James Cowan:

The Significance of his Journalism

Volume One

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Volume 1: Thesis
Volume 2: Recovered Texts
Volume 3: 'The White Slave' Critical Edition

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Abstract

This thesis argues that to understand Cowan the historian, his interest in history and his way of writing history, one must return to the roots of his writing – his journalism. Cowan's adroit penmanship meant that his history writing existed in close parallel to his journalism. His writing style varied little between the two areas, which meant that he reached a wide group of readers regardless of their reading level or tastes. His favourite topics included travel writing and recent history, that is, history in his lifetime. For a better understanding of how and why he wrote, some key aspects of his life and career have been selected for study. These aspects include his childhood, his early journalism as a reporter for the *Auckland Star*, and his later journalism for *Railways Magazine*. Finally, his legacy is considered from the viewpoint of his colleagues and contemporaries.

Cowan the journalist was the making of Cowan the historian, and to better understand the strengths of his histories one must appreciate his journalistic background. Past and present cannot be easily separated, and his historical work becomes more clearly articulated in the present with the discovery of previously unknown material from the nineteenth century and representing a quarter of his journalism output. That material has can now be appreciated for what it is – as the wellspring of his writing, the original source of his histories.

Preface

Firstly, this thesis uses the first edition of Cowan's *The New Zealand Wars* (1922–23) for referencing purposes, which has the same page numbering as the 1955 reprint. The page numbering of the 1983 reprint is however different to the two earlier versions due to the use of a wider typeface. Secondly, some of the spelling in Cowan's writing differs from a contemporary spelling but has not been altered in order to keep it within the context of its era. Accordingly, 'yards' are still yards and not metres.

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Abbreviations

ATL: Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington
DNZB: The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography
JNZS: The Journal of New Zealand Studies
NZJH: The New Zealand Journal of History

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Previously unknown articles written for the *Auckland Star* during 1890–1902 by James Cowan while he was working as a Special Reporter. These articles have only been found to have been written by him following investigations for this thesis.

VOLUME THREE

'The White Slave' (1906) by James Cowan, Critical Edition, 2019

1
Introduction: Gauging Cowan's Significance

In 1941 a librarian named Clyde Taylor began compiling a bibliography of the works of James Cowan (1870–1943), much to the consternation of the popular writer. He had a longstanding grievance that his work was being plagiarised and that a bibliography would make access to 'literary sneak thieves' – as he termed them in a letter to Taylor – all that much easier.[1] Taylor must have allayed Cowan's misgivings, for the bibliography went ahead. Cowan's concerns appeared valid, however; for example, in 1934 a letter of apology was sent to his publisher by Janet McLeod of St. Albans, Christchurch after she was found to have used Cowan's material in two plays without the necessary permission being obtained.[2]

This sort of copyright infringement was inevitable considering the popularity and breadth of Cowan's writing, which covered over six decades working as a journalist or historian, his fulltime writing career beginning in 1888 and coming to a close around 1942. His subsequent Turnbull Library bibliography included 36 book titles ranging from pocket-sized travel guides to a two-volume war history and over 370 articles.[3]

But his bibliography was only compiled from the turn of the twentieth century and left out fourteen years of his writing for the *Auckland Star* between 1888 and 1902. One of the likely reasons for such a large omission is because newspapers retain ownership of anything written by their employees. In the context of trying to understand Cowan better as a journalist, however, the omission was substantial, representing a quarter of his total output.

Of course, one can always question the value of journalism being included in a bibliography in the first place, due to its industrial and transient nature. But here a mental shift is required in order to appreciate the high value placed on newspaper and magazine journalism in New Zealand during the nineteenth century, especially considering that a local book publishing industry was in its

[1] Rachel Barrowman, *The Turnbull: A Library and its World* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995), 64.
[2] Letter from Janet McLeod to H. H. Tombs, publisher, and J. Cowan, 8 Mar. 1934, Cowan Papers, MS 0039, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
[3] C. R. H. Taylor, *A Bibliography of the Works of James Cowan* (Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library, 1941).

infancy. Indeed, Cowan was rather fortunate to have lived during an era when print journalism internationally was enjoying a halcyon period that would last until the late 1940s. It was a world that Malcolm Muggeridge once coined as 'a vast no-man's land in which most writers, from Johnson to H. G. Wells and Shaw, have been content to forage, if not to reside.'[1]

Cowan however took steps to ensure that his journalism would not suffer from the transience effect by adopting a sustained programme of archiving combined with transferring his journalism into book form. For according to his second wife, Eileen Cowan (nee Stowell) his journalism was at the heart of his later books, and in a series of letters to one of her husband's colleagues, Eric Ramsden, she documented her efforts to continue Cowan's work once he passed away in 1943. 'I want to get published in book form the bulk of his writings, which was the goal he set himself,' she wrote,[2] her letter one of several addressed to Ramsden during 1943–44 on the subject of preserving her late husband's work. Her letters are discussed in a later chapter because they provide anecdotal evidence that Cowan had always envisaged publishing his journalism in book form, which means that it is impossible not to mention his books without discussing the journalism that made them.

The central argument of this thesis, then, is that to understand Cowan the writer, and later the historian, and his way of writing history, one must return to the roots of his writing – his journalism. His adroit penmanship meant that his history writing existed in close parallel to his journalism, for his writing style varied little between the two areas, which meant that he reached a wide group of readers regardless of their reading level.

To support this argument, key aspects of his life and career have been selected for a better understanding of his contribution to New Zealand's cultural history, including a study of his childhood influences, his grounding as a reporter for the *Auckland Star*, and in the early twentieth century, the commencement of writing for book publishers as a parallel income stream to his newspaper and magazine work. His favourite topics included travel writing and recent history – that is, history in his lifetime – and his work in the 1930s

[1] Paul Ashdown, ed. *James Agee: Selected Journalism* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Tennessee University Press, 2005), xiii–xiv.
[2] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 6 Mar. 1944. Cowan Papers MS 0691, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL).

came full circle when he reflected on his early material in periodicals such as *New Zealand Railways Magazine*.

The making of Cowan the journalist was the making of Cowan the historian, then, and to better understand the strengths of his histories one must understand and appreciate his journalistic background. What is equally as important however is to understand his weaknesses. Unfortunately, many of the tests one applies to historians or their work do not overlap into journalism naturally. Modern history keeps the two disciplines apart, yet past and present studies of Cowan cannot be easily separated, and his historical work has become more clearly articulated in the present space and time due to new methodologies that have been applied to his work in this thesis and uncovered his previously unknown nineteenth century articles.[1] That early material can now be appreciated in its own right as the source of his histories, making any return to the wellspring of his writing metaphorically akin to the 1857 Burton–Speke expedition to find the source of the Nile.

So how successful was he; what is Cowan's lasting significance as a journalist? This is the central question that this thesis sets out to answer without it turning into a popularity contest amongst competing journalists from his era. For what set him apart from his peers was that he habitually retained copies of what he wrote in case it came in handy as material for future articles. This material he stored inside a number of trunks, which when opened revealed an assortment of 'jottings, comprehensive diary entries, original documents and letters, and all manner of exact transcriptions of fact,' according to one observer in the mid-1930s.[2] There is a moral here if seeking a personal lasting is a goal: retaining all of one's material, no matter how insignificant it seemed at the time, is an important first step. Cowan's papers are now stored in the Turnbull Library in Wellington.

The word 'significant' is however highly subjective, for what one person considers significant might not be the same for the next person. For example, David Colquhoun, a former Turnbull Library researcher and archivist, wrote in his profile of Cowan for the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* that in the first forty years of the twentieth century, Cowan was one of New Zealand's

[1] Those early articles have been compiled in Volume Two of this thesis.
[2] Oriwa Keripi, 'James Cowan, the Doyen of New Zealand's Great Writers', *Railways Magazine*, Apr. 1936, 27.

most widely read non-fiction writers, and that 'during his lifetime his writing did much to shape the way New Zealanders perceived their history.'[1]

Commendable praise indeed but as a 'Special Reporter' Cowan was already being read nationally as early as the nineteenth century because of the *Auckland Star*'s membership of the United Press Association. The Association's role was to share articles with member newspapers throughout New Zealand, and it had been doing so since 1879: 'It effectively drew the country together as newspaper readers had access, via the telegraph, to news from beyond their region,' wrote *New Zealand Herald* journalist Andrew Stone in an article recording the eventual demise of the Association in 2011.[2]

Another approach to measure the significance of Cowan's as a journalist is to consider all the books that have links back to his journalism. Appendix One lists his complete book oeuvre (including those published posthumously), but for this segment Appendix Two is more relevant because it lists 27 books from Cowan's oeuvre containing material which can be traced back to his journalism, the books collectively representing three-quarters of his oeuvre. They cover three general areas: travel writing (10 books), historical writing (7) and collected stories (10). 'When he heard a new story, he would write it down, publish it in a newspaper and later recycle it in a book,' historian Chris Hilliard wrote in 1997. 'Cowan's papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library abound with newspaper cuttings of his work that have been glued onto blank paper and had their background material crossed out and a chapter heading attached. Scarcely edited, these newspaper stories would appear in a subsequent book.'[3]

Depending on their relevance, some of these cut and pasted articles could have reappeared as short stories in *Tales of the Maori Coast* (1930), *Tales of the Maori Bush* (1934) and the posthumously published *Tales of the Maori Border* (1944). Even the seven books of historical writing list in Appendix Two were not impervious to a similar treatment considering the unique finds that Cowan uncovered while working as a journalist, material which simply could not be ignored if relevant. For history builds up in layers over time, and material for Cowan's *The Maoris of New Zealand* (1911), for example, can be traced back to his time at the *Star*, especially the final chapter on Tawhiao's tangi. Another

[1] David Colquhoun, 'Cowan, James', *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (5 vols. Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1993–2000), 3: 119a.
[2] Andrew Stone, 'Farewell NZPA', *New Zealand Herald*, 31 Aug. 2011.
[3] Chris Hilliard, 'James Cowan and the Frontiers of New Zealand History' (*The New Zealand Journal of History*, October 1997), 221.

book, *Samoa and its Story* (1914), draws heavily on material when Cowan visited Samoa on assignment as a *Star* reporter in 1899. Even *The New Zealand Wars* (1922–23), often acknowledged as Cowan's magnum opus, contains material inspired by Cowan's visit to Apia Beach while on assignment to the *Star*, which is discussed in Chapter Three.

These examples reveal the 'organic' nature of Cowan's books, how they overlapped between the two areas of history and journalism, which allowed him to reach that already mentioned wide group of readers regardless of their reading level or tastes. For Appendix Two could just as easily be broken down into a subset of thematic areas which included memoir, 'the South Seas' and folklore. Ronald Jones inferred such an alternative arrangement when he wrote that although *The New Zealand Wars* was Cowan's magnum opus, 'it is probable that he is better known and pleasantly remembered for the assiduity with which he collected and published the myths and fairy tales with which Maori folk lore abounds.'[1] Jones was a journalist and scriptwriter for the then New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation. In a profile of Cowan for *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* (1966) he described Cowan as a journalist and Maori scholar who had 'a genuine love for the elegance and beauty of the Maori language'. He added that one of Cowan's special gifts 'was a discerning eye for sources of legend and folklore'. He also had 'a meticulous regard for the correct spelling of the most difficult place names, and never heard a new one without searching out its picturesque meaning.' In doing so, Jones added, Cowan 'preserved much that would otherwise have been lost with the passing of the old Maori identities.'[2]

Jones has a point here regarding the potentially higher audiences for some of Cowan's less-remembered books, especially as initial sales of his so-called magnum opus *The New Zealand Wars* were 'not particularly strong', according to Vincent O'Malley. One thousand copies were printed for each volume and three years later only about two thirds (682) of the first volume had been sold and a third (392) of the second volume. It took twenty years before the first volume finally sold out in 1942, when copies of the second volume were still available.[3]

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[1] Ronald Jones, 'Cowan, James', *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* (3 vols. edited by A. H. McLintock, Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1966), 1: 404.
[2] Jones, 'Cowan, James', 1: 404.
[3] Vincent O'Malley, *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800–2000* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016), 21, 612, 27n.

Book sales do not however give the full picture. If the volumes had also been made available for borrowing from public libraries, considering that the Government had commissioned them, readership could have been much higher. But it was the multi-layered content which made *The New Zealand Wars* into Cowan's magnum opus, not necessarily its initial popularity or lack of it.

1.1 Introducing the chapters

The following chapters progress in a chronological fashion through Cowan's life and career to help reveal his growth as a journalist. Chapter Two, called 'Origins', covers Cowan's time growing up at Orakau during 1870–87. His childhood is a logical start point for any study of him as a writer, for he began writing articles for newspapers while still living on the family farm. My arguments are that firstly, Orakau forged in Cowan a 'sense of place' and that, secondly, growing up at Orakau introduced a strong cross-cultural element and subsequent source of writing material into his young life because of the events he witnessed and the people he met during a still-volatile period in the region's history.

Chapters Three and Four cover Cowan's time working for the *Auckland Star* during 1888–1902, where he was extremely fortunate in being made a 'Special Reporter' in two areas, Maori affairs and shipping, virtually from the outset. These were obviously important years in any study of Cowan's significance and growth as a journalist, the early part of Chapter Four in particular revealing a developmental learning curve in Maoridom for him with a case study of Tawhiao's tangi.

Chapter Five is also based in the *Star* years and involves a case study of the 1898 Dog Tax Rebellion from Cowan's perspective.

Chapter Six looks at the saga of Kimble Bent, an army deserter during the Taranaki Wars of the 1860s and subsequent interest in his story, which can be partially put down to his having lived to tell the tale by prudently waiting until the wars had ended before attempting any reconnection with Europeans. An initial aim of this chapter is to build up an accurate account of Bent's life once he emerged from the forest by identifying and contrasting various threads in his interviews with the first journalists who met him, and co-ordinating their reports with Cowan's later interviews, which were published as a serial called 'The White Slave' (1906) in several New Zealand newspapers. The value of 'The

White Slave' is that Cowan's translation of Bent's life determined whether European society would forgive Bent for being a deserter by accepting his version of events. Difficulties in authenticity however arose when Cowan published a book version of Bent's life called *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* in 1911. This chapter suggests a motive behind Cowan's rationale in writing a book version, for it is better to try and understand his motives in writing the book than to reject it outright just because its use of fictitious or speculative dialogue makes it problematic as a truthful account.

Chapter Seven covers the 1930s, which was a time when Cowan capitalized on everything that had gone before. Reviewers of his work from this period variously described him as a journalist, historian or Maori scholar; his writing was highly developed, and his opinions were sought out. The chapter looks at Cowan's role in the transformation of *New Zealand Railways Magazine*, for whose pages he contributed up to eighty per cent of his writing at the time,[1] so any comprehensive study of his writing from that period cannot ignore such a huge personal contribution to just one periodical.

Chapter Eight looks at how Cowan's writing estate was managed shortly before and after his death. It considers the efforts by his wife Eileen and a few colleagues to preserve his work. The chapter looks at Cowan's final days firstly through the dialogue of his close friend, journalist Eric Ramsden, and secondly through letters that Eileen wrote to Ramsden, who acted as an adviser and confidant while she was sorting her husband's manuscripts for publication.

The conclusion for the thesis (Chapter Nine) suggests a handful of keywords or terms, based on the findings in the chapters, which collectively create a concise profile of Cowan, and which help make him stand out from other journalists. It also considers his legacy today.

As a whole therefore, the chapters progress through Cowan's journalistic ventures to a fitting and natural ending while searching for missing contexts for the continued interest in these works, including explaining some aspects that have been most severely criticized.

[1] Taylor, *A Bibliography of the Works of James Cowan*, 4–27.

2
Child of the Borderlands
1870–87

'The first home I knew, the first trees and flowers, were on the soil that had less than ten years before been a battlefield.'

James Cowan, 1940

James Cowan grew up at Orakau, a farming locality on the undulating plain of the Waipa basin about thirty kilometres south of Hamilton. He arrived there with his parents while only a few weeks old, and later wrote that it was the first home he could recall.[1] He was living at Orakau when he first began submitting articles to newspapers, two of which were accepted by the *New Zealand Herald* in 1887.[2] He would later refer to Orakau as his 'story-ground' in the context of gathering Maori folklore,[3] and attributed his time living there as 'unconsciously' laying the foundations for writing *The New Zealand Wars*,[4] Orakau being the scene of one of the most famous battlefields of the Waikato War (1863–64).

Collectively, these aspects suggest that Cowan's childhood is an appropriate point to begin assessing his eventual significance as a writer because it introduced him to some of the areas in which he would later specialize, more specifically, Maori, settler society and the New Zealand Wars. He would go on to live in three other locations, in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, but whenever he needed to define himself in his writing in terms of his background, he would refer to his life growing up at Orakau with its 'charmed atmosphere' and its 'spirit of the Pakeha-Maori borderland that helped shape one's youthful inclinations', as he wrote in *Legends of The Maori* (1930).[5] In a later book, *Settlers and Pioneers* (1940), he writes of drawing chiefly on the narratives of 'my people' who were both Pakeha and Maori, 'for the Ngati Maniapoto and Waikato and their kindred are as much my own folk

[1] James Cowan, *Settlers and Pioneers* (Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1940), 44.
[2] Eugene Grayland. *More Famous New Zealanders* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1972), 105.
[3] James Cowan, *Legends of the Maori: Mythology, Traditional History, Folk-Lore and Poetry.* 2 vols. (Wellington: Harry H. Tombs, 1930), 1: xvii.
[4] James Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars and the Pioneering Period*. 2 vols. (Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1922–23), 1: vi.
[5] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, 1: xvii.

from my earliest years as any of my Pakeha blood.'[1] He also used 'Orakau' as a pen name in *Auckland Star* newspaper articles despite having left the district in 1887. A local reminder of him can however be found on a display board at Te Awamutu Museum, where he is honoured as the museum's first patron.

Here I suggest that Orakau forged in Cowan a strong sentimental attachment to the locality known as a 'sense of place'. According to Denis Cosgrove of Royal Holloway, University of London, '[c]ertain physical locations seem to generate powerful responses over sustained historical periods through their distinctive or memorable qualities.' Cosgrove cites the Sugar Loaf at Rio de Janeiro and Table Mountain at the Cape of Good Hope as examples of physical locations that seem to generate powerful responses from people.[2] In Cowan's case, the volcanic cone Kakepuku (449m) was a frequent reference point because he passed it every time he rode to school at Te Awamutu, the uplift of Kakepuku 'looming a few miles across the valley to the westward'. The volcanic cone 'seemed an enchanted mountain, holding infinite suggestion of mystery and adventure,' he wrote in *The Old Frontier* (1922), a regional history of the Waipa District. 'I came to look on that lone mountain with very much the kind of affection in which it is held by the Maori people who live around its base, whose local folklore and poetry enshrine many a reference to Kakepuku.'[3]

Continuing Denis Cosgrove's interpretation of 'sense of place', he points out that a location does not need to be as tactile as (say) a mountain to instil a sense of place in an individual. A significant event like a battle, for example, can also leave its mark in social memory and trigger a similar sense of place in those affected by it.[4] I have already mentioned Cowan's growing up on the battlefield where the Battle of Orakau (1864) took place, but there were other similarly powerful stimuli within a four-kilometre radius of the family homestead, including war graves, a blockhouse and a border river. He later found ways to put his observations into words once he began working as a journalist, for from 1888 the land of his youth became part of his reporting territory while working for the *Auckland Star*. According to historian Michael

[1] Cowan, *Settlers and Pioneers*, viii.
[2] Denis Cosgrove, 'Sense of place' in Johnston, R., Derek, G., Pratt, G. and Watts, M., eds., *The Dictionary of Human Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 731–32.
[3] James Cowan, *The Old Frontier: Te Awamutu, the Story of the Waipa Valley* (Te Awamutu, NZ: Waipa Post Printing and Publishing Co., 1922), 7.
[4] Cosgrove, 'Sense of place', 732.

Belgrave in *The Journal of New Zealand Studies*, the influence of Cowan's childhood at Orakau in his writing has long been recognised. '[M]any of the contradictions seen in Cowan's approach to war, colonisation and relationships between Maori and settler have their origins in this crucial dramatic period in his life,' Belgrave writes,

> and in the nature of the relationships he experienced with the Maori and European inhabitants of the borderland of the Rohe Potae. These were men with dramatic histories, heroes and villains of the war, trying to find accommodations with each other in a period that was still marked by tensions and threats of further hostilities.[1]

For Belgrave, Cowan's experiences as a childhood observer helped mould his understanding of time, 'and this understanding is crucial to Cowan's treatment of the past, his use of oral history and his belief both that the wars brought Maori and Pakeha together and that the confiscations were a gross and unresolved injustice.'[2]

This chapter, then, examines Cowan's experiences as 'a childhood observer', as Professor Belgrave aptly puts it, and how it has played out in his literary development. Drawing mainly upon autobiographical segments in his books, it firstly sketches out the role of his antecedents for any evidence of inheriting a writing ability, before looking at his childhood from 1870 to 1887. The chapter then goes on to suggest a turning point in Cowan's life that propelled him into the direction of journalism. 'Memories! One strives to marshal them into some order,' Cowan wrote in *The Old Frontier*, 'but the most that can be done is to recall the things that chiefly fixed themselves on the youthful mind.'[3] The genre of remembering in its various manifestations (memoir, autobiography) is notorious for colouring the past in favour of its author, and *The Old Frontier* is probably no exception. It was published 35 years after Cowan had left the family farm, so he was writing with the benefit of hindsight. The book however contains a chapter on his childhood called 'Pioneer Life on the Old Frontier'. The chapter is important because Cowan

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[1] Michael Belgrave, 'James Cowan: Autobiographical Historian and Traveller in Time', *The Journal of New Zealand Studies* (NS19, 2015): 50–51.
[2] Belgrave, 'James Cowan: Autobiographical Historian and Traveller in Time', *JNZS,* 51.
[3] Cowan, *The Old Frontier*, 85.

normally devoted no more than a few lines about his past in his later writing, and that was usually to indicate that he was present at the particular event he was writing about – never a whole chapter about himself. Another valuable autobiographical source was the opening chapter in the first edition of *Legends of the Maori* (1930) called 'The Gathering of the Legends'. The two books provide an interesting juxtaposition, *The Old Frontier* recording a European point of view and *Legends of the Maori* addressing largely a Maori readership.

2.1 Early life and antecedents, 1863–70

James Cowan's father was named William Andrew Cowan (1839–1913), a son of Irish landowners in County Down. He became a widower and in 1863 emigrated from Ireland to New Zealand.[1] Upon arrival, he enlisted in the Waikato War of 1863–64 as a militiaman,[2] but he was not expected to fight. His role was to act as an auxiliary to the main force, which included building roads and boats for troops crossing the Waikato River, and guarding garrison posts, all the while carefully looking after his uniform issue of two pairs of trousers, two blue serge shirts, two pairs of boots and a blue forage cap.[3]

In 1866, two years after the Waikato War ended, William married Elizabeth Jane Qualtrough (1838–1918), who had emigrated from the Isle of Man and arrived in New Zealand in 1859 with her parents, James and Catherine Qualtrough, along with seven brothers and sisters. Their passage aboard the clipper ship *Mermaid* is recounted in the opening chapter of Cowan's *Settlers and Pioneers* (1940), Cowan drawing upon excerpts from a diary of the voyage kept by his maternal grandfather, James Qualtrough, who was aged 51 at the time. In Cowan's eyes James Qualtrough possessed many of the necessary attributes to be a successful pioneer: he was a 'tall, deep-chested farmer' of Isle of Man stock and had a large family to help with the labour of setting up in a new land. They were not pressed to go abroad for want of money, he added, for there were farms in the family. 'But the Isle of Man was old and very small; there was not much room there for growing families'. In

[1] Elizabeth Barlow & Joy McDougall, *A Quota of Qualtroughs: Early Settlers to New Zealand from the Isle of Man* (Matamata: Elizabeth A. Barlow, 1984), 51.
[2] 'Cowan, William Andrew', in NZ Militia, Volunteers and Armed Constabulary of New Zealand 1863–71 database, Auckland Council Libraries, retrieved 26 April 2015.
[3] L. H. Barber, *The View from Pirongia: The History of Waipa County* (Auckland: Richards Publishing, 1978), 31.

contrast, each adult settler who paid his or her passage out to New Zealand 'received forty acres of free land and twenty acres for each child,' he wrote.[1]

A slightly less romantic picture of the family's decision to move to New Zealand is painted by Elizabeth Barlow and Joy McDougall in their book about migrants to New Zealand from the Isle of Man called *A Quota of Qualtroughs* (1984). James Qualtrough had apparently been struggling for some time before deciding to emigrate. 'It seems he had inherited debts from both his father and father-in-law and was obliged to meet them', they write, so the decision was made to dispose of his three farms and it was 'good-bye forever to mystic Mannin Beg – Isle of Fairies – where Qualtroughs had lived for hundreds of years.'[2]

Upon arrival in New Zealand the family was allocated 120 acres of virgin forest at Hunua, near Papakura, 45 miles south of Auckland, under a land settlement scheme for emigrants called the Forty-Acre Scheme. Within a year, however, they had shifted onto 118 acres at Pakuranga, which was in the same general area but closer to Auckland and more settled in comparison to Hunua, with easier access to Auckland either by water or across country. Barlow and McDougall describe James's mother as 'a practical, efficient sort of a girl' who acted as a right hand to her mother. They suggest that Elizabeth probably met her future husband at one of the church functions or socials put on for the militia who were stationed at redoubts at Howick and East Tamaki in southeast Auckland during the Waikato War.[3]

2.2 Orakau, 1870–87

James Cowan was born on 14 April 1870 in the house that his grandparents had built on their new Pakuranga estate. He was the first-born of an eventual family of seven sons, a daughter named Elizabeth having died in infancy.[4] As soon as James was capable of travelling, the Cowans shifted 120 kilometres south to the Orakau block that William Cowan had been preparing. Although Orakau was about thirty kilometres south of Hamilton it was still part of Auckland Province until 1876 when the Abolition of Provinces Act renamed the area around Orakau as Waipa District.[5] The district has two major rivers,

[1] Cowan, *Settlers and Pioneers*, 5.
[2] Barlow & McDougall, *A Quota of Qualtroughs*, 28.
[3] Barlow & McDougall, *A Quota of Qualtroughs,* 51, 53.
[4] Colquhoun, 'Cowan, James', *DNZB*, 3: 119.
[5] Barber, *The View From Pirongia*, 60.

the Waipa in the west and the Waikato in the east. A third smaller river, the Puniu, courses along the district's southern boundary, parts of it creating a physical barrier between Waipa and the region historically known as the King Country, but now divided up into the districts of Otorohanga and South Waikato.

The nearest settlement to the Cowan farm was Kihikihi, four kilometres to the west; another four kilometres north-west was the settlement of Te Awamutu. With the arrival of the Cowans, the combined European population of Orakau, Kihikihi and Te Awamutu was boosted to 45.[1] In his book *Tales of the Maori Bush* (1934) Cowan recalled that the family home 'was built among the peach groves and almond trees of the old mission days; we lived on the site of a deserted village and wheat farm and the orchards of the defeated but unconquerable Maori.'[2] His reference to a 'defeated but unconquerable Maori' was because the Cowan farm, along with scores of surrounding ones, was a spoil of the Waikato War.

So, what was the Waikato War and what were its ramifications for the newly arrived Cowan family? There are deep discussions surrounding the Waikato War and the ramifications for Waikato Maori in Vincent O'Malley's *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800–2000* (2016) and in Michael Belgrave's *Dancing with the King: The Rise and Fall of the King Country, 1864–1885* (2017). For O'Malley, the Waikato War was the defining conflict in New Zealand history. 'On 12 July 1863 the biggest and most significant war ever fought on New Zealand shores commenced less than forty miles from central Auckland, as British imperial troops crossed the Mangatawhiri River and invaded Waikato,' he wrote. This was 'a remarkable state of affairs', he added, considering that

> Waikato Maori had recently been deemed among the most loyal and progressive in the country, with lands dotted with flour mills and signs of busy endeavour testifying to their economic success. To European eyes, they were well down the path to 'civilisation'. Yet all that was to end. Following the Waikato war of July 1863 to April 1864, the once flourishing Waikato Maori

[1] H. C. M. Norris, *Armed Settlers: The Story of the Founding of Hamilton, New Zealand, 1864–1874* (Hamilton: Paul's Book Arcade, 1956), 179.
[2] James Cowan, *Tales of the Maori Bush* [1934] (Auckland: Reed, 2006), 184.

economy stood in ruins – with villages destroyed, crops razed and livestock looted.[1]

An area that just a few years earlier had been 'a hub of colonial commerce' exporting to New South Wales, Victoria and as far as California, now lay at waste, O'Malley added, and those Maori who survived were compelled 'to seek refuge with their Ngati Maniapoto relatives south of the Puniu River, which became the new frontier between Maori and Pakeha.'[2]

Soldiers who had participated in the war – including William Cowan – were granted land seized by the Government for transfer to settlers. Many who signed on to fight in exchange for grants of land however had envisaged that their allotments were already cleared, according to L. H. Barber in his social history of Waipa County called *A View from Pirongia* (1978). They visualized walking into a life as yeoman farmers amidst 'tidy fields, surrounded by neat hedges, and lanes with stone cottages set in flower gardens.' Few recruiting officers 'felt it their duty' to point out that about a third of the Waipa delta was unusable as agricultural land in its swampy state, Barber wrote.[3]

William Cowan's war service ended in 1865, during which time he had earned the New Zealand Medal, which would eventually be issued to all who had served in the New Zealand Wars, including the militia and kupapa.[4] He was now free to claim his war service grant of a block of land plus a town section at Kihikihi. The higher one's rank, the better the chances of being allocated at least some land free of swamp. Colonels were eligible for a grant of 400 acres, captains 300, lieutenants 250, sergeants 80, corporals 60 and privates 50.[5] William Cowan's initial allocation had been a swampy block next to the Mangaohoi Stream, but he ultimately acquired an established farm at Orakau from a captain in the Waikato Militia named T. C. Speedy.[6] One of the sons of James Qualtrough (William's eventual father-in-law) also bought land at Orakau after following a similar path as a militiaman in the Waikato War.[7]

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[1] Vincent O'Malley, *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800–2000* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016), 9.
[2] O'Malley, *The Great War for New Zealand,* 9–10.
[3] Barber, *The View from Pirongia*, 3, 31.
[4] Capt. G. T. Stagg, 'Campaign and Service Medals' in A. H. McLintock, ed., *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*. 3 vols. (Wellington, Govt. Printer, 1966), 1: 289.
[5] L. H. Barber, *Frontier Town: A History of Te Awamutu, 1884–1984* (Auckland: Richards Publishing, 1984), 49.
[6] Cowan, *Settlers and Pioneers*, 44.
[7] Barlow & McDougall, 53, 56.

William Cowan's farm at Orakau had a lot going for it, for it had already been cleared, so avoiding the soul-destroying task of breaking in the land, and its trees were still bearing fruit even if its crops had been neglected during the Waikato War. Further, its fields received the maximum amount of available sun because they sloped gently towards the north. On the slope and its adjacent plain once stood the Maori village of Orakau, consisting of a collection of thatched hamlets. On the crown of a nearby hill there had been a Maori church, the central focus of the village. When William took over the Orakau block around 1866, he built his homestead on the hill where the old Maori church had been. The former landowner, the Ngati Maniapoto tribe led by Rewi Maniapoto (1807–94), now lived on the opposite (southern) bank of the Puniu River, which flowed four kilometres south of Orakau.

2.3 Border river

The presence of the Puniu River border is the main reason why James Cowan is considered so special as a writer: For during the first decade of his life he grew up amidst an imposed physical division of the races amid all the tensions that ensued along the border river. Ever since the end of the Waikato War, Europeans had occupied by confiscation the northern bank of the Puniu and Maori the southern side, which was known as the Rohe Potae or King Country, after the Kingites, the supporters of the Maori King Movement. Michael Belgrave wrote in *Dancing with the King* that from 1865 to 1886 Maori and Pakeha recognised the aukati as the border between the Queen's authority and the King's: 'South of the aukati the King's people were contained, but they remained an independent state beyond the control of the New Zealand government's police and land surveyors, tax collectors and railway builders. Europeans travelled to the area at their own risk, and a few met violent deaths.'[1]

For the outlying settlers, the Puniu River was considered a likely site for a Maori revenge attack because it marked the most southerly penetration into the King Country. The Cowans lived so close to the border or 'aukati' that the Puniu's course could be made out from a ridge on the family farm. Only one farmer lived slightly closer, their neighbour Andrew Key.[2] The emotional strain of always being prepared for an attack must have dwelt on William

[1] Michael Belgrave, *Dancing with the King: The Rise and Fall of the King Country, 1864–1885* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017), 2–3.
[2] Cowan, *The Old Frontier*, 86.

Cowan's mind, for in March 1870, when he was about to leave for Pakuranga to witness the birth of his first son, he wrote a letter to John Williamson, Commissioner of Crown Lands during 1866–70, concerned over inadequate security in the region. 'On behalf of the Settlers of Orakau, I wish to bring under your notice our unprotected state since the Armed Constabulary were withdrawn from this Block House,' he began:

> We are three miles outside of Kihikihi and whenever there is a panic with our wives and children we have to abandon our homes leaving them to the mercy of the Natives and go into Kihikihi. Whereas if there was a small force here, we could stop in our houses and it would be a protection to Kihikihi and Rangiaowhia as well as the Block House commands the principal native tracks into those places. I have heard that his Excellency the Governor when he was here on Saturday last expressed his surprise that the Block House was not manned. I beg leave on behalf of the Settlers that you will cause a few of the Armed Constabulary to be put in this place as it will [aid] settlement and be a guarantee that the Government does not intend to desert us.
>
> William A. Cowan.[1]

A blockhouse had been built at Orakau in 1869 but was unmanned at the time of William Cowan's letter. Shortly after his letter was sent however, a garrison began to occupy the blockhouse fulltime, and a volunteer frontier horse brigade was established to patrol the border. William and Andrew Key, the two settlers who lived closest to the Puniu River, were made lieutenants in the border patrol.[2]

Although James was too young to fully comprehend the politics of the 1870s, he probably had some feeling for the danger that the Puniu represented whenever he watched his father ride off to patrol the river. In *The Old Frontier* he gave some impression of what the sight of the King Country on the other side of the Puniu represented to him as a boy: 'Looking southward across the Puniu in the Seventies and early Eighties we who were bred up on the Frontier saw a mysterious-appearing land, fascinating to the imagination because unknown,' he began,

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[1] Letter to John Williamson, Commissioner of Crown Lands, from William A. Cowan, Mar. 1870, Donald McLean Papers, MS 0032–0232, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
[2] Cowan, *The Old Frontier*, 86–87.

> – a land, too, of dread in the years of unrest, for there in the hinterland only a few miles from the border river lived Te Kooti and his band and the hundreds of Waikato dispossessed of their good lands on which we Pakeha families now dwelt. As far as the eye could range it was a land altogether given up to the Kingites and Hauhaus — an untamed country painted in the dark purple of broken mountain ranges, merging into the vague, misty blues of great distance, the sombre green of ferny hills and plains, and the yellow and white of deep flax and raupo swamps.[1]

'Civilisation' as Cowan understood it lay on one side of the river and a primeval world on the other, Michael Belgrave wrote. The 'aukati' or border had been the result of 'an unresolved and undeclared truce' and it defined the identities of those living on both sides of this frontier. It was however a somewhat porous frontier, which 'did not preclude economic, diplomatic and social intercourse,' Belgrave added.[2]

For a young Cowan, however, the border river showed all the trappings of dividing two distinct worlds. 'The contrast!' he wrote in *The Old Frontier*. 'On our side the green farms of the pioneer settlers, roads, villages – each with its own redoubt as a rally-place in alarm – churches, schools – primitive schools, maybe, in the early stages – the flag of British authority flying.' He wrote that he could vividly recall life within the boundaries of the family farm, 'the garden with its sweet old flowers, the cherry orchard, the huge almond trees … the wild mint that grew in the tiny creek that went rippling down a swampy gully near the big acacia grove; the dam and the lake-like pond in the Tautoro swamp'. Tons of peaches grew in those groves, he wrote, 'and those wanted were gathered by the simple process of driving a cart underneath and sending one of us youngsters up to shake the branches until the cart was filled with fruit.' A curiosity was an old grove of trees on the crown of the farm near the road, 'for there the lead flew most thickly in the three days' siege of Orakau, and nearly every tree bore the curious weals and knotty growths that indicated a bullet-wound, and a search with a knife sometimes revealed a half-flattened ball or fragment of one.'[3]

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[1] Cowan, *The Old Frontier*, 84–85.
[2] Belgrave, 'James Cowan: Autobiographical Historian and Traveller in Time', *JNZS,* 52.
[3] Cowan, *The Old Frontier*, 85.

According to Annabel Cooper in *The Journal of New Zealand Studies*, Cowan's landscape was clearly a remembered landscape, 'whether in the distant views across the river or in the close detail of the knots and weals a child could touch and excavate.' It did not take a great stretch of the imagination to suggest that Cowan's feeling for Orakau 'may have had a quite direct relationship with what became his habitual practice of establishing the meaning of place through its past.' This was however a selective imagining of the past on the part of Cowan, Cooper added, with an emphasis by him on a peaceful Pakeha co-existence forged out of the confiscation of Maori agricultural land following the Waikato War.[1]

Cowan conceded in *The Old Frontier* that by the time he came to write the book, his life at Orakau when viewed through the vista of years seemed like 'a kind of dream, a fabric of remembrance tinged with a faerie haze'.[2] But as long as one keeps within the confines of his memories of the family farm and a four-kilometre radius stretching as far as Kihikihi to the west, his 'remembered landscape' as a child can be reasonably relied on.

Little is known about the next stage in his life, when he began riding to school, firstly at Kihikihi and later at Te Awamutu, except for a smattering of information from various sources both old and new. Firstly, Barlow and McDougall suggest that Cowan inherited his writing skills from his maternal grandfather, James Qualtrough of Pakuranga.[3] Secondly, Cowan wrote in *Settlers and Pioneers* that he was happy at home and that the evenings were never monotonous; 'We had books at any rate.'[4] His recollections of his actual school days are however meagre. In a 1940 magazine article he praises the skill of one of his teachers at Kihikihi Primary School, Norman Matheson, who he considered to be his first 'real' teacher:

> In the early Eighties our first real teacher came and really taught us something – he was a good old Waipu Nova-Scotian Highlander, Mr. Norman Matheson, whose memory I love to this day. He had been one of the Rev. Norman McLeod's Gaelic flock, and the Highland tongue was strong upon him. As was

[1] Annabel Cooper, 'No Orakau: Past and People in James Cowan's Places', *The Journal of New Zealand Studies* (NS19, 2015): 73–74.
[2] Cowan, *The Old Frontier*, 85.
[3] Barlow & McDougall, *A Quota of Qualtroughs*, 54.
[4] Cowan, *Settlers and Pioneers*, 46.

> the way with those who had 'ta Gaelic' he had his own way with English consonants; he called me 'Chummy'.[1]

Due to such scant evidence, one can only speculate that his childhood learning was on par with his peers. For his strongest interest seems to have been an extreme sensitivity to the nuances of his physical environment, as can be found in the following recollection in *Legends of the Maori* of what he termed his 'story-ground',

> the Maori border line little more than a mile away, the mysterious-seeming Rohepotae spread out to the south in blue ranges and fern plains, the tall dark forest of rimu and kahikatea pine filling the swampy levels on the north; the frontier blockhouse on its sentry hill; long days when the heat waves danced on the shimmering landscape; nights sharp-pricked by the cry of the weka, calling and answering its mate in the raupo; often a high long-drawn Maori chant coming through the dark, some late traveller singing to keep the ghost and aboriginal bogies away.[2]

For Cowan, writing in 1930, the sentence encompassed the 'charmed' atmosphere and spirit of the Pakeha-Maori borderland that had helped shape his youthful inclinations, which included a liking for enquiry into 'the mystic things', as he put it, the development of an intense affection for 'one's native land' and an increasing interest in its history.[3]

2.4 Turning point, 1880s

On 11 July 1881 the veil that had shrouded the southern side of the Puniu in a cloak of fear and apprehension for almost twenty years began to lift when several hundred Maori supporters swarmed across the border accompanying Tawhiao, the Maori King, who had come to make peace with the Pakeha. In a symbolic gesture at the Alexandra stockade near the foot of Mount Pirongia, Tawhiao laid down his gun before the Government's local Native Officer, Major William Mair, and stated that there would be no more fighting by his

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[1] James Cowan, 'Frontier Town: The Life of a Border Settlement', *Railways Magazine*, Jun. 1940, 16.
[2] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, 1: xvii.
[3] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, 1: xvii–xviii.

followers. For Michael Belgrave in *Dancing with the King*, this was not an act of submission by the Kingites; 'Far from it. Mair treated the entire meeting as a gesture of peace-making between two independent parties. He may well have represented the Crown but there was no settlement with Tawhiao.'[1] What the ceremony did however facilitate was a more harmonious 'regal' tour by Tawhiao and his followers through the Waikato settlements than would have been possible without the gesture. For a 'peaceful though martial-appearing march of the Kingite men through the European settlements' followed the ceremony, Cowan wrote in *The Old Frontier*, with 'much firing of salutes to the dead – the "powder burning of sorrow" – over the battlefields of the Sixties':

> Six hundred armed Kingites escorted the tattooed king and his chiefs, the lordly Wahanui and his shawl-kilted cabinet of rangatiras, on the pilgrimage to the scenes of the last despairing fights, and there were amazingly animated scenes in the outermost villages of Waikato when Tawhiao came to town, riding grimly in his buggy, and guarded front and rear by his fierce-faced riflemen.[2]

Sometime afterwards Cowan witnessed an event that apparently changed his life forever. He does not mention exactly *when* it happened, but it did not take place on the day of Tawhiao's noisy procession through the district or Cowan would have mentioned such an important person in this recollection. Rather, it was a more intimate affair involving only a small number of participants, but the event was significant enough for Cowan to later include it in *Legends in the Maori*. In its introductory chapter, called 'The Gathering of the Legends', he recalled playing in his father's orchard next to the local road when a group of Maori horseback riders pulled up:

> A group of mounted Maori, most of them old men with tattoo-carved faces halted on the gentle mound of Rangataua, at Orakau, where the waggon road ran, and gazed about them over the green farm lands that sloped easily to the bush and the raupo swamps. One of them pointed to this place and that; he was reconstructing for his companions an episode of the past. As I watched

[1] Belgrave, *Dancing with the King*, 180.
[2] Cowan, *The Old Frontier*, 91.

> them over the hedge from the peach-grove I heard one of the grim old warriors begin a wavering chant, a song that rose and fell in slow cadences of sorrow. Presently the others joined him and they chanted all together, and tears flowed down their chisel-trenched, blue-scrolled cheeks as they sang. I did not know then what they chanted, but I knew this much, that they were mourning for Orakau.[1]

Cowan's reference to the old Maori men 'mourning for Orakau' referred to the Battle of Orakau, which lasted three days from 31 March to 2 April 1864. The main scene of the battle had been a fighting pa, which had been hastily built on a ridgeline bordering William Cowan's eventual farm. 'There were about 300 Maoris in the pa, – men women, and children,' Cowan wrote in an *Auckland Star* article in 1914, which was commemorating the battle's fiftieth anniversary, 'and more than half of them were killed. Quite 160 were buried by the troops after the battle, most of them in the ruined pa, many along the line of retreat across the swamp and hills.'[2] In comparison, only 17 British soldiers killed,[3] who were buried at St John's Anglican Church in Te Awamutu.[4]

The Maori dead were buried virtually where they fell, Cowan later identifying in *The New Zealand Wars* three mass graves of those who fell while heading towards the comparative safety of the Puniu River. Back at the pa itself he wrote that forty warriors were buried by the soldiers 'in the trenches on the northern side of the pa'. He identified the spot as 'just within the farm-fence on the north line of the present main road".[5] It was to this crude little cemetery, 'the gentle mound of Rangataua' as Cowan called it in *Legends of the Maori*, that the Maori horseback riders had followed the road to Orakau and upon reaching the little picket fence just below the ridge, gazed about them.[6]

Within a few years, he added, he started collecting local folklore and learning the Maori language, as if his encounter that day had signalled a life's calling. For in the ensuing years he would hear many a tangi chanted in earnest,

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[1] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori.* 1: xvii.
[2] James Cowan, 'Orakau', *Auckland Star*, 17 Mar. 1914, 9.
[3] Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars*, 1: 453; *The Old Frontier*, 70.
[4] O'Malley, Vincent. 'Recording the Incident with a Monument: The Waikato War in Historical Memory', *The Journal of New Zealand Studies* (NS19, 2015): 83.
[5] Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars*, 1: 392.
[6] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori.* 1: xvii.

'but youthful impressions are the most vivid and the longest-lived, and memory often goes back in a flash to that little group of King Country men, patriots who fought for a hopeless cause, keening their dirge, like a Highland piper's lament, on the place of a hundred dead.'[1]

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With the opening of the Puniu River border following King Tawhiao's peace-making ceremony with William Mair at Alexandra, Cowan's exposure to the Maori world gathered pace. In *Tales of the Maori Bush* he wrote of riding through the King Country in 1885 with his young friends, one of them a Maori friend and guide. They were looking for stray horses, which 'might have joined their untamed brothers across the Puniu.' The young adventurers ended up at the onetime Maori fortress of Patokatoka, 'a castle-like crag of grey rhyolite rock rising abruptly from the fern and flax.' The boys tethered their horses and scrambled to the top, which was only a few yards square on its summit. 'What an appeal this fort of the silent ones carried to the imaginative heart of boyhood!' Cowan declared. 'I imagined how these terraces rang long ago with the high solemn sentinel song of the night watch, how warriors met quick death with spear or club in assailing and defending its bold escarpments and its encircling stockades.'[2]

'The imaginative heart of boyhood' – what an apt description of the wild imaginings that course through the minds of young boys as they try to recreate scenes from the books they read. On top of Patokatoka Cowan was fighting an imaginary war in an ancient citadel, which only a few years before had been banned to his kind upon threat of death.

A further example of Cowan's burgeoning interest in things Maori was when he recalled in *Legends of the Maori* of meeting Hopa te Rangianini, a chief of the Ngati Matakore sept of the Ngati Maniapoto tribe. His home was at Whenuahou, at the foot of Tokanui, one of three cones known as the Three Sisters pa complex about ten kilometres to the south of Kihikihi in the King Country:

> 'Hello, there's old Hopa from the Three Sisters. Wonder what he's making yonder?' We were riding through Kihikihi to school, and with the curiosity of

[1] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, 1: xvii.
[2] Cowan, *Tales of the Maori Bush*, 34–37.

> youth we went over to watch the ancient man. He was squatting on the grassy road in front of the little weatherboard whare built for his use when he happened to visit the frontier township, and he was making a kite – a Maori kite, a kahu, or manu, which is a very different affair from our kite of Pakeha childhood. … We found that he was making it for his friend, Major William Jackson, the veteran Forest Ranger and Commander of the Waikato Cavalry. Jackson was interested in these old-time Maori artefacts, and perhaps this raupo bird was intended for some museum.[1]

The interesting aspects of this encounter are two-fold; firstly, that Hopa was making the kite for a former enemy from the Waikato War, Major William Jackson. 'Some of these veterans of the Rangers were our neighbours at Kihikihi,' Cowan later recalled in a magazine article, 'and Major Jackson's big house on Kenny's Hill seemed to command the scene of soldier settlement as he had commanded the men in the field in the years of the Waikato conquest.'[2] According to Michael Belgrave, negotiations to open up the King Country were taking place at all levels – from personal reconciliations to high level diplomatic negotiations. 'Soldiers from both sides came together,' he wrote, in 'attempts by both sides to resolve the tainted legacy of war.'[3] Secondly, the ease with which Cowan could increasingly observe Maori events as a normal part of his daily environment is another pertinent point here. For Hopa was also a tohunga, 'educated in the whare maire of the old days', Cowan wrote, 'and he was regarded with healthy respect as a man of intimate communion with the Maori deities, whom it were well not to offend even in this Pakeha-church era.'[4] Regardless however of the healthy respect one paid to this chief's supernatural powers, Hopa was now peaceable and 'made accessible' to the extent that a Pakeha boy could wander over with his schoolmates and watch him assemble his gift to the Major.

2.5 Conclusion

A key point to emerge from Cowan's reminiscences is the timing of events in his young life, events that he managed to capitalize on in his later capacity as a

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[1] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, 85.
[2] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 35: Major William Jackson', *Railways Magazine*, Feb. 1936, 17.
[3] Belgrave, 'James Cowan: Autobiographical Historian and Traveller in Time', *JNZS,* 58.
[4] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, 86.

writer. For he resorted to his background extensively for material during his writing career, which raises the question that, without these events, whether he could have ever written on things Maori, or wanted to? For '[i]n James Cowan, the man met the time and the place,' Oriwa Keripi wrote in her 1936 profile of Cowan. 'His birth here in New Zealand at the time it occurred was one of those happy circumstances that seem to have blessed this land of ours.' For Keripi, Cowan had grown up 'in the company of the ghosts of old glories, the haunting memories that sprang from every field he could see from his cradle.'[1] While living in seemingly peaceful rural surroundings he later finds out that the little picket fence he regularly passed on the family property marked a mass grave, its presence no doubt setting up bewildering interpretations for a young boy about the price to be paid for European settlement in New Zealand. Who were these people who had fought Cowan's own kind on his father's farm and had until recently lived on the other side of the river, which one was forbidden to cross? And then one day the river was forbidden no more and the people from the far side crossed to pay homage to their fallen kin at 'the gentle mound of Rangataua'. All alone in the peach orchard, a young Pakeha boy eavesdrops on a Maori ceremony and observes a grief so deep that he determines to learn more about their kind.

As a boy he did not intentionally set out to exploit his environment – he was too young for such notions – but nevertheless Orakau imprinted upon him a strong sentimental identification with the locality known as 'a sense of place', and he set out to absorb as much of its environment, both physical and cultural, as he could. His imaginary battle with his pals on top of the ancient Maori fortress of Patokatoka in the mid-1880s was but one example of youthful forays into a world of 'the other' on the southern side of the Puniu.

The contrast between these two worlds became more noticeable through Cowan's childhood and early teens with the growth of towns and the arrival of the railway, Michael Belgrave wrote, the Maori world of the aukati appearing to Europeans as if it was 'caught in a moment of the past and unchanging, while everywhere modernity and civilisation were rapidly advancing.' For Belgrave, European progress 'accentuated the primordial in the landscape'; crossing the border 'was often described as a journey through time.'[2]

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[1] Oriwa Keripi, 'James Cowan, the Doyen of New Zealand's Great Writers', *Railways Magazine*, Apr. 1936, 25.
[2] Belgrave, 'James Cowan: Autobiographical Historian and Traveller in Time', *JNZS*, 53.

The significance of all this is that had Cowan been born a few years earlier, his memories of the New Zealand Wars could have been too one-sided – that is, in favour of Europeans – to display the level of empathy towards Maori he would show in later writings. If he had been born a few years later, however, he would have known only peace and therefore not experienced the simmering tensions and cultural contrasts of living in the borderlands during that era of division up to the mid-1880s. The creative and intense mind of James Cowan drew on a rich repertoire of vivid memories not simply to enhance his historical writing with memories, but to report and interpret a living and evolving national identity.

3
The *Star* Years, Part I: Special Reporter (Marine) 1888–1902

In 1888 James Cowan became a reporter for the *Auckland Star*, a move that marked the beginning of a fourteen-year phase working as a journalist for the same employer. This was one of the most important phases of his career, for as his first fulltime position it represented a personal 'proving ground' in determining his suitability as a journalist. Within a short while he was given the byline of 'Special Reporter' when covering two specialist areas, the marine environment and Maori affairs, the byline creating a huge advantage over other journalists in terms of his long-term recognition by initially helping to locate his suspected early material. I say 'suspected' because it was not simply a matter of tracing early articles using the keyword 'special reporter'. For there were several journalists working at the *Star* at the same time as Cowan who had also been given the byline of Special Reporter for their particular area of expertise. Further the *Star*'s competitor, the *Herald*, also had its own group of Special Reporters. So, a series of tests and rationales had to be applied before determining with any confidence that a particular article was by Cowan. Each test, if successful, would however reveal yet another formerly 'lost' text from Cowan's hand. The ones recovered so far have been collated in Volume Two of this thesis, along with details on where to access them online.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to explore Cowan's start at the *Star* before charting his work as a Special Reporter (Marine). The following chapter covers his role as Special Reporter (Maori affairs) and the one after that a case study of Cowan's coverage and interpretation of the 1898 Hokianga Dog Tax Rebellion, which taps into both of his specializations. For up till now there has been little study of the *Auckland Star* period of his journalism career despite many of the events he covered being considered major moments in New Zealand's history. I also want to show over the next three chapters how his early copy often gained a second or third life by being revised to suit certain magazines and books. What began as an article published in the nineteenth century, for example, often morphed into a completely different type of story

for readers of the twentieth, the change marking a transition from reporter to either feature writer or historian, which was only made possible by the longevity of his career over half a century.

3.1 From farm boy to Special Reporter

Cowan's transition from farm boy to newspaper reporter based in the heart of Auckland city (pop. 33,161 in 1886) happened very quickly, within a year in fact, and came about from a combination of an early recognition of his abilities bundled with that old fall-back of 'Who you know'. In 1886, while living on the family farm a friend was teaching him shorthand and Maori,[1] and after passing a junior civil service exam, he was offered a cadetship in the Native Department in Wellington, 'but the offer was turned down, partly because his mother felt James was too young for city life,' Cowan's biographer David Colquhoun wrote.[2] As good fortune would have it, James's father knew two men who ran a newspaper in Auckland called the *Evening Bell*. Its editor was a former Presbyterian minister, the Rev. George McCullagh Reed,[3] and its manager William McCullough; both men came from the same part of County Down in Ireland as Cowan senior and the three were friends. In 1887 Cowan junior was subsequently dispatched to Auckland to try his hand as a proofreader on the *Evening Bell*.[4]

His time as a proofreader would have put him in good stead, as it gave him time to absorb the newspaper environment, its hours and demands, to see if it appealed. For according to Philip Gaunt in his 1992 international handbook on journalism training, there was no formal training in writing journalism in the nineteenth century. New Zealand copied the old British apprenticeship system of recruiting cadets straight from high school and training them on-the-job, which was limited to basic newsroom and print room skills 'and duplicated the kind of informal on-the-job training that had existed in newspapers for generations.' Formal journalism training eventually began to

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[1] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, 86.
[2] Colquhoun, 'Cowan, James', *DNZB*, 3: 119b.
[3] G. H. Scholefield, *Newspapers in New Zealand* (Wellington: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1958), 87.
[4] Eugene Grayland, *More Famous New Zealanders* (Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1972), 104.

emerge around the turn of the twentieth century, Gaunt wrote, 'firstly in the United States and then in France and other Western European countries.'[1]

At the time Cowan joined the *Evening Bell* the newspaper was undergoing a merger with the *Evening Star*, and by 1888 the merger was complete, the new paper emerging as the *Auckland Star,* on which Cowan was given the position of a junior reporter.[2] In terms of getting ahead, his new position came at an opportune time. The *Star*'s backers were intent on forging a publishing empire based on a cross-platform of the *Star* as Auckland's leading afternoon daily – having either absorbed or seen off its afternoon competitors – plus magazine and book production. Within a year of the *Star*'s emergence Henry Brett had taken over full ownership of the newspaper and then offered a junior partnership to its long-serving editor, Thomson Leys.[3]

The *Star*'s office had two street frontages, Wyndham Street and Shortland Street (the main entrance), and was two blocks from the city's docks, Cowan later recalling the waterfront being part of an early daily round.[4] From the *Star*'s perspective however a just-as-useful role for Cowan considering his background in Maoridom was to interpret the concerns and needs of Maori affairs for the newspaper's readers. While undertaking both roles, Cowan would receive the byline of 'Special Reporter' beneath his supplied copy. The byline was not unique to Cowan; those who covered rugby tours also received the byline, along with the parliamentary reporter based in Wellington. The *Star*'s sole Auckland city competitor by 1888, *New Zealand Herald*, also used the byline for some of its reporters. The *Herald* was a morning daily and widely regarded as the 'leading journal', but according to David Hastings in his history of nineteenth century Auckland newspapers, the *Star* usually managed to edge out the *Herald* for the number of copies sold.[5]

In many respects Cowan's byline as 'Special Reporter' was the next best thing to having one's name in print in terms of keeping his legacy in journalism alive by helping provided a paper trail back to his original articles, as mentioned earlier. If other journalists from his era had also retained copies

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[1] Philip Gaunt, *Making the Newsmakers: International Handbook of Journalism Training (*Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 27, 119.
[2] Grayland, *More Famous New Zealanders*, 104.
[3] Scholefield, *Newspapers in New Zealand*, 89.
[4] James Cowan, 'R. L. S. and his Friends, Some Stevenson Memories', *Railways Magazine* May 1937, 59.
[5] David Hastings, *Extra! Extra! How People Made the Press* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2013), 160, 176.

of their stories, they could have been remembered to much the same degree. For the alternative was 'anonymity' (or no byline), a practice that originated in England and has always been part of the New Zealand newspaper scene up until the 1980s. Anonymity made it impossible for a journalist to gain any public recognition, according to Patrick Day, which stifled individuality and a reporter's bargaining power with their employer. Writers however managed to write under pen names and 'soon became well enough known to acknowledge rather than conceal their identity,' Day added.[1] For example, as well as his own name, Cowan wrote under a handful of pen names during his career, including 'J. C.', 'Beachcomber', 'Orakau', 'Tangiwai' and 'Tohunga'.

3.2 Special Reporter (Marine)

Cowan's writing on nautical affairs has not received as much exposure as his writing on Maori-Pakeha relations which, with the publishing of three editions of *The New Zealand Wars*, has tended to push into the background many of the other areas he was equally adept at. For, like his New Zealand Wars narrative, his nautical writing also spanned his entire writing career, beginning in earnest as a marine reporter for the *Star*, his main responsibilities concerned with movements on the Waitemata Harbour but also including at times Manukau Harbour, the Tasman Sea and the South Pacific. Just as Orakau had become a special place at an earlier stage in his life, Waitemata Harbour also became a special place for him with its own unique set of sentimental attachments. To begin with, his parents were buried at O'Neill's Point Cemetery, Bayswater, on the opposite shore to where he worked at the *Star*.[2] He also had his own special times to visit the harbour, writing in 1902:

> It is in the early morning-time, on a fine spring or summer day, that the Waitemata is perhaps to be seen under its most subtly-fascinating aspect – when the grey streamers of the cold night mists are just beginning to clear away before the first sun rays, and when the whole expanse of water … lies silent and still, a slumbering sheet of polished smoothness. Nothing is moving

[1] Patrick Day, *The Making of the New Zealand Press: A Study of the Organizational and Political Concerns of New Zealand Press Controllers 1840–80* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990), 169.

[2] Elizabeth Barlow & Joy McDougall, *A Quota of Qualtroughs: Early Settlers to New Zealand from the Isle of Man* (Matamata: Elizabeth Barlow, 1984), 55.

> save, maybe, a sleepy-sailed scow, her deck heaped high with great logs, creeping up with the tide, a solitary dimly-outlined figure at the seldom moving wheel the only sign of human wakefulness.[1]

The 'sleepy-sailed scow' mentioned in the quote is indicative of another unique value that Cowan's managed to incorporate into his nautical narrative, which was as a witness to the passing of the era of sail-powered vessels. According to statistics collected by Michael Brown, a librarian at the Turnbull Library, the movement of vessels through Auckland's port in 1888 – when Cowan first began as a marine reporter – consisted of 147 sail-powered vessels and 99 steam-powered.[2] Newspapers from Great Britain averaged three months to arrive by a fast sailing ship, and when one appeared 'excited newspaper men still rushed to the waterside and took boat to meet it down the harbour,' G. H. Scholefield wrote in *Newspapers in New Zealand* (1958): 'Swift rowboats were kept for this strenuous rivalry to gain possession of the first precious files of English papers. From these our papers would get the latest news of world events and they could glean top-line items for the next week or two.'[3]

By 1892 however, as early as four years into Cowan's job as a marine reporter, steam-powered arrivals were first recorded as outnumbering those entering the Waitemata under sail.[4] The harbour had its own grand narrative for Cowan, then, which was the passing of the era of sail-power and its sailors, the last of whom faded away in the 1920s about the same time as most of Cowan's veterans from that other grand narrative that appealed to him, the New Zealand Wars. The transition to steam power would however never be total: by 1903, when Cowan had just left the *Star*, two thirds of vessels arriving were steam-powered (176 under steam compared to 65 under sail),[5] but there still was a place for the 'sleepy-sailed scow' whose shallow draught gave access to the northern beaches with their equally-shallow estuaries.

The role of marine reporter was not necessarily a job that anyone would happily undertake considering its risks. Cowan had a couple of factors in his favour that made him suited for such a position: 'He liked yachting and

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[1] James Cowan (aka 'Beachcomber'), 'Our Harbour', *Auckland Star*, 4 Oct. 1902, supplement, 4.
[2] Michael Brown, '"The Chantey" and "The Bush Poet": James Cowan and Vernacular Song in New Zealand' (*The Journal of New Zealand Studies*, NS19, 2015): 125,136: n.12.
[3] Scholefield, *Newspapers in New Zealand*, 10.
[4] Brown, '"The Chantey" and "The Bush Poet"', 136: n.13.
[5] Brown, '"The Chantey" and "The Bush Poet"', 136: n.13.

rowing,' David Colquhoun wrote;[1] indeed one of the first articles he had published came about from a yachting trip on Auckland's Hauraki Gulf which included a visit to a recently-established native bird sanctuary on Little Barrier Island, the *New Zealand Herald* publishing the article in 1887.[2] Cowan no doubt brought this early attempt at feature writing to the attention of Henry Brett, his new boss at the *Star*. Brett had become known as the 'greatest' of Auckland's shipping reporters, 'a task at which he stood out for his skill, courage and physical fitness,' David Hastings wrote in his history of nineteenth century Auckland newspapers.[3] The role included having to go out and meet everything that came into Waitemata Harbour regardless of the weather conditions, Brett recalled in his book *White Wings* (1924), a memoir of sailing ships plying the New Zealand trade between 1850 and 1900:

> Having been a keen oarsman in my home town of St. Leonards-on-sea, the boat work was interesting to me, but nowadays when I look out on Rangitoto Channel, lashed by a nor'-easter, I often wonder at the reckless way one used to run risks in stormy weather, with hardly the thought of danger. But I was a young man then, strong and keenly interested in my work, and if the truth were known I rather suspect that the spice of adventure about the work made it all the more fascinating.[4]

Getting a scoop in advance of the competing Auckland newspapers was his goal, but just who exactly was 'the competition' depended on where he was working for at the time; for Brett worked for the *Southern Cross* as a marine reporter from 1863[5] before shifting to the *Herald*, and then finally taking over ownership of the *Star*. He recalled one instant while working for the *Herald* of being involved in a bidding war with two other marine reporters from competing newspapers for a copy of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the only scrap of news aboard this particular vessel. Brett won the impromptu auction and handed over ten shillings and sixpence (10/6) to the ship's steward. When he opened the paper, he found that it contained a page summarizing a month's

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[1] Colquhoun, 'Cowan, James', *DNZB*, 3: 119.
[2] Grayland, *More Famous New Zealanders*, 105.
[3] Hastings, *Extra! Extra!* 106.
[4] Henry Brett. *White Wings: Fifty Years of Sail in the New Zealand Trade, 1850–1900* (2 Vols. [Auckland: The Brett Printing Company, 1924] Christchurch: Capper Press facsimile, 1976), I: 5.
[5] Brett, *White Wings*, 5.

news from England, plus important Australian news. 'I was well satisfied with my bargain,' he wrote,

> but when I told my employer, Mr. W. C. Wilson of the *Herald*, the money I had paid for the paper, he did not appear over pleased, but on the following day, after being congratulated upon the 'scoop' by several merchants, he with a smile, said the paper was cheap and I had done well securing it.[1]

The reason why the merchants were so happy was because ships' manifests were being published in full in newspapers at the time, Brett explained; so, the arrival of an overseas newspaper was often the first time local merchants would hear of the progress of any incoming orders, due to an 'irregular' mail service.[2] Likewise, Cowan recalled in *Suwarrow Gold* (1936) of getting 'many a wet coat' for the sake of a scoop while boarding an incoming clipper ship or island trader as it worked its way up the harbour against wind and tide. It was however worth getting drenched in news-gathering terms, for '[a] South Seaman very often brought news for us in those pre-wireless times – shipwrecks, islands swept by hurricanes, native wars and now and then a piracy.'[3]

3.3 A Stevenson connection

Another important part of Cowan's responsibilities involved scanning the passenger lists of arriving vessels for any famous people who had made the effort to come to this part of the world, either as tourists or on speaking tours. In this capacity he met Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain and Robert Louis Stevenson.[4] Of the three renowned writers, his meetings with Stevenson would be the most far-reaching, Stevenson influencing the way Cowan would later write at times. Stevenson's books *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886) proved popular and Cowan would later quote passages by Stevenson whenever his own books dealt with similar sea lore.

That Stevenson even entered Cowan's orbit was more a matter of good fortune based on utility than any attraction for New Zealand: Auckland was a port of call for a regular steamer service that also included Samoa, and in 1890

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[1] Brett, *White Wings*, 9.
[2] Brett, *White Wings*, 6–7.
[3] James Cowan, *Suwarrow Gold and Other Stories of the Great South Sea*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1936, 9–10.
[4] Grayland, *More Famous New Zealanders*, 105.

Stevenson had purchased some land on the island of Upolo, Samoa, taking up residence there in an attempt to ease his exhaustion and associated health problems, and to rekindle his creativity. According to literary historian William Gray, one of the reasons Stevenson chose Samoa over the other islands was because it had regular and reliable mail services that were 'indispensable' for his communication with publishers and printers in Britain and the United States. There was a service between Apia (Samoa's capital), Auckland and Sydney, as well as a monthly service to San Francisco 'on which Stevenson came to rely', Gray wrote.[1]

In April 1890 an article appeared in the *Star* in which Cowan wrote of briefly meeting Stevenson during a stopover at Auckland aboard the island steamer *Janet Nicoll*. Cowan's main preoccupation at the time was not its distinguished passenger but on covering a complaint about labour problems aboard the vessel during a maritime strike. 'There was trouble about the inexperienced crew; most of whom were "black" in a labour union sense,' he later recalled, and some of the hands came to the *Star* office to complain about the inefficiency of the others:

> The men made a long statement which I took down; it was sworn to by them before a Justice of the Peace and published; and the chartering firm made a reply to it next day. But there were all manner of shipping troubles then which had to be got over in some way or another; ships must sail, with any kind of crew they could get. The *Janet*'s hands were right enough, once the ship got away and the officers got them into sailorly shape.[2]

Despite the distraction of the labour dispute, Cowan managed to gather enough material for a brief article on the Stevenson family's stopover, writing that Robert was taking a trip round the islands with his wife Fanny, stepson Lloyd and a number of other excursionists. He came ashore for a couple of hours intending to visit Sir George Grey, 'but being still very weak' had to retire to his bunk on the *Janet Nicoll* and make do with sending some copies of his books to Grey, who in turn sent Stevenson copies of several of his best known

[1] William Gray, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 140.
[2] Cowan, 'R. L. S. and his Friends', 59.

books, 'with his sympathy and best wishes'.[1] Fanny's diary of the stopover mentioned her husband being 'very tired and glad to rest'.[2]

The steamer left the next day bound initially for Niue Island after which Stevenson intended to proceed to other islands for an extended stay for the benefit of his health and 'to get considerable material for book-making,' Cowan wrote.[3] The *Janet Nicoll* however almost never made it out of Waitemata Harbour, Fanny recording in her journal that some calcium powder bought in Auckland spontaneously combusted next to a load of fireworks when the ship was passing Bean Rock, a small fire subsequently destroying about ninety photographs. The captain later told Fanny how lucky it was that there had been a man at the helm who he could trust, but in actual fact there had been no man at the wheel, the helmsman having run below to check out the fire: 'It was a rather dangerous moment to leave the ship drifting, for we were not nearly out of the harbour, being just opposite the lighthouse when the fire broke out,' Fanny wrote. 'A steamer passed us quite closely when the scene was at its wildest.' Just in time, she stopped a couple of crew members throwing overboard a burning suitcase containing four boxes of her husband's papers – all of this commotion because an Auckland chemist sold the family some calcium powder for fireworks and told them that the mixture was 'as safe as a packet of sugar', and that even a lighted match would not be sufficient to ignite it.[4] Who knows what great literary manuscripts could have been lost if the suitcase had disappeared into the harbour.

In 1893 Cowan managed to finally interview Stevenson at length during a second stopover in Auckland aboard the Oceanic Steam Company's mail steamer *Mariposa*, while he was on his way from Samoa to Sydney with Fanny. Cowan remarked in his subsequent article that Stevenson looked pale and ill, 'and his health did not appear to have very greatly benefited by his sojourn in Samoa.'[5] At the time, Britain, the United States and Germany were vying over Samoa as a colony, and the current political situation was about 'as bad as they can be', Stevenson told Cowan:

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[1] James Cowan, 'A Noted Novelist', *Auckland Star*, 21 Apr. 1890, 3.
[2] Roslyn Jolly, ed., *The Cruise of the Janet Nichol Among the South Sea Islands: A Diary by Mrs Robert Louis Stevenson* (University of New South Wales Press, 2004), 59.
[3] Cowan, 'A Noted Novelist'.
[4] Jolly, *The Cruise of the Janet Nichol*, 54, 59–61.
[5] James Cowan, 'Novelist R. L. Stevenson', *Auckland Star*, 24 Feb. 1893, 3.

> There is no money in the Treasury and not a single salary has been paid for the last four months, either to the Municipal Magistrate – Mr Cooper, an Auckland gentleman – to the native police or the Customs officers; in fact, the only men who have got their salaries have been the two officials appointed by the Powers. A radical change of some sort or other is needed in Samoa.[1]

Stevenson was in a bind if he favoured one power over another considering that he had built a villa at Vailima, a village four kilometres south of Apia which was under the control of Germany. When Cowan asked him whether he was in favour annexation by any one of the three foreign powers now interested in the country, he replied that he did not know exactly in what light his answer would be looked on in some quarters. 'I can tell you that every day deepens my conviction that annexation will be the best thing that could happen to Samoa. I won't say what Power should, in my opinion, annex it, but l am certain that annexation is the only cure for the present state of things down there.' As to the possibility of any new literary work he replied: 'Well, you know, I am always hard at work on something or other, always pegging away at some book. I have several new works on my hands, but I think the next one will be a book, to be called "The Schooner Farallon".'[2]

The significance of this interview for Cowan was that it would be the last time he would meet the famous author; indeed, it was the second-to-last time that Stevenson would ever take a sea voyage. In a 1937 article on Stevenson, Cowan thought that Stevenson was 'indeed dying then', and wrote of the interview as an 'ever-treasured experience':

> That pale, romantic figure is plain in the mind's eye, after all those years. Romantic is an ill-used adjective, yet I feel it is the right word here. His deep emotional eyes, with a humorous kindly glint, his lank black hair, rather long and rather damp-looking, his slender waxy-white hands, were features that do not pass from memory. [3]

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[1] Cowan, 'Novelist R. L. Stevenson'.
[2] Cowan, 'Novelist R. L. Stevenson'.
'The Schooner Farallon' was eventually published as *The Ebb-Tide* (1894).
[3] Cowan, 'R. L. S. and his Friends', 60.

Stevenson looked tired and worn, 'but he was very kind to his young interviewer,' Cowan added, and talked freely about the triangular political squabbles in Samoa. He was expecting to be deported by the Germans, and 'I think that at the moment I was more concerned to get Stevenson's views about Samoa, present and future, than to ask about his books,' Cowan wrote.[1] Sadly, a year after his interview, Stevenson passed away in his villa at Vailima on 3 December 1894. 'Stevenson died from what the doctors who attended him called "apoplexy combined with paralysis of the lungs", or in modern terminology a cerebral haemorrhage,' William Gray wrote in *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Literary Life* (2004); and the following day he was buried according to his wishes on the summit of Mount Vaea (472 m.), which overlooked Apia.[2]

3.4 Creating a nautical narrative

Cowan has at least five books that can be linked to his experiences as a marine reporter, including *New Zealand Cities: Auckland* (1913), *Samoa and Its Story* (1914), *Tales of the Maori Coast* (1930), *Fairy Tales from the South Seas* (1932) and *Suwarrow Gold and Other Stories of the Great South Sea* (1936). His nautical material would also contribute to articles for newspapers and magazines plus two chapters in *The New Zealand Wars*, namely 'The Beach at Kororareka' (Chapter 2) and 'The River War Fleet' (Chapter 23). For historian Chris Hilliard, each story was a piece in a jigsaw puzzle which when assembled revealed a novel view of New Zealand's culture. 'If we focus on Cowan the collector and teller of small stories, rather than the Cowan who, on appropriate occasions, gestured at much more encompassing stories of New Zealand, how are we to think about his relationship to New Zealand culture more broadly? Hilliard wrote.

> I am not suggesting that we ignore the big picture and luxuriate in the details. Rather, I want to suggest that the details help us get at the big picture more effectively than Cowan's explicit mission statements do. Here it may be useful to draw an analogy with Michael Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism' – not coherent national identities or national ideals, but the humdrum national consciousness engendered by street names, flags, and other signs of

[1] Cowan, 'R. L. S. and his Friends', 60.
[2] Gray, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Literary Life*, 168.

> nationhood that we might not notice at the time, but which help perpetuate a sense that the country around you exists, means *something*.[1]

For Hilliard, many of Cowan's contemporaries exclaimed that New Zealand had an exciting and distinctive history, 'but they did not provide directions so that readers could locate the traces of it for themselves.'[2] But Cowan certainly did. In *New Zealand Cities: Auckland* he directed the reader to a clifftop lookout at Stanley Point on the harbour's northern shore, a lookout which is still there today at the end of Stanley Point Road. In the following excerpt from the book he writes of following the passage of a flat-bottomed sailing scow laden with kauri logs as it tacked up the harbour towards her anchorage in Freeman's Bay 'against a piping westerly breeze':

> She is making a tremendous fuss as she comes foaming along, with the seas every now and again heavily splashing her decks and cargo. She comes in so close that we can easily read her name, the *Seagull*. Close in she heads, until it looks as if she were thinking of giving the shrub-grown cliff a bump – then we hear the sharp word of command from the skipper at the wheel, 'Lee-oh!' The head-sheets are let fly as the wheel goes over, the Old Man tends the main-sheet and his mate the fore, there is a thunder of flapping and banging canvas, round comes the centreboard craft on her heel as smartly as any keel-schooner, the sails are flattened well in, and off she goes across on the other leg, with her nose pointing for the Queen Street wharf. Another brace of tacks and she will reach her anchorage off the mills.[3]

Once the vessels had tied up and discharged their cargoes, the most often mentioned destination in Cowan's nautical books was the ships' chandlery, a supplier of equipment for ships and boats. Cowan knew of one in particular near the Auckland wharves. 'It smelled beautifully, of tarred rope and paints and oils,' he later recalled in *Suwarrow Gold*. 'There were rubber sea-boots and oil-skins and sou'-westers hanging on the walls, and strings of jib-hanks; there were binnacle compasses and sidelights, and tomahawks, steering-wheels,

[1] Chris Hilliard, 'Stories of an Era Not Yet So Very Remote: James Cowan in and out of New Zealand History' (*The Journal of New Zealand Studies,* NS19, 2015), 36.
[2] Hilliard, 'Stories of an Era Not Yet So Very Remote', 36.
[3] James Cowan, *New Zealand Cities:* Auckland (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1913), 23–25.

ships' bells, boat-anchors, a thousand things large or small craft needed.' Its proprietor was 'a big whiskered sailorman, with a deep-sea gait, who had been a bos'n in clipper ships,' Cowan added.[1] (One can only guess at what a 'deep-sea gait' looks like, possibly, a slightly bow-legged stance to better absorb the pitching of a vessel.) But what was important for his story gathering was to time his visit with the meetings of the seafarers, which was 'about the time the sun was over the foreyard, or a little later maybe … The nautical debates and the reminiscences and the cuffers there'd be!'[2] – a 'cuffer' being a term for a yarn.

The same rituals took place in the ship chandler on Apia Beach, he noted in another of his books, *Samoa and its Story*: 'This is the place, about the time the sun is over the foreyard, as the sailors say, to hear the tales of old Samoa. What "yarns" the old hands tell as they gather in that big ship chandlery'.[3]

Using this sort of material, then, one can see how Cowan managed to reasonably accurately describe another chandlery operating on Kororareka Beach circa 1845 in *The New Zealand Wars*, but this time he had to qualify it with the words 'Picture this', one of his most frequently occurring cues in his writing that he was visualizing. In this case he asks the reader to picture Kororareka as a 'straggling town, its single street fitting itself closely to the rim of the gravely beach … no jetty, the boats of men-o'-war whalers, and trading craft alike are hauled up on the beach.' Later, an officer from one of the vessels ventures into the town to buy provisions at a chandler:

> Follow the stores-buying captain … into one of the weatherboard trading houses, blue with strong tobacco smoke and thick with the tang of tarred rope. This interior is a typical South Sea warehouse; the proprietor is ship-chandler, sea-stock dealer, ironmonger and gunsmith, grog-seller, gunpowder-purveyor, and a dozen other trades. He can provide a ship with an anchor and cable, … provide a 300-ton barque with a complete new set of sails or sufficient muskets and ammunition to conquer a cannibal island.[4]

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[1] Cowan, *Suwarrow Gold*, 14–15.
[2] Cowan, *Suwarrow Gold*, 15.
[3] James Cowan, *Samoa and Its Story* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1914), 16.
[4] Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars*, I: 10.

This excerpt is historical fiction, and for literary historian Mary Lascelles, the writer who offers a vision of the past that has been drawn from history and amplified by imagination, 'impels us to ask of their sources in the course of searching for access to the past. What historical documents was the writer acquainted with when reaching backwards beyond memory.'[1] For Lascelles, the marriage of history with invented narrative poses its own set of problems: 'History will accept romance as a partner,' she writes, but 'it shows a want of literary good manners in the writer if he treats a grave historical situation otherwise than seriously.'[2]

In the case of Cowan's description of Kororareka, it was however far from guesswork; a former sea captain and later artist of nautical paintings named Captain Mathew T. Clayton gave him a sketch map depicting the layout of the town along the shoreline with its most prominent buildings.[3] Cowan later recalled that Clayton was always careful to obtain accurate data for his paintings. 'When last I called on him, at his little Manurewa farm homestead, he was still busy in his studio. That was in 1919, and he was eighty-eight.'[4]

So, Cowan is drawing upon his list of informants as part of a quiver of sources when he asks us to imagine scenarios as far back as Kororareka in 1845. Some of his subsequent historical depictions may appear imaginative, but he clearly signals this by writing 'Picture this', or something similar, at the beginning of the description.

3.5 In Samoa

In 1899 Cowan had the opportunity to visit Samoa on behalf of the *Auckland Star* to observe a truce between two warring Samoan factions and three colonial powers, namely Britain, the United States and Germany. He arrived aboard the New Zealand Government steamer *Tutanekai* which was delivering some dispatches to the British authorities. The *Tutanekai* was also being used in an experiment to see whether New Zealand had a role to play in the conflict and could or should assist in the future. Indeed, in his first dispatch Cowan wrote of the vessel's subsequent functionality: 'That the *Tutanekai* was of practical use

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[1] Mary Lascelles, *The Story-teller Retrieves the Past: Historical Fiction and Fictitious History in the Art of Scott, Stevenson, Kipling and Some Others* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 20–21.
[2] Lascelles, *The Story-teller Retrieves the Past*, 76.
[3] Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars*, I: 6–8.
[4] James Cowan, 'Captain M. T. Clayton, A Great Sailor and an Artist of the Sea' ('Famous New Zealanders No. 44', *New Zealand Railways Magazine*, Nov. 1936), 17, 23.

while at Samoa is shown by the fact that the senior British naval officer there despatched her to the Island of Savaii to bring over to Apia a large number of friendly natives,' some of whom were menaced by the opposing side, the Mataafa party.[1] Further, in his final dispatch from Samoa a week later, he cited a letter from the British Consul to Premier Seddon which suggested that *Tutanekai* had a role in the forthcoming peace negotiations by transporting friendly chiefs from the outer islands to Apia for the gathering of commissioners conducting the peace ceremonies.[2]

Due to the brevity of the vessel's stay, Cowan's opportunities to observe anything once he reached Samoa were severely limited. This was to be expected however, for one suspects that he was sent to Samoa because the *Tutanekai* was on a mission lasting only a week. This would have given the *Star* an opportunity to signal a presence in Samoa and observe a turning point in the peace negotiations without getting bogged down with having to keep a reporter on the ground because the conflict had unexpectantly flared up again.

As a brief background to the Samoa situation, at the heart of the conflict was the interests of two groups. The first group consisted of foreign settlers and their governments, namely Britain, the United States and Germany, who all wanted to establish a stable Polynesian government in order to provide 'a secure environment for the introduction of plantation economies and the facilitation of trade,' according to Vanessa Smith in her book *Literary Culture and the Pacific* (1998).[3] An obvious sticking point however was that the three colonial powers were vying to secure Samoa's resources for their own governments – not to share it with other colonial governments.

The second interest group tied up with the Samoan conflict were its local inhabitants, namely two Polynesian chiefly factions who were competing for control of the island group. The two warring factions coincided with colonial interests, which meant that the three Western Powers 'sought to influence the course of Polynesian government by promoting, alternately and inconsistently, the cause of the ruling party or of contending claimants,' Smith wrote.[4] Britain and the United States supported one chief and Germany another, each foreign power supplying their preferred local leader with arms. When Cowan arrived,

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[1] James Cowan, 'News by the *Tutanekai*', *Auckland Star*, 4 May 1899, 5.
[2] James Cowan, 'The Latest', *Auckland Star*, 4 May 1899, 5.
[3] Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-century textual encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 197.
[4] Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific*, 197.

Britain and the United States were supporting Malietoa Tanu and Germany was supporting Mataafa (or Mata'afa).[1] All was quiet on the Samoan front when he landed on Apia Beach, for 'the war is now temporarily at an end,' he wrote in his first dispatch,

> as the result of the recent despatches received from Auckland and the news of a Commission to deal with Samoan affairs. The warships have ceased active operations, and the military work is confined to strong bodies of friendly natives and bluejackets patrolling the environs of Apia daily in order to keep the vicinity of the town clear of rebels.'[2]

Apia was controlled by the British and Americans, the only sign of a German presence being a consulate to help maintain dialogue between the powers. Cowan would later describe Apia Beach as a military camp, 'entrenched and defended with field-guns, manned by British sailors and marines', the roadside ditched and parapeted:

> Out after dark one made no delay in answering the challenges of the bluejacket sentries, British and United States, posted in the streets. … 'Halt! Who goes there?' came through the soft tropic night every few hundred yards. You advanced and produced your face and your passport – a scrap of paper furnished by the naval authorities – for the inspection of the sentry, by lantern-light, backed up by a row of shining bayonets, and passed on your way.[3]

Cowan's movements were restricted to Apia unless the British and Americans, along with the supporters of Malietoa, were conducting sorties beyond the capital's limits to help gauge the closeness and strength of Mataafa's forces, at which times he was allowed to accompany them. He did not have the coverage to himself, however, for there were two other New Zealand reporters already in Samoa. Malcolm Ross had arrived four months earlier, his stay being supported by Dunedin's *Otago Daily Times*, Christchurch's *The Press* and Wellington's *The Evening Post*. Ross normally worked as a parliamentary reporter but was covering the Samoa situation while Parliament was in recess.

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[1] Cowan, *Suwarrow Gold*, 197.
[2] James Cowan, 'News By The *Tutanekai*', *Auckland Star*, 4 May 1899, 5.
[3] Cowan, *Suwarrow Gold,* 198.

Another reporter was Fred Rollett who had been reporting for the *New Zealand Herald* even before Ross arrived.[1]

According to Allison Oosterman in her 2008 PhD thesis on the life of Ross, he went there was because New Zealand had an interest in the island nation, and because other newspapers either had a reporter already in Samoa (the *Herald* and Rollett) or were about to send one (the *Star* and Cowan).[2] In other words, the newspapers were indulging in a game of commercial one-upmanship with each other, which seemed rather odd considering that the *Star* would have had access to both Ross's and Rollett's copy eventually. For all of the above-mentioned newspapers belonged to the United Press Association back in New Zealand and were obliged to share copy with each other. Presumably the advantage of having a reporter on the ground was that the newspaper who employed him could control how the material was first used for the most impact. It would give them the opportunity to editorialize about Samoa a day before being obliged to distribute the material via the Press Association.

Oosterman's thesis focuses solely on Malcolm Ross; she makes only one mention of Cowan while at Samoa and seems unaware of his dispatches. She also makes only a couple of mentions of Rollett. Oosterman describes Ross's writing style as 'lengthy affairs, minutely detailed, and often with graphic descriptions of the actions he witnessed interspersed with flights of literary fancy extolling the beauty of the surroundings – a recognisable Ross peccadillo.' He did not otherwise tend to romanticise war, she adds, but the British or American soldiers were described as being either 'brave, daring, cool, fearless' or 'bold' in action.[3] Cowan also used similar words to describe the soldiers as if they had been accepted as universal descriptions of the British in action.

Oosterman also writes that by allying himself with the British and Americans, and the Malietoa party, Ross made

> no effort to stand above the conflict and take a neutral position in his reporting. With all the freedoms he experienced in Samoa, Ross did not take

[1] Allison Oosterman, 'Malcolm Ross: From the peaks to the trenches,' PhD thesis (School of Communications), AUT University, 2008, 110–11.
[2] Oosterman, 'Malcolm Ross', 111.
[3] Oosterman, 'Malcolm Ross', 118.

> the opportunity to move beyond the one point of view. … When he did, these opinions were largely reflective of the New Zealand Government and of his own newspapers.[1]

This is an interesting comment by Oosterman because in a later chapter of this thesis on the Hokianga Dog Tax Rebellion I suggest that Cowan made an effort to see different viewpoints in the conflict. Indeed, his attempts to present the viewpoints of both sides in any New Zealand conflict was one of his calling cards. So, it is with some interest to present the following excerpts written by Ross and Cowan in order to gain an insight into their different writing styles and the degree of their biases. The excerpts came from their coverage of the same events during the week of Cowan's stay:

Malcolm Ross, Apia, April 1899

> The *Moana*, which arrived from New Zealand on the twenty-first of April, brought news of the appointment of a High Commission to inquire into the Samoan troubles. In the meantime, however, the position had been further aggravated by the attitude and actions of the rebels. The news that there was to be a cessation of hostilities therefore came at a very inopportune moment. Just, in fact, as the rebels were on the point of being thoroughly whipped. In another week or ten days the Americans and the British would have solved the difficulty, the rightful King would have been secure on the throne, the Supreme Court and the Berlin Treaty upheld, and the peace of Samoa practically assured for many years to come.[2]

James Cowan, Apia, April 1899

> The cable despatches from the British and American Governments brought by the R.M.S. *Moana*[3] and the *Tutanekai* contained instructions to cease active operations against the Mataafa party beyond acting on the defensive pending the arrival of the Commission. This news has been received with great disapprobation by the English and American residents here, and the officers of the British and United States warships make no secret of their disgust. They say that just as a good strong force of well-

[1] Oosterman, 'Malcolm Ross', 119.
[2] Oosterman, 'Malcolm Ross', 117.
[3] R.M.S.: Royal Mail Ship

> armed Malietoa natives had been drilled and knocked into shape, and ready, with parties from the warships, to take the field in a regular organised campaign against Mataafa, and able in the opinion of many to inflict a decisive defeat on him and restore peace, the Powers upset everything by appointing a Commission which can do no good till peace is restored, and which is playing right into the hands of the Germans. The only way of restoring peace is to defeat and disarm Mataafa and his party, and then when this is done, to disarm the Malietoa natives. But the Commission is looked on with great misgivings, and on every hand, one hears grave doubts as to whether it will do anything practical to improve the present wretched condition of things.[1]

In the dispatch by Ross, he describes the chiefly faction supported by Germany as the 'rebels', which was hardly the case considering that the three colonial Powers were the interlopers in Samoan affairs, not the local clans. Secondly, his comment that 'the rebels were on the point of being thoroughly whipped' feels incredibly imperialistic as if the Samoans were slaves and that it was only a matter of time before they would be put in their place. Thirdly, his comment that 'the rightful King would have been secure on the throne' if the fighting had been allowed to continue for a short time longer suggests that Ross was unfamiliar with local Samoa culture and likening the restoring of absolute power as if one was back in England. This is just one paragraph of Ross's dispatches; considering that he was supplying thousands of words to his parent newspapers, one can surmise that his copy was overly opinionated.

Let us now compare Ross with Cowan's coverage of the same event. Like Ross, Cowan also proffered his opinion in his copy at times, and he also took the side of his newspaper – the British side in Samoa – which he was obliged to do as an employee. But instead of describing the opposing side as 'rebels' as Ross did, he correctly calls them 'Mataafa and his party', which is a much more apt description. Secondly, he does not inject his opinion as forcefully as Ross, who described the truce as 'inopportune', as if acting as judge and jury. Rather Cowan follows the correct channels by explaining that news of an enforced ceasefire 'has been received with great disapprobation by the English and American residents here, and the officers of the British and United States

[1] Cowan, 'News By The *Tutanekai*'.

warships make no secret of their disgust.'[1] For, it was up to the commanders to opine that the truce was 'inopportune', not Ross. The offshoot of this is that one could trust Cowan's copy much more than Ross's because it more accurately followed the chain of command for the releasing of information under war conditions. It might have felt like a too-rigid chain of command, but war throws up its own sets of rules to the journalist on the ground, and overt editorializing is best left to the newspaper editors once they receive the journalist's copy.

What Cowan and Ross did have in common was their skill in 'painting with words' during an era when taking photographs in a remote tropical environment would have proved extremely difficult. Oosterman describes Ross's final dispatch from Samoa as 'leisurely, literary, and often long winded so beloved of the time and of which Ross was an adherent par excellence. We are reminded that he was writing for an audience which did not have the benefit of illustrations. Writers felt that they had to paint word pictures for their readers.'[2] Cowan was also adept at word pictures, as was his method, and had written extensively of the voyage out just in case the war restricted his movements when he arrived, as was the case.[3] His dispatches were however far from long-winded which Oosterman frequently mentions as a recurring trait for Ross.

When the *Tutanekai* returned to Auckland three weeks after leaving, Cowan's dispatches were published in the same edition of the *Star* on 4 May 1899. Such a massive wash of material on Samoa in one edition failed to create any real understanding of a day-by-day narrative and simply gave the impression of an observer landing in the middle of a conflict. A resolution of sorts was fortunately in sight for the island group and by the end of 1899 the islands of Upolo, where Robert Louis Stevenson had lived, and Savaii, were assigned to Germany. The remainder of the Samoan island group east of longitude 171 degrees was assigned to the United States. Great Britain renounced all territorial rights to Samoa and was 'given' the Tongan Islands. The Solomon Islands were also divided up between Great Britain and Germany.[4]

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[1] Cowan, 'News By The *Tutanekai*'.
[2] Oosterman, 'Malcolm Ross', 118.
[3] James Cowan, 'A Sharp Fight', *Auckland Star*, 4 May 1899, 5.
[4] James Cowan, *Samoa and Its Story*. Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1914, 54–55.

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Cowan could also have envisaged his visit to Samoa for the *Star* as an opportunity to make a pilgrimage to Stevenson's grave. But any such notions were dashed because his Mount Vaea grave and former villa at the village of Vailima was out of bounds, the village being Mataafa's headquarters. Cowan's attraction to Stevenson was not so much the romantic South Sea lifestyle of a writer but the ideas he brought to genres that Cowan was also attempting to write in. For Stevenson's range was just as impressive as his output, according to Roger Robinson in his book *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings* (2003), 'especially for an invalid propped on pillows and wracked with coughing fits.' For Robinson, Stevenson 'brought realism, psychological insight and a sense of history's complexity to the old genre of period romance. With *Jekyll and Hyde*, he took both science fiction and the psychological horror story to a new level as serious genres.' He also moved the English short story 'in lasting new directions, especially in realism, in his collections'. Finally, he was 'idiosyncratic and influential' as a travel writer, memoirist, and essayist.[1]

Cowan would later attempt to adapt these genres to his own work. For example, there could be an argument that *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* (1911), which is discussed in a later chapter, 'brought realism, psychological insight and a sense of history's complexity to the old genre of period romance' once it had morphed out of its initial serving as 'The White Slave' newspaper serial in 1906. Secondly, his trip to Samoa had provided the realism necessary to more accurately depict a lawless Kororareka circa 1840s in the Bay of Islands in *The New Zealand Wars.* 'Robert Louis Stevenson described the town on Apia Beach as the seat of political sickness of Samoa,' Cowan wrote in Volume One of the *Wars*. In comparison, Kororareka was 'the seat of the troubles of north New Zealand', where Hone Heke, 'one-time mission pupil, malcontent, and rebel general, played as bold a part in the drama of our early days as ever the patriotic Mataafa enacted in his little world under Upolu's palms in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.'[2]

Here, Cowan is forging an affinity with Stevenson based around seeing the beaches at Apia and Kororareka as first points of conflict between cultures – as cultural frontiers – Cowan endeavouring to bring Stevenson closer to his own

[1] Roger Robinson, *Robert Louis Stevenson: His Best Pacific Writings* (Auckland: Streamline, 2003), 14.
[2] Cowan, *The New Zealand* Wars, I: 14.

work. Stevenson however never really understood the lot of newspaper journalists, describing their work as always being incomplete, which over time meant that they became wedded to what he termed the 'cheap finish'. In an article for New York-based *Scribner's Magazine*, in which he warned about embracing 'Art' (writing, painting) as a career, Stevenson wrote that the only real reward in writing was the lifestyle of a writer, not the physical wages from earning a trade: 'In ordinary occupations, a man offers to do a certain thing or to produce a certain article with a merely conventional accomplishment, a design in which (we may also say) it is difficult to fail. But the artist steps forth out of the crowd and proposes to delight: an impudent design, in which it is impossible to fail without odious circumstances.'[1] For Stevenson, derision of his work while he was striving for perfection was always deeply felt, whereas the journalist could possibly shrug off a poorly-written article, try again later and still collect a weekly wage. For Stevenson, journalism might have been one of the 'ordinary occupations' but it was work that enabled Cowan to firstly meet Stevenson, and secondly, offered an outlet that kept the romance of the South Seas alive in New Zealand newspaper articles for another fifty years after Stevenson had passed on.

3.6 Cowan's alternative approaches in marine journalism

Not all of Cowan's nautical material could be couched in romantic notions of South Sea lore. Sometimes his reporting was tinged with the rawness of reality, as the following two newspaper articles show. The first article, which covered the sinking of the *S.S. Wairarapa* in 1894, is especially poignant because I suggest that the event taught Cowan how to write with compassion about death, which would help him in later life when writing about death in books such as *The New Zealand Wars*. As a short background to the disaster, shortly after midnight on 29 October 1894 the *Wairarap*a with 235 passengers and crew on board hit a reef off the northern end of Great Barrier Island, with the subsequent loss of approximately 130 lives as some passengers were never found.

[1] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Letter to a Young Gentleman who Proposes to Embrace the Career of Art', New York: *Scribner's Magazine*, Sep. 1888, 623–31.

'The *Wairarapa* was making record time on route from Sydney to Auckland when, after rounding North Cape, it encountered dense fog,' Andy Dodd wrote, a historian with the Department of Conservation.

> In spite of the poor conditions and misgivings of his crew, Captain McIntosh kept up a speed of 14 knots, crashing into the north-western coast of Great Barrier Island near Miners Head. The swell of the sea and pitch-black conditions added to the confusion and only two lifeboats were successfully launched, the others being smashed or swamped during attempts to get them into the water. A few wearing lifebelts were picked up, and some stronger swimmers were able to make it to shore. At dawn a line from the ship held by those on the rocks allowed more people to reach safety.[1]

As soon as news of the disaster reached Auckland, which took three days, the Northern Steam Ship Company's steamer *Argyle* returned to Great Barrier Island. Cowan was also on board and in his subsequent article when the *Argyle* returned to Auckland, he wrote that the first signs of the disaster was the scent of oranges and their broken crates floating by. Once at the island, he accompanied police and undertakers, whose duties included, firstly, locating bodies strewn over the coves and rocks; secondly, ascertaining from local Maori which passengers had already been found and buried; thirdly, repatriating some of the bodies and survivors to Auckland; and fourthly, compensating the Great Barrier Islanders for provisions they had already provided to survivors. 'Every additional detail of the wreck of the steamer *Wairarapa* renders the disaster still more shocking than before,' Cowan wrote in his article.

> The death toll has increased, while the terrible sights witnessed at the wreck and along the coast of the Great Barrier Island daily impart a more sickening aspect to the catastrophe. Dead bodies have been washed ashore by the dozen for miles and miles along the rocky Barrier coastline, and the distress of relatives and friends of the unfortunate drowned and killed voyagers renders the calamity a most heartbreaking occurrence. Those who visited the locality

[1] Andy Dodd, *S.S. Wairarapa Graves 1894 Heritage Assessment* (Auckland: Dept. of Conservation, 2007, doc.govt.nz, accessed 17 Oct. 2018.)

of the wreck and laboured at the recovery of corpses witnessed scenes of horror which will cling to their memories till their dying days.[1]

Most of the victims were wearing a lifebelt, and most were discovered half-naked from taking to the water in loose-fitting night clothes, a scenario under which the tides could have torn their clothing from them. 'It was a peculiar feature of the bodies recovered that several of them had their clenched hands thrown across before their faces as if warding off a blow, probably in their struggles on the fatal rocks,' Cowan wrote. And so it went on, his descriptions ending with the finding of the nineteenth body, the details quite specific at times: One young girl had a nightdress on, which had got tangled round her waist. Another man had only one sock on.[2]

Some might suggest that Cowan was being overly-melodramatic with his descriptions, but if so, he was accompanying policemen and undertakers who he observed at one stage 'had to turn away their heads to hide their emotions as they took in the situation.' The policemen had to remove any jewellery, but before them was a girl who was 'apparently 14 or 15 years of age and looked a most pitiable object as she lay with upturned face on the sea-worn shingle, her eyes staring vacantly into space, and her mouth filled with sand.' He surmised that she was a Roman Catholic, for around her neck she wore a cross 'and some Catholic relics, tied together with worsted thread.'[3] Cowan's description of the young girl's necklace was important, for sixty bodies were not shipped back to Auckland but buried at Onepoto and Tapuwai Point on Great Barrier Island. These belonged to passengers who could not be identified, or because their bodies were unrecognisable. Their graves were referenced with headboards and enclosed in a white picket fence to assist re-interment 'should they be subsequently identified by relatives on the basis of their possessions,' Andy Dodd of the Department of Conservation wrote, the Department currently administering the grave-sites.[4]

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[1] James Cowan, 'The Wreck of the *Wairarapa*', *Auckland Star*, 3 Nov. 1894, 2.
[2] Cowan, 'The Wreck of the *Wairarapa*'.
[3] Cowan, 'The Wreck of the *Wairarapa*'.
[4] Andy Dodd, *S.S. Wairarapa Graves 1894 Heritage Assessment* (Auckland: Dept. of Conservation, 2007, doc.govt.nz, accessed 17 Oct. 2018.)

Search for the Perthshire

Cowan's second article was nowhere as graphic as the sinking of the *Wairarapa* but highly specialized in its own right, befitting the role of a Special Reporter (Marine). In June 1899 the steamer *Perthshire* was reported overdue during a crossing between New Zealand and Australia. On board were members of Premier Seddon's family, which added an extra incentive to find the vessel, which was believed to have broken down and was drifting. Cowan was fortunate to be allowed to be part of a search aboard the government steamer *Tutanekai.* The article he eventually had published in the *Star* is apt for a number of reasons. Firstly, it introduced elements far removed from the romanticism of many of his nautical yarns. For the *Tutanekai* failed to find the *Perthshire*, Cowan mentioning the failure in the second paragraph, thus heightening the tension over the fate of its important passengers. This however meant that he had to work hard because his material was not particularly strong and he had already given the outcome away. The point here is that the poorest of reporters can look good when they have strong source material like the *Wairarapa* disaster, but it takes a seasoned professional to work poor material into a successful article, especially in this case considering the time Cowan spent away on the voyage for a single article. To do this he turned the search into a conundrum beginning with the statement, 'The whereabouts of the overdue steamer *Perthshire* is becoming a greater mystery than ever':

> It is now 44 days since she sailed from Sydney bound for the Bluff, en route to London, and though numerous steamers have searched assiduously for her, she seems to be completely lost to the outside world as though she had gone to the bottom. No doubt, however, within the next few days she will arrive at Sydney in tow of some steamer, for there is still no reason to believe that anything worse has happened to her since she was last reported disabled on the 25th of May by the barque *Northern Chief*.[1]

The subsequent article was laced with compass bearings and nautical jargon, Cowan remaining faithful to that section of interested readers who would have bothered to read on, that is, those vitally interested in shipping, the statistics adding realism of the search. For example, he wrote:

[1] James Cowan, 'The *Perthshire*', *Auckland Star*, 9 June 1899, 5.

> The first course steered by Captain Post from Cape Maria was W. ¼ S. magnetic, which is a little to the northward of the usual, course of steamers running between Sydney and Auckland'. This course was continued for 470 miles, the run occupying about 45 hours. During the first part of the trip the weather was not bad| but it grew hazy, with frequent drizzling rain, as the steamer approached the locality where the *Perthshire* was supposed to be.[1]

But it was not all statistics and jargon; he also introduced a human element that harks back to Chris Hilliard's mention of 'banal nationalism' allowing access to New Zealand cultural history. In this case there were salvage rights for the vessel that located the *Perthshire* and could tow it to a safe harbour. 'All hands looked anxiously for the steamer,' Cowan wrote,

> for though the *Tutanekai* was a Government vessel, and as such not perhaps actuated so much by prospects of gain as the other search steamers, still it was bruited[2] through the ship that a bonus in the form of salvage or prize money would no doubt be divided amongst the officers and crew in the event of the *Perthshire* being towed to port by the New Zealand steamer. This incentive, as may be imagined, kept every eye well skinned, and between whiles the crew used to sit down and decide what it would do with its share of the salvage. One was going to retire to the happy position of a hotelkeeper, another was going to get married, and another was going to buy 'a little farm well-tilled.'[3]

The human element extended to descriptions of the ships. When another vessel named the *Hauroto* was sighted the *Tutanekai* met up with it to share notes in the search. In this case the *Hauroto* was 'spoken', a term used to bring another vessel close enough to communicate with:

> The stranger altered her course on seeing the *Tutanekai*'s bright light, and hauled down to meet her. … Captain Post hailed the red-funnel liner from the bridge, and found that she was also searching for the *Perthshire*. After some

[1] Cowan, 'The *Perthshire*'.
[2] bruit: spread word
[3] Cowan, 'The *Perthshire*'.

conversation between the two vessels, Captain Post agreed to send a boat to the *Hauroto* to show Captain Newton his chart.[1]

In the end it had been a 'lame duck hunt', Cowan wrote, but in another context it worked well as a nautical story is because Cowan tried to include non-nautical readers by humanising the ships and their crew and even the weather during the search, 'but nothing was in sight, save the wheeling albatrosses and the rough waves'.[2] But ten days after Cowan's article appeared in the *Star*, another article was published with news that the *Perthshire* had been found drifting off Norfolk island with a damaged tail shaft. The *Talune* took it in tow destined for Sydney. All on board were well and '[g]reat excitement prevailed as the vessels passed Newcastle, 73 miles north of Sydney, its cliffs 'lined with spectators with glasses'.[3]

3.7 Conclusion

Cowan's nautical narrative describes a world that was virtually over by the First World War. Reminders of that era were still close at hand even when he left the *Star* in 1902, at the age of 32, for although this was a time when steam-power was overtaking sail, foreign-going sailing vessels still anchored in Waitemata Harbour only a stone's throw from the doors of the *Star* in Shortland Street. It was also an era when kauri logs milled from the Auckland hinterland massed behind booms in the next bay, Freeman's Bay, while waiting to be processed. These two iconic images, sailing ships and kauri logs delivered by coastal scows, were all from a world in the act of vanishing, and, considering their handy juxtaposition to Cowan's city work space, would provide plenty of inspiration for him to write virtually a complete oeuvre on the act of remembering.

Cowan's employer, Henry Brett, had also been a marine reporter during the 1860s and early 1870s, and by all accounts little had changed; the potential hazards of being around moving ships remained and Cowan probably was 'given some slack' for this compared to some of the other reporters undertaking 'softer' work like court reporting. For every sea story had to be treated differently, and Cowan's account of shipwrecks and searches for lost ships

[1] Cowan, 'The *Perthshire*'.
[2] Cowan, 'The *Perthshire*'.
[3] Press Association, 'Arrival at Sydney', *Auckland Star*, 19 Jun. 1899, 4.

show the huge variety in his daily workload. But there were some improvements to Cowan's era compared with Brett's, namely the creation of the United Press Association and the sharing of information amongst competing newspapers via cable and telegraph, which possibly meant fewer risky forays into the Waitemata Harbour in tiny open boats.

For Cowan, then, Auckland's early growth was interwoven with and bound up in the doings and progress of the port. In 1930 he recalled that the *Star*'s shipping columns chronicled 'a truly fascinating' day-to-day history of the Waitemata. 'Tall ships!' he wrote, 'The ships of sails, the lofty-sparred, the now-vanished rigs,'

> the harbour-front life, the lively scenes on wharf and quay, the varied character of vessels and crews, the old-fashioned details of ship-furnishing, the pictures they made as they warped in to their berths or made sail for distant lands – what a flood of memories their very names bring up as one endeavours to set down some impressions of the Waitemata in the period covered by the existence of the *Auckland Star*.[1]

His article was however not all about reminiscence, Cowan merely rehashing old material for yet another filler for the paper. For his central argument was that Auckland's early growth was so interwoven with and bound up in the doings and progress of the port that the harbour and its shipping was to all intents and purposes a mirror of the city's life and its rise from 'the day of small beginnings'. The *Auckland Star* too, from its own beginning, was a reflection of the port's development, he wrote, its shipping columns presenting 'a truly fascinating' day-to-day history of the Waitemata, and 'the thrill of the pioneer epoch'.[2]

An appropriate description of the copy Cowan supplied during his time as a shipping reporter is as 'reportage', a French term originating in the seventeenth century which by the late nineteenth meant the reporting of events for the press.[3] Although the word can be used in a contemporary context, it reverberates with that era of Empire-building that Cowan inhabited while at

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[1] James Cowan, 'The Pageant of the Ships: Memories of the Waitemata', *Auckland Star*, 7 May 1930, 26.
[2] Cowan, 'The Pageant of the Ships'.
[3] J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 20 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 13: 652.

the *Star*. 'Reportage' can also be described as a style of writing,[1] so David Colquhoun's description of Cowan's writing being sometimes florid by modern standards can stand because it inadvertently reinforces the meaning of reportage as inhabiting a clearly defined period when Cowan's style of writing was considered normal.[2]

Further, reading Cowan's marine journalism from the *Star* years allows one to experience the seafaring culture of that era in small increments, one article at a time and one story at a time while he lived through it. His reflections on those years and events would come in later phases of his career when he no longer had to get drenched while clambering aboard vessels during howling nor'easters in the hunt for that elusive scoop. Thus, this chapter shows Cowan as a reporter with an expansive prose style, a mastery both of technical details and of tight observation of humans, and close attention to what his audience was looking for. It can be argued that this marked out his style as a historian as well.

[1] Simpson and Weiner, eds. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 13: 652.
[2] Colquhoun, 'Cowan, James', *DNZB*, 3: 119b

4
The *Star* Years, Part II: Special Reporter (Maori Affairs)

Between 1888 and 1902 Cowan worked for the *Auckland Star* as a Special Reporter (Maori Affairs) at the same time as his other role as a Special Reporter (Marine). It is difficult to ascertain the amount of time he applied to each role but as shipping movements in and out of the Port of Auckland occurred on a daily basis, it is likely that that particular area took up the bulk of his time. For searches of articles relating to Cowan's role as a Special Reporter (Maori Affairs) have revealed his attendance at only the major Maori events in the main, which suggests a selection process going on over whether a particular event required the expertise of a bilingual expert like Cowan or could 'get by' with a stringer's report. So far, newly-recovered articles by Cowan in his capacity as Special Reporter (Maori Affairs) include his coverage of Tawhiao's tangi in 1894, the Dog Tax Rebellion in 1898, which is covered in Chapter Five, and a royal visit to Rotorua in 1901. 'His despatches to the *Star* from Rotorua on the gathering of the Maoris to meet the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George V and Queen Mary) in 1901, were really magnificent,' a *Star* colleague named Alan Mulgan recalled in 1962. 'This was the last assemblage of old-time chiefs.'[1]

A bonus of being on the road for several days while covering major events meant that Cowan was continually picking up stories and contacts that he could not necessarily use straight away. For he shared with Robert Louis Stevenson a curiosity about the culture he was passing through at any one time: 'Stevenson revelled in the sense of perpetual discovery, the opening out of a new world with every new island visited,' Roslyn Jolly wrote in her introduction to Stevenson's *South Sea Tales*, a collection of short stories in one of which Stevenson had written that '[t]he first love, the first sunrise, the first South Sea Island are memories apart, and touched a virginity of sense.'[2] Every island represented a new beginning, Jolly wrote, 'an unknown world with its

[1] Alan Mulgan, *Great Days in New Zealand Writing* (Wellington: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1962), 77.
[2] Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson, Tusitala Edition*, 35 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1923–24), xx, 4.

own people, landscape, culture and possibilities of engagement.'[1] And as Stevenson prolonged his stay in the Pacific, his interest in new islands

> began to give way to – or to be contextualized within – the resident's interest in the complex society of which he had become a member. Increasingly Stevenson realized that not only did each island offer itself, individually, as a new world for experience and or fiction, but that the whole Pacific was itself a new world, hardly known in Europe and barely represented in literature.[2]

For Jolly, the 'keynote' of this world was contrast and unexpected juxtaposition, Stevenson describing the Pacific in one of his published letters as 'a strange place' where the nineteenth century only existed in spots; 'all round is a no man's land of the ages, a stir-about of epochs and races, barbarisms and civilisations, virtues and crimes'.[3]

Cowan could certainly relate to such a description despite not having a myriad Pacific islands to compare and contrast, but with later travels his field of interest managed to become New Zealand-wide. 'I came to discuss Maori-Polynesian creation myths with the few surviving wise men in the South Island, as far as the foggy shores of Foveaux Strait,' he wrote in *Legends of the Maori*, 'and to note down ancient Hawaikian traditions and chants in the Far North'. The village communal hall was where he got much of his secondary information, where popular folk tales, old love songs and laments were heard nightly, he added, for it was never difficult to divert the talk in remote settlements 'to the doings of the ancestral heroes, the deeds of gods and men far back in the Polynesian half-light of time.'[4]

But for the more intimate things, it was out in camp away from the tribal gatherings that he wrote in *Legends of the Maori* of drawing out the confidences, the private beliefs, the talk about the 'shadowy folk' (the Patupaiarehe), all under the spell of 'wood-smoke magic':

> 'Wood-smoke magic,' Mr Kipling said in one of his speeches, 'works on everyone according to his experience. I know men otherwise silent become

[1] Roslyn Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson: South Sea Tales,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), x.
[2] Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson: South Sea Tales,* xii.
[3] Jolly, *Robert Louis Stevenson: South Sea Tales,* xii.
[4] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, I: xviii.

> suddenly and surprisingly eloquent under its influence.' How true the words in ones of experience!' The most taciturn of bush companions unbends before the 'friendship fire' when the day's journey is done, and the evening meal is over and tongues, as well as belts, are loosened.

He went on to cite the time when he travelled all day with an old Maori bushman who had maintained 'a warrior silence' on the mountain tramp 'but talked long and sang many a waiata when we were snug and comfortable in camp.'[1]

4.1 Case study: Tawhiao's tangi, 1894–1910

One of Cowan's most far-reaching assignments as a Special Reporter was when he was sent to cover the initial tangi for Tawhiao, the second Maori King. Tawhiao's father was Te Wherowhero, the first Maori King and leader of the Waikato tribe. His mother was Whakaawi, Te Wherowhero's senior wife. When Te Wherowhero died in 1860, Tawhiao became the second Maori King and reigned for another 34 years. He passed away on 26 August 1894 at Parawera pa, a Kingitanga (Maori King Movement) stronghold on the Waipa District side of the Puniu River. A police report said that he had succumbed to influenza, aged 69.[2]

On hearing of Tawhiao's passing, the *Star* assigned Cowan to go to Parawera pa where Tawhiao's corpse was lying in state awaiting the arrival of his coffin. The plan was for his coffin to be taken on a slow journey through the Kingitanga villages to give their inhabitants an opportunity to farewell their king and display their grief. The final resting for his coffin would be the Waikato tribal cemetery on Taupiri Hill, near Huntly. Invitations had been sent out to all the tribes in New Zealand and a great final gathering was expected.[3]

When Cowan returned from Parawera his article was published under the headline of 'Tangi of King Tawhiao' on 4 September 1894. The article was repeated two days later as part of the *Star*'s formal obituary for Tawhiao called 'Death of Tawhiao'. They are the same article essentially albeit with a formal introduction added to the latter more befitting of an obituary, for Cowan's

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[1] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, I: xix.
[2] James Cowan, 'Death of Tawhiao', *Auckland Star*, 6 September 1894, 11.
[3] James Cowan, 'Tangi of King Tawhiao', *Auckland Star*, 4 Sep. 1894, 2.

original version was hardly a solemn rendition. Rather, it showed that the role of a Special Reporter in Maori affairs had its risks. But just as importantly, it signalled his arrival as a feature writer with an ability to mix up his writing style, for despite the solemnity of the occasion, he opened his report as if it was a travelogue:

> Leaving Auckland by train for Te Awamutu, a small township on the borders of the King Country, which is the terminus of the daily train to that portion of the Waikato, I put up for the night at Lynch's Commercial Hotel, with whom I made arrangements to obtain a horse to ride to Parawera next day and see the tangi. Having procured from Mr Lynch a real good 'Neddy,' I started off in a light drizzling rain, which soon cleared away, but the road was in a perfect state of quagmire on account of extremely heavy rains, which made progress rather slow.[1]

It was the norm at that time to be a capable horse rider and Cowan was no exception. The road between Te Awamutu and Parawera pa passed Cowan's old stamping grounds of Kihikihi and Orakau, and in his article he could not resist describing the historical significance of the localities:

> About three miles beyond Te Awamutu I came to the settlement of Kihikihi, where not long since a large tangi was held over the remains of the deceased chief Rewi Maniapoto. A really handsome monument is now erected over his grave, which is right in the township of Kihikihi. … The next important place to pass was the site of the famous Orakau Pa, which was the stronghold of Rewi during the Waikato war. Instead of being a formidable looking pa now it is the site of a pleasant looking farm covered with luxuriant grass and numbers of splendid cattle and sheep browsing on the pastures. The old Maori trenches are almost obliterated and the only remaining memento of the war is the blockhouse erected by the soldiers after the place was captured from the Maoris.[2]

[1] Cowan, 'Tangi of King Tawhiao'.
[2] Cowan, 'Tangi of King Tawhiao'.

Cowan resisted mentioning his family connection with the locality, his parents having moved from Orakau to Auckland the previous year, settling at Devonport. The farm had been left to one of the sons, Henry, who later sold it and replaced it with another in the Waikato.[1] By then, James had left Orakau to work in Auckland, which raises the question whether anyone attending the tangi, which was only five kilometres further on from the Cowan family farm, would still remember or consider James as a former 'local'.

Within sight of Parawera pa he noticed a 'peculiar-looking' flag flying at halt-mast. It was coloured half-black and half-white and had the letters 'King Tawhiao' sewn into it. 'This I afterwards learned was the King's flag,' Cowan wrote.

> On my arrival at the entrance to the pa I was met by the canine population of Parawera, who rolled out in great numbers when they saw me coming; I think if there was one there were 100 yelping nondescript mongrels surrounding me. Needless to say, my horse was very much startled, and nearly unseated me, but I stuck to the pig-skin, for had I got a tumble off at that juncture, I'm afraid the 'kuris' would have had a good mauling with my body before being called off.[2]

Cowan could have been exaggerating here, unless he arrived via a back entrance, which is permitted for those with 'local' status and do not have to be 'decontaminated', like those new to the marae. For it is hard to comprehend these canines being allowed to cause such a commotion considering the numbers who would have been passing through the gates of the pa to pay their respects that day.

Once safely through the canine gauntlet, he tethered his horse and 'started to fossick around', soon discovering where the body of Tawhiao was lying in state inside a large tent.

> Only the face was exposed, the body being covered with valuable kiwi and korowai mats with his numerous meres, heitikis, tokis, etc., all arranged around the body. The floor was covered with splendid whariki mats, and on

[1] Barlow & McDougall, *A Quota of Qualtroughs*, 54–55.
[2] Cowan, 'Tangi of King Tawhiao'.

> which were seated Tawhiao's wives, for he was the possessor of several. Some were engaged in fanning the body with fans, and others kept up a sort of melancholy dirge and sobbing interspersed with a mournful waiata or song composed for the occasion.[1]

Visitors lined up outside the tent, paying their respects for about an hour 'and commenced to cry as Maoris only can cry at a tangi,' he wrote, followed by speeches and the pressing of noses. Cowan's article then goes into a lengthy discussion of the cooking and serving of the meal for the guests, along with performances by dancers and athletes. Having something to eat and drink after the formal greeting, and pressing of noses as a physical introduction, were important phases of the 'decontamination' process of people entering a marae for the first time, historian Michael King wrote in *Kawe Korero: A guide to reporting Maori Activities* (1985): 'According to Maori values, eating is one of the ways of removing the alien tapu that all visitors carry, Reporters who refuse a cup of tea will not only be seen as discourteous – they will also appear to endanger the health and wellbeing of their hosts.'[2]

By participating in the rituals Cowan was fitting in well, but where he did start to break Maori protocol was when he wandered off to the king's enclosure and started making some sketches. For he was suddenly accosted by some guardians near the enclosure where the king lay and told not to sketch there or to enter:

> I said all right I would not go there, but a number of boys who crowded round said that I had already sketched the places, so I was requested to hand over my book, which I reluctantly did after some argument, and in searching over the leaves my friends(?) wanted to know the meaning of my sketching, so I said it was for pastime, and they were about to destroy my book when I said I would rub them out if it pleased them.[3]

He did so, but not to their satisfaction, 'so they then seized the book and I thought it was good-bye to it, for they took it away.' About ten minutes later

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[1] Cowan, 'Tangi of King Tawhiao'.
[2] Michael King. *Kawe Korero: A guide to reporting Maori Activities* (New Zealand Journalists Training Board, 1985), 23.
[3] Cowan, 'Tangi of King Tawhiao'.

he was handed back the book with the sketches completely wiped out and was told to 'clear out' from the pa. He said that he would remain for some time longer but not do any more sketches, 'to which they assented and sent several natives wherever I went to see I did not open my book.'

> I went round taking in the situation mentally, and when going for the last time near the king's enclosure, I saw two men run for guns and stand at the gate and threaten not to let me near there, so I, to use the colonial term, 'got out of it' as soon as possible, as the consequences might have been serious for me, because I was the only white man amongst 400 natives, who now were unmistakably hostile to me.[1]

So, what was Cowan sketching? Was he drawing the layout of the tent and where everything was positioned inside it to jog his memory when writing up his story? Or did he have an ulterior motive? The answer lies in his comment to the Maori guards who wanted to know the meaning of his sketching, to which he replied that it was 'for pastime'. Sketching Maori facial tattoos (moko) for a pastime was 'one of my pet interests, in the course of researches into matters Maori,' he revealed in a much later article for the *Star* (1935), in which he added that there were often small differences in the moko patterns that were peculiar to specific tribes, which only 'a careful pencil drawing of the tattoo' could reveal. Tawhiao had actually ordered a revival of the art of facial tattooing to keep the old practice alive, and Cowan had at one time taken Tawhiao's cousin, the chief Mahutu te Toko, to a photographic studio for a portrait where they 'carefully heightened his handsome moko with black paint' before taking the photo. Mahutu looked in the mirror and was so delighted that he declared he would not wash his face for a month, Cowan wrote; 'his youth had been renewed; he looked as if he had just been tattooed (without pain this time).'[2]

Such cross-cultural actions could evidently take place during times of peace and goodwill between Maori and Pakeha, but King Tawhiao's wake had heightened emotions. 'The tapu of a high chief's person was particularly

[1] Cowan, 'Tangi of King Tawhiao'.
[2] Cowan, James. 'A Vanished Art. The Maori Moko. Last of the Tattooed Men', *Auckland Star* Magazine supplement, 9 November 1935, 12.

concentrated on his head,' Peter Buck wrote in *The Coming of the Maori* (1949),[1] and here at Parawera was an unrelated white stranger wanting to sketch the most scared part of the figurehead of the Maori King Movement. Cowan's attempts to get close to Tawhiao's corpse could therefore have easily been construed as having a sinister motive, especially considering that 'there were rumours amongst the Maoris that the Pakehas desired the tattooed head of the old King as a museum curiosity,' Cowan later recalled in one of his books.[2] Under those circumstances the most tactful move seemed to be a hasty retreat, and 'after a slight delay I saddled up and got away for Te Awamutu again,' Cowan wrote in his *Star* article, 'and they were rather pleased to see the last of me, and I also was glad to get away from them.'[3]

Here, I am assuming that Cowan had not been at the pa before and was not considered tangata whenua, a local. '[U]nless you are known to the tangata whenua and have permission to do so, you cannot simply bypass ritual and wander on to and around a marae as a free agent,' Michael King writes. 'To do this would be to seriously offend against tikanga (custom). Journalists who have done this in the past have created ill-will and ultimately made their own jobs and those of their colleagues more difficult to carry out.'[4]

Another elusive factor was whether Cowan informed someone in authority at the marae that he was attending in the capacity of a reporter. Being a reporter sometimes carries a certain mana considering that this was a major event that needed reporting on, but it in no way gave him an exclusive right to wander around unaccompanied. On the other hand, the article is unique because it goes where few Pakeha had been or would ever experience first-hand, which justified to an extent the *Star* having a Special Reporter to help its Pakeha readers better understand Maori etiquette.

Despite his setbacks in the earlier part of the day, Cowan managed to round off his article nicely enough following a chance meeting on the way home from Parawera with the deliverers of Tawhiao's coffin: 'It is a most elaborate affair, being lined with lead, and a glass front, so as to permit the features being seen,' he wrote. Tawhiao's remains were to be taken to

[1] Peter Buck, *The Coming of the Maori* ([1949] Wellington: Whitcoulls, 1987), 347.
[2] Cowan, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, 356.
[3] Cowan, 'Tangi of King Tawhiao'.
[4] King, *Kawe Korero*, 23.

Maungakawa, near Cambridge, and the tangi would be continued there for some time.[1]

4.2 Redemption at Taupiri

Later that month (September 1894) Cowan took a different tack to cover the closing ceremonies of Tawhiao's tangi being held at the foot of Mount Taupiri by first obtaining permission to attend from the Waikato tribal organisers. Such a move met with immediate success, his permits allowing for a week-long attendance at Taupiri and to post daily dispatches to the *Star*, in the first of which he speculated that the gathering contained an undercurrent of political intrigue. 'Of late,' he began, 'the cry of the Maori mourner has often been heard in the land, and the sad death-wail has ascended from many a Maori kainga over the remains of some grizzled old rangatira, such as the race will never produce again, for its destiny is changed.' For Cowan, the present gathering at Taupiri, near the Waikato River, was not just a funeral wake 'to lament over a dead aboriginal potentate'; it also bore a more significant aspect, 'for it has already helped to weld together hitherto estranged factions of what is grandiloquently termed the Maori "kingdom," and it is a fact, I believe, that the new "king," young Mahuta, already has considerably more staunch adherents than had Tawhiao, at the time of his death.'[2]

He did not however continue with this line of thought for the time being, the rest of his article describing the sheer scale of the opening ceremony when Tawhiao's coffin arrived at Taupiri and was handed over to the Waikato tribe. Between three and four thousand men, women and children had gathered to witness the arrival of the funeral entourage, he estimated, after the 'faithful adherents of the Kingitanga' had borne the remains of their monarch from Parawera through Cambridge to Maungakawa and thence to Tauwhare, Hamilton and Hukanui – 'a long and tedious journey, prolonged by tangis and the consumption of the funeral baked meats,' Cowan wrote.[3] He estimated the funeral cortege at 900, all Ngati Maniapoto, with a bodyguard of men dressed in New Zealand Wars-style fighting costume, 'stripped naked, except for a shawl or a sheet round their loins, feathers in their hair, and cartouche-boxes slung round their waists':

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[1] Cowan, 'Tangi of King Tawhiao'.
[2] James Cowan, The Deceased King', Auckland Star, 22 Sep. 1894, 2.
[3] Cowan, 'The Deceased King'.

> As they advanced, firing their guns into the air at frequent intervals, the armed party were seen to number some 300 men, the rest of the party having their heads and bodies profusely entwined with green leaves, as a sign of mourning, the rear of the procession thus presenting the sight of a moving 'Forest of Dunsinane.' The cries of lamentation and the mournful notes of the 'Dead March in Saul,' played by the band as the procession moved slowly into the township, rendered the spectacle a most impressive one. Immediately behind the band came the coffin enclosing Tawhiao's body, borne by sixteen Maoris of Ngatimahuta, the late King's tribe. Beside his father's corpse walked Mahuta, an intelligent looking young man of about 28 years of age. Next came the armed men, in military array, eight deep, led on by Arakatare Rongowhitiao, a big and brawny Ngatiraukawa chief, attired only in a sheet and gesticulating with a whalebone mere. The hearse in which the corpse had been conveyed (Tawhiao's buggy) was brought on at the end of the procession.[1]

Cowan continued in this vein for several more paragraphs, covering a song of welcome by the Waikato tribe, the visitors' reply, a pressing of noses in welcome along with a weeping over the coffin, his writing alive with symbolism. For example, the gesticulating with a whalebone mere by Rongowhitiao while in the funeral procession involved hand movements important to Maori which had to be mentioned even if they could not be explained to a Pakeha readership without delving into an extended explanation of Maori custom.[2]

He also compared the march-past to a scene in a Shakespearian tragedy, 'the rest of the party having their heads and bodies profusely entwined with green leaves, as a sign of mourning'. This shuffling line of humanity swathed in greenery created the impression of a moving grove of small trees, he wrote, 'the rear of the procession thus presenting the sight of a moving "Forest of Dunsinane."'[3] Such a description was to give Europeans something that they could relate to in their own English lore, in this case a stanza from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In the play Macbeth is told that he will only be defeated

[1] Cowan, 'The Deceased King'.
[2] Cowan, 'The Deceased King'.
[3] Cowan, 'The Deceased King'.

when Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane, a hill in Perthshire, Scotland that he had built his fort upon. Macbeth replied, 'Bring me no more reports; let them fly all: / Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane / I cannot taint with fear.' At that very time of his utterance, an army seeking to depose Macbeth was passing through Birnam Wood, each soldier cutting a large branch to camouflage himself with, so that when they moved along as a column it looked as if Birnam Wood was actually on the move to Dunsinane, and Macbeth's potential downfall '(Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane / I cannot taint with fear').[1] That Cowan used a tragedy to draw his analogy from is probably not coincidental, for the whole procession conveyed a sense of finality.

As initially mentioned, Cowan's coverage was made a lot easier by firstly obtaining all the necessary permissions to cover the final ceremonies. Europeans who had not obtained special permission were expected to attend only on one particular day, for which a special train from Auckland had been booked, and dances and songs of welcome would be repeated in full costume.[2] No doubt Cowan wanted to put the debacle that took place at Parawera pa the previous month behind him and follow protocol to the umpteenth degree. To this end he was incredibly successful, the organisers even allowing him and an artist into the Maori camp where Tawhiao's body was lying in state, something which even the *Herald* correspondent was denied. 'There is quite an army of policemen under the control of three aboriginal "inspectors of police,"' Cowan wrote in one of his subsequent dispatches, noting that 'these native bobbies' wore coloured badges and carried sticks and were 'tremendously officious'. In a touch of irony, he however condoned their actions to prevent Europeans taking it upon themselves to go wherever they wanted:

> Until today, no European spectators were allowed to set foot inside the Maori camp whilst Tawhiao's remains were lying there. This law, which was made by the Kingite 'Committee,' chiefly, and wisely too, to prevent Europeans crowding in out of mere curiosity and spoiling the proceedings, was strictly carried out, and the only two Pakehas who succeeded in gaining admission to the enclosure were the *Star* reporter and the *Graphic* artist. Even this was not managed without much difficulty, and a series of amusing but annoying

[1] *Macbeth* (1606) act 5, scene 3, line 20.
[2] Cowan, 'The Deceased King'.

> encounters with the ubiquitous policemen. In the case of the two newspaper men, a concession was made by the assembled chiefs, but not until a solemn korero was held on the question, at which the whole of the people were present. … [P]ermission was accorded to the reporter and the artist to enter and do what they liked, much to the disgust of the policemen, who sadly wanted something or someone to 'run out.'[1]

The *Herald*'s Special Reporter also managed to get into the Maori camp 'for a little while', he wrote in his subsequent article, but he only had time for a hasty look around before being asked to leave. '[I]f I had been up on the Friday I might have had my name bracketed with the others, … though everything going on could be seen to far better advantage from the outside.'[2] Where his article did prove extremely useful, however, was in supplying another layer of explanation as to why Cowan was treated so harshly at Parawera pa the previous month. For the *Herald*'s Special Reporter wrote of a great aversion by Maori to Europeans taking photographs of 'the dead king':

> One reason for this is said to be that his followers are afraid, if a portrait is taken of Tawhiao, as he lies in his glass-covered cabin, witchcraft may ensue. Another reason given is that a camera somewhat resembles a dumpy level, being both mounted on a tripod, and thinking that the sight of a surveyor, with his instruments, means the taking away of their lands, so they imagine the object of the photographer is to take away from them Tawhiao's body.[3]

So here lay an answer to Cowan's treatment at Parawera, that, in Maori eyes, his attempt to sketch a portrait of Tawhiao while his body lay in state was tantamount to witchcraft. Further, the overall conclusion that could be taken from this was that both Special Reporters had shown in their articles that their role was not an easy one; it was often unpredictable and fraught with personal risk if they failed to observe Maori custom, impressions that they managed to convey to their readers.

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[1] James Cowan, 'The Taupiri Meeting', *Auckland Star*, 24 Sep. 1894, 3.
[2] 'Tawhiao's Tangi' (By our Special Reporter), *New Zealand Herald*, 24 Sep. 1894, 5.
[3] 'Tawhiao's Tangi', *New Zealand Herald*.

4.3 Cowan's bilingualism

An obvious requirement for Cowan's communication with Maori was his ability to speak Maori, for his work as a Maori Affairs reporter entailed entering some the last remaining Maori strongholds and to then establish a rapport, for which Cowan considered a mastery of the Maori tongue as 'indispensable' along with 'a diplomatic approach in the Maori manner'.[1] But just how unique was Cowan's ability to speak Maori in the mid-to-late nineteenth century? According to Jeffrey Holman, bilingualism was common for both races, at least in some regions. In his study of the ethnographer Elsdon Best in *Best of Both Worlds* (2010), Holman referred to Best's childhood while he was growing up in the 1860s near Wellington, where 'everyday bilingualism' seemed to be the typical experience:

> Here in the bustle of frontier commerce, surrounded by Maori speakers and almost certainly a number of Pakeha who had learned the language, he encountered the everyday bilingualism that existed in rural areas until at least the end of the century – a state of affairs mothered for Pakeha and Maori by commercial and political necessity. […] Along with his relationships with Maori children, this situation presented the growing Best with a social norm: it was natural to be bilingual. It was necessary not only for adults, but also for him to communicate with his Maori mates, most of whom would have had little English at that time, before the enforced learning they experienced later in the Native School system.[2]

Here, I suggest that the everyday bilingualism encountered by Best boiled down to how much a Maori and Pakeha needed to know of each other's language in order to get by in daily life. Holman's belief was that bilingualism might have been pervasive but I suggest that it was probably only to a certain middling level of proficiency. In contrast, Cowan needed to understand the intricacies of Maoridom and accurately communicate it to *Star* readers on a regular basis. In two early books he attempted as sideline projects while still at the *Star* (a tourist guide and a descriptive catalogue of Maori portraits painted by Gottfried Lindauer), he incorporated Maori history and traditions, but

[1] James Cowan, 'On the History Trail', *Railways Magazine*, Sept. 1938, 17.
[2] Jeffrey Holman, *The Best of Both Worlds: The Story of Elsdon Best and Tutakangahau* (Auckland: Penguin, 2010), 40.

according to David Colquhoun, such work later led Elsdon Best to privately complain about Cowan's 'facile' translations and 'very ordinary knowledge of the Maori tongue'.[1]

So, what was behind Best's misgivings about Cowan's translations? In later years Best would become renowned as a chronicler of 'the Maori as he was', along with S. Percy Smith, the two founding the Polynesian Society in 1892. But for most of the time Cowan resided in a completely different literary sphere to Best and Smith, who were pursuing the 'scholarly interests of ethnologists', according to historian Peter Gibbons, while Cowan's direction was 'the more *popular* celebration of Maori subjects as a basis for a distinctive New Zealand literature' [my italics].[2] Michael Belgrave also considered Cowan's historical work 'a literary or artistic task', for which he aligned himself with the likes of Charles Goldie and Gottfried Lindauer – artists who painted Maori subjects and rose to prominence at the turn of the twentieth century – all the while still admiring the efforts of Best and Edward Tregear as 'salvage ethnologists'.[3]

Although Best regularly wrote newspaper articles, the main media he targeted were the journals of the two learned societies, the Polynesian Society and the New Zealand Philosophical Society (later called the New Zealand Institute). Best positioned his material as the last word in ethnographic studies of 'the Maori as he was' and his work would be published by Wellington's Dominion Museum in an ornate collection of eleven matching volumes. In comparison, although Cowan wrote occasionally for the learned society journals from 1901 while still at the *Star*, his main target media was newspapers, a conduit that did not necessarily demand the slow and steady depths that Best was plumbing. It must have therefore been frustrating for Best to see Cowan's journalism becoming a popular if not dominant conduit to the public on all things Maori, creating a received popular conception of Maoridom in the process, hence Best's outburst at Cowan's 'facile' translations. But as a working journalist, Cowan had to return from several days' journeying with *something* to write about or he would not have lasted very long.

Be that as it may, for Chris Hilliard, being bilingual was not the rarest of skills for a Pakeha in the 1870s, 'as the size of the Polynesian Society's active

[1] Colquhoun, 'Cowan, James', *DNZB*, 3: 120b.
[2] P. J. Gibbons, 'Non-fiction' in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* ([1991] edited by Terry Sturm. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998), 62–63.
[3] Michael Belgrave, 'James Cowan: Autobiographical Historian and Traveller in Time', *The Journal of New Zealand Studies* (NS19, 2015): 56.

membership indicates'. For Hilliard, what *was* distinctive about Cowan was not his bilingualism but the period he was studying. Most Pakeha researchers at the time were looking for Maori ancestral knowledge in the period before the arrival of the British; in comparison Cowan's focus was on 'the tense interactions of the following decades'. He was studying different eras in Maori history, which meant that there was no significant overlap with other researchers, Hilliard wrote: 'If there were other historians investigating the recent past, they did not publish their findings anywhere as much or as prominently as Cowan did.'[1]

4.4 Conclusion: an argument realized

Some sixteen years after Tawhiao's tangi was published in the *Star*, an edited version of it appeared in one of Cowan's first major books, *The Maoris of New Zealand* (1910) as part of its final chapter. His newspaper accounts of the tangi had now morphed into recent history, for in some of the book's chapters one can observe him converting his *Star* reportage into an all-encompassing history of Maori until the end of the nineteenth century, the final chapter in particular a condensed version of 'The Deceased King', his *Star* article covering the funeral procession at Taupiri.

Cowan was however not republishing without direction or planning. *The Maoris of New Zealand* reveals Cowan as an interpreter of New Zealand on a much wider platform, for not only was it his largest attempt to date to make the world of Maoridom accessible to the general reader, it made a fitting platform for an argument he had formed about nineteenth century Maori. By then he had already published four books, two of them while still working for the *Star* and two while working for the Department of Tourist and Health Resorts between 1903 and 1909. But what set *The Maoris of New Zealand* apart from his earlier attempts was that it represented a step up in its level of prestige, Cowan being invited to contribute to an international series called 'The Makers of Australasia' with volumes being written in New Zealand and Australia. Further, editing the series was James Hight, New Zealand's first acknowledged academic historian. The hardback certainly was one of the more finely crafted efforts for the period, published by Whitcombe and Tombs and bound in a

[1] Chris Hilliard, 'Stories of an Era Not Yet So Very Remote: James Cowan in and out of New Zealand History', *The Journal of New Zealand Studies,* (NS19, 2015): 30.

crimson marbled leather-look finish (though possibly vinyl) with gold embossing.

So why did Cowan choose to reuse 'The Deceased King' some sixteen years later for *The Maoris of New Zealand*? To properly answer that question, one has to go to his main argument in the book's opening chapter, in which he recorded several meetings with Hau-auru, 'the West Wind'. Cowan first met the rangatira in 1885 while still living at Orakau and would later use his meetings with Hau-auru to open his personal argument that, amongst other things, *The Maoris of New Zealand* was recording meetings with the last of a generation who typified the Old New Zealand type of Maori. 'Decidedly a more interesting type, that blanketed tattoo-spiralled old warrior,' he wrote of Hau-auru, 'than the present generation of Maori rangatira, who as often as not wears tailor-made clothes of the latest pattern, has a piano and a graphophone in his European-built house, is proud of his break of billiards, and whirls to the races in a motor-car.' In contrast, for Cowan, Hau-auru typified 'the splendid dying manhood of his people':

> Born in the New Zealander's Stone Age, he survived to near the end of the miracle-working white man's nineteenth century, flotsam of the primitive world stranded on the shores of modern progress – "like an old canoe", to use his own image. Well I remember that tattooed patriarch, the head-chief of his little clan, the Ngati-Matakore, though it is more than twenty years since I last saw him.[1]

For Cowan, Hau-auru (or Hauauru) reinforced his argument that a distinctive era of Maori was passing away, and its symbolic endpoint was the tangi for Tawhiao. When the funeral cortege had slowly wound its way up Taupiri Mountain to Tawhiao's gravesite amid a massed wailing, the stamping of feet, the firing of guns and the letting off of explosives, for Cowan, these rituals marked 'the final passing away of the restless ancient order', and with the old King 'there died too the futile forty-year-old dream of an independent Maori kingdom'.[2] His newspaper series and subsequent book had followed the

[1] Cowan, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, 7.
[2] Cowan, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, 348.

ceremonial path to Tawhiao's burial site over a course of sixteen years and created an end-point for his argument in the process.

Not all historians however shared Cowan's view that the end of nineteenth century had signalled the end of a great class of warrior. For Michael King, such a view was limiting on several counts. Firstly, it sentimentalised early Maori life to the point of unreality, he wrote in 1983, for it suggested to outsiders 'that everything worthwhile about Maori life lay in the past and soon would be lost irretrievably.'[1] For King, Cowan tended to overly-romanticise the end of 'Old New Zealand':

> In the role he defined for himself Cowan was far more interested in the distant past than in the more recent past or than in the Maori present; in Tawhiao rather than Te Puea; in Te Kooti rather than Rua Kenana. All this is a matter of some regret in as much as he was a witness to events that would be of vital interest to a later generation of historians, and he had access to informants who could have articulated objectives and tactics related to the survival of the Maori race and culture. But Cowan at his time, like Elsdon Best, tended to equate Maori adaptation with pollution of a formerly pure stream of culture.[2]

King however fails to take account of the fact that Cowan's fulltime work with the *Star* had come to an end in 1902 and he had moved to Wellington to work on other projects for other employers. That era of observing the last of Old New Zealand in the Central North Island – a Maori stronghold – had come to an end. He was no longer in regular touch with his Maori contacts in that region, either because they had passed away or their paths were no longer crossing as regularly as when he worked from Auckland, when the *Star*'s territory coincided with the abodes of his old Maori contacts. Further, he had such rich newspaper records of his *Star* period which, when combined with the sheer scale of Tawhiao's tangi and the unfettered access he was given to record it, the event had left an indelible impression on him. It was the most remarkable Maori funeral – or 'tangihanga' – he had ever seen, he wrote in 'The

[1] Michael King, 'Introduction' in *The New Zealand Wars.* [1922] by James Cowan (2 vols. Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1983), 1: viii.
[2] King, 'Introduction' in *The New Zealand Wars,* 1: viii.

Tangi' in *The Maoris of New Zealand*, for here were being witnessed 'probably for the last time on such a scale, some thrilling pictures of old Maoridom.'[1]

The 'writerly' style of Cowan's *Star* articles meant that they could easily morph into a book at a later date if need be. Indeed, Cowan could have been using his articles at times to experiment with different ways of treating a story. For his coverage of the two tangis mentioned in this chapter clearly demonstrate a change in writing style, his first article from Parawera a much more informal piece, and more specifically targeting a Pakeha readership than his later series of articles from Taupiri. One could conject that the *Star* gave him a latitude in his writing not tolerated in those undertaking more conventional reporting rounds, suggesting that Cowan was considered as a feature writer. For as early as 1855 the feature article was emerging as a 'distinctive or prominent article or item' in newspapers and magazines, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*.[2] Any mention of Cowan as a feature writer is not apparent in his *Star* articles, but his 'Special Reporter' byline signals a certain affinity with the *Dictionary*'s description of the feature article as 'distinctive'.

[1] Cowan, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, 348.
[2] Simpson & Weiner, eds. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 5: 790c.

5
The Star Years, Part III:
The Hokianga Dog Tax Rebellion, A Case Study
1898

'If dogs were to be taxed, men would be next.'

Hone Toia, 1890s

In May 1898 Cowan was assigned as a 'Special Reporter' to cover an event which was rapidly unfolding around Hokianga Harbour, about 250 kilometres north of Auckland. The event is remembered as the Hokianga Dog Tax Rebellion and this chapter discusses Cowan's dispatches written during the rebellion in the context of their being 'a first rough draft of history' – a term sometimes given to journalists' copy in recognition of the historical value of their coverage. '[M]y mission was to report events for the *Auckland Star* and the Press Association,' Cowan later recalled, 'a job that kept me in the Hokianga country for a fortnight.'[1] His dispatches covered a peak in the crisis between 3–13 May 1898, and were sent via telegraph, which usually made them capable of a being published within 24 hours of being sent, barring Sundays.

So, how does that coverage help gauge Cowan's significance as a journalist? To answer that question, there are three points to consider. Firstly, the fact that he was writing for the Press Association as well as his parent paper suggests that he was chosen for the dual roles in recognition of his value as a Special Reporter. His bilingualism could have been seen as a distinct advantage over non-Maori speaking journalists covering the rebellion. For according to Jennifer Ashton in *At the Margin of Empire* (2015), a biography of prominent Hokianga settler John Webster, although the ability to speak Maori might have been considered a novelty in the homes of Auckland in the 1890s, 'on the streets of Rawene it was still heard on a daily basis, and it was still being used as a language of trade.'[2] Secondly, addressing a national audience lifted the prestige of his coverage above that of any other individual reporter covering the rebellion, even if it meant that he tended to write more general summaries

[1] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 43: John Webster, Of Hokianga', *Railways Magazine*, Oct. 1936, 17.
[2] Jennifer Ashton, *At the Margin of Empire: John Webster and Hokianga, 1841–1900* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2015), 184. Principal historian for this chapter.

of what took place in contrast to the more parochial coverage by the *New Zealand Herald*, which also had reporters covering the rebellion but was targeting an Auckland readership.

A third reason why Cowan's coverage can be deemed important for gauging his significance as a journalist is because his coverage of this highly politicised event could be considered a classic example of what is known as an 'early rough draft of history'. Being identified as a writer of such material holds an appeal for journalists, writes Jack Shafer in the online *Slate* magazine (2010): '*First*, *rough* and *draft* all have separate and distinct meanings, yet they all point to a morning greenness, a raw beginning where truth originates.' For Shafer, the phrase is appropriate on emotional and intellectual levels. When grouped together, 'these single-syllable words fall like hammer blows driving a nail. The formulation is so perfect.'[1]

Further, for Howard H. Baker, Jr., Baker, who was vice-chairman of the United States Senate Watergate Committee, the search for truth 'is a much more ambitious and profound pursuit than the mere accumulation of facts, even when assembled with the most stringent accuracy':

> Journalists, who produce what the late *Washington Post* publisher Philip Graham called 'the first rough draft of history', know better than anyone that their daily reporting is incomplete, that the truth of a matter emerges more slowly than a newspaper deadline demands, that it is best to avoid the pretense of omniscience when so much remains obscured from view.[2]

Baker's comment that 'it is best to avoid the pretense of omniscience when so much remains obscured from view' is especially relevant for Cowan's coverage of the Dog Tax Rebellion considering that for much of the time he accompanied a government military force sent to quell the rebellion. Staying with the force gave him access to the front line, but there were obvious limitations on what he saw or heard due to a degree of restricted movement in a war zone. In order to keep up the momentum of daily reports, however, he

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[1] Jack Shafer, 'Who Said It First: "Journalism is the First Draft of History"' *Slate* magazine, 30 Aug. 2010. Accessed 10 July 2018:
www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/press_box/2010/08/who_said_it_first.html

[2] Howard H. Baker, Jr. 'Foreword' in *Journalism and Truth* by Tom Goldstein (Medill School of Journalism. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), ix–x. Baker was vice-chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee.

had to go with whatever material he had managed to accumulate even if it felt incomplete to him. Further, the angle of any report was heavily dependent on where he was positioned at the time. Take for example his coverage of an incident at Waima Pass during the rebellion, which is discussed later in this chapter. A *New Zealand Herald* reporter was also accompanying the column, the two reporters occupying different positions in the column, which meant that they noticed and reported on different aspects of the same event.

Fortunately, the *Star*'s supporting coverage of Cowan's dispatches was extensive, the newspaper receiving input from multiple sources including a local correspondent (or stringer), editorials, statements from the police, Maori chiefs and local dignitaries, and announcements from the Parliamentary debating chamber. Decisions on the rebellion were being made as much in Wellington as they were on the ground due to the spread of telegraph, for by 1891 the telegraph had reached as far as Omapere on the south side of Hokianga Harbour and Kohukohu on the north side.[1]

The advantage of the telegraph was its speed in sending messages, which increased the likelihood of one's newspaper story appearing in the next edition. For getting around nineteenth century Northland and Auckland often required using several means of transport on any one trip, including, horses, trains or steamers. 'Far more than any other province, Auckland lived by a fleet of little coasters, for railways were few and short, and roads were bad – in winter horrible,' former *Star* journalist Alan Mulgan wrote in his 1958 memoir *The Making of a New Zealander*, Mulgan having lived in Auckland from the 1890s.[2] The best way to get to Hokianga, *Murray's Handbook for Travellers* (1893) advised, was to take a steamer from Auckland to Whangarei and then across the island by a combination of rail and coach in order to connect with a river steamer at Herd's Point, located at an inner reach of Hokianga Harbour. One could return south along the West Coast and back to Auckland by train if desired, but it first involved hiring horses for a 25-mile ride from Omapere at the head of Hokianga Harbour and following a trail through forest and along the beach to reach a railhead at Opanaki in time for the afternoon train.[3]

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[1] Malcolm McKinnon, ed. *New Zealand Historical Atlas* (Auckland: David Bateman, 1997), Plate 52.
[2] Alan Mulgan, *The Making of a New Zealander* (Wellington: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1958), 47.
[3] F. W. Pennefather, *A Handbook for Travellers in New Zealand*, (London: John Murray, 1893), Routes: Route 2, 8–9.

The current chapter, then, attempts to consider Cowan's dispatches as an 'early first rough draft of history' by dividing the chapter into several parts. The first part sets the background to the Dog Tax Rebellion, for it is important to put the rebellion into a wider context before the conflict started to escalate and sides had to be taken. The second part of the chapter follows Cowan as an eyewitness reporter from when he first landed at Rawene. It focuses on his dispatches in order to eventually decide in the conclusion if they met the criteria of being 'a first rough draft of history', which would raise their value beyond being just another news story. Another part of the chapter looks at how Cowan made use of his dispatches for later interpretations of the uprising.

5.1 Background to the rebellion

On Friday, 29 April 1898, a few days before Cowan arrived in Hokianga, the *Star* published an article with the startling headline 'Armed Hauhaus Assemble Near Rawene', the article based on information sent by a local constable. Rawene lay on the southern shore of Hokianga Harbour and was a regional centre. It had a courthouse, telegraph office and a substantial jetty that afforded passage to Kohukohu on the northern side of the harbour, to which the European residents of Rawene had fled in alarm, the article said. Their hasty departure was because some Maori living near Rawene were threatening a 'hostile demonstration' upon the township, the second demonstration at Rawene in two years by the same group, who had carried loaded weapons the previous time. The reason behind the latest planned demonstration was because 'a number of the Rawene natives have recently been served with summonses for refusing to pay the dog tax,' the article said: 'The Maori seems to have a rooted hatred of the dog tax, and to be summonsed for non-payment is apparently a cross he will not bear in silence.'[1]

The dog tax was introduced in Hokianga District in 1892.[2] According to historian Richard Hill in his book *The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove: The Modernisation of Policing in New Zealand, 1886–1917* (1995), Maori tended to own many dogs for hunting wild pigs, a staple of their diet, and the dog tax was meant to induce local Maori to keep fewer dogs in order to prevent runholders' sheep and cattle from being menaced by them: 'Many Maori had

[1] 'Armed Hauhaus Assemble Near Rawene', *Auckland Star,* 29 Apr. 1898, 3 (no author).
[2] Ashton, *At the Margin of Empire*, 188.

no intention of altering their lifestyle,' Hill added, 'and since they had only partially integrated into the cash economy, they saw the tax as discriminatory as well as oppressive.' A campaign opposing it became 'a symbolic rallying point for a number of Maori resistance struggles.'[1]

But what was the Hauhau connection with the Hokianga demonstrators? Why did the *Star* use such a sensationalistic headline as 'Armed Hauhaus Assemble Near Rawene'? For the word 'Hauhau' is loaded with negative connotations surrounding Maori fanaticism, the *Dictionary of New Zealand English* tracing its origin to 1864 where it was attributed to the militant section of Pai Marire, a Maori religious movement that sprang up during the New Zealand Wars.[2] For the *Star* article suggested a possible link between the Rawene demonstrators and another Northland group suspected of indulging in ritual cannibalism, which had also been adopted by a Hauhau sub-tribe during the Taranaki Wars of the 1860s:

> The Hauhau fanaticism has at various times manifested itself amongst the native there, though there has been no trouble except on one occasion, some twelve years ago, when an affray took place between a force of police and the riotous Maoris at Waihou when a considerable number of natives were arrested and some of the police were hurt. These natives had been accused by the other Maoris of burning the body of a child who had died and of eating the heart or some portion of it. This was the last serious row in the North, but the most-friendly of the Maoris have always protested over the dog tax.'[3]

A second major running story in the *Star* that week was about the Spanish-American War in Cuba, which appeared on the same page as the article about the Rawene demonstration. Militancy was in the air, and it does not take a huge leap of faith to suspect that the Hokianga uprising represented to some a localized version of the Spanish-American War, and that it could escalate unless the government took some decisive action. 'War fever is proverbially infectious, and one is not surprised to hear that some of the Maoris have caught it,' the *Star* said in its 'Armed Hauhaus …' article: 'It is thought that unless the

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[1] Richard S. Hill, *The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove: The Modernisation of Policing in New Zealand, 1886–1917* (Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore Press, 1995), 134.
[2] H. Orsman, ed. *The Dictionary of New Zealand English* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1997), 358.
[3] 'Armed Hauhaus Assemble near Rawene'.

native disturbance at Hokianga soon passes over, a force of Permanent Artillery, and police from Auckland, will be sent up there to restore order.'[1]

Meanwhile, fear of an all-out war between Europeans and Maori had spread south along the West Coast as far as Dargaville, a timber-milling town on the banks of the Wairoa River 105 kilometres south of Rawene. At the time, a twelve-year-old boy named George Campbell was gathering a particular kind of fungus close to Wairoa River. He sold the fungus to a merchant in Auckland for shipping to China as an ingredient for a very rich soup. Suddenly he heard 'an ear-piercing noise' and became 'paralysed with fear, certain that the world had come to an end,' he recalled in his memoir *The Golden North: Growing Up In The Northern Wairoa* (1963). He looked through a gap in the trees and saw a 'warship' going north up the river at high tide. The ship's siren was sounding, and the surrounding wildlife reacted by stampeding into the bush:

> I reached home in record time to find all the family excited over the incident. It seems it was the *Tutanekai* with troops aboard going to Dargaville and the war with the Maoris had started. When my father arrived home from work he said he had seen the warship and that troops were to march overland to Hokianga. He expected that within a week they would be at war. My mother wanted to keep us all home from school and planned to move to Aratapu and there get passage on a ship to Auckland out of the danger zone.[2]

The *Tutanekai* was owned by the Marine Department and was undergoing the duties of a coastal trader. The vessel may have been dropping off a small force of soldiers at Dargaville, as George's father suspected, but was also collecting 6,000 railway sleepers from one of the timber mills lining the Wairoa River.[3] By sounding its siren, the *Tutanekai* was most likely warning the mill of its imminent arrival. The Campbell family's conjecture surrounding the incident however shows how easily hearsay can escalate fears in the absence of regular and balanced news reports.[4]

George Campbell's recollections are also valuable in helping reveal the extent which the Hokianga disturbance was having on the river region. There

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[1] 'Armed Hauhaus Assemble Near Rawene'.
[2] George L. Campbell, *The Golden North: Growing Up In The Northern Wairoa* (Auckland: Paul's Book Arcade, 1963), 29, 34–35.
[3] 'The *Tutanekai* From Hokianga', *Auckland Star*, 16 May 1898, 2 (no author).
[4] 'The Maori Prisoners', *Auckland Star*, 13 May 1898, 5.

were two Maori settlements close to where Campbell lived, and he wrote that there was a strong bond of kinship between Hokianga Maori and the Maori workers in the local timber mills or on the boats plying the Wairoa River. 'My father said the Government of that time levied taxes on Maori land which the Maoris were determined not to pay,' he wrote. 'They would rather die fighting than pay. Troops were being mustered in Auckland. Everybody was afraid of being affected by the war, and people were leaving the Hokianga district and coming down to Dargaville. My mother was very worried as we were right on the main road.'[1]

A further point to be drawn from Campbell's memoir is that local Maori had told his father that the main cause of any dispute was a tax on Maori land, not the dog tax, which only appeared to be 'the last straw' in a long-running discord over increased costs for Maori ever since the creation of county councils in 1875. After that date local infrastructure had to be paid for from local taxes, and in 1892 Hokianga District Council introduced a dog tax to control a dog problem followed by a wheel tax in the same year as the rebellion to pay for the upkeep of roads. If Maori failed to pay, a debt could be lodged against their land, debts which would be claimed back once the block was eventually sold (this clause was later dropped as being far too discriminatory).[2]

Individuals now needed to have an income to pay for local taxes, and a census taken in 1896 – which showed that 1,909 Pakeha outnumbered 1,829 Maori in Hokianga District – helps explain why this was proving so difficult for Maori: The major wage-earning industry in the 1890s was kauri felling and milling, and the mainly European owners of the timber mills tended to favour European employees, Jennifer Ashton wrote in *At the Margin of Empire*, and any perceived European bias against Maori as employees had a knock-on effect in hampering their ability to pay their share of rates, disaffected Maori having to resort to the less lucrative kauri gum-fields for an income stream. 'These combined pressures to earn cash in order to pay rates and other debts and avoid the need to sell land became central concerns,' Ashton wrote. 'They also became a recurring theme in the relationship between Maori and the Crown as the economic benefits that many Maori had expected to flow from collaboration with both the Crown and settlers failed to materialize.'[3]

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[1] Campbell, *The Golden North*, 34.
[2] Ashton, *At the Margin of Empire*, 186–88.
[3] Ashton, *At the Margin of Empire*, 186–88.

From 1896 until 1898 simmering grievances amongst Hokianga Maori escalated into a 'campaign of civil obedience', Paul Moon wrote, which included the hunting of birds out of season by Maori 'without any effort at concealment'.[1] For another historian, Ian McGibbon, what was about to take place at Hokianga was merely one of a number of occasions in the late nineteenth century when military force was used to police dissident Maori communities: 'When in April 1898 Maori at Waima, near Hokianga, indicated that future attempts to enforce the tax would be resisted, there were fears among the local non-Maori population of a full-scale rebellion,' and Premier Richard Seddon ordered troops to the area under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Stuart Newall.[2]

The Government steamer *Hinemoa* arrived at Rawene on May 2 with 90 men aboard under Newell. The *Girlock* arrived shortly afterwards with 30 soldiers, followed by HMS *Torch* with a detachment of sailors. 'Thus equipped, this warlike ensemble of seven constables, 120 men and their officers, a machine-gun and a squad of sailors, together with a small fleet of vessels, prepared for battle with the "rebels,"' Jack Lee wrote in *Hokianga* (1987).[3]

On the same day as the troops arrived at Rawene, an editorial in the *Herald* attempted to supply some context by pointing out that the dog tax, which cost two shillings and sixpence (2/6) per dog per year, 'is insisted upon chiefly as a means of compelling the natives to keep fewer curs about their settlements than they have been in the habit of doing.' The editorial added that it sympathised with the enforcement of this tax because it was 'the chief cause of Maoris being bad neighbours to Europeans':

> Every Maori settlement has a pack of mongrels about it. The natives do not feed these dogs. They are left to get their living from the offal they can pick up around the kainga, and from occasionally killing a sheep or calf belonging to a settler. A farmer has no redress. It is seldom he can get a chance of shooting a dog in the act of worrying his sheep, and when he complains to the Maoris he finds he has no remedy. We have heard of cases in which Europeans have had to abandon their holdings simply because they found it impossible to farm

[1] Paul Moon, *Ngapua: The Political Life of Hone Heke Ngapua, MHR* (Auckland: David Ling, 2006), 181.
[2] Ian McGibbon, ed. (*The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000), 148.
[3] Jack Lee, *Hokianga* (Auckland: Reed Books, 1987), 242.

in proper style with a pack of starved dogs about them, chasing and worrying stock.[1]

An important point here is that the dog menacing problem was not necessarily only a Maori problem; Pakeha owners could also expect punishment if they lost control of their dogs. On 3 May 1898 a typical court case arising from the dog problem played out during a court session at Paparoa (Kaipara District Council), 51 kilometres southeast of Dargaville. A dog owner named Mr B. Kane sought damages when his dog was seized and destroyed by a farmer, the *Northern Advocate* reported. During the hearing the presiding judge cited a previous Supreme Court hearing which outlined the only times when a farmer could legally destroy trespassing dogs:

1.) When the dog was found 'attacking or running at large amongst his stock, but in such case the dog must be killed while actually attacking or running at large and could not be seized and destroyed afterwards.'
2.) When 'the landowner found on his land a dog without a collar for the current year, and in such case the landowner might seize the dog and destroy it after detention.'

In this case the dog was found worrying sheep in a paddock which a farmer was leasing from a neighbour, who caught the dog and tied it up. The dog had not been registered for that current year and the farmer later removed it to his own property and destroyed it. The dog owner sought thirty pounds (£30) for the loss of his dog, but the farmer counter-sued for the damage the dog did to his sheep and was awarded twenty-eight pounds (£28) plus five pound fifteen shillings (£5/15–) in court costs.[2]

And thus, the scene was set for a comparatively 'modern' war in the aspect of publicity, as the expansion of the telegraph meant that the rebellion could be manipulated as much by politicians based in Wellington as by the military on the ground due to quick turnaround times for the sharing of information. For example, in responding to the imminent march upon Rawene by the 'Hauhau' demonstrators, the Hon. A. J. Cadman had told the *Herald*'s

[1] 'The Native Disturbance at Hokianga', *New Zealand Herald*, 3 May 1898 (no author).
[2] 'Unregistered Dogs', *Northern Advocate*, 14 May 1898 (no author).

Wellington correspondent that '[t]he whole thing, according to the advices received by the Government, existed only in the fervid imagination of the local constable.'[1]

All the same, a 'recent visitor to the Hokianga district' later told the *Herald* that at the first indication of trouble, the children of Rawene school were sent home with a message to their parents 'to go to Kohukohu for their safety'. A steam launch came from Horeke further up the harbour and towed all available boats containing the women and children across the harbour to Kohukohu, 'where the residents threw their houses open for the reception of refugees'. A delegation subsequently spoke to the 'natives of Waipa' and returned with the advice that it was safe for the women and children to return. 'On the Hauhaus hearing of this they again threatened to burn and cut down everything in Rawene,' sending a message to that effect, the 'visitor' told the *Herald*. They even mentioned a time when a 200-strong force would descend upon the town: 'one o'clock on Sunday'. A second order to evacuate the town was then given, which took until three o'clock in the morning on the Sunday of the threatened demonstration.[2]

This is a highly coloured and distorted report of the actions of both sides. There was no evidence of a 200-strong force of Hauhaus capable of descending on the Rawene, but such an over-the-top threat by the 'natives of Waipa' was useful if it put enough pressure on Hokianga Council to reconsider the dog tax, along some of the other local Maori grievances. For the Rawene residents, the fear factor must have been high for them to evacuate the village twice, but it was logical that any demonstration would target Rawene because it was the regional centre with the local courthouse. The knock-on effect of the visitor's report to the *Herald* however was that it would help justify any action taken by the Government in retaliation.

5.2 Cowan's dispatches

Dateline: 3 May 1898, 'The Arrival of the Hinemoa*'*

On Tuesday, 3 May 1898 Cowan's first dispatch from Rawene was published in the *Star* with the words 'By Telegraph – Special Reporter' beneath the headline. The byline 'Special Reporter' helped to separate his coverage from

[1] 'Threatened Native Disturbance at Hokianga', *New Zealand Herald*, 30 Apr. 1898 (no author).
[2] 'The Rawene Native Difficulty', *New Zealand Herald*, 5 May 1898.

another reporter also writing for the *Star* under a byline of 'Own Correspondent' – most likely a stringer being paid for whatever copy he managed to get published.

Things at Rawene were still quiet, Cowan wrote in his dispatch. The main news was that the government steamer *Hinemoa* had arrived from Wellington with a military contingent on board. About 50 kilometres away by road, near Ohaewai, several 'friendly' Ngapuhi chiefs had been keeping tabs on the demonstrators. One of the 'friendlies', an 'influential' chief of Waima named Raniera Wharerau, had been trying to persuade the demonstrators to listen to reason, 'but could not do anything with them,' Cowan wrote.[1]

The main protagonist amongst the demonstrators was Hone Riiwi Toia (c. 1859–1933), the leader of a breakaway group of Wesleyans who held meetings once a month at different locations including the village of Waima, after which they would then discuss political matters. 'They wanted the right to live as Maori without interference, and to make use of their traditional resources as guaranteed by the Treaty of Waitangi,' Angela Ballara wrote in her profile of Toia for *the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, their specific grievances against the Government and local council being:

- the seasonal restrictions imposed on hunting native birds;
- a land tax on land held under Crown grant within five miles of a public road;
- a wheel tax on vehicles with a certain tyre width;
- the dog tax, under which local authorities issued owners with a licensed collar for each dog at two shillings and sixpence (2/6).

'It was probably during one of his night-time meetings that Hone Toia prophesied that if dogs were to be taxed, men would be next,' Ballara added.[2]

Within a week of arriving Cowan had however deduced that Toia and his followers were not Hauhaus as had been claimed by some of the Hokianga settlers. 'The name by which Toia and his followers are popularly known, that of Hauhau, is hardly a correct designation as they are not Hauhaus,' he wrote in a dispatch:

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[1] James Cowan, 'Arrival of the Hinemoa', *Auckland Star*, 3 May 1898, 4.
[2] Angela Ballara, 'Toia, Hone Riiwi' (*The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. 5 vols. Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1993–2000), 2: 542.

> The term by which the surrounding natives call them is 'Whiowhio,' or whistlers, from a whistling noise made by the alleged medium in their spiritualistic and ghostly seances. … The Maoris at Waima and adjacent districts have for some years past adopted the practice of calling on the spirits of departed members of the tribe and ancestors. In seances held at night in meeting houses, this practice, which is an old Maori one, is known as consulting 'Kehua', or ghosts. Ventriloquism on the part of the priests who carried out the services played an important part in these calling of spirits from the Maori Reinga. Hone Toia is said to be a ventriloquist and to have imposed on his people so successfully in the 'kehua' or 'whiowhio' business that he attained great influence over a section who were soon ready to do anything at his bidding. He had a keen eye to anything that would advance his prestige.[1]

Unfortunately, Toia and his followers appeared to have suffered the legacy of being associated with a spate of religious cults that had sprung up in the Hokianga and adjacent regions in the four years prior to the peak of the rebellion, some of which *did* adopt Hauhau practices. In *Mana From Heaven* (1989) a study of a century of Maori prophets in New Zealand, Bronwyn Elsmore identified three prophetesses from basically the same group of people who were operating in the Hokianga region and thereabouts 'attempting to formulate a new system of belief and worship' based on practices reminiscent of ancient Israelite communities gleaned from the Old Testament. Most of the reports about them were wildly exaggerated, Elsmore added, but some of the 'friendly' Maoris amused themselves by telling settlers what these so-called 'Hauhaus' had done or were planning.[2] Elsmore however identified elements which were initially part of the Pai Marire movement from amongst the philosophies of the three Maori prophetesses, including:

- the notion of the sacrifice of a child;
- the waiting for the appearance of the angel Gabriel to come and lead them;

[1] James Cowan, 'A Peaceful Termination', *Auckland Star*, 7 May 1898, 2.
[2] Bronwyn Elsmore, *Mana from Heaven: A Century of Maori Prophets in New Zealand* (Auckland: Reed, 1989), 280–81.

- that God would descend to share total knowledge with them;
- that they would be impervious to bullets, which was inspired by stories of divine intervention in books of the Old Testament available at the missions.[1]

'The links between the former movement and that of the new "Hauhaus" was therefore more than one of name only,' Elsmore wrote, 'In view of this, it is possible that rumours such as those regarding sacrifices were spread because of the expectations and fears of some outside the group, based on their knowledge of the former response.'[2]

Toia was not a member of any of these movements, but one can see how he and his followers could have been suspected of having links based on physical proximity and their growing annoyance at being economically disadvantaged by a Pakeha invasion of the Hokianga. The resistance to the dog tax was something to pivot around almost as akin to the ancient nui pole being used to inspire adherents to Pai Marire. The influence of Toia's cult reached its peak in 1897 and 1898, anthropologist P. W Hohepa wrote in his study of Waima village, 'because of the resentments engendered by the spread of the European settlers, the increasing competition of the gum lands and the enforcement of government-inspired legislation in Hokianga.' He added that by 1898 'little money was available; the gum fields were almost exhausted; timber milling had declined' and local Maori were vehemently opposed to selling their land to pay for their predicament.[3]

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Meanwhile, news of the rebellion had reached as far as Australia, and on Thursday, 5 May 1898 the *Star* had received a cable from the Victorian Premier, who had apparently been asked to send it by a former Hokianga resident named Hereward Hauraki Maning. 'To the principle disaffected Maoris,' the cable began. 'Stop that trouble at Rawene. Let the Government carry out the laws for the people. That work of agitation is foolish work. That is all. From Hauraki Maning, Melbourne.'[4] Presumably Maning considered that he had sufficient right to give an opinion from Australia as his mother, Moengaroa,

[1] Elsmore, *Mana from Heaven*, 282–83.
[2] Elsmore, *Mana from Heaven*, 283.
[3] P. W. Hohepa, *A Maori Community in Northland* (Wellington: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1964), 47, 49.
[4] Hereward Hauraki Maning, 'Stop That Trouble', cable, *Auckland Star*, 5 May 1898, 5.

was Ngapuhi and the tribe was centred in the Hokianga region. His father was Frederick E. Maning, who was once prominent in the region as an early trader and later a Native Land Court judge.[1] Premier Seddon was informed about the cable before it was published, an article accompanying the cable said, such diplomatic manoeuvring possibly suggesting an attempt to allay any accusation of interference in New Zealand affairs by another country.[2]

Dateline: 5 May 1898, 'Fanatical Natives Remain Obdurate'

Two days after sending his first dispatch from Rawene, Cowan sent a second dispatch in which he reported that a number of friendly Maoris had gathered at Rawene including several high-ranking Ngapuhi chiefs. They were being frequently consulted by officials to try and induce Hone Toia's people to lay down their arms, as their actions reflected on the 'good conduct and loyalty of the Ngapuhi people', who the Waima section of the rebels were related to.[3]

Cowan's dispatch also mentioned that news had arrived from Waima that some of those under arms were 'disposed to comply with the request of the Government to submit' but had asked what conditions would be imposed. The message was passed on to Wellington; a quick reply stated that only one outcome was possible: an unconditional surrender.[4]

To help lighten the tension, a gunner in the Permanent Artillery 'enlivened Rawene with his skill on the bagpipes,' Cowan wrote, adding that it was suggested (in a slightly derogatory way) that the piper should be sent out to put the Maoris to rout by playing 'Cock o' the North', but those in command did not take the hint.[5] This rousing Scottish jig became famous in military history as a rallying cry at the Siege of Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. As the story goes, a drummer boy from the Ninety-Third Gordon Highlanders was trapped inside Lucknow and noticed the approach of other divisions of his regiment attempting to relieve the besieged garrison. Under heavy fire, he climbed a spire and played 'Cock o' the North' on a bugle to spur the regiment

[1] David Colquhoun, 'Maning, Frederick Edward' (*The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. 5 vols. Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1993–2000), 1: 265–66.
[2] Maning, 'Stop That Trouble'.
[3] James Cowan, 'Fanatical Natives Remain Obdurate', *Auckland Star*, 5 May 1898, 2.
[4] Richard Homes, *Soldiers: Army Lives and Loyalties from Redcoats to Dusty Warriors* (New York: Harper Press, 2011), 275.
[5] Cowan, 'Fanatical Natives Remain Obdurate'.

on.[1] And so two legends were born, one for the tune and one for the drummer boy, who appeared to be just as dexterous with the bugle.

Of course, it is doubtful if Maori knew the legend of Lucknow, so they would have had little to fear from the sound of bagpipes emanating from Rawene. But when the two Nordenfeldt field guns were brought out for drills at various ranges, which could throw a shell 4,000 yards, plus the two Maxim machine guns with their range of 2,000 yards, they 'greatly impressed the native spectators', Cowan wrote.[2]

Dateline: 6 May 1898, 'Government Force At Waima'

On Friday, 6 May, Cowan's third dispatch from Rawene was published under the headline 'Government Force At Waima'. It carried the news that Lieutenant-Colonel Newall's force had entered Waima Pass on their way to Waima to carry out instructions from Wellington to end the Maori rebellion. The pass consisted of a steep-sided gorge on the road between Rawene and Waima, and a reconnoitre of the planned route the previous day had noted that the gorge would make an ideal setting for an ambush if such a tactic was being considered. Before setting out, Newall had ordered all guns loaded, including the Maxim machine guns, and gave instructions regarding the procedure to be followed if they were had to skirmish in the bush.[3] The following extended segment is taken directly from Cowan's dispatch regarding the showdown in the pass:

> The force left Omanaia at 2.30, the outpost and advanced guard being sent out, followed by one of the Maxim guns. Then came the main body, followed by the rear-guard under Captain Coyle, with the other Maxim ready for action. Behind that the ambulance came with the orthodox Red Cross flag, which was borrowed from H.M.S. *Torch*. The Rev. Messrs. Gittos and Cowie accompanied the force, the latter on foot. Mr. John Webster, a veteran colonist, well acquainted with the Hokianga Maoris, also accompanied the force, as also did Mr. Geo. Brown, native interpreter, and another interpreter.

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[1] Richard Homes, *Soldiers: Army Lives and Loyalties from Redcoats to Dusty Warriors* (New York: Harper Press, 2011), 275.
[2] Cowan, 'Fanatical Natives Remain Obdurate'.
[3] James Cowan, 'Government Force At Waima', *Auckland Star*, Friday, 6 May 1898, 5.

As the force left Omanaia Valley and began to ascend the fern and bush-clad hills which lay between Omanaia and the Waima Valley the officers saw that everything was in readiness in case of surprise, especially as it became known that a number of Maoris belonging to Hone Toia's section (the Mahurehure) were posted in the bush ready to fire.

The road was a winding one, cut out of the side of a hill. Danger was apprehended from the left-hand side of the track, which rose abruptly above the road, and afforded excellent facilities for an ambuscade on the part of Maoris if such had been seriously contemplated. As the force ascended the hill a keen look-out was kept for Toia's scouts, but none were seen. About half-past 4 o'clock, as the rear-guard were passing a steep cutting, surrounded by thick fern and bush, they were startled by two rifle shots in quick succession, fired from the bush.

The riflemen could not be seen, but one of the balls was said by Captain Coyle and others in the party to have distinctly whizzed over the heads of the rear-guard conveying the Maxim gun. The shots were evidently fired over the force as a threat, or else as a signal to Waima, though many thought they were fired directly at the men.

Just after this incident, which created some excitement, as the men thought the Maoris were firing on them, two of Toia's followers appeared on horseback. They explained that they had been sent out by Toia on receipt of Colonel Newall's message to order the natives in the bush to return to the village and not to fire on the soldiers.

No more shots were heard, but all hands were on the alert, with arms ready, till the end of the bush was reached, which was about a mile further on. Captain Coyle, in command of the rear-guard, made preparations to return the fire if any native showed himself in the bush, and took up a carbine himself. However, the Maoris obeyed Toia's order, and no doubt retired quietly through the bush to their settlement. […][1]

This is a remarkable piece of eyewitness reporting considering how close Cowan was to the action, so, how effective and accurate was he as an eyewitness reporter? According to Tom Goldstein in his book *Journalism and Truth* (2007) the accuracy of an eyewitness report depends on a set of four factors which

[1] Cowan, 'Government Force At Waima'.

were first published in *The Growth of a Legend* (1916) by Belgian sociologist Fernand van Langenhove.[1] The four factors came about from a series of experiments by van Langenhove and others in which a totally unexpected incident would take place in front of an unsuspecting crowd, for example, a staged murder. Eyewitness accounts of what had taken place were then gathered and compared based on the following four factors:

1.) The emotional condition of the observer and whether any errors they made in recalling the incident increased in proportion to the observer's level of excitement.
2.) How familiar the observer was to the scene in the context of the more unfamiliar a situation was, the higher the potential to make errors.
3.) The predisposition (or bias) of the observer regarding the incident or the people taking part in it.
4.) The time that had elapsed between the observer witnessing the incident and writing it down, based on the concept of the longer the time the less accurate the recollection.[2]

Regarding the *first* factor, the emotional condition of the observer, if one tries to visualize Cowan in action during the incident at Waima Pass, he was probably in a heightened state of anticipation because the column had been warned of the likelihood of an armed confrontation.

Any suspicion of Cowan becoming over-excited and corrupting his eyewitness report would however have been mitigated to some extent by the *second* factor mentioned by Goldstein involving the degree of one's familiarity with the surroundings, where the less familiar an observer is with their surroundings, the more propensity there is for errors in judgment to creep in. Admittedly, Waima was far from Cowan's home location, and he had not done much reporting from the North; but he should not have been overly affected by his surroundings even if this particular region was new to him. For, as mentioned in the opening chapter on Cowan's upbringing, he spent his youth in the outdoors as much as possible and was exposed to Maori and militarism during the mopping up period of the New Zealand Wars, which included

[1] Fernand van Langenhove, *The Growth of a Legend* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1916), 119–21.
[2] Tom Goldstein, *Journalism and Truth: Strange Bedfellows* (Medill School of Journalism. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 79.

growing up next to a sometimes-volatile Waikato border separating Pakeha and Maori territory.

The *third* aspect mentioned by Goldstein which could potentially corrupt the validity of an eyewitness report is the factor regarding the predisposition of the observer taking in the incident. This factor is concerned with any bias creeping into the report, which was possibly challenging for Cowan. As an employee of the *Star*, he was expected to not go against the political leanings of his employer, who was a strong supporter of Premier Seddon's reigning Liberal Party. As well, he was embedded with the government side for much of the time, which was unavoidable if he wanted to tag along and see action. He could however have taken a much more partisan stance if he had chosen to leave out the explanation the gunman gave for his actions at Waima Pass. Following that incident Cowan wrote in his dispatch:

> The spot where the shots were fired is known as Te Puku O te Hau, being named after an ancestor who was buried there. Soon after the force had passed this place one of Toia's Maori men, named Te Makara, who was concerned in the Hauhau affray at Waihou in 1887, came out of the bush with a double-barrelled gun and spoke to Heremia Te Waki, a friendly chief, who was following in the rear of the force. Makara told Te Waki that he had fired the shots himself in the bush but that he did not fire at the troops, but only as a signal to Waima to let the people know of the approach of the force.[1]

Te Makara's comments suggested that there might not have been an ambush laid for the column after all, that Te Makara was only acting as a lookout to warn the villagers at Waima of the proximity of the column. Such a comment undermined the power of the dispatch as a story of government soldiers walking into a trap and being exposed to an ordeal by gunfire. Cowan could have left Te Makara's explanation out, leaving readers with no doubt about a trap being set. But by including Te Makara's explanation in the dispatch, Cowan was trying to be a neutral observer as far as possible by presenting viewpoints from both sides until any new information would confirm what really happened. This aspect is important, for it impels the journalist working

[1] Cowan, 'Government Force At Waima'.

in the capacity as an eyewitness to report only what is before them and leave conjecture to editorials or when more complete information comes to hand.

The *fourth* aspect mentioned by Goldstein that could impair accurate reporting involved time delays in recording the events. In his dispatch about the happenings in Waima Pass, Cowan wrote that it was not until 4.30 p.m. that the column reached the pass. He might then have spent another hour or two gathering information from the friendly chiefs and others, including the comments of Captain Coyle in charge of the rear-guard, and then possibly drafting a brief, rough copy. If his final dispatch was subsequently written up even several hours later, it would not necessarily impair accurate reporting if good notes had been taken within the first two hours of the incident. Indeed, it usually takes a little time to settle one's mind and let the events fall into some kind of shape for reporting on. But this is the methodology of a trained journalist; in contrast, a report from an untrained observer would most likely be far less accurate if their recall was based only on mental notes.

The overall impression of Cowan's effort is that he managed to keep under control three of the four factors mentioned by Goldstein that can impair accurate eyewitness reporting. Only the first factor, involving Cowan's likely level of excitement, is doubtful because we simply do not know his state of mind at the time.

Dateline: 7 May 1898, 'A Peaceful Termination'

A day after the incident at the pass Cowan wrote in his next dispatch, 'A Peaceful Termination', that Hone Heke Ngapua, MHR[1] for Northern Maori, had finally arrived from Wellington and was negotiating with Toia and his followers. Ngapua appeared to have been caught off-guard by the swiftness of events; or had been left out of any decision-making regarding sending a force to quell the rebellion. For, while a government force was steaming out of Wellington harbour, Ngapua was telling Cabinet that if there had been any cause for concern he would have heard from his elder chiefs.[2]

Upon arrival at Hokianga, Ngapua invited Cowan to accompany him to a mass meeting with Toia and his followers. 'After a journey of about mile and half down the winding valley of Waima, flanked by high hills, we arrived at

[1] MHR: Member of the House of Representatives.
[2] 'A Maori Trouble. Disturbance at Hokianga', *Auckland Star*, May 3, 1898, 5 (no author).

Toia's place some distance above the old Mission Station,' Cowan wrote in his dispatch. 'We took seats on mats spread on the ground in the centre of a gathering of about 200 people, including women and children. … The majority of the men present were young, many of them mere youths.'[1] Ngapua made a brief speech, explaining to them the course of action he wished them to pursue. Toia replied that he and his people had decided to surrender unconditionally to Colonel Newall, to give up their guns as a sign of peace, and to go up in a body and allow the Government to pick out whom they wanted:

> Hone Heke sent a message to Colonel Newall, asking him not to bring his force down to the Waima lower settlement but remain where he was and the natives would go to them. Accordingly, shortly after noon Toia and his people took a number of guns out of a large house in which they were kept, and a large party of them consisting about 100, chiefly men, rode up to where the troops were encamped.[2]

Meanwhile, the column under Colonel Newall had fallen in under arms on the road in front of the local schoolhouse, with the two machine guns pointing down the road along which the Maoris were expected to come. When Toia's party arrived, they laid fourteen guns which they had brought with them down on the road in front of the column. Cowan noted that although several were good weapons, others were evidently old guns. Newall was not satisfied with the small number of arms handed in, 'as there were considered to be at least 60 or 70 guns, many of them good rifles, in the hands of Maoris this week, with plenty of ammunition,' Cowan wrote. Further, Hokianga settler John Webster had visited Waima a few days earlier and counted 51 rifles and other guns in the hands of the Waima residents. Subsequently, '[t]he natives were informed that they must bring in all the guns they promised to bring in, and some of the party went away to do so,' Cowan wrote.[3]

Five men from amongst Toia's group were arrested that day and placed under armed guard. In his dispatch, Cowan attempted to explain the temperament of Toia's 'hot-headed followers', as he put it, who were nearly all

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[1] James Cowan, 'A Peaceful Termination', *Auckland Star*, 7 May 1898, 2.
[2] Cowan, 'A Peaceful Termination'.
[3] Cowan, 'A Peaceful Termination'.

young men 'and ripe for any mischief to pass the time'. The previous year they had had a craze for playing football matches for large sums of money, the games degenerating into 'very rough and exciting scrimmages'; this year their diversion had taken the form of 'preparing to fight the Pakeha'.[1]

When news arrived that Colonel Newall's column was approaching, a haka was performed and then Toia's followers 'rushed off to the Bush Hills overlooking the road,' one of the 'friendly' chiefs told Cowan.[2] This comment gives a clue to the influence of the 'friendly' chiefs on the final outcome, for according to Jennifer Ashton in *At the Margin of Empire*, the 'friendly' chiefs Hapakuku Moetara and Re Tai Tai had a crucial impact on the peaceful outcome. While acting as go-betweens for Colonel Newall and Toia, the chiefs and had been present at the meetings where the terms of surrender had been negotiated by Ngapua. For Ashton, the dispute had effectively been solved by traditional means, 'that is, by the intervention and influence of men of rank, even if Heke's status as an MHR was a variation on the past.'[3]

Dateline: 10 May 1898, 'Accused Before the Court'

Those arrested appeared in Rawene courthouse shortly afterwards and were charged with treason, Cowan's wrote in his next dispatch of 10 May ('Accused Before the Court'), in which it was revealed that the gunman Makara had sinister intentions all along. 'It turns out that the Maoris had breastworks constructed of logs at four localities in the bush commanding the road to Waima, each large enough to hold ten or fourteen men,' Cowan wrote.[4] It is a discovery such as this that adds realism to his dispatches, the reader finding out the truth of the matter in real time only when Cowan does. For although he was unable to make a close inspection of the scene of the shooting at Waima Pass on the day it happened, he returned to the scene with Ngapua to look for any evidence of an ambush a couple of days later – most likely when they were making their way to the mass meeting at which Toia and his followers would surrender – and he included his findings in his next available dispatch.

According to historian Richard Hill, a contributing factor to saving the column from a bloodbath was a lengthy argument between Colonel Newall

[1] Cowan, 'A Peaceful Termination'.
[2] Cowan, 'A Peaceful Termination'.
[3] Ashton, *At the Margin of Empire*, 200.
[4] James Cowan, 'Accused Before The Court', *Auckland Star*, 10 May 1898, 5.

and a constable just before entering the pass, which delayed the column long enough to give a mounted messenger from Ngapua time to reach it:

> He reached the ambush party just in time, a bloody scene having been averted by a delay in the departure of the column from Rawene, and a lengthy difference of opinion between [Constable] Beazley and Newall at the foot of the hill, where Newall overrode the Native Constable's warning that the road ahead was likely territory for an ambush.[1]

Another contributing factor in helping save column can be found in a dispatch by the *New Zealand Herald* reporter who was also accompanying the column and wrote that halfway up Waima Pass, the horses towing the ambulance began struggling with the incline and fell back. The rear-guard also slipped further back from the main body in order to stay and help the Ambulance Corps.[2] This snippet of information becomes relevant when it is combined with Cowan's dispatch of 10 May, when he wrote that '[t]he Waima natives informed Hone Heke that their plan was to wait till the whole Pakeha force, including the rearguard, were within the Maori lines, and then a simultaneous fire was to be opened when Makara gave his signal.' Te Makara was much disgusted, they said, after he fired the signal shots to commence firing, but the others did not fire.[3] Their comments suggest that because the column was stretching out further and further, as observed by the *Herald* reporter, never at any stage was the entire force in the line of fire of the Maori ambushers. If they had shot at only part of the column, there would have still been those soldiers outside the path of gunfire capable of retaliation.

5.3 Mopping Up

On Saturday, 7 May 1898 the *Star* published an editorial in which it suggested that the leaders of the disturbance should be severely punished, but not their followers: 'Now that the native disturbance in the North has been successfully suppressed, there is a tendency to think that it was much exaggerated, and that the precautions taken to deal with it were exaggerated too,' it read. The editorial added that it could understand such a view being generally accepted

[1] Hill, *The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove*, 136.
[2] 'The Rawene Native Difficulty', *New Zealand Herald*, 7 May 1898, 5 (no author).
[3] Cowan, 'Accused Before The Court'.

in Auckland because the majority of its citizens knew little of Maori living in remote parts of the country and rarely came into contact with them. It was this lack of contact with rural Maori that was a large part of the problem, it suggested:

> Outside the narrow, cultivated circle of which the township [of Rawene] forms a centre, the forest-clad hills, the lonely ti-tree flats, the desolate swamps are the same as they were before the white man came to the country; any change that the wandering gum digger may effect on the landscape being of as transient and unnoticeable a character as the footprints of the Maori himself. There the latter breathes in a freer air and forgets for a time that his mana has departed.[1]

The editorial added that although a smaller and less heavily equipped force might have been 'quite competent' to deal with the natives successfully,

> it is impossible to say how much the success of the expedition was due to the moral effect which the large body of men armed with heavy artillery had on the native mind. To a less imposing display of strength they might have shown much less disposition to yield, and continued resistance might easily have led to bloodshed.'[2]

The editorial however saw no reason to abandon the dog tax or the road tax: 'If they get the benefit of the roads and cut them up with their carts, they should certainly pay something towards their maintenance.' Further, it would be a great mistake to abolish the dog tax because it was an efficient form of animal control, it said: 'In respect to other and more reasonable grounds for complaint which the natives may have they should be met in a reasonable and lenient spirit,' and that the present disturbance 'should not unfairly prejudice us against the aboriginals.'[3]

In Cowan's dispatch of Friday, 13 May ('The Maori Prisoners') he wrote that the *Tutanekai* arrived at Rawene to transport the arrested ringleaders of

[1] 'The Native Trouble Settled', editorial, *The Evening Star/Auckland Star*, May 7, 1898.
[2] 'The Native Trouble Settled', editorial.
[3] 'The Native Trouble Settled'.

Toia's sect to Auckland for trial.[1] The outcome of the trial was a sentence of eighteen months' imprisonment for seven of the ringleaders, and a fine of ten pounds for others. 'Looking dispassionately at all the circumstances of the case after a lapse of more than half a century,' A. H. Reed wrote in *The Story of Northland* (1956), 'it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that the law might have dealt more leniently with these offenders, seeing that there had been no loss of life, nor even any real violence.'[2]

Another historian, R. M. Burdon, wrote in his 1955 biography of Seddon that as Premier he 'habitually reacted violently to the faintest threat of violence', and in the case of the Hokianga rebellion had prepared to use force 'with what was perhaps unnecessary haste'. Burdon surmised that such a large display of force was to help Ngapua negotiate more favourable terms with the Waima rebels.[3] According to Tom Brooking however, in his 2014 biography of Seddon, '[a]ny outbreak of armed fighting threatened a return to the chronic instability of earlier times and he could not afford to risk armed insurrection.'[4] Brooking's interpretation helps explain what the *Star* was aiming to do on the eve of the rebellion when it wrote 'Armed Hauhaus Assemble Near Rawene' for a headline, the subsequent article designed to shock Aucklanders and politicians out of their apparent complacency about an impending disruption to one of the region's few industries – the kauri industry.

Little is known of Toia in the years following his release from Mount Eden jail, but he retained his status as a leader of his community and his religious ministry continued, according to Angela Ballara in her biography of Toia in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. Later in life he lived on a farm close to Lake Omapere where he died in 1933 aged in his early seventies. When he passed away, his body was taken to Waimate North for burial. 'He had predicted that he would not lie down for three days after his death, and his grandchildren remember him sitting upright until the third day,' Ballara wrote. For the next thirty years his family continued to hold religious meetings once a month in the style Toia had practised, combining prayers and hymns

[1] James Cowan, 'The Maori Prisoners', *Auckland Star*, 13 May 1898, 5
[2] A. H. Reed, *The Story of Northland* (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1956), 309, 313.
[3] R. M. Burdon, *King Dick: A Biography of Richard John Seddon* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1955), 182–83.
[4] Tom Brooking, *Richard Seddon: King of God's Own*. Auckland: Penguin, 2014, 226.

with family feasts. 'Sometimes the whiowhio continued to be heard,' Ballara added.[1]

5.4 Later versions

Cowan waited sixteen years before returning to the Dog Tax Rebellion in his writing. By then he had left the *Star* (in 1902) and his reflections of the rebellion appeared in three of his books, *The Maoris of New Zealand* (1910), *The New Zealand Wars* (1922–23), and *Tales of the Maori Coast* (1930). In the first book, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, he wrote in a chapter titled 'Maori at War' that the rebellion was an example of outdated nineteenth century practices for solving political problems by Maori. Protest was meant to be through a Maori Member of Parliament rather than by force of arms, he suggested. In a largely unsympathetic summary of the event he wrote that 'the last shots in anger' had been fired between Maori and the white man during the rebellion, and he considered it remarkable that 'the Maoris of Waima and their cousins of Kaikohe' still retained their war-like spirit despite having the longest contact with the white man out of all the tribes. 'But they are of the true ancient fighting-blood of the North,' he reasoned.[2]

A second and also unsympathetic account of the rebellion appeared as a one-page summary in the final chapter of *The New Zealand Wars*, in which Cowan accorded Hone Heke Ngapua the honour of preventing 'the Mahurehure firebrands plunging their people into a foolish little war.'[3] As with his earlier book, Cowan portrayed the rebellion as an artefact of nineteenth century Maori fighting attitudes.

Finally, a fictional version of the rebellion appeared in 1930 as a chapter in *Tales of the Maori Coast*.[4] The chapter, called 'Hone and the Dog-Tax', was a thinly disguised profile of Hone Toia, who had been renamed Hone Tupara ('Tupara' being Maori for 'shotgun'), and the locality of Waima was renamed Mawai. Much of the body of the narrative remained intact however as if it had been gleaned from Cowan's *Auckland Star* dispatches. It is possible that Cowan changed some of the names in the book because Toia was still alive when it was published and some of its content could have been considered slanderous. A

[1] Ballara, 'Toia, Hone Riiwi', *DNZB*, 2: 542–43.
[2] Cowan, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, 236–7.
[3] Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars*, 2: 502.
[4] James Cowan, *Tales of the Maori Coast* [1930] (Christchurch: Capper Press facsimile, 1976), 69–78.

further legal protection for Cowan was by including Toia's story in a book of *'Tales'*, Cowan writing in the guise of a raconteur, not a historian. At best, the chapter on Toia gives an insight into the workings of the Whiowhio religion, but as a satirical account it fails to work properly.

5.5 Conclusion

In May 1898 Cowan was assigned as a 'Special Reporter' to cover an event that was rapidly unfolding around Hokianga Harbour about 250km north of Auckland. The event is remembered as the Hokianga Dog Tax Rebellion and this chapter considered some of Cowan's dispatches written during the rebellion as 'a first rough draft of history' to help gauge his significance as a journalist. 'A first rough draft of history' is a term sometimes given to journalists' copy in recognition of the ongoing value of the coverage.

Cowan's dispatches however never really became a 'first rough draft of history' because most later historians who wrote about the rebellion opted for the 'top down' approach to the rebellion by citing from the *Journals of the House of Representatives* as the primary source of information rather than the 'bottom up' approach from journalists' dispatches on the ground. And when historians did resort to mentioning newspaper copy, Cowan's dispatches were largely ignored, most historical reports preferring to use the *New Zealand Herald* over the *Auckland Star*. For example, the most comprehensive coverage of the rebellion was in Jennifer Ashton's 2015 biography of prominent Hokianga settler John Webster called *At the Margin Of Empire*, in which she deferred to the *Herald* for newspaper clippings of the rebellion rather than the *Star*. Her only use of Cowan's material was his 1936 profile of Webster in *New Zealand Railways Magazine*.[1]

Another example of obvious preferences can be found in Jack Lee's book *Hokianga* (1987) in which he mentions a meeting between Ngapua, the friendly chiefs and Toia prior to the arrest of five members of Toia's followers, a meeting which Cowan wrote up in his dispatch of 7 May 1898 ('A Peaceful Termination'). Lee however only mentions a *Herald* reporter attending the meeting, ignoring Cowan's coverage in the *Star*.[2]

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[1] Ashton, *At the Margin of Empire*, 199, 236: n49.
[2] Lee, *Hokianga*, 243.

A third example is Tom Brooking's 2014 biography of Richard Seddon in which he refers to articles and editorials in the *Herald*, the *Evening Post* and *Northern Advocate* to fill out his coverage of the rebellion, but never the *Star*.[1] The *Northern Advocate* is an interesting choice because it was a local newspaper and had its hand on the 'pulse' of the region. But it was a weekly, coming out on a Saturday, and only expanded to daily production in the twentieth century. This meant that it could never compete with the *Star* or *Herald* for timely coverage of the rebellion as it unfolded, but only as a weekly summary. One of its strengths however was in covering local court cases involving prosecutions surrounding the dog tax.

A final example of Cowan's copy being ignored is Paul Moon's 2015 biography of Hone Heke Ngapua called *Ngapua* which cites the *Herald*'s articles for the first two weeks in May 1894 – when the rebellion was entering its peak period – with only a solitary mention of any *Star* material.[2] And so it goes on, the *Herald* being the paper of choice for later historians for any coverage that coincided with Cowan's dispatches, the *Star* receiving one or two mentions at best.

What is important in the context of this thesis however is the focus on Cowan's contributions as an individual. It would have been interesting to compare the *Herald* copy with Cowan's if one knew the identity of the *Herald* contributor working virtually alongside Cowan for much of the time. For a key difference between the two competing newspapers' rendering of the rebellion is that the *Star* published Cowan's copy as a standalone narrative, inserting its own editorial comments or other breaking news as separate articles. In contrast, the *Herald* inserted any material from third parties into the copy of the correspondent reporting from Rawene. This might have made their eventual report seem like a fast-breaking news event with material coming from all angles, but it lost the individual voice of the correspondent reporting from Rawene. In short, it became the newspaper's all-inclusive story, whereas Cowan's story remained his own.

As the work of an individual, Cowan's coverage is laudable considering the difficulties of predicting where the most important place was to be each day in order to give the most useful account. For he was under some pressure to be at

[1] Brooking, *Richard Seddon*, 223–26.
[2] Moon, *Ngapua*, 362, n.42.

the most crucial spot because his dispatches were being telegraphed around the country on behalf of the New Zealand Press Association, which meant that his interpretation of what was taking place was going to be widely read. In later years, he managed to build his accounts into his own historical writing even if historians ignored his dispatches in favour of the coverage from other newspapers. Over a century on, one can readily identify his dispatches from being, to date, the only version of the rebellion to have undergone extended critical analysis.[1] New historians cannot now dismiss Cowan's attempts at a 'first rough draft of history' so readily.

[1] Cowan's dispatches are reproduced in Volume Two of this thesis.

6
'The White Slave' and Beyond: Separating fact from fiction in the saga of Kimble Bent

The 1906 story of an army deserter named Kimble Bent has proven to be one of the most enduring pieces of journalism that James Cowan has written. Its significance lies in its extraordinary ability to transcend genres and generations, along with the sheer novelty of its story. Kimble Bent's life amongst the Maori as an army deserter was certainly uncommon, particularly as he survived the Taranaki Wars of the 1860s when at least three other deserters to the Maori side did not – Charles Kane, John Hennessey and Humphrey Murphy. All were killed while in the hands of their Maori 'protectors' for various reasons but mostly for trying to cross back to the Pakeha side.[1] The interest in Bent's story, then, can be partially put down to him being a survivor by prudently waiting until all the campaigns of the New Zealand Wars – Taranaki being one of them – had ended in 1872 before attempting any reconnection with Europeans. He subsequently began trying to contact his former world while still living deep in the Taranaki forest by sending letters downriver, a gesture metaphorically akin to 'a message in a bottle' being thrown into the outgoing tide by an island castaway. Eventually one of those letters made it into the right hands, setting off a sequence of events that culminated in two important meetings with journalists.

An initial aim of this chapter is to build up a common account of his life as recorded by the first two journalists to interview him in 1878 and 1880 under the watchful eye of his Maori guardians. From those interviews one can build an early composite picture of Bent by comparing and contrasting the findings from the two reporters. The interviews also act as a handy lead-in to the much more thorough round of interviews by Cowan from 1903 onwards, which would reveal how Bent had fared in the intervening years.

The result of Cowan's interviews was a serial published in 1906 in three newspapers. The serial revealed that Bent had endured an even harder life than when he was in the army. 'He was virtually a slave amongst the Maoris,' Cowan

[1] 'The Life of Kimball Bent – Fifteen Years Amongst the Maoris', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 Feb. 1880, p. 5.

wrote, hence his title for the serializing of those interviews under the banner of 'The White Slave'. Bent had had fond imaginings of the easy time he would enjoy in the heart of Maoridom, Cowan added, 'but to quote from his own lips, "they made me work like a blessed dog."'[1]

There was however a dark side to Bent's testimony, which Cowan hoped to resolve, involving the rumour that while living with the Hauhaus he had shot his former commanding officer during one of the battles of the Taranaki Wars. If Bent could put that rumour to rest, it would make it a lot easier for the Pakeha community to forgive him for being a deserter. Unfortunately, Bent's English had deteriorated while living in the forest because the main language around him was now Maori. This put a lot of pressure on Cowan to supply an adequate rendition of Bent's life from interviews conducted partly in Maori and partly in broken English,

'The White Slave' was however too good a story to languish as a newspaper serial, so in 1911 Cowan updated the material and turned it into a book called *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*. Because the book has endured into the twenty-first century as the only available story of Bent, and therefore a definitive version by default, I want to return to the initial interviews in 1878, 1880 and 1903–06 in order to set up an argument that 'The White Slave' serial should be considered the definitive edition of Kimble Bent's story, not the book. I however also want to suggest that it is better to try and understand Cowan's motives in writing a 'flawed' book version – in historical terms – rather than to reject it outright just because of its use of fictitious or speculative dialogue. For it was the only version available until quite recently and therefore occupied an important place as the most widely read interpretation of Bent's story, which was good exposure for Bent and enhanced Cowan's reputation as a storyteller, but not necessarily as a historian.

So, the chapter can be broken into several parts involving firstly, the early interviews with Bent; secondly, Cowan's interview with Bent; thirdly, the transition by Cowan of Bent's story from a serial into book form; fourthly, the reaction to Bent's credibility by later researchers, writers and historians; and finally, my conclusion and final argument for the definitive version – the serial.

[1] James Cowan, 'The White Slave', Ch. 2, *New Zealand Times*, 12 Sep. 1906, 5.

6.1 Early contact, 1873–80

From about the mid-1870s, while still living with his Maori protectors, Kimble Bent began to encounter Europeans – initially accidentally. In 1873 a surveyor named Skinner reported coming across Bent in the bush, but the meeting was only a brief conversation while Skinner tried to establish Bent's identity.[1] In 1876 Bent was more forthcoming when he gave a letter to Robert Parris, the then civil commissioner in Taranaki while he was visiting Waitara. He asked Parris to post the letter to his friends in Maine, but he never received a reply. Three further letters were written, but having to trust others to post them, and being unable to get postage stamps, he did not know if they were sent.[2]

In 1878 Bent had better luck when he personally delivered a letter to land purchase commissioner W. Williams at a native settlement about two miles from the town of Carlyle (today part of Patea).[3] Williams passed the letter on to the local newspaper, the *Patea Mail*, as in reality it was an open letter from Bent to the people of Taranaki asking for forgiveness and acceptance. When the letter was finally published in the *Mail* on 7 December 1878, the newspaper commented that although Bent's handwriting was good, 'his fourteen years amongst the Maoris has thrown him somewhat out in the matter, of composition, as will be judged by the letter, which is reprinted exactly as written'[4] (followed by a corrected version):

Original Version

> I take my pen in hand at the present to write tu yoo tu give yoo the reasons that intendid tu write tu the Governor is to inquire if I would be takeing a prisoner for comeing among the natives of country th year I came tu th natives was in 1865 June 12 day at the presant it is 13 years and a half during this time that I have been with the natives I know in my own mind that the white people do say that when the natives was in fighting I would go at fight with them at the white men thanks be tu god during the time that I have been with the natives I never have liffited up a weapon in my hand against the white men at the presant that I have been with the natives I am tu say the white I know in my own mind that thy all are veary vext tu me for stoping with the natives I

[1] Maurice Shadbolt, *Monday's Warriors* (Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 305.
[2] 'Kimble Bent – Fourteen Years with the Maoris', *Patea Mail*, 14 Dec. 1878, 2 (no author).
[3] 'Kimble Bent – Fourteen Years with the Maoris'.
[4] 'Letter from Kimble Bent', *Patea Mail*, 7 Dec. 1878.

can tell yoo thanks be to allmight God I have nothing against the while men in this country the Chieff name that I am stopping with his name is Tama Tana I will be very thankful tu yoo if yoo would inquire if they would be dainger for me tu go among the white men in this country please write tu me and Mr Tama Tana tu know that I am a free man or not this is from your friend among the Natives pleas anawer this letter.

Kimble Bent, 27 Nov. 1878[1]

Corrected version

I am writing to you to inquire if I would be taken a prisoner for coming among the natives of this country. The date I came to the natives was 12 June 1865, 13 years and a half years ago. During that time, I know that the white people have said that when the natives were fighting the white man, I would go and fight the white man with them. Thanks be to God during that time with the natives I have never lifted up a weapon in my hand against the white men. I know the whites are very vexed for my stopping with the natives. I can tell you, thanks be to almighty God, that I have nothing against the white men in this country. The name of the Chief that I am stopping with is Tama Tana. I would be very thankful if you would inquire if it would be dangerous for me to go among the white men in this country. Please write to Mr Tama Tana or me whether I am a free man or not. This is from your friend among the Natives – please answer this letter.

Kimble Bent, 27 Nov. 1878

On 14 December 1878, a week after the *Patea Mail* had published Bent's letter to commissioner Williams, the newspaper published an account of a meeting with Bent – possibly the first ever newspaper interview. At the time he was visiting a village called Hukatere about ten miles up the Patea River (the town of Patea is located at the mouth of the river). 'While I was in the kainga,' Bent later told Cowan, 'the local chief went down to the town of Patea, a few miles away, to get me some European clothing';

He informed some people in the town that Tu-nui-a-moa, the Pakeha-Maori, who had been with the Hauhaus for twelve or thirteen years, was in his kainga,

[1] *Patea Mail,* 'Letter from Kimble Bent'.

> and next day about twenty Europeans rode up to the settlement out of curiosity to see me. We had a long talk, and they gave me some articles of clothing, and told me all about the white man's world from which I had cut myself off. That was about the year 1878.[1]

The *Mail* reporter was most likely amongst the twenty Europeans who rode out to meet Bent, and in his subsequent article he tried to assess Bent's fitness to reintegrate into Pakeha society based on his physical appearance, his demeanour, and what he said. He described Bent as slim and of medium height and build with well-formed features and a Roman nose that appeared to have been broken at some stage. He had a full and shapely beard and dark, fine hair. He was 'fairly intelligent looking, quiet in demeanour, tidy in appearance, and a man who in a good suit of clothes, would be presentable anywhere,' the reporter wrote: 'Judging by appearances Bent is a man of easy and retiring disposition, rather sensitive, and without any indication of viciousness, strong passion, or boldness.'[2]

Despite Bent being able to present himself reasonably well to this reporter, the central issue remained over whether his immersion in Maori society during the past thirteen years would make assimilating back into a Pakeha world too difficult for him. For the reporter noted that although Bent chatted freely on matters of everyday life, and replied readily to questions, he used facial expressions 'after the manner of Maoris'. The results of his long banishment from civilised life became especially noticeable when he was asked to give an account of his life amongst the Maoris and to state the most prominent events that had taken place. 'He seemed willing and anxious to accede to the request,' the reporter wrote, 'but had no idea of how or where to commence and could not find suitable words to convey his meaning. He talks Maori like a Native and has a tendency when short of English to fill in with Maori.' The reporter wrote down an example of how Bent talked, which referred to the time when he decided to desert after being flogged in the army for disobedience:

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[1] James Cowan, 'The White Slave', Ch. 19, *New Zealand Times*, 15 Oct. 1906, 5.
[2] *Patea Mail,* 'Kimble Bent – Fourteen Years with the Maoris'.

> Then I thought in my own mind to run away and leave the soldiers. I thought I might at that present time just as well be with the natives as with the Europeans. I could not find it proper to slop in the army after being flogged.

'The above are the exact words used by Bent and are a fair sample of the way he related his story,' the reporter wrote, adding that there were continual repetitions and sometimes the words used did not represent the ideas he wished to convey, 'which were only made clear by continual questioning.'[1]

The reporter cited a second example of Bent's poor English, this time on a much more controversial topic, as it referred to hearsay amongst Europeans that Bent was present at the Battle of Te-Ngutu-o-te-Manu Pa in 1868, and had fired on his fellow soldiers, which he always firmly denied, saying that when the battle took place he was sent into the bush with the women as on previous occasions.' When I came back the Natives gave me information that they had a great fight with the Europeans,' he told the reporter:

> See it I did not. Of all the fighting I did not see it. When, the Europeans came to the pah at the fight, the Natives sent me into the bush, with the women. Thanks be to God, I have never lifted up a weapon since I have been with the Natives against the Europeans. If I knew the Europeans would not interfere with me, I would go to my own country.[2]

In assessing Bent's life amongst the Maori, the *Patea Mail* reporter concluded that it must have been 'painfully monotonous and uneventful'. Bent had kept a few notes of the chief events, 'but the life was too eventless to be worth record.' Further, he appeared to have no notion of the lapse of time or the order of events. 'His mind is a perfect blank as to the stirring events which have taken place in the world during the time of his seclusion,' the reporter wrote. 'He has, on a few occasions only, met with scraps of newspapers but until Sunday week he had not had any copy of a late date newspaper in his hand for thirteen and a half years.' He also became upset, pointing out mis-statements in a brief earlier account about him in the *Mail,* a copy of which had been forwarded to him. For Bent, fourteen years' seclusion from the world seemed sufficient

[1] *Patea Mail,* 'Kimble Bent – Fourteen Years with the Maoris'.
[2] *Patea Mail,* 'Kimble Bent – Fourteen Years with the Maoris'.

punishment for his desertion. He now wanted to communicate with the American Consul, and to be sent back to Maine, but did not know how to proceed, 'as he does not now know the customs of the outer world,' the reporter said. 'Although so near to Carlyle, he has not seen it, and until assured of safety does not seem inclined to leave his present friends.'[1]

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In February 1880, two years after the *Patea Mail* had interviewed Kimble Bent, an article appeared in the *New Zealand Herald* aiming to settle once and for all if the *Mail* reporter had actually interviewed Bent, or someone else. For, in the intervening period, a book called *Reminiscences of the War in New Zealand* (1879) had been published in which it was reported that Bent had died at the hands of the Hauhaus. The book's author, Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Gudgeon, a veteran of the Taranaki Wars, wrote that after the Battle of Te-Ngutu-o-te-Manu a Maori boy was taken prisoner. 'When questioned about the deserter Kimball Bent, he said there were two Pakehas with Titokowaru, one of them named Te Ringi-Ringi and the other Kingi (Bent),' Gudgeon wrote:

> He also stated that both of them were engaged in the attack on Turu Turu Mokai, and that Kingi tried hard to persuade the Hauhaus to rush the redoubt. After they returned to Te Ngutu, he cursed the Maories for their cowardice in not following him; these men complained to Titokowaru, who replied, 'Shoot him.' Now this tale is not strictly true; the reason that Kingi was shot was, that a tale had been industriously circulated by the Europeans among the semi-friendly Maories, to the effect that Bent had promised McDonnell to shoot Titokowaru, provided he received pardon for having deserted to the Hauhaus. This tale reached the Ngutu o te Manu, and gained credence among the people, who at once demanded his death. Titokowaru, consented … but no sooner was Kingi dead, than they wanted to serve the other Pakeha in the same manner; but Titokowaru refused, saying, 'He is too useful; who will make the cartridges when he is dead?'[2]

[1] *Patea Mail*, 'Kimble Bent – Fourteen Years with the Maoris'.
[2] Lieut.-Col. Walter Edward Gudgeon, *Reminiscences of the War in New Zealand* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1879), 190–191. (NB. Walter's father, Thomas Wayth Gudgeon, appears as the author.)

The Maori boy had made a mistake in his identification of Bent from amongst the two Pakeha deserters. Te Ringi-Ringi was Bent, not Kingi, whose European name was Charles Kane. It was Kane who was trying to cut a deal with Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas McDonnell, commander of the attack on Te Ngutu-o-te-Manu, to be pardoned and allowed back on the European side if he could kill Titokowaru, but his letter to McDonnell setting up the deal was intercepted by the Hauhaus. Amidst all the growing angst against double-crossing Pakeha deserters, Bent managed to survive because he was 'useful' as a cartridge maker. The case of mistaken identity however induced Gudgeon to save his reputation and write to the *Herald* querying the validity of the *Patea Mail*'s revelation that Bent was still alive.

In the summer of 1880 a representative for the *Herald* set out to Taranaki to unravel the mystery. He claimed in his resultant article to have 'an intimate knowledge of the country, and of the resources and capabilities of both Europeans and Maoris.' In order to help positively identify Bent, he had obtained from a former comrade of Bent's a description of his birth marks. He had also obtained details 'of tattoo and other marks duly registered when Bent was sentenced to imprisonment for stealing a watch.'[1]

Arrangements for the meeting were shrouded in secrecy. Bent agreed to meet the correspondent on condition that neither the time nor location of the interview would be disclosed in the article. The meeting eventually took place in the bush within ten miles of Normanby in South Taranaki, several miles from where the correspondent believed was Bent's 'usual place of concealment'. When the reporter and a guide arrived at the prearranged spot, they met a young native girl who subsequently turned out to be Bent's wife, and her father named Tame Tana, who was Bent's 'protector' at the time. Tame Tana conducted the correspondent and the guide to some mats spread in the shade of a tree, 'on which several Maoris, one of whom was of very high rank, were lying. These all welcomed us.'[2]

Half an hour later, 'an extraordinary figure, reminding me forcibly of the old pictures of Robinson Crusoe, made his appearance, shook hands, and lay down without saying a word,' the correspondent wrote. 'He was dressed in dilapidated odds and ends of European clothing, a cap adorned with military

[1] 'The Life of Kimball Bent', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 Feb. 1880, 5 (no author).
[2] *NZ Herald*, 'The Life of Kimball Bent'.

buttons covering a head of unkempt hair' and had 'dark, sharp, and anxious eyes', a prominent hooked nose that looked like it had met with some injury, and a 'firm' mouth and chin.[1]

Part of the correspondent's description of Bent's appearance matched that described by the *Patea Mail* reporter some two years earlier, but in other areas Bent seemed to have deteriorated since then. For example, the *Patea Mail* reporter described Bent as intelligent-looking, tidy in appearance and quiet in demeanour, who only needed a good suit of clothes to be presentable anywhere. In contrast, for the *Herald* reporter Bent looked haggard and became excitable in conversation, 'at times almost hysterical.' He questioned Bent minutely as to his knowledge of places in America and Europe that he said he had visited, 'and with which I am familiar'. In the correspondent's eyes, Bent's features 'bore strong indications of his descent from the North American Indians, his father, a well-known ship-builder of Eastport, Maine, having married a half-caste Indian.' He therefore believed Bent's account of his early career to be truthful, except for matters 'on which he could not be expected to criminate himself.'[2]

The *Herald* correspondent did however gain a similar impression to that of the *Patea Mail* reporter regarding Bent's standard of English: 'His action, movements, and gestures are all more Maori than European,' he wrote, 'and he speaks Maori much more fluently than English, many words of which he uses without understanding their meaning.' For instance, in referring to a sum of money he called it 'summons'.[3]

The interview continued inside a whare, where food was served. In the course of listening to Bent's life story, the correspondent surmised that the turning point in Bent's life was when he was arrested for his first act of desertion from the army in England in 1860, for which he was court-martialled and sentenced to 84 days in a military prison. He was also branded with a letter on the left side of his body, which was used to later help identify him, but the branding appeared to have a profound effect on him: 'From this period he seems to have been inspired with a desire for revenge.'[4]

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[1] *NZ Herald*, 'The Life of Kimball Bent'.
[2] *NZ Herald*, 'The Life of Kimball Bent'.
[3] *NZ Herald*, 'The Life of Kimball Bent'.
[4] *NZ Herald*, 'The Life of Kimball Bent'.

Further punishment in New Zealand was to follow, including being sentenced in 1862 to three years' imprisonment in Wellington gaol for stealing a watch. Upon his release Bent was sent back to his regiment 'a soured and desperate man', the correspondent wrote. 'In March 1865 he received a flogging of 25 lashes for disobeying an order to cut firewood on a wet day,' and merely waited for his back to heal from the flogging with a cat-o-nine-tails before deserting.

When told by the correspondent that in *Reminiscences of the War in New Zealand*, Gudgeon had described minutely the manner of Bent's death after deserting to the Hauhaus, he became very annoyed. 'That is not proper, that was King [Charles Kane],' another deserter, he said, and went on to explain Kane's murder at the hands of his former protectors.[1]

One key point that neither reporter from the *Herald* or the *Patea Mail* could completely clarify was whether Bent was a free man now that the New Zealand Wars had ended. Was it safe for him to leave the Maori if that was what he wanted? Or was he merely testing the current European attitude towards him so as to be immune from persecution if he entered Pakeha towns? The *Patea Mail* had initially claimed that if Bent wanted to leave the Maori, they would not object on condition that there was a guarantee that he would be safe in Pakeha hands, or could be repatriated to America: 'He has a vague sort of notion that he is despised and hated by the Europeans for having stayed so long with the natives and expressed himself as afraid to go amongst the white people, lest they should do him harm,' the *Mail* wrote. 'For some years past, the Maoris have treated him very well, and though they would not now like him to leave them, they would not object if they thought he would be safe and could go to his own country to his friends.'[2]

In a slightly different interpretation some two years later, the *Herald* correspondent gained the impression that Bent was too scared to leave the Maori for fear of being killed while trying. He also was too scared to return to the Pakehas despite denying to the correspondent about having committed any 'capital offences', that is, offences that would result in capital punishment – the death penalty:

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[1] *NZ Herald*, 'The Life of Kimball Bent'.
[2] *Patea Mail,* 'Kimble Bent – Fourteen Years with the Maoris'.

> At present he is anxious to return to America, but dreads that if the natives, amongst whom he is little else than a slave, suspect him of intending to escape, they will kill him, and that if he fell into the hands of the colonists they will either lynch him or put him on his trial for his life. As a matter of course, he denies having committed any capital offences, and when I directly charged him with certain matters that are laid at his door, his invariable answer was, 'That is all nonsense; it is not proper to say so.' [1]

In his summing up of Bent, the *Herald* reporter wrote that he was inclined to think that, to a certain extent, Bent's mind had been seriously affected by his long alienation from the society of his own race 'and that he is now almost unfitted for civilised society.' He suggested that it was too dangerous for Bent to cross back to the Pakeha world for the time being. Further, while travelling through Taranaki the correspondent had noticed what seemed to be an unusual number of visiting Maoris from Waikato and other parts of the island staying at the Maori villages. When he asked Bent about the build-up of numbers in terms of the possibility of an imminent Maori uprising in Taranaki, he noticed that Bent became reticent and evasive, 'and an expression of suspicion and cunning crept into his face when I spoke of it.'

'Oh no, it is not proper it should be so,' Bent replied, the word 'proper' having multiple meanings for him as in 'right, good, desirable'. Whatever it meant this time, his reply was too vague to glean much from it. The *Herald* correspondent however went on to suggest that Bent's plight was too difficult to solve in the current climate: 'As to whether he would form a dangerous factor in the event of a rupture between the races, I am not prepared to say,' he wrote, but if such a rupture occurred, he believed that the Maoris would either compel him to be of service to them or would kill him. 'They would never allow him to go over to the Europeans with his intimate knowledge of the resources and intentions of the Maoris.'[2]

The *Herald* reporter was proved wrong, for by 1881 Bent was able to venture into Pakeha towns again in safety.[3] For the next quarter of a century his life was devoid of incidents and he acquired a reputation as a medicine man. He even travelled to Auckland and Waikato where he met the Maori King, for

[1] *NZ Herald*, 'The Life of Kimball Bent'.
[2] *NZ Herald*, 'The Life of Kimball Bent'.
[3] Cowan, 'The White Slave', Ch. 19, *New Zealand Times*, 15 Oct. 1906, 5.

Bent had become an expert in the pharmacopoeia of the bush. Te Whiti sent for him to come to Parihaka and heal ten sick patients, Cowan later wrote: 'He spent a week in Parihaka and returned to his Taiporohenui whare with more money in his pocket than he had possessed since he left his old home town of Newport.'[1]

6.2 The Cowan interviews, 1903-06

Cowan first met Kimble Bent in 1903,[2] shortly after moving to Wellington with his wife Eunice. The shift from Auckland to Wellington was to take up a position researching and writing travel articles – along with more general publicity – for a newly created Department of Tourist and Health Resorts.[3] The Department had been formed in 1901 and was apparently the first government department in the world to be created exclusively to promote tourism.[4] Its main push at the time was to open up the South Island to tourist travel and Cowan had been invited to work for the Department by Prime Minister Joseph Ward, who had read his articles in the *Auckland Star*, according to a former *Star* journalist named Eugene Grayland: 'Cowan naturally accepted this remarkable opportunity to travel widely and write about New Zealand's glories for overseas readers,' Grayland wrote in 1972. 'He was given a fairly free hand and for seven years travelled all over the country, turning out a constant stream of articles, pamphlets and books that formed the basis of the state publicity scheme.'[5]

When Cowan first met Bent, he was keeping a low profile while living in Blenheim – on the opposite side of Cook Strait to Cowan – with a farming family who had taken him in. 'Sometimes he would venture out, unrecognised, save by one or two Pakehas who knew his story and kept his secret,' Cowan later wrote.[6] Bent was induced to cross the Strait to Wellington by the head of the Department of Tourist and Health Resorts, Thomas Donne, in order to have his photo portrait taken and be interviewed.[7] Donne was a collector of

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[1] Cowan, 'The White Slave', Ch. 19.
[2] James Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent: A Story of Wild Life in the New Zealand Bush* [1911] (Christchurch: Capper Press facsimile, 1973), ix.
[3] Colquhoun, *DNZB*, 3: 119.
[4] Neill Atkinson, *Trainland: How Railways Made New Zealand* (Auckland: Random House, 2007), 104.
[5] Eugene Grayland, *More Famous New Zealanders* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1972), 105.
[6] James Cowan, 'The White Slave', 'Introductory', *New Zealand Times*, 12 Sep. 1906, 5.
[7] Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, ix.

Maori antiquities and New Zealand fine art, but that does not explain the circumstances behind inviting Bent to Wellington, as his story had nothing to do with promoting tourism. On Bent's part however, there was an obvious motive of self-interest: 'The soldiers serving in the Taranaki war, which was then proceeding, were convinced that Bent was fighting against his old comrades,' Cowan later wrote, 'but according to the man's own account, he did not take any more active part on the enemy's side than making cartridges and helping to build fortified pas.'[1] A series of interviews with Cowan would now give Bent an opportunity to clear his name.

In the spring of 1906 Cowan's interviews with Bent were published as 'The White Slave', a serial of nineteen chapters plus an introductory chapter which appeared in the *New Zealand Times* (Wellington), *Otago Daily Times* and *Auckland Star*. The version discussed here is from the *New Zealand Times* which can be viewed in its entirety on the 'Papers Past' website from 12 September 1906 until 13 October 1906, or in Volume Three of this thesis.

In Chapter One of the serial Cowan gave a brief outline of Bent's early life. He was born in Eastport, Maine in the United States in 1837, and during his youth spent three years aboard a United States training ship before making his way to England and joining the Fifty-Seventh Regiment. The regiment was acting as a mobile force for policing the British Empire and Bent initially travelled with the regiment to India. Later, he was posted to Taranaki while the British Army was fighting in the New Zealand Wars. In 1864 he was court-marshalled for insubordination and flogged.[2]

A year later he deserted: 'On the morning of the twelfth of June, Bent, in uniform but without his arms, strolled out of the barracks and, unobserved except by one or two of his tent mates, who sympathetically watched him off, made his way towards the banks of the Tangahoe River,' Cowan wrote of that fateful day in "the White Slave'.[3] The Tangahoe flowed into the South Taranaki Bight about five kilometres east of the present-day town of Hawera. In 1864 it was acting as a border river, separating the British Army and associated New Zealand armed corps from the Hauhaus. For Cowan, writing about Bent crossing the Tangahoe harked back to the days of his youth while growing up near yet another river, the Puniu, which had also acted as a border between

[1] James Cowan, 'The White Slave', 'Introductory', *New Zealand Times*, 12 Sep. 1906, 5.
[2] James Cowan, 'The White Slave', Ch. 1, *New Zealand Times*, 12 Sep. 1906, 5
[3] James Cowan, 'The White Slave', Ch. 2, *New Zealand Times*, 12 Sep. 1906, 5

Maori and Europeans following the Waikato War. For Cowan, it was happening all over again, except that this time it was another place and another river.

The one big advantage Cowan had over the previous interviewers of Bent in 1878 and 1880 was his ability to converse in Maori, whereas the early reporters had to get Bent to speak English no matter how difficult it now was for him. According to historian Michael King, it would be impossible to record an oral history from a Maori subject adequately without some knowledge of spoken Maori, which for King made the difference between a positive and a negative response more than any other factor: 'In addition, the researcher must work to establish the kind of relationship in which the informant will feel relaxed and confident enough to answer questions fully and unselfconsciously.'[1] In this context, if speaking in Maori gave Bent greater confidence, fluency and clarity, a more accurate record of the interview would result provided he presented a true account of his life. This meant that Cowan's bilingual interviews were Bent's best chance of determining whether European society could forgive him for being a deserter by their providing the fullest understanding yet of his version of events. For the interviewer is not a neutral channel, historian W. H. Oliver points out, 'but is a shaper of the story and the event they are covering through the questions they ask, or do not ask.'[2]

When he first published 'The White Slave' Cowan wrote in a letter to the editor of the *New Zealand Times* that it was not intended to be a history of the Taranaki Wars, 'but is simply a narrative of Bent's personal adventures, and the incidents that came under his immediate notice.'[3] A 'narrative' is a general term for an account of events or experiences structured so as to tell a story. For a narrative is a reference to the form in which it is written, not the content. This means that the same event or set of facts can be used to construct very different narratives, which can be long or short, detailed or plain, factual or fictitious.[4] Indeed, there is so much flexibility in how a narrative can be interpreted that

[1] Michael King, 'New Zealand Oral History: Some Cultural and Methodological Considerations (*New Zealand Journal of History*, October 1978): 109–10.
[2] W. H. Oliver, 'Oral and Other History' (*The New Zealand Journal of History*, October 1978): 101.
[3] James Cowan, The White Slave', To the Editor, *New Zealand Times*, 11 Oct. 1906, 11
[4] Tom McArthur, ed. *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 680; Tony Harcup. *A Dictionary of Journalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 189.

Bent's story, which contains elements of history, ethnography, memoir, and early oral history, can be read on several levels.

By calling 'The White Slave' a narrative, then, Cowan made it possible for different groups of readers to take completely different interpretations from the book depending on their particular approach to it. On one level, for example, the text chronicles a social experiment to find out what happens when a 'civilised' man returns to the wilderness to become a hunter-gatherer. What elements of his former civilised world would he miss? Would he survive in the 'Robinson Crusoe' tradition of a castaway? Even though Bent's lot was vastly different to Daniel Defoe's Crusoe, the concept of the castaway in terms of being separated from civilisation is a common theme in both accounts. This approach is particularly strong in 'The White Slave' because of its focus solely on Bent, a focus which becomes progressively diluted in the later book version as more 'voices' are introduced.

Alternatively, 'The White Slave' could be considered a war history because Cowan's interviews include Bent's memory of five battles from the Taranaki Wars. Looking at the serial in that context, 'The White Slave' is a story about the British Empire in its expansionist heyday, when a British soldier decided to switch sides to see if life would be better for him. Reversing his decision would have meant imprisonment or death. Cowan does not however push the battles to the fore of every chapter as much as one would expect in order to sufficiently call the serial a war history; and is just as likely to open a chapter with an anthropological description of bush life as anything else. It is almost as if he is undecided in how he should best present the material, so opts for multiple themes and introductions.

It is not until the later book version that his chapter headings give the impending battles more prominence, at which stage the dominant theme of Bent's narrative could be considered as shifting towards war history, Bent bringing to the text a series of anecdotes about coping while under the threat of being continually attacked, and how it affected him. Whenever a battle was about to take place, he had always claimed that was sent away with the non-combatants (women, children, elderly) when the war-chief in charge of defending the pa ordered that it was time for them to leave. Even during the supposed shooting at of Major Hassard at Otapawa pa, Bent claimed to be in a bush camp about four miles away: 'I never fired a shot against the whites all

the time I was with the Hauhaus,' he told Cowan, 'and the charge that I killed my old officer is utterly untrue.'[1]

There is however one inconsistency to Bent's claim of always departing before a battle started. In the attack on Papa-tiakiaki pa (Moturoa) in 1868 by forces under Colonel McDonnell, Cowan wrote that Bent *was* present, at least during the early part of the fighting:

> All this time Kimble Bent was squatting in a trench and peering over the bank at the fight. Bullets zipped and sang over him. A woman quite close to him was shot dead through the head as she incautiously rose in her excitement to wave her shawl and yell a fighting cry to the men at the palisades.
>
> Just after the fight began, Bent was an eyewitness of the most desperately daring deed he had ever seen. A fiery old tattooed warrior by name of Te Waka-tapu-ruru … was in a quiver of excitement while the garrison awaited the attack and could hardly be silenced until the attack was delivered.
>
> When the Pakeha storming party rushed up at the double, the old man could no longer be restrained. Perfectly naked, except for the broad flax waist girdle, which held his short-handled tomahawk, and gripping his double-barrelled gun, the tall old savage took a great running jump at the stockade from the inner parapet and leaped clean over it! Yelling a Pai-marire battle cry as he rose from the ground after his extraordinary leap, he snatched the tomahawk from his belt, and charged straight for the advancing whites. It was a fit of 'whakamoremore' – sheer blind desperation, utter recklessness of death. Possibly the furious old fanatic imagined that his Hauhau angel and his mesmeric password, 'Hapa! Pai-marire! Hau!' would avert the bullets of the Pakeha. But he was killed in the very charge – the first Maori shot that day. A Pakeha ball took him square in the forehead, and with a convulsive bound and a half-choked barking 'Hau!' on his lips, the tattooed brave fell dead amongst the foremost of his enemies.[2]

This is a solid example of Bent remaining inside a pa during a battle and telling Cowan of events that took place there – for the start of the battle, at least –

[1] Cowan, 'The White Slave', Ch. 14, *New Zealand Times*, 29 Sep. 1906, 13.
[2] Cowan, 'The White Slave', Ch. 14.

despite his continual assertions to the contrary throughout his interview sessions with Cowan.

6.3 From serial to book, 1906–11

Once 'The White Slave' was published it was inevitable that veterans who had served in the various campaigns mentioned in the text would focus on various details left out of the narrative, as the following exchange points out. For example, John Handley of Okehu, Wanganui wrote a letter to the editor of the *New Zealand Times* complaining of the details that had been missed out in Chapter Fifteen of the serial, which covered the attack on Tauranga-ika pa. 'It opens with a mis-statement and is all wrong from beginning to end,' he wrote. He then itemized a series of small events that had been incorrectly reported, suggesting at the end that if the authors wished the work to be a success, they should re-write the chapter.[1]

Cowan replied in his own letter to the newspaper that the facts as narrated had been verified 'from a variety of trustworthy sources – from eye-witnesses on both sides, who are probably much better qualified to speak with authority than is Mr Handley':

> After careful inquiry, only one error can be detected in the chapter, and that is the statement in the first paragraph that the Tauranga-ika stockade was erected on the site of 'an old trenched pa'; this should no doubt read 'old residential kainga'. … With this trifling exception, the story is pronounced exactly correct by men who fought and scouted round Tauranga-ika. The description of the pa and the engagements there agrees in every particular with both Pakeha and Maori narratives, and with the published account written by Sir George Whitmore, then Colonel commanding the troops in the attack on the pa.[2]

Handley's letter and Cowan's reply show that 'The White Slave' was taking on a life of its own, moving beyond the bounds of an informant narrative into a story with multiple voices. Not everyone had grasped the value of the serial as one man's oral testimony rather than a comprehensive history of the Taranaki

[1] John Handley, 'The White Slave', 'To the Editor', *New Zealand Times*, 11 Oct. 1906, 11
[2] James Cowan, 'The White Slave', 'To the Editor', *New Zealand Times*, 11 Oct. 1906, 11.

Wars, seemingly echoing the sentiments of Michael King when he wrote in 1978 of the difficulties he also encountered while trying to establish from oral evidence *alone* 'something as fundamental as what apparently happened'. Memories deteriorated, informants died, and oral accounts differed, King wrote, for both sets of resources – oral and documentary – 'were too thin for either to be relied on exclusively.'[1]

To accommodate some of these new voices, Cowan in 1911 published an updated version of the 'White Slave' as a book called *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*. The book included new material from a series Cowan had written for the *Auckland Star* called 'Tales of the Maori War' during November and December of 1909. The book was now a third longer than the serial and contained stories from both sides of the Taranaki Wars. Indeed, a more appropriate title for the book however would have been 'The Adventures of Kimble Bent and Other Tales of the Taranaki Wars' to more accurately reflect the sharp deviation from the earlier version as one man's testimony. Cowan was now being forced to resort to the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator to explain away the events taking place beyond Bent's sphere. For while cosseted away in the forest with his Maori masters, he was largely unaware of the wider events of the Taranaki campaigns. His main sources of information were either returning war parties or when occasional messengers from the plains brought stories of battles and skirmishes.

The key issue surrounding *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, then, is whether it is too imaginative to be considered non-fiction, for the book's content is too often reminiscent of historical fiction. Publisher Whitcombe and Tombs had the book printed and bound by Hazell, Watson and Viney Limited of London,[2] possibly with one eye on it being cheaper to get printed in England than in New Zealand at that time, and one eye on a potential British readership. For in England at the turn of the twentieth century, adventure stories for boys featuring the glory days of the British Empire ranked second in popularity in the genre of historical fiction, beaten only by 'true romance' – albeit by a wide margin.[3] But Cowan had no intention for his book to be considered fiction and was quite explicit about the authenticity of his work in the book's preface. 'This

[1] King, 'New Zealand Oral History', 107.
[2] Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, vi.
[3] Margaret Drabble, ed., 'Historical Fiction' (*The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 483.

book is not a work of fiction,' he began, ignoring any mention of the phony dialogue:

> It is a plain narrative of real life in the New Zealand bush, a true story of adventure in a day not yet remote, when adventure in abundance was still to be had in the land of the Maori. Every name used is a real one, every character who appears in these pages had existence in those war days of forty years ago. Every incident described here is a faithful record of actual happenings; some of them may convince the reader that truth can be stranger than fiction.[1]

Here, Cowan has carefully worded his statement to imply that his book is 'a faithful record' with 'actual happenings' and real characters, but would the reading public buy into his blinkered interpretation of authenticity? The *New Zealand Herald* remained neutral in a basic review of the book in February 1912, describing it as 'a most interesting contribution both to the history of New Zealand and to our knowledge of Maori life and customs.'[2] The *Wanganui Chronicle* described the book as 'a stirring tale, and it has the virtue of being true,'[3] seemingly as if the passages of dialogue in the scenes when Bent was not even present were perfectly acceptable because it was after all only a 'tale'. Admittedly, there had also been dialogue in the original version, 'The White Slave', but it was at least made plausible by Bent being present on those occasions and was retelling the conversations that had occurred.

6.4 Later criticism, 1924–

In the second decade of the twentieth century *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* helped usher in a local film industry based around stories of the New Zealand Wars. According to Annabel Cooper in *Filming the Colonial Past: The New Zealand Wars on Screen* (2018), an aspiring film director named Rudall Hayward read *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* and later wrote that when he saw around him films dealing with the history of the American West, he believed that New Zealand had material equally as fascinating and that 'a vast amount of material was available in the form of historical accounts.'[4] At the time, the

[1] Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, vii.
[2] 'News and Notes', *New Zealand Herald*, 10 Feb. 1912, 4 (no author).
[3] 'The Story of Kimble Bent', *Wanganui Chronicle*, 24 Jan. 1912, 8 (no author).
[4] Annabel Cooper, *Filming the Colonial Past: The New Zealand Wars on Screen* (Otago: Otago University Press, 2018), 36.

motion picture industry was undergoing a meteoric rise in popularity: in 1915 there were 165 picture theatres throughout New Zealand, a number which quadrupled by 1928.[1] In 1924 Hayward hired Cowan as a historical advisor and went on to produce and direct three films, the first two of them silent, *Rewi's Last Stand* (1925) and *The Te Kooti Trail* (1927); followed by a sound version of *Rewi's Last Stand* in 1940.[2]

Hayward's inspiration and Cowan's books (and war histories by others) conveyed the story of the New Zealand Wars to a new generation of film-going audiences. As historical advisor to Hayward, Cowan showed that he was not hostile to reinterpretations of his writing as long as he was being acknowledged and compensated for his expertise and the use of his material. But just how accurate can a filmic story be compared to written versions? In a 2001 study of the impact of film and novels, Professor Annabel Cooper suggested that both film and literary fiction covering the colonial wars in Pakeha cultural memory demanded as much attention as written histories: 'As Edward Said has argued, colonization proceeds not only through political and military institutions but cultural ones, including the dissemination and consumption of narrative fiction.'[3] If one follows Said's line of argument, then the wider story of *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* was one of colonization through a narrative of real events during the New Zealand Wars. 'More recently, though, scholars have suggested that film should be understood as "doing history differently", Cooper later suggests in *Filming the Colonial Past*, 'and should not be measured by the same standards as written history.' She goes on to cite Robert Rosenstone who suggested that '[h]istory on film is largely about emotion, an attempt to make us feel as if we are learning about the past by vicariously living through its moments.' Cooper adds that 'film engages our senses so that we feel immersed in its world. Further, 'by calling upon our emotions and senses, film has a memorability that written history can seldom match.'[4]

Under that scenario, if *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* had ever been turned into a film, a darkened cinema environment and selective dramatic music could possibly have created a nightmare for the film viewer, especially

[1] Cooper, *Filming the Colonial Past,* 37.
[2] Cooper, *Filming the Colonial Past,* 38, 40.
[3] Annabel Cooper, '"Our Old Friends and Recent Foes": James Cowan, Rudall Hayward and Memories of Natural Affections in the New Zealand Wars', *The Journal of New Zealand Studies* (NS14, 2013): 153.
[4] Cooper, *Filming the Colonial Past,* 19.

considering that *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* deals with cannibalism, which was possibly too close to home. Alternatively, a film with its inevitable shortcuts could possibly have done no more harm than Cowan had already done by partially fictionalizing his book version of Bent's story. For, as Cooper points out, film has reach: 'James Belich, who was determined to take history to a broader audience, was startled to find that the screen could reach audiences many times the size of even the raciest historical book.'[1]

Finally, there is a touch of irony in Hayward hiring Cowan to help him make authentic New Zealand movies, for in 1996 literary critic Eric McCormick accused Cowan of being obsessed with recreating a New Zealand version of the American West in much of his writing.[2] What McCormick saw as an 'obsession' however worked in Cowan's favour in Hayward's eyes as far as filmic values went. Take for example Cowan's coverage of the incident at Waima Pass during the 1898 Dog tax Rebellion at Hokianga. Here was a typical Hollywood setting for an ambush, a pass with little room to manoeuvre, and a column of troops about to enter it, their progress through the pass being tracked by a gang of Maori 'renegades'. In true Hollywood fashion, 'something' would have had to happen in order to let 'justice' prevail, even if it meant a 'last stand' for the troops under a hail of bullets. The ambush at Waima Pass never made it on screen, but what Cowan's reportage for the *Auckland Star* revealed was that many of the iconic elements used by Hollywood and earlier writers of Western romance novels to typify a nineteenth century North American setting were already present in New Zealand without Cowan having to invent them.

Returning to books now, Bent's story has appeared in a number of works, both fiction and non-fiction, all with largely varying narratives. In the non-fiction book category, Bent received a one-page biography in Cowan's *The New Zealand Wars*.[3] Much later, James Belich used Bent's story to help set the scene for a wider understanding of the wars in Taranaki, especially as he had such a unique and valuable viewpoint from the Maori side. Bent is mentioned in *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (1985) in

[1] Cooper, *Filming the Colonial Past,* 19.
[2] Eric McCormick, Eric. *An Absurd Ambition: Autobiographical Writings* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996), 146.
[3] Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars*, II: 176.

which Belich refers to 'Bent's memoirs, dictated to Cowan'.[1] Bent is more conspicuous in Belich's second book, *I Shall Not Die: Titokowaru's War 1968-69* (1989), because the Maori war-chief mentioned in the title, Riwha Titokowaru, was his protector for a period. Bent also has a listing in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* written by W. H. Oliver, and in 2005 Nigel Ogle published a booklet called *Runaway Soldier: The Kimble Bent Story*.

Occupying a genre of its own is a graphic novel (or animated book) called *Kimble Bent, Malcontent* (2011), drawn and written by Chris Grosz and supplying a factual albeit truncated version of Bent's story.

In the fiction category, Bent's story was published as a historical novel called *Monday's Warriors* (1990) by Maurice Shadbolt, in which Cowan received some criticism. So, what did Shadbolt think of the making of *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* considering that he managed to glean a novel from Cowan's idea? Between 1986 and 1993 Shadbolt had written a trilogy of the New Zealand Wars, which Ralph Crane described as 'perhaps the most important work of historical fiction yet produced by a New Zealand writer.'[2] The trilogy consisted of *Season of the Jew* (1986) which looked at Te Kooti's campaign, *Monday's Warriors* (1990) which featured Bent and Titokowaru's campaign, and *The House of Strife* (1993) which looked at Hone Heke and the northern campaign. At the end of *Monday's Warriors* Shadbolt wrote an outline of the life of Titokowaru and Bent based on the research he had compiled, and in the same chapter criticised Cowan's standard of research for *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*. Firstly, he wrote that Cowan failed to check the spelling of Bent's first name, adding that he was bound to get much else wrong. 'He duly did. Much might be credited to Bent's leg-pulling. Much was surely due to Cowan's failure to audit Bent's story.'[3]

Bent's Christian name has been spelt in two ways over the years, either as 'Kimball' or 'Kimble'. Early references to 'Kimball Bent' can be found in two books written in the nineteenth century about the New Zealand Wars by Walter Gudgeon. He mentions a 'Kimball Bent' in *Reminiscences of the War in*

[1] James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*. (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1986), 272.
[2] Ralph Crane, 'Shadbolt, Maurice' (In R. Robinson & N. Wattie, eds., *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998), 468.
[3] Maurice Shadbolt, *Monday's Warriors* (Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 307.

New Zealand (1879)[1] and in *The Defenders of New Zealand* (1887).[2] Gudgeon later allowed Cowan to use some of the content from *Reminiscences of the War in New Zealand* for *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*. In return, Cowan thanked Gudgeon in the book's preface for his information and assistance,[3] but at some stage he also made a conscious decision to spell Bent's first name as 'Kimble' – even after working with Gudgeon. Other historians also prefer to use 'Kimble', for example W. H. Oliver in his profile of Bent for *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (although he also allows the alternative spelling).[4] James Belich also prefers 'Kimble' in *I Shall Not Die*, and 'Kimble' also appears on Bent's death certificate.[5]

Secondly, Shadbolt wrote that Bent denied firing at fellow whites while living with the Hauhaus, and particularly not at his regimental commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Jason Hassard (1825–66). He admitted to only manufacturing shot, and that the story 'would not have survived long under cross-examination in a witness box.'[6] Belich however writes in *I Shall Not Die* that a South Taranaki Maori chief named Ngawaka Taurua said that Bent did not shoot Hassard.[7] Further, Cowan wrote in *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* that Bent was not allowed to handle a gun in an engagement for fear he might use it against the Hauhaus. When the pa was attacked on the day Hassard was shot, Bent was at least three miles away on the northern side of the Mangemange stream: 'This is confirmed by the Maoris,' Cowan wrote:[8]

A scapegoat was however needed to mark the death of this popular commander, and one has only to refer to the obituary in the *Wellington Independent* for Hassard to gauge the level of resentment that could have been generated towards Bent as the suspected shooter. Hassard fell mortally wounded 'while gallantly leading his company to the assault of Otapawa,' the obituary read. He left a widow and a large family, 'but it must be a satisfaction

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[1] Walter Edward Gudgeon, *Reminiscences of the War in New Zealand* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1879), 190.
[2] Walter Edward Gudgeon, *Defenders of New Zealand* (Auckland: Brett Printing and Publishing, 1887), 529–30
[3] Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, x.
[4] W. H. Oliver, 'Bent, Kimble', *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (5 vols. Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1993–2000), 1: 27–28.
[5] Chris Grosz, *Kimble Bent, Malcontent: The Wild Adventures of a Runaway Soldier in Old-Time New Zealand* (Auckland: Random House, 2011), last pg. (unnumbered).
[6] Shadbolt, *Monday's Warriors*, 307.
[7] Belich, *I Shall Not Die*, 37–38.
[8] Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, 61.

to them in their bereavement to know that he died in harness, leading on his men, his death bed their arms, and his requiem their shouts of victory.'[1]

Thirdly, Shadbolt wrote that Cowan credited Bent with 'half-membership of a mysterious Indian tribe called the Musqua in northern Maine', adding that there was no such tribe.[2] An online search using the word 'Musqua Indian' however reveals a group of Indians using 'Musqua' as a surname, based mainly in Saskatchewan, Canada. Further, *Encyclopaedia Londinensis* (1810) lists 'Musqua–tons' and 'Musqua–kies' as Indian inhabitants of the southern shore of Lake Michigan,[3] which lies 1,400 kilometres west of Maine. Lake Michigan is part of the Great Lakes system that empties into the Atlantic via connecting rivers adjacent to the State of Maine, so it might have been possible to reach the St Croix River in Maine by canoe, where there was an Indian camp and Bent's mother reportedly once lived. Bent told Cowan that his mother Eliza was half-Indian. She married Waterman Bent, a successful ship-builder of Eastport, Maine, and the couple had seven children.[4] There is no mention of Eliza in online databases but Waterman Bent, *is* mentioned; he died in 1855 and his body resides in Eastport cemetery.[5] Sketchy evidence indeed, but at the very least new technology since Shadbolt's era in the form of the internet casts some doubt on his assertion.

Finally, it is not immediately clear why Shadbolt would want to question the validity of Cowan's research, but according to the W. H. Oliver in his profile of Bent for the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, a contributing factor to why later historians held mixed opinions about the accuracy of Bent's accounts was because there was so little evidence of what took place in his life – except from his own much later testimony. Oliver had read *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* and checked newspaper articles in the *Taranaki News*, *Patea Mail* and *New Zealand Herald* between 1873 and 1880. He concluded that Bent had lied to retrieve his reputation but conceded that many of Bent's stories were probable because much of it was unrelated to his later quest to justify his actions, and that Cowan had checked Bent's tale with survivors from both sides of the conflict.[6]

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[1] 'The Late Lieut. Colonel Hassard', *Wellington Independent*, 18 January 1866, 5.
[2] Shadbolt, *Monday's Warriors*, 307.
[3] *Encyclopaedia Londinensis* (Sussex: John Wilkes, 1810), Vol. 16: 403.
[4] Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, 7.
[5] www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nbcampob/eport.htm
[6] Oliver, 'Bent, Kimble', *DNZB*, 1: 27–28.

James Belich also accepted the reliability of Bent's testimony while he was living with Titokowaru and his followers. Belich later published Titokowaru's story in *I Shall Not Die*, in which he wrote that Bent had no reason to lie: 'His memoirs are generally accurate, he kept a journal, and received a tohunga's training in the arts of memory. He was an eyewitness, and as one of Titokowaru's immediate entourage was in a position to be well informed.'[1] Mystery surrounds the existence of a journal except when Bent mentions in 'The White Slave':

> I had managed to procure some needles and thread, together with paper and pencil (I kept up a sort of diary now and then), and one or two other little things which I kept in a kit, thinking that though I had nothing to sew with the needles and thread, and very little to do with the other belongings, they might come in useful before very long.[2]

For Annabel Cooper, Cowan's collaboration with Bent is a sympathetic account by the standards of the time, which is 'the more remarkable because Cowan's work is also strongly influenced by the history and fiction of the North American West, where natural intimacies between colonizer and colonized were hardly a dominant theme.' In contrast, 'the border society Cowan produced was much more strongly marked by the working out of cultural exchange in landscapes that were frequently both contested and shared.'[3]

6.5 Conclusion

In 1906 James Cowan published a newspaper serial called 'The White Slave', which was about the life of an army deserter named Kimble Bent during the Taranaki Wars of the 1860s. The serial was followed some five years later by a book version of Bent's life called *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*. The main aim of this chapter was to see which of the two versions of Bent's story was the more authentic. Bent had renounced European civilization and returned to a seemingly antediluvian world of the forest dweller. His life amongst the Maori

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[1] Belich, *I Shall Not Die*, 244.
[2] James Cowan, 'the White Slave', Ch. 4, *New Zealand Times*, 15 Sep. 1906, 6.
[3] Cooper, 'Our Old Friends and Recent Foes', *JNZS*, 156.

as an army deserter was certainly worth getting right, particularly as he survived the Taranaki Wars when at least three other deserters to the Maori side did not.

Unfortunately, the book version suffered from having too much fictitious dialogue. This would not normally have been a problem if Cowan had stated that he was writing historical fiction. Instead, he maintained that the book was 'a true story'[1] despite its sections of fanciful dialogue, the book's content more reminiscent of a colonial adventure novel. To exacerbate the problem regarding authenticity, later generations have used the book version to access Bent's story because it was readily available compared to the serial. Accounts of Bent's experiences subsequently appeared in a number of books, both fiction and non-fiction, and the fact that Bent's story is still available in a variety of formats, including a graphic novel, suggests that the Bent occupies a sort of 'dark' folk hero status as an example of the outcast 'other' in our culture.

It is my contention however that it is important to get his story right, and that 'The White Slave' should be considered the definitive edition of Kimble Bent's story, not *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*. My approach to deciding which was the better version was to trace Bent's life back to his first interviews between 1878 and 1880 with journalists once he had emerged from the forest, albeit temporarily. The reporters' opinions subsequently differed regarding Bent's capacity to be considered civilized enough to re-enter Pakeha society, so Cowan's interviews during 1903–06 became important to help decide.

Bent's testimony was however useless until it was translated into proper English. For Cowan noted in the serial's introduction that Bent had spent thirteen years 'completely estranged from his fellow-whites' and 'had almost forgotten the English language and could speak it but with difficulty and hesitation'. So, Cowan's interpretation became Bent's story by default, even if that meant that one had to accept Cowan's own idiosyncratic writing approach to the serial.

'The White Slave' still scores highly, however, because there is little attempt to create extraneous dialogue, which has tended to corrupt the integrity of the book version. Essentially, it is a piece of long-form journalism which could only be accommodated in newspapers of the day as a serial. But it is not really a serial in a conventional sense, for there is no build-up to a dramatic ending. No doubt Cowan was desirous of turning it into a book

[1] Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, vii.

considering the prestige of that format, but a good story got mangled when he had to pad it out to book length. The additional material seemed forced and did not fit as smoothly as was probably envisaged. Fortunately, the re-emergence of 'The White Slave' means that the original narrative can be appreciated on its own merits as raw journalism before commercial publishing considerations took over the project.

7
Opportunity Knocks! Cowan's role in the transformation of *New Zealand Railways Magazine* 1928–40

'Engines – the small boy's dream, the father's secret vice.'

A. Oman Heany[1]

Between 1928 and 1940 James Cowan published up to eighty per cent of his journalism in just one magazine, *New Zealand Railways Magazine*, according to his article listings in his Turnbull Library bibliography.[2] Although he was only one of a large and diverse group of contributors, any comprehensive study of his writing during the 1930s cannot ignore such a huge personal commitment to a single periodical, which was published between 1926 and 1940 by the New Zealand Government Railways Department.' In historical circles, a series named 'Famous New Zealanders' has been recognized as Cowan's most significant contribution, and was 'an important contribution to New Zealand biographical journalism,' according to Stephen Hamilton in his doctoral thesis 'New Zealand English Periodicals of Literary Interest Active 1920s–1960s' (1996).[3] The series was launched in 1933 and coincided with a revamp of the magazine in which it diversified into the fields of travel writing and local cultural work including drawings and photography. The timing of the series' debut placed Cowan at the forefront of the revamp, which when combined with his other contributions made him a major 'voice' for the magazine. For Chris Hilliard, Cowan's 'Famous New Zealanders' acquired 'some of the standing of a reference book' before the publication of the first *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* by G. H. Scholefield in 1940. Hilliard added that he was surprised the series was not reissued in book form considering Cowan's propensity to recycle his work.[4]

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[1] A. Oman Heany, 'The Dream of a "Water Baby" – Through the Engine Driver's University', *Railways Magazine*, Nov. 1931, 38.
[2] C. R. H. Taylor, *A Bibliography of the Works of James Cowan* (Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library, 1941), 4–27.
[3] Stephen Hamilton, 'New Zealand English Periodicals of Literary Interest Active 1920s–1960s' (PhD thesis, English, Auckland University, 1996), 521.
[4] Hilliard, 'Stories of an Era Not Yet So Very Remote', *JNZS*, 33.

Through a study of Cowan's contributions one can discern a parallel journey of *New Zealand Railways Magazine* from its progression from a shop organ into a major cultural entity during the 1930s. (The magazine shortened its name to *Railways Magazine* in 1935, which will be used from now on.) This chapter accordingly begins with a brief background to the creation of the magazine and the original philosophy behind it. It also introduces its editor, a former railwayman with a literary bent who was the driving force behind the magazine for its entire life (1926–40). The second part of the chapter charts Cowan's arrival at the magazine from 1928, a role that gradually expanded into other writing areas. A coterie of professional journalists was also starting to form as the magazine slowly began introducing material beyond the bounds of its primary role. The third part of the chapter backgrounds the unusual circumstances that led to a radical revamping of the magazine in 1933 and how much of a contribution Cowan made to that change in direction.

This chapter, then, shows Cowan interacting with his colleagues much more than in previous chapters of this thesis, for his fortunes were heavily interwoven with the vision of the editor and the desire by Railways Department management to create a magazine with a national character that had up to that time been only partly self-sustaining.

7.1 Rise of a magazine, 1926

Railways Magazine was a product of the Railways Publicity Branch which when it was established in 1925 had only two staff members – a manager and an assistant. Its manager was named George (G. G.) Stewart, who became also became founding editor of *Railways Magazine* and remained in that role throughout the magazine's fourteen-year life. Stewart had emigrated from Scotland with his parents, the family settling in Nelson where he went to secondary school before taking up a railway cadetship in 1898. Some 27 years later his appointment as editor of *Railways Magazine* was partly because of the wide experience he had gained in the intervening years working in various departments of the railway network. He also had a literary bent, which included membership of the executive of the local branch of PEN, a worldwide association founded in London in 1921 to promote friendship and intellectual co-operation amongst writers.[1]

[1] 'Retirement of Mr. G. G. Stewart', *Railways Magazine*, Jun. 1940, 13 (no author).

The inaugural issue dealt entirely with the internal workings of the Railways Department. There was no initial move to promote the railway for tourism purposes; rather, the focus was on establishing a communication channel to address the needs of the Department's workers. The first edition contained such items as an interview with Railways Minister Gordon Coates – the magazine being a Coates initiative[1] – news of the upgrading of a railway bridge on the West Coast, a speech by the Prime Minister while attending the annual head office picnic, an article on labour problems, and so on. In his interview Coates said he wanted the Department 'to be properly appreciated by the public and staff alike', for which purpose the magazine would 'act as an agent for the easy circulation of valuable information'. It would function as 'a common platform for the interchange of ideas and suggestions,' he said, and provide a medium to foster a spirit of co-operation. Without that spirit, 'no great undertaking such as our national railways can be operated successfully with the minimum of friction and the maximum of public advantage,' he said. Further, for Coates, a periodical like *Railways Magazine* was long overdue for the country: 'In this one thing, at least, we have lagged behind the Old Country and our Sister Nations of the Empire,' he said, adding that elsewhere the departmental magazine, or 'Shop Organ', as it was commonly called, had proved a useful and valuable medium of communication in government departments and large private companies. He hoped the magazine would act as a medium to help settle differences, 'which under the old regime might have been allowed to drift until culminating in a serious dispute.'[2]

Stewart's first editorial for the magazine was an editorial, called 'The Trial Run', had echoes of a shop steward cajoling his members at a local trade union meeting, Stewart writing that if the branches of the Railways Department pulled together, they could 'exercise a tremendous influence on public opinion' by the sheer number of employees. He added that the magazine's first business was to help sell rail as an attractive mode of transportation. To do that effectively there had to be a 'firm faith in the quality of the goods we have to sell', and that it was up to the workforce to 'develop an interest in securing business'. 'There are endless ways by which traffic can be encouraged,' he added:

[1] Hamilton, 'NZ English Periodicals of Literary Interest Active 1920s–1960s', 526.
[2] Gordon Coates, 'To the Staff of Our Railways', *Railways Magazine*, May 1926, 3.

> Standing up sturdily for the Department against chance-met, ill-informed criticism; recommending Railway methods of travel and transport; using the psychology of 'Boost' to make others believe in the Railway; these and other means will readily suggest themselves if every member develops the habit of regarding the Department as his own business.[1]

One of his ideas to create 'ownership' of the railways amongst its workers was a monthly women's section in the magazine, which Stewart introduced the following in 1927. Women at that time comprised a mere 85 employees out of the entire New Zealand Railways workforce of around 17,000. Women worked in the food serveries at train stations, in the accountancy department, and as typists, but a major 'secondary work force' was the wives of railwaymen. 'We have about 12,000 married members,' Stewart wrote in his second editorial the following month, 'whose wives and daughters, we hope, will appreciate the regular appearance of a page devoted to feminine and household matters.'[2] A women's section called 'Of Feminine Interest' now became a regular part of each edition, containing notes on fashion and shopping along with hints for around the home for that major 'secondary work force' of railwaymen's housewives.

Other new measures included human-interest stories and gossipy pieces. The September 1927 issue, for example, opened with 'The Romance of the Lost Property Sale', which described the experiences and emotions of individuals who attended an annual auction of goods left behind on Auckland trains. It was followed by a story on the strengthening of Waiteti Viaduct; and the making of the Maxim machine gun at Petone railway works in an experiment to see if New Zealand could supply its own ordinance. Towards the back of the magazine there was a regular page called 'London Letter'; a report on a guest speaker at the Citizens Luncheon Club; and 'Of Feminine Interest', Stewart's brainchild to extend harmonious worker relations into the home environment, the page also reporting on the annual staff dance. The September 1927 edition also contained a page devoted to positive feedback from anyone who had a good experience to tell about his or her railway experience, called 'By Those

[1] G. G. Stewart, 'The Trial Run', editorial, *Railways Magazine*, May 1926, 2.
[2] Stewart, G. G. 'A Ladies' Page', editorial, *Railways Magazine*, Jun. 1927, 3.

Who Like Us'. For example, Mr. W. H. Wood 'of Oxford University Press' wrote expressing his appreciation

> for the courtesy, the good attention, and useful help, afforded me by the officer in charge of the 'B' goods shed at Invercargill in connection with my luggage which, with myself, arrived by the *S. S. Moeraki* on the 8th June. By the assistance of the officer mentioned, and members of his staff, I was saved considerable trouble and delay. Also, on the passenger platform I found readiness to assist me when making inquiries in the same matter.[1]

Another page was called 'Suggestions and Inventions', where contributors received a bonus of between two and ten pounds if their idea or suggestion was adopted. That month, apprentice carpenter E. C. D. Elmes of Addington received a bonus of five pounds for suggesting the idea of a metal plate to hold braces on a certain type of railway wagon. Promotions within the service were also mentioned: No doubt the relations of L. C. Stubley of Christchurch were chuffed when the magazine announced that he had been promoted from acting fireman to fireman in the Locomotive Branch; and that stationmaster W. T. Dick of Okahukura Station, on the Stratford–Okahukura Line, was now at 'Grade Six' in rank.[2]

Employees in the service of the Railways Department received a free copy along with principal public libraries and leading shippers and traders doing business with the Department, according to a blurb on its title page. A further 2,500 copies were printed each month to be sold for sixpence each at railway station kiosks and bookstores, thus extending the magazine's exposure to the general public. Sales of the magazine did not cover its costs of production, however, an aspect that was queried in Parliament in 1927 once the 'Railway Statement' of affairs for the previous year was published. In reply, the Right Honourable Allan Bell, MP for the Bay of Islands, told the House that as far as the Railway Board was concerned, the publication was 'one of the finest things they have done, because it has been the means of creating great interest not only among the staff, but amongst people outside.' Newspapers all over New Zealand were continually publishing extracts from the magazine, Bell added,

[1] 'By Those Who Like Us', *Railways Magazine*, Sep. 1927, 41 (no author).
[2] 'Promotions Recorded' & 'Suggestions and Inventions', *Railways Magazine*, Sep. 1927, 47 (no author).

and that 'although it costs a considerable amount of money,' he hoped the publication would continue.[1]

Bell's support of the magazine was laudable considering that the magazine's production values were already austere. The only colour was on the front and back covers, and the bulk of the supplied copy was still contributed by local railway workers with no mention of payment other than the honour of being published. For example, in the April 1928 edition the former chief accountant of New Zealand Railways, L. C. E. Hamann, contributed an account of his travels through America and Europe, which was serialized over several issues.[2] Another contribution from locomotive shunter N. McGaffan covered his impressions and observations of railway practices in Australia during a recent holiday in that country. It also became a serial.[3] For Stephen Hamilton, a historian, archivist and writer on New Zealand literature, Australian settings were common in many of the contributions, the fact that it was an Australian setting being considered irrelevant by the magazine's readers; 'but for the naming of indigenous species, the bush and railway settings were more or less interchangeable.'[4] It is hard to imagine the New Zealand bush being interchangeable with Australia's dry wastes, but the railways technology and infrastructure was probably similar.

7.2 Cowan's debut, 1928

In 1928 Cowan began writing on a regular basis for *Railways Magazine*, which at the time had a stable circulation of over 20,000, according to its circulation figures on its title page. The publishing of his material meant that there were now at least two professional journalists contributing regularly to the magazine, the other one being the well-known Wellington journalist Leo Fanning. Here, it is too early to suggest that giving work to professional writers was a planned trend for the magazine, at least not in 1928. Rather, their presence should be compared to a football team contracting a couple of 'star' players for a season to boost the team's overall profile.

Cowan had recently completed a 65-page booklet for the Railways Department called *The Romance of the Rail: The North Island Main Trunk*

[1] Allan Bell. 'Magazine Appreciation', *Railways Magazine*, Nov. 1927, 45.
[2] L. C. E. Hamann, 'Notes on Our Travels', *Railways Magazine*, Apr. 1928, 24–27.
[3] N. McGaffan, 'A Holiday in Australia', *Railways Magazine*, Apr. 1928, 14–16.
[4] Hamilton, 'New Zealand English Periodicals of Literary Interest Active 1920s–1960s', 529.

Railway, and the magazine began serializing the book in its May 1928 edition. This meant that, for a few months, each issue would contain a historical piece on a section of the Main Trunk Line. An Auckland to Wellington express was to become the 'standard means of travel between the two main centres for the next forty years or so,' Stephen Hamilton wrote, as part of a push by Prime Minister (and Minister of Railways) J. G. Coates to 'counter the rise in road transport and private vehicle use.'[1] In that respect *The Romance of the Rail* as a booklet should have had a long life. It had cost the Railways Department nothing to turn into it a serial considering that it had already been commissioned as a book, but it had obvious limitations in serial form. Cowan had written it with a north-south flow, that is, from the perspective of a train leaving Auckland Railway Station destined for Wellington. The text did not work at all when travelling in the opposite direction. To further mangle the flow of the serial, the magazine sometimes cut a chapter in half, an editorial decision which was based on lack of space presumably, and would include it the following edition. Despite Hamilton describing it as Cowan's 'first major contribution' to the magazine,[2] *The Romance of the Rail* was being treated as little more than a filler.

If one was however prepared to buy a copy of the book from the magazine kiosk at Auckland Station before boarding their train, a profound experience of the journey ahead awaited them. For the price of a shilling the traveller received a historical travel guide packed with photographs, sectional maps of the Main Trunk Line, names and locations of every station, historical photographs and artwork. Once the train started rolling *The Romance of the Rail* described what could be seen from the carriages, especially anything to do with the New Zealand Wars, even if much of that history could only be glimpsed momentarily. For example, in a section called 'Crossing the Frontier River', Cowan wrote:

> A mile south of Te Awamutu Station the railway crosses the Puniu River. An insignificant stream this, almost hidden by weeping-willows. Unless you keep a lookout for it you may cross without noticing it. But it is worth a glance and more, for it was, and still is, a river of great political importance. This quiet

[1] Hamilton, 'NZ English Periodicals of Literary Interest Active 1920s–1960s', 522.
[2] Hamilton, 'NZ English Periodicals of Literary Interest Active 1920s–1960s', 545.

river, meandering down westward to the Waipa, is the northern boundary of the Rohepotae, or King Country. [1]

'The new iron road passed through the regions where "Jimmy Cowan" knew every skyline contour, every stream, every bush track, level plain or deep gully, and, moreover, every legend about them,' Cowan's work colleague O. N. Gillespie wrote in a 1938 review of *Romance of the Rail*. He liked the text's 'easy-going but supple prose' and its 'large friendliness of outlook' which, he suggested, had been written by a person with 'a lifetime of intimacy with the folks of this bush-covered land'.[2]

Another reviewer, Lydia Wevers, wrote in 2015 that the Main Trunk obviously held some intense memories for Cowan, and part of the distinctive character of the work was how he held in tension the conflicting drives of progressivism versus nostalgia, and colonialism versus cultural sympathy: 'In his travel writing there is constant interplay between these emotional forces in his metaphors and set descriptions, and they are particularly evident as Cowan promotes the Main Trunk, which runs along the path of some intense emotional experience.'[3]

The secret behind Cowan's intimacy with the land and its people can be found in the booklet's preface, where Cowan had written that New Zealand was a young country as years go, 'but it has lived its life swiftly, and the transformation of the land from a condition of savage freedom through stress of war and wild adventure to a settled wealthy peace has been covered in a single life-time'[4] – Cowan's lifetime, that is. For the first part of the Main Trunk between Auckland and Te Awamutu had been completed in 1882, at the same time as a twelve-year-old James Cowan was roaming his childhood 'story-ground' around Te Awamutu and its immediate districts, and which would later form part of his news-gathering territory while working for the *Star* between 1888 and 1902.

For Wevers, Cowan's declaration as a self-styled keeper of the old records opened the way for a counter-narrative 'of dispossession and alienation, of nostalgia and memory, of the ineradicability of time past, no matter how

[1] James Cowan, 'The Romance of the Rail (North Island)', *Railways Magazine*, Aug. 1928, 27.
[2] O. N Gillespie, 'From Shop Organ to Great National Journal', *Railways Magazine*, Dec. 1938, 11.
[3] Lydia Wevers, 'Romance of the Rail' (*The Journal of New Zealand Studies* NS19, 2015): 44.
[4] Cowan, *Romance of the Rail No. 1*, 3.

modern or safe or comfortable the technological advance of the present.' For example, she writes, 'while he declaims that the King Country has been "wonderfully transformed" he simultaneously evokes it as a vanished scene of glory, colour and life – processions of waka in the Waikato and a territory marked off by a non-European taxonomy [the King Country]:

> While his rhetoric is determinably progressive and colonialist, his memory evokes a different set of impressions and implied emotions driven by … the "overly discredited" emotion of nostalgia, and it is obvious that when his sentences begin to flow with energy and apostrophes he is recalling and evoking the 1860s.[1]

In many respects, *The Romance of the Rail* could be described as another 'companion book' like Cowan's *The New Zealand Wars*, for here was another historic trail to follow for the price of a train ticket and an extra shilling. A degree of imagination was needed, however, because not all of Cowan's descriptions fitted what could now be seen alongside the tracks.

7.3 Advocate

In 1930 Cowan's profile in *Railways Magazine* increased even further with the creation of two regular columns written by him under the pen names of 'Tangiwai' and 'Tohunga'. The columns mostly contained snippets of information too short to build a self-contained article around, and if one was searching for a clear division between the two, 'Tangiwai' looked at life from a Pakeha perspective and 'Tohunga' from a Maori perspective. Cowan was however careful not to portray himself as an actual tohunga by adding that the information he was presenting 'was told to me' by such-and-such.

A sample column taken from the April 1934 edition of *Railways Magazine* by the 'Pakeha' columnist 'Tangiwai' contained a short account of the life of a Christchurch frontiersman named Sir Arthur Dudley Dobson, an account of the dangers for ploughmen working close to the Confiscation Line in the King Country during the 1880s, and a discussion on Mount Tongariro's appeal to thrill-seeking tourists because of its periodic eruptions.

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[1] Wevers, 'Romance of the Rail', *JNZS*, 44.

In the same edition, the 'Maori' columnist 'Tohunga' covered an account of a meeting with Tutanekai Haerehuka, who Cowan called 'the last of the old men of the tohunga class in the Arawa tribes', comments from a group of disappointed overseas tourists that the performers at Rotorua sang European songs like 'Home Sweet Home' instead of Maori ones, an account of old-time Maori customs relating to the fertility of the soil and fishing, and an account of the origin of some Maori place names.[1]

Overall however, the delineation between the two columns was not rigid and many of the articles suited either column. Often, they contained advocacy on topical issues, members of the public often adding to any on-going debate through their letters. For example, on one occasion the magazine was used as a forum when the Turnbull Library's head librarian, Johannes Andersen, took issue with 'Tangiwai' who in his column had criticised the Geographic Board's plans to drop the apostrophe in many of New Zealand's place names. The board wanted to create uniformity by dropping the possessive apostrophe in names like Hawke's Bay and Young Nick's Head. Anderson wrote that dropping the apostrophe was a natural trend in language, however 'Tangiwai' retorted in the next edition that the revised place names would 'displease the eye and in some cases obscure the original meaning.'[2]

The editor was dragged into the debate and like a literary ringmaster, Stewart summarized both sides of the debate in separate paragraphs:

Anderson:

> Mr. Johannes C. Andersen writes on the subject of New Zealand place names, referred to by 'Tangiwai' in a note in last month's *New Zealand Railways Magazine*. He objects to criticism by 'Tangiwai' of the Geographic Board's ruling regarding the form of such names as Riley's Lookout. The Board proposes to drop the apostrophe and make it Rileys Lookout, Devils Punchbowl, and so on. It is a natural trend of language. The Board favours, also, the dropping of the possessive 's' in many names where the possessive is now used; the idea is to obtain some sort of uniformity. Mr. Andersen urges that newspaper people especially should adopt the rule; the public generally would do the same, and so the change would soon come about.

[1] 'The Wisdom of the Maori' and 'Pictures of New Zealand Life', *Railways Magazine,* April 1934, 40–41.
[2] G. G. Stewart, 'New Zealand Place Names', in *New Zealand Railways Magazine*, Aug. 1934, 3.

> The Board was not trying to be arbitrary at all but only to be uniform and systematic.

Cowan / 'Tangiwai'

> On the other hand, 'Tangiwai' to whom Mr. Andersen's letter was referred for his comments, contends that there should be no interference with the present written form of place names sanctioned by long usage, correct spelling, and euphony. The deletion of the apostrophe would displease the eye and also in some cases obscure the original meaning. Exact uniformity is not practicable. No good reason has been shown for any alteration in such names as Riley's Lookout, Arthur's Pass (which was fixed as written very nearly seventy years ago by the Canterbury survey authorities), and other well-known names. 'Tangiwai' also considers that before the Geographic Board decides to make alterations in place names it should make its proposals public in the form of suggestions so that the mooted changes could be discussed by all those interested in this subject of place nomenclature.

Finally, Stewart gave his opinion by steering the discussion away from a clash of wills between Anderson and 'Tangiwai', blaming instead the Geographic Board for a lack of public consultation. 'Generally, the Board has done very excellent work in recording and correcting place names throughout the Dominion,' he wrote, 'but the cause of accuracy would be advanced in some cases by consulting the public.' The end result was that the apostrophes in the already-existing place names remained intact. The Geographic Board also adopted the suggestion from 'Tangiwai' that before making future alterations in place names it should make its proposals public so that the mooted changes could be discussed by all those interested in the subject of place nomenclature.[1]

7.4 Opportunity knocks, 1933

In 1933 Cowan's involvement with *Railways Magazine* received a substantial boost when the magazine revamped its format. At the time Cowan had been putting together a series called 'Famous New Zealanders' and its first instalment began in the magazine's April 1933 edition, the same edition as the

[1] Stewart, 'New Zealand Place Names'.

revamped format. This meant that the 'Famous New Zealanders' series could be construed as representative of the magazine's fresh new direction by association. Whether its first launch was planned to coincide like that is uncertain. Chris Hilliard suggests that the stimulus for the revamped format came from journalist Leo Fanning and the recently hired advertising manager Pat Lawlor, the Railways Department acting on Lawlor's and Fanning's suggestion that the shop organ be turned into a general interest magazine.[1]

According to magazine's editor, however, it was a letter from overseas which triggered the revamp. The letter arrived on the Stewart's desk in early 1933 and had been sent by Ferdinand Perret, director of the Ferdinand Perret Research Library in Los Angeles. Perret called himself a Consultant of Fine Arts and was soliciting for material to add to his library. 'Most of my reference to New Zealand is gleaned from your Magazine,' he wrote in his letter to Stewart. 'It is only through such graphic recording that the general public in the Americas may obtain through my library a true knowledge of the scenic beauty, the natural resources, the development of science and art of such a marvellous country as New Zealand.' He added that, in every detail, he had endeavoured 'to collect and compile in compact form, authentic information and *pictorial proof* instead of multitudinous books of unrelated reference, such as one might find in large private or public libraries [my italics].'[2]

Perret was the son of a French textile engraver and in 1906 had immigrated to the United States and settled in Los Angeles, where he worked as an artist and a restorer of paintings. His work led him to begin serious art research, and in 1909 he established the Perret Research Library. By the time he wrote to Stewart, his private library had been operating for 24 years, with a central focus on California art and artists.[3] The clue to his intentions in his letter were the two words 'pictorial proof', for what set his library apart from others was its emphasis on visual culture. It was a pictorial library, and Perret was seeking from *New Zealand Railways Magazine* – along with other travel publicity outlets like shipping companies and travel bureaux – illustrated catalogues or pamphlets for which they had no further use.[4]

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[1] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion*, 44.
[2] G. G. Stewart, 'New Zealand Publicity in America', *Railways Magazine,* Apr. 1933, 31.
[3] 'Ferdinand Perret' in 'Archives of American Art', Smithsonian Institute, (www.aaa.si.edu).
[4] Stewart, 'New Zealand Publicity in America'.

The offshoot of Perret's letter was that it fired up Stewart's imagination and provided him with an impetus to extend the appeal of the magazine beyond its traditional role as a journal for Railways Department employees and clients. He published Perret's letter in the April 1933 edition of the magazine putting the words 'pictorial proof' into semi-bold type for emphasis. 'Here, at last, is opportunity knocking at the door,' Stewart wrote in an editor's note at the end of Perret's letter, '[a]nd it took ten cents to bring the letter.'[1] He went on to explain his reasoning behind the revamp: From a historical viewpoint, 'the huge progress and development marking the last sixty years of New Zealand's life has been made possible by the operation and extension of the Government-owned railway lines through most of the fertile lands of the country, and between the principal centres of commercial activity,' he began.

> Railway operations in this country are inseparable from national prosperity. … But it requires the assistance of graphs and parables and comparative figures to realise the vast scale of railway operations – the quantities of coal and livestock; the frozen meat, butter, wool and fruit for export; the big lines of imports, such as fertilisers and sugar; the port traffics; the big movements of holiday, seasonal, excursion, suburban and other peak loads of passengers. All these are moved upon the Dominion's three thousand miles of track, the transport giant which renders national service of an all-embracing nature.[2]

Stewart added that it was therefore only natural 'that the *New Zealand Railways Magazine*, which for the past seven years has been putting the railway case before the public who own the lines, should become a national publication telling also the story of the country which the railways have done so much to build up.'[3] Much of the tourist traffic within the Dominion was already dependent upon the magazine for 'an adequate presentation of information' regarding the various localities and natural attractions, he wrote. But he also wanted the magazine to give increasing attention to 'the historic associations of men and events with Dominion development – the nation-building drama

[1] Stewart, 'New Zealand Publicity in America'.
[2] G. G. Stewart, 'Aims of the Magazine', editorial, *Railways Magazine*, April 1933, 3.
[3] Stewart, 'Aims of the Magazine'.

of a young country where real settlement did not commence till long after the Napoleonic Wars'.[1]

Such 'historic associations' would no doubt justify Stewart introducing a series like Cowan's 'Famous New Zealanders', but at the same time he was mindful of the looming centennial celebrations in 1940, which would mark 100 years of colonisation since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. 'With these and other aims to make New Zealand better known to New Zealanders and others, the *New Zealand Railways Magazine* will be increasingly concerned,' Stewart concluded, 'while at the same time maintaining its service to the staff as a dependable reference work of railway information.'[2]

An early move by Stewart was to hire the well-connected and extremely versatile Wellington journalist Patrick (Pat) Lawlor (1893–1979) as a sales representative and literary columnist. Lawlor was a veteran of several New Zealand and Australian newspapers and periodicals;[3] his new role included selling advertising and taking over a column that Stewart had been writing called 'Among the Books', which updated happenings in the literary scene. Lawlor wrote in his inaugural column that he wanted to do everything within his power to promote those who came within the orbit of the magazine. 'A literary page usually has only a limited appeal,' he wrote. 'It deals with big names and big books; literary folk whom we have heard of often but have never met – never hope to meet.' In contrast, Lawlor wanted to take a more 'national' approach:

> Mostly I will deal with literary endeavour in our own land, of writers you have met, of those who have had their first stories accepted, of local newspapers, of reporters, of coming or present endeavours in local print, of local cartoonists and caricaturists. In short, I hope to play my humble part once more, just as I did in the New Zealand edition of *Aussie*, in the world of literary enterprise in the Dominion.'[4]

Another new measure was payment for supplied articles, poems, drawings, cartoons and eventually photographs. Payment had never been previously

[1] Stewart, 'Aims of the Magazine'.
[2] Stewart, 'Aims of the Magazine'.
[3] Hamilton, 'NZ English Periodicals of Literary Interest Active 1920s–1960s', 535.
[4] Pat Lawlor (aka Shibli Bagarag), 'A Literary Page or Two', in 'Among the Books' column, *Railways Magazine*, April 1933, 43.

mentioned in print, although professional journalists who had been writing for the magazine before 1933 – like Cowan, Elsie Morton and Leo Fanning – would not have worked for nothing. Now, from the April 1933 edition, the magazine began soliciting for contributions with payment set at tuppence a line. To put that amount into perspective, a written work of about a thousand words was worth sixteen shillings, which was a reasonable amount in the 1930s. A column called 'Answers to Correspondents' written by Stewart was also set up to inform those whose contributions had been accepted or rejected. The following examples are a sample of 'Answers to Correspondents' in the magazine's June 1933 edition, only two months after the changes were announced.

To F.A.S: 'If poetry, it is too intricate; if prose, too hopeless. Your grip on words should be turned to better purpose.'
To M.J.H: 'Not for us, with or without pepper.'
To T.F: 'Fails through sectarian reference.'
To P.L: 'Great pioneering – use with pleasure.'
To L.M.B: 'It is about time that simple things had a chance again – hence your poetic appreciation is accepted.'[1]

An informal survey of the contributions from this period reveals that the magazine did indeed offer a glimmer of hope for aspiring writers, as half of the contributions were from first-time writers. The remainder was from a handful of regulars – mostly working journalists with an established reputation. To a large extent, then, the magazine kept faithful to Lawlor's opening comment in his inaugural 'Among the Books' column when he wrote that he would mostly deal with 'literary endeavour in our own land', which included already-familiar local writers and those who had their first stories accepted.[2]

The tone of the magazine had obvious limitations. For Stephen Hamilton, Lawlor was 'more interested in encouraging mainstream literary activity than in supporting the efforts of the literary avant-garde, or the use of prose or verse as outlets for political protest or social criticism.'[3] Hamilton suggested that evidence of the magazine's exclusion of many writers with radical political

[1] G. G. Stewart, 'Answers to Correspondents', *Railways Magazine*, June 1933, 2.
[2] Lawlor, 'Among the Books', *RM,* Apr. 1933, 43.
[3] Hamilton, 'NZ English Periodicals of Literary Interest Active 1920s–1960s', 522.

leanings could be found by comparing the contributors to *Railways Magazine* with the radical fortnightly *Tomorrow* magazine, 'which clearly indicates that writers who appeared in both magazines are the exception rather than the rule.'[1] Of course, one can question whether *Railways Magazine* had any obligation to publish all spectrums of literature, especially if *Tomorrow* was already catering for the literary avant-garde.

7.5 The first 'Famous New Zealander', 1933

There was much at stake for the inaugural profile in Cowan's 'Famous New Zealanders' series when it was published when in April 1933. Not only had the article to set the tone for the rest of the series, it had to demonstrate that it was also contributing to the 'national character' of the magazine's contents, as desired by Railways Department management. Stewart had received the backing of management for his changes, especially as advertisers seemed to approve of them. 'Many new features are being introduced in the current year to increase the national character of the journal's contents,' the Acting-General Manager of the Railways Department, G. H. Mackley, wrote in his monthly column for the April 1933 edition, 'and it is hoped that the increased variety of articles and illustrations will prove pleasing to readers.' He added that the stronger support which advertisers were giving was proving 'distinctly helpful in financing the publication and should have favourable reactions for all concerned.'[2]

The eventual series would consist of 55 sketches of people who had made an impact in New Zealand between 1840 and 1940. The profiles can be divided into four major groups consisting of politicians and public servants (22), writers and scholars (11), Maori leaders or chiefs (9), and explorers (8). A list of the order they appeared in the magazine can be viewed as an appendix. Also included were a few clergymen, runholders and entrepreneurs, plus a handful of lesser-known individuals whose actions during a particular event in New Zealand's past turned them into instant heroes.

Cowan's selection of Donald Sutherland and Quinton McKinnon to open the series would have been comfortable choices because they fitted neatly into the editor's aim for the magazine to create 'historic associations of men and

[1] Hamilton, 'NZ English Periodicals of Literary Interest Active 1920s–1960s', 538.
[2] Mackley, G. H. 'General Manager's Message', *Railways Magazine*, April 1933, 8.

events with Dominion development'.[1] For Cowan, Sutherland and McKinnon stood out above all others 'on the roll of South New Zealand explorers who have drawn the veil of mystery from the Dominion's most rugged and formidable region, the Fiordland National Park'. He added in his inaugural article that the summer of 1932–33 had seen more travellers than in many years 'gazing in wonder at the mile-high granite walls of Milford Sound, and tramping along the famous overland route between Lake Te Anau and the coast.'[2]

Here, Cowan was obviously forging a connection between dominion development and the two explorers who had opened up previously unexplored territory for the benefit of the economy in the form of tourism, both domestic and international. His article for the 'Famous New Zealanders' series was a rewrite of an article he wrote on Sutherland for the *Auckland Star* in March 1917, called 'A Fiordland Pioneer'.[3] His initial meeting with Sutherland was most likely around 1903-04 when Cowan was gathering material in Fiordland for a travel book on the area while working for the Department of Tourist and Travel Resorts. The subsequent book was called *New Zealand Lakes and Fiords: The Wonders of Western Otago* (1906). At the time Sutherland was helping his wife run an accommodation house on the shores of Milford Sound but had previously been an explorer of some repute in the Fiordland region. A fiord about 25 kilometres south of Milford Sound is named after him (Sutherland Sound), which he 'discovered' in 1883; and a waterfall is also named after him (Sutherland Falls, 580m), which spills more than half a kilometre down a near-vertical mountainside near Milford Sound. 'It was on November 10, 1880, that Donald Sutherland first set eyes on the triple water-leap that bears his name,' Cowan wrote in his 'famous New Zealanders' profile. 'His were the first human eyes to see this marvel, unless we credit the wandering Ngati-mamoe, the lost tribe of the Sounds, with having wandered up that far from Lake Ada, where their stone-marked camping-places were found … in the early Seventies.'[4]

Sutherland and McKinnon belonged to that rugged breed Cowan dubbed the 'lone-handed explorer'. 'Sometimes in their trail-blazing they had the

[1] Stewart, 'Aims of the Magazine'.
[2] Cowan, James. 'Famous New Zealanders (FNZ) No. 1: Pathfinders in Fiordland', *Railways Magazine*, April 1933, 25.
[3] James Cowan (aka 'Orakau'), 'A Fiordland Pioneer', *Auckland Star*, 24 Mar. 1917, 8.
[4] Cowan, 'FNZ No. 1: Pathfinders in Fiordland', 27.

company of others,' he wrote, 'but they did not require the backing of human society; the solitary life had no terrors for them, even in that land of tremendous, overpowering landscapes and vast difficulty of travel.'[1] Cowan never got a chance to meet McKinnon, who went missing while sailing alone in his boat on Lake Te Anau in November 1891, his body never being found. Several landmarks and geographical features in the Milford and Fiordland area have been named in his memory, including Lake Mackinnon and Mackinnon's Pass (complete with an alternative spelling of his surname, which was spelt 'McKinnon' on his birth certificate).[2]

In his 'Famous New Zealanders' article Cowan described Sutherland as

> a big, gruff, hard man, who had been sailor, soldier, bush-scout, gold-digger, for many years before he came to an anchor for good in the towering gloom of Milford Sound, to enjoy what he described as 'the quiet life.' Most people would call it anything but enjoyment, set down there with dog and tent and gun and a few stores, in that terrific solitude.[3]

'But Sutherland was no ordinary man,' Cowan added, for here was a transplanted Scot who had also fought the Maori as a soldier in the New Zealand Wars, the latter aspect adding weight to Sutherland's appeal for Cowan considering that the New Zealand Wars was one of his specialty areas.

Lone exploring seemed to be Sutherland's métier, Ronald Jones wrote in a later profile of him for the *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*; 'the still virgin country of Fiordland fascinated him, and he sometimes disappeared for weeks at a time.'[4]

In keeping with the editorial premise of the 'Famous New Zealanders' series, Sutherland can be viewed as living through two phases of the Dominion's development. The first phase was in the nineteenth century when he was an explorer; the second in the twentieth century as a tourism entrepreneur while helping to manage a summer accommodation house with his wife Elizabeth at Milford Sound, Sutherland opting to eke out a seasonal

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[1] Cowan, 'FNZ No. 1: Pathfinders in Fiordland', 25.
[2] Bernard Foster, 'McKinnon Quinton McPherson' *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* (3 vols. edited by A. H. McLintock. Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1966), 2: 368–69.
[3] Cowan, 'FNZ No. 1: Pathfinders in Fiordland', 25
[4] Jones, Ronald. 'Sutherland, Donald (1839–1919).' *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* (3 vols. edited by A. H. McLintock. Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1966), 3: 331–2.

living rather than leave surroundings that bore his name and footprint. Elizabeth would continue to maintain the accommodation house until 1922, when it was sold to the Government, her onetime 'lone-handed explorer' husband having died at Milford Sound in 1919. Elizabeth passed away in 1923.[1] The couple's graves lie side by side 'in a quiet little glade' near the shores of their beloved sound, Elsie Morton wrote in 1949: 'Perhaps as the story of these two great pioneers becomes more widely known, the decaying cross and the wooden slab, the neglected grave itself, with its pathetic little patch of heather, will be replaced by some more worthy and lasting memorial.'[2]

7.6 Reaction

The reaction to the revamped April edition of *Railways Magazine* was virtually spontaneous, the magazine selling out in the first week it went on sale. 'So great was the demand for copies that within two days of publication the publishers had to draw on our reserve stocks to meet repeat orders from book-sellers,' Stewart wrote in the following month's editorial (May 1933).[3] The magazine had also received a 'remarkable' response to its call for paid contributions, he added, which had revealed 'a vast reservoir of talent and knowledge regarding New Zealand subjects' that the magazine could draw upon.[4] Short stories, poetry, pen-and-ink sketches were being accepted, but published contributors were expected to send in a clipping of their work before being paid. Stewart did however champion the cause of contributors by pointing out the value of their role in reminding New Zealanders of the charm and wonders of their own country, hence the heading of his May 1933 editorial as 'The Spirit of New Zealand'. 'Do distant fields look greenest, and has a prophet no honour in his own country?' he asked:

> If so, appearances may be wrong and local judgments defective. Misconceptions of this kind, where they exist, are usually due to a lack of adequate knowledge – a blind faith in the highly coloured tales of

[1] Parham, W. T. 'Sutherland, Donald. *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. 5 vols. Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1993–2000, 2: 491.
[2] Elsie K. Morton, *A Tramper in Fiordland* (Auckland: Phoenix Printing Co., 1949), 38.
[3] G. G. Stewart, 'The Spirit of New Zealand', editorial, *Railway Magazine*, May 1933, 3.
[4] Stewart, 'The Spirit of New Zealand'.

> Munchausen-minded travellers from foreign lands and in the alleged giants and mighty men of other places.[1]

Stewart did not want his fellow citizens to feel inferior to their overseas counterparts; their efforts 'were certainly not surpassed by those of any country in the world,' he wrote. By placing dependable information before New Zealanders, he hoped the magazine would reveal more and more the spirit of New Zealand to its people, 'so that, placing a just value upon their own land, they may have a true appreciation of their relative position in the world at large.'[2]

Stewart's editorial had covered many bases. Obviously enthused by a rise in sales of the magazine that month, he had welcomed new contributors to the magazine, guaranteed to pay them, championed their cause, and created a creed for them to aspire to in his editorial headline 'The Spirit of New Zealand'. The 'warm-hearted' response to the previous edition had indicated to Stewart that there already was a large body of patriotic New Zealanders who saw in *Railways Magazine* 'a means of strengthening and extending their interest in national affairs and amplifying their knowledge of their country's historical and geographical features.' Any further success in this direction – by a noticeable increase of sales of the magazine, or of increased tourist traffic on the railway lines – would be a measure of the magazine's worth to New Zealanders, he added.

While outlining a role for new contributors, Stewart was also mindful of not drifting too far from the needs of his grass roots readership, the workers of the Railways Department, by suggesting that the new services provided by the magazine would strengthen the public's appreciation of the railways. And in a final nod to Perret's letter from Los Angeles, which only so recently had sent *Railways Magazine* spinning off in a whole new direction, he wrote that the magazine would also be doing a service for those beyond New Zealand 'by providing an additional source of reliable information concerning what is coming to be universally regarded as the choicest and most varied scenic country in the world.'[3]

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[1] Stewart, 'The Spirit of New Zealand'.
[2] Stewart, 'The Spirit of New Zealand'.
[3] Stewart, 'The Spirit of New Zealand'.

To a large measure, the popularity of the April edition can be put down to one word – greed. Its initial success was predicated, I suggest, on the magazine's saturation coverage about finding gold. 'Gold!' ran the headline on the front cover, 'How to Find It – Prospecting for Everybody – Five Pounds Cash Prize Competition', ran the sub-headings. Gone was the stylish art deco cover art, which had been a mainstay since the magazine's inception. In its place was the photograph of an assayer looking at a huge lump of ore, and the background shading was a golden yellow. Inside, the magazine's lead story was about how to get a mining licence, followed by the best places to begin looking for gold.

In short, the overnight success of the magazine could just as easily be put down to desperate people buying a copy lured by the prospect of quick riches during the Depression years. Even Cowan's article on Donald Sutherland got in on the act, writing in his article that Sutherland had read the *Arabian Nights* and had given the name 'Sindbad Gully' to a steep-sided narrow passage which ran up at the side of Mitre Peak because its topography reminded him of the valley of diamonds mentioned in the Oriental story. 'Two of us went up this wild gulch one day with Sutherland,' Cowan wrote:

> It is a fearful gully, full of huge rocks confusedly piled, and holes and caverns half-hidden by the decaying vegetation of centuries; a place of twilight gloom, arched over by great twisted trees and drooping fern-plumes. A far wilder place, one imagined, than anything ever seen by Sindbad the Sailor.[1]

Sutherland had stoutly maintained that it was 'likely country' for finding diamonds; but all his prospecting was in vain, Cowan added: There was more likelihood of finding gold than diamonds and Sutherland once had some men put in a drive on a supposed gold-bearing reef slightly north of the heads at Milford Sound, 'but there again no luck.'[2]

7.7 Creating Connections

When one looks at the list of profiles in Cowan's 'Famous New Zealanders' series in the order they appeared (see Appendix), it becomes clear this project was somewhat rushed in its conception. Despite bringing Cowan to the fore as

[1] Cowan, 'FMZ No. 1: Pathfinders in Fiordland', 27.
[2] Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 1: Pathfinders in Fiordland', 27.

a biographer, the series appears to have been hastily conceived to coincide with the launch of a revamped *Railways Magazine*. For although Donald Sutherland as the initial profile was one of the strongest matches for the apparent philosophy behind the series, his appearance sealed the fate of the series to be completely out of any chronological order from the outset. This aspect might not have been important for some readers, but it does suggest that the series was not mapped out 'from go to woe' and its profiles more carefully considered before publication commenced, for some of the profiles have only marginal credentials as famous New Zealanders.

To backtrack a little, Cowan's was to write about 'the story of the country'; to give increasing attention to 'the historic associations of men and events with Dominion development'; and to be mindful of the looming centennial celebrations in 1940.[1] Here in a nutshell was his brief for the new series. Ideally then, the sphere of operations of his profiles would be following the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, but one profile fell outside those parameters, the war chief Hongi Hika, who had passed away twelve years before the Treaty was signed. Cowan however justified Hongi Hika's inclusion because, along with Hone Heke and Tamati Waka Nene, they represented the 'most commanding figures in North New Zealand during the first half of the nineteenth century, and the men who had the greatest share in the shaping of history there.' Leaving out Hongi Hika from such a pronouncement would have been unthinkable. For Cowan, 'primitive man as he was,' Hongi Hika was no different to some of the European rulers of the day who had planned and carried out vengeance and invasions 'on a vastly more dreadful scale than the petty wars of cannibal chieftains.' Although Hongi Hika was insignificant in military terms when compared to what Napoleon and Mussolini did, 'he was a ruthless Attila to the tribes who were less well armed than his Ngapuhi musketeers,' Cowan wrote.[2]

Ideally, if the series had been in chronological order, Hongi Hika would have opened the series, followed by Captain William Hobson, who did not appear until twelfth place, and Bishop Pompallier who appeared even later in twenty-first place. But having a 'cannibal chieftain' – as Cowan called him – for the inaugural profile of the series was never going to happen, and so the

[1] Stewart, 'Aims of the Magazine'.
[2] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 33: Hongi Hika, Hone Heke, and Tamati Waka Nene', *Railways Magazine*, Dec. 1935, 17.

series was fated to follow an arrangement with no real order. This was not ideal but probably reflected the realities of the series and its dependence on whatever profile Cowan had ready to go each month.

Fortunately, he had some support for his selections from his work colleague O. N. Gillespie who wrote in a 1938 history of *Railways Magazine* that what appealed to him about Cowan's selection of profiles was that it did not conform to a predictable list of businessmen and politicians. Gillespie firstly rattled off some of the better-known personalities who had made it into the series, like the Premiers John Ballance and Richard Seddon, and poet Jessie Mackay, but he also noted the inclusion of 'many shining figures from our past who have never joined the ranks of those gaining honour in print in our conventional histories':

> He told of Ahumai (of Orakau), of Julia Matenga (the Maori Grace Darling of the *Delaware* wreck); Major Jackson of the Forest Rangers; Te Heu Heu, the great chieftain of the Tongariro lands; Samuel Leigh, the first Wesleyan missionary; Te Puea Herangi, the Waikato Princess and present leader of her people; John Webster of Hokianga; and Captain Clayton, the master mariner who left such paintings as *The Kent Passing the Owen Glendower* in 1861; and so on.[1]

Three of Gillespie's mentioned examples, Ahumai, Major Jackson and John Webster, were not famous in terms of being widely known, but what they had in common were links to the New Zealand Wars, which was one of Cowan's pet subject areas. Indeed, a perusal of the backgrounds of all the profiles reveals that in the first year of the series, all but two of the published profiles had New Zealand Wars connections. Ultimately, 22 out of the 55 profiles had a New Zealand Wars connection – almost half of them.[2] One might surmise that Cowan was drawing too readily upon his archive of interviews with veterans of the wars, which was skewing the wars into being the most important aspect of New Zealand's nineteenth century history. For had he grown up in the South Island, his New Zealand Wars accent could have been completely different. The South Island had only one incident with a

[1] Gillespie, 'From Shop Organ to Great National Journal', 13.
[2] Appendix 6 list all the profiles with New Zealand Wars connections.

tentative link to the New Zealand Wars when in 1843 European settlers clashed with Maori over land at Wairau, near Nelson.[1] Cowan barely mentioned the incident in his official history of the wars in 1922, describing it as 'a tragic blunder' and taking place before the wars began proper in the North in 1845.[2]

One possible explanation why the New Zealand Wars profiles came early in the series was because they began in 1845 in Northland, so had a correct chronological position in a series depicting profiles between 1840 and 1940. Another likely explanation was that Cowan had set himself a punishing workload to create a new biography averaging 3,000–4,000 words each month on top of his other commitments. For the magazine was already publishing two monthly columns under his pen names, 'Pictures of New Zealand Life' by 'Tangiwai' and 'The Wisdom of the Maori' by 'Tohunga'. By publishing profiles on whom he already had material, like his New Zealand Wars veterans whose interviews dated as far back as his *Auckland Star* years, he could devote more time to the more demaning profiles.

So how much research went into these biographies? Firstly, for facts and figures, there was always the Turnbull Library in downtown Wellington, only a tram ride away from Cowan's home in Brooklyn. A researcher named Horace Fieldes, who worked out of the Turnbull, supplied some material to Cowan.[3] In return, he made a point of acknowledging Fieldes in two of the profiles; firstly, the Rev. Benjamin Yate Ashwell (Church Mission Society) who established a mission at Te Awamutu in 1839, near Cowan's later childhood stamping ground;[4] and secondly, the Right Rev. Jean Baptiste Francois Pompallier, Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania and the first Roman Catholic Bishop in New Zealand. The Bishop proved very busy during his thirty-year stay, baptising ten thousand converts.[5]

Other book sources frequently mentioned by Cowan in his profiles included *Political Portraits* (1892) by Joseph Evison, or 'Phiz' (his pen name), which consisted of background sketches of the Members of the House of Representatives reprinted by the Christchurch *Press*. Some might query

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[1] M. P. K. Sorrenson, 'Maori and Pakeha' (in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*. Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1981), 177–78.
[2] Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars,* 1: ix, 4.
[3] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion,* 54.
[4] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 18: The Rev. B. Y. Ashwell', *Railways Magazine*, Sep. 1934, 21.
[5] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders: No. 21: Bishop Pompallier', *Railways Magazine*, Dec. 1934, 25, 29.

Cowan's use of such journalism in his biographies, but he was the first to admit that they were sketches, a selective look at an individual's life rather than an attempt at an overall biography. He also mentioned referring to G. H. Scholefield's *Who's Who in New Zealand and the Western Pacific* (1925), which was regularly updated and reprinted. Nancy Coad's *From Tasman to Massey* (1934) was another frequently mentioned book, which was a history of New Zealand from Abel Tasman to the end of the First World War.

And of course, Cowan had his vast storehouse of early journalism to draw upon; for example, Donald Sutherland's profile originated in a 1917 article for the *Auckland Star*.[1] Often an article provided material for more than one profile, as was the case when he wrote a commemorative piece for the *Star* in 1914 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Orakau. In the article he covered Major William G. Mair, Rewi Maniapoto and Ahumai te Paerata,[2] all who went on to be included in the series.

If possible, Cowan would add his personal touch to each profile by recalling when he last met them, what he wrote about them back then and what had changed since then. William Mair was easy to write about because Cowan had had a long association with him and his brother, Gilbert. 'Both the Mairs I knew from my boyhood,' he wrote in their subsequent profiles.[3] Rewi Maniapoto was somewhat different, Cowan apparently only seeing him as a boy: 'Rewi Maniapoto, as I remember him, was a man of rather small, compact build, quick-moving, keen-eyed, an active man even in his old age,' he wrote in Rewi's profile, before focusing on his role in the Battle of Orakau as remembered by his cousin, Tupotahi.[4] For Ahumai te Paerata, it is difficult to tell from her profile if Cowan ever met her, but he did meet her brother Hitiri who probably gave him the bulk of his information on his sister.[5]

Even if he did not meet Ahumai, Cowan gave an impression of *possibly* meeting her, but his tendency to cloud the facts behind an actual encounter becomes overtly problematic at times. For example, he profiled Sir John Logan

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[1] James Cowan, 'A Fiordland Pioneer', *Auckland Star*, 24 Mar. 1917, 8.
[2] James Cowan, 'Orakau', *Auckland Star*, 17 Mar. 1914, 9.
[3] Cowan, James. 'Famous New Zealanders No. 9: The Mair Brothers', *Railways Magazine*, Dec. 1933, 17–21.
[4] Cowan, James. 'Famous New Zealanders No. 5: Rewi Maniapoto', *Railways Magazine*, Aug. 1933, 25–29. One of the features of this article is an actual photograph of the Orakau battlefield taken by Cowan (p. 29).
[5] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 25: Ahumai te Paerata & Julia Matenga', *Railways Magazine*, April 1935, 20–22.

Campbell (1817–1912), the eighth profile in the series. Cowan no doubt met Campbell because he had a small office in Shortland Street, the same street in which the *Auckland Star* building – and Cowan's workplace at the time – was situated. 'There one used to see him, on occasion, in the Nineties, sitting there like some sagacious old sage, with his long white locks and beard, gathering in the threads of his many businesses, but ever ready to talk of the far romantic past,' Cowan wrote. [1] So with his last comment 'ever ready to talk of the far romantic past' he obviously did meet Campbell but needed to state it more clearly, for Campbell certainly deserved inclusion in the series based on his reputation as the 'Father of Auckland'.

Another aspect that one has to be aware of when reading the series is that Cowan's treatment of the profiles varies. Some profiles have solely descriptive sketches written about them while others are highly subjective, the deciding factor being whether Cowan had personally met or observed them. For example, if a profile's main sphere of operations was before Cowan was born, like that of Governor Hobson and Bishop Pompallier, they had purely descriptive sketches written about them. From the 1880s however, he began to treat some profiles subjectively, especially if they had fallen into his childhood orbit. For example, the Ngati Maniapoto chief Wahanui Huatere was treated with a degree of subjectivity because Cowan had observed him while he was living at Orakau:

> Wahanui was a man of fame and weight when I first saw him, in my boyhood on the frontier; that was in 1881, when Tawhiao laid down his guns at Major Mair's feet in Alexandra township, and six hundred of his people marched to Kihikihi and enlivened the township – Rewi's home – with their war dances of new-made peace and their Hauhau religious chantings. Wahanui and all the Ngati-Maniapoto chiefs were there. And often thereafter we saw the great man; and I call to mind now that the Pakehas of the border country appreciated the fitness of the big chief's name and nicknamed an uncommonly strapping lad 'Wahanui.' Literally it means 'Big Back,' and also 'Big Mouth,' hence 'Great

[1] James Cowan. 'Famous New Zealanders No. 8: Sir John Logan Campbell', *Railways Magazine*, Nov. 1933, 17.

> Voice.' In both respects the name became him, but chiefly it fitted his unusual powers of eloquent speech.[1]

Here, not only does one get Cowan's youthful impression of Wahanui but also the popular impression of him as a great orator. Cowan's recollection also comes ever so close to confirming that he was present at the peace-making ceremony when Tawhiao laid down his rifle before William Mair at Alexandra in 1881 and said that his tribe would cease hostilities towards the Pakeha. If only he would say, 'I was there' more often without leaving the reader hanging…

Another aspect to consider while perusing the profiles is whether Cowan felt obliged to include certain people because they had helped him out in the past. For it is quite normal for a journalist to develop a list of contacts as reliable sources of information, but it is a fine line to tread and any relationship can become exploitative on the part of either party. For example, in his profile of Commander F. A. Worsley, who was profile number seven, Cowan wrote,

> When I first knew him, in 1899, he was second mate in the *Tutanekai*, under Captain C. F. Post; later he was chief officer in the *Hinemoa.* I was shipmates with him, as passenger, on two voyages, one to Samoa, the other a search in the Tasman Sea for the disabled and drifting steamer *Perthshire*.[2]

So, Cowan's friendship with Worsley covered much of his early journalism career as a Special Reporter (Marine). He was aboard the same vessel as Worsley on the voyage to cover the end of the war in Samoa, and to search for the *Perthshire* while it drifted in the Tasman with Seddon's family on board, both events mentioned in early chapters. During their time together, Worsley would have given Cowan much information and it only seemed proper to reciprocate that generosity even if he had not been a famous person. But Worsley was indeed a highly suitable choice for a profile. Born at Akaroa in 1872, he was captain of the expedition ship *Endurance* during Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914 trans-Antarctic expedition. When the ship had to be abandoned in pack ice in

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[1] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 23: Wahanui Huatare', *Railways Magazine*, Feb. 1935, 18.
[2] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 7: F. A. Worsley', *Railways Magazine*, Oct. 1933, 25.

1915, Worsley (as navigator) set out with Shackleton and a small group in a 22-foot open boat to seek help, a voyage of 800 nautical miles. The remainder of the crew of the *Endurance* who were left behind on the ice were subsequently rescued.[1]

Two other profiles suggest that Cowan may have crossed the line and got too close to supply any real balance. The profiles in question were of Sir Donald Maclean (father) and Sir Douglas Maclean (son). In the sketch of Sir Donald, who was the second profile in the series, and had previously been appointed Native Minister eight times, Cowan wrote that he had been making 'a special study' of Maclean's life, the implication being that he was working on a biography of him.[2] The following year he included his son, Sir Douglas Maclean, as the twentieth profile in the 'Famous New Zealanders' series. Sir Douglas was a pastoralist who Cowan described as 'an old friend' and 'one of the builders of modern Hawkes Bay'.[3] Six years later the biography of Maclean senior was published, and a cynic could infer that the inclusion of Sir Donald Maclean's son as a 'Famous New Zealander' was because Cowan felt obliged towards him for helping supply material for his father's biography – even if Maclean junior deserved a profile in his own right.

Cowan could have got around the dilemma of getting too close to his subjects if he had named the series 'Famous People I have Met', which sounds rather contrived. But it is Cowan's *actual* encounters that appeal the most today, not the pieces cobbled together when he had *not* met them. An appendix lists 26 actual encounters with his profiles – that is, encounters during which he either observed or spoke to his subject, the encounters beginning as early as the 1870s and comprising almost half of his profiles. Such an actual encounter was with Sir George Grey, who ticked many of Cowan's boxes for a profile including his involvement in the New Zealand Wars. Grey had been Governor of New Zealand from 1845–53 and from 1861–68,[4] his terms coinciding with various campaigns of the New Zealand Wars. This was however a particularly difficult profile for Cowan because Grey had caused so much division during

[1] P. Y. Dennerly, 'Worsley, Frank Arthur', *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (5 vols. Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1993–2000), 3: 577.
[2] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 2, Sir Donald Maclean', *Railways Magazine*, May 1933, 25.
[3] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 20: Sir Douglas Maclean', *Railways Magazine*, Nov. 1934, 17, 19.
[4] Bernard Foster. 'Governors', *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* (edited by A. H. McLintock, 3 vols., 1: 866–67. Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1966), 1: 866–67.

his second term as Governor. The test for Cowan was whether he should gloss over Grey's affairs and be accused of bias or lay it all out for public scrutiny. He opted for the latter. He had interviewed Grey for the *Auckland Star* in 1894, shortly before he left permanently for England, Cowan using that interview some forty years later as a lead-in to his profile of Grey as a 'Famous New Zealander':

> On a leading Auckland daily newspaper, in the days when Sir George Grey lived in retirement after his life of activity and turmoil, the practice held of sending a member of the staff to obtain the veteran's opinion on current political events of moment. It was tradition there that Sir George's sage views were of considerably greater value than those of most men, and certainly the journalistic practice usually was justified by results, for the old man seldom failed to say something interesting from a point of view that perhaps could not be expected from other public men of the day. … More than once on newspaper duty, I had the opportunity of meeting the grand old man, and one occasion in particular is still vivid in memory. It was not long before Grey's final departure for England, and some development in New Zealand politics called for a talk with him and a request for his opinion on the situation. So, this then youthful interviewer was despatched by the editor, who was a great friend of Grey and a supporter of his liberal principles in politics.[1]

Grey, then, qualified as a 'Famous New Zealander' because Cowan already had solid material on him, which included an exclusive interview. Grey had also remained a popular figure while in retirement from politics – at least in Auckland. When the city's public library opened in 1887, he donated more than half of the library's stock of over 8,000 books, a tally that eventually reached 14,000.[2] Despite Grey's much-welcomed philanthropy, Cowan was however not going to gloss over his treatment of Waikato Maori during the New Zealand Wars, in the process turning what began as a good-natured profile into a damning expose of Grey's treatment of Maori during the Waikato campaign. 'Never was any ruler of a land with a native race so greeted and so

[1] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 3: Sir George Grey', *Railways Magazine*, Jun. 1933, 17.
[2] John Barr, *The City of Auckland, New Zealand, 1840–1920* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1922), 147–48.

lamented as Sir George Grey was when he was leaving New Zealand in 1853 on the completion of his first term of governorship,' Cowan wrote. 'Deputations of chiefs and addresses of farewell from all over the island expressed the grief of the people at his departure.'

> Hoani Papita Kahawai and other chiefs of Rangiaowhia, in their address of farewell to Kawana Kerei, recalled the great kindness which he had manifested towards the people of the place and the gifts of ploughs, horses, carts and other property, which had enabled the Maoris to assimilate some of the usages of the Pakeha.
>
> 'You have made our lands important,' they wrote. 'Our love to you and our remembrance of you will not cease; no, never. Go hence, O friend, go to the Queen and carry with you our love to her in return for the gifts which we have in our possession. If the Queen should send another governor, let his love for the Maoris be like yours, and we will repay him with our love.'[1]

Ten years later, however, during Grey's second governorship, Grey 'was launching an army against those once so loyal folks of Rangiaowhia', Cowan wrote. The very chiefs who had once expressed 'the grief of the people' at his first departure from New Zealand were now 'flying for their lives' before Grey's army, 'leaving their beautiful village a ravaged and bloodstained ruin, and never again were they to worship in their pretty churches … or gather the fruits of the good soil. Land and cultivations, churches and all passed to the Pakeha.'[2]

Few writers would have had the background material and writing acumen to pull off such a wide-ranging assessment of Grey, but this was Cowan writing in his own series, not advertorial. If he had glossed over Grey's darker moments during his second term as governor, it would have cast an uneasy suggestion of bias over the rest of the 'Famous New Zealanders' series.

Finally, Cowan could be considered idiosyncratic in his choice of profiles in his efforts to balance the series along North-South lines. For two thirds of the profiles had a sphere of influence or operations in the North Island, and an attempt to balance out this overt northern bias could explain Cowan's including Samuel Butler as a profile. Butler arrived in 1860 and stayed for less

[1] Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 3: Sir George Grey', 19.
[2] Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 3: Sir George Grey', 19.

than five years before returning to England to find literary success with *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement* (1863) and *Erewhon* (1872). Despite such a short stay, Butler met the prerequisites for the series, Cowan argued ever so eloquently:

> Far up the valley of the snow-fed Rangitata River, growling down in many streams over its two-mile wide shingle bed, is the historic sheep station which the young litterateur turned squatter named Mesopotamia long before the world of letters discovered in him a genius; and rising broken range beyond range to the ultimate peaks of the Southern Alps is the mighty anteroom of *Erewhon*. Samuel Butler did not come to this Canterbury tussock land seeking 'local colour' for a romance. He came prepared to make his living as a sheep-farmer; he toiled in that part to such effect that he made money and sold out well after only four years of pastoral effort, in which he took a hand in everything, from bullock-team driving to shearing and dipping, with intervals of exploring the back country for new sheep land. The wonder and enchantment of those lonely places, the solitudes full of promise and menace, the strange glory and the perils of Alpland became part of him. The landscape, the sights and sounds of the high country, gave him delight and naturally and without strained search influenced his thoughts and writings.[1]

For Cowan, it was New Zealand that made Butler famous, for the country gave him 'something of the inspiration and all of the dramatic setting for his great romance *Erewhon*.'[2] His sentiments are echoed by Roger Robinson in his profile of Butler for *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, Robinson writing that Canterbury 'provided for Butler the significant beginnings to a literary achievement of high distinction.'[3] Butler also attracted the attention of literary critic Eric McCormick who preferred Butler's *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement* for its realism over *Erewhon*, describing it as 'a pleasant and not uncritical picture of life in Canterbury and one which, with modifications,

[1] James Cowan. 'Famous New Zealanders No. 29: Samuel Butler', *Railways Magazine*, Aug. 1935, 21.
[2] Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 29: Samuel Butler', 21.
[3] R. Robinson, 'Samuel Butler' (in Robinson, R. & Wattie, N., eds., *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* Auckland: Oxford University Press), 1998.

would have fitted the greater part of the colony between the sixties and the nineties.'[1]

With so much support for Butler, one could possibly ignore the fact that his literary success happened once he sold his farm for a profit and returned to England. New Zealand was merely a backdrop to his success and gained nothing but more profit-seeking 'new chums' hoping to emulate Butler's success. One of them was Herbert Guthrie-Smith who in 1880 travelled to New Zealand in search of profit by building up a sheep station, intending to stay only for seven years. Unlike Butler, however, Guthrie-Smith decided to remain in New Zealand. He could also write well, publishing *Tutira, The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* (1921) which in its most recent reprint in 1999 in the United States has been described as an environmental classic.[2] Guthrie-Smith lived in Hawkes Bay however, and Cowan already had that region covered in his series with his profile of the pastoralist Sir Douglas Maclean. Butler would have conveniently balanced the ledger as a southern counterpart.

7.8 Conclusion

This study of Cowan's time with *Railways Magazine* has observed him from 1928, when he first started contributing to the magazine, but more so from 1933, when the magazine expanded into a literary monthly while also retaining its role as a trade journal for the Railways Department. Cowan's 'Famous New Zealanders' series was one of the first additions to the revamped magazine in 1933, and once all the changes were set in place, the magazine became until 1940 an oasis for a select group of journalists in much the way that the *New Yorker* magazine had its own coterie of literary journalists. Admittedly, the magazine presented an upbeat view of New Zealand in the thirties: 'The great majority of stories published in the periodical press in the 1930s followed conventional narrative patterns and were directed at a conservative and implicitly untroubled readership,' Lydia Wevers wrote.[3] Further, the magazine still contained content that had been sent from overseas, O. N. Gillespie observed in his 1938 history of the magazine, but 'our own story-tellers have

[1] Eric McCormick, *Letters and Art in New Zealand* (Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1940), 61.
[2] Herbert Guthrie-Smith, *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* [1921] (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1999), ii.
[3] Lydia Wevers, 'The Short Story' (in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* [1991], edited by Terry Sturm, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998), 266–67.

had liberal representation' and no other periodical at the time was more deserving of the title 'Made in New Zealand'.[1]

Some of Cowan's profiles in his 'Famous New Zealanders' series have been cited in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, which gives the series a degree of long-term usefulness that prevents it from being considered merely as a string of profiles of interest to those from Cowan's era. For many of the profiles that made it into the *Dictionary* were based on Cowan's personal encounters, which certainly added a realistic dimension to them.

When the 'Famous New Zealanders' series ceased in June 1937, Cowan's output for that year had diminished to only half of what he had achieved in previous years. One could assume that it had run a natural course, but anecdotal evidence suggests that chronic rheumatism was hindering his output, not only for the *Railways Magazine* but other publications he was contributing to.[2] Cowan's health in the late 1930s could however best be described as 'up-and-down' rather than in a downward spiral, for he was still contributing articles in June 1940 when the magazine simply folded around him. There was no obvious indication in his final article that it was to be his last. It was about his recollections of Kihikihi as a border settlement and had a business-as-usual feel to it rather than signalling his exit.

For all the limitations in selection criteria, Cowan's articles were masterly proof that he had achieved to a high degree a bridge between journalism and historical writing. The combination of vivid recollection with sensible assessment of reputation showed that Cowan to the end wrote history with the journalist's flair for the present, but his sense of overview had deepened and enriched his work. His biographies are much weaker where there is no journalistic recollection. Were it not for the Centennial Projects, which included the first *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*,[3] these biographies would have made a significant volume, and one of his best works, but this was not to be.

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[1] Gillespie, 'From Shop Organ to Great National Journal', 72.
[2] Park, Ruth. *A Fence Around the Cuckoo* (Auckland: Penguin, 1993), 249.
[3] G. H. Scholefield, ed. *A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Wellington: Internal Affairs Dept., 1940.

8
Managing Cowan's Legacy

'The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot merely be a pitiful appendage of life's morning.'

Carl Jung, 'The Stages of Life' (1930)

One of the potentially unkindest tests of the value of one's vocation as a writer is when their career comes to an end through illness or death. For authors retain only a measure of control over their material in their own time, writes Blake Morrison in *The Guardian*, and once they are gone, it is left to others to guard their reputations. Wills may be contradictory and instructions to literary executors confusing, he adds, the appointed guardians, 'whether spouses, children, lawyers, agents, editors or friends, becoming not so much keepers of the flame but more like dragons guarding a cave'.

> Posterity is rarely kind to them: however they act, they will be accused of acting badly. If they deny the author's wishes, as those acting for the French philosopher Michael Foucault have recently done by consenting to the publication of a book he hadn't finished, and didn't want to come out, they will be called treacherous. And if they are overly loyal, destroying work the author disowned but that deserves to be saved, they will be called philistine or just plain stupid. Either way, they can't shirk the role allotted them: They have an estate to manage: an acreage of words.[1]

In September 1943 Eileen Cowan was faced with managing her husband's 'acreage of words', as Morrison puts it, when James passed away after a long illness and his friends began inquiring about the fate of his material. '[M]any of Jim's old friends have been so concerned over his manuscripts,' she wrote in a letter to Eric Ramsden in August 1944, who was acting as an informal consultant regarding Cowan's literary affairs.[2] Fortunately, Eileen shared a similar philosophy to her husband on the matter of preserving his work, having

[1] Blake Morrison, 'Up in smoke: should an author's dying wishes be obeyed?' (*The Guardian*, 10 Mar. 2018). Morrison is a writer and journalist whose non-fiction book *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* (1993) won the J. R. Ackerley Prize and the Esquire/Volvo/Waterstone's Non-Fiction Book Award. His poetry collection *Dark Glasses* (1984) won a Somerset Maugham Award.
[2] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 30 Aug. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.

already declared to Ramsden in an earlier letter of wanting 'to get published in book form the bulk of his writings, which was the goal he set himself.'[1] How Eileen and a close group of friends coped with her husband's decline and affairs between 1942 and 1944 is the main focus of this chapter. It chronicles an attempt to continue the momentum of Cowan's writing reputation as a journalist and historian after his death and gives some indication of the huge struggle that can become for those taking on the task.

Cowan was in the habit of constantly pitching new ideas for books to publishers. In the last quarter of 1942, for example, publisher A. H. and A. W. Reed had four of his manuscripts that he was awaiting a decision on.[2] Three of them were possibly book ideas that had already been rejected by Jonathan Cape. Chris Hilliard wrote in *The Journal of New Zealand Studies* that Cowan had offered the London publisher three more books after the firm published his *Suwarrow Gold and Other Stories of the Great South Sea* in 1936. Cape replied that he would rather wait and see how *Suwarrow Gold* sold before committing to more, Hilliard wrote, 'then, rather than leaving things hanging, he explicitly rejected 'The Sword of Von Tempsky', 'Knocking About', and 'Wild Sanctuaries', which remain "lost" books in the Cowan canon.'[3]

Another book never to eventuate was called 'Traditions and Culture of the Maori' (1933), which is mentioned in Cowan's papers in the Turnbull Library along with thirteen proposed chapters. The chapters are listed below and suggest that one of the reasons for its rejection was because of similarities to Cowan's *The Maoris of New Zealand* (1910) and its revised version *The Maori Yesterday and Today* (1930).

Proposed chapters: 'Traditions and Culture of the Maori'[4]

1.) Maori Navigators – The Voyage to NZ
2.) Industries of the Maori
3.) The Maori and the Forest
4.) Maori Artcraft and Decorations
5.) The Tattooing Art
6.) The Maori Warrior and Military Engineer

[1] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 4 Mar. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[2] Eric Ramsden's notes on the back pages of a copy of *Sir Donald McLean*, MSX 2282, ATL.
[3] Chris Hilliard, 'Stories of an Era Not Yet So Very Remote: James Cowan in and out of New Zealand History', *The Journal of New Zealand Studies,* (NS19, 2015): 35.
[4] Cowan Papers MS-44E, ATL.

7.) The Maori Canoe
8.) The Institution of Tapu
9.) The Sacred Lore of the Maori
10.) Language and Literature of the Maori
11.) Sports and Amusement
13.) Mourning Ceremonies

Another failed work in progress was a book called 'The Maori and the Land', which was mentioned in a letter Cowan received a from I. (Ivan) L. G. Sutherland, editor of *The Maori People Today: A General Survey* (1940). In the letter, dated September 1940, Sutherland had written that he hoped Cowan would get 'The Maori and the Land' published before very long.[1]

Fate however intervened for Cowan before any of these books could materialize. In October 1942 his close friend Eric Ramsden found a letter waiting for him after returning from a long sojourn in Australia. It was from Cowan and was sent from Ward 3A of Wellington Public Hospital: 'Here I am on by back crippled, condemned to be here until the doctors let me go,' he had written in a laboured scrawl. 'I do want to see you. Can't write more at the moment. Please call soon as you can. … Yours, J. Cowan.'[2]

'I had no idea he was ill,' Ramsden later wrote in an account of this period for *The New Zealand Journalist*, the official organ of the New Zealand Journalists' Association. Cowan had suffered two strokes, and when Ramsden visited him in hospital, he found him in a public ward surrounded by elderly men in various stages of illness. 'Such a situation was extremely obnoxious to him, and a poor reward for the years of service that he had given to New Zealand letters,' Ramsden wrote.[3] He had brought with him to the hospital a copy of Cowan's 1940 biography *Sir Donald Maclean* for him to sign, but instead it became an improvised notebook to record the visit. He wrote in the back of the book that he found Cowan very ill but comparatively alert and glad to have someone to chat with. Cowan said that he had several matters to discuss but that his thoughts had 'evaporated like a cloud'. Ramsden wrote that he believed that Cowan was 'obviously failing' but his demeanour remained

[1] I. L. G. Sutherland, Letter to James Cowan, 2 Sept. 1940. Cowan Papers, ATL.
[2] *Sir Donald McLean* with jottings by Ramsden & Cowan, Cowan Papers, MSX 2282, ATL.
[3] Eric Ramsden, 'N.Z.'s Debt to James Cowan', *The New Zealand Journalist*, 12 Nov. 1943, Vol. 9: No. 11.

'exceedingly friendly'. He however complained of a lack of privacy, and that he could not sleep at night because the ward was so noisy.[1]

'I referred to him as "Te Kaumatua", and he smiled rather grimly,' Ramsden wrote in the back of the book he had brought. '"Rather a wreck of a Kaumatua!" he said. "Get me out," he said, "I am helpless, and I hate it!"'[2]

That afternoon, Ramsden met up with some fellow members of PEN, an international association of authors, and told them of Cowan's condition. 'Naturally, he was anxious to return home,' Ramsden wrote,' but there were difficulties in the way, especially any strain upon his wife, who had already been nursing him for a long time. One member of the group, O. N. Gillespie, immediately promised to bring his plight to the notice of Prime Minister Peter Fraser. When Gillespie approached Fraser, it was the first time he had been made aware of Cowan's plight, and he promptly arranged to have him shifted to Beach Hospital, a convalescent home at Otaki, north of Wellington.[3]

For the next year, from October 1943 until September 1944, Eileen made the seventy-kilometre journey from the family home to visit her husband. Eileen Constance Cowan (1892–1968) was twenty-two years younger than James. The couple had married in 1913 and had two boys, Roy and Jack, the family settling in Connaught Street in the Wellington hillside suburb of Brooklyn.[4] In a series of letters, she kept Ramsden up to date with her husband's condition and any publishing affairs. No doubt she was also writing to others, but her letters to Ramsden have been retained in the Turnbull Library archives. Collectively they create a poignant record of how the spouse of a famous writer copes with their deteriorating health.

'I visited my husband at Otaki on Sunday last, she wrote to Ramsden on 28 June 1943, 'it was very sad to see him so helpless and bedithered, and vaguely aware that all was wrong with himself. He has even given up writing to me now, and for him one dim day succeeds another.'[5]

Just a few months later, James Cowan died at Beach Hospital, Otaki on 6 September 1943, aged 73. 'Mr. James Cowan, New Zealand Historian' ran the headline above his obituary in the *Evening Post*, the newspaper describing him as 'a recognised authority on the Maori, and his many writings on New

[1] Ramsden, 'N.Z.'s Debt to James Cowan'.
[2] *Sir Donald McLean* with jottings by Ramsden & Cowan, Cowan Papers, MSX 2282, ATL.
[3] Ramsden, 'N.Z.'s Debt to James Cowan'
[4] Colquhoun, 'Cowan, James', *DNZB*, 3: 120.
[5] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 28 Jun. 1943, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.

Zealand and its Native race will always hold an important place in New Zealand literature.' It added that in one way or another, Cowan had 'touched every facet of New Zealand life in his writings'.[1] Prime Minister Peter Fraser attended Cowan's funeral along with other leading citizens.[2] Members of PEN acted as pallbearers and his ashes were taken to Auckland to be scattered on Waitemata Harbour.[3] One can only speculate why the Waitemata was chosen for his ashes, but as mentioned in the opening chapters of this thesis, although throughout his career Cowan had endeavoured to be representative of all people and places in New Zealand, some places left a deeper impact than others. Orakau for instance was one of those very special places at a certain stage of his life, and Waitemata Harbour also became a special place for him with its own unique set of attachments, especially as his parents were buried at O'Neill's Point Cemetery, Bayswater, on the opposite shore from where he worked at the *Auckland Star*.[4]

'I have been steadily ploughing through conventional messages of reply today,' Eileen wrote to Ramsden a week after the funeral, who since his return from working in Australia had begun working for the Christchurch *Press*:[5]

> There are scores of letters and telegrams here, and more to come, people have been just marvellous; it's a pity Jim could not have read some of these tributes himself, it might have given him some measure of comfort, but there it is.
>
> For the last few weeks of his life he was becoming paralysed all down his right side, and the last seizure was too much even for his intense will and determination to survive. I stayed beside him for twenty-four hours, in case there was a flicker of recognition, but he slept his last feeble remnants of life away. Mercifully, for if he had lingered and become a paralysed invalid, he would have suffered mental agony. In fact, his last year was agony to him and to us all.
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> *Eileen Cowan, 12 Sep./43*[6]

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[1] 'Mr James Cowan, New Zealand Historian', *Evening Post*, 7 Sept. 1943, 6 (no author).
[2] Grayland, *More Famous New Zealanders*, 107.
[3] Colquhoun, 'Cowan, James', *DNZB*, 3: 121.
[4] Elizabeth Barlow & Joy McDougall, *A Quota of Qualtroughs: Early Settlers to New Zealand from the Isle of Man* (Matamata: Elizabeth Barlow, 1984), 55.
[5] Michael King, 'Ramsden, Eric', *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (5 vols. Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1993–2000), 4: 418.
[6] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 12 Sep. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.

Over the next few months she sent to Ramsden occasional material from her former husband's archives for some books he was planning, in particular a biography on Te Puea.[1] In one letter she expressed concern that James's 'adopted' Maori tribe, the Waikato, would forget him too quickly.

> I am so sorry to hear that Te Puea is so ill, will you please convey my sympathy to her when next you write? I heard that she was not at Ruatoria and wondered if she was too ill to go across. I wonder if she heard that my husband died? He worked more for the Waikato than any other tribe, he identified himself with them, and I should not like to think they will forget him too soon.
>
> *Eileen Cowan, 31 Oct./43*[2]

In January 1944 Eileen wrote to Ramsden bringing him up to date with her sorting of James's manuscripts. She had not done anything recently about a proposed book of short stories in the hope that Roy, her eldest son, would come home from the war on furlough and illustrate it, 'but have lately heard that he has joined a Hurricane squadron.' The proposed book of short stories was most likely a draft of *Tales of The Maori Border*, which would be Cowan's first posthumously published book. She added that she liked the idea of bringing out a new edition of the *Maori Folk Tales of the Port Hills*, which had first been published in 1923, and she hoped to consult with Ramsden regarding it later on.[3]

In March 1944 Eileen again wrote to Ramsden and his wife expressing gratitude for a letter published in *The New Zealand Journalist* by E. N. G. Poulton who had worked with Cowan at the *Star*.

> Such a genuine and deep feeling the writer expressed to Jim, and he knew so well the retiring shy nature of his fellow worker; a trait which was always at odds with his writing to the public. On thinking over this I realise that Jim never thought of his readers as the public; he wrote because he must; and not to any public – very frequently he was asked to address audiences (to speak on

[1] King, 'Ramsden, Eric', *DNZB*, 4: 418.
[2] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 31 Oct. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[3] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 31 Jan. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.

> any topic) from school children to Rotarians. The request always gave him the horrors.[1]

It had now been six months since her husband had passed away and she mentioned finally being able to send a draft of the book of short stories she had been working on to A. H. and A. W. Reed.

> With a final extreme effort, I got the MSS of short stories, with photographs, and Mr Mulgan's preface, off to Mr Reed, and it's a great relief to have done even that much. During the winter I hope to assemble the Von Tempsky book, and another of short stories, and so gradually reduce the bulk of material Jim left. I want to get published in book form the bulk of his writings, which was the goal he set himself. If I come across anything which may be of interest or use to you, I shall send it down.
>
> *Eileen Cowan, 6 Mar./44*[2]

The following month she wrote to Ramsden about the material she was sending to him from her husband's collection: 'I am glad you found the papers I provided you of use; when I can settle down again to working on my husband's papers, I'll send you anything I find relevant to the Maori book you contemplate.'[3]

In August 1944 page proofs of Cowan's first posthumously published book, *Tales of the Maori Border*, were ready for checking. 'Mr Reed rang up yesterday,' Eileen wrote to Ramsden, 'I am collecting proofs of the short story book today.

> I'll be glad to see it is printed as so many of Jim's old friends have been so concerned over his manuscripts. I think I am over-anxious about it especially as there are some <u>fierce</u> critics about these days. Anyway, I am going on with getting out the next book; once his writings are published in book form, they are preserved for the future. It's a great pity that so much good material published in the past newspapers in NZ has been lost for ever, for instance the

[1] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 6 Mar. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[2] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 6 Mar. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[3] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 2 April. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.

> *Otago Times* ran columns of splendid articles by famous New Zealanders. Printed for the readers of the day and then forgotten.
>
> *Eileen Cowan, 30 Aug./44*[1]

The book of short stories called *Tales of the Maori Border* was finally published in 1944. It was a smallish book of 160 pages produced to 'war economy standard', according to a statement on one of its opening pages, a reference to the low grade of paper being used to print it on. It continued the format of Cowan's earlier collections of anecdotes (*Tales of The Maori Coast* in 1930, *Tales of The Maori Bush* in 1934), but this time its final chapter seemed as if it had been deliberately selected to mark the end of Cowan's career. It was called 'Border River: Story of the Puniu', in which he compared the River Tweed to the Puniu River flowing close to his childhood home. The Tweed marked a boundary between England and Scotland for some of its course; likewise, the Puniu had for centuries divided the territories of the Waikato and Ngati Maniapoto tribes. At one time it had been navigable for several miles, he wrote, and large canoes laden with cargoes of wheat and flour from Orakau and Kihikihi fields and mills were paddled and poled along the Puniu on a hundred-mile journey to Auckland. During his youth he had observed that although the great canoes of had gone, there were small canoes cut out of kahikatea logs still in use at the Maori settlements along the Puniu's banks, 'and I used to speculate how long it would take us to reach the ocean which we had never seen, if we set out to paddle down to Waikato and far away. The Maori children must often have had the same dream of a wonderful voyage.'[2]

But now the classic stream of 'Pekehawani' (its ancient name) no longer sharply defined the terrain, there now being no apparent difference between the north and south banks, so completely had European methods of agriculture taken over. The Puniu had become 'an insignificant stream', Cowan added, its lower course impeded by weeping willows, 'and it would be difficult to navigate it now.'[3] It was as if the river's waning significance was a metaphor for Cowan's own life and his awareness of his own place in time. For any vibrancy the river had for him belonged to an earlier era when 'we lads, like our elders,

[1] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 30 Aug. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[2] Cowan, *Tales of the Maori Border,* 155–56.
[3] Cowan, *Tales of the Maori Border,* 155, 157.

could splash through the Puniu on our own account, exploring old pas, calling at the small villages of friendly and always hospitable Maoris whom we knew.'[1]

*

This chapter has chronicled the physical decline of James Cowan and the efforts by his family and close associates to publish a final book. The letters documented between Eileen Cowan and Eric Ramsden give an insight into the actions of two dedicated people – in addition to his publisher – trying to manage Cowan's legacy. Eileen's choice of Eric Ramsden as a confidant on Cowan's publishing affairs was appropriate considering that the two journalists had a similar background. Ramsden entered journalism in 1919 at the age of twenty and, like Cowan, had worked for the *Auckland Star*, amongst other newspapers, and eventually became deeply interested in Maori-Pakeha relations.[2] Further, it was Ramsden who Cowan wrote to for help when he was hospitalized, which says a lot about their relationship. He eventually received some of Cowan's material for his own books, for Eileen mentions in two of her letters of sending Ramsden material belonging to her late husband.[3] Ramsden managed to complete four books with substantial Maori content.[4]

Moving on to Eileen Cowan now, her efforts in getting her late husband's work published was not simply out of a widow's loyalty to a lost partner. Rather, she was from a highly informed insider's background, her family consisting of a community of historically and 'New Zealand'-minded people with a strong Maori consciousness, who saw the value in Cowan's work. Eileen's father, Henry Stowell, 'was a licensed Maori-language interpreter,' Peter Gibbons wrote in a profile of Stowell for *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, adding that Stowell was 'one of many nineteenth-century New Zealanders who were genuinely bicultural and who moved easily between and within Maori and Pakeha communities.'[5] In 1910 Stowell had written a review for *The Dominion* of one of Cowan's earliest books, *The Maoris of New Zealand* (1910). Stowell's own book called *Maori-English Tutor and Vade Mecum* (1911) is still available second-hand.[6] In a letter to Ramsden, Eileen recalled that her

[1] Cowan, *Tales of the Maori Border*, 160.
[2] King, 'Ramsden, Eric', *DNZB*, 4: 417.
[3] Eileen Cowan's letters to Eric Ramsden, 6 Mar. & 2 April. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[4] King, 'Ramsden, Eric', *DNZB*, 4: 418.
[5] P. Gibbons, 'Stowell, Henry Matthew', *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. 5 vols. (Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1993–2000), 3: 492–93.
[6] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 31 Jan. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.

father had 'an extremely analytical mind, and it was a delight to his friends to hear him expound almost any subject.' When he was dying in hospital from bowel cancer but still able to speak, '[h]e loved us to read Burns to him'.[1]

The value of Eileen's letters to Ramsden is that they reveal sides of Cowan not previously mentioned in other published profiles of him. For example, the abstracts quoted in this chapter reveal a man with a shy and retiring nature who abhorred public speaking.[2] Cowan also preferred to live in the North Island rather than the South because his interests and contacts were all in the North: '[T]he South Island seems alien to a writer interested in the Maori people,' Eileen wrote.[3] She was also concerned that James would be forgotten too quickly by the Waikato, the tribe he identified himself the most with.[4]

Framing Cowan's significance through the eyes of others however carries a risk of misinterpretation. Eileen's educated background and Eric Ramsden's support have dominated so far in terms of analysing Cowan's legacy, but that is only because their exchange of letters has been preserved by the Turnbull Library. Eileen was probably receiving other support from her family and her husband's connections, which has to be acknowledged here. What they all have in common however is an insider's knowledge from Cowan's own time, which shows up acutely in the perspective in which he is being framed. They saw that Cowan had made an important contribution as a recorder of the past and that they had an estate to manage, 'an acreage of words' as Blake Morrison has so aptly put it at the beginning of this chapter.[5]

The finishing of *Tales of the Maori Border* in 1944 probably provided closure for the friends and peers who were acting as temporary guardians of Cowan's literary estate. Five years later, in 1949, Eileen donated much of her husband's material to the Turnbull Library.[6] This suggests that she had stopped trying to compile books from his material and had sent it to the Turnbull for later generations to pour over. The donation was most likely a very personal gesture of closure for her.

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[1] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 2 Apr. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[2] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 6 Mar. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[3] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 2 Apr. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[4] Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 31 Oct. 1944, Cowan Papers, MS 0691, ATL.
[5] Morrison, 'Up in smoke'.
[6] Tikao, 'Borderland, from Archive to Gallery', 17.

9
Conclusion

Journalism and journalistic practice are at the heart of Cowan's writing, even when he is discoursing as a historian, for much of his later historical accounts began as coverage of current events while working as a newspaper reporter. So, based on the findings of this thesis, how can one gauge Cowan's significance as a journalist? To answer that pivotal question, my approach was to firstly find phases which stood out as major contributors to his development as a journalist, followed by character traits. Accordingly, the first significant phase was his childhood at Orakau during 1870–86 (Chapter Two). That period was not part of his career proper, but it gave him access to so much material involving Maoridom and settler society in the Waipa following the New Zealand Wars that could later be utilized. Some of the material was exclusive to him, some not, but it is how he strung it together as historical narratives during later phases of his career that makes those articles so unique as a type of personal journey.

The second significant phase was Cowan's *Auckland Star* years during 1888–1902, which has been covered in Chapters 3–5 while he was working as a Special Reporter. What these two phases have in common is that they took place in the late nineteenth century, a period which could be summarized as a time of personal growth for Cowan, the essence of which he managed to capture in an article for *Railways Magazine* called 'On the History Trail' (1938), in which he compared the uncovering of new material to that of a treasure hunter:

> The peculiar satisfaction that a field-research worker derives from digging up the true stories of old adventure, the real thing from participants in the events narrated, is comparable to the feeling of a successful treasure hunter who finds that he has struck the right spot and the gold's there – the authentic chest with skull and cross-bones. My years of search and enquiry into the frontier history of New Zealand have brought me much treasure of that kind.[1]

[1] James Cowan, 'On the History Trail', *Railways Magazine*, Sep. 1938, 17.

He added that the process of discovery usually cost more than the material it yielded, but 'the search was the thing, the pleasure of exploration in bush and hill fort, the talks with the grey old people who were the last survivors of the warrior glory of their people.'[1] It is the 'exploration in bush and hill fort' that is important here, for Cowan is positioning himself as a type of correspondent who is concerned with life beyond the city limits. Admittedly, not all of his work was out in the bush; his role as a marine reporter was based in Auckland. But much of the material he gathered from the docks could also be considered a type of frontier journalism, for the city's port was as much a zone of exchange, a cultural frontier between Auckland and the South Seas as any land-based urban/rural divide.

According to historian Graeme Wynn, each generation writes its history anew: 'Changing circumstances lead historians to ask different questions of their sources, or, indeed, to utilize new sources in their quest for a modified (most would say better) understanding of the past.'[2] In Cowan's case, it was rather fitting that his article 'On the History Trail' was published in *Railways Magazine* during the 1930s, for the periodical gave him an opportunity to update and republish his early articles in the magazine as historical journalism (although he was still writing some new material as well). The thirties could be labelled as a third significant phase in terms of his journalism, then, by creating a noticable point of difference from his early journalism of the late nineteenth century (and early twentieth). For it was marked by a noticeable increase in the amount of reflection in his material as poor health increasingly began to limit his travels.

9.1 Character traits

A second approach to helping gauge Cowan's significance as a journalist is to look for recurring traits in his makeup and to see how they were applied throughout his career. For example, a recurring trait was his sympathy towards Maori in the context of 'trying to better understand' them. The trait can be discerned as early as his childhood at Orakau, when Cowan witnessed an impromptu tangi by some old Maori men at a little graveyard next to the family farm in which were buried fallen warriors from the Battle of Orakau. His

[1] Cowan, 'On the History Trail', 17.
[2] Graeme Wynn, 'Reflections of the Writing of New Zealand History' (*The New Zealand Journal of History* (October 1984): 104.

solitary and secretive encounter affected him so deeply, he later wrote in *Legends of the Maori*, that it set in process a burgeoning curiosity about local Maori culture and a desire to learn the language.[1]

No doubt Cowan's interest in and sympathy with things Maori helped him land his first fulltime job as a Special Reporter for the *Auckland Star*. The term 'Special Reporter' is subsequently an important term in helping to seek a better understanding of Cowan for two reasons. Firstly, the position gave him to access to Maoridom on behalf of the *Star* from central North Island to the Far North. Secondly, 'Special Reporter' was a byline accorded to his writing during an era when bylines were seldom used. A byline was the next best thing to having one's name in print, and the long-term ramifications of having that byline are revealed in Chapter Four, when Cowan was assigned to cover the 1898 Hokianga Dog Tax Rebellion. Other newspapers were also covering the rebellion, and even the *Star* was receiving correspondence from multiple sources, but Cowan's Special Reporter byline meant that his dispatches could be readily identified throughout the ten-day climax of the rebellion. This helped create a permanent record of the rebellion from a single 'voice' experienced in cross-cultural communication, such experience providing balance and consistency of interpretation in a tense reporting environment where it was easy to take sides. Adding weight to his reportage was the fact that, as the representative for the Press Association, Cowan's copy being distributed nationally.

Cowan's character trait 'sympathy' re-emerges in Chapter Six, which was a study of his newspaper serial 'The White Slave' (1906), in which he managed to get the Pakeha-Maori Kimble Bent to open up about his life far more than any previous interviewer. Bent could express himself better in Maori than in English, having spent thirteen years exclusively living with Maori,[2] but the material then needed to be properly expressed in English. 'Sympathy' is relevant here, then, in the context of the forging of a set of understandings between the interviewee, the interviewer and the targeted newspaper readership. For cooperating with a Maori affairs specialist like Cowan was Bent's best chance if wanted to clear his name and explain how he could not possibly have shot dead his former commanding office during an engagement

[1] Cowan, *Legends of the Maori*, I: xvii–xviii.
[2] Cowan, *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*, viii.

with his old regiment while he was living with the Maoris. Further, the best way for him to do this was through the Pakeha press. Maori language newspapers had been published since the 1830s, but most had ceased by the early 20th century, partly through problems with funding.[1] In Bent's case, being published in the Maori press would simply have not helped him, however. It was a Pakeha readership that he needed more than a Maori one for his version of the shooting of his commanding officer, 'The White Slave' being published as a serial virtually simultaneously in at least three city newspapers.

Another significant trait to emerge from the Kimble Bent chapter was a demonstration of Cowan's commercial nous. Cowan was a lifelong writer, an aspect he shared with Robert Louis Stevenson,[2] who he idealized. His sole living came from writing and he no doubt sensed that Bent's story was too rare a find for it to vanish once it had been used as a newspaper serial. He subsequently expanded and republished it as *The Adventures of Kimble Bent* in 1911 speculating on the demand at the time for adventure stories for boys about the glory days of the British Empire. In this context Cowan's reflections may have been double-edged in that Maori were both viewed as people he cared for and people who had a value to him. For there is no escaping the fact that his specialty in Maori affairs helped provided a living, but one cannot deride any writer for exploiting their work as much as possible, especially one as timeless as Bent's story with its ties to the theme of a castaway in the manner of Robinson Crusoe.

A new term to emerge from his writing for *Railways Magazine* in the 1930s was his self-perception as a noble rebel, a term which Cowan mentioned in two articles in the 'Famous New Zealanders' series. The first time was in a profile of Henry Holland, who was leader of the Labour Party while it was in Opposition between 1925 and 1933 (except for a three-year interlude when Gordon Coates replaced him). 'Harry Holland was a man for whom I had the warmest admiration,' Cowan wrote in his profile,

> not so much for his great intellectual qualities and his literary ability and all that, as for his spirit as the noble rebel. Having always been somewhat of a

[1] Janet McRae, 'Maori newspapers and magazines', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, TeAra.govt.nz, accessed 14 December 2017.
[2] Richard Aldington, *Portrait of a Rebel: The Life and Work of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1957), 228.

> rebel at heart myself – probably a hereditary virtue – I could never hear of a man setting himself up as an opponent of established rule and conventions without making some inquiry or search for the cause. Nothing worthwhile has ever been accomplished in this world except by rebels of some kind or another, and the rebels of to-day are often the Government of tomorrow.[1]

Cowan also found the spirit of the noble rebel in Jessie Mackay, who he worked with during 1913–17 while she was editor of the *Canterbury Times*. Later, while writing a profile of Mackay for the 'Famous New Zealanders' series, he wrote that what first attracted him to Mackay's poetry and prose was 'her divine spirit of rebellion':

> All that has ever been done in this world for the betterment of mankind has been done or begun by rebels against established tyrannies and long-persisting wrongs. Jessie Mackay's chivalrous soul was fired by the Celtic race's long struggle for self-government in Ireland. I imagine that if she had lived in New Zealand a generation earlier, she would have championed that great patriot Wiremu Tamehana and his lost cause which a more just appraisal of Maori national rights by the Pakeha has now given its proper place in history.[2]

For Cowan, the 'mainspring' or main agent of motivation for Mackay was her 'immensely strong sympathy' for those threatened with losing their homes by those with power to do so, the Highland clearances being 'the first burning wrongs that gave a note of passion to her pen.'[3]

What is interesting about both profiles is that Cowan has identified himself as a noble rebel in them for only the first and second time in his writing. The term appears to have previously 'flown under the radar' so to speak, even though there was plenty of evidence of it. According to Eileen Cowan, later in life James assailed newspapers with commentary on virtually a daily basis. 'He was unsettled in his mind until he had seen *The Dominion* and discovered something upon which to comment,' she wrote in 1944, and 'didn't take up the current chapter of his book until he had got a column or less off to

[1] Cowan, James. 'Famous New Zealanders No. 40: Henry E. Holland', *Railways Magazine*, Jul. 1936, 17.
[2] James Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 46: Jessie Mackay', *Railways Magazine*, Jan. 1937, 13.
[3] Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders No. 46: Jessie Mackay', 13.

the *Star*.'[1] The fact that Cowan was always ready to post off a comment to a newspaper meant that he perceived his reputation to be of sufficient standing to allow him to be published virtually at will during an era when newspapers were still the dominant medium for the discussion of topical current events. 'The power of James Cowan's pen is not fully understood,' Oriwa Keripi (a pen name) wrote in in a 1936 profile of Cowan for *Railways Magazine*. 'He has fought the good fight for many a good cause and succeeded. To him, largely, we in Wellington owe the grove of pohutukawas in Courtenay Place. All over our land his onslaughts have saved the tall trees from their destroyers.'[2]

Another who came close to discerning the 'noble hero' in Cowan in his own time was Peter Fraser, who was New Zealand Labour Prime Minister from 1940–49. Like Cowan, Fraser had at one time been a journalist, writing and editing the Labour Party organs *Maoriland Worker* and *New Zealand Worker* during the 1920s.[3] When Labour came into power in 1935, Fraser held several key portfolios and arranged for Cowan to receive a new pension being created for distinguished but impoverished New Zealand authors. Cowan was the first recipient to be paid £100 annually, along with another 'noble rebel' (in Cowan's eyes), Jessie Mackay.[4] Fraser also wrote the foreword for Cowan's *Tales of the Maori Border* in 1944, by which time he was Prime Minister. He might not have specifically described Cowan as a 'noble rebel' in the book's foreword but his judgement of him as 'a creative artist in words [who] wrought with his pen a work of noble statesmanship'[5] comes reasonably close.

A final factor in helping gauge Cowan's significance as a journalist was his ability to maintain a strong output right up to the end of his working career due to his lifelong archiving habits. This was tacitly revealed when the Turnbull Library acquired some further boxes of his papers through auction in 2012. According to Ariana Tikao, a Maori specialist in the Arrangement and Description team at Turnbull Library, a pattern emerged in the way Cowan had arranged his papers in this acquisition. 'It is clear that Cowan often grouped his papers in a certain way, probably to make it easier for him as he

[1] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion*, 68. (Originally in Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 21 June 1944, Ramsden papers, MS 196–191, ATL)
[2] Oriwa Keripi, 'James Cowan: The Doyen of New Zealand's Great Warriors', *Railways Magazine*, Apr. 1936, 29.
[3] Tim Beaglehole, 'Fraser, Peter', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. 5 vols. Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1990–2000, 4: 183.
[4] Colquhoun, 'Cowan, James', *DNZB*, 3: 120–21.
[5] Cowan, *Tales of The Maori Border*, Foreword.

rewrote articles or worked on a particular publication,' she wrote in the *Journal of New Zealand Studies*. 'This is often apparent in his labelling of envelopes and notebooks. Sometimes we dispose of envelopes when sorting collections, but these ones we kept because of the clues they give to Cowan's personal arrangement of papers.'[1]

9.2 Cowan's legacy today

Every few years a New Zealand publisher will take a punt on bringing out a new version of one of Cowan's own books, and currently there are two on offer. Firstly, there is a nicely produced 2006 paperback reprint of *Tales of the Maori Bush*, which was first published in 1934; and secondly there is a large hardback version of *Maoris in the Great War*, which was first published in 1926 and is now slightly renamed as *Maori in the Great War* (2011). So, what is the key motivating factor to keep publishing Cowan's books? Here I suggest that Cowan has achieved a folk hero status as a writer of the lives of others. His subjects came from an era of adventure and discovery when the country was still being opened up and in which Cowan was traversing as a reporter. By recording these people and their achievements he assumed a status as an adventurer in his right, such were the risks he often took in gaining a story. Take for example when he was accompanying a column of government soldiers through Waima Pass during the height of the 1898 Dog Tax Rebellion when a shotgun blast passed over his head:

> Bang! A thunderous crash it made, then another, loaded with ball, too. That Maori had put heavy charges of powder into his old tupara. … 'Now, we're in for it!' said John Webster to me, quietly, and I declare he was smiling in his cool, wise old way. Well, the Maoris were not likely to fire at their old friend – but you never know. … The next few moments would tell.[2]

Collectively, these excerpts and keywords and terms mentioned in this chapter help build a picture of Cowan as an adventurous storyteller who was skilled at writing in the various modes required of a journalist. For 'versatility'

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[1] Ariana Tikao, 'Borderland, from Archive to Gallery: Working on James Cowan's Papers' (*The Journal of New Zealand Studies*, NS19, 2015): 17.

[2] Cowan, James. 'Famous New Zealanders No. 43: John Webster, Of Hokianga', *Railways Magazine*, Oct. 1936, 17.

was what literary critic F. H. Pritchard considered to be one of the key ingredients of the storyteller's craft. 'All art consists in shaping and adapting some raw material to a certain end,' he wrote 1931. 'At its root is always the conflict between mind and matter. If the artist … is too fastidious to risk soiling his fingers – whether with ink, clay, or pigment – there can be no work of art. If he allows the medium to master him and to get out of control, then also no real work can result.' For Pritchard, words were a particularly difficult form of raw material to work with, 'and it is instructive to watch the literary craftsman at work patiently moulding the language to his requirements.'[1]

Whether the journalist considers his or her writing as literary art is arguable; indeed, most newspaper journalists might smile wryly at Pritchard's notion of being able to patiently mould the language to one's requirements when a deadline is looming. But today's journalists are still storytellers, like Cowan, and any goals, like seeking perfection, adventure or romance in one's writing, can still be retained as ideals no matter how much of it must be subsumed for the task at hand. Cowan had the same dilemmas. His soul desperately sought an affinity with the likes of Holland and Mackay as a fellow noble rebel, but he was essentially a 'writer for hire' due to, one suspects, the financial imperatives of supporting a family. He never veered from writing to earn a living, but this meant accepting commissioned pap at times, such as *New Zealand's First Century: The Dominion's Scene and Story* (1939), a 36-page series of vignettes chronicling the country's nation-building for the Government Tourist Department. All these various aspects formed part of Cowan's writing, but in the past there has been too much concentration on the paternalistic or philo-Maori aspects of his writing, losing perspective and the need to see that formidable strengths arose from factors (and genres) often seen as his weaknesses, but which he had little control over.

Finally, it is with a touch of irony that one of Cowan's books still available new, *Tales of the Maori Bush*, is a collection of articles. For it vindicates his dream all those years ago to republish his journalism in book form, a dream which his wife and colleagues continued as a legacy to his standing.

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[1] Pritchard, F. H. *Books and Readers*. London: Harrap, 1931, 110–11.

APPENDIX 1: James Cowan's books.

1901

– *Maori Biographies. Sketches of Old New Zealand: Descriptive Catalogue of Maori Portraits Painted by Herr G. Lindauer*. Collaboration. Auckland: Brett Printing and Publishing, 1901.

– *Lake Taupo and the Volcanoes: Scenes from Lake and Mountain and Tales from Maori Folk-Lore*. Auckland: Geddis and Blomfield, 1901.

– *New Zealand Lakes and Fiords: The Wonders of Western Otago*. Wellington: Dept. of Tourist and Health Resorts, 1906. Not ascribed to Cowan.

– *New Zealand, or Ao-tea-roa: Its Wealth and Resources, Scenery, Travel-Routes, Spas and Sport.* Wellington: Dept. of Tourist and Health Resorts, 1907. Expanded and reissued 1908.

1910

– *The Maoris of New Zealand*. Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1910.

– *Official Record of the New Zealand International Exhibition of Arts and Industries, 1906–7.* Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1910.

– *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*. Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1911.

– *Pelorus Jack: The White Dolphin of French Pass, New Zealand with Maori Legends.* Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1911.

– *New Zealand Cities: Auckland.* Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1913.

– *Samoa and Its Story*. Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1914.

– *New Zealand Cities: Christchurch.* Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1916.

1920

– *The Old Frontier: Te Awamutu. The Story of the Waipa Valley*. Te Awamutu, NZ: Waipa Post Printing and Publishing Co., 1922.

– *The New Zealand Wars and the Pioneering Period*. 2 vols. Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1922–23.

– *Maori Folk Tales of the Port Hills, Canterbury, New Zealand*. Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1923.

– *Fairy Folk Tales of the Maori.* Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1925.

– *The Maoris in the Great War: A History of the New Zealand Native Contingent and Pioneer Battalion.* Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs/Maori Regimental Committee, 1926.

– *Travel in New Zealand. The Island Dominion. Its Life and Scenery, Pleasure-Routes and Sport.* 2 vols. Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1926.

– *The Tongariro National Park, New Zealand: Its Topography, Geology, Alpine and Volcanic Features, History and Maori Folk-Lore*. Wellington: Tongariro National Park Board, 1927.

– *Romance of the Rail No. 1: The North Island Main Trunk Railway.* Wellington: NZ Railways Publicity Branch, 1928.

– *Romance of the Rail No. 2: The South Island Main Line.* Wellington: NZ Railways Publicity Branch, 1928.

1930

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APPENDIX 2: James Cowan's books with links to his journalism (27/36).

Travel (10)

1901 *Lake Taupo and the Volcanoes* (while at the *Auckland Star*)
1906 *New Zealand Lakes and Fiords* (for Dept. of Tourist & Health)
1907 *New Zealand, or Ao-tea-roa* (for Dept. of Tourist & Health)
1913 *New Zealand Cities: Auckland* (while at the *Canterbury Times*)
1916 *New Zealand Cities: Christchurch* (while at the *Canterbury Times*)
1926 *Travel in New Zealand* (2 vols.)
1927 *The Tongariro National Park*
1928 *Romance of the Rail* (2 vols.)
1936 *New Zealand Railway Station Place Names and Their Meanings*
1938 *Rotorua: Wonderland of the World*

Historical (7)

1901 *Maori Biographies. Sketches of Old New Zealand* (while at the *Auckland Star*)
1910 *The Maoris of New Zealand*
1911 *The Adventures of Kimble Bent*
1914 *Samoa and Its Story*
1922-3 *The New Zealand Wars and the Pioneering Period*
1930 *Pictures of Old New Zealand*
1940 *Settlers and Pioneers*

Collections of stories (10)

1911 *Pelorus Jack: The White Dolphin of French Pass with Maori Legends*
1923 *Maori Folk-Tales of the Port Hills*
1925 *Fairy Folk Tales of the Maori*
1930 *Legends of the Maori Vol. 1*
1930 *Tales of the Maori Coast*
1932 *Fairy Tales from the South Seas*
1934 *Tales of the Maori Bush*
1935 *Hero Stories of New Zealand*
1936 *Suwarrow Gold and Other Stories of the Great South Seas*
(1944) *Tales of the Maori Border* (work in progress at time of Cowan's death)

APPENDIX 3: 'Famous New Zealanders' profiled in *Railways Magazine*.

Key

Sth. Is.	Profiles largely based in the South Island (18).
Asterisk (*)	Profiles who Cowan states he met or observed (24).

1933		
1, April	Donald Sutherland*	*Sth. Is.*
	Quinton McKinnon	*Sth. Is.*
2, May	Sir Donald Maclean	
3, June	Sir George Grey*	
4, July	Judge F. E. Maning	
5, Aug.	Rewi Maniapoto*	
6, Sept.	Thomas Brunner	*Sth. Is.*
	Charles Heaphy	*Sth. Is.*
	James Mackay	*Sth. Is.*
7, Oct.	Commander F. A. Worsley*	
8, Nov.	Sir John Logan Campbell*	
9, Dec.	Gilbert Mair*	
	William Mair*	
1934		
10, Jan.	J. E. Fitzgerald	*Sth. Is.*
11, Feb.	Col. J. M. Roberts*	
12, Mar.	Capt. William Hobson	
13, Apr.	Edward Tregear	
14, May	Alfred Domett	
15, June	Wiremu Tamehana	
16, July	William Pember Reeves	*Sth. Is.*
17, Aug.	John Ballance*	
18, Sep.	Rev. B. Y. Ashwell	
19, Oct.	Te Whiti*	
20, Nov.	Sir Douglas Maclean*	
21, Dec.	Bishop Pompallier	
1935		
22, Jan.	Capt. G. A. Preece*	

23, Feb.	Wahanui*	
24, Mar.	Professor J. Macmillan Brown*	*Sth. Is.*
25, Apr.	Ahumai Te Paerata	
	Julia Matenga	*Sth. Is.*
26, May	Sir Harry Atkinson	
27, June	Dr. Peter H. Buck*	
28, July	Richard John Seddon	*Sth. Is.*
29, Aug.	Samuel Butler	*Sth. Is.*
30, Sep.	Sir Julius von Haast	*Sth. Is.*
31, Oct. S.	Percy Smith*	
32, Nov.	Heuheu family	(Tureiti Heuheu*)
33, Dec.	Hongi Hika	
	Hone Heke	
	Tamati Waka Nene	
1936		
34, Jan.	Elsdon Best*	
35, Feb.	Major Jackson*	
36, Mar.	Wesleyan Church in NZ	(Rev. Gittos*)
37, Apr.	(James Cowan)	
38, May	Sir Joseph Ward*	*Sth. Is.*
39, June	William Ferguson Massey	
40, July	Henry E. Holland	*Sth. Is.*
41, Aug.	Michael Joseph Savage	
42, Sep.	Te Puea Herangi*	
43, Oct.	John Webster*	
44, Nov.	Capt. M. T. Clayton*	
45, Dec.	Sir F. Truby King*	*Sth. Is.*
1937		
46, Jan.	Jessie McKay*	*Sth. Is.*
47, Apr.	Dr. Leonard Cockayne	*Sth. Is.*
48, June	Lord Rutherford	*Sth. Is.*

APPENDIX 4: Cowan's 'Famous New Zealanders' profiles with a New Zealand Wars connection.

1933

1. *Donald Sutherland*, soldier
2. *Sir Donald Maclean*, Native Minister eight times
3. *Sir George Grey*, Governor during two campaigns
4. *Judge F. E. Maning*, settler liaison in Northern War
5. *Rewi Maniapoto*, Maniapoto chief in Waikato War
6. *Charles Heaphy,* earned a Victoria Cross in Waikato War

9a. *Maj. William Mair*, involved in several campaigns

9b. *Capt. Gilbert Mair*, involved in several campaigns

1934

11. *Col. J. M. Roberts*, forest ranger
13. *Edward Tregear,* fought in Tauranga
15. *Wiremu Tamehana,* peace broker on Maori side
19. *Te Whiti,* fought in Taranaki

1935

22. *Capt. G. A. Preece,* frontier soldier, won NZ Cross
23. *Wahanui,* Ngati Maniapoto chief, fought briefly in Waikato War
25. *Ahumai Te Paerata*, survivor of Orakau
26. *Sir Harry Atkinson,* rifleman in Taranaki
31. *S. Percy Smith,* served in Taranaki rifles

33a. *Hone Heke,* chief in Northern War

33b. *Tamati Waka Nene,* 'friendly' chief in Northern War

1936

34. *Elsdon Best,* fought in Armed Constabulary in Taranaki
35. *Major Jackson*, Forest Ranger
43. *John Webster*, settler liaison in Northern War

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– MS 0691. Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 28 Jun. 1943.

– MS 0691. Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 31 Jan. 1944.

– MS 0691. Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 6 Mar. 1944.

– MS 0691. Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 2 April. 1944.

– MS 0691. Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 30 Aug. 1944.

– MS 0691. Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 12 Sep. 1944.

– MS 0691. Eileen Cowan's letter to Eric Ramsden, 31 Oct. 1944.

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