

Horowhenua Family History Group Inc

Email: horofhg@gmail.com

Postal: HFHG 44 Rimu Street Levin 5510

Website: <https://www.horowhenuafamilyhistory.org.nz>

FaceBook:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/horowhenuafamilyhistory>

Location: Te Takere Heritage Room 10 Bath Street Levin



Levin Post-office 1903

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COMMITTEE

Kevin Miles	021 1364 075	President
Brian Bernon	027 286 4186	Secretary
Prue Theobald	021 2010 052	Treasurer
Sharon de Boer	021 739 247	
Michael Holland	021 2010 052	
Ian Meyer	06 368 0602	
Cathy Holmes	021 338 227	
Lynn Williams		Librarian

Thompson House
4 Kent Street, Levin
Monday 26 January 2026
1.30pm
Members share recent discoveries
and memorabilia.

Next meeting
Monday 23 February 2026
1.30pm
Brian Bernon: DNA: Am I a
Huguenot? Oh my goodness, a
new cousin!

Group Visit to the Woolshed Café and
Heritage Walk, Sanson
Explore 7 heritage houses, at your leisure.
Date: Thursday 19 February 2026
9am-1pm
Email horofhg@gmail.com for more
information.

President's message

I hope everyone had a good Christmas and New Year break.

I was impressed how quickly I received a digital copy of a marriage certificate from Victoria over the New Year (arrived within an hour). To be fair to our BDMs, I have received two records within a week.

We have been looking at the meeting programme for the coming year and hope we keep up or improve on our attendance.

Some of the topics that will be covered include Family Grave research from Rodney King, a presentation using Land Records from Sarah Hewitt, DNA talks from Brian Bernon and myself, as well as Members' contributions on stories from WW 2 and School Days.

Following some planning late last year the Heritage Room Committee has started a revamp of the Heritage Room to make it a more inviting space and much less cluttered. It is a work in progress so please be aware that it will take a while to get everything sorted.

Kevin Miles

President Horowhenua Family History Group

Discovering Isabel Borreson

By John Dixon

The September 2025 Newsletter featured an article on my research on the Levin women who signed the Suffragette Petition in 1882 and 1883. In this piece I mentioned the fact that I was unable to find what had happened to some of the women. One of these was Isabel Russell Borreson nee Sim.

This is now a mystery no longer.

I found Isabel had moved to Auckland and in 1910 moved to Australia. Searching the NSW BDMs after using different spellings of Borreson I found Isabel spelt Borrison, just one letter different.

With this spelling I then found the death notice in Trove. Isabel was cremated and her ashes interred at Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney. On Ancestry a ship's passenger list in 1922 has Isabel departing for the USA and giving her next of kin as Judge Sim her brother and she gave her home address as Sydney, Australia.

Another woman I was searching for was Ada Elizabeth Neaber who appears to have died in 1892 after the birth of her son who also died at 9 days old. I suspect that both mother and child are buried in Old Levin Cemetery in Tiro Tiro Road. The available records for the cemetery only record burials from 1894 and it is believed the records prior to 1894 have been lost.

So, with plenty of research and a lot of luck I have at least established the final resting place and death of Isabel Russell Borreson/Borrison.

*Papers Past
Trove
Ancestry
NSW BDMs
NZ BDMs*

An interesting find in my search for Isabel/Isabella was the following: Isabel along with husband Charles practised as Professional Phrenologists giving lectures and demonstrations around both islands in New Zealand. Some newspaper articles refer to her as Madam Borreson.

(Phrenology was 19th century Pseudoscience that claimed that shape of a person's skull could be used to determine the personality, traits and mental abilities).

FOR A SHORT TIME.

C. W. AND ISABELLA BORRESON,
Professional Phrenologists,
Can be CONSULTED DAILY at their
Phrenological Rooms,
HIGH STREET (opposite Strange and Co).

Isabella Borreson will give delineations and
advice to ladies. Fee from 2s 6d.

Office hours from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. 5312

The Press 6 April 1889

Kete Horowhenua

Kete Horowhenua contains a wealth of images, audio, video and documents for and about Horowhenua, New Zealand, which are collected and catalogued by the community.

Administered by Te Takeretanga o Kura-hau-po Levin Library, this is a valuable resource for genealogists and others researching local history.

An excellent guide is available on Kete Horowhenua to help get you started on digitising your family collection and also provides a good list of online resources.

[Visit Kete Horowhenua](#)

The Horowhenua A P & I Show held over the Wellington Anniversary Weekend (January) is one of many collections located on Kete Horowhenua. Established in January 1906 as the Horowhenua A&P Show, the event remains a must to do for many local families today.



Law and Adkin Family Members

Inscription on reverse reads: "Ronald J Law (Shannon), Josie Law (Mrs Aitchison), Nancy Adkin, Mrs Dora Law (nee Adkin), Mrs Maude Adkin, Clyde Adkin at Levin A & P Show at Levin racecourse, 1928.

Credit "Horowhenua Historical Society Inc." Kete Horowhenua

ŌTAKI HERITAGE Newsletter

The Clue Hunt

Over Wellington Anniversary Weekend, 17-19 January, we are once again participating in the Kāpiti Coast Heritage Clue Hunt. Visit the museums, find the clue in each to enter a prize draw. A great way to learn more about local heritage.

Fun and free for all the family. We'll be open 10am-2pm each day of the long weekend.

More information on <http://www.kapitiheritage.org.nz/>

HOROWHENUA HISTORICAL SOCIETY Meeting

Kapiti US Marines Trust on US Marines in Kapiti, 1942-44

Speaker: Anthony Dreaver

Sunday 15th February 2 pm.
Thompson House, 4 Kent Street, Levin
A gold coin please

Anthony will discuss the brief history of the Marines in Kapiti and illuminate some of their family connections. He also has a short film of stills and movie pictures that have come from America to show.

Tips for Taking Family History Tours

By Max Kennedy NZSG Wellington Newsletter, November 2025

I have taken trips both in New Zealand and offshore to visit family sites. I have done trips both with my wife and with a larger group of family. Here are some of the tips I learnt along the way.

1. The best advice I could give is to do your research and planning before you go. The more you know about your ancestor in advance the more you will get out of the trip. I wrote up family history books and stories about each ancestor and used the information generated to plan the tours.

While having this resource may be a luxury, even a short investigation into an ancestor will often give information of value to the trip. I compiled a list of information for each stop on the trip. Apps on your phone for your family history programme or grave finders are very handy.

2. Contact other relevant family history researchers/relatives to find out if they have been there. Their experiences can be a goldmine of information from the mundane, such as which bus to catch, or where a grave is located, to the more valuable “don’t forget to see X” or “you should contact relative Y who lives nearby”. Similarly contacting a local family history society in the area you are visiting, may lead to a lot of information and assistance.

3. Look at destinations on google maps/earth so that you understand what will be at the site when you arrive.

4. Have a variety of activities planned. Rather than spend the entire trip visiting graveyards and churches, add some other events such as visiting more distant relatives (often met initially on-line via doing family history research), visiting the site of a home or farm, or visiting a local museum to find out more about the area. Even visiting a tourist attraction, such as a garden, adds interest and variety and avoids “not another cemetery” quibble.

5. Locating graves can be a challenge. Although you may know an ancestor is in area A, row B and plot C, most cemeteries do not have the rows or plot numbers marked on the ground. You should download a map of the cemetery before you go (often available from local council sites). Some cemeteries can bear only a passing resemblance to the map. I like to download a photo of the grave beforehand (from sites such as Find-a- Grave or Billion Graves), as what is in the background (a tree or prominent headstone) is often useful for finding the grave. Another way to find the grave is to look for the year of death as most often those who died in a given year, are located near each other.

6. Don’t squash too much into one day. As you are likely to be far away and sometimes unlikely to return there is a tendency to want to do a lot in one area. This can lead to exhaustion and becoming unmotivated over the length of a tour. Focus on the big-ticket significant items and enjoy the tour. I find about 2 hours driving per day allows for enough time to visit a location(s) and see it at a leisurely pace.

7. Talk about the trip in advance with family members. This often brings to light extra information and good ideas.

I have found that while travelling to sites with my wife can be very rewarding, it can be difficult to transfer the information to other family members. Nothing beats being on site to get the story across. A family history tour with lots of your family can spark a real interest in the family and are great for dissemination of information for family members who may not want or have time to read your magnum opus book. I have, on 3 occasions, taken family groups of 10-12 family members around sites in New Zealand. These have been very rewarding. While the tips above still apply there are other things to note with a large group.

1. The logistic requirements of accommodation, parking, restaurant bookings etc climb significantly with numbers. Motorhomes may require special consideration eg parking. Consider the attendees requirements, whether dietary or physical limitations. A very detailed plan is required. In our last tour we planned in advance and booked where we would have lunch, which saved a lot of time.

2. Unfortunately, it is usually only retired folks who have time for such tours. Taking the younger members of family may need to occur at the weekend.

3. Travelling with a large group attracts attention, particularly if you are stopped outside someone's home where your relatives used to live. Be prepared to talk with interested bystanders who may come along. We had one member of the group do this function, so that the rest could talk as planned.

4. I have a handout synopsis of 1-2 pages prepared for each stop of the tour, which talks about each relative and how they are related to the family. This has two benefits. Firstly, as the range of relatives talked about during the trip can be large, it can be confusing as to where they all fit in. Having the tree on a page for each stop is very helpful. Secondly family members can refer to these handouts after the trip to refresh their memory (and it helps in labelling the photos).

5. Group photos at sites will leave out the photographer. We had one person at each stop be the designated photographer and everyone gave their phones/cameras to that person to take the shot. We would then rotate the photographer position so that the same person did not miss out on every photo. Take a variety of types of shots or you will end up with lots of shots of people next to graves or eating at restaurants. Having sunglasses off gives a better photo for subsequent generations to see.

6. Travelling with a large group has many benefits such as having more eyes to look for wayward graves in cemeteries. Most importantly the bonds formed on the tour are priceless. As TS Elliott said, "The journey is the destination".

By remembering our ancestors, we are made grateful for their journeys leading to us, for without them we wouldn't be here. In their stories we find they carried on as best they could, with both success and failures. Their lives, remembered and talked about, become gifts.

Why do I have DNA anomalies *and* Life was hard for our ancestors (Thanks to them)

NZSG Nelson Branch December 2025

Genetic studies reveal a haunting truth: when Vikings settled **Iceland**, nearly half the female ancestry was Irish. That's not poetic, it's the legacy of slavery.

Let's talk about something that rarely makes it into the Viking fanfare: the women who were taken. When we picture Vikings, we think longships, raids, and rugged warriors. But behind that image is a brutal reality, especially for Ireland. From the late 8th century onward, Norse raiders repeatedly struck Irish coasts, not just for treasure, but for people. And the most "valuable" captives? Women.

These women were taken as thralls, the Norse word for slaves. Some were sold, others kept. Many were transported across the sea, eventually ending up in places like Iceland, which was colonised by Norse settlers in the late 9th century. But here's the twist: modern DNA studies show that while Iceland's male ancestry is overwhelmingly Norse, the female ancestry is about 50% Gaelic, mostly Irish and Scottish.

That means the women who helped build Iceland's population weren't Norse wives, they were captives. Enslaved. Displaced. And yet, they became mothers, workers, cultural carriers. Their mitochondrial DNA, passed from mother to child, still echoes through Iceland's population today.

It's a sobering reminder that colonization isn't just about conquest. It's about who gets taken, who gets silenced, and who gets woven into the story without ever being named. The sagas may glorify Norse heroes, but the genetic record tells a quieter truth: Irish women helped build Iceland, not by choice, but by survival.

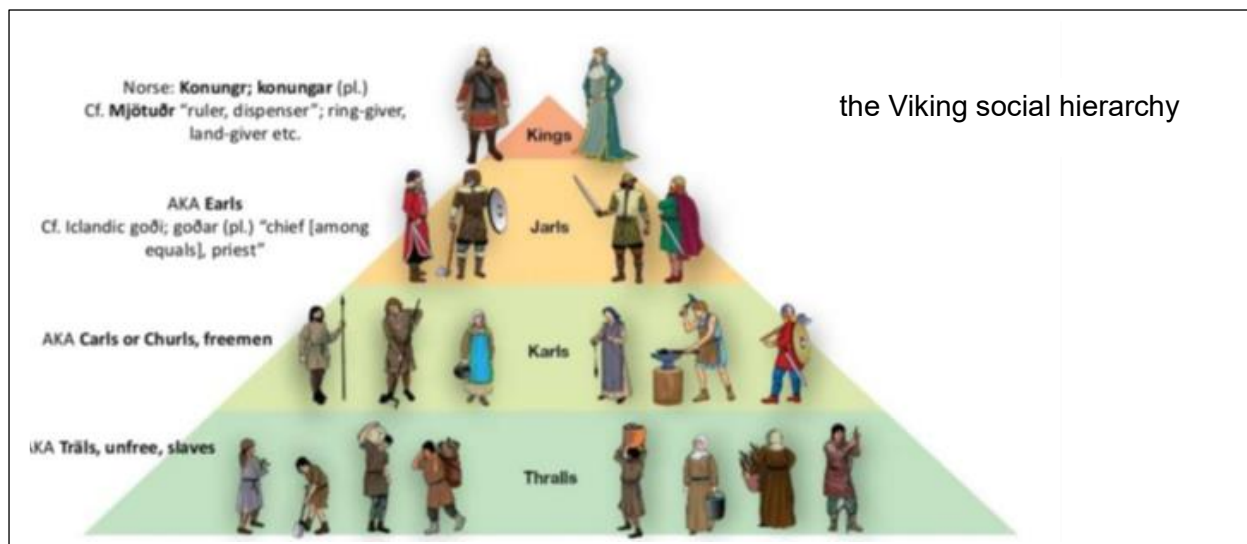
So next time someone romanticises the Viking age, remember the women whose strength shaped a nation, without ever being asked.

Slavery had already existed in Ireland for centuries by the time the Vikings began to establish their coastal settlements, but it was under the Norse-Gael Kingdom of Dublin that it reached its peak, in the 11th century.

As a young man, **Saint Patrick** was kidnapped by Irish pirates, transported to Ireland, and sold as a slave.

Early medieval legal texts provide a wealth of knowledge on the practice of slavery. Gaelic raiders kidnapped and enslaved people from across the Irish Sea for two centuries after the Fall of the Western Roman Empire destabilising Roman Britain;

In the **Brehon Laws** (see note 1), **Senchus Mór (2)** and the **Book of Acaill**, a "daer fuidhir" ("servile inferior") was a name applied to all who did not belong to a clan, whether born in the clan territory or not. This was the lowest of the three classes of the non-free people. This class also was sub-divided into saer and daer, the daer fuidhirs being the class most closely resembling slaves. Even this lowest condition was not utterly hopeless; promotion was possible, and in constant operation. Therefore, all families did not remain permanently in this kind of servitude but had the possibility of gradually rising from a lower to a higher degree according to a certain scale of progress, unless they committed some crime which would arrest that progress and cast them down again further. Slaves could be obtained through war, purchase and marriage to outsiders.



When the Vikings established early Scandinavian Dublin in 841, they began a slave market that would come to sell thralls captured both in Ireland and other countries as distant as Muslim Spain, as well as sending Irish slaves as far away as Iceland, where Gaels formed 40% of the founding population, and Anatolia. In 875, Irish slaves in Iceland launched Europe's largest slave rebellion since the end of the Roman Empire, when Hjörleifr Hróðmars-son's slaves killed him and fled to Vestmannaeyjar. Almost all recorded slave raids in this period took place in Leinster and southeast Ulster; while there was almost certainly similar activity in the south and west, only one raid from the Hebrides on the Aran Islands is recorded.

Slavery became more prevalent throughout Ireland in the 11th century as port cities built up by Vikings flourished, with Dublin becoming the biggest slave market in Western Europe. Its main sources of supply were the Irish hinterland, Wales and Scotland. The Irish slave trade began to decline after William the Conqueror consolidated control of the English and Welsh coasts around 1080 and was dealt a severe blow when the Normans abolished slavery in 1102.

The 1171 Council of Armagh freed all Englishmen and women who were enslaved in Ireland where contemporary sources detail that the English sold their children as slaves, as stated in the Decree of the Council of Armagh, "For the English people hitherto throughout the whole of their kingdom to the common injury of their people, had become accustomed to selling their sons and relatives in Ireland, to expose their children for sale as slaves, rather than suffer any need or want."

Sources: The Historian's den. (Facebook page) Wikipedia – "Slavery in Ireland"

https://www.dublinia.ie/events_news/vikings-bring-back-slavery-dublin/

Notes on meanings of Gaelic/ Irish words: (1) **The Brehon Laws**, or to use their proper name *Fénechas*, was the native indigenous law system found in early medieval Ireland. The word Brehon comes from the Irish *brithem*, meaning jurist. These *brithem* essentially filled one of the many roles previously tended by the Druids and preserved and interpreted the laws that had been handed down orally through the centuries. These laws were eventually written down first between 650-750 AD in the old Irish period. The texts only survive in 14th-16th cent manuscripts which are often incomplete or corrupted and early translations and publications are problematic. <https://irishfolklore.wordpress.com/2018/09/02/the-brehon-laws/>

(2) **Senchas Már** (Old Irish for "Great Tradition") is the largest collection of early Irish legal texts, compiled into a single group sometime in the 8th century, though individual tracts vary in date.

FAMILYSEARCH

RootsTech 2026 classes to take your skills to the next level. RootsTech has classes tailored for you! View the 2026 class (March 5-7 2026) preview—and learn about the latest advancements in: • Discovering connections through DNA • Using artificial intelligence to enhance your research and much, much more! Use the link below to sign up for free classes online. <https://www.familysearch.org/en/rootstech/?cid=EM-00052929&lid=uqbfsxxt8yj>

SOUTHLAND NZSG December 2025 Newsletter **Konae.org.nz** :

Konae – my Records Guide has information on more than 60 state and faith-based organisations that have records for over 800 homes & places in New Zealand about people who have been in their guardianship or care.

There is a map showing past & present places e.g. children's homes, boarding houses, orphanages, hospitals, Youth Justice facilities and many more. Each place on the map has details about who was responsible for running it and how to get records. Filters include date range, religion, type of organisation, name and locations. This could include information on adoptions.

Scotland Stuff:

<https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/media/wftgjv/wftgjv/baptisms-episcopalian-and-presbyterian-by-fathers-surname.pdf>

This pdf has 731 pages of baptisms of children where the name of the father is known with a good sprinkle of unknown fathers. Also includes name of mother, occupation of father and residence. Irish Heritage: <https://irishheritagenews.ie> – look out in April 2026 for the release of the 1926 Census!

FEILDING

A travel diary from the 1850s written in Māori

Vicki-Anne Heikell working as a conservator at Alexander Turnbull Library is fascinated by a small notebook, a travel diary, written by Te Hemara Rerehau and Wiremu Toetoe who were invited to travel to Europe on the Austrian frigate *Novara* which sailed from Auckland in 1859.

It gives a view of Europe seen through Māori eyes. The men returned with the gift of a printing press which was used to print the Kingitanga newspaper *Te Hokioi o Nui Tirenī, e Rere atu na* - the first Māori newspaper printed in Māori.

Log in to Press Reader with your library card and read the article in *The Post* Tuesday 4 November 2025.

<https://www.pressreader.com/new-zealand/the-post-1022/20251104/>

NEW PLYMOUTH NZSG

NPDC Cemetery Search The New Plymouth District Council provides an online database to search burial records in the district.

This was recently changed to a new platform, with some changes to the search fields. Initially the new system did not have the ability to search on plot number, but this has now been reinstated.

The new search page has only one field for name, whereas the previous search page had a field for first names and another field for surname. This is a problem if you are searching for a surname like FRANK or MARTIN, because the results are dominated by hits of first names.

Please let the council know if you think this should be restored to the functionality that was there previously.

PALMERSTON NORTH NZSG

The New Free BMD

Some of you will have already used the FreeBMD website <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/> where local volunteers have transcribed Civil Registration records from England and Wales to share with others. In October the website was updated <https://www.freebmd2.org.uk/> to a more modern design that enables one-click searches and is more accessible on mobile devices.

This site is part of a wider FreeUKGenealogy family <https://www.freeukgenealogy.org.uk/>, where you can also search FreeCEN for transcribed census data, and FreeREG for records from parish registers.