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A STUDY OF THE FLAXMERE EDUCATIONAL  
FUTURES PROJECT

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfilment  
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of Master of Arts  
In Geography

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis offers an interpretation of the origins and nature of the community initiative, the Flaxmere Educational Futures Project, an example of local cooperation which occurred in Flaxmere, in 1985 and 1986.

The thesis discusses the development of Flaxmere as a suburb in terms of physical site, population pressure, housing development and demographic patterning. These matters are considered in relation to changing education and social service policy and the aspirations of local residents about education and social facilities. The suburb is viewed as a product of many decisions made by a variety of institutions and individuals over nearly 25 years. Significant influences that set the stage for the local turmoil within which the Flaxmere Educational Futures Project developed are documented and discussed.

The Project represented a relatively sophisticated political response to related but not always obvious local concerns of residents living in Flaxmere and the statutory body responsible for primary education in the suburb, the Hawke's Bay Education Board. The thesis does not attempt to discuss in detail procedures relating to the community survey which was a central part of the Project but only presents results of importance to each interest group. The study identifies the complex set of background influences which carried the residents of the suburb towards a situation where local cooperation was a distinct possibility, and shows that once an arrangement for cooperation for the development of the Flaxmere Educational Futures Project had been achieved, many different groups were able to effectively participate in information gathering and in the preparation of a clear statement of local difficulties, concerns and aspirations regarding education and service provision in Flaxmere.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE THESIS

Between September 1985 and March 1986 the community of Flaxmere collaborated in the Flaxmere Educational Futures Project. The Project was unusual in a number of respects. Local residents participated in the design of the questionnaire which formed a central part of the Project, made up the interview team and provided objectives in the political sense. Expertise from the Department of Geography, Massey University was sought by both the local community and the Hawke's Bay Education Board.

The Project represented a relatively sophisticated political response to related but not always obvious local concerns of residents living in Flaxmere and the statutory body responsible for primary education in the suburb, the Hawke's Bay Education Board. Disagreements between Maori and Pakeha groups were submerged in an attempt to generate information which would be used by the community at large and by each interest group.

The results of the survey were used by the Hawke's Bay Education Board and the Flaxmere Community Network to resolve the issue of establishing a fourth primary school. The Board principally wanted demographic details of primary and intermediate aged children and younger to provide a basis for predicting future numbers attending Flaxmere schools. The Flaxmere Community Network was more concerned with survey information that pertained to the management of a fourth primary school in a different manner to the other primary schools in Flaxmere. The Network sought to widen the scope of education provision by acquiring information that would identify needs and substantiate claims for

different forms of educational services. The information gathered from the survey allowed the Network to apply pressure on the Hastings High Schools Board to reconsider the establishment of a high school in Flaxmere.

As a member of the original research team the writer was involved in a consultative role in the project. Rather than making the Project the focus of the thesis the intention is to highlight the background influences which resulted in an unique combination of local cooperation which occurred in 1985. Detailed discussion of method relating to the survey is not introduced in the thesis, only results of importance are presented and discussed.

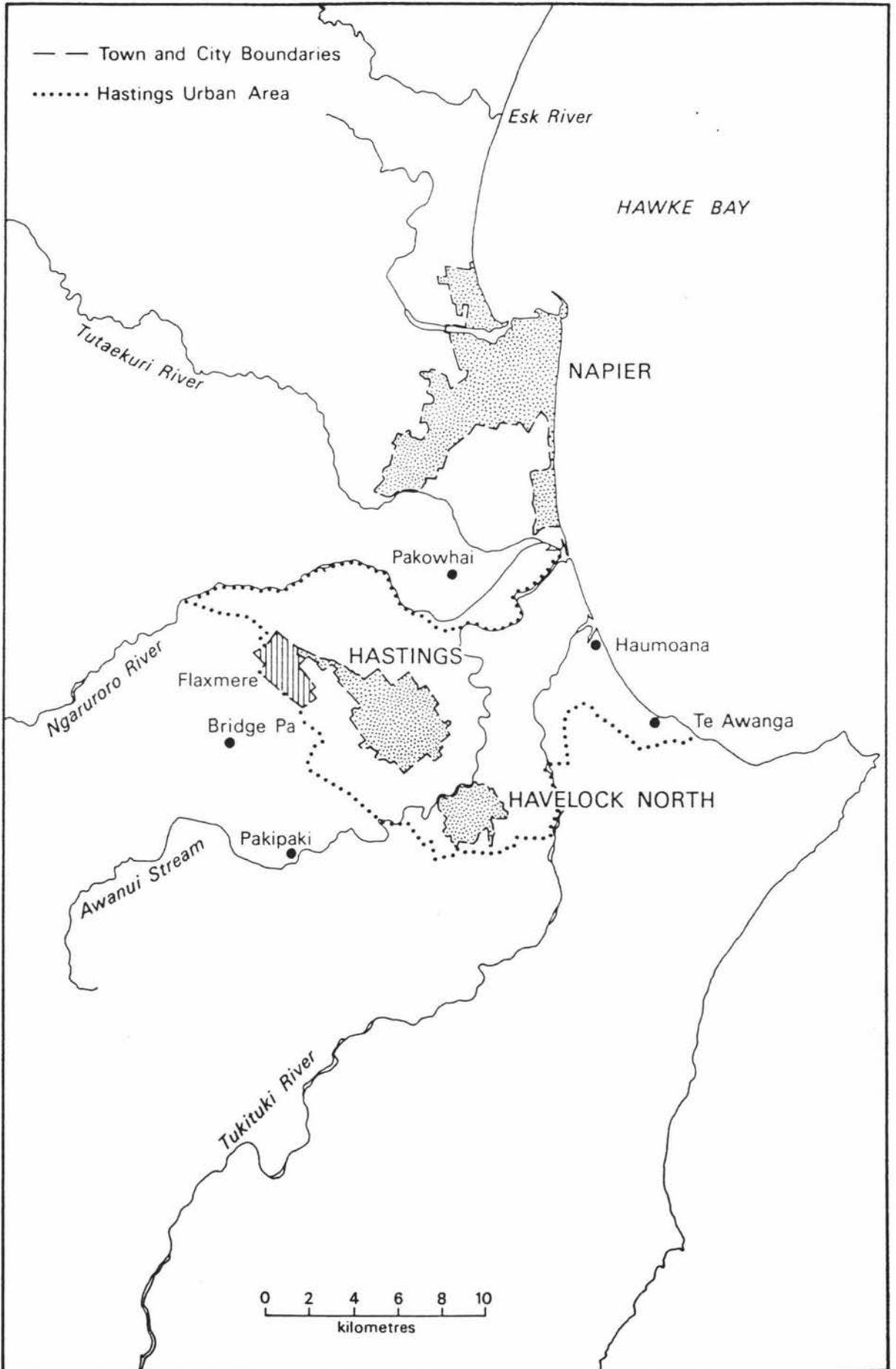
The approach taken in the thesis is to examine the origins of Flaxmere (Figure 1.1) as a suburb in terms of physical site, population pressure, housing development and demographic patterning. These matters are considered in relation to changing education and social services policy and the aspirations of local residents about education and social facilities. The approach emphasises historical geography of the suburb as a product of many decisions made by a variety of institutions and individuals over nearly 25 years. The aim of this thesis is to document and discuss the significant influences that set the stage for the local turmoil within which the Flaxmere Educational Futures Project was spawned.

The thesis begins in Chapter Two with a review of post-1945 patterns of industrialisation and urbanisation because these developments resulted

in a concentration of urban population growth in Napier and Hastings and this development necessitated action by planners to identify new sites for urban growth. Chapter 3 discusses suburbanisation and demographic change looking particularly at the general framework within which particular suburban development took place. Detail is presented about the formation of Flaxmere as a suburb and this covers the institutional constraints of local authorities which largely determined the direction and form the expansion might take. Chapter 4 takes up the way in which the State has intervened in this period in education and welfare and identifies the creation of the Community Education Initiatives Scheme (CEIS) in the early 1980s. This Central Government move was one which directly influenced the Flaxmere community. The next chapter proceeds to discuss the evolution of education policy at a time when school rolls were starting to decline. Information is provided which shows how these twin influences were worked out in Hastings and in Flaxmere. Chapter 6 focuses on the politics of education services in the suburb and indicates why and what ways the variety of groups with claims and grievances entered into a cooperative venture to try to resolve several specific issues and to provide a platform for further, largely independent, action.

A number of different sources were used in compiling relevant information in each chapter. Chapter 2 draws heavily on census information about population and economic activity and refers to planning legislation covering urban encroachment. Chapter 3 looks at information in a number of Housing Commission reports. This enables a simplified

FIGURE 1.1



LOCATION MAP

statement to be made about the main channels about which housing is provided in New Zealand. This is supplemented by local information provided by the Hastings City Council.

Chapter 4 in contrast is largely based on newspaper and government reports connected with the operation and evaluation of CEIS. The focus in Chapter 5 is such that official documentation from the Department of Education (Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives of New Zealand, E1) is used to summarise developments in education policy. Detailed records of the Hawke's Bay Education Board housed in Napier are used to summarise regional education policy.

The discussion found in Chapter 6 principally springs from a search of newspaper and newspaper office records dealing with the variety of 'problems' associated with Flaxmere. This source is especially helpful in establishing the spokespeople of particular views and gives a basis for comparing popular reported views with those identified in the community survey. The report on the Network forms the other important source in this chapter.

It is hoped this study identifies the complex set of background influences which carried residents of the suburb towards a situation where effective local cooperation was a distinct possibility. In the end the setting up of the Flaxmere Educational Futures Project was a relatively chancy affair, there being no particular compulsion for the joint approach amongst the Hawke's Bay Education Board, the Department of Geography, Massey University and the Flaxmere Community Network to take

place. However, once an arrangement for cooperation had been made many different groups were able to effectively participate in information collection and in the preparation of a clear statement of local difficulties, concerns and aspirations regarding education and service provision in the suburb.