



the Duntroon DIGGER

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A Note from the Digger Team

For us at The Digger and for the DDDA, it's been an eventful year. So much has been achieved around the township with upgrades and repairs to the Blacksmith Shop, the Gaol, the Sexton Shed, St. Martin's Church and, currently, the Vanished World Centre.

The culmination of these activities came in October with The 150th Celebration, the launching of the Heritage Trail and Mary Duff's children's book.

We would like to thank EVERYONE who has contributed to and participated in the events of 2025. We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays. We look forward to sharing more Duntroon and district stories with you in 2026.

Gill, Allan and Anne

The Duntroon Township Sesquicentennial Celebration

October 25 and 26 2025

The celebration of the founding of Duntroon Township 150 years ago took place over Labour Weekend and the feedback has been very positive. Even the weather played its part.

It was most gratifying to have past residents of Duntroon return to catch up with friends and neighbours.

On Saturday, the Duntroon Township Heritage Trail was introduced.

Participants were provided with a newly produced trail guide designed by Allan Kynaston. The guide includes a short history of each site.

Two Clydesdale horses, from John and Gay Booth's Dayboo Stud, led the way towing a landau with invited guests as passengers. Others followed in vehicles or on foot.

Anne Phillips-Vira, who lived in Duntroon as a child, took on the role



Two Clydesdales, towing a landau, led the way.

of guide. Her extensive local knowledge added colour to the stories of the trail.

The craft market did a good trade according to reports from stall holders. There was a diverse variety of goods on offer.



The historic vehicle display.

At the very same time, just a short distance away at the Vanished World Heritage Centre, local writer Mary Duff launched her delightful book entitled 'A Discovery in the Rocks'. The book tells the story of a child finding something unusual in the rock and how it becomes an exhibit in the local fossil museum. Mary's story features the artwork of Duntroon School pupils and Burns Pollock. You can order your copy by going to Mary's page <https://maryduff.co.nz>.

Prior to the celebration, members of the committee spent many hours setting up the photographic display at the Duntroon Hall. Sarah White loaned a large screen from the Vanished World Centre which was used to show videos. The Duntroon Photography Group added their images to the display and people from many locations contributed their precious images and memorabilia.

Also on display were artworks by Burns Pollock. Burns had donated prints to be sold to raise funds for the restoration of Duntroon's historic buildings. Thank you to Burns for this very generous offer. The prints depicted Duntroon township in 1979.

At another table, prints of a Burns Pollock watercolour depicting Saint Martin's Church were also being offered. The funds raised were to support the church. Visitors rightly took the opportunity to acquire the prints while they had the chance.

The DDDA is most grateful to the Kurow Museum for loaning their display boards and a model of Campbell Park. The model was built by Ted Banks who lived in Duntroon until his death a few years ago.

As fate would have it, Sandy Sutherland spotted it at the hall and incorporated the display into her brilliant video about Campbell Park. Check out her video here: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/17yy14U57W/>

Sunday dawned fine, and a display of historic vehicles was a treat to behold. A lot of work had gone into preparing these vehicles and there were some rare examples to be viewed. From gigs to tractors, there was something for everyone.

Meanwhile a well attended special service was held in the beautiful Saint Martin's Church.

At about 12.30pm the strains of Scotland the Brave rang out across the village, drawing visitors to the green space opposite the Duntroon Hotel. Two talented brothers Jonty and



Heritage Trail participants visit the Sexton's shed at the Duntroon Cemetery.

Connor Nelson set the scene for the official tree planting. Well before the establishment of Duntroon township in 1875, the Waitaha people regularly travelled through the valley. They often stayed in the area and left their mark at places, such as Takiroa, so it was fitting that a Totara tree was planted by Tumuaki of Waitaha Taiwhenua o Waitaki Trust Board, Anne Te Maiharoa - Dodds, with the assistance of Councillor John McCone.

After the tree planting the official cake cutting ceremony took place at the Duntroon Hall. Two local identities, Marie Francis and Colleen Sutherland did the honours.

Throughout the weekend acquaintances were renewed and memories were recounted.

So many people were responsible for the success of the event. The DDDA committee was supported by many locals, without whom the event would not have been the success it was. Even after the dust had settled, locals were there at the hall helping to clean up and transport items to be returned. To all those people, the Committee extend a sincere "thank you".



Councillor John McCone and Anne Te Maiharoa - Dodds plant the Totara tree.

'A Discovery in the Rocks' by Mary Duff



Author Mary Duff.

Although author Mary Duff now lives in Christchurch, she spent her formative years at Duntroon School and loved exploring the rocks around her family farm in Prydes Gully Road at Island Cliff.

It wasn't until Mary had children that she suddenly felt an urge to help the next generation understand the treasures beneath their feet. 'A Discovery in the Rocks' is the outcome of that. A nonfiction narrative set in the Duntroon/ Tokarahi area, it's perfect for ages 5 - 9 and introduces fossil formation and Aotearoa's Oligocene geology in an engaging, accessible way.

Get your copy at the Vanished World Centre in Duntroon.

Family Stories

If you have family stories from the past that you would like to share, please type them up and send them to Gill or Anne at duntroondigger@gmail.com We would love to hear from you.

Calling Aspiring Wetland Weeders

Come and join Kat on Wednesday mornings from 10am for a one hour a week session weeding the wetlands and a general tidy up. Ph. Kat 0274239711

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Duntroon Scout Group Scarf Wanted

A scout leader and keen collector of scout badges and items is wanting to obtain the scarf from the former Duntroon Scout Group. The Duntroon Scout Group used a triangular scarf of Black Watch Tartan between 1967 and 1981. Between 1981 and the 1990s, the scarf was green with a yellow border and a small piece of Black Watch Tartan on the peak.

The Duntroon scarf would be part of a collection of tartan scout scarves used in NZ. Also interested in other memorabilia, blankets, uniforms, scout items pre 1970. Especially from the 1954 Motukarara, 1959 Auckland and 1962 Otago Jamborees. Ph Edmund 021 2619369

Help us find the needle in a haystack

Chilean needle grass (CNG) is an invasive grass that can grow up to one metre tall. It has bright green leaves and distinctive long-tailed seeds with a pointed base. CNG is easiest to identify from late October until March during flowering and seeding when its drooping panicles have a red-purple tinge.

CNG spreads easily on clothing, machinery, vehicles, feed and livestock and is very difficult and costly to control once established. Their sharp, needle-like seeds can also penetrate the flesh and eyes of livestock, causing serious injury and degrading meat and wool products.

If you have seen CNG or think you have it on your property, contact us on **0800 324 636** or visit **reportpests.nz**

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Free Business/Services List

The Digger Team is reaching out to local businesses and service people for contact details in an effort to make your services known to the local community. If you would like to be included in our list for publication in 'The Digger', please contact us at duntroondigger@gmail.com Please keep your entry to 2 lines maximum.

Barley: can deliver. Phone Errol Wells 0274 570 700

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Historic Duntroon: The Orkney Islands Connection and the Three James' (Part II)

by Anne Phillips-Vira

This article follows on and completes the story of the three cousins which featured in the August/September issue. James A. Taylor, James B. Taylor and James Phillips all migrated to the Waitaki District from the farming area around the village of Birsay in the Orkney Islands between the years 1868 and 1871.

My research on Orkney islanders who were laid to rest in the Duntroon Cemetery provides evidence that Orkney Island settlers in the Duntroon District overwhelmingly came from the Birsay/Harray Parish on Orkney's mainland.

James A. Taylor

By 1875, the same year as Duntroon became a township, James A. Taylor had bought 'Viewfield Estate' at Kokoamo (Obituary, 1934). He later purchased an adjoining property which he named 'Riverside'. Incidentally, a recent conversation with Burns Pollock revealed that part of James A's property later passed into the hands of Burns' father, John Pollock, in the mid-1940s.

An extract from 'The Cyclopedia of New Zealand' (1905), states that James claims to have covered an impressive 30 000 miles of travel between Duntroon School and back to 'Viewfield' to ensure his children's regular attendance.

James A. made quite a name for himself in the Duntroon District. According to his obituary, he was a successful farmer and breeder of Border Leicester sheep, a member of the Duntroon School Committee, a founder and director of the North Otago Farmers' Cooperative Association, and a Government Land Valuer. In addition, he was an elder of St Magnus Presbyterian Church in Duntroon.

Figure 1: Mr. and Mrs J. A. Taylor and Family.

Children eldest to youngest: Elizabeth (1879), William John (1880), Mary Jane (1882), James Don (1883), Robert Anderson (1886)

From The Cyclopedia of New Zealand [Otago and Southland provincial districts], 1905.



In his obituary he is described as a quiet and generous man who displayed a deep commitment to the church. James and his wife Janet, née Don of Stirling, Scotland (National Records of Scotland, 1861), had two daughters and three sons, all of whom remained in the Waitaki District and are buried in the Oamaru Old Cemetery.

James died at his home in Wharfe Street, Oamaru, in 1934 and was buried in Duntroon with Janet, who passed away 21 years earlier in 1913.



Figure 2: The road to Kokoamo

James B. Taylor

James B. Taylor acquired 558 acres of land near his cousin at Kokoamo (The Cyclopedia of New Zealand, 1905) and named it 'Springbank'. Like his cousin, James A., he grew wheat and farmed Border Leicester sheep.

James B. took an active part in establishing the Kokoamo School and Post Office and serving as a member of the North Otago Agricultural and Pastoral Association. He also served on the Waitaki Road Board until it merged into the Waitaki County Council in around 1876. In addition, he was a trustee of the Duntroon Public Cemetery until 1925 when, after his death in the same year, John Rutherford was appointed to replace him (New Zealand Gazette, 1925).



*Figure 3: James B. Taylor and Christina (Robertson) Taylor
Children eldest to youngest:
Maggie Ann (1883), May
Hunter (1884), Elizabeth
Robertson (1886), Christina
(1888), Annie Clementina
(1890), Thomas (1892), Grace
Isabella (1895)
From Phillips private
collection.*

Both men were "instrumental in the founding of the Presbyterian Church in the Upper Waitaki" (Duntroon Presbyterians, 1931, p.8). James A. was the Chairman at the first meeting of the congregation which was held at Duntroon School in 1881. At the same meeting, James B. was elected treasurer while, Thomas McWhirter of Ayrshire, Scotland, was elected secretary. Interestingly, Thomas' wife Jessie (née Yorston), was also Orcadian.

James Phillips

For the third of the Orkney cousins, things did not go so well. In 1885, James Phillips married Amelia Campbell (née Henderson) who was, at the time, proprietor of the Ngapara Railway Hotel.

James appears to have been quite a speculator. His ventures included the raising and sale of draught horses in Ngapara and Duntroon (Wm. Christie, 1887/ The Clydesdale Entire, 1908), farming at 'Springhill', Awakino in the back blocks of Kurow (Land Board, 1888), managing a Kurow coalmine (A sample of lignite, 1889) and contract ploughing in the Hakataramea Valley (Smith, 2011).

Finally, he sold most of his worldly goods at auction in Kurow (Clearing Sale at Kurow, 1911) and moved to Te Pirita, Hororata. James left his sons to embark upon an extraordinary journey by wagon over the Hakataramea Pass, through Fairlie, Mt Somers and the Rakaia Gorge to a farm, which he had leased, in Hororata.

James' overall losses were significant. He was forced to sell the draught horses he had raised to pay the rent on the farm at 'Springhill' Awakino. The coalmine flooded in 1892 and was subsequently closed (Coal-mines of New Zealand, 1892). Then later, in 1910, the couple lost their second eldest son, James George, to a brain tumour. Things came to a head when James' entire flock of sheep was wiped out in a hailstorm after the move to Hororata.

Worse was yet to come when in 1913, James tragically died of a fatal gunshot wound. Family stories suggest that he took his own life. However, the coroner's report declares that his death was accidental. Whatever the case, the incident spelled severe hardship for Amelia, her sons and daughter, who were forced to leave the Te Pirita farm due to unpaid debt.

It is unclear where the family resided immediately after James' death, although they remained in the Hororata district. The wagon that made the epic journey over the Hakataramea Pass to Hororata was returned to the Waitaki District in 1963 and now takes pride of place at the Kurow Museum display shed.

My father, James George (Jim) Phillips (namesake of his Uncle James George), returned to the Duntroon/Kurow area in c1941 where he later married my mother Alison (née Stewart) and eventually settled in Duntroon in 1961. Jim spent most of his life farming and contracting in and around the Waitaki District before moving to Oamaru in 2004.



Figure 4: James Phillips, Amelia (Henderson) Phillips and Family.

Children from left to right: Peter Taylor (1892), David Robert (1890), William James Archibald (1883), Edward John (1888), Amelia Millar (1893), James George (1885).

From Phillips private collection.

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Dunroon 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 Dunroon 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
February	28/01/2026	03/02/2026
April	31/03/2026	07/04/2026
June	27/05/2026	02/06/2026
August	29/07/2026	04/08/2026
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 dunroondigger@gmail.com