

East Harbour Regional Park History
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B. HISTORICAL

The areas that lie within the East Harbour Regional Park reflect a series of historical narratives that cover a wide range of topics including ongoing Maori use and occupation, local early European settlement, important aspects of Wellington's maritime history and the use of the eastern harbour as an early and continuing place of recreation for Wellingtonians.

(a) Pre-European Maori Occupation

In Maori tradition it is recorded that the voyager Kupe, came to Te Whanganui a Tara (now known as Wellington Harbour) as part of his extensive travels. Several place names within the harbour have come from Kupe including Te Tangihanga o Kupe or Te Raranga a Kupe (Barretts Reef), Maoro (Ward Island) and Matiu (Somes Island).¹

The next recorded explorer was Whatonga who named the harbour after his son Tara. Settlement of this area was undertaken by peoples who claimed descent from Whatonga. These included Ngai Tara, Rangitane, Muaupoko and Ngati Apa. The development of Wellington peoples continued with successive migrations into and out of Te Whanganui a Tara. One of the most recent arrivals before the advent of Europeans was the Ngati Ira who had come from the east coast of the North Island and had had intermarried with the descendants of Tara. By the start of the nineteenth century a key area of settlement of Ngati Ira was along the east coast of Te Whanganui a Tara from Waiwhetu to Turakirae.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE INSERT?

Early in the nineteenth century, the occupation of Te Whanganui a Tara was to change dramatically. In 1819 and 1821, war parties armed with muskets came from the north and fought

¹ Information on which this subsection is based has come from Waitangi Tribunal *Te Whanganui a Tara me ona takiwa*. Wellington: Waitangi Tribunal, 2003, pp.17-43

with the resident people. Those who took part in these raids included, at different times, Ngapuhi, Ngati Toa, Waikato, Ngati Mainapoto and Ngati Whatua. Although several battles were fought and lost by the Wellington groups, their attackers from the north did not occupy the land.

Following these military excursions, a series of migrations to Te Whanganui a Tara came from Kawhia and Taranaki. These began in the early 1820s and continued for a number of years bringing groups such as Ngati Toa, Ngati Mutunga, Ngati Tama, Te Atiawa, Ngati Raukawa and several others to different places around the Wellington district. Although the resulting occupation and nature of land rights around the harbour was intricate and multi-faceted, it can be said that Ngati Tama were located at Kaiwharawhara and in other places on western Te Whanganui a Tara and Te Atiawa hapu occupied the northern western and northern shores of the harbour with seasonal sites on the south eastern coast. Ngati Mutunga, once a major resident group in Wellington harbour, had left in 1835 for the Chatham Islands.

By the time that Europeans arrived to settle Wellington in 1839, regular Maori occupation continued around the southern shores of Fitzroy Bay.² Parangarehu was a place that the Te Atiawa community from Pitoni went to seasonally to fish and collect berries. In addition, it was an important cultivation site.³ To reach the coastal settlements on the Pencarrow coast, in Fitzroy Bay and beyond, Maori had developed a network of routes along the eastern bay ridges. The current track of Butterfly Creek was one of these routes.⁴

(b) The First Navigational Aids at Pencarrow

In the final decades of the seventeenth century, European explorers also reached Te Whanganui a Tara. Captain James Cook, although having visited, did not enter the Heads. Therefore it was Captain James Herd of the *Rosanna* who first surveyed the harbour in 1826. At this time, one of

² Bagnall, Austin Graham *Okiwi: European Occupation of the Eastern Bays, Port Nicholson*, Eastbourne, Mahina Press, 1972, p.11

³ Native Land Court, Wellington Minute Book No.3, p.226-7

⁴ Beaglehole, Ann *Eastbourne: a history of the eastern bays of Wellington Harbour*, Eastbourne, Historical Society of Eastbourne,

the passengers, Thomas Shepherd, described the eastern shoreline as being "...a ridge of hills of various height from 300 to 1000 feet with a number of bays and inlets... their natural productions are a variety of timber trees growing close together on particular places."⁵

The occupation of European settlers within Wellington Harbour began from 20 September 1839, when the *Tory* sailed into Te Whanganui a Tara.⁶ The ship was owned by the New Zealand Company which had been established to put into practice a theory of colonisation devised by Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Wakefield believed that colonisation would only succeed if it was planned, rather than being attempted in a haphazard manner. To accomplish this, he devised a system aimed at creating a balance between land, capital and labour. Any land acquired from local Maori had to be on sold to settlers at a price that would be sufficiently high to create a fund to pay for the costs of founding a colony. Amid rumours that the British Government would soon intervene in New Zealand to seek sovereignty over the islands, the Company fitted out the *Tory* and their officials voyaged to New Zealand to buy land for their colonisation scheme. Following negotiations with local Maori, on 27 September 1839, the Port Nicholson Deed was signed.⁷ (A number of difficulties were experienced in having this land transaction ratified and recognised. These are not detailed in this entry, however. For a more complete summary account of the difficulties that arose, see the entry for Battle Hill)

The whole eastern harbour lands were viewed by Company officials as having been included within their land transaction with local Maori. As the boundaries and features of the purchase were mapped by surveyors, several of the place names lying today within the East Harbour Regional Park were named after men with New Zealand Company connections. Pencarrow Head is named after the Cornish country residence of Sir William Molesworth who was a Director of the New Zealand Company.⁸ Baring Head is named after a London banker who was a very keen supporter of the Company.⁹ In addition, Hinds Point, passed when travelling along the coastal

2001, p129

⁵ Bagnall, op cit, p.11

⁶ Waitangi Tribunal, op cit, pp.45-8

⁷ Ibid, pp.52-59

⁸ East Harbour Environmental Association, *The Pencarrow Walk: Eastbourne to Kohangatera*, Eastbourne, The Association, 1991, p.10

⁹ 18 Dec 1958, *Upper Hutt Leader*

road, is named after the Reverend Samuel Hinds, said to be an avid clerical supporter of the Company.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Pencarrow Head immediately featured amid Company plans for establishing navigational aids. In 1840 a public reserve for lighthouse purposes was set aside there although nothing immediately was put in place. Without any navigational guidance, shipwrecks soon began to litter the Wellington coast. On 4 August 1841, the *David* was wrecked near Sinclair Head with the loss of three lives¹¹ and on 12 December, the American whaling ship *Elbe* went aground in Palliser Bay. According to William Wakefield, the New Zealand Company's leading official in Wellington, the *Elbe* had run past the opening of Port Nicholson harbour. He suggested that had there been a lighthouse available, or even a beacon, the accident may not have happened.¹² Following this spate of sinkings, a public meeting was held at which Wakefield was censured for not having erected beacons previously. Therefore, early in 1842, the Company erected a pyramid-shaped beacon on Pencarrow Head.¹³ The beacon was soon blown over in gale winds. A replacement beacon was erected which was described in 1844 as being 30 feet high and painted white. Other than in clear weather, however, the beacon could not be seen when more than five miles away.¹⁴

The shipwrecks continued around Wellington. One of the more serious, of the cutter *Matilda*, occurred on the eastern shore at Fitzroy Bay. On 6 May 1848, the *Matilda*, coming to Wellington from the Manawatu with a cargo of wheat, was caught in a gale and was driven ashore in Fitzroy Bay near the heads of the harbour. Although the ship was discovered on the following day, there was no sign of the two-man crew. Two days later, however, both bodies were washed on shore between Parangarehu pa and Pencarrow Head. The bodies were buried nearby. The anchors and masts were removed, but the badly damaged hull was left where it had beached.¹⁵

¹⁰ Bagnall, op cit, p.13

¹¹ Ingram, C.W.N. *New Zealand shipwrecks, 1795-1982*, 6th ed, Wellington, Reed 1984, p.18

¹² 5 Feb 1842, Wakefield to NZ Co. Sec., NZC3/2 No.89, Arch NZ, Wgtn.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Wakefield, Edward Jerningham, *The Handbook for New Zealand*, London, John W. Parker, 1848: See also Ross, John O'Connell *The Lighthouses of New Zealand*, Palmerston North, Dunmore Press, 1975, pp.18-9

¹⁵ Ingram, op cit, p.35. Also *New Zealand Spectator and Cook's Strait Guardian*, 10 and 13 May 1848.

Another shipwreck on the Pencarrow Coast occurred on 29 September 1849 when the *Inconstant*, travelling from Adelaide to Callao and entering Wellington harbour to replenish its water supply, ran aground at a point now named after the ship. Although quick action by the harbourmaster got the *Inconstant* off the rocks and towed into port, her hull was found to be so badly damaged that the ship was condemned. Soon after, prominent Wellington businessman John Plimmer bought the hull and used it as a warehouse and jetty. The well-known Wellington landmark was eventually nicknamed 'Noah's Ark' by locals.¹⁶



PENCARROW HEAD FITZROY BAY

Scene of Pencarrow Head 1848 showing the Pencarrow Beacon
[Brees, Samuel Charles] 1810-1865: Pencarrow Head, Fitzroy Bay [Between 1842 and 1844. Drawn by S C Brees. Engraved by Henry Melville. London, 1849] Alexander Turnbull Library, E-070-015

¹⁶ East Harbour Environmental Association, op cit, p.4

One of the worst shipwrecks that Wellington experienced at this time occurred on 23 July 1851 when the barque *Maria*, sailing from Lyttelton to Wellington, came too close inshore and hit submerged rocks near Cape Terawhiti. When the masts collapsed the ship broke up and 26 lives were lost with only two survivors being pulled from the water.¹⁷ This tragedy increased community demands for the erection of a lighthouse at Pencarrow.¹⁸ By the beginning of 1852, Governor Grey had issued instructions that a lighthouse would be built. In response, on 23 April, Colonial Engineer Edward Roberts reported on the necessary height of the structure, the type of light that should be used and the nature and layout of outbuildings. He also recommended the lighthouse be made of iron to resist both fire and earthquake.¹⁹

As planning for the lighthouse continued, another shipwreck occurred on the Pencarrow coast within the very vicinity of the beacon's location. On 5 June 1852, the schooner *Henry* was totally wrecked in Fitzroy Bay with the loss of the three young crewmen who were on board. The vessel was transporting army supplies from Porirua to Wellington when a sudden storm hit and the schooner was driven ashore where it broke up. The Harbourmaster wrote to the Pilot seeking his view as to whether the presence of a lighthouse would have averted the disaster. The Pilot responded that a light would have been of no use in preventing this particular tragedy. Nevertheless, public concern had been created. A deputation, headed by Captain W.B. Rhodes, visited Governor Grey on 17 June 1852. The Governor informed these representatives that a decision had been made to erect an iron lighthouse on Pencarrow Head. He noted, however, that while planning was continuing there would be some delay in getting the structure built. Therefore Grey promised that as an interim measure, a lighthouse keeper's residence would be built featuring a large semi-circular window in which a navigational light could be placed.²⁰

The lighthouse keeper appointed to the job was George White Bennett, a seedsman from England, who came to New Zealand early in 1840. He was soon followed by his fiancée Mary Jane Hebden, the 21-year old daughter of the squire of Dacre Banks, a small West Yorkshire village. By mid-1852, the now married couple and their three children, moved out to the new

¹⁷ Ingram, op cit, p.41

¹⁸ East Harbour Environmental Association, op cit, p.11

¹⁹ 23 Apr 1852, Roberts to Colonial Sec., LE1854/6, Arch NZ, Wgtn.

²⁰ See Ingram, op cit, p.43. Also *New Zealand Spectator and Cook's Strait Guardian*, 12 and 19 June 1852: And 17 Jun