



# Henry Atkinson

Philanthropist

Conservationist

Lobbyist

1838-eternity

1910,  
AGED 72



# SO WHO WAS HENRY, THE MAN?

- ◉ Born in 1838 in Windermere, UK, the ninth child of 16 of William and Ann Atkinson
- ◉ Engineering education funded by elder brother John
- ◉ Worked in U.K., Russia and Portugal on waterworks engineering projects while in his mid twenties
- ◉ Emigrated to NZ in 1863 on the ship Hellvellyn where he met his future Scots wife Jane Johnstone

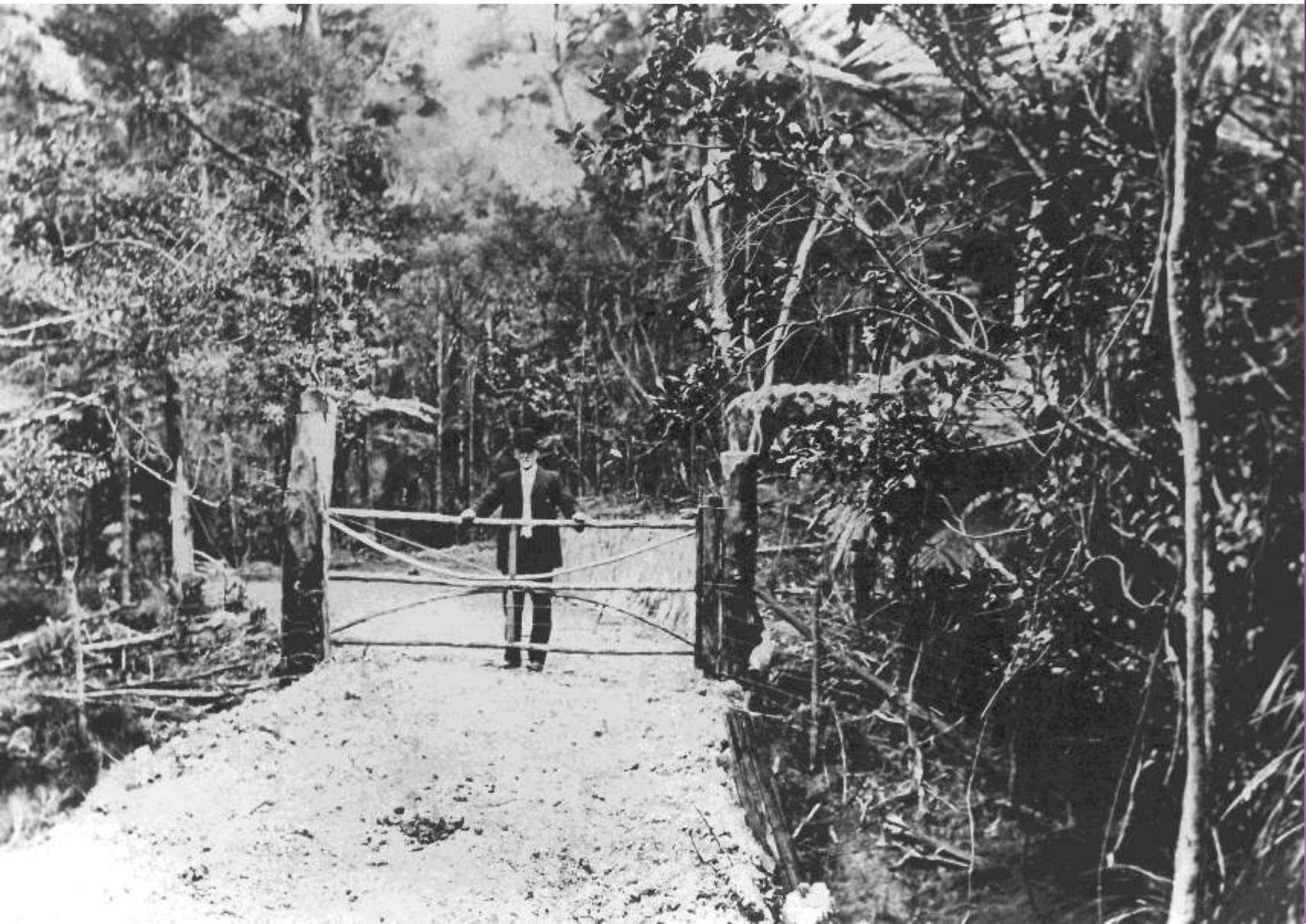
# WHY DID HE COME TO N.Z.

- ◉ He supervised the establishment of the first Auckland Gas Works on the corner of Nelson and Fanshawe Streets
- ◉ He was manager of the works for 34 years
- ◉ He retired in 1897, becoming a prominent citizen in both Auckland city and Titirangi where he built several houses
- ◉ He lived for over 30 years in Nelson Street
- ◉ By 1900 he was building a large 3 storied house in Grafton Road
- ◉ In 1915 he built a holiday home in Rangiwai Road

# RANGIWAI, HENRY'S HOLIDAY HOME



# HENRY AT RANGIWAI GATE



# WHAT WAS HIS CONNECTION TO TITIRANGI IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY?

- ◉ In the 1880s he began purchasing land there
- ◉ Was influential in changing an Auckland City Council scheme to obtain water from the Oratia Stream (Canty's Creek)
- ◉ Suggested diverting the Nihotupu stream as an alternative
- ◉ This scheme was accepted alongwith his gift of land for the purpose and in 1902 the first Waitakere water was in public use
- ◉ In 1900 he gifted a water reservoir site in Atkinson Road and another area for the Upper Nihotupu reservoir

# THE FAMED NIHOTUPU FALLS 1910



# TRIP TO PIHA, C.1910



# GROUP NEAR THE GAP, PIHA 1910



# AUCKLAND CITY COUNCIL CHRISTMAS FUNCTION 1913



## AND THERE'S MORE...

- ◉ Henry sold a further block of land adjacent to the Nihotupu Stream for water reticulation
- ◉ Effectively secured the scheme that gave Auckland City permanent water supply for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- ◉ Advocated for the construction of the Whau canal to connect the Waitemata and Manukau harbours along the Whau portage

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 283: 2669-2674, 2000.



# HERALD REPORT ON “THE CANAL THAT WAS NEVER DUG”

The *New Zealand Herald* of 16/7/1903 reported that “The committee and subscribers to the Waitemata-Manukau Canal scheme, together with a large number of gentlemen interested, made a visit of inspection yesterday along the route of the proposed canal, which is intended to link the Manukau and Waitemata harbours, and materially shorten the sea distance between Auckland and the West Coast ports.

*“The party were taken by the launch Ruru to the mouth of the Whau River and beyond to Archibald’s brickworks, where Mr Archibald came on board, kindly piloting the steamer to Keane’s brickworks. Here a landing was effected. It had been arranged to get up as far as the Whau River bridge, but the tide was falling when the steamer reached Keane’s. Brakes were in waiting at the bridge, and the party were driven as far as Astley’s tannery, where most of them alighted, proceeding on foot over the selected route to the highest point along it. Here Mr Atkinson, who was in charge of the party, pointed out the principal engineering difficulties and the cutting which would have to be made.*

*“The party then descended through Mr W. H. Smith’s property at Karaka Bay, where it is proposed to make the Manukau entrance to the canal. After a brief inspection of the geological features of the bay and some further explanations by Mr Atkinson, and also a Mr Hamer, who appeared to be thoroughly convinced of the practicability of the scheme, the party rejoined the brakes and returned to town.”*

In the next few years three shafts and a large number of exploratory bores were sunk in the New Lynn-Avondale district, but nothing more was done.

# WHAT HAPPENED TO HENRY?

- ◉ Married in 1866 to Jane
- ◉ They had 3 daughters and 3 sons
- ◉ On retirement in 1897 he formed a partnership with his sons and set up more than 10 gas works around New Zealand
- ◉ Started subdividing his Titirangi properties
- ◉ Henry died in 1921, aged 84
- ◉ The Atkinson family commissioned a sculpture of Henry
- ◉ He moved from Mt Atkinson to Lopdell House in 1989 following vandalism

# HENRY ATKINSON & SONS

IN REPLY COMMUNICATE WITH.....OFFICE.

## HENRY ATKINSON & SONS,

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BIRKENHEAD  
AND NORTHCOTE "

HAWERA " "

PAHIATUA " "

BALCLUTHA " "

ELTHAM CORPORATION  
GAS WORKS.

# HENRY RETIRES FROM 34 YEARS SERVICE WITH THE AUCKLAND GAS COMPANY

On Saturday afternoon Mr **Henry Atkinson**, late manager of the Auckland Gas Company, who has retired to take up the duties of consulting engineer to gas companies, was presented by the employees of the Company with a handsome illuminated address, expressing regret at his departure and giving voice to the high esteem in which he was held by all the employees. Mr **Atkinson**, in reply, expressed regret at parting with the men in retiring from active work after 34 years' service. The employees at the same time presented Mrs **Atkinson** with a gold bangle, with a diamond in the centre. The address was as follows -. —•• Auckland, April, 1897.

*To Mr Henry Atkinson : Dear Sir, —It is with the deepest regret that we, the employees of the Gas Company, hear of your intention of retiring from the position of manager, which you have filled with honour and credit to yourself and profit to the Company for so many years. We are conscious of your strict impartiality and honourable dealing with every man under your care, and the interest you have always taken in our welfare has produced the most friendly relationship throughout the whole works. As a manager and engineer, we believe you have few equals. Under your direction and supervision every man felt an interest in his work, and in parting from you we feel we are losing an honoured friend. We all join in wishing you every success in whatever work you may undertake in the future, and trust that Mrs Atkinson, yourself, and family may live to enjoy many happy years together.*

The address was artistically illuminated by the Star Office, and was illustrated with suitable views. Mr M.H. Hamilton, in making the presentation, referred to the consistent way in which Mr Atkinson had adhered to the eight hours' system, and to the fact that many years ago he had introduced the weekly half-holiday into the works, and had ever since carried it out. He had been a consistent supporter of all labour measures, and during the great maritime strike he had been successful in preventing any friction between the employees and the Company. Mr Atkinson, after replying, wound up by calling for three cheers for Mr Suggatt, his successor.

# WHAT WAS HIS MAJOR LEGACY?

- ◎ To quote John A. Lee, 20<sup>th</sup> century famous NZ politician/writer: *“Men have gone to the moon and marvelled, but no greater event occurred on the earth than the abundance of soap and the unheralded arrival of hot and cold water by the turning of a tap. It is a gift of my life time, as is the leisure to use it. A rocket to the moon put millions on to exploration potential; but hygiene - made possible by instant hot and cold water - probably doubled our lifespan”*

# WHAT IS HIS LOCAL LEGACY?

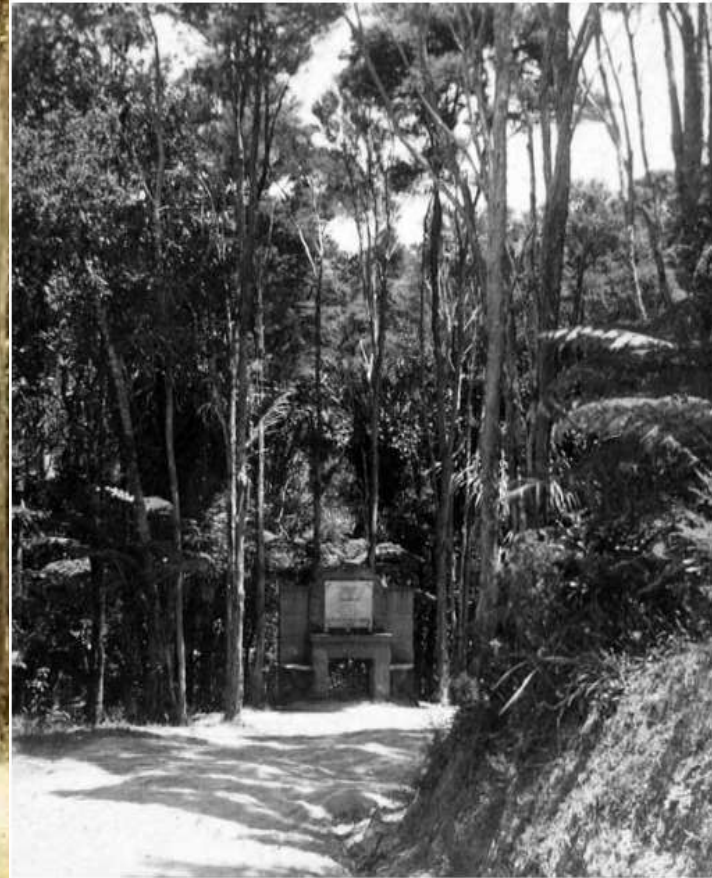
- ◉ Mt Atkinson, gifted 1913
- ◉ Titirangi Beach
- ◉ Atkinson Reserve, gifted 1913
- ◉ Titirangi First World War Memorial, gifted 1917
- ◉ Rangiwai heritage house
- ◉ Titirangi Primary School (land gifted )
- ◉ Titirangi roads and walks including Park Road and the Zig Zag Track
- ◉ Waitakere Water Catchment areas
- ◉ Himself immortalised 1923, first on Mt Atkinson and later outside Lopdell House

# THE FIRST WORLD WAR MEMORIAL

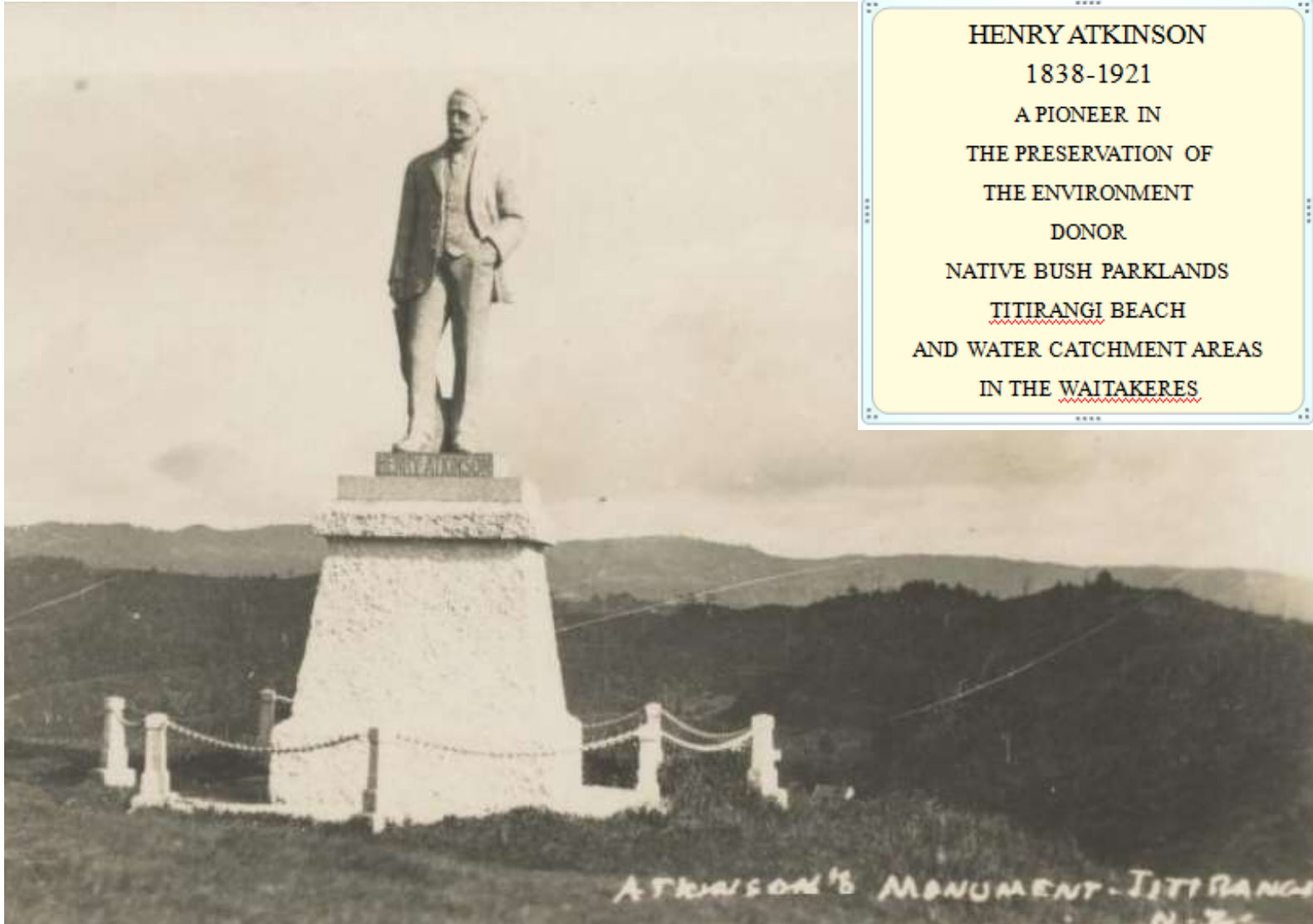
- ◉ First located on the ridge, now Soldier's Memorial Walkway
- ◉ 68 names from World War I
- ◉ 87 names added after World War II
- ◉ Relocated 1965 to park opposite Titirangi Memorial Hall
- ◉ Resited 2011 between the Memorial Hall and the library



# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE COMMEMORATIVE DRINKING FOUNTAIN?



# HENRY, IMMORTALISED



# WHAT'S HENRY UP TO IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY?

- ◉ Co-opted member of the Titirangi Protection Group

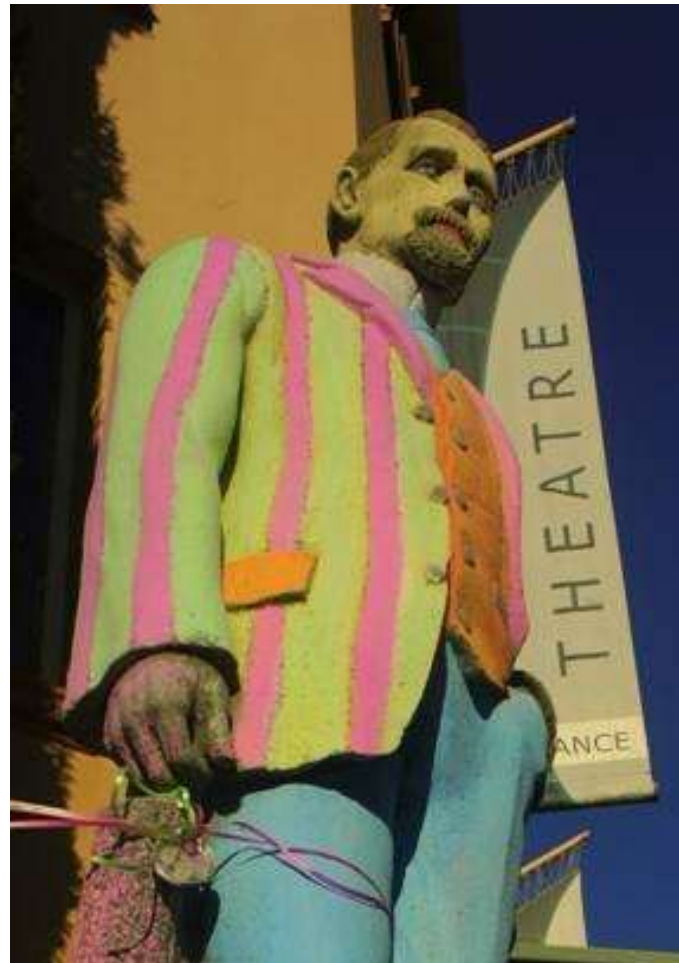
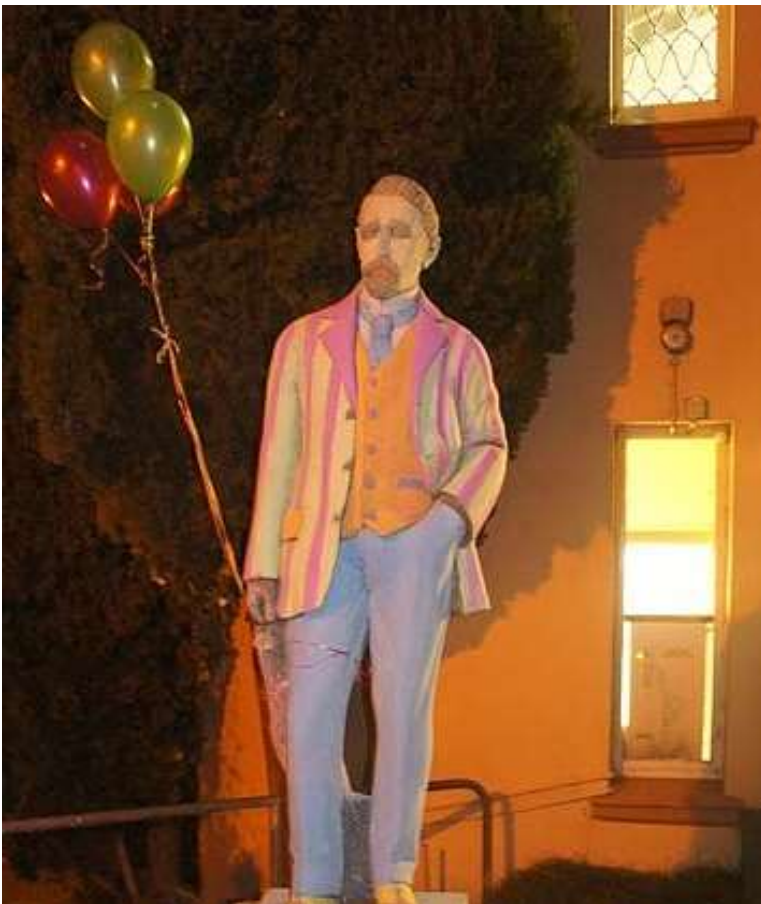


# WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS HENRY ABOUT A NEW WATER TREATMENT PLANT FOR AUCKLAND CITY?

- ◎ Absolutely the city needs it
- ◎ I said Oratia wasn't the best site for a water source back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century! Thus it isn't a quintessential site for a water treatment plant!
- ◎ Cheers Auckland, certainly YIMBY, a gift of some post 1850s regenerating scrubland, uninhabited by people or kauri trees!

# MORE GOOD WORKS...

## ©Colourful Advocate for Mental Health





# CHAMPIONING TITIRANGI CREATIVITY

# HENRY'S CHALLENGE TO YOU THIS CENTURY



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- ◉ Auckland Libraries, West Auckland Research Centre, Atkinson papers
- ◉ From Windermere to Titirangi, An Atkinson Family History
- ◉ Lynette Sollitt-Morris's book "Atkinson Park and Life at Paturoa Bay: 1910-1980"
- ◉ Lisa Truttman - Timespanner article  
"https://timespanner.blogspot.co.nz/2008/11/canal-that-was-never-dug.html"
- ◉ Auckland Libraries *Papers Past*
- ◉ The immortal Henry Atkinson, always open for a chat or a new cause