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THE NEW ZEALAND TIMBER AND FLAX TRADE

1769 - 1840

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy  
in History at  
Massey University

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1981

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the commercial, social and political dimensions of the New Zealand timber and flax trade 1769-1840.

Chapters One to Three provide a chronological account of the trade. The level of activity was sporadic until 1827 after which time the trade expanded. The years 1769-1827 were a period of familiarization. The Europeans needed to experiment with the New Zealand products, to test the market for them and to settle traders at New Zealand. The Maoris had to learn what Europeans required and to adjust to the demands of trading. Each group used these years to get to know the other and to establish the rapport required for the trade to function. Exports of wood and fibre from New Zealand increased rapidly after 1827 because the Europeans were prepared to invest in them and the Maoris were willing to produce enough timber and flax to sustain an export trade. During the 1830s the trade prospered only for as long as the markets for the products were buoyant and the Maoris were prepared to continue to assist with the production of them.

Timber and flax trading could substantially affect the lives of those involved in it. Chapters Four and Five examine how traders adapted to the demands of the New Zealand physical and social environment and how Maoris faced changes in their work and settlement patterns, health, inter-tribal relations, and material culture.

Chapter Six discusses the increasing interest by British and colonial governments in New Zealand affairs which was stimulated in large part by the timber and flax trade. For example the sent naval vessels and issued contracts to private firms to collect cargoes of these products. They also sought to regulate affairs in New Zealand (by passing Acts of Parliament, by sending naval vessels to cruise the coast and by appointing a British Resident) at least partly in order to provide an environment which would be conducive to trading. The eventual British decision to annex New Zealand was strongly influenced by the pressure exerted on the government by those who were interested in trading with that country.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADM	Admiralty Papers
<u>A.E.H.R.</u>	<u>Australian Economic History Review</u>
AONSW	Archives Office of New South Wales
AOT	Archives Office of Tasmania
AP	Auckland Public Library
AR	Auckland Institute and Museum Library
AU	Auckland University Library
BT	Board of Trade Papers
B.T.	Bonwick Transcripts
<u>C.C.</u>	<u>Cornwall Chronicle</u>
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CO	Colonial Office Papers
CUST	Customs Papers
DU: Ho	Hocken Library, Dunedin
<u>G.B.P.P.</u>	<u>Great Britain: Parliamentary Papers</u>
HO	Home Office Papers
<u>H.R.A.</u>	<u>Historical Records of Australia</u>
<u>H.R.N.Z.</u>	<u>Historical Records of New Zealand</u>
<u>H.T.C.</u>	<u>Hobart Town Courier</u>
<u>H.T.G.</u>	<u>Hobart Town Gazette</u>
<u>H.T.G.T.L.</u>	<u>Hobart Town General Trade List</u>
<u>J.P.S.</u>	<u>Journal of the Polynesian Society</u>
<u>L.A.</u>	<u>Launceston Advertiser</u>
<u>L.G.T.L.</u>	<u>Launceston General Trade List</u>
LMS	London Missionary Society
NLA	National Library of Australia
NPL/D	Dixson Library, Sydney
NPL/M	Mitchell Library, Sydney
NSW	New South Wales
NZ	New Zealand
<u>N.Z.J.H.</u>	<u>New Zealand Journal of History</u>
OLC	Old Land Claims
PAMBU	Pacific Manuscripts Bureau
PC	Privy Council Papers
<u>S.G.</u>	<u>Sydney Gazette</u>
<u>S.G.T.L.</u>	<u>Sydney General Trade List</u>



<u>S.H.</u>	<u>Sydney Herald</u>
T	Treasury Papers
TAUP	Tauranga Public Library
TSL	Tasmanian State Library
VDL	Van Diemen's Land
WArc	National Archives, Wellington
WMS	Wesleyan Missionary Society
WTu	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

(Note: In order to assist the reader the full title of each work is cited in the first reference to it in each chapter. Abbreviations such as 'ibid.' and 'op.cit.' have not been used.)

GLOSSARY

<u>ariki</u>	a senior ranking chief
<u>hahunga</u>	disinterment and reinterment of the bones of the dead
<u>hakari</u>	entertainment, feast
<u>hapu</u>	sub-tribe
<u>hoko</u>	buy, sell, exchange; a fair
<u>kahu kuri</u>	dogskin cloak
<u>kainga</u>	domestic settlement, village
<u>mana</u>	spiritual potency, prestige, authority, sacred essence
<u>Maoritanga</u>	Maori-ness, Maori culture
<u>pa</u>	fortified settlement
<u>patu</u>	thrusting weapon with a short blade and sharp edge
<u>tangi</u>	funeral, lamentation over the dead
<u>tapa</u>	cloth made from the beaten bark of the Paper Mulberry ( <u>Broussonetia papyrifera</u> )
<u>tapu</u>	under religious or ceremonial restriction, sacred, charged with spiritual potency
<u>tihore</u>	finest <u>phormium</u> - that which can be scraped without using a shell
<u>tohunga</u>	expert (usually in spiritual matters)
<u>utu</u>	satisfaction, compensation, revenge, equivalence
<u>wahi tapu</u>	sacred place, burial ground
<u>wenerau ki</u> ('heneraki')	to grumble at, censure
<u>whanau</u>	sub-division of <u>hapu</u> , an extended family

## PREFACE

This thesis is a study of the New Zealand timber and flax trade 1769-1840. It examines the commercial aspects and the social consequences of this trade. It also explores how the trade helped involve the governments of Britain, New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land in New Zealand affairs and influenced moves for annexation.

Chapters One to Three of the thesis outline the chronology of the trade 1769-1840, while Chapters Four to Six are a thematic examination of the implications of the trading process.

Earlier writers have tended to regard the flax trade in terms of the period 1827-1832 and the timber trade only in relation to the 1830s.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter One it is argued that the foundations for the trade were first laid when Cook and his colleagues extolled the virtues of New Zealand trees and phormium. Thus, rather than regarding the events of the trade in the years before 1827 as isolated incidents they are examined as being part of the process of preparation, familiarization, and experimentation that was necessary before trading could take off.

Chapter Two analyses the factors which determined the quantities of phormium that were exported from New Zealand between 1827 and 1832. It looks also at the nature of the trade after the boom years had passed through to the end of the decade. Chapter Three is concerned with the activities of the spar trade and the fluctuations in the colonial timber trade in the 1830s. In addition both chapters describe the patterns of European settlement in New Zealand that resulted from the requirements of each branch of the trade.

Chapters Four and Five are concerned with the people involved with the trade and the ways in which a commitment to the trade affected their lives. These chapters are in no way

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1. There have been two New Zealand theses which have included information specifically on the pre-1840 period but these dealt with neither the mechanics nor the social history of the trade before 1840. They are S.J.L. McCay, 'Phormium Tenax and New Zealand History', M.A. thesis, Otago University, 1952; P.H.H. Taylor, 'The History of the Kauri Timber Industry', M.A. thesis, Auckland University, 1950.

to be regarded as a history of the Europeans or Maoris in New Zealand in the period to 1840 and neither are they a general discussion of culture contact. Moreover, although trading involved prolonged contacts between Maoris and Europeans, these chapters do not deal with the wider question of race relations. However, all these matters are touched on in the course of the discussion but only in so far as they relate to the subject of the thesis.

The final chapter of the thesis deals with the wider repercussions of the New Zealand timber and flax trade. It discusses the role of the British and colonial governments both in promoting the trade and in attempting to regulate it. It is argued that this involvement played a significant part in determining the nature and timing of Britain's annexation of New Zealand.

The study ends about the beginning of 1840 because the formal assumption of British control over New Zealand and the huge influx of colonists in that year affected the nature of the trade. What had been, from a New Zealand perspective, effectively a maritime free-trade was, from 1840, influenced by internal government regulations, import duties and the internal market demands of the new colony.

The approach adopted in this study has been to start by examining the details of the trade and then to broaden the perspective by analysing first its social and then its political dimensions. This approach is aimed to demonstrate both the development of the trade and the continuity which linked Cook's suggestion of the potential for a timber and flax trade to the events which led up to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. An account of the voyages to and from New Zealand grows in significance when the effects of the trade on the lives of the participants are considered. In much the same way contemporary commentators and the British and colonial governments also became aware of the wider implications of the trade. It was, respectively, their descriptions of the ill-effects of the trade on life in New Zealand and their moves to promote

and to regulate trading at that country that brought the timber and flax trade into the arena of British colonial policy-making. In that forum the trade took on a new importance. Thus the thesis goes on to look at the implication of the governments' involvement with the trade and how this was in part, responsible for the decision to annex New Zealand to the British Empire.

The evidence available for this study varied markedly in its quality and quantity. Information about the volumes of timber and flax which were exported annually from New Zealand (particularly the products which were imported into New South Wales) is available in broad outline in the works of other writers, from nineteenth century government accounts of colonial trade, and from newspapers.

The more detailed analysis of the volume of shipping, of voyages by individual vessels, of the process of trading and the lives of the participants of the trade was arrived at from my reading of a large range of contemporary colonial newspapers and the rich and full collections of colonial government records held in Australian institutions. To add to this colonial perspective I read the files of the Colonial Office, Board of Trade, Treasury, Admiralty and Foreign Office.

Traders, generally, were too concerned with the management of their business to leave a consistent record of their work. The letterbook left by Ranulph Dacre, which covers the years when he was trying to complete his Royal Navy timber contract, provided an all too brief exception to this rule. A few log books survive but mainly for the period before 1820, and some small snippets were found in whalers' logs.

The task of fleshing-out the skeleton has therefore been a matter of gleaning scraps of information from collection of private correspondence, from some published contemporary accounts, from parliamentary proceedings and reports from select committees, and from the journals of missionaries and visitors to New Zealand.

During the preparation of this thesis I have been advised, assisted and supported by very many people in both their professional and personal capacities. To them all I extend my most grateful thanks. In particular I want to acknowledge the following:

the University Grants Committee for awarding me a mixed tenure scholarship;

the History Department of Massey University and the Head of Department, Professor W.H. Oliver;

my supervisors, Dr J.M.R. Owens, Dr K.R. Howe and Dr W.P.N. Tyler;

the staffs of the Massey University Library, Alexander Turnbull Library, Auckland Public Library, Auckland Museum and Institute Library, Auckland University Library, Tauranga Public Library, Hocken Library, New South Wales Public Library, Mitchell Library, Dixson Library, Archives Office of New South Wales, Archives Office of Tasmania, Tasmanian Public Library, Queen Victoria Institute (Launceston), National Library of Australia;

the friends and people whose encouragement of my work requires special mention: in New Zealand: Dr Judy Bennett, Mr Greg Arnold, Mr Jim Owen, Dr P.W.T. Adams, Mrs Margaret Tennant, Mr Bob Bremer, Dr H.A. Morton, Ms J. Binney, Mrs Claudia Orange;

in Australia: Mr and Mrs Brian Nelson, Professor H.E. Maude, Dr D. Shineberg, Dr N. Gunson, Drs Gre and Caroline Ralston, Mrs Penny Lavaka, Professor M. Roe, Mr R.A. Langdon;

my typist Mrs Diana Steffert;

my wife and helpmate Judith who also drew the maps and figures in this thesis.