

# Te Umuhika Waterwheel



The industrial revolution had arrived in the Bay of Plenty by the late 1850's, when William Swainson (1809-1884) recorded the Lakes and Bay of Plenty Tribes owned 4 water power mills, 96 ploughs, 43 vessels averaging nearly 20 tons each and upwards of 900 canoes.

The flour mill was constructed by George Close of Matata in the early 1860's. It was located on Onepu road (now Braemar Road) in a partnership between Close and local Maori, who lived at Te Umuhika. Partnerships such as these were encouraged by Governor George Grey (1812-1898) who wanted to provide opportunities for Maori to remain within one area and become reliant upon a source of income - therefore reducing the opportunities for war.

However, during the New Zealand Wars, Close's stores of food, wheat and flour were looted, and his house at Te Omeheu was razed by Te Kooti's forces. Close left the district. The mill was subsequently converted to a flaxmill, which by 1874 was not financially viable<sup>1</sup>.

The mill derived its power from a tributary of the Tarawera River flowing from the vicinity of the Manawahe.

Following the Tarawera Eruption of June 1886, the roof of the mill collapsed and was repaired by Arthur Matheson, assisted by his apprentices Tiki White, and T S Gee. Gee subsequently undertook alterations to the Waterwheel and the Flaxmill to house additional machinery, the workers and a store. Harry Knowles operated the flaxmill until it was taken over by Thomas Wrigley (1817-1894). In 1891 the uninsured flaxmill burnt down<sup>2</sup>, with the Waterwheel remaining and subsequently being used by locals as a diving platform until it fell into disrepair.

In 1959 remains of the wheel hub and rim section were collected by the Whakatane & Districts Historical Society to form part of their early Whakatane Museum Collection. They were subsequently passed to Stan Fretwell, who has used the relics to estimate the dimensions and construction of the original wheel. That research has culminated in the new waterwheel we see turning today.

## **Other Mills**

Two flourmills were built by Jean Guerrin (c. 1824-1869). One was established at Otipa, a few miles up the Rangitaiki River from Te Teko, which was operated by a Mr Aubrey, in partnership with Te Pahipoto; and a second one was established at Te Poronu, which Guerrin operated for Ngati Pukeko. Two mills constructed in Whakatane were destroyed by Te Kooti's raid in 1869.

<sup>1</sup> Bay of Plenty Times, Volume IV, Issue 387, 27 May 1876, Page 3

<sup>2</sup> Bay of Plenty Times, Volume XXII, Issue 3183, 17 October 1894, Page 2