

## HIGHLIGHTS:

# The Treasury: A history of the Coromandel-Hauraki community archive and research centre

*By Danielle Campbell*



**Figure 1.** The Treasury Research Centre and Archive, comprising the former Thames Carnegie Library building and a purpose-built adjoining Archive.  
Photograph by Danielle Campbell, Sept 2021.

A small community of 7,000, the people of Thames are proud of their heritage and passionate about the preservation of their town's history. Thames Goldfield was opened in 1867 and the settlements of Shortland and Grahamstown were merged soon afterward to form Thames. Much of the town's built heritage from the gold mining era remains and several historic buildings now operate as heritage attractions, such as the Thames School of Mines and the Bella Street Pumphouse. However, the preservation of the area's documentary heritage has been largely tasked to a Thames-based regional community archive and research centre, The Treasury.

Operated by The Coromandel Heritage Trust, a non-profit organisation formed in 2003, The Treasury is comprised of two buildings; the former Thames Carnegie Library and a purpose-built adjoining Archive. Built in 1905 for £2000, the Carnegie Library was funded by Scottish-born American businessman and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. 2,500 libraries were built around the world with Carnegie Foundation funds, including 18 in New Zealand (of which 12 remain). This building was used as a library until 1990 when the new Thames Library was built. It was subsequently occupied by various community groups, including the local music and drama society, until The Coromandel Heritage Trust took over the lease in 2008.

Listed by HNZPT as a Category 2 Historic Place, much of the former Carnegie Library building's original fabric and features have been retained. This includes brass door handles, kauri fireplaces, tiling, gas lamps and pressed metal ceilings. The Treasury also has a set of Boer War trophy rifles belonging to the Thames-Coromandel District Council on permanent display. Trophy rifles were distributed to councils across New Zealand following the Boer War and this is believed to be the only complete set remaining in New Zealand.

The former Carnegie Library now houses The Treasury's research centre, which contains a range of historical resources that may be of use to researchers. This includes a tangata whenua book collection, gold mining records, family history books, a births, deaths and marriages section, an oral history collection and more. Adjoining the research centre is The Treasury's purpose-built Archive, which was constructed in 2014 after many years of fundraising by the dedicated founders and members of The Coromandel Heritage Trust. The only brief to Architectus, the architectural firm which designed it, was that the Carnegie Library building needed to stand out. Therefore, the Archive is a brown recessive colour, its height doesn't match the Carnegie Library and there is a glass passageway connecting the two buildings so that they each retain their individuality.

The Archive is a temperature and humidity-controlled facility where maps,



**Figure 2.** Inside The Treasury's Archive, which holds maps, newspapers, books, diaries, letters, photographs and more relating to the Coromandel-Hauraki region's history. Photograph by Danielle Campbell, Sept 2021.

newspapers, books, diaries, letters, photographs and more relating to the Coromandel-Hauraki region's history are preserved. The Treasury is fortunate in that there is no pressing need to undertake deaccessioning work in order to free up physical storage space. With the Archive having been built only 7 years ago, there remains plenty of available shelving. However, The Treasury faces significant challenges as an organisation that has operated for most of its existence without professional paid staff. Making the collection accessible to the public has not always been a priority. Much of the collection hasn't been catalogued in a CMS, public access to archival material was generally restricted, and there was no formal collections or acquisition policy in place to guide the appraisal process. High research fees also posed a considerable barrier to access.



**Figure 3.** Letter books and cash books c.1930s, preserved in The Treasury's Archive alongside a range of documentary heritage relating to the Coromandel-Hauraki region. Photograph by Danielle Campbell, Sept 2021.

This year The Treasury has made significant steps towards increasing access to its collection. The Trust received a grant from the Lottery Environment and Heritage Fund to appoint a full-time, fixed-term Collections Assistant to catalogue the organisation's most important collections. Condition-dependent, archival material can now be retrieved for researchers to utilise in the research centre. Among The Treasury's most frequently accessed archive collections are the Thame Star and Hauraki Herald newspapers, which are only available digitally on Papers Past up to 1934. A formal collections policy has also been adopted to ensure that any new items collected are authentic, have archival value, relate to the Coromandel-Hauraki region and are unlikely to be held by other museums or archives in Aotearoa.

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Free tours of The Treasury are now offered, and on-site research charges have been considerably reduced (free for students and Trust members, \$5 per hour for non-members). The Trust also hopes to purchase the photographic equipment required to set up an in-house digitisation suite and begin making its collections available online. The Treasury Research Centre and Archive certainly has great potential and a bright future ahead of it. Its unique collection of documentary heritage capturing many different histories of the Coromandel-Hauraki region will continue to be enhanced and made more accessible to the public.

Watch this space!



**Figure 4.** Exterior shot of The Treasury's purpose-built, temperature and humidity-controlled Archive, which was constructed in 2014 after many years of fundraising. Photograph by Danielle Campbell, Sept 2021.