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## The post office at Piha, Auckland -a moving story

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Piha, located on Auckland's rugged west coast, is a well-known holiday resort and surfing beach. In earlier times the area was forested and extraction of the indigenous timber was the primary industry. A state-owned timber mill operated at Piha from 1910-20.

Official Post & Telephone Department services began on 15 June 1912 with the opening of a telephone office. Postal services were added on 10 March 1913. The office was associated with the timber mill. Postal services were withdrawn on 21 December 1920 while the telephone operation was closed on 17 January 1921 probably coinciding with the closure of the mill.

An agency post office reopened on 3 September 1935 and seems to have been in the local boarding house run by L.E. Le Grice. By 1940-1 Edward Browne is listed in directories as proprietor of the boardinghouse, store, post office and petrol bowser. In 1944 Browne was replaced by Chas Pope.



The Piha store and post office c.1970 [photo: ex Coney (2008-10)].

In 1982 the then store owners informed the Post Office they no longer wished to run the agency. Subsequently the post office was forced to share accommodation with the local library. In an earlier life this dual purpose building, best described as a shed, had been a bus shelter then a storage facility for Auckland Regional Council machinery. In mid-1985 it became known that the Post Office intended to build a new telephone exchange on the Piha site which had been acquired under the *Public Works Act* in 1968. The Piha Ratepayers & Residents Association Inc. (PR&RA) approached the Post Office about using the old exchange building for post office accommodation. Late in 1985 the PR&RA was informed they would be gifted the building but further progress was hindered by the impending break-up of the New Zealand Post Office. In May 1987 the fledgling state-owned enterprise Telecom NZ, who had been allocated the asset, advised the gifting of the building, together with the right to use the existing site, would proceed but the PR&RA would be responsible for refurbishment. The following month the PR&RA accepted the gift and quickly converted the building into a working post office. NZ Post provided a nest of 60 private boxes for the new office.





The Piha Post Office in accommodation shared with the Piha Library [photo: H.E. Waite, c. 1986].



The Piha Post Office [photo: H.E. Waite, 1987].

NZ Post closed the post office on 31 May 1989. It is currently designated a PostCentre.

In February 2004 the new telephone exchange was badly damaged by fire. Changes in technology meant a rebuild was unnecessary as roadside boxes were an adequate replacement. Telecom NZ advised the PR&RA the site might be sold. In mid-2008 the PR&RA resolved to continue fighting for the retention of the facility. In 2009 Telecom NZ sold the site to a developer who gave permission for the PR&RA to remove the PostCentre building. It was lifted off its foundations and

The two cabins which served as the PostCentre from early 2009 until October 2009 [photo: ex PR&RA website]

