

WIGAN BRIDGE - NEW ZEALAND

by Dennis Dickenson

In a little corner of New Zealand some 12,000 miles away from Wigan, Lancashire and 32 miles from Gisborne (where Captain James Cook first landed in New Zealand) is a short stocky wooden bridge which crosses the Mangaheia River.



The bridge is named 'Wigan Bridge' and it has a wooden plaque attached to it. In 1903 it was the centre of the Wigan township which boasted a school and a few houses.

These days the majority of traffic using the bridge are logging trucks which are carrying large logs on there way to be either milled or exported to Asia.

Local native historians inform me that it was named 'Wigan Bridge' as a remembrance of Richard John Seddon who served as the Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1893 until his death in 1906.

Richard John Seddon was held in high esteem throughout New Zealand and was nicknamed 'King Dick'.

In January 2004, over 50 descendants of the original settlers, former pupils of the Wigan school etc gathered to commemorate the Centennial of land being selected in the Wigan Settlement in late 1903.

Richard John Seddon was actually born in Eccleston, St Helens in 1845. However, the local people of the area (here in New Zealand) declared that he was born in Wigan, hence the name.