

# Ranulph Dacre and Patuone's topknot

*The vicissitudes of a 19th-century Royal Navy officer who became a Pacific trader and timber merchant in Australia and New Zealand*

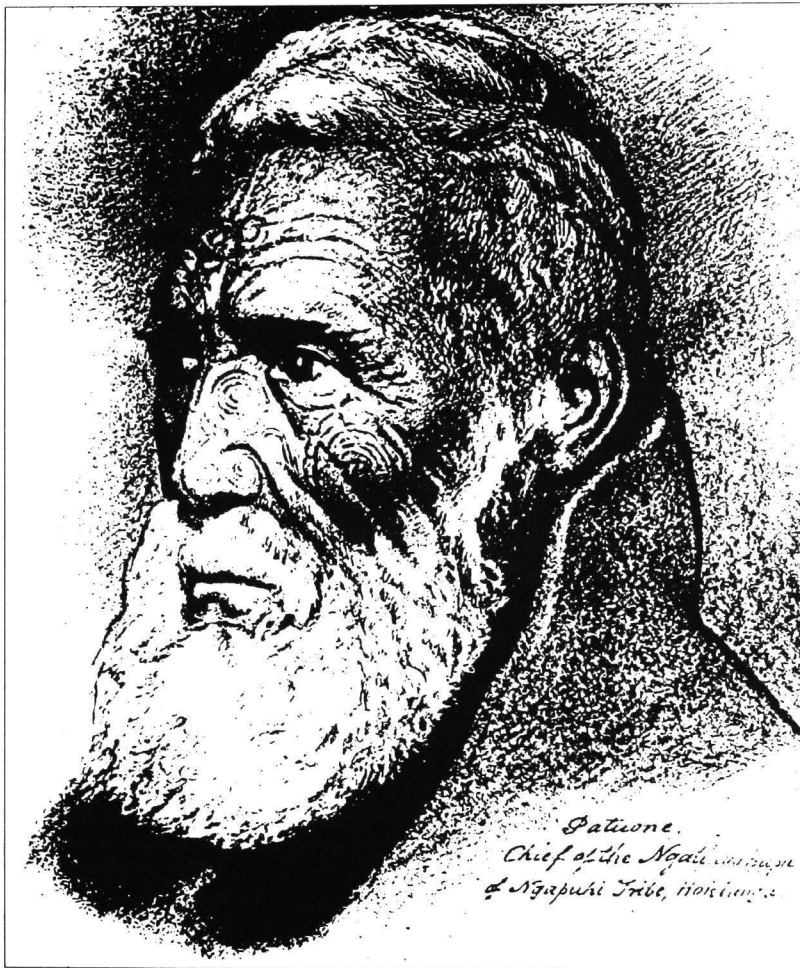
FRANK ROGERS

Frank Rogers taught History and English at Auckland Grammar School for 29 years. In retirement he worked for 15 years at the University of Auckland Library in an honorary capacity on private papers including those of A.R.D. Fairburn, Sylvia Ashton-Warner and John Weeks.

The following is an expanded version of his essay on Ranulph Dacre published in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, vol 1, pp 97-8, and presented at a Stout Centre Wednesday Seminar.

Ranulph Dacre's career as an entrepreneur covers the pre-colonial and colonial periods of Pacific trade. He was a pioneer of maritime-merchant enterprise based firstly in New South Wales and then New Zealand when it was desirable to have a number of skills in addition to commercial expertise and organisational ability to embark on Maori-Pakeha trading – knowledge of the language, seamanship appropriate to maritime trade, command of resources, and the temperament to have mana among the Maori.<sup>1</sup>

Evelyn Stokes<sup>2</sup> has suggested that there were three phases in the Maori-Pakeha economy of New Zealand up to 1850. Money was useless in the first period



Above: A pencil drawing of Patuone, Chief of the Ngati Hao Hapu of Ngapuhi tribe, Hokianga. Alexander Turnbull Library.

1790 to the 1820s and barter was the method used for trading with the sealers and whalers who called in to replenish food and water as well as masts and yards. Whalers also loaded logs for Canton. Pork, potatoes, kumara, logs, spars, flax, planks and 'curiosities' were exchanged for iron, cloth and clothes, tools, weapons and arcane treasure. Trading was speculative and intermittent, depending on ships' visits.

The second, Pakeha-Maori era 1830s-1840s, saw the beginning of a money economy with more con-

tinuous trading mediated through an estimated sixty to a hundred European middlemen. They bought dressed flax, food, timber, land, and sold more market-oriented goods - firearms, blankets, clothing, tobacco, tools etc. Government encouragement of trade led to intervention - the advent of the British Resident, the Treaty of Waitangi and Colonial Government.

Third, 1840-50 saw the growth of a semi-commercial economy with direct Maori trade with European settlements, supplying foodstuffs, labour for building and timber-working etc. The hunters and food growers/gatherers were in transition to farmers, traders, ship owners, depending upon the degree of proximity to European settlements.

Dacre's career as a South Pacific entrepreneur covered all these periods and into the growth of a Pakeha-dominated economy.

#### ORIGINS

Dacre was born in 1797, the fifth son of the High Sheriff of Hampshire and colonel of the Fencibles, George Dacre and his wife Julia (Hall), at Marwell Hall. The family was armigerous (entitled to heraldic arms). In 1810 Ranulph entered the Royal Navy as a midshipman serving in the *Cayne*, *Spartan*, and *Leviathan*. Frederick Marryat the novelist also served on the *Spartan*.<sup>3</sup> Dacre's Certificate in the Auckland Public Library was the result of the examination that was a prerequisite to his gazettement as lieutenant in 1812.<sup>4</sup> The certificate gives dates of service and ships, ranks and skills. His period of naval service was during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1812-13 he served in the American War on a frigate blockading the Atlantic ports so that he did not share Marryat's exciting experiences in the Mediterranean in the *Impérieuse*. At the end of the wars he resigned his commission and became captain of a merchant schooner trading with the West Indies for Robert Brooks of London. It is possible that the prize money from his period of naval service would have enabled him to invest in commercial enterprises.

This was the beginning of a career as an entrepreneur which resulted in his acquiring a fortune in Pacific trading and then los-

ing it; his connection with New Zealand where he bounced back; his sometimes exciting relations with the Maori; the part he played in exploiting New Zealand's potential for trade with New South Wales, the Pacific, and Europe. Napoleon's Continental System had cut Britain off from the Baltic sources of naval stores including timber for masts and spars, and flax for ropes and cordage. This period saw the beginning of European deforestation when New Zealand was open slather for the harvesting of easily-won natural products of timber, flax, whale and seal oil, seal skins, minerals.

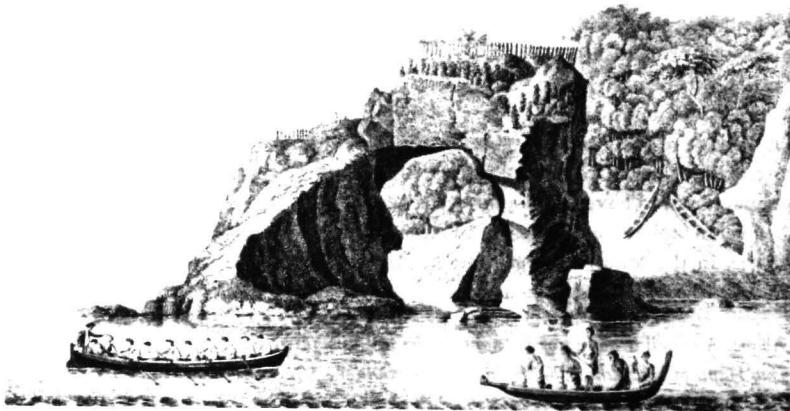
#### PROBLEMS OF THE NEW ZEALAND TRADE<sup>5</sup>

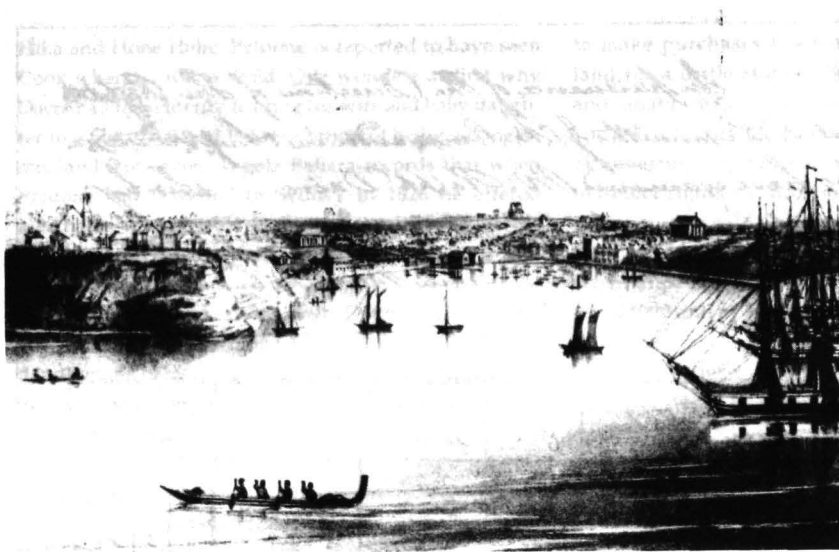
##### *Spars*

This was a very speculative trade. Expertise was necessary in the selection of logs to precise Navy specifications (eg, a 1" taper per yard, no knots or blemishes). Maori gangs were engaged to haul the logs to the river or seashore and to load them onto the ships. Maori workers took time to acquire new skills and were subject to the need to return to the pa for seasonal planting, harvesting and tribal conflict. Transporting the spars to Britain was costly. Although the price was high (£100-£200 per spar) there was a high percentage of rejects which had to be sold at a loss.

##### *Timber*

This involved negotiating cutting rights or purchase of forest from iwi, arranging for Maori workers to haul logs to the loading point, setting up a station for a team of sawyers and carpenters with stores and equipment, and surviving the imponderables of tribal warfare which interrupted the supply of food and workers, and the vagaries of the market, weather, terrain, etc.





### Flax

After the Navy had tested out trial shipments to England there was a market for phormium fibre. At first some shipments had arrived in poor state and it took some time to overcome the problem of quality control. There was a difference between Maori preparation of flax for traditional domestic purposes such as the making of cloaks, mats, piupiu, to be used as needed, and fibre for ropes and cordage in commercial quantities to be shipped to a distant land. Some varieties were difficult to scrape, and the work was tedious. It took the pressures of the musket wars to ensure the production of marketable quantities. Eventually the supply fell off as the market for muskets became saturated and other products proved more profitable and less arduous.

### DACRE AS A PACIFIC TRADER

After a period in the West Indian trade he visited New South Wales in 1823 as commander of the *Elizabeth* for Robert Brooks. In 1824 he first came to New Zealand in the schooner *Endeavour*, calling at Whangaroa for supplies. His fellow passengers were Tyerman and Bennet from the London Missionary Society returning from visiting Pacific missions. A Maori party boarded the vessel and began stealing gear - Captain Dibbs took preventive action with the result that the vessel was seized. There ensued a very tense period until a reception party returned to the ship; the hostile action was attributed to 'petulance of the

*Opposite: Fortified rock at Tolaga, from Hawkesworth, H.D. Sporing, 1773.*

*Above: At Auckland harbour entrance, P.J. Hogan, 1852.*

captain'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1825 Dacre, as part owner of the *Surrey*, had visited Whangaroa, Mercury Bay, and Hokianga in search for spars. In 1827 he took his first load of spars from the latter. He and Robert Gordon Browne were pioneers of the New Zealand timber trade. Browne was one of the principals of the 'Deptford' boat-building yard at Horeke on the Hokianga, which folded after a time. Next he worked for Dacre who installed him as his agent

at Mahurangi to fulfil his contract with the Navy for the supply of spars.<sup>7</sup>

In 1828 Dacre opened a business in Sydney and continued his Pacific trading in such commodities as for example, whale oil, and sandalwood from the Isle of Pines in New Caledonia, destined for China and the Philippines, as well as making an unsuccessful attempt to obtain greenstone from Milford Sound. In 1830 he disposed of his property in England and settled in Sydney and the next year married Margaret Sea, daughter of a Sydney merchant. His ships included the *Surrey*, *Mary Ann*, *Endeavour*, *Bolina*.<sup>8</sup> The various places of Dacre's operations in New Zealand were Mahurangi, Coromandel, Mercury Bay, Mangonui, Hokianga, in each case with the aid of a deal with the iwi for land purchase or felling rights, employing a team of sawyers from Sydney and Maori labour for shifting logs and loading the vessels. The stations also involved trading and cattle farming where possible, the cattle being needed to provide a supply of meat for the workers. At first Dacre's adventures in the New Zealand timber trade were dogged by misfortunes. At Mercury Bay his schooner was wrecked and looted by Thames Maori with a loss of £1200. The Mahurangi spar station was affected by tribal war resulting in shortage of labour and food supplies, and his trees were seized by *HMS Buffalo*. The Mangonui land purchase was also in the end unsuccessful, the trees proving to be too short for spars, but he was able to lease the property to other timber workers.

In 1832 he succeeded in opening up a large trade at Hokianga. It was here that we have the story of his relations with Patuone of the Ngati Hao, Hgapuhi iwi, brother of Tamati Waka Nene, and related to Hongi

In pursuance of the Direction of His Majesty's  
 Lord Admiral Lord Exmouth, J. C. B. Comdr. in Chief  
 We have examined Mr. Ralph Daire who by  
 Certificate appears to be more than fifteen years of Age, and find  
 he has gone to sea more than six years in the Ships and Qualities  
 herein mentioned. 1816.

Ships	Days	Where	Age	Entry	Qualities	Discharge		Time			
						Time	Place	Y	M	D	
Cyane	none	London	13	26 May 1811	By 30th 1811	15 June 1811	—	—	—	3	1
"	"	"	"	17 June 1811	By 11th 1811	11 Sept. 1811	—	—	—	5	1
Startan	"	"	"	17 <sup>th</sup> 1811	By 11 <sup>th</sup> 1811	15 June 1811	—	—	—	1	9
"	"	"	"	13 June 1811	By 11 <sup>th</sup> 1811	15 June 1811	—	—	—	1	5
Levathan	"	"	"	27 Nov 1811	By 11 <sup>th</sup> 1811	31 Dec 1811	—	—	—	1	1
"	"	"	"	1 <sup>st</sup> Dec 1811	By 11 <sup>th</sup> 1811	12 Dec 1811	—	—	—	—	1
"	"	"	"	13 <sup>th</sup> 1811	By 11 <sup>th</sup> 1811	15 June 1811	—	—	—	—	3
Ramsey	Admiral						Total	6	0	2	

He produces Journals kept by himself in the Startan  
 and Levathan — and Certificates from Captains, Broughton, Drummond  
 & Briggs — of his diligence and ability. He can speak, write, read,  
 take in, and set sails, Moor and Unmoor, Work and manage a Ship in  
 the various Situations in which she may be placed. Calculate the Sides,  
 keep a reckoning of a Ship's way by Plane and Mercator's sailing,  
 observe the Latitude by the Sun and Stars, and also find the same by  
 double Altitudes of the Sun, Ascertain the Variation of the Compass,  
 Account the and Compleatides, and is well qualified to take Charge  
 of a Watch on board any of His Majesty's Ships.

Given under our hands on board the Berwick at  
 Sea this 31<sup>st</sup> Day of June 1816.

*M. B. B.* Captain A. M. B. Berwick  
*S. P. B.* Captain — — — — — Boga  
*P. H. W.* Captain — — — — — Boga  
*M. J.* Master — — — — — Berwick

Hika and Hone Heke. Patuone is reported to have seen Cook when he was a child. One wonders at first why Dacre had the temerity to bring his wife and baby daughter to a place that had the reputation of being a dangerous land. However, Angela Ballara records that when Patuone had travelled to Sydney in 1826 he offered merchants (presumably including Dacre) to leave his son there to reassure them that Hokianga was a safe place for them to trade.<sup>9</sup>

During his negotiations with Dacre on board the ship in Hokianga Harbour Patuone took pleasure in dandling the baby Julia on his knee. One day she seized his topknot. Immediately Patuone and his followers left the ship. We can only conjecture what went on in the minds of both parties after this breach of tapu remembering the fate of Marion du Fresne and the *Boyd*. However, Patuone eventually said that he would overlook the offence, giving as his reason that the child was *porangi* - 'mad'.<sup>10</sup>

There appears to be a sensible explanation for this about face. At the time there was competition amongst chiefs and tribes for European trade so that Patuone's mana partly depended on bringing home the goods. Both Patuone and Dacre needed one another. One can regard this as an example of a chief being pragmatic about tapu. Roger Wigglesworth records that initially Maori were quick to punish infringements of tapu but after regular trading relations were established the incidence of punishments diminished.<sup>11</sup> This can be seen as a sign of Maori forbearance, and that the traders were beginning to learn how to avoid giving undue offence.

On another occasion the workers at Mahurangi ran out of supplies. Dacre set out in an open boat manned by a crew of rowers for Coromandel, a distance of 100 kilometres. When they reached the beach one of the crew was murdered by a chief. When Dacre expostulated the chief offered to let him kill one of his slaves. Another version was that he was sent a gift of kai which included cooked human flesh. What at first appears as thoughtless savagery has an explanation - it is likely that the crew member was Ngapuhi, an enemy, but when the chief realised that Dacre was in the boat he was concerned to mollify the trader.

In 1836 Dacre moved Browne and his operation from Mahurangi to Mercury Bay. According to letters in Dacre's Old Land Claim,<sup>12</sup> he had instructed Browne

to make purchases to secure the timber, and to buy land for a cattle station. Browne had been bankrupt and unable to continue until Dacre employed him and gave him fresh scope for his undoubted talents by investing capital and providing direction, access to timber rights etc. Browne was responsible for erecting a stone wharf and the first water-powered sawmill in New Zealand, as well as a shipbuilding and repair slip. The costs of these developments to Dacre was £4000 and at first the operating loss was reported as £9000.

Despite these losses in New Zealand, by 1840 Ranulph Dacre was one of the leading merchants in Sydney, with a town counting house and a wharf at Darling Harbour. He owned a cattle and sheep station in Gammon Plains in New South Wales and was an importer and agent for Robert Brooks of London.

He was also a director of the Sydney Alliance Assurance Company, the Australian Steam Navigation Company, and one of the first directors of the Union Bank of Australia. Also he was an assessor of the Supreme Court, a share-broker, a magistrate, and a member of the LMS Committee. His firm was active in the Pacific Islands trade, and was engaged in exploiting the markets for whale and seal products, and sandalwood. A venture to New Zealand to obtain greenstone from Milford Sound ended in disaster when Captain Anglin was blinded whilst blasting stone.

In 1841 or 1842 Browne was in debt, became prey to religious mania and died at Russell. In the 1842-4 depression in New South Wales Dacre himself became insolvent and lost his ships and estates. He decided to collect debts due to him in New Zealand, the Society Islands and Hawaii. In 1844 he came to New Zealand to pursue his claim to the spar venture lands and began to prosper again as a merchant and shipowner. For a time he divided his time between Auckland and Sydney, establishing business relations with James Macky of the Auckland firm of L.D. Nathan.

He went into partnership with Thomas Macky, brother of James, in Auckland in 1854, and invested in land - 4000 acres at Omaha and other properties at Whangaparaoa and Okura. In 1859 he settled in Auckland with his family and was again a respected citizen and businessman. The firm of Thomas Macky and Company was said to be the largest in Auckland with premises in Lower Queen Street. In 1864 he was an Anglican Synodman and was well enough off to share with Colonel Mould RE the cost of enlarging the East and West wings of St Paul's Church. In 1866-7 the



*Opposite: Certificate of examination of Mr Ralph Dacre at sea 21 June 1816'. NZ MS 644. Auckland City Library.*

*Above: The Dacre family crest.*



Dacre family were living in a house in Eden Crescent.<sup>13</sup> This was in the 'snob' area overlooking Official Bay, a short distance from Government House.

The Okura property, which is still known as the Weiti Station<sup>14</sup>, was run by two bachelor sons, Life Septimus and Henry. On the foreshore of this farm there stands the Dacre cottage (which may be rented), a brick single room that has been restored by the Auckland Branch of the NZ Historic Places Trust. In 1882 Dacre and his wife owned 9,000 acres (3,600 ha) of land valued at £10,000 (\$20,000).<sup>15</sup>

In 1878 the Dacres returned to England to seek medical treatment for daughter Harriett. In letters to one of his sons in New Zealand he complained of being financially drained by the costs of treatment. In 1884 he died at Clapham in Surrey. Margaret died the next year.

Dacre's character is portrayed in a letter from Thomas Poynton<sup>16</sup> for whom he had worked many years before: '... at the time there was no man trading in the North more respected and deservedly so, for his gentlemanly conduct and upright dealing'.

Patuone, after being involved as a peacemaker in the Northern War, eventually went to live on a grant of land at Takapuna and was often to be seen in the streets of Auckland.<sup>17</sup> It is likely that he would have met the Dacres and Julia who by this time was Mrs. Vincent.

The story of Ranulph Dacre throws light on the development of Pacific trade and the growth of Sydney as a commercial centre when New Zealand was part of the Australian frontier. His story also parallels the evolution of the Maori-Pakeha trade until the economy came to be dominated by the Pakeha. It also throws some light on the nature of Maori-Pakeha relations during the period before 1840.

Contrary to the view of some historians that the Maori-Pakeha relationship began in 1840, Alan Ward claims 'There was a mutually enriching association from trade, travel and intermarriage for half a century before the Treaty of Waitangi. Neither people, by 1840, was wholly traditional, wholly separable from one another'. J.M.R. Owens spells out the detail: 'By 1840 there were some 2000 overseas settlers in New Zealand, and many thousands more had come and gone in the previous half century. Settlers had already made their own accommodations with the Maori'.<sup>18</sup> In this process Ranulph Dacre undoubtedly played a part. He was not deterred by the alarmist reports of conditions in New Zealand and persisted in the 'mutually enriching association' despite bankruptcy, Maori belligerence and other setbacks.

He lived to survive a series of changes. As a seaman he participated in the transition from wooden ships to

iron vessels, and from sail to steam; to see trading by barter with the Maori evolve into a money and market economy. He observed the consequences of the Treaty of Waitangi, the establishment of British government, the Land Wars and their inconclusive settlement, and the development of a vigorous pastoral economy in which his merchant firm was able to flourish.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Biographical information is based upon: *New Zealand Herald*, 11 October 1884, Suppt. p.1 cols 5-6, (obituary article compiled by his son Charles).
- 2 *Australian Dictionary of Biography* vol.1, 1788-1950, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1960, p.275.
- 3 *Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, vol.2.
- 4 Stevenson, M. and W. Macdonald. 'Captain Ranulph Dacre', *Auckland-Waikato Historical Journal*, No. 37, Sept. 1980, pp.14.
- 5 The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography office has available further biographical data.
- 6 Stokes, Evelyn. 'The Traders', *New Zealand Heritage*, Paul Hamlyn, Wellington 1971, p.388.
- 7 Lloyd, C. *Captain Marryat and the old navy*. Longmans Green, London, 1939, pp.145-51.
- 8 'Certificate of examination of Mr Ralph Dacre at sea 21 June 1816, ... is well qualified to take charge of a watch on board any of His Majesty's ships,' Auckland City Library, MS 644.
- 9 Wigglesworth, R.P., *The New Zealand Timber and Flax Trade 1769-1840*, Ph.D thesis, Massey University, 1981.
- 10 Montgomery, James. *Journal of voyages and travels of the Rev. Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet Esq. deputed from the London Missionary Society, to visit their various stations in the South Sea Islands, China, India, etc. between the years 1821 and 1829*, vol.11, Westley and Davis, London, 1931, p.99.
- 11 Ross, R.M. *The material of history: European trade and settlement in New Zealand before 1840*. Post Primary School Bulletin, vol.6, No.7, 1952, School Publications Branch New Zealand Education Department, Wellington, 1952, pp.131-8.
- 12 Parsons, R.H. *Australian shipowners and their fleets*, book 7. R.H. Parsons, Magill, South Australia, 1982, pp.24-5.
- 13 Ballara, Angela. 'Patuone, Ereuera Maihi', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, volume 1, pp.388-40.
- 14 *NZ Herald*, as above.
- 15 Wigglesworth, as above, p.231.
- 16 New Zealand, National Archives. *Preliminary inventory No.9 Archives of the Old Land Claims Commission*, Dept. of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1961, p.16.
- 17 *New Zealand Directory, 1866-7*, Stevens and Bartholomew, Melbourne.
- 18 'Dacre Cottage, the cottage that time has passed by', and 'Captain Dacre & the Weiti Block', *Auckland Regional Committee, New Zealand Historic Places Trust, Newsletter*, vol.13, No. 1, March 1984, pp.1-7.
- 19 New Zealand, Property Tax Department. *A return of the freeholders of New Zealand, October 1882.*, Wellington, 1884; *AJHR* 1863, D-14, PP.11,72.
- 20 Shea, M. 'Letter to C.Dacre behalf of T.Poynton re Capt. R.Dacre, 18 August 1884'. Auckland City Library, MS 306.
- 21 Ballara, as above.
- 22 Ward, Alan, in Renwick, William ed. *Sovereignty and Indigenous rights: The Treaty of Waitangi in its International Context*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, p.129.
- 23 Owens, J.M.R., *Archifacts*, October 1993, p.90.