

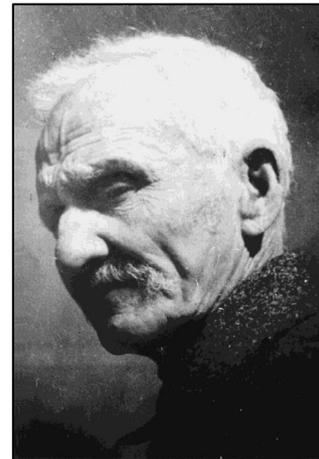
J. B. Morris

Karangahake School and District 70th Jubilee 1889-1959

John Benjamin Morris, 1861-1946

Karangahake records would be incomplete without the story of J. B. Morris, whom many will remember as a spare, bent man of prodigious energy and drive. Coming here early in 1900, with a frail wife and three young children, he weathered almost every phase of its rise and fall.

Mr Morris had been left an orphan at an early age, had worked in the Northern Kauri Forest before he was 14, and then went to sea for some years. His first contact with mining was in Australia during the Palmer Diggings goldrush but on returning to New Zealand, he married and went back to bush work in Taranaki until the gold lure brought him here.



He built a house up the Rahu Road and his wife died when their youngest child, Charlie, was born there. His bent for individual projects led him to bush work again and the establishment of a sawmill. There was timber in plenty and it was urgently needed, both for building and for the mines. A team consisting of at least 20 bullocks was acquired to haul the logs to the mill. But anyone who knows the contour of the country will realise the difficulty of negotiating the steep bush tracks from which both logs and bullocks were liable to disappear.

Later Mr Morris's second wife mothered the children, who so much needed and appreciated her. There were Ben (already a young bushranger), Alma (late Mrs Laurie Turnbull) and Harry, who was later drowned in the Ohinemuri River, while searching for the body of our tragically lost little Dot Pool. (Mrs Meagher had adopted Charlie from birth).

There is a Cinnabar deposit up the Rahu and when Henry Flavill first had some samples assayed, Mr Morris became very interested. Finally they had to abandon it for lack of capital, although small samples of the ore had proved rich in mercury which is used in various explosives. During a further mining venture he was "winding" for the Crown and later for the Talisman until the main work ceased about 1919. He then opened a large stone quarry near the Crown Battery, thus providing needed work for many men. But expenses became prohibitive and Mr Morris with others turned to prospecting, resulting in the re-opening of the Dubbo mine, which yielded considerable gold. Then this stout-hearted man opened his own battery in Karangahake, crushing from various workings till at the age of 80 he retired to Waihi in 1942.

During all this time Mr Morris was very interested in local affairs, serving for many years on the County Council and the School Committee (of which he was often Chairman) and on the Domain Board and the Church of England Vestry. He was also a J.P. for many years, a member of the Odd-fellows Lodge, and when he passed away in 1946 was the oldest Masonic member in the district. He was a music lover and played his old violin with great gusto. Both Mr and Mrs. Morris were keen gardeners and their last home in Waihi was always a picture, the fruits of their labour helping

many a needy cause and family. Mrs Morris died in 1950, aged 89 years. It could truly be said of them that they lived to serve others.

Ben, who now lives at Whangamata, is the only surviving member of the family and he suffers very indifferent health, mainly as a result of being an "Old Soldier" — First World War. But when he is well enough he enjoys going out in his boat to do a little fishing. In the 1920's he and his wife (once Nessie [Nezzie (Isabella)] McLeod) lived in Mackaytown and Ben was foreman for McLoughlin, who had the contract for dismantling the Crown Plant.¹

KARANGAHAKE the years of the gold 1875 -1935. Mining Men.

JOHN BENJAMIN MORRIS

came to Karangahake in 1898, after earlier working in many parts of New Zealand and on the Australian Goldfields. His family joined him when he had built a house (now Muirheads), on Rahu Road. They had three children: Bennett, Alma and Harry. Another son, Charlie, was born at Rahu Road, but when he was 10 days old, his mother died. Their great friends, Mr and Mrs Meagher, brought up the child as their own, and King Meagher continued to care for the Morris family till the end.

In 1903 Mr Morris married Maude Wyatt, the daughter of the first Master at the Auckland Grammar School, and his bent for individual projects, led him to bush work again, with a team of 20 bullocks and the establishment of a saw mill. Then he discovered Cinnabar on his property and tried to develop the mining of it, but the project was not successful.

Having an Engineering Certificate, J.B. began working six days a week in the Crown Battery, continuing until it closed in 1920, when he had the contract for dismantling it. Later he and his son Harry (assisted by Fred Dare and Albert Nelson) opened up the adjacent Crown Battery, supplying metal throughout the district. This continued for several years until the heavy railway freight forced closing. After Harry's tragic death in 1924, Ben assisted his father in the final years. Charlie Meagher had died in 1920, after a long illness, and Alma had married Lawrie Turnbull. They lived at the White Rocks farm for many years before moving to Auckland, where Alma died in 1946 leaving four children.

Men who have once "Mined" find it difficult to resist the lure of gold, and Mr Morris was the man, who, with others in the 1920s, opened up the old Dubbo Mine on the south side of the Karangahake Mountain peak. He built a small battery there, and the results attracted the attention of some well known Auckland businessmen who purchased the Claim in which Mr Morris retained some shares. He then took over another part of the old Crown workings where he employed several men and achieved such promising results that he built a treatment plant on the site of the present picnic area -once part of the town. A good friend, the late Mr Ben Gwilliam, assisted with refining and assaying, but there were tremendous difficulties and setbacks. In an effort to solve these, two employees, John Cotter and Jim O'Brien, became working partners with their gallant old friend, thus sharing losses as well as profits, the firm being known as "J.B. Morris & Coy.". Among local men who worked there were: Jack Milroy, Kel Goldsworthy, Jack Clarkin, Jack O'Brien and others. Finally the venture closed.

¹ <https://www.ohinemuri.org.nz/historic-texts/karangahake-school-70th-jubilee/john-benjamin-morris-1861-1946>

John Benjamin Morris, 1861-1946. Karangahake School and District 70th Jubilee 1889-1959

The years had taken toll (J.B. was then in his 80s) and when, in 1940, Mrs Morris' health made it impossible to continue to live on Rahu Road, they bought a neat little home in Pipe Lane in Waihi, where they maintained their well-known hospitality and their interest in Karangahake. Mr Morris had served its Anglican Church, was Chairman of the School Committee there, and had represented it on the Ohinemuri County Council. He was a J.P., a Life Member of the Masonic Lodge, and Past Master of the Oddfellows. His old Maori Bible and Dictionary were his dearest treasures during his later years, enabling him to act as interpreter when needed. On the eve of his death he dedicated a farewell letter to friends of his youth. And so passed a remarkable and revered old man. His widow died in 1950 in her 90th year.

Nezzie Morris.²

Newspapers

20 May 1927

At Karangahake a miner named Morris has erected a primitive five-stamper battery, driven by an old engine, and is ready to start work crushing quartz from some leaders at the back of the Crown Hill.³

7 June 1927

FURTHER VENTURES AT KARANGAHAKE. SMALL MILL ERECTED

(By a Correspondent)

During the past nine months Mr J. B. Morris, with a party of men, has been engaged in erecting a five head battery about three miles along the Trig Road, with the object of crushing quartz from a reef known as the Pewaka. A start was made a week ago to crush, but unfortunately the engine that had been installed to drive the plant was not powerful enough to lift the full complement of stamps and operations had to be carried on with three head. Although small, it is believed that the lode carries rich ore, and hopes are held out that the venture will place Karangahake on the map again as a gold producing district.⁴

26 July 1927

KARANGAHAKE DISCOVERY. NEW AURIFEROUS LODGE

(BY TELEGRAPH. —OWN CORRESPONDENT.) PAEROA, Monday.

Some excitement has been created at Karangahake by the discovery of a gold-bearing reef. This was made by Mr. J. B. Morris and party on land recently taken over by Mr. Morris from the New Zealand Crown Mines, Ltd.

The find is adjacent to the Imperial Company's ground, where a considerable amount of prospecting work has been done in the last two years. It consists of a well-defined reef a little more than 2ft. wide. The ore is said to show free gold throughout.

Mr. Morris was recently working on another small leader and had erected a small plant with five head of stamps. Although good stone was being mined the battery returns were not satisfactory on account of the refractory nature of

² <https://www.ohinemuri.org.nz/historic-texts/karangahake-the-years-of-the-gold-1875-1935/mining-men>

Mining Men. KARANGAHAKE the years of the gold 1875 -1935

³ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19270520.2.17>

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume XXXVIII, Issue 5128, 20 May 1927, Page 3

⁴ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WHDT19270607.2.12>

Waihi Daily Telegraph, Volume XXIV, Issue 7527, 7 June 1927, Page 2

the ore and of the great difficulty in treating concentrates in New Zealand. Several bags of quartz from the new reef were taken out on Saturday. A sample of this was impregnated with yellow mineral...⁵

22 August

KARANGAHAKE RIDING. REPRESENTATIVE ON COUNCIL.

MR. J. B. MORRIS ELECTED

A poll was taken on Friday for the purpose of electing a councillor for the Karangahake Riding of the Ohinemuri County, the vacancy having been caused by the death of Mr A D. McGuire. Nominations received were those of Mt T. A. Barrett, Waihi Road Paeroa, and Mr J. B. Morris, Karangahake.

...Mr Morris was returned by a majority of ten votes...

The complete roll for the riding contained the names of 80 ratepayers who were eligible to vote, and of that number 74 ratepayers exercised their privilege. This is the first poll that has been taken at Karangahake for the election of a councillor since November, 1913, the late Mr McGuire having represented the riding continuously since that date.⁶

24 August 1927

THE EARL OF GLASGOW MINE. AUCKLAND SYNDICATE FORMED.

Authoritative information has been received that a strong Auckland syndicate has been formed to thoroughly equip a small battery on the site of the Earl of Glasgow mine at Karangahake, at present being worked by Mr J. B. Morris. A substantial sum is being set aside to open up the mine in a systematic manner. Owing to the refractory nature of the ore a small return only has been taken from the copper plates. The indications at the present time have assured the subscribers that the expense is well warranted. The carrying out of operations will be continued until the directors decide upon a definite course of operations.

This is the mine which was referred to in these columns, a few weeks back. The assay of the ore already obtained has proved very satisfactory, and later results are very encouraging.⁷

JB Morris battery using amalgamated plates, not cyanide.

AJHR 1928

For the year 1927

MINES STATEMENT BY THE HON. G. J. ANDERSON, MINISTER OF MINES.⁸

**ANNEXURE A. SUMMARY OF REPORTS BY INSPECTORS OF MINES.
NORTHERN INSPECTION DISTRICT (Mr. M. Paul, Inspector of Mines).
Quartz-mining.**

⁵ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19270726.2.25>

New Zealand Herald, Volume LXIV, Issue 19698, 26 July 1927, Page 7

⁶ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19270822.2.15>

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume XXXVIII, Issue 5168, 22 August 1927, Page 3

⁷ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19270824.2.8>

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume XXXVIII, Issue 5169, 24 August 1927, Page 2

⁸ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1928-I.2.2.2.3>

MINES STATEMENT BY THE HON. G. J. ANDERSON, MINISTER OF MINES., Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1928 Session I, C-02

Mr. M. Paul, Inspector of Mines

Page 20

Earl of Glasgow Claim, Karangahake (J. B. Morris, manager). —A five-head stamp mill, one berdan and wilfry [Wilfley] table were erected during the year, and 81 tons of ore treated yielded 97 oz. 4 dwt., valued at £144 14s. 7d. The ore treated is of a refractory nature and the return by amalgamation process has not been satisfactory. The values in the lode from which this ore was obtained occur in pockets, and a picked sample of 1 ton treated at the Thames School of Mines yielded bullion valued at £19 4s. 1d., included in the total.

Newspapers

6 December 1929

OHINEMURI COUNTY. MEETING OF COUNCIL.

Cr. Morris considered that a fatal accident was due in the Karangahake gorge. Up till lately, he said, drivers through there had been careful, but now they rushed along at top speed.

Cr. Hoye said it had been turned into a speedway since the road had been put in good order.

Cr. Morris: That's what's the matter, the road is too good.

Cr. Hoye pointed out that signs bearing the speed limit of six miles per hour had been taken down since the Public Works Department took over the road.

The chairman thought there were already too many traffic signs. People disregarded them. He considered that a traffic inspector would be the best deterrent.⁹

4 September 1930

ENCOURAGING RESULTS AT KARANGAHAKE. TALISMAN-DUBBO PROPERTY.

During last week-end Mr M. H. Wynyard and Captain A. J. Pearce, of Auckland, and Mr J. Morris, of Karangahake, directors of the Talisman-Dubbo Gold Mining Company, paid a visit to the company's property on the site of the old Talisman Dubbo mine at Karangahake...¹⁰

27 December 1930

AUCKLAND GOLDFIELDS.

...Another company formed this year was the Talisman-Dubbo, at Karangahake, to work an area formerly included in the holding of the old Talisman Company. The new company is really a prospecting venture, only a small amount of capital having been called up to enable work to be carried out on a reef that was located, and the ore from which gives satisfactory assays. On the property is a small battery.¹¹

⁹ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19291206.2.21>

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume XXXX, Issue 5510, 6 December 1929, Page 4

¹⁰ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WHDT19300904.2.11>

Waihi Daily Telegraph, Volume XXVII, Issue 8049, 4 September 1930, Page 2

¹¹ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19301227.2.21>

Auckland Star, Volume LXI, Issue 306, 27 December 1930, Page 4

16 June 1932

COUNTY AFFAIRS NEW OHINEMURI COUNCIL MEETS PRESERVING BEAUTY SPOT

The New Zealand Forestry League, Inc., wrote pointing out that Mr J. B. Morris, with the assistance of Mr E. C. Cutten, S.M., had succeeded in having placed under the control of the council a small area at Karangahake on which there were growing some kauri and other native trees. As the object of the league was to preserve where possible such native forests, it desired to know what steps in that direction the council had taken. Cr. Morris said the job of fencing the area was a small one and he moved that the work be done by relief labour.

The Chairman: I think it is up to us to preserve these little beauty spots.

Cr. Mason seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.¹²

12 May 1933

AID FOR MINERS. DEPUTATION TO MINISTER. CRUSHING FACILITIES DISCUSSED.

The Low Grade Ores.

Mr J. B. Morris said that he had been on the field for very many years. The whole of the mountain contained low grade ore, but on account of the cost of cartage it was not a payable proposition with the present crushing facilities. He could show over 5000 tons of low grade ore. Mr Jessep said that why he had asked his question that low grade ore was attracting attention everywhere, and its working would provide much employment for many years. Mr Morris said that if some assistance was given in order to make a start with the working of low grade ore employment would be provided for very many years.¹³

13 May 1933

MINING ASSOCIATION.

An organisation to be known as the Karangahake Tributers and Prospectors' Association has been formed at Karangahake, some twenty odd members being enrolled. Mr D. Leach was appointed chairman and Mr. C. Waines secretary and treasurer, Messrs J. B. Morris, W. Symes, T. J. Maher and N J. Cherry the committee. Rules for the conduct of business were drawn up and active work was commenced a few hours later, when a deputation waited upon the Minister of Employment.¹⁴

18 August 1934

KARANGAHAKE PROSPECTS

¹² <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WHDT19320616.2.9>

Waihi Daily Telegraph, Volume XXIX, Issue 8324, 16 June 1932, Page 2

¹³ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19330512.2.35>

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume XXXIV, Issue 3020, 12 May 1933, Page 7

¹⁴ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19330513.2.26>

Auckland Star, Volume LXIV, Issue 111, 13 May 1933, Page 4

The well-known prospector, Mr. J. Morris, who has a claim on the Taukani Hill, has nearly completed his battery, which is being erected in the township. It is stated that he has a large tonnage of ore in sight.¹⁵

JB Morris has a battery in Karangahake township. This at what is now car park?

1 December 1934

KARANGAHAKE DISTRICT.

(From Our Own Correspondent.) WAIHI, Thursday.

The once famous mining district of Karangahake is again the centre of much activity in prospecting, in addition to the operations of the Talisman-Dubbo Company, and most of the surrounding country has been pegged out. Mr. J. Morris has completed the erection of his battery in the township. The old stamper system has been discarded and the plant consists of a stonecrusher and ball mill. Mr. Morris is working a claim on top of the Taukani Mountain, which skirts the main road in the Karangahake Gorge, and where in the early days payable ore was mined...¹⁶

AJHR 1937

E. J. Scoble, Inspector of Mines¹⁷

Page 31

Waiawa Claim, Karangahake (J. B. Morris, Owner). —Five men employed. The result of the storm in February and several other adverse matters affected the output of this mine, and probably not more than six months of a production period should be recorded. A total of 299 tons of ore was treated for a return of 70 oz. 8 dwt. of gold, worth £463 12s., and 58 oz. of silver, valued at £5. The production of bullion since the beginning of operations is 391 oz. 10 dwt. 8 gr., valued at £1,375 2s. 3d.

AJHR 1938

E. J. Scoble, Inspector of Mines¹⁸

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Waiawa Claim, Karangahake (J. B. Morris, Owner). —Stoping operations in this mine have produced 264 tons of quartz for the year, which, on treatment in the owner's battery, yielded 159 oz. of gold, valued at £981 13s. 6d., and 208 oz. 10 dwt. of silver, valued at £11 13s. 7d. The total production since the commencement of operations is 759 oz. of bullion, worth £2,358 9s. 4d.

¹⁵ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19340818.2.18>
Auckland Star, Volume LXV, Issue 195, 18 August 1934, Page 4

¹⁶ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19341201.2.109>
Auckland Star, Volume LXV, Issue 285, 1 December 1934, Page 12

¹⁷ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1937-I.2.2.2.3>

MINES STATEMENT. BY THE HON. P. C. WEBB, MINISTER OF MINES., Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1937 Session I, C-02

¹⁸ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1938-I.2.2.2.3>

MINES STATEMENT. BY THE HON. P. C. WEBB, MINISTER OF MINES., Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1938 Session I, C-02

Hauraki Plains Gazette

9 November 1938

It is reported that Mr J. B. Morris is getting good results from his claim at Karangahake. Six hands are employed at his battery which cannot cope with all the ore that is being extracted and the surplus is being treated at the Dubbo battery.¹⁹

Ohinemuri Regional History Journal 36, September 1992

Recollections of Karangahake: 1938-1945

By Oliver Pipe

Johnnie Morris, a very old identity, had a small five or ten stamper battery [no, a small ball mill] close to the site of the present toilet block on the picnic area. He treated small quantities of ore for various tributers. Mr Ben Gwilliam (Sen) did the assaying for him and also for the Dubbo.²⁰



JB Morris at work in his battery. Staples Collection.

Photographer unknown, date unsure, c. 1937.

This is probably his battery in the township, what is now the reserve beside the river.

“The old stamper system has been discarded and the plant consists of a stonecrusher and ball mill. Mr. Morris is working a claim on top of the Taukani Mountain, which skirts the main road in the Karangahake Gorge, and where in the early days payable ore was mined...”²¹

¹⁹ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/HPGAZ19381109.2.2.2>

Hauraki Plains Gazette, Volume 48, Issue 2831, 9 November 1938, Page 1

²⁰ <https://www.ohinemuri.org.nz/journals/journal-36-september-1992/recollections-of-karangahake-1938-1945>

Recollections of Karangahake: 1938-1945. Ohinemuri Regional History Journal 36, September 1992

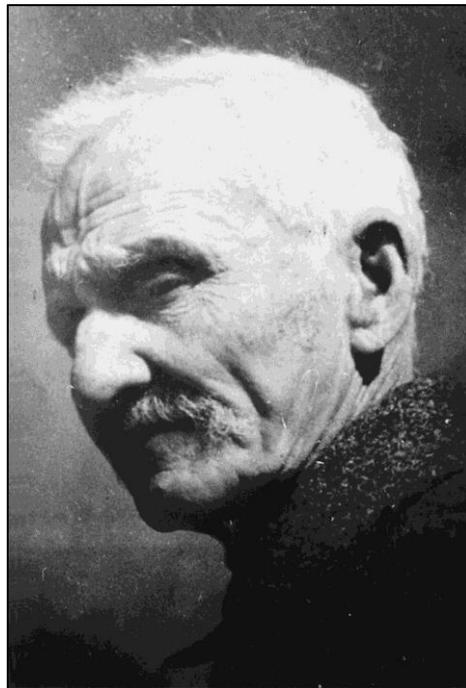
²¹ <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19341201.2.109>



Miner (JB Morris) Staples Collection.

Photographer unknown, date unsure, c. 1937.

This is probably his battery in the township, what is now the reserve beside the river.



John Benjamin Morris, 1861-1946

Staples Collection.

Picnic ground was not always so peaceful²²

Set between State Highway 2 and the Ohinemuri river at Karangahake is a good sized picnic area well patronised by holiday makers travelling through Paeroa and Waihi. When Karangahake was a booming gold town this area was covered by shops and businesses. After gold became too expensive to extract from the reluctant rocks of this mountain country, the buildings were demolished, shifted or allowed to fall down and grass and weeds grew freely. After several years, Johnnie Morris, an old goldminer who had great skill in building quartz-crushing batteries, built a small battery on this vacant land. An assayer's office, operated by Mr B. Gwillam [Gwilliam], was built beside the battery.



The late B. Gwillam [Gwilliam] working in his assayer's office. Here, after extracting the pure gold and silver from a sample of bullion, he is rolling the bead into a "cornet." When the "cornet" is weighed, the difference between its weight and the original sample represents the amount of base metal contained therein.

To complete the assay the silver must be dissolved into silver nitrate, and the weight of the little piece of gold remaining indicates the value of the bar of bullion.



Right (above): The late J B Morris inside his small battery on the site of the present picnic ground. Here he extracted gold from rock waste left by earlier large mining companies.

²² From my files, source not recorded.

J. B. Morris



Shovelling crushed rock through a hole in the roof of Johnnie Morris' battery. The rock, left as waste at the old Crown battery nearby, was carried in an old 1925 Chevrolet 4 truck. Karangahake mountain lurks in the background.

Source not remembered ☹
From 2003