Pēwhairangi: Bay of Islands Missions and Māori 1814 to 1845
By Angela Middleton
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Reviewed by Geoffrey Troughton

Two centenaries of national importance for New Zealanders occurred in 2014. While much national attention focused on commemoration of the outbreak of World War I, another significant milestone was also reached with the bicentenary of the founding of the first permanent European settlement in New Zealand. As is well known, that early settlement was at Hohi in the Bay of Islands – established by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), and often previously referred to as the Rangihoua mission. *Pēwhairangi* was produced with the bicentenary of this event in mind, but as Middleton notes, the book was more than a decade in the making. The volume builds upon Middleton's doctoral research on Te Puna, which was published in 2008, and other subsequent studies of the Kerkeri and Hohi mission stations. In *Pēwhairangi*, she extends the story, providing a broad overall account of the expansion of the CMS missions in the Bay of Islands, and of interactions between the missions and different hapū that necessarily shifted with time and changing circumstances.

The book is mainly structured around close analysis of the five key CMS mission stations connected with the Bay of Islands. It opens with a brief introduction to the early setting, the Protestant missionary movement and "the Māori world". The second chapter addresses the Hohi mission station (1814) and Rangihoua Pā. This is followed by a chapter that explores the context and implications of the CMS's "civilization first" policy, particularly focusing on cultural and technological interchanges connected with horticulture and the introduction of muskets. Subsequent chapters deal respectively with the Kerikeri mission (1819) and Kororipo Pā, Paihia (1823), the inland station at Te Waimate (1830) and Te Puna (1832). The final main chapter examines the period from the Treaty of Waitangi to the Northern War, before a conclusion entitled: "What Hath God Wrought?" Focusing on the individual mission stations allows for a careful examination of immediate contexts, and for elaboration of the particular characteristics and situation of each mission. It leads to a certain amount of overlap at times, however, given that after the later stations were not independent or entirely isolated from each other. The focus on the CMS stations also means that the Wesleyan and later Catholic missions are only incidental parts of the story. Each chapter is interspersed with informative text boxes and delightfully extensive illustrations, which address a wide range of objects, themes and issues. A series of appendices provide information on Māori figures associated with Te Puna and Rangihoua, as well as the known residents of the various missions. The book is written with clarity in pithy, economical prose.

There have been many fine studies of the early years of encounter and interaction between Māori and missionaries in the Bay of Islands. Despite walking in well-trodden terrain, Middleton provides a remarkably fresh account. Familiar stories are retold with interest and insight, and we also encounter a rich cast of characters that includes, wherever possible, lesser-known figures such as the missionary wives and non-missionary settlers amongst others. I suspect that even amongst those who know the general story of the missions well, few are likely to have heard of John and Sarah Shergold, or known of Sarah's death and burial in 1816 – the first in the mission. Accounts from individuals like Marianne Williams provide intimate glimpses into the day-to-day world of the missions, and of the social values they expressed.

Middleton carefully illuminates the intricate social and political world in which the missions operated, and complex relational networks, drawing extensively on the voluminous primary literature that exists along with more recent anthropological and historical sources. Her connections with local Māori and descendants of the missions are evident in many places;

signs of the living memory and continuing salience of these early events are referenced at various times in the text. The author's archaeological expertise contributes to key strengths and characteristic features of the work. She provides very fine accounts of the material culture of the missions, and her attentiveness to objects, time and space provide particularly rich evocations of the mundane aspects of the missions.

The account is less sure-footed in some of its religious characterizations and interpretations, such as aspects of the introductory accounts of the evangelical and institutional context of the missions. It is also relatively uninterested in the theology of the missions. From a secular perspective, Middleton notes that missionaries' strong belief in providence and their views about sin, hell and the sacredness of the Sabbath look very much like superstition; to Māori, their beliefs and practices may have been simply "witchcraft". Religious and cultural differences tend thus to be treated in terms of equivalences, with little space for theological divergences to matter. Yet, as Sarah Dingle has recently pointed out, important notions such as civilization are contexts in which theological meanings and resonances have particular significance in the history of the missions. Interestingly, Middleton's account also emphasizes the trouble that missionaries had in understanding the cultural and religious values of Māori, and apparent Māori indifference to the missionaries' Gospel message. Larger questions about the nature of religion, its relationship to culture, and the nature and extent of conversion, are closely related to these issues – though they are not central to Middleton's concerns. On the latter point, she is more sceptical than interpreters such as Belich in her reading of Māori conversion to Christianity, contending in her conclusion that Christianity was often a shallow skin that was easily shed. This may well have been true in cases. However, this position risks eliminating even the possibility of "conversion," either because it is deemed inconsequential or too narrowly defined. Within global Christianity there has always been extraordinary range and adaptability, and we would expect that to be true also of Māori Christianities.

Such observations are not intended to paint *Pēwhairangi* as anti-missionary. Some of the limitations and conceits of the missions are well known, and Middleton does not shy from pointing them out. Her interpretation emphasizes the role that the CMS missions played in naively unleashing "the forces of British colonisation," and casts the long-serving missionaries John and Hannah King as "players in a farcical story" (273). On the other hand, she offers numerous rejoinders that provide more understanding accounts of missionary actions than their contemporary opponents put forward. Middleton's focus on the failure and futility of the missions is partly attributable to her story's focus on the Bay of Islands. The decline of those missions was bound up in other local changes, and the weakening economic and political influence of this area more generally. The wider impacts of the cultural, colonial and religious changes initiated in these early years were, however, more widespread and enduring – not least in the remarkable process of "ethnogenesis" that Middleton identifies.

Overall, *Pēwhairangi* provides a rich exploration of the complex interactions, negotiations and entanglements of the area and era under consideration. In so doing, it highlights again the significance of the bicentenary just past. Middleton's account is an excellent addition to a distinguished field of New Zealand scholarship and deserves to be widely and carefully read.