

Back to the past

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It's nearly 10am at the Howick Historical Village, a group of 100 students sit on the grass eating their morning tea dressed in a mish-mash of clothing gleaned from the depths of wardrobes and bathroom cupboards in an effort to look 'Victorian'. Parent helpers and teachers also attempt the Victorian look, but more often than not they miss the mark, ruining the look of a replica dress with a pair of sandals, or donning what can only be a shower cap above an apron that is none other than a lacey tablecloth. It's all in good fun, and the Education team at Howick Historical Village revels in the efforts people have made for their EOTC¹ trip.

The museum story

The Village tells a very specific story. In the mid-1800s, after the Treaty of Waitangi was signed and while Maori activist Hone Heke was busy cutting down the flagpole with the British repairing it just as quickly, a letter was sent from Governor George Grey to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, requesting a delegation of the armed forces be sent to New Zealand. Consent was given for soldiers who had seen at least 15 years of active service in the colonies (and were now retired due to age or injury) to apply. The soldiers (all of them old but none older than 45) were given free passage with their families, promised a house built ready for them on an acre of land, half of which would be cleared ready for planting. In exchange, the soldiers would attend church every Sunday, be available to practice their soldierly duties for fourteen days each year, assist in defence as needed, and get themselves a job as they would be paid only a token pension for their services. After seven years, the house and land would be theirs to keep, along with an opportunity to buy more land at a good price. This was to be the largest immigration scheme of its time with 2,500 people departing England and Ireland for a new life at the bottom of the world. The soldiers were known as "Fencibles", which is an ancient word meaning 'able to defend'.

Inevitably, the houses were not built, nor the land cleared when the first ship came into Auckland harbour, and a further six weeks (after an 8-month

voyage) was spent on the vessel while the powers-that-be debated where to put the Fencibles. Should they go up north towards Kerikeri, or should they be sent to the Coromandel region? They went to neither—instead establishing the Auckland suburbs of Onehunga, Otahuhu, Panmure, and Howick.

Recreated village

The Village is a collection of buildings set on 7 acres of land. Most of the buildings have been donated to the Village by descendants of Fencible families. All of the buildings represent a Fencible family—some of whom actually lived in the cottage, others were more colourful or distinguished characters whose story is immortalised in a house similar to the one they once lived in.

“How did they wash their clothes? Where did they get their water? Where were the toilets? Why were they called thunder-boxes?”



Twins Jennifer & Chloe explore the wonder of herbs

[Photograph: Christine Milne]

¹ Education Outside the Classroom

Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

The buildings themselves are distinctive. The promised houses were unable to be built for the Fencibles because there were not enough men in New Zealand to provide the labour. Instead, the Fencibles were given money to build their own houses. Privates were not given enough money to build a whole house, so they found their neighbour, combined their money, and built a 'siamese' cottage on the border of their properties. The sergeants had a stand-alone cottage, most commonly situated on the corners of the settlements in order to watch for danger coming in to the village, but also to more easily supervise the Fencibles as they were believed to be given to weakness of habit having been given so much freedom. The Captain's house, of course, is many times the size of those of their subordinates.

So that's the story

But there's far more to social history than a biography of a group of men, women, and children immigrating to New Zealand on a plan. There's the nitty gritty of how people lived. How did they wash their clothes? Where did they get their water? Where were the toilets? Why were they called thunderboxes? Why do the fences have only one rail? What is that funny straw building? What games did children play? Was school the same then as it is today?

There are so many questions...and all of them with answers that the students discover throughout their visit. Did you know that if you have a stubborn stain, urine will dissolve it? Or you can rub the spot with good soap and leave it on the grass in the light of a full moon, and the stain will be gone in the morning. Did you know that chlorophyll and sunlight act together to do the same job as 'blue', which makes the whites whiter and the brights brighter? Did you know blue even still exists? Do you know about settling pans, and graces, pokes, and spills?

It's all here for the discovering and the knowing. At our Village, we work to make our activities interactive. Students do the washing, the butter-making, role-play a court case. Toys and games aren't merely passed around; students play with them, figure out how to make them work. Boys let girls go first, children should be seen and not heard (not too strictly—just enough to gain greater respect!), and adults are always to be respected and promptly obeyed.

We communicate with teachers before their visit to identify their learning objectives—we offer more than twenty activities that can be adapted to student age and ability, and to science, social, technology, and history modules. We have also developed special events for one-off visits (e.g. sexuality/sex

education now and then; building design and construction) as well as re-enacting colonial attitudes in NZ society.

Enquiries from teachers are often doubtful. They're not sure if an historical setting is the place to find support for their 21st Century curriculum. But it is, and feedback from teachers and students alike, is nearly always positive.

With schools bringing 80–120 students every day of the week throughout the school terms, the Education team has its work...cut out for them. Not only do they provide a solid 4-hour programme, they also dress in Victorian clothing, including multiple layers of petticoats in the hot summer; they have Victorian expectations of student behaviour (with a healthy dollop of humour); and often use the Victorian manner of speaking while leading their activity. (If you want to try it, the simplest thing is to remove contractions from your sentences. Obviously planes, cars, computers and other modern apparatus need to be eliminated too!) To speak in such a way leads to an automatic slowing down of speech that somehow lends itself to more active listening.

Class-sized bookings are also welcomed. Occasionally, if other bookings have been made, a smaller group will be attached to another visiting group, but usually we are able to work things so that each school group has its own quota of educators.

Our Village attracts schools from all over Auckland. It attracts schools from Tauranga, Hamilton, Rotorua, and Whangarei. We've had visiting schools and special interest groups (e.g. touring school choirs, orchestras, and sports teams) from Australia. A school from New Caledonia visits the Village every year. The local secondary schools use the Village as their base for their drama studies; another visits every year over a period of five days, bringing 300 students for a two-hour intensive visit midway through a study on immigration to New Zealand.

Of relevance to Christians

In the 1800s, huge changes were being made the world over regarding religious beliefs. The Salvation Army, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Baptists were all establishing their theological viewpoint.

Today's modernism makes it easy to look at our church fathers and cast them aside as unfashionable fuddy-duddies. For Seventh-day Adventists, for example, Ellen White is a classic example—so often her God-given talent is diminished by our judgment of her hairstyle and her clothes.

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Reflections, Impressions & Experiences

Ellen White was no fuddy-duddy. Examine her portraits alongside other portraits of her period and she is as modern as any teacher today. Show your students that life back then was real—that people worked together for survival; that methods of communication, while developing, were slower than today and what that meant back then; that things like electricity, taps, dishwashers, washing machines, and garage door openers were inventions in the future.

Take a step further back in time, to Bible times when people lived in many ways as they did in pre-industrial revolution times. Make your Bible stories come alive with the detail of history—the science, the social norms, the technology, even the stories that happened before the story you tell.

A trip to the museum—especially living museums—is one of the best things you can ever do. Find a good one, make a day of it, explore your history, and have fun with the past so you can understand the present. **TEACH**

A suggestion

To find out more about what our Education team offers, go to www.fencible.org.nz or email education@fencible.org.nz



Young boys pose for a picture working in the carpenter's shop

[Photograph: Christine Milne]