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Cultural Perceptions of the Wellington Landscape  
1870 to 1900: an Anthropological Interpretation

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Social Anthropology at Massey University,  
Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2008

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines how cultural perceptions of Wellington's environment changed from the 1870s to the early 1900s. The historical material shows how clearing the New Zealand landscape of its forest cover in the early settler years reflected a particular cultural perception of the New Zealand bush. By 1900, this cultural perception had changed indicating that not only was the New Zealand landscape different, but New Zealand society had changed. These changes can be seen in the geographic historical accounts of clearing New Zealand's bush and the parliamentary debates of the 1875 Forest Act, 1885 State Forest Act and the 1903 Scenery Protection Act.

The anthropological theories of dwelling, taskscape, phenomenology of landscape and the hybridity of nature are used as a contemporary synthesis of ideas to examine cultural perceptions of the Wellington bush. An anthropological approach is also used to bring together diverse historical material in a way that allows these ideas to be applied.

Cultural perceptions of the Wellington landscape can be understood in the way the bush was cleared for pasture, how the landscape was depicted in paintings and photography and in the case study of the establishment of Otari-Wilton's Bush.

The thesis argues that cultural perceptions can be appreciated historically by understanding how people lived within the Wellington landscape, and how this was reflected in attitudes towards the New Zealand bush. Cultural perceptions of New Zealand's bush were a combination of existing cultural attitudes, the practicalities of living within the New Zealand environment and a direct perception of the bush itself. It is the shifting influence of all three of these aspects that determines overall cultural perceptions of the bush in any particular period in New Zealand's history.

The establishment of Otari-Wilton's Bush shows how the cultural perception of Wellington's bush had changed from seeing it as an obstruction covering potential farmland to having a defined place and purpose within the Wellington landscape.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful for the assistance of the staff from the Alexander Turnbull Library and Wellington City Council archives; Robyn Smith, the curator at Otari-Wilton's Bush during my archive research; Rewi Elliot the current curator Otari-Wilton's Bush, Mike Oats and David Sole at Wellington City Council.

My thanks to the people associated with Otari-Wilton's Bush who recounted what they knew of the history; Barbara Hampton, Margaret Crimp, Rod Prother, John and Ann Moffet, John Riseborough and the decedents of Job and Ellen Wilton, Susan and Helen Waugh.

The work required for this thesis would not have been possible without the patience and support from my wife Angela and the ongoing interest from my immediate family. I am most appreciative of those who read my earlier drafts of chapters, and particularly my father, Lindis, who read them with an interest in the history and ideas. I also reflect on how my late grandparents Clyde and Inez Taylor would have read this thesis with both an appreciation of the work involved and a scholarly understanding of much of the material.

I would like to thank Dr Keith Ridler and Dr Henry Barnard who supervised this thesis and understood my desire to explore this subject anthropologically as post graduate work.

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