



the Duntroon DIGGER

Established 2005

Aug. 2026 - Sept. 2026 Edition

Email: duntroondigger@gmail.com

Coordinator: Gill Gee

Editor: Anne Phillips-Vira

Publisher: Allan Kynaston

Next issue: 6th Oct. Please send your contributions to us at duntroondigger@gmail.com by 29th Sept. See Duntroon Digger Dates 2026 on the last page of this issue.

WALLY

Wally's always ready for a chat and photo.

Has anyone noticed Wally's new ensemble lately? He is looking very smart and dapper all thanks to Mike Gray's care and attention.

Wally has been a feature and guardian of the blacksmith for many years and represents the swaggers that used to travel up and down the valley.

Originally conceived and created by Mike and Lyn Gray, this is the third iteration of clothing required as the elements tend to take their toll.

Tokarahi Rural Women's Group Gathering

When Tokarahi Rural Women disbanded earlier this year, it was decided that the group should stay connected, gather socially for a coffee catch up and welcome anyone in the community who may like to join us.

This month we plan to meet on Wednesday 19th August 11.00am at Nicol's Blacksmith for a walk around the Duntroon Wetlands, then lunch at the Flying Pig.

Fiona Conlan 0272013339

Yvonne Duff 0279740353



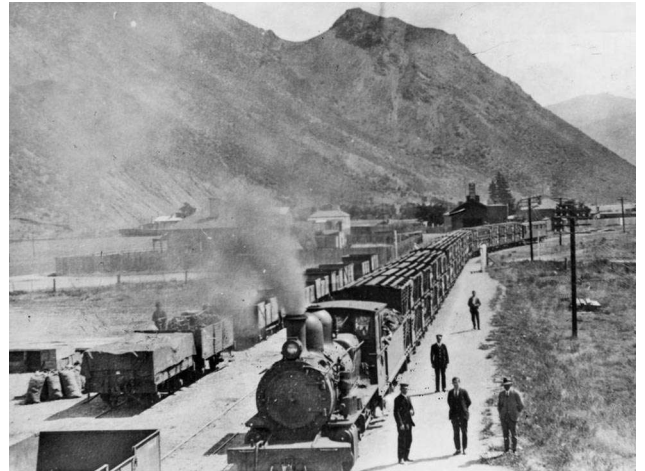
North Otago Branch Line Railways

If anyone local is interested: a good book has just come out on the history of the railway branch lines of North Otago

It has about 48 pages and plenty of pics of the Kurow branch. I bought one last week and have really enjoyed it.

This is the summary:

Designed to transport produce from the hinterland farms, plus limestone and coal deposits to the port and beyond, North Otago's numerous branch lines successfully fulfilled these tasks through the decades.



*Kurow Railway Station c1926
Waitaki Archive Id: 177757*

Author, Arthur De Maine, covers, in detail, the features and operation of each line. Branches covered are: Kurow, Waitaki dam extension, Ngapara, Tokarahi, Dunback and Makareao, the formative Port Moeraki branch and little-known lines at Shag Point.

A4 portrait format, softbound, 97 black & white and 11 colour photographs, 5 diagrams, 11 maps, 126 pages.

Paul Mahoney, Whanganui

This link takes you to the publisher website: [Publication Catalogue - NZRLS](#)

Village Working Bee

Lots of activity went on in the heart of the village on Saturday morning 8th of Aug. Thanks to those lovely people who made up the work force cleaning and polishing the gaol and share shed.

Jan, Katrina, Daniel, Trevor and Mel certainly made a real difference. A real treasure was discovered in the gaol; a genuine New Zealand Railways chair.

Even the Sextons shed got a spruce up.

Below: Daniel Moffat with broom.



Below: the genuine New Zealand Railways chair.



Below: Jan Keeling and Mel Jones scrubbing the interior of the share shed.



Free Business/Services List

Please contact us at duntroondigger@gmail.com. Please keep your entry to 2 lines maximum.

Seed/Seed Mixes: fodder beet, grass, oats and kale seed. www.dufffarming.com.
duffs@dufffarm.co.nz or call Grant 027 7379518

MASSAGE: Therapeutic & Relaxing. Qualified massage therapist available Tues, Wed & Thurs 10 am - 2 pm. Sat by appt. Papakaio area. \$60 per hour - \$35 per 1/2 hour.
Ph. Sam (female) 021 701 518

HEAVY METAL WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERED AROUND DUNTROON



MEDIA RELEASE WAITAKI DISTRICT COUNCIL

8 August 2026

Waitaki approves joint Head Start proposal

Five Council proposal to be submitted to the Government ahead of Sunday, 8th August midnight deadline.

August again marks a significant moment of change for the Waitaki District Council with its unanimous decision to submit a Head Start proposal for a Unitary Authority with its northern neighbours. On the same month in 1866, 160 years ago, the Oamaru Borough Council met for the first time.

The community's strong focus on protecting the Waitaki River is at the heart of Waitaki District Council's approach to the district's future and its decision to put forward an amalgamation proposal with its northern neighbours, as agreed unanimously at today's extraordinary Council meeting.

Council approved submitting a Head Start Proposal including Waitaki, Waimate, Mackenzie, Timaru and Ashburton. It also set an off-ramp clause for any Council to enact before the detailed design proposal is agreed, noting that Ashburton had not resolved to join the Head Start pathway earlier this week.

All councillors believed moving into the Head Start programme was the best option for the district and its communities, but attention would need to be given to the detailed design of the final proposal.

"If we don't move into Head Start or our option isn't acceptable, then we fall into the Back Stop process where we go on the menu," Councillor John McCone said. "The Northern option is best for us. None of the other options are palatable to me."

Mayor Mel Tavendale said, "By submitting a proposal after hearing from our community, we ensure that our future is led by our community's voice and their elected representatives."

"The strongest messages were to protect the Waitaki River catchment, retain rural and small-town identity, keep services affordable, maintain local voice, and avoid being swallowed by a large metropolitan authority."

"Today is not a final decision, but another step in the amalgamation journey,"

"If our Head Start joint-proposal is approved, we will continue to consult with our community as we enter the design stage - and be able to provide them with some of the detail we could not due to the Government's three-month deadline.

"Waitaki District Council's CEO Alex Parmley thanked the community for the direction they had provided, and staff and councillors for their work on getting the proposal over the line.

"I especially want to thank our community members who took part in our surveys and came to our community meetings despite the compressed timeframe for the engagement. The guidance you gave on the direction we should take was invaluable."

In May, the Government set all Councils in New Zealand (except Auckland) a 3-month deadline to make an amalgamation proposal under the Head Start pathway or be placed in a government-led backstop process.

Waitaki District Council entered discussions with Otago and Canterbury Councils, conducted two separate surveys receiving over 600 responses and held four public meetings about amalgamation in May and June.

The proposal will now be submitted to Government and reviewed by the Government's Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) - with the final decision resting with Cabinet.

It is expected that Cabinet will approve or reject proposals by the end of September 2026, with more detailed plans to be submitted in early 2027.

ENDS

media@waitaki.govt.nz

St Magnus Presbyterian Church; its first members

by Anne Phillips-Vira

Several months ago, I spent some time at Knox College Presbyterian Archives in Dunedin. The purpose of that visit was to learn more about James A and James B Taylor having previously stumbled across the fact that they were my great grandfather's Orcadian cousins.

They were also both founding members of St Magnus Church Duntroon. I wanted to learn more about their associates in the church and where they were from. My search has revealed some interesting insights.

I discovered that a 'session' meeting was held at the manse in Duntroon on October 14, 1882. It is worth noting that the church wasn't built until 1897. It seems that the manse existed long before that. Those in attendance at the meeting included the Reverend Peter Hay, the Reverend John Steven and Mr Goodall (Hay, 1882). Mr Goodall was an elder of the Oamaru Presbytery at the time ('Oamaru Presbytery' 1881).

These men authorised a list of names to be placed on the first Duntroon Presbyterian Church Communion Roll. The names listed are as follows: Mrs A. Murdoch, William Howden, James Howden, George Stringer, Mrs Mary J Stringer, James A Taylor, Mrs Taylor, James B Taylor, Mrs Taylor, James Wilson, Mrs Hay.

Murdoch Family

I began a search for Mrs A. Murdoch. I had previously come across the name Murdoch in a search for Centre Park, Ngapara. Coincidentally, in a recent conversation with Robert Duff, I asked if he knew where Centre Park was. To my surprise he told me that it was the name of his farm on Prydes Gully Road!

Robert's family took ownership of Centre Park in 1901 after the government put up the land for public ballot following 'The Lands for Settlements Act Amendment Act, 1896' (Ministry of Lands, 1897). Robert also mentioned that the Murdochs were the



*St Magnus Church under construction 1879
Waitaki Archive Id: 1034312*



*Murdoch homestead Centre Park early 1920s. Note:
Reproduced with permission from Robert Duff.*

first farmers on Centre Park and that they built an eight roomed timber house there in about 1880 (R. Duff, personal communication, July 26, 2026).

Written evidence of the Murdochs presence at Centre Park appears in a birth notice in the Otago Witness which states that 'Mrs A. Murdoch of Centre Park, Ngapara' (Births, 1881, p.16) gave birth to a son at her mother's residence in Green Island on July 11, 1881. This was the announcement of Alexander and Alice Murdoch's eldest son, Joseph Alexander Murdoch.

In later years, Joseph was to marry Amelia Margaret Henderson, daughter of John Henderson, the smithy of Prydes Gully Road and my father's great uncle. The couple were married by Reverend Hay at John and Agnes Henderson's home, Island Cliff. The plot was thickening!

According to the Waitaki County Council Rates books (1878-1900), Alex Murdoch was occupying and leasing block 2 plot 6 in addition to leasing block 2 plot 7 and block 7 plots 6 & 7 in the Maerewhenua district. Lease payments were made for the properties from November 1883 until @1898.

This information aligns with details in his wife's death notice (Mrs Alexander Murdoch, 1931) which states that 'In 1898 [Alex] sold both properties and went to live in the Riversdale district,' (p.8). The maps from this time are difficult to decipher but it seems most likely that the above plots encompassed Centre Park.

A further search for the Murdochs in Papers Past revealed several key events in their lives. In October 1884, Alice gave birth to a daughter, Jessie who survived only 28 days (Murdoch, 1884). She is buried in the Duntroon Cemetery.

In May 1888 Alex was elected as President of the North Otago Agricultural & Pastoral Association and in December of the same year he was selling stud Leicester ewes and rams at the Otago Agricultural and Pastoral Show (Sale of show stock, 1888).

A search for their death and burial notices led me back to the Duntroon Cemetery where I found Alexander and Alice Murdoch and another daughter, Alice Chalmers Murdoch.



Figure 1: Murdoch headstone



Figure 2: Howden headstone. (Source: Find a Grave, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com>: accessed August 03, 2026), memorial ID 183343522, created & maintained by [Leefield])

Alice died at the age of 11 in 1894. The death notice states that she died 'at the parent's residence, Riverside, Ngapara' (Death, 1894, p.2). A little further 'digging' led to the discovery that Mrs A. Murdoch was born Alice Hunter Howden; a sister of James and William Howden who appear immediately below her on the first Duntroon parish communion list.

Howden Family

That brings us to the Howden family. For the stories of James and William Howden I started my search at Green Island, Dunedin where they were born. Their parents David and Alice (Chalmers) Howden, settled at Green Island after arriving off the ship *Bernicia* from Scotland in 1848. David Howden was reportedly 'the first man to turn a furrow with a plough in Otago' ('Mrs Howden' 1896).

The couple had 8 children. Their first child John was born at sea en route to Port Chalmers. There were four tragic deaths in the family. Their sixth born twin sons died consecutively between January 17th and 21st 1862 followed by another infant son in 1864. Then in 1887, their youngest son Thomas died aged 22 at 'the residence of his brother-in-law (Alexander Murdoch)' (Death, 1887, p.2).

According to the North Otago Times their mother, Mrs Alice (Chalmers) Howden also died at the home of her daughter Alice and son-in-law Alexander at Centre Park (Howden, 1896). Mrs Howden was returned to Dunedin by train for burial in Green Island Cemetery with her husband, David, who died several years earlier in 1873.

William, the second eldest son, spent his life in the Waitaki District. However, by 1911 his brothers John and James had both made the move to Southland. In May 1888, William married Elizabeth Finnie at her parents' home, Saddle Hill, Dunedin (New Zealand Intentions to Marry Project, 2025 a).

His death notice (Obituary, 1930) states that he was born in Dunedin, educated at Green Island and moved to Oamaru in 1877. According to the obituary, in 1880 he leased a block of land from Mr Alexander McMaster and 'later acquired that property known as Glen Moa' (p.6). This information aligns well with evidence in the Waitaki County Council rate books (1878-1901) which indicate that he was occupying parts of blocks 2 & 7 (Maerewhenua) and block 3 (Duntroon) in 1884. In the 1911 electoral roll he appears listed as a farmer at Island Cliff (New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1911a). Both William, who died aged 74 in 1930, and Elizabeth who died in 1948, are buried in Duntroon Cemetery.

William's younger brother James married my great grand aunt Isabella Henderson in May 1884 at her parents' house on Coquet Street, Oamaru (New Zealand Intentions to Marry Project, 2025 b). James is listed on the electoral roll (1893b) as a ploughman residing in the



Threshing mill at Howden's farm, Glenmoa c.1910; William Howden third from left. Note: Reproduced with permission from Robert Duff.

Ngapara area. In 1911 the couple were residing in the Waikaka Valley near Gore. Both James and Isabella are buried in Gore Cemetery (Find a Grave, 2016).

Still to come from the Duntroon Parish communion list are the stories of the Stringers and James Wilson, both of whom migrated from Ireland. I will save them for the next edition.

References:

Births. (1881, July 23). *Otago Witness*, p.16.

Death. (1887, July 9). *Oamaru Mail*, p.2.

Death. (1894, October 20). *North Otago Times*, p.2.

Find a Grave. (2016, July 11). Memorial for James Howden (1853-1929).

Retrieved August 03, 2026, from

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/166790344/james-howden>

Hay, P. S. (1882, October 14). *Duntroon parish board of managers minute book, 1881-1883*. [Unpublished manuscript].

Presbyterian Research Centre, Dunedin, New Zealand. Howden. (1896, January 20). *North Otago Times*, p.2.

Mrs Alexander Murdoch. (1931, June 20). *North Otago Times*, p.8.

Mrs Howden. (1896, January 22). *Southland Times*, p.2.

Ministry of Lands. (1897). *The Tokarahi settlement, North Otago, New Zealand: particulars, terms, and conditions of disposal and occupation of 9464 acres*.

<https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/discover/collections/record/1134991?p=2&sbj=Land%20subdivision&lang=en-nz>

Murdoch, J. (1884). *Jessie Murdoch (1884-1884)* [Memorial record # D: 231294199]. *Find a Grave*. Retrieved July 31, 2026, from [findagrave.com](https://www.findagrave.com)

New Zealand, Electoral Rolls2. (1865-1957b). *FamilySearch*.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:8ZG3-CD3Z?lang=en> Entry for James Howden, 1893.

New Zealand, Electoral Rolls. (1865-1957a). *FamilySearch*.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:8ZG3-CD3Z?lang=en> Entry for William Howden, 1911.

New Zealand Intentions to Marry Project. (2025a). *Notice of intention to marry for William Chalmers Howden & Elizabeth Finnie*. [1888/1831].

<https://itm.howison.co.nz/search/William%2BChalmers%2BHowden?>

New Zealand Intentions to Marry Project. (2025b). *Notice of intention to marry for James Howden & Isabella Henderson*. [1884/1083] <https://itm.howison.co.nz/search/James%2BHowden?>

Oamaru Presbytery. (1881, September 5). *North Otago Times*, p.2. Obituary. (1930, May 27). *North Otago Times*, p.6.

Sale of show stock. (1888, December 1). *Otago Daily Times*, p.4.

Waitaki County Council Rates (1878-1900). *Rate books*. Retrieved July 14, 2026, from <https://www.culturewaitaki.org.nz/Waitaki-Archive/Rate-Books>

Duntroon Digger Dates 2026

Dear Readers: We are providing the following table as a guideline/reminder of Digger dates for 2026. The table below also provides a 'pre-digger' deadline date for those of you who wish to send in content such as advertisements, letters or articles. Please note that we do not advertise items for sale. We suggest that this be done on the Duntroon Facebook page.

We intend to email The Digger on the same date as publication. Hard copies will be distributed by our deliverers as soon as possible after publication.

Month	Pre-Digger Deadline	Publishing Date
October	29/09/2026	06/10/2026
December	25/11/2026	01/12/2026

Thank you for your ongoing interest in The Digger. We look forward to receiving your news items, comments and letters in the year ahead. Please send to Gill at duntroondigger@gmail.com