

New Plymouth Genealogy Society Incorporated Newsletter



Number 42

September 2025

Society Library: Open free to members. A small charge to visitors.

Opening Hours: Every Monday and Saturday: 10 am to 12 noon
Other times available by appointment

Taranaki Heritage Month 2025

Heritage month is organised by [Heritage Taranaki](#) and runs from 3 October to 8 November 2025. It features a diverse range of activities, discussions and events to engage with the public, honour the past and improve understanding of local heritage.

This year, our society is contributing to Heritage Month with an open day at our rooms on Saturday 4 October from 10am to 4pm. Entry is free.



Next meeting: 7:30pm Tuesday 2 Sep 2025

AI telling the story

Artificial Intelligence is a new tool that can help you craft compelling narratives. AI can help transform dry genealogical data into engaging family stories while maintaining historical accuracy. It can suggest narrative structures, help overcome writer's block, and ensure stories flow naturally. AI can also help you write in different styles and assist with clarity and readability.

Come along to hear how AI can help you with your genealogy stories.



Chairperson: Gail Tanner 027 376 0630
Secretary: Sally Morch
Treasurer: Sharyn Guthrie
Committee: Lorraine Austin
Jeff Grange
Peter Hewett
Glenys Krutz
Lois Lovell
Russell Smith

New Plymouth Genealogy Society Inc
c/- Gail Tanner
122 Wairau Road
New Plymouth 4314

Meetings: 7:30 pm, first Tuesday each month
at society rooms, Moturoa Shopping Centre
access is off the Whiteley Street car park

Email: newplymouthgenealogy@gmail.com

Website: www.genealogynp.com

Last month: Members interests

At our August meeting, several members gave us a short outline of the research that they are doing.

Some of our members listed the family names and locations of the ancestors that they are researching. Most of these are in the UK.

Bill Irving showed us what is possible using the [Wikitree ship categories](#) to research immigrants to New Zealand.

Roger Hawkins told us about a new book on the Hirst family in 19th century New Plymouth. When our group indexed the New Plymouth land records about 20 years ago, it was noticed that a large proportion of the land owners were from, or were associated with Halifax in Yorkshire. The indexing team didn't know why, but this recent book explains how the business dealings by the Hirst family were behind this.

Reviews of this book by two of our members are attached to this newsletter.



Grace & Thomas HIRST c.1850 Puke Ariki PHO2015-0238

Chairperson's Report

How the time has flown this year. I can't believe we are heading into September already.

It's been a busy month with our open weekend at the Bridge Club, then a trip to Auckland with Sharyn to the 2025 Auckland Family History Expo (what a great weekend), and then a bout of winter woes with a horrible cough for the last couple of weeks.

The open days weren't as successful as we'd hoped but the people that did come got top notch help with no queues. It was nice to catch up with the ladies from Inglewood, Hawera and Stratford too. Thank you to all the helpers and especially Sharyn for organising it all and Jeff for taking care of the parking.

We are having another open day at our own rooms on Saturday 4 October for Taranaki Heritage Month. Keep an eye out for more details about that.

We are looking into having a couple of new taps installed at the main sink and the handbasin to give us hot water for washing dishes and hands. The handbasin will also be moved slightly to make it easier to use. We've also had all the lights sorted.

In time for the open days etc we have also had a couple of new additions of a flag and a pull up sign. These will both be used when the library is open as well. They replace the little sign we used to put out. Thank you to Russell for organising these. They are fabulous!

This meeting Sally is going to give us an overview of AI – I must say I was terrified of AI until I took a course at the Auckland Expo, which helped me understand it more and not be so frightened of using it. Still prefer the old ways though.

All the best

Gail Tanner
Society Chairperson

BOOK FAIR

The Salvation Army New Plymouth
9, 10, 11 October 2025



EAST END SKATE RINK
Doors open **9am–6pm** Thursday
9am–7pm Friday
9am–2pm Saturday

MAIN RINK: Collectables, \$2 books and Childrens
OTHER RINK: \$4 books—all top quality books
sorted into many categories

We will have eftspos and loads of bargains for everyone. Come along and support our work in the community. Phone **027 491 0012** for details.



Open Day: New Plymouth Genealogy

On the weekend of 2 and 3 August, we held genealogy open days at the New Plymouth Bridge Club. These were open to the public and free to attend.

Genealogy groups from Inglewood, Stratford and Hawera were there with desks and information. We took along a selection of our research material.



Desks were set up to help people with genealogy topics, including

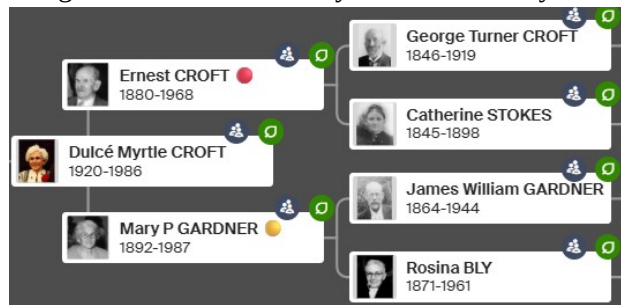
- general research of their ancestors
- DNA guidance and support
- our Taranaki Biographical Index
- demonstrations of online genealogy, such as [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)
- information and demonstration of the [Taranaki Media Archive](https://www.taranakimediaarchive.co.nz/).



DNA Interest Group

Next meeting: Sunday 21 September 2025, 1:30pm at the rooms.

I will be showing you how to separate your DNA matches into your four main grandparent groups using the colour dot/block system on Ancestry.



This helps you work through your matches in smaller groups, especially helpful if you are looking for a parent, grandparent or great grandparent. I have been over this before and it is a very helpful exercise. It will help you more if you make notes on your DNA matches before coming to the Interest group meeting, if you can identify your most recent common ancestor couple or estimate who.

Using this part of my pedigree to demonstrate – e.g. CROFT/ STOKES or GARDNER/ BLY and if you know the relationship you have with the DNA match then 1C1R (1C1R) or 2C (2nd cousin). I will also be going over these relationships as well.

Sharyn Guthrie

NZSG Online DNA Interest Group

Did you know that the NZSG Online DNA Interest Group (ODIG) has now been going for 2 years! Yes, it was our anniversary presentation on last Wednesday and this was given by Lorna Henderson from Kapiti Genealogy. Lorna spoke on the new Mitotree from FTDNA and helped us all realize the value and way you can use mitochondrial DNA in your genealogy research.



You can join NZSG through their website – [genealogy.org.nz](https://www.genealogy.org.nz) and it is \$115 per annum. I am on the ODIG committee.

Sharyn Guthrie

Library Roster: September 2025

Monday 10 am to 12 noon
Saturday 10 am to 12 noon

Mon 1 Sep Charles Le Breton
Sat 6 Sep Karen Crowe
Mon 8 Sep Lorraine Austin
Sat 13 Sep Russell Smith
Mon 15 Sep Annette Larsen
Sat 20 Sep Lea Bellini
Mon 22 Sep Graeme Jury
Sat 27 Sep Jeff Grange
Mon 29 Sep Sally Morch
Sat 4 Oct Karen Crowe
Mon 6 Oct Charles Le Breton

Facebook Group



New Plymouth Genealogy Society

■ Private group · 265 members

I learn so much from being on many groups on Facebook. Our group can also be helpful and we now have 294 members, many of whom are keen to help you with your question. Do you have a photo you are unsure about or would like more information about. Do you have a story about your ancestors you would like to share.

This group has been formed for our members as well as those others who come from Taranaki or have family who did and want to know more about them. Have a think about how you could contribute.

Sharyn Guthrie

Internet Connection

The internet connection for our society rooms is generously sponsored by Primo.



Primo has supported us with internet connectivity since 2017. Please consider Primo for your internet service and for mobile phone plans. Ring them on 0800 123 774 or visit their website:

primo.nz

Library News

Magazines received;

Family Tree (Aug, Sep)

Newsletters received;

Canterbury, Dunedin, Feilding, Hutt Valley, Kapiti, Nelson, Palmerston North, Papakura, Papamoa, Porirua, Riccarton, Southland, South Waikato, Wellington, Whanganui

If you would like an email copy of newsletters from another genealogy society or branch, please contact Peter Hewett.



Newsletter

If you have any comments or suggestions for the newsletter, please contact the editor (Peter Hewett) at newplymouthgenealogy@gmail.com.

BOOK REVIEW

Grace Hirst A Settlers Life in New Plymouth

Author: Ian Connor Published by Heritage Press, Fielding

<https://heritagepress.nz/product/grace-hirst-a-settlers-life-in-new-plymouth/>

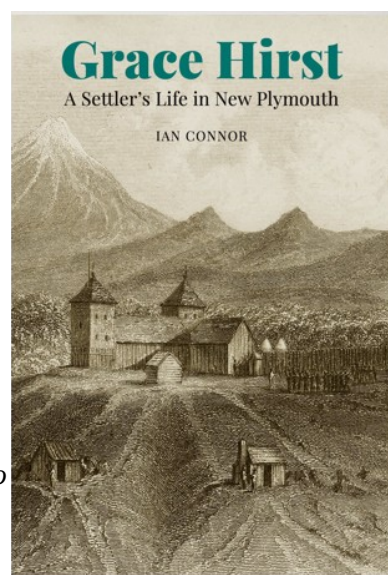
The book certainly lives up to the publisher's blurb,

Grace Hirst – A Settler's Life in New Plymouth is an important family and social history based on a treasure-trove of letters sent to her family in England over nearly 50 years.

Primary sources of history such as this provide insight into the experiences of our first settlers, from their harrowing voyages to an unknown country, to their struggles to build homes and livelihoods against the odds.

The Hirst family had to contend with the Land Wars, even burying many of their valued possessions in the garden and taking refuge in overcrowded, illness ridden New Plymouth for safety. But Grace Hirst was built of strong Yorkshire stuff, becoming the mainstay for her growing family of traders and farmers during the Taranaki Land Wars and the Long Depression of the 1880s.

Grace personifies the pioneer optimism and drive of early settlers in Taranaki. Described as 'pious and practical' by a fellow settler, Grace was stoic, at times stubborn, generous, loving and well able to make wry, pithy observations on life bound by her strong Christian faith. She died in 1901 at the age of 96, having witnessed, and recorded, one of the most extraordinary periods of New Zealand colonial history.



2001 Land Information New Zealand Project

Many older members will remember the Lands and Survey office that closed in 2001, twenty-four years ago. A project led by a young Bruce Bellini, set about indexing the grants of land in the fledging New Plymouth environs before the records were transferred to Hamilton. I seemed to spend a couple of months of lunchtimes in the then Atkinson building as I worked next door at Shell Todd Oil Services.

The team were puzzled by the large, indeed substantial number of grants to residents of Halifax, Yorkshire and thereabouts. Despite numerous enquiries, including consulting Taranaki historian Murray Moorhead and the Calderdale Family History Society, no explanation was found at the time.

It is the publication of this book in 2025 that provides the answer, for Grace Hirst's husband, James, became a wool broker and land agent in New Plymouth, and both maintained strong business relationships with their families and former business colleagues in Halifax.

The Hirst family were not artisans; they were primarily businessmen and were very aware of the need to not make a loss on a deal. Their wealth was sufficient to build a substantial house *Willowfield* in New Plymouth in 1863 in the block bordered by Cameron Street, Pendarves Street and Boys High hill. They eventually built five houses for each of their New Zealand based children in Albert Terrace today's Pendarves Street. *Willowfield* and these five houses became known as the *Hen and Chickens*.

One disappointment: the author gives no clue as whether he used the resources of the Taranaki Biography Index or not. As the book itself, it is an essential read for any Taranaki genealogist.

A copy has been obtained by the NPDC Library.

Reviewed by Roger Hawkins

REFERENCES

Calderdale FHS: <https://www.cfhsweb.com/>

New Book for New Plymouth Genealogy Society Library

Grace Hirst: A Settler's Life in New Plymouth

By Ian Conner

Reviewed by Russell Smith

In *Grace Hirst: A Settler's Life in New Plymouth*, Ian Conner brings to life the extraordinary journey of Grace Hirst (née Bracken), a Yorkshire woman whose resilience and strong Christian Faith helped shape the early colonial fabric of New Plymouth, Taranaki.

Grace, her husband Thomas, and five of their seven children departed Yorkshire, England aboard the barque *Gwalior* on 15 December 1851. After nearly seven months at sea, they arrived in New Plymouth on 4 July 1852 exhausted, hopeful, and entirely unprepared for the trials ahead.

This meticulously researched account chronicles the Hirst family's harrowing voyage and their determined efforts to build a life in an unfamiliar land. From carving homes out of the bush to surviving the Taranaki Land Wars and the Long Depression of the 1880s, the Hirsts endured hardship with grit and grace. Grace herself emerges as a towering figure practical, generous, devout, and fiercely protective of her family.

During times of conflict, the Hirsts buried treasured possessions in their garden and sought refuge in overcrowded, disease-ridden New Plymouth. Yet Grace remained a steadfast matriarch, raising a family of traders and farmers who would contribute to the region's growth.

Living to the age of 96, Grace witnessed one of the most transformative periods in New Zealand's colonial history. Her story is not just a family record, it is a window into the soul of a pioneering generation.

For genealogists, historians, and anyone curious about the settler experience in 19th-century New Plymouth, Taranaki, Aotearoa, this book offers a vivid and invaluable portrait of life of early colonial settlers.

