WILLIAM BUCHANAN MAXWELL: A VETERAN WHO BECAME ‘TE AROHA’S PET ADORNMENT’

Philip Hart

Te Aroha Mining District Working Papers
No. 147
2016

Historical Research Unit
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

ISSN: 2463-6266

© 2016 Philip Hart
Contact: prhart@waikato.ac.nz
WILLIAM BUCHANAN MAXWELL: A VETERAN WHO BECAME ‘TE AROHA’S PET ADORNMENT’

Abstract: Famous in Te Aroha as a veteran soldier, Maxwell had fought in the Crimea, China, and India before fighting against Maori in New Zealand. Proud of his four wounds, he would lead a detachment of volunteers marching off to war in 1915. In his personal life, despite his involvement in the New Zealand land wars he would marry a Maori. After the fighting ceased, he had a variety of low-skilled jobs in Rotorua, Tauranga, and Ohinemuri before settling in Te Aroha, where he was a fireman. At Te Aroha he did a little prospecting, but did not really deserve the title ‘miner’. His jovial personality made him one of Te Aroha’s most popular residents.

A FIGHTING MAN

William Buchanan Maxwell’s place and date of birth has not been traced in the English records. In 1905, when applying for an old age pension, he declared that he had been born in Kent on 22 June 1840. When enrolling as a Taranaki Military Settler in August 1863 he gave his birthplace as Chatham in Kent and his age as 28, meaning a birth date of 1835; when admitted to hospital in 1895 and 1898 he was aged 59 and 62, giving a birth date of 1836. In recording his death in August 1915, the Te Aroha News gave his age as 80, as did his death certificate, and an Auckland obituary stated he was born in 1836. As an 1840 birth date

---

1 Observer, 21 November 1914, p. 5.
2 For photographs, see Observer, 19 July 1913, p. 5; Te Aroha News, 19 June 1931, p. 3; Ohinemuri County Diamond Jubilee 1885-1945 (Paeroa, 1945), p. 87.
3 Ancestry.co.uk.
4 Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, Old Age Pension Claim Register 1899-1909, no. 64, BBAV 11503/1a, ANZ-A.
5 Army Department, Nominal and Descriptive Roll Book, Taranaki Military Settlers, Regimental No. 195, microfilm.
6 Thames Hospital, Register of Patients 1884-1902, folios 68, 95, YCAH 14975/1a, ANZ-A.
would have meant he would have been only 14 when he sailed for the
Crimea immediately after joining the navy,\(^8\) an earlier one was more likely.

In 1913, the *Observer* published a photograph and eulogy of his
fighting days:

> The gallant veteran whose picture you are gazing at is William
> Buchanan Maxwell, of Te Aroha, where he is better known than
> the Domain or the baths or the mountain, and a member of the
> Fire Brigade. He’s crammed a lot of adventure into a life 76 years
> long, for when he joined the Royal Navy in the dim days of 1854
> he was rushed off to the Crimea, and as you see wears two medals
> for that historic campaign. He swung a cutlass, too, in the China
> War, and got the medal, and then looked in to the Indian Mutiny,
> and as you see again he not only wears the medal for the great
> campaign but the good conduct medal also.\(^9\)

One obituary recorded that ‘during the Crimean War he served on
H.M.S. Majestic, in the China War on H.M.S. Shannon in 1856, and in the
Indian Mutiny, in Peel’s Naval Brigade, in 1857 and 1858. When he came to
New Zealand, at an unknown date, he fought against Maori, serving under
and under four other officers ‘between 1865 and 1866’;\(^12\) (in fact, the Patea
campaign was in 1865).\(^13\) According to his death certificate, he arrived in
New Zealand in 1861,\(^14\) and, according to the *Te Aroha News*, he ‘had not
been ashore four hours before he was a fighting man again’.\(^15\) This would
put his date of arrival as 1863, for in August that year, when he was a

---

\(^8\) *Te Aroha News*, 17 December 1910, p. 2; *Observer*, 19 July 1913, p. 5.

\(^9\) *Observer*, 19 July 1913, p. 5.

\(^10\) See Maori War Series, Army Department, AD 32, box 63, no. 4193; Lands and Military
Claims Commission, 1896, Lands and Survey Department, LS 69, box 31, no. 1858, ANZ-

\(^11\) For a brief outline of his military career, see T.W. Gudgeon, *The Defenders of New
Zealand* (Auckland, 1887), pp. 43-46.

\(^12\) *Auckland Star*, 18 August 1915, p. 2.

\(^13\) *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, ed. Ian McGibbon (Auckland,

\(^14\) Death Certificate of William Buchanan Maxwell, 17 August 1915, 1915/280, BDM.

\(^15\) *Te Aroha News*, 17 December 1910, p. 2.
seaman living at Dunedin, he enrolled in the Taranaki Military Settlers, formed in that month.\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{Observer'}s eulogy continued:

Still burning with ardour, he came to New Zealand and served under Major Atkinson in the Taranaki “Bushrangers,” and under Col. [H.J.] Warre\textsuperscript{17} never missed an engagement which that gallant officer fought. Mr Maxwell in the Patea campaign was highly esteemed for his soldiering qualities, and he in turn speaks with the greatest admiration and affection of those brave leaders, Cols. T[homas] McDonnell\textsuperscript{18} and [George] Whitmore,\textsuperscript{19} and the famous and fearless Prussian, [Gustavus Ferdinand] Von Tempsky.\textsuperscript{20} With Col. Whitmore he fought in all engagements in the Urewera and Opotiki districts and took his discharge at Tauranga in 1869 before you were born, you young fellows of forty. He has been wounded four times in various engagements, and if you talk about “conscientious objectors,” he gets very angry – and we don’t blame him.\textsuperscript{21}

Another \textit{Observer} article published in the following year declared that he took

a vigorous hand in the Maori war. He bore himself well in those campaigns and judging by his wounds formed a habit of getting where the bullets were thickest. Mack is proud of his four wounds, and, providing the visitor’s appearance pleases him, will even go to the extent of removing his false teeth to better display the fact that the whole of his left lower jaw has been lost in the service of his country,\textsuperscript{22}

Maxwell fought in two battles with a future Te Aroha miner, William Morris Newsham,\textsuperscript{23} as a private in the Taranaki Bush Rangers.\textsuperscript{24} His last

\textsuperscript{16} Army Department, Nominal and Description Roll Book, Taranaki Military Settlers, Regimental No. 195, microfilm; \textit{The Oxford Companion}, p. 326.
\textsuperscript{17} For brief mention of his fighting in Taranaki, see Cowan, pp. 54-57.
\textsuperscript{18} For brief outline of his military career, see Gudgeon, pp. 183-186.
\textsuperscript{19} For brief outline of his military career, see Gudgeon, pp. 248-252.
\textsuperscript{20} For a brief outline of his military career, see Gudgeon, pp. 227-232.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Observer}, 19 July 1913, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Observer}, 21 November 1914, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{23} See paper on his life.
\textsuperscript{24} Maori War Index, MW 340, Army Department, AD 32, ANZ-W; for an outline of the fighting in Taranaki, see \textit{Oxford Companion}, pp. 374-375, 379, 381.
battle in Taranaki was at Te Ngutu-o-te-Manu, in September 1868, in which another future Te Aroha miner, Sergeant Henry Southey, also participated. Upon leaving Taranaki, Maxwell enrolled in the Armed Constabulary, giving his age as 28, again recording his occupation as seaman. In 1903 he would become a member of the King’s Empire Veterans; earlier he had received three medals for the Crimea, one for the Indian Mutiny, and another for the New Zealand Wars.

Understandably, he was known in Te Aroha as ‘old Mac’, the ‘Old General’, and ‘Veteran Mac’. When a member of the Te Aroha Rifle Club in 1907 he sang at one of its ‘smoke socials’. At the outbreak of the Great War he ‘again volunteered, although bordering on 80 years, and received a courteous reply that he was accepted, and would be called upon when required’. The Te Aroha News considered it ‘worthy of note that the first member to join the Te Aroha branch of the National Reserve was Veteran Maxwell’. In November 1914 he was reportedly ‘wildly excited about the war and never misses telling the visitor about the campaigns in which he himself figured’. One of the four local recruiting officers, in 1915 he headed the parade of recruits marching to the railway station; ‘the “boys” ’ were reportedly ‘pleased that “Old Mac” was there to see them off’. Although, according to this newspaper, his only son (wrongly recorded as William) fought at Gallipoli, there is no record of his joining the army.

25 See Gudgeon, pp. 184, 185; Oxford Companion, 381.
26 See Te Aroha News, 18 October 1884, p. 7.
27 Te Aroha News, 12 September 1908, p. 2.
28 Armed Constabulary Force, Description Book, Register 172, folio 5, Police Department, P 8/1, MICRO 6429, ANZ-W [recorded as William Maxwell].
29 Roll of Honour, 1840 to 1900: Defenders of the Empire resident in New Zealand (Wellington, 1902), p. 33; Auckland Star, 23 May 1903, p. 5, 18 August 1915, p. 2; Te Aroha News, 23 August 1914, p. 2.
31 Te Aroha News, 11 April 1907, p. 3.
33 Te Aroha News, 12 May 1915, p. 2.
34 Observer, 21 November 1914, p. 5.
36 Te Aroha News, 18 August 1915, p. 3; not listed under either William or George, Army Department, First World War records (online), ANZ-W.
AFTER HIS FIGHTING DAYS WERE OVER

After Maxwell was discharged from the Armed Constabulary in November 1869, his career has not been traced. At some time, despite years of fighting Maori, he married Te Aira, possibly at Rotorua, under Maori custom not Pakeha law; neither their marriage nor the births of his three children were registered. When revisiting in 1907, Maxwell claimed ‘to have been the first guide in Rotorua away back in 1869’, but there is no contemporary confirmation of this. Probably he was the William Maxwell who gave evidence in December 1874 about the death of Hone Werahiko’s first wife at Ohinemutu two months previously. When living in Rotorua in the early to mid-1890s his wife was not registered on the electoral roll; in September 1895 he was still married, but in three years later was a widower. His death certificate, clearly filled in by his Te Aroha friends, recorded that he had married an unknown Maori at an unknown time and place and had one son and two daughters. His probate revealed that his son was named George and his daughters were Annie and Ema, both married and living at Rotorua. Ema had married a Maori and Annie had married Edward Douglas, but only Annie registered her 1893 marriage. Her marriage certificate recorded that she had been born at Oropi, on the back road from Tauranga to Rotorua, and that she was illiterate and of ‘full’ age, meaning aged 21 or above, as was her husband. His birth had not been registered either; he was the son of Edward Douglas, who owned Halfway House, erected in 1882 at Ngawaro, on the back road between Tauranga.

37 Armed Constabulary Force, Description Book, Register 172, folio 5, Police Department, P 8/1, MICRO 6429, ANZ-W.
38 Marriage Certificate of Annie Maxwell, 31 May 1893, 1893/4027, BDM.
40 See paper on his life.
41 Maketu Magistrate’s Court, Daily Southern Cross, 18 December 1874, p. 5.
42 Bay of Plenty Electoral Rolls, 1893, p. 36; 1894, p. 33; 1896, p. 37.
43 Thames Hospital, Admissions Register 1884-1901, folios 68, 95, YCAH 14075/1a; Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, Old Age Pension Claim Register 1899-1909, no. 64, BBAV 11503/1a, ANZ-A.
44 Death Certificate of William Buchanan Maxwell, 17 August 1915, 1915/280, BDM.
45 Probate of William Buchanan Maxwell, Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/602, ANZ-A.
46 Te Aroha News, 18 August 1915, p. 3.
and Rotorua. His mother was Korowhiti Tuataka, who as Isabella Te Karowhiti had married Douglas in 1874; he assisted her unsuccessful attempts to obtain the Okauia block in Waikato. Like Maxwell, before marrying a Maori he had fought in several battles against iwi. When he died in December 1917 he left a widow, 11 children, 59 grandchildren, and five great grandchildren. Maxwell Road in Rotorua was named after the family: Horowaewae Maxwell, son of Buchanan and Te Aira Maxwell, married Iranui Mohi Tarau in 1928, and some of their descendents were prominent in the district. Buchanan and Te Aira were too much of a coincidence not to have been directly related to Maxwell.

A William Maxwell was recorded as bravely fighting fires in Tauranga in 1877, 1878, and 1881; as he would later be a leading member of the Te Aroha fire brigade, this was almost certainly William Buchanan Maxwell. Presumably these actions led to his receiving three medals from the Royal Humane Society. In October 1881 William Maxwell, probably the same man, was sued in Tauranga for the £6 7s 6d remaining from a £12 15s debt. The plaintiff explained ‘that this debt was due a couple of years. He was aware that defendant had been in employment, and in the receipt of good wages. Recently defendant had been acting as valet to Mr [Samuel?] Radcliffe, a gentleman that had the reputation of being a millionaire, and would consequently be expected to pay good wages’. Maxwell ‘stated that the debt was contracted in connection with a partnership arranged between him and Mr [Andrew] Wilson at Katikati, where they had been engaged in the bush business. He was willing to pay his share, and he thought his

47 Marriage Certificate of Annie Maxwell, 31 May 1893, 1893/4027, BDM; *Bay of Plenty Times*, Maketu Licensing Court, 6 June 1882, p. 2, advertisement, 16 May 1885, p. 3, 10 January 1917, p. 2.
49 *Bay of Plenty Times*, 10 January 1917, p. 2.
54 See *Bay of Plenty Times*, 21 October 1876, p. 3, 22 November 1876, p. 2, 3 January 1877, p. 3, 14 December 1878, p. 3, 30 January 1879, p. 3, 13 May 1879, p. 3.
partner ought to be made to pay his’. As Radcliffe’s valet he had received £9 10s; he was owed £27 by two other employers, and was willing to pay his debt once one of them paid the £18 owed. ‘He had a wife and two children to support’. He agreed to pay within a month.\(^{55}\)

From 1882 until 1890 Maxwell was a labourer at Rotorua.\(^{56}\) In March in the latter year, a Rotorua correspondent reported that Maxwell, ‘our fellow townsman’, had ‘made a very lucky purchase in horseflesh. He bought a pony a short time ago for £5’, and when a man saw it ‘do a spin in company with one of the crack Waikato stock’ he offered Maxwell £10 for it.\(^{57}\) In 1891 he was at Whangamata, still working as a labourer.\(^{58}\) When his elder daughter married in May 1893 he was living with her and the Douglas family at Halfway House and he gave his occupations as both labourer and guide.\(^{59}\) He was recorded as being a labourer living at Rotorua from that year until 1896.\(^{60}\) In September 1895 he was working as a ‘boots’ in a Paeroa hotel,\(^{61}\) and three years was a miner there.\(^{62}\) In 1896 he was a member of the Paeroa fire brigade.\(^{63}\) In September 1898, when still described as being a miner, he spent over a month in the Thames hospital recovering from having a thumb amputated.\(^{64}\)

AT TE AROHA

In January 1899, Maxwell wrote from Te Aroha to the Minister of Mines:

I am out on the ranges here prospecting and I think that before very long I will have something very good to show, in the meantime I wish to know if you could give me any assistance from any prospecting association or if any subsidy can be given to prospectors.

\(^{55}\) Magistrate’s Court, Bay of Plenty Times, 10 October 1881, p. 2.

\(^{56}\) Tauranga Electoral Rolls, 1882, p. 17, 1885, p. 17, 1887, p. 16.

\(^{57}\) Rotorua Correspondent, Bay of Plenty Times, 24 March 1890, p. 2.

\(^{58}\) Te Aroha Electoral Roll, 1891, p. 23.

\(^{59}\) Marriage Certificate of Annie Maxwell, 31 May 1893, 1893/4027, BDM.

\(^{60}\) Bay of Plenty Electoral Rolls, 1893, p. 36; 1894, p. 33; 1896, p. 37.

\(^{61}\) Thames Hospital, Admissions Register 1884-1901, folio 68, YCAH 14075/1a, ANZ-A.

\(^{62}\) Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1897, p. 39.


\(^{64}\) Thames Hospital, Admissions Register 1884-1901, folio 95, YCAH 14075/1a, ANZ-A.
I have been laid up by accident for some 4 months, and have run pretty short otherwise I would not apply for any funds. I intend giving the place here a thorough good trial.  

This accident referred to must have led to the amputation of his thumb. A copy of the regulations relating to applications for assistance was sent to him, but he did not apply. As in October he was granted a residence site at Mackaytown, he may not have settled in Te Aroha yet. Because the rent was not paid, a summons was issued against him in September 1904, but could not be served because he could not be found; the arrears were remitted five years later. In June 1901, he purchased the Golden Crown Special Quartz Claim, just over 53 acres near the hot springs. Because he paid rent only until the end of 1901, he forfeited it in January 1903 and the following January was sued for £5 8s and costs. A distress warrant was issued, but 'returned No Effects'; in late 1905 the rent was treated as unrecoverable. Thus ended his mining career, although in his probate he was described as a miner.

His Te Aroha News obituary estimated that he had lived in Te Aroha for 'over 20 years', rendering it 'invaluable assistance' in many ways, especially in connection with Fire Brigade and Band matters. He was a member of the former institution since its inception many years ago, and was, up to the time of his

---

65 W.B. Maxwell to Minister of Mines, 12 January 1899, Mines Department, MD 1, 99/72, ANZ-W.
66 Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to W.B. Maxwell, 24 January 1899, Mines Department, MD 1, 99/72, ANZ-W.
67 Warden’s Court, Ohinemuri Gazette, 28 October 1899, p. 2.
68 Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Special Claims 1887-1895, p. 184, ZAAP 13294/1A, ANZ-A.
69 Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Plaints 1903, 9/1903, BBAV 11572/3a, ANZ-A.
70 Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1887-1909, folio 141, BBAV 11500/8b; Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court Home Warrant Book 1883-1928, 11/1904, BBAV 11498/1a, ANZ-A.
71 Piako County Clerk to Minister for Mines, 25 September 1905, Piako County Council, Letterbook 1905-1906, Matamata-Piako District Council Archives, Te Aroha; Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1887-1909, folio 141, BBAV 11500/8b, ANZ-A.
72 Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/602, ANZ-A.
death, caretaker of the station. He held the five year service medal, bars, and many certificates.\textsuperscript{73}

He joined the volunteer fire brigade upon its formation in 1900, and two years later was elected its foreman.\textsuperscript{74} In 1909 he was training new firemen.\textsuperscript{75} Also in that year, to get a very sick man to the Thames hospital he drove the ambulance to the railway station.\textsuperscript{76} Two years later he was still ‘closely allied’ with the fire brigade.\textsuperscript{77} In 1914, at a meeting of its sports club, ‘an enlarged photograph of Veteran Maxwell was presented’.\textsuperscript{78} It is not known whether he played a musical instrument, but in 1909 he was the brass band’s librarian.\textsuperscript{79}

According to the \textit{Te Aroha News}, ‘everyone who knows Mr Maxwell is impressed with his cheery, vigorous personality’.\textsuperscript{80} The personality of his faithful dog Dingo was less popular, for someone poisoned it.\textsuperscript{81} According to the \textit{Observer}, writing in the last year of his life, Maxwell was ‘as much a piece of Te Aroha as the mountain itself…. He must be approaching the age of the mountain, but he’s just as sprightly as the spring lamb the poets rhapsodise about and the butchers advertise but never sell’. It described him as ‘a fine old chap’ and ‘Te Aroha’s pet adornment’.\textsuperscript{82}

In September 1908, he was sufficiently robust to be a full back in the fire brigade and football club rugby match.\textsuperscript{83} The following month, after he had been confined to bed for some days, the newspaper commented that it took ‘a good deal to keep “Mac” in bed’.\textsuperscript{84} Not until a month later could he leave his house ‘after his recent severe illness’.\textsuperscript{85} His illness in the following

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{73} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 18 August 1915, p. 3.
\bibitem{74} \textit{Thames Star}, 5 October 1900, p. 2; \textit{Auckland Weekly News}, 16 October 1902, p. 33.
\bibitem{75} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 14 January 1909, p. 2, 30 January 1909, p. 2.
\bibitem{76} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 19 January 1909, p. 2.
\bibitem{77} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 29 April 1911, p. 2.
\bibitem{78} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 10 August 1914, p. 2.
\bibitem{79} \textit{Auckland Weekly News}, 27 August 1908, p. 39.
\bibitem{80} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 16 February 1909, p. 2.
\bibitem{81} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 29 April 1909, p. 2.
\bibitem{82} \textit{Observer}, 21 November 1914, p. 5.
\bibitem{83} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 17 September 1908, p. 2.
\bibitem{84} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 15 October 1908, p. 2.
\bibitem{85} \textit{Te Aroha News}, 12 November 1908, p. 2.
\end{thebibliography}
year was sufficiently severe for the newspaper to report his recovery.\textsuperscript{86} He was severely ill early in 1910.\textsuperscript{87} In January 1912, he had a severe attack of ‘neuralgia of the stomach’.\textsuperscript{88} His final illness, gastro-intestinal inflammation, lasted only five days, and he died in a private hospital at Te Aroha in August 1915.\textsuperscript{89} As he had ‘emerged triumphantly’ from periods of illness over the past two years, ‘his death came as a shock to the whole town and district’.\textsuperscript{90}

His will, made in 1909, divided his estate equally between his three children, and when probate was sought it was estimated that he left an estate of less than £200.\textsuperscript{91} His executor discovered its value to be nil.\textsuperscript{92}

Fondly remembered, a photograph of ‘Veteran Maxwell’ was published in the local newspaper in 1931.\textsuperscript{93} He was recalled 50 years later as ‘always good for a yarn’ and ‘particularly popular with children’.\textsuperscript{94}

CONCLUSION

Maxwell was another example of men who had fought Maori then becoming very personally acquainted with them; George Thomas Wilkinson was the most notable of them.\textsuperscript{95} Like so many others, he had a variety of occupations in a variety of places; less commonly, his personality was such that he was one of the most popular residents of Te Aroha and was fondly remembered for many years.

\textsuperscript{86} Te Aroha News, 9 September 1909, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{87} Te Aroha News, 24 March 1910, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{88} Te Aroha News, 25 January 1912, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{89} Death Certificate of William Buchanan Maxwell, 17 August 1915, 1915/280, BDM; Te Aroha News, 18 August 1915, pp. 2, 3.
\textsuperscript{90} Te Aroha News, 18 August 1915, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{91} Probate of William Buchanan Maxwell, Hamilton Probates, BCDG 4420/602, ANZ-A.
\textsuperscript{92} Testamentary Register 1915-1916, folio 337, BBCB 4208/10, ANZ-A.
\textsuperscript{93} Te Aroha News, 19 June 1931, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{94} Charles Kingsley-Smith, \textit{This is Te Aroha: The story of the founding of Te Aroha and the settling of its adjoining districts, 1880-1980} (Te Aroha, 1981), p. 44.
\textsuperscript{95} See paper on Merea Wikiriwhi and George Thomas Wilkinson.