

THOMAS GAVIN: 'TOMMY CHAIRMAN', A MINE MANAGER
AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLITICIAN AT TE AROHA

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Abstract: *After starting mining on the Thames goldfield at the age of 17, Thomas Gavin quickly became a competent miner. As later at Te Aroha, he was active in the wider community, especially as a rower and a Volunteer. After participating in the Te Aroha rush of 1880, he became a mine manager for the first time, and on the Waiorongomai field managed several mines for over two decades (with the consequence that he would die from miners’ complaint). He also managed the tramway on several occasions and supervised repairs to the mining tracks. As another way of assisting the mining industry, he was a member of the accident relief fund.*

Gavin acquired land close to Te Aroha and farmed it for many years, the combination of farming and mining providing a modest income for his large family. He was notable for being active in all aspects of life in the community, notably his church, sport, horse racing, and social and cultural life. In local government, he was an active member of several bodies: the licensing committee, the domain board, the county council, and town board followed by its replacement, the borough council, and missed out on being the first mayor of Te Aroha by the closest of margins. A supporter of the Liberal Party, he did not, as some expected, stand for parliament.

With strong views on many issues, he was impatient with criticism, but despite his occasional irritability his reputation was high in the community of which he was one of its most prominent members.

AT THAMES

Thomas Gavin was born in Howick, near Auckland, on 1 October 1850, to James, a carpenter, and Eliza, neé Robinett.¹ Born in County Wicklow, Ireland, after serving in the army his father settled in New Zealand as a fencible.² The family later moved to Panmure, where at the age of 12 Gavin

¹ Birth Certificate of Thomas Gavin, 1 October 1850, 1850/972; Death Certificate of Thomas Gavin, 9 December 1913, 1913/8314, BDM.

² *The Royal New Zealand Fencibles 1847-1852* (Auckland, 1997), p. 141; see also pp. 57, 60, 61, 65, 116.

first earned money by working for a local resident.³ Until aged 15 he assisted his father on the family farm, and joined the Thames gold rush in November 1867.⁴ His first miner's right was taken out on 14 December 1867, for the Karaka block,⁵ two months after he turned 17. After mining in the Eureka,⁶ he worked 'in some of the principal mines'.⁷ He first acquired interests in June 1868, when he bought one of the five shares in the Panmure, at Moanataiari Creek; a year later he sold it to the Moanataiari Company for £200.⁸ In August 1868 he was one of the six original owners of the Tamaki, at Karaka Creek, with a one-tenth interest.⁹ In May 1870, he was one of the eight owners of the City of Chester, at Kuranui, with a one-seventh interest.¹⁰

After this date, because of working for companies Gavin was not recorded as a shareholder in such small claims. He told the Minister of Mines that he spent ten years working in the Moanataiari; he was first recorded mining there in 1874.¹¹ He was head of a tributing party that successfully operated in it from at least December 1876 until November 1878.¹² An indication of his competence as a miner was his election in 1877, when aged 26, as a director of the New North Devon Company mining at Moanataiari Creek.¹³ The following year he was elected a director of the New Zealand Independent, which mined at Wiseman's Creek.¹⁴ The only other shareholding acquired before moving to Te Aroha was taken up in

³ *Te Aroha News*, 16 March 1907, p. 2; note 1879 probate of his brother Patrick James Gavin, Probates, BBAE 1568/852, ANZ-A.

⁴ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 834.

⁵ Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miners' Rights 1867-1868, no. 2826, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶ *Thames Star*, 1 August 1913, p. 5.

⁷ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 834.

⁸ Thames Warden's Court, Claims Register 1868, folio 372, BACL 14397/1a; Register of Deeds 1869, folios 289-290, BACL 14417/3a, ANZ-A.

⁹ Thames Warden's Court, Claims Register 1868-1869, no. 723, BACL 14397/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁰ Thames Warden's Court, Shortland Claims Register 1870, no. 2180, BACL 14397/5a, ANZ-A.

¹¹ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 21 July 1887, Mines Department, MD 1, 87/687, ANZ-W; *Thames Advertiser*, 9 March 1874, p. 2.

¹² *Thames Advertiser*, 7 December 1876, p. 3, 2 November 1878, p. 3.

¹³ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 August 1877, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 2 May 1878, p. 553.

¹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 May 1878, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 May 1878, p. 712.

1880, when he acquired 200 of the 12,000 scrip shares in the Victoria Company.¹⁵

In 1902, the *Thames Star* described him as ‘once as well known on the Thames as the proverbial town pump’, having taken ‘a lively interest in local and political movements, including volunteering. He was for years Captain of the Navals’.¹⁶ He subscribed to the building fund for the Catholic church.¹⁷ In 1877, he was a member of the football club’s committee and of the team that played Auckland; as a heavyweight, he was used in the ‘scrimmage’.¹⁸ Also in 1877 he was a member of the champion Thames Naval Brigade rowing team, his fellow rowers being three miners who would later participate in mining at Waiorongomai: Alfred Newdick, another Thames pioneer,¹⁹ and Henry and Thomas Goldsworthy.²⁰ As well as participating in whaleboat races at regattas at Nelson and Thames, they won the race for four-oared outriggers at the Auckland Regatta.²¹ When a new rowing club was formed the following year, he was elected to its committee of management.²² His crew won at the Auckland regatta in 1880.²³

Gavin told a reunion of Volunteers at Te Aroha in 1907 that he thought he first joined the Naval Brigade in Auckland in 1865.²⁴ He ‘related several amusing experiences’, the only one published being that when a new recruit he

was put with a more advanced squad, and in consequence of a slight hitch in unfixing his bayonet, evoked from the captain a remark that was the reverse of complimentary. Then he rapidly

¹⁵ *New Zealand Gazette*, 8 April 1880, p. 474.

¹⁶ *Thames Star*, 1 August 1902, p. 2.

¹⁷ Averil Howarth, *The Early History of St Francis’ Church, Thames* (Thames, 1978), p. 16.

¹⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 23 April 1877, p. 2, 17 September 1877, p. 3.

¹⁹ See *New Zealand Herald*, 14 February 1923, p. 7, 28 September 1928, p. 15, 5 May 1930, pp. 8, 10; for his involvement at Waiorongomai, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 259-261, BBAV 11567/1a; *Plaint Book 1880-1898*, 33/1882, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁰ See paper on the Goldsworthy brothers.

²¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 January 1877, p. 3, 1 February 1877, p. 3.

²² *Thames Advertiser*, 28 February 1878, p. 3.

²³ *Thames Star*, 12 January 1880, p. 2, 2 February 1880, p. 2.

²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1907, p. 3.

improved himself by a little quiet drill at home, with the result that shortly afterwards he was called forward as fogleman.²⁵

His contribution to the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* stated that for nine of his 13-years' membership of the Thames Naval Brigade 'he held the rank of first lieutenant'.²⁶ In fact he was elected a sub-lieutenant on 25 June 1873, not being becoming a full lieutenant until April 1878.²⁷ A good rifle shot, he was awarded a medal for winning the brigade's contests twice running in 1873.²⁸ Later that year, he was reported to be 'gradually improving in the use of the rifle', but his hopes to 'go with the Melbourne team' ended when he was beaten by four points in a competition to determine the fourth member.²⁹ When competing at Napier, he was only three points behind the winner.³⁰ In a subsequent contest he had the lowest score, 40, compared with a top score of 62.³¹ Four years later, when in charge of the brigade in the absence of its captain, he was one of the top shots in another competition.³²

Gavin participated in the social life of the Volunteer movement, for instance in 1877 singing one of the two songs 'most worthy of mention' at a St George's Naval Cadets' entertainment.³³ In his 1907 speech, he stated he valued a testimonial from the brigade 'almost more than any other piece of furniture in his house'. He had 'never spent a better thirteen years in his life than during the time he belonged to the Naval Brigade', and urged every young man to join a Volunteer corps, 'as it could not fail to set them up'.³⁴

Although living at Te Aroha in early 1881, Gavin accompanied the Thames Volunteers to their Waikato camp in April.³⁵ In late July, when he

²⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1907, p. 3.

²⁶ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 834.

²⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 June 1873, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 31 December 1873, p. 738, 20 June 1878, p. 892.

²⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 July 1873, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 September 1873, p. 14.

²⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 October 1873, p. 3.

³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 February 1874, p. 2, 17 March 1874, p. 3, 18 March 1874, p. 3.

³¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 March 1874, p. 2.

³² *Thames Advertiser*, 14 September 1878, p. 2, 23 September 1878, p. 3.

³³ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 August 1877, p. 3.

³⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1907, p. 3.

³⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 April 1881, p. 3.

resigned as first lieutenant because his work at Te Aroha prevented him 'giving proper attention' to his duties, the *Thames Advertiser* described him as 'very popular with his brother officers and men'.³⁶ Before his resignation took effect, in October he went to Parihaka as second-in-command of the Thames Naval Brigade,³⁷ as he later recalled:

He stuck to the Brigade until the Battle of Parihaka, of which, no doubt, his hearers all knew. On that occasion 1250 men were sent down to take one man [Te Whiti], and to the credit of the British flag, they took him, said Mr Gavin, although the man was unarmed. (Laughter). They were two months away, but had all been engaged for three months, but in spite of that engagement they only received two months' pay. This piece of financial manoeuvring was the means of breaking up volunteering at Thames. His company was only allowed to be 100 strong, but they had fifty over that number, for which the company bought the uniforms. So strong was the feeling against the Defence Department, that Mr John Bryce, the Minister for Defence at that time, was burnt in effigy at the Thames. It was the wind-up of volunteering, and it had never looked up since. He remembered two men coming over the mountain track to Te Aroha - there was no other road in those days - asking him to go to Thames ready to proceed to Parihaka. Major [Thomas Leitch] Murray³⁸ sent word that the men wanted him to go with them. He went to Thames, and announced to the corps what the situation was, and ordered all those men who would go to Parihaka to step two paces forward, to which every man responded. However, he advised the married men to stay at home, and all but a few reckless spirits did so.³⁹

Although he recalled the brigade being away from Thames for two months, it was just over two weeks.⁴⁰ As he had settled at Waiorongomai by mid-1882, the Naval Brigade decided to replace him with a new officer, and in August he resigned.⁴¹

THE TE AROHA AND WAIORONGOMAI RUSHES

³⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1881, p. 3.

³⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 October 1881, p. 3, 31 October 1881, p. 2.

³⁸ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7, pp. 96-97.

³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1907, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1907, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 18 November 1881, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Thames Star*, 31 July 1882, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 14 September 1882, p. 1250.

Gavin was at Te Aroha on opening day.⁴² With Henry Ernest Whitaker,⁴³ he pegged out the Golden Gate and Te Aroha No. 1 South,⁴⁴ holding scrip shares in the latter when it was formed into a company.⁴⁵ He was registered as one of the eight owners of the Morning Light on 6 December, but as no work was done it was forfeited two weeks later.⁴⁶ At the beginning of December, for the first time he became a mine manager, in what was recorded as Te Aroha South No. 2 but probably was No. 1. A preliminary call of £2 per share was made to enable work to be 'systematically proceeded with'.⁴⁷ He was present when the body of Himiona Haira was discovered in February 1881,⁴⁸ and found some of the murdered man's possessions 'not three yards from the body'.⁴⁹ By April, he still managed Te Aroha No. 1 South, assisted by a wages man.⁵⁰ By June, mining being at an end, with another unemployed miner he successfully tendered to make a road linking Waitoki, north of Te Aroha, to the main road to Thames.⁵¹

After Hone Werahiko⁵² reported finding payable gold at Waiorongomai, Gavin joined the first party to inspect his discovery, their trip to the Colonist (which he claimed to have pegged out first) and back taking 14 hours.⁵³ The Colonist was probably referred to in October 1881,

⁴² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Butt Book of Miners' Rights 1880, no. 992, issued 25 November 1880, BBAV 11533/1b, ANZ-A.

⁴³ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

⁴⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 22 May 1886, p. 2 [date of pegging out incorrectly printed as May, not November].

⁴⁵ *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

⁴⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 170, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Thames Star*, 4 December 1880, p. 2.

⁴⁸ See paper on the Te Aroha murder in 1881.

⁴⁹ *Waikato Times*, 15 February 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1881, p. 3.

⁵¹ *Waikato Times*, 4 June 1881, p. 3.

⁵² See paper on his life.

⁵³ *Brett's Auckland Almanac ... for 1884* (Auckland, 1884), p. 120; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 834.

when his party found another gold-bearing reef.⁵⁴ At the same time, he assisted in preliminary testing of the New Find reef, boring two feet into its footwall and breaking out about two tons containing good gold.⁵⁵ Appointed mine manager for the New Find, he took out several blocks of stone before, at the end of October, accompanying the Volunteers to arrest Te Whiti. Hone Werahiko replacing him during his absence,⁵⁶ but upon his return Gavin resumed his post. In late February 1882 a visiting miner reported that Gavin took 'great pains and trouble to show me all' the workings.⁵⁷ He continued to manage the New Find until August 1883.⁵⁸

In early December 1881, Gavin acquired interests in seven claims.⁵⁹ One of eight owners of the Diamond Gully, he sold his one share in June the following year for £72 10s.⁶⁰ One of four owners of the Young Colonial, he held 4 1/2 of the 15 shares, and during 1882 sold three shares for £85 10s before the remainder went to the Colonist Company, in which he held 1500 scrip shares.⁶¹ His eight of the 15 shares in the Waterfall were transferred to the Canadian Company in 1882 for 1,592 scrip shares,⁶² and his one-third of the total interest in Little and Good went to the Eureka Company in 1884

⁵⁴ *Thames Star*, 13 October 1881, p. 2.

⁵⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 October 1881, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Thames Star*, 22 October 1881, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 28 October 1881, p. 3.

⁵⁷ 'A Miner', 'My Visit to Te Aroha', *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 March 1882, p. 11.

⁵⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 25 August 1883, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 2, 4, 38, 41, BBAV 11500/9a; Register of Applications 1880-1882, folio 116, nos. 57-59, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 4, BBAV 11500/9a; Thomas Gavin to Robert Frater, 24 June 1882, Transfers and Assignments 1882, no. 406, BBAV 11581/2a, ANZ-A.

⁶¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 2, BBAV 11500/9a; Transfers and Assignments 1882, nos. 9, 178, 389, BBAV 11581/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 10 August 1882, p. 1101.

⁶² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 38, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 14 September 1882, p. 1264.

for an unknown sum.⁶³ He also sold shares in the Arizona, Smile of Fortune, Canadian, Queen, and Queen of Beauty.⁶⁴

In late November and early December 1881, he successfully sued for surplus ground in four claims.⁶⁵ A plaint led to his being awarded a share in another claim.⁶⁶ In early 1882, he became an owner of 13 claims and sole owner of a small one, which he sold to a company a year later.⁶⁷ Legal action gave him surplus ground from one claim and possession of two more for non-working.⁶⁸ In turn, he and two sleeping partners were in August fined one shilling in lieu of forfeiture for not working a claim.⁶⁹ In addition to his scrip shares in the companies already noted, in 1882 he had shares in another five Waiorongomai companies and in a Thames one.⁷⁰

MINE MANAGER DURING THE 1880s

In 1882, Gavin become manager of two other important mines, the Premier and the Colonist. In February he was deputed, along with a local investor in the claims being amalgamated to form the Premier Company, to obtain machinery and develop the ground.⁷¹ Accompanying two directors, James McCosh Clark and Josiah Clifton Firth,⁷² to the mines in April led to

⁶³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 41, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Transfers and Assignments 1882, nos. 123, 292, 385, 386, 388, 399, BBAV 11581/1a; no. 495, BBAV 11581/2a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Plaints 1880-1898, 64, 69, 81, 82/1881, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Plaints 1880-1898, 83/1881, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Licensed Holdings Grant Book 1882-1886, folios 34, 37-40, 42, 43, BBAV 11549/1b; Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 6, 25, 39, 59, 76, 98, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Plaints 1880-1898, 7, 11, 12/1882, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 January 1882, p.3.

⁶⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Plaints 1880-1898, 70/1882, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 March 1882, p. 490, 13 July 1882, p. 961, 17 August 1882, p. 1131, 14 September 1882, p. 1263, 19 October 1882, p. 1522, 16 November 1882, p. 1732.

⁷¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 February 1882, p. 3.

⁷² See paper on the Battery Company.

an accident. ‘While riding down the track’ after their visit, ‘the reins of his horse caught in some small sprig or other impediment which was overhanging the road’, causing him ‘to fall forward at the same time as the horse suddenly brought its head up, striking the rider in the face’ and breaking his nose.⁷³ In mid-year he was driving through the reef, and extracting ore showing gold freely.⁷⁴ In October, a visitor commented that he had development well in hand and ‘evidently knows his work’.⁷⁵ When Gavin ceased to be manager was not reported, but apparently he held this post until mid-1884. In February that year, the local newspaper retailed a ‘good story’ about the unnamed manager of this mine which had ‘the additional merit of being true’:

A new chum recently stuck up the manager of the P. mine with, “Kin ye give me a job o’work, sir; I yere yer a-takin’ on men?” “Yes,” replied the manager, with that charming air of *ensouciance* for which he is noted, “but you won’t suit me. Better go down to Mr So-and-so (the manager of a neighbouring mine), as he is taking on all sorts there.”⁷⁶

Work ceased in the following month because the ore was unpayable; when operations resumed in August, John Goldsworthy⁷⁷ was manager.⁷⁸

The *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* stated that he managed the Colonist ‘very successfully for about two years’.⁷⁹ In August 1885 he was noted as being ‘well-known from his long connection with’ it.⁸⁰ Gavin had been in charge until February that year, when its unprofitability forced its

⁷³ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 April 1882, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *Te Aroha Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 3 July 1882, p. 2.

⁷⁵ A.L., ‘The Te Aroha Goldfield’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 October 1882, p. 13.

⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 9 February 1884, p. 2.

⁷⁷ See paper on the Goldsworthy brothers.

⁷⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 22 March 1884, p. 2, 16 April 1884, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 9 August 1884, p. 3.

⁷⁹ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 834.

⁸⁰ *Waikato Times*, 13 August 1885, p. 4.

closure.⁸¹ When it reopened four months later, Edward Quinn⁸² was its manager because Gavin was at Karangahake.⁸³

Gavin was one of the leading managers. When the Premier visited in February 1882, Gavin showed him specimens from various mines and put them ‘through the mortar’.⁸⁴ In December 1883, at the banquet celebrating the opening of the battery, he responded to the toast of ‘Prosperity to Mining Managers and Working Men’.⁸⁵ In January 1884 he was the spokesman for all the directors after they cut the miners’ wages.⁸⁶ One month later, he accompanied Firth’s tour of inspection.⁸⁷ In February 1885, a meeting elected him to a delegation to explain their needs to the Minister of Mines.⁸⁸ To assist their arguments he produced output figures for the Colonist from December 1883 to December 1884.⁸⁹ Eight months later, when he proposed a petition asking the government to assist making the Tui Track, he was elected to a committee to negotiate with it and to another to determine the best line for this track.⁹⁰

In addition to managing for companies, Gavin continued to be a part owner of some claims. In September 1883, he held one of the 15 shares in the newly registered Clunes and bought a small interest in the Young Caledonian for £10; the latter went into receivership six months later.⁹¹ Also in September, he was a shareholder in the New Welcome Company and two months later in the Lady Ferguson Company.⁹² In May 1885, after

⁸¹ *Waikato Times*, 3 February 1885, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 7 February 1885, p. 2, 14 February 1885, p. 2, 21 February 1885, p. 2.

⁸² See paper on his life.

⁸³ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 June 1885, p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Waikato Times*, 25 February 1882, p. 2.

⁸⁵ *Waikato Times*, 8 December 1883, p. 2.

⁸⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 January 1884, p. 3.

⁸⁷ *Waikato Times*, 16 February 1884, p. 2.

⁸⁸ *Waikato Times*, 24 February 1885, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Thomas Gavin, gold obtained from 6 December 1883 to 20 December 1884, Mines Department, MD 1, 85/1072, ANZ-W.

⁹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 24 October 1885, p. 2.

⁹¹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 132, 150, BBAV 11500/9a; Patrick Quinlan to Thomas Gavin, 24 September 1883, Certified Instruments 1883, no. 481, BBAV 11581/4a, ANZ-A.

⁹² *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 September 1883, p. 1345, 22 November 1883, p. 1675.

ceasing to manage company mines, he was tributing in the Wellington.⁹³ In that November he obtained shares in two claims at Tui and became sole owner of the Purotarau at Waiorongomai.⁹⁴ He attempted to obtain possession of another Tui claim ‘for being illegally marked out’ but withdrew his application.⁹⁵ In turn, he and John Goldsworthy were unsuccessfully sued for ‘collusion and non-working’ of one of his Tui claims, and was able to rebuff a challenge (on the grounds of illegal marking out) of his right to the Purotarau.⁹⁶

In early August 1885, Gavin and Goldsworthy unsuccessfully tendered for a contract for the tramway to the second battery,⁹⁷ being erected for Peter Ferguson.⁹⁸ Immediately afterwards, the shareholders of the Te Aroha Prospecting Association asked him to manage their ground because, in the words of a local correspondent, he was ‘an eminently practical miner’.⁹⁹ The *Te Aroha News* described him as a ‘thoroughly practical mine manager of great experience’ and ‘universally respected’.¹⁰⁰ The association followed his advice on where to prospect, particularly for silver.¹⁰¹ When announcing in November that he was to move to Karangahake to supervise the Argentine, Imperial and Gladys mines, the *Te Aroha News* referred to him as ‘well known in mining circles and universally respected’.¹⁰²

Within three weeks of arriving at Karangahake, Gavin, at a meeting held after a series of lectures given by Professor James Black,¹⁰³ ‘in his usual manly and straightforward style’ moved that a branch of the Thames School of Mines be established, and was appointed to a committee to carry

⁹³ *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7.

⁹⁴ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 187, 193, 201, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁹⁵ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Plaints 1880-1898, 25/1885, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

⁹⁶ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Plaints 1880-1898, 35, 36/1885, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

⁹⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1885, p. 7.

⁹⁸ See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

⁹⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 August 1885, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 13 August 1885, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 15 August 1885, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 August 1885, p. 3, 29 August 1885, p. 3.

¹⁰² *Te Aroha News*, 7 November 1885, p. 2.

¹⁰³ See paper on prospectors’ and miners’ skills.

his motion into effect.¹⁰⁴ The *Thames Advertiser* was impressed by his ‘admirable speech’.¹⁰⁵ Shortly afterwards, he was instructed to suspend work in all three claims and dismiss all the men.¹⁰⁶ Eighteen months later, Gavin told the Minister of Mines that he had been a mine manager for four months at Karangahake during 1885, more than doubling the time he spent there before returning to Waiorongomai to work his own claim.¹⁰⁷ This was the Hopeful, adjoining the Purotarau; registered on 15 March, it was first owned by himself and then with Goldsworthy.¹⁰⁸ One week after obtaining it, he was granted permission to work with fewer miners than required.¹⁰⁹ As two and a half tons tested in early April produced £4 13s 6d per ton, which was not payable, he determined to select stone for treatment more carefully.¹¹⁰ As no good ore was found, by February 1888 he had ceased work; sued for its forfeiture, he abandoned it.¹¹¹

Gavin attempted, unsuccessfully, to obtain a contract to make two sledge tracks to claims near Buck Rock.¹¹² Later in the year, after a farmer and former miner, Denis Murphy,¹¹³ told his fellow councillors that Gavin ‘knew the country well, and could report without making a special visit’, for they had ‘both frequently been over it’, it agreed he should recommend the line for the proposed track from the Premier to Tui.¹¹⁴ He said he was ‘well acquainted with the country’, and his route was adopted.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 28 November 1885, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 27 November 1885, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 December 1885, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 19 December 1885, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 18 June 1887, Mines Department, MD 1, 87/687, ANZ-W.

¹⁰⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 143, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 10 April 1886, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 23/1886, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 10 April 1886, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Plaints 1880-1898, 4/1888, BBAV 11547/1a; Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 143, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹¹² *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1886, p. 7.

¹¹³ See paper on his life.

¹¹⁴ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 2 September 1886, p. 2; Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 4 September 1886, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 9 October 1886, p. 3; Piako County Council, 30 October 1886, p. 2.

In mid-1887, because he had been an underground manager at Te Aroha and Waiorongomai for five years, a mine manager at Karangahake, and since then had been mining on his own behalf, Gavin successfully applied for a certificate of competence as an underground manager.¹¹⁶ At the end of the year, when proposed as a member of the provisional committee of the Te Aroha Prospecting Association, he declined to serve.¹¹⁷ In April 1888, with Hugh McLiver,¹¹⁸ manager for the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company, he acquired the Silver King, and others then joined their party.¹¹⁹ Two months later this company bought it for £4,000.¹²⁰ They may have been agents for the company, for the finances of neither McLiver nor Gavin indicate they received such a large payment. Gavin presided at a Waiorongomai meeting that decided to hold a banquet to honour Henry Hopper Adams¹²¹ for drawing the district to the attention of William Robert Wilson (who formed the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company),¹²² and was chairman of the committee that arranged it.¹²³ Gavin over-optimistically informed the gathering that the district had ‘hundreds of reefs that would handsomely pay for working, if they had a satisfactory means of treating the ore’.¹²⁴ The following year, he and McLiver forfeited their Day Dawn for failing to pay the rent, although they retained another claim by paying the amount owing.¹²⁵

TRAMWAY MANAGER

¹¹⁶ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 18 June 1887, 21 July 1887, Mines Department, MD 1, 87/687, ANZ-W.

¹¹⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 3 December 1887, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ See papers on the New Find mine and the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company.

¹¹⁹ Plan of Silver King Licensed Holding, 5 April 1888, Te Aroha Museum; Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Application dated 24 April 1888, Mining Applications 1888, BBAV 11582/3a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 24 March 1888, p. 2.

¹²⁰ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Application dated 6 June 1888, Mining Applications 1888, BBAV 11582/3a, ANZ-A.

¹²¹ See paper on Henry Hopper Adams.

¹²² See paper on this company.

¹²³ *Te Aroha News*, 31 March 1888, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 17 April 1888, p. 2.

¹²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 14 April 1888, p. 2.

¹²⁵ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Complaints 1880-1898, 1, 14/1889, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

Gavin was less active as a miner in the later 1880s because, in August 1886, he successfully tendered to manage the tramway, for £3 10s per week. The *Te Aroha News* described him as ‘straight forward and thoroughly competent’ and would ‘have his employer’s interests at heart’.¹²⁶ Several well-qualified men had applied, but a local correspondent reported his appointment gave ‘general satisfaction as he is in every way well suited to perform the duties and is otherwise held in high respect for his sterling qualities’.¹²⁷ He quickly proved to be much more efficient than his predecessors.¹²⁸ At a council meeting in April the following year, ‘several councillors referred in terms of eulogy to the manner in which the tramway had been managed’.¹²⁹ In September, the council unanimously agreed to write to Gavin ‘acknowledging the excellent manner in which he had managed’ it; one councillor ‘said there had never been a complaint against him’.¹³⁰

When the Battery Company¹³¹ took over the tramway in November 1887, Gavin was kept on as ‘checker, and general supervisor of the line’.¹³² The county clerk, in conveying the council’s gratitude for his efficient and economical management, added an acknowledgement of ‘the correctness of the various returns and statements furnished’ and the ‘promptness’ with which he fulfilled all instructions.¹³³ Later, he managed the line for the Te Aroha Silver and Gold Mining Company.¹³⁴ After this company abandoned the district, in August 1891 the council employed him to repair the tramway and paid him £3 per week to operate it until it was leased.¹³⁵ Under his supervision, the line was restored to full working order, although he recommended more repairs.¹³⁶ Gavin then sought the lease, tendering an

¹²⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 21 August 1886, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 24 August 1886, p. 2.

¹²⁸ See paper on the Piako County tramway at Waiorongomai.

¹²⁹ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 19 April 1887, p. 3.

¹³⁰ Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 29 October 1887, p. 2.

¹³¹ See paper on this company.

¹³² *Te Aroha News*, 5 November 1887, p. 2.

¹³³ Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 26 November 1887, p. 2.

¹³⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 7 December 1889, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 4 August 1891, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹³⁶ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 3 September 1891, p. 2, 8 October 1891, p. 2, 5 November 1891, p. 2, 28 November 1891, p. 2, 6 February 1892, p. 2.

annual payment of £5 plus a royalty of 3d per truck. One councillor strongly urged that he be granted it because 'he would take more care of the property than anyone else, but the councillors thought it right to accept the highest tenderer'.¹³⁷ Gavin continued to work the line until the following March; in the eyes of councillors his final report satisfactorily rebutted an accusation of carting firewood for his own use without paying.¹³⁸

His December 1891 report illustrated his sometimes-combative character, for he charged a local blacksmith, David McLean Wallace,¹³⁹ with trying to steal the old turntable:

I wish to inform you that the contractor who made the turntable has taken possession and removed from the tramway the old turntable and all the gear belonging to it; he claims it is old debris, but I wish to inform you it is not old debris but a complete turntable, as good now as the day it was put down, and it must have cost the council a good sum of money.... I consider it a piece of sharp practice on the part of the contractor even if the law of contract will allow him to do so, as he is the man who has done all the blacksmith work for the tramway for the last two years, and he is still doing it, and he ought to be the last to take advantage of the council.

Gavin proposed taking legal action to recover it.¹⁴⁰ This led to the *Waikato Times* publishing, under the heading 'A Vindication', Wallace's letter to the council because he had 'good grounds for complaint'. Wallace explained how, after the turntable had been removed to his shop, he had offered to buy it:

Mr Gavin, two days after this, asked me where the old turn-table was, when I replied: "Here it is! Do you want it?" Gavin said: "Oh, no! I don't want it, but if they ask me where it is, I would like to be able to tell them." Next day he must have written his report accusing me of sharp practice and trying to take advantage of your council, also stating that the old turn-table is a complete turn-table, as good as the day it was put down. This, gentlemen, is a willful untruth, as anyone with any practical knowledge can

¹³⁷ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 22 December 1891, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 2 January 1892, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meetings of 1 March 1892, 5 April 1892, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; *Waikato Times*, 3 March 1892, p. 2.

¹³⁹ See paper on his life.

¹⁴⁰ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 24 December 1891, p. 2.

testify who sees the old plate. If the old turn-table is a good one, then Mr Gavin has been guilty of squandering public money, in recommending and allowing the said table to be lifted.

Wallace claimed that, when handing him the notice from the county clerk requiring the return of the turntable, Gavin exclaimed, 'A-ha! you are in for it now'. Wallace immediately returned the turntable, which was

on the tramway four days before your last meeting; but it seems to me that Mr Gavin was not very prompt in supplying this information. Now, gentlemen, this report is written to damage me in the eyes of your council, and may tend to damage me with my customers in my business; and I would very much like to thrash the matter out before your honourable council, with Mr Gavin, myself, and with witnesses present.

He wanted the council to investigate and not allow Gavin 'to call any man a thief unless he has substantial grounds for doing so'. The chairman considered Wallace 'had scored heavily', and his explanation was accepted unanimously 'as satisfactory'.¹⁴¹

When Aroha Gold Mines operated in the 1890s,¹⁴² Gavin operated the tramway on its behalf.¹⁴³ With this company abandoned the district, he supervised the working of line by a new manager on behalf of the council, of which he was a member.¹⁴⁴ When in 1899 no tender was received to lease it, he arranged for its continued working.¹⁴⁵ In May that year, he urged the council to continue to subsidise it as prospects were 'so good' because of Edwin Henry Hardy's mining.¹⁴⁶ 'The Council had already decided to abandon the tram, but he thought they should hold it for another year in the interests of the mining industry, and the district generally'. The history of the line proved that 'when there was any activity the tram was worked at a profit'. Councillors agreed to contribute to repairs to be done under his supervision, Gavin providing timber worth £4 to replace damaged

¹⁴¹ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 6 February 1892, p. 2.

¹⁴² See paper on the New Zealand Exploration Company and Aroha Mines Ltd.

¹⁴³ *Waikato Argus*, 17 July 1897, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ County Clerk to Albert Edwards, 18 June 1898, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1897-1899, p. 291, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁴⁵ County Clerk to Thomas Gavin, 26 April 1899, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1897-1899, p. 456, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁴⁶ See paper on his life.

sleepers.¹⁴⁷ Upon announcing in October 1899 that he would not seek re-election to the council, he was unanimously thanked for his supervision, the chairman stating he 'had taken considerable trouble to conserve the Council's interest' and 'under his management the tramway had been most advantageously worked'.¹⁴⁸ The following year, the council thanked him for donating 20 new sleepers to replace those damaged in a smash on an incline.¹⁴⁹ A month later, for five days he worked on the tramway with his mining mate, William Morris Newsham,¹⁵⁰ and two tramway hands to bring 42,000 feet of timber from an abandoned water race down Fern Spur Incline.¹⁵¹ However, Hardy, who at the turn of the century was constantly critical of Gavin, accused him of misleadingly claiming the line was in perfect order.¹⁵²

When a councillor once more from 1903 to 1908, he supervised the tramway, in early 1903 providing full details of its state and the repairs needed,¹⁵³ and was asked to compile a list of requirements 'with a view of Government grant'.¹⁵⁴ During that year he advised both council and government on alterations and repairs.¹⁵⁵ In 1905 he assisted the engineer to inspect repairs made by Hardy's Mines.¹⁵⁶ After this company ceased to run it in 1908, Gavin arranged for more repairs and its subsequent

¹⁴⁷ Piako County Council, *Waikato Argus*, 23 May 1899, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ Piako County Council, *Waikato Argus*, 24 October 1899, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ County Clerk to Thomas Gavin, 21 April 1900, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1899-1901, p. 174, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; Piako County Council, *Waikato Argus*, 23 April 1900, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ See paper on his life.

¹⁵¹ County Clerk to E.H. Hardy, 2 May 1900, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1899-1901, p. 188, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁵² *Te Aroha News*, 25 January 1900, p. 2.

¹⁵³ Piako County Council, *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1903, p. 28.

¹⁵⁴ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 25 April 1903, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁵⁵ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meetings of 17 June 1903, 22 July 1903; County Clerk to Minister of Mines, 10 August 1903, Letterbook 1902-1903, pp. 399-400, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁵⁶ County Clerk to Secretary, Hardy's Mines, 29 August 1905, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1905-1906, p. 130; Francis Pavitt to W.P. Chepmell, 16 September 1905, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1905-1906, p. 149, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1905, p. 2.

working,¹⁵⁷ and in February 1909, shortly after he retired from the council, he reported 'fully' on its state.¹⁵⁸ Because Gavin was still mining after that date, in 1910 the tramway foreman was instructed to check with him about the repairs he wanted.¹⁵⁹

MINING TRACKS

Gavin was active in ensuring that the council kept tracks to the mines in order. In 1894, at his request a small amount was spent on the upper track, and the following year he reported on all the tracks and was authorized to make repairs and to build a new bridge over Butler's Incline.¹⁶⁰ Twice in 1896 he supervised repairs to the upper track, and in the early twentieth century supervised its repair and sought government assistance.¹⁶¹ He also supervised the formation of a track from Waiorongomai to Waitawheta at no charge to the council, the reason for his apparent generosity being that there was no track to his prospecting claims there.¹⁶² When the lower road was extended in 1912, as the person most

¹⁵⁷ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 21 September 1908, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁵⁸ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 8 February 1909, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 11 February 1909, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ County Clerk to J.S. Hill, 1 April 1910, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1909-1912, p. 379, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁶⁰ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meetings of 6 February 1894, 8 August 1895, 12 September 1895, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁶¹ Piako County Council, Minutes of Meetings of 21 February 1896, 17 April 1896, 19 April 1905, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 27 September 1908, Mines Department, MD 1, 08/1023, ANZ-W; *Te Aroha News*, 12 March 1910, p. 3.

¹⁶² Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting held on 8 February 1909; County Clerk to Thomas Gavin, 16 September 1909, Letterbook 1909-1912, p. 185, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 27 September 1908, Mines Department, MD 1, 08/1023, ANZ-W; *Te Aroha News*, 30 March 1909, p. 2; County Clerk to Thomas Gavin, 26 April 1910, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1909-1912, p. 411, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

conversant with the locality he was asked to explain the work required to those tendering.¹⁶³

MINING DURING THE 1890s

In January 1891, Gavin became owner of the Warrior, the former Colonist.¹⁶⁴ He held it for two years, for much of this time employing only two prospectors.¹⁶⁵ He did some prospecting on his own account,¹⁶⁶ and in November 1892 was a member of a committee to form the Te Aroha Prospecting Association, which appointed him and Newsham to prospect Waiorongomai.¹⁶⁷ Also November the machine site, water right, hoppers, and battery building he, with two others, had purchased from Ferguson's Syndicate were under offer to Hugh McLiver.¹⁶⁸ A correspondent in 1894 referred to the association working under Gavin's 'able guidance'.¹⁶⁹ In March 1895 Gavin informed Alfred Jerome Cadman, the Minister of Mines, that he 'was forming small Syndicates and getting them to pay a small sum weekly and send out men to prospect with the promise of government aid their is all redy four such partyes formed'.¹⁷⁰ (As with other mine managers, an ability to spell was not required.) Gavin believed two parties were on 'paible gold',¹⁷¹ but two months later the mining inspector reported that none had made a new discovery, which was confirmed by the reports the

¹⁶³ County Clerk to Thomas Gavin, 12 February 1912, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1909-1912, p. 930, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁶⁴ *AJHR*, 1891, C-4, p. 156.

¹⁶⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 5/1891, 3/1892, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A; *AJHR*, 1892, C-3A, p. 15.

¹⁶⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 22, 25/1893, 1/1894, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁷ Information on Te Aroha Prospecting Association, 1893, Mines Department, MD 1, 93/1281, ANZ-W; *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 November 1892, p. 23.

¹⁶⁸ *Te Aroha News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 7 November 1892, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 5 March 1894, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 4 March 1895, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/1074, ANZ-W.

¹⁷¹ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 4 March 1895, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/1074, ANZ-W.

prospectors sent Gavin.¹⁷² He was director of works for the Stoney Creek Prospecting Syndicate during that year, resigning in May but being appointed to its works committee the following month.¹⁷³ Also in June he urged upon Cadman the need for a track from the end of the tramway to Waihi to provide access for prospectors. ‘I have my self got boulders in the Creak back in this valley’, the Mangakino, ‘that assaid as high as £30 per ton & as far as I went thair are numarous Reefs out Cropping’.¹⁷⁴

Also in June 1895, he applied for the Arizona, but later withdrew this application,¹⁷⁵ and for the Great Western, 100 acres adjoining the former New Find, which was not granted until April 1896.¹⁷⁶ Four months later, he successfully applied for six month’s protection while a company was formed.¹⁷⁷ During the following two years, he obtained permission to work it with either two or four men rather than the 33 required by law, ‘pending trial under option’, and then was granted four months’ complete protection, instead of the six requested, because the machinery was ‘unsuitable’.¹⁷⁸ In 1897, when the Hauraki Development Syndicate took up an option, Gavin

¹⁷² George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 21 May 1895, *AJHR*, 1895, C-3A, p. 14; letters from prospectors to James Mills and Thomas Gavin, March 1895 to September 1895, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/1072, ANZ-W.

¹⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 10 April 1895, p. 2, 8 May 1895, p. 2, 15 June 1895, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 10 June 1895, Mines Department, MD 1, 95/950, ANZ-W.

¹⁷⁵ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1895, 21/1895, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁶ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1895, 13/1895, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A; *AJHR*, 1897, C-3, p. 98.

¹⁷⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1896, 137/1896, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 33, 95/1897, 2, 29, 31/1898, BBAV 11505/1a; Mining Applications 1898, 2, 29, 31/1898, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

expected to obtain £150 from this deal.¹⁷⁹ This syndicate developed it further under another manager before floating it in London in 1898.¹⁸⁰

In September 1895, he sought surplus ground in the Extended from Newsham, but withdrew the application in the following month.¹⁸¹ In December, they registered that they had equal shares in the Alexandra.¹⁸² The following year, Gavin applied for the Old Find, 60 acres adjoining the New Find; after the warden awarded the ground to a challenger because he was encroaching on an earlier claim, Gavin withdrew a fresh application.¹⁸³ In April 1897, he chaired the meeting that formed the Inland Reefs Company, and held 1,200 of its 100,000 scrip shares.¹⁸⁴ The following month, immediately after the Premier Extended and Te Aroha Queen were forfeited, he pegged out the ground and was granted 98 acres as the Aroha Queen Special Claim.¹⁸⁵ In December 1898, he applied for the Sceptre Extended, adjoining the Cadman.¹⁸⁶ Three months later, he applied for the

¹⁷⁹ Jackson and Russell to Thomas Gavin, 5 June 1897, Letterbook no. 66, p. 710; Jackson and Russell to Thomas Gavin, 18 February 1898, Letterbook no. 68, p. 824, Jackson and Russell Papers, MS 360, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum; *New Zealand Mining Standard*, 24 June 1897, p. 4; *Thames Advertiser*, 28 August 1897, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 April 1898, p. 4; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 March 1898, Supplement, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Complaints 1880-1898, 22/1895, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1895, Application dated 23 December 1895, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1896, 8/1896, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Waikato Argus*, 8 September 1896, p. 2; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 12 September 1896, p. 2, 10 October 1896, p. 2; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1891-1899, Hearing of 12 November 1896, BBAV 11505/4a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁴ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 142 no. 916, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 6 May 1897, p. 1036.

¹⁸⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Letterbook 1883-1900, p. 422, BBAV 11534/1a; Register of Applications 1891-1899, Hearing of 14 June 1897, BBAV 11505/4a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1898, 8/1898, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

Sceptre, but withdrew his application a further three months later.¹⁸⁷ The Sceptre Extended produced 9oz 15dwt of gold in July 1899.¹⁸⁸

THE LOYALTY PALACE

During the 1890s his most successful mine was the Loyalty, later the Loyalty Palace. On 14 November 1893, he marked out the former, which was granted to him and his seven partners in the Te Aroha Prospecting Association, only one other, Newsham, being a miner.¹⁸⁹ By May 1894, under his management three men had done ‘a considerable amount’ of mining. ‘A large amount of work was done on the surface, and a cross-cut driven 35ft to the reef, which is 18in in thickness. 60ft were driven on it, and 12 fathoms stoped out. A winze was also sunk 20ft. 55 tons of quartz crushed yielded 93oz of gold’.¹⁹⁰ The following year, after prospecting unaided for ‘a long time’ in adjoining ground, he pegged out a new discovery in what became the Palace.¹⁹¹ When combining the two claims as the Loyalty Palace, he promised to invest £500.¹⁹² The *Te Aroha News* commented, in July 1895, that the fact that the Loyalty had been ‘for nearly two years working upon payable ore, and paying dividends regularly’, not only spoke well for the mine but also for Gavin’s ‘able management’.¹⁹³

As the fortunes of the Loyalty Palace are detailed in the chapter giving an overview of mining to the turn of the century, only Gavin’s role is noted here. In June 1895, when the warden considered an investor’s opposition to his application for it, Gavin declared that ‘these people had pegged out the whole country and were driving men away from the place’.¹⁹⁴ After winning

¹⁸⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1899, 5/1899, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

¹⁸⁸ County Clerk, Piako County Council, to Minister of Mines, 23 March 1900, Mines Department, MD 1, 00/495, ANZ-W.

¹⁸⁹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1893, 25/1893, BBAV 11582/3a, ANZ-A; George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 7 May 1894, *AJHR*, 1894, C-3A, p. 14.

¹⁹⁰ George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 7 May 1894, *AJHR*, 1894, C-3A, pp. 14-15.

¹⁹¹ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 9 February 1895, p. 2.

¹⁹² *Te Aroha News*, editorial, 9 February 1895, p. 2, 2 March 1895, pp. 2, 3; Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1895, 3/1895, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A.

¹⁹³ *Te Aroha News*, 6 July 1895, p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ Warden’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 5 June 1895, p. 2.

his case, he informed the warden in November that it had been ‘intended to float the Loyalty mine on the English market, but capitalists who had visited the ground were of the opinion that the area was too small’. Accordingly, the Extended Special Claim was sought, which included along with the Loyalty ‘old abandoned ground, which was repeatedly tried, but it was found necessary that capital was required to carry on operations successfully’. Once working capital was acquired, his party would ‘erect more modern machinery, put in low level tunnels, and otherwise prove the value of the claim’. The larger area was granted.¹⁹⁵

It was not floated, and during 1899 another party worked the Loyalty.¹⁹⁶ In March Gavin made ‘a discovery of considerable importance’ in his Loyalty Extended, the first assays revealing the newly discovered lode to be ‘highly payable’; a small syndicate would work it once the best method of treatment was decided.¹⁹⁷ Late the following year Gavin successfully requested that outstanding rent of £23 be treated as unrecoverable ‘as he was never made aware officially that the claim had actually been granted him’.¹⁹⁸ Early in 1900, he returned, with Newsham, to the Loyalty, ‘that well-known gold producing claim’.¹⁹⁹ They worked the Loyalty Palace by themselves, in the following year taking out 30 tons.²⁰⁰ The total return in bullion for this period is unknown, but in June 1900 they obtained 14oz 4dwt.²⁰¹ One year later, a miner sought its forfeiture because of not being

¹⁹⁵ Warden’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 30 November 1895, p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ County Clerk to Manager, Bank of New Zealand, Thames, 3 September 1900, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1899-1901, p. 279, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁹⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1899, 2/1899, BBAV 11582/4a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 25 March 1899, p. 3; *Auckland Weekly News*, 31 March 1899, p. 35.

¹⁹⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Plaints 1900, 37/1900, BBAV 11572/2a; Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1887-1909, folio 133, BBAV 11500/8b, ANZ-A; Piako County Council, *Waikato Argus*, 30 November 1900, p. 4, 24 December 1900, p. 2; County Clerk to Minister of Mines, 24 December 1900, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1899-1901, p. 352, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

¹⁹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 1 March 1900, p. 2.

²⁰⁰ *AJHR*, 1901, C-3, pp. 57, 138.

²⁰¹ County Clerk to Manager, Bank of New Zealand, Thames, 3 September 1900, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1899-1901, p. 279, Matamata-Piako County Council Archives, Te Aroha.

worked by the number of men required.²⁰² As it was proved that Gavin had done no work for the past three months, it was forfeited.²⁰³

MINE MANAGER FOR A LOCAL SYNDICATE AND AN OVERSEAS COMPANY

During 1891, Gavin managed the New Find and Colonist mines, owned by Adams' syndicate, supervising 11 men.²⁰⁴ As the case study of Adams details, mining continued in the New Find mine until 1895, but whether Gavin was in charge all that time cannot be determined from surviving records. In 1892, he received a mine manager's service certificate,²⁰⁵ and three years later obtained his most important post: manager for the Aroha Gold Mines.²⁰⁶ The local newspaper applauded this choice because of his 'practical and thorough knowledge of the hill'.²⁰⁷ He worked under the general supervision of the company's general manager.²⁰⁸ A mining correspondent who visited in May 1896 wrote that under his 'vigorous management' a 'distinct change' was 'observable in the manner of working'.²⁰⁹ In September, Gavin turned the first sod of this company's low level drive,²¹⁰ the work being done by contractors under his direction.²¹¹

After eight months, Richard Robert Hunt, general manager of the parent company, the New Zealand Exploration Company,²¹² sent Gavin to request a subsidy from Cadman. Hunt informed Cadman that Gavin could explain how the tunnel was being driven: 'He knows all about it and also the history of the field from the beginning; and how it was virtually once

²⁰² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Plaints 1901, 50/1901, BBAV 11572/3a, ANZ-A.

²⁰³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Plaintiff Book 1899-1947, Hearing of 3 July 1901, BBAV 11551/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁰⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 May 1891, p. 2, 27 May 1891, p. 2.

²⁰⁵ *New Zealand Gazette*, 11 February 1892, p. 298.

²⁰⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 November 1895, p. 2; Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 236 no. 1382, ANZ-A.

²⁰⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1895, p. 2.

²⁰⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 May 1896, p. 39; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7, p. 39.

²⁰⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 May 1896, p. 9.

²¹⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 2 October 1896, Monthly Summary, p. 1.

²¹¹ For example, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 3 March 1897, p. 3, 10 March 1897, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 14 July 1897, p. 3.

²¹² *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7, pp. 28-29.

abandoned, because a subsidy could not be obtained'.²¹³ Gavin was unable to obtain assistance.²¹⁴ In April 1898, he again requested aid, emphasizing his confidence that the drive would find good ore by telling Cadman that he had spent all his own money on mining at Waiorongomai and had ignored 'tempting offers to go to Coolgardie and other places'. After stressing the amount spent, he warned the district was unlikely to get another chance 'for some time' if the company ceased operations, and the low level might never be extended.²¹⁵ Once again, reluctant to set a precedent, Cadman declined the request.²¹⁶

When Aroha Gold Mines abandoned the district, Gavin asked Cadman to retain the battery.²¹⁷ When Cadman visited Te Aroha, and in subsequent letters, Gavin asked him to acquire and preserve the drive until it was extended by a new owner, 'on perhaps a smaller scale, as a prospecting drive, and thus all the labour and expenditure over this large tunnel would not be thrown away'. He wanted the government to purchase it for half the value of the timber.²¹⁸ This was Gavin's own, unauthorized, proposal: 'I did know that in the event of the tunnel being stoped [meaning stopped] that arrangements had been Mad for the Crown Mines to purchase all the timber which was to be Drawn from the tunnel at once'. As it would be a 'pity to have it Distroyed when £300 or £250 would preserve it for 10 or 15 years', he had ignored orders to remove the timber, instead obtaining Hunt's agreement for his proposal. There could be payable gold ahead, for the last crosscut had found 'a little gold and silver which proves that the Reefs live

²¹³ R.R. Hunt to Minister of Mines, 3 June 1897, Mines Department, MD 1, 98/657, ANZ-W.

²¹⁴ Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to R.R. Hunt, 17 August 1897, Mines Department, MD 1, 98/657, ANZ-W.

²¹⁵ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 16 April 1898, Mines Department, MD 1, 98/657, ANZ-W.

²¹⁶ Minister of Mines to Thomas Gavin, 28 May 1898, Mines Department, MD 1, 98/657, ANZ-W.

²¹⁷ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 17 June 1898 [second letter written on that date], Mines Department, MD 1, 99/588, ANZ-W.

²¹⁸ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 17 June 1898, Mines Department, MD 1, 99/588, ANZ-W.

Down'.²¹⁹ To preserve the tunnel, Cadman arranged that the timber remained in place, but did not purchase it.²²⁰

PROMOTING MINING

Cadman took Gavin's opinions seriously, noting in March 1895 that he was 'thoroughly reliable'.²²¹ He was often the spokesman for the industry, as at an 1891 Te Aroha banquet for the local Liberal parliamentarian.²²² When on the county council, he sought government assistance for prospecting.²²³ In July 1909, in encouraging a company to continue Aroha Gold Mines' low level drive, he wrote that he knew 'the reef system thoroughly'.²²⁴ That same month, the *Observer* reported his ideas on investment:

Thomas Gavin, of Te Aroha, has a theory that there is in Auckland province an abundance of capital awaiting investment, and that it could be turned into the channel of mine development on a large scale by proper "encouragement." That encouragement, he thinks could be given if [mine manager John Watson] "Long Drive" Walker,²²⁵ G[eorge] A]lfred] Buttle [an Auckland investor and mining company director],²²⁶ or some such authority on mining, were to write up the history and prospects of mining on the Cape Colville Peninsula in a sufficiently attractive manner.... Isn't Mr Gavin's notion that mining can be made "a legitimate business and not a gamble" rather refreshing?²²⁷

²¹⁹ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 17 June 1898 [second letter written on that date], Mines Department, MD 1, 99/588, ANZ-W.

²²⁰ Minister of Mines to Cabinet, 14 July 1898; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Minister of Mines, 25 August 1898, Mines Department, MD 1, 99/588, ANZ-W.

²²¹ Memorandum by A.J. Cadman, 9 March 1895, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/1072, ANZ-W.

²²² *Waikato Times*, 20 October 1891, p. 2.

²²³ For example, Piako County Council, Minutes of Meeting of 25 April 1903, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

²²⁴ Thomas Gavin to H.D. Abbott, 20 July 1909, Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 236 no. 1382, ANZ-A.

²²⁵ See paper on his life.

²²⁶ See *Auckland Star*, 27 December 1894, p. 5, 1 May 1895, p. 3, 25 March 1896, p. 5, 25 June 1898, p. 2, 8 December 1903, p. 2.

²²⁷ *Observer*, 17 July 1909, p. 17.

According to Hardy, Gavin's interests were uppermost when he promoted mining. In December 1900, he accused Gavin of locking up '220 acres of the best available mining land around about the tram' and of persistently attempting to impose 'harassing conditions' on him, the only genuine miner. He considered Gavin, like the owners of other unworked claims, to be 'speculative opportunists'.²²⁸ Three months earlier, Hardy had complained that Gavin's rents for the Loyalty Palace and Loyalty Extended were in arrears.²²⁹ Then, in April 1902, Gavin complained to the minister that Hardy was not crushing for miners unless haulage rates were reduced.²³⁰ The warden noted 'some private grievance' between the two men, and the Mines Department considered the government had no power to interfere with how Hardy ran his private crushing plant.²³¹ The last recorded squabble between the two men was two years later: upon Hardy informing the council that he would not pay freight on goods lost on the tramway, Gavin 'said that under the circumstances the Council should refuse to carry anything up in the future'.²³²

MINING IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Although Gavin, like most if not all miners, could be described as a speculative opportunist, he did not shepherd his properties for years without doing any work, unlike some. In 1901, he acquired interests at Tui, in April applying for the Mocking Bird.²³³ Four months later, he sought

²²⁸ E.H. Hardy to Piako County Council, 24 December 1899, printed in *Te Aroha News*, 25 January 1900, p. 2.

²²⁹ County Clerk to Receiver of Gold Revenue, Te Aroha, 25 September 1900, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1899-1901, p. 297, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

²³⁰ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 30 April 1902, Mines Department, MD 1, 02/569, ANZ-W.

²³¹ Warden to Minister of Mines, 27 May 1902, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Letterbook 1883-1900, pp. 650-652, BBAV 11534/1a, ANZ-A; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Thomas Gavin, 5 June 1902, Mines Department, MD 1, 02/569, ANZ-W; *New Zealand Mines Record*, 16 June 1902, p. 474.

²³² Piako County Council, *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 March 1904, p. 19.

²³³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1901, 14/1901, BBAV 11582/4b, ANZ-A.

three months' protection to enable him 'to raise capital to erect a plant'.²³⁴ Another two months later, he surrendered it and applied for the adjoining Champion Lode Extended.²³⁵ Just over four months later, he applied for six months' protection 'during testing of the ore'. A 'favourable report' had been received from the smelting of three tons in Sydney, and with another man he had broken out another parcel to send to London, where it would 'receive special treatment by an entirely new process and if successfully treated by that or any other process capital will be found'.²³⁶ A further six months' protection, rather than the 12 sought, was given another six months later because the London plant had not tested his sample.²³⁷ The mine was surrendered on 1 December 1903 but re-applied for two days later; this application was abandoned two months later.²³⁸ Thus ended his involvement in Tui mining.

At Waiorongomai, Gavin attempted to develop the adjoining Cadman and Sceptre in the hope of forming a company. In July 1901, he applied for 30 acres as the Cadman, for two acres at the foot of Butler's Spur for a crushing and reduction plant, and for a 50-chain water race; the applications for machine site and water race were later withdrawn.²³⁹ Within two months of applying for the claim, he sought permission to have two rather than five men working it for six months.²⁴⁰ The following February he applied for the Sceptre, and three months later was permitted to work the two claims jointly for another six months with fewer men than required.²⁴¹ He told the warden he had sent ore to London for treatment by a new process, and was about to send five tons from a recently discovered lode to be tested in Thames; he was negotiating to raise capital.²⁴² In May

²³⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1901, 76/1901, BBAV 11582/4b, ANZ-A.

²³⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1901, 27, 94/1901, BBAV 11582/4b, ANZ-A.

²³⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1902, 9/1902, BBAV 11582/4b, ANZ-A.

²³⁷ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1902, 38/1902, BBAV 11582/4b, ANZ-A.

²³⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1903, 105, 108/1903, BBAV 11289/17a ANZ-A.

²³⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1901, 20, 61, 62/1901, BBAV 11582/4b, ANZ-A.

²⁴⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1901, 75/1901, BBAV 11582/4b, ANZ-A.

²⁴¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1902, 1, 23, 24/1902 BBAV 11582/4b, ANZ-A.

²⁴² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1902, 23/1902, BBAV 11582/4b, ANZ-A.

1902 he sold 12oz 15dwt of melted gold from the Cadman.²⁴³ In the following February he surrendered the Sceptre but applied for it once more in December, successfully.²⁴⁴ In August 1904 he applied for six months' protection 'pending formation of Company', but three weeks later withdrew the application and surrendered the claim.²⁴⁵ In February 1905 the mining inspector reported Gavin's party had obtained 'fair results'.²⁴⁶

In January 1905, Gavin was one of six vendors of the Cadman Company, the others being Newsham and four Auckland investors. His share of the sale was 1,250 scrip shares paid up to 1s and 3,125 paid up to 1 5/7d; the total number of shares was 100,000, worth 2s 6d each.²⁴⁷ The company ceased work in August 1905 for want of funds, and in the following year Gavin was granted both the Cadman and Sceptre.²⁴⁸ Later that year, when applying to work each with two men for six months, he declared he was 'thoroughly prospecting' the Cadman and attempting to raise capital.²⁴⁹ In September 1907, when successfully asking yet again for six months' protection for both claims while he formed another company, he declared that, as the ores were refractory, it was 'impossible to do more at present than prospecting and preparatory works'.²⁵⁰ The following July, a local farmer unsuccessfully sought their forfeiture for not being worked, instead Gavin being granted another six months to prospect and test the reefs that

²⁴³ Bank of New Zealand, Thames Branch, Gold Purchase Register 1899-1932, entry for 31 May 1902, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

²⁴⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1903, 1, 106/1903, BBAV 11289/17a, ANZ-A.

²⁴⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1904, 33, 41/1904, BBAV 11289/18a, ANZ-A.

²⁴⁶ James Coutts to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 18 February 1905, *AJHR*, 1905, C-3, p. 36.

²⁴⁷ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 132 no. 849, ANZ-A.

²⁴⁸ H.J. Lee to Assistant Registrar, Joint Stock Companies, 6 June 1906, Company Files, BADZ 5181, 132/849; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1906, 2, 3/1906, BBAV 11289/18a, ANZ-A.

²⁴⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1906, 24, 25/1906, BBAV 11289/18a, ANZ-A.

²⁵⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1907, 27/1907, BBAV 11289/19a, ANZ-A.

were to become the property of the Bendigo Company.²⁵¹ Under an agreement with this dated 10 September 1908, Gavin sold the two claims for £673 15s, not cash but in 26,950 2s shares paid up to 6d.²⁵² Later that month, he became its mine manager, a post he still held in 1911, when he retained 1,900 of the 143,958 shares allotted.²⁵³ The Bendigo Company was not a success.²⁵⁴

Also in September 1908, Gavin was the agent for John Endean, a former Thames miner turned hotelkeeper and mining investor,²⁵⁵ in obtaining possession of the Seddon, adjacent to the Cadman.²⁵⁶ Gavin was to hold 1,000 of the 100,000 3d shares in the Seddon Company,²⁵⁷ another short-lived venture.²⁵⁸

In October 1908, he applied for 94 acres in the Mangakino Valley as the Premier Extended; it was granted in the following May.²⁵⁹ When asking the government to assist constructing a track, he stated he had formed a party with a former Thames miner, Charles Manuel.²⁶⁰ They would develop 'two Reefs which I panned sum uears back and which I know to be carrying rich sulphide ore, but unles the track is Extended we will have to carry our provisions and tools on our backs for two miles'. From his knowledge of the area between Waiorongomai and Waihi, he was certain it would open up good auriferous country. 'I hope you will assist us in the great Effort we are making to Revive the Mining industry in our District at the present time and I have Resan to believe we shal be succesful'.²⁶¹ In mid-1909, he applied

²⁵¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Plaints 1908, 3/1908, BBAV 11572/3a; Mining Applications 1908, 24/1908, BBAV 11289/19a, ANZ-A.

²⁵² Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 226 no. 1332, ANZ-A.

²⁵³ *Te Aroha News*, 24 September 1908, p. 2; *AJHR*, 1911, C-3, p. 22; Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 226 no. 1332, ANZ-A.

²⁵⁴ See paper on financing mining companies.

²⁵⁵ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 466.

²⁵⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1908, 32/1908, BBAV 11289/19a, ANZ-A.

²⁵⁷ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 244 no. 1431, ANZ-A.

²⁵⁸ See paper on financing mining companies.

²⁵⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1908, 34/1908, BBAV 11289/19a, ANZ-A.

²⁶⁰ See paper on his life.

²⁶¹ Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 27 September 1908, Mines Department, MD 1, 08/1023, ANZ-W.

for six months protection ‘pending Introduction of Capital’. As a road had only been commenced, for the next six weeks he would not be able to get a pack horse to it. Two unnamed Auckland men were selling shares in Dunedin, hoping to float a company there in about six months’ time, after which the ground would be properly worked and in due course a battery erected.²⁶² A month later, he was granted 98 adjoining acres as the Te Aroha.²⁶³ In early 1910, he was granted six months’ protection for both claims. By then, he had spent £100 employing two men to prospect the Premier Extended, which, with an adjoining claim, was under option to John Watson Walker. He told the warden the claims were ‘in an inaccessible position’ and the ores were ‘refractory’. Although on the main lines of the reefs, the claims had been ‘occupied time and time again’ for the last 20 years; their development required ‘extensive capital’, which could not be raised in New Zealand.²⁶⁴ Two years later he surrendered them both.²⁶⁵ The following year, the rents owing was treated as unrecoverable.²⁶⁶

THE IMPACT OF MINING ON HIS HEALTH

This was Gavin’s last attempt to earn a living from mining. One consequence of mining since 1867 was revealed when he was admitted to a private hospital in October 1913,²⁶⁷ dying two months later, aged 63. ‘He

²⁶² Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1909, 114/1909, BBAV 11289/20a, ANZ-A.

²⁶³ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1909, 11/1909, BBAV 11289/20a, ANZ-A.

²⁶⁴ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1910, 11/1910, BBAV 11289/20a, ANZ-A.

²⁶⁵ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1912, 52/1912, BBAV 11289/21a, ANZ-A.

²⁶⁶ Te Aroha Receiver of Gold Revenue to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 27 June 1913; memorandum by Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 2 July 1913; memorandum by Minister of Mines, 5 July 1913; County Clerk, Ohinemuri County Council, to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 30 July 1913; Te Aroha Receiver of Gold Revenue to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 16 August 1913; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to County Clerk, Ohinemuri County Council, 26 August 1913, Mines Department, MD 1, 1913/1426, ANZ-W.

²⁶⁷ *Thames Star*, 22 October 1913, p. 4.

had been laid up for some time past, being a victim of the dread miners' complaint'.²⁶⁸ His death certificate recorded that he had suffered from pneumoconiosis and asthma for 20 years.²⁶⁹ It had probably caused him to be 'indisposed' for two weeks in 1908.²⁷⁰ His widow received a pension from the Goldminers' Relief Fund because of this disease.²⁷¹

THE ACCIDENT RELIEF FUND

Another way Gavin assisted mining was as a member of the committee of the Accident Relief Fund, formed in 1883.²⁷² The following year he was thanked for his work and elected a vice-president.²⁷³ This fund faded when mining did; when a new committee was elected in 1889 to control a new fund he was not a member.²⁷⁴ Indeed, at a meeting of members of the new fund, he protested at what he considered was an illegal move to rescind 'without giving previous notice' the previous meeting's resolution to give other trustees a small present for their work. Supported by another miner, Gavin 'proceeded to further address the meeting when the Chairman requested Mr Gavin to confine himself to the resolution'. After the motion he opposed was carried, he refused to sign the report of the new committee because he considered the meeting was acting illegally. 'Mr Gavin was proceeding to further address the meeting, when the Chairman interposed with a view of mollifying²⁷⁵ the affairs; some angry words ensued with the result that the Chairman vacated the chair'.²⁷⁶

Ten years later, Gavin, as one of the two vice-presidents, agreed to transfer the fund to the Thames Hospital Building Fund.²⁷⁷ The hospital board was informed that a conversation with Gavin had prompted him to

²⁶⁸ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 10 December 1913, p. 2.

²⁶⁹ Death Certificate of Thomas Gavin, 9 December 1913, Deaths, 1913/8314, BDM.

²⁷⁰ *Thames Star*, 20 May 1908, p. 4.

²⁷¹ Goldminers' Relief Fund, Register of Applications 1911-1913, Public Trust Office, PT 193, ANZ-W.

²⁷² *Te Aroha News*, 23 June 1883, p. 2.

²⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 16 February 1884, pp. 2, 7.

²⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1889, p. 2.

²⁷⁵ Printed as 'modifying'.

²⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 27 February 1889, p. 2.

²⁷⁷ H.H. Adams, George Taylor, and Thomas Gavin to Thames Hospital Board, 1 June 1899, printed in *Thames Advertiser*, 6 June 1899, p. 3.

suggest this money be transferred if the other two trustees agreed. Gavin 'had been threatened with summonses by other people who wished to get hold of this money'.²⁷⁸ Because of competition amongst members of the board for the credit for obtaining this gift, Gavin wrote that 'the whole business originated from myself'. He had spoken to George Taylor, the other vice-president,²⁷⁹ who then talked to Henry Hopper Adams. After describing the actions of one man wanting all the credit as 'childish', he asked that the trustees not be made honorary life members of the hospital, as they were only doing their duty 'administering the fund for the greatest benefit of all concerned'. He ended by sarcastically hoping Thames residents would try to get the man seeking the credit knighted 'for his great service in wresting this money from us when such great obstacles were put in his way' by others.²⁸⁰ The object of his sarcasm bit back:

I could not but think "That fools rush in where angels fear to tread." It appears to me that Mr Gavin is losing time in Te Aroha, for if the London publishers only knew of his ability as a writer there would be a general rush for his productions, and his future would be thus assured. I hope the Te Aroha people will see that he is represented in the proper quarter, for I am sure it would be a national loss for them to lose the services of so wonderful a man. I wonder if Te Aroha could spare him.

He described Gavin explaining 'in a rambling way' how the donation was arranged, and claimed Adams had raised the possibility three weeks before Gavin's involvement. He wondered what Te Aroha residents would think of his handing over the fund to Thames when they considered their local hospital was more entitled to it.²⁸¹ Gavin replied to this 'long gassy letter' by insisting that he alone had been able to convince Taylor to sign. As Te Aroha had a 'first-class hospital with plenty of funds to run it', he agreed to the money going to the dilapidated one in Thames. 'I am not going to wind up, as he did, by promising you that if you insert this that I will not trouble you again on the matter, as I believe in dying game, and will have a

²⁷⁸ *Thames Star*, 6 June 1899, p. 4.

²⁷⁹ See paper on the Piako County tramway at Waiorongomai.

²⁸⁰ Thomas Gavin to Thomas Radford, n.d. [c. 8 June 1899], printed in *Thames Star*, 10 June 1899, p. 2.

²⁸¹ Letter from R.R. Menzies, *Thames Star*, 17 June 1899, p. 2.

say as long as you will permit me space. I have neither done nor said anything that I am afraid of.²⁸² This ended the press controversy.

LAND DEALINGS

Gavin did not apply for a residence site at Te Aroha until October 1882, being granted one the following month in a block of suburban land on the southeastern fringe of the township.²⁸³ This land was known as the Hori More Block, after its principal owner, a rangatira who lived near Turua.²⁸⁴ Gavin cannot have built on it, for the site was forfeited after he paid the first year's rent.²⁸⁵ In February 1885 he sub-leased 20 acres of Lot 14, Block 1X from Charles Stanislaus Stafford and Henry Ernest Whitaker,²⁸⁶ who had earlier leased this block from Wiropo Hoterene Taipari, Hori More and the other Maori owners,²⁸⁷ and erected a four-roomed house.²⁸⁸ In February 1889, with Adams he leased of another 600 acres of the same block.²⁸⁹ Later that year, they purchased Whitaker and Stafford's interests, Gavin occupying the land on the lower side of the Te Aroha to Waiorongomai road

²⁸² Letter from Thomas Gavin, *Thames Star*, 21 June 1899, p. 2.

²⁸³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folio 221, no. 352, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A; Te Aroha Borough Council, Rate Book 1888, Block X [no pagination], Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

²⁸⁴ See Waihi Warden's Court, Te Aroha Gold Field, Native Land Blocks 1880-1895, p. 61, BAFV 13781/1a, ANZ-A; Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Books no. 8, p. 321; no. 36, pp. 157-164; no. 37, p. 96; no. 45, p. 375; Aroha Block 1X Section 14, Block File H979, Maori Land Court, Hamilton; Maori Land Blocks, Justice Department, J 1, 94/313, ANZ-W; *Te Aroha News*, 20 July 1889, p. 2.

²⁸⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Rent Ledger 1881-1900, folio 297, BBAV 11501/1a; Letterbook 1883-1900, p. 12, BBAV 11534/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁸⁶ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

²⁸⁷ Lands and Deeds Registry, Auckland, Nominal Primary Index, vol. 3, folio 810, Land Information New Zealand, Auckland; Aroha Block 1X Section 14, Lease dated 13 February 1885, Block File H979, Maori Land Court, Hamilton.

²⁸⁸ Te Aroha Borough Council, Rate Book 1888, Block X, [no pagination], Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

²⁸⁹ Aroha Block 1X Section 14, Lease dated 1 November 1889, Block File H979, Maori Land Court, Hamilton.

and Adams the upper portion.²⁹⁰ By late August they had fenced nearly all the land.²⁹¹

Gavin was a founding member of the Gordon Special Settlement, up-river from Te Aroha, in 1886 being granted Block X Section 8, containing 150 acres.²⁹² In March 1889 he was warned that, as he had not been 'continuously in residential occupation', the section was liable to forfeiture.²⁹³ Four months later, Gavin told the Crown Lands Board he could not comply with the regulations and asked if he could sell it to a man who would pay the arrears of rent.²⁹⁴ The ranger noted that Gavin had made no improvements and had only paid the first instalment of rent of £15 2s, owing £22 10s; the sale price of £28 9s 9d he wanted was precisely what it had cost him.²⁹⁵ The board initially refused to permit the sale, and re-assessed the arrears at £60 8s.²⁹⁶ In response, Gavin informed the Commissioner of Crown Lands that he was not making a penny: 'I did not take up the land as a matter of speculation but in hopes that I would be able to make a home on it but it is situated too far from the mines where I am Employed to live on it, and continue my occupation as a miner and I am not in a position to Give up my Employment'. He wished to sell the section, and confirmed no improvements had been made.²⁹⁷ Because the man who had bought the section had erected a house and made improvements, the transfer of the lease was approved.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 20 July 1889, p. 2, 28 August 1889, p. 2.

²⁹¹ *Te Aroha News*, 28 August 1889, p. 2.

²⁹² *Waikato Times*, 7 September 1886, p. 2.

²⁹³ A.F. Etheridge to Thomas Gavin, 4 March 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

²⁹⁴ Thomas Gavin to Crown Lands Board, Auckland, 10 July 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

²⁹⁵ G.R. Beeson to A.F. Etheridge, 10 July 1889; Memorandum by Ranger, 20 August 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

²⁹⁶ Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, to Thomas Gavin, 4 August 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

²⁹⁷ Thomas Gavin to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, 5 September 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

²⁹⁸ Memorandum by Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, 7 September 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A; Register of Rents of Lands held under Deferred-Payment Leases, 1887-1890, folio 97, Lands and Survey Department, LS 23/2, ANZ-W.

All Gavin's subsequent land dealings were restricted to the Hori More Block. By 1895, his land was 'partly improved' and his house was valued at from £100 to £200.²⁹⁹ Gavin and Adams jointly occupied 76 acres 1 rood and 38 perches, being sections 14F, G, and J.³⁰⁰ Gavin sub-leased five residence sites.³⁰¹ By 1898, he had purchased the freehold of 38 acres of section 14D for £2 10s an acre from George Lipsey,³⁰² who had earlier purchased it from Hori More; Robert and Mary Michael³⁰³ sub-leased three sections from him.³⁰⁴ In December that year, Gavin wrote to the Native Minister enclosing three applications from owners of sections 14F, G, H, and J seeking the removal of restrictions preventing them selling their interests. 'I wish to purchase this land in order that I may make a home for my family in this District where I have been Engaged in Gold Mining for many years. I wish to state that I have no land of my own as yet Except that which I hold under Lease for mining purposes'.³⁰⁵ Asked for the price agreed upon for sections 14F, G, and H,³⁰⁶ he explained that

There has been no price fixed, nor are the Natives in any way bound to sell the land to me, but they are anxious to sell and have promised to give me the first offer, and as I have been a tenant of theirs for a number of years and found them good people I believe they will keep their promise, I wish to say also that I have not

²⁹⁹ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Balance Book for the Half Year to 30 September 1895, [no pagination], Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁰⁰ Aroha Block 1X Section 14, Maori Land Court, Block File H979, Maori Land Court, Hamilton.

³⁰¹ D. Banks to E.V. Cave, 26 November 1898, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Letterbook 1883-1900, pp. 498-499, BBAV 11534/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁰² See paper on his life.

³⁰³ See paper on Robert Michael.

³⁰⁴ Thomas Gavin to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 22 December 1898, Maori Land Blocks, Sections F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128; Thomas Gavin to Minister of Mines, 15 June 1899, Mines Department, MD 1, 99/923, ANZ-W.

³⁰⁵ Thomas Gavin to Native Minister, 3 December 1898, Maori Land Blocks, Sections 14F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³⁰⁶ Under-Secretary, Native Department, to Thomas Gavin, 15 December 1898, Maori Land Blocks, Sections F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

advanced Eney money to the Natives on account of purchase nor
Do they owe me Eney money at the present time.³⁰⁷

In August 1897, the government valuation made of the land owned by Gavin and Adams was £630; improvements were valued at £221. Gavin's house was worth £100, fencing was £46, and grass £75.³⁰⁸ The Native Minister agreed to the sale, subject to enquiry by the land court and full value being paid.³⁰⁹ Immediately upon receiving this news, Gavin asked him to remove the restrictions on the sale of section 14J because its owners wanted him to buy it, and emphasized that he had 'a large family for whom I am anxious to get a freehold home for'.³¹⁰ A year later, after being informed he was allowed acquire it for the 'property tax value', he told the under-secretary that he preferred to pay the current rateable value of £3 per acre for the flat land and 10s for the hill portion. 'The Natives offer to sel for an averige of 30/- per acre if I will pay survay and all Expences. this I am prepared to Do, this I consider a fair price considering the class of land as their is only a third of it ploughable'. When he had bought section 14D from Lipsey he had paid 50s an acre and also the survey costs for better land in 'a better position as it joints Morgantown I make this statement to show I am Dealing fair with the Natives'.³¹¹

On the same day, Gavin sought the Premier's assistance to settle the matter. 'I am offering a fair price to the natives and as I know you are inclined to protect the natives against every sharp practice I wish to lay the matter fully before you'.³¹² Asked to provide a valuation for each section, he

³⁰⁷ Thomas Gavin to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 22 December 1898, Maori Land Blocks, Sections F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³⁰⁸ Government Valuation dated 27 August 1897, Maori Land Blocks, Sections F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³⁰⁹ Memorandum by Under-Secretary, Native Department, 13 January 1899; Memorandum by Native Minister, 23 February 1899, Maori Land Blocks, Sections F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³¹⁰ Thomas Gavin to Native Minister, 29 January 1899, Maori Land Blocks, Sections F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³¹¹ Thomas Gavin to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 3 January 1900, Maori Land Blocks, Sections 14F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³¹² Thomas Gavin to R.J. Seddon, 3 January 1900, Maori Land Blocks, Sections 14F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

promised to do so.³¹³ Then Patrick Sheridan, the senior land purchase officer, reminded his superiors that ‘the original intention was that these reserves should be absolutely inalienable - Sir George Grey was very strong on that point. I really think that Mr Gavin should be content with a 21 years lease which he can if the Natives agree obtain without intervention of Government’.³¹⁴ Sheridan’s view was ignored, and Gavin was permitted to purchase it at government valuation.³¹⁵ Hearing that he wanted to buy it prompted Robert Michael, who rented 40 acres from him, to protest that Gavin was ‘trying all he knows to purchase said land, and if he does we shall be done out of our chance of obtaining it’. Gavin’s ‘exorbitant rent’ of 10s an acre prevented him making a decent living, and he and another sub-lessee, Emmelah Blencowe,³¹⁶ had fenced and improved the land.³¹⁷ Michael complained too late for the decision to be reconsidered,³¹⁸ and between July 1900 and January 1901 Gavin paid £428 to acquire the interests of 18 owners.³¹⁹ At the same time he obtaining a lease of 131 acres of section 14B

³¹³ Under-Secretary, Native Department, to Thomas Gavin, 10 January 1900; Thomas Gavin to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 13 January 1900, Maori Land Blocks, Sections 14F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³¹⁴ Patrick Sheridan to Under-Secretary, Native Department, 20 April 1900, Maori Land Blocks, Sections 14F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³¹⁵ Under-Secretary, Native Department, to Registrar of Native Land Court, Auckland, 11 July 1900; Under-Secretary, Native Department, to Robert Michael, 13 March 1902, Maori Land Blocks, Sections 14F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³¹⁶ See *Te Aroha News*, 2 May 1885, p. 2, 11 December 1886, p. 2, advertisement, 23 March 1895, p. 1, 4 December 1895, p. 2, 24 March 1900, p. 2, 4 September 1914, p. 2, 21 May 1920, p. 2, 9 August 1923, p. 1, 30 September 1921, p. 1, 16 September 1980, p. 8; *Thames Advertiser*, 19 January 1891, p. 2, 20 January 1891, p. 2, 7 March 1896, p. 2.

³¹⁷ Gilbert Mair to Patrick Sheridan, 14 April 1900, Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 1, 1899/234; Robert Michael to R.J. Seddon, 1 October 1900; Robert Michael to Jackson Palmer (MHR for Ohinemuri), 1 October 1900, Maori Land Blocks, Sections 14F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³¹⁸ Native Minister to Jackson Palmer, 25 October 1900, Maori Land Blocks, Sections 14F, G, H, J Block 1X Aroha, Justice Department, J 1, 1901/1128, ANZ-W.

³¹⁹ Aroha Block 1X Section 14, Land Block File H979, Maori Land Court, Hamilton (includes map of the sections); see also Lands and Deeds Registry, Auckland, Nominal Primary Index, vol. 3, folio 810, DOSLI, Auckland.

at £26 4s per annum; this was later mortgaged to a local storekeeper.³²⁰ His lease on section 14E expired in 1902, and Mary Michael acquired it for 5s an acre, 3s more than Gavin had paid.³²¹ Gavin sought to renew his lease both before and after she obtained it, failing because he offered only 4s.³²² Gilbert Mair, a land purchase officer who became involved in the negotiations, informed the land court that Gavin would require adjacent landowners to erect 200 chains of fencing. Mary Michael had claimed to have been 'hardly treated by Gavin', but Mair 'afterwards found that she had nothing to complain of; and that she owed Gavin back rent'.³²³ In May 1903, Gavin leased 54 acres of section 14E for £2 14s per annum.³²⁴

In late 1904, Gavin was 'cutting up into residence sections a considerable area' of freehold land in section 14D and making roads and footpaths.³²⁵ The price of these sections is not known. He was recorded in the county council's rate book for 1905-1905 as owning and occupying part of section 14D, 11 acres 2 roods 3 perches, rateable value £47; 22 acres of section 14F, value £22; had equal ownership with the Maori owners of part of sections 14H and 14J, 19 acres 2 roods, value £19; and occupied 90 acres of Maori land in section 14B, value £295.³²⁶ The rateable value of his properties within the borough were £25 for his dwelling in section 14D, £69 for the freehold portions of sections 14D, F, G, H, J, £23 for his 46 acres 3 roods 5 perches leased in section 14B, £15 for a dwelling and sheds on

³²⁰ Agreement of 11 September 1900 between Thomas Gavin and Reihana Tutana and others, Aroha Block 1X Section 14, Land Block File H979, Maori Land Court, Hamilton (includes map of the section); Aroha Block 1X Section 14B, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton, BACS A102/3113, box 26, ANZ-A; Maori Land Blocks, Maori Affairs Department, MA, MLP 1, 10/46 Part 1, ANZ-W.

³²¹ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 53, p. 134.

³²² Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 53, p. 252.

³²³ Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 53, p. 258.

³²⁴ Aroha Block 1X Section 14, Maori Land Block H979, Maori Land Court, Hamilton (includes map of section).

³²⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 September 1904, p. 37; Evidence of Peter Gilchrist, Minutes of Land Tenures Commission 1914, Correspondence of Royal Commission on Hauraki Mining District, 1914, Lands and Survey Department, LS 77/2, ANZ-W.

³²⁶ Piako County Council, Rate Book 1905-1906, Te Aroha Riding [no pagination,] Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

section 14D, and £10 for two dwellings within the township.³²⁷ In October 1906, at the request of several residents the government agreed to buy 'Gavin's Freehold', 37 1/2 acres on the edge of Morgantown, for £1,200, and divide it into residence sites.³²⁸ As the under-secretary noted, he like others who had leased sections for 50 years had 'an interest in the land equal to half of the freehold value. The lessees are fully aware of this, hence their desire that the land should be sold. When 14F, G, H and J were sold', Gavin 'received a considerable amount as compensation'.³²⁹ He sold 110 acres above the domain, section 14C, for £1,200.³³⁰

In 1909, he offered to purchase 100 acres of section 14B from Te Hira More, son of Hori More. He already leased all 254 acres from Hori More and his family, but of the four owners only Te Hira More and his father wished to sell their interests; Te Hira More wished to develop his Turua farm. After following legal advice to partition off the land to be sold, in June 1910 he received a letter from Gavin stating the land was valued at £3 10s per acre, and complained to the Native Minister that he and his father

considered this valuation to be considerably below the true value, because the land is very superior in quality and in first-class order, well fenced and housed. The lessee added that if we did not think that a fair price to quote a price ourselves. As we knew that a fair price was far above that quoted by him, we quoted to him £12--10--0 an acre.

Gavin refused to pay this amount.³³¹ In early 1911, because Te Hira More could not raise a mortgage on the land, he 'consented to sell' 165 acres to Gavin for £550 instead of the government valuation of £635.³³²

³²⁷ Te Aroha Borough Council, Rate Book 1906-1907 [no pagination], Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha.

³²⁸ Under-Secretary, Lands Department, to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 7 May 1907, Mines Department, MD 1, 07/437, ANZ-W.

³²⁹ Memorandum by Under-Secretary, Native Department, n.d. [July 1910], Maori Land Blocks, Maori Affairs Department, MA-MLP 10/46 Part 1, ANZ-W.

³³⁰ Map of 'Block IX Te Aroha SD' (1894, with 1898 annotations), Tourist Department, TO 1, 08/295, ANZ-W.

³³¹ Te Hira More to Native Minister, 28 June 1910, Maori Affairs Department, MA 1, 10/4544, ANZ-W [the land was incorrectly stated by Te Hira More to be section 4B].

Gavin's land holdings within the county were valued in March 1911. By then he owned 108 acres of section 14B No. 1, 46 acres of which were within the borough. The unimproved value of the portion within the county was £360, and he had fenced, drained, cleared, and grassed to a value of £140. Section 14B No. 2, of 103 acres, had not been improved; its value was £400. His 32 acres of sections 14F, 14G, and 14H were also unimproved, and were valued at £150. Fencing valued at £10 had been erected on his 8 acres of section 14J, the unimproved value of which was £45. This meant the total value of land and improvements within the county was £1,205.³³³

FARMING

Most of the land Gavin farmed most of the land he leased or purchased. For years he actively encouraged farming, in 1894 being one of the four vice-presidents of the newly formed Te Aroha Horticultural Society (later an Agricultural and Horticultural Society).³³⁴ He was re-elected to this position in subsequent years until, in 1902, becoming an ordinary committee member.³³⁵ The following year, he was a steward at its annual show and was elected to the stock committee.³³⁶ Still on the committee in 1905,³³⁷ he was not re-elected after then.

In the early years of the twentieth century, although he sold small portions of his freehold land, he grassed and otherwise improved other parts and created a dairy farm.³³⁸ In 1902, he was one of the three representatives of Te Aroha West (where he did not farm) at a meeting to

³³² Te Hira More to Native Minister, 28 June 1910, 21 May 1911, Maori Affairs Department, MA 1, 10/4544, ANZ-W; Aroha Block 1X Section 14B no. 1, Maori Affairs Department, Hamilton Office, BACS A102/3113, box 26, ANZ-A.

³³³ Valuation, March 1911, Te Aroha Riding, folios 1-3, Piako County Council, Valuation Department, BBBC 14670, A150/903, ANZ-A.

³³⁴ *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 September 1894, p. 23.

³³⁵ *Waikato Argus*, 27 April 1897, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 14 May 1898, p. 2, 27 March 1900, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 April 1901, p. 26, 2 October 1902, p. 32.

³³⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 February 1903, p. 33, 25 May 1903, p. 32.

³³⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 10 October 1905, p. 2.

³³⁸ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Memorandum Book 1902-1914, pp. 55, 136; Te Aroha Branch, Manager's Diary 1905-1919, entry for 19 September 1905, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

consider establishing a dairy factory.³³⁹ When the Te Aroha District Co-operative Dairy Company was formed the following year, he was a director; his occupation was recorded as 'farmer'.³⁴⁰ Re-elected each year, he became chairman of directors in 1905, a post he retained until his death.³⁴¹ In 1911, after chairing a meeting about home separation, he

admitted that he had been a strong opponent of home separation, but he now said that there were great possibilities in it. The whole question was: How could we get the highest price for butter-fat? What mattered was the return per cow.... He was quite prepared to see the change from creameries to home separation effected.³⁴²

In addition to dairying, Gavin also had an orchard, and was fined £1 in 1910 for neglecting to eradicate disease.³⁴³ This was the second time that he had criminal charges of an exceedingly minor nature laid against him: the first was in 1897, when he pleaded guilty and was fined 1s for failing to register the birth of a child.³⁴⁴ He also had turkeys; in 1911 larrikins shot some.³⁴⁵

FINANCIAL POSITION

Despite all his years of mining and diversifying into farming during the early twentieth century, Gavin achieved only a modest standard of living. Details of his finances have not survived before 1894, when he sued

³³⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 February 1903, p. 33.

³⁴⁰ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 176 no. 1085, ANZ-A.

³⁴¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 20 August 1903, p. 34, 27 August 1903, Supplement, p. 2, 7 August 1913, p. 68; *Te Aroha News*, 8 August 1905, p. 2, 7 August 1906, p. 3, 21 September 1911, p. 2; *Te Aroha Mail*, 2 August 1910, p. 2; see also *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1930, p. 4.

³⁴² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 August 1911, p. 49.

³⁴³ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1907-1913, 39/1910, BCDG 11220/2a, ANZ-A.

³⁴⁴ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1896-1907, 37/1897, BCDG 11220/1b, ANZ-A.

³⁴⁵ *Te Aroha Mail*, 24 January 1911, p. 1.

an Auckland publican for repayment of a loan of £67,³⁴⁶ revealing he then had sufficient spare cash to be able to lend that amount. The following year, a correspondent wrote that all those working the Loyalty were ‘poor men’.³⁴⁷ Another correspondent recorded that the four men working it between November 1894 and October 1895 earned an average of £5 3s 6d each week.³⁴⁸ In September 1895 his overdraft was £113, having risen by £6 during the preceding six months. His bank manager noted that he had provided five securities collectively worth £150. ‘Obligant has every prospect of clearing off O/D early. Is an honest, reliable man, worth of trust. Safe’.³⁴⁹ Six months later, when the overdraft had diminished to £25, the manager again noted his confidence in the account. ‘Decent honest fellow of some local influence: a/c small but safe’.³⁵⁰ The overdraft rose to £34 by March 1897 and to £108 by March 1899.³⁵¹ At the latter date, his assets were worth £488 whereas liabilities were only £20; his property was valued at £190.³⁵² Six months later, its value had fallen by £10 and the overdraft had risen to £63.³⁵³

Gavin’s overdraft continued to increase in the early years of the twentieth century. In March 1901 it was £77, rising to £148 six months later, £299 a year later, £435 six months later, and another six months later to £599; by March 1905 it was £616.³⁵⁴ His bank manager noted in July

³⁴⁶ Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, Civil Record Book 1889-1896, 45/1894, BCDG 11221/1c, ANZ-A.

³⁴⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 30 September 1895, p. 6.

³⁴⁸ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 4 October 1895, Supplement, p. 1.

³⁴⁹ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book, Balance as at 30 September 1895, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁵⁰ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book, Balance as at 31 March 1896, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁵¹ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book, Report on Advances, 31 March 1897; Half-Yearly Balance Book, Balance as at 31 March 1899, Advances, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁵² Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book, Balance as at 31 March 1899; Advances, Securities, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁵³ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book, Balance as at 30 September 1899, Overdrawn Accounts, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁵⁴ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Balance Books, Reports on Advances as at 31 March 1901, 30 September 1901, 30 September 1902, 31 March 1903, 30 September 1903, 31 March 1905, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

1903, when an overdraft limit of £550 was approved, that additional security had been taken over his 37 1/2 freehold acres, which had been mortgaged for £200 and was under offer to the government for residence sites. The general manager, in approving the increased limit, noted that 'the security is not of the best and the position of the applicant is not strong. The a/c must be carefully watched'.³⁵⁵ Three weeks later, Gavin asked the local manager for the limit to rise to £700:

Says he cannot do with less: needs it to buy horses & to work the place. Told him I thought it most unlikely H.O. would sanction this & that he must draw no more without authority. Says he must arrange otherwise but will first put his position before me in writing.³⁵⁶

Whether this letter was written is not known, but a month later Gavin visited the bank in response to a letter from the manager 'telling him he was Dr. £571 and must go no higher. Wants to go to £600. Can give no further security except Sec. 14H, 46 ac. of which he owns 2/3rd'.³⁵⁷ On the basis of this new security, a limit of £650 was approved, but the manager 'only told Gavin £625, as he has a tendency to strain the limit'.³⁵⁸ In November 1904, when the overdraft had reached £683, Gavin told the manager that he wanted 'to pay Hori More £26 rent in order to get H.M. to fight a dispute as to title which will result in Gavin getting title to 40 ac. of which he has now only one-half. Declined to go higher'.³⁵⁹ The following day, Gavin requested an overdraft of £800, 'giving us security over his capital. I promised to meet his cheque for £26 on his distinct undertaking to repay that amount immediately if we don't increase his limit' (which was not

³⁵⁵ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Memorandum Book 1902-1914, p. 55, entry for 7 July 1903, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁵⁶ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Memorandum Book 1902-1914, p. 55, entry for 28 July 1903, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁵⁷ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Memorandum Book 1902-1914, p. 55, entry for 25 August 1903, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁵⁸ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Memorandum Book 1902-1914, p. 55, entry for 15 September 1903, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁵⁹ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Memorandum Book 1902-1914, p. 136, entry for 10 November 1904, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

increased).³⁶⁰ In February 1905, he obtained £200 from William Dibsell, a local storekeeper,³⁶¹ at 10 per cent interest, by providing a bill of sale over his cattle.³⁶² Four months later, when the overdraft had reached £658, he was arranging to re-mortgage his land.³⁶³ When in September he applied to the bank for £100 to enable him to grass some land, this was declined.³⁶⁴ Early the following year, Gavin withdrew his securities from the bank so he could borrow another £200 from Dibsell.³⁶⁵

No further details of his finances have survived, apart from his unwillingness near the end of his life to pay the outstanding rent of £27 17s on his abandoned Premier Extended.³⁶⁶ He left an estate of £2,607 2s 6d.³⁶⁷

HIS CHURCH

Gavin's active involvement with the Catholic Church continued at Te Aroha. In 1884, he was a member of the church committee, and when St Joseph's Church was opened during that year he was one of the four signatories to an address to the bishop.³⁶⁸ He became chairman of the committee, and a surety for its bank account.³⁶⁹ On at least one occasion his

³⁶⁰ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Memorandum Book 1902-1914, p. 136, entry for 11 November 1904, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁶¹ See paper on his life.

³⁶² Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Memorandum Book 1902-1914, p. 136, entry for 16 February 1905, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁶³ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Memorandum Book 1902-1914, p. 136, entry for 2 June 1905, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁶⁴ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Manager's Diary 1905-1919, entry for 19 September 1905, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁶⁵ Bank of New Zealand, Te Aroha Branch, Manager's Diary 1905-1919, entry for 6 February 1906, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

³⁶⁶ County Clerk, Ohinemuri County Council, to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 11 July 1912; Receiver of Gold Revenue, Te Aroha, to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 27 June 1913, 16 August 1913, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/1412; memoranda of 2 July 1913, 5 July 1913, Mines Department, MD 1, 1913/1426, ANZ-W.

³⁶⁷ Testamentary Register 1913-1914, folio 102, BBCB 4208/9; Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/347, ANZ-A.

³⁶⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 21 March 1884, p. 12; *Te Aroha News*, 15 March 1884, p. 2.

³⁶⁹ Bank of New Zealand, Paeroa Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Book, Balance as at 31 March 1896, Securities, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

religious beliefs influenced his views on how the domain baths should operate, in 1898 stating his strong opposition to their being open on Sunday mornings during church services.³⁷⁰ A speech he made in 1908 at a farewell to the Anglican minister may illustrate his good relations with members of other denominations: after praising his 'duty and rectitude of life', he said that 'on the Charitable Aid Board he had seen frequent examples of Mr Cowie's kindness of heart'.³⁷¹

SPORT

The last time he was recorded as participating in rowing races was in November 1886, when he rowed in a four-oared gig that lost a race at the Te Aroha Regatta.³⁷² Retained an interest in this sport, he was elected a vice-president of the Junior Rowing Club in 1895.³⁷³ During the 1890s he assisted several other sporting clubs. In 1890 he was elected president of the football club,³⁷⁴ and although the length of time he held that post cannot now be determined, in 1896 and 1897 he was elected a vice-president.³⁷⁵ He was both a vice-president of this club and of the Piako Rugby Union in 1907.³⁷⁶ In 1897, he was elected one of the two vice-presidents of the cricket club and a vice-president of the Te Aroha Thermal Springs Golf Club.³⁷⁷ When a bowling club was formed in 1902, he was one of its three vice-presidents.³⁷⁸ In 1897, despite his 'want of practice', he top scored for the civilians in a shooting match against the Volunteers.³⁷⁹ Six years later, he was a member of the Te Aroha Rifle Club,³⁸⁰ suggesting that he continued to participate in shooting contests.

³⁷⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 7 April 1898, p. 2.

³⁷¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 July 1908, p. 36.

³⁷² *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1886, p. 2.

³⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 16 October 1895, p. 2.

³⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 26 April 1890, p. 2.

³⁷⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 April 1896, p. 2; *Waikato Argus*, 6 April 1897, p. 2.

³⁷⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1907, p. 2, 23 April 1907, p. 2.

³⁷⁷ *Te Aroha Times and Waiorongomai Advocate*, 3 November 1897, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 18 September 1897, p. 2.

³⁷⁸ *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 November 1902, p. 33.

³⁷⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 October 1897, p. 2.

³⁸⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 4 August 1903, p. 2.

HORSE RACING

Gavin assisted horse racing for many years. The first time he was mentioned as being on a committee organizing a race meeting was in 1886, and in 1889 he was a steward for the Jockey Club's Summer Meeting.³⁸¹ Continuing to be a steward in the nineties,³⁸² in 1897 he was on the club committee, being elected a vice-president in November.³⁸³ Shortly before Easter that year he chaired a meeting to organize sports and hack races on Easter Monday.³⁸⁴ The last time that he was noted as being a vice-president was in 1902.³⁸⁵ His only other notable involvement with horses was a broken nose when riding down from the Premier mine in 1882,³⁸⁶ and when his horse fell and rolled on him on the Te Aroha to Waiorongomai road in June 1884 he suffered only 'severe bruises'.³⁸⁷

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Gavin assisted, in a small way, cultural and social life. In 1883, he was a member of the committee that established a public library,³⁸⁸ but (an exception to the general rule) did not become a member of the management committee. Two years later, he was on the committee of the Social Club and Debating Society.³⁸⁹ He was one of the two vice-presidents of the Waiorongomai Rinking Club in 1888.³⁹⁰ In 1897, he was chairman of the Te Aroha Band Contest Committee,³⁹¹ but otherwise took no part in the musical life of the community.

³⁸¹ *Te Aroha News*, 16 January 1886, p. 2, 23 January 1889, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 9 February 1889, p. 3; for photograph of him as a steward, see *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1934, p. 4.

³⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 23 February 1895, p. 3, 16 November 1895, p. 2.

³⁸³ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 23 January 1897, p. 4; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 December 1897, p. 3.

³⁸⁴ *Waikato Argus*, 3 April 1897, p. 2.

³⁸⁵ *Thames Star*, 10 September 1902, p. 4.

³⁸⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 20 April 1882, p. 3.

³⁸⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 14 June 1884, p. 2.

³⁸⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 21 July 1883, p. 2.

³⁸⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 15 August 1885, p. 2.

³⁹⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 5 May 1888, p. 2.

³⁹¹ *Waikato Argus*, 20 March 1897, p. 3.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: LICENSING COMMITTEES

In 1898, Gavin stated he 'had always taken an interest in local affairs'.³⁹² An indication of his increasing prominence during the 1880s was being a Te Aroha representative on the committee that met in Thames in 1886 to decide on a memorial for Warden Kenrick.³⁹³ At the same time, he was becoming actively involved in several forms of local government.

In February 1886, when he was elected unopposed to the licensing committee, his views were described as 'moderate'.³⁹⁴ An indication of his attitude was a 1907 reminder to Volunteers of the old rule that men who drank were not permitted to enrol:

As an instance of the immense good done by volunteering, he related the case of two young men who used to come from the bush into the town to drink at nights for want of something better to do. They begged to be enlisted so that they would have something to keep them away from the public house when they came to the town. Their request was acceded to, and they finally made two excellent volunteers.³⁹⁵

He resigned seven months after being elected because, having been appointed by the council as its tramway manager, he was disqualified from being a member.³⁹⁶ In 1894, he became a member of the Waikato committee.³⁹⁷ At an unknown date in the 1890s, he was a member of the Ohinemuri committee.³⁹⁸ In his advertisement for the 1900 election to this he promised to ensure hotels were 'properly conducted'.³⁹⁹ He received the third largest vote, 935; the highest was 1,056.⁴⁰⁰ By three votes, he obtained the highest vote at Waiorongomai, and was the highest scoring candidate at

³⁹² *Te Aroha News*, 26 May 1898, p. 2.

³⁹³ *Thames Star*, 23 August 1886, p. 2.

³⁹⁴ *Waikato Times*, 16 February 1886, p. 2.

³⁹⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1907, p. 3.

³⁹⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 11 September 1886, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 14 October 1886, p. 1309.

³⁹⁷ *Waikato Times*, 10 March 1894, p. 9, 15 March 1894, p. 4.

³⁹⁸ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 31 March 1900, p. 3.

³⁹⁹ Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 27 March 1900, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 31 March 1900, p. 2.

Te Aroha by 25 votes.⁴⁰¹ Re-elected in 1903 and 1906, he topped the poll in the latter contest.⁴⁰² Commenting on his highest number of votes, 1,001, he told Thames Volunteers in 1907 that ‘as only 300 of the votes were given him in Te Aroha he always put down the bulk of the remainder to the old members of the Naval Brigade who had formed committees to help him’.⁴⁰³

HOT SPRINGS DOMAIN BOARD

In November 1884, Gavin became a member of the Hot Springs Domain Board.⁴⁰⁴ In December 1886 he replaced George Wilson as chairman, a position he held for many years.⁴⁰⁵ When re-elected in February 1889 he described the springs as the mainstay of the town’s economy.⁴⁰⁶ In mid-1898, he told a meeting that, ‘as the town would be nothing without the springs’, the more these were developed ‘the more would the town benefit’.⁴⁰⁷

When there were personality conflicts within the board, it was argued that Gavin’s living some distance away and seldom visiting the domain was a disadvantage.⁴⁰⁸ The first time disputes involving him became public was in December 1888, when the Hamilton newspaper published a detailed report of a board meeting attended by Gavin, Charles Ahier, an accountant and agent,⁴⁰⁹ and John Ilott, editor of the *Te Aroha News* until mid-1890 and a persistent critic of local politicians.⁴¹⁰ The first business was a letter from George Wilson stating that his resignation not having been accepted by the government, he wished to resume his seat. Gavin asked how he knew about the non-acceptance of his resignation, as the board had received no

⁴⁰¹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 31 March 1900, p. 3.

⁴⁰² *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 17 April 1903, p. 3, 23 March 1906, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 14 March 1906, p. 2.

⁴⁰³ *Te Aroha News*, 13 April 1907, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 22 November 1884, p. 2; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 834.

⁴⁰⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 18 December 1886, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁶ *Waikato Times*, 12 February 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 5 July 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁸ John Ilott to Minister of Lands, 21 February 1887; Alfred Wright to Minister of Lands, 6 January 1888, Tourism Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

⁴⁰⁹ See Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 November 1893, p. 23; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 6 (Christchurch, 1908), p. 115.

⁴¹⁰ See papers on James Mills and Denis Murphy.

information. Wilson, who was in attendance, explained that Warden Northcroft wanted him to remain a member. Gavin responded:

“I do not wish to be discourteous to Mr Wilson, or offer any objection to his resuming his seat, knowing that at all times he works disinterestedly for the good of the Board, but I do object to our communications to the Government being ignored, as I know that it is the underhand work of some members of this Board, who have managed all this and several other matters which have placed the Board in a false position. I am certain that Mr Northcroft would not have interfered unless he had been influenced. I do not wish to blame Mr Wilson; but the Government should treat the Board courteously, and reply to their communications, and not for the Board to only learn by a side wind,⁴¹¹ as in this instance, what they are doing. I would like Mr Wilson to refrain from resuming his seat, though I admit he has a perfect right to it, until we, as a Board, make enquiries and get officially the matter obtained in Mr Northcroft’s letter.” – Mr Wilson: “I will willingly retire, rather than create any discord.” – Mr Ilott: “If Mr Wilson retires so will I. You need not think, Mr Chairman, to make me angry, as I came quite prepared for all this!” – The Chairman: “I hope you won’t get angry; you can do just as you please; and now I hope the Press will take a full report of what I am saying. You are the man who has caused all the trouble, with influence at your back, causing the wishes of the Board to be set aside, and I, as Chairman, will not submit to it any longer to be in the position of having a minority ruling and humiliating the other members. In this instance the Board accepted your (Mr Wilson’s) resignation, and a successor was nominated by a majority of the Board, and yet we learn that a second person has been nominated.” – Mr Ilott: “You need not think to frighten me by asking the Press to take a full report.” – The Chairman: “If the Press had always reported fairly, all would have gone well, but when it only reported a part of the proceedings and suppressed the remainder, trouble ensued at once, and public meetings were held in reference to what appeared to be the action of the Board.” – Mr Ilott: “I can publish just what I please.” – The Chairman: “Certainly, and the public can tell you what they think of you for doing so as they did in a very emphatic manner at the last Town Board election.” – Mr

⁴¹¹ ‘Side wind’ has more than one possible meaning. ‘A bastard’: Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (London, 7 ed., 1970), vol. 2, p. 1403; a sidewinder is ‘a wide-reaching blow with the fist’: Jonathon Green, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang* (London, 1998), p. 1073; or just used in the sense of information being provided by an unofficial rather than an official source?

Ilott: "You made a nomination without my being consulted. Did I not ask for the telegram you sent?" – The Chairman: "Yes, and it was at home; I brought it to the next meeting, and if you had asked for it again, you would have obtained it, and I would have asked you to produce the correspondence you had sent re nominating Dr Wright. – Mr Ilott: "What I do as a private person has nothing to do with the Board. I never nominated Dr Wright." – Chairman: "No, you are too good a general for that." – Mr Ilott: "If I deny that I had anything to do with the matter, you would not believe me." – Chairman: "I would not, for we received a telegram from one of the Ministers saying that the successor we nominated should be appointed, and asking would it do to put Dr Wright on also. You did not ask again at the next meeting for the telegram." – Mr Ilott: "No, I am not going to play second fiddle to you" - Chairman: "If you did you would be playing at any rate to an honest man."

After this squabble, not reported in Ilott's newspaper, Ilott and Gavin agreed that Wilson was rightfully a member of the board. Gavin apologized for blaming Wilson, as his explanation was 'now quite satisfactory, but it only puts the other members the deeper in the mud. And now that the matter has been fully discussed, we had better write to the Government in regard to the matter'.⁴¹²

In another version of the latter part of these squabbles, Ilott told Gavin that he spoke 'fairly now to Mr Wilson, and very different from what you said about him in my office', to which Gavin responded that he would tell Wilson what he had said (which was not reported). When Ilott said, 'No trouble would have ensued between the Chairman and I except through the influence of a third party', Ahier interposed that if the inference was to himself, it was 'a lie'; Gavin added that Ilott was crediting him 'with not having sufficient sense to form my own opinion'.⁴¹³

At the subsequent special meeting, Lipsey, another member, reported a father of a boy who had committed a 'misdemeanour' at the baths using 'abusive language'. Gavin interposed with his own recommendation of how to deal with such a man:

If you said to me what he said of you, I should meet him on the road and punch his head for him. That's my way of doing business. He's such a harmless old fellow I would not like to put

⁴¹² *Waikato Times*, 6 December 1888, p. 2.

⁴¹³ Domain Board, *Aroha Gazette*, 7 December 1888, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

him to any expense by going to law, but if I gave him a black-eye, he could put a beef-steak on when going up the hill and take it off when he came down.

When Ilott protested that Gavin was seeking to obtain approval for new works and suggested another special meeting be held to approve these, Gavin ‘said he would neither convene nor attend any special meeting for that purpose. He considered Mr Ilott had “sat upon him” in this matter, and it could stop now until the monthly meeting as far as he was concerned’.⁴¹⁴ A fuller account of this dispute recorded Gavin declaring he had no doubt the funds required could ‘be obtained with less than the signatures of all the members. But I regret that we should need to try, as I have always understood that after a full discussion upon any subject the minority gave way, and co-operated with the majority to bring the matter to a successful issue’.⁴¹⁵ The *Aroha Gazette* fully supported this view,⁴¹⁶ and ‘John Bull’ considered that Gavin deserved ‘the best thanks of the inhabitants for the courageous and manly attitude he took’ at these meetings.

The following conversation between an Englishman and a fellow countryman of the obstructionist, overheard by the writer, sums up pretty accurately the popular estimation of the scene at the meeting when Mr Gavin summed up his character in three words: Englishman Loq: “Well, if he had called me that I’d have had a rap at him, anyhow, I’d never sit with him again.”

Irishman Loq: “Sure you never knew a member of the crowbar brigade wid pluck, or an immergency man wid honor.”⁴¹⁷

At the subsequent meeting, this conflict of personalities erupted once more, prompted by Gavin pointing out that, before being re-elected chairman, the Act required him to resign at the annual meeting. ‘As that had gone past, he thanked the members for the assistance they had given him, and now begged to tender his resignation. Although at times they had had little differences, he thought they were all working for the good of the

⁴¹⁴ Domain Board, *Te Aroha News*, 15 December 1888, p. 2.

⁴¹⁵ ‘Another Lively Meeting’, *Aroha Gazette*, 14 December 1888, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

⁴¹⁶ Editorial, *Aroha Gazette*, 14 December 1888, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

⁴¹⁷ Letter from ‘John Bull’, *Aroha Gazette*, 14 December 1888, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1891/198, ANZ-W.

place'. Ilott protested that the only business that could be transacted concerned the balance sheet; when the other members wanted to discuss the election he 'was about to retire when the chairman invited him to remain, at the same time explaining his opinion that he could resign at any time'. When Lipsey proposed accepting Gavin's resignation to enable his being legally re-elected,

Mr Ilott added: Then I leave this meeting, and he went. – The chairman: I don't understand such conduct, nor how such a man should be thrust amongst us. It seems very hard when a majority of the Board are agreed that an obstructive member should behave so. Why couldn't he have sat and listened.- Mr Ahier: Can any one work with such a man? – Mr Lipsey: If we do wrong ourselves, we wrong the place. There was no cause whatever for Mr Ilott to leave the room. Speaking of Mr Gavin, he said he would elect him fifty times, as he had proved himself the best chairman they could have. Mr Gavin thanked the members of their good opinion of him, he had no enemies, he said, except Ilott. He had been 19 years at the Thames, and every child in the streets knew him. He did no care what appeared in the paper against him, but he was afraid such writing might damage the Domain Board and Te Aroha.

(December 1867 to November 1880 was not 19 years: Gavin's arithmetic was as bad as his spelling.) Members agreed that Gavin should act as chairman until a full meeting confirmed his position.⁴¹⁸ This account was published in Hamilton, Ilott presumably assuming that to publish it would not enhance his reputation; instead, the *Te Aroha News* restricted itself to blaming Gavin for delaying the annual general meeting.⁴¹⁹ Personal relations may have improved during the following 12 months, for in December 1889 Gavin was unanimously re-elected chairman.⁴²⁰ He continued to be re-elected during the 1890s until the formation of the borough in 1898, when the mayor became ex-officio chairman.⁴²¹

Some conflicts continued. In December 1892 Gavin criticized Ahier and Edward Gallagher⁴²² for inviting James Mills⁴²³ to join the board to carry

⁴¹⁸ *Waikato Times*, 10 January 1889, p. 2.

⁴¹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 January 1889, p. 2.

⁴²⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 18 December 1889, p. 2.

⁴²¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 September 1894, p. 23; *Waikato Argus*, 8 May 1897, p. 3; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 824.

⁴²² See paper on his life.

out reforms without informing their colleagues. At the last meeting, Gavin had asked that changes in management be delayed until Ahier was present, charging that ‘for years past Mr Ahier had been doing all in his power to have a change made, but he never has had the courage to propose it himself’. In response to Ahier’s denial, Gavin ‘said he would rather believe Mr Mills than Mr Ahier’. Ahier insisted the statements were untrue and complained that he was being ‘very unfairly treated’; Gavin replied that Mills ‘had treated him as he deserved’.⁴²⁴

A correspondent described Gavin’s election in 1894 as ‘a most popular one’ because he was ‘well known as an honest, straightforward man, who will do what he considers right under all circumstances’.⁴²⁵ In 1898, when responding to a toast to the board at the banquet for the opening of the Cadman Bathhouse, he stated that he thought it should be credited with doing its best. ‘He did not object to criticism of himself personally, but he thought it should not take the form of injury to the place’, the result of some of the criticism.⁴²⁶ Just over a month later, an editorial in the *Te Aroha News* stated that

Mr Gavin’s whole personality is bound up in the Te Aroha Domain, and we very well remember him saying more than a year ago, that the one thing he prided himself on most was being chairman of the Te Aroha Domain Board.... Mr Gavin spoke on that occasion of his affection for the Domain and the work he had done and contemplated doing for it in tones of such genuine sincerity as to create an impression in our minds that time has not served to efface.⁴²⁷

PIAKO COUNTY COUNCIL

Gavin’s first became involved with the county council in 1884, when he seconded and then nominated Denis Murphy in elections for the Te Aroha Riding.⁴²⁸ He stood for this riding in 1890, gaining 53 votes, insufficient to

⁴²³ See paper on his life.

⁴²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 7 December 1892, press cutting in Tourist Department, TO 1, 1892/96, ANZ-W.

⁴²⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 13 January 1894, p. 22.

⁴²⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 26 May 1898, p. 2.

⁴²⁷ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 5 July 1898, p. 2.

⁴²⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 23 August 1884, p. 2, 30 August 1884, p. 2, 8 November 1884, p. 2.

be elected: the successful candidates obtained 103 and 83.⁴²⁹ Three years later he and the only other candidate were elected unopposed.⁴³⁰ He was immediately appointed as one of the council's representatives on the Waikato Charitable Aid Board.⁴³¹ In the 1896 election Gavin and William Herries (later Sir William, a prominent politician)⁴³² were elected with an equal number of votes, 84.⁴³³ Three years later, he informed councillors that he would not seek re-election, as 'he expected to be away from the district within a year, and did not wish to put the Council to the expense of a by-election'. A resolution unanimously thanked him for his services, especially overseeing the tramway.⁴³⁴ As Gavin did not leave the district after all, he was a member once more from 1903 to 1908 and chairman from 1905 until his retirement.⁴³⁵ His re-election as chairman in 1906 was unanimous.⁴³⁶ A Waiorongomai correspondent hoped, in December 1908, that he would continue as chairman, as he had 'proved a worker for both mining and agriculture'.⁴³⁷ At the conclusion of the subsequent meeting, councillors praised him, one saying there had never been a better councillor, and another, who had been on the council for 14 years, described him as 'a first-class man, both as Chairman and member. He very much regretted Mr Gavin's retirement'. In reply, Gavin

thanked his colleagues for their kindly remarks towards him, stating that he was pleased to see his little efforts to do his duty had been appreciated. They had had their differences of opinion. He had been connected with local bodies all his life, so to speak, but none have given him more pleasure to attend to than the Piako County Council, and he had endeavoured to the best of his ability to assist to further the interests of the County. Private business necessitated his retiring from local politics – the Mining Company he represented claimed his attention.⁴³⁸

⁴²⁹ *Waikato Times*, 18 November 1890, p. 2.

⁴³⁰ *Waikato Times*, 2 November 1893, p. 5.

⁴³¹ *Waikato Times*, 7 December 1893, p. 5, 6 December 1894, p. 3.

⁴³² See R.S. Herries, *Memoir of Sir William Herries*, KCMG (London, 1925).

⁴³³ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 November 1896, p. 3.

⁴³⁴ Piako County Council, *Waikato Argus*, 24 October 1899, p. 4.

⁴³⁵ C.W. Vennell and David More, *Land of the Three Rivers: A centennial history of Piako County* (Auckland, 1976), pp. 335-336.

⁴³⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 December 1906, p. 32.

⁴³⁷ 'Waiorongomai Notes', *Te Aroha News*, 22 December 1908, p. 2.

⁴³⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 28 January 1909, p. 2.

TE AROHA TOWN BOARD

In 1884, Gavin was elected to a committee charged with establishing a borough.⁴³⁹ Late in 1887, at the request of 29 residents he agreed to stand for the town board. The *Te Aroha News* described him as ‘well known and generally respected’, and who would make ‘a most useful member of the Board, and on election day will, we venture to predict, be placed at the head of the poll’.⁴⁴⁰ This forecast was accurate.⁴⁴¹ The following year he did not stand for re-election.⁴⁴² Although asked by a ‘large number’ of electors to stand for a vacant seat in January 1890, the *Te Aroha News* would have been ‘surprised’ if he agreed to be nominated or connected ‘in any way with the present board’, which could outvote him. As he had been ‘a very useful member’ and had taken ‘an active part in the carrying out of many of the improvements effected in the township’, it had ‘no doubt’ that his election was ‘practically assured’.⁴⁴³ As anticipated, Gavin declined to stand because of the majority’s policy.⁴⁴⁴ When a vacancy occurred at the end of 1893, he topped the poll;⁴⁴⁵ in September 1894 he came second with 67 votes, three less than the highest polling candidate.⁴⁴⁶ He was re-elected chairman, holding this position until 1898.⁴⁴⁷ In 1896 he obtained the second highest vote, 78, the top candidate again receiving three more votes.⁴⁴⁸

Personalities sometimes intruded into the board’s discussions, as when, in October 1897, there was a ‘somewhat sultry discussion’ between Gavin and Gallagher about the legality of Gavin’s motion to levy a rate. When Gallagher claimed proper notice had not been given at the last meeting, Gavin interjected, ‘But I say I did, and any of these gentlemen present will bear me out in that. The reporters took note of it, and it appeared in the reports of the meeting’. Gallagher responded, ‘You must

⁴³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 29 November 1884, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 3 December 1887, p. 2.

⁴⁴¹ *Te Aroha News*, 10 December 1887, p. 3.

⁴⁴² *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1888, p. 2.

⁴⁴³ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 25 January 1890, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 29 January 1890, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 December 1893, p. 22, 6 January 1895, p. 23.

⁴⁴⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 September 1894, p. 22.

⁴⁴⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 September 1894, p. 23; *Waikato Argus*, 19 March 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁸ *Waikato Argus*, 17 September 1896, p. 2.

have some hold of these reporters somehow, as they report anything you say'. The *Te Aroha News* denied it had been 'got at', stating Gallagher could not 'possibly substantiate' his statement.⁴⁴⁹

TE AROHA BOROUGH COUNCIL

In the outline of his life published in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* in 1902, Gavin wrote that he had 'always taken a very active interest in the municipal affairs of Te Aroha and district', being 'chairman of the Te Aroha Town Board, since superseded by the Borough Council'.⁴⁵⁰ This account omitted his hope of being the leading member of the latter body. In May 1898, when at first he was the only candidate standing to be the first mayor, the *Te Aroha News* was pleased there was no competition. 'Like every strong man resolute in the discharge of what he considers to be his duty, he has his hostile critics. That he is a clear, level-headed man and a lucid, if not ornate, speaker, nobody will attempt to deny'. An example of his 'excellent sense' was 'not meddling with the improvements in the Domain'. His years of service on many local bodies 'eminently' fitted him 'for the more responsible duties of a mayoralty'.⁴⁵¹

Gavin's election advertisement was brief: 'I am not coming out as the Nominee of any particular Party, but hope that my long term of office on Public Bodies will secure for me again the votes I have recruited in the past'.⁴⁵² When James Mills stood against him, in his only election address Gavin's claimed this was 'the first time he had addressed a public meeting' was curious for one who had been speaking in public for years. Mills 'had based his claim for support on his knowledge of public affairs', but Gavin 'had equal claims. He had been alluded to as a pick and shovel man. Well, he did not object to that, but he hoped he had as much intelligence as a man who carried a carpenter's kit'. (Mills was a carpenter.) He had five planks in his platform, 'and would give first place to the three which his opponent claimed'. These were a water supply, which he had wanted for years but could not achieve through lack of money; lighting, which he had also wanted but which had stalled because no clear advantage between electricity and gas had been determined; and sanitation, which the board had also wanted.

⁴⁴⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 October 1897, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁰ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 834.

⁴⁵¹ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 14 May 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁵² Advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1898, p. 2.

Mills 'had not forestalled the Board in any manner'. The hot springs were 'the most important question of the lot', and 'if they were not developed, and every effort made to keep Te Aroha a leading sanatorium, there would be no need to discuss a water supply or any other thing'. After describing the improvements contemplated for the domain, he declared 'he had always striven to benefit the place and had always endeavored to spend all the money he had earned in the town, and he thought it only right that that should be done'. Responding to criticism of some of the board's actions, he claimed to have 'no objection to criticism, the more criticism the better work', and defended and in part apologized for past works, rates, and valuations.⁴⁵³

Although this was his only formal election address, a week previously he had participated in a public meeting called by Mills to refute charges made in the *Te Aroha Times* of misusing travel expenses. During it, after allegations were made that Mills had forged a signature to a voucher, Gavin 'regretted the necessity for discussing this subject, especially at such a juncture, when two old friends like Mr Mills and himself' were competing for the mayoralty. He gave 'Mills every credit for having agitated to get Te Aroha formed into a Borough long before he (the speaker) had ever thought of it'. After recalling details of a board meeting, he claimed 'that after the exposure' Mills 'asked him to have the matter hushed up' because a third party was implicated. Having agreed to this request, 'he had remained silent so long'. After Gavin's recollection was confirmed by another board member, a member of the audience said 'all the members were alike blameworthy, and Messrs Gavin and Mills were two good men; a statement which was received with great applause'. Clem Cornes, a prominent miner,⁴⁵⁴ charged 'this present trouble had been worked up' by Gavin and his supporters, a view disputed by another man. After a resolution was passed that the matter be left alone, Mills

thought it would be a good opportunity to give his views on Municipal matters, and as he was prepared to criticize the late administration he hoped Mr Gavin would wait. Mr Gavin declined to do so, and protested most emphatically against Mr Mills making use of the meeting for such a purpose. Mr Mills had called the public together for a specific purpose, and he had no right to take advantage of that to introduce fresh matters. Mr

⁴⁵³ *Te Aroha News*, 5 July 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁴ See paper on Clement Augustus Cornes.

Gavin left the Hall declaring that this action of Mr Mills [was] unfair, and was on a par with all his other actions since ever he had known him. At this point there was a general exodus from the Hall, and Mr Mills abandoned the idea of the proposed address on his municipal policy.⁴⁵⁵

The *Te Aroha News*, for long a critic of Mills,⁴⁵⁶ enthusiastically supported Gavin. Shortly after he announced his candidature, it cited a Paeroa view that he deserved the position because of ‘the untiring, disinterested, and zealous work he has performed for the welfare of the district and Domain for so many years’.⁴⁵⁷ Two days later, its editorial insisted there was ‘no question as to the most fit and proper person’ to be mayor, for it was ‘pretty generally conceded’ that ‘from nearly every point of view’ Gavin was ‘head and shoulders above every other possible candidate’; wide support for him was anticipated. ‘A comparatively young man, with all the aspirations and sympathies belonging to his years’, he had obtained his experience through ‘long association in various public bodies with the elders in the community’.⁴⁵⁸ Just over a week later, another editorial explained, apart from ‘his splendid services in the past’, he had ‘unusual qualifications for the position from a business as well as from a personal point of view, being a man of excellent address’. He was ‘a capable and experienced administrator in whose hands nothing relating to the business of the borough will suffer’. Mills, by contrast, was ‘not at all suited for the position’. The newspaper believed Gavin’s success was ‘assured’ and that he would obtain a ‘substantial majority’.⁴⁵⁹

On the day of the election, the newspaper’s editorial, ‘Last Words to the Electors’, repeated its backing for Gavin, but noted ‘many whose opinions we are accustomed to respect appear to be dubious. Mr Gavin at one period in the campaign had good reason to put up a petition to be saved from his friends’. No details of the behaviour of the latter were provided, as this would be ‘profitless’. It trusted that the campaign would ‘reach a fitting climax’ with Gavin’s victory. It believed ‘ratepayers for a long time had accustomed themselves to recognize’ him as ‘the legitimate heir to the

⁴⁵⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 28 June 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁶ For example, *Te Aroha News*, 3 August 1889, p. 2, 7 August 1889, p. 2, 31 August 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, n.d., cited in *Te Aroha News*, 21 June 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁸ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 23 June 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁹ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 2 July 1898, p. 2.

throne of our lately reconstructed little kingdom. The fixity of this idea was somewhat disturbed, however, by the untoward circumstances which occurred recently'. An unexpected win for Mills would be 'largely due to the advantages he gained over his opponent by reason of the unhappy tactics resorted to' by some of Gavin's supporters. Gavin was 'heavily handicapped' by having

for several years past continuously resided in an atmosphere of publicity, whereas Mr Mills has just emerged from retirement clad in all the charm of novelty. All the sins of omission and commission in connection with the Town and Domain Boards, the errors of the individual commissioners, the caretakers, the co-operative labourers, and all the experts from Wellington, are focussed on the unfortunate chairman, who perforce stands in a moral pillory, a tempting mark for every uncharitably disposed person to hurl the garbage of his wit at.

After referring to an earlier speech by Gavin about his pride in developing the domain, it commented that

such an expression of warm and whole hearted devotion proceeding from one usually so undemonstrative must touch even the cynical as pathetic in a public man, when we remember the vicissitudes of fortune such men are liable to. We grant that as a public man we think he is too impatient of criticism at times; but we believe the added responsibilities that would devolve upon him as the chief officer of a municipality would tone down any little acerbities of manner to which we are at present inclined to take exception. For after all he is a comparatively speaking young man. At any rate he is a man in the prime of life, and from a purely selfish point of view sound reasons for supporting him might be adduced.

Electors were urged to put from their minds 'all that the brazen-throated partisans and whisperers have said of them' and to vote for the best man.⁴⁶⁰

On the morning of the election, 'voters displayed no great anxiety to poll, and it was not until well into the afternoon that they began to roll up freely'. The newspaper considered it 'pleasant to observe the two opponents engaged, from time to time, in friendly conversation on political and general topics'. Near the end of polling,

⁴⁶⁰ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 5 July 1898, p. 2.

the excitement deepened, and all sorts of rumours went winging their way through the streets. Now it was Mr Mills who led, now Mr Gavin, but a strongly accentuated impression seems to have got abroad after the poll was closed that the result, when it became known, would reveal how desperate the struggle between the two candidates had been. No one imagined, however, that such a slender majority would separate the victor from the vanquished.

For Mills had triumphed, by 67 votes to 65. 'When the poll was announced it was received with a spontaneous outburst of cheering from the successful candidate's numerous friends and sympathisers'. A special edition of the *Te Aroha News* published the result within a few minutes of the declaration of the poll. Some people received it 'with incredulity. All sorts of conjectures were hazarded as to the real reason of what many regarded as an unexpected reversal of public opinion; the consensus of belief being that some very strong undercurrent of feeling' had caused the defeat of such a 'strong and acceptable candidate'.⁴⁶¹ The editorial considered 'it would be unprofitable, nay more, ungracious on our part to attempt to explain away the defeat our candidate sustained'. Although this was the greatest rebuff that Gavin had ever suffered, it was pleased 'to see in what an excellent spirit he took his reverse'. The editorial congratulated him on a deserved 'rest from the cares of office', for having stood only for mayor he would not be on the council. It hoped his rest would be a short one, for he had 'proved himself too valuable a servant for the public to allow him a lengthened furlough', and *Te Aroha* had 'prospered under his dispensation'.⁴⁶²

In a broadsheet published in Paeroa before the election, 'Hotspur' described the event as a horse race, the 'Electors' Welter Handicap'. Gavin was 'Black Tom, who is a dark, brown colt, with black points. He is very plain about the head, and disfigured by his large lop ears and hollow temples'. Bred 'by the Voucher' (a reference to the controversy over expenses), 'out of Panmure' (where he had spent his early childhood), he had been 'running in the interests of a small company for some years' (a reference either to his mining or a *Te Aroha* clique). His jockey was 'a

⁴⁶¹ *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁶² Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1898, p. 2.

Frenchman, and we think it is a case of hard Times',⁴⁶³ a reference to his being supported by Henry Foulke Gotz, owner of the *Te Aroha Times*.⁴⁶⁴ Mills was 'Splodger', whose greyness was a dig at his being much older. 'Hotspur' noted that, four years before, when competing to be chairman of the town board, they had been neck and neck until both fell at Lipsey's Bridge. 'Black Tom knocked his near front fetlock, causing a large growth, which will take more than blotting paper to blot out now that the public know that they were both in it', presumably a reference to the false voucher presented by Mills and paid with Gavin's approval.

When the race started, 'I fully expected to see some circus business with Black Tom, as I had been led to believe that he was an unruly customer'. The start 'was the only time he managed to get away without performing and the reason for that was, that he is being raced this season with winkers which, in my opinion, has proved a great benefit. Black Tom looks as if he is over-worked, wearing the opinion of being very nervous and anxious'. Before the start, he had 'showed a bit of temper by wheeling around suddenly, and trying to kick Splodger in the ribs'. The latter got increasingly far ahead in the race, leading to a display of temper by Black Tom which caused the public 'to hoot', and when Black Tom's winkers fell off he threw his jockey and did not finish the race, 'making Splodger an easy winner by six lengths'.⁴⁶⁵

Which was not the result of the real election, but 'Hotspur' had based his lampooning on one aspect of Gavin's character, his impatience with criticism, referred to both in this spoof and in the *Te Aroha News* editorial printed on the day of the election. It had also been noted in an article headed 'Lese Majeste' in January that year:

A collection of the unpublished sayings of certain members of the Domain Board would add to the gaiety of pressmen, if not of

⁴⁶³ 'Hotspur', 'The Electors' Welter Handicap. To be Run at Te Aroha on Tuesday, 5th inst', (Paeroa, n.d. [July 1898]), Te Aroha Warden's Court, Newspaper Clippings 1895-1905, BBAV 11532/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁶⁴ Marriage Certificate of Henry Foulke Gotz, 11 January 1892, 1892/192; Birth Certificate of Leon Francis Aroha Gotz, 12 September 1892, 1892/9312, BDM; *Te Aroha News*, 28 June 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁵ 'Hotspur', 'The Electors' Welter Handicap. To be Run at Te Aroha on Tuesday, 5th inst', (Paeroa, n.d. [July 1898]), Te Aroha Warden's Court, Newspaper Clippings 1895-1905, BBAV 11532/1a, ANZ-A.

nations. We feel inclined to bracket the Chairman with the Emperor of Germany in his intolerance of press criticism. According to a report which has reached us from a reliable source, a hireling attached to this journal, too lazy to travel to Waiorongomai for news, bailed the Chairman of the Domain Board up in the street and wanted to know how things were going in that blooming suburb. Instead of going out to Waiorongomai the hireling in question, the Grand Panjandrum alleges, spends his time picking holes in the administration of the Board. Fortunately ours is but an obscure country paper otherwise we might share the fate of the editor of the Germany *Kladderdatsch* and find ourselves arraigned for high treason, inasmuch as we so far forgot ourselves as to suggest, a day or two ago, in an elegantly conceived local paragraph that a certain fence would be none the worse for a coat of paint. Our critic did not stop at this, but went on “in King Cambyses⁴⁶⁶ vein,” to say: “I could speak more freely; but for the fact that there are two press men present, who are not always to be relied on to give a proper view of matters.”

The newspaper commented that if these comments were to be taken seriously Gavin was in favour of censorship, gagging the press, and excluding the latter from local government meetings. ‘But we know Mr Gavin too well to entertain such an outrageous notion’, and the statements should be treated as jests.⁴⁶⁷

At the final meeting of the town board, a member thanked Gavin for the ‘able and courteous manner’ he had chaired its meetings, and regretted he would not be on the borough council.⁴⁶⁸ It was noted by the press that another election for mayor would be held in November,⁴⁶⁹ but Gavin did not stand either as mayor or as councillor. In 1909, ‘Ratepayer’ argued that Gavin would make a good mayor,⁴⁷⁰ but his involvement with the county council and other organisations may have been why he did not stand.

He continued to be involved in borough issues, for instance in 1903 participating in a meeting about providing electric lighting. As a self-proclaimed expert on the local creeks because of his mining experience, he ‘was confident that in dry weather they would be found wanting’ for

⁴⁶⁶ There were two kings of Ancient Persia with this name: see Google.

⁴⁶⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 8 January 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 14 July 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 July 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁰ Letter from ‘Ratepayer’, *Te Aroha News*, 6 March 1909, p. 3.

generating power, and seconded a successful motion opposing any borrowing of capital for this purpose.⁴⁷¹ In 1907, he declared he had always opposed electric lighting. He also stated that he was always happy to chair meetings, as he was doing on this occasion, and to meet his opponents. 'There was not a man in Te Aroha with whom he could not shake hands tomorrow'. He had 'neglected his own duties for public duties – somebody had to do it, although he had sometimes thought of giving it up'. Although 'ambition was growing in him',⁴⁷² his involvement in public affairs was ending, probably because of worsening health.

NATIONAL POLITICS

When commenting on Gavin's defeat in the first mayoral election, the *Te Aroha News* wrote that it had

heard it said that a man of his genius for administration should seek preferment in the higher world of politics where his undoubted abilities would find ampler scope for their exercise than in the limited field offered by parochial affairs. Up to now he has steadfastly set his face against the temptation.⁴⁷³

Even if not contemplating a career in national politics, he was an active supporter of the Liberal Party. The earliest published reference to this was his chairing, in 1893, of Cadman's Te Aroha election meeting.⁴⁷⁴ Two years later, at a meeting of the town board he defended the government against criticism by the *Te Aroha News* that it had given too little assistance to the township compared with Rotorua. His figures proved that Te Aroha had been more generously treated, and he successfully obtained a unanimous vote of thanks to Cadman for 'the zealous manner in which he had worked for the district'.⁴⁷⁵ The following year he signed an address to Sir George Grey congratulating him on his 74th birthday.⁴⁷⁶ A

⁴⁷¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 December 1903, p. 44.

⁴⁷² *Te Aroha News*, 11 April 1907, p. 3.

⁴⁷³ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 7 July 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁴ *Waikato Times*, 18 November 1893, p. 9.

⁴⁷⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁶ 'Addresses Presented to Sir George Grey on his 74th Birthday, 14 April 1886, by European and Maori Residents of Auckland Province', p. 155, Grey New Zealand MS 275, Auckland Public Library.

rumour was current in 1898 that he was to be asked to contest the Ohinemuri seat,⁴⁷⁷ but this came to nothing. Instead, in the following year he was one of those nominating William McCullough, a Liberal who had been a Member of the Legislative Council,⁴⁷⁸ for this seat.⁴⁷⁹ When McCullough gave an election address at Te Aroha, Gavin seconded the vote of thanks.⁴⁸⁰ Two weeks later, he attended a meeting of the Liberal Federation League,⁴⁸¹ no doubt not for the first time, but his involvement cannot now be traced. He was referred to in 1905 as a prominent supporter of the Liberal Government,⁴⁸² and the following year became president of the new Te Aroha branch of the Liberal and Labour Federation.⁴⁸³ In 1907 he was mentioned as being a 'probable candidate' for the Tauranga seat but with little chance against the incumbent, William Herries.⁴⁸⁴ His political interests were broader than just New Zealand, for in 1911 he supported Home Rule for Ireland and hoped the Home Rule delegate then in New Zealand would visit Te Aroha.⁴⁸⁵

OTHER INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

As an extension of his interest in politics, in 1901 Gavin was one of two convenors as well as the chairman of a meeting to discuss forming an educational association, which he hoped would discuss the issues of the day. It was decided to establish a Citizens' Association, Gavin being one of the five members of the committee to draw up its rules.⁴⁸⁶ This association was another of many such bodies never heard of again. His prominence in the community was recognised in other ways, as when in 1896 he was

⁴⁷⁷ *Waikato Times*, 1 April 1898, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁸ See *Observer*, 22 October 1892, p. 10, 1 June 1893, p. 9, cartoon, 15 July 1893, p. 13, 4 November 1893, p. 7, 11 November 1893, p. 5, 8 February 1896, p. 3, 11 November 1899, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 29 November 1899, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 November 1899, p. 1.

⁴⁸¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 November 1899, p. 4.

⁴⁸² *Te Aroha News*, 14 September 1905, p. 2.

⁴⁸³ *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 March 1906, p. 16; *Te Aroha News*, 15 June 1907, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁴ *Observer*, 9 March 1907, p. 4; *Te Aroha News*, 16 March 1907, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 19 March 1907, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 23 May 1911, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁶ *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 May 1901, p. 31.

appointed a Justice of the Peace.⁴⁸⁷ Other examples of his participation in community affairs were his being elected in 1895 as the local representative on a committee to erect a hospital at Paeroa, and two years later being a member of the medical association that sought to retain a resident doctor in Te Aroha.⁴⁸⁸ A final indication of his involvement in every aspect of community life was that, five months before his death, he was voted to the chair of a meeting to consider establishing a co-operative blacksmith's and wheelwright's company, and was elected to the committee to collect information.⁴⁸⁹

FAMILY LIFE

In November 1883, Te Aroha's *Observer* Man noted that 'Tommy and Maggie are hard at it'.⁴⁹⁰ Five months later he married Margaret Catherine Murphy, a domestic servant who was the daughter of a labourer; he was aged 32, and she was recorded on 17 April as being aged 20 and on 22 April as being 19.⁴⁹¹ The latter seems to have been correct, for when their first child, Annie was born in February 1885, she was recorded as being 19.⁴⁹² The other children were, in order: Elizabeth Maud, Alice Madge, Mabel Helen, Margaret Ivy, Thomas James, William Roy, Charles Victor, Mary Irene, John Joseph, and the last, Patrick George, who was born in 1901.⁴⁹³ Most unusually, none died in childhood. Gavin's pride in his children was indicated by an oil painting made of them. Charging the artist with not

⁴⁸⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 24 July 1896, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 27 November 1895, p. 2; *Waikato Argus*, 15 May 1897, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 July 1913, p. 49.

⁴⁹⁰ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 3 November 1883, p. 16.

⁴⁹¹ Notices of Intentions to Marry, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/29, p. 942, entry for 17 April 1884, ANZ-W; Marriage Certificate of Thomas Gavin, 17 April 1884, 1884/911, BDM.

⁴⁹² Birth Certificate of Annie Gavin, 2 February 1885, 1885/1401, BDM.

⁴⁹³ Birth Certificates of Elizabeth Maud Gavin, 7 December 1885, 1885/1401; Alice Madge Gavin, 14 December 1886, 1886/16418; Mabel Ellen Gavin, 24 January 1888, 1888/1550; Margaret Ivy Gavin, 30 January 1889, 1889/18856; Thomas James Gavin, 26 May 1890, 1890/9722; William Roy Gavin, 22 February 1892, 1892/1285; Charles Victor Gavin, 29 May 1893, 1893/10052; Mary Irene Gavin, 14 November 1896, 1897/14039; John Joseph Gavin, 14 November 1898, 1899/14253; Patrick George Gavin, 3 September 1901, 1901/20876, BDM.

painting a true likeness, he refused to pay the balance owing; on comparing the painting with the children, the magistrate concurred, and non-suited the artist.⁴⁹⁴ In 1937, when describing the isolated lives of settlers in the 1880s, Charles Garlick, who was, briefly, a contractor at Waiorongomai,⁴⁹⁵ quoted as an example ‘the family of Mr Gavin, who in the early days would scuttle under the house and peer out like a lot of terriers, on the approach of strangers’.⁴⁹⁶ This seems to be over-egging the pudding: Gavin’s house was adjacent to the road between Te Aroha and Waiorongomai, hardly an isolated locality, and the children may have been playing a game rather than being terrified by seeing strangers.

Nearly four years after his death, his widow sold the farm and acquired one at Putaruru with her son John Joseph.⁴⁹⁷ She died in May 1940, aged 75, leaving an estate of £773 2s 9d.⁴⁹⁸ Her obituary referred to her husband as ‘a prominent resident concerned with the administration of early Te Aroha’ and ‘much in public activities’, whereas she was ‘of a retiring disposition. She was respected by everyone for her kind heartedness and her generosity. She was a devout Christian and a zealous worker in the Roman Catholic church, helping to build it up as it is know today’.⁴⁹⁹

HIS REPUTATION

The issue of the *Te Aroha News* containing Gavin’s obituary has been lost. The obituary in the *Thames Star* was sure that ‘general and genuine regret’ would be expressed at Thames at the news of his death. He was ‘well and favourably known throughout the Hauraki Peninsula, for wherever he went his genial nature and thoroughness made him many friends’. At Te Aroha he had

held many respectable positions as mine manager and superintendent. He was in charge of operations when the big

⁴⁹⁴ Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 April 1897, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁵ See advertisement, *Te Aroha News*, 27 July 1889, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 16 August 1941, p. 14, 22 August 1944, p. 6.

⁴⁹⁶ Recollections of Charles Garlick, *Te Aroha News*, 7 April 1937, p. 5.

⁴⁹⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 22 June 1917, p. 2; Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/4740, ANZ-A.

⁴⁹⁸ Death Certificate of Margaret Catherine Gavin, 6 May 1940, 1940/24302, BDM; Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/4740, ANZ-A.

⁴⁹⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 9 May 1940, p. 5.

tunnel was piercing the hill at Waiorongomai – one of the most extensive and important undertakings in the history of the field. “Tom” was ever an optimist, and his breezy manner and hearty genuineness endeared him to his many friends.

He was ‘deservedly held in high esteem’.⁵⁰⁰ A Te Aroha storekeeper, John Williams,⁵⁰¹ suggested that a memorial be erected,⁵⁰² but this idea was not taken up.

In 1899, Gavin wrote that residents knew ‘the sort of man I am. They know that I can’t write’, in the sense of writing fluently and grammatically, ‘but they know I have done more for the place than many a man who can’.⁵⁰³ The *Observer* during the last decade of his life described him as ‘the evergreen Tom Gavin, manager of many mines, and politician-in-ordinary’.⁵⁰⁴ His involvement in local government and local affairs generally led to his being popularly known as ‘Tommy Chairman’.⁵⁰⁵ The manager of the Bank of New Zealand in Thames in an 1887 testimonial wrote that, on the basis of an acquaintance of nearly 20 years, he was a ‘man of sound judgment, sober, honest, and upright in conduct, and a man of high and sterling character’.⁵⁰⁶

CONCLUSION

As the occasional conflict he experienced indicated, Gavin could be conscious of his own dignity and be very combative, but these qualities did not detract from the general good feeling held towards one of the local community’s main pillars. He was a thoroughly competent mine manager, his success or failure in different mines being the consequence of geology

⁵⁰⁰ *Thames Star*, 20 December 1913, p. 4.

⁵⁰¹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 831-832; *Te Aroha News*, 17 October 1917, p. 2.

⁵⁰² Letter from John Williams, *Te Aroha News*, 5 January 1914, p. 2.

⁵⁰³ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 June 1899, p. 4.

⁵⁰⁴ *Observer*, 6 August 1904, p. 4.

⁵⁰⁵ A popular expression noted in *Te Aroha Convent 75th Jubilee 1903-1978* (Te Aroha, 1978), p. 27; no source was given, but the expression had clearly remained in popular currency since his death.

⁵⁰⁶ Reference written by Thomas Leitch Murray, 28 April 1887, Mines Department, MD 1, 87/687, ANZ-W.

rather than his skills, as was usual with most managers. To provide for his large family he had to take whatever work was offering, combining both mining and farming, but still willing, extremely willing, to take on extra and unpaid public responsibilities.

Appendix

Figure 1: The Gavin family, n.d., with Thomas second from right in the middle row, Te Aroha and District Museum; used with permission.

Figure 2: Plan of 'Block IX Te Aroha S.D.', 1894, with notes made in 1898, Tourist Department, TO 1, 08/295, ANZ-W [Archives New Zealand The Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua]; used with permission.



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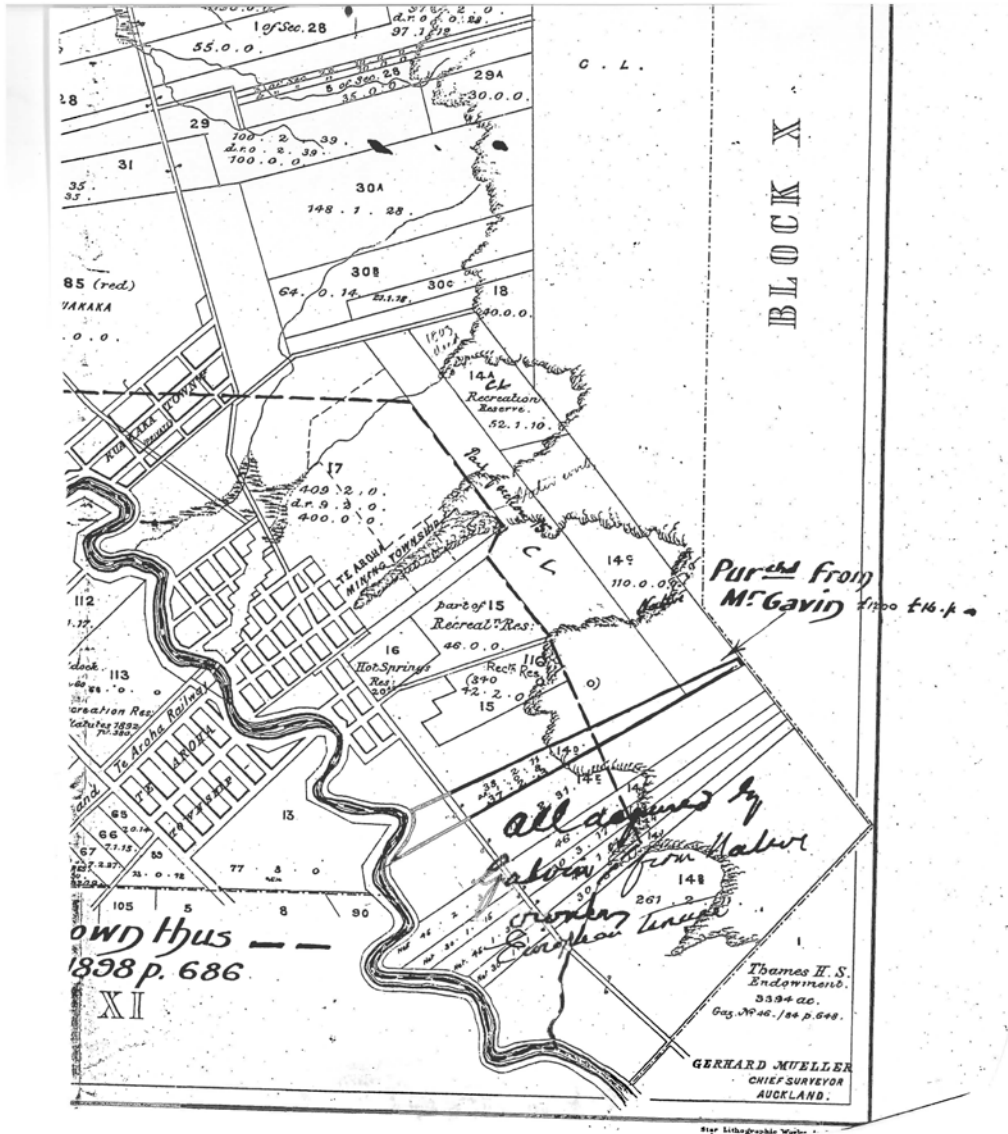


Figure 2: Plan of 'Block IX Te Aroha S.D.', 1894, with notes made in 1898, Tourist Department, TO 1, 08/295, ANZ-W [Archives New Zealand The Department of Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua]; used with permission.