

Ōhinewai

RIVER, WETLAND, RAIL AND ROAD

22 JANUARY 1942 · C.152.89 · No. 12422

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Publication Master Revision 2

20 September 2026

Controlling prose source: Ōhinewai Reader Manuscript Revision 19 - Whole Book Prose and Family Locations Integration - 20 Sep 2026.

Cover: Ōhinewai and the Waikato River, 22 January 1942, frame C.152.89, No. 12422. Project-held original aerial.

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Introduction

The old road

Most people now pass Ōhinewai at 110 kilometres an hour. From the expressway there is a quick view of flat paddocks, the interchange and the new industrial buildings, then the place is behind you. Turn off and the old road is still there, running past the school and hall, former business sites, houses, sheds and farms. It has been railway road, Great South Road, State Highway 1 and now a local road, and each version is still visible if you know where to look.



Modern aerial view of Ōhinewai, with the Waikato River at left, the former State Highway 1 corridor through the centre, and the Waikato Expressway at right.

Until 2003 this was State Highway 1. Traffic between Auckland and Hamilton came straight through Ōhinewai, and the road earned its keep from it. There was a supermarket, garage, nursery, cafés and the usual collection of places where people stopped because they needed petrol, food, plants, a cup of tea or simply a break from driving. Local people used them too, of course. For families living around Ōhinewai these businesses were part of ordinary life, not roadside curiosities waiting to be photographed for a history book.

Then the traffic moved. The 2003 four-laning left the old highway suddenly quiet. Some businesses disappeared, others changed use, while the school, hall, farms and houses carried on. The road still had the width and shape of a main route, but the endless line of cars and trucks had shifted a few hundred metres away.

Ōhinewai had shifted around a transport route before. The railway arrived in 1877 and drew mail, passengers, farm supplies, freight and nearby businesses towards the

station. John Wilkins remembered being up at about four in the morning to put mail on the train, cattle being loaded, and bags of stock feed and a tonne of cement coming through the goods-shed area. The official records explain the railway. Memories like those explain what people actually did with it.

The road gradually took over more of that work. Horse teams gave way to trucks, blacksmithing gave way to motor repairs, and buses and delivery vehicles could reach farms nowhere near the station. The Lumsdens moved from horses into early International trucks. Oliver Wilkins combined shop deliveries, mail and school buses; a generation later John Wilkins spent decades driving school buses and delivery runs, including newspapers at hours when most of the district was asleep.

The same names keep turning up because the same families were involved in several parts of local life. The McKinnons farmed Riverdale opposite the station. Robert Muir helped establish the school. Gall and Son carried goods and mail with horses and wagons. The Fosters, Lynches, Lumsdens and Wilkins appear through farming, contracting, transport, shops and community organisations. Around them are schoolchildren, railway workers, sports clubs, Māori communities, shopkeepers, farmers and the occasional person having a particularly bad day at a level crossing.

The land underneath all of this has always had its own ideas. Ōhinewai sits among the Waikato River, shallow lakes, peat and wet ground. Roads sank, floods cut routes, drains changed paddocks and the railway crossed country that had never been especially interested in becoming dry. Long before any of those works, Māori lived and travelled through a connected river and wetland landscape. Later came raupatu, survey, farms, the railway, Great South Road, State Highway 1 and the expressway. Each left another layer.

Ōhinewai does not arrange itself particularly neatly into chapters. The railway overlaps the shops, the shops overlap the farms and families, and the wet ground interferes with almost everything. Some events survive in newspapers, court files and engineering reports. Others survive because somebody remembered the early train, the shop beside the Post Office, a flood across the road or a vehicle breaking down at exactly the wrong time. Put together, they make the place recognisable again.

Chapter 1

Under the peat

Ōhinewai looks flat enough to have avoided geology altogether. From the road there is pasture, drains, low rises, a few lakes and a great deal of sky. The Waikato River runs to the west and peat country spreads east towards Lake Waikare. Yet beneath that apparently uncomplicated surface sits a very long history of wetlands, rivers, lakes, volcanic material and buried coal. Flat, in this part of the Waikato, does not mean simple.

Two wetlands

The first useful thing to know is that the peat near the surface and the coal deep below it are not the same swamp with an unusually long memory. They are separated by roughly 35 million years. The coal began as plant material accumulating in ancient wetlands during the Eocene, long before anything resembling the modern Waikato landscape existed. Waterlogged vegetation built up, was buried under later sediment and, over immense periods, became the sub-bituminous coal that would later make Huntly famous and tempt planners to look seriously at mining beneath Ōhinewai.

A lot happened in between. The old coal wetlands disappeared beneath later deposits, at times even beneath the sea, and the basin filled again with gravel, sand, silt, clay and volcanic material carried by rivers. Cores drilled at Ōhinewai have gone through roughly 200 metres of younger sediment above the older coal-bearing rocks. For anyone who has ever looked across a paddock here and thought there was not much going on underneath, 200 metres is a fairly decisive rebuttal.

Volcanoes also contributed without needing to be anywhere near Ōhinewai. Ash could fall directly, but the Waikato River was just as capable of moving pumice and volcanic sediment downstream and depositing it again. A geological unit even carries the name Ōhinewai Tephra, although it is about 150,000 years old and has nothing to do with the much later Taupō eruption familiar to most New Zealanders. Pumice became so common in the district that by the early twentieth century Ōhinewai had a pumice industry of its own.

Lakes under the paddocks

The landscape people eventually lived in took shape much later. Near the end of the last Ice Age, enormous volumes of sediment moved through the Waikato basin and slowed drainage across the low country. Shallow lakes spread through areas around modern Lake Ōhinewai and Lake Waikare. Later drilling found grey-green lake mud beneath the peat at Ōhinewai. Some of the land now carrying fences, drains and stock was once open water.

As those lakes changed and shallowed, vegetation crept across their margins. Dead plant material accumulated in waterlogged ground and slowly built the peatlands. In places the peat became six to nine metres thick. Over thousands of years it preserved pollen, charcoal and traces of volcanic ash. The plants around it changed. Fires came and went, including natural fires long before people arrived. The bog itself changed as it thickened and became increasingly dependent on rain rather than ordinary groundwater.

By the time people reached the lower Waikato, the main pieces of the landscape were already there. The Waikato River ran through its lower course. Lake Ōhinewai, Rotokawau and Lake Waikare sat among a much larger wetland system. Peat, swamp forest, shallow water, streams, backwaters and seasonally flooded ground occupied the low areas. Firmer terraces, river levees and rises stood out as the places where dry feet were more easily arranged.

Wet ground, long memory

Māori travelled through the waterways and wetlands because they were routes, food sources and useful parts of the landscape. Crown troops in the 1860s had a much harder time crossing the same country and relied heavily on the Waikato River. Road builders fought soft ground and floods. Farmers cut drains and watched peat settle as it dried. Great South Road could disappear under water. In the 1980s mine engineers contemplated pumping through saturated younger ground to reach coal formed in a completely different wetland tens of millions of years earlier.

Roads, factories and services can be built here, but peat and soft alluvium still have to be dealt with. Lake restoration still works with water moving through a landscape shaped long before drains and paddocks. Ōhinewai was built across the remains of lakes and wetlands beside a river that had already been organising movement for thousands of years. The ground has never been background scenery.

Chapter 2

Te Wai o Hine

When Polynesian settlers reached the Waikato in the thirteenth century, they entered a landscape in which water already joined almost everything together. The river, lakes, streams, wetlands and backwaters were not separate blue patches on a map. They were routes, food places and landmarks, with the useful dry ground threaded between them. A flood could redraw the practical map overnight. A place that was miserable to cross on foot could be straightforward by waka.

Water first

The Waikato River was the great route through this country, but the smaller waters mattered too. Lake Waikare, Lake Ōhinewai, Rotokawau, streams and repo formed part of an interconnected lower-Waikato system. Tuna, kōura, kākahi, wetland birds, fish and plant resources made these waters productive places. Raupō and harakeke had practical uses. The drier rises, terraces and levees provided better places for houses, storage and cultivation. Across Waikato, Māori gardeners altered soils and worked large horticultural areas where conditions suited them. The wettest peat country might be useless for kūmara and excellent for something else.

There is no secure first-arrival date for Ōhinewai itself. Archaeology around the wider district records settlement, gardens and pā across Waikato, including sites near Rangiriri and Lake Rotongaro. Ōhinewai sat inside that lived landscape long before a road or railway fixed a north-south line through it.

Two Hine stories

The name Ōhinewai carries two local traditions about Hine. The account preserved through Ōhinewai School tells of Hine, Pukewhau and Mahirangi, with Hine's grief and tears associated with the place. A second tradition, related by kaumātua Glen Tupuhi in a modern environmental study, remembers the lake as Ōhinewai or Te Wai o Hine, a place where the tūpuna Hine bathed. They are different stories, and they can remain different. What they share is Hine and the water.

Later writers offered translations such as 'girl's water place' or 'place of Hinewai'. The local traditions are more specific: both keep the name attached to Hine and to water, while preserving different accounts of why. The two traditions are left distinct here.

By the nineteenth century European travellers began leaving more written descriptions of the Waikato. Their accounts often dwell on swamp, raupō and difficult tracks, which says at least as much about the travellers as it does about the landscape. Māori communities already knew how to move through this country.

George French Angas's 1844 drawings at Kaitotehe and Taupiri show substantial settlement, buildings and cultivation with the Waikato River at the centre. They are not pictures of Ōhinewai, but they show the river world of which it was part.

Missionaries entered that world rather than creating it. Benjamin Ashwell's Church Missionary Society station at Pepepe near Taupiri was established in the 1840s. Trade, literacy and Christianity added new connections to communities whose routes, gardens and political relationships were already established. The river remained the main line through the country.

Rauwhitu

By the 1850s one household brings the story much closer to Ōhinewai. Rauwhitu lay beside the Waikato River in the immediate district. In April 1859 an intention-to-marry record listed James Armitage, aged thirty-four, and Hannah Tuhi Tuhi, aged twenty-two, both living there. Each said they had been at Rauwhitu for four years. Their daughter Emma was baptised in 1859, and another daughter was born there in February 1863.

Those records put named people at Rauwhitu rather than leaving the district as river, wetland and archaeology. James was a solicitor who later served as Resident Magistrate for the Lower Waikato. Hannah's life continued through Māori land and succession records long after James disappeared from the record. Their household sat beside the river as mission connections, colonial administration and growing political pressure were closing in on an older Māori landscape.

Chapter 3

The river world

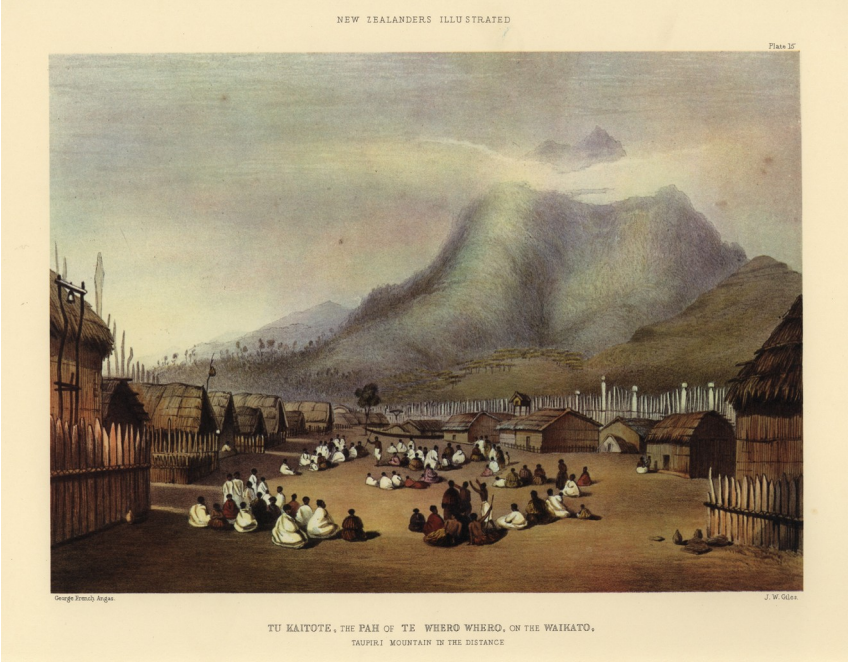
The Waikato River was the main route long before the railway fixed a north-south line through Ōhinewai or Great South Road could be trusted with regular wheeled traffic. People, produce and news moved along it between Rangiriri, Rauwhitu, Taupiri, Rāhui Pōkeka and settlements farther south. A modern road map hides how closely those places were joined by water.

A river road

The system reached beyond the main channel. Streams, tributaries, wetland passages and seasonal floods connected the river with lakes and low country. Waka could make sense of a landscape where a short overland trip might involve mud, water and a great deal of regretting one's choice of footwear. Communities drew on gardens, fisheries, forest and wetland resources spread across different places, joined by knowledge of how to move between them.

European visitors recorded cultivation as well as water. At Taupiri and Kaitotehe in 1844, George French Angas saw substantial Māori settlement and cultivated land.

Archaeology across Waikato has since documented large horticultural areas, deliberately modified soils and the use of suitable dry ground for kūmara. The land was already worked, travelled and understood.



George French Angas's Waikato river-landscape view at Tu Kaitote/Taupiri, drawn in 1844 and published as a lithograph in The New Zealanders Illustrated in 1847. Regional lower-Waikato context only: this is not an Ōhinewai view. Public-domain Wikimedia Commons reproduction of the historic work.

Mission stations and trade fitted themselves into those existing routes. Ashwell's station at Pepepe became part of a growing network of Christianity, literacy and exchange, while Māori producers moved crops, livestock and other goods through an economy that reached well beyond individual settlements. The Waikato River gave that economy range. When colonial officials later began looking closely at the same river, they were studying infrastructure Māori had been using for generations.

East of the river, Te Hoe-o-Tainui carries another old story into the written record. In an account published in 1900, Winikerei Te Whetuiti recalled explaining the name as the steering oar of Tainui. By 1890 Te Hoe-o-Tainui also had a Rūnanga House used as a Māori electoral polling place. Land there later became tangled in Native Land Court proceedings and survey debt. The old name survived while a new legal system was being laid over the country around it.

The household at Rauwhitu

Rauwhitu gives this period its clearest household story. James Armitage had lived in Waikato since the early 1850s and ran cattle. In 1859 he and Hannah Tuhi Tuhi were both recorded at Rauwhitu, where they had already been living for four years. They married at Taupiri with Benjamin Ashwell officiating. Their daughter Emma was baptised that year, and another daughter arrived at Rauwhitu in February 1863.

Hannah deserves to remain more than 'Armitage's wife' in the story. Later records name her as Hani or Hana Maki and show her involved in Māori land and succession matters connected with Whangamarino and Onewhero. An 1884 notice names Tuhituhi Maki, Te Ata Maki, Te Ngaehe Maki and Te Huia Maki in the same family setting, and further succession records followed. Her life continued through Māori land relationships after the war and after James was gone.

A later map gives Rauwhitu unusual physical detail. Drawn in 1877, it shows more than 196 acres beside the Waikato River, including a dwelling and Wai Wata swamp. The title still refers to the land as being in the occupation of James Armitage, although he had been dead for fourteen years. The map is therefore a relic of several times at once: a later survey of a pre-war household, with river and swamp still visible beneath the new paper boundaries.

A tightening frontier

Politics around that household had been tightening through the 1850s. Pōtatau Te Wherowhero became the first Māori King in 1858. The Kīngitanga grew from concern over land and political authority as colonial pressure increased. The lower Waikato sat in the heart of that confrontation. The Crown increasingly studied routes, crossings and settlements not only for trade but for military use.

The surviving Rauwhitu records from early 1863 are strikingly ordinary. In January there was a Māori social gathering at Armitage's residence. In April a newspaper carried the birth notice for the daughter born there in February. A family was living beside the river while the political situation around them deteriorated rapidly.

In July 1863 Crown forces crossed the Mangatāwhiri and invaded Waikato. The river that had carried families and produce became the main military supply route south. James Armitage became involved in that supply system. On 7 September he was killed at Camerontown while supervising military stores on the river. Hannah and the children survived him. Two months later the fighting reached Rangiriri, only about eight kilometres north of Ōhinewai.

Hannah after Camerontown

James Armitage's death at Camerontown in September 1863 produced plenty of colonial paperwork. Hannah Tuhi Tuhi lived on. The Armitage Pension Act

referred to his widow and children, but later Māori records return her to her own names and relationships rather than leaving her permanently attached to the circumstances of James's death.

In the 1880s and 1890s she appears in published Māori land material as Hani or Hana Maki, with interests and succession questions connected with Whangamarino and Onewhero. Other Maki names appear around her, including Tuhituhi, Te Ata, Te Ngaehe and Te Huia. The surviving notices do not need to be converted into a complete family tree to make their main point. Hannah remained part of Māori land life long after the invasion had passed through the district and long after the colonial record had stopped treating Rauwhitu mainly as James Armitage's household.

A map made in 1877 adds another odd piece to the story. It is titled 'Rauwhitu on the Waikato River in the occupation of Jas. Armitage Esqre., Barrister', even though Armitage had been dead for fourteen years. The map covers more than 196 acres and marks a dwelling, waterways and swamp, including Wai Wata. It is a useful warning about historical maps: they can preserve an older name or legal description long after the life on the ground has changed.

In 1877 a surveyor was still drawing Rauwhitu under the name of a man killed during the invasion, while only a few kilometres away the new railway was opening through Ōhinewai. The old river household and the new transport system briefly occupy the same year on paper.

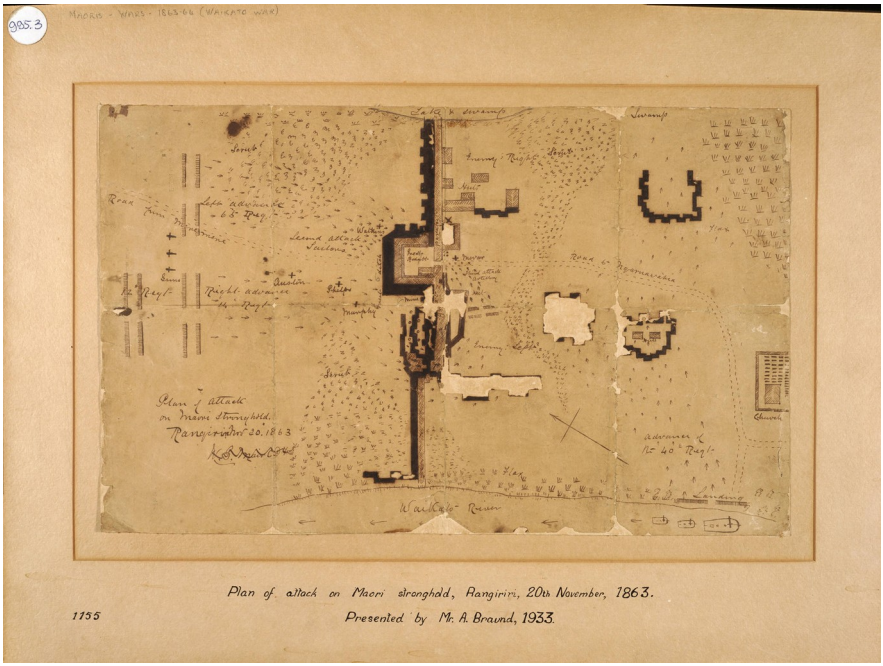
Chapter 4

Eight Kilometres from Rangiriri

On 20 November 1863 the war arrived at Rangiriri. The defensive line crossed the narrow country between the Waikato River and Lake Waikare, roughly eight kilometres north of Ōhinewai. Water made the position powerful. The river guarded one side, wet ground and the lake restricted movement on the other, and the Crown brought troops forward by land and armed steamers by river.

Rangiriri

The battle was hard and costly. Lieutenant-General Duncan Cameron's troops attacked a position built across the isthmus while the Pioneer, Avon and other vessels worked the Waikato. Repeated assaults failed to produce an easy victory. When Rangiriri fell, the route south opened, but the army still had to move men, animals, ammunition and food through a landscape that had never been designed for military convenience.



Plan of attack on the Māori stronghold at Rangiriri, 20 November 1863. Rangiriri lies about eight kilometres north of Ōhinewai and was the major battle site in this part of the lower Waikato corridor. Source image: Auckland Libraries Kura. Publication reuse conditions remain to be confirmed.

For Ōhinewai, the war was mostly about what moved through the corridor after Rangiriri. The river became the supply line. Larger steamers struggled with shallow reaches, smaller craft carried stores, and horses hauled boats where the banks allowed it. Charles Heaphy examined creek mouths and possible road lines. What had once been a network of Māori travel and trade was now being used to push an invading army farther into Waikato.

Rāhui Pōkeka, south of Ōhinewai, became a forward position almost immediately. On 9 December 1863 the Pioneer left there with about 250 men of the 40th Regiment bound for Ngāruawāhia. The Avon had also reached the area. A camp, stores and stock facilities followed. Coal from the wider Rāhui Pōkeka and Kupa Kupa area was useful because the military steamers needed fuel. The later Huntly coal industry would become far larger, but war had already shown why coal beside a navigable river was valuable.

Rauwhitu was caught in the same transformation. James Armitage had been killed at Camerontown in September, leaving Hannah Tuhi Tuhi and their children. In 1864 Rauwhitu was named alongside Meremere, Rangiriri, Paetai and Ngāruawāhia during discussions about land lost through the conflict. Two years

later, the Rangiriri confiscated block was described in legal notices, with the land granted to the late Mr Armitage at Rauwhitu specifically excepted.

The Compensation Court brought the upheaval into individual claims. In January 1867 the Reverend Heta Tarawhiti appeared over land at Rauwhitu. Witnesses discussed Waikare, Rauwhitu, Mangawhara and Rāhui Pōkeka in a landscape now being divided through Crown law after military conquest. Wiremu Te Wheoro and other Māori participants appeared within that new system. Hannah's later records as Hana Maki show that Māori land relationships continued through and beyond it.

After Rangiriri

The fighting at Rangiriri ended in November 1863. The arguments over land did not. In the years that followed, names familiar from the river world began appearing in Compensation Court proceedings, Crown notices and surveys as the government turned conquest into boundaries and titles.

Rauwhitu was caught directly in that process. When the confiscated Rangiriri block was formally described, land that had been granted to the late James Armitage at Rauwhitu was specifically excepted. That legal exception fixes the household inside the new confiscation geography rather than leaving it as a family story floating somewhere along the river.

In January 1867 the Reverend Heta Tarawhiti appeared over land at Rauwhitu. Court discussion ranged across Waikare, Rauwhitu, Mangawhara and Rāhui Pōkeka, with Wiremu Te Wheoro among the Māori figures appearing in the wider proceedings. These were places people already knew through occupation, cultivation, travel and whakapapa. They were now being discussed in a court system deciding who would receive, retain or lose land after the invasion.

Surveyors laid out roads, townships, farm sections and reserves around Rangiriri and Rāhui Pōkeka. On paper the new settlement looked orderly. On the ground, a settler still had to deal with peat, swamp and winter rain. Waikare and the surrounding wetlands had not become dry because survey lines had been ruled across them.

For Māori families the change was far more serious than awkward farming. Raupatu shifted control over a vast area of Waikato and disrupted the relationship between communities and land. Some people remained, some returned, some pursued claims and succession interests through the new legal system, and the Kīngitanga continued. The post-war landscape was not empty and it was not settled once and for all. It had been forced into a new system while older relationships continued underneath it.

The railway entered this country in 1877 after invasion, confiscation, court proceedings, military settlement and more than a decade of survey work had already changed who controlled much of the land around it.

Raupatu and survey

Across Waikato, raupatu changed the scale of everything. About 1.2 million acres were confiscated after the invasion. In the lower Waikato, land that had been understood through whakapapa, use, river routes and community was redrawn as confiscated blocks, military settlements, grants, reserves and survey parcels. Rangiriri became a planned settlement. Kupa Kupa was mapped with a coal reserve and miners' cottages. Soldiers and settlers received land on paper that could still be wet, awkward and difficult to farm in practice.

The maps arrived faster than the roads. Surveyors drew straight boundaries across country still crossed by horses and boats. Great South Road reached Rāhui Pōkeka by about 1868, but a road on a plan was not yet a reliable route for heavy traffic. The Waikato River continued to carry much of the work.

The next line south

Fourteen years after the invasion began, another line was fixed through the district. On 13 August 1877 the railway from Mercer to Newcastle opened through Rangiriri and Ōhinewai to the settlement increasingly known as Huntly. Unlike the road, it offered a scheduled route across country where wet ground could still make ordinary travel difficult.

The railway did not erase the river, raupatu or older Māori relationships with the land. It did give Ōhinewai a new fixed point. Farms, roads, mail and businesses gathered around the station, and a scattered place became somewhere outsiders could find on a timetable.

Chapter 5

13 August 1877

Ōhinewai station opened on 13 August 1877 with the Mercer to Newcastle railway. It was a small stop on a new line through wet lower-Waikato country, but a timetable gave the district something the road still could not: a regular north-south service that arrived because it was supposed to.

The early trip to Auckland took roughly four hours and forty-five minutes. In the 1870s the comparison was with horses, rough roads and river travel, so that was progress. The train connected Ōhinewai directly with Rangiriri and Huntly and, through them, with a growing national network. It carried passengers, but the freight soon became just as important locally.

A station to navigate by

The station quickly became a local reference point. In September 1881 Angus and Donald McKinnon advertised for someone to plough about seventy acres at Riverdale and located the work simply as opposite Ōhinewai Railway Station. An 1882 railway letter referred to 'a siding called Ohinewai', while roads were pushed towards the station from Matahuru and the Ngarua country. A scattered district now had a place that could be put in an advertisement without several lines of directions.

The relationship became practical in all sorts of small ways. In June 1915 Dalgety & Co advertised the clearing sale of E. L. Tucker's stock and equipment and arranged a conveyance to meet the 11 am train at Ōhinewai for outside buyers. The train did not merely carry people past the district. It delivered customers to farm gates.

Goods, mail and early mornings

Freight made the station part of ordinary working life, and an unattended station also made it a tempting place to steal things. In April 1902 the Auckland Star reported complaints that theft was being carried on 'in a most systematic manner'. Biscuits, sugar and wire had disappeared, and one settler had lost nearly £6 worth of groceries. A separate letter published in May gave an even more precise example: ten tins of beef had vanished from a case of two dozen. The writer's solution was not especially complicated. Ōhinewai needed a caretaker.

The theft complaints put some ordinary contents back into railway freight. Cases of beef, groceries and wire had been ordered and paid for by local households and farms. At an unattended flag station, there was not much between the goods and anybody willing to help themselves.

Surrounding farms were already dependent on the station. Food, fencing, household goods and building supplies could travel most of the distance by rail; the last few miles still belonged to a carrier, horse and wagon, and later a truck. The railway ended where local transport began.

The goods shed remained part of working life for decades. A 1936 court report described a truck collecting goods there before following a narrow track beside the railway to the main road. John Wilkins remembered cattle being loaded at Ōhinewai and collecting bags of stock feed and, on one occasion, a tonne of cement from around the goods-shed area. Once the train had gone, somebody still had to shift it.

Mail also ran through the station. By 1920 mail for Ōhinewai, Rangiriri, Mercer and Auckland was going by train daily, with mail arriving back along the same corridor. The Post Office and station were closely linked. In 1923 the connection between them was recorded as 440 yards, walked twice daily. A new Post Office went up during 1923–24 near the main road and store, with additions and

improved accommodation later in the decade. In the 1930s and early 1940s the station-to-Post Office walk was still recorded as a quarter-mile, which is the same 440 yards wearing a different hat.

John Wilkins remembered the less charming end of that arrangement: being up at about four in the morning to put mail on the train. For a local delivery family, the railway timetable was not an abstract list in a newspaper. It decided when someone had to get out of bed. Later motor routes carried mail from Ōhinewai towards Te Hoe, Hoe-o-Tainui, Matahuru and Waiterimu, joining the train to a network of rural roads.

Residents could become quite protective of useful trains. In March 1925 Ōhinewai and surrounding settlers met over the proposed loss of the No. 300 Frankton-to-Auckland service. The report described it as the only benefit they had received from the Railway Department in twenty years and pointed out that someone could do business in Auckland and still get home that evening. A railway could run directly through the district and still be of limited use if the train did not stop.

Road against rail

The road was improving at the same time, although the peat made sure nobody became overconfident. In 1924 road metal was quarried below Mercer, brought up the Waikato by barge, landed with a windlass and shifted across peat on a temporary tramway. A small locomotive named Clarissa hauled the trolleys and occasionally left the rails. It is hard to imagine a better summary of road building in the lower Waikato: even the machinery brought in to improve the road had trouble staying on its own track.

By 1939 five miles of duplicated railway between Huntly and Ōhinewai were due to open after work involving about 300 men. The remaining swamp section farther north was still being described as difficult. The main line was becoming more important nationally just as roads and motor vehicles were beginning to compete with it locally.

The post office by the river

The railway did not instantly pull every service to the station. In the early twentieth century George Silvester ran the Ōhinewai post office from his house beside the Waikato River. He was also a sheepowner and served on the school committee. One household therefore sat at the intersection of farming, local administration and the mail.

Silvester's post office belongs to an older geography. Letters might arrive through an increasingly railway-based national system, but the person dealing with them could still live on the river side of the settlement. Roads were improving, the station was becoming more important and yet the Waikato still shaped where people lived and how they moved.

That overlapping arrangement lasted for years. Mail contracts gradually tied the Post Office more closely to the railway, and by the 1920s the station-side relationship was explicit. The earlier riverside Post Office also shows that Ōhinewai did not switch from river to rail in one clean step. For a long time it used both, plus whatever state the roads happened to be in that week.

By the opening years of the twentieth century, roads fed towards the station, farms were described by their distance from it, mail passed through it and goods waited there for collection. Around that transport stop the McKinnons, Muirs, Fosters, flax workers, school families and businesses were building a more permanent community.

Chapter 6

Farms, Flax and a School

After the railway opened, the records begin to fill with names. Farms were being broken in, flax cut, horses bred and children taught, while the same people started turning up on school and local committees year after year. Ōhinewai was still scattered across wet country, but more families were staying.

Riverdale

Angus and Donald McKinnon were among the first farmers to make the new railway part of their address. In September 1881 they advertised for someone to plough about seventy acres at Riverdale and described the farm as directly opposite Ōhinewai Railway Station. Four years after the line opened, the station had already become the easiest way to tell a stranger where a farm was.

Riverdale spread across country between the Waikato River and the wetlands towards Lake Rotongaro. A 1904 sale description put the wider property at about 2,400 acres, roughly 2,000 of them in flax. Long before drains and pasture dominated the view, the wetland itself was part of the local economy.

A surveyor looking back in 1921 remembered one Riverdale boundary with some amusement. Two survey parties had worked towards Lake Rotongaro from opposite directions. According to his account, the northern line stopped about three-quarters of a mile short of the lake, with a sizeable ridge still in the way. Survey plans have a wonderful habit of making everything look inevitable once the mud, scrub, hills and human beings have been removed from the page.

Donald McKinnon also bred horses. By 1891 the thoroughbred Flintlock was standing at Riverdale, giving the farm a connection to racing as well as ordinary agricultural work. The railway made that sort of enterprise easier. Horses, buyers, newspapers and racing networks could all connect a farm at Ōhinewai with a much wider world.

The McKinnon name carried on after Donald's death in 1913. John Malcolm MacKinnon was farming at Ōhinewai when he married in 1915 and said he had lived there for thirty years. He later served locally as a Justice of the Peace. Riverdale was still associated with the family in the 1940s.

Flax country

Flax was not simply vegetation waiting to be cleared. It was a crop that could be cut, milled and sold. In November 1903 Foot and Moody bought Tulloch's established flaxmill and plant on the Waikare swamp. The operation involved road access, a landing and a punt, which says a great deal about the country around it. A mill in wetland needed more than machinery. It needed a way to get workers in,

fibre out and everything else across ground that had little interest in behaving like a road.

The flax industry sits neatly between older Māori use of the wetlands and the later pastoral landscape. It made commercial use of wet ground before drainage changed much of it into farmland. By the twentieth century the same country would increasingly be judged by how effectively water could be removed from it. Earlier operators had made money from what was already there.

Tommy and Rihi Noda

One farming story came from well outside the usual British settler pattern. Asajiro Noda, widely known as Tommy, married Rihi Tipene Te Ahu of Ngāti Mahuta in the 1890s. They settled for a time in the Ōhinewai district, with the family story placing them on a twenty-four-acre island in Lake Waikare.

Tommy became known particularly for growing strawberries. When he was naturalised in 1908 he was farming at Ōhinewai and owned land. By 1912 the family was living at Rangiriri. Their time at Ōhinewai was shorter than that of the McKinnons or Fosters, but it leaves a useful picture of the district: a Japanese immigrant, his Māori wife and their family making a living in the same lake and wetland landscape that other settlers were draining, farming and milling.

A footballer in the flax

The flax economy drew in people whose lives do not fit the usual rural-settler pattern. Albert John Gourlay had played top-level Australian rules football for Melbourne and Carlton before crossing the Tasman. By about 1905 he was working as a flax cutter at Ōhinewai.

A man who had played senior football in Melbourne ended up cutting flax in Waikato wetland. The surviving material does not say how long Gourlay stayed, which mill employed him or what he thought of the work. The Australian War Memorial biography that records his Ōhinewai employment later follows him into New Zealand military service.

His short appearance is valuable precisely because it is not a pioneer dynasty. Ōhinewai's industries employed people who came through, worked hard jobs and moved on. Flax cutting was physical, wet and seasonal work, and a mill needed a much larger labour force than the names of its owners suggest. Gourlay is one of the few workers who can now be identified individually.

The same industry also explains why punts, landings and rough access tracks turn up in the records. Cut flax had to reach the mill, fibre had to leave it, and workers had to reach places that were wet for very good geological reasons. The wetland economy depended on transport just as much as the farms and shops did.

A school begins

Teaching is remembered as beginning in April 1882 in a building supplied by Robert Muir, who also offered land for a permanent school. The public opening celebration followed on 11 April 1883 at Muir's property. From then on the school produced one of the richest continuous records of local families and everyday life.

It sounds less like the opening of a government facility than a proper district gathering. There were sports, dinner, visitors from around the area and dancing to the Huntly Brass Band. By December 1883 Miss Blackman was teaching there and residents were already wanting a better building. A permanent school followed in 1885 and a teacher's residence in 1890.

The Muir family was firmly part of the place. Alexander Stewart Muir said in 1900 that he had lived at Ōhinewai since birth, while newspaper notices identified Isabella and Maud Muir as Robert Muir's daughters. The school story was therefore also a family story, built by people who expected to remain in the district long enough for their children to use it.

School committees gradually provide a roll-call of familiar local names. McKinnon, Muir, Foster and others appear repeatedly through the 1890s and into the new century. These were not grand public offices. They were the work of keeping a small rural school going, finding teachers, maintaining buildings and making sure local children had somewhere to learn.

Edwin Foster

Edwin Foster stayed with that work for decades. He appears on school committees in the 1890s and early 1900s, was chairman during the First World War and was still being remembered for the school when he died in 1939. The New Zealand Herald said he had chaired the committee for forty-seven years.

His family had equally deep roots. In 1919 his daughter Edna May Foster, aged nineteen, said she had lived at Ōhinewai for nineteen years. It is a wonderfully simple record of a local childhood: born into the settlement, raised there and old enough by the end of the war to marry from it.

Edwin's working life took him beyond farming. He was an engineer associated with the Firth pumice operation and drove his own motor lorry for the business. That puts him across several versions of Ōhinewai at once: school committee chairman, industrial worker and early motor-vehicle owner in a district still full of horses and wagons.

Pumice by the river

Pumice had been worked at Ōhinewai since the early years of the twentieth century. The material itself had arrived through much older volcanic and river processes, but turning it into an industry needed distinctly modern equipment.

Dredges and barges worked around the river operation, while engines, winches and later motor lorries kept the plant moving.

The jobs broadened the local economy. Men around the works appear as engineers, engine drivers, dredgers and lorry drivers. Ōhinewai could still look like a farming district from the road, but not everybody was earning a living from cows and grass.

By 1914 the railway was the main transport spine, the river still supported industry, farms were expanding, flax was being milled and the school had been operating for a generation. People such as Edwin Foster had become long-term fixtures. The First World War would take some local men overseas and make the practical skills of those who remained unusually visible in the records.

Chapter 7

War, Work and Community

The First World War reached Ōhinewai through its farms, railway, carrying businesses and small industries. Men enlisted; others stayed because goods still had to move, horses still needed shoeing, machinery still broke and farms still had to run.

Names on the wall

The Ōhinewai and District Roll of Honour now hangs in the foyer of the community hall. It carries nineteen First World War names and thirty-four from the Second World War. Behind those names are very different connections with the district.

Samuel Watts Reynolds had worked for New Zealand Railways and was associated with Ōhinewai before he left with the Wellington Battalion. He was killed at Gallipoli on 16 May 1915. Donald McKinnon, whose next of kin Angus McKinnon was recorded at Ōhinewai, served with the Auckland Battalion. He was wounded, returned to the front and was wounded again in August 1915.

Frank Sydney Fitness had been working as a driver for Alan Gall at Ōhinewai. His mother Margaret was living at Matahura, Ōhinewai. He served in the New Zealand Field Artillery, was wounded and died on 23 June 1917. Pari Retimana served with the Māori Expeditionary Force, with a sister recorded at Ōhinewai. Stanley Foster, whose father E. Foster was at Ōhinewai, served with the Machine Gun Corps, was wounded in 1917 and appears among returning soldiers in 1919.

The names on the roll had different connections with Ōhinewai. Some lived there, some worked there and some belonged to families in the wider district. Even a small rural settlement sent men into several parts of the war.

The men who stayed

War records also reveal the jobs that could not simply be abandoned. Edwin Foster appeared before military-service authorities as an engineer and motor-lorry driver. Firth Pumice Company argued that his skills and his lorry were important enough to keep him at work. Other local Foster men were recorded as engine drivers, winch drivers and dredgers.

The strongest example came from the blacksmith's forge. In February 1918 Thomas Neill appealed for Percy Senior, the Ōhinewai blacksmith, because he had been unable to find anyone to replace him. The Military Service Board recorded that it was 'practically impossible to secure blacksmiths now' and that 'the public interest must be considered'.

One missing blacksmith could affect horses, wagons, farm machinery and the work of a whole district. In 1918 that was enough for the Military Service Board to treat Percy Senior's continued presence at Ōhinewai as a question of public interest.

Five wagons and fourteen horses

Carrying was another job that could not stop. Adam Gall was carrying mail between Ōhinewai and Te Hoe by 1910, and Gall and Son was well established by the war years. Samuel John Gall was listed as a wagoner at Ōhinewai in 1917, while Charles Frederick Gall served overseas and was reported in hospital in 1916.

One 1918 Military Service Board report described an Ōhinewai storekeeper and carrier whose son had been the first man from the settlement to go to the front. The carrier told the Board that he kept five wagons and fourteen horses. The surviving newspaper scan has not left his surname clear, but the scale of the operation is vivid enough on its own. Farms, the station and scattered households all needed goods shifted, and fourteen horses were part of the machinery that kept it happening.

Gall's business continued into the motor era. His Ōhinewai shop was broken into in March 1929 and a woollen rug and three cigarette-holders were stolen. Five years later two men travelling in a three-seater English car were wanted after another break-in. The transport outside the shop had changed rather more quickly than the basic problem of people stealing things from it.

Horses meet trucks

The Lumsden family made the change from horse power to motor power almost literally. John and Jessie Lumsden came to the district in 1912. John was an engineer and contractor who initially worked with draft horses, while Jessie milked cows and kept the farm going when he was away. In 1918 he bought an International Harvester truck. Another followed in 1924.

The truck did not arrive after the horse era had politely ended. Both belonged to the same working life for a time. Roads were still rough, wet and unreliable, but a lorry could carry loads farther and faster and gave contractors a much bigger operating area. A century later, Malcolm Lumsden's restoration of the 1924 International preserved a very solid reminder of that transition.

Motor traffic announced itself rather abruptly at the end of the war. On 28 December 1918 a Rotorua express collided with a motor-lorry at Ōhinewai. Miss Smyth, a daughter of J. Smyth of Hamilton East, was injured and taken to Waikato Hospital. The surviving follow-up is brief, but the timing is striking: only weeks after the Armistice, a train and a motor vehicle were already finding ways to disagree over the same narrow transport corridor.

Rail still dominated long-distance traffic, horses remained common and motor lorries were beginning to claim more of the road. For a time Ōhinewai had all three systems operating at once. The 1918 collision was an early indication that sharing the same narrow corridor would not always go smoothly.

School and hall

While adults dealt with war, work and transport, the school kept producing its own records of ordinary life. In August 1919 residents gathered at Ōhinewai Hall to farewell assistant teacher Miss D. Moor after four years. She was presented with a sterling silver teapot, and the evening included songs, violin, piano and dancing. Small communities have long understood that a farewell can require considerably more organisation than the employment itself.

The hall was busy during the war too. In September 1917 a social and dance organised by Ōhinewai women raised more than £8 for the YMCA after expenses. The same local report noted that the latest military ballot had caught most of the district's eligible men. Fundraising, music and conscription sat side by side.

Sport supplied more names and, occasionally, injuries. In August 1918 Ōhinewai beat Horotiu 8–5 at Ngaruawahia. D. Vincent scored, H. Austin converted and later kicked the winning goal from a difficult angle. B. Coleman of Ōhinewai finished the day with a broken nose and slight concussion. The newspaper assured readers the match had been fast but not rough.

In January 1920 Ōhinewai and Railway split two cricket matches. That evening the visitors were entertained at the hall with songs, recitations and dancing. A. Gall played the violin and J. Haig the piano. It was the sort of event in which the sport took an afternoon and the social programme took the rest of the day.

Keeping the telephone

Communication could become a local cause in its own right. In April 1929 representatives from Ōhinewai, Waiterimu and Te Hoe met at Ōhinewai Hall

because the local telephone exchange had fallen below the minimum of twenty-five subscribers needed to justify keeping it open. The Chief Postmaster proposed closing the exchange and connecting remaining subscribers through Huntly instead.

For scattered farms, losing the exchange meant more than an administrative change. Telephones were becoming part of stock work, transport, family emergencies and business. Rather than accept connection through Huntly, residents decided to canvass for enough subscribers to keep the local exchange open.

Two years later the school found itself dealing with something much more serious. In June 1931 staff noticed severe bruising on eight-year-old Evelyn Steele and nine-year-old John Milton Steele. Headmaster Mr Peacock laid the information, assistant teacher Y. R. Lyttle gave evidence and Dr D. C. Macdiarmid examined the children. Their father, Ōhinewai farmer Walter Steele, admitted beating them and said he had lost his temper.

The case went before Magistrate F. H. Levien, who convicted Steele and sentenced him to one month's imprisonment with hard labour. The school staff had noticed the injuries, acted on them and carried the concern beyond the school gate into the court system.

Buildings, rolls and sports days dominate most school histories. This case records another role: a small rural school could be where trouble inside a household first became visible to adults outside it.

The next generation

The school gives an unusually good glimpse of children in the interwar years. At the 1932 Matahuru Show, Ōhinewai pupils entered drawing, writing, sewing, plasticine and recycled-material competitions. Audrey Matchett, Nolan McDonald, Mary Hill, Ainsie Hall, Jessie Earle, Edna Foster, Ruby Higgins, William Earle, Jack Thomson, David Loftus, Rex McGovern, George Thomson, Stanley Foster, Joseph Frost, Roy McGovern and Frank Storey were among those named.

The list leaves a better picture than a population total: children drawing, sewing, moulding plasticine and competing while trains ran through the settlement and motor vehicles became ordinary.

The Women's Institute drew the wider district together as well. In September 1932 about sixty women came to an Ōhinewai At Home from Huntly, Te Hoe, Rangiriri and Te Kauwhata. The hall was decorated with spring flowers and the programme included songs, recitations, a chorus and short plays. Mrs McGaughran, Mrs Earle, Mrs Reston, Mrs Lynch, Mrs A. Hill and Miss R. Hill were among those named.

Edwin Foster died in 1939 after about fifty years in the district. He had farmed, worked in industry and spent decades around the school. His life stretched from the early railway settlement into the motor age, which makes him one of the people who best connects the two.

Shops, axes and explosives

Adam Gall's shop supplied two unusually specific interwar crime stories. On the night of 31 March 1929 somebody broke in and stole a woollen rug and three cigarette-holders worth £2 15s 6d. In June 1934 the shop was burgled again. This time two unidentified men were wanted and were reported to be travelling in a three-seater English motor-car. The detail is almost cinematic, although the Police Gazette did not trouble itself with atmosphere.

The 1934 burglaries also sat inside a much wider burst of rural crime. In September two armed men suspected in district break-ins were found at about two in the morning taking petrol from the garage of settler S. H. Spencer in the back country behind Ōhinewai. One of Spencer's sons disabled their car by removing the distributor, which was an admirably direct piece of rural problem-solving.

One of the men responded with a shotgun. He fired at Spencer's feet and ricocheting pellets struck Spencer in the face. Police, detectives and local settlers then searched a large area of bush country behind Ōhinewai. The same report referred to a recent night attack on F. Meuli of Ōhinewai, who had been struck on the head with an electric torch.

The identities and final outcome of the two armed men have not survived in the material used here. Cars had made it easier for burglars to move through rural districts, while one Ōhinewai household responded by removing the offenders' distributor before they could drive away. The Gall burglaries also establish the shop as a real trading place into the 1930s, long after the family's horse-and-wagon mail and carrying work. By then the getaway vehicle was a motor-car rather than fourteen horses.

Sport could be just as serious. In May 1935 brothers Les and Reg Grundy were named among four New Zealand champion axemen selected to meet touring Australian champions. Les was explicitly described as being from Matahuru via Ōhinewai. Competitive wood chopping was major rural sport, drawing crowds and reputations from the same communities that supplied farm and forestry labour. For the district, the Grundy brothers were a national sporting connection well before Hugh Anderson started winning on motorcycles.

The Post Office had its own encounter with serious crime in 1938. On the night of 27 June someone broke into the Ōhinewai Post Office and opened the safe with explosives. About £37 7s in cash, stamps and postal material disappeared, along with money-order forms, motor-registration certificates and receipt books. Police

recorded pieces of blue fuse, a woman's handkerchief and a pick marked 'W.M.' left behind.

The surviving inventory needs little embellishment: explosives, blue fuse, a handkerchief and an abandoned pick. The Post Office was worth attacking because it handled far more than letters. Cash, stamps, forms and vehicle-registration material all passed through a small rural office that linked residents to government and commerce.

These incidents sit beside dances, cricket, rugby and school competitions from the same years. Shops were burgled, axemen became champions, a Post Office safe was blown and children entered plasticine at the Matahuru Show. Ōhinewai was small, not uneventful.

Lake Waikare

Not every community story ended cheerfully. On 19 March 1944 Ōhinewai farmers Lawrence Humphries Hoskin and James Wooller drowned in Lake Waikare when boats returning from an island were swamped in choppy water. Hoskin's son made it to shore, and Foster Bros joined the search.

Hoskin had lived at Ōhinewai for fourteen years. He was a returned First World War serviceman and had served as president of the Patriotic Committee and Rugby Football Club. Wooller had been married only six months. For a district whose history is so often about using water as a route or resource, the lake could still become dangerous very quickly.

By the end of the Second World War, horses, trucks and trains had overlapped for decades and the school and hall had become long-standing local centres. The next large shift came from a road that was finally reliable enough to carry much more of the district's everyday movement.

Chapter 8

Roads Across Wet Ground

Great South Road had been on maps for decades before motorists could rely on it. Through the lower Waikato, reliability arrived one load of metal, one culvert and one drainage job at a time. Being the main road between Auckland and Hamilton did not make the peat any firmer.

Clarissa and the peat

In 1924 road metal for work north of Huntly was quarried below Mercer, brought up the Waikato River by barge and landed with a windlass. From there it crossed peat on a temporary tramway. A small locomotive called Clarissa hauled the trolleys.

Clarissa sometimes came off the rails. Road metal had arrived by river and then crossed the peat on a temporary railway whose locomotive also struggled with the ground. River, rail and road were all involved in building the road that would eventually compete with the other two.

By 1930 a paving scheme from Ōhinewai to Huntly was joining work already completed from Mercer to Ōhinewai, creating about twenty-four miles of continuous surfaced road. Motor services were already linking the district with Auckland, Morrinsville and Te Aroha. A farm family or carrier no longer had to begin every longer journey by getting to the railway station.

Blacksmith to garage

The trades along the route changed with the vehicles. George Bain Lyon was working as a blacksmith at Ōhinewai by the 1890s. Percy Senior was the blacksmith whose loss during the First World War was considered serious enough for the Military Service Board to hear an appeal. Martin Robert Lynch was a blacksmith when he married in 1920 and was later described as a garage proprietor.

Horses and cars overlapped for years. A blacksmith repaired farm equipment as well as shoeing horses, and early motor vehicles required plenty of mechanical attention. Lynch's shift from blacksmithing to garage work follows the road itself: by the post-war years a garage made more sense beside the highway than a forge.

Road services were still vulnerable to things other than mud. In 1942 the Te Aroha to Ōhinewai service, intended to connect with the train, was extended to Mercer because the connection was not working. Wartime petrol restrictions and shortages of tyres and motor supplies made the job harder. A proposal to continue towards Auckland using a gas producer was first refused and then authorised. Even a better road was not much use without fuel and rubber.

Rail beside the road

The railway was not quietly fading while the road improved. Double track opened between Huntly and Ōhinewai in August 1939, increasing capacity on the Main Trunk. Rail freight remained an everyday part of the district for decades.

A 1944 theft case gives a strange inventory of what was moving in railway wagons through Ōhinewai and Whangamarino: tyres, batteries, gumboots, electric-fence equipment, suitcases, clothing, sugar, bacon and ham. Three men faced charges and the proceedings were expected to call eighty-seven witnesses. Whatever the court eventually made of the case, the list itself is a shop window into wartime and post-war freight.

The railway could also make itself felt rather more dramatically. In heavy fog on 12 June 1945, one goods train ran into another standing at the southern end of Ōhinewai station. The guard's van was telescoped and derailed, another wagon was

damaged, the Main Trunk was blocked and two passenger trains were delayed. Nobody was reported injured.

Two years later the meeting of road and rail was fatal. Malcolm Wills, the thirty-three-year-old works manager of New Firth Pumice Company, was driving south beside the railway when he turned onto a crossing about half a mile north of the station. His truck collided with the Auckland to Wellington express. Debris was reported over about 400 yards, and Wills died in the Huntly ambulance.

The road was becoming dangerous in its own right as traffic increased. On Labour Day 1950 a head-on crash near Ōhinewai injured Rex Townsend and his three-year-old child Robin. Rex's wife Melva, aged thirty-one, later died in Waikato Hospital. The highway was making travel faster and easier, but it was also bringing more vehicles together at speed on a road that still passed directly through rural settlements.

Lake Waikare in the 1950s

The road and railway were only part of childhood geography. Colin Sherrard later remembered Lake Waikare in the 1950s as somewhere people actually went for fun. He swam, waterskied, kayaked and sailed there. Ōhinewai School held its annual swimming sports at the lake, church groups had picnics, and families swam at sandy Spencers Bay.

One of his strongest memories was of patches of water 'literally boiling with mullet'. It is a striking image now because later generations know Lake Waikare mainly through poor water quality, invasive fish and restoration plans. In Sherrard's childhood memory the lake was a playground as well as a working landscape.

At almost exactly the same time, government field staff were using the lake for a very different purpose. In 1950 the Department of Internal Affairs added Lake Waikare at Ōhinewai as a duck-trapping and banding station. Specially trained ranging staff captured birds, fitted bands and released them so later recoveries could help track movement and survival.

The surviving numbers from the first two years are remarkable. In 1950 and 1951 the Lake Waikare operation captured 1,958 grey ducks and only twelve mallards. That ratio is a snapshot of a bird community very different from the one later familiar across much of Waikato. Mallards became increasingly prominent over following decades while grey ducks declined.

The two stories belong together. One lake could be a school swimming pool, a picnic place, a waterskiing venue and a field-science station. Children saw mullet boiling near the surface while government staff were counting and banding ducks elsewhere around the water. Neither scene resembles the technical language used

in later debates about eutrophication, koi carp or nutrient loads, but both help explain what people felt had been lost.

Farm work around the same period was becoming more measured too. In 1950 L. M. and R. J. Harper at Waiterimu Rural Delivery, Ōhinewai, appeared in national pig-performance tables with Large White litters weighed at three weeks and eight weeks. One litter began with twelve piglets, nine were weaned, and the litter reached 408 pounds at eight weeks. Another reached 387 pounds. R. J. Harper appeared again in 1954 with further recorded litters.

The figures are very specific because post-war farming was becoming increasingly interested in measured performance and comparison. A family at Ōhinewai could appear in a national agricultural journal because somebody had weighed a litter of piglets carefully enough for the results to be useful elsewhere.

Water wins again

Then there were the floods. On 7 July 1953 water deeply submerged Great South Road between Rangiriri and Ōhinewai. An aerial photograph published two days later showed the road disappearing into a much larger sheet of water. By evening the route had been closed to all but heavy traffic.

Three years later, on 5 July 1956, Whites Aviation photographed flooding around Rangiriri and Ōhinewai again. From above, the problem was obvious. Road, railway, river and flooded lowlands occupied the same narrow landscape. The road had been surfaced, raised and improved, but the country around it had not stopped being a floodplain.

Reliable motor access changed the district. Goods moved more easily, families travelled farther and roadside businesses gained passing customers. Every flood still exposed the engineering underneath: drains, culverts, embankments and constant maintenance were what kept the road usable across wet country.

A village street

By the late 1950s the highway was also becoming something more than a route through farmland. Ten residential sections were surveyed around Great South Road and Tahuna Road in 1958. That September a limited-speed zone was declared through Ōhinewai around the junction. The village was now built up enough, and traffic heavy enough, that vehicles needed formal slowing down.

The road brought businesses towards it. Carriers who had once worked from wagons moved into trucks. Garages replaced some of the work once done by blacksmiths. Shops could deliver across a wider district. A national route was gradually becoming Ōhinewai's main street.

The railway remained right beside it. On 15 January 1964 photographer Weston Langford caught three trains at Ōhinewai: Ka 942 and K 900 hauling coal trains,

and Ja 1282 on a down express. The photographs show a busy double-track Main Trunk still carrying heavy freight and passengers through open rural country.

Local passenger service ended on 10 April 1965. The railway itself did not close. Trains continued to thunder through Ōhinewai, and the station kept local goods functions until the end of 1978. What changed was the way local people used the transport network. Increasingly, ordinary life belonged to cars, buses, trucks and a highway that stopped at the places people actually wanted to go.

By the 1960s the road had become Ōhinewai's commercial centre. The businesses that faced it would depend on through traffic for decades, then discover in 2003 what happened when the main route moved.

Chapter 9

The Post-War Village

By the mid-1960s trains still ran through the middle of Ōhinewai, but everyday life had shifted away from the passenger platform. The school, hall, Domain, shops, garage, farms and small industries faced the road, and State Highway 1 was becoming the line most people used.

School days

Ōhinewai School had been operating for more than sixty years by the end of the Second World War and was still growing. Another classroom was added in 1946–47, and a new block followed in 1965, the same year passenger trains stopped calling at Ōhinewai.

The Domain and hall formed another local centre. The old Domain had once covered a much larger rural reserve, but over time community facilities gathered around the hall and recreation area. Tennis had been organised locally since at least the early 1930s. Anderson, Balemi, Foster, Lynch, Mawston, Pipe and Waugh recur through Domain records, the familiar pattern of a small district relying on the same willing people for years.

Calves, camps and ordinary school life

The post-war school left some wonderfully ordinary records. At a Lower Waikato schools field day in 1950, Ōhinewai children competed with calves they had raised themselves. Gloria Harvey, Yvonne and Hilda Robertson, Colleen Harvey, Barry Mawston and Allan Taylor were among those named, and Ōhinewai placed third in the school group of three calves.

Calf-club days brought farm work into school life. Feeding, handling and presenting an animal turned work done at home into something judged alongside classmates, and rural children had the useful advantage of already knowing when a calf was promising and when it was mostly expense.

In 1968 the classroom widened much farther. Forest and Bird recorded pupils and staff from Ōhinewai, Waiterimu and Te Hoe schools spending ten days together at the Port Waikato Children's Camp. The surviving report does not list the children or provide an itinerary, but ten days is long enough to have been a substantial event in a small rural-school year.

Waiterimu, Te Hoe and Ōhinewai were separate schools, but their children met through sport, agricultural events, buses, family connections and shared trips. The ten-day Port Waikato camp belonged to that wider district network.

By the 1960s the surroundings had become distinctly modern while some of the school experiences remained deeply rural. Heavy coal trains passed on the Main Trunk. State Highway 1 traffic ran through the settlement. Hugh Anderson was winning motorcycle world championships overseas. At school, children could still be judged on a calf and then head away with two neighbouring schools for ten days at the coast.

A world champion from Ōhinewai

Hugh Robertson Anderson began with motorcycles on his mother's Ōhinewai dairy farm. He later remembered riding as a child and becoming fascinated by reports of the Isle of Man races when he was about ten. The interest turned into one of New Zealand's great motorcycle careers.

Anderson won four Grand Prix world championships for Suzuki in the 50cc and 125cc classes and two Isle of Man TT races. The international results took him far from the Waikato, but the newspapers kept attaching Ōhinewai to his name. In June 1964 the Press described H. R. Anderson 'of Ohinewai' after his Isle of Man 50cc victory at an average of 80.64 mph. In January 1966 it again called him the reigning 125cc world champion from Ōhinewai and reported him reaching 120 mph at Wigram.

For a settlement better known for cows, peat and slow roads, producing a four-time motorcycle world champion was a respectable change of pace.

The bottom store

One of the best pictures of old Ōhinewai is a flood photograph rather than a posed street scene. Water surrounds a low shop with a truck outside and two petrol pumps near the front. A light-coloured building sits immediately beside it, and the camera appears to be on the ramp to the railway overbridge.

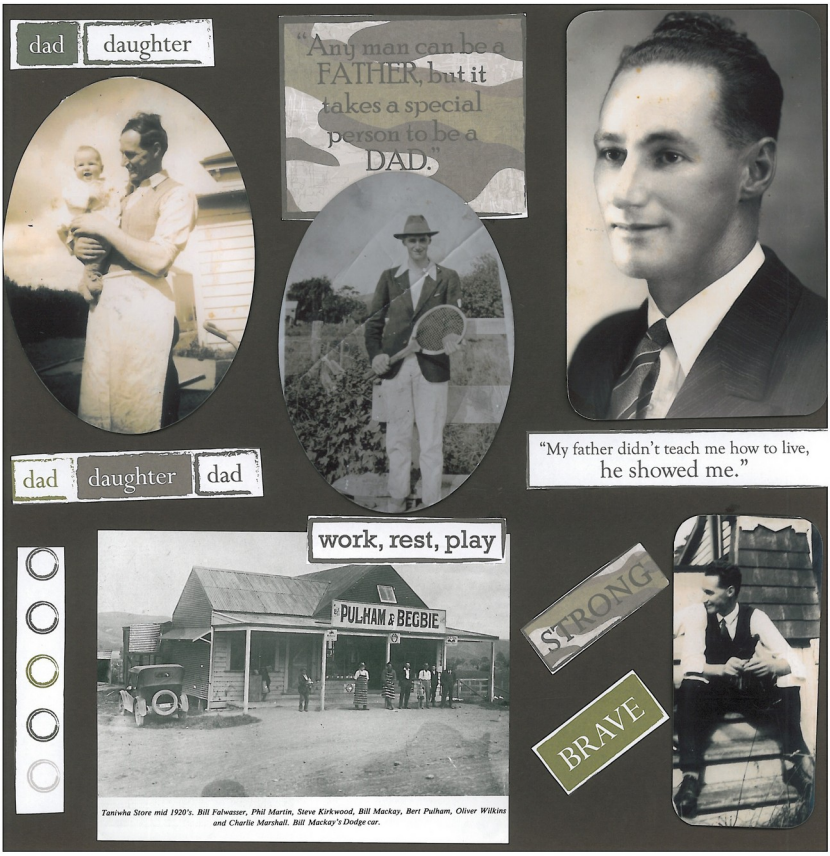
John Wilkins recognised the light-coloured building as the old Post Office. In family memory the shop beside it became the 'bottom store', down by the railway rather than up around the later highway businesses. The photograph is undated, but it fixes the shop, Post Office, road and railway tightly together, with floodwater covering most of the gaps between them.

The Post Office had been built near the railway and main road in the 1920s. For years the walk between station and Post Office was recorded as 440 yards, or a quarter-mile. Mail came off trains, goods came through the shed, and local carriers took both farther into the district.

John remembered the working version of that arrangement: being up at about four in the morning to put mail on the train, cattle being loaded at Ōhinewai, bags of stock feed coming through and collecting a tonne of cement from around the goods-shed area. The memories are ordinary jobs, which is precisely why the station becomes easier to picture.

The Wilkins shop

The Wilkins retail story began before the family settled at Ōhinewai. Ruth May Jean recorded that her father, Oliver Johnston Wilkins, left school at thirteen and worked for Pulham & Begbie at Taniwha. A family photograph from the mid-1920s shows the Taniwha store with the Pulham & Begbie sign and Oliver among the people outside.



Ruth May Jean's family scrapbook page, including the Pulham & Begbie store at Taniwha in the mid-1920s and Oliver Wilkins among those named in the family caption. Wilkins family source; private family material, with external publication subject to appropriate family permission.

After marrying in 1938, Ruth says Oliver continued working for Pulham & Begbie at a shop at Ōhinewai and cycled about seven miles from Te Kauwhata. She records that in 1940 he bought 'the shop at Ohinewai'. The family then lived down near the railway overbridge.

John Wilkins remembered the old shop differently. Looking at the flood photograph in 2019, he associated it with a Mr Langlands and thought Oliver bought it around 1958. That date sits interestingly close to the period when the Langlands name appears in Ōhinewai grocery history. The two family recollections may be describing different stages of the business, different premises, or simply the same history remembered from different points in a long life. There is no need to force them into one tidy transaction.

The shop was only part of Oliver's work. He delivered groceries, carried mail for a time and began a school-bus service in 1943 with an adapted ex-Army Dodge

carrying twenty-five children. John remembered that Oliver bought the Dodge from Bob Harvey.

A new Austin followed in 1946, carrying thirty pupils and also doing grocery deliveries. In 1951 Oliver bought a Bedford for high-school pupils, and the school-bus work continued until 1961. Children, groceries and mail could all be moving over the same rural roads under the same family business.'

Shops and trades

The village had other everyday services. Joseph Mercep was recorded as a fish vendor in the early 1930s. Aidan and Cyril Cairns were grocers at Ōhinewai around 1940–41. Charles Eric and James Stewart McGaughran were butchers. These names help recover a village that once had more local shopping than the surviving buildings suggest.

Martin Robert Lynch had moved from blacksmithing into garage work by the post-war period. His career followed the vehicles. Horses and wagons had needed a forge; cars and trucks needed fuel, repairs and a mechanic. By the 1960s a garage was an obvious part of a settlement sitting directly on State Highway 1.

Farms were changing too. In 1952 R. J. Harper of Ōhinewai took part in a national trial of spray treatments for ripe spot in apples. George and Eileen Stark formed a farming partnership in 1965 and dairy-farmed on Tahuna Road before later moving into grazing. These are small details, but they keep the agricultural story attached to named people rather than to a general statement that farming modernised.

A carrier with a long paper trail

A separate carrying story appeared after the war. In 1942 John Clydesdale Cowden Lumsden was recorded as a millwright at Ōhinewai. Eleven years later, on 27 October 1953, Ohinewai Carriers & Contractors Ltd was formed with John and Mary Ruth Lumsden as directors.

Carrying and contracting fitted Ōhinewai well: farm materials, machinery, road work, rural deliveries and jobs that sat somewhere between transport and whatever needed doing next. The surviving company records do not identify the trucks or yard, so those details remain open.

The business had a long life. In 1989 John, then described as a company director of Huntly, formally stated that Ohinewai Carriers & Contractors had ceased operating and had discharged its debts and liabilities. That gives the company a documentary span of more than thirty-five years.

The surname invites comparison with the older John and Jessie Lumsden family, whose story also includes engineering, contracting and early International trucks. No family connection has yet been established, so the two lines remain separate.

The company records are enough to show that carrying and contracting remained a substantial local business for more than three decades.

Old sites, new work

Some older industrial sites found new uses. The former Firth pumice operation became home to Waikato Wool Scourers from about the mid-1960s. Wool washing brought its own machinery, water use and wastewater ponds to a place where industry had long been tied to the river.

From saleyards to hatchery

The old saleyards area went through one of the more dramatic changes in use. By the late 1960s it was associated with Speyside Poultry Farm and Hatchery. Cattle and sheep had once been gathered around the area for sale; now the emphasis was breeding and hatching chickens at scale.

Ōhinewai also appears in the national story of New Zealand's modern meat-chicken industry. In 1967 an operation described as Ohinewai Hatchery joined Fairfield Hatcheries of Levin, Williams of Christchurch and Petterson of Invercargill to establish a new hatchery and breeding farm near Levin. The following year local heritage material places Speyside at the old saleyards site, and by 1974 Speyside was part of Wescon Industries.

The surviving records do not quite join the 1967 'Ohinewai Hatchery' name directly to Speyside, so the two stages are best left slightly apart. What is clear is that poultry production at Ōhinewai was connected with a much larger change in New Zealand farming. Purpose-bred meat chickens, hatchery networks and national distribution were replacing the smaller mixed arrangements of earlier decades.

Wescon's Silver Star meat chicks were eventually distributed around New Zealand and into the Pacific. For a place whose earlier agricultural trade had involved stock sales beside the railway, participation in a national hatchery network was a very different sort of rural industry. The animals were smaller. The scale was not.

In 1965 another business began to grow beside the highway. Noel McMillan had started raising plants while teaching at Huntly Primary School and, with his brother Don, developed a four-acre Ōhinewai property into a garden centre and tree-and-shrub nursery. Noel bred polyanthus and later cyclamen. The nursery would become one of the businesses people remembered as part of the highway strip.

By about 1970 Ōhinewai had an expanding school, hall and recreation centre, farms, a garage, shops, horticulture, wool scouring, poultry and railway freight. Buildings and businesses were spread along the road and around the railway, often with paddocks between them.

People knew the school, hall, store, garage, nursery, Post Office and bridge without needing a continuous row of shops between them. By then the railway was mostly in the background. Local goods service ended on 31 December 1978, more than a century after the station had first reorganised the settlement. The road had taken over.

Chapter 10

State Highway 1 as Main Street

By the 1970s Ōhinewai's main street was also New Zealand's main road. State Highway 1 followed the old Great South Road alignment past the school, hall, houses, farms and roadside businesses. Nobody travelling between Auckland and Hamilton had to decide to visit Ōhinewai. The highway brought them through it.

Through traffic gave a small rural community far more customers than its population could supply. The supermarket served farm families and travellers. The garage caught people who had never planned to stop. McMillan's nursery drew customers from farther away, while cafés and later roadside businesses fed whoever happened to be hungry between Auckland and Hamilton.

The supermarket

Ruth May Jean remembered her father Oliver building a new supermarket with tearooms in 1964. It belonged to the new road-facing Ōhinewai rather than the old station-side world of the bottom store and Post Office.



Reconstruction of Wilkins Supermarket in the 1970s, based on the surviving family photograph. This is a reconstruction, not a historical photograph. Colours and some foreground details have been reconstructed.

The tearooms served the road while the groceries served locals as well as travellers. For people growing up there, the supermarket was simply one of the landmarks of the village. Te Radar later remembered it alongside the garage and nursery as ordinary parts of an upbringing 'wedged in between SH1 and the main trunk line'.

Ruth remembered the supermarket continuing until 1984. Whatever precise changes of ownership or business name occurred around it, that date works as the end of the Wilkins family story she recorded. By then the highway strip had been the commercial face of Ōhinewai for two decades.

Family along the road

The Wilkins family was spread along both sides of the old highway rather than concentrated at one shop or farm. Family memory places Oliver and Jean Wilkins with their children for a time in the house on the northern corner at 102-34 Ohinewai North Road, before the house beside the school was built. Frank and Ruthanne lived at 105 Ohinewai North Road. Frank was sharemilking with Robin and Jesse at 61 Ohinewai North Road. Family knowledge records that Jesse was killed in a car crash while travelling to Waihi Beach in the mid-1980s.

Joy Wilkins and Meynell Dugdale lived for many years at 56 Ohinewai North Road before moving into Oliver and Jean's house at 15 Ohinewai South Road. John and Andrea Wilkins lived first at 4 Howard Street in Huntly, then moved with Duane, Nicholas, Steven and Jeffrey into the old shop on Old Station Road for several years from about 1980 while a new house was being built opposite the Ōhinewai Domain.

That house later acquired the joking Google Maps label 'Historic Wilkins Homestead'. The label outlived the house: it was demolished for the Waikato Expressway. John and Andrea then moved to 188 Ohinewai South Road at the corner locally known as Curletts Corner. Family memory also remembers the corner as a frequent crash site during the years when Ohinewai South Road formed Great South Road and later State Highway 1.

These addresses are family-location evidence rather than a reconstructed title history. They place several branches of one local family along the same road as the school, Domain, shops and farms described in this chapter.

Fuel and plants

The garage depended even more directly on traffic. A surviving former service-station property near the hall and Tahuna Road junction still looks like the sort of place where a driver could pull in for petrol or repairs without leaving the highway. Local recollections later linked the garage's eventual closure with the four-laning and removal of through traffic.

The nursery served a different kind of customer. Noel and Don McMillan's four-acre operation developed into McMillan's Greenworld Garden Centre and a substantial tree-and-shrub nursery. Noel's plant breeding gave it a reach beyond casual roadside trade. People could stop because they saw it from the highway, but they could also make Ōhinewai the destination.

Fuel, food and groceries served immediate needs, while McMillan's nursery gave people a reason to make Ōhinewai the destination. Immediately south of the supermarket, family memory places an older store building that for decades carried a large Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble sign advertising Adzed Furniture. Duane Wilkins does not remember the store actually trading during his childhood; the sign and building lasted more clearly in memory than the business. Later came cafés and roadside food businesses, including Comfort Zone, while Cowboys was firmly part of the roadside landscape by 1991.

Growing up between road and rail

Andrew Lumsden, later known as Te Radar, grew up inside this version of Ōhinewai. He described the family upbringing as very rural and 'wedged in between SH1 and the main trunk line'. The railway overbridge, machinery, cattle and weather were everyday surroundings rather than historic scenery.

He later found an old piece of primary-school writing in which he had announced, 'When I grow up I'm going to be farmer.' The family farm gave him a close view of the work behind that ambition. His parents' days were long, and the romantic version of rural life had to coexist with the fact that cows keep their own timetable.

The Lumsden connection went back to John and Jessie arriving in the district in 1912. John had worked with horses, engineering, contracting and early trucks. Frank and Margaret Lumsden continued the farm after the Second World War, and Andrew grew up as the fourth generation in that core family line.

In 1983 he was still a pupil when Ōhinewai School celebrated its centenary. He remembered the children using a version of 'Down by the Riverside', which was unusually appropriate for a school whose district had spent a century trying to decide whether the river, railway or road was in charge.

Te Radar later built a national career in comedy, television and writing, but his childhood memories are useful here because the supermarket, garage, nursery, hall, tennis club, highway, railway and landing were simply the places around him. Official records rarely preserve what children did around an overbridge after school.

More than shopfronts

The highway was the visible face of Ōhinewai, but it was never the whole economy. Waikato Wool Scourers continued on the old pumice-works site, poultry operations used the former saleyards area, and farming still dominated the surrounding land. Behind the road signs were mills, contractors, wool buyers and small manufacturing businesses that a passing motorist could miss completely.

In 1972 Hubertus Antonius Josephus Commissaris was formally recorded as an Ōhinewai wool buyer and the owner of a one-acre property in part Allotment 42. His full name occupies rather more space than his landholding in the record, but it gives the local wool economy a person rather than only the larger wool-scouring plant. Buying wool was its own trade, linking farm clips with the wider market.

Two other company names turn up repeatedly in the post-war record: Ohinewai Concrete Products and Ohinewai Posts. Concrete Products had been incorporated in 1956 with a Main South Road office. In August 1984 both companies published dissolution notices on the same day, signed by the same secretary, O. R. Cooper of Huntly, and the companies carried consecutive Hamilton register numbers. They were clearly close neighbours in the paperwork. What Ohinewai Posts actually made is less clear, so the obvious temptation to turn it automatically into a concrete fence-post factory is best resisted.

Timber was easier to see. N. H. Udy had operated a sawmill at Te Hoe via Ōhinewai in the early post-war years. By the mid-1980s a later Udy Sawmills company was

listed on Lumsden Road, while Mohring Bros had a separately registered mill on Main Road. For a settlement often remembered through its supermarket, garage and nursery, the two registered sawmills put some of the heavier work back behind the shopfronts.

Sawmills meant stacks of timber, machinery, trucks and noise rather than a tidy retail frontage. They also suited Ōhinewai's position. The district had road access, room for yards and a rural workforce, and freight could move without depending on the old station. By the 1980s the railway still ran through the settlement, but industries no longer needed to gather around it in the way earlier stores and carriers had.

The industrial economy was broader than a roadside photograph suggests. Travellers remembered fuel and food; residents also knew the mills, wool buyers, hatchery, yards and trucks behind the highway frontage.

N. H. Udy Ltd was operating a sawmill at Ōhinewai in the 1980s, and Mohring Bros was listed with a mill on Main Road in 1985. Hubertus Antonius Josephus Commissaris was recorded as an Ōhinewai wool buyer in the 1970s. Concrete and related businesses also carried the Ōhinewai name. These were the sorts of activities a traveller could drive past without ever knowing they were there.

A later gardening connection came through Eion and Ann Scarrow. After Eion's television series Dig This ended in the mid-1980s, they ran a small gardening-related business from Ōhinewai, producing a bi-monthly magazine and organising garden tours. It was another example of the village supporting work that did not depend entirely on whoever happened to be passing on State Highway 1.

A museum in a farm shed

Not every 1970s roadside story involved selling something. By October 1974 Gordon Anderson of Ōhinewai had assembled a private farm-machinery museum. A national museum-sector survey published the following year recorded the collection and pointed back to a Waikato Times feature on Anderson and his machinery.

The original newspaper feature is still the piece that would tell us what was actually in the collection, but the existence of the museum is enough to add a different sort of local character. Old machinery was already becoming something worth saving while farms around it were buying newer equipment. Long before every old tractor acquired a restoration club and a polished plaque, somebody at Ōhinewai had started putting rural working history aside instead of sending it for scrap.

A new farming story arrived from much farther away. Hardial Singh Deo came to New Zealand in 1970 with very little money, worked in a dairy factory and gradually moved into farming. He bought a dry-stock property in 1979 and his first

dairy farm in 1988. Later the family business included Deo Farms on Tahuna-Ohinewai Road, with his son Ajmer continuing in farming.

Hardial Deo's story adds a different migration line to the farming district. Post-war Ōhinewai was no longer made up only of families with nineteenth-century roots. New migrants entered the same dairy economy, bought land and built family businesses of their own.

The Post Office robbery

On 10 July 1980 the Post Office produced a story of a very different kind. Robbers stole the Anderson family's car as a getaway vehicle while three-year-old David Anderson was still inside it.

The Press published a photograph the next day showing his mother, Lisle Anderson, reunited with him. John Wilkins remembered that by this period the Post Office had moved up near the hall from its old position beside the bottom store. The building had moved with the centre of village life, from the railway end of the settlement towards the road.

Forty years behind the wheel

John Thomas Wilkins's working life belongs almost entirely to the road era. Family chronology places the working Ohinewai Delivery Service operation from around the early 1980s and the beginning of his long school-bus career in the same broad period.

For about forty years he drove children as part of ordinary rural school life. That meant twice-daily runs, term after term, while the roads, vehicles and schools around him changed. Mail and newspaper delivery later became another substantial part of his work.

There was a family precedent. Oliver Wilkins had started his own school-bus service in 1943, first with the ex-Army Dodge, then the Austin and Bedford. Oliver carried children, groceries and mail. A generation later John spent decades doing different combinations of the same basic rural job: taking people and things from where they were to where they needed to be.

The family records from John's later years give the work its proper hours. Mail could be late and heavy. Newspaper runs began at times when most of the district was asleep. Family members helped. Vehicles broke down, usually without consulting the delivery schedule first. The old 4 am railway-mail memory and the later road runs belonged to different transport systems, but the inconvenience of getting things delivered remained remarkably consistent.

People leaving and arriving

Ōhinewai also sent people into lives that had little to do with farming or transport. A 1980 Broadsheet profile followed sisters Gillian Marie and Ros Sherrard, who had grown up at Ōhinewai before leaving New Zealand separately in the early 1970s.

Gillian arrived in Vancouver in December 1970. By 1980 she had completed a master's degree in history, was working as collective coordinator at Vancouver Status of Women and was teaching Women's Studies. Ros left New Zealand in June 1972 and was working in a collectively run organic fruit and vegetable co-operative.

The same rural childhood that produced farmers, drivers, mechanics and plant breeders also sent Gillian and Ros into very different lives in 1970s Vancouver. Their later careers are part of Ōhinewai's history without needing to represent everybody who grew up there.

Gillian later appears back in Waikato through the University of Waikato Centre for Continuing Education. That return closes the loop neatly enough without turning the sisters into a moral about leaving home. Like many people raised in rural districts, their connection to Ōhinewai was a starting point rather than a boundary.

At about the same time, new families were still arriving in the wider district. Mary and Wayne Mickleson moved from Taihape to Matahuru Valley in 1981, originally thinking they might later move on to a larger farm. They stayed and raised their family there. The highway was the most visible part of Ōhinewai, but the community extended well beyond the businesses a traveller could see from a car window.

Cowboys, garden tours and the late highway years

By 1991 Cowboys was definitely part of the Ōhinewai roadside landscape. Hamilton City Libraries holds programme and menu material produced for Cowboys Ohinewai that year. That dated material places Cowboys securely in 1991, while leaving the precise opening year and original proprietor open.

The surviving building at 3360 Ohinewai North Road later became one of the most recognisable remains of the old highway strip. Cowboys Roadstop Limited appears in later company proceedings, including a 1993 debenture and the receivership and liquidation process of the late 1990s. The legal paperwork is much less interesting than the basic point: by the early 1990s Ōhinewai had a named roadside hospitality business large enough to leave menus, letterhead and a building people still recognise.

Another familiar national name arrived in a very different way. After the television gardening programme Dig This ended in 1986, Eion Scarrow and his

wife Ann ran a small gardening-related business from Ōhinewai. Later accounts say they produced a bi-monthly gardening magazine and organised garden tours around New Zealand. The business name and exact address have slipped out of the accessible record, but the activity fits an Ōhinewai that already had a strong horticultural connection through McMillan's nursery.

McMillan's was not simply selling plants from beside the road. Noel McMillan had begun raising plants while teaching, then developed the four-acre nursery with his brother Don. A later workplace recollection described Noel and an assistant hand-pollinating flowers, isolating crosses and keeping extensive notes. Plant breeding required patience, record-keeping and a willingness to become interested in details most customers would never notice.

That work eventually brought national recognition. Noel received the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture's Plant Raisers' Award in 1999 and was awarded the QSM in 2006 for public services. The awards came later, but they grew from work already being done while the nursery was part of the everyday Ōhinewai roadside landscape.

By the late highway years the roadside strip sat in front of a much wider local economy: a gardening business, plant breeding, sawmills, wool trading, farming and Cowboys serving travellers on the main route. In 2003 the traffic moved somewhere else.

The hall

The commercial strip changed, but the hall remained one of the places that belonged primarily to residents. The original hall dated from 1914. In 1994 it was replaced with a new and enlarged Ōhinewai Community Hall.

That investment came when small rural shops and services were already being squeezed by easier travel to larger centres. Huntly, Te Kauwhata and Hamilton were closer in practical terms than they had ever been. A household could drive elsewhere for groceries, parts or entertainment without turning the trip into an expedition.

The hall, school, tennis facilities and local organisations were less dependent on traffic than the shops. Retail could disappear or move; people still lived there.

Community work beyond the hall

Lorraine Storey provides another example of local public life extending well beyond the district. By 1987 she was chairing the Rural Communities Trust, which worked with rural families and individuals, particularly around education and health. Later she served as a trustee of the Waikato Community Trust.

In 1997 she was appointed a Companion of the Queen's Service Order for community service and was officially listed as being from Ōhinewai. The honour

came from work that rarely leaves a dramatic physical trace. There is no factory, shopfront or road named after rural advocacy. Its effects sit in people getting support when distance, money or circumstance make ordinary services harder to reach.

Lorraine Storey's work extended local public life well beyond the village. People based at Ōhinewai carried rural experience into regional and national organisations as well as serving institutions at home.

The road starts to work against itself

State Highway 1 created the roadside economy, but better roads also weakened some of it. The easier it became to travel, the easier it became for locals to spend money somewhere else. Small garages and shops across rural New Zealand faced the same pressure. A national highway could bring customers to the door and carry local customers straight past it.

By the 1990s Ōhinewai still had recognisable roadside businesses, but the old commercial model was thinner and more dependent on passing traffic. Cowboys, cafés and other stops could make use of the stream of vehicles. The school, farms, hall and industries were tied to the place in a different way.

Then the road moved. In 2003 the new four-lane alignment took State Highway 1 traffic away from the old strip. The school, hall, houses, farms and remaining businesses stayed exactly where they were. The traffic that had helped shape the village for most of the twentieth century did not.

Ōhinewai had already lived through one transport shift when the road displaced the station from everyday life. In 2003 the route changed again.

Chapter 11

The Mine That Never Was

In the early 1980s, a drive through Ōhinewai still showed dairy farms, drains, the railway, State Highway 1 and low country stretching towards Lake Waikare. Beneath it lay a thick coal deposit known about for decades. The difficult part was the hundred metres or so of wet, unstable ground above it.

An old problem returns

Mining around Huntly had already shown the value of Waikato coal, and companies had looked at Ōhinewai long before the big 1980s proposal. In the 1950s Taupiri Coal Mine Company tried to drive an underground access tunnel towards the coal. It got only about ten metres before the soft, saturated ground brought the attempt to an end.

A separate coal-company site also existed at Ōhinewai in that period. Whites Aviation photographed a Pukemiro Collieries operation there in September 1952. Six surviving frames show that coal interest at Ōhinewai was more than a later planning idea, although that site and the failed Taupiri tunnel were separate operations.

Exploration continued. A 1975 bore in the southern Waikare Coalfield passed through about 25.5 metres of coal beneath roughly 65 metres of cover. By the mid-1980s close to 500 holes had been drilled across the Waikare Coalfield, around 200 of them helping define the shallow, thick deposit near Ōhinewai. Nobody needed convincing that there was coal. The question was whether anyone could get it out economically without losing control of the water.

The proposed coal sat roughly 100 to 120 metres below the surface beneath peat, sand, silt, clay and groundwater. Local farmers already knew what drained peat did: it dried, compacted and lowered the land surface. Measurements across Ōhinewai between 1959 and 1983 found average subsidence of about 11 millimetres a year at monitored sites, with larger movements in some places. An opencast mine would multiply the water problem enormously.

The argument begins

The public fight began before the main feasibility study. In September 1982 State Coal Mines applied to the Waikato Valley Authority for permission to dewater a trial pit and discharge water towards Lake Waikare. Among those objecting were D. G. Powell, D. C. Hill, H. M. Horton and P. C. Levin, along with Federated Farmers, Waikato Watchdog, the South Auckland Conservation Association, the Environmental Defence Society and the New Zealand Insurance Company.

The objections focused on farmland, water and how little was then known about the effects of dewatering. Farmers, environmental groups and other organisations were already treating the proposal as a land-and-water issue as well as a mining project.

Field investigation began in December 1983. Pumping tests followed in 1984 and expanded sharply in 1986. Engineers installed pumping wells, piezometers, pressure instruments and settlement-monitoring stations, then ran individual seven-day tests followed by a combined forty-day pumping programme. Before the pit could be designed, they needed to know where the groundwater would go when pumping began.

RWL Mining Consultants completed feasibility work in 1987. The concept was enormous beside Ōhinewai: roughly 30 million tonnes of coal, production around 1.1 million tonnes a year, and a later reconstruction of the State Coal design showing about 34 million tonnes in a pit roughly two kilometres across. The figures changed as the design developed, but the scale did not.

Keeping the hole dry

The dewatering system was almost a project in its own right. Modelling suggested up to 82 bores operating at once and more than 100 over the life of the mine. Pumping on that scale was expected to lower groundwater well beyond the pit, in some models several kilometres north and towards the Waikato River.

Engineers also expected the ground to settle as water was removed. Estimates allowed for settlement of up to about a metre within the mine area and lower amounts outside it, with particular concern around the southern edge of Lake Waikare where the surrounding land was already low. Those figures described what engineers thought could happen if the mine went ahead. They were not later measurements of damage, because the mine never reached that stage.

The full development would also need much more land than the hole itself. Contemporary descriptions put the wider requirement at about 1,800 hectares once the pit, waste areas, roads and supporting works were included. A proposal that size could not avoid farms, drains, lake margins and the working landscape around it.

In 1984 Tu Tangata reported environmental concerns raised at Waahi Marae, where Tainui spokesman John Te Maru included the proposed Ōhinewai opencast among developments causing concern. At a later University of Waikato seminar, Nganeko Minhinnick of the Huakina Development Trust spoke about Māori environmental values and the place of water in government decisions. The mine debate therefore included cultural relationships with water as well as engineering predictions.

Farms in the way

For some landowners the proposal stopped being theoretical in 1986. The Crown compulsorily acquired substantial areas for the mine, including about 560 hectares associated with the E. G. Levin Farm Settlement Trust and land belonging to August Daniel Deane.

The mine began affecting people before any coal was removed. Farms had already changed hands because the Crown expected the project to proceed, leaving families and trusts dealing with a pit that still existed only in plans, bores and engineering reports.

Then the political and commercial setting changed. State Coal Mines was restructured during the wider reforms of government trading operations, and the Ōhinewai mine was not carried into production. Land acquired for the project became surplus to a future that had disappeared.

The consequences lasted much longer than the mine proposal itself. Questions over whether compulsorily acquired property should be offered back, and to whom, eventually produced major litigation involving the Levin interests and the

Deane and Horton cases. The coal stayed underground while arguments created by the proposed mine carried on through the courts.

No pit

There is no abandoned opencast mine hidden behind the farms at Ōhinewai. The huge groundwater cone was never created by an operating mine, and the predicted mine-related subsidence never happened. Lake Waikare's later environmental problems came from a much longer history of catchment change, sediment, nutrients, wetland loss and altered water levels, not from a mine that was never dug.

Even without a pit, the project left a substantial record: hundreds of holes drilled, pumping tests, settlement monitoring, farms acquired, a mine kilometres across designed on paper, formal objections and Māori environmental concerns placed directly into the debate. Then the project stopped.

The paddocks remained and the coal stayed below them. Above ground, State Highway 1 was still shaping the village while the land acquired for an unbuilt mine continued into court cases and later arguments over ownership.

Chapter 12

The Bypass

For most of the twentieth century, State Highway 1 ran through Ōhinewai's front yard. In the 1990s motorists between Auckland and Hamilton still passed the old commercial strip, hall, houses and businesses without making any deliberate decision to visit.

In 2003 that ended. The Rangiriri to Ōhinewai four-laning put State Highway 1 onto a new alignment and left the old Great South Road as Ohinewai North Road and Ohinewai South Road. The interchange remained close by, so Ōhinewai did not lose access to the national road. What it lost was the steady line of customers who had previously arrived whether they meant to or not.

When the cars stopped coming past

For businesses dependent on passing traffic, the change was immediate. A garage could no longer rely on a driver noticing a low fuel gauge, a noise under the bonnet or a sign beside the road. Food and convenience businesses were no longer directly in front of everyone heading south. Stopping at Ōhinewai became a deliberate choice.

Later local interviews linked the garage's closure directly to the four-laning. That is the clearest individual business story from the bypass. Other businesses had already changed or disappeared at different times. Ruth May Jean remembered the Wilkins supermarket operating until 1984, well before the new highway opened.

McMillan's nursery had customers who could make a deliberate trip. Cowboys and cafés belonged to a later roadside period. The old strip did not close as a unit on one day in 2003.

The bypass affected businesses differently. Fuel, food and convenience retail lost the advantage of being unavoidable, while farms, contractors and industrial businesses kept excellent access north and south. The school and hall had never depended on Auckland traffic in the same way.

The former service-station site remained beside the old road. The Cowboys building survived and later found new uses, including as a filming location in the early 2020s. Houses, the hall and school stayed put. The large change was the stream of traffic, not the physical location of the community.



Ōhinewai before the 2003 State Highway 1 bypass. The recovered Crown aerial is identified in its source email as Ōhinewai, 1997, and shows the settlement while through traffic still followed the old highway corridor. Credit: recovered Crown aerial, CROWN_Temp132X_2961_210.jpg. Rights: Crown/LINZ attribution remains to be confirmed before unrestricted publication.



Ōhinewai after the bypass, from a Google Earth source file saved in 2014. The divided highway is visible, but the underlying imagery acquisition date has not been verified. Credit: Google Earth source file saved 7 July 2014. Rights: Google Earth attribution and reuse rules apply.

The road had once pulled everyday movement away from the railway. In 2003 the new alignment did the same thing to the old highway strip: the national route remained close, but it no longer passed the businesses' doors.

For the next fifteen years Ōhinewai remained a small rural community. No replacement commercial centre appeared and no new town filled the paddocks. The school, hall, farms, Matahuru connections and remaining workplaces continued along a much quieter road.

Chapter 13

Community After Traffic

After the bypass, the old highway became quiet enough to behave like a local road again. Its width still showed what it had been built for, but most Auckland to Hamilton traffic had disappeared past the school, hall, houses and surviving commercial buildings.

The school continued because children still lived across the district. The Community Hall continued because people still needed somewhere for meetings, celebrations, sport and local events. The hall had been rebuilt and enlarged in 1994, only nine years before the bypass, so it entered the quieter-road period as a recent community investment rather than a relic of the old highway.

Matahuru

Matahuru also became more visible in the modern public record. In August 2009 the reservation was formally redefined as the Matahuru Papakāinga Marae Reservation of Waikato-Tainui, loyal to the Kīngitanga, with Ngāti Makirangi and Ngāti Mahuta named in the Gazette notice. Later that year Te Hookioi reported Matahuru becoming Waikato-Tainui's 68th marae.

Modern sources describe whakapapa and affiliations around Matahuru in slightly different ways, so this book keeps those source-specific distinctions. The 2009 formal recognition did not create Matahuru; it made a longstanding Māori presence in the wider Ōhinewai district more visible in contemporary records.

Work continued away from the old shopfronts. Farming remained extensive, while sawmilling, transport, contracting, building work and other rural or industrial activities benefited from the interchange. A business needing every driver to see its sign had lost something; a business needing land and fast truck access had not.

Up at eleven at night

John Wilkins's later delivery work gives the post-bypass years a much more useful human scale than traffic counts do. By 2010 the jobs were appearing in family messages because they were simply part of daily life. In February that year the mail was late and there was plenty of it. By July Nicholas was helping with the Friday-night papers, and by December he had learnt enough of the run for John to get a break.

Then the Waikato Times changed from afternoon to morning publication. On 28 June 2011 John wrote that the change would begin on 5 September and added, 'suppose will sort it out somehow'. On the evening of 5 September he had gone to bed because he had to start work at 11 pm.

The newspaper's production schedule changed somewhere else. In Ōhinewai, John rearranged his sleep and drove rural roads through the night so the papers would be there in the morning.

Vehicles had their own opinions about the arrangement. In February 2012 the delivery van 'packed a sad', leaving family members running around until about two in the morning getting papers delivered. A few days later the van had blown an oil seal while the household Mitsubishi Lancer had also lost its gearbox. Rural delivery has never been improved by having both available vehicles develop problems in the same week.

A later memory filled in another piece of the geography. In August 2020 John asked Duane about photographs from a day when they had gone out to Waerenga on the Waikato Times run and stopped at the old Wilkins home at Taniwha. That

one trip links the later newspaper work back to the place where Oliver Wilkins had worked at the Pulham & Begbie store decades earlier.

John's working life therefore crossed nearly the whole road story in this book. There was the old memory of getting up around four for railway mail, decades of school-bus driving, delivery work and finally newspaper runs starting before midnight. The technology changed. The requirement that somebody actually carry things along rural roads did not.

People still working the district

The years after the bypass also produced local stories that had little to do with roadside trade. Des Hickey built a national reputation in Jersey cattle while based in the Ōhinewai district. Jersey records later associated him directly with Ohinewai, and his long involvement in breeding, judging and classification brought recognition well beyond the farm gate.

The awards stretched across decades. He received the Jock Singers Scroll in 1996, a Royal Agricultural Society Gold Medal in 2005 and Jersey New Zealand's Distinguished Member Award in 2017, as well as long service within Lower Waikato Jersey circles. Those are specialist honours rather than household names, which is exactly why they belong here. Rural expertise often becomes highly visible inside an industry and almost invisible outside it.

A breeder's reputation is built slowly. It comes from animals, pedigrees, production, judging, club work and the accumulated trust of other breeders. Hickey's story therefore belongs beside the older calf-club and pig-performance records rather than in a detached list of notable residents. It shows the same district producing increasingly specialised farming knowledge across generations.

Neil Bateup became another nationally recognised rural figure from the district. A North Waikato dairy farmer identified with Ōhinewai, he spent decades working in agricultural and rural-support organisations and was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2018 for services to agriculture and the community.

Much of that work sat outside the normal image of farming. Rural Support organisations deal with the periods when weather, debt, disease, isolation or personal pressure turn ordinary farm problems into crises. Bateup helped build and lead support structures that connected farming families with practical help rather than leaving them to sort everything out at the kitchen table.

The role became particularly visible during large adverse events. By the mid-2020s he had been involved in coordinating support well beyond Waikato, including efforts after Cyclone Gabrielle that mobilised more than $3 million in private donations for affected rural communities. That work had national reach, but the person doing it remained grounded in an Ōhinewai farming life.

Neither Hickey nor Bateup depended on the old highway economy. Their reputations grew from farming itself: one through cattle breeding and breed organisations, the other through agriculture and rural support.

The old highway strip was quieter, but farming in and around Ōhinewai continued to produce specialist work and national recognition.

Another migration story sat inside the modern dairy workforce. Isidro Quilla Jr came to New Zealand from the Philippines in 2013 after completing a farming internship in Denmark. One of his early New Zealand roles was as a dairy manager at Ohinewai before later work took him through Matamata and then to Patetonga.

Isidro Quilla Jr's time at Ōhinewai was short compared with the older family histories, but it records a changed dairy workforce. By the twenty-first century a farm manager could arrive after training in Europe, work at Ōhinewai and then move through a professional dairy career elsewhere in Waikato.

Trying to repair a lake

Lake Ōhinewai was also entering a different phase. For generations, much of the engineering around local water had been about drainage, flood control and making wet ground easier to farm or build on. By the twenty-first century the lake was being treated increasingly as something damaged that might be repaired.

In May 2011 a one-way barrier was installed downstream of the Tahuna Road culvert to reduce the return of adult koi carp while still allowing fish to move out of the lake. Koi numbers fell at first, but monitoring did not show a convincing long-term recovery in most water-quality measures.

The result was disappointing but clear. Sediment, nutrients, invasive fish, vegetation loss and a heavily modified catchment had accumulated over decades, and reducing one pressure did not remove the others.

Later work tried different approaches. RotoTurf trials used biodegradable mats planted with native aquatic species, while kākahi research looked at the role freshwater mussels might play in shallow lakes. Matahuru people were involved in advice, surveys, monitoring and practical restoration work. Nobody could claim Lake Ōhinewai had been restored by 2025, but the direction had changed. The lake was no longer being discussed only as water to drain, divert or keep off farmland.

By the 2010s the old road was quieter and local water work had changed direction. The settlement was no longer organised around through traffic, while Lake Ōhinewai was increasingly treated as an ecosystem to repair rather than water to remove from farmland.

By 2018 the settlement was still small. The school and hall were active, farms dominated the surrounding land and industrial and rural businesses used the road network. Developers looking at the interchange, however, saw room for something much larger.

Chapter 14

A New Town Proposed

In the late 2010s, the interchange that had taken passing customers away from the old highway strip became one of Ōhinewai's main development advantages. Large rural properties sat beside the Auckland to Hamilton corridor with direct road access. That was poor geography for a café relying on passing traffic and very good geography for a manufacturer needing land and freight access.

Ambury Properties assembled a proposal over roughly 176 to 178 hectares around Lumsden, Tahuna and Balemi Roads. Ambury was the property-development vehicle associated with the owners of The Comfort Group, the company behind Sleepyhead. What began publicly as a major manufacturing move quickly became something much larger.

More than a factory

During the 2018–19 Waikato District Plan process, plans showed industrial land, housing, business areas, open space, stormwater systems and new roads. Different versions talked about roughly 900 to 1,100 homes. Promotional material described major investment and large numbers of jobs.

The proposal was several times larger than the existing settlement. A place made up largely of farms, a school, hall, businesses and scattered houses was suddenly being planned with roughly 900 to 1,100 new homes as well as industrial and commercial land.

The land itself was still working farmland. A 2019 investigation described about 177 hectares of dairy pasture with farmhouses, a milking shed and other rural infrastructure. The proposal was not filling an unused gap beside the expressway. It involved turning farms into a mixture of factories, streets, houses, open space and services.

The plan changed as it went. In early 2020 council material still included a service station, convenience retail and a discount factory outlet. Later that year the outlet disappeared from the scheme and more industrial land took its place. Housing numbers and staging also moved around. The masterplan was a proposal under negotiation, not a photograph of the future.

Water again

Any large development at Ōhinewai had to deal with the same water problems that appear throughout this history. The land was low, drained and in places peaty. Stormwater, groundwater, wetlands and wastewater had to be designed alongside the streets and buildings, not after them.

The project also developed formal relationships with Māori organisations. On 3 December 2019 an agreement was announced involving Nga Muka Development, Waahi Whaanui Trust, Te Riu o Waikato and the Waikato-Tainui executive. A later Kaitiaki Environmental Values Assessment dealt with water, mauri, Te Ture Whaimana and the Waikato River as part of the development setting.

The proposal sat inside the same river and wetland landscape that had shaped Māori travel, farming, roads, the mine proposal and lake restoration. The development was new; the engineering problem of building on low Waikato ground was not.

Planning permission

On 24 May 2021 the independent Waikato District Plan Hearings Panel approved a rezoning framework for Ōhinewai. Industrial, business and residential precincts could now be planned alongside open space, stormwater and supporting infrastructure.

The decision changed what the land could legally become. It did not build the houses, shops or streets.

The factory component followed a separate fast-track path under the COVID-19 recovery legislation. The project was referred into that process in December 2020. Ambury applied for resource consent in May 2021, and an expert panel granted consent in August for the manufacturing development and associated works, including provision for rail-related infrastructure.

The Huntly section of the Waikato Expressway had opened the year before, in February 2020. That improved the wider Auckland to Hamilton corridor but did not bypass Ōhinewai again. The old village had lost through traffic in 2003. What the completed expressway did was make the interchange and surrounding land even more useful for freight and regional travel.

Appeals over the district-plan decision were resolved in early 2022. On 2 March Waikato District Council announced the Environment Court determination following agreement between the parties. By then the development had cleared major planning hurdles and the manufacturing component had its own consent.

By early 2022 the factory had consent and the district plan allowed a much wider industrial, business and residential development. Early masterplans looked like a new town. Construction would prove much more selective.

Chapter 15

Ōhinewai in 2025

By the end of 2025, the early development drawings and the ground at Ōhinewai no longer looked like the same thing.

The industrial development was real. Stage-one earthworks were complete by May 2023, and a foam-manufacturing building of about 6,076 square metres was under construction. Later work added industrial buildings, loading areas and factory fit-out. By 2025 jobs were being advertised for production and warehouse work at the Ōhinewai site.

The paddocks east of the older settlement therefore looked very different from a few years earlier. Large modern industrial buildings now occupied land that had been farmed at the beginning of the decade.

The industrial buildings were visible. The town drawn around them was not. Early plans had shown hundreds of houses, business and service areas, open space and a new street network, but by 31 December 2025 nothing on that scale had appeared.

Infrastructure was part of the reason the programme slowed. Council discussions through 2023 still involved wastewater, stormwater, water supply, electricity and the order in which supporting investment would occur. The developer also slowed the programme. Rezoning remained in place, so future development was still possible, but the early masterplan could no longer be read as a timetable.

The same caution applies to the proposed rail siding. Rail connections appeared in approved plans for the manufacturing development. By the end of 2025 there was still no firm sign in the material used for this book that trains were operating over a completed siding. The Main Trunk was still there beside the site, just as it had been since 1877.

Still a small community

Small-area census reconstruction gives roughly 159 people in 2006, 159 in 2013, 162 in 2018 and 159 in 2023. The statistical boundaries are not identical enough to treat those as four exact headcounts of the same place, but they show no town-sized population appearing before the 2023 Census.

The existing community was still recognisable. Ōhinewai School remained. The hall and tennis facilities remained. Farms still surrounded much of the settlement. Matahuru had its place in the modern Waikato-Tainui network. Ohinewai North Road and Ohinewai South Road still traced the route that generations knew as State Highway 1.

The old commercial buildings were still readable too. The former service-station site remained near the hall. The old Cowboys building survived farther along the

road and had acquired an unlikely second career as a television filming location. Neither was doing the job for which the highway economy had originally created it, but both still made the old road understandable.

The farming community had not become a museum piece beside the factories. In 2024 Jacoba Gread of Ōhinewai was collecting national Holstein Friesian youth awards, including the Kingsland Trophy and an All New Zealand Black and White Youth Calf Class win. Seventy-four years earlier Ōhinewai schoolchildren had been entering calves at a Lower Waikato field day. The competitions were different, but the habit of young people learning stock well enough to put it in front of judges was still recognisable.

Aerial photographs are now dominated by the large industrial roofs, but farming families, schoolchildren, contractors and people working around the lakes continued beside them.

The lakes

Tāwera Nikau and the lake

One of the better-known people connected with the modern lake story is Tāwera Nikau. His rugby league career included nineteen tests for New Zealand and the 1999 Melbourne Storm premiership, followed later by national recognition for both sport and community service. His connection with Ōhinewai, however, is not simply that a famous sportsman lives nearby.

Nikau farms whānau land in the district and has been involved with Matahuru and work around Lake Waikare. Recent restoration projects have brought him into practical work around water, native vegetation and lake health, which is the relevant connection here rather than a replay of his sporting career.

In 2003 Nikau suffered a major motorcycle accident on a rural road at Ōhinewai. Two decades later his local connection also included farming, community work and lake restoration. They are separate parts of a long association with the district.

Lake Ōhinewai was still a work in progress. The 2011 koi barrier had changed the fish population without producing the hoped-for overall recovery. In 2023 and 2024 restoration trials used planted RotoTurf mats to test whether native aquatic vegetation could be re-established. Kākahi work explored the role of freshwater mussels in a shallow, nutrient-rich lake.

Matahuru participation brought local cultural and practical knowledge into that work. The aim was no longer simply to push water out of the landscape and keep it away from farms. People were trying to put pieces of the lake ecosystem back.

Lake Waikare remained much larger and much more difficult. Its poor water quality, altered levels and long history of catchment change were not problems with quick fixes. The lower-Waikato wetland landscape was still being engineered

in 2025, but some of that engineering was now about restoration rather than drainage.

Drive the old road

The easiest way to understand Ōhinewai in 2025 was still to leave the expressway and drive the old highway. It passed the school and hall, surviving roadside-business buildings and the railway corridor that reorganised the district in 1877. Within a few minutes were farms, drains and low wet ground that had frustrated road builders, worried mine engineers and shaped modern development plans. Beyond them stood the new industrial buildings.

The railway still carried trains. The old highway still carried local traffic. The school still taught children. Farms remained beside industrial land, and Lake Ōhinewai was still being worked on rather than declared fixed.

At the end of 2025 Ōhinewai was neither the new town shown in the early masterplans nor the highway village remembered from the 1970s and 1980s. Around Tahuna Road the hall, school, old highway, railway, paddocks and new industrial buildings still sat within a few minutes of one another. The quickest way to understand the place remained the same: get off the expressway and look.

Source notes and bibliography

These notes identify the principal evidence behind each chapter rather than reproducing the full research register. They are intended to let a reader trace the main claims while keeping the narrative readable. Newspaper dates, government notices and technical reports are given where they carry an important factual point. The selected bibliography at the end lists the main works and repositories; fuller pinpoint references can be added during final copy-edit.

Introduction

The introduction draws across the source groups listed below. The 2003 bypass date is controlled by Transit New Zealand's 2002/03 annual reporting and later Waka Kotahi planning evidence. The modern development summary relies on Waikato District Council, Environmental Protection Authority and Environment Court records. The deep-landscape outline follows the geological and palaeoenvironmental studies used in Chapter 1.

Chapter 1 – Under the peat

The principal scientific foundations are Matthew McGlone, Campbell Nelson and Andrew Todd's 1984 study of pre-peat and surficial peat at Ōhinewai; Campbell Nelson, Dallas Mildenhall, Andrew Todd and David Pocknall's 1988 subsurface-stratigraphy study; C. G. Vucetich, K. S. Birrell and W. A. Pullar's 1978 paper defining the Ōhinewai Tephra Formation; regional Waikato coal geology; and recent Waikato palaeolake synthesis. Older radiocarbon ages are retained in the form used by the original studies rather than silently converted into calendar dates.

Chapter 2 – Te Wai o Hine

The chapter combines archaeological and environmental work with source-specific Māori material. The two Hine traditions are deliberately kept separate: Ōhinewai School's local-history account and the Ngāti Hine oral history recorded from kaumātua Glen Tupuhi in the 2025 Lake Waikare environmental work. Matahuru affiliation and beneficiary wording follows the source that created each statement, including the 2009 New Zealand Gazette notice, Waikato-Tainui and Te Kāhui Māngai. Wider cultural-landscape context comes from the 2020 Kaitiaki Environmental Values Assessment.

Chapter 3 – The river world

The Rauwhitu household is supported by James Armitage and Hannah Tuhi Tuhi's 1859 intention-to-marry record, Anglican baptism material, contemporary newspaper references and the later Rauwhitu manuscript map held by the Alexander Turnbull Library. Hannah's later history as Hani or Hana Maki is drawn from Māori Gazette notices and succession-record catalogues. George French Angas's 1844 Waikato images are used only as regional evidence and are not presented as views of Ōhinewai.

Chapter 4 – Eight Kilometres from Rangiriri

The military narrative relies on Duncan Cameron's Rangiriri despatch, contemporary 1863–64 newspaper reporting, Waikato-Tainui historical material, post-war Compensation Court notices and proceedings, and later archaeological and historical work on Rangiriri and Rāhui Pōkeka. No source used for this book identifies a battle, redoubt or permanent Crown camp at Ōhinewai itself. The chapter therefore treats the settlement as part of the military and logistics corridor rather than inventing a local battlefield.

Chapter 5 – 13 August 1877

Railway opening and closure dates follow New Zealand railway heritage records and contemporary Public Works and newspaper reporting. The railway opened through Ōhinewai on 13 August 1877. George Silvester's early twentieth-century post office in his riverside house is recorded in district historical material drawing on the Cyclopedia and is supported by contemporary evidence of his farming and school-committee role. The detailed nineteenth-century station layout remains a visual-retrieval question rather than a narrative assumption.

Chapter 6 – Farms, Flax and a School

Riverdale is reconstructed from McKinnon Brothers advertisements, agricultural returns, sporting notices and the 1921 published surveyor's recollection. That recollection is also the source of the story that the northern boundary line stopped short of Lake Rotongaro; it is treated as a remembered surveying episode, not as surveyed modern geometry. The flax-property and Waikare-mill stories come from contemporary sale reporting and the Waikato District historic overview. The Noda section follows the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography entry for Asajiro Noda, including his marriage to Rihi Tipene Te Ahu of Ngāti Mahuta, their Ōhinewai farming period and the family account of an island property in Lake Waikare. Later McKinnon continuity is drawn from John Malcolm MacKinnon's 1915 marriage record, Gazette appointments, sheep returns and the 1942 Riverdale record; the post-1913 McKinnon Bros partners are deliberately left unnamed because the surviving evidence does not prove their identities. School dates distinguish the later 1882 classroom tradition from the securely documented public opening celebration of 11 April 1883. The short New Zealand Herald follow-up of 31 December 1918 is the only source used for the Rotorua express and motor-lorry collision at the end of the chapter; it confirms Miss Smyth's injury and treatment at Waikato Hospital but does not support reconstruction of further circumstances.

Chapter 7 – War, Work and Community

The Roll of Honour is used alongside service, casualty and family records rather than as a complete biography of every name. Samuel Watts Reynolds, Donald McKinnon 12/797, Frank Sydney Fitness, Pari Retimana 20819 and Stanley Foster 55819 are included only to the extent supported by the available records. The Gall carrying-business evidence comes from postal, trade, Police Gazette and military-service sources. The 19 February 1918 Military Service Board report adds the named Percy Senior blacksmith case and preserves the wording “practically impossible to secure blacksmiths now” and “the public interest must be considered”. James Lumsden is recorded as a contractor at Ōhinewai in 1917. The 1917 Lynch entry is retained as Ngaruawahia evidence, not as proof of an Ōhinewai garage history. The early Domain evidence is dated to 1904 and 1912. Several family relationships remain deliberately qualified until personnel or civil records resolve them.

Chapter 8 – Roads Across Wet Ground

Road development is based on government transport records, contemporary reporting and the Alexander Turnbull Library's Great South Road photographic holdings. The 1953 flood account comes from the Press aerial report of 9 July 1953; the 1956 sequence is supported by Whites Aviation imagery. The Lumsden motorisation story follows the family's documented account published in 2024. George Bain Lyon's 1896 marriage record and the 19 February 1918 Military Service Board report provide the named blacksmith sequence, including Percy Senior's appeal and the Board's wording about the public interest. The 1917 James Lumsden contractor entry is kept separate from the family narrative where identity is not proved. The 1944 goods-wagon theft proceedings are treated as charges and freight evidence, not as proof of guilt. The Ashburton Guardian of 13 June 1945 supports the goods-train collision in heavy fog, while the Northern Advocate of 26 May 1947 is the preferred detailed source for Malcolm Wills's fatal crossing collision and its road-and-rail geography. Rotorua Morning Post, 1 November 1950, supplies the Melva, Rex and Robin Townsend road-collision account. The 1958 New Zealand Gazette speed-zone notice supplies the precise highway limits, while Waikato District Council's historic overview records the ten-section Great South Road and Tahuna

Road subdivision. Passenger service at Ōhinewai ended on 10 April 1965, while local goods functions continued until 31 December 1978.

Chapter 9 – The Post-War Village

School, Domain and recreation history is drawn from school histories, New Zealand Gazette notices and council reserve records. Forest and Bird, 1 May 1968, supplies the ten-day Port Waikato camp shared by Ōhinewai, Waiterimu and Te Hoe schools. Hugh Anderson's Ōhinewai childhood is controlled by his own retrospective account together with contemporary Press captions from 1964 and 1966 and Motorcycling New Zealand material. R. J. Harper's 1952 apple-spray trial comes from the New Zealand Journal of Agriculture. George and Eileen Stark's 1965 farming partnership, Tahuna Road dairy farm and later conversion to grazing are supported by Moses v Stark [2023] NZHC 1955. Retail chronology includes Joseph Mercep, the Cairns grocers, United Stores and the company records for Ohinewai Stores Limited and Langlands Foodmarket Limited. The New Zealand Gazette notice of 16 April 1958 establishes the legal name change from Ohinewai Stores Limited to Langlands Foodmarket Limited. The 1972 dissolution is treated as a company endpoint, not as proof of the physical shop's closing date or of succession to the later Wilkins supermarket. Poultry-industry history is based on the Waikato District historic overview and the later national industry history, which are kept separate where the identity of 1967 Ohinewai Hatchery and Speyside remains unproved. The 1963–64 visual controls include the NZMS 3 N.52/7 aerial mosaic, the three Whites Aviation "Waikato River, Ohinewai" aerials and the Weston Langford railway photograph 104004. The exact site of Martin Robert Lynch's garage remains unresolved.

Chapter 10 – State Highway 1 as Main Street

John Thomas Wilkins's early-1980s working ODS chronology and about-forty-year school-bus career are controlled by project-owner family evidence, PER-0020, RR-0115, SR-0083 and STY-0120. The comparison with Oliver Johnston Wilkins uses project-held family scrapbook evidence controlled through BIB-0290, IMG-0064 and IMG-0077. Oliver's 1943–1961 buses, schools and delivery territory remain evidence for Oliver only; no John-specific school, route or fleet detail has been inferred from them.

The roadside-business narrative combines New Zealand Gazette and company records with local and regional recollection. Oliver Johnston Wilkins is independently documented on Great South Road, and the supermarket is strongly identified in family and local memory. New Zealand Gazette 1975 No.98 independently confirms Wilkins Supermarket Ltd, HN 1966/725, in the Hamilton Companies Register. That company record substantially strengthens the remembered business name but does not identify directors, shareholders or a trading address, so it is not yet joined to Oliver Johnston Wilkins, an earlier retail company or a particular shop building. The separate Ohinewai Merchants record is limited to the 1968 name change from Fransham Contracts Limited and the 1974 dissolution because its actual trade remains unknown. The same 1975 Gazette issue records Goscomb Motors Ohinewai Ltd, HN 1965/493, as struck off and dissolved, providing a strong garage-era trading-name lead without proving the 8 Ohinewai North Road premises. The 1972 Gazette identifies Hubertus Antonius Josephus Commissaris as an Ōhinewai wool buyer. Official sawmill registers identify N. H. Udy Ltd at Ōhinewai in 1984 and Mohring Bros on Main Road in 1985; the earlier Te Hoe Udy records are not assumed to be the same site. Ohinewai Concrete Products Ltd and Ohinewai Posts Ltd are controlled by company notices that prove the paired company identities and shared secretary but not the products of Ohinewai Posts. Broadsheet, 1 May 1980, supports the Gillian Marie and Ros Sherrard material; the Press caption of 11 July 1980 supports only the established facts of the Post Office robbery and David Anderson's reunion with Lisle Anderson; later family material supports the Micklesons' 1981 Matahuru Valley arrival. New Zealand Herald and Otago Daily Times obituaries support the later Eion and Ann Scarrow Ōhinewai gardening-business account while leaving the business and magazine names unresolved. Later Gazette insolvency notices identify Alan James Wakelin as having traded as Comfort Zone Café, while the direct Ōhinewai location link remains unproved. NurseryWorld or Commercial Horticulture and Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture material control the McMillan nursery and plant-breeding story. Adzed remains a local-memory lead rather than a fully reconstructed business.

Chapter 11 – The Mine That Never Was

The mine chapter now begins before the 1980s feasibility programme. Dean Andrew Fergusson's 2020 expert evidence summarises the separate Taupiri Coal Mine Company attempt to drive an underground access tunnel in the 1950s, the 1975 bore intersecting about 25.5 metres of coal and the cumulative Waikare Coalfield drilling record. The Alexander Turnbull Library's Whites Aviation sequence WA-31082-G to WA-31087-G, photographed on 1 September 1952 and catalogued as a Pukemiro Collieries Limited mine site at Ōhinewai, is treated as a separate company/site unless primary records prove otherwise. A University of Waikato historical-planning study provides the current account of the September 1982 trial-pit water-right application and named objectors; the original Waikato Valley Authority file remains the preferred primary source. Tu Tangata, 1 October 1984, supports the John Te Maru, Waahi Marae and Nganeko Minhinnick environmental discussion. The main mine design still relies on the 1980s Ōhinewai regional-resource and feasibility source chain, including Soil Bureau work, RWL investigations and Schneider, Voigt and Wharton's 1988 technical paper. Groundwater drawdown and subsidence figures are predictions from feasibility work, not observed mine impacts. The mine was never built. Crown land acquisition, including the Deane and E. G. Levin Farm Settlement Trust properties, and the later offer-back disputes are supported by legal-historical work and resulting litigation.

Chapter 12 – The Bypass

The local bypass date is 2003, supported by Transit New Zealand and Waka Kotahi evidence. The 2020 Huntly section did not bypass Ōhinewai a second time. Business effects are treated individually: the garage has direct evidence connecting closure with the four-laning, while the supermarket and nursery belong securely to the pre-bypass economy but do not have sufficiently precise closure evidence to assign every outcome to 2003. The chapter therefore distinguishes loss of passing trade from the continued existence of the community.

Chapter 13 – Community After Traffic

John Thomas Wilkins's later delivery evidence comes from private family correspondence controlled as BIB-0289, RR-0115, SR-0083 and STY-0120 to STY-0122. The dated material records late and heavy mail in February 2010; Nicholas helping with Friday-night papers and learning the run in 2010; John's 28 June 2011 response to the Waikato Times morning-publication change; the 11pm start on 5 September 2011; the February 2012 vehicle failures; and John's August 2020 recollection of a Waikato Times trip through Waerenga with a stop at the old Wilkins home at Taniwha. The evidence is used only for the period it documents and is not backdated into the early-1980s operation. Private family material requires appropriate permission for external publication.

Matahuru's 2009 modern institutional recognition follows New Zealand Gazette and Waikato-Tainui material, with affiliation descriptions kept source-specific. Modern business evidence comes mainly from council social-effects and planning records. Lake Ōhinewai's 2011 fish barrier and its mixed results follow Waikato Regional Council Technical Report 2017/10. Later RotoTurf and kākahi work is mentioned only as a forward link to the final chapter.

Chapter 14 – A New Town Proposed

The modern development chronology is controlled by Waikato District Plan hearing material, the 24 May 2021 hearings-panel decision, Environmental Protection Authority fast-track records and the Environment Court resolution announced in March 2022. Housing, employment and investment figures are treated as forecasts from particular planning stages. Ambury Properties, The Comfort Group and Sleepyhead are not treated as interchangeable legal entities. Proposal drawings show intended development, not completed buildings.

Chapter 15 – Ōhinewai in 2025

The closing chapter separates physical outcomes from plans. Waikato District Council and contractor records establish stage-one earthworks and industrial construction, while 2025

recruitment material confirms manufacturing and warehouse activity. No reliable evidence used here establishes completion of the proposed town-scale residential component by 31 December 2025. The rail siding is treated as unverified operationally at the cutoff. Lake restoration material comes from Waikato Regional Council and NIWA. Population figures are approximate small-area reconstructions and are used only to show the absence of an obvious town-scale residential expansion.

Selected bibliography

Wilkins family archive. Private family correspondence, 2010–2020, and project-held family scrapbook material relating to Oliver Johnston Wilkins and John Thomas Wilkins. Controlled as BIB-0289 and BIB-0290; external publication of private correspondence or family photographs requires appropriate family permission.

Te Radar and Lumsden family sources. Te Radar, 'The Insider's Guide to Ohinewai, Waikato', New Zealand Herald, 2 May 2021; Elisabeth Easther, 'Te Radar: My story, as told to Elisabeth Easther', New Zealand Herald, 26 April 2021; National Library of New Zealand He Tohu interview; Federation of Motoring Clubs, Wheel Torque, September–October 2013; Catherine Fry, Lumsden family and restored-truck feature, May 2024; related comedy-award, school and Wintec records.

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Image acknowledgements and production notes

Cover aerial: project-held original, 22 January 1942, frame C.152.89, No. 12422. The accepted prepared colourised derivative could not be transferred into the active production runtime, so this edition uses the exact recovered original aerial.

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