

Archaeological infrastructure of Wai-te-mata (Auckland) 1820–1850

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“Certain styles of architecture require corresponding styles of gardening as their proper accompaniments, as a fine house require terraces and geometrically planned gardens...” David Hay, 1863.²

“...the remains of pahs, and marks of cultivation chiefly on the scoria land, and the heaps of pepe-shells everywhere, show the country was, at no distant period, highly cultivated and thickly peopled...” Dr Andrew Sinclair, 1851.³

Introduction

The focus for this paper is 1820 to 1850. Case studies will apply comparative research between historic landscapes in Auckland’s ‘Official Bay’, home of the first permanent houses and gardens of the government and the Te Papa peninsula of Tauranga City and several Auckland and Waikato (Anglican) Church Mission stations built before 1850.

I will argue for the use of landscape archaeology as a heritage management tool and explain what land use changes can be read from the physical environment and pictorial and written records. By revisiting primary archives and the physical places with these insights we may see the past with new understanding.

Landscape archaeology

My research and field work applies the practice of landscape archaeology which has three key landscape objectives when “understanding the spatial relationships utilized within a garden’s design” as “(1) establishing its boundaries, (2) finding its major axis, and (3) locating other passageways through it.”⁴

Plants feature in all aspects of the design of this economic and social landscape history. Garden plants were, and often still are, grown for ornament, food, medicine and shelter; native timbers were milled locally and imported timbers shipped for the first permanent houses. Raupo (*Typha* species), a common swamp plant was also used to make houses for the Mechanics (skilled labourers). Flax (*Phormium tenax*) and peach groves marked contemporary Maori settlements.

Trees and buildings

I have always been amused by the consistent staging of Pakeha settlement with gardens and/or trees planted ceremonially *before* any permanent built structures are placed in or on the ground. Archival and physical evidence of the construction of an earth platform for the first home of Robert Graham at Wenderholm, north of Auckland, has been discovered with a central earth platform surrounded by a deep ditch to lower the local water

table for improved dwelling comfort and no doubt improved human and plant health.⁵

A comparative study between the Bay of Plenty / Waikato and Official Bay

If we identify the primary actions on land selection for mission stations we find some interesting practices. Fruit trees – including pears – are the first actions before building starts. For example, in August 1834 the Reverend A. N. Brown carried fruit trees to the Maungapouri mission site in South Waikato which were planted by him.⁶ These trees were planted before any building was constructed. Brown has also written of the Matamata Maori chief Te Waharoa’s attitudes about Brown’s abandoned mission orchard in January 1837:

“Waharoa had rendered the orchard ‘sacred’ by calling the fruit trees his head which had deterred the natives from doing any further injury to them, and the fruit will probably be allowed, as it ripens, to drop from heavily laden branches and rot on the ground...”⁷

The narrow Te Papa (Tauranga) peninsula was long settled by the local Maori, with Paa located on the coastal cliff edges of the peninsula landform.⁸ Cultivation by Maori of parts of the area would have involved using fire to regularly clear the bracken fern / manuka at the required time of the year

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² Hay, D. (1863). Choice of house site & laying out the grounds. *Southern Monthly Magazine*.

³ “At the time the site of Auckland was fixed on for the capital of the colony, there were almost no inhabitants in the neighbourhood. Independent what [was is] known, however, of the history of the locality, the remains of pahs, and marks of cultivation chiefly on the scoria land, and the heaps of pepe-shells everywhere, show the country was, at no distant period, highly cultivated and thickly peopled...” *Hookers Journal of Botany and Kew Garden Miscellany*. Volume 3. 1851. P. 214.

⁴ Miller, N.F. and Gleason, K.L. (1994). *The archaeology of garden and field*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 221 p.

⁵ Research undertaken in 2005 for Archfacts and the Auckland Regional Council Wenderholm Landscape and Garden Conservation Plan.

⁶ Journal, August 28 – “This morning, Mr Brown and myself (Rev. W. Williams) were employed in planting fruit trees we had bought with us, in a spot of ground new to my projected dwelling...” *Church Missionary Society Register*, 1834. P.523. [University of Auckland Library].

⁷ Journal, January 19, 1837. P. 100. MS 40. Auckland Institute Museum.

⁸ “Many [coastal cliff and riverbank] sites on the Te Papa peninsula and Otumoetai have been obliterated by the buildings of the City of Tauranga...” [P. 36]. See figure 2.2, ‘Maori Earth Works’ [opp. p. 36]. In: Stokes, E.M. (1980). *A history of Tauranga County*. Dunmore Press. 489 p.

for horticulture and probably for strategic reasons. Fire was not used in the husbandry of land by Northland missionaries, researched by geographer R. P. Hargreaves. He says:

“It is significant that in *no* missionary diary is there mention of any attempt to follow the Maori practice of clearing land by fire...”⁹

Fire was used across the Waitemata isthmus by surveyor Felton Mathew and his staff to clear “sight lines” for his surveying equipment.¹⁰ The Church Mission houses supervised by Rev. Brown were all built on the very end of the Te Papa Peninsula on a raised terrace.

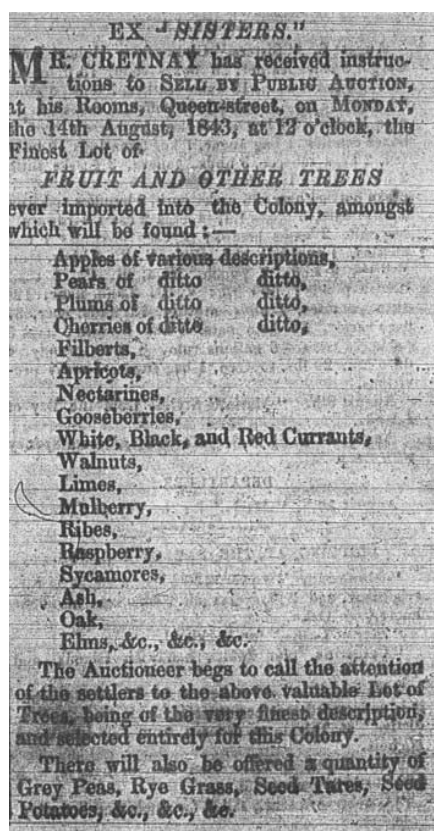


Fig. 1 First plant sale of plants for Auckland. Source: *The Southern Cross*, 12 August 1843.

The Wai-te-mata – Auckland

The “Wai te mata,” as Governor William Hobson and his advisors called Auckland City before they chose its name was gardened by Maori who used fire to husband the land. The first eyewitness accounts of the cultural landscape reveal some surprising details. For example Charles Terry who came to make his fortune in New Zealand flax recorded near Maungawhau or Mount Eden:

“Here, although quite deserted by natives, there are ... the remains of a most extensive Pa, with their former cultivated grounds, on which are now growing wild, in luxuriant vegetation, tares (sic) [taro] cabbages, turnips, celery, and grass. The [taro] were in October (Spring) 1840, in full blossom, four feet high, and there were some acres completely covered with them.”¹¹

William Hobson sent his advisors from Russell in Northland to locate a permanent site for the new capital. His poor health kept him in the north but his advisors reported to him the progress on the creation of the town with, in the case of the Superintendent of Works, William Mason, two lengthy reports written by him.¹² They chronologically document the dates and names of the entire Mechanics who built the first six permanent wooden houses in Official Bay.¹³ The Mechanics included: Thomas Wright (carpenter); Francis Hamilton (quarryman); Thos O’Neill (carpenter); W. Kendell (?); James McGee (labourer); Samuel Mills (carpenter); Richard Condon (carpenter); John Swanson (carpenter); R. Seale (carpenter) and Charles Hale (blacksmith).

The house construction has been presented as evidence of architectural history by Stacpoole (1971). However, re-evaluating these reports in terms of a broader place making origin of the first New Zealand government provide new insights into the process of site and building selection and construction of dwellings and landscape.

Colonial Surgeon, Dr John Johnson, MD’s,¹⁴ timber framed four roomed home was built in five days in early October 1840 by six carpenters and one blacksmith. The “Mechanics” names with their trade are recorded in the five page report and an eighteen page time sheet under the direction of the “Superintendent of Works” (1840–1845), William Mason. Mason was a professional architect and these dwellings were the first permanent houses ever built in Auckland, and months before the first wooden Government House (1841–1848) was constructed as a prefabricated house carried aboard the ship *Platina* direct from London.

Central to a permanent settlement was the military and a permanent water supply, such as the springs flowing from Official Bay and the Auckland Domain where the “Government garden” was constructed; both Maori and Pakeha gardeners cultivated plants to supply the Governor and local and countryside residents.¹⁵

Dr David Monro described the garden in the summer of 1842:

“In this garden there was to be seen a large variety of vegetable, flower, young vines and fruit trees and several plants and seeds of which Mr. C. [Cleghorn, Government Gardener] had bought from Rio Janeiro.”¹⁶

⁹ Hargreaves, R.P. (1962). Waimate – pioneer New Zealand farm. *Agricultural History* 36: 38–45.

¹⁰ i. Felton Mathew Surveyor’s Field Book. NZ MS 99. MSS APL. ii. Memorandum. Charles Terry to Governor W. Hobson. Compensation for burnt prefabricated house. 1840/89. G36/1. Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

¹¹ Terry, C. (1842). New Zealand its advantages and prospects as a British Colony. London. P. 37.

¹² i. IA 1. 1840/492. Reporting proceedings. 23 September, 1840. William Mason, Superintendent of Works. Archives New Zealand, Wellington. ii. IA 1. 1840/589. General report, 20 October, 1840. William Mason, Superintendent of Works. Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

¹³ IA 1. 1840/589. General report, Wai te Mata. Superintendent of Works to Governor, William Hobson, 10 October, 1840. 5 page report and 18 page three week timesheet. Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

¹⁴ *The Anglo-Maori Warder*, 3 August, 1848. P2, C4.

¹⁵ Adam, J.P. (2005). Changing places: understanding the destruction of landscape celebration. Proceedings of XXII Annual Conference of Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand. Pp. 11–15.

¹⁶ Journal of Dr. David Monro 1842. MS 210. P29. Auckland Institute Museum.



Fig. 2 *Phormium tenax* plants photographed in 1870 in Official Bay. Estimated age 50 years c.1820. Source: 7-A527 Special Col. APL.

This same garden supplied rare trees to Auckland and North Island public landscapes from 1840 until the present. Trees growing today across the UNITEC campus in Auckland can be traced from this garden. In the winter of 1884, for example:

“...it was agreed to supply the Lunatic Asylum with a quantity of Oriental plane and other trees suitable for planting as ornamental specimens...”¹⁷

Comparing those permanent houses and gardens recorded in pen and pencil built during the 1840s reveals the use of a singular or a series of stepped terraces to construct the dwelling space in front of the houses. Graham and Edgerley were the first Pakeha gardeners to advertise their practice in Auckland.¹⁸ Most houses have expansive verandahs. The same process can be read in the paper written by nurseryman and garden maker David Hay quoted at the head of this paper. This traditional mathematical design process was probably a convention applied in the Mission station gardens of Northland and it extended well into the late 19th century with the house sites chosen that were potentially the previous dwelling sites of Maori.

Primary infrastructure plants

What food and ornamental plants grew in Auckland before Governor Hobson chose that place as the Capital of New Zealand in 1840? How old are the oldest trees (pear, willow, poplar) and other plants (such as *Phormium* and taro) growing in Auckland parks and gardens? I contend that buildings are historically important in acting as magnets for plants when private and public buildings were constructed. Gardens cultivated by Pakeha required manures and the production of this was linked to a political and social system that saw the “depasturing of stock” [and late night ramblings of the cattle and cows] on a range of commons across the Wai-te-mata isthmus.

Some plant histories have been recorded by John Johnson MD. For example in his Annual Report of Auckland Agricultural and Horticultural Society he records that “The vine plants brought from Sydney in October 1840...” and on the history of one popular vegetable he says “There have been several varieties introduced from North America, under the name of ‘squash’ which are very fine...”¹⁹ His writing emphasized the scientific method of recording change in the landscape.

We find in a random set of possibly Johnson’s writings as “Agricultural Notes for September, 1847”²⁰, a statement that:

“...some of the Hobarton potatoes have exhibited symptoms of the dreaded rot, plant as many of the sound and excellent native sorts as possible. There is not a finer potato in the world than the native ‘shark’s egg’ or *hua-maunga*”.

There was at this time concern about both Maori and Pakeha relying too much on the potato.²¹ In the same “Notes” appeared this warning under:

“THE WINTER... The natives predict a dry summer, and as their observations are generally correct, farmers and gardeners should take warning, and get their crops in...”²²

The Government supported the trade in what were called “native productions”, such as flax processing and bark gathered from native trees such as kowhai for tannin. Introduced weeping willow, *Salix babylonica*, became an important infrastructure plant for both Maori and Pakeha.²³

But it is the extremely early reporting of plant cultivation in Official Bay such as that in December 1841 that confirms that gardens were functioning and what was being grown:

“...wrote a correspondent of the *New Zealand Herald* and *Auckland Gazette* at the end of 1841 [29th December, Page 2, Column 3], is to be seen a second crop of potatoes appearing above ground ... this garden [William Mason’s] and a few others, viz: Dr Johnson’s and Mr. Leach’s do certainly reflect much to the credit of the industrious proprietors.”²⁴

¹⁷ Auckland Domain Board Minute Book 1860–1884. PDB 1. Auckland City Council Archives.

¹⁸ i. Edgerley, J. *The Southern Cross*, 12 August, 1843. P3, C2 [advertisement]. ii. Thomas Graham [obituary]. *The Southern Cross*, 27 July, 1852.

¹⁹ *The Southern Cross*, 25 November, 1843.

²⁰ *The New Zealander*, 8 September, 1847.

²¹ *The New Zealander*, 22 May, 1847.

²² *The New Zealander*, 8 September, 1847.

²³ “T. W.[Tom Walsh]” Napoleon’s Willows. New Zealand descendants. *The Waitemata Post*, 15 September, 1910.

²⁴ Stacpoole, J. (1971). William Mason. The first New Zealand architect. Whitcombe and Tombs. P. 36.



Fig. 3 Raupo (*Typha* species) growing in Auckland Domain ponds late 1870s. Source C8241, Auckland Institute Museum.

Conclusions

Trees paradoxically protect the buried historic stratigraphic sequence from human disturbance. Tree trunks can be buried at a considerable depth with the base of the tree trunk marking the original garden levels. Land can fill up over time and the raised soil levels produce multiple tree stems sometimes caused by the uncontrolled grazing of animals.

So why do we have a problem in understanding the age of our local landscapes? Maybe it is the legacy of the likes of dendrologist Bob Burstall's Forest Mensuration studies completed throughout the 1960s and 1970s for the New Zealand Forest Service. Burstall was searching for the largest and most perfect form of individual genera, species and cultivars of trees, or in some cases monuments of Nature.²⁵ Accurate authentication of the age, origin and spatial associations with dwellings and landscape was rarely described.

As a practicing landscape historian there is a serious problem within the practice of landscape conservation where social and architectural historians and arboriculturists tend to ignore or at best understate the age of our landscape infrastructure and by association the tree cover. A recent example of this was given by Wolfe who wrongly stated that "The planting of trees [in the Auckland Domain] began in 1864..."²⁶.

These errors add to considerable confusion in the related design disciplines of landscape architecture and urban design. The Crown bought trees and plants from Sydney in 1840! As I have illustrated, Maori plantings existed across the Isthmus before 1840. Do any of these trees survive today?

In September 1840 the ship the *Anna Watson* arrived from Russell – Korarareka with Government officials such as Colonial Surgeon, Architect, Surveyor, Superintendent of Domain and their entourage of what were called "Mechanics" who were employed to create a new settlement on an existing settled cultural landscape that can be read from paintings and early photographs.

I hope that detailed archaeological examinations of gardens will become normal practice in the future when understanding the Maori and Pakeha exchange of knowledge and plants between each other and other centres of trade.

Acknowledgments

Staff at Archives New Zealand, Wellington; Susan Sweetman, Auckland; Ann Andrews, Auckland and Robin Skinner, Wellington.

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²⁵ Burstall, W. and Sale, V. (1984). Great trees of New Zealand. A. H. & A. W. Reed Ltd.

²⁶ Wolfe, R. (2002). Auckland Pictorial History. Random House. 124 p.