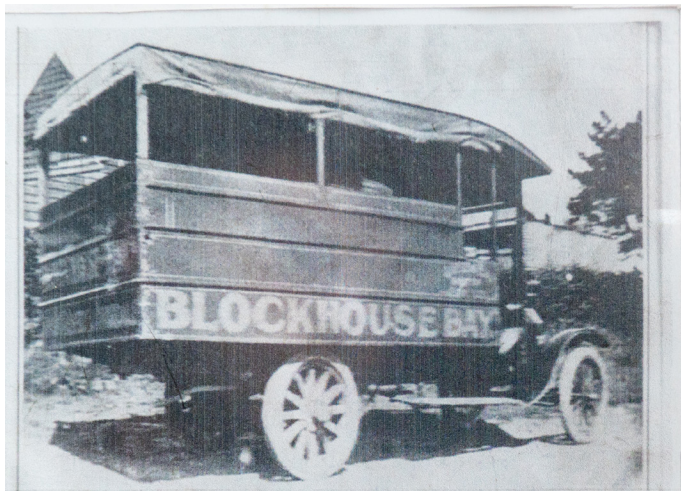
We are, of course, still open on Tuesdays from 9am - 1pm.

Our faithful handymen, Brian, Tony and Terry have been cleaning up the back area of Armanasco House.

A linen Map of the area in 1918 was donated and this has been framed and is on display.

Our guest speaker at our April meeting Melanie Middleton from the NZ Society of Genealogists showed kindred spirit with our Society. It is not about name, numbers and dates but about the stories they tell us. If you have a story to share about the Bay please let us know. You might not think it is of interest but others will.

The Society has applied for a Whau Local Board Grant to help with reframing and restoring current photos. No response as of yet.



## Names

The Maori name for Blockhouse Bay is Āmio. Additionally, the area was historically known as Whau Beach and Te Whau Point. Blockhouse Bay adopted its current name in 1948, with Avondale South preceding it, and before that, it was part of Waikomiti.

- Āmio: This is the current official Maori name for the Blockhouse Bay Beach Reserve.
- Whau Beach: This name was used before 1882, when Avondale and Avondale South were established.
- Te Whau Point: This is the name for the headland at the beach and is a remnant of the area's Maori heritage, being the site of a Maori pa

*Mary Marshall*

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