



Bringing the Past to the Future

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

NEWSLETTER OF THE UPPER CLUTHA
HISTORICAL RECORDS SOCIETY INC.

(Upper Clutha includes Cardrona, Albert Town, Luggate, Queensberry, Tarras, Hawea,
Makarora, Wanaka and Lakes Wanaka and Hawea)

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GEORGE? GEORGE WHO?

Learning who George was should be compulsory reading for any student of the history of the Upper Clutha. Twentieth century writers of our history such as the well-known Irvine Roxburgh, John Angus, and FWG Miller, owe much to this pioneer, teacher, entrepreneur, sawmiller, ferryman, sailor, shopkeeper, father, husband and prolific writer. Persons of such stature often have places or streets named after them, but I know of none in the Upper Clutha.

George Magnus Hassing was born on 16 March 1837 in Denmark, just before Queen Victoria ascended to the British Crown. After completing his education he became a sailor and sailed the 'seven seas' until he arrived in Lyttleton in February 1859, after a voyage from London. There he and two other sailors "jumped ship". Whilst the officers wined and dined late into the night, the sailors quickly proceeded over the Port Hills bridle track to Christchurch. They successfully travelled on to Wellington

even though the "men in blue" were on the lookout for them.

In 1860, George obtained a contract with Stewart and Kinross to supply timber for posts, rails, and shingles for the Wanaka West Station and so started a remarkable association with the Upper Clutha. He lived a very full and active life, so much so, that it is impossible to record within the confines of this newsletter, all that he occupied his life with – he was still working up to age 85.

George and his partner, Bill Atkin, completed the timber contract in the summer of 1861 and then he teamed up with William Ellacott. The Arrow Goldrush led to the establishment of a ferry across the Clutha where the old Albertown was situated near the confluence of the Hawea and Clutha Rivers. This was in January 1863 but he saw a greater profit in selling that ferry and establishing a new one and a store at Sandypoint which he sold to the Maori Chief Patu in 1865. George also purchased the ferry at Rockypoint just before the Bendigo goldfield became wellknown.

In 1867 George tried his luck chasing gold on the Buller River but this goldrush proved to be a bit of a fizzer for many men, including George, and he returned two years later to "... *my first love, Wanaka Lake, Otago ...*" where he joined his friend Alfred Pinn on Pigeon Island (now Mou Waho). There they built the lake vessels *Eureka* and *Nun*.

The Cardrona goldrush attracted George and he became the main owner of the Empire Gold-Mining claim. He married Elizabeth Lavinia Agnes Wilson Price on 23 February 1876 but eight months later, he filed for bankruptcy on 17 October 1876, unable to pay his debts. George was discharged from bankruptcy on 15 October 1878 and good fortune smiled a week later when, on 24 October 1878, their daughter, Christina Margaret Agnes was born. Coincidentally, this was the week of the Great Flood that ruined many Cardrona miners. George also busied himself as secretary of the Miners Association and taught the many Chinese miners to learn some English. He was known by them as "Mr Ah Sing".



George with his grand-daughter Petrina

Good fortune smiled again and in 1878 George applied to the Southland Education Board for the vacant position of teacher at the Cardrona School. He was successful and he remained in this position until 1885. He also involved himself in the town's community affairs helping to obtain £6,000 for a "mountain traffic road", a cemetery, library and a large public commonage. He also set up a miners orchestra in the town.

His time in Cardrona ended after considerable disagreement with local clergy who wished to impose religious teaching etc during school hours. George could not continue to teach under those conditions, so he moved to Hokonui and then in 1888 to Hedgehope. The salary there was supposed to be £42 per annum but because of poor attendances, it reportedly cost George £1-5-0 in the first 3 months to teach the 35 children. I wonder how modern-day teachers would react to that situation?

His grand-daughter, Petrina Georgina Elizabeth Hassing, was born in 1899 and his wife died in 1906 when he retired.

It is reported he was known to partake of a nip of whisky and on one occasion at the local hall had hidden a bottle in the hedge nearby. When retiring at intervals with friends for a nip, he discovered the bottle gone. He promptly stormed back into the hall and let the attendees know what he thought! It is believed a replacement bottle was later purchased for him, such was his standing in the community.

But George found that he was not suited to retirement and offered himself as a relieving teacher until he was 85 years of age. He spent his final years at Riverton with his grand-daughter and died in the local hospital on 25 December 1928. He

and his wife are buried in the Old Winton Cemetery.

Thus the life of a valuable citizen of the Upper Clutha ended but his detailed memoirs are still available for us all to read. He was a prolific writer of history, especially to the Otago Witness and other local newspapers. His articles are very valuable sources of information about the early days of Upper Clutha settlement. A number of his articles were printed in a book called "Pages From the Memory Log of G. M. Hassing" (published in 1930). Copies can occasionally be found in local libraries or for sale in secondhand bookshops. But do not forget the Paperspast website mentioned in our last newsletter. Just search on "George Magnus Hassing" (or even just Hassing) from say 1860 onwards and the resulting list will be substantial.

References for this article has been sourced from Paperspast, "The Memory Log", "Aspiring Settlers" by John Angus, "Wanaka Story" by Irvine Roxburgh, and the Lothians blog (in two parts) –

Part One <http://the-lothians.blogspot.com/search?q=hassing+part+one>

Part Two <http://the-lothians.blogspot.com/search?q=hassing>

But I have barely scratched the surface of the history of this remarkable man.

UCHRS HISTORY – PART 2

This follows on from Part One published in the last newsletter:-

The move into our new Records Room in the library was followed by some significant changes for our Society.

From the beginning we have had great support from Wanaka Library staff including an hour a week during which Julie Stretch helped me with accessioning archives and scanning and creating digital images of our photos.

Stan Kane resigned as President in 2004 after successfully steering our committee from 1985. Peg Mathieson's resignation as Secretary followed in 2005 and Ivor Hayman, our Treasurer died suddenly in 2007. Ken Thomlinson succeeded Stan as President followed by Graham Dickson who was elected in 2006.

David Simmers was elected Treasurer in 2007 and worked hard raising funds for various projects: – The Windmill at Windmill corner, The Dog Trial's "statue" by Mt Iron (both built by Graham Taylor), the very successful "The Upper Clutha 150 Years" booklet (produced by Graham Dickson and Ken Thomlinson), new shelving and map drawers for the Records Room and ongoing funding for a computer, scanner and printer with related computer and IT costs. Other projects needing help with funding included the Wanaka and Districts Schools 125th Reunion, the WW1 book "Courageous and Free" produced in conjunction with the Wanaka Genealogical Group, and Loris King's project, "Unmarked Graves". In 2018 Ken Allan was elected Treasurer and David became our Secretary.

Back in 1993 Stan had co-opted Ken and Margaret Thomlinson to find a new way to store and catalogue the UCHRS' archives. With the help of the committee we sorted the material into labelled and numbered boxes and recorded box and file numbers in the Accessions Book and the Index Card file.

The decision in 2004 to buy a computer, scanner and printer changed the way we recorded and shared our archival collection. Since purchasing the database program, Past Perfect, in 2007, entering our records and researching requests for information from the public has become much simpler.

Brian Gilbert helped design a way to use Past Perfect for our records and a working group entered them into the database. Jan Kelly later helped us catalogue and enter our maps into the database and the scanning, digitizing and recording of our large photographic collection is ongoing with help from Julie Stretch, Greta Bowron and Pam Kane.

Jo Wilton joined our committee in 2008. She set up our Pioneer Register project and later managed computer-based projects, including our successful web page. Erena Barker has also provided expertise in this area and now helps me with accessioning. Jo's Wednesday working group has streamlined the way our Records Room functions and the indexes provided for many of our books and paper records has added greatly to the researchable information held on Past Perfect.

A significant example of this is the task taken on by Dave Simmers, with help from Pam Dovey, of indexing our Ian McCrone material given to us in 2004 not long before he died. Pam and Barbara Chinn have written several historical articles for the Wanaka Sun.

A Monuments project started by Ivor Hayman was completed by Graham Dickson with two file folders containing photographs and information on all monuments in the Upper Clutha area.

Richie and Iris Hewitt donated a TV monitor for outside our Records Room in 2018. This now runs a slide-show designed by Ken Allan using our photographic collection. Ken also came up with the idea for producing regular Newsletters which he now edits.

(Special thanks to Margaret Thomlinson for writing the two articles on the Society's

100 YEARS AGO

Hughie Glass of Lawrence announced in the paper that he had purchased the Wanaka Hotel.

Jan 25–27: it was reported the area was suffering from floods all the way down the Clutha Valley. Lake water had risen up to Perrow's Store at Wanaka and the Ewing family had to abandon their home on the Matukituki Peninsula after stacking their furniture etc as high as they could. W R Norman was able to row around the homestead and buildings the next day (looking for his own tent and possessions). The flood was sometimes described as being as big as the Great Flood of 1878.

By 10 March the weather was much better and Mt Barker was experiencing good yields from the grain threshing.

George "Shang" Matheson arrived back in Pembroke from overseas service claiming he never had one day off sick – his Army Record says otherwise and he died in July from tuberculosis contracted overseas. Don't believe all you read in the newspapers!

JO'S NOTES AND UPDATES

Wednesday morning research sessions have recommenced. Any new volunteers are most welcome.

We are assisting the history students of MAC with their project on timelines. This started off with a visit to the Millenium Tiles which forms part of their project.

Our database "People Biographies" contains the Upper Clutha Pioneer Family Register plus information on other local 'identities'. This valuable information is constantly growing.

THE MILLENIUM TILES

I hear on the grapevine that some people have now reacted to the show of concern by Wanaka locals (the petition and other work going on in the background) at the possible destruction of this important historical facility of the district. Judging from the article in the Otago Daily Times on 20 Feb, it looks like some progress is being made to preserve at least part of the current facility.

PLANS FOR THIS YEAR

The Society's computer is starting to show its age (occasionally has 'grand-dad naps' when it is most needed!) and will need replacement. A project is underway to identify the Society's computer and communication needs for the next few years. This will involve having to obtain some funding towards the project.

Some thought is being given to publishing a booklet on local historic locations.

MEMORY BANK

There are times when I could do one of these (information 'withdrawals' are sometimes problematic these days - however this is slightly different!). But first, please remember that we want to retain our Upper Clutha history records here as part of the Society's collection. That does not stop you providing digital copies to this project.

The Memory Bank is an initiative undertaken by the Central Otago Heritage Trust, developed in close cooperation with Department of Information Science, University of Otago.

Community groups and individuals with an interest in Central Otago's heritage may use this website to store information, images, stories and recordings, at no cost.

Over time, it is envisaged that the Memory Bank will become a major heritage resource which could provide references for writers seeking authentic backgrounds, historians, librarians and museum curators researching our social history, statutory authorities requiring information for planning and resource management purposes or tourism operators seeking business opportunities which focus on heritage stories.

Further development of the website is planned but if you have any queries, or need assistance, contact the Central Otago Heritage Trust's Heritage Co-ordinator, Alice Speirs of Wanaka. Contact can be made by email to centralotagoheritagetrust@gmail.com

The website is at <http://memorybank.co.nz/en/site>

MORE IRISH 'MATTERS'

In the last newsletter I gave you the definition of "Irish Diplomacy". My cousins in Ireland occasionally send me little 'gems' so here is one on "Irish Philosophy":

There are only two things to worry about,
either you are well or you are sick.

If you are well

then there is nothing to worry about.

If you are sick,

There are two things to worry about.

Either you will get well or you will die.

If you get well,

there is nothing to worry about.

Either you will go to heaven or to hell.

If you go to heaven,

there is nothing to worry about.

But if you go to hell,

you'll be so damn busy shaking hands with
your friends,

You won't have time to WORRY!!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Just a reminder that the next AGM will take place probably in May before the next newsletter. An email will be sent out to all interested parties and members when we have a firm date. It will also appear in The Messenger notices.

history).

OUR PUBLICATIONS

The Society has published a small number of books and booklets over the years. Three are still for sale:

Skirt Tales – Historical Stories from the Upper Clutha - \$25. This is the 3rd Edition and is available from the Society, Paperplus Wanaka, and the libraries at Wanaka and Hawea

125, Look Alive – 125 Years of Schooling in the Wanaka District - \$12.00. Available from the Society or the Wanaka Library.

The Upper Clutha – 150 Years - \$5. A short history of the Upper Clutha district. Available from the Society or the Wanaka Library

Courageous and Free – Stories of Upper Clutha WW1 Soldiers and Nurse – **Sold Out!** – but we are investigating publishing another edition.

Postage is extra – please enquire from the Society.

WHO ARE WE?

President: Graham Dickson

Vice President: Jo Wilton

Secretary: David Simmers

Treasurer: Ken Allan

Committee Members: Ken and Margaret Thomlinson, Bruce Foulds.

The Society was established in 1985 to collect and preserve records and images of the history of the Upper Clutha region and make them available to members of the public. The records are held in a special room in the Wanaka Library and a team of

volunteers provides research assistance (appointments are necessary) to members of the public who may be looking for their family history or for persons searching for aspects of NZ history. Copying costs apply.

Please contact a Librarian at the Wanaka Library who will pass on the request, or send us an email to uchrsoc@gmail.com.

The Society is Incorporated and is a Registered Charity. Funding is reliant on the assistance of a variety of community funders and individual gifts. Donations are very welcome, as are new members.

Donations may be made to our bank account 03-1739-0012311-00 with the reference – Donation. As we are a Registered Charity, donations over \$5 are tax deductible – please ask for a receipt.

Membership Subscriptions for year ending 31/3/2019 are \$10-00.

Website:

<http://www.uppercluthahistory.org/>

Email: uchrsoc@gmail.com