

Europeans in Early New Zealand
— Missionaries and Traders before 1840 —

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Within only twenty or so years of James Cook's first exploratory visit to New Zealand in 1769 extractive industries such as whaling and sealing were flourishing and traders were making profits from the country's timber and flax. Missionaries also began their work in New Zealand long before it had officially become a British colony.

This paper outlines the nature of the activities of the first Europeans in New Zealand with reference to connections with the penal colony in New South Wales in Australia and their dependence on the patronage of Maori leaders in New Zealand.

Introduction

It was not until the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 that New Zealand officially became a British Colony. Studies of the history of the country after this date recount the activities of the Crown and British officials and the establishment of organised British settlements which grew to become the cities of Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin, as well as the ever expanding activities of the missionaries.

The sense of security given by the fact that New Zealand was now a British colony combined with active attempts to encourage immigration from Great Britain lead to a rapid rise in population after 1840. In 1830 there were only two thousand Europeans settled in New Zealand. Ten percent of these were missionaries and their families. The remainder were traders, sawyers and whalers, in other words men employed in extractive industries. Whaling alone occupied between five hundred and seven hundred men during its peak in the 1830s and 1840s (Mackay 1992, 20).

New Zealand's very first contacts with Europe were prompted by commercial interests. Before the country was even officially named New Zealand it was the focus of what Mackay (1992, 9) calls a 'treasure hunt'.

Discovery and Exploration

The first documented sighting of New Zealand was by Abel Janzoon Tasman in 1642. He had set out at the behest of the Dutch East India Company which was forever looking for ways to increase revenue to cover constantly increasing costs of trade and administration. Tasman's assignment was "to find, not new worlds for conquest but new worlds for commerce" (Johnston & Morton 1988, 54). The choice of direction for Tasman's ambitious and hopeful exploratory enterprise lay in Europe's belief that there might be a still undiscovered great land to the south and the east which might yield convenient sea passages to rich lands, or better yet wealth and profitable avenues of trade such as Spain and Portugal had found in the Americas (Johnston & Morton 1988, 56).

The Company's and Tasman's hopes were based not on any kind of certain evidence, but merely on rumors of lands in the southern seas which had filtered back to Europe from Chinese and Arab traders who had perhaps visited northern Australia as may have the Spanish and Portuguese. This land appears as a large, vague shape on a map published in Dieppe in the 1500s, but it was as yet mostly in the imagination. In fact the outcome of Tasman's voyage was deeply disappointing. There were no riches to be had in southern lands until the hard work of European immigrants had created them (Johnston & Morton 1988, 56).

Tasman's first sighting of New Zealand was a point off the tip of the South Island now named Cape Farewell. Attempts to approach land, however, brought threatening actions and an attack from natives in canoes on a small boat sent out by Tasman. Tasman could see no prospects here of making contacts or finding goods of value to the East India Company and after spending a few days at sea in the area now known as Cook Strait Tasman left New Zealand, which, however, to this day bears the name of a Dutch sea province, Zeeland.

The great British sea captain, James Cook, did not make the next recorded voyages of discovery to New Zealand until 1769, more than a hundred years after Tasman. This voyage, which was the first of three he made to New Zealand, was motivated, at least overtly, by the thirst for knowledge of 18th century scientists. The very knowledge gained in fact led within little more than twenty years after Cook's return to Britain to the beginnings of extractive commercial enterprises.

Cook had on board his vessel *Endeavour* two botanists, Joseph Banks and Dr Daniel Karl Solander, as well as two artists, one of whom was also a botanist, making manifest the scientific nature of the voyage, but apart from merely examining flora and fauna, it was hoped that by sailing farther east than Tasman had done, the existence of a vast southern continent might be confirmed. Cook also had instructions to observe carefully the geography, wildlife and natural resources and to claim any land discovered and enter into friendly relationships with any natives met with. With their permission he was then to take possession of desirable lands in the name of the King of Great Britain (Price 1971, 19)

Cook's voyages to New Zealand placed the two islands accurately on the map of the

then known world and disproved theories of the existence of a major southern continent. They did not therefore succeed in the sense it was hoped that they might. What his reports of his visits to New Zealand did do, however, were to make the land known in Britain as one with a climate to which European plants, animals and people would adapt well. It was these reports that eventually led to the first stages in the development of New Zealand as a prospering British colony, which it officially became in 1840.

‘Treasure Hunters’

Reports made by Cook and the naturalists and artists on board *Endeavour* had their effect. Cook reported the existence of large, strange trees which might possibly be suitable for ships masts. He also thought New Zealand flax would make good ropes and canvas, which indeed it did. He further recounted finding the largest seals he had ever seen in Dusky Bay, and a seal hunting expedition in which he participated produced skins for rigging, oil for lamps as well as flesh for food (Johnston & Morton 1988, 104). Cook’s journals also have entries about whale sightings, which, along with those about seals, gave impetus to the sealing and whaling industries which sprang up in New Zealand waters within little more than twenty years of his visits.

These early entrepreneurs came more often from the nearest other settlement to New Zealand, Sydney, Australia, at that time a convict settlement. As Sinclair (1969, 34) put it “for thirty years New Zealand was the colony of a convict settlement, since there soon sprang up among the officials, who were soon joined by free settlers and emancipated convicts, a group of men, aggressive and far from scrupulous who began trading and farming on their own account... . It was this trading class which first took an interest in the profits which might be made in New Zealand”.

At the forefront of the Europeans who were active in the infant New Zealand were sealers, whalers and traders and along with them came the first missionaries. Samuel Marsden, who set up the first mission station in New Zealand was at the time a prison chaplain in the convict settlement at Sydney, then known as Botany Bay. Although known for his rough treatment of convicts and disdain for the native peoples of Australia, he nevertheless was moved by encounters with Maori seamen who had been kidnapped or signed on by trading and whaling vessels calling at New Zealand ports and “determined to save their people from paganism and exploitation” (Sinclair 1969, 33). The traders were after profit and the missionaries were in search of souls to save.

The first Christmas service in New Zealand was conducted by Samuel Marsden in 1814, but before the establishment of Marsden’s mission is described, let us examine the trading activities which gave impetus to its setting up, and which were a necessary part of its management.

The first gang of sealers to begin their slaughtering activities in New Zealand waters was put ashore on the south-west coast of the South Island in 1792. At about this time, too, a few whaling vessels began to fish for sperm whales. In 1774-5 a vessel from Sydney spent

three months in the Hauraki Gulf in the north of the country cutting trees to make up a cargo of spars and was soon followed by other vessels. These were the beginnings of European trading activities in New Zealand.

Sealers

In the early days Australian and American vessels left gangs of men in spots around the coast to set up camp and fend for themselves while they went about their “profitable slaughtering” (Sinclair 1969, 34). These men lived for months in tents, or flax-walled huts until their ship returned to collect the skins and oil they had collected and leave supplies; there were times when scheduled vessels did not return and a gang had to wait for another vessel to rescue them. It was not an enviable lifestyle. As Mackay (1992, 16) describes it :

Sealing was perhaps the rawest, harshest industry of the New Zealand frontier. The sealers' job was to club the seals to death, and to do it they had to endure terrible conditions, bloody fights with Maori groups and appalling treatment from their masters ... it was the preserve of some of the roughest men in the colonial world.

Although it was a short-lived industry, lasting only thirty or so years, partly because the sealers were too efficient and reduced the seal colonies to unprofitable sizes, but also because demand for seal skins diminished, it had its place in the early economy of New Zealand. The skins were sent to London to make a kind of hat then in fashion and to China in exchange for tea which was much in demand in Britain and in the penal colony in New South Wales. Because sealing didn't require big ships, a skilled work-force or a great deal of capital investment it had been one of the first extractive industries set up in Australia and the sealers there had moved across to the southern part of New Zealand when large seal colonies had disappeared from Australia (MacKay 1992, 16).

Because the sealing industry was short-lived and those that took part in it generally not the kind of men to record their experiences on paper, there are few written records of the activities of the sealers. One of the main sources of information is a journal kept by an educated Englishman, John Boulton, who spent time with sealing gangs in Australia and New Zealand. His story, along with those of other individual early European arrivals in New Zealand, helps exemplify the nature of the activities of the first Europeans to come to New Zealand as well as the young country's early connections with Australia.

Boulton was born in Nottinghamshire, England and as a young man first tried to settle in Barbados, but, finding himself unable to accept the cruel use of slaves, emigrated to Tasmania where he became a sealer. He was eventually taken to southern New Zealand where, with six weeks' food, three muskets and a dog and clothing, his gang headed for Milford Sound. Here it was necessary to keep a look out for hostile Maori while the work

of killing seals went on, and his gang did indeed suffer an attack. Later Boulton returned to Australia as a stowaway then joined a whaling ship headed for Timor. He eventually died in Ceylon, probably in 1854 (Natusch 1992).

Whalers

The expansion of the whaling industry was assisted by the sealers in that they were in a position to pass on information about the New Zealand coastline and about whales in the area. The whaling industry was a much larger and more important one than sealing. Whale oil had a part to play in the growing industrialization of Britain and America in that it was an excellent lubricant. Whale oil was also used for lighting and heating to a certain extent, while whalebone was used in the making of women's corsets and skirt hoops (Mackay 1992, 19).

At first whalers worked from their ships and used New Zealand ports as bases for reprovisioning. The shore based whaling stations which were later established brought Europeans to New Zealand in much larger numbers than did sealing. Many of these new arrivals combined their whaling activities, which were seasonal, with farming, fishing and trading in timber and flax, often marrying Maori women and remaining in the country permanently.

It is probably on account of the long term presence of these whalers and traders that there is more information available about their activities. Once again these life histories indicate the importance of Australia as a stepping stone on the way to New Zealand. They also serve to show the nature and importance of the relationship of the earliest European residents with the Maori people who served as their patrons and protectors.

One of the best known names in early New Zealand's history is that of Richard Barrett, partly perhaps because it is preserved as the name of a reef in Wellington harbour and a hotel in the city.

Barrett's life was a full and adventurous one. He left England, the country of his birth, at the age of sixteen as crew on a sailing ship and early recognized the possibilities of newly opened up New Zealand. He traded clothes, blankets, muskets, rum, grains and razors loaded in Sydney with Maori in exchange for pigs, flax and potatoes destined for Sydney.

He formed a connection with Te Ati Awa of the Taranaki area at the Maori leaders own insistence because they wanted an association with a European trader who could get arms for them. He married a Te Ati Awa woman of high position in a Christian marriage service. He then extended flax plantations using Maori labour to prepare the product for trade with Sydney.

While in Taranaki he enabled the Te Ati Awa to withstand a siege from traditional enemies thanks to his supply of arms and goods, but fled with them overland to Port Nicholson (now Wellington) to escape reprisals. He continued to trade and also set up a whaling station in Queen Charlotte Sound. He was greatly involved as translator and

negotiator in the setting up of the first official settlement in Wellington. Later, however, he returned to the Taranaki area and began cattle farming while his boats chased whales and transported flax to Port Nicholson (Bremner 1992).

Another whaler of some renown was one Thomas Halbert who arrived in Poverty Bay from England in about 1832 and spent the rest of his life in the district. During the course of his life he formed connections at different times with three tribes in the area and married at different times six Maori women. His attempts at trading failed because he was too generous with credit. In 1837 he began working with Captain J. Harris in operating the first whaling station at the mouth of the Tuanganui River. He also bought some land and began farming but later resold it. According to Simpson & Simpson (1992, 98) :

Harris lived through lawless and violent times. As a trader he was a link between Maori and Pakeha [Europeans]. Leading Maori often exchanged a daughter and a piece of land for a European husband who was a steady contact with the new economy.

Generally speaking this was an agreeable, indeed a necessary arrangement for the traders and whalers, and many, although not Halbert, used the opportunities it presented to become wealthy.

John William Harris, the partner of Halbert mentioned above, emigrated to Australia in 1820 and stayed 10 years then came to Poverty Bay as an agent for a trading company to set up a flax trading business. He owed much of his success to the fact that he came under the protection of the Maori people in the area and not long after his arrival married a Maori woman of high standing who bore him two children. He was the first to buy land in the Poverty Bay area and to begin pastoral farming as well as establishing a whaling station next to his store. Harris is considered the most prominent Pakeha citizen in the first thirty years of settlement in the Poverty Bay area (Whyte 1992).

As will have become apparent from these life histories, support from local Maori was considered essential for survival and success by the first generations of Europeans in New Zealand. For the Maori, giving patronage to a European trader guaranteed access to European goods, the most desirable of which, once the novelty of iron nails, axes and blankets had worn off, came to be tobacco, rum, and most especially, muskets.

Flax

Barter using these goods was an essential part of the considerable trade in New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax*). Agents come from Sydney to barter with the Maori to acquire the raw materials for rope and cordage. The British Navy and English merchants were also interested in acquiring flax, but trade declined in the 1830's partly because the market for the product weakened and because the Maori, whose labour, in particular that

of the women, was essential for preparing the flax for export, felt they had acquired enough guns. They then turned to traditional activities like repaying old debts of honour with other tribes using their newly acquired guns to improve their chances of victory (Sinclair 1969, 39) with the unfortunate consequence that the number of deaths incurred in such skirmishes rose dramatically as compared to the days of hand to hand fighting.

Timber

Among those interested in the commercial possibilities of New Zealand flax were those who wanted to acquire timber, especially that of the giant kauri tree, for use as masts spars and vessels. The first vessel to come to New Zealand on such business was the *Fancy* which spent three months in the Hauraki Gulf in 1794-95 collecting a cargo of spars (Sinclair 1969, 34). It was not long before other European ships were calling on New Zealand to trade with the Maori and obtain fresh food and water. This in turn led to the establishment of onshore settlements to carry out the work of exploiting the country's resources more effectively. Many such outposts were set up around the coast in the late 1820's and 1830's especially in the north where the giant kauri grew (Mackay 1992, 19).

The kauri bushmen's work, while it was responsible for destroying almost all the kauri forests, was also one of the longest lasting of the extractive industries since ever increasing numbers of settlers created an unceasing demand for timber. Most of the buildings that were put up in Auckland at the end of the last century were made of kauri (Mackay 1991).

Commercial logging of kauri forests begun in the the late 1700s relied on Maori labour which was paid for with muskets and the timber, usually as whole logs, was exported for use in the shipbuilding industry. By the late 1820's a few European traders and shipbuilders were living and working among the Maori in the northern part of country operating small water-driven sawmills. (Mackay 1991)

Missionaries

It was, however, the missionaries who established the first permanent settlement. This was the mission station set up by Samuel Marsden in the Bay of Islands in 1814. The missionaries' activities were not completely divorced from those of the traders, however, and it was their presence which attracted new traders from Australia by showing them the opportunities for trade with the Maori that existed.

This came about because Marsden approached his work in New Zealand with specific plans to "excite a spirit of trade", and create "artificial wants to which they [the Maori] had never before been accustomed" (Nicholas 1817, 17). The missionaries envisaged themselves becoming important figures in Maori communities by virtue of the goods and knowledge only they could supply. In this way their presence would come to seem indispensable to the Maori leaders and the necessary patronage and protection would thus be available. It was believed that these contacts would then lead to opportunities for the missionaries to introduce their religious teachings.

The Maori however, turned out to be more astute businessmen than the missionaries had imagined and set the traders up in competition to secure the best bargains for themselves. Trade also had its risks. The Wesleyan mission founded in 1823 was considered too stingy by its Maori patrons and had its storehouses raided for the large quantity of goods which they contained but which the missionaries, who were not after all primarily traders, had not made available to the Maori (Binney, Bassett & Olsen 1993, 19).

The pattern of access to European goods and the acquisition of prestige by the Maori in return for the protection and patronage which the traders relied on for the smooth operation of their commercial activities was also a necessity for the missionaries and was an arrangement which continued to figure in the lives of Europeans in New Zealand for the next twenty-five or so years.

In keeping with Marsden's plan to attract the Maori to Christianity by way of introducing new material needs and skills the first three missionaries he brought to the Bay of Islands mission were not properly trained clerics, but rather 'mechanics', to use Marsden's own word. William Hall was a carpenter, John King a shoe-maker and Thomas Kendall a teacher.

At the mission station the most important work to be undertaken was the publishing of portions of the Bible in Maori and this was achieved as a result of the work of Thomas Kendall, who, as well as opening New Zealand's first school house and preparing a textbook called *The New Zealander's First Book*, collaborated with Cambridge language expert, Samuel Lee to compile the first Maori language and grammar. This made the planned Bible translations a reality and with their appearance it became the fashion among the Maori to learn to read and write (Binney, Bassett & Olsen 1993, 15). It was not for many years, however, that the missionaries actually succeeded in gaining any converts among the Maori.

The story of Thomas Kendall, one of the very first of the many colourful characters who inhabited the New Zealand landscape in the very early days of European presence in the land, is as interesting as those of the whalers and traders already described. Born in Lincolnshire in England, he worked as a trader, linen retailer, grocer and school teacher in London before volunteering to the Church Missionary society to go to New Zealand. He joined Samuel Marsden and the other two missionaries in Australia and set out for New Zealand from there. He was unable to maintain a friendly relationship with the other missionaries, who could not condone his overt trading activities including the giving of guns to the Maori, his drinking, and his taking a Maori woman into his home as a "second wife" - he had travelled out to New Zealand with his English wife and children. He was eventually dismissed on account of this unorthodox relationship (McLauchlan, 642).

Conclusion

These early traders and missionaries opened up a new country in their own way and in accordance with the needs of the times and the environment they found themselves in.

Their presence was motivated primarily by the desire to take advantage of trading opportunities, or by their missionary calling. They were not yet interested in a significant way in the chief possession of the Maori, the land itself, and in general were on good terms with them. The Maori had something to give and something to gain as did the traders. The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 and the large influx of land hungry settlers arriving in its wake vastly altered the Maori's sense of place in their own land and brought about changes in Maori Pakeha relationships which have not yet been fully resolved. In this sense the first quarter century of the history of European settlement in New Zealand can be seen to stand apart as something a little distinct from the 'colonization' of the country that followed it. F.E Maning (1863, 1) who described himself as a 'Pakeha Maori' and published an account of his own experiences in early New Zealand, puts it thus :

Ah ! those good old times, when first I came to New Zealand, we shall never see their like again. Since then the world seems to have gone wrong somehow. A dull sort of world now.....But those were the times ! - the "good old times" - before Governors were invented, and law, and justice and all that.

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ガーデン エイドリエン